SPORT LEADERSHIP TO EMPOWER BLACK WOMEN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL

EXPLORATION OF INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP

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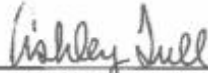

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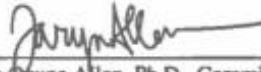**EXPLORATION OF INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP**
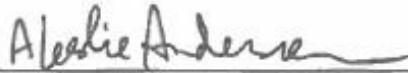
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She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come. She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children arise and call her blessed. Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all. Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Honor her for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.

Proverbs 31:25-31

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the organizational cultures of collegiate and professional athletics and the influence they have on Black women's leadership opportunities. It also explored inclusive leadership and the impact this has on the experiences of Black women in athletics. Despite how long Black women have existed in this country or have been allowed to advance their knowledge in higher education institutions, they are still underrepresented in athletic leadership positions. Contemporary research (Abney & Richey,1991; Bruening, 2005; Mcdowell & Carter-Francique, 2017; Simpkins, 2017) has shown that Black women experience sports organizational cultures and leadership opportunities in a unique and often challenging way due to the intersection of their race and gender in a White male-dominated profession. Black women often lack access to leadership roles and understanding how the culture of sports organizations impacts this phenomenon deserves further examination. This study differed from previous studies by investigating the sports cultures of intercollegiate and professional organizations while collecting data from a diverse participant population. This study sought to amplify Black women's voices and understand how other people experience Black women as leaders in sports organizations.

Qualitative data was collected through interviews with six identified leaders who embody inclusive leadership qualities. Participants had significant years of working in collegiate and professional athletic sports organizations. These interviews illuminated the continuing challenges that Black women experience in leadership positions, as well as advancements made in some organizations. In many respects, Black women are still experiencing an astounding amount of marginalization, despite their titles and academic backgrounds. From the interviews of the participating leaders, literature review, and research, I have advanced several practices and

recommendations to close this vital gap. This study is essential to the policies of sports organizations as it may provide critical insight to leaders focused on growth and developing inclusive leadership behaviors. The work of this scholarship may also aid in the success of teams, and the development of cultures that champion victories with consistent practices and actions that encourage innovation.

Chapter I: Introduction

If people follow you, what will they become? Powerful? Motivated? Inspired?

Leadership has been described in many ways. O'Boyle et al. (2015) mentioned, "leadership is a

dynamic, fluid concept, and it is one of the most interesting reflections of its contemporary social

environment and context…how it continues to change, is of general interest, and of critical

importance to the sporting world in particular" (p. 1). The concept of leadership and what it

means to lead others continues to change largely because people can only lead if they can

influence others and clearly explain their ideas and vision. Bass (2008) suggested an expanded

notion of leadership affirming:

> Leadership is an interaction between two or more members of a group that often involves
>
> structuring or restructuring of the situation and the perceptions and expectations of the
>
> members. Leaders are agents of change, whose acts affect other people more than other
>
> people's acts affect them. Leadership occurs when one group member modifies the
>
> motivation or competencies of others in the group. Leadership can be conceived as
>
> directing the attention of other members to goals and the paths to achieve them. (p. 25)

Throughout our lifetimes, our passions often bring new opportunities and ventures that

may lead to leadership positions. Different characteristics make leaders successful in numerous

professional fields. The sports world is frequently thought of as a universal space that bridges

people together from different backgrounds, uniting them in the pursuit of greatness. In the

United States, we continuously see this in collegiate sports, on professional stages, and once

every four years, the world takes part in the Olympics. Unfortunately, women are under-

represented in leadership positions in sports (O'Boyle et al., 2015). This chapter will discuss the

landscape of sports and organizational cultures to address this issue and better understand the

lack of access and opportunities for Black women in sports leadership. Additionally, this chapter will add information regarding the purpose and significance of the study and will conclude by addressing research questions and key terms throughout the study.

History of Intercollegiate Athletics

One institution that continues to extend across cultures is the world of sports. The sports enterprise has shown the power to transform and impact our society in unique ways. As researchers, we cannot neglect the ongoing need for racial equity and advancement within collegiate athletics and the lack of racial and gender equity within leadership positions. Most intercollegiate athletics in the United States are governed by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), which is divided into divisions: Division I, II, and III. The NCAA was founded in 1906 to assist in regulating the rules of collegiate sports, and to protect young athletes (NCAA, 2022). It is essential to note colleges and universities still faced segregation, as the NCAA was formed before the Supreme Court's *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954) decision (Couch et al., 2015). Additionally, as colleges and universities grew, the passing of Title IX led to an expansion of women's athletics in the 1970's (NCAA, 2022). Given the formation of the NCAA, and the nationwide variations of colleges and universities, the organizational culture throughout each division may differ. Equally, this may employ a variance in Black women's experiences and leadership opportunities.

Landscape of Professional Athletics

Professional athletics in the United States is a large part of American culture. For this study, the focus will be on the scope of the WNBA, (Women's National Basketball Association) and the NBA (National Basketball Association). In 2021, 74.5% of the players in the WNBA

identified as Black or African American (Lapchick, 2021). Additionally, in 2021, 23.1% of all professional staff members in the WNBA League Office were women of color.

Lapchick (2022) reported, "For the 2021-2022 season, 82.4% of the NBA's players were people of color…the percentage of players who were classified as Black or African American in the league was 71.7%" (p. 3). The NBA also has the highest percentage of women in League Office professional staff among the four major men's professional sports leagues (Lapchick, 2022). As of May 1, 2022, 17.9% of the NBA's League Office leadership were Black or African American; of this percentage, nine were Black or African American women who held a vice president position or higher (Lapchick, 2022). Intercollegiate athletics, and higher education have more connections and influence on professional athletics and leadership than what has been acknowledged. According to the NCAA (2022), on the 2019-20 opening day NBA rosters, former NCAA Division I players filled 85% of roster spots. Additionally, draft data from 2019 for the WNBA showed there were 36 draft slots in that year's draft, 31 of which went to NCAA players. When we discuss the players and the leadership in the NBA and the WNBA, there must be recognition that higher education experiences helped shape leadership styles and the landscape of professional athletics.

Sport Organizational Cultures

Minimal studies have investigated the organizational cultures of athletics (Fink, 2008; Shaw & Frisby, 2006; Southall & Nagel, 2003; Southall, Wells & Nagel, 2005). Schroeder (2010) defined organizational culture as a pattern of assumptions that guide organizational behavior and values. An organization's culture is also a direct correlation to the leadership of the organization. Schein (2004) expressed, "the only thing of real importance that leaders do is create and manage culture" (p. 11). When individuals assume leadership roles within athletics,

changing the culture is often a topic of conversation, and norms and values in sports are often influenced by winning and competition.

There is an incredible amount of planning, designing, and implementation of players and support staff to produce winning teams and programs, and billions of dollars are cast into professional and NCAA sports teams. This complete reliance on success can attract flawed leadership that can be destructive to cultures and environments. Moreover, sports organizations have institutionalized masculinity as a principle in sports, identifying male activity as privileged and reinforcing masculine behavior as the appropriate leadership qualities required for sport (Shaw & Frisby, 2006). Norms and values such as these could unfavorably impact women's access to leadership roles within athletics. In addition, many sports organizations operate with an organizational culture of similarity, where the leadership is not diverse, and represents the dominant group (often White males) and does not have policies to improve diversity in leadership positions (Fink et al., 2001). Therefore, this could also impact Black women's leadership opportunities and experiences.

Problem Statement

Diversifying organizational leadership and creating equitable and inclusive organizations should take precedence in collegiate and professional athletics. However, it often centers the needs and desires of White men, while marginalizing others (Fink et al., 2001). Though some research has tackled the overall influence of leadership and culture in organizations, past literature has shown little focus on the impact of Black women as leaders in intercollegiate and professional athletic athletics (Bruening, 2005). Women of color have a unique intersection, and how Black women are centered across these organizations is a topic that deserves further exploration. In addition, leadership stereotypes and what is required to be a successful leader in

sports organizations must be re-defined to include Black women. Diversity is essential as we move through the 21st century and beyond, and sport organizations must consider the benefits of diversity and inclusion in their success plans.

Need for the Study

There is excellent value in diverse leadership within organizations. O'Boyle et al. (2015) mentioned, "the landscape faced by sports leaders has changed, and so too have the skills and competencies required by leaders to be effective on this new playing field" (p. 241). Black women are an underrepresented group in sports and lack leadership positions. Addressing these issues is essential and understanding the barriers and structures that are in place that impact the lack of access for Black women is necessary. Fink (2008) mentioned that issues in sports are "situated in multi-level, sometimes subtle, and usually taken-for-granted structures, policies, and behaviors embedded in sports organizations" (p. 147). Having a multilevel perspective allows us to examine how society impacts under-represented groups in sports (macro-level), stereotyping of leaders, issues of prejudice and discrimination (meso-level), and perceptions of leadership in sports (micro-level) (O'Boyle et al., 2015). By better understanding these barriers and structures, this study can work towards equity, inclusivity, and elevate the experiences for Black women working in the world of sports.

Purpose of the Study

Research is fundamental to power and access, and what it would look like to share power with Black women in organizations can aid leaders in our ever-changing society. The purpose of this study was two-fold. It examined the organizational cultures of intercollegiate and professional athletics and the influence they have on Black women's leadership opportunities. It also explored inclusive leadership and the impact this has on the experiences of Black women in

athletics. The role of a leader is fluid, and dismantling long-standing repressive social orders is a part of what it means to be an inclusive leader. How people are transformed by their leaders and what qualities they personify to impact others can be the difference in what continues to change our world.

Significance of the Study

To be a leader, you also need followers. Black women have proven throughout our nation's history to be powerful, intentional, inclusive leaders. However, in athletics, access to leadership positions is not always there. O'Boyle et al. (2015) stated, "leaders need the support of followers and the systems that underpin their organization" (p. 145). This study was multidimensional in the approach—structures and barriers that limit experiences for Black women in leadership positions will be discussed; however, knowledge will also be gained on what can support inclusive leadership and how being a person of influence can be exercised in new ways.

Research Questions

After a review of the current literature, the following research questions were developed to guide the study that flows from the previously identified problem and need for the study (outlined above):

1. How are organizational cultures in intercollegiate and professional athletics influencing Black women's leadership opportunities?

2. How are leaders creating an atmosphere that values inclusion for Black women in athletics?

Definition of Key Terms

The following is a list of key terms used in this study that will appear later. They are defined here to help guide the reader, as well as to identify sources of their definition (from the literature):

Anti-racist

One who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea (Kendi, 2019).

Colorism

A powerful collection of racist policies that lead to inequities between Light people and Dark people, supported by racist ideas about Light and Dark people (Kendi, 2019)

Culture

The norms, values, practices, patterns of communication, language, laws, customs, and meaning shared by a group of people located in a given time and place (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Discrimination

Action based on prejudice toward social others. When we act on our prejudgments, we are discriminating (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Equity

Identifying and dismantling systemic barriers to the representation and inclusion of women, people of color, and people from other historically marginalized communities (Tulshyan, 2022).

Intersectionality

The location of women of color both within overlapping systems of subordination and at the margins of feminism and antiracism (Crenshaw, 1991).

Microaggressions

The everyday slights, indignities, put downs and insults that people of color, women, LGBT populations or those who are marginalized experience in their day-to-day interactions with people (Sue, 2020).

Oppression

The prejudice and discrimination of one social group against another, backed by institutional power. Oppression occurs when one group is able to enforce its prejudice and discrimination throughout society because it controls the institutions. Oppression occurs at the group or macro level and goes well beyond individuals. Sexism, racism, classism, ableism, and heterosexism are forms of oppression (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Prejudice

Learned prejudgment toward social others and refers to internal thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and assumptions based on the groups to which they belong (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Race

Race, like gender and disability, is *socially constructed*. The differences we see with our eyes, such as hair texture and eye color or shape, are superficial and emerged over time as humans adapted to geography. However, race as a *social idea* has profound significance and impacts every aspect of our lives (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Racism

A form of oppression in which one racial group dominates over others. White racial and cultural prejudice and discrimination, supported by institutional power and authority, used to the advantage of Whites and the disadvantage of people of Color. Racism encompasses economic, political, social, and institutional actions and beliefs that systematize and perpetuate an unequal distribution of privileges, resources, and power between White and peoples of Color (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Stereotype

Reduced or simplified characteristics attributed to a group (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Expectations on Terminology

This is a research study that focuses on the organizational cultures of intercollegiate and professional athletics and the influence they have on Black women's leadership opportunities. It will also explore inclusive leadership and the impact this has on the experiences of Black women in athletics. When using the term "collegiate athletics" or "intercollegiate athletics": I am referring to sports played at the collegiate level. When using the term "professional athletics": I am referring to sports played at the professional level.

As the researcher, I respect the work of other scholars and their contributions to learning and growth. Ruchika Tulshyan (2022) is a global inclusion strategist with expertise in creating diverse teams and inclusive cultures. In her book, *Inclusion on Purpose, An Intersectional Approach to Creating a Culture of Belonging at Work*, she shared expectations on terminology that is my intention to echo:

- I acknowledge that the discussion of "men" and "women" in this study leaves unsaid the experiences of gender nonbinary people.

- I use "women of color" broadly, acknowledging that it is a flawed and incomplete term, but the one that is most relevant to my work as it stands. I endeavor to be more accurate by naming exactly which demographic I am referring to when I can.

- I refer to white people to racially describe people of northern European descent, although the classification of who can call themselves white has contracted and expanded throughout history to include some and exclude others.

- I'll be noting "Black women" when referring to people who identify ethnically, culturally, and socially as Black.

Assumptions

The study was conducted under the following assumptions:

a. That all participants are honest in their interview process, and in sharing their leadership experiences.

b. Organizational culture in athletics can be assessed through the methods chosen in this study.

Conclusion

Chapter 1 began by providing context to the history of Black women and leadership, and the history of the NCAA. It followed by providing information on professional athletics, and information regarding the purpose and significance of the study. This chapter concluded by addressing research questions, key terms, and expectations of terminology throughout the study.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

There is a need for intentional space to empower and equip voices of change, particularly voices that have been historically silenced and contemporarily continue to be siloed. The purpose of this study was two-fold. It examined the organizational cultures of intercollegiate and professional athletics and the influence they have on Black women's leadership opportunities. It also explored inclusive leadership and the impact this has on the experiences of Black women in athletics. Each section of the literature review provides a deeper understanding of the literature and how it relates to Black women in sport leadership.

History of Black Women in Leadership

For years, the voices of Black women have been historically silenced, although they have been advocates for change, and shown up as leaders in various institutions and movements. Throughout slavery, the Jim Crow Era, the Civil Rights Movement, and Women's Movements, Black women have emerged in their ability to lead and persevere. During the era of slavery, Black women emerged as leaders through one of the most turbulent times in American history. Sojourner Truth was a Black women's rights activist, an abolitionist, and recognized as a Suffrage Movement pioneer (Painter, 1994). In 1955, by standing up for what she believed was right, Rosa Parks' actions launched the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Because Black women were seen as invisible, in addition to being humiliated, Rosa Parks was also expected to give up her seat for a White male on a bus based on the color of her skin (Richardson, 2021).

Time and time again throughout history and the present day, we see Black women leading despite access and often discrimination. Black women have been restricted from leadership opportunities in multiple sectors of society largely because of race and gender, and the

experiences of Black women in sports are no exception (Simpkins, 2017). Yet, for generations, Black women have emerged as leaders at critical times throughout history. Phillis Wheatley (*1743-1784*), born into slavery, was said to have published her first poem when she was fourteen years old (Harrison, 2017). She was the first African American woman ever to be published, and Harrison (2017) mentioned, "she corresponded with George Washington and the famous French writer and philosopher Voltaire…her work was so powerful that abolitionists used it as an example of the intelligence and promise of Black people" (p. 2). Phillis Wheatley was living proof that education was possible for Black women, even those born into slavery. Rebecca Lee Crumpler (*1831-1895*) was the first Black female physician in the United States after graduating from an all-White medical school. Throughout her career, she held a special place for helping women and children; her work as a physician was a beacon of hope for Black women in education (Harrison, 2017).

Mary McLeod Bethune (*1874-1955*), a daughter of freed slaves, became one of the most influential Black female leaders of her time. She held leadership appointments under Presidents Coolidge, Hoover, Roosevelt, and Truman. Mary McLeod Bethune advocated for racial and gender equality and was also devoted to education with a strong passion for the education of Blacks and Black girls (Johnson-Miller, 2006). Wilma Rudolph (*1940-1994*) was one of the most famous track athletes in United States history. She became the first American to win three gold medals in the 1960 Olympics and used her platform to impact the Civil Rights Movement (Harrison, 2017). She later founded the Wilma Rudolph Foundation to support young athletes in pursuing greatness. These examples amplify Black women who created an opportunity for themselves in times of adversity and emerged as leaders and trailblazers.

For centuries, Black women have been underserved and underrepresented by colleges, universities, and American society. In a powerful statement, hooks (1981) explained:

> No other group in America has so had their identity socialized out of existence as have black women. We are rarely recognized as a group separate and distinct from black men, or as a present part of the larger group "women" in this culture…When black people are talked about the focus tends to be on black *men*; and when women are talked about the focus tends to be on *white* women. (p. 7)

There are systems in place that have kept Black women from breaking down barriers deliberately. A gap in the literature exists that needs further exploration to determine the structural and organizational barriers specific to Black women that impede advancement in leadership. Understanding these barriers can provide desperately needed context for Black women and how their identities intersect in the sports world. When the negatives are further identified, this can make space for the positive aspects of leadership and how these goals can be attained.

Black Women and Sport Leadership

Athletics is a landscape unlike any other, with the ability to restructure and build new environments and team culture. While many organizations are separated by time and space, athletic cultures are centered around teams and teamwork (Robbins, 2020). Countless organizations have the option of working remotely, however, this is not possible universally in athletics. When it comes to game performance, there are no technological advancements that allow for coaches and athletes not to be physically present. In addition, cultural differences play a role in how we interact, and gender and race impact our perceptions and assumptions about one another (Tulshyan, 2022).

While considering the marginalization of Black women as leaders, it is also important to identify how these different identities intersect with one another. Intersectionality is a term that has been used to define the different identities in which Black women experience multiple forms of prejudice. The term was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1991 (Crenshaw, 1991). Crenshaw (2005) explained:

> Intersectionality is an analytic sensibility, a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power. Originally articulated on behalf of black women, the term brought to light the invisibility of many constituents within groups that claim them as members, but often fail to represent them. (p. 2)

Essential research on the experiences of Black women and sports leadership have been explored (e.g., Abney & Richey, 1991; Armstrong, 2007; Bruening, 2005; Mcdowell, J., & Carter-Francique, A. (2017); Simpkins, 2017), but more is needed.

Foundational in their approach, Abney and Richey provided information to help Black women handle career barriers in athletic spaces. Their research also emphasized how Black women could not only obtain but remain in athletic administrative and coaching positions despite these barriers (Abney & Richey, 1991). In research by Armstrong (2007), the work explored Black women who are at the intersection of racial discrimination and gender discrimination. Equally, how they are prevented from showing their talent in the workplace, and often feel the need to conceal who they are to blend in with the organizational culture in athletics (Armstrong, 2007).

Bruening provided a necessary exploration of sports culture and the dominant White male culture that exists within sports. The notion that Black women are silenced and ignored was further investigated, as well as the literature surrounding Black women in sports often outlining

the same myths. Bruening (2005) mentioned the call for more research to examine the positives of Black women in sports, rather than an incomplete or contradictory view of Black females. Mcdowell & Carter-Francique (2017) used Intersectionality Theory as a lens to further understand how stereotyping influences Black women and women of color working in athletics in higher education—equally, societal expectations and how structural bias influences perceptions in the workplace. Finally, Simpkins aided in creating the preliminary Sport Intersectional Model of Power (SIMP), to take a further look at the macro and meso-level limitations that may contribute to micro-level factors Black women face in intercollegiate athletic departments (2017). The SIMP suggests that Black women may be limited in leadership opportunities, but also seeks to understand better ways of creating sports organizational cultures within intercollegiate athletic departments.

Intersectionality of Identity of Black Women as Leaders

The experiences of Black women in leadership are unique. Even stating Black women in conversations surrounding leadership requires transcending existing stereotypes about Black women. There are always stories surrounding resilience and an insurmountable strength for Black women. They are seen as strong, matriarchal figures—even in the presence of extreme pain and fear. Black women have little room to express their emotions because emotional displays are considered signs of weakness and inadequacy (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2007). In occupational settings, the 'angry black woman' stereotype portrays Black females as aggressive and hostile in work environments (Motro et al., 2021). It has taken years for Black women to etch themselves into leadership positions in the general sense, and leadership positions in the sports world. Bruening (2005) suggested:

There is no one Black female experience that encompasses race, gender, class, and the experiences those social constructs influence. Sport research in particular, has failed to acknowledge this. Black women's experiences have been assumed to be similar to White women or to Black men. (p. 331)

The distinctive perspectives and experiences of Black women are essential to understanding further exploration of organizational culture and inclusive leadership. Black women are still being placed in a position to be unseen, and the current messaging in sports is that Black women are not a priority (Mcdowell, J., & Carter-Francique, A., 2017). Furthermore, if Black women can attain a leadership position in sports, or are given a major platform, they are held to higher standards than other members of the organization. Comas-Díaz & Greene (2013) mentioned, "rarely have they been allowed to be leaders in the larger society. The pattern of leadership for women of color in sports parallels their experiences in the wider society, with segregation limiting leadership roles" (p. 340).

Being a Black woman in sports is a challenging juncture. First, there is the racial bias that precedes every interaction, gender bias that follows, and constant exclusion because the focus falls on Black males, or White females, ultimately making Black women, and women of color invisible in sports (Wallick, 2018). Finally, Hall (2001) stated, "women of color who are successful in any sport are frequently perceived as exceptions, not due to their success…but exceptions to their race" (p. 391). If we are to focus on inclusion and belonging truly, this can no longer be the norm, or at minimum, can no longer be considered acceptable.

Diversity must be seen as a value, not an instruction—our differences make us unique and there is meaning in differing viewpoints. Encouraging an organizational culture that fosters equity and inclusion takes a collective effort (Robbins, 2020). At the basis of organizational

culture in athletics, as it relates to inclusive leadership and Black women, the literature is not extensive in large part because Black women have not been afforded the same access as others. Schroeder (2010) stated, "any assessment of athletic department culture requires an accounting of leadership and power…those with leadership are capable of negotiating and managing the cultural balance between the institution, department, and external environment" (p. 105). Black women have different lived experiences and provide a unique perspective to leadership positions. Changing the perspective of what leadership can look like in the athletics realm is key to creating more inclusive cultures in the world of sports.

There are a lot of assumptions about what the culture of athletics should be, and a lot of value in maintaining the status quo. However, as the landscape of athletics is shifting, this is an opportunity to examine new ways to create effective programs with sustainable efforts that include everyone. We can seek out diversity in our professional networks, cultivate inclusivity and belonging atmospheres, and be successful. An additional finding that supports the desired research was explored in 2014, where scholars examined senior women leaders within higher education in the United States. The study focused on 35 women at the senior staff levels of institutions in higher education. Hannum et al. (2014) identified barrier subthemes that included "not having a leadership identity, lack of opportunity or support, discouragement and sabotage, and different expectations for men and women" (p. 69).

Expanding this research to athletics and examining how higher education impacts current leadership roles can continue the inquiry further. Hannum et al. (2014) also stated, "women of color are not offered leadership opportunities and are more likely to experience scrutiny and criticism than their white counterparts is an important finding. It suggests that particular focus

and attention is needed in this area" (p. 73). Therefore, continuing the work and finding shared actions that can help shape new institutional practices is essential.

Caste and Power

Words such as race, privilege, and power tend to make the setting uncomfortable in work environments, but they are terms that need investigation and constant re-evaluation. Historically, these words have been used to maintain a certain hierarchy within populations. Preservation of self and ego has devastated cultures for centuries. Exploring human history even more profound is the caste system. Wilkerson (2020) offered an insightful definition to caste in our society:

> A caste system is an artificial construction, a fixed and embedded ranking of human value that sets the presumed supremacy of one group against the presumed inferiority of other groups on the basis of ancestry and often immutable traits, traits that would be neutral in the abstract but are ascribed life-and-death meaning in a hierarchy favoring the dominant cast whose forebears designed it. A caste system uses rigid, often arbitrary boundaries to keep the ranked groupings apart, distance from one another in their assigned places. (p. 17)

Race plays a vital role in the caste system. How people look, and who they are perceived to be based on their outward appearance is the cue to their caste (Wilkerson, 2020). Power then plays a role, as it characteristically privileges some groups and marginalizes others.

Demographics across the world are changing, and this creates numerous cultural impacts. Progress has been made in the evolvement of athletics, however, there is still an ongoing assessment of leadership and organizational culture regarding race and gender. As a culture, we are resistant to these shifts since the elimination would compromise the imbalance of power for

those who are wealthy, male, and White (Hall, 2001). Therefore, it is crucial to consider different

characteristics of direction. Schroeder (2010) stated:

> When considering leadership with respect to athletic department culture, three aspects of
>
> leadership must be assessed…(1) the source of leadership must be pinpointed; (2) how
>
> decisions are made and communicated; and (3) the selection of leaders must be
>
> investigated when defining culture. (p. 105)

How aware leaders are of the elements of the culture in which they guide others is

paramount to the success of others, and the teams in which they lead. We are all entering spaces

with different social awareness and cultural competencies. As important as it is for the sports

world to focus on production and wins, it is equally important to focus on inclusion. If the

organizational culture of athletics is to move beyond access and more multifaceted approaches,

this is where inclusive leadership comes into play. Stefani & Blessinger (2018) stated, "an

inclusive theory of leadership holds that inclusive leadership as a leadership style, with its

emphasis on participation, community, empowerment, and respect for different identities" (p. 4).

Inclusive leaders create environments where everyone feels they belong regardless of

background or role (Brown, 2018). Sport is an institution that prides itself on crossing barriers of

gender, race, and political views. However, the reality is that this is still a space in need of

growth and inclusivity.

<div align="center">

Access

</div>

Within professional spaces, higher education, and organizational networks, the

intersection of race and gender for Black women often means a lack of acceptance. Often, they

are the first of their race and gender to hold a leadership position in that organization (E.L. Bell,

1990). Additionally, Black women may have some form of access, but organizations do not

always have an obligatory implementation of policies and procedures to create an atmosphere of equity and fairness. Black women often find themselves in a challenging position between two cultural worlds, and often what leads to acceptance and gratification in one world does not in the other (E.L. Bell, 1990). When trying to gain access to leadership positions within athletics, we need to gain further insight on what negates accessibility and what can propel equal opportunity. Unless leaders intentionally empower colleagues and/or junior-level employees with information concerning their well-being and empowerment, many may not have the language to express their feelings of exclusion and marginalization.

Conceptual Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework that was developed first by legal scholars in the late 1970's, and early 1980's as an investigation into persistent racial disparities despite the passage of laws that prohibited them (D. Bell,1995; Crenshaw, 2011; Delgado & Stafancic, 2001). From there, it was adopted by scholars in higher educational settings to explore racial disparities at colleges and universities (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Muñoz, 2009). Among the major tenets of the CRT framework are the following: race is a social construction, meaning it exists only in our operation of the meaning of skin color and how we distinguish and place others in groups; that race is endemic in United States culture, meaning the consideration of this has been embedded into our society, in formal policy and informal practice (Jim Crow laws, sundown towns, even the absence of representation of Black leaders at all levels on college campuses) as described by M. T. Bell (2018).

Further, CRT insists on valuing the lived experiences of those being discussed, and responsible scholarship must include the knowledge of people living racialized experiences for a critical understanding of the phenomenon being explored, in this case, race (Ladson-Billings &

Tate, 1995; Muñoz, 2009). To fully consider the organizational cultures of intercollegiate and professional athletics and their influence on Black women's leadership opportunities and experiences, I believe CRT must be assessed within this study as it helps to examine the structural barriers that limit opportunities within sports cultures and organizations.

To reiterate, contemporary scholars' work exploring Black women's experiences in collegiate athletics (Abney & Richey,1991; Bruening, 2005; Mcdowell & Carter-Francique, 2017; Simpkins, 2017) also argued that power and access contribute to the lack of leadership opportunities for Black females. These scholars propose meaningful research on barriers that impact Black women. Abney & Richey (1991) attributed several factors that negatively influenced Black women in collegiate athletic leadership positions. Specific obstacles presented included the lack of financial compensation, difficulties being the only Black woman in collegiate athletic environments, and lack of cultural support at their institutions (Abney & Richey, 1991). Bruening (2005) explored sports scholarship, dominant White male culture, and how Black women in sports are represented and silenced. Bruening also explained that existing research on race and gender in sports is incomplete, and at times contradictory and institutional influences should be further investigated (Bruening, 2005). Mcdowell & Carter-Francique (2017) used their research to examine Black women in collegiate athletics in the leadership role of athletic directors, and how the intersection of race and gender impacted their experiences and leadership opportunities. The importance of how stereotypes influence decisions and misconceptions concerning leadership roles were critical findings in the study (Mcdowell & Carter-Francique, 2017).

As a researcher, I admire the research of Simpkins (2017) and her work, which explores The Sport Intersectional Model of Power (SIMP) as a transformational resource in addressing the

ways race and gender intersect in sports culture and center the needs of Black women. Simpkins (2017) explored this model as a lens to study Black women as leaders in sports. The SIMP (found in Figure 1 below) focuses on organizational elements such as policies and practices, resistance to diversity, and assumptions about power.

Figure 1

Sport Intersectional Model of Power
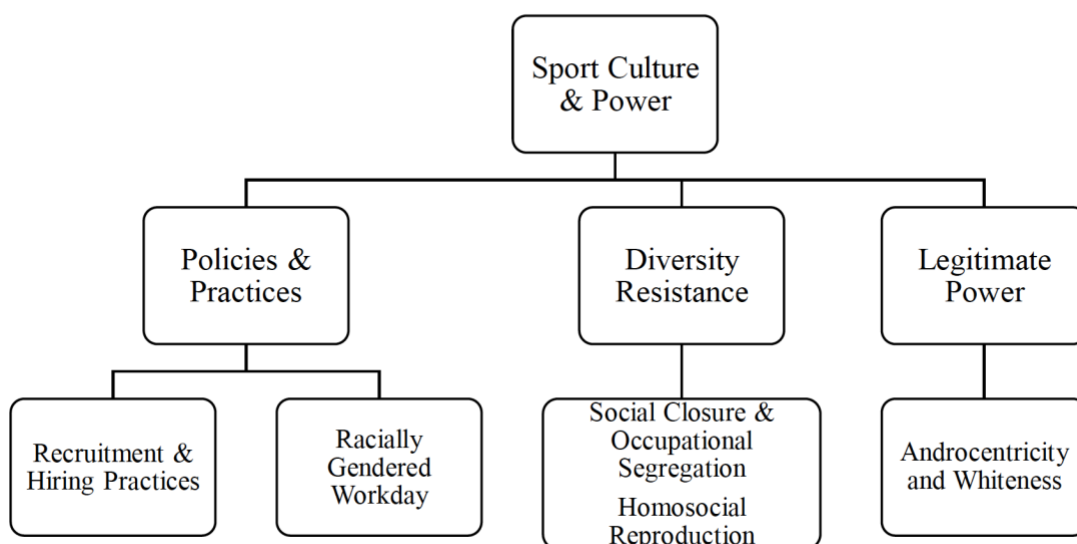
These contemporary scholars (Abney & Richey,1991; Bruening, 2005; Mcdowell & Carter-Francique, 2017; Simpkins, 2017) elevated and evaluated collegiate athletics' policies, practices, and organizational cultures and the impact they have on Black women. They examined how Black women are first nearly invisible as young Black females competing in sports and are further othered if they continue as Black women with careers in athletics. These scholars also further illuminate how power structures in collegiate athletics directly impact access to leadership opportunities for Black women. Power and lack of access for Black women

consistently showed up in the themes of intersectionality, stereotyping, hiring practices, and structures within organizational cultures throughout the work of these scholars.

Black women deserve to exist in organizations that are inclusive of all. Years of lack of access to education, followed by racism and gender inequity, have been significant factors that contribute to the lack of belonging for Black women as sports leaders. Structural and organizational barriers need to be addressed to emphasize new forms of leadership that can assist Black women in advancing.

Organizational Culture in Athletics

The literature on organizational culture in athletics as it relates to inclusive leadership is limited. Much of this is due to the need for frameworks to analyze athletics as organizational cultures. Although there is a lack of research examining organizational culture in athletics, Schroeder (2010) stated, "there is a significant body of research on values and assumptions in intercollegiate athletics. Central to many of these studies is an inconsistency of values" (p. 101). For decades, the structure of athletics has been centered around the leadership of White males with limited insight from others on how systems should operate within establishments (Brooks & Althouse, 2000; Cook & Glass, 2013; Economou, Glaskcock, & Gamble, 2022). Each year, The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES) comprehensively analyzes racial and gender practices for professional and collegiate sports. Lapchick (2021) stated, "the TIDES team asks participating organizations…are we playing fair when it comes to sports? Does everyone, regardless of race or gender, have a chance to make and run the team?" (p. 4). TIDES also releases a Race and Gender Report Card, collecting data to evaluate the value of diverse and inclusive hiring practices for leadership positions in sports. Lapchick (2021) found:

Opportunities for women and people of color among men's and women's head coaching positions have hardly improved for over a decade. For the 2021 season, 85.3 percent of Division I, 86.0 percent of Division II, and 89.6 percent of Division III men's coaches were white. (p. 3)

Equally, there needs to be more movement in other leadership positions, such as general managers and conference commissioners. Lapnick (2021) also found, "today, 86.7 percent of conference commissioners are white in all of Division I. In 2007-2008, 86.5 percent were white" (p. 3). It is the responsibility of teams, institutions, leagues, and universities to create initiatives and incorporate sustainable diversity policies and programs while also breaking down barriers. Emphasizing equity and inclusion is vital for all organizations to help create culturally responsive people.

A prevalent issue within sports organizations is that many organizations are dominated by only one set of values and beliefs. Due to the lack of diversity in sports leadership positions, redefining roles has become challenging. The sports world is moving at a slow pace in creating leadership positions for Black women and shifting into more inclusive practices and leadership includes embracing differences (Lapchick, 2021). Many past leadership styles encourage individuality, autocracy, and despotism, whereas inclusive leadership emphasizes awareness of self, others, and collaboration that includes others within the organization (Dillion & Bourke, 2016).

Every organization has a unique set of values that defines the culture of the organization. Organizational culture, as defined by Schein (1996), is "the set of shared, taken-for-granted implicit assumptions that a group holds and that determines how it perceives, thinks about, and reacts to its various environments" (p. 236). No group can escape culture. Although there has

been extensive research on the construct of organizational culture within businesses, the same has not been accomplished in sports as extensively. Studies examining organizational culture in athletics (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016; Maitland, Hills & Rhind, 2015; Southall, Wells & Nagel, 2005) provide a strong basis as the landscape continues to change in sports culture.

Race, Context, and Organizational Leadership

The impact of the racial reckoning in America and across the globe has been enormous. This shift in society includes the world of sports. Sport is a unique landscape. It unites us globally and transcends barriers that often divide us. Therefore, creating inclusive work cultures is paramount, and ensuring leaders are equipped to lead in unparalleled times plays a vital role in organizations.

We are now in a society where riots are no longer filling the streets of cities across the globe, and organizations may believe they have met their anti-racism implementation quota. Anti-racism requires frequent and consistent choices within organizations, and this also requires self-awareness throughout our everyday lives. Every system, institution, and organization in the United States is racialized. If organizations are not addressing systemic issues, this creates a massive barrier, especially for Black women. Resistance to change within organizations is not a new concept. One form of resistance within organizations is simply acting as if racism is not a factor. Tate (2016) mentioned, "racism's familiar invisibility produces its own psychic life in institutions and individuals through the power of its deniability which paralyzes us into inaction" (p. 73). Although race is a social construct, it is essential to acknowledge and examine how we see others and accept racism as it lives in our societies and places of work.

Organizations can get caught in a strange space in which the racism they deny exists re-merges to deny the possibility of being post-race (Tate 2016). Another form of resistance is

diversity resistance, which goes against changes in overall diversity (Thomas & Plaut, 2008). Diversity resistance is explained as a range of practices and behaviors within and by organizations that interfere, either intentionally or unintentionally, with the use of diversity as an opportunity for learning and effectiveness (Thomas & Plaut, 2008). Changes to an organization's culture can feel uncomfortable, as people would prefer things to be linear.

We are in a critical time where people are voicing how they want to be led, and who they are willing to follow. Leadership is a constant journey, and organizational culture as it relates to inclusive leadership in athletics is still a new concept. Furthermore, as this intersection extends to Black women in athletics, additional considerations must be examined. Stefani & Blessinger (2018) stated, "a chief aim of inclusion is to eliminate negative attitudes and beliefs associated with race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle, socio-economic class, age, language, religion, disability, and other intersections" (p. 2). There are new insights and tools as it relates to inclusive leadership that can have a positive impact in sports culture. How teams operate, belong, and trust one another is pivotal to success. Identifying ways to include others and integrating best practices within growing organizations can bring groups to a new level.

Leadership Found in Athletics

Why do some organizations thrive, and others do not? Even with good intentions, and a seamless plan, some organizations still fail. The *it* factor is hard to describe but quickly identifiable and necessary for success in any organization. In athletics, success is often defined by wins and losses. However, the most successful teams are not always comprised of the most talented individuals. The intangibles of success and fulfillment, individually and within teams vary. What are the intangible qualities of leadership, communication, and performance that bring out the best in others? Leadership styles that impact performance differ from organization to

organization and as it pertains to sports at the collegiate and professional level. There are multiple stakeholders at each level, and the importance of leadership and the ability to connect and involve others continues to evolve as inclusivity and belonging advance in these organizations.

The current literature broadly defines common forms and styles of leadership in collegiate and professional athletics. Still, it does not always account for the everchanging demographics of current athletes and those serving in leadership roles. O'Boyle et al. (2015) stated, "leadership is a dynamic, fluid concept, and it is one of the most interesting reflections of its contemporary social environment and context…how it continues to change, is of general interest, and of critical importance to the sporting world in particular" (p. 1). Before exploring the various leadership forms, establishing a broad definition of leadership is also necessary. The idea of leadership and what it means to lead others continues to change in large part because people are only able to lead if they can influence others and clearly explain their ideas and vision. Bass (2008) suggested an expanded notion of leadership affirming:

> Leadership is an interaction between two or more members of a group that often involves structuring or restructuring of the situation and the perceptions and expectations of the members. Leaders are agents of change, whose acts affect other people more than other people's acts affect them. Leadership occurs when one group member modifies the motivation or competencies of others in the group. Leadership can be conceived as directing the attention of other members to goals and the paths to achieve them. (p. 25)

Intercollegiate athletics occupies a unique space between sports and education, and professional sports occupies a unique space between sports and business. The realm of sports is an industry that has significant impacts on higher education and broader implications as well.

Even at the professional level of athletics, leadership styles and forms of leadership are impacted by higher educational involvement and experiences. One of the most prevalent models of sport leadership at the collegiate and professional levels is the Multidimensional Model of Leadership (MML); (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980). This model considers the frequently changing dimensions that occur in coaching environments. Furthermore, Chelladurai (1999) stated, "the model focuses on three states of leader behavior—required, preferred, and actual. It classifies the antecedent variables that determine these leader behaviors into situational characteristics, member characteristics, and leader characteristics" (pp. 163-164). A supplementary concept of this leadership model is the model's ability to transcend sport and blend into the business world, which is highly significant due to the economic implications of collegiate and professional sports.

A common form of leadership in the athletic realm is transformational leadership. Yukl (1989) suggested, that transformational leadership is "the process of influencing major changes in attitudes and assumptions of organizational members and building commitment for the organizations mission and objectives" (p. 204). The central tenet of transformational leadership is the intent that individuals would develop their own ability to lead. In athletics this is essential to development with the expectation that other staff members and athletes would then be able to lead themselves. Another common form of leadership in athletics is transactional leadership. In this form of leadership, Chelladurai (1999) suggested, "the leader distributes rewards and punishments in exchange for member compliance or resistance to the leader's directions or requests" (p. 171). Transactional leadership focuses on individual outcomes by achieving goals with a strong draw towards personal rewards. The transactional leader sets challenging goals, and members know the performance expectations.

Lastly, servant leadership is an alternative approach to leadership used in athletics. O'Boyle et al. (2015) stated, "servant leadership challenges the dominant perception that leadership must be exercised from the top and that effective leadership relies on the use and deployment of power and control by those in leadership roles" (p. 44). Servant leaders are comfortable empowering others around them and willing to allow others to lead in spaces where they may have a deficit. Equally, servant leaders emphasize building community, have a strong level of empathy for others, and commit to the growth of others around them.

One of the largest differences between leadership styles at the professional and collegiate levels are the individuals in the leadership roles. At the collegiate level of sports, athletic directors, head coaches, and other member coaches of individual sports serve as primary leaders in the athletic department. Some student-athletes may assume a leadership responsibility by sport position or a team captain. However, there are clear power structures and boundaries set in place by the higher educational institution for the perceived success of the student-athletes. At the professional level, some professional athletes can assume the role of a leader on a team. They have influence, and their actions can affect the team's success. This is in addition to head coaches, managers, and executives who also assume leadership roles in a professional sports organization. The main commonality between these stakeholders is the foundational experience of leadership responsibilities and roles at higher educational institutions. The individuals leading most professional organizations, who have the most influence, are products of higher education. This also applies to athletes in leadership roles within professional organizations. For professional leagues such as the National Basketball Association (NBA), and the National Football League (NFL), at least one year of higher education at the collegiate level must be completed to be eligible to play in the league.

An additional factor is the size of individual sports teams. Frontiera (2010) mentioned, "an NFL team is allowed 53 players on its active roster, with 11 players on the field at any given time. An MLB team allows 42 players...in contrast, an NBA roster has 12 active players, with five on the court at any given time" (p. 82). Though executives and head coaches may stay in place for more extended periods, there are constant changes in player acquisitions and draft picks at the professional level. Professional athletes may already consider *themselves* leaders, and their role will impact the team's success, just as leadership styles from others in the organization will. At the collegiate level, roster size is in accordance with rules imposed by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), and staff roles are assembled by each collegiate institution. There are more complexities with changes in group size because there are more direct relationships.

There are many similarities between leadership styles at the collegiate and professional levels of sports. The Multidimensional Model of Leadership applies to all levels due to the emphasis on leader behavior and situational requirements. Transactional leadership at the professional level can be seen as a more prevalent leadership style than at the collegiate level. Once at the professional level, individuals see the sport more through the lens of an occupation. In contrast, at the collegiate level, athletics is often the vehicle to receive an education that will eventually lead to a career outside of athletics. Nevertheless, monetary arrangements occur at the collegiate and professional levels in athletics.

At the collegiate level, student-athletes sign National Letters of Intent (NLI), at the professional level, negotiations are made to create salaries for each athlete. An NLI can bind the institution to the student-athlete for up to five years. This includes payment of tuition, room, and board. There are instances where transactional leadership can appear necessary because of the financial implications at the collegiate level. Transactional leadership can have better outcomes

at a stable collegiate athletic program, where all parties are aware of the needs and directions of the athletic program. At the professional level, transactional leadership can be influential and needed for necessary outcomes. Chelladurai (1999) stated, "transactional leadership influences the cognition and abilities of the member and influences the exchanges between the leader and the member. Such exchanges lead to lower turnover and absence, member satisfaction, and expected performance" (p. 172). At the professional level, so much success is based solely on performance; transactional leadership detaches emotions and focuses on results.

The transformational leader has a strong sense of self and how their colleagues and athletes see them. Transformational leadership also centers on the belief that other people's needs are the highest priority, not just the leaders. Transformational leadership in sports can be seen at both the collegiate and professional levels and evokes emotion and articulates a strong vision. Chelladurai (1999) suggested, "transformational leadership…affects the emotions of members and their values, goals, needs, and self-esteem. These influences raise the aspirations of members who put forth greater efforts in order to achieve levels of performance beyond expectations" (p. 172). We see this consistently at both the collegiate and professional levels of sports. Teams overachieving and acknowledgment to leadership that inspires players and staff to go above and beyond their wildest dreams. The level of commitment and clear vision of everyone within the organization is collective and significant.

Those who thrive as servant leaders can drop their egos and are comfortable with other colleagues and members of the group having a form of power. This form of leadership is more so seen at the collegiate level, where leaders may feel they have more time to focus on the growth and development of others (Chelladurai, 1999). Servant leaders also focus on developing individual relationships and are willing to go through a process of advancement. Nevertheless,

this form of leadership is complex when the stakes are high and there is a need for immediate production. This leadership style can be seen as too mild for the politics and power involved in the sports world.

Dawn Staley and Becky Hammon are two high-achieving leaders worth mentioning in athletics. Dawn Staley is currently the Head Women's Basketball Coach at The University of South Carolina and attended the University of Virginia as an undergraduate. She epitomizes the characteristics of a transformational leader, as she has restructured the South Carolina women's basketball program and has significantly impacted the growth of women's basketball equity in sports. Becky Hammon is the Head Women's Basketball Coach of the Las Vegas Aces, a professional team in the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA). Coach Hammon attended Colorado State for her undergraduate degree and is a trailblazer in women's sports. She encompasses transformational, transactional, and servant leadership qualities as a leader. She talks at length about her growth as a leader being one of the only females in the country to coach in the NBA and the WNBA, and how different leadership styles are timely for the other teams she is coaching. These two leaders show the different leadership styles in athletics and how they translate in real time.

Transformational leadership has many positives, especially when the members involved have significant buy-in to major changes. Transformational leadership can inspire others, and people will often exceed expectations (Chelladurai, 1999). However, the negatives of transformational leadership can show up when members do not feel like they are seen and valued. Often this will involve more emotions to manage and feelings to validate. The positives of transactional leadership assume the subordinate, or in this case the athlete, is comfortable with rewards for achieving goals (Chelladurai, 1999). At both the collegiate and professional levels,

some athletes desire the straightforwardness of transactional leadership. If the task is complete, there will be a reward. If the task is not complete, there is a punishment. The lines are clear, and confusion is limited. Chelladurai (1999) mentioned, "transactional leadership is based on the assumption that the environment of the workgroup is somewhat stable and that both the leader and members are satisfied with the workgroup's purposes and processes" (p. 171). If this is not the case, this is where the negatives of transactional leadership come into play. If others are unaware of expectations, the needs of the leader and the group are not met.

There are purposes for transformational, transactional, and servant leadership styles. Transactional leadership implies that the leader's primary obligation is to help move the team toward the pre-determined goal. In contrast, the transformational leader will inspire and incite high ambitions for the team (Chelladurai, 1999). Servant leaders are aware of an ever-changing world and deeply understand the social process (O'Boyle et al., 2015). Although transformational, transactional, and servant leadership styles are common leadership forms in sports, due to the current changes in collegiate athletics with the implementation of Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL), providing collegiate-student athletes the ability to generate their own income, collegiate athletics are shifting closer to the model of professional athletics. At both levels, athletes are showing why they are more than performers. They are individual business owners moving into more innovative spaces, including business and commerce, and want to be seen beyond the scope of athletics. This shows that other forms of leadership, those that would typically apply in the business world, may be needed to manage the new-age athlete at both levels.

Sport is not the only factor leaders are navigating with leading their athletes. Leaders must factor the other influences occurring in the lives of athletes that they consider just as

valuable as their sports performance. Good leaders communicate proactively and effectively while empowering others with humility and confidence.

Conclusion

Our identities are multifaceted, and we all come from different parts of the world rich with history and culture. This chapter provided the history of Black women in leadership, discussed the intersectionality and identity of Black women as leaders, and explored the implications of power and access. There is limited research on Black women in sport leadership other than the research investigated in this chapter. Although some research has tackled the experiences of Black women in these spaces, there is limited existing research on the organizational cultures of intercollegiate and professional athletics and their influence on Black women's leadership opportunities and experiences. Furthermore, assessing the positives of inclusive leadership in higher education and its impact on Black women's experiences is important. Simpkins (2017) provided an innovative model that addresses how race and gender intersect in the world of sports, and I believe this to be transformative in the research topic. However, the globe has seen an enormous shift, and centering Black women in this space is necessary for further exploration.

Chapter III: Research Methods

To recap, the purpose of this study was two-fold. It examined the organizational cultures of intercollegiate and professional athletics and the influence they have on Black women's leadership opportunities. It also explored inclusive leadership and the impact this has on the experiences of Black women in athletics. This chapter will present the methodology used in this study to outline: (a) intersectional qualitative research, (b) participants, (c) data collection, (d) role of the researcher, (e) data analysis, (f) trustworthiness and validity, (g) limitations of the study, and (h) summary.

Intersectional Qualitative Research

Our human experiences are distinctive and vibrant, which leads me to believe our research should reflect this individuality of lived experiences. For years, qualitative research has been conducted by those who are White and educated, which consequently reflects a much more limited world view, and lacks depictions of those who exist under the restrictions of society (Evans-Winters, 2019). Koro et al. (2022) mentioned, "critical qualitative research always and already embraces justice matters(ings) and stays with 'good trouble,' an ontological position that can result in collaborations, previously unthought possibilities, actions, pluriverse transformations, and increased justice and equity in multiple directions, bodies, and forms" (p. 572). Having the practice to embody research from the lens of marginalized perspectives are still classified as newer models (D. Bell, 1995). Jennifer Esposito and Venus Evans-Winters (2022) introduced Intersectional Qualitative Research as a methodological approach, which this study will utilize. Esposito & Evans-Winters (2022) explained:

> Intersectionality goes beyond simplistic one-dimensional critiques and analyses of power and domination, such as traditional feminism's singular focus on gender oppression.

Instead, intersectional methodologies juxtapose social categories to systems of power and social phenomena to power relations. Consequently, qualitative inquiry from an intersectional perspective unashamedly and ardently concedes that individuals can be multiply situated in the world and, thus, the researcher must be prepared to accept complexity as a part of the research process. (p. 40)

As a qualitative researcher, part of my responsibility entailed investigating what people are doing, questioning if this extends knowledge and research, and if the research improves practices (Tracey, 2010). Therefore, having the opportunity to be a researcher during a moment in time when methodology has been created that truly encompasses who I am as a Black woman, and a researcher, is essential.

Role of the Researcher

I used intersectional qualitative research for this study, a qualitative research design developed by Jennifer Esposito and Venus Evans-Winters (2022). My quest to determine methodology was an enlightening and incredible experience. As a Black female in higher education, I have seen myself as a mentor, a coach, and a colleague, but never as a scholar. Even throughout my studies and my research, it was difficult for me to see myself in this light and this power. According to the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES, 2020), 4.4% of doctoral degrees are earned by Black women. By interviewing other Black women in leadership positions or holding doctoral degrees, I am aware that sharing my personal story to build rapport may impact the participants empathetically while also building trust.

Nevertheless, I want to amplify unheard voices and discover innovative and inclusive practices in higher education leadership. Evans-Winters (2019) mentioned, "we are witnessing a growing body of literature on the ways in which culturally and linguistically diverse scholars

engage in qualitative inquiry" (p. 8). I want to contribute to the literature and respond to scholars before me who have called for more knowledge and more contributions for Black women in sports leadership positions.

Positionality: I Can Lead, Too

My initial interest in the absence of Black women as sports leaders began at the start of my coaching career. My first coaching opportunity was at Dartmouth College. My overall experience was amazing, however, in my first season coaching the Ivy League wanted to feature Black assistant coaches at each Ivy League school in celebration of Black History Month and run a series of profiles. As a young assistant coach new to the profession, I accepted the opportunity to talk about my journey and my impact as a mentor for student-athletes. However, afterward, I did not have the emotional literacy to express how the interview made me feel. I knew my voice and my perspective mattered, but why only in the month of February? There were few Black coaches in the Ivy League and no Black women's basketball head coaches. As I continued throughout my career, I wondered why there were rarely Black women in leadership positions in athletics and the realm of higher education. My own career aspirations began to shift as I realized what leadership experiences were like for Black women in athletics. Many of my colleagues experienced stereotypes, constant microaggressions, and being in the field became isolating.

Individually, I experienced these things as well. Additionally, being a Black woman in this culture of athletics, there were constant feelings of bias and discrimination. If the situation involved communication with current student-athletes, who were predominantly Black, or the recruitment of Black student-athletes, my involvement was always needed. However, in the realm of leadership positions, even as the most qualified, myself and my colleagues of color were often overlooked. I began to second-guess myself. Not many others looked like me, so I

also constantly felt the weight of having the knowledge, language, and expertise of *all* Black women, just in case I was the only Black woman my colleagues ever encountered. My career ambitions have powered my desire to look deeper into the potential obstacles that impact Black women in sport leadership opportunities. Even if we are unaware, we will always bring certain beliefs and assumptions to our research (Creswell & Poth, 2016). An intersectional qualitative method allows me to connect with participants in a distinctive way. This methodology is a new tool for engaging in meaningful, thoughtful conversations involving awareness and encompassing diverse cultural experiences.

Participants

The participants in this study were chosen using purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) and snowball sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2016), described in detail in the next section. The primary target participants for this study were individuals who identified as Black women working within athletics in higher education and the professional athletics sector. The secondary participants identified for this study were females and males of diverse backgrounds working within athletics in higher education and the professional sector, who demonstrated inclusive leadership qualities as evidenced by their professional reputation within athletics: demonstrating emotional intelligence, openness to their growth, and effective and collaborative cross-cultural communication skills. Initially, I intended to interview 10 participants: seven working in collegiate athletics, and three working at the professional level of athletics. Ultimately, I conducted a total of six interviews (two each) with three individuals working in collegiate athletics, and three individuals working in professional athletics. The participants identified as follows: three Black females, one International Transracial Adoptee female (an individual who is of one race or ethnic group with adoptive parents of another race or ethnic group), one White

female, and one Black male. One Black male began the study but withdrew due to work conflicts. See Table 1 for a summary of the individuals who participated in this study.

The first participant interviewed was Melinda. Melinda works in Division I collegiate athletics and holds a high position as a licensed supervising counselor in her athletic department. At the time of the interview, she was recently promoted; before her current role, she held a similar position in the same athletic department. She is the only Black woman in her department on the leadership team. She has never had a Black woman as a supervisor in collegiate athletics.

The second participant interviewed was Zena. Zena has a unique background in athletics as she has spent time in collegiate athletics at the Division I and III level and worked in professional and international athletics. Zena held a supervisory role at each level she worked at. Zena currently uses her expertise to train organizations and teams on equity, anti-racism, and belonging. Zena identifies as an International Transracial Adoptee; in her years of coaching, she never experienced having a Black woman as a supervisor.

The third participant interviewed was Dawn. Dawn worked for several Division I institutions in non-coaching staff roles and assistant coaching roles. She recently accepted a position in professional athletics for a male-dominated sport with a semi-pro team. She started her new role days before our second interview. Dawn identifies as a Black female; she had one Black female supervisor during her time in collegiate athletics.

The fourth participant interviewed was Quentin. Quentin worked for a Division II program for several years and recently transitioned to Division I collegiate athletics. At the time of the interview, he was completing his first year as a Division I head coach. For nine years, he has been in a leadership role. Quentin identifies as a Black male; during his time in collegiate athletics, he has never had a Black woman as a supervisor.

The fifth participant interviewed was Jennifer. Jennifer worked for a Division I program for several years. She held a high-level position as the director of her department. She now works in professional athletics in a similar role. Jennifer identifies as a Black female; she currently has a Black woman as her direct supervisor.

The sixth participant interviewed was Sara. Sara spent numerous years in collegiate athletics at two Division I programs in leadership roles. She now works in professional athletics in a very distinct, high-level position. Sara identifies as a White female; early in her career, Sara had a Black woman as her direct supervisor. At her current organization, Black women are present in leadership roles.

For the purpose of the study, I felt Black women needed to be able to amplify their voices and discuss their own lived experiences. It was also critical to gain lived experiences and narratives from those with other backgrounds working in athletics. Other research studies in the realm of Black women in sport leadership have focused on a singular demographic, only focusing on the experiences of Black women. As the researcher, I wanted to expand the lens to explore how others are experiencing Black women as leaders and individuals. Understanding the practice of inclusive leaders with a particular focus on the impact of Black women leaders is critical.

Several remarkable studies have examined Black women in sports leadership (Abney & Richey,1991; Armstrong, 2007; Bruening, 2005; Mcdowell & Carter-Francique, 2017; Simpkins, 2017). Still, including inclusive leadership and spaces where Black women thrive as leaders was an important aspect to investigate. The experiences of and surrounding Black women in sport leadership continues to be a space that lacks in-depth investigation. Ongoing research that acknowledges the marginalization of Black women in sports, while seeking to show diverse

perspectives about Black women in leadership through qualitative analysis, was imperative to better understand how leaders create inclusive cultures within sports organizations.

Purposeful Sampling

Having the experience of working in leadership positions in collegiate athletics for several years as the researcher, I have created relationships with others working in athletics at different levels. Esposito & Evans-Winters (2022) emphasize, "qualitative researchers try to be deliberate in selecting and inviting participants to join their study" (p.75). Ruchika Tulshyan (2022) identifies qualities of inclusive leaders, citing leaders that value growth mindset, trust, and listen to input from others. The participants for this study were selected to represent a broad range of perspectives intentionally. It was essential to include participants who reflected a level of professional maturity (i.e., at least 30 years of age, and a minimum of 5 years working in athletics). Additionally, participants were known in professional circles to be emotionally intelligent, open to their own growth, and effective and collaborative cross-cultural communicators. Initial participants were identified through professional networks, then were asked to identify other inclusive leaders.

Snowball Sampling

Snowball sampling involves asking a current participant about others who fit the parameters of the study (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Two participants in the current study emerged from snowball sampling; this strategy was essential in my recruitment process as the researcher.

<div align="center">

Data Collection

</div>

The primary data collection method was through interviews via Zoom, a communications technology platform that allows users to connect using audio and video. Interviews were

recorded and then transcribed using TranscribeMe, a secure transcription service used to transcribe the audio/video recordings. I also took notes of observations and non-verbal communication to enhance credibility of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All data were protected on the researchers' secured, password-protected drive. In this study, it was imperative for participants to remain anonymous. Therefore, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to protect their identity.

As the researcher, I incorporated The Data Collection Circle (Creswell & Poth, 2016) into my study, seen below in Figure 2. Ethical considerations are central to qualitative research and research participants. As the researcher, it was imperative to protect the human participants in the pursuit of this study (Esposito & Evans Winters, 2022). After using purposeful sampling and snowball sampling to identify research participants, the researcher pinpointed a secured office space to conduct both rounds of semi-structured interviews. Before each interview, the researcher took time to build a rapport with each participant, to better understand each leader as an individual and express appreciation for participating in the study. The researcher was purposeful in sampling by selecting participants that met a particular criterion (i.e., at least 30 years of age, and a minimum of 5 years working in athletics). Additionally, leaders were known in professional circles to be emotionally intelligent, open to their own growth, and effective and collaborative cross-cultural communicators. The primary form of data collection was gathered through two semi-structured interviews to understand further how participants processed the research questions. A secondary form of data collection was gathered through documents, as the researcher kept a personal journal during the research study to further collect data.

Furthermore, each interview was recorded via Zoom and a secondary recording device. Both recordings were secured always using password protection. To minimize field issues, I

worked to gain early access to the identified leaders for this study. I ensured that all interviews were conducted in a quiet, secured space to minimize interruptions that could distract the interview process. As the researcher, I also reflected on previous relationships with interviewees prior to the interviews to remove any unwarranted bias (Kvale, 2006). I did encounter an unexpected issue when a participant working in professional sports had to drop out of the study. Due to the roles and high-level prominence of some of the participants, there were instances when interview times had to change. This was out of my control as the researcher, but all interviews were still conducted.

Regardless of the approach, a qualitative researcher will face many ethical issues that surface during the collection of data and the analysis process (Creswell, 2007). Earlier in the chapter, I addressed my intersectionality as a Black female and how this identity could impact the study. How the researchers' intersectionality informs the research ethics is important to note. Largely speaking, ethical research involves harm reduction or does no harm to research participants (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022). As an intersectional researcher and Black woman, I worked to employ ethical decision-making during the research. Lastly, the data collected was organized and stored securely in a password always protected device. Protecting the anonymity of participants was imperative to the study, and all data was organized solely by the researcher.

Figure 2

Data Collection Circle

Interviews

Before interviews, participants were asked questions related to their demographics and background in higher education, including: (a) age, (b) racial identity, (c) education, (d) collegiate athletic background, (e) institutional type or current position, and (f) current title. In-depth, semi-structured interviews served as the primary form of data collection. As the researcher, the interview process allowed me to examine how organizational cultures in intercollegiate and professional athletics influence Black women's leadership opportunities and how leaders create an atmosphere that values inclusion for Black women in athletics.

Each interview allowed me to ask in-depth questions to leaders and ranged from 40-90 minutes. The interviews focused on their background in higher education and how their experiences in higher education shaped them individually. The study sought insight from Black women and identified inclusive leaders as it related to creating spaces where Black women have

access and can flourish as leaders. The purpose of this study was two-fold: It examined the

organizational cultures of intercollegiate and professional athletics and the influence they have

on Black women's leadership opportunities. It also explored inclusive leadership and its impact

on Black women's experiences in athletics. Follow-up questions were tailored to each individual

participant to focus the conversation of the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Lincoln

& Guba (1985) encourage gathering detailed accounts to explore patterns of cultural and social

relationships to establish transferability of qualitative data. I asked additional questions using

semi-structured interviews to gain a deeper understanding from the participants.

Data Analysis

As a qualitative researcher, I engaged in a series of activities to analyze data (Creswell &

Poth, 2016). After each interview, I made personal notes debriefing the interview. Recordings

were transcribed, then those transcripts were first cross-referenced and verified for accuracy

using audio recordings of interviews. Then transcripts were read and thematically coded using

line-by-line analysis as recommended by Coffey & Atkinson (1996). The second line-by-line

review of the transcript was compared to the researchers' notes taken during the interviews to

clarify themes further. Finally, a third line-by-line review was conducted, spending time with

each participant's transcript, listening for their voice, and seeking thick descriptions as described

by Geertz (1973).

Trustworthiness and Validity

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that good qualitative research is dependable. To

assure credibility in my role as a researcher, I ensured processes and procedures were tracked

thoroughly to analyze data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Integrity was assured in multiple ways:

I discussed identity and roles with participants, and further, had a peer-reviewer cross-check

themes to control researcher bias; transcripts were reviewed multiple times and compared with the audio recording for detail and accuracy, as well as compared with the researcher's notes in vivo. Additionally, I included member checking as an added layer of dependability. Lincoln & Guba (1985) mentioned member checking as the process "whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stake holding groups from which data was originally collected" (p. 314).

Furthermore, as a researcher, I maintained a reflective journal to assist in checking any biases that could impact that outcome (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lastly, triangulation methods included a comparison of transcripts to researcher notes, peer-review, and member-checking. This helps to meet Lincoln & Guba's (1985) evaluative criteria of credibility (member-checking and triangulation), transferability (thick description), dependability (committee review), and confirmability (triangulation).

Conclusion

The work of Black women's contributions should not be reduced to a few recognizable faces. Inclusion is an act of accountability, and as a society we all have a role to play. Each of our roles will look different, and at times it requires us to challenge the status quo and processes that have been in place for decades. Tracy (2010) mentioned, "the most successful researchers are willingly self-critical, viewing their own actions through the eyes of others while also maintaining resilience and energy through acute sensitivity to their own well-being" (p. 849). For years, Black women have asked for a seat at the table. This study has enhanced understanding of missteps and policies hindering inclusion and advancement. In Chapter IV, I will highlight these voices, and analyze and make recommendations in Chapter V.

Chapter IV: Findings

The key purpose of this chapter is to share the findings in accordance with the evidence gathered from the interviews conducted. The purpose of this study was two-fold: it examined the organizational cultures of intercollegiate and professional athletics and the influence they have on Black women's leadership opportunities. It also explored inclusive leadership and the impact this has on the experiences of Black women in athletics. To achieve this, the study was conducted employing the following two research questions:

1. How are organizational cultures in intercollegiate and professional athletics influencing Black women's leadership opportunities?

2. How are leaders creating an atmosphere that values inclusion for Black women in athletics?

This chapter discusses the themes that emerged from the interviews conducted with each participant in response to the research questions developed to guide the study. Each participant's background was researched prior to the interview, and everyone provided additional background information at the beginning of each interview. This provided me with additional information on each identified leader's educational and professional journeys and helped me establish a further connection with each participant.

The semi-structured interview protocol consisted of 10 questions that guided the first interview, and eight questions that guided the second interview. Interviews were conducted through Zoom, a frequently used communications technology that enabled the researcher to connect with participants using video and audio. Participants identified as follows: three Black females, one International Transracial Adoptee female (an individual who is of one race or ethnic group with adoptive parents of another race or ethnic group), one White female, and one Black

male. It was of utmost importance to gain research findings and understanding from participants with diverse backgrounds and experiences, and participants are identified by their assigned pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. Table 1 provides the participants' duration of athletic employment and collegiate or professional affiliations.

Table 1

Participant Background

Pseudonym	Gender	Position	Athletic level	Overall duration of athletic experience
Melinda	Female	Athletic Counselor	Division I collegiate athletics	8 years
Quentin	Male	Head Coach	Division I collegiate athletics	15 years
Dawn	Female	Assistant Coach/Athletic Counselor	Division I collegiate athletics	9 years
Zena	Female	Coach/DEI Facilitator	Professional athletics	14 years
Jennifer	Female	Director of Wellness	Professional athletics	8 years
Sara	Female	Director of Performance	Professional athletics	11 years

In this chapter, I outlined the participants' narratives, giving the reader further insight into each participant. At the end of the chapter, I analyzed their narratives where I identified four themes and one sub-theme that emerged through the analysis process: education and impact: inclusion or exclusion; professional athletics: celebrated for being me; navigating leadership: we before me, and mentor of many: Black women's leadership with the sub-theme of hiring

practices. In response to research question 1, how organizational cultures in intercollegiate and professional athletics influence Black women's leadership opportunities, two themes emerged: education and impact: inclusion or exclusion, and professional athletics: celebrated for being me. In response to research question 2, how leaders are creating an atmosphere that values inclusion for Black women in athletics, two additional themes and one sub-theme emerged: navigating leadership: we before me, and mentor of many: Black women's leadership with the sub-theme of hiring practices.

This chapter will discuss the results relative to the analysis of data obtained in the transcribed interviews with the participants in this study related to their sport leadership opportunities and experiences. In the following section, I present the narratives of Melinda, Quentin, Dawn, Zena, Jennifer, and Sara. Before each interview, I discussed each participant's educational background, and length of time working in athletics (reported in Table 1 above).

Melinda-The Servant Leader

Melinda is currently working in collegiate athletics while specializing in counseling and pursuing her doctorate. Melinda considers herself an advocate of many, and a professional who wants to impact the lives of those around her positively. Leadership, and the influence she has on others is something she holds as an honor, and she places value on the way she can serve others.

Melinda has always valued education, and her undergraduate experience began the journey in her focus on the mental health and well-being of student-athletes. What started as a vehicle to form friendships, eventually became a passion, leading to a college athletic scholarship offer. Reflecting on her experience, Melinda stated:

> I guess my athletic career began by trying to use sports to connect with people on the
>
> military base. I moved a lot as a kid and really used sports to foster community—that

trajectory led me to playing basketball at the collegiate level, where I majored in psychology, so I got an introduction to mental health there. I then went on to get my master's degree in counseling. Maybe because I moved so much as a kid, and being an only child, I can adapt and relate to others easily. I don't really like to be in the spotlight, but I have a passion for helping other people.

Although Melinda prefers to work behind the scenes, she began to see how her servant leadership style helped her approach and relatability with others. As a result, she would be asked to serve in different leadership positions, eventually elevating to her current leadership position in collegiate athletics. When asked about her career trajectory, Melinda went on to mention:

I think I was pretty open to my career in athletics, especially given my role was new, and it's newly evolving in the field. So even now it's consistently changing. I have a positive experience in athletics, but I also now understand the complexities of the business side and again, meeting the needs of a lot of different stakeholders. That was probably one of the biggest realizations, understanding that collegiate athletics is a business, and the stakeholders are wide-ranging and consistently shifting. I've realized that you definitely can't always make everyone happy, but I also feel like everyone's voice should be heard. I also think that is highly important in leadership.

Being a Black woman working in collegiate athletics, Melinda acknowledged that several moving parts can go into making practices within her organization more inclusive. One thing that consistently stood out to her is the hiring practices and positions given within athletics. She has worked extremely hard to gain her current leadership role but feels others that look like her are not consistently present or offered a seat at the table. Melinda is thankful that she has gained

autonomy to make decisions within her unit, but also admits there have been reoccurring matters that need further examination:

> Something that I've been thinking a lot about in terms of Black women in my specific field in counseling and psychology is I keep hearing Black women say 'I thrive in crisis', and I have a question just like what is that about and why? And then also boundaries. I find Black people to organically set boundaries. We have to, and so I think Black women in the athletic space show up with strong boundaries, which sometimes can be challenging for the athletic space, which doesn't generally operate with great boundaries. So even just like, for example, work/ life dynamics. I see Black clinicians saying more like, oh no, like I work 9 to 5. That's the job I signed up to where I'm not answering calls on evenings or weekends. Which I think is challenging in a system that expects that but doesn't directly say that. Being a Black female, we have to navigate this differently, and we have to consistently be savvy with our communication, but also regulate our emotions for safety reasons.

Melinda continues to navigate the culture of college athletics and what that means for her as a Black woman in a leadership role. She admitted the realization of her unique skill set and the value she brings to her athletic department but has also evaluated the moments when her abilities and expertise appear unseen.

Quentin-The Growing Leader

Quentin is currently a head coach of a Division I team in collegiate athletics. He considers himself someone who is *growing the game*, and prides himself on his commitment to seeing others succeed. He constantly thinks of new ways to grow as a leader, a father, and a man

of great faith. Working in collegiate athletics is a dream fulfilled for Quentin, and he desires to continue leading a collegiate program for as long as he can.

Education has always been at the forefront for Quentin, and even from a young age, he always found himself in a leadership role. Much of this had to do with his older brother, who inspired him from a young age by being one of his first coaches, although he was only a 7th grader. Playing sports allowed Quentin to spend time with his family, but also led to an opportunity to play his sport at the collegiate level. For Quentin, each opportunity that led to the next was designed for a reason. He has a strong focus on different ways to challenge himself and those around him; Quentin went on to say:

My faith was a big part of my journey to where I am today. I think that for me, I've always tried to improve. I'm always trying to get better. I'm always trying to find ways to stay current. I don't think you can have one style that works from year to year. If you're not evolving, then the world will pass you by—because players today are way different now even than they were last year.

Even though Quentin was hired to become a head coach at a young age, knowing others believed in his abilities to lead a team helped with his confidence and belief that he would have continued success. As a Black male, Quentin often felt a responsibility to be a voice for others with marginalized identities. Although Quentin competed in college as a student-athlete, working in college athletics was still a completely different experience for him:

I was shell-shocked. Eyes wide open. Like, oh, this is what it's really like, because I saw the dark side of that early on. Just seeing people not care about the rules, and just have kind of like whatever it takes to win type stuff. It opened my eyes to a lot of things. I just got to see some stuff early on and what I didn't want to be like. Right now, I feel like the

culture of college athletics is really about the individual. I know that I try to be inclusive.

I want input from everybody. It bothers me when people don't have a voice. For me, part

of inclusive leadership is being inclusive in hiring. It's very hard to be inclusive in your

leadership style if you're only getting input from certain types of people, otherwise,

you're only seeing things from one perspective.

The landscape of collegiate athletics continues to change and has shifted significantly as operating budgets have increased and student-athlete exposure increases. Quentin went on to mention:

Now, there is definitely more money at stake, especially at the Power 5 level. Also,

people don't always feel included, and people don't want to be somewhere for a long

period of time where they're the only one. I've always tried to diversify my staff because

I think that is of utmost importance. I have autonomy to do certain things within my

program, but we also have to see this from other leadership positions. Especially for

young Black female athletes.

Quentin has encountered various times throughout his career where he has been the only

Black male in the room but acknowledged there are rarely instances where there are Black

females in leadership positions present. Due to Quentin's positive impact at his institution, he is

frequently asked to serve on committees and be a part of different campus initiatives. Although

he has full autonomy over his program, his authority does not hold true when the senior

leadership is present which is composed of predominantly White men. Quentin went on to

reflect:

A huge benefit for some of our young Black women would be if there was a voice in

those rooms. But to never have a Black woman, a Black woman's voice in those rooms,

in the decision-making rooms, it's almost like the Black student-athlete, the Black female student-athlete, doesn't exist. Also, there is no one in those rooms that has experienced what they're going through, and those decisions are often going to affect them.

Quentin has continued to be vocal about his commitment to growth for himself and for those he leads. He expressed the obligation he feels in the many roles that he encompasses to find new ways to learn and address inequities in whatever way he is able.

Dawn-The Emotionally Intelligent Leader

Dawn has spent several years in numerous leadership roles in collegiate athletics at the Division I level. Relating to others and relationship building has strongly impacted her leadership style. As a collegiate athlete, she realized early on in her life the importance of balance and navigating the obligations of being a student-athlete while managing academics and a social life. She values her time with others to communicate and connect and is passionate about understanding how people relate in different environments. These characteristics helped shape her desire to pursue a profession in collegiate athletics.

Holding several leadership positions in collegiate athletics, Dawn has managed how she can best lead within the culture of each institution she has worked with. Having athletic experience and being well-educated has assisted Dawn in her performance and ability to relate to others. Dawn emphasized:

I've always felt like connection with people is important. I genuinely believe people will work harder and feel more passionate about what they're doing if they feel trusted and respected by others around them. Of course, everyone may be motivated by different things, but finding out what that is has importance as well. A lot of what I have learned about leadership came from my experience with sports, but you start finding out about what

expectations are and how important executing those responsibilities are for yourself and your teammates.

For Dawn, watching others and finding out what worked in leadership positions was always important:

I would always look at what the leaders I was around and what they did, what their values were, what their personality was, how they treated people…that was a really big thing, and just kind of observing, I've always been very observant. Is your leadership style working, not working? Are people responding to you, not responding to you?

Dawn touched on the realization that although the culture of athletics is assumed to be about the development of student-athletes, and the mission of the university many times her departments did not reflect this. Dawn went on to mention:

These days I feel like coaches and leaders in collegiate athletics have a very difficult time. Mainly because they have to say they care about certain things, but at the end of the day the only thing that holds real value is winning. It's easy to say you care about the athletes, but at the same time you have to win by any means necessary because everyone's job is on the line. I've worked with plenty of people that I would not consider very inclusive, or great leaders, but because they have shown they can win they are placed in leadership positions. It's kind of like you don't really have to be a leader, we just need you to win games. At least that has been my experience.

Dawn also discussed how important it is to evaluate how people are brought into leadership positions in collegiate athletics, and how hiring practices impact others around them:

It feels a lot like is based on who you know in the world of athletics. Anytime we're hiring somebody, we kind of already know, or somebody knows somebody. There's

going to be some sort of bias there and because of that, you maybe aren't always hiring the right person for the position. So that, to me, is probably the downside of it. Are they the most qualified? Or is it just easy because you know somebody that knows them.

Dawn consistently emphasized the importance of colleagues and having the emotional intelligence to interact and work with people from different backgrounds. She also mentioned having an awareness of toxicity in athletic departments but not feeling comfortable enough to talk about it. Others in the department had an awareness of this underlying culture but it would never be addressed. She felt a lot of this had to do with the leadership patterns of athletic departments and the need for more diversity on leadership teams. Dawn went on to state:

> In reality at the collegiate level, we're probably missing out on a lot of great, qualified people with amazing leadership skills. Staff, student-athletes, really everyone participating in whatever capacity should feel included in higher education. Right now, I think we need more diversity, and more Black women in leadership positions in athletics. In fact, we may always need more.

Dawn went on to mention how the lack of Black women in leadership positions also impacts the student-athletes at universities:

> I don't think we'll ever get to a point where we have what would be considered enough in terms of Black women in leadership positions. I think we are seeing improvement, but we still have further to go. I also believe it is important for representation purposes, and for student-athletes, whoever, to see that, and to know that they can be in those positions and know what that looks like and feels like. To also feel like they have somebody who is looking out for them.

Leaders, and others in positions of power must take time to understand the barriers that Black women pursuing leadership positions endure and further understand the influence of representation within communities and organizations. Leaders should be willing to advocate for those who are marginalized to help advance workplace cultures in athletics.

Zena-The Effective Leader

After several successful years of coaching and leading teams, Zena currently uses her education and background in athletics to partner with organizations in numerous fields to reimagine equity and belonging. Her coaching career boasts leading NCAA, professional and international programs as a head coach for 14 winning seasons. As a leader she is collaborative, effective, and reliant on a shared commitment to ongoing learning and action.

Education has always been important to Zena and attending a higher education institution was always a dream for her. She played club sports at the collegiate level and having this involvement was a big part of community for her:

I loved my experience so much of being a part of my club team that I really wanted to stay around the sport. My undergrad institution had some of the best coaches in the country, so I would ask, but I just started sitting in on some of their practices. I wanted to know more about how they led their teams and how they communicated with players. That initially gave me a good foundation to go into collegiate coaching. Then, a big part of me getting my professional coaching experience was the work I had done coaching in collegiate athletics. Well, not only coaching, but also talking about race-related issues in the sport. I think that is relevant, and it wasn't necessarily something I was doing publicly, but I was holding conversations, and my educational background and research also made those conversations possible.

Zena spoke about her leadership development and how she shifted her thinking and leadership style over time. To be an effective leader, Zena emphasized the importance of collaboration and continuing to learn from others:

Growing up, I gained a lot of my leadership skills from my dad. So, I guess I learned a lot from White males, specifically when I was younger, that was kind of what was available to me. As a coach I started very much in a way that was character forward, but there was still this authority. I was always use to the coach dictating things. But then I began to evolve, I think I became much more collaborative in terms of getting and giving feedback in kind of a more constant way. I would talk about working with teams all the time, empowering various people on the team to do not even necessarily typical captain duties, but just kind of feeling like they have a say in what we were doing you know.

In addition to learning what worked well in her leadership style, Zena also understood what did not work and how to move in a positive direction that would have greater influence. She also began to realize how important it was to see leadership from the lens of others:

When I was younger, things seemed to be more fear-based, and as I continued in the field of coaching, I wanted to get away from that. I was able to surround myself and spend a lot of time with some pretty incredible leaders, and I knew I wanted to make an impact that was significant, and sports seemed like a great way to do that. I had an investment in growth and an investment in learning.

As Zena's career progressed, she had the opportunity to coach at the professional level and reflected on the different make-ups of collegiate and professional athletics:

At the collegiate level, I think there's an overarching part where you cannot be fully collaborative. There are so many times as the head coach where you are the only person

that can make some of those difficult decisions. At least, that is how I believe it's designed, that seems to be the structure. So that was a positive change for me at the professional level. The micro level with players and then on the macro level with the team systems.

However, for Zena, she was intentional about addressing the overarching culture of athletics. Zena also emphasized the history of higher education and the overall structures of institutions in America:

Sports is an overall interesting world that sometimes can feel like it has its own separate existence. When you don't fit the stereotype of your sport, or the leadership of that sport, a lot of times you are othered. I don't necessarily think it's even intentional, it's just the way it is. I also believe there has to be an acknowledgement of systems of oppression. I think that's really important. You have to take that into account with everything. If you're in denial about these things, then you're essentially erasing the experience of people potentially, or yourself. I see that happen all the time. Higher education to me is so established. It's so huge. It's such a big institution. It was literally founded at a time when enslavement of people was completely normalized within our society; owning other human beings was seen as wealth and status. So, yeah, the whole founding, the origin story of higher education in this country, there's such good I mean, there's like incredible research and books and things about it. But we've never actually reckoned with it. It's never been disrupted. So, until that occurs, it's difficult to say, okay, here's how we make things more inclusive because those things have not really been addressed.

When considering how things are being made more inclusive, Zena emphasized that institutionally there is still much work to be accomplished:

I think the way that we make things more inclusive is kind of like band-aids, we have an immediate crisis how can we alleviate that? I think harm reduction is of course, important, but ultimately the NCAA and higher education are such powerful institutions that they aren't changing, so we'll just continue to see the same patterns.

Zena also emphasized the importance of sports structures at all levels, and how power, access, and hiring policies influence what occurs:

At the professional level of athletics, I believe culturally things are more so player forward and a true business structure. So, there are things that can feel more inclusive because of the social impact approach. But when we look at the overall structure of professional sports organizations, you still have the billionaire owners of the teams. Power still lies in their hands. In sports we tend to normalize dehumanizing people, taking their individuality away, and I personally do not align with things like that. In general, I feel like the sports world has to do a better job of problem solving, understanding the power structures, and taking a hard look at hiring policies. I would like to see a shift in power in terms of those who have opportunities.

Zena had strong sentiments about the lack of inclusion as well as the absence of Black women in leadership positions during her time in athletics:

If this organization looked more like even more like me, in a broad people of color sense, in HR, and ownership, I think every one of my interactions would have been different. Not only did I not have a Black woman in a leadership position during my time in higher education, but I also don't even think I worked with a Black woman at any of those jobs... I genuinely believe my entire experience would have been better had more Black women been present. Black women are not monolithic. So, within that word phrase,

there's a ton of diversity and a ton of differing values and opinions and experiences and identities.

Diversity in athletic cultures and interacting with people from different backgrounds can aid in breaking down discriminatory biases and addressing structural barriers. Zena emphasized how including Black women in leadership teams can provide an additional lens and add value to sports cultures and organizations.

Jennifer-The Inclusive Leader

In addition to her work in collegiate athletics, Jennifer is now one of the leading experts in the nation working in the professional athletics sector as a specialist in her field. She is elite in her ability to collaborate and communicate with others; Jennifer continues to break barriers as she shines, working to continue her personal and professional growth.

Jennifer was the only participant who did not have a background in sports before entering her professional role in athletics. What others may view as unconventional, Jennifer felt this helped her growth as a leader and provided a rare perspective:

I really value my collegiate journey, and I feel like my undergraduate and graduate experiences gave me a great baseline to enter the workforce. I began my career working as a child therapist and also spent part of my time working with the criminal justice system. During this time, I got to see both sides of the trauma. Most people would probably think it's a bit different that I don't have a sports background, but I gained so much valuable experience that actually helped me transition into the space I'm currently working in. I've had the chance to work in different leadership roles at different points in my life, and my crisis experience has come into play as I've helped in different mental health initiatives because I have the background to build those resources.

Additionally, Jennifer detailed how her involvement working in collegiate athletics provided her with additional experiences in leadership:

> During my time in higher education, I could look at the infrastructure that was embedded within a team and find different ways to use my expertise, and it morphed into a leadership position in the sense of, you are one person working with a multidisciplinary team of coaches, trainers, academic personnel, and say, okay, how can we best help this person and student and get the resources that they need.

Jennifer's specialty is on the mental health side, but she has always desired to be a helping hand no matter what role she has played in her organization. Being collaborative and leaving room for open dialogue has always been important:

> For me, diversity means diversity of thought, diversity of expertise, and diversity of lived experience as well. Particularly in professional sports, decreasing certain stigmas that may exist. If you look at collegiate sports, most of the athletes that compete in those sports are African American or people of color, so, I think representation is important and visibility is important also. But within that scope, diversity for me and inclusion is being able to have representation of various backgrounds, and education, and not just to say we can check that box.

When it comes to someone being a transformational leader, Jennifer believes that relationships are crucial and cannot be solely transactional. Seeing and knowing people as individuals to build a rapport has always been important to Jennifer:

> In general, when we think about athletes, we hear people talk about putting the person before the performer or the student before the athlete, but we genuinely have to start thinking about that more. From a leadership perspective, I don't think this is always a

priority. I would love to see collegiate athletics adopt more of an inclusive culture in terms of understanding the Black people and other people of color you have within your organization. When I say other, I really mean everyone who is 'othered,' I don't think we have a true grasp on that, and it impacts organizations.

Identifying as a Black female, Jennifer also emphasized the importance of intentionality when working toward equity in sports:

We can't just check boxes. You can't continue to just use the name and images of people of color. We also need to be visible in leadership positions, and it takes real efforts from folks to open doors and facilitate opportunities. Organizations must understand the value of Black women in this space because we can be helpful and successful.

Jennifer echoed how the intersection of gender and race that Black women hold must be acknowledged and accepted in athletic cultures and organizations. Instead of exploiting Black women, Jennifer advocated that those in positions of power see the talents and abilities of Black women to bring success and improvement to their organizations.

Sara-The Authentic Leader

After numerous years of working in collegiate athletics, Sara is currently working in professional athletics specializing in mental health and well-being. Her authenticity has shined through as she has worked with some of the top athletes in the world, while also building a reputation as an expert in her profession.

Sara has always placed a lot of value on education, and shared how her past experiences have led her to the current role she serves in:

I got my undergraduate degree in psychology and health and sports studies, and I also competed at the Division I level athletically. After college, I did a couple of things

outside of athletics, but it was always about helping other people for me, as well as my family. After a few years, I got back into athletics in higher education, and now I have this amazing opportunity of working in professional athletics. It really has been quite the journey, but I've always just approached everything from a collaborative perspective. I've always been less impacted by what the literature says about leadership, and more aware that I have the opportunity to be a mentor. I've always wanted to be a person that provides support and guidance, and that authenticity is just a primary core value in my life.

For Sara, working in collegiate athletics was never about a personal ego, and always about creating and developing other people. Having the ability to understand other perspectives has always been considered as well:

A part of my job is to create leadership experiences for other people, and not to operate from a space of fear. If anything, I want to help others become better than I am. Intellectually, I think we try to create inclusive policies where we can prove something is happening within organizations, it almost appears performative. We won't really see true changes until things become interpersonal and we authentically understand people from other backgrounds.

Sara admitted that during her time in collegiate athletics, there was some apprehension created around job security which would influence the way people were able to operate:

I also think that because of the competitive nature and sometimes the cutthroat nature, particularly when we're talking Power 5 schools, I do think people start to operate from a space of worrying that people might be out for their jobs or that their job is at risk because of other people. Whether it's the performance of a student-athlete that might cost

a coach a job, or it's the performance of a coaching staff that might cost a sports

administrator their job. I don't know that there is a real solution to this, but if we could

create a system where people feel more supported and understood, instead of feeling as

though they have to protect their job, I think that would allow for people to relax and

move to a more collaborative space and into that inclusive leadership where we are trying

to support and develop people.

Having worked in collegiate athletics, and currently working in professional athletics,

Sara also reflected on the differences between the levels:

To me, that is one of the biggest differences between sports at the collegiate level, and

sports and the professional level; in retrospect, there seems to be a fakeness at the

collegiate level, and the professional level feels more authentic. I never thought I would

leave collegiate athletics, but I had an opportunity that I could not pass up and I am so

thankful that I was reached out to, and I am able to serve in this new space. The idea of

what college athletics is seems to be completely fabricated, because at the end of the day

if you don't win games, you won't have a job. You also need to sustain financially. It's

not necessarily bad, it just is what it is, but everyone pretends it's about something else.

Moving into the future, Sara highlighted what leadership could look like across athletic

organizations:

I hope we move beyond creating an inclusive opportunity, and we move into a space

where people are known and their voice is heard, and we openly say, wow, you have this

incredible experience. Can you teach us? And here's what we have to offer you. Also,

here is how we think we can innovatively and creatively collaborate in ways that enhance

all of us and that you will become better by doing that. I will become better by doing that,

and my knowledge and experience deficits are not threatened by the fact that you have more advanced experiences in these ways.

Sara was forward-thinking in her approach to moving towards considerations of redefining power structures. With a focus on collaboration, Sara insisted on ways to disassemble existing harmful systems and incorporate inclusive leadership.

Thematic Analysis: Guided By the Research Questions

Each participant's experience or interaction applies to the central research questions for the study:

1. How are organizational cultures in intercollegiate and professional athletics influencing Black women's leadership opportunities?

2. How are leaders creating an atmosphere that values inclusion for Black women in athletics?

The four themes and one sub-theme that emerged, education and impact: inclusion or exclusion; professional athletics: celebrated for being me; navigating leadership: we before me, and mentor of many: Black women's leadership with the sub-theme of hiring practices, were developed after careful consideration of the data. In response to research question 1, how organizational cultures in intercollegiate and professional athletics influence Black women's leadership opportunities, two themes emerged, education and impact: inclusion or exclusion, and professional athletics: celebrated for being me. In response to research question 2, how leaders create an atmosphere that values inclusion for Black women in athletics, two additional themes and one sub-theme emerged, navigating leadership: we before me, and mentor of many: Black women's leadership with the sub-theme of hiring practices.

Education and Impact: Inclusion or Exclusion

Participants spoke at length about their experiences of working in athletics at higher education institutions. Much of their narratives focused on why they attended these institutions, their experiences working in higher education, and the organizational culture of athletics in these institutions. Several participants played collegiate sports, which impacted their decision process in attending certain universities but did not change their scope of the institution. Several participants mentioned the impression of organizational cultures within collegiate athletics and the reality of the organizational cultures being conflicting. Melinda stated:

> The culture of athletics revolves around performance and winning, and because of that value of winning, it can be challenging for people to develop and grow personally in that space because it has a very different mission than you might have as an employee. So I think that's what can make it challenging in athletics. It's a financial industry. It's really reliable on winning to make money, which can create a culture that is competitive, hierarchical, patriarchal, and rigid.

The culture of athletic departments can often be a division that is siloed from the other significant entities of institutions. It can be challenging for leaders to address what they cannot identify. Black women may be present in athletic organizations, and even the most qualified for leadership positions, but the lack of consistency from one athletic program to another can create confusion. Equally, the university may promote words and phrases that value inclusivity, growth, and learning but often the members of the athletic department are treated as a separate entity of the university. Zena revealed:

> I definitely felt very out of place the entire time I was at that institution. I think they did some things that made me feel excluded, for sure, but included no. I think that's one of

the downfalls within athletic departments, so there isn't any kind of community care. Everybody's kind of in a silo. You're so focused and busy. It's like the amount of time spent on things like film is so much and recruiting. You don't really have that type of camaraderie, I don't think. Other jobs might, at least from talking to people that work in different sectors. It's like everyone is running their own business within the larger department, so that is your focus. I don't think we take good care of each other in athletics. I don't think that we include the larger community well in athletics as a whole to be honest.

All participants at some point expressed the impact of working in college athletics consistently reiterated practices that do not always reflect inclusion. Equally important, inclusion can mean different things for different people in the workplace. If the foundational culture of the organization is winning at all costs, but individuals serving in the organization do not have a clear understanding of this, a disconnect is bound to occur. As previously stated, sports leadership in collegiate athletics has been dominated by those that are White and male. This dominant form of leadership directly impacts the organizational culture of college athletics and influences experiences for Black women's leadership opportunities. Jennifer stated:

I'd say, collectively, as a whole, I'd love to see college athletics adopt more of trying to think of inclusive culture in terms of understanding you have Black, or people of color within your organization and what it is like showing up every day as a Black person, or a person of color, Latino person, or an Asian American person, every day. Versus hey, I'm a coach or I'm a therapist or I'm an athletic director and I'm fulfilling this position. This is multi-layered and I would hope that athletic departments really start to think about that because if you look at it statistically, some of what I just said, because I'm a Black

woman, I know a number of Black people who have left college athletics because they did not feel included, or value within the space that they occupy that they give so much to.

Participants also emphasized the lack of awareness for how Black women show up at their place of work. In the workplace, often, White culture explicitly and implicitly privileges whiteness and discriminates against those who are not (Gray, 2019). Due to discrimination, coupled with lack of awareness, this directly impacts leadership opportunities for Black women, making it difficult for others serving in leadership positions to have the consciousness of elevating a demographic that is existing while also being unseen. This stressed sensing an act of self-preservation for Black women working in athletics, juxtaposing the awareness of Black women and how they were perceived. In the realm of collegiate athletics, working harder and Black women having to prove themselves was also a theme that came up during the interviews. This revealed the struggle that Black women are trying to go above and beyond and show they are well-equipped to lead, while simultaneously feeling unseen, siloed, and receiving little to no validation of their time and commitment.

Professional Athletics: Celebrated for Being Me

Participants in the study emphasized various ways that inclusion was more prevalent in professional sports, as opposed to their time spent working in collegiate athletics. Participants all pointed out that working in professional athletics was never the goal. In fact, once initially starting their careers in collegiate athletics, participants articulated not thinking beyond this level. However, over time the organizational culture of collegiate athletics and exclusive practices made the decision process simpler when considering a move into professional athletics. Sara reflected, "I think that the college space now, in retrospect is so full of pretense and fakeness,

and the professional sports space feels a lot more authentic and real, and I never thought I was

going to leave the college space."

More often, when referencing feelings of existence in professional athletic organizations,

gender was the more prominent identity, but distinctions of race were also accounted for. Each

participant who worked in professional athletics emphasized their gender being an asset,

including feelings of empowerment and having a unique perspective. Being only one of a few in

the professional space impacted others' opinions of their ability to do their jobs in a positive

light. Colleagues viewed them as intelligent, powerful, and equipped. This varied drastically

from the collegiate space, where being only one of a few included feelings of isolation and

otherness. The organizational culture of professional athletics appears to be celebrating

leadership opportunities for Black women. However, the number of opportunities is still limited,

especially in reference to male-dominated sports.

A unique finding included each participant that had the experience of having a Black

female colleague or mentor, expressed emotions of genuine care, empathy, and understanding of

others in the workplace, except for Dawn. Jennifer was currently the only participant with a

Black female supervisor in professional athletics. When specifically asked about her experience

having a Black female as a supervisor, Jennifer mentioned:

> She's somebody that I look up to and not only in business, but just in how she carries
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> herself in life. She is very open to discussing her challenges that she's faced as a way to
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> help lead me in my role as I'm transitioning as a woman into the professional space of
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> sports. This has been something that I'm really thankful and grateful for. She gives me the
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> autonomy to do my job, and I really appreciate that. And not only that, but she is
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> accessible to where I could call, I could text, and she also makes a point to spend quality

time, not just discussing work, but asking me how I'm doing. I appreciate how we have

that type of relationship of how are you really, or whenever we greet each other, there is

an embrace of I got you, and I see you, and I'm here for you, which I really appreciate

too.

The distinctive experience for Jennifer with the presence of other Black women in her organization and Black women in leadership positions in her organization has been a focus in the world of professional athletics along with visible change. Jennifer went on to mention, "I would say it's more progressive you know. In the sense that I am now at an organization where we are trending upward in having Black women be a part of our organization and leadership roles."

Jennifer's experience provides her with a model of leadership that has given her work experience an immediate positive impact. She expressed how her supervisor's leadership style has also influenced others in the organization, and that it has made a significant impact on her experience. At work, she can be her *full self* and not hide any of her *Blackness* because it is accepted and celebrated. This has also impacted her colleagues from other diverse backgrounds, as everyone sees their organization as a place of inclusion.

Also working in professional athletics, Sara expressed her gratitude of working in an inclusive environment where her feelings and thoughts are validated and often sought after. Sara mentioned, "I've never felt more energized and empowered to have ideas and to execute them, and I think for me the biggest component of feeling empowered is feeling trusted." When specifically asked about the differences in organizational culture at the professional level, Sara expressed:

In the pro space, what has been really refreshing is, we don't have to lie about anything. I

want people to be, we want, we want our players to be happy, healthy, functional. Our

job is to support them to make as much money as they can to create generational wealth

for their families to support their families, to win games and we all want to achieve

success. We are helping to support the athletes to achieve success in one domain that

everyone is in agreement on, that they've worked so hard to get to.

Mutual respect and others having the capacity to listen to one another was common

among responses of those working in professional athletics. The internal barriers of the

organizational culture of professional athletics that impact Black women's leadership

opportunities, are based on the positions available, rather than the lack of awareness of the

benefits of having diversity in leadership positions. The self-confidence and cultural awareness

that Black women bring to professional sports leadership positions are seen as an advantage to

the sports organization. This was reiterated by all participants who had the experience of

working in professional athletics. For participants working in professional athletics, their

experience attending higher education institutions directly impacted their professional athletics

experience as they are seen as *experts* in their field. Jennifer and Sara both obtained terminal

degrees and referenced several times that although they do not view themselves as individuals

with all the answers, their higher education knowledge is consistently admired and

acknowledged. Leaders in the professional space are creating an atmosphere of inclusion for

Black women by giving Black women autonomy, celebrating, and recognizing the

accomplishments of Black women, and elevating Black women.

Navigating Leadership: WE Before Me

The culture of athletic departments can often perpetuate the model of giving your all to

the organization with little concern to how this can impact the individual. Participants mentioned

that a common saying arises, describing athletic departments as a *family*. Common scenarios like

this impact Black women's leadership opportunities and set up barriers to creating an inclusive atmosphere. The intersectionality of being a Black woman has been previously discussed, adding the responsibilities that come with the execution of a work role, and any other identities an individual may hold, play a part in how this language is complex. Essentially asking employees daily to enter their workplace and assimilate to a new identity further exhibits the lack of awareness athletic cultures create for Black women. Participants all mentioned the desire of wanting healthy boundaries opposite from the culture of athletics. The importance of leadership and trust was a strong theme in how this impacted the cultures of the participants' organizations. Equally, they all emphasized how being given autonomy to execute roles as a part of organizational change as it impacts Black women and their leadership opportunities in sports.

When asked about their leadership styles, participants often referenced others being instrumental in impacting their leadership. They also consistently indicated the importance of serving others and steadily growing in their own self-awareness to meet others where they are. Melinda stated:

Whether that's serving the people that you supervise or work with, or serving others, I think I am a leader from behind. I don't really like to be out in front or in the spotlight, so servant leadership serves me well in the sense that I really like helping people. In any position I've been in a leadership role, my focus is really on ensuring that the people I work with, and for, are getting the support they need, and that just drives my decision-making in leadership.

Several participants also referenced the importance of being trusted to execute their leadership role and how this influenced their ability to lead. Quentin stated:

As a coach, I try to consistently teach life lessons and realizing where young people are, and young coaches are at this time in the world. I'm at a place too, I don't get as bent out of shape over wins and losses because just as life experiences happen, you have to meet people where they are a lot of times to get them to where they need to go. I think a big part of leadership and success is belief, belief in what you do, belief in that it's together. I believe, in saying we and not me, or we and not you, the more you say we, or our, the more it is everyone, it's not a dictatorship. We're all in this together; I think there's a lot of power in words.

Quentin emphasized the value and importance of Black women in leadership roles and how representation is highly important in collegiate athletics. As a Black male, he acknowledged his personal adversity but consistently recognized his privilege of being a male in sports and holding positions of power.

Dawn emphasized the importance of cultivating relationships within her ability to lead in organizations. She wanted to feel reliable for her leadership skills, and not expected to constantly prove that she was competent while still promoting growth for others:

I'm straightforward you know, everything that I feel like I am as a leader are things that I would want in a leader as well. I just try and provide that welcoming environment. I think building connections is really important, and you know it's important to me to show up and let people know that I am grateful and thankful for the things that they do. I think if you're able to build a better connection, people essentially will want to do more and want to work harder for someone that they trust and respect and that they feel like is good to them. When you learn everybody individually, you learn what motivates everyone, and

what they like, what they don't like, and ways in which to communicate with them. I

believe all of those things in turn can help with productivity and just things getting done.

All participants acknowledged the importance they felt in their ability to lead at the top

level of sports organizations. Leaders never acknowledged seeking validation but sensing trust

from their direct supervisors to execute their leadership roles did arise. Although it was

consistently recognized that Black women in leadership roles were a rarity within their

institutions of sport, it was noted that their direct supervisors often valued inclusion and

understood the importance of cultural differences within an organization.

Leaders created atmospheres of inclusion for Black women in their organizations by

listening to their opinions and ideas and giving them autonomy to execute their roles without

micromanaging or controlling their workflow. Additionally, compensation was seen as a form of

creating an inclusive culture. Melinda, Zena, Quentin, and Jennifer all emphasized how often

Black women are acknowledged for their expertise to an organization; therefore, they are

frequently asked to go beyond their given roles. With many participants exhibiting servant

leadership qualities, they felt the need to aid on committees and do extra work to offer their

diverse perspectives and leadership capabilities. When compensation followed or was offered,

instead of the assumption of 'other duties as assigned,' this demonstrated that their time was

valuable, and created an atmosphere of empowerment.

Mentor of Many: Black Women's Leadership

Black women's leadership played a vital role in their own development as individuals

and leaders. The nuances of being a Black woman in sports was often referenced, especially

when seen in a position of power. Melinda, Quentin, Dawn, Zena, Jennifer, and Sara all

identified Black women who positively impacted them at some point in their careers. Dawn was

the only participant who had a negative experience with a Black woman as a supervisor and attributed most of this to the individual's lack of leadership skills and lazy hiring practices by the institution. However, this did not change her overall perspective of Black women acquiring leadership roles. Sara attributed much of her ability to lead and now serve in a leadership position in professional sports to her experience of having a Black female supervisor in the beginning of her career:

> It was far more experiencing the profound impact of representation and watching her navigate her role and watching her mentor me. I guess learning vicariously the hardships for me obviously being a woman in sports and then seeing the intersectionality for her and seeing how she handled it. We ended up developing a really close relationship where she would be really candid with me. So there also wasn't the facade of being the strong Black woman, and she could show emotion without being the angry Black woman, and it was just this ability to see more depth in an experience that I hadn't had.

Zena touched on her experiences working with Black women, and women of color, as well as some of the difficulties she has seen:

> In my experience with athletics in general, it's like women of color, particularly Black women you know, just from knowing people and being around things, I feel like women of color are the most silenced and also expected to talk the least in certain rooms. But they are demanded the most of. So, I mean, I think it's like this dichotomy of yours like you're supposed to be really, really, really perfect. And you have to get everything right when you do talk. But then, everyone's like shh, so it better be right…and so then women of color, I swear to God, it sounds so cheesy, but when I end up in a room and there's a bunch of women of color, there's so many things that are unspoken that are so affirming.

Every time I've worked with a Black woman, it has been my most positive experience, and definitely my most encouraging.

For many of the leaders that participated in the study, Black women played a special role in their personal development. The workplace experiences of Black women in athletics are important, and how leaders prioritize inclusion not only influences the Black women within the organization, but others in the organization as well.

Hiring Practices

Within the theme of mentor of many: Black women's leadership, a subtheme of hiring practices emerged. All the participants mentioned the lack of Black women in leadership positions and the correlation with hiring practices. Within sports organizations, a common phrase of usage is finding someone that is a *culture fit* within the organization or institution. If the foremost demographic of athletics is centered around predominantly White, all-male leadership, hiring Black females becomes extremely limited. Quentin reflected:

The president's hire the AD [athletic director]; more times than not the presidents are mainly White males. So, I just think that there needs to be more focus on including women and including minorities when it comes to hiring practices. You tend to hire just people that you know or people that are in your circle, a lot of times people that look like you. Until we have things in place and programs in place to be more inclusive when it comes to hiring different types of people, the cycle is going to continue.

The bias that Quentin referenced can be defined as affinity bias, where it makes sense that people with shared identities would be easier to work with (Turnbull, 2014). Unfortunately, this is commonplace in athletic cultures, and leaders attempt to justify why everyone on the leadership team is White, and in the process leaving Black women out of opportunities.

Zena, who also felt strongly about hiring practices and how they impact Black women working in athletics, took an in-depth look at some of her recent work. She echoed Bruening (2005) in that oftentimes Black women in sports are underrepresented, and eventually silenced:

It is staggering to me the amount of Black female collegiate basketball players you know. That's like 80% that make up the sport, and then it's 4% are actual head coaches. So Black women are being hired as assistants and other roles, but they don't want Black women necessarily as their head coaches. You know I look at the NCAA demographics, their survey. So, this might not even be relevant, but I just used it the other day in a presentation, the way that they categorize racially is only White, Black, and Other. It's so interesting to me when people are still getting hired in 2023 and it's like, this is our first Indian American volleyball coach, or this is our first African American coach, and I'm like, how? Like, how? But it's just, wild.

Zena went on to discuss leadership in collegiate athletics further, and how it compares to the landscape of college campuses, and the correlation to the overall culture of sports:

Within the NCAA, looking at leadership, I think less than 1% of athletic directors are other women who are not White or Black, which can be multiracial, Asian American, etc., but less than 1%. And then it's like 10% of student-athletes are "Other" women. So the same issue where you're just like, okay, clearly, this is not representative of the country. We knew that already. But it's also not representative of the student-athlete body. Then when we just look at sports culture, or a lot of other organizations in the sense that there's ownership, and those are the people that are still making a lot of these bottom-line decisions.

Due to the make-up of leadership in higher education settings, collegiate athletics, and professional athletics hiring for *culture fits* only perpetuates exclusionary practices. By default, this only implies hiring for sameness (Tulshyan, 2022). Zena also mentioned the aspect of ownership within sports, which supports the elements of power and access. Wilkerson (2020) goes in-depth about how race plays a vital role in society. How people look, and who they are perceived to be based on their outward appearance is the cue to their status (Wilkerson, 2020). Power then plays a role, as it characteristically privileges some groups and marginalizes others. The ownership of athletic organizations determines the hierarchy and makeup of the leadership, which also directly influences the hiring practices.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed analysis of six lived experiences of identified inclusive leaders working in athletics. Three of the interviews focused on the experiences of working in collegiate athletics, and three of the interviews centered around working in professional athletics through two semi-structured interviews. Through the analysis, four themes emerged. The first two themes that emerged, education and impact: inclusion or exclusion, and professional athletics: celebrated for being me, answered research question 1, and how organizational cultures in intercollegiate and professional athletics are influencing Black women's leadership opportunities. The other two themes that emerged, navigating leadership: we before me, and mentor of many: Black women's leadership, with a sub-theme of hiring practices, answered research question 2 and how leaders are creating an atmosphere that values inclusion for Black women in athletics.

Since I identify as a Black female with my own biases, it was important for me to interview participants that held identities like my own and differing individualities to gain a

phenomenological perspective of diverse experiences. Interestingly, there were no differences in how much each participant felt Black women's leadership opportunities needed to be expanded in athletics. Also, for those who had a Black woman as a direct supervisor or colleague at some point in their professional career, five of the six participants praised the impact these Black women serving in the leadership role provided them. Furthermore, Black women were acknowledged as providing participants with a high level of confidence and a strong sense of self. The presence of Black women who served in a leadership role in their professional life, fully translated to their personal roles as mothers, fathers, partners, and friends. Leaders also felt having a Black woman present constructively impacted the organizational culture; more importantly, the Black women in leadership roles made them better people.

Chapter V: Analysis, Summary, & Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to further explore how organizational cultures in intercollegiate and professional athletics influence Black women's leadership opportunities, and to examine how leaders are creating an atmosphere that values inclusion for Black women in athletics. Existing literature on Black women in athletics focuses heavily on the phenomenological experiences of only Black women, or Black women in collegiate athletics. As the researcher, I sought to add to the limited literature on the experiences of Black women in both collegiate and professional athletics. Additionally, the experiences of other individuals working in collegiate and professional athletics to further understand how others experience Black women in leadership positions. In using Critical Race Theory (CRT) theoretical perspective for this study, I gained insight into how participants' phenomenological experiences intertwined with the tenets of CRT (D. Bell,1995; M. T. Bell, 2018; Crenshaw, 2011).

Six individuals participated in this research study, three individuals working in collegiate athletics, and three individuals working in professional athletics. The participants identified as follows: three Black females, one International Transracial Adoptee female, one White female, and one Black male. All participants served in leadership roles at their organizations and were identified as inclusive leaders as evidenced by their professional reputation within athletics: Demonstrating emotional intelligence, openness to their own growth, and effective and collaborative cross-cultural communication skills. Prior to each interview, background information about each participant was gathered, and a semi-structured interview protocol was used to interview each participant using Zoom.

Upon conducting the study, four themes and one sub-theme emerged that were discussed in Chapter 4: education and impact: inclusion or exclusion; professional athletics: celebrated for being me; navigating leadership: we before me, and mentor of many: Black women's leadership, with a sub-theme of hiring practices. These findings were then reviewed using the conceptual framework outlined in the literature review in Chapter 2. The existing literature, and the findings in Chapter 4 are the basis from which the conclusions and recommendations for future research and practice were developed.

Summary

This study was guided by utilizing the following two research questions:

1. How are organizational cultures in intercollegiate and professional athletics influencing Black women's leadership opportunities?

2. How are leaders creating an atmosphere that values inclusion for Black women in athletics?

Research Question 1: The Influence of Organizational Culture on Opportunities for Black Women in Leadership

The first research question for this study: How are organizational cultures in intercollegiate and professional athletics influencing Black women's leadership opportunities? The role of any leadership position is a complex one. Many participants explained entering their current role in athletics and living out an entirely different reality than expected. Ultimately, the results of research question one discovered that the foundational culture influenced Black women's leadership opportunities within their work setting, and the image of how Black women were portrayed within their organization.

Many participants described what would be defined as the structural bias of collegiate athletics. Structural bias refers to the institutional patterns and practices that offer advantages to some, and disadvantages to others based on identity (Rosette & Tost, 2013). Specifically, this structural bias is benefiting White men because foundationally colleges and universities were built for White, landowning men (Thelin, 2011), by design, excluding Black women. This is a prime example of what D. Bell (1995) meant by the tenet of CRT, that racism is endemic in American society. All the leaders in this study, regardless of gender or racial identity, discussed the defective or undefined culture of intercollegiate athletic departments. Without the stability of an inclusive culture, Black women's leadership opportunities were consistently impacted. Zena referenced the current leadership statistics in collegiate athletics; in 2022 The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sports (TIDES) reported that White men continued to dominate athletics director positions holding 68.2% at the Division I level. Women athletic directors at the Division I level hold 7.7% of the total (Lapchick, 2022). It was not reported of the 7.7% how many women identify as Black women. Additionally, 78.6% of chancellors and presidents in American higher education, and 77.1% of athletic directors were White (Lapchick, 2022). Resistance to diversity and change was evident to all participants. Even if words were not being directly said to leaders in the study that identified as Black women or other Black women within the organization, the workplace had structures in place that stereotyped how Black women performed their roles or were portrayed by simply being themselves.

Zena explained the notion of never being included but was made to feel excluded consistently during her time working in collegiate athletics. Melinda shared feelings of working in *crisis*, and other Black women colleagues felt as if they were constantly in crisis in workplace

settings. Dawn expressed she felt the culture of intercollegiate athletics was *toxic* and experienced the absence of Black women in leadership positions consistently.

At the professional level, the organizational culture was described as dissimilar to that of collegiate athletics. Sara described the culture of her organization as "healthy and honest." Jennifer, who held a unique experience as the only participant with a Black female supervisor at the professional level of athletics, detailed how Black women were given leadership positions in her organization and the positive impact that had on her success and the success of others within the organization. One of the most interesting and surprising elements of the findings was how Black women were portrayed in professional athletics. As referenced in Chapter 2, Black women have been historically silenced, and although Black women have shown their leadership capabilities for years, oftentimes, they are not given leadership positions. This was consistent in the findings as it relates to culture of collegiate athletics. However, the dominant element that must be recognized is the visibility of Black women in professional athletics that the participants expressed.

Due to the racial and gender bias of Black women in sports, women of color have been described as invisible, and exceptions to their race when they have been successful in the athletic world (Hall, 2001; Wallick, 2018). Participants who worked in professional athletics remarked being seen as experts and celebrated for their work contributions. Black women were portrayed as intelligent and successful and relied upon for their capabilities. However, the negative that participants made note of was the overall shortage of vacancies. Working in male-dominated professional sports in America, participants referenced how they were selected for their position, and the reality that their leadership opportunities were exclusive.

Research Question 2: Leaders Role in Creating Atmospheres that Value Inclusion

The second research question for this study: How are leaders creating an atmosphere that values inclusion for Black women in athletics? The results of research question two revealed three distinct ways leaders are creating an atmosphere that values inclusion: autonomy and trust, and the presence of other Black women in professional settings, which was fundamentally impacted by the hiring practices of the organization. As mentioned in Chapter 2, there are always stories about the insurmountable amount of strength of Black women. They are continuously seen as strong, even amid pain and fear, but have little room to show their true emotions (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2007). Black women are personally able to regulate themselves within the culture of their organization, many times because they have no choice. From a CRT perspective, race is a social construct (D. Bell, 1995), meaning we have historically socialized people in this culture to exclude Blacks.

Instead, we have assigned race based on skin color to create stratified groups in society, or place people in their determined caste (Wilkerson, 2020). This has resulted in socially constructed arbitrary meanings of group membership (i.e. that Black women should not be in leadership positions), which in fact creates an exclusive environment. So, to create an environment that values inclusion, inclusion must become a verb. It must be something that leaders are recognizing and an activity that must be constructed within organizations. Inclusion becomes an active decision to lead through awareness and cultural consciousness. For Black women working in athletics, feeling trusted, or being given autonomy to execute a leadership role was a way that leaders helped to create atmospheres that valued inclusion. Jennifer reflected that by being trusted, she could simply show up to work as herself, not pretending to be someone else.

During her interview, Sara referenced two common stereotypes commonly made in reference to Black women in the workplace. Sara's previous Black female supervisor, "didn't have the façade of being the strong Black woman, and she could show emotion without being the angry Black woman." This too indicates the element of leadership creating trust and how that allowed their relationship to grow. Additionally, this correlates with Motro et al. (2021) and the belief that in occupational settings there is the stereotype of the 'angry black woman,' which portrays Black females as aggressive and hostile in work environments. For Jennifer, having a Black woman as a supervisor who instilled trust, and her presence, created an extraordinary atmosphere of inclusion.

For all the participants, seeing other Black women in leadership positions, or working with Black women in leadership positions exhibited an atmosphere where diversity was seen as positive. For Sara, she described the Black women in her organization as their *everything*, encompassing leadership skills while also being mentors, friends, and advisors to others. Quentin continuously mentioned the absence of Black women in leadership positions, and how necessary he felt the need was for their representation and mentoring in collegiate athletics. As a Black male, he recognized his own positionality and felt there were constant imbalances of power which helped to explain his lack of opportunity to have a Black female as a supervisor. This aligns with Hall (2001), and Simpkins (2017) in that as a culture we are resistant to these shifts in race and gender since the elimination would compromise the imbalance of power for those who are wealthy, male, and White. Quentin acknowledged many times being the only Black male holding a leadership position within his department, but rarely seeing Black females in equivalent positions. These frequent occurrences were deflating for him and Black female student-athletes at his institution. Additionally, this further echoes the SIMP model of Simpkins

(2017), and how organizational elements such as policies and practices, and resistance to diversity impact Black women in sports.

As a Black woman working in a leadership role herself, Melinda recounted the astonishment of having access to attain her current leadership role. As mentioned in Chapter 2, often, Black women are the first of their race and gender to hold a leadership position within their organization (E.L. Bell, 1990). However, for Melinda this was different. A Black woman occupied her current role, excelled, opening the position for Melinda. Melinda admitted the presence of the previous Black woman helped her shine, and unequivocally impacted the hiring practice for her role in the athletic department.

Limitations of the Study

The purpose of this study was to create an intentional space to empower and equip voices of change, particularly voices that have been historically silenced and contemporarily continue to be siloed. Black women in sport leadership are a distinctive group, as well as those who identify as inclusive leaders in this space. In conducting the study, there were some limitations. This study is focused exclusively on those who are identified as leaders and have achieved many accomplishments; it did not focus on those who are not in leadership positions. Additionally, due to the schedule of individuals working in collegiate and professional athletics, there were instances when interviews had to be rescheduled. Most times, this was not due to the interviewee, but rather circumstances outside of their control with media outlets or urgent needs of student-athletes. As previously mentioned, one of the participants had to drop out of the research study due to the demanding schedule of his sports organization. This study was conducted to seek broader voices, but there were still only six participants. Also, the findings in this study are not generalizable, and although researched and investigated, the examination does

not apply to every Black woman who is a leader in sports. Responses to the research questions developed for this study may have varied based on a variety of other characteristics not examined. These could include institutional type and size; geographical location(s); institutional resources; size of coaching staff, etc. Lastly, my identity as a Black female working in sports had the potential to limit my own viewpoint and overlay, which I have tried to eliminate to the best of my abilities.

Implications for Practice

The purpose of this study was to further explore how organizational cultures in intercollegiate and professional athletics are influencing Black women's leadership opportunities, and to examine how leaders are creating an atmosphere that values inclusion for Black women in athletics. Participants openly shared their lived experiences of their time working in collegiate and professional sports. Implications and recommendations detailed here are resultant from the findings and conclusions along with literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

Hiring practices

In athletics, hires are often completed before the position is posted on the organization's website or other platforms that post job vacancies. Prior relationships with the assumption of skill set and leadership skills serve as the only requirement for the hire. This is also asserted in the SIMP model (Simpkins, 2017), guiding that sports culture and power directly impact the policies and practices within the organization, therefore making determining factors in the recruitment of future employees and hiring practices. To make hiring more equitable in athletics, it would be beneficial to do a candidate search, and interview candidates that meet the requirements for the available position. Equally, diversify the hiring committee to provide multiple perspectives on how the candidate can best serve the organization. Dawn reflected on

how many people are hired in athletics simply because they share the same recreational traditions. This excludes respective wonderful colleagues from the candidate pool. Shifting hiring practices provides opportunities for a wider range of people.

Provide Adequate Compensation for Black Female Staff

Compensation is one of the ways we indicate and affirm value. A pay gap between men and women already exists (Tulshyan, 2022). As we pursue goals of diversity and inclusion, we do not want to further widen the already existing pay differential. If we are serious about our diversity and inclusion efforts, we want to assure that those who work in these positions of leadership receive adequate pay. This speaks volumes in terms of what an athletic department, or an organization really is serious about.

Give Credit

Participants that received credit for the hard, incredible work they accomplished, praised how thankful they were to receive credit. This promotes opportunities for others to progress and acknowledges that Black women can do their job effectively. In the hierarchy of athletics, research has shown that Black women are not the dominant group in leadership positions. Giving credit assists in dismantling the structural bias that occurs in workplace cultures and helps in the advancement of women in the workplace (Tulshyan, 2022).

Communication Between Athletic Levels

Based on the findings, the organizational culture of collegiate athletics and the organizational culture of professional athletics varied greatly. However, one commonality with all the participants was that they attended higher education institutions which impacted their leadership abilities no matter which level they worked in. How the culture of professional

athletics has managed to find ways to incorporate more inclusive practices should be shared and interconnected with other athletic organizations.

Team Culture vs. Organizational Culture

A team is a group of people with complementary skills who work together to achieve a specific goal (Thompson, 2008). Schein (1996) defines organizational culture as the set of shared, taken-for-granted implicit assumptions that a group holds that determines how it perceives, thinks about, and reacts to its various environments. Although a team may function interdependently, or have stability, this does not ensure the same for the organization. In professional athletics, the organizational culture can have more clarity as most staff and personnel are there in the pursuit of excellence for one team. In collegiate athletics, there are different departments, stakeholders, and other athletic teams within the organization. Equally, teams do not always have success. Therefore, having an advanced organizational culture that is led by inclusive leadership can assist when, and if failure within teams occurs. Acknowledging and understanding the differences can also support in reducing the confusion of expectations and opportunities within the organization.

Customize Equity & Inclusion for the Organization

Many athletic organizations at the collegiate and professional levels are starting to create positions specific to their department in diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. Customizing equity and inclusion in athletic organizations can help define and regulate the organization's culture. Melinda mentioned being asked to serve on committees as someone with a marginalized identity, to come up with ideas to serve marginalized identities within athletic departments. After some time, this can exhaust the community the committee was intended to serve. Instead, create

and customize equity and inclusion strategies specific to the athletic organization with a clear understanding of organizational values and beliefs.

Plan for the Future

While it is true, we do not know the future nor can we see it, we can plan for it and do that wisely. The demographic projections of what our student population is going to be from a racial and ethnic standpoint will have a direct impact on the labor force. Taking steps that address the concerns expressed by the interviewees can address the status quo now and positively impact future workspaces. Equally, addressing these concerns with specific strategies and resources will help to bring about meaningful and lasting change. Workplace changes should not be the responsibility of a few, or the very people impacted the most, but rather an institutional, cultural change embraced by all levels of leadership. Regular evaluation of these steps will help to ensure that deviation can be addressed and corrected.

Culture vs. Control

Implementing a foundational culture for an organization can be beneficial and serve others within the organization. However, the culture should be defined, and the expectations and beliefs should also be clear. The boundaries of what is permissible should also be stated. Bigotry, racism, and microaggressions should not be allowed, and foundational expectations must apply to everyone. Listening, emotional intelligence, and cultural awareness should also be included in the organizational culture of organizations.

Recommendations for Future Research

As reflected in Chapter 2, Black women have a unique lived experience in the sports world (Hannum et al., 2014). The landscape of athletics is constantly shifting; continuing research on Black women and how they persist as leaders in the culture of athletics is a topic that

needs consistent re-evaluation. They often manage high-level organizations amid crises or frequent transformations. Additionally, participants also shared the need for information on why Black women are absent from leadership positions in athletics to increase visibility and amplify others.

Increasing the Sample Size

As this study included only six participants, there is an opportunity to expand the sample size. Doing so would produce a larger understanding of Black women's experiences in collegiate and professional athletics. This would allow for additional results and further understanding of the research questions.

Examine the Problem of Practice Quantitatively

As this study used qualitative research methodology, future researchers may find value in engaging more participants through quantitative methodologies such as administering a large-scale survey to a wider participant group. This would allow for a more detailed look at some of the themes that emerged through responses to qualitative questions that were posed in the present study.

Examine Supervisors or Hiring Managers of Black Women Leaders

A closer examination (through qualitative or quantitative measures) of those who hire and supervise Black women leaders in college and professional athletics would help in the identification of practices on the employment side of the organization. In addition, hiring managers and supervisors should be questioned or surveyed to learn more about how they identify and develop more women of color within their organizations. This can add to a growing body of literature that would encompass multiple sides of the leadership equation for Black women in athletics.

Studying Additional Identities

As this study focused on Black women and inclusive leadership, participants were selected by identified leadership skills, gender, age, and professional years of experience working in athletics. By examining additional identities (i.e., sexual orientation, religious orientation, socioeconomic status), future research can extend to highlight the experiences of Black women further. This can provide additional insight into other factors that may be at work in the experiences of Black women in leadership.

Conclusion

Each participant made it clear that they held themselves responsible for their actions and how they show up as a leader for their colleagues, department, or team. As each participant had the opportunity in their careers to work in collegiate athletics, although their leadership aligned most coherently with that of servant leadership, or transformational leadership, all their leadership styles were in many ways disruptive to the organizational culture of collegiate athletics. By serving, or placing strong value on collaboration, at some point, they were seen as problematic to the structure of their institution. The act of their personal accountability, exception of failure, or challenging organizational policies distinguished them as leaders, however, in the collegiate space it also isolated them at one stage or another in their career.

The interviews made it clear that Black women in leadership positions at the collegiate level must be intentional in every word and movement they make. Additionally, they have the difficulty of often being the individual who must challenge the status quo because they must preserve their integrity, and ultimately their true selves. Conversely, Black women in leadership positions at the professional level are seen as insightful, and everyone understands they are in a leadership position and well-deserving without constantly being questioned or undermined.

Overall, the level of maturation seems to be higher, and the organizational culture of professional athletics does not appear fear-based. There is a more profound understanding by all of the fundamental goals. This is not to say that issues are not prevalent, however, the inherent structure of professional athletics has a lesser discriminatory foundation, along with different leadership structures that aid in some of the outcomes. Organizational culture at the meso-level in professional athletics is in the process of taking a shift. This directly impacts how Black women can exist in leadership roles and have the opportunity to obtain them. The organizational culture of collegiate athletics at the macro-level limits opportunities for Black women working in sports.

During the interviews, every participant also referenced sports that generate top revenues: Football and Men's Basketball in the collegiate space, and the National Football League (NFL) and the National Basketball Association (NBA) in professional athletics. It was often referenced how these organizations are predominantly led by White, able-bodied men. In the collegiate space, college presidents and athletic directors hold the senior most leadership positions. In professional athletics, billionaire owners hold the most senior positions. Conflicting messaging often came into play in collegiate athletics, operating under the umbrella of a higher education institution. Athletic directors in leadership positions subtly mentioned academics, or other campus initiatives being of importance. However, coaches, administrators, and even student-athletes continue to operate under the assumption that winning is the only constant. The landscape of professional athletics, presenting the known element that revenue needs to be generated, and success is expected assists in individuals effectively leading in their designated roles.

Although this dominant form of masculinity is maintained in the professional athletic space, though minuscule, Black women are obtaining leadership opportunities, being celebrated

in their roles, and being acknowledged for their unique perspectives and intelligence. The connection of higher education impacting the experiences of working in professional athletics connects through leadership and hiring practices. Exhibiting resilient, inclusive, transformative leadership in the culture of collegiate athletics is what provided the foundation for Zena, Jennifer, and Sara's leadership roles in professional athletics. The other theme that emerged between all participants was the hiring practices that led to their current positions. Due to both the professional and collegiate athletic levels being led by White men, when filling leadership positions within organizations, other White men are routinely called to assess the leadership skills of their employees. What is believed to be valuable for the available leadership position, directly impacts Black women's leadership opportunities within that organization. If leaders are creating inclusive environments, they will see diverse leadership in their organization as enhancing numerous aspects of their organization. Having diverse leadership in organizations has shown to improve financial performance, and support the enhancement of innovation and group performance, while also improving employee retention (O'Boyle et al, 2015). If leaders do not value inclusion, it will only limit access to positions of power, and reproduce traditional notions of authority.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Research: Sport Leadership to Empower Black Women: A Phenomenological Exploration of Inclusive Leadership.
Principal Investigator: Dr. Ashley Tull
[Co-investigators:] Leah J. Foster

Overview: You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be over the age of 18, have the ability to speak English, and currently working, or have previously worked in a leadership position within collegiate or professional athletics.

Study Details: This study is being conducted virtually via Zoom and will not be supported or sponsored by any additional entities. The purpose of this study is two-fold. It will examine the organizational cultures of intercollegiate and professional athletics and the influence they have on Black women's leadership opportunities. It will also explore inclusive leadership and the impact this has on the experiences of Black women in athletics. The research will include two rounds of interviews, the first interview will take place to gain background information and the leadership background of participants, and the expected duration is 60- 90 minutes. The second interview will include follow up questions, and an opportunity to make meaning of any additional information. The expected duration of the second interview is also 60-90 minutes.

Participants: You are being asked to take part because you exhibit exceptional leadership skills. The researcher wants to further examine leadership skills of those who seek to empower and not diminish, who have emotional intelligence, and are respectful of others. The researcher wants to see the impact these leadership skills have on the experiences of Black women working in athletics. If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of six participants in this research study at TCU.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate and may stop your participation at any time. There will be no loss to you if you decide to longer participate in this study. No incentive or compensation are being offered to participate in this study. The benefit of participating is to further research as it relates to inclusive leadership in athletics.

Confidentiality: Even if we publish the findings from this study, we will keep your information private and confidential. Anyone with authority to look at your records must keep them confidential.

What is the purpose of the research? The purpose of this study is two-fold. It will examine the organizational cultures of intercollegiate and professional athletics and the influence they have on Black women's leadership opportunities. It will also explore inclusive leadership and the impact this has on the experiences of Black women in athletics. Women of color have a unique intersection, and how Black women are centered across these organizations is a topic that

deserves further exploration. Leadership stereotypes, and what is required to be a successful leader in sport organization needs to be re-defined to include Black women. Having a deeper understanding of diversity is important as we move through the 21st century and beyond. Sports organizations must consider the benefits of diversity and inclusion in their success plans.

What is my involvement for participating in this study?
The researcher's main form of data collection will be conducted through two rounds of interviews. Prior to interviews, each participant will first be asked to submit a current resume and will also receive a background questionnaire to identify education and current position. The researcher expects each interview to last 60-90 minutes. The interviews will focus on how the participants' background shaped them individually, as well as questions that examine the organizational cultures of intercollegiate and professional athletics, and the influence this has had on their leadership experiences. The researcher will use a phenomenological approach to obtain an in-depth understand of their experiences. By using a phenomenological approach to gather data, the research will be able to examine how a participant experiences reality and later describes this phenomenon. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that good qualitative research is dependable, and the researcher additionally plans to include member checking as an added layer of dependability. All interviews will be conducted virtually via zoom. Audio recording will be used during zoom interviews, and participants will be informed of taping. The researcher will be the only individual with access to the recordings, other than when the interviews are transcribed through a professional transcription service where confidentiality of participants will be kept. The recordings will be maintained for 3 years after the Final Report is submitted to the IRB. Information from data collected will be shared in the findings of the dissertation.

The research expects participation to take two interactions, with each interaction lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. The data collected during these interviews will be used for this research study, there will be no protected health information, or administrative data. The following are examples of the first round of interview questions to participants:

1. Can you please describe your personal, academic, and professional experiences leading up to this position?
2. Please describe your leadership style? How has this been developed as a result of previous experiences?
3. How would you define inclusive leadership?
4. What practices do you use to make other people feel included?
5. What can be done in higher education organizations to promote a more inclusive environment?
6. Define the culture of college athletics and/or define the culture of professional athletics (the later if the person has experience in both types of environments).
7. Describe the degree to which you feel your definition of culture in athletics is congruent (or not) with that of others in your workplace?
8. What presently does an inclusive environment look like to you? What does an inclusive environment look like in the future?
9. How do you feel empowered (or not empowered) in your current role?
10. What have others done in your journey, to your current position, to make you feel included?

Are there any alternatives and can I withdraw?
You do not have to participate in this research study.

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time.

What are the risks for participating in this study and how will they be minimized?
The researcher does not believe there are any risks from participating in this research that are different from risk that you encounter in everyday life.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?
Although you will not directly benefit from being in this study, others might benefit because research and the overall influence of leadership and culture in organizations is important and significant for future success plans in athletics.

Will I be compensated for participating in this study?
You will not receive a payment for your participation.

What are my costs to participate in the study?
To participate in the research, you will not need to pay for anything.

Is there any conflict of interest?
There is no conflict of interest.

How will my confidentiality be protected?
Every effort will be made to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information, including research study records, to people who have a need to review this information. I as the researcher will be the only individual handling data. We cannot promise complete secrecy. If your records were ever reviewed, these individuals would be bound by the same confidentiality, including University personnel or other individuals who will be bound by the same provisions of confidentiality.

We may publish or publicly present what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish or present anything that would let people know who you are.

What will happen to the information collected about me after the study is over?
The researcher will not keep your research data to use for future research or other purposes. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be kept secure and stored separately from the research data collected as part of the project. Research will be housed in a password protected database for three years, and then destroyed.

We will not share your research data with other investigators.

Who should I contact if I have questions regarding the study or concerns regarding my rights as a study participant?
You can contact Dr. Ashley Tull at Ashley.tull@tcu.edu and (817) 257-6938 with any questions that you have about the study.

Dr. Brie Diamond, Chair, TCU Institutional Review Board, (817) 257-6152, b.diamond@tcu.edu; or Dr. Floyd Wormley, Associate Provost of Research, research@tcu.edu

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. A copy also will be kept with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team 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 this study.

_____
Printed Participant Name

_____
Signature   Date

_____
Printed Name of the person obtaining consent

_____
Signature   Date

Consent to be audio/video recorded

I agree to be audio recorded. Yes ____   No ____

I agree to be video recorded. Yes ____   No ____

_____
Signature   Date

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.

Yes ___   No ___

_____
Signature   Date

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 projects.
Yes ___   No ___

_____
Signature   Date

APPENDIX B

Qualitative Interview Questions

Round 1 Interview Questions:

1. Can you please describe your personal, academic and professional experiences leading up to this position? (RQ2)

2. Please describe your leadership style? How has this been developed as a result of previous experiences? (RQ2)

3. How would you define inclusive leadership? (RQ1) (RQ2)

4. What practices do you use to make other people feel included? (RQ1) (RQ2)

5. What can be done in higher education organizations to promote a more inclusive environment? (RQ1) (RQ2)

6. Define the culture of college athletics and/or define the culture of professional athletics (the later if person has experience in both types of environments). (RQ1)

7. Describe the degree to which you feel your definition of culture in athletics is congruent (or not) with that of others in your workplace? (RQ1)

8. What presently does an inclusive environment look like to you? What does an inclusive environment look like in the future? (RQ2)

9. How do you feel empowered (or not empowered) in your current role? (RQ1)

10. What have others done in your journey, to your current position, to make you feel included? (RQ2)

Round 2 Interview Questions:

1. Describe your first memory of someone being a leader? (RQ2)

2. How has your experience working in athletics been what you expected it to be? (Context, Transferability)

3. Do you have a direct supervisor? (Context, Transferability)

    a. How would they describe their race/ethnicity?

    b. How would they describe their gender?

4. How would you describe your relationship with your supervisor? (Context, Transferability)

5. How do you think the organizational culture of your department would be different if there were more Black women present? (RQ1) (RQ2)

6. What are your thoughts on the hiring practices of your organization? (RQ1)

7. Describe the level of autonomy you have to make important decisions within your organization? (Context, Transferability)

8. Please share any additional thoughts or comments about Black women in athletic leadership positions? (RQ1) (RQ2)