“Not What I Expected”: A Narrative Inquiry on the Leadership Experiences of Women Campus Recreation Directors in the Power Five Conferences

Emily J. Johnson

University of Tennessee, Knoxville, ejohn112@vols.utk.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss

Part of the Sports Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Emily J. Johnson entitled "'Not What I Expected": A Narrative Inquiry on the Leadership Experiences of Women Campus Recreation Directors in the Power Five Conferences." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Kinesiology and Sport Studies.

Steven N. Waller, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Jeffrey A. Graham, Kathleen C. Brown, Mitsunori Misawa, Andrew R. Meyer

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)
“Not What I Expected”: A Narrative Inquiry on the Leadership Experiences of Women Campus Recreation Directors in the Power Five Conferences

A Dissertation Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Emily Joann Johnson

May 2023
DEDICATION

To my participants, I am incredibly grateful for your willingness to share your life stories with me. Without your vulnerability, this research would be impossible. Thank you for paving the way for the many women who will come after you.

To my mother, Jenny, whose steadfast, unconditional love has carried me through the challenging days. Your strength of spirit, persistent prayers, and compassion mean so much to me. I thank you from the bottom of my heart. To my grandmother, Gayle, I thank you for the countless prayers, encouraging words, and loving support as I have journeyed through my education and my life. There is no way I could have done this without you – I love you. To my sisters, Katie and Becky, I thank you both for your continued love and support. I am so proud and thankful for you both. To my sweet cat, Mowgli, your embodiment of unconditional love and furry-ness has gotten me through the hard times. I thank you for being my guardian angel. To my dearest friends, Natalie and Jimmy, you demonstrate the true meaning of friendship and fill my life with such happiness. I also want to thank my future in-laws, who have created a home for me in Knoxville and continue to affirm the importance of family.

Finally, to my soon-to-be husband, Tyler, this would not have been possible without you. I thank you for your unconditional love and support. I thank you for your patience during the late nights and difficult days, and your belief in me when I did not have belief in myself. I thank you for our many conversations related to women in sport and recreation – it gives me hope for a better future. It’s true what they say, being in a relationship with a Ph.D. student is a bit like going through the Ph.D. program yourself. I
dedicate this dissertation to you, my love. You fill my life with joy, and I love you more than words can express.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This formative, doctoral education journey would not have been possible without the support I have received from so many people at the University of Tennessee and beyond. I will be eternally grateful to my advisor and dissertation committee chair, Dr. Steven Waller. Dr. Waller believed in my potential long before I believed in myself. He encouraged me to embark on this doctoral journey, to take risks, and to research a wide, yet related, array of interests. He was always the voice of reason and encouragement when I felt disheartened. I am a braver teacher and scholar because of him. Finally, I am forever grateful for his commitment to valuing my personhood first and foremost, and for his steadfast prayers over my life and this journey.

My sincerest appreciation goes to Dr. Jeffrey Graham, Dr. Kathleen Brown, and Dr. Mitsunori Misawa, for their time, care, and expertise throughout this dissertation process as they graciously served as my dissertation committee members. Dr. Graham’s kindness has made an incredible impact on me. His commitment to his students and his encouragement to me have been invaluable during my doctoral education. Dr. Brown has championed the unconventional nature of blending public health and sport and recreation management. She supported me wholeheartedly during my concurrent, nontraditional Master of Public Health education, and she also demonstrated care for me as a person. Dr. Misawa has been instrumental in my development as a scholar. He has guided me through many qualitative classes and taught me the importance of prioritizing humanity in research.
I acknowledge and thank my committee member, mentor, and friend, Dr. Andrew Meyer. I would not have pursued my doctoral degree without him. Dr. Meyer has played a pivotal role in my life more times than I can count. From shepherding me through my undergraduate honors thesis, to mentoring me during my transition from Baylor to Tennessee, to supporting me during my sport psychology master’s degree, to forwarding me the call for applications for this doctoral program, to praying over me with Dr. Waller, to meeting up at academic conferences, to finally to serving as a committee member. For all this and much more, I am forever grateful.

Finally, I acknowledge and thank my cohort and peers for providing inspiration, a listening ear, and encouragement over the years. A special thanks to Lauren for her support and friendship, this journey is impossible without others by your side.
ABSTRACT

Although there is an increase of women working in campus recreation, there remains an underrepresentation of women in leadership roles within campus recreation and related industries. Not only can it be challenging for women to navigate male-dominated fields to achieve their desired position, but women experience difficulties once they finally obtain leadership roles. This study built upon the limited research conducted about the experiences of women leaders within campus recreation. The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of women directors of campus recreation departments in the Power Five conference institutions. Specifically, I examined their career development, resilience, and health in response to stressors, such as the work-life interface and gender discrimination. By utilizing a qualitative design, narrative inquiry, the goal was to understand further the social contexts (i.e., gender, organizational structure, social relationships) that influence the career development of women in campus recreation. Through the use of narrative thematic analysis, four themes were constructed: (a) “I was very aware of being the only woman:” navigating the cycle of the system by examining their positionalities; (b) “relationship focused:” women’s ways of developing their own leadership styles; (c) “life is bigger than just work:” work and life interface; and (d) “rhythm of back and forth:” negotiating personal and professional impact of being women leaders. These findings have important implications for both recreation and sport management and public health. There was a demonstrated need to better prepare the next generation of women leaders, including providing strategic professional development opportunities as well as key conversations about leader succession. Further,
gender-related policy changes must be made to facilitate a more functional work-life balance as well as enhance job satisfaction and health for women leaders.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION
- Background of the Study ............................................. 1
- Women in Campus Recreation Leadership .......................... 2
- Women in Sport Leadership ........................................... 3
- Health Implications for Women in Recreation and Sport .......... 4
- Work-Life Interface in Sport Disciplines .............................. 4

## Theoretical Frameworks
- Career Development .................................................. 6
- Career Construction Theory .......................................... 6
- Hegemony and Critical Feminist Theory ............................ 7
- Resilience, Spirituality, and Religion ................................ 9

## Statement of the Problem ............................................. 10

## Purpose Statement and Research Questions .......................... 12
- Purpose Statement .................................................... 12
- Research Questions ................................................... 12

## Significance of the Study ............................................. 12

## Definition of Terms .................................................. 14
- Campus Recreation ..................................................... 14
- Work-Life Interface .................................................... 14
- Hegemony ................................................................. 15
- Resilience ................................................................. 15
- Religion ................................................................... 16
- Spirituality ............................................................... 16

## Study Overview ..................................................... 16

## CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW ................................. 18

### History, Growth, and Evolution of Women Leaders in Recreation and Sport ........................................................................ 18
- Women in Sport .......................................................... 19
- Women in Recreation and Leisure ...................................... 20
- Women in Campus Recreation ......................................... 22

### Core Concepts in the Study of Women Leaders in Recreation and Sport ........................................................................ 25
- Gendered Organizational Culture and Sexism ....................... 25
- Gendered Organizational Culture ...................................... 26
- Sexism ........................................................................... 27

### Women Leaders in the Context of the Current Study ................. 28

### Health Implications for Women Leaders .............................. 29
- Health Implications for Working Women ............................ 31
- Health Implications from the Work-Life Interface ................. 33
- Health Implication of Work Stress ...................................... 35
- Work Meaningfulness and its Health Implications .................. 38
- Health Implications for Women Leaders in Sport .................. 39
- Mental Health Challenges for Women Leaders in Sport .......... 39
- The Effects of Gender Discrimination and Sexual Harassment .... 40
- Health Implications for Women in Recreation ....................... 42
Deconstructing Hegemony and Critical Feminist Theory

Hegemony

Gramsci

Foucault

Althusser

Laclau and Mouffe

Hall

Derrida

Critical Feminist Theory

Critical Inquiry

Feminism and Feminist Theories

Hegemony in Higher Education, Sport and Recreation

Blending of Hegemony, Hegemonic Masculinity, and Feminist Theory in Sport

Hegemonic Feminism

Theoretical Constructs and the Current Conversation

Resilience, Religion, and Spirituality

Resilience

Workplace Resilience

Religious and/or Spiritual Resilience

Resilience as Examined by Religious and Spirituality Studies

Spirituality Promotes Well-Being Following Stress

Spirituality Promotes Job Satisfaction

Spirituality and Religion as Coping Resources

Spirituality and Leadership and Higher Education
“Rhythm of Back and Forth:” Negotiating Personal and Professional Impact of Being Women Leaders .................................................................................................................. 234

Collision of Life and Work ........................................................................................................ 234
Physical Manifestations of Stress ............................................................................................... 238
Importance of Resilience and Self-Care .................................................................................... 245

Chapter Summary ..................................................................................................................... 255

CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS ..................................................................................................................... 257
Study Summary .......................................................................................................................... 257
Discussion .................................................................................................................................... 259
Research Question 1 .................................................................................................................... 259
Research Question 2 .................................................................................................................... 270
Research Question 3 .................................................................................................................... 274
Research Question 4 .................................................................................................................... 277
Career Construction Theory and Its Application to the Current Study ................................ 281
Vocational Personality .................................................................................................................. 281
Career Adaptability ..................................................................................................................... 282
Life Themes .................................................................................................................................. 283
Limitations .................................................................................................................................... 284
Implications .................................................................................................................................... 286
Practice Implications ..................................................................................................................... 286
Policy Implications ....................................................................................................................... 289
Recommendations for Future Research ..................................................................................... 292
Summary ......................................................................................................................................... 295

CHAPTER SIX CONCLUSION .................................................................................................... 296
Study Overview ............................................................................................................................ 296
Guiding Theories .......................................................................................................................... 299
Methodology .................................................................................................................................. 300
Findings and Discussion ............................................................................................................... 301
Implications .................................................................................................................................... 302
Future Research ............................................................................................................................ 304
Summary ......................................................................................................................................... 304

LIST OF REFERENCES ................................................................................................................. 306
References ...................................................................................................................................... 306
APPENDICES .................................................................................................................................. 352
Appendix A ....................................................................................................................................... 352
Appendix B ....................................................................................................................................... 357
Appendix C ....................................................................................................................................... 359
Appendix D ....................................................................................................................................... 361
Appendix E ....................................................................................................................................... 364
Appendix F ....................................................................................................................................... 365
Appendix G ....................................................................................................................................... 366
Appendix H ....................................................................................................................................... 367
Appendix I ....................................................................................................................................... 368
VITA
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Participant Demographics........................................................................................................175
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1 Career Construction Theory as a Heuristic Model ......................... 87
Figure 2.1. Amended Career Construction Theory as a Heuristic Model .............. 88
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Women have played an essential role throughout the history of parks and recreation in the United States (e.g., Henderson et al., 2013). However, this did not come without its challenges, as women have had to gain access to opportunities within parks and recreation before leading and managing organizations (e.g., Henderson et al., 2013). These experiences have been echoed in parallel fields such as campus recreation (e.g., Waller et al., 2015) and intercollegiate athletics and corporate sport (e.g., LaVoi et al., 2019). As a result, women are now in various positions in the organizational hierarchy of parks and recreation agencies throughout the United States (Henderson et al., 2013; Waller et al., 2020). Although much of this progress can be accredited to legislation and policies prohibiting gender discrimination, inequity remains in the practices of these organizations (e.g., Aitchison, 2005). These inequities surface in instances of gender bias, lack of respect from male peers, lack of female mentors, pay inequity, and gender discrimination (e.g., Waller et al., 2015, 2020).

The first chapter of this doctoral dissertation begins with the background of the study, which focuses on women in campus recreation leadership and sport leadership. There is also a discussion about health implications and the work-life interface for women leaders. Next is an outline of the theories utilized to frame the study, including career development theories, specifically career construction theory, as well as hegemony and critical feminist theory, and resilience, spirituality and religion. This is followed by a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research questions, and the significance of the study for women directors of campus recreation, the fields of
recreation and sport management, and public health. Lastly, I will define terms, and the chapter concludes with an overview of the study.

Background of the Study

Women in Campus Recreation Leadership

Campus recreation departments are an entity within the structure of institutions of higher learning in the United States. Generally, campus recreation plays a vital role in the development and success of students. It provides a variety of recreational activities, including but not limited to club sports, intramurals, fitness classes, aquatics, and outdoor recreation (Vasold, et al., 2019). Overall, students participating in campus recreation programming experience higher grade point averages, higher retention rates, healthier lifestyles, and greater overall wellness (Vasold et al., 2019). According to the National Intramural and Recreational Sports Associate (NIRSA), campus recreation is the facilities, services, and activities within the broader field of recreational sports that cater specifically to college and university campuses (NIRSA, 2008).

Since 1972, women have gained more opportunities to participate in and work in campus recreation (NIRSA, 2008). Similar to public parks and recreation, this may partially be due to Title IX. Title IX is a federal law that protects against gender discrimination in educational settings. Additionally, the upcoming workforce does contain more women because more female students are majoring in sport-related programs (e.g., recreation and leisure studies, sport management, and sport studies) (e.g., Forsyth et al., 2019). Thus, more women are entering the workforce who can lead and manage campus recreation departments.
Broadly, limited research has been published regarding women’s experiences in campus recreation leadership positions (e.g., Waller et al., 2015). Although leadership in higher education and sport management fields are gradually changing to reflect more gender diversity (e.g., Madsen, 2012; Shaw & Frisby, 2006), there remains a disproportion of women in campus recreation leadership positions (e.g., Waller et al., 2015).

**Women in Sport Leadership**

Tangentially related, women in sport leadership have experienced a myriad of advancements as well as challenges in their careers. Study after study has pointed to the deeply ingrained sexism and inequities that remain in the sport sphere (e.g., Bartos & Ives, 2019; Fink, 2016; Karami et al., 2020; Lapman et al., 2016; Lorenz et al., 2019; Mohipp & Senn, 2008; Taylor et al., 2018a; Taylor et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2018). Women are routinely subjected to sexual harassment, contrapower harassment, incivilities, and bullying in their workplaces (e.g., Attell, et al., 2017; Fink, 2016; Taylor et al., 2018a; Taylor et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2018). This leads to poor work satisfaction and a higher likelihood that women will eventually exit the workplace (Hindman & Walker, 2020).

For several reasons, women’s experiences in sport leadership are essential to consider when examining women’s experiences in campus recreation. Campus recreation, too, is a field that remains male-dominated (e.g., Waller et al., 2015). It is widely known that male-dominated workplaces can produce hostile work environments toward women (e.g., Hindman & Walker, 2020, Parker, 2018, Vogt et al., 2007).
Health Implications for Women in Recreation and Sport

Generally, working women can experience a vast array of health outcomes due to their occupation. These can range from benefits like job satisfaction, meaningfulness, and autonomy (e.g., Mayer et al., 2015) to disadvantages as a result of workplace stress and the “second shift” (e.g., Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Lee et al., 2020; Payne & Doyal, 2010).

Of particular note, Kentta and colleagues (2020) assessed the mental health implications for women high-performance coaches. They found that the challenges of balancing motherhood and cultural expectations to manage family responsibilities contributed to negative mental health implications for their participants. There were also elements of the stereotypical male culture in sport that provided significant challenges. These same experiences are echoed throughout the sport literature (see also, Hindman & Walker, 2020; McLaughlin et al., 2017), yet there remains a dearth of information related specifically to health for women directors of campus recreation.

Work-Life Interface in Sport Disciplines

The work-life interface can generate experiences of inter-role conflict when pressures from life and work domains are, at times, mutually incompatible (e.g., Badawy & Schieman, 2020; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). These experiences of incompatibility often force individuals to prioritize work or life responsibilities. Ultimately, one role needs to be sacrificed to achieve self-acceptance with their role in each environment (e.g., Greenhaus & Powell, 2003). This experience of sacrifice has primarily been found to be
negative; as the individual is pulled into one realm, there are negative consequences in the other realm (e.g., Byron, 2005).

Although most workers feel tensions with the work-life interface, studies have shown that the conflict between work and family is increasingly tricky to navigate in sport environments (e.g., Taylor et al., 2019). This may be due to various factors, including a culture of sacrifice, extreme pressure to win, and high competition for jobs (e.g., Dixon & Bruening, 2005; Graham & Dixon, 2014).

Concerning women in sport, Bruening and Dixon (2008; Dixon & Bruening, 2005) studied female coaches and their challenges with balancing work with their parental responsibilities. Their participants referenced guilt about their job commitment and the potentially adverse effects on their families. Women tend to experience higher levels of work-family conflict than men; however, this gap is becoming narrower between younger men and women (e.g., Dabbs et al., 2016; Bruening & Dixon, 2008; Graham & Dixon, 2014). Additionally, employers may view employees as not committed to the organization when they strive to achieve a balance between work and family, especially for individuals trying to achieve the social norms of parenthood and maintain their career (Graham & Dixon, 2017; Hoobler, Wayne, & Lemmon, 2009).

Although the sport field and the campus recreation field differ in many ways, challenges such as high expectations to balance professional and parental responsibilities, long work hours, and nontraditional hours may overlap between the two professions (e.g., Henderson et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2012; Waller et al., 2015).
Theoretical Frameworks

Career Development

Over time, it has become apparent that women’s career development is vastly more complex and non-linear than men’s. Women typically encounter issues such as pressures to balance work, family, and social obligations more so than men (e.g., Astin, 1984; O’Neil & Hopkins, 2018). As such, in male-dominated industries, women may have difficulty obtaining the upper levels of management. Thus, women experience fewer opportunities for promotion, receive lower pay, and encounter organizational barriers (e.g., Schein, 2007).

In the context of recreation, Frisby (1992) developed a women-centered model of career development. Included in this model was the variety of factors that influence paid and non-paid roles that women have over their lifetime. The factors Frisby (1992) included were socioeconomic, organizational, legislative, background, and individual factors, as well as professional organizations, current positions, and family situations. She argued that by revising some human resource development policies, organizations might be able to attract employees to a labor force that was increasingly composed of women.

Henderson and colleagues (2013) utilized the career development model to assess the status of women in parks and recreation in the U.S. The model utilized by Henderson and colleagues (2013) was a variation of the model developed by Frisby (1992) and then used by Henderson and Bialeschki (1995). The career development model includes current position, career patterns, career satisfaction, family/work/leisure balance, and gender equity issues.
The model portrays how these dimensions comprise and influence the career development of women. At the same time, the dimensions are all linked to one another. Focusing solely on any one of the dimensions will not enhance women’s career development, even though each dimension has a contribution to make to career development (Henderson et al., 2013, p. 59).

**Career Construction Theory**

Career Construction Theory (CCT) provided a helpful primary framework through which to explore how women navigate career decisions and career trajectories. CCT, as well as critical theory (discussed in the next section), provide a social constructivist lens (Savickas, 2005) as a way to examine personal characteristics and social contexts that inform the development of identities, both personal and professional, of women in leadership positions (e.g., Astin, 1984).

CCT answers two questions: (1) What do people do? and (2) Why do they do it? This “focuses the attention on the interpretive processes, social interaction and negotiation of meaning” (Savickas, 2005, p. 43). CCT encompasses three components: (1) vocational personality, (2) career adaptability, and (3) life themes. Thus, it is used to understand the choices individuals make based on perceptions of social realities about vocational self-concepts (Hancock & Hums, 2016).

Vocational personality is aspects of an individual’s needs, values, and interests relating to their careers (Savickas, 2005). Studies have shown that gender role socialization, personality, and self-efficacy contribute to career development (e.g., Burke, 2007). According to Hancock and Hums (2016), “For women, in particular, gender role
socialization and associated cultural expectations influence the career decision-making process” (p. 200).

Career adaptability references an individual’s coping ability related to developmental tasks and contextual factors (Savickas, 2005). Typically, contextual factors include structural and social determinants, which influence career goals and expectations. Thus, career adaptability reflects constraints and facilitators in one’s career and how that individual responds to those experiences (Savickas, 2005).

Finally, life themes speak to an individual’s experience of meaning, purpose, and life circumstances in their career and everyday life roles (Savickas, 2005). By considering these factors, one may be able to reveal why people make career decisions.

**Hegemony and Critical Feminist Theory**

In conjunction with CCT, an understanding of hegemony and critical feminist theory provides additional secondary frameworks through which to explore women’s experiences navigating leadership positions. It not only adds to the constructivist nature of CCT, but critical feminist theory also identifies constraints imposed by dominant power structures (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002).

Hegemony is essentially the maintenance of power through ideological domination. This concept has been recapitulated over the years – starting most notably with Antonio Gramsci (Gramsci, 1971; Schell & Rodriguez, 2000; Maglaras, 2013). This concept has evolved through the work of several other scholars by unpacking ideas such as power and class relations. Critical theory seeks to highlight these power relations in society by exposing hegemony and injustices (Crotty, 2003). Feminist theory then
theorizes about gender relations within our patriarchal society as they are reproduced in our society (Birrell, 2000). Similar to, an overlap of, or an ancillary of critical theories (depending on whom one confers with), feminist theory is grounded in analysis of personal experiences and how those are housed in greater patterns of oppression and broader social conditions (Birrell, 2000).

Both CCT and critical theory, generally, have been utilized in the sport management literature, which has pointed to the power structures and gendered practices within sport-related organizations (e.g., Hancock & Hums, 2016; Taylor et al., 2018c). Ultimately, both CCT and critical theory aid in validating the experiences of study participants by positing that perception is reality. By utilizing CCT and critical theory in studying women leaders in campus recreation, scholars can better understand how context and personhood affect career development and experiences. It is important to note that Knoppers and McLachlan (2018) called for more recreation and sport management literature to be explicit in its use of feminist theories. They explained that this is on the heels of the need for more critical research in general in this field. Additionally, feminist work “can be used to challenge and disrupt normative gendered ways of managing and organizing sport” (Knoppers & McLachlan, 2018, p. 174).

Resilience, Spirituality, and Religion

Finally, resilience, spirituality, and religion will be utilized to help inform this study. In terms of resilience, stress-related growth seems to be the best way to understand resilience in the context of the current study. Typically, stress-related growth refers to stressful yet non-life-threatening experiences such as problems in a romantic relationship,
being fired from a job, moving, the death of a significant other, or an illness or accident (Park et al., 1996). Therefore, it is expected that the participants in the current study may recount stressful experiences in their careers.

Although not the primary focus, it is expected that some participants will directly or indirectly reference their use of religious or spiritual practices as they navigate their experiences while holding a director position within campus recreation. Park (2013) sought to integrate meaning and spirituality with stress-related growth better. Using what she termed the Meaning Making Model (Park, 2010), Park explained that spirituality is a core aspect of meaning for many in the face of life’s challenges, particularly regarding health. One could easily argue that work stress is a significant contributor to poor health (2013; see also World Health Organization, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

Although there is an increase of women working in campus recreation, there remains an underrepresentation of women in leadership roles within campus recreation and related industries (U.S. Department of Labor, Women’s Bureau, 2017). Not only can it be challenging for women to navigate male-dominated fields to achieve their desired position, but also what do these women experience once they finally obtain leadership roles? Studies have demonstrated that sport-related fields traditionally encompass nontraditional work hours, which can lead to challenges of work addiction and life balance (Hancock et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2019). Women are routinely subjected to pursuing the “unattainable work-life balance” to have both a career and to fulfill traditional roles at home (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020).
Women are also subjected to a variety of other stressors including, but not limited to, contrapower harassment, incivility, bullying, and sexual harassment in sport-related disciplines (e.g., Bartos & Ives, 2019; Fink, 2016; Karami et al., 2020; Lapman et al., 2016; Lorenz et al., 2019; Mohipp & Senn, 2008; Taylor et al., 2018a; Taylor et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2018). Until now, studies have focused primarily on women holding leadership roles within intercollegiate athletics and higher education (e.g., Hancock & Hums, 2016; Madsen, 2012; Taylor et al., 2018). This study will build upon the limited research conducted about the experiences of women leaders within campus recreation (e.g., Bower & Hums, 2003; Bower et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2012; Waller et al., al., 2015). Additionally, there is a call for broadening the scope of women’s experiences within sport to other silos (e.g., campus recreation) as well as to continue to pick apart the power structures within these organizations that significantly impact the experiences of women in leadership roles (Hancock & Hums, 2016; Fink, 2016; Taylor et al., 2018). Critical theorists and many of the afore-referenced researchers suggest that offering women in sport-related disciplines an opportunity to voice their experiences is essential for those working in male-dominated environments (e.g., Creswell, 2008; Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Hancock & Hums, 2016; Fink, 2016; Taylor et al., 2018). By utilizing a qualitative design, narrative inquiry, the hope is to understand further the social contexts (i.e., gender, organizational structure, social relationships) (Savickas, 2005) that influence the career development of women in campus recreation.
Purpose Statement and Research Questions

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of women directors of campus recreation departments in the Power Five conference institutions. Specifically, I examined their career development, resilience, and health in response to stressors, such as the work-life interface and gender discrimination.

Research Questions

1. What narratives do women leaders in campus recreation have about their leadership experiences?
2. What narratives do women leaders in campus recreation have about the work-life interface?
3. What narratives do women leaders in campus recreation share about their career evolution?
4. What narratives do women leaders in campus recreation share about their career satisfaction?

Significance of the Study

As mentioned above, significant research has been done on women in sport leadership positions as they relate to the work-life interface and workplace discrimination. Nevertheless, there is little work completed in its sister discipline, recreation, specifically, campus recreation. A handful of studies have looked generally at the demographic breakdown of campus recreation as well as the career paths of women in campus recreation. However, there is a dearth of literature about women’s lived
experiences in campus recreation leadership positions. This study, first, aimed to start filling that void specifically from a qualitative perspective. Ultimately, the goal was to consider how the experiences of women directors of campus recreation converge and diverge from the experiences of women in sport leadership positions (e.g., Smith et al., 2012). By doing so, the field of recreation and sport management can better serve this population in the future.

Secondly, this study aimed to examine how women’s experiences as directors of campus recreation impacted their health positively or negatively. In general, not much attention has been given to the health implications of women in the recreation and sport space. We know that the experience of sexism and gender discrimination in intercollegiate athletics can negatively affect one’s career trajectory, tenure in the field, and mental health (e.g., Hindman & Walker, 2020). However, these studies are limited in quantity. As such, this study aimed to begin the conversation about health and wellness for women directors in campus recreation. Additionally, in general, there is a small cohort of researchers calling for more interdisciplinary work between the fields of recreation and sport management and public health (see Eime et al., 2015; Librett et al., 2007). This study provided a link between the two disciplines from a female employee health perspective.

Finally, this study added to the work-life interface literature by responding to the call from Lopez and colleagues (2020). These researchers highlighted that women working in campus recreation generally reported higher rates of work-life conflict. This finding came on the heels of the acknowledgment that campus recreation employees are
usually satisfied with their work circumstances yet feel burdened by the long hours and unanticipated added responsibilities. Essentially, Lopez and colleagues (2020) suggested further qualitative research to unpack the unique aspects of the campus recreation workplace that may diverge from the dominant, intercollegiate athletics literature in recreation and sport management.

**Definition of Terms**

**Campus Recreation**

Campus recreation departments are entities within the structure of higher education institutions in the United States. Generally, campus recreation plays a vital role in the development and success of students. It provides a variety of recreational activities, including but not limited to club sports, intramurals, fitness classes, aquatics, and outdoor recreation (Vasold et al., 2019).

**Work-Life Interface**

The work-life interface has evolved over the years into three distinct constructs: (a) work-life conflict, (b) work-life balance, and (c) work-life enrichment. Work-life conflict is a form of interrole conflict in which the fulfillment of role responsibilities in the workplace contrasts with the role responsibilities for other areas of life (Greenhaus & Beutel, 1985). Although work-life conflict remains an ever-present challenge, many individuals strive to negotiate the conflict by seeking balance between work and life roles, termed work-life balance. Finally, work-life enrichment is founded on the argument that combining work and family roles has positive effects. Greenhaus and Powell (2006)
defined work-life enrichment as the “extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life in the other role” (p. 73).

**Hegemony**

Antonio Gramsci developed the concept of hegemony. “Hegemonic success is established when the subordinate classes of society accept the ruling class’ moral, political, and cultural values with minimal amount of force” (Schell & Rodriguez, 2000, p. 17). It has also been described as intellectual leadership that produces consensus and true coercion (Lawner, 1975; cited by Schell & Rodriguez, 2000), which is achieved through the maintenance of power through “manipulation against, and collaboration with, the masses to establish an ideological domination in society” (Schell & Rodriguez, 2000, p. 18). Gramsci indicated that the elite class (e.g., doctors, lawyers, and politicians) exercised power over the rest of society (Joll, 1977; cited by Schell & Rodriguez, 2000).

**Resilience**

The concept and experience of resiliency has been defined and examined in many ways over time. One way to think about resilience is through the lens of growth after adversity, specifically, stress-related growth (SRG) (Park et al., 1996). Typically, SRG refers to stressful yet non-life-threatening experiences such as problems in a romantic relationship, being fired from a job, moving, the death of a significant other, or an illness or accident (Park et al., 1996). Park and colleagues (1996) developed the stress-related growth scale (SRGS) and ultimately determined that significant predictors of SRG included the stressfulness of the event, positive reinterpretation of the event, religion, and social support. Additionally, Rees and colleagues (2015) sought to understand individual
resilience in the workplace and defined psychological resilience as “the ability of a person to recover, rebound, bounce-back, or even thrive following misfortune, change or adversity” (p. 2; see also Garcia-Dia et al., 2013). In other words, stress (traumatic or otherwise) is a misfortune, change, or adversity that one must recover from to be resilient.

**Religion**

Using Koeing’s definition (2008), religion is “a system of beliefs and practices observed by a community, supported by rituals that acknowledge, worship, and communicate with, or approach the Sacred, the Divine, God (in Western cultures), or Ultimate Truth, reality, or nirvana (in Eastern cultures)” (p. 11). Pargament (1997) defined it as “a search for significance in ways related to the sacred” (p. 34).

**Spirituality**

Hill and colleagues (2000) explained that not all conceptions of spirituality are linked to religion, and in many ways, it has become more differentiated from religion. In other words, over time, religion has become narrower and more specific. Spirituality, then, could be understood as the personal expression of human goodness or the physically imperceptible, transcendent aspect of life (Hill et al., 2000).

**Study Overview**

Chapter One introduced the study of the experiences of women directors of campus recreation. The background of the study provided an overview of women in campus recreation and sport leadership, health implications for working women, the impact of the work-life interface as well as the theories utilized in framing the study (i.e.,
hegemony, critical feminist theory, career construction theory, and resilience, spirituality, and religion). The statement of purpose and purpose of the study sections explained that there is a dearth of literature explicitly examining the experiences of women directors of campus recreation departments housed in institutions of higher learning. The chapter concluded with a section on the potential significance of the study as related to recreation and sport management practice, research, and interdisciplinary work with public health. A definition of terms is also provided.

Chapter Two will provide a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to this study to aid the reader in understanding the history, growth, and evolution of women leaders in recreation and sport; health implications for women leaders; and the work-life interface. Finally, the chapter will discuss career development for women; hegemony and critical feminist theory; and resilience, spirituality, and religion. Chapter Three will explain narrative inquiry in qualitative methodology and how it will be utilized in this study in interviews with participants. Chapter Four will present the study themes. Chapter Five will discuss the findings, implications, and future directions. Chapter Six will complete the study by offering poignant concluding comments.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

As Chapter One discussed, the experiences of women in campus recreation director positions is an understudied area of recreation and sport management. We know that historically male-dominated professions can be rife with gender discrimination and sexism. We also know that within the field of recreation and sport management, there is an evolving discussion of the work-life interface and the need to understand the health implications for the workers involved. Chapter One provided a background of the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, and the research questions.

The following chapter, Chapter Two, will provide a review of the literature relevant to the study. This includes information pertaining to the field of campus recreation, the work-life interface, health implications for working women, as well as the theoretical frameworks informing the study. These frameworks include career construction theory, critical theory, and feminist theory. Within the context of overcoming work-place stress, information about resilience, religion, and spirituality is also provided.

History, Growth, and Evolution of Women Leaders in Recreation and Sport

The sport industry consists of a wide range of careers, including, but not limited to, intercollegiate athletics, recreational sports, and academia (Bower & Hums, 2013). The following section outlines the history, growth, and evolution of the literature about women leaders in recreation and sport. Next, the core tenets, concepts, and constructs will be addressed for this line of research. Finally, a summary of how this literature informs the purpose and research questions for the current study will be provided.
Women in Sport

Leberman and Burton (2017) provided a comprehensive summary of the status of women leaders in sport. They reminded the reader that the participation of women and girls in sport has increased significantly over the past 40 years. Much of this is due to legislative and programmatic opportunities. In terms of women’s sports at the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) level, it was not until 1966 that the Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (CIAW) established the framework for intercollegiate athletic programs for women (Bower & Hums, 2013). Later, in 1971, CIAW changed to the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW), which oversaw women’s intercollegiate athletics until the early 1980s. By the time AIAW was dissolved, they had been in contention with NCAA in a power struggle between which governing body would ultimately control women’s intercollegiate athletics (Bell, 2008). Since then, Title IX and various non-profit groups have been promoting empowerment for women and girls through sport (e.g., Girls on the Run).

Leberman and Burton (2017) recalled that the 2012 Summer Olympics in London were considered the Women’s Olympics. Despite these advancements, women remain underrepresented in leadership roles. Therefore, over the past several years, researchers have sought to determine why this underrepresentation of women remains pervasive even as women and girls have increasingly entered sport and recreation spaces. Study after study has pointed to the deeply ingrained sexism and inequities in the sport sphere (e.g., Fink, 2016; Taylor et al., 2018a; Taylor et al., 2018b; Taylor et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2018d). This is primarily due to sexism in sport remaining overt and uncontested (Fink,
Women are routinely subjected to sexual harassment, contrapower harassment, incivilities, and bullying in their workplaces in a variety of sport spaces ranging from professional sport to sport management academic programs (e.g., Fink, 2016; Taylor et al., 2018a; Taylor et al., 2018b; Taylor et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2018d). This leads to limited leadership opportunities, poor work satisfaction, pervasive mental and physical health issues, and a higher likelihood that women will eventually exit the workplace prematurely (Hindman & Walker, 2020).

**Women in Recreation and Leisure**

Women leaders in recreational sports, while still considered a part of the sport industry (Bower & Hums, 2013), has received less attention over the years. In broader recreational settings, Henderson (1992) examined the role of women in these settings. Many participants indicated they did not have as many opportunities for advancement as their male counterparts. Additionally, they expressed that they had been discriminated against at least once. Henderson and Bialeschki (1995) continued to investigate women working in recreational settings by completing a survey of women in the parks and recreation field. They found that many of the women indicated there was unconscious discrimination based on gender.

Based on many of these findings, Aitchison (2005) called for developing critical theory to advance feminist research in sport and leisure management to address many of these pervasive gender issues. These included (a) the perceptions of gender (in)equity, (b) evaluations of policies to address equity, and (c) career appraisal and progression opportunities to achieve equity. Up to that point, Aitchison (2005) determined that
women’s experience of sport management was shaped by material and cultural factors (e.g., gendered power).

Later, Henderson and colleagues (2013) sought to describe the “current status of women in parks and recreation in the US” (p. 59). Compared to Henderson and Bialeschki’s (1995) findings, Henderson and colleagues (2013) found some positive changes. For example, women demonstrated higher levels of management and career longevity and seemed more satisfied with their jobs. However, more women had taken on additional care responsibilities at home, and fewer women were aspiring to senior management positions.

Around the same time, Smith and colleagues (2012) conducted a narrative analysis of women’s perceptions of their careers in parks and recreation. They discovered that most women who entered a career in parks and recreation were motivated by an intrinsic desire to help others by making a difference. However, a career in parks and recreation was challenging for many participants because of the demanding hours and challenges related to advocating for the importance of the parks and recreation profession compared to other public service or private industries. Smith and colleagues (2012) also determined that many participants were more likely to be optimistic about their careers if the agencies they worked for had organizational structures that were more supportive of reducing work-life conflict. Additionally, they explained,

Some of this career negotiation appears more complicated because of the nature of work in parks and recreation (e.g., work hours). To some extent, the double bind of being a woman and working in a field that requires constant justification
and advocacy seemed to put added stress on career balance (Smith et al., 2012, p. 66).

The researchers explained that there was this sense that for women to be successful in their careers in parks and recreation, they had to always advocate for themselves and their profession. Finally, Smith and colleagues (2012) clarified that there seemed to be nuances in the field of parks and recreation compared to other professions. For example, the need to work while others play in conjunction with the participant’s strong commitment to the value of recreation as a social good complicated their personal and work lives.

**Women in Campus Recreation**

Starting in 1978, Carney and Gold were the first to study women working in campus recreation. The researchers were interested in the extent and involvement of women within the campus recreation profession. Following focus groups, the participants indicated they experienced a variety of challenges, including lack of visibility and involvement in publications, presentations, workshops, committees, and programs; lack of support and professional development; lack of compensation and respect; lack of career mobility and representation within the professional organization; and negotiating the balancing act between job and personal life.

Later, Yager (1983) was arguably the first to produce scholarly work that specifically dealt with women leaders in campus recreation. In her study, Yager (1983) investigated personal and professional attributes, perceptions of facilitators and inhibitors in the job, perceptions of improving professional advancement, and career expectations and aspirations for achievement. Varner (1992) followed suit and studied the history of
women in the National Intramural Recreation Sports Association (NIRSA). NIRSA is the national organization that supports campus recreation. Women’s entry to NIRSA was tumultuous starting in 1950. 1959 marked the banning of women from participating in NIRSA, and it was not until 1971 that women were granted permanent presence within the organization. Since then, they have played an integral part in the development of NIRSA (Varner, 1992).

After those three studies (Carney & Gold, 1978; Varner, 1992; Yager, 1983), Bower and Hums (2003) sought to establish and examine career information of women working as administrators in campus recreation. They conducted a descriptive survey to capture the demographics, career paths, enjoyable/least enjoyable aspects of working in campus recreation, and career advice of women leaders in campus recreation. Bower and Hums (2003) found that women in the campus recreation environment described parallel experiences to women working in other sport industry segments (i.e., professional sport, intercollegiate athletics). The participants used terms like “good old boys’ network” and “glass ceiling,” and felt they were not given the respect they deserved and had to prove themselves to male colleagues and student workers. Additionally, the participants in Bower and Hums’ (2003) study struggled with balancing long and irregular hours with family commitments.

Later in 2006, Bower and colleagues narrowed their focus to how mentoring played a role in advancing women in leadership roles within campus recreation. They found mentoring to be incredibly important for the advancement of women in the field of campus recreation. This was especially true when women entered the field during that
tumultuous time from 1950 to 1970. Therefore, there was a lack of women leaders in the position to mentor female proteges; thus, for some mentors, this was the reason to mentor women. Other reasons for mentoring included helping the protégé develop as a professional. Bower and colleagues (2006) called for more research on the role of mentoring for women in campus recreation and more institutional support.

Although studying some of these concepts, Bower (2008a; 2008b) pivoted to studying women in the broader health and fitness industry. Bower (2008b) sought to dissect the mentoring functions utilized by mentors seeking to enhance advancement opportunities for women. She found mentoring was beneficial for women seeking to learn how to advance in the industry. There was also the added benefit of confidence-building through the relationship with a mentor, which led to job satisfaction. Bower (2008a), then, was curious about the career path of a woman interested in pursuing a management position. Many women entering the health and fitness field started in entry-level positions and treated those as building blocks.

Interestingly, many women were well-educated as the field was so competitive that employers were looking for women who were well qualified with degrees and certifications. Again, obtaining a mentor was important for women wanting to pursue a leadership position. Bower (2008a) called for research comparing women leaders in the health and fitness industry across age groups.

During this time, Willer (2002) completed a survey of women campus recreation directors. In 2002, the average woman campus recreation director was between 40 and 45
years old, white, single, and with no children. Similar to other scholars’ findings, the most significant barriers were a lack of female role models and a lack of mentors.

Finally, Waller and colleagues (2015) built off this previous work to provide an updated “portrait of where female administrators are positioned in campus recreation organizations in the USA” (p. 30). They found that women hold various administrative positions within campus recreation, but many were not actively seeking career advancement. Waller and colleagues (2015) felt this might have been a positive sign indicating that women were experiencing career satisfaction. However, others (e.g., Henderson and colleagues, 2013) suggested that this indicated women were not seeking career advancement due to high stress and time commitment that women feel would be difficult to negotiate with their personal lives. Waller and colleagues (2015) called for research about individual factors and their effects on career advancement and career mobility and incorporating in-depth interviews.

Core Concepts in the Study of Women Leaders in Recreation and Sport

The following section outlines a few core concepts and models utilized in studying women leaders in recreation and sport. These include gendered organizational culture and sexism.

Gendered Organizational Culture and Sexism

Hindman and Walker (2020) discussed how sexism in sport organizational culture results in emotional and professional consequences. As outlined above, despite the advances women have made in the sporting spaces, they remain the minority. Many scholars, Hindman and Walker (2020) included, suggest that sexism may be to blame.
When considering organizational culture as one of the widely utilized constructs, scholars such as Hums and Sutton (1999) stated that the sport organizational culture is inherently gendered because men have dominated that space in terms of participation, salary, and media coverage. Organizational culture was initially modeled by Schein (1984, 2010). Schien (2010) described organizational culture as similar to a person’s personality. Culture either guides or constrains a group’s behaviors and is present at three levels: artifacts (visual aspects of culture), values (norms of the group), and underlying assumptions (beliefs that create actions, values, and symbols).

**Gendered Organizational Culture**

Hindman and Walker (2020) deeply considered that the culture of sport must play a role in why there are so few women in sport and why women leave sport. Generally, women are excluded from sport due to institutionalized gender inequality. Shaw and Hoeber (2003) asserted that the institutional valuing of masculinity in sport is a form of inequality. They examined how the discourses of masculinity and femininity were developed and reinforced. They found that discourse routinely promoted men into senior management roles and relegated women into less influential roles. Later, Hoeber (2007) sought to analyze gender equity as an organizational value by conducting interviews with administrators, coaches, and athletes at a Canadian university. She found that many participants denied and rationalized gender inequities as many understood the gender inequities as expected, natural, or normal. This study further illustrated administrators’ and coaches’ power in creating and maintaining knowledge that rationalizes gender
inequities. By maintaining these beliefs, institutionalized gender inequities become very difficult to challenge because they are embedded in the organizational culture.

Cunningham (2008) called for diversity management strategies to highlight how to create change, not merely focus on the desired end state of ending institutionalized gender inequality. Ultimately, Cunningham (2008) highlighted the pressures that call into question the legitimacy of the institutionalized nature of gender inequality and specific steps sport managers could take to positively influence change in this area. Walker and colleagues (2017) summarized these institutionalized practices in sport leadership. They explained that sport organizations value male ideals, provide men with unquestioned power, and devalue women’s contributions to sport leadership. The researchers recalled role congruity theory and its part in explaining some institutional bias against women in leadership. Citing Eagly and Karau (2002), Walker and colleagues (2017) explained that people have different ideas about male and female leaders. These inconsistencies lead to more favorable attitudes toward male leaders, the difficulty for women to advance to leadership positions, and the difficulty for women to obtain leadership roles. This becomes substantially more difficult in sport organizations due to the culture of masculinity, and women’s interactions in sport spaces do not blend well with dominant femininity ideals (Walker et al., 2017, p. 41).

**Sexism**

Typically, the experiences of sexism result from an organizational culture that allows these behaviors and attitudes to persist. Aitchison (2005) explained that both material and cultural factors indeed shape women’s experiences, and in many ways, these
factors are influenced by gender issues and inequities. In detailing her work (Aitchison et al., 1999), Aitchison (2005) found that although women entered the leisure management field, the glass ceiling remained. Women routinely reported discrimination and harassment as they related to (a) inequality in work experiences, (b) poor treatment for women trying to balance work and family, (c) negative perceptions of women as managers, and (d) the use of sexist language.

Fink (2016) finally highlighted sexism’s embedded and persistent nature in sport. She claimed that sexism in sport is “commonly overt yet simultaneously unnoticed…It is so entwined in the fabric of sport that most do not even discern it” (Fink, 2016, p. 2). In other words, sexism has become a pervasive norm within sport organizations that is barely recognizable and infrequently challenged. This environment leads to limited opportunities for women as well as increased experiences of stress, depression, and reduced well-being (McLaughlin et al., 2017). Other consequences include withdrawal from work and increased employee turnover for women in these positions (Hindman & Walker, 2020).

**Women Leaders in the Context of the Current Study**

By merging the above literature into a succinct picture, it is clear that women experience significant challenges as they ascend to leadership positions in sport and recreation. Gender discrimination is pervasive, as are limited opportunities. Several calls have also been for more mentoring as these relationships can be pivotal in a woman’s career trajectory. The literature outlined above in both sport and in recreation does bifurcate at times. For example, women working as NCAA Division I coaches will have
different experiences than women working in campus recreation. This is primarily due to
the differing pressures each job brings. One could argue that women in the collegiate
sport setting experience pressures such as the need to win, the need to recruit, and the
need to remain relevant and competitive. For women in campus recreation, one could
argue they experience pressures such as ensuring students, faculty, and staff have good
experiences and are available during all operating times and programming. Therefore,
these varying experiences could affect how women manage these stressors differently.

It is important to note that women’s experiences in collegiate athletics have been
much more widely studied than the experiences of women in campus recreation. As
outlined above, much of the work in campus recreation has sought to paint a picture of
how women are positioned within campus recreation. There has also been attention given
to the mentoring of these women. However, one is hard-pressed to find studies that
unpack the experiences of women working as leaders in campus recreation. Significant
attention has been given to other populations within campus recreation (e.g., the impact
of students, staff, and faculty utilizing the programming), yet the attention to women
leaders’ experiences within campus recreation has remained largely untouched in the
academic space. Therefore, additional research is needed to understand the experiences of
women leaders in campus recreation.

Health Implications for Women Leaders

In the 1990s, the United States Public Health Service began calling for “social
institutions to accept shared responsibility for achieving better health for women in the
United States” (United States Department of Health & Human Services, 1991; cited by
Collins et al., 1997, p. 4). Up to that point, women’s entrance into the labor force had been substantial. By 1996, women comprised 46% of the labor force (United States Department of Labor, 1996; cited by Collins et al., 1997). Now, as of 2020, women make up 47% of the workforce (United States Department of Labor, Women’s Bureau, 2020). However, it is essential to note that the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected women. “Over 2.3 million women completely dropped out of the labor force between February 2020 and February 2021” (National Women’s Law Center, 2021, p. 2). As such, new data is necessary to gain a clearer picture of women’s participation in the workforce since 2021.

Due to women’s substantial participation in the workforce, many researchers have studied women’s career entry, career mobility, and work experiences, with some attention given to the health implications of their work. Much of the attention has been given to women in the medical and service industries and women who held part-time work. Additionally, research has reached across the globe, with many studies centered on the experiences of women from Middle Eastern or Asian countries as well as Europe and the United States. As such, the purpose of the following section was to survey the research about working women from Westernized countries with the goal of narrowing the focus to women who held leadership positions in fields such as management, higher education, and sport and recreation. This section begins with a broad look at the health implications for working women in general before narrowing to women in the sport industry and finally in campus recreation.
Health Implications for Working Women

Collins and colleagues (1997) aimed to identify the gaps in worksite health promotion for women up to that point in the United States. They outlined the ways work factors, health behaviors, family roles and responsibilities, and women’s health are linked in five areas. These areas were chronic disease prevention, mental health, occupational health, reproductive health, and organizational issues. Collins and colleagues (1997) goal was to highlight areas in which working conditions affected women uniquely, disproportionately, or differently than men. Up to 1997, researchers had found that employed women enjoyed better health (e.g., a greater sense of well-being) than non-employed women (e.g., Rubenstein, 1992; cited by Collins et al., 1997). However, it was also apparent that not all women experienced health benefits from work, and it was clear to Collins and colleagues (1997) that there was limited research in this area. Collins and colleagues (1997) summarized that acute and chronic stress, gender discrimination, occupational hazards, and legislation accounted for many of the risk factors for women in relation to their health outcomes. Women who experienced higher rates of workplace stress, including environments that were socially isolating and non-supportive, demonstrated higher rates of cardiovascular disease as well as other chronic diseases (Collins et al., 1997). Stress also accounted for higher rates of mental health issues. Women were subjected to job loss, job dissatisfaction, trauma, and gender discrimination. Gender discrimination includes, but is not limited to, the gender wage gap, sexual violence, and physical workspaces (i.e., many workspaces are designed for men and are not accommodating for women). All these experiences can lead to higher rates of burnout
and depression, decreased productivity, and the desire to exit the workplace or the workforce entirely (Collins et al., 1997). Finally, women were subjected to policies, regulations, and legislation that did not work in their best interest. According to Collins and colleagues (1997), women were routinely subjected to policies that limited their participation at work, limited maternity leave, and maintained reduced wages.

Around this time, Messing (1997) offered a critical review and discussion about women’s occupational health. Messing (1997) asserted that many studies mishandled the convergence of gender, exposure, and symptoms when analyzing data. By doing so, gender was either ignored or adjusted, or “female” was indicated as a symptom during data analysis. She echoed much of Collins and colleagues (1997) discussion by directing attention to women’s occupational health issues, including physical health and mental and emotional stress. Messing (2007) explained that women routinely held jobs that promoted increased musculoskeletal diseases and workplace stress. These included cleaning, food service, childcare, clerical, or sales jobs. All of which typically have a low level of decision latitude and a high level of stress and have been known to cause a higher incidence of coronary heart disease. Many of these occupations also consisted of repetitive work, leading to arthritis, back pain, and circulatory problems. Of course, when one experiences physical pain, they also experience psychological distress (Messing, 2007).

Additionally, and often understudied, were the reproductive health implications for women. Messing (2007) summarized that occupational exposures (e.g., synthetic hormones, organic solvents, night work, strenuous work) could lead to amenorrhea and
dysmenorrhea. Up to that point, the occupational health of women was rarely studied. It was assumed that not many women experienced occupation-related diseases because they were routinely in occupations that were assumed to be “safe,” such as nursing and teaching (Messing, 1997).

**Health Implications from the Work-Life Interface**

As discussed in detail in the next section, the work-life interface results in various outcomes, including conflict, balance, and enrichment (e.g., Greenhaus & Beutel, 1985). The predominant arguments are: (a) women are disproportionately subjected to work-life conflict due to societal role requirements (e.g., Dixon & Bruening, 2005). However, this discrepancy between women and men is decreasing as more men are asked to take on roles in the home (Graham & Dixon, 2017; Graham, Smith, & Dixon, 2019). (b) Although many researchers call attention to the adverse or zero-sum effects of the work-life interface, there do remain benefits of the relationship as well (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

From a health perspective, the work-life interface has several implications. In 2009, Hammig and Bauer investigated the mental health effects of unequal work-life balance (i.e., work-life conflict) in Switzerland and included potential gender differences. In the context of Switzerland, the prevalence of work-life conflict is high because of the long work week, frequent overtime, and irregular hours (similar to working in sport and recreation). Hammig and Bauer (2009) found that the adverse effects of work-life conflict seemed stronger in women than in men. Of these adverse effects, there was a noted
increase in mental health problems like increased fatigue and emotional disorders (e.g., negative emotions and depression).

Shepherd-Banigan and colleagues (2015) also described that poor balance between work and family could be a significant stressor for women, especially women with young children, which can negatively impact emotional well-being. The researchers specifically studied the impact of workplace attributes on changes in depressive symptoms for working women with young children (i.e., between 6 and 24 months of age). Shepherd-Banigan and colleagues (2015) found that low schedule autonomy, psychological demands, and lack of control all contributed to a stressful work environment which in turn negatively influenced the mental health of women with young children. Instead, women with young children who could work from home demonstrated fewer depressive symptoms. The researchers suggested that the time benefits and job flexibility of this format helps reduce job stress and, in turn, depressive symptoms (Shepherd-Banigan et al., 2015).

Work-life balance, then, lent itself to finding equilibrium between competing roles. Haar and colleagues (2014) sought to study the effects of work-life balance across cultures. They found that individuals, particularly in individualistic cultures (e.g., New Zealand, United States), experienced higher levels of job and life satisfaction when also experiencing high levels of work-life balance. This, the researchers understood, was due to individuals in individualist cultures having full responsibility for their work-life balance resulting in higher levels of job and life satisfaction when it was achieved. High work-life balance was also negatively related to anxiety and depression, resulting in
fewer mental health issues among individuals who had achieved work-life balance. Haar and colleagues (2014) believed that individuals who were balanced might be healthier because of their “sense of harmony in life and optimal psychophysiological conditions which enable them to meet the long-term demands of work and nonwork roles” (p. 362) (see also Greenhaus & Powell, 2003).

Finally, work-life enrichment offered a perspective highlighting areas in which competing roles have positive outcomes. For women, Ruderman and colleagues (2002) determined that when high-level female leaders occupied multiple roles, their level of life satisfaction as well as psychological benefits, multi-tasking skills, self-esteem, and self-acceptance increased significantly. The participants in this study indicated that their personal lives provided them with the psychological resources that enhanced their work performance (i.e., confidence, well-rounded perspective). Additionally, the commitment to multiple roles was related to general life satisfaction and a positive sense of self-worth and self-esteem.

Overall, the work-life interface poses a critical juncture in which health can be affected based on various factors stemming from the work and home environments. When individuals cannot find a balance between their work and life responsibilities, adverse health outcomes are probable. However, if individuals can find balance or even feel there are mutual benefits of the competing roles, their health may improve.

Health Implication of Work Stress

Burke (2002) studied women’s experiences of work stress and health. By considering demographics and work conditions, he looked at whether work stressors
would have a significant relationship with satisfaction and well-being (including psychosomatic symptoms and illness). Burke (2002) recalled that women in managerial positions experienced more isolation, Type A behavior, and more significant strain than men, as well as extra pressures such as lack of self-confidence and discrimination. The claim was that women were experiencing more gender-related stress than their male counterparts due to the extra work at home and the pressures of their societal roles (see also Hochschild, 1997). In other words, women who wanted to work outside the home were forced to assimilate into the inflexible eight-to-six workday but also were required to maintain a well-run home. Burke (2002) found that demographic characteristics, work conditions, experiences of work stress, and work-life conflict accounted for changes in psychosomatic symptoms (stomachaches, back problems, headaches, trouble sleeping). Single women, women with less formal education, women with lower income, women working more hours per week, women reporting more work stress, and women with more work-life conflict indicated higher levels of psychosomatic symptoms. Women leaders reporting work stress seemed to have the most significant relationship with harmful health outcomes by increasing psychosomatic symptoms and decreasing job satisfaction.

Later, Hochschild and Machung (2012) reissued the 1989 book, The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home, with updated data about working mothers and families. In this work, the authors highlighted the phenomenon that many working women experience a “second shift” in which they leave their day job and engage in several hours of labor at home (e.g., cooking, cleaning, taking care of children), which
equaled about an extra month of work per year. This extra burden compounds the gender-related stress and its impact on health Burke (2002) referenced in his study.

Lee and colleagues (2020) analyzed the experience of job discrimination and its impact on sleep health among working women. We know that women seem more vulnerable to discrimination at work than men. This is evidenced by the gender wage gap, the influence of gender on promotion opportunities, and interpersonal interactions. Until now, it has been determined that discrimination, prejudice, sexism, and racism have been associated with greater levels of allostatic load. In other words, cumulative wear and tear on the body due to sustained stress levels leads to physical and mental health manifestations such as cardiovascular disease and anxiety. Lee and colleagues (2020) are among the first to look specifically at sleep health in working women as it relates to discrimination in the workplace. They found that “perceived job discrimination was generally associated with poor sleep health concurrently and over time” (Lee et al., 2020, p. 1151). Additionally, the researchers found that those exposed to multiple sources of job discrimination (i.e., age, race/ethnicity, sex, health) experienced poorer sleep health. Poor sleep health can lead to many effects, such as reduced work productivity, reduced decision-making among working women, and adverse health outcomes (Lee et al., 2020).

For women, work stress due to work pressures, home pressures, and gender discrimination can lead to a myriad of health issues. For example, women in the studies mentioned above report increased psychosomatic symptoms and mental health issues as well as disruptions in their sleep health.
Work Meaningfulness and its Health Implications

In South Africa, Mayer, Surtee, and May (2015) studied the meaningfulness of work for women in higher education. The researchers utilized meaningfulness as their primary construct summarizing that meaningfulness is essential for personal growth and when studying higher education. Mayer, Surtee, and May (2015) explained that work is more meaningful to an individual when it is congruent with the values and strengths of that individual (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; cited by Mayer et al., 2015). By engaging in phenomenological methodology, the researchers studied female perspectives on the meaningfulness of their work. They found that many leaders in higher education felt they played a significant role in the development of student’s academic, personal, and professional development, and this meaningfulness at work was essential to their lives in general, especially if they applied their life values in their leadership work (Mayer et al., 2015). One important category of this meaningfulness at work was their spirituality. The women leaders’ sense of calling, purpose, and connection to God provided them with “calmness, time for reflection, ideas and strength to resolve problems and conflicts at work” (Mayer et al., 2015, p. 194).

Mayer, Surtee, and Barnard (2015) expanded on this psycho-spiritual perspective by exploring spirituality and its impact on the well-being of women leaders in higher education. They found that a sense of spirituality enhanced the well-being of individuals in leadership positions. Women in this study related spirituality to a personal inner connection regarding identity and self-awareness. They “integrated spirituality with work as a coping resource and standard of behavior” (Mayer et al., 2015, p. 109). Additionally,
the researchers linked spirituality with meaningfulness, similar to Mayer, Surtee, and May (2015). Mayer, Surtee, and Barnard (2015) asserted that meaningfulness was a motivational and relational construct. When embedded in the psycho-spiritual perspective, it was helpful for women leaders to cope with daily challenges promoting their well-being.

**Health Implications for Women Leaders in Sport**

Until now, much of the literature about health implications and women in sport has focused on athletes and how sport benefits or does not benefit that population. Very little literature speaks specifically to the health implications for women working in sport and recreation. The following studies primarily highlight the challenges women face in working in sport and how those experiences can impact their overall well-being within their organizations.

**Mental Health Challenges for Women Leaders in Sport**

Kentta and colleagues (2020) assessed the mental health implications for high-performance women coaches. Consistent with the work-life interface literature and the sport literature (e.g., Dixon & Bruening, 2005), Kentta and colleagues (2020) found that the participants expressed the challenges of balancing motherhood and the persistent cultural expectations to manage household duties and family responsibilities. The participants also described the challenges of adapting to the stereotypical male culture of sport and coaches rather than attempting to change the culture (Kentta et al., 2020). Within this culture, the study participants reported a lack of acceptance and relatedness within the high-performance coaching community, which led to diminished mental health
and feelings of ill-being. Finally, Kentta and colleagues (2020) explained that their participants expressed having to overachieve to demonstrate and prove competencies. The researchers related this to the concept that minority groups tend to have fewer resources and less power and status than the dominant groups, which can exacerbate overperformance. These behaviors of overcompensating and overachieving were essential to consider in this study due to the culture of high-performance sport. This was because “vulnerability is often perceived as a weakness and thereby limiting help-seeking behavior with the risk of…attempting to mask severe mental health problems” (Kentta et al., 2020, p. 23-24). In other words, individuals who work in high-performance sport are not likely to reach out for help despite suffering from mental health issues.

The Effects of Gender Discrimination and Sexual Harassment

In a report from the Pew Research Center in 2017, gender discrimination is commonplace, especially in male-dominated spaces, and 62% of women say that sexual harassment is a problem in their industry (Parker, 2018). Study after study has pointed to the deeply ingrained sexism and inequities that remain in the sport sphere (e.g., Fink, 2016; Taylor et al., 2018a; Taylor et al., 2018b; Taylor et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2018d). Women are routinely subjected to sexual harassment, contrapower harassment, incivilities, and bullying in their workplaces because male-dominated environments and sport-related environments often see these occurrences. (e.g., Fink, 2016 Taylor et al., 2018a; Taylor et al., 2018b; Taylor et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2018d). These experiences lead to poor work satisfaction, poor health, and a higher likelihood that women will eventually exit the workplace (Hindman & Walker, 2020).
McLaughlin and colleagues (2017) examined the economic and career effects of sexual harassment on working women. In addition to the myriad of mental and physical health ramifications occurring as a result of sexual harassment, there are also significant psychosocial health ramifications. Women who experienced or witnessed sexual harassment took on more significant financial stress and were ostracized by coworkers for challenging misogyny in the workplace. These experiences reduced work hours or exiting the workplace entirely to escape harassers and the toxic work environment.

Their findings were echoed by Hindman and Walker (2020). Once women obtain positions within sport, their experiences of sexism significantly affect their career progression, job performance, and psychological health (Hindman & Walker, 2020). According to Hindman and Walker (2020), sport organizations are structured in a way that allows sexism to take on a “regenerative form” (p. 68). The atmosphere is more relaxed and casual, and sexist language is “often used by men in sport organizations as a way to test the tolerance of women they work with” (Hindman & Walker, 2020, p. 68). Professionally, due to sexism in the workplace, women had a more challenging time completing routine job responsibilities or experienced changes in career trajectory or mobility. Emotionally, the women in Hindman and Walker’s (2020) study expressed words like anxious, angry, rattled, discouraged, and disgusted in reference to their career experiences. Some women expressed that when they experience sexism, it builds on their self-doubt and “‘adds to that general lie we tell ourselves that we are not adequate’” (Hindman & Walker, 2020, p. 71).
Health Implications for Women in Recreation

Many studies on women in parks and recreation occurred in the 1990s (e.g., Aitchison et al., 1999; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1995). Most were interested in career entry, career mobility, and women’s overall experiences in the field. In 2012, Smith and colleagues sought to bridge this time gap and studied women’s perceptions of their parks and recreation careers. Although not specifically health-focused, some of their findings provided insight into the health of women working in parks and recreation. Smith and colleagues (2012) found that the women in their study expressed the benefits of working in parks and recreation. Their participants reported that their work was rewarding, and they had a passion for their careers. They found job satisfaction in giving back to the community and joy in watching community members recreate, both of which benefit mental health. However, the challenges the participants mentioned related to the difficulty balancing work and life and gender discrimination, which caused stress and discouragement. They felt the burden of the long, non-traditional work hours as well as limited funding for recreation organizations and felt that negotiating these experiences was energy draining.

Campus Recreation Health Implications in General

In campus recreation, many studies focus on the experiences of students, faculty, and staff utilizing and benefiting from the campus recreation facilities. To provide insight into those working in campus recreation, a handful of researchers sought to examine the experiences of campus recreation administrators, specifically within the context of job satisfaction. Studying campus recreation administrators is essential because they are
pressed to increase program productivity and efficiency, increase participation, manage recreational facilities, plan and budget for program enhancement, and manage limited resources (Zhang et al., 2004). This, along with meeting the needs of the ever-changing student body, created the need to assess the job satisfaction of campus recreation administrators. Job satisfaction, as mentioned previously, is essential as it can significantly impact one’s mental and psychosocial health.

Furthermore, not only does job satisfaction have significant ramifications for the organization (e.g., reduction in employee turnover, increased productivity), but it also has a significant effect on the employees individually (e.g., an alignment of personal and professional values) (e.g., Zhang et al., 2004). The following cohort of researchers studied campus recreation administrators in general. That is, they did not distinguish between female and male experiences. However, their findings provide a foundation for future research in the field.

In 2004, Zhang, DeMichele, and Connaughton studied mid-level campus recreation administrators and their job satisfaction. They determined that the level of job satisfaction impacted the way one moved through the organization and their motivation for career advancement. However, they called for more research on demographic characteristics such as gender. Later, in 2009, Kaltenbaugh sought to learn to what degree campus recreation administrators expressed their job satisfaction. They found that individuals preferred autonomy over their jobs and valued the interpersonal relationships within their work environment. By promoting a good work environment, campus recreation administrators felt satisfied in what they did while also maintaining good
productivity. Again, Kaltenbaugh (2009) echoed the call for more research to focus on the impact of demographic characteristics on these outcomes.

Stier and colleagues (2010) continued the line of inquiry pertaining to job satisfaction for campus recreation professionals. They hoped to add insight into areas of high and low satisfaction for this population. Stier and colleagues (2010) found that job satisfaction varied based on tenure with the organization. Individuals with loftier titles in campus recreation expressed greater job satisfaction due to higher salaries and more responsibility and autonomy. Those with less job satisfaction were typically newer to the organization. The researchers expressed that part of their job dissatisfaction may have been due to their ability to move across organizations, therefore, having less commitment to any one organization. Finally, Stier and colleagues (2010) explained that where the campus recreation department was housed significantly impacted job satisfaction. If housed within the athletics department, those campus recreation administrators expressed dissatisfaction due to the discrepancies in budget allocation favoring intercollegiate athletics over campus recreation. Ultimately, Stier and colleagues (2010) called for more research in this arena to further unpack the specifics of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

In 2014, Ross and colleagues examined job satisfaction in relation to demographic and other work-related variables. They claimed that gender and age did not seem to matter in terms of campus recreation. However, their study was quantitative and did not specifically account for women’s experiences. This is an important consideration as there was no distinction in the findings specific to women who held a master’s degree or
greater and held administrative, higher-paying positions for many years. Ross and colleagues (2014) found that job satisfaction was more significant for individuals who had been employed the longest and had high educational attainment. However, as we know from other studies (e.g., Burton, 2015), women are routinely less represented in those positions that Ross and colleagues (2014) claimed produced higher job satisfaction. Therefore, Ross and colleagues’ (2014) claim that gender does not matter in terms of job satisfaction in campus recreation is limited because women were not equally represented in that particular part of the findings.

Most recently, in 2020, Lopez and colleagues examined work experiences among campus recreation employees. Their goal was to examine the “impact of work and family conflict, workaholism, work engagement, burnout, and coping on employees within the industry of collegiate recreation” (Lopez et al., 2020, p. 15). They found, consistent with work-life interface literature, that campus recreation employees struggled to reconcile their competing work-family roles. This became especially true for employees with children under the age of 18, which indicated that employees with more outstanding nonwork commitments struggle the most with balancing work and life. Additionally, employees with less than ten years of experience reported the highest level of burnout and the lowest level of work engagement. Lopez and colleagues (2020) postulated that this might be due to the lack of career advancement in the first 5 to 10 years working in campus recreation and the long, non-traditional work hours, which often leads to burnout. This, in conjunction with those who are in the early stages of their careers, is often balancing children under 18, which compounds burnout and low work engagement.
Similar to the work done on job satisfaction, burnout is another construct that impacts one’s physical, mental, and psychosocial health. Lopez and colleagues (2020) utilized burnout as a construct to frame their study. However, the researchers did not engage much with the health implications of burnout for this population in their discussion. Burnout is a “psychological syndrome in response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job. The three key dimensions of this response are an overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment” (Maslach et al., 2001, p. 399). From a women’s health standpoint, burnout can lead to depression, anxiety, sleep disturbance, cardiovascular symptoms, gastrointestinal problems, and increased inflammation (Soares et al., 2007). In Soares and colleagues’ (2007) study, they specifically investigated women’s health in Sweden. They found that burnout was related to age in many ways. As a woman aged, she expressed fewer burnout symptoms in relation to her career. Soares and colleagues (2007) asserted that this might be due to the lack of occupational experiences and coping resources among younger women. The researchers also found that burnout was related to experiences of physical overload and chronic stress response, which can lead to cardiovascular disease due to allostatic load.

Again, the studies mentioned above provided a foundation for the experiences of leaders in campus recreation. They highlighted some critical areas of interest, including job satisfaction as well as burnout for the population. This work opens the door to more opportunities to study women leaders’ specific experiences, particularly from a health perspective.
Women in Campus Recreation

Not many studies looked specifically at women working in campus recreation. Of the studies that did look at women in campus recreation, the primary focus was on women entering the field of campus recreation (Carney & Gold, 1978; Varner, 1992; Yager, 1983), career mobility, and barriers to career mobility (Bower & Hums, 2003; Bower et al., 2006; Willer, 2002), mentoring of women in campus recreation (Bower & Hums, 2006; Bower et al., 2006), and the portrait of women within campus recreation (Waller et al., 2015).

In 2003, Bower and Hums (2003) found that women in the campus recreation environment described parallel experiences to women working in other sport industry segments because they were not given the respect they deserved and felt they had to prove themselves to male colleagues and student workers. As we know, gender discrimination can lead to diminished health and well-being (e.g., Hindman & Walker, 2020; McLaughlin et al., 2017; Parker & Griffin, 2002). The participants in their study also struggled with balancing long, irregular hours with family commitments (Bower & Hums, 2003). However, despite the frustration and stress experienced by the participants, they also indicated a sense of gratification and satisfaction when they felt they succeeded in a male-dominated environment.

Later, in 2008, Bower found that one of the ways women succeed in this industry was through mentorship. Quality mentorship provided women with the benefit of confidence-building, ultimately leading to job satisfaction. As discussed previously, job
satisfaction is critical for occupational health as it bolsters confidence and motivation (e.g., Zhang et al., 2004).

Of these studies, the researchers did not specifically highlight but rather alluded to health implications related to women’s experiences leading campus recreation departments. Therefore, there seems to be a gap in the literature pertaining, specifically, to the health implications for women working in recreation and sport contexts.

Concluding Comments for Women’s Health Implications

After a broad literature search, a plethora of studies have been completed worldwide on women’s health. In this review, primacy was given to studies in Westernized countries in an effort to streamline cultural implications across reviewed studies. Additionally, Although many studies focused on women’s health and their occupation, specifically from the perspectives of women who held part-time work or women in medicine, priority was given to studies focused on women leaders, women in full-time work, and women in higher education and management.

Much of the surveyed research focused on the adverse health effects on working women. Many studies gave a “nod” to the benefits for women working (i.e., independent source of income, access to social networks, and increased self-efficacy). Yet, the challenges women face in the workplace were given center stage. In terms of women working in higher education, popular culture references promote additional benefits of working on a college or university campus, such as access to cultural offerings (e.g., lectures, symposiums) and being surrounded by young people (Edwards, 2013).
The literature search was unsuccessful in finding studies that looked solely at the health implications for women working in sport or recreation. Although some studies did incorporate a discussion on the implications of stress related to the work-life interface and gender discrimination, most studies’ primary goals were to unpack women’s experiences in these spaces rather than how their interactions in these spaces impacted their health, physically, mentally, or psychosocially. As such, this current study aims to fill that void. By incorporating interview questions that speak specifically to health outcomes as a result of their career in campus recreation, one can begin to scratch the surface of how a career as a director of campus recreation can positively or negatively impact a woman’s life.

**A Brief Comment About the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Given the timing of this project, it is essential to note the disproportional impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on women in the workforce (National Women’s Law Center, 2021). According to the National Women’s Law Center (NWLC; 2021), between February 2020 and February 2021, over 2.3 million women completely dropped out of the labor force. This means they were not working or looking for work during this time. “By comparison, over 1.8 million men have left the labor force since February 2020 (NWLC, 2021, p. 2). The NWLC provided several other staggering statistics about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women. They asserted that in just one month of the pandemic, April 2020, women’s pandemic-related job loss wiped out “nearly a decade of women’s job gains since the Great Recession” (NWLC, 2021, p. 3). As of March 2021, 41.5% of women’s jobs that were lost due to the pandemic have yet to
return, and one in six childcare jobs lost have not returned either (NWLC, 2021). Finally, Tucker (2021) contended

it is likely that when women return to the workforce, many are going to be willing to accept the first job offer they receive because they cannot afford to not work any longer; employers, in turn, may pay lower wages to employees who have been unemployed or out of the workforce for long stretches of time...women may face larger wage gaps moving forward (p. 2).

As we know, the gender wage gap significantly impacts one’s health and well-being in a multitude of ways.

Fortunately, the assumption is that all women in this current study were able to keep their jobs, as those in higher education leadership positions were relatively protected from job loss. However, there is a chance that many of the participants were required to negotiate to work from home while taking care of children who were also learning from home; or negotiating to work from campus with limited childcare options available. Additionally, there may have been other financial stress as well as the overarching burden the COVID-19 pandemic has had on society. As such, this population was not immune to the ramifications of the past year.

**Work-Life Interface**

The work-life interface has evolved over the years. In the mid- to late-twentieth century, this interface obtained significant attention, and since then, the intersection between work and life has continued to be a point of interest. Now, there are three distinct constructs: (a) work-life conflict, (b) work-life balance, and (c) work-life
enrichment. The following section outlines each of these constructs in detail, specifically as they relate to sport and recreation.

**Work-Life Conflict**

Greenhaus and Beutel (1985) offered an examination of literature that focused solely on the experience of interrole conflict as it related to the work-life interface. According to Greenhaus and Beutel (1985), at that time, there did not seem to be a systematic review of work-life conflict even though there was a rising number of two-income households, increasing concern for employees’ quality of life, and changes in the definitions of success and self-fulfillment.

There were a few ways researchers had defined role conflict up to that point. Kahn and colleagues (1964) defined it as the difficulty of completing the tasks of two separate roles simultaneously (Greenhaus & Beutel, 1985). Interrole conflict is when the pressures from each role are in opposition to one another and are incompatible (Greenhaus & Beutel, 1985). Work-life conflict is a form of interrole conflict in which the fulfillment of role responsibilities in the workplace is in contrast to the role responsibilities for other areas of life. In the literature, work-life conflict is often termed work-family conflict as family is a predominant facet of life. However, more recently, many are utilizing the general work-life language with work-family used only when discussing family challenges.

Greenhaus and Beutel (1985) pulled together a myriad of resources to develop a model that described the sources of work-family conflict. The researchers found three major forms of work-family conflict, including time-based conflict, strain-based conflict,
and behavior-based conflict. Time-based conflicts are time pressures in the workplace that make it “physically impossible to comply with expectations from another role” (Greenhaus & Beutel, 1985, p. 78). In other words, work hours, inflexible work schedules, as well as a preoccupation with work when not there make it impossible to meet the demands of other roles in one’s life.

Strain-based conflict is the impact of work stress on one’s other life roles. When one is experiencing stress-related symptoms such as tension, anxiety, fatigue, and irritability, it becomes increasingly difficult to devote energy to other areas of life (Greenhaus & Beutel, 1985). Behavior-based conflict, then, occurs when behaviors that are necessary to complete work-related tasks are not compatible with behaviors needed to complete non-work tasks. For example, “the male, managerial stereotype emphasizes self-reliance, emotional stability, aggressiveness…” whereas “family members…may expect a person to be warm, nurturant, emotional, and vulnerable” (Greenhaus & Beutel, 1985, p. 81-82). If a person cannot adjust their behaviors as they transition between work and other life roles, conflict may arise.

Later, Greenhaus and Powell (2003) added to this discussion, suggesting that an individual’s self-identity can influence one’s role-related behavior. By further investigating role salience and its effects on how one decides between competing role activities, Greenhaus and Powell (2003) explained that by being firmly rooted in family, one will, most likely, prioritize a family obligation over a work obligation. Of course, they suggested, this finding may have been overstated in the study because, in the real world, participants may have more freedom to adjust work schedules or accommodate...
competing demands. However, this study highlights the variations of family-to-work conflict and work-to-family conflict.

Therefore, it is important to note that work-life conflict is not one-directional. Although many researchers have combined work-family conflict and family-work conflict constructs into one definition. Netemeyer and colleagues (1996) asserted that these two constructs are more distinct. Up to this point, work-life conflict has been discussed in detail. While also a form of interrole conflict, family-work conflict occurs when family roles and responsibilities interfere with performing work-related responsibilities (Netemeyer et al., 1996). One way this manifests itself is in the case of work self-efficacy. Family roles and responsibilities may negatively impact one’s work performance and self-efficacy. Therefore, it is important to consider the bidirectional influence of both roles.

**Work-Life Conflict in Sport**

According to Dixon and Bruening (2005), sport is an excellent context in which to study work-life conflict, given its non-traditional, long work hours as well as significant travel requirements. Additionally, sport offers insights pertaining to gender because sport is typically male-dominated, and the work-family interface is relevant across many cultures in these settings. Dixon and Bruening (2005) offered an integrated theory of work-family conflict in sport, sometimes referred to as the Multilevel framework. This theory incorporates individual, structural, and sociocultural factors. Individual factors are influenced by one’s personality, work values, family structure, coping, and gender. It is
understood that these factors preceded conflict, and the experiences of conflict are based on these factors (Dixon & Bruening, 2005).

Dixon and Bruening (2005) argued that individual factors must also be assessed within the context of structural and sociocultural factors. Structural factors (i.e., job pressures, work hours, and work culture) incorporate the understanding that individual factors are bounded by broader operations and decisions (Allison, 1971; cited by Dixon & Bruening, 2005). Within this context, one may consider workplace characteristics and how those constrain individual choices (Knoppers, 1992). Finally, sociocultural factors incorporate the understanding of the individual and the structures and then places those within a broader context by examining “the social meanings, norms, and values associated with work and family as social institutions” (Dixon & Bruening, 2005, p. 242). Dixon and Bruening (2005) asserted that, within the context of work and family, the assumption that these two social institutions are gendered remains salient.

Dixon and Bruening (2005) summarized the three implications for gender roles on work-family conflict given the dominant social definitions of masculine and feminine: (a) women have limited opportunities to enter and stay in male-dominated professions, (b) women have a more difficult time than men maintaining work and family responsibilities, and (c) women can have significant emotional distress when they do not conform to traditional gender norms.

Throughout many of these studies, the common thread was the impact of gender roles within the work-family conflict and the disproportionate burden that falls on women. Dixon and Bruening (2007) continued to build upon their multilevel framework
(Dixon & Bruening, 2005) by investigating the experience of Division I female head coaches with children. They bolstered this multilevel framework while also highlighting how female coaches’ individual experiences (e.g., individual conflict and time management) were constrained by factors like work climate and culture. The results indicated that traditional, hegemonic sociocultural definitions of work and success were pervasive in the workplace. Coaching mothers felt the structural constraints of the job (e.g., long hours, extensive travel, and “face time” in the office). They also described their personality traits such as “driven” and “achiever,” and expressed their guilt over not spending time with their families and their discontent that men did not experience the same pressures. The coaching mothers were unwilling to accept anything other than placing equal value and pursuit on sport and family despite the widespread understanding that to succeed in sport, one must sacrifice all areas of their lives to achieve their goals (Dixon & Bruening, 2007).

Bruening and Dixon (2007) offered a secondary perspective from their study on Division I female head coaches with children. In this commentary, they focused on coping mechanisms that the participants utilized to achieve success at work and at home. Unfortunately, in their sample, Bruening and Dixon (2007) found that 29% of their participants left Division I head coaching positions between the start and the end of their study. Additionally, several participants indicated they contemplated leaving the profession at some point. Despite this, many of the remaining coaches sought to reduce work-family conflict by making negotiations at the individual level. They did not, however, strive for structural change. This was due to the limitations of being the only
mother in the workplace, as well as the persistent cultural norms of sport and its commitment to sacrifice and success. Nevertheless, the coaches did hope that their individual negotiations (e.g., childcare, staffing) would “emerge into collective cultures or actions” (Bruening & Dixon, 2007, p. 490).

Interestingly and importantly, Graham and colleagues (2017; 2019) have observed that the work-life conflict and its implications can have significant effects on men as well. This is due, in part, to what Graham and Dixon (2017) described as the changing role expectations for men. This may be due to the shift in more women working professionally and looking to their significant others for support at home.

Dixon and Sagas (2007) investigated work-family conflict from an organizational support perspective in the context of athletic organizations and coaches with families. They determined that “in the athletic context, it appears that one way organizations can support their employees is to demonstrate support for their family lives, thereby decreasing work-family conflict” (Dixon & Sagas, 2007, p. 243). Similar to what Allen (2001) found, work cultures that support families are related to lower work-family conflict and higher job satisfaction.

Building from this foundation, Taylor and colleagues (2019) and Huml and colleagues (2020) assessed workaholism in sport as it related to work-family conflict and burnout. They found that workaholism had a positive relationship with their work-family conflict, and work-family conflict had a positive impact on their burnout. Therefore, sport employees who were overcommitted to their work experienced negative consequences as it related to work-family conflict. Interestingly, Huml and colleagues (2020) suggested
that the tension between work and family may not be all bad. In fact, work-family conflict may actually deter individuals from turning into a workaholic. These studies are important as they further describe the pressures experienced within the sport and recreation field and their impact on employee well-being and work-life conflict (recall long work hours, non-traditional work hours, competitive environment).

**Work-Life Balance**

Up to this point, the work-life interface has been discussed from a conflict perspective. Although this remains an ever-present challenge, many individuals strive to negotiate the conflict by seeking balance between work roles and life roles. Bruening and Dixon (2008) continued to build upon their study of Division I head coaching mothers. They were particularly interested in the negotiations their participants made from a life course, gendered perspective. They found, from the life course perspective, that the participants were able to highlight turning points in their lives that significantly impacted their work-life balance. “In the case of coaching mothers, by far the most often pointed-to turning point was the birth of a child” (Bruening & Dixon, 2008, p. 17). Up to that point, many of the coaching mothers were satisfied with their careers as well as the lifestyle it required. However, once a baby was introduced, coaching mothers were faced with the issue of deciding whether or not their work lifestyle meshed well with their new family life.

In order to navigate this, the coaching mothers indicated two support systems, (a) spouse/partner and (b) athletic administration. Significant others were pivotal in the process of adjusting their lifestyles to become more involved in childcare. Although the
participants pointed out the shared responsibility, they referred to their significant other as a huge part of making the balance possible. Coaching mothers also felt that their athletic director’s support was nearly as important as the support from their significant others. The coaching mothers talked about the need for support from administrators to understand their situation and provide assistance. The support coaching mothers felt most important was related to their athletic director demonstrating overall consideration and understanding of their situation, providing flexible work hours, and being provided, additional assistant coaches. Interestingly, although many institutions offer work-life benefits for their employees, many female sport administrators do not take advantage of these benefits. Taylor and Wells (2017) suggested this may be due to the departmental culture being unsupportive of female sport administrators utilizing the benefits.

Leberman and Palmer (2009) studied women leaders in New Zealand who sought to create a work-family-leisure balance. They found that while there were many constraints such as guilt, exhaustion, and stress, these women negotiated these through their passion for their job, support networks, and compartmentalizing/integrating strategies. The participants identified the mutual benefits of motherhood and sport leadership. Some of these mutual benefits included the feeling that their leadership role translated into them becoming a positive female role model for their children. Some of the participants felt that their children benefited and were more flexible, adaptable, and independent as a result of their leadership role requirements.

Although Taylor and Wells (2017) did not specifically mention work-life balance, they did discuss the importance of support for female athletic directors. These supports,
such as inclusive environments and human and social capital, facilitate better work-life balance. Specifically, this may happen when organizations shift to promote a welcoming, family-friendly environment that allows for freedom to bring children to campus.

Taylor and colleagues (2018c) then utilized Career Construction Theory (CCT) to assess how female athletic conference commissioners negotiated their work roles and their family roles. They found that rather than using the term “balance,” many of their participants preferred to reference the integration of work and life as a “negotiation.” These participants felt that balance implied an unrealistic expectation that work and life would be equal, which was not always the case. Taylor and colleagues (2018c) explained, “CCT posits that an individual does not make decision about [their] career without influence from other facets of [their] career” (p. 326). Therefore, the female conference commissioners were constantly negotiating their time between personal and professional. In order to do this successfully, the organization and their family needed to be highly flexible. By creating flexible work environments, Greenhaus and Powell (2006) indicated that individuals who have work-life balance feel a sense of security, a sense of enrichment, and a higher sense of well-being. Women then stay in their positions longer if they receive organizational support that aids in managing work and family in a healthy way (Bruening & Dixon, 2008).

Finally, Graham and colleagues (2019) sought to understand how college coaches allocate personal resources among their competing demands between work and family. They found, similar to Dixon and Bruening (2008) that the work environment is a key factor in obtaining balance between work and family. Therefore, this points to the need
for leaders within sport organizations to be sensitive to employees’ abilities to balance work and family effectively.

**Work-Life Enrichment**

Work-life enrichment is founded on the argument that there are indeed positive effects of combining work and family roles. Greenhaus and Powell (2006) defined work-life enrichment as the “extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life in the other role” (p. 73). Therefore, work and family can enhance each other, and there should be a focus on improving work and family interactions from a positive perspective. Work-life enrichment differs from work-life conflict and balance because work-life conflict and balance tend to focus more on the negative aspects or the zero-sum of the relationship between the two.

Greenhaus and Powell (2006) summarized three ways participation in multiple roles, termed role accumulation, may produce positive outcomes. First, work and family roles can have an additive effect on well-being. Individuals who are satisfied with work and with family will have greater happiness and life satisfaction compared to individuals who only have one role or are unhappy in one or more of their roles. Second, work and family roles can buffer one another. If an individual is distressed in one of their roles, they can rely on their other role(s) to moderate or compensate those effects. Third, experiences in one of the roles can produce positive experiences in the other role(s). In other words, there is a transfer of positive experiences between roles. For example, beneficial interpersonal skills acquired at one’s job may translate to, and be useful for, interpersonal interactions with the family. According to Greenhaus and Powell (2006),
this third description best captures work-family enrichment because they felt this relationship is bidirectional. Work experiences may improve the quality of family experiences and vice versa.

In their study, Schenewark and Dixon (2012) investigated college coaches and how work-family conflict and enrichment simultaneously influenced job and life outcomes. They found that coaches with families did experience both conflict and enrichment. In terms of enrichment, there was a higher level of family-to-work enrichment, and the participants fought to find the benefits of the work-life interface. This meant that the coach’s family was a positive influence in their life and may have improved their performance at work. Additionally, in this study, enrichment accounted for an increase in life satisfaction as well as career commitment among the participants (Schenewark & Dixon, 2012).

For women, Ruderman and colleagues (2002) determined that when high-level female leaders occupied multiple roles, their level of life satisfaction as well as psychological benefits, multi-tasking skills, self-esteem, and self-acceptance increased significantly. The participants in this study indicated that their personal lives provided them with the psychological resources that enhanced their work performance (i.e., confidence, well-rounded perspective). Additionally, the commitment to multiple roles was related to general life satisfaction as well as a positive sense of self-worth and self-esteem. These findings were supported by the role accumulation perspective from Greenhaus and Powell (2006). Barnett and Gareis (2006) then found that women experienced a sense of accomplishment if they achieved success in balancing work and
life roles. Women also benefited from the salary and health benefits, being challenged at work, using their talents, and receiving social support.

Graham and Dixon (2017) then studied male high school coaches who were fathers. Although this population is outside the scope of the current study as it relates to gender, Graham and Dixon (2017) offered insights pertaining to work-family enrichment. Some of the participants cited the mutual benefit of working with high school athletes and parenting. By routinely coaching high school athletes, the coaches felt their parenting ability improved. The same was true in reverse; the participants felt that their role as a father helped them relate better to their athletes. Many of the participants also expressed their intentionality when planning and utilizing off-season. Given the nature of high school coaching, these participants did have built-in breaks coinciding with the school schedule, and each break was utilized as focused family time, bolstering work-life enrichment.

Heskiau and McCarthy (2020) expanded the work-family enrichment literature by developing and evaluating a work-to-family enrichment training program. Their goal was to evaluate the effects of resource (skills, knowledge, and values) transfer training on enrichment and job satisfaction. The participants in their program were administrative employees from a large university in North America. They found that by conducting an employee-focused training program, the participants increased self-efficacy as they related to intentional resource transfer from work to family roles.
Work-Life Interface in the Context of the Current Study

The current study aims to assess the experiences of female campus recreation directors, and less is understood about that population as it relates to the work-life interface. There have been a variety of studies completed focused on the experiences of students and others using campus recreation facilities. A recent study on work experiences among collegiate recreation employees conducted by Lopez and colleagues (2020) started to fill this void. Given that the culture of campus recreation may be similar to other fields in sport and recreation management, its position within this literature review remains relevant. Lopez and colleagues (2020) highlighted several important implications of their study. Given the nature of sport management research, those who are often studied are housed within intercollegiate athletics and professional sport. However, in the case of recreation research, the consumers of recreation services are the most often studied. As such, those working to provide these recreational and sport services are largely overlooked.

Lopez and colleagues (2020) highlighted that campus recreation employees routinely clock more than 47 hours per week during the school year. They also found that although women reported higher levels of work-family conflict, men reported higher levels of family-work conflict. Additionally, they found that employees with greater non-work commitments found it more difficult to balance both work and life. Much of this is consistent with the previously stated literature on coaches and others within intercollegiate athletics. Finally, although Lopez and colleagues (2020) acknowledged that campus recreation employees are usually satisfied with their work circumstances,
many participants felt overburdened by long hours and added responsibilities that were not anticipated. The researchers call for future research utilizing qualitative methods to better understand the unique aspects of campus recreation workplaces that may mirror or diverge from the dominant sport management literature.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

**Career Development Theory**

*Career Development Theory* is widely used in counseling when assisting people in finding work that has meaning and purpose. The National Career Development Association (NCDA; 2003; cited by O’Neil & Bilimoria, 2005) defined career development as “the total constellation of psychological, sociological, educational, physical, economic, and chance factors that combine to influence the nature and…significance of work in the total lifespan of any given individual” (p. 2). As will be demonstrated, throughout many iterations of career development theory, the predominant theme encompasses examining life holistically and over time.

In 1980, Donald Super developed the Career Development Theory. He claimed that up to that point, theories related to career development had focused primarily on career choice rather than career development. In this theory, he addressed an individual’s life span through stages: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement. These stages happen throughout one’s life as well as during the various careers one may have in their lifetime. One experiences new things, develops, and explores before establishing their position within an organization and maintaining a rhythm of engagement. Over time, individuals will disengage from their career for many
reasons, like an abrupt life change or an organic transition to the next career. In order to better understand this process, Super (1980) revisited his Life-Career Rainbow. Within this rainbow, a person moves through life stages, and those life stages coincide with their age as well as their roles in society and their roles in their career progression. At the center of the rainbow are personal determinants (e.g., attitudes, interests, needs, achievements) that influence and individualize an individual’s life experiences and career trajectory within this framework. Ultimately, though, Super’s (1980) career development theory and Life-Career Rainbow operate under the assumption that throughout one’s life and career, stages and tasks happen at relatively predictable times. Additionally, these models are based predominately on men’s career experiences, which do not always mirror the career experiences of women. Despite these critiques, Super’s (1980) models laid the foundation for career development theory.

**Career Development as Nonlinear**

In 2005, Bloch provided an in-depth perspective on career development theory. Then, in 2021, Yates did the same. Career development theories were initially influenced by positivism, which assumes a single objective truth. In the late 20th century, there was a shift toward focusing on relationships when studying complex structures asserting that humans and their careers are complex, nonlinear entities. This shift was reflected in many career development theories taking a more constructionist approach (Yates, 2021). Bloch (2005) explained that the career development theory should focus on relationships and nonlinear dynamics because careers are complex entities. Bloch (2005) said that while humans are pattern-oriented, career paths are “characterized by unexplained trajectories”
She described how humans as complex entities intersect their careers in their development. The elements of this interaction included (1) self-regulation; (2) open exchange; (3) participation in networks; (4) fractals; (5) phase transitions; (6) nonlinear dynamics; (7) potential for small changes to being large effects; (8) limits to growth; (9) emergence; and (10) spirituality.

For self-regulation, people regularly reinvent their careers, and that career development is a natural process born out of the acceptance that careers are a complex adaptive entity. Then for open exchange, a career requires give and take with the human body. Related to this was the concept of participation in networks; the relationship between the career and the person and the affiliated relationships and environments all impact and move through and with one another. Then one’s career was considered a fractal of the individual’s life. In considering phase transitions, career changes occur, whether planned or unplanned, and this is part of the relational network.

Through these phase transitions, fitness is thought of as those moments in which a person is searching for the best they can imagine for themself. This can be thought of with the assistance of nonlinear dynamics, which means that each person’s career development makes sense in terms of their own work-life, environment, and internal state. This development, at times, is difficult to explain. The concept behind the potential for small change to bring about large effects was straightforward. At times, small, random events may lead to major career shifts. For both attractors that limit growth and strange attractors, the concept is that people are drawn to their careers in a myriad of ways. Sometimes this occurs in an individual has their mind set on a single career. Other
times this occurs during life’s surprises. Finally, spirituality is an interesting component of career development in that the assertion was that there could be no living system without interdependence. Bloch (2005) explained that there are similarities between the effects of nonlinear dynamics and spiritual beliefs. It constitutes the search for oneness, purpose, and meaning in an individual’s career and life.

Yates (2021) echoed much of what Bloch (2005) described. She also sought to distill the field of career development into a holistic framework with four central themes. These themes included identity, environment, career learning, and psychological career resources. Yates (2021) understood identity and environment as multidimensional influences on the content of career development. In her integrated career development model, identity is not only influential to the person-environment fit of a career but also plays out differently in different contexts. The more an individual feels their career matches their interests and values, the more satisfied they will be in their career. Identity is also constructed by “people mak[ing] their own meanings from their experiences, working out whom they are by creating narratives…which account for their interactions with their environment” (Yates, 2021, p. 134). Environment, then, is multifaceted with ever-changing and socially constructed components. The individual is influenced by and influences their environment through the influence of social capital, noticing and taking advantage of opportunities, the influence of others in one’s life, or their individual perspectives of the world (Yates, 2021).

Career learning and psychological career resources focus on the process of career development (Yates, 2021). Career learning is the blending of understanding oneself and
their environment. Individuals examine and make judgments about career information as well as engage in experiential learning and reflection (Yates, 2021). Psychological career resources such as self-efficacy, adaptability, resilience, hope, and optimism are important for individuals as they navigate their career paths (Yates, 2021). Each of these resources bolsters the ability to believe in oneself, adapt to changes in one’s career and life, and develop appropriate goals and motivation to achieve those goals (Yates, 2021).

**Career Development Theory as Applied to the Current Study**

**Career Development Theory for Women**

The understanding of career development theory for women has changed over time. In 1997, Phillips and Imhoff reviewed research pertaining to women and career development up to that point. They explained that women have unique experiences when it comes to their career development. In terms of how they develop their self-concept, questions such as: “who am I?” “How far can I go?” and “What can I, as a woman do?” are formative. These are impacted by early life experiences as well as the development of occupational aspirations and ideas about what women can do. Occupational choices have long been limited to traditional roles but more recently have expanded to include entry into nearly every occupation. They summarized how women identify (e.g., having a more egalitarian attitude), the impact of school and family, and interventions all impact what type of career a woman chooses.

Additionally, much of the research they summarized focused on barriers to entry (e.g., gender discrimination) and the unique experience of women exiting and reentering the workforce. Unlike men, women can experience periods in which they exit the
workforce to engage in family roles and then reenter the workforce at a later time (Phillips & Imhoff, 1997). Finally, experiences at work impact a woman’s career development. Career advancement, salary, occupational status, and performance evaluations all have components that are unique to women (Phillips & Imhoff, 1997). Unfortunately, women typically struggle in these areas due to gender discrimination leading to lower salaries, lower-ranking occupational status, and barriers to career advancement. Yet, it is known that mentoring and social support can help women navigate these experiences as well as find satisfaction and success in their careers. Of course, women entering the workforce must also reckon with the work-life interface. Until recently, the challenges of the work-life interface have disproportionately affected women (see also, Graham & Dixon, 2017).

Echoing much of what had been studied, Coogan and Chen (2007) sought to connect career development theories to improve career counseling for women. They reminded the reader that women face many barriers in their career development. In their application of Super’s (1980) career development theory, a person’s self-concept changes over time due to biology, social roles, and evaluations of how others react to a person. Coogan and Chen (2007) explained that women, impacted by early gender-role orientation, select occupations because of their developed self-concept. Additionally, there is the understanding that people play a variety of roles throughout their lives. Women particularly experience significant overlap, which is “essential when considering the career development of women” (Coogan & Chen, 2007, p. 196). Finally, Super’s (1980) theory clarifies women’s career development because, within the model, people
recycle through the various development stages. This may happen more often for women as they exit and reenter the workplace.

In 2005, O’Neil and Bilimoria provided commentary on women’s career development and its phases over the life course. Women’s careers can be vastly different from men resulting from three critical factors: (1) family responsibilities; (2) the relational emphasis on career development; and (3) under-representation of women in high-status positions (O’Neil & Bilimoria, 2005). We know that work-life balance can be challenging for women, as well as the effects of hegemonic masculinity and gender discrimination in the organizational hierarchy (Hindman & Walker, 2020). We also know that relationships are essential for women’s growth and development (see also Bower & Hums, 2006). O’Neil and Bilimoria (2005) determined three phases of a woman’s career: (1) idealistic achievement, (2) pragmatic endurance, and (3) reinventive contribution.

Idealistic achievement typically occurs during the early stages of one’s career. Most women were “likely to see themselves in charge of their careers and will be proactive in taking strategic steps to ensure their career progress” (O’Neil & Bilimoria, 2005, p. 182). The women were also achievement-oriented and believed in unlimited possibilities for themselves. Despite some setbacks and negative organizational behaviors, the women felt they could overcome those. Pragmatic endurance typically occurs during one’s mid-career as well as mid-life. Women in this phase managed multiple roles while remaining actively productive in their career. “These women are most likely to be dissatisfied and disenfranchised with their workplaces and stalled at the middle management level” (O’Neil & Bilimoria, 2005, p. 183). This contributed to experiences of limited job
promotions as well as discrimination and sexual harassment. Finally, the reinventive contribution was associated with the advanced stage of one’s career. Many in this phase may have experienced “their personal lives being subsumed by their professional lives…as a result of divorce or death of a spouse initiating a renewed focus on work and career concerns” (O’Neil & Bilimoria, 2005, p. 184). The researchers explained that women in this phase were more likely to feel they contributed meaningfully to their work. Although career patterns seemed ordered at the outset of one’s career, these patterns shifted and changed as women moved through the various career phases (O’Neil & Bilimoria, 2005).

In 2015, O’Neil and Hopkins provided a perspective article that called attention to the impact of gendered organizational systems on women’s career advancement and development. They explained that for women to continue to develop in their careers, attention must be directed toward the systemic norms and structures of the workplace rather than simply focusing on individual issues. By merely focusing on women’s lack of confidence, for example, energy is directed away from the structural disadvantage facing women seeking career advancement to leadership positions (O’Neil & Hopkins, 2015).

O’Neil, Brooks, and Hopkins (2018) built upon their previous work and examined women’s roles in women’s career advancement and development. They were most interested in what women in the workplace expect of each other as it related to career development and advancement. The researchers found a disconnect between the expectations and perceptions that women have of one another – particularly between junior and senior women in the workplace. O’Neil, Brooks, and Hopkins (2018)
explained that junior women felt that senior women were not being supportive enough although senior women felt they were engaging in supportive behaviors. On the other hand, the senior women felt that the junior women were not engaging in career advancement behaviors, while the junior women felt they were engaging in these behaviors. These disconnections between the two groups of women highlighted several larger issues within the workplace. First, due to gendered organizational culture, senior women may not feel equipped or motivated to heavily support junior women. Gendered organizational culture dominated by white males typically does not champion advocacy for gender equity, which can lead to this minimal support for junior women. Therefore, O’Neil, Brooks, and Hopkins (2018) explained that senior women rely on change naturally occurring (i.e., more women entering the workplace) rather than actively advocating for junior women. Secondly, the researchers asserted that there might be the concern that a less qualified group member (i.e., an underperforming junior woman) may perpetuate negative stereotypes about women in general (O’Neil et al., 2018). Thus, if senior women do not believe that the junior women are being proactive in their careers, they may be less willing to select junior women for difficult job assignments. In the end, O’Neil, Brooks, and Hopkin’s (2018) findings indicated that there is still much work to be done in terms of formal and informal mentorship and sponsorship between junior and senior women. They suggested for organizations to create and promote women’s networks, which can ultimately strengthen the overall cultural climate for women and benefit their career development and advancement.
Career Development Theory for Recreation and Sport and Women

In the recreation and sport management literature about women, some researchers have utilized aspects of career development theory to understand how individuals obtain and maintain positions within recreation and sport management. Henderson and colleagues (2011) and Henderson and colleagues (2013) based their studies on the women’s career development model. In 2011, Henderson and colleagues studied women faculty in higher education and the recreation and leisure field. To contextualize their study, the researchers explained that “career development for women is often complicated because of the social role factors that embed women’s lives in a larger context of work and family” (Henderson et al., 2011, p. 15). They found that for women faculty members, the biggest challenge was for younger women to obtain a mentor to help guide them through their career development.

In 2013, Henderson and colleagues studied the status of women in parks and recreation in the United States. To inform their research, “career development models for women generally define career broadly to include the personal as well as professional issues, which continuously interact with one another” (Henderson et al., 2013, p. 59). In their iteration of the women’s career development model (originally developed by Henderson and Bialeschki (1995), demographic background, current position, career patterns, career satisfaction, family/work/leisure balance, and gender equity issues. The reader is reminded that traditional career development models may not always take into account the complex factors associated with women’s careers. Henderson and colleagues (2013) found that in the enhancement of the women’s career development model, some
of the dimensions included organizational climates as well as social structures. This may have contributed to the lack of career advancement the researchers noted for many of the women.

Finally, Waller and colleagues (2015) also utilized Henderson and colleagues’ (2013) women’s career development model when they studied women administrators in campus recreation. They found that significant aspects of career development for women were attributed to networking and mentoring in order to advance their careers in the field.

Considering its storied history in the study of women and their career evolution, career development theory is a helpful construct in understanding the experiences of women directors in campus recreation. It allows for the nonlinear trajectory that is traditionally found in women’s career development. It also takes into account the myriad of life circumstances that can impact one’s career development. It was assumed that in this study, the participants recounted multidimensional career and life experiences, which may be understood through the lens of career development theory.

**Career Construction Theory**

Of the multitude of career development theories circulating in the literature, *Career Construction Theory* (CCT) provides a helpful framework through which to explore how women navigate career decisions and career trajectories and acts as a primary theory for the current study. CCT provides a social constructivist lens (Savickas, 2005) as a way to examine personal characteristics and social contexts that inform the development of identities, both personal and professional, of women in leadership positions (e.g., Astin, 1984).
CCT was developed by Mark Savickas (2005; 2013). In essence, CCT “explains the interpretive and interpersonal processes through which individuals construct themselves, impose direction on their vocational behavior, and make meaning of their careers” (Savickas, 2013, p. 147). Originally, CCT was intended to be used in a multicultural society and informs a model for career counseling. Its overarching goal was to address how people build their careers through social constructionism and personal constructivism. In other words, the goal of CCT was to consider how people make themselves into who they are through their construction of representations of reality – epistemological constructivism (Savickas, 2005). Savickas (2005) pulled foundational concepts of CCT primarily from Super (1980) and Holland (1997).

Savickas (2013) elaborated on the foundations of CCT by first focusing on how people make themselves into who they are, and then he focused on three central developmental perspectives: self as actor, self as agent, and self as author. “Individuals compose a self and career by reflecting on experience, using the uniquely human capacity to be conscious of consciousness” (Savickas, 2013, p. 148). Savickas (2013) claimed that people construct themselves through interpersonal experiences, so in essence, oneself is co-constructed as a result of interpersonal experiences. This process of self-making and career construction varies throughout one’s lifetime, moving from actor to agent to author. Savickas (2013) reminded the reader that for much of the 20th century, careers were a sequential path through life, a relatively straightforward trajectory. However, now, scholars have reconceptualized the meaning of career to be more boundaryless. CCT
“views career as a story that individuals tell about their working life” (Savickas, 2013, p. 150).

CCT begins with the self as actor. Savickas (2013) explained that when a child is born into the family, they quickly understand the world of the family and the culture that surrounds it. In conjunction with the family, children craft their character through their interactions with the neighborhood and school environment. The process of co-constructing oneself through these interpersonal experiences helps shape their life and career down the road. Additionally, in an effort to navigate these formative experiences (e.g., problems, preoccupations, and predicaments), children select role models who have overcome these experiences and that act as “blueprints for self-design” (Savickas, 2013, p. 152). In other words, children adopt characteristics of their role models to make sense of their own lives. Then, it is through these interactions with family and friends, as well as imitation of role models, that Savickas (2013) made the claim that a person’s personality is being formed.

After establishing oneself as an actor, young people develop an internal sense of agency. Agency is responsible for forming goals of one’s own choosing. In CCT, agency is of utmost importance when one’s occupation is lost, halted, or in transition. Agency provides the space to adapt when there is a social challenge that forces occupational change. Perhaps it’s vocational development tasks, occupational transitions, or work traumas. Vocational development tasks refer to the changes one takes on throughout their specific vocation to match their abilities and interests. Occupational transition occurs when one moves from one job to another for a myriad of reasons. Finally, work trauma
refers to unpredictable and unwanted job experiences such as work injuries and plant closings. All of these experiences require adaptability through preparing for the future, engaging in self-control, and demonstrating confidence.

There is an integration of action and agency into a purposeful and unified life story. The individual acts as the author of their life, narrating their experiences by expressing goals, directing behavior, and placing meaning on the activities in which they participate (Savickas, 2013). “The individual uses this self-sustaining narrative to evaluate career opportunities and negotiate social constraints” (Savickas, 2013, p. 163).

In 2005, Savickas outlined sixteen propositions for CCT. These included (1) society structures an individual’s life course through social roles; (2) occupations provide a core role for an individual, but for some other roles take precedent (i.e., family, friends); (3) individual career patterns are determined by socioeconomics, education, personality; (4) all people are different; (5) every occupation is different and has different requirements; (6) people are qualified for a variety of occupations; (7) occupational success depends on pairing with prominent vocational characteristics of the individual; (8) job satisfaction is positively related to an individual using their talents; (9) career construction is developing and implementing vocational self-concepts in work roles; (10) vocational self-concepts can change over time; (11) vocational change goes through stages of growth, exploration, establishment, management, and disengagement; (12) these aforementioned stages act on a smaller scale when transitioning from one stage to the next; (13) vocational maturity indicates a person’s degree of vocational development; (14) career adaptability indicates a person’s readiness for coping with vocational
development; (15) career construction is prompted by vocational development tasks and produced by responses to these tasks; and (16) career construction can be fostered by conversations, exercises, and activities to bolster vocational self-concepts.

In many of these propositions, Savickas (2005) mentioned vocational self-concepts and vocational personality, which were derived from Holland (1997) and Super (1980). Vocational self-concepts are unique to each person and are defined as “the self-perceived attributes that an individual considers relevant to work roles” (Super, 1963; cited by Savickas, 2005, p. 163), and these are developed through interactions with family, neighborhood, and school as well as a variety of other developmental tasks. Super (1980) described a series of life stages: growth, exploration, establishment, management, and disengagement. These occur throughout one’s life as an individual establishes their interests, advances their work, maintains their relevance, and finally disengages from their career. When one is in their career, they are faced with a variety of challenges as they adapt to that career. Generally, an individual copes with developmental tasks and job crises by having concern and control about the future of their career, curiosity about if that career is the right fit and if there is something better, and finally establishing confidence about their career tasks (Savickas, 2005). In terms of this confidence, Savickas (2005) made the point that self-concept and self-esteem, while related, are not synonyms. Those with low self-esteem are less likely to make a good match between their vocational self-concept and their occupational role.

Ultimately, CCT answers two questions: (1) What do people do? and (2) Why do they do it? Which “focuses the attention on the interpretive processes, social interaction
and negotiation of meaning” (Savickas, 2005, p. 43). CCT encompasses three components: (1) vocational personality, (2) career adaptability, and (3) life themes. Thus, Hums and Hancock (2016) summarized that CCT is used to understand the choices individuals make based on perceptions of social realities in relation to vocational self-concepts.

Vocational personality is aspects of an individual’s needs, values, and interests as they relate to their careers (Savickas, 2005). Individuals develop their personalities from a young age as they are influenced by school, family, and their neighborhood. It is during these formative experiences (i.e., childhood games, chores, hobbies, reading, studying) that personality traits that appear in occupations are practiced. Savickas (2005) built off Holland’s (1997) study of personality dispositions and the development of interests, as well as the concise vocabulary he provided to describe personality traits. However, CCT “views interests as relational phenomenon that reflects emergent and socially constituted meanings…interests are viewed as a dynamic process, not as stable traits” (Savickas, 2005, p. 47) as they are viewed in Holland’s (1997) work. By using Holland (1997) as a jumping-off point, Savickas (2005) was able to “concentrate on bridged between personality and work, especially how individuals build and cross their own bridges…[CCT] concentrates on self-extension” (p. 48). Studies have shown that gender role socialization, personality, and self-efficacy contribute to career development (e.g., Burke, 2007). Specific to the current study population, according to Hancock and Hums (2016), “for women, in particular, gender role socialization and associated cultural
expectations influence the career decision-making process” (p. 200). Ultimately, vocational personality emphasizes the occupational content of one’s career.

Career adaptability “emphasizes the coping process through which individuals connect to their communities and construct their careers…[it] deals with how an individual constructs a career” (Savickas, 2005, p. 48). This is different from vocational personality, which is concerned with what career they construct. Career adaptability references an individual’s coping ability as it relates to developmental tasks and contextual factors (Savickas, 2005). Developmental tasks span the life cycle. Similar to Super’s career development theory (1980), there are five career stages: growth, exploration, establishment, management, and disengagement. Additionally, these developmental tasks occur within each career as well. Savickas (2005) explained that through these developmental tasks, people structure the story of their work-life in their minds by using the social structures of society’s grand narrative of a career. In turn, this narrative frames an individual’s story of their work and its consequences as they are influenced by society. Savickas (2005) asserted,

The grand story of career synchronizes individuals to their culture by telling them in advance how their work lives should proceed and prompting them to stay on schedule…Given these scripts, individuals bring to life the grand narrative…by enacting their unique version of it in a particular…specific opportunity structure that discriminates by…sex…The story of the career stages tells a grand narrative about psychosocial development and cultural adaptation…success in adapting to each developmental task results in more effective functioning (p. 50).
By experiencing these grand narratives over time, individuals can become better equipped to adapt more effectively and efficiently. In essence, developmental tasks within career adaptability represent an individual’s ability to cope with learning new skills.

Typically, contextual factors include structural and social determinants, which influence career goals and expectations. Thus, career adaptability is a reflection of constraints and facilitators in one’s career and how that individual responds to those experiences (Savickas, 2005). There are four career adaptability dimensions that are influenced by contextual factors, including concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. Career concern can encourage an individual to engage in activities and experiences that promote competencies in planning as well as sequencing activities that propel a person toward their desired future. Career control means that individuals “feel and believe that they are responsible for constructing their careers” (Savickas, 2005, p. 54). This is particularly important in the United States as the dominant culture values independence. Career curiosity “refers to inquisitiveness about and exploration of the fit between self and the work world” (Savickas, 2005, p. 55). This can promote appropriate choices to fit oneself to the situation. There is also an openness to new experiences and the development of knowledge. Career confidence in CCT “denotes feelings of self-efficacy concerning the individual’s ability to successfully execute a course of action needed to make and implement suitable educational and vocational choices” (Savickas, 2005, p. 56). Additionally, there can be an increase in self-worth and self-acceptance when one recognizes they are useful and productive in daily activities.
In 2012, Savickas and Porfeli focused specifically on the adaptation mechanism of CCT and developed a psychometric scale to measure career adaptability. The resulting scale consisted of four measures, concern, control, curiosity, and confidence as psychosocial resources for managing occupational transitions, work traumas, and developmental tasks. These four, according to Savickas and Porfeli (2012), all support self-regulation strategies as individuals develop confidence in their ability to adapt to their ever-changing work environment and life circumstances.

Finally, life themes pertain to an individual’s experience of meaning, purpose, and life circumstances that happen both in their career and in their other everyday life roles (Savickas, 2005). These themes matter in one’s career because individuals give meaning and purpose to their work. It is also important to note that choices that occur in one’s career do not happen in isolation from other life roles (Savickas, 2005). By considering these factors and their meaning, one may be able to reveal why people make career decisions. In other words, life themes are the narrative component of CCT in that they address the “why” of vocational behavior, whereas vocational personality addresses the “what” and career adaptability addressed the “how.”

**Career Construction Theory as a Primary Theory in the Current Study**

CCT has also been utilized throughout literature as a helpful model for understanding women’s career development from a social constructivist lens. Hancock and Hums (2016) used CCT as a foundational theory in their study about senior-level female administrators in NCAA Division I athletic departments. They felt that the ways in which women perceive or experience “personal and contextual factors may influence
her career interest, choice, and development,” specifically in intercollegiate athletics (Hancock & Hums, 2016, p. 200). Hancock and Hums (2016) found that interpersonal relationships with mentors as well as access to professional development opportunities were key to their participant’s career advancement. On the other hand, perceptions of gender and professional value incongruence affected their participant’s career choices and, ultimately, their career advancement.

Later, Taylor and colleagues (2018) applied CCT to female NCAA Division I conference commissioners. For their study, Taylor and colleagues (2018) felt CCT was helpful in understanding decisions and choices made by their participants in the construction of their career paths. Ultimately, they found that their participants continually had to negotiate their personal and professional obligations, gender normalcy, and the development of organic mentor relationships. Taylor and colleagues (2018) found that their participant’s career experiences reflected the three components of CCT (recall vocational personality, career adaptability, life themes) as they fostered skill development, negotiated work-life conflict, and navigated gender discrimination.

In 2019, Darvin and colleagues utilized CCT as a guiding framework for analysis and interpretation of the initial career aspirations of women assistant coaches who voluntarily left their position. They explained in this context that CCT and its three themes (i.e., vocational personality, career adaptability, and life themes) not only operated independently as the participants negotiated their entry into the coaching profession but also operated in tandem and many times interwoven with one another in the career construction process. The participants described instances in which they may
not have had the opportunity to develop their vocational personality as it related to having specific coaching experience, yet they drew on their life themes as a catalyst to their coaching position. Darvin and colleagues (2019) brought attention to the need for more education for women about careers in sport and recreation. They also expressed the need for increased sponsorship of women to enter the coaching space. Both suggestions positively affect aspects of CCT, which will benefit women entering and remaining in sport-related positions.

Also, in 2019, Hartzell and Dixon found CCT to be a useful perspective through which to provide a holistic perspective on the career pathways of women in athletics administration. They explained that rather than seeing an individual’s career progression as a ladder, path, or labyrinth, CCT “views it as a story that one tells about his or her working life” (Hartzell & Dixon, 2019, p. 88). In this way, CCT not only acknowledges the unpredictable and nonlinear nature of careers, but it acknowledges the complex factors that influence one’s career journey. Therefore, CCT is helpful when examining women’s career experiences from a holistic perspective. Hartzell and Dixon (2019) called for a more advanced, holistic approach to understanding the career experiences of women by considering the context, circumstances, and life events that influence career development. One way to achieve this, Hartzell and Dixon (2019) urged, is through researching other contexts outside of collegiate athletics (i.e., campus recreation). Secondly, Hartzell and Dixon (2019) expressed the need to further examine women’s experiences in and out of the workplace, taking into consideration life events, their generation, cultural context, personal relationships, work-life interface, etc. One way to
do this, the researchers suggested, is by examining women’s experiences retrospectively using a qualitative study to capture events by those who experienced them.

Finally, Taylor, Shigeno, and Kraus (2022) utilized CCT as their theoretical framework while studying former Division III female student-athletes and their experiences pursuing a career in sport. They described the many influences that facilitated their participants’ desire to pursue a career in sport, which resulted from their gendered experiences. The researchers explained that those previous experiences (i.e., life themes) impacted the career decisions of their participants. Overall, in recent years, CCT has been utilized more frequently when studying women’s career development as it accounts for personal experiences and vocational personality (Savickas, 2005), both of which take into consideration gender and social norms (Hancock and Hums, 2016).

This dissertation study about women directors in campus recreation sought to fill the aforementioned call from Hartzell and Dixon (2019). Speaking specifically to the suggested qualitative methodology, the study sought to utilize narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry and CCT are complimentary, given the storied nature of CCT. Savickas (2013) explained that individuals act as the authors of their own lives. They narrate their experiences by expressing goals, directing behavior, and placing meaning on the activities in which they participate (Savickas, 2013; see also Savickas, 2005). Additionally, by focusing the population pool on women who hold directorship positions, one can obtain life or career history of experience up to that current moment. This was helpful in understanding the “complexities of women’s career trajectories in [campus recreation] leadership” (Hartzell & Dixon, 2019, p. 89). Finally, CCT seeks to consider
the holistic construction of one’s career, and it was the assumption that the women in this study would recount multifaceted career stories, which is why CCT was an essential primary theory for the current study.

**Career Construction Theory as a Heuristic Model**

As described above, CCT provides a social constructivist lens (Savickas, 2005) as a way to examine personal characteristics and social contexts that inform the development of identities, both personal and professional. Figure 1.1 shows how the current CCT model is conceptualized. Again, CCT asks two primary questions in terms of one’s career construction, (1) what do people do? (2) why do people do it? In order to fully understand how their career is constructed, one takes into account a person’s vocational personality, career adaptability, and life themes. One’s vocational personality derived from early childhood: family, friends, neighborhood, and school. It is in those places that one’s personality develops and informs how one initially chooses their career as well as how one engages in that space. Career adaptability essentially “recognizes the interplay among social expectations and occupational interests, perceived skills and abilities, real and perceived opportunities to engage in occupational roles, and peer acceptance in occupational roles” (Hancock & Hums, 2016, p. 200). Finally, life themes influence how one actually makes meaningful choices about their work and their life.

Figure 2.1 shows how the researcher saw the model shifting based on the findings of the study. The researcher expected that women in campus recreation leadership positions would explain lived experiences that reflect gender discrimination. CCT does not provide the critical component of examining power and privilege, specifically for
Figure 1.1 Career Construction Theory as a Heuristic Model
Figure 2.1. Amended Career Construction Theory as a Heuristic Model
women, in the workplace, which is why elements of critical feminist theory will be added to the model. There also does not seem to be a clear indication of where spirituality and resiliency fit into the model. As such, minor additions have been made to reflect what the researcher expects to find.

In vocational personality, socialized gender roles as an added component. In career adaptability, the researcher added gender discrimination and role expectations as components. Although one could argue that these are subsidiaries of foundational life experiences and structural and social determinants, respectively, it seems important to give primacy to these particular experiences within our culture and their impact on people. Critical feminist theories typically center gender as the overarching source of oppression in our society. How women are socialized, particularly from a gender roles perspective, during their formative years will impact what career they construct in the future. Then, as women engage in the “how” of their career (career adaptability), they are likely to experience the challenge of role expectations and gender discrimination. This may appear in challenges advancing in their field, navigating the work-life interface, or not having mentoring opportunities.

Finally, in life themes, spirituality and resiliency are added. These two constructs round out what is expected to be heard from the participants but also what the researcher felt was missing in the CCT model. The researcher anticipated, within the participants’ stories, that spirituality and resiliency would be described as they share stressful or challenging experiences as women leaders in campus recreation. For spirituality, although some may combine it with meaning, spirituality can stand as its own construct,
informing how individuals make choices and navigate the intersection between work and life. Then, to further understand the “why” behind career decisions, resiliency will be helpful as well. Developmental tasks, job transitions, and personal traumas all may inform life circumstances. Yet how individuals bounce back from those experiences does not seem to be addressed.

**Deconstructing Hegemony and Critical Feminist Theory**

Hegemony and critical feminist theory have many intersecting moments. The feminist movement, particularly in the sport and recreation context, has utilized hegemony to understand gender power relations better. The following section unpacks the foundations and understandings of hegemony before turning to critical feminist theory and its foundations. The latter part of the section weaves together how hegemony is understood in the context of sport and recreation and how feminist scholars critically examine women’s experiences in this context.

**Hegemony**

Hegemony is, essentially, the maintenance of power through ideological domination rather than physical force and revolt. This concept has been recapitulated over the years – starting, most notably, with Antonio Gramsci and evolving through the work of Foucault, Althusser, Laclau, Hall, and Derrida. Scholars and philosophers have had various convergences and divergences in their theorizing about hegemony, class, and power. Each prominent thinker is briefly considered in the following sections to help build the foundation of the concept of hegemony.
Gramsci

Antonio Gramsci was an Italian, working-class individual who studied and was heavily influenced by Marxian theory. To combat Fascism, Gramsci believed there needed to be an alliance between the working class and the peasantry to revolt against the bourgeoisie (Nemeth, 1980; cited by Schell & Rodriguez, 2000). However, instead of maintaining that the power must be taken through force and redistribution of material goods, Gramsci proposed that the revolution must be more sophisticated (Joll, 1977; cited by Schell & Rodriguez, 2000). He meant there needed to be a philosophical awakening where individuals are active participants in society (Joll, 1977; cited by Schell & Rodriguez, 2000).

From this ideology, Gramsci developed the concept of hegemony. Essentially, “hegemonic success is established when the subordinate classes of society accept the ruling class’ moral, political, and cultural values with minimal amount of force” (Schell & Rodriguez, 2000, p. 17). It has been described as intellectual leadership that produces consensus and true coercion (Lawner, 1975; cited by Schell & Rodriguez, 2000). This is achieved through maintaining power through “manipulation against, and collaboration with, the masses to establish an ideological domination in society” (Schell & Rodriguez, 2000, p. 18). Gramsci indicated that the elite class (e.g., doctors, lawyers, and politicians) exercised power over the rest of society (Joll, 1977; cited by Schell & Rodriguez, 2000).

Daldal offered a comparative analysis of Gramsci and Foucault (discussed in the next section). For Gramsci, Daldal (2014) explained that hegemonic order was established once the relations of power were indicated as common sense. In other words,
power was present, observable, and exerted by the dominant bourgeois class through ideology. In essence, power was ideology (Daldal, 2014). For example, in patriarchal societies, it is accepted as common sense that men are faster, stronger, and more fit to be leaders rather than women.

**Foucault**

Foucault chose not to confine himself to a broader political theory like Gramsci. Instead, he was influenced by Nietzsche and believed “power is everywhere and man cannot escape from the complex relations of power that make up society” (Daldal, 2014, p. 160). Foucault was more interested in the “how” of power over the “why” of power (Daldal, 2014). In this way, he was curious about how man can be turned into a subject through power relations. As such, the three modes of objectification included: (a) the objectification of man in the scientific paradigm, (b) objectification of man in dividing practices, and (c) self-subjectification. In order to resist these power relations, one must become an individual through struggle against subjection. In this way, Foucault was a humanist like Althusser (another philosopher discussed below) who gave weight to human will (Daldal, 2014). Foucault did mention that the State was a central source of power, but only from a Western Christianity perspective. The production of truth was linked with knowing the inside of people’s minds, exploring their souls, and making them reveal their innermost secrets (Foucault, 1980; cited by Daldal, 2014). In many ways, he reproduced Gramsci’s understanding of hegemony and Althusser’s understanding of ideological state apparatus, yet, according to Daldal (2014), Foucault wanted to avoid perpetuating Marxist understandings of the State.
Power was central to Foucault’s understanding of society. “Similar to Gramsci, Foucault also sees power as a relation of force that only exists in action” (Daldal, 2014, p. 164). Foucault believed power to be omnipresent as it comes from everywhere and is created in every moment (Daldal, 2014). In this way, Foucault was different from Gramsci in that Gramsci saw power from a binary perspective, whereas Foucault viewed power as diffused and not localized. Additionally, Foucault placed the body, rather than the mind, as the central focus. The actual effects of power in society result from the power exerted on people’s bodies as the body is a site of disciplinary, normalizing practices (Daldal, 2014; Markula, 2003). This was considered a more abstract form of control. Markula (2018) summarized that this “control reduces multiplicity into an acceptable form of ‘normalcy’: operating from multiple locations, an invisible ‘gaze’ secures that humans, through self-surveillance, conduct themselves ‘normally’” (p. 395).

**Althusser**

In many ways, Althusser was a staunch critic of Gramsci’s work. Particularly in terms of Gramsci’s understanding of hegemony. As discussed above, Gramsci believed domination of one group over another was relative and civil through the use of language and asserting ideological power. “Althusser preferred hegemony as a notion, rather than domination when referring to the ideological level” (Sotiris, 2017, p. 123). Althusser’s equivalent to Gramsci’s hegemony was ideological state apparatuses. An ideological state apparatus is an institution outside the State’s control that communicates beliefs held by the State. For example, popular media in the United States is mainly outside the State’s control yet still perpetuates ideologies of the State to the public. In distinguishing
between these two concepts, Althusser provided a few comments. First, ideological state apparatuses needed to be defined based on their cause versus their result (in the case of hegemony) (Sotiris, 2017). In other words, ideology is the cause, and hegemony is the result. The various ideological state apparatuses (e.g., popular media, family, church, education) should be defined based on the ideology that drives them.

Additionally, Althusser felt Gramsci was too closely tied to the classical ideas of power as force and consent. As such, “Althusser accuses Gramsci of over-generalizing the notion of hegemony and of underestimating the role of force” (Sotiris, 2017, p. 125). In essence, Althusser felt Gramsci overgeneralized hegemony without considering production, exploitation, the law, and the State. For Althusser, this was dangerous as it discounted the potential for violence and prioritized consent, education, and culture. In this case, he took on an almost “totalizing view of human nature which makes man a perpetual subject of some ideological construct” (Daldal, 2014, p. 161). However, some argue that Althusser was limited in his understanding of Gramsci’s hegemony (e.g., Sotiris, 2017; Thomas, 2012). For example, Althusser asserted that hegemony underestimated class struggle and could not account for absolute power beyond the law. However, Althusser “fails to realize that hegemony refers to the complexity of the exercise of power in capitalist social formation and simply to consent. He also failed to realize that Gramsci confronted the question of complexity of the revolutionary process” (Sotiris, 2017, p. 133).
Laclau and Mouffe

In 1985 Laclau and Mouffe published Hegemony and the Socialist Strategy, what Townshend (2004) termed “ground-breaking work” (p. 269). The timing of this publication came as the “Marxist left failed to grow influence in the post-1968 period” (Townshend, 2004, p. 269). This was because it could not capture the working class’s attention and impact new social movements (Townshend, 2004). To pull Marxism out of irrelevance, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) sought to critically examine its theoretical foundations and recast its political strategy (Townshend, 2004). Through their critical examination, one of Laclau and Moufe’s (1985) goals was to reposition hegemony as a more central rather than a supplementary idea within the Marxist tradition. Although they pulled ideas from Foucault and others, they also remained closely tied to Gramsci and Althusser in their theorizing.

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) viewed discourse and political identities as a result of hegemonic struggles. According to Laclau and Mouffe, hegemonic struggles were characterized by the conflict between two competing logics of equivalence and difference (Townshend, 2004). For Laclau and Mouffe (1985), hegemony involved competition between political forces to get support for freedom, equality, or order. In this way, they built on emerging political identities that championed gender, sexuality, ethnicity, peace, and the environment and sought to radicalize liberal democracy rather than overtake it with orthodox Marxism (Townshend, 2004).

On his own, Laclau believed that hegemony entailed the interplay of decisions between the ethical and the normative, or between what ought and what is. The trouble
for Laclau was that the identity of the working class was not necessarily anti-capitalist, and they struggled to maintain the categories of capitalism, class, and class struggle central to traditional Marxism (Townshend, 2004). To Laclau, there was value in Gramsci’s idea of collective will because he felt that by only focusing on class struggle, the meaningful struggle involved in transcending that identity was ignored (Townshend, 2004). In other words, rather than focusing on one’s economic position and capitalism, the masses must come together to form the collective will, with the goal of having a revolution based on new values and new ideological dominance not based on capitalism (see also Maglaras, 2013).

**Hall**

On the other hand, Stuart Hall interpreted hegemony as “a complex discursive field that takes shape across various social locations” (Wood, 1998, p. 404). He called hegemonizing hard work because he understood that “dominant groups must not only win the war of maneuver – control over resources and institutions, but they must win the war of position as well; they must make their triumphs appear legitimate and necessary in the eyes of the vanquished” (Lipsitz, 1988, p. 147; cited by Wood, 1998).

Hall was instrumental in structuring the field of cultural studies. He felt there had been a significant shift in the development of capitalism that Hall felt was unanticipated by Marx (Sparks, 1996; cited by Davis, 2004). Hegemony almost needed to be re-understood considering the new affluent worker and the mass media. Hall saw the power of class interests and the maintenance of the values of the capitalist system. “There are real class issues at stake in the way the media systematically reinforces a dominant world
view of society and its dissenters. It is a dialectical relationship enabling those in power
to maintain power while apparently giving the people exactly what they want” (Davis,

Within his studies, Hall (1998) also contemplated the study of popular culture.
“The changing balance and relations of social forces throughout history reveal
themselves, time and again, in struggles over the forms of the culture, traditions, and
ways of life of the popular classes” (Hall, 1998, p. 442). In his breakdown of the term
popular, Hall indicated that the most common-sense meaning of the term was essentially
something or aspect of culture that was made popular because the masses consumed it
(i.e., bought it, read it). Yet, he critiqued the aspect of popular culture that infers that
those who consume what is popular have been duped and are merely passive participants.
He also critiqued the opposite idea that there was an alternative culture within the
working class that is not falling subject to cultural coercion. Hall (1998) believed that
both positions did not tell the whole story of cultural power. He stated

The cultural industries do have the power constantly to rework and reshape what
they represent…to impose and implant such definitions of ourselves as fit more
easily the descriptions of the dominant or preferred culture…the means of culture-
making in the heads of the few…These definitions do not have the power to
occupy our minds…but they occupy and rework the interior contradictions of
feeling and perception in the dominated classes…Cultural domination has real
effects – even if these are neither all-powerful nor all-inclusive (p. 447).

Hall (1998) finished his stance by asserting,
I think there is a continuous and necessarily uneven and unequal struggle, by the dominant culture, constantly to disorganize and reorganize popular culture; to enclose and confine its definitions and forms within a more inclusive range of dominant forms. There are points of resistance; there are also moments of supersession (p. 447).

Throughout his definition and deconstruction of popular culture, Hall (1998) echoes Gramsci’s understanding of hegemony and Foucault’s understanding of power. However, for Hall (1998), this power struggle within culture is not merely an ideological domination, or manipulation, of the lower class because he asserted that the subordinate class is not a “blank screen” (p. 447) that can be easily duped. This power struggle is also not understood quite the same way as Foucault conceptualizes power. For Hall (1998), power is housed within dominant culture, whereas Foucault understands power to be diffused throughout society and not localized with any one group of people.

**Derrida**

Derrida developed the idea of deconstruction in the 1960s. Many argue that deconstruction and the theory of hegemony are two sides of the same coin (e.g., Thomassen, 2005). Royle (2003) provided an in-depth look at Derrida and his significant impact on the development of critical inquiry. Through this inquiry, Royle (2003) explained that Derrida’s “deconstruction” came to be understood as a critical method or tool. Deconstruction is commonly defined as a “strategy of critical analysis associated with…Derrida, directed towards exposing unquestioned metaphysical assumptions and
internal contradictions in philosophical and literary language” (Royle, 2003, p. 24). Royle (2000) himself sought to define deconstruction as:


It is important to note that Derrida himself did not have a clear definition for deconstruction; therefore, scholars have sought to provide clarity and understanding of this concept (e.g., Royal, 2003). Markula (2018) described that Derrida was concerned with how the meaning-making process situations language within structures of power. He sought to deconstruct philosophy and “located structuralism as part of a power structure that advances one type of thought as truth” (Markula, 2018, p. 402). Markula (2018) asserted that it is here that Derrida intersects with Foucault in that language, knowledge, and meaning are deeply embedded in power relations rather than in neutral or universal truths.

Derrida has been described as being postmodern in that marginalized, and suppressed voices (i.e., women, minorities) are prioritized. Farmer (1997) understands Derrida as aiming to break down binary oppositions to show that the superior (e.g., inside, true, private, masculine, politician) is, in fact, subordinate. In the context of feminism, Markula (2018) followed up with, “if the entire feminist thought system is
based on a masculine-feminine binary, would not Derridean deconstruction reveal feminism as deeply embedded in Western metaphysics instead of providing an alternative to it?” (p. 402). In other words, is feminist thought just recapitulating masculine and feminine hegemony? Are we just admiring the problem instead of offering radical solutions and changes to a system that continually suppresses and marginalizes the voices of women and minorities? Additionally, deconstruction points out that the language we use to understand or describe reality is inherently distorted and that there is an “inescapable reliance on binary oppositions and irreducible metaphors. It shows there are multiple varieties of meaning in the text and that the text constrains the meaning that the writer can express” (Farmer, 1997, p. 14).

All scholars mentioned above (i.e., Gramsci, Foucault, Althusser, Laclau and Mouffe, Hall, and Derrida) wrestle with essentially the same question: How do those in power acquire and maintain said power through ideology rather than physical force? The question was initially answered by Gramsci and his concept of hegemony. In essence, the dominant class ideologies were disseminated through society controlling the working class with little to no force. Despite his staunch criticism of Gramsci, Althusser’s ideological state apparatus was basically the same concept as hegemony with some nuances. Althusser felt hegemony was overgeneralized and discounted the role force played in controlling society. Later, Foucault’s understanding of hegemony was from the perspective of power. He did not want to be confined to political theory but instead discussed power and its diffusion throughout society. He understood power to be a more abstract form of control, and normalized behaviors were perpetuated by self-surveillance.
Then, Laclau and Mouffe hoped to reposition hegemony as a more central idea in Marxism. They viewed discourse and political identities as a result of hegemony. Laclau felt hegemony focused too much on economics and class. He encouraged the masses to transcend this focus and develop new values and ideological dominance separate from capitalism. In 1988, Hall, in many ways, sought to increase hegemony’s relevance given the new affluent working class as well as the development of mass media. He explained that hegemony is hard work given that the subordinate class cannot be as easily swayed as Gramsci asserted. In other words, dominant ideology is not merely seeping through society with the subordinate class blindly following along. Finally, Derrida’s concept of deconstruction was closely tied to hegemony. While difficult to define, generally speaking, deconstruction points out that even the language we use is deeply embedded with a specific, accepted, and dominant view of reality. Whether it be ideology, power, or language, all scholars discussed above were committed to understanding how one group dominates over another with limited use of physical violence.

**Critical Feminist Theory**

*Critical Inquiry*

Critical inquiry is primarily attributed to the foundational work of Karl Marx and the Frankfurt School. The overarching goal is to seek to understand, unpack, and change social structures that reinforce power. Critical inquiry is vast and multifaceted, Crotty (2003) summarizes Paulo Freire’s work from the mid-20th century, which focused on the oppressed. Freire asserted that groups of people are subjected to the power of the elite, who rule with a “regime of oppression” (Crotty, 2003, p. 154). As a result, those who are
mainly oppressed operate in silence and internalize the oppressor’s guidelines, hegemony. Additionally, those who are oppressed may also internalize how the oppressor sees them (e.g., as lazy, incompetent). Due to this internalization, those who are oppressed are generally unable to free themselves from oppression and need help to engage in their own liberation (Crotty, 2003). For example, women may internalize sexism and contribute to their own oppression by viewing themselves as unfit to be a leader.

Today, “critical forms of research call current ideology into question, and initiate action, in the cause of social justice” (Crotty, 2003, p. 157). Critical inquiry aims to highlight the power relationships in society to expose hegemony and injustices (Crotty, 2003). Some of the assumptions of critical inquiry are: (a) all thought is mediated by power relations, (b) language is central to the formation of subjectivity, (c) certain groups in society are privileged over others, and (d) oppression occurs in many different ways (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). Thus, critical inquiry “illuminates the relationship between power and culture” (Crotty, 2003, p. 158).

**Feminism and Feminist Theories**

There are various ways feminism is interpreted and characterized with many, at times, conflicting assumptions (Crotty, 2003). Liberal feminism (see Stuart Mill, 1869; Friedan, 1974), Marxist feminism (see Tong, 1989), socialist feminism (see Jagger, 2004), radical feminism (see Echols, 1989), and postmodern feminism (see Assiter, 1996) are a few of the many branches of feminism. Liberal feminism focuses on equal opportunity and equal rights. Marxist feminism is grounded in assumptions of Marxism
(i.e., economic and class oppression are central) and that gender oppression is a derivative of class oppression (Birrell, 2000). Socialist feminism builds upon Marxist feminism by further prioritizing gender oppression over simply worker oppression (Jagger, 2004; Tong, 1989). Radical feminism views the oppression of women as the oldest, most damaging form of oppression. It focuses on women’s sexual and reproductive issues highlighting the disordered patriarchal society and calling for a reconstruction of society (Birrell, 2000). One could begin to connect this back to Foucault’s understanding of power diffused throughout society, mainly through the control of bodies. Hall (1996) explained that the female body is subject to cultural demands that result in self-surveillance and obedience to these demands. However, much of Foucault’s use in feminist work appears in postmodern feminism. Postmodern feminism is closely tied to deconstruction, which is committed to breaking down traditional paradoxes (see Assiter, 1996; Irigaray, 1985).

Postmodernism deconstructs modernist fallacies about unity. The authenticity of the self, a central notion in many theoretical schemes, including the focus on identity politics which underlies radical feminism is replaced with the notion of subjectivity, that is, our self as subject is always contexted within dominant discourses (Birrell, 2000, p. 68).

Birrell (2000) explained that postmodernism disrupts the relationship between language and reality in that language is the primary way our consciousness is structured. By disrupting language and reality, the concept of truth is decentered. There is no truth but rather provisional truths.
Postmodern feminism also strives to contradict binaries to challenge gender order (Knoppers & McLachlan, 2018). One can be skeptical of attempting to adhere too closely to the boundaries of these categories and can think of these categories more on a spectrum because, ultimately, there is a “collective commitment to the undermining of oppressive gender-based power relations” (Assiter, 1996, p. 88). When using feminism as a theory, one offers an “explanation of life within culture by attempting to abstract from concrete individual lives a general pattern of experience” (Birrell, 2000, p. 62). Feminist theory seeks to theorize about gender relations within our patriarchal society as they are reproduced in our society (Birrell, 2000). Similar to, an overlap of, or an ancillary of critical theories (depending on whom one confers with), feminist theory is grounded in analysis of personal experiences and how those are housed in greater patterns of oppression and broader social conditions (Birrell, 2000).

Critical theories are historically housed in cultural studies (Martin, 2003). “Cultural studies is based on the assumption that power is distributed inequitably throughout society, often along lines of gender, class, and race. These relations of power are not fixed but contested” (Birrell, 2000, p 67).

Starting in the 1980s, the critical feminist cultural studies project began to gain momentum in sport due to the “usefulness of the theoretical vocabulary of cultural studies to explore the intersection of gender…in sport” (Birrell, 2000, p. 67). The four themes central to this project included: (1) ideology of masculinity and male power through sport produced; (2) dominant notions of women are reproduced in the media; (3) the body, sexuality, and physicality define gender relations; and (4) resistance of women
to dominant sport practices (Birrell, 1988; cited by Birrell, 2000). For Birrell (2000), “as a critical theory, feminist theory is committed to producing frameworks of understanding that can serve as the basis for thoughtful and profound social change” (p. 70). Finally, this interweaving of critical theory (and cultural studies) and feminist theory drew researchers and theorists “beyond the boundaries of social science” to the territory of Gramsci, Foucault, and Derrida and hegemony, poststructuralism, and deconstruction (Birrell, 2000, p. 69).

The importance of using critical feminist theory as a significant secondary theory in this particular context is because the current study is centered on women’s experiences. Gilligan (1982) believed that women and men have different ways of perceiving and relating to the world. Additionally, the claim is made that women’s experiences within the campus recreation spaces are inherently gendered and influenced by power relations.

**Hegemony in Higher Education, Sport and Recreation**

The use of hegemony in higher education is relatively minimal in terms of its relevance for the current study. Much of the literature up to this point speaks to “American hegemony” and the “instrumental strength of the United States in higher education compared with all other nations” (Marginson, 2008, p. 308). Marginson (2008) outlined how U.S. hegemony manifests itself in knowledge flows, the global role of English, and universities in the U.S. attracting scholars and setting the stage for ideal practice. Essentially, universities in the U.S. control much of the ideological power across the world in terms of information generation and dissemination, as well as attracting and keeping scholars from around the world (Marginson, 2008). Also, although not explicitly
related to the current topic, hegemony appears in the confrontation of the ivory tower. The ivory tower is a euphemism for the inherent racism within higher education. Douglas and Halas (2013) contended that “both the predominance of Whites and the cultures of whiteness have had a significant influence on the character of pedagogical practice and knowledge production” (p. 456). Therefore, the hegemony of whiteness in higher education discourages conversations about what and who is present and not present. Overall, though, there seems to be a dearth of literature about hegemony in higher education.

Perhaps, the best connection between hegemony and higher education is housed within the understanding of power and physical education. I would argue that campus recreation is more closely related to physical education, health, and wellness than traditional higher education. Scraton (2018) stated, “physical education continues to be an important site in the making and re-making of hegemonic masculinities” (p. 31). She continued, “the institution of schooling and the individuals within it remain influenced by powerful gendered discourses that impact what is taught, how it is taught, and gendered expectations about behavior, appearance, and abilities” (p. 35). In other words, Scraton argued that hegemonic gender norms remain pervasive throughout physical education – young girls are taught how to (and how not to) experience their physical bodies.

Education needs to be reformed to incorporate more critical social research. She also called for the blending of researchers and practitioners to address these issues together. The current study can start to meet that need for learning from and incorporating the
experiences of women campus recreation directors in how they learned and now how they teach and promote physical education concepts.

Of additional importance, the Gramscian concept of hegemony has gained a foothold as a helpful framework when examining the social influence of sport and its role in the construction and maintenance of dominant ideologies that serve the interests of powerful groups (Birrell, 2000; Pringle, 2018). Feminist writers such as Hargreaves (1982) and Theberge (1981) utilized the concept of hegemony to explore the impact of sport on gender relations. Given close parallel experiences between sport and recreation, their understanding of hegemony, from the gender perspective, in sport may also provide a helpful lens through which to examine hegemony in recreation.

Blending of Hegemony, Hegemonic Masculinity, and Feminist Theory in Sport

Hegemony within the context of gender can be understood as the “values and expectations of gender-role appropriate behaviors that are so deeply ingrained in our culture that they rarely are questioned” (Krane, 2001, p. 117). For men, characteristics such as strength, aggression, competitiveness, confidence, and independence can be understood as hegemonic masculinity. Men are expected to act within these parameters to avoid social scrutiny. The same can be said for women and the characteristics of hegemonic femininity as emotional, passive, understanding, dependent, and gentle. In many ways, hegemonic gender roles sustain sexism and oppression of women.

One way to understand hegemony in sport is through understanding socialist feminism. In this context, Scraton and Flintoff (2013) summarized socialist feminism as the feminist approach that seeks to explain how both class relations as well as how men’s
power over women acts to oppress women. Instead of just merely looking at women’s experiences, socialist feminists explore male power through hegemonic masculinity. In the sports context, studies exploring hegemonic masculinity draw attention to the privileges men enjoy in sport through unequal gender relations, but also the cost men pay for their adherence to the narrow definitions of masculinity. Messner (1990) explained that there is an embodiment of hegemonic masculinity in sport. Men’s power over women is naturalized, sport is a place where men are superior to women, and sport reinforces the embodiment of masculinity (Messner, 1990). However, these ideologies also have high personal and interpersonal costs. Messner (1990) expanded on this by explaining that men’s sports’ aggressive, violent nature can lead to unhealthy relationships with their bodies as they navigate injuries. Injury pain is seen as contributing to the development of character. Interpersonal relationships with women suffer as the devaluation of women in the sports sphere bleeds into their social lives (Messner, 1990).

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) offered a conceptual map of hegemonic masculinity. From its early days, before the women’s liberation movement started in the 1960s, there was much discussion about the male sex role and the complexities of gender construction. The women’s liberation movement was a political movement that emerged in the late 1960s until the 1980s that sought to achieve equality for women from oppression and male supremacy. However, in the mid-1980s, hegemonic masculinity emerged as a pattern of practice that allowed men’s dominance over women to continue and was distinguished from other masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).
Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) explained that hegemonic masculinity embodied the most honored way of being a man, and it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it. A key to this understanding was the homosociality among heterosexual men described by Bird (1996). She asserted that through these interpersonal interactions, hegemonic masculinity is maintained as the norm – the shared meanings of emotional detachment, competition, and the sexual objectification of women.

Friedman (2015) then discussed the continued “stalled revolution” toward gender equality in the workplace related to hegemonic masculinity. Her argument highlighted that the gender revolution had focused primarily on expanding women’s opportunities; however, the persistent gender role expectations due to hegemonic masculinity for men have largely stagnated the process toward more gender equality. This is because men are not moving into female-dominated fields or taking on feminine roles at home at the same rate that women are entering male-dominated fields and continuing their traditional roles at home. Therefore, in the context of the current study, one must consider the ultimate goal of the women who pursued and achieved the position of director of campus recreation. Are they aiming to be more like their male counterparts? Are they searching for, or hoping to build, something else entirely?

In 2018, Knoppers and McLachlan reflected on the use of feminist theories in the sport management literature. They critiqued that up to that point, there was a dearth of literature that specifically utilized feminist theories within sport management research. Yet, there were some that provided the undertones of liberal feminism and social-construction feminism in their research and analysis. Throughout their discussion of the
various types of feminisms that have been used in sport management literature, Knoppers and McLachlan (2018) briefly unpacked social-construction feminism. They explained that this approach assumes gender is not a natural categorization but is constructed through interactions. Citing Connell (2005), Knoppers and McLachlan (2018) said some practices are more desirable than others in the sport and recreation setting, and these fall under the term hegemonic masculinity. By engaging in practices emphasizing hegemonic masculinity, the exclusion of women is reproduced, and power is reserved for white men. From this perspective, we have a limited number of women in leadership positions in sport-related professions, including campus recreation.

Francomb-Webb and Toffoletti (2018) expressed their understanding of a critical postfeminist sensibility. Their goal was to continue exposing the way gender remains fundamentally tied to power relations. They hoped, through the foundational work of Hargreaves (1982; 1994), that the understandings of sport and gender could move beyond systems of male domination and female oppression and look at “which female bodies are made visible, whose voices are heard and whose are being oppressed” (Francomb-Webb & Toffoletti, 2018, p. 54).

**Hegemonic Feminism**

Just as hegemonic masculinity works to maintain order in how men should act according to societal values, hegemonic femininity also acts to maintain the status quo for how women should act. Particularly in sport, there is great importance placed on conforming to hegemonic femininity. Krane (2001) summarized the paradox that females experience in sport: they are only accepted in sport as long as they preserve their
heterosexual attractiveness. For example, a toned body is perceived as ideal, but large muscles are condemning. Therefore, female athletes struggle with striking a balance between toned and strong rather than overly muscular and ‘male-looking.’ Female athletes who are successful in conforming to this balance are rewarded and feel they receive less overt discrimination. However, Krane (2001) explained that female athletes who do not conform to hegemonic femininity would experience adverse treatment from administrators, coaches, and even the media. They also have the potential to lose endorsements as well as experience increased sexism. According to de Los Reyes and Mulinari (2020),

Hegemonic feminism is the institutionalized understanding of power articulated around a binary perception of gender relations and its implementation in projects, indicators, and expert knowledge. This perception is premised on a theoretical understanding of power as a system of domination based on the hierarchical divisions between the category of women and the category of men (p. 185).

Eisenstein (2017) provided clarity on the hegemonic femininity project. She believed this had taken on a variety of names such as neoliberal feminism, transnational business feminism, and faux feminism. She argued that feminism has been commodified by the mainstream media and operates within the power structures of society, specifically when considering gender. Eisenstein (2017) claimed that no longer is feminism working to upend the social structures that work to silence and oppress women. Instead, feminism, hegemonic feminism, and faux feminism is placing the ownness directly on the shoulders of women and girls to seek individual empowerment and operate within the power
structures that keep them in their place. In other words, our society has made feminism palatable and “popular” (see Banet-Weiser, 2018; Banet-Weiser, Gill, & Rottenburg, 2020) and singularly focused on fixing women and girls as if they need fixing in the first place. As such, the idea is that women and girls have lost their self-esteem along the way and are disempowered, so we (the collective we) must bolster them up and stand beside them as they fix themselves and engage in the singular, backbreaking pursuit of “leaning in” and grabbing empowerment. However, in this same action, our society is not doing anything to change the social structures that cost women and girls to “lose” their self-esteem in the first place. If anything, the opposite seems to be happening. We are celebrating the empowerment of women and girls in tandem with the persistent gender wage gap, gender discrimination in the workplace, and many other inequities in our society.

**Theoretical Constructs and the Current Conversation**

In line with Eisenstein (2017), several other feminist researchers are investigating and problematizing hegemonic feminism and related constructs. These constructs include neoliberal feminism, popular feminism, and postfeminism. The troubling issues that arise across these various terms, while all slightly different, essentially claim that we are “past” the need for the feminist agenda. More women and girls are participating in sport and business than ever before; more women are graduating with higher educational degrees (U.S. Department of Labor, Women’s Bureau, 2017). “There is little trace of the battles fought, of the power struggles embarked upon, or of the enduring inequities which still mark out the relations between men and women” (McRobbie, 2004, p. 260).
Many of these conversations within the sport and recreation context are happening in sport media. Although the current study is not focused on sport media, the researchers provide a helpful framework to understand the various feminisms circulating sports culture within the United States. Of those conversations, Banet-Weiser, Gill, and Rottenberg (2020) further unpacked these concepts, particularly postfeminism, popular feminism, and neoliberal feminism.

First, postfeminism seeks to make sense of paradoxes in the representation of women. In the 1990s, there was the celebration of girl power “alongside intense hostile scrutiny of women in the public eye” (Banet-Weiser, Gill, & Rottenberg, 2020, p. 5). Gill, specifically, utilized the term postfeminist sensibility to capture the ways postfeminism is used. She critically analyzed postfeminist culture, like the emphasis on choice and autonomy for women as well as the focus on women’s bodies and the requirement to upgrade one’s life to be more confident (Banet-Weiser, Gill, & Rottenberg, 2020). According to the researchers, postfeminism rejects the need for feminism.

Then, following in Gill’s footsteps, Rottenberg developed neoliberal feminism, particularly on the heels of powerful, high-profile women publicly identifying as feminists (Banet-Weiser, Gill, & Rottenburg, 2020). Yet, this feminism that these high-profile women were adopting replaced key terms like liberation and social justice with terms like balance and happiness. Neoliberal feminism describes the attention given to gender inequality but denies the cultural structures shaping our lives. “This feminism also helps to spawn a new feminist subject, one who accepts full responsibility for her own
well-being and self-care” (emphasis in original text; Banet-Weiser, Gill, & Rottenburg, 2020, p. 7). Ultimately, neoliberal feminism maintains a “discourse of reproduction and care work while at the same time ensuring that all responsibility for these forms of labor…falls squarely on the shoulders of so-called aspirational women,” and it makes feminism palatable and legitimate (Banet-Weiser, Gill, & Rottenburg, 2020, p. 8).

Banet-Weiser (2018) unpacked popular feminism. She wrote, “popular feminism has in many ways allowed us to imagine a culture in which feminism, in every form, doesn’t have to be defended; it is accessible, even admired” (p. 1). In other words, popular feminism is a happy feminism, and the inclusion of women is enough to call feminism into being (Banet-Weiser, Gill, & Rottenburg, 2020). Popular feminism also must exist within capitalist practices and values because economic success, new market growth, and self-entrepreneurship are part of the popular feminism equation. It is also fueled by neoliberal feminism due to the messages of body positivity, equal pay, and self-confidence that make it corporate-friendly and commodifiable (Banet-Weiser, Gill, & Rottenburg, 2020).

Ultimately, the current conversation continues to wrestle with the ways feminism has been commodified, repositioned, and even ignored. “Sexism has become more mobile, subtle, and revitalized” (Pullen, 2016, p. 440). We also know that deeply ingrained sexism and inequities remain in the sport-related sphere (e.g., Fink, 2016), which is why it is necessary to continue to unpack these experiences from a critical feminist lens.
Given the methodological context of this current study (i.e., narrative inquiry), Cooky and Antunovic’s (2020) study offered insight into the articulations of feminism in media narratives. Particularly relevant was their call for sports media, as well as academic feminists, to strive to tell stories differently. Currently, hegemonic masculinity and popular feminism shape sport media in many ways. In the media, attention is routinely diverted away from the core issues pertaining to social justice and calls for structural change; Cooky and Antunovic (2020) interrogated the “dominant story in sports media studies that centers hegemonic masculinity and its pervasiveness in sports” (p. 6). Adjusting how narratives are constructed pertaining to feminist initiatives in sport is imperative because of the ways in which feminism is now mainstream and popular (Banet-Weiser, 2018; cited by Cooky & Antunovic, 2020).

**Resilience, Religion, and Spirituality**

Religion and spirituality, in conjunction with resilience, have intersecting moments, understandings, and concepts throughout literature. This section sought to unpack how these constructs overlap and inform one another, particularly in the workplace. The construct of resiliency is surveyed first before moving into a discussion about how resiliency has been understood in the religious and spirituality literature. This section ends with a discussion as to how this study will add to the current conversation.

**Resilience**

The concept and experience of resiliency have been defined and examined in a myriad of ways over time. Fletcher and Sarkar (2013) offered a review of psychological resilience. They explained that most definitions of resiliency center around the two core
concepts of adversity and positive adaptation. For resiliency to occur, one must experience some type of adversity and then be able to “bounce back,” or quickly recover, while also staying efficient under challenging situations and continuing to gain strength in the process (Cooper et al., 2013). One way to think about resilience is through the lens of growth after adversity, specifically, stress-related growth (SRG) (Park et al., 1996). Typically, SRG refers to stressful yet non-life-threatening experiences such as problems in a romantic relationship, being fired from a job, moving, the death of a significant other, or an illness or accident (Park et al., 1996). Whereas post-traumatic growth (PTG) (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995, 2004) refers to serious, traumatic events such as severe events threatening life or limb. Despite these differences, Tedeschi and Calhoun’s (1995, 2004) functional-descriptive model of post-traumatic growth is helpful. It suggests that a traumatic (or stressful) life event reconfigures an individual’s schema about the self, the world, and the future, and by coping with their trauma (stress), growth may occur. This growth typically includes cognitive rebuilding, where the individual takes into account the changed reality and creates new schemas that incorporate what was learned from the stressful incident.

Park and colleagues (1996) developed the stress-related growth scale (SRGS) and ultimately determined that significant predictors of SRG included the stressfulness of the event, positive reinterpretation of the event, religion, and social support. There is an element of the severity of the stressful event. According to Kesimci and colleagues (2005), there was a positive association between the severity of the stress and the level of SRG. Furthermore, they suggested that females tend to report more SRG than males. This
finding had been suggested by other researchers as well (e.g., Tedeschi & Calhoun 1996). Furthermore, they argued that women could have higher levels of distress after a stressful experience, which may indicate that females may have more significant experiences of SRG.

SRG seems to be the best way to understand resilience in the context of the current study. In fact, Park (2013) sought to integrate meaning and spirituality with SRG better. Although her commentary is primarily related to illness, it remained helpful for contextualizing spirituality within SRG. By using what she termed the Meaning Making Model (Park, 2010), Park explained that spirituality is a core aspect of meaning for many in the face of life’s challenges, particularly as it relates to health. One could easily argue that work stress significantly contributes to poor health (2013; see also World Health Organization, 2020).

Finally, Rees and colleagues (2015) sought to understand individual resilience in the workplace and defined psychological resilience as “the ability of a person to recover, rebound, bounce-back, or even thrive following misfortune, change or adversity” (p. 2; see also Garcia-Dia et al., 2013). In other words, stress (traumatic or otherwise) is misfortune, change, or adversity that one must recover from to be resilient. Additionally, resilience seems to be a multi-level construct that includes: “optimism, self-esteem, personal competence, social competence, problem-solving skills, self-efficacy, social resources, insight, independence, creativity, humor, control, hardiness, family cohesion, spiritual influences, and initiative” (p. 3; see also Windle et al., 2011). Although this current dissertation research focused primarily on the influence of spirituality on
workplace resiliency, the participants in this study may reference any of these components found in the literature, which may indicate their resiliency.

**Workplace Resilience**

According to Rees and colleagues (2015), “workplace stress has serious implications for the quality of an employee’s work” and their psychological health (p. 5). In fact, Avery and colleagues (2009) cited the World Health Organization’s claim that occupational stress is a worldwide epidemic. At that time, they called for human resource managers to develop strategies to bolster workplace resilience. This, in turn, reduces employee turnover as well as poor employee health. Later, Rees and colleagues (2015) felt that there was not much of a model for individual workforce resilience. King and colleagues (2016) also explained that there had been little work examining organizational factors that promoted resilience in individuals in the workplace and were calling for more researchers to integrate theory in future studies. Particularly in how resilience develops within organizations and individual employees and how resilience can lead to positive outcomes in the workplace. On the other hand, perhaps these aforementioned researchers have not considered how these efforts to promote resiliency may instead perpetuate power imbalances among the workers, particularly in the context of hegemonic masculinity. How one individually experiences, identifies and defines resilience could instead lead to a neutral or negative outcome in the workplace. This “dark side of resilience” was suggested by Mahdiani and Ungar (2021). They summarized that resilience relies on an agreed-upon set of social rules, yet often these rules are flawed. “After the exposure to risk, the individual, who is acting resilient, bounces back towards
their initial state before exposure to the stressor, ignoring the fact that the original state was flawed” (Mahdiani & Ungar, 2021, p. 151).

**Religious and/or Spiritual Resilience**

It is important to conceptualize both religion and spirituality in the context of resiliency, as both have been understood in a myriad of ways. First, using Koeing’s definition (2008), religion is “a system of beliefs and practices observed by a community, supported by rituals that acknowledge, worship, and communicate with, or approach the Sacred, the Divine, God (in Western cultures), or Ultimate Truth, reality, or nirvana (in Eastern cultures)” (p. 11). Pargament (1997) defined it as “a search for significance in ways related to the sacred” (p. 34). For spirituality, Hill and colleagues (2000) explained that not all conceptions of spirituality are linked to religion, and in many ways, it has become more differentiated from religion. In other words, over time, religion has become narrower and more specific. Spirituality, then, could be understood as the personal expression of human goodness or the physically imperceptible, transcendent aspect of life (Hill et al., 2000). By taking these brief definitions into consideration, Selvarajan, Singh, and Stringer (2020) suggested that religiosity and spirituality can potentially buffer the relationship between work and family demands. In so doing, they conceptualized both religiosity and spirituality as resources (in other words, coping mechanisms) in dealing with life’s stressors as effective (see also Dust & Greenhaus, 2013). As of 2011, a Gallup Poll found that more than 90% of Americans profess their faith in God or a higher power. Thus, Selvarajan, Singh, and Stringer (2020) said that religion and spirituality could act as a vital coping resource for employees navigating work and family demands. To their
knowledge, not much previous research had included religiosity and spirituality as buffering mechanisms in conjunction with the work-family interface. Their goal was not only to examine the role of extra organizational variables in explaining work-related phenomena but to also “contribute to the religion and spirituality literature by examining the influence of religiosity and spirituality on employment relationships” (p. 158). Ashmos & Duchon (2000) were some of the first to examine the spiritual dimension of people in the workplace and found it to be not only an essential part of us all but also an essential component of the workplace.

In considering this intersection of the work-life interface with religion, spirituality, and resilience, Selvarajan, Singh, and Stringer’s (2020) summarized, “what makes religion distinct is the presence of a sacred dimension, which consists of concept of God, the divine, and transcendence, and the way these concepts are understood and experienced differently from religion to another” (p. 159; see also Pargament & Mahoney, 2005). In this way, Patel and Cunningham (2012) explained that the thought processes, moral frameworks, and social aspects associated with organized religion qualify it as a coping mechanism or a way to promote resiliency. Interestingly, in Selvarajan, Singh, and Stringer’s (2020) study, they position religion as both a resource and a demand. This is because religion can have several drawbacks, including social divisiveness, conflicts with governing bodies, and restrictions (see also Benefiel, Fry, and Geigle, 2014). Selvarajan, Singh, and Stringer (2020) summarized that, at times, religion might exacerbate the work-life interface if religiosity has too many demands of its own.
In thinking about religion as a resource, Duffy and colleagues (2012) equated religion to a calling, which is a way of life that ultimately adds meaning to an individual’s life. Religion can act as a buffer that minimizes the adverse effects of life’s stressors. It has also been found that the more closely a person identifies with their religion, the less they define themselves in terms of their work. This type of identity leads people to be less burdened by work stressors (Schreurs et al., 2014; cited by Duffy et al., 2012). Religious people, when experiencing a stressful event, tend to “submit to God’s will and perceive stressful events as part of God’s big plan” (Selvarajan, Singh, & Stringer, 2020, p. 160; see also Mickley et al., 1998). Finally, religion can offer many tools for an individual, such as support from church members and prayer to help them navigate life stressors and maintain harmony in their life (Selvarajan, Singh, & Stringer, 2020).

Spirituality as a resource, suggested by Selvarajan, Singh, and Stringer (2020), does not seem to have any adverse outcomes in comparison to religiosity. Following Dust and Greenhaus’ (2013) footsteps, Selvarajan, Singh, and Stringer (2020) identified spirituality as an individual-level resource because it can be related to personal characteristics such as hope and optimism. Selvarajan, Singh, and Stringer (2020) asserted that “spirituality is essential for individual well-being and is interwoven in all aspects of human life…and better understand their purpose in life” (p. 161; see also Dust & Greenhaus, 2013; Hill & Pargament, 2003). By maintaining this balance through the use of spirituality, individuals are better protected against stressors.
In the end, Selvarajan, Singh, and Stringer’s (2020) findings indicated that individuals with higher levels of spirituality were able to utilize their spirituality to reduce conflict in the family domain, yet spirituality did not do much in the relationship between job demands and work-family conflict. For religiosity, they found that “in the presence of work demands, religiosity acts as a demand that further deteriorates the impact of job demands on work-family conflict. On the contrary, within the family domain, religiosity acts as a resource that mitigates the negative impact of spousal demands on the family-work conflict” (p. 163). This was because families typically engaged in religious activities together, which promoted work-family balance by easing the pressure of family demands.

Utilizing the same data, Selvarajan, Singh, Stringer, and Chapa (2020) sought to understand how spirituality moderates the relationship between work-family conflict and well-being. They found that spirituality mitigated the adverse effects of work-family conflict in various ways. In both studies, but perhaps more so in this study, the researchers focused more on spirituality versus religiosity. This was due to Gallup survey results in 2003, with no apparent update to these results since then, that indicated nearly 33% of Americans consider themselves spiritual but not religious. Previous studies have recognized that the work-life “conflict is a major predictor of mental health outcomes and may be directly associated with increased symptoms of psychological distress such as anxiety, depression, and stress” (Selvarajan et al., 2020; p. 424; see also Smith, McCullough, and Poll, 2003). Therefore, Selvarajan, Singh, Stringer, and Chapa (2020) were interested to see how spirituality impacted psychological well-being and, in turn,
influenced the negative experiences of work-life conflict. They found that daily spiritual experiences played a strong role in determining psychological well-being within the work-life interface. In other words, spirituality was an important factor in buffering the conflict that arose in the work-life interface (Selvarajan et al., 2020)

Cook and White (2018) investigated the role of spirituality and resilience as well. The reader was reminded of the difficulties in defining, measuring, and understanding the concepts of spirituality and resilience as there are so many interpretations. Despite these challenges, the researchers explained that aspects of spirituality might promote resiliency, such as purpose, meaning, transcendence, and relationship (Cook & White, 2018). A sense of purpose is significant when considering positive health outcomes. Again, it is important to consider how purpose is defined by the individual. This is in an effort to examine how one’s purpose may be influenced by hegemonic ideals, which may constrain an individual rather than lead to positive outcomes.

In terms of spirituality, it is “concerned with the purposive nature of human existence” (Cook & White, 2018, p. 10), which can help develop resilience. “Meaning and meaning-making are important in positive mental health outcomes” (Cook & White, 2018, p. 10). It has been suggested that meaning-making systems of belief (e.g., religions, spiritual practices?) are protective and can increase resiliency. This is because those who experience trauma or significant stress seek to find meaning in their experiences and many spiritual practices and religions provide that framework (Cook & White, 2018). This framework can provide individuals the space to reframe their circumstances to enable positive coping. When one believes in the transcendent (i.e., God, a higher power,
nature), they can experience stability despite changes in their circumstances and find hope, purpose, and meaning through this external source. This focus on transcendent points of reference can support resilient adaptation. Social support is a predictor of resilience, and being a member of a faith community can bolster one’s social network.

Recently, Dal Corso and colleagues (2020) conducted a study that considered the relationship between workplace spirituality and resilience, positive affectivity, self-efficacy, and work engagement, particularly from a burnout perspective. They found that workplace spirituality was related to higher resilience, especially when reducing employee burnout. As a result, Dal Corso and colleagues (2020) called for burnout prevention programs to consider employee spiritual needs when navigating workplace stressors. Additionally, the researchers found that positive affectivity, self-efficacy, and work engagement were associated with workplace spirituality and employee well-being.

Resilience as Examined by Religious and Spirituality Studies

Although there is a vast understanding of resiliency and its role in overcoming adversity, and there is a vast understanding of religiosity and spirituality in overcoming adversity, there do not seem to be many studies that merge the two. Most studies that do so are typically housed in the medical scholarship, particularly in nursing literature. Some studies focus on overcoming sexual trauma within the psychology field. However, there does seem to be a dearth of literature focusing specifically on the use of religiosity and spirituality when being resilient. This is especially true for women navigating the work-life interface as well as gender discrimination in the workplace. In this way, Shafique and colleagues (2019) aimed to provide a framework with antecedents of women managers’
resilience in the workplace. In their study, they equate resiliency with coping and its relationship with adapting to adversity to endure job demands specific to women managers (e.g., the gender wage gap, gender discrimination). They also highlighted the limited attention women managers and their experiences of resilience have received in the literature, yet spirituality was only mentioned once in their article.

This dearth of information may be due to the myriad of ways resiliency, religiosity, and spirituality are understood. Therefore, perhaps due to this vast spectrum of definitions and conceptualizations, it can be challenging to study these phenomena in conjunction with one another. On the other hand, the challenge of finding studies that specifically mention resiliency along with religion and spirituality may be due to the use of different terminology to reference resiliency. The terminology most widely noted was related to (a) the promotion of well-being following stress, (b) the promotion of job satisfaction, and (c) the use of spirituality and religion as coping resources.

**Spirituality Promotes Well-Being Following Stress**

When Fabricatore, Handal, and Fenzel (2000) discussed spirituality as a moderator of the relationship between stressors and well-being, their explanation of life stressors and the use of spirituality can be understood in the context of stress-related growth as discussed above (see Park et al. 1996). Although the construct of resiliency is not strictly mentioned, the bolstering of well-being using spirituality following a stressful event could be understood as resiliency. Fabricatore, Handal, and Fenzel (2000) found that personal spirituality moderated the relationship between stressors and life satisfaction and was a helpful resource in maintaining life satisfaction in the face of stressors. Arnetz
and colleagues (2013) indicated similar findings in their study. They focused on the experience of incorporating spiritual values and practices in the workplace. Arnetz and colleagues (2013) found that through this blending of spiritual values and workplace practices, workplace stress seemed to be attenuated, and mental well-being was promoted. Given these similar constructs being discussed in the literature, perhaps the understanding of resiliency in religious and spirituality studies can be understood through the lens of SRG (Park et al., 1996).

**Spirituality Promotes Job Satisfaction**

It seemed, too, that the use of job satisfaction attainment or maintenance in the face of stressors could be understood as a form of resiliency. Duffy and colleagues (2012) examined the relationship between perceiving a calling, living a calling, and job satisfaction. A calling has been understood in the literature as an approach to work that aligns with “personal meaning, motivated by prosocial values, and arises in response to a transcendent summons (Duffy et al., 2012, p. 50). The researchers asserted that many barriers constrain individuals from following their desired career path, yet adhering to one’s calling may increase life satisfaction and psychological well-being in the face of these challenges (Duffy et al., 2012). Duffy and colleagues (2012) suggested that perceiving a calling may lead to greater job satisfaction through commitment to and meaning in work. Once again, one could critique the positive nature of perceiving and having a calling in life because perhaps callings are perpetuated by hegemonic forces.
Spirituality and Religion as Coping Resources

Another way the concept of resiliency may appear in the literature is through the use of spirituality and religion as coping resources. Cook and White (2018) stated that the “concept of coping is closely related to resilience in that both concern adaptation to adversity” (p. 9). However, they caution that coping does not necessarily imply a positive outcome like resiliency (Cook & Whilte, 2018). However, in much of the literature, it seems that when spirituality is referenced as a coping resource, it is utilized as a positive source of resiliency. Patel and Cunningham (2012) sought to understand how organized religion impacts the work-life interface through the use of the conservation of resources theory. This suggested that “we act to acquire and maintain a variety of psychosocial resources, such as objects, energies, conditions, and personal characteristics (Hobfoll, 1989)” (Patel & Cunningham, 2012, p. 390). Therefore, religion can provide critical resources that help us positively manage stressors in the work-life interface. Patel and Cunningham (2012) found that when one increases their psychosocial resources through their religious involvement, they are likely to engage in active coping when faced with stressful situations.

Spirituality and Leadership and Higher Education

Given that the context of the current study is housed within higher education, it is imperative to discuss spirituality within the educational space. Spirituality and higher education are sometimes at odds because of the traditional scientific nature of most institutions (Tisdell, 2003). Instead, Tisdell (2003) argued that spirituality does have a place in higher education for reasons that are particularly relevant to the current study.
She explained that spirituality is often about meaning-making, which is related to the development of self-awareness, interconnectedness, and a relationship with a higher purpose or power. As a result, Tisdell (2003) said this meaning-making happens all the time, including in higher education and learning. Even more important was the idea that spirituality (religious or otherwise) moves towards authenticity. In citing Borysenko (1999), Tisdell (2003) explained that in particular to women’s spiritual development, spirituality is related to the development of a more authentic self. Authenticity, she defined, means “having a sense that one is operating more from a sense of self that is defined by one’s own self as opposed to being defined by other people’s expectations” (p. 32). Therefore, as a woman becomes more grounded in her own spirituality, she will have a “greater sense of embracing an identity more congruent with who one is” (Tisdell, 2003, p. 33).

This blends nicely with one of the guiding theories of this study, Career Construction Theory (CCT), as CCT answers two questions: (1) What do people do? and (2) Why do they do it? Both questions incorporate a deeper look into an individual’s lived experiences in relation to their career development. The three components of CCT are (1) vocational personality, (2) career adaptability, and (3) life themes. Life themes particularly speak to an individual’s experience of meaning, purpose, and life circumstances that happen in their career and everyday life roles (Savickas, 2005).

It must also not go unnoticed that Tisdell (2003) discussed gendered spirituality in that there can be challenging aspects in the intersection of gender and spirituality from a patriarchal perspective. Particularly the message that women are inferior in some
religious traditions. Because of this, women speak much more of their spirituality in relation to their gender and identity development than men (Tisdell, 2003). As such, incorporating critical feminism as an additional guiding theory is necessary as women in the current study may speak of their career, life, and possible spiritual experiences in unique ways.

**Connections to the Current Study**

We know that women develop their spirituality differently than men, and we also know that women tend to evoke their coping resources more frequently than men in the work setting because they can experience higher rates of stress (e.g., Lynn et al., 2010; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995; 2004). This study focused entirely on the lived experiences of women – specifically women who are campus recreation directors. The emphasis was on their work-life integration as well as their experiences of gender discrimination and how all those experiences, plus others within the workplace not yet accounted for, impacted their health.

A secondary focus was on women’s experiences of resiliency in the face of challenges, specifically from a spiritual or religious perspective. Based on the findings of this survey of the literature, there seems to be a dearth of literature as it relates to women in the workplace and their use of spirituality or religion as a component of their resiliency. Selvarajan, Singh, and Stringer (2020) were some of the only researchers unpacking how religion or spirituality aids in navigating the work-life interface. However, their study examined both men and women. Due to the varying experiences across genders, this study provided an important look at how women utilized their
religiosity or spirituality to navigate challenges in the higher education workplace, particularly in terms of the work-life interface and gender discrimination.

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter Two provided an in-depth review of literature relevant to this dissertation study. It started with a review of the history, growth, and evolution of women leaders in recreation and sport. The chapter continued with a detailed discussion about the core concepts utilized in the study of women leaders in recreation and sport. This included gendered organizational culture (Hindman & Walker, 2020) as well as sexism (Fink, 2016). Then, a discussion about the health implications for working women both generally and within recreation and sport was offered. Next, the chapter outlined in detail the work-life interface (e.g., Bruening & Dixon, 2007), considering work-life balance, work-life conflict, and work-life enrichment. The second half of chapter two detailed the theoretical frameworks that guided this dissertation study. This included Career Development Theory (Super, 1980) and, more specifically, CCT (Savickas, 2005). The chapter continued with a discussion of hegemony and critical feminist theory and their use when studying women in recreation and sport contexts. The chapter concluded with a review of spirituality and resilience for women in recreation and sport.

The third chapter of this dissertation will detail the methodology utilized for this dissertation study. It will start with an overview of qualitative research before moving into a discussion about research design. The chapter will outline narrative inquiry and its data collection and analysis processes. It will conclude with my subjectivity statement.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

As Chapters One and Two discussed, the experiences of women in campus recreation director positions is an understudied area of recreation and sport management. While tangentially related to the more substantial area of inquiry, women intercollegiate athletics, the experiences of women in campus recreation may bifurcate at times given the different pressures, work environment, and history of the profession. We know that historically male-dominated professions can be rife with gender discrimination and sexism. We also know that within the field of recreation and sport management, there is an ever-growing discussion of the work-life interface as well an urging to understand the health implications of the workers involved. Chapter One provided a background of the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, and research questions to be addressed. Chapter Two provided a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to the study to aid the reader in understanding the field of campus recreation, the work-life interface, health implications for working women as well as the theoretical frameworks such as career construction theory, critical theory, and feminist theory. Information pertaining to resilience, religion, and spirituality are also provided within the context of overcoming work-place stress.

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to understand the experiences of women directors of campus recreation departments in the Power Five conference institutions. Specifically, I examined their career development, resilience, and health in response to stressors, such as the work-life interface and gender discrimination. The research questions that guided this study were:
• What narratives do women leaders in campus recreation have about their leadership experiences?
• What narratives do women leaders in campus recreation have about the work-life interface?
• What stories do women leaders in campus recreation share about their career evolution?
• What stories do women leaders in campus recreation share about their career satisfaction?

This chapter will present my research process and design, including an overview of qualitative research, epistemology, theoretical framework, methodology, and methods. I will include research context and participant selection. I will also share my data collection methods, data analysis process, and ways in which I ensured trustworthiness. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of my subjectivity.

**Overview of Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is a way of doing research that, according to Creswell and Poth (2018), begins with the use of theoretical/interpretive frameworks that inform research questions specific to the meaning ascribed to social or human problems. In this way, it “crosscuts disciplines, fields, and subject matter” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 9). Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that in order for qualitative researchers to engage in this type of inquiry, they collect data in the natural setting, giving credence to the people and places under study. Data analysis typically involves deductive and inductive work to establish patterns or themes. Creswell and Poth (2018) made note that the final product
includes “voices of the participants, the reflexivity of the research, a complex description of the problem, and its contribution to the literature of a call for change (Creswell, 2013, p. 44).

**What is Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research was established as an important way to study human group life in the field of sociology and in the work of the Chicago school in the 1920s and 1930s (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). During this same time, anthropology was also providing building blocks for this discipline through establishment of fieldwork methods, which were utilized to study the customs and habits of another culture or society (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Since 1900, qualitative research has had a storied history spanning several moments (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). These moments: traditional, modernist age, blurred genres, crisis of representation, postmodern, postexperimental, and the historical present have shaped how qualitative research, or inquiry, operates. This historical present, aptly named by Denzin and Lincoln (2018), wrestles with social justice, human oppression, injustices, poverty, and inequality. There are also “postinterpretive paradigms on the horizon” as well as the reconfiguring of older paradigms and the emergence of hybrid paradigms (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 1). Despite this complex history and vast interpretations of qualitative research, Denzin and Lincoln (2018) offered a generic definition of qualitative research:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world…This means that qualitative researchers
study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (p. 10).

To put it another way, Erickson (2018) described qualitative inquiry as a way to explain narratively what people do in their everyday lives and explore what those actions mean to them.

Qualitative research was originally based in the positivist paradigm as researchers were originally striving to do “good positivist research with less rigorous methods” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 14). Over time, positivist and postpositivist paradigms have largely been rejected by the new generation of qualitative researchers because they believe too many voices are silenced through inferential, empirical methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). In fact, now, some qualitative researchers are calling to replace the word research with the word inquiry as it erases the need to ascribe to a specific way of doing research. Additionally, we are now in a turn of qualitative inquiry that is pursuing social justice by prioritizing voices and experiences that have historically gone unheard (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Finally, qualitative researchers believe they are better able to capture individual points of view, examine constraints in everyday life, and secure rich descriptions of the social world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) because qualitative methods allow for deeper immersion in a person’s lived experiences. This allows for a deeper understanding of life’s phenomena. Despite these staunch differences, it is important to note that there are researchers who do advocate for qualitative and quantitative methods working in tandem. “Indeed, there are many opportunities for the naturalistic investigator
to utilize quantitative data – probably more than are appreciated” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 198).

After considering this brief comparison between qualitative and quantitative research, there are several characteristics of qualitative research. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), five of these characteristics include natural setting, researcher as a key instrument, participants’ multiple perspectives and meanings, context-dependent, and reflexivity. These characteristics will be expanded upon in the next few paragraphs.

In qualitative research, data is often collected in the field, in the natural setting, where the issue is experienced by the participants of interest. Typically, the participants are not brought into a lab setting and usually participants are not asked to complete an instrument (e.g., a survey). Rather, researchers either talk or observe their participants up-close to see what they say and how they behave in their own context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher is the primary collector of data in that they interview participants, observe behavior, examine historical documents for example. If a researcher does utilize an instrument, it is usually one of their own design in the form of an interview guide or questionnaire (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research questions for the specific inquiry guide the selection of methodology and methods, which may result in the crafting a new or adapting a preexisting instrument. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to this as “human-as-instrument” because the methods typically found in qualitative research includes that are deemed normal like interviewing, observing, and document analysis. (p. 199).

Throughout the research process, it is important for the researcher to focus on the meanings that the participants hold about a certain phenomenon rather than the meanings
the researcher brings to the research. By doing so, this may suggest that there are multiple perspectives and diverse views on the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Then, for the researcher to fully understand the phenomenon in question, they “must seek an understanding of the contextual features and their influence on participants’ experiences (e.g., social, political, and historical)” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 44). Maxwell (2013) urged that this is essential for fulling understanding how the context uniquely shapes one’s experiences. Qualitative researchers typically study a small number of people, which preserves the individuality of each person therefore the researcher strives to understand how the phenomenon under study is shaped by unique circumstances (Maxwell, 2013). Finally, “researchers ‘position themselves’ in a qualitative research study” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 44). Thus, the researcher communicates their background and how it informs the interpretation of their findings as well as their interaction with the participants and the development of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Wolcott (2010) explained that the reader has a right to know who the researcher is – their interest in the topic, whom they are reporting to, and what the researcher is gaining from the study.

**Insider/Outsider Phenomenon of Qualitative Research**

In qualitative research, it is important to consider positionality as it relates to the insider/outsider phenomenon. “The key concern is understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants’ perspectives not the researcher’s” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 16). Merriam et al. (2001) explained that there is a complexity when considering insider/outsider status. They called for “the reconstruing of insider/outsider status in
terms of one’s positionality vis-à-vis race, class, gender, culture, and other factors, offer us better tools for understanding the dynamics of researching within and across one’s culture” (Merriam et al., 2001, p. 405). Simply,

We all occupy positions in society that continually affect our lives…Positionality, or social location, is a way of classifying other people…by placing them into groups, connecting them when what we know as a way of figuring out who people are and, more important, who people are in relation to us… (Johnson-Bailey, 2012, p. 260)

Merriam et al. (2001) framed their discussion of insider/outsider status with the blending of positionality, power, and representation. Although parts of one’s identity may afford them insider status in a group, other parts of their identity may complicate that relationship pushing them closer to the outside.

Banks (1998) understood this from a cross cultural perspective, yet asserted that the following typology can be applied to men studying women, middle-class studying low-income, etc. The types of researchers Banks (1998) described were indigenous-insider, indigenous-outsider, external-insider, and external-outsider. The indigenous-insider is a welcomed, indigenous member of the community of study. The researcher identifies with the values, beliefs, and behaviors of the culture. The indigenous-outsider was socialized in their community, but also culturally assimilated into another culture. The researcher identifies with the outside community. Therefore, the community of study views the researcher as an outsider despite their insider socialization. The external-insider was socialized in another culture, yet claims the values, beliefs, and behaviors of the
community of study. They are essentially adopted into the studied community. Finally, the external-outsider not only was socialized in another culture but has limited understanding of the culture being studied. Despite these clearly defined categories, Johnson-Bailey (2004) critiqued this work from the perspective that research is dynamic, standpoints can shift, and power can problematize analysis and representation.

Merriam et al. (2001) expressed the importance of considering power and representation. Power must be negotiated in the research process, and there needs to be an understanding of the power of the position as researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). “The power dynamics of the interview process are negotiated by the interviewer, the interviewees, and the culturally embedded interview context constructed by both” (Merriam et al., 2001, p. 413). The researcher tends to hold more power in this relationship for a myriad of reasons. The researcher may have inherent power over the interviewee due to their intersecting identities, perceived expertise, etc. The interviewee may be of community, population, or identity that has been historically marginalized. Both of these considerations, among others, within the cultural context of the interview dictates power and representation. Then, how is the data represented? Whose voices are heard? How is the complexity of truth constructed, understood, and communicated ethically (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016)? Johnson-Bailey (2004) explained that “no research methodology can provide a perfect balance for telling and representing. Power can affect the relationships or the historical positions and patterns of relationships between the researcher and the researched” (p. 138).
Then, Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) offered a more fluid understanding of the insider/outsider phenomenon when considering membership roles of the researcher. Essentially, these membership roles exist on a continuum: the researcher is a member of the group or has personal experience with the phenomenon being studied (insider) to the researcher is peripheral to the group or phenomenon being studied (outsider).

Insider research has both benefits and challenges. If the researcher is a member of the group they are studying, there is already an increased level of trust between the researcher and participant because they have shared ground (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Therefore, participants may be more willing to share their experiences due to the assumption of understanding. On the other hand, insider research can impede the research process if the researcher’s personal experiences cloud their ability to analyze their participant’s experiences appropriately (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Johnson-Bailey (2001) described this as the difficulty in maintaining intellectual and ethical integrity because the “perspectives that inform the insider position” are charged by “a history of injurious outsider research” in which people at the margins are seen as different and deficient (Johnson-Bailey, 2004, p. 133). Additionally, internalized oppression could negatively affect insider research as the researcher may have adopted the ways of the dominant group over their own disenfranchised group and judge their own culture through harsh eyes (Johnson-Bailey, 2004).

Outsider research is not immune to the influence of personal experiences. Just as subjectivities must be taken into consideration, identified, and monitored in how they shape the collection and interpretation of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As was stated
above, complete objectivity is not possible, therefore even in outsider research researchers must have awareness of their positionality. Johnson-Bailey (2004) also stated that outsider research must be careful not to become one of the oppressors when studying and writing about the oppressed. Moreover, many times are risking more than the researcher. “Repeatedly…the reason for asking the respondents to take changes is to fulfill the need of the researcher to do her part, answer her political convictions, and become an advocate fighting for the ‘Other’” (Johnson-Bailey, 2004, p. 136).

“Drawing from contemporary perspectives on insider/outsider status…not only will the researcher experience moments of being both insider and outsider, but that these positions are relative to the cultural values and norms of both the researcher and participants” (Merriam et al., 2001, p. 415-416). Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) contended that there is a space between insider and outsider and “perhaps, as researchers we can only ever occupy the space between” (p. 61). They explained that “as qualitative researchers we have an appreciation for the fluidity and multilayered complexity of human experience. Holding membership in a group does not denote complete sameness…Likewise, not being a member of a group does not denote complete difference” (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 60). Because of this, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), critical researchers need to be even more cognizant of the insider/outsider relationship as it influences level of access to participants and the kinds of stories the participants will ultimately share with the researcher. This in turn emphasizes the necessity for being aware of power and its inherent implications in
research itself; and that “the point of critical research is generally to do research with people, not on people” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 64).

Ultimately, Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) argued that the insider/outsider phenomenon is one of the many ways qualitative research is unique from quantitative research. In qualitative research, the researcher is immersed in all steps of the research process. At no point throughout the research process can the researcher disconnect from the stories of the participants as these stories are interwoven throughout the research experience. “The intimacy of qualitative research no longer allows us to remain true outsiders to the experience under study and, because of our role as researchers, it does not qualify us as complete insiders” (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 61).

Given this overview of qualitative research as well as the important considerations related to subjectivity, positionality, and the insider/outsider phenomenon, we now turn to how one uses qualitative research methodology to anchor their research.

**Research Design**

**Importance of Methodology**

O’Reilly and Kiyimba (2015) argued for congruence between epistemology, theoretical framework, and methodology. These form the foundation for decisions related to research design, data collection and data analysis methods. Creswell and Poth (2018) referred to this as methodological congruence, which promotes an interconnected and interrelated cohesive study. Particularly, it is imperative to take into consideration how the researcher will make assumptions about the data because how one views reality will influence every stage of the research process (O’Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). In other
words, even in the process of identifying a problem or phenomenon worth investigating, the researcher has already made several assumptions about the world. If the researcher views reality as subjective, then the mode of collecting data cannot be neutral because data collection becomes a social action not just a tool to reflect reality (O’Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015).

When the researcher does not operate from a place of congruence, there are limits to the level of analysis, trustworthiness, and integrity of the collected data. This can lead to weak or invalid research. O’Reilly and Kiyimba (2015) called for investing the time to consider the importance of “epistemological integrity” because this facilitates consistency in the research process as well as quality and transparency in the dissemination of results.

**Narrative Inquiry**

Over the past few decades, narrative inquiry has established itself as a substantial methodology within educational research and beyond (e.g., Clandinin, 2007; Mertova & Webster, 2020). According to Chase (2005), narrative inquiry is “flourishing” in the social sciences as there is increased interest in using and showcasing narrative work to study human experience (p. 615). Researchers typically can agree that narrative, or the use of stories, is one of the most fundamental units that accounts for human experience (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 4).

Since the time of narrative inquiry’s inception, researchers have strived to create common understandings of concepts and definitions within narrative inquiry (e.g., Chase, 2005; Clandinin, 2007; Mertova & Webster, 2020). Chase (2005) situated narrative inquiry as a subtype of qualitative inquiry. She explained that contemporary narrative
inquiry is interdisciplinary with both traditional and innovative methods “revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them” (p. 651). As such, narrative is both a “story and its telling, what is constructed and then related” (Lyons, 2007, p. 627). Narrative inquiry aims to investigate a question and tell the story of its meaning and impact on the future.

In another attempt to situate narrative inquiry, one might look to the Deweyan Theory of Experience. According to Clandinin and Rosiek (2007), “experience is a fundamental ontological category from which all inquiry – narrative or otherwise – proceeds” (p. 38). Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) explained that this ontology is transactional in that inquiry does not generate a representation of experience independent from the knower. Rather, inquiry generates a new relationship between the knower and their experience. “In this pragmatic view of knowledge, our representations arise from experience and must return to that experience for their validation” (p. 39).

Narrative inquiry, then, falls within the greater qualitative research methodology. Although most forms of narrative inquiry rely on some type of conversation (e.g., structured interviews versus unstructured interviews), researchers must be clear in how they reached their conclusions, their methodology, and their own epistemological standing (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007).

For this study, constructionism and critical inquiry were utilized in tandem as the epistemological foundation. For the constructionist researcher, truth is unstable. Knowledge is co-constructed in specific social interactions, and there is less separation between the researcher and the participant. As the interviews were conducted, the
narratives were socially constructed. This reflected that the “participants’ intentions and interpretations are as important as the researchers” (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007, p. 151). In contrast, for the critical researcher, there is no stable truth, and understanding is based on history and political relations. Different from constructionist beliefs, there is no separation between the researcher and the participant. The “direction of the narrative shifts between narrators and researchers” (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007, p. 150). From a critical perspective, it is important to always consider the identity of the researcher and fully understand how power plays into the researcher-participant relationship.

Once these appropriate methodological considerations are made, narrative inquiry “provides researchers with a rich framework through which they can investigate ways humans experience the world depicted through their stories” (Mertova & Webster, 2020, p. 1). There is a powerful ability of narrative inquiry to distinguish the shifting contributions of self and society (Baddeley & Singer, 2007). For qualitative researchers, working with stories holds great potential because stories are “particularly suited as a linguistic form in which human experience can be expressed” (Kim, 2016, p. 6). In other words, narrative inquiry is much more than a story. It is important to read narratives as complex social processes, as culture in action, and that there is power in narratives (Daiute, 2014). “The power of narrative is not so much that it is about life but that it interacts in life” (p. 2). In reading this quote, Daiute (2014) makes the claim that narrative is a product of human culture, is uniquely human, and is used to develop societies. The appeal of narrative inquiry is that there is a focus on lived experience rather than
objective truths. Additionally, there is an element of “sense-making – a process for figuring out what’s going on in the world and how one fits” (Daiute, 2014, p. 15). An individual is creating identity and sharing experience.

**Epistemology for this Narrative Inquiry**

Epistemology is the discipline of philosophy that focuses on the theory of knowledge and the relationship between the knower and what can be known (Guba & Lincoln, 2004). The terms typically associated with epistemology are contested at times, and it can be challenging to delineate clearly between epistemology, theory, and paradigm. For example, critical inquiry has been positioned as both an epistemology as well as a paradigm depending on who is reporting (e.g., Crotty, 2003; Padgett, 2008). O’Reilly and Kiyimba (2015) suggested this could be due to the idea that these boundaries are, in fact, fluid. As a framework for this discussion, Crotty’s (2003) understanding and delineation between the four elements: (1) epistemology, (2) theoretical perspective, (3) methodology, and (4) methods will be utilized.

According to Crotty (2003), epistemology can be largely divided into three main categories. These include objectivism, constructionism, and subjectivism. For the current study, the epistemology utilized was constructionism. Constructionism is the view that “all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of the interaction between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 2003, p. 42). Recall, Lyons (2007) explained that narrative inquiry encapsulates both the story and its retelling. It is in the space of the retelling, in the narrative interview, that
knowledge and understanding are socially constructed between interviewer and interviewee. O’Reilly and Kiyimba (2015) describe it as being concerned with identifying ways of constructing social reality within a culture.

In the current study, the social reality of women directors within the culture of campus recreation was the focal point. Constructionism claims there are no true or valid interpretations of reality. Perhaps, though, some interpretations are more useful, liberating, or fulfilling than others (Crotty, 2003). These interpretations are generated through the marriage of objectivity and subjectivity. Crotty (2003) claims this is because “constructionism takes the object very seriously” (p. 48). In other words, meanings emerge from one’s interaction and relation with their experiences. Yet, these meanings are also socially constructed. “As a direct consequence of the way in which we as humans have evolved, we depend on culture to direct our behavior and organize our experience” (Crotty, 2003, p. 53). Thus, all meaningful reality is socially constructed. In the context of the current study, the women participants shared stories related to their careers and lives. In doing so, the participants made meaning of these lived experiences within the context of culture. By taking epistemology into consideration, one then builds upon this foundation to inform their theoretical framework.

**Theoretical Framework for this Narrative Inquiry**

O’Reilly and Kiyimba (2015) argued that “different qualitative methodological approaches are underpinned by particular theoretical assumptions, and consistency between their philosophical position and methods should be clear” (p. 2). For Crotty (2003), epistemology informs the theoretical framework. These theoretical frameworks
include positivism, interpretivism, critical inquiry, feminism, and postmodernism to name a few. Foundationally, for the current study, the theoretical framework most useful as it moves between constructionism and narrative inquiry was interpretivism.

*Interpretivism*

Interpretivism falls in line with the epistemology of constructionism. It “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 2003, p. 67). Interpretivism, essentially, takes human interpretation as the “initial point for generating knowledge regarding the social world” (O’Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015, p. 11). Thus, from this perspective, researchers hope to understand how people perceive, feel, and experience the social world (Chen et al., 2011; O’Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). Interpretivism, according to Crotty (2003) can be used in three different ways: (1) phenomenology, (2) symbolic interactionism, and (3) hermeneutics. For the current study, interpretivism using the lens of hermeneutics was utilized.

Hermeneutics was originally the interpretation of religious texts. Now it is understood as the process of interpreting data and emphasizing the importance of context (O’Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). Essentially, the researcher aims to be holistic in the interpretation, considering both the social and historical context (Bryman, 2008). Furthermore, Crotty (2003) discussed this from a language perspective.

Hermeneutics is useful when interpreting unwritten sources such as human practices, human events, and human situations – in an attempt to ‘read’ these in ways that bring understanding. This outcome squares with the centrality of language in any concept of human being. We are all essentially languaged
beings. Language is pivotal to, and shapes, the situations in which we find ourselves enmeshed, the events that befall us, the practices we carry out, and in and through all this, the understandings we are able to reach” (p. 87).

Interpretivism with the hermeneutics approach is useful when using narrative inquiry as a method. Narrative inquiry positions human stories as the focal point of study. Ultimately, how participants use language to describe their lived experiences matters as “narrative illuminates human actions and complexities” (Mertova & Webster, 2020, p. 18). Furthermore, narrative inquiry is historically embedded in narrative traditions in which narration is the tool for the transfer of knowledge (Mertova & Webster, 2020).

It is important to consider that interpretivism, while useful “to understand and interpret through meaning of phenomena” (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018), it remains largely uncritical. Interpretivism seeks to understand, while critical inquiry and feminism seek to challenge and change the status quo (Crotty, 2003). Thus, it was necessary to bring into the conversation a blending of both critical inquiry and feminism to fully round out the theoretical framework.

**Critical Inquiry**

Critical inquiry, founded in subjectivist epistemology, is largely attributed to the foundational work of Karl Marx and the Frankfurt School. The overarching goal is to seek to understand, unpack, and change social structures that reinforce power. Although critical inquiry is vast and multifaceted, Crotty (2003) offers a summary of Paulo Freire’s work from the mid-20th century, which focused on the oppressed. Freire asserted that groups of people are subjected to the power of the elite, who rule with a “regime of
oppression” (Crotty, 2003, p. 154). Those who are oppressed largely operate in silence and internalize the oppressor’s guidelines. Additionally, those who are oppressed may also internalize how the oppressor sees them (e.g., as lazy, incompetent, etc.). Due to this internalization, those who are oppressed are generally unable to free themselves from oppression and need help to engage in their own liberation (Crotty, 2003).

Today, “critical forms of research call current ideology into question, and initiate action, in the cause of social justice” (Crotty, 2003, p. 157). Critical inquiry aims to highlight the power relationships in society with hopes of exposing hegemony and injustices (Crotty, 2003). Some of the assumptions of critical inquiry are: (a) all thought is mediated by power relations, (b) language is central to the formation of subjectivity, (c) certain groups in society are privileged over others, and (d) oppression occurs in many different ways (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994; 2002). Thus, critical inquiry “illuminates the relationship between power and culture” (Crotty, 2003, p. 158).

Within this narrative inquiry, critical inquiry served as an important lens through which to examine the lived experiences of women directors of campus recreation departments. Undoubtedly, the career construction undertaken by the participants involved the negotiation of power in a myriad of ways.

Feminism

There are a variety of ways feminism is interpreted and characterized (Crotty, 2003). Liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism, and postmodern feminism are a few of the many branches of feminism. Liberal feminism focuses on equal opportunity and equal rights. Marxist feminism focuses on the need for structural change.
Specifically, women’s work and how the system needs to be radically changed. Radical feminism views the oppression of women as the oldest, most damaging form of oppression. It is focused on women’s sexual and reproductive issues highlighting the disordered nature of patriarchal society. Postmodern feminism is closely tied to deconstruction, which is committed to breaking down traditional antinomies. Although all these and several others are fully described by Tong (1995), one can be skeptical of attempting to adhere too closely to the boundaries of these categories. One can think of these categories more on a spectrum because there is a “collective commitment to the undermining of oppressive gender-based power relations” (Assiter, 1996, p. 88; cited by Crotty, 2003, p. 173).

The importance of using feminism in conjunction with critical inquiry is due to the context of the study, which was centered on women’s experiences. Gilligan (1982) believed that women and men have different ways of perceiving the world and relating to it. Hence, the need to not simply utilize critical inquiry in the pursuit of understanding women’s experiences. In other words, the claim was made that women’s experiences within the campus recreation spaces was inherently gendered as well as influenced by power relations.

**Research Methodology for this Narrative Inquiry**

The theoretical framework sets the stage for methodology. Methodology is the “strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcome (Crotty, 2003,
O’Reilly and Kiyimba (2015) summarized methodology as the way in which the researcher goes about finding out what they believe can be known.

There are a variety of methodologies in qualitative research. Creswell and Poth (2018) summarized five common approaches to qualitative inquiry: phenomenological research, grounded theory research, ethnographic research, case study research, and narrative research. Each has epistemological and theoretical framework ties as well as affiliated data collection and analysis methods. Therefore, having a clear understanding of one’s epistemological and theoretical framework is critical in carefully selecting the appropriate methodology.

For the current study, narrative research was utilized. Narrative research tells the stories of an individual’s lived experiences. The focus of narrative research is not only to understand a person’s experience but also to explore the social, cultural, and familial narratives that surround a person’s experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018; see also Clandinin, 2007; Mertova & Webster, 2020; Reissman, 2008).

**Data Collection Methods**

In qualitative research, there are several data collection methods one can utilize. Deciding which to use is contingent on the chosen methodology. The common methodologies include observations and interviews as well as others, like journaling and focus groups. In the case of the current study and its use of narrative research, narrative interviews were the most appropriate method. Narrative interviews allowed the participants to detail stories of their lived experiences within campus recreation, their
career trajectory, and their leadership. This experience was made possible by the trusted rapport between researcher and interviewee (Reissman, 2008).

For interviews, the researcher develops an interview protocol based on the type of methodology and its underpinnings. The interview is a “social interaction based on a conversation” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 163; see also Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Thus, the interview is where knowledge is constructed based on the purpose of the study and the research questions, yet it is imperative that the researcher remains aware that the interview process is not an equal partnership because the researcher sets the agenda and directs the conversation (O’Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). In essence, an interview is a series of questions and answers between the researcher and the participant (Roulston, 2013). Again, we are reminded that the researcher interacting in interviews is the research instrument. How the researcher engages in those spaces should be driven by methodological congruence (e.g., epistemology, theoretical framework, methodology, and methods; O’Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015).

For this study, a semi-structured interview guide was utilized as opposed to an unstructured interview or a highly structured interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Roulston, 2013). This allowed me to guide the conversation following the research questions while also allowing the participant to expand on their experiences and deviate from the order of the interview guide when necessary (Kim, 2016; Roulston, 2013). Structured interviews, on the other hand, follow the interview guide closely and maintains the sequence of questions, and unstructured interviews allow for free-flowing conversation free from a rigid interview protocol (Roulston, 2013).
I developed the semi-structured interview guide based on my research questions (see Appendix A) as well as information put forth by Merriam and Tisdell (2015) and Kim (2016). As I developed my interview guide, I sought to develop questions that were “flexible enough to expand the scope of the interview...[and] ask different but relevant questions depending on the interviewee’s response” (Kim, 2016, p. 163). In doing so, I aspired to allow the interviewees to use their own voices and express themselves freely (Kim, 2016). As such, aside from the initial demographic questions, all questions within the interview guide were open-ended so that the participants were able to use their own words to share their stories (Roulston, 2013). Within the interview guide, I reserved space for probing questions, so I could gain more information or greater detail (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Roulston, 2013). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), specifying probing questions is nearly impossible as one cannot predict what the participant will say in the interview. However, some probing questions were included in the script as I attempted to anticipate additional information I would need. These questions were generic such as “Would you explain more?” and “Can you give an example of...?”

Furthermore, this narrative interview guide consisted of four phases. These include introduction and explanation of the research, narrative, questioning, and conclusion (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016). The introduction phase consisted of reviewing the signed informed consent, detailing the research process and the participant’s involvement in the study, and explaining the purpose of the study. I spent a few minutes getting to know the participant informally. I also asked the participant for a preferred pseudonym. Included in this phase, I obtained consent for recording the
interview. The introduction phase concluded with a series of demographic questions pre-established in the interview guide.

In the narrative phase, the participants were given the latitude to share their stories without interruption. These stories centered around how they became a director of a campus recreation department, how they developed their leadership, how they navigated gendered experiences, and how they engaged in their work-life interface. In this phase, I was only permitted to utilize non-verbal encouragement such as “mmhmm” and positive facial expressions. These non-verbal cues encouraged the participant to share their stories freely and validated them in this process (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016). I strived to follow the direction they chose to take their stories. As Kim (2016) stated, “narrative interviewing requires us to give up control” (p. 166). Yet, I needed to maintain a posture of active listening. It was during this phase that I was able to give power back to the participant. Oftentimes, women (or other minorities) have not been allowed to center their experiences.

In the questioning phase, I utilized the participant’s own language as well as other information gathered during the narrative phase to “fill in any gaps or to ask for more detail about an issue of interest” (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016, p. 632). Typically, these questions were phrased like, “What happened before/during/after?” or “Can you explain more about…?” Furthermore, I was able to utilize my previous experience working in a campus recreation department to facilitate a deeper connection and understanding with the participants. I recognized their terminology, and I had pre-existing knowledge of how a career might be developed and experienced within this field. Our dynamic
conversations surrounding their stories in this phase generated co-constructed knowledge. It was important that I was attentive to guiding the conversation as needed, allowing for the conversation to develop organically, recognizing as learning occurred within the conversations, and examining assumptions and power within my relationship with the participant (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007).

Finally, in the conclusion phase, I asked a final question intended to open the floor if they had anything else they would like to share with me. All participants shared a concluding thought, clarification, or suggestion during this time. I then extended gratitude for the participant’s time and vulnerability. I also explained what to expect next in the process, which included scheduling the second interview and/or a description of the transcription of the two interviews, as well as the member-checking process.

**Research Participants and Context.** This study will focus on women holding directorship positions within campus recreation departments at universities and colleges in the Power 5 conferences in the United States (US). As of 2015, there were at least 89 women holding director positions throughout the US (Waller et al., 2015). The current total number of women holding director positions across the US in 2022 is unknown. However, the women for this dissertation study hold director positions at comparable universities in the Power Five conferences. As of 2022, 16 women fit this category. The power five conferences include the Southeastern Conference (SEC), the Big XII Conference, the Big Ten Conference, the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), and the Pac 12 Conference. Typically, these institutions are large, public, or private research
institutions. The assumption was that many of the potential participants will have general similarities as it relates to career mobility and cultural context.

Before beginning data collection, the researcher must obtain institutional review board (IRB) approval and be open and honest about the purpose of the study through the use of informed consent. I obtained IRB approval on May 19th, 2022 (see Appendix B). Then, I engaged in purposeful sampling and establish access and rapport with the population of interest. For this study, participants were found using criterion sampling. Criterion sampling outlines a set of criteria that potential participants must meet in order to be considered for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The criteria in this study included (1) employment with a Power Five Conference member institution, (2) holds the title of Director of Campus Recreation or comparable language, and (3) identifies as a woman. These requirements were listed in the study invitation (see Appendix C).

Initial contact was made via email to 18 women directors of campus recreation departments who met the above criteria in June 2022. Included in this initial emailed invitation were the aforementioned study requirements as well as the study’s purpose, risks, benefits, and participation expectations. I also attached the informed consent, which further detailed the study overview, purpose, and methodology as well as risks, benefits, and time commitment (see Appendix D). Once this initial email was sent, I received three responses within a few hours. Over the course of the next two days, I received an additional two responses. All indicated their interest in participating in the study and requested “next steps.” To each of these inquiries, I responded with a second email that included a summary of their role in the study and a link to an online scheduling program.
called Calendly (see Appendix E). This program allowed each participant to privately select two interview times that aligned with their schedule. For each scheduled interview, a secure Zoom link was generated and sent directly to the participant and to me. Within this follow-up email, I also reattached the informed consent requesting that they sign and return it at their convenience. Upon receipt of the informed consent, I sent a truncated interview protocol for review before our first interview (see Appendix F).

After the first five responses to the initial email, I did not receive any more communication from any other potential participants. Two weeks after the first email was sent, I sent a follow-up email, as indicated in my IRB application, including the same information as the first email. I received a response indicating I had made the wrong assumption about an individual’s name and gender. I quickly responded with my sincerest apologies and removed them from the participant pool. I did not receive any additional responses. Therefore, I transitioned to snowball sampling as an additional mode of obtaining participants. Snowball sampling is the act of identifying additional participants through the recommendation and referral of current participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The hope was to generate buy-in from potential participants who did not respond to the initial invitation but were willing to respond based on a colleague’s recommendation. Additionally, website updates can lag behind real-time job changes and promotions, so the assumption was that the current participants were aware of newer women directors that may have not been included in the original sample. Based on previous data, we know that the cohort of women directors across the country was relatively small. As a result, we assumed that many knew of each other through their own
professional networking. Through snowball sampling, I was able to obtain four more participants.

My goal for this study was to recruit six to eight participants. In qualitative research, determining the sample size varies widely and according to Merriam and Tisdell (2015) there is no clear answer. I followed the guidance of Creswell and Poth (2018) and, first, maintained the intent to not generalize across cases but rather seek to collect extensive detail about each participant. Ultimately, the goal was to reach a point of saturation or redundancy in which there seemed to be no new information coming from participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Therefore, I set my goal at six to eight participants based on the recommendation from Kim (2016). I knew that suggested sample sizes could range from six to fifteen or more as long as there is saturation after six interviews (Kim, 2016). I also knew that in narrative inquiry, the focus needs to be on the quality rather than the quantity of the interviews (Kim, 2016). I finally took into consideration the amount of time I had to realistically engage in quality interviews over the course of ten weeks. Taking this information into consideration, I determined that a goal of six to eight interviews was appropriate for this study. I ended up surpassing this goal and obtained nine participants. I completed the final interview of my ninth participant at the end of August 2022.

Data Collection Experience. Guided by the four research questions, I conducted two semi-structured narrative interviews with each participant over the course of two days. The interviews ranged in length from 51 minutes to 83 minutes. The interviews took place via online video conferencing using Zoom Video Communications (Zoom)
because participants were located across the U.S. All participants consented to audio and video recording. This allowed me to generate rapport with the participants as well as enhance the data collection process with non-verbal communication, facial expressions, and other visual cues. Each interview followed Anderson and Kirkpatrick’s (2016) four phases of narrative interviewing – introduction and explanation of research, narrative, questioning, and conclusion. I found that the narrative and questioning phases were cyclical throughout the interview process as each participant had more than one story to share based on the semi-structured interview guide. The interviews were recorded, and the audio files were transcribed verbatim, resulting in a total of 317 pages of transcription. This ranged in length from 27 pages to 45 pages of transcription per participant. During transcription, the interviews were de-identified, and pseudonyms were utilized in place of participants’ names. Although I provided the opportunity for the participants to choose their own pseudonyms, all nine requested that I generate one for them. A total of eighteen interviews (two interviews per participant) were conducted over the course of 10 weeks. The transcriptions were completed during this time as well. Once the transcriptions were completed, the transcripts were sent via secure email to the participants as a form of member-checking. In the email to participants, I informed them they had 14 days to review their information and provide any feedback or edits they would like me to make to their transcript (see Appendix G). Of the nine participants, three replied with edits, notes, and requested redactions within the transcript. The remaining six provided approval for me to proceed with their transcript as-is.
During both the interviews and transcriptions, I engaged in a reflexive process by keeping a research journal in order to strive for protection against bias. In this journal, I kept notes of my experiences, impressions, and overall takeaways from the experiences. After each interview, I spent time journaling about my experience with the participant. I made note of body language and facial expressions as well as aspects of the interview that may have gone poorly. I reflected on how I engaged as a researcher. Did I ask leading questions? How was my own body language and facial expressions? Importantly, I took note of instances when the participant’s stories were triggering in some way, or overly relatable. Then, after each transcription, I spent time adding to my reflexive journal. I asked myself many of the same questions, but I also compared across journal entries to assess how my impressions and takeaways may have changed or stayed the same. I wanted to be certain to protect against biasing the participant’s stories while I was co-constructing them during the data analysis stage.

**Data Analysis Methods**

There are a variety of data analysis methods that naturally follow data collection methods as they are dictated by the research questions and the methodology chosen. For narrative inquiry, narrative thematic analysis will be the primary data analysis method for the current study.

Narrative research and interviews focus on an individual’s story and the importance of relationships and events. This communicates to the researcher “culture in action” (Daiute, 2014, p. 2). Thus, narrative inquiry investigates how these stories are embedded within life. “The researcher does not find narratives but instead participates in
their creation” (Reissman, 2008). After an initial listening, transcription, and subsequent reading of the interviews, narrative thematic analysis was the primary analysis method utilized.

The goal for thematic narrative analysis in this setting was to keep the story as a whole. Reissman (2008) describes this as “theorizing from the case rather than from component themes (categories) across cases” (p. 53). Furthermore, it was important to focus on what each participant said rather than the how, whom, or for what purposes. Attention to this focus became incredibly important when utilizing narrative thematic analysis within this study so that each participant’s story was privileged and valued on its own. This ability to privilege each participant’s story was key. This was because one of the goals of the current study was to give voice to individuals who may not always have a voice (e.g., women). Additionally, Career Construction Theory (CCT) centrally positions the narrative nature of an individual’s career development (Savickas, 2005). In each case, prioritizing each participant’s story was essential to understanding the unique career experiences of women in leadership in campus recreation.

To do this, I utilized Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-stage thematic analysis process. These stages include: (1) becoming familiar with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing these themes, (5) naming and defining the themes, and (6) creating the final report. Beginning in the first stage, I started to gain a preliminary understanding of, and familiarization with, the data during the transcription process. Before I started the initial coding process, I also read through each transcript at
least two times. It was important for me to begin noticing patterns across transcripts as well as any other pertinent notes before moving to stage two.

In stage two, I started to develop the initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Saldana (2016), “a code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based…data” (p. 4). In other words, a code is the most basic element of the raw data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, coding is a cyclical process and oftentimes requires at least two cycles of coding before categories and, later, themes (Saldana, 2016). Ultimately, the purpose of coding is to “attribute interpreted meaning to each individual datum” to detect patterns in the later stages (Saldana, 2016, p. 4). Following the method laid out by Braun and Clarke (2006), I worked through the data systematically, striving to identify and give full attention to interesting aspects of each data component. Braun and Clarke (2006) also provided three pieces of key advice: (1) code for as many potential themes as possible, (2) maintain some context with each code, and (3) data components can be coded as many times as needed.

In narrative thematic analysis specifically, the goal was to keep the stories “intact for interpretive purposes,” however determining the boundaries of the stories can be difficult (Reissman, 2008, p. 74). Therefore, since a large aspect of the research questions focused on the experiences of events, or stories, within one’s campus recreation career, for each interview, the stories were identified using a blend of holistic and narrative coding (Saldana, 2016). The holistic coding process is most applicable to “self-standing
units of data…such as: interview excerpts of a participant’s story with a definite beginning, middle, and end…or [an]…excerpt of social life with bounded parameters such as time, place, action, and/or content” (Saldana, 2016, p. 166). This was made possible because, based on the research questions, I already had a framework within which I could place most of the stories shared (Saldana, 2015). Story identification also included narrative coding and some semblance of the criteria laid out by Labov and Waletzky (1997) for Labovian Narrative Analysis. However, rather than a rigid structural analysis, I looked for a start and end point of the story along with details about people, places, and/or emotions. Labovian Narrative Analysis has been criticized for its use when coding women’s stories. This is because there are significant differences between stories told by men and stories told by women…the approach developed by Labov, which is based on the study of men’s narration, fails to adequately address the subtle interactional intricacy of women’s personal narratives…[there is an] interaction between conversation and story and story and conversation, as women collaboratively weave stories of a shared reality (Patterson, 2017, p. 37-38).

Ultimately, I sought to address each story “holistically in all its complexity and richness” (Mertova & Webster, 2020, p. 2). This was important because narrative research “relate[s] to human centeredness” (Mertova & Webster, 2020, p. 18) and people “express…knowledge that uniquely describes [their] human experience” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 8). Therefore, each story was unique to each participant and their own life experiences.
After this was complete, each story within each case was coded using in vivo coding (Strauss, 1987). The in vivo codes were combined and analyzed to form categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Then, the cases’ categories were compared to indicate general patterns (if any) that occurred to ultimately develop the final themes. Reissman (2008) explained that attention should be given to broader contexts. For example, giving attention to how social structures have impacted the participant’s experiences was an aspect of data analysis. Yet, during this process, it was important to remain case-centered as each participant had her own unique story. The act of balancing generalizability with being case-centered was important because “stories can have effects beyond their meanings for individual storytellers, creating possibilities for social identities, group belonging, and collective action” (Reissman, 2008, p. 54).

**Trustworthiness.** Trustworthiness is how qualitative researchers aim to establish rigor in their research. Guba and Lincoln (1985) reconceptualized reliability and validity in the context of qualitative research by developing the following categories for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, (d) confirmability, and (e) meeting all criteria above. For this study, trustworthiness was obtained through peer debriefing, member checking, and reflexive journaling.

Peer debriefing is the act of reaching out to a professional peer who is unfamiliar and not involved in the project, however they are familiar with “phenomenon being explored” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 129). They are able to provide an objective perspective on the results of the study. This involves providing a professional peer(s)
with the interview transcripts and the thematic table for them to review and offer constructive feedback on their interpretations of the data. Importantly, the peer debriefer is qualified to offer this service in some way. For this study, the peer debriefer, in conjunction with their doctorate, primarily conducts qualitative studies. They have supported several doctoral students through the dissertation research process. Additionally, this professional has participated in several research studies focused specifically on women’s experiences in intercollegiate sport leadership. Although tangentially related to the current study, this expertise offers a helpful lens through which to examine the data about women’s experiences in campus recreation leadership.

The peer debriefer was provided the deidentified transcripts and the preliminary thematic table at the beginning of November 2022. Given the magnitude of data, they took three weeks to review the information. Upon completion, we met via Zoom to review their notes and suggestions. I was able to better conceptualize a few of the categories and rename one of the themes based on this feedback.

Member checking is the act of sending the transcripts to the participants. The participants are given the opportunity to confirm or offer changes to the information. This is to insure they feel the data and subsequent conclusions accurately represent their experiences. This process involves sending the transcribed interview to the participant to review for accuracy and representation. If the participant feels that information needs to be changed, or if something needs to be omitted, they are free to offer edits and changes to ensure they are represented appropriately. Finally, reflexive journaling is the act of reflecting on one’s subjectivity throughout the research process. This may include
detailing emotions, memories, thoughts, or reactions that the researcher had during the interview, transcription, and data analysis processes. Typically, reflexive journaling occurs during the various stages of data collection and analysis. For example, directly after each interview, the research devotes time to reflect and process their experience through journaling. This may happen again during the transcription process and again during the data analysis process.

Reflexivity is one of the major markers of trustworthiness (O’Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). Reflexivity is the process of the researcher reflecting on their own role in the research process and the ways their role may have impacted the project (O’Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). “Qualitative researchers need to be mindful of how their own epistemological world-view both shapes and influences the research conducted...Reflexivity encapsulates the process of being self-aware of how these attributes influence participant responses” (O’Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015, p. 37). In qualitative research, it is impossible to completely separate the researcher from the participant; therefore, these three modes of establishing trustworthiness ensure rigor in one’s research.

**Subjectivity Influences**

All of the aforementioned characteristics of qualitative research create a research space in which the researcher and the participants are closely involved with one another. The qualitative researcher typically enters the natural space of the participant and acts as the instrument of data collection. Therefore, it is imperative in qualitative research to maintain an ethically reflective position (O’Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). “How we write is a
reflection of our own interpretation based on the cultural, social, gender, class, and
personal politics that we bring to research” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 228). Building off
the concept of reflexivity mentioned above, an aspect of reflexivity is the importance of
positioning oneself in their writing and research. Creswell and Poth (2018) indicated that
reflexivity has two parts: (1) the researcher explains their experiences with the
phenomenon they are exploring including past life experiences; and (2) then the
researcher explains how their past experiences may influence their interpretation of the
phenomenon. Kincheloe, McLaren, Steinberg, and Monzo (2018) distinguished between
subjectivity and positionality. Subjectivity is the researcher’s understanding of their
history and ideologies whereas positionality speaks to ourselves in relation with others (p.
252). This will be discussed in detail throughout the next few paragraphs.

Peshkin (1988; 1994) contended that subjectivity operates during the entire
research process, and it is important for the integrity of the researcher and their research
because one’s personal qualities have the ability to skew, shape, filter, transform, and
construe what happens as a result of the research project. He invited the reader to reflect
on a series of questions as they relate to one’s research. These questions included: “(1)
Why do you choose the topics you work on? (2) Why do you collect data as you do? (3)
Why do you see in your data what you see? (4) Why do you conclude as you do?”
(Peshkin, 1994, p. 47). Peshkin (1988; 1994) claimed that all researchers are subjective
because of the three interrelated aspects of the self. All individuals have values, attitudes,
and preferences; everyone has a past bounded in a particular place and time with family,
friends, and community; and everyone has personal attributes like gender, age, religion,
occupation, etc. Yet, Peshkin (1994) also claimed that subjectivity is dynamic and individuals change over time, however no one can disengage from their subjectivity as it is part of who they are. Considering one’s subjectivity is imperative as it has the “capacity to influence, possibly dictate the choices I make in all phases of my research, with results that can range…from virtuous to the damning” (Peshkin, 1994, p. 47-48). In order to maintain appropriate control over one’s subjectivity and avoid doing harm to research participants and those who are influenced by research thereafter, it is important to “note the emergence of our subjectivity so we can tame it” (Peshkin, 1994, p. 55-56).

The other part of this reflexive process is the relationship between the researcher and the participant known as positionality. Positionality is determined by where one stands in relation to the other (Merriam, et al., 2001). Yet, these positions can shift based on a myriad of identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc.). Johnson-Bailey (2012) described positionality and the understanding of one’s place in society as “fluid, subject to time and experiences, and complicated by intersection and overlap of the positions and of understandings of the subject and the person attempting to know the subject” (p. 263). In the research process, it is imperative for the researcher to understand how their position in society intermingles with their participant’s position.

Due to the nature of qualitative research, there is a natural relationship that can form. This may occur because the participant shares their lived experiences with the researcher, which may result in relationship building. When the researcher engages with their participants and immerses themselves in the participants’ narratives, there is the potential for risk (O’Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). This risk encompasses the blurring of
relational boundaries and the struggle for balancing objectivity and sensitivity. Strauss and Corbin (1998) described this as the “interplay between the researcher and the research act” (p. 42). The researcher is immersed in the research and is both shaped by the data as well as shaping the data. Both objectivity and sensitivity are important throughout the research process. It is nearly impossible to remain completely objective as we each rely on knowledge and experience to make sense of the world and the problems we encounter (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Instead, objectivity in qualitative research “means openness, a willingness to listen and to ‘give voice’ to respondents,” and listening and observing participants and “representing [them] as accurately as possible” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 43). Sensitivity, then, involves having insight into the happenings in the data, and be able to see “beneath the obvious to discover the new” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 46). Professional and personal experiences can offer insight, familiarity, and a foundation for more questioning if used correctly. Ultimately, despite these definitions, both are necessary in the reflexive process to be transparent and honest about how the results are being analyzed and communicated.

Given our historical moment in qualitative research, more attention has been given to this reflexive process particularly as it relates to the impact the writing may have on participants. Ethically, it has been imperative to consider if one’s writing marginalizes or oppresses their participants. If research dissemination does this, it stands in direct contrast to the purpose of qualitative research – to hear all voices and perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Reflexivity and our wrestling with our subjectivity and positionality “demands that we interrogate each of our selves regarding the ways in
which research efforts are shaped and stages around binaries, contradictions, and paradoxes that form our own lives” (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018, p. 143).

**Subjectivity Statement.** Another way I engaged in trustworthiness was by acknowledging my subjectivity. While I do not believe that one can fully separate themselves from who they are and take a completely objective look at data; I do think that it is imperative to be aware of who I am as I interact with who my participants are. By engaging in this reflexive process, I maintained my position as the researcher and acknowledged how my background, belief system, and experiences influenced my interpretations of my participant’s experiences. Additionally, coming from a constructionist perspective, I believe that my participants and I co-created their narratives. As I asked the questions and my participants responded, we each brought a unique set of experiences that colored our interpretation of their stories.

I am a Caucasian, heterosexual, cisgender female who is currently working on a Doctor of Philosophy in kinesiology and sport studies with a specialization in sport management. I grew up in an upper-middle-class family in a predominantly white neighborhood in Colorado. Due to this privilege, I feel this has aided in my ability to travel for higher education and be granted opportunities throughout my educational experiences.

I bring with me an understanding of, and passion for, gender discrimination in sport-related spaces. Specifically, I desire to dismantle these power dynamics and create welcoming spaces in which women can not only participate but flourish. I am aware that leadership spaces can be contentious environments as women strive for opportunity.
Sport, especially, is a unique environment in which women experience overt sexism. Women, across professions, also attempt to navigate the work-life interface and are routinely subjected to the conflict between the desire to work and the social norms of raising a family. I also bring with me a myriad of personal experiences related to gender discrimination in sport-related spaces. Primarily as a woman who teaches sport management classes, I have been subjected to the challenges of navigating sexism, bullying, and incivility in the classroom (Johnson & Beasley, 2022). I have also been subjected to these issues as a student in sport management classrooms. With both my understanding of, and personal experience with, gender discrimination, I needed to remain cautious as I could not assume that all my participants had similar experiences.

Part of this difference may be due to an intergenerational component. Their experiences as they related to Title IX, being women in the workplace, and moving through the various feminism waves may have impacted their experiences in ways different than my own experiences. Therefore, I needed to stay aware of my position throughout the interview process, data analysis, and discussion phases of the project. It was imperative that I acknowledged that my challenging experiences result from my gender, but not my race, as my race is a protective factor in many ways. I did not have any women of color in my participant pool, but if I had, they would have had vastly different experiences due to their intersecting identities. It was important that I did not make assumptions about their experiences or conjecture about their experiences from my lens.
Additionally, I have experience working in campus recreation as an undergraduate and graduate student. During my time at Baylor University, I was given the opportunity to work in nearly every area of campus recreation. This included aquatics, fitness, and outdoor recreation. Over the course of my undergraduate experience, I was able to advance to leadership positions and learn more about the inner workings of a campus recreation department. Upon graduating, I stayed at Baylor University in the Master of Public Health program. I was able to work as the Fitness Graduate Assistant. Through this experience, I was able to learn about group fitness programming. During my final months working in campus recreation, I was given the opportunity to co-direct summer camps. All of my experiences in campus recreation gave me exposure to much of the language the participants used in relation to their jobs in campus recreation. Of course, I needed to be cognizant that my experience in campus recreation was limited to one private institution. My experience was also limited to a predominately undergraduate understanding of how campus recreation departments operate. As such, I needed to remain vigilant that I did not take liberties when working to understand their administration experiences.

Finally, I bring with me a deep personal spiritual conviction and an understanding of the Christian religion. I have relied on my faith throughout my life as I have navigated the various stressors and traumas as well as the good times. In fact, when I think of resilience, whether it is the true definition or otherwise, I think of my spirituality as it has been a protective factor for me. Again, I needed to remain cognizant of this part of my positionality because not all of my participants identified as religious or spiritual. I
strived not to ask leading questions or assume that what they meant was related to their spirituality. This was particularly important because only one of my participants expressed a commitment to her Christian faith. Several of the other participants expressed dissatisfaction with the Catholic church and a more secular understanding of spirituality.

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter Three discussed the methodology utilized for this dissertation study. It started with an overview of qualitative research. Then, it detailed narrative inquiry and its associated data collection and analysis methods. The chapter concluded with my subjectivity statement. The next chapter, Chapter Four, will discuss the findings of this dissertation in detail.
CHAPTER FOUR
FINDINGS

This narrative inquiry sought to understand the experiences of women directors of campus recreation programs at Power Five Conference Institutions through their lived stories. The previous chapters provided an overview of the study before breaking down the literature utilized to set the foundation for this dissertation study. The third chapter, then, provided an overview of qualitative research and research design. It also discussed narrative inquiry, its associated methods, and my subjectivity statement. This fourth chapter will provide an in-depth look at the findings that were constructed as a result of narrative thematic analysis.

Narrative Introduction of Participants

This study included nine participants. The demographics of participants are included in Table 1, which includes participants’ pseudonyms, gender, race and ethnicity, age, education level, spirituality or religious identity, and family status. In the narrative introductions, more detail is included about the participants and their careers as campus recreation professionals.

Sam

Sam in a researcher-selected pseudonym for a 58-year-old Canadian woman who is married and has two young adult children. She has been working as a director of campus recreation for 18 years. For the 16 years before entering her role as director, Sam worked in a variety of positions within campus recreation, including starting as a graduate assistant in intramurals before following the traditional path of coordinator,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Spirituality /Religious</th>
<th>Family Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>Married w/ 3 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Married w/ 1 child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>EdD</td>
<td>Atheist</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Married w/ 2 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>Married w/ 2 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>&quot;Just Christian&quot;</td>
<td>Married w/ 2 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>Belief</td>
<td>Marital Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>&quot;Belief in higher being&quot;</td>
<td>Married w/ 2 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Eurasian</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Divorced w/ 1 child; Domestic Partner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
assistant director, and then associate director. She has been a director at two different institutions. Sam holds a Doctor of Philosophy in educational leadership.

Michelle

Michelle is a researcher-selected pseudonym for a 47-year-old White woman who is married and has two children. She has been working as a director of campus recreation for three years. For the 22 years before entering her role as director, Michelle worked in a variety of positions within campus recreation, including starting as a lifeguard at her undergraduate recreation center. She, too, transitioned to a graduate assistantship in aquatics before moving through the roles of coordinator, assistant director, and associate director. Michelle holds a master’s degree in health, physical education, and recreation.

Lisa

Lisa is a researcher-selected pseudonym for a 46-year-old White woman who is married and had two young children. She has been working as a director of campus recreation for seven years. For the 14 years before entering her role as director, Lisa has held five positions within the same institution. She oversaw the fitness programming at both the graduate assistant and assistant director levels. She later ascended to associate director of programs. Lisa holds a master’s degree in clinical exercise physiology.

Jenny

Jenny is a researcher-selected pseudonym for a 58-year-old White woman who identifies as a lesbian. She is married. Jenny has been working as a director of campus recreation for 15 years. For the 18 years before entering her role as director, Jenny became a graduate assistant in intramurals. She then gained experience as an assistant
director and associate director of facilities. Jenny has been a director at two different institutions. She holds a master’s degree in recreation resource administration.

**Rachel**

Rachel is a researcher-selected pseudonym for a 60-year-old Eurasian woman who “is divorced with a domestic partner.” She also has one adult child. Rachel has been working as a director of campus recreation for seven years. Rachel indicated her entry point was in college when she needed a part-time job; therefore, she started as an undergraduate lifeguard. For those 31 years before entering her role as director, Rachel’s career path was different from the other participants. She has remained at the same institution throughout her professional career, whereas all other participants changed institutions multiple times to pursue career advancement. The institution where Rachel has remained has seen major changes in organizational structure over the years, including merging with the athletic department as well as separating from the athletic department. As such, Rachel described her transition from the coordinator of facilities from a holistic perspective. Over the course of her career, Rachel describes taking on additional responsibilities until she seemingly was the associate director. Rachel was then the interim director for three years before attaining her role officially. She holds a master’s degree in leadership studies and organizational behavior.

**Emma**

Emma is a researcher-selected pseudonym for a 55-year-old White woman who is married and has two adult children. She has been working as a director of campus recreation for nine years. Emma entered the campus recreation field as her second career.
Prior to her campus recreation career, Emma was a collegiate basketball coach for eight years. She decided to exit coaching when she made the decision to start a family. At that time, Emma felt that intercollegiate coaching and raising kids was “just not gonna work.” Upon beginning her campus recreation career, she was “an emergency hire, temporary position doing intramural sports.” After obtaining that opportunity, for the next 16 years, Emma was associate director slowly acquiring new responsibilities. She has been director at two different institutions. Emma holds a master’s degree in sport psychology.

Sarah

Sarah is a researcher-selected pseudonym for a 49-year-old White woman who is married and has two young children. She has been working as a director of campus recreation for one year. For the 24 years before entering her role as director, Sarah was a graduate assistant and assistant director before becoming senior associate director. Outside of her first professional experience, Sarah has remained at the same institution. She holds a master’s degree in post-secondary athletic administration.

Marie

Marie is a researcher-selected pseudonym for a 43-year-old White woman who is married and has one young child. Her role is unique compared to the other participants as she has a dual role of assistant vice chancellor for student affairs. For the 17 years before becoming director, Marie was a graduate assistant for intramurals and then coordinator for intramurals at two different institutions. Later, she became an assistant director for intramural sports, an associate director of programs, and finally, the interim director.
Marie holds a master’s degree in education with an emphasis in recreation and sport management.

Joanne

Joanne is a researcher-selected pseudonym for a 50-year-old White woman who is single. She has been working as a director of campus recreation for 13 years. At the beginning of her campus recreation career, 10 years before becoming director, Joanne worked as a graduate assistant and as a professional at an institution where recreation was housed within the athletic department. She did not indicate what her first professional position title was, but from that position, Joanne became director. Since then, she has been a director at four different institutions. Joanne holds a Doctorate in Education.

Study Themes

Through the use of narrative thematic analysis (Reissman, 2008), I constructed four themes: (a) “I was very aware of being the only woman:” navigating the cycle of the system by examining their positionalities; (b) “relationship focused:” women’s ways of developing their own leadership styles; (c) “life is bigger than just work:” work and life interface; and (d) “rhythm of back and forth:” negotiating personal and professional impact of being women leaders. “I was very aware of being the only woman:” navigating the cycle of the system by examining their positionalities included the categories of systemic sexism; interpersonal struggle with supervisors, predecessors, and others; and opportunity knocks. “Relationship focused:” women’s ways of developing their own leadership styles included the categories of collaborative leadership style and leadership challenges. “Life is bigger than just work:” work and life interface included the
categories of finding balance and work-life benefit?. “Rhythm of back and forth:” negotiating personal and professional impact of being women leaders included the categories of collision of life and work, physical manifestations of stress, and importance of resilience and self-care. See Appendix H and Appendix I for my data analysis process and the codebook that shows the construction of codes to categories to themes.

“I was Very Aware of Being the Only Woman:” Navigating the Cycle of the System by Examining their Positionalities

The first theme constructed from the participants’ narratives was “I was very aware of being the only woman:” navigating the cycle of sexism by examining their positionalities. This theme provides insights into the systemic sexism that persists within campus recreation. Within this system, many stories were shared as they related to interpersonal struggles with supervisors, predecessors, and other people in power, as well as the opportunities and opened doors that arose due to networking or happenstance.

Systemic Sexism

Throughout each participant’s stories related to their gender, there were clear instances of sexism. This systemic sexism manifested in various ways, both overt and covert. It was particularly apparent in interactions with those in construction or those from the athletic department.

Several of the participants consistently discussed the challenges of participating in meetings related to the construction of new campus recreation facilities. Construction of new campus recreation facilities is common across universities. Often campus recreation facilities and the respective equipment and programs are utilized as marketing tools for
prospective students. As such, campus recreation directors are commonly involved with
the entire construction process, which begins with fundraising and ends with the opening
of the new facility. Throughout this entire process, it is not uncommon to interact with
architects, engineers, and contractors, as well as university personnel, with a vested
interest in the project. Jenny explained,

But what’s interesting through the construction process, and I am in an active
process of my career here at [school omitted], of kind of having to undo some of
how the system really caused me to show up during construction… But you
know, I have to go into these meetings with my fists balled up because people
want to use student money inappropriately, being a woman, being an out woman,
being dismissed. So it makes you, it makes you walk into a space not always
assuming positive intent. Because you know someone’s either… they don’t have
the student’s best interest in mind. So during our construction process, I was the
person who was put in that category by virtue of the commitments and dialogue
we made with the students. I said, “I will not let them spend your money
inappropriately. My goal, and my role, is to be a steward of your resources.” And
that means that when I see things are going off the rails, are not being spent
properly. I have to call that out, right? Well, you know, in construction, there’s
this thing called contingency funds, and a certain portion of a project has to go
into contingency funds. Well, a contingency fund has some true reasons. And then
it has lots of made-up reasons. So true reasons are unforeseen conditions. And
they’re like, “Well, okay, we’ll just take it out of contingency.” I’m like, “Whoa,
whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa.” At this point, we were pinching pennies on the project because we did the project in phases, and we wanted to make sure the last phase, which is the building, had the lion’s share of the money, right? I’m like, “That’s not an unforeseen condition. That’s somebody who [messed] up (with emphasis).” So the relationship piece, I’m in there, I’m a steward of the students’ money, and I probably used [aggressive] language. And so what’s interesting is so you go through this construction process and you’re being a guardian of the student’s money, and you’re a female, and you’re an out lesbian. And again, it’s not like I walk in and announce that in a meeting. But, you know, this bunch of dudes are just like, “You’re not married. You’re, you don’t wear dresses.” I mean, stupid, right?

Jenny explained that due to her identity as a lesbian, she had to remain increasingly vigilant over the students’ money as those involved in the construction process actively tried to take advantage of the contingency funds. She had to fight to maintain the project’s integrity and felt she had to fight harder due to the sexist system.

Sarah’s story was particularly poignant when considering how sexism exists within the system and often is in the form of microaggressions.

I would go into those different architect or construction contractor meetings, I was usually always the only female in those spaces. There was one contractor, specifically that would come on site… and I would change… I normally like to wear skirts, sandals, flip flops, you know, whatever…. But on construction days, I would have pants, I would have close toed shoes, I would do what I needed to do
to, you know, fit in with the group. And I would walk up to those onsite meetings or wherever we were at, and there was always this one contractor that would start his meetings off with, “Hello, gentlemen.” And I would just be like, “Okay, obviously, I’m the only girl here (annoyed tone),” but it was just... So finally one of the construction managers on campus... He’s like, “Hey, she is not a gentleman; she is a “mam,” and you need to start addressing her correctly.” I was like, “Oh, what a good upstander, what a good friend of mine.” I was so thankful to him for interjecting because I just didn’t know how to do it. Like, as a female, I was just like, “Okay, I should stand up for myself.” I should say, “Hey, can you acknowledge me, too.” But I was like, “I just don’t know the tenor of the group. I like I don’t know if that’ll be like, laughed off. I don’t know if I won’t get respect after that because I don’t really care if you call the group gentleman or not.” I mean, but I wrestled with that probably way more than I needed to, just because I was worried about how my calling him out in front of his peers was gonna look, you know, to the rest of the group.

Not only was this situation troubling for Sarah, but she also engaged in significant emotional labor negotiating how she should stand up for herself. It took another man to step in and address the situation on her behalf for it to be resolved.

In other cases, the participants were told outright that they did not belong. Marie shared,

On my very first day, I was there, and the director at the time was in his office, and they were building the sports complex. And there was a construction meeting.
He said, “There’s this construction meeting.” And so, I picked up my things. And he said, “No, what are you doing?” And the short of it was he started to say, “Well, don’t come because you’d be uncomfortable. It’s all men.” And I was like, “Well, that’s been my whole career; I really haven’t worked with many women... it’s okay.” And his response was, “Well, it would make them uncomfortable to have a woman there.” And that was sort of my hint that, “I don’t know if this is going to work for me.” There was the belief, in my opinion, it was pretty widely known that he had a lot of biases and was not an effective leader.

As a member of the leadership team, Marie needed to be at the construction meeting to provide insight from her unique perspective and to advocate for her specific program areas. In campus recreation, all assistant and associate directors oversee different aspects of the department. Therefore, it is important to ensure that all voices from across the department are present in the process.

These exemplar stories from the participants demonstrated just how deeply embedded sexism can be within campus recreation. Unfortunately, at the basic level, Sam provided insight into what is already assumed about many of the issues surrounding women ascending to leadership positions.

I think it is a disadvantage. I think that people don’t look to women as being able to be strong, consistent leaders. I think there’s a competency that’s seen, but I don’t think they see... they think that you’re just going to fade out with family. And I think about the early 90s even, “Oh, you’re just gonna have a family and you’re just gonna not be able to be as focused and do the things we want you to
do as a leader.” And I think that is slightly changing. I don’t think it’s changed a lot because of the way higher education works. And I think even like looking at how job descriptions are written, looking at how searches are done. There’s still a bias towards the men that have led us in this profession to this point.

It is well known that systemic sexism persists in the day-to-day interactions and experiences of women across disciplines. This is embedded in the hiring practices of organizations and how women are viewed as leaders. From the participants’ stories, campus recreation was not immune to these circumstances.

**Interpersonal Struggle with Supervisors, Predecessors, and Others with Power**

The category of interpersonal struggle with supervisors, predecessors, and others captured many of the participant’s stories related to the challenge of interacting and working with those with more power. The participants expressed frustration and feelings of being disrespected as a result of these interactions.

**Supervisors.** Apparent in many of their stories, the participants described the negative impact of their male supervisor. Often, these supervisors not only displayed overbearing body language but also demonstrated arrogance, disrespect, and a general sense of minimizing women in the room. Sam described,

Definitely very hostile. Somewhat... I don’t know how to... I’m trying to describe the body language. So just laid back, kick back, knee cross-legged crossed men, pushed back from the table, nonchalantly making decisions. What seemed to me it’d be nonchalantly making decisions about things that were going to greatly impact students, whether it was the students in the academic program or the
students in the recreation program, and even students in athletics because we all report to the same Dean, we’re all together. And, and those, those parts of that leadership were like, it was like I was invisible at times. It was like I wasn’t at the table. I’m really good at listening and trying to strategically pull the themes together. I love qualitative research, by the way. And so, I would be like, “Here’s what I heard. And I would like to add from a perspective of working with the student government, or this student group, that we could have impact on the overall involvement.” … And they were just like, “Well, that stupid thing.” Just disrespected things that the students wanted to do and that I thought we would be really good to be engaged in, or using our spaces for activities and things like that. They would be like, “Oh, [Sam], you just go off and do that with the students. We’re too busy for that. We don’t have time for that, or athletics isn’t the face of the University.” And I’m like, “Yes, you are.” [with emphasis] And the feelings I had were…I was very cautious. Even the Dean himself, he would turn and look at me… And I think I was asking, I was asking for, within the marketing & communications, to be included in a promotion thing for athletics to try to bring more students into the rec side of it. And he actually said in front of all these other men, “Don’t beg.” And I was just like... “Yeah, exactly” (with sarcasm)… Sam was not only disrespected in this space with her supervisor and the other men at the table; she was blatantly insulted. When asked how she responded, I just looked at... I know that I tried to, “don’t let them see that face, [Sam], don’t let them see your face. Don’t let him know he got to you, right?” I was at that
point where I was trying...I was operating so different to my core that I, literally, after a meeting, I had to go for a walk and be like, “You know who you are. You have to do this right now for a survival mechanism.” Because I couldn’t just up and quit with my daughter sick, it was just... a combination of things that... He would just look at me disgustingly and say things like, he wanted to be... This is how I described him... He’s like the kid that never got to sit at the cool kids table. But now he got to be the leader at the cool kids table. So he was gonna let everybody know that he’s the leader and he’s going to treat you like you don’t matter unless you prove, or are of use to him. And to him, the rest of the students were of no use to him. As long as he could look important at some athletic event or look important academically on campus, then it didn’t matter. And so it was really hard. I had a few allies in the department, but they were women and the women left rather quickly after that. But I was really close with the Assistant Vice Provost at the university… She had no solution for me. She goes, “his terms are going to be up. It’ll be five years.” And I’m like, “I don’t think I can last five years. This is tearing me apart.” Because it was just so against who I am and my values of... and I know we have to operate on the values of the department, or the values of the organization, but it was so far from being about students, and being about them, that I just, I just couldn’t deal with it.

This story was indicative of the toxic, sexist culture that Sam directly experienced. Unfortunately, other women in her department also fell victim to this negative behavior.
So the assistant dean, she had been there a long time, like 20 plus years. And she moved to be the assistant provost at [the university] down the road, ended up being provost at [school omitted]. But she... it was obvious that as the assistant dean and him as the dean, it was really obvious that her voice wasn’t being heard either... So she chose to leave I think, because of the culture. And then the other one, she no longer was the Assistant Dean for Graduate Education. She stayed in the department but was no longer in a leadership role...she went back to her research.

Sam struggled in this environment, as she mentioned earlier in her story; the behavior of her supervisor toward her and others radically ran counter to her values.

It was more like, the bullies in the room. This is like straight out of a book. He wanted to be important. And he had his people who did his dirty work for him, who went out and had the conversations like, “Hey next time, we’re not going to be moving any of that stuff forward. So maybe next time, don’t bring that up at the leadership team meeting.” And I’d be like, “Yeah, I know right where that came from.” But every now and then, I probably got less and less stepping myself out there because I just didn’t want to take it; I just didn’t want to have that feeling of... but I would get fired up in the sense of, “I am here for a reason. For students.” I would jump out there and be all me and say what I thought and then... people would look at me and then turn back. And it would be like, “Mmm, you heard me, but you’re pretending you didn’t.”
Although not quite blatant sexism, as in Sam’s story, Michelle’s former supervisor regularly asserted his power unnecessarily and without regard for others.

It would be the coldest day of the year, and he decided to tear down a shed and so I stayed outside and helped him tear down a shed. And it was the coldest day of the year, and a flowerbed needed to be mulched, and so I went out and helped my staff mulch a flowerbed. And it was one of the hottest days of the summer, and he wanted us to clean up this space in between the bubble parking lot and the tennis courts, and all the asphalt was just peeling up. So I was like, “Could we just get a bulldozer to come in and help us pull it up so we can be done faster?” “No, it doesn’t need it.” So, I finally had to trick someone into bringing the bulldozer over to do it (chuckling). But it was those types of things... Like I would have staff planned and prepared to work on a certain day, and he would insist that it happened the day before.

What made these interactions all the more troubling were the seemingly contrasting ways the participants were treated by their supervisors under different circumstances. Both Michelle and Sam shared instances in which their supervisor demonstrated some semblance of kindness in the face of family challenges. Michelle recalled,

You know, he was terrible at so many things, but when it came to our family and having children, he was good. He let me work from home before work from home was popular. And he let me extend my leave for as long as I could...because those preemie babies require so many other things.
Sam also shared,

Yeah, it’s such a weird fact about him because my son also got... sometime in the same two years... my son got checked into the boards in hockey from behind, and he ended up... boarding him off the ice and neck brace and everything... He [the dean] had the whole [location omitted] hockey team sign a jersey and gave it to my son while he was in the hospital recuperating. And so it was this weird mix, right? How do you put those two things together? He wasn’t heartless, but when it came to work, it was like it had to be about him. And if you weren’t, he was just disrespectful toward you. So it’s just the weirdest thing.

This kindness in the face of hardship for both Michelle and Sam brought to mind the embedded nature of sexism in the workplace. When these participants attempted to take up space as women leaders, they were routinely disrespected and insulted. Yet, when these participants demonstrated motherly qualities or needed to take care of their families, their supervisors bent over backward to offer support. It was normal behavior for these women to take on their family roles, while it was abnormal behavior to be leaders and work outside of the home.

When considering this deeply embedded nature of sexism, sometimes it goes completely unnoticed. Lisa shared a story about her supervisor, whom she admired. He supported her in her role as director, encouraged her to take risks, and valued her as a person. In many ways, her relationship with her supervisor was positive.

There were a handful of things that as soon as … I was in the director position, I wanted to change. And still to this day, he brings those up and says, “I never
would have changed that. And it was the right move, I wouldn’t have seen it.” But at the end, even at the time that I was saying I’d like to change this, this, and this. At the time, he was like, “Well, I mean, you’re the director.” And he wasn’t saying, “I agree,” because at the time, I don’t know if he did agree. But he also was like, “It’s not life or death, give it a go. Risk is okay, give it a go. If not, you know, you got some options and just come up with your contingency plan and give it a go.” And I think he honestly had bigger problems (chuckling). And so that worked out for me that it also created a lot of autonomy, but he has always really trusted me. And I know that because he brings me into conversations where, you know, he could make decisions that he doesn’t need my input on. But he’ll come, and he’s like, “I just want to talk to you about this. I want to see what you would think.” And they might be things that don’t have anything to do with Rec Sports exactly. It’s maybe another department that he’ll pick my brain. So I think we, I think that there’s respect both directions. And so that kind of creates trust and autonomy.

Yet, even in this positive relationship between Lisa and her supervisor, sexism was seemingly interwoven. Lisa explained,

I’ve got a supervisor who believes heavily in family, he’s just a big supporter of making time and space for your family. He has, in almost every single evaluation I’ve ever had with him, he’s talked to me about, “You can’t get time back. So make sure that you’re investing your time into your husband and your relationships with your kids and your time with your kids.”
Arguably, Lisa explained a great quality to have in a supervisor. Anymore, it seems nearly impossible to have a supervisor who acknowledges life outside of work. Yet, the context in which Lisa’s supervisor demonstrated support may be problematic because the purpose of her evaluation should be to review, critique, and praise her job performance, not to provide commentary or guidance on her investment as a wife and mother.

Ultimately, interactions between the participants and their supervisors varied widely from outright disrespect to positive regard. Navigating these power dynamics proved tricky for the participants, particularly for those in negative relationships, and impacted their leadership.

**Predecessors.** Something that was particularly unique throughout many of the stories was the interactions with predecessors. Even as the predecessors retired, their presence and influence remained pervasive. This was particularly true of the predecessors who had held their position for over 30 years. Emma explained,

It’s hard in a very different way. I meet with him regularly, we probably go to lunch every month or so, sometimes more often when I want to pick his brain. He’s a legend on this campus, like *legend* (with emphasis). When he left, the student government named a super prestigious award after him. And so I just keep telling him like, “God [name omitted], I don’t want to screw this up…” I’m facing a little resistance, you know, which is to be expected from the “[name omitted] disciples,” but it’s super manageable. And so it’s hard but in a very appropriate way. It’s more of internal pressure versus external resistance if that makes sense. He’s retired, but he’s still super close with a lot of our staff. He golf’s with them,
he goes out to eat with them, and he texts a lot. And there’s been a couple of instances where I’m like, “Dude, you’re killing me.” You know? Like, like, “If you get a call from athletics, call me, don’t call our staff.”

Emma felt her interactions with, and the influence of, her predecessor were manageable. Although she faced resistance from her staff, she attempted to work in tandem with her predecessor as the power shifted.

Sarah’s transition reflected the need to set boundaries differently. Her predecessor was the director for 38 years.

It was his entire identity. So him making sure that I was applying and the confidence in me applying... I truly felt like he was giving me that blessing of, “I’m turning over my entire identity to you to move forward and to continue that journey.” So that was huge, but then also in that regard of, “Oh, is that something I really want to do after following somebody that’s been doing this for 38 years.”

And it definitely has a... A personality of it and a, “What am I going to do to it?”

So, finding that balance of new and different, but then paying homage to, to what existed. That sounds like a lot of pressure. Both good and challenging. They were granted emeritus status and so they’re still in the office they still are very frequent “worker outer” of the building and user of the services. And so that has been another one of those where, in that transition moment, to be able to say, “There are times where there’s a balance of legacy and importance, and there’s a time of how do we chart a new path with respect to to the previous?”…It does create challenges, you know. And because we definitely had a relationship, and still
have a relationship, but there are certain things that you learn from the people that you have relationships with or in that leadership-subordinate thing... I have found that navigating the conversations with direct reports in a new role has been way easier than navigating conversations in this role reversal of the two of us and being able to just having to say, “Well, I appreciate that, and thanks for pointing that out for me, but that’s not a direction I’m choosing to go right now.”

Sarah has been intentional about setting boundaries with her predecessor. Over the course of the transition of power, contentious interactions have become less common as she has “express[ed] my leadership.”

Sam has had two different experiences with two different predecessors. One of her experiences, the most recent, is similar to Sarah’s. She shared,

[Ted], who was the director here 32 years, he was retiring, but he stayed on for six months as a special project to the Vice Provost. I report to in Student Affairs, so every meeting I was in as a new director there sits the director of 32 years across the table from me with the other leaders of Student Affairs. So it was awkward at times in the sense of like, I was saying what I thought, and I’m [inaudible] I look at [Ted]. “Do you think [Ted] cares? Nope, I’m gonna be me. I’m not gonna worry about hurting his feelings. I do not mean to hurt his feelings. I’m not being mean about things. I’m just getting at what I would do.”

Like Sarah, Sam felt that starting out as a strong leader and setting boundaries from the outset while also finding a good balance between the old and the new were important to
establishing her power. Sam’s second example was problematic in many ways, yet humorous, “I’m gonna laugh (chuckling),” Sam further asserted,

The first day I started, [George] met me at the office door. This is the director that had been there 32 years, and he was going to do some overlapping with me... he was going to help, he was going to show me where things were and stuff like that. He shows me to my office, and he shows me where my desk is and how he has his desk set up in the corner and his contract was for six more months. So he was just going to work in there with me for six months. So that’s how I started (laughing). So I said, “Yeah, give me a minute. I gotta go do something.” And I popped up to the dean’s office, and I was like, “I just needed to ask if this is what you expected to happen because this is not how I expected to begin my leadership.” And his eyes got huge, and he’s like, “I’ll take care of it.”

Despite the humor interwoven throughout the story, Sam was caught off guard in this situation. As the newly appointed director of campus recreation, it should have been obvious to her predecessor that Sam would have the director’s office, solely. Establishing power and “begin[ning] my leadership” would have been more complicated if her predecessor was constantly present. Not only would it have affected her experience as a leader, but it also would have affected others’ perceptions of her as a leader. Fortunately, she had a strong, positive ally in her supervisor at the time who was able to intervene on her behalf.
Others. When considering the other individuals who seemingly had more power, stories about athletic departments and athletic directors were shared. Rachel highlighted her struggles when working with the athletic director.

So we have a male athletic director, we have a male physical education director, and then the Vice Chancellor is male, right? And so, rec sports has resources that these other two departments want. And so, you know, those guys would contact me and it’d be, you know, “Nice to talk to you” or we’d talk about this and that and then it’s, “Well, we need XYZ.” And then I would say “Well, unfortunately, that’s not going to work for us because we’ve got our priorities, and so we can’t help you; or we can give you this instead.” Well, they didn’t want to hear that. So of course, it’s like all of a sudden, they’re talking to... they kick it up to the Vice Chancellor, which is fine. That’s the chain of command, but then I get the sense of, there’s this “good old boys club.” Because then I talk to another person and they are similar. They want stuff from us, and I’m like, “No, I’m sorry.” And then all of a sudden, he blatantly says, “Oh, well, okay. It’s alright, [Rachel], I’ll go talk to [name omitted] about this, and I’ll talk to [name omitted], and we’ll figure it out.” And I’m like, “Really?” (with emphasis) Luckily, the Vice Chancellor does check-in and I’m like, “[name omitted], this is the deal.” And so he will parrot what I’ve already told those two guys, but it’s this assumption that because it’s the “old boys club,” somehow they’re gonna go ahead and work around it. Right? That’s just irritating… And then they turn... and then the one case with the [athletic director]. You know, his whole MO is that we’re not cooperative or good
partners. So when he doesn’t get what he wants, then he goes above and
overboard and then after that, he’ll [still] say that we’re not good partners. So...
That’s irritating too…(chuckling with exasperation)…
It was clearly incredibly frustrating for Rachel to be in regular conflict with the athletic
director and the physical education director, who were her peers within this particular
school’s organizational hierarchy. These conflicts seemed to always end in one of those
men going over her head to their shared Vice Chancellor. Not only did they disrespect
Rachel’s position as their peer, but they would also gaslight her and accuse her of not
being a “good partner.” She said, “They’re all grumpy and they demand stuff, and they
get very entitled, and that is such not (with emphasis) the way to go about that.”
In a similar vein, Emma shared an example in which several male individuals on
the senior leadership team leveraged their power despite having a limited understanding
of the situation.
So at [school omitted], Campus Recreation managed a number of spaces that were
shared with athletics, but they were Campus Recreation-managed spaces. And the
natatorium was one of them, the indoor pool complex, so we were responsible for
managing it, staffing it, for scheduling it. Basically, athletics would just come in
and practice there. So there was a huge push right before the pandemic to build a
new [natatorium]; it was desperately needed. Athletics came to the table with no
money. They wanted students to fund it through a recreation fee. So there were all
these demands, right? It was fascinating. I was just like, “What alternate universe
am I living in right now? Like, how do you possibly think this is gonna work?” So
we have this meeting, the Vice President, Vice President of Administration, the provost, director of facilities, an associate, a deputy athletic director, and me. All men and me. They sat there, and ...oh there was our Associate Director, Senior Associate Director there who was also a woman who was in charge of our facilities, a phenomenal facility person. So anyway, they sat there and opened up and... I’m sorry, I’m gonna back up to say it was the very first meeting with a consulting group that was going to come in and talk about the current state of the facility and how many years we had before catastrophic failure. I had been screaming since I got there, like, “Hey, this facility could have catastrophic failure any day,” and people weren’t listening, weren’t listening, and then it failed. Right? So then it got everybody’s attention. So we have this meeting with this consulting group. The consultants start the meeting. They asked, “Okay, let’s talk about the current state.” And all these yahoos started talking about the natatorium. And I was waiting. Now I know there’s positional power stuff. So I wasn’t going to step on a vice president. But when the deputy [athletic director] then jumped in ahead of me, just, “What in the world is going on here?” So anyway, during the entire meeting, I talked one time [with emphasis] about our facility. Oh, my God. It was bizarre. Like it was the most egregious example of sexism [with emphasis], and... Just completely discounted. And, you know, I wanted [name omitted], our senior associate, to talk because she was the most knowledgeable in the room. You know, she just was, right? And had built a pool, the Olympic pool at [another university]; she had a ton of aquatics experience. And they’re like... honestly,
what it felt like was, “Shhh, shhh, the men are talking.” That’s exactly... it was bizarre. And so that’s kind of how the whole process went with the consultants. They ended up with a report that was useless, honestly. And now they still don’t have a natatorium, and the [university’s] swim team busses an hour and a half to [location omitted] to practice.

In her story, Emma clearly outlined the many instances in one meeting that spoke to the immense difficulty of navigating a system in which her position as a woman put her at a disadvantage. Not only was her (and her colleague’s) expertise not considered, but she also felt they did not even have a voice in that space. As we know, sexism does more than harm the woman toward whom it is directed. Unfortunately, this story demonstrated what can happen to those tangentially related to the issue. Students, and the university swim team, were experiencing the consequences of this “egregious example of sexism” (Emma).

**Opportunity Knocks**

Despite the difficulties experienced by the participants during their interactions with others, many described a system that does have opportunities and the potential for opened doors. In nearly every participant’s story related to their career trajectory, they described the encouragement they received from others to apply for the director position. Emma shared,

I was interim for a few months. And then my then boss said, “Hey, are you gonna apply?” And I was like, “no, no, I have like a total of seven months of experience
here.” And he encouraged me to apply. So I did. And then I got that job, which
was super lucky.

Sarah also used the word “encouraged” to describe her experience,

I was definitely encouraged. And my predecessor, he was probably the biggest
champion of doing that. Having lived this role for the last 38 years, it was his
entire identity. So him making sure that I was applying and the confidence in me
applying... I truly felt like he was giving me that blessing of, “I’m turning over
my entire identity to you to move forward and to continue that journey.” So that
was huge.

For both Emma and Sarah, the encouragement received from their supervisors
provided the necessary motivation and confidence to apply for the director role. For Sam,
she recalled an interaction between her and her mentor that was pivotal to her career
trajectory.

She [Sam’s mentor] was obviously senior to me in the department and been there
and so I was like, “I’m gonna apply for this, are you (with emphasis)? What do
you think if we’re both in the pool?” She’s like, “Oh, hell, no, I’m not applying
for this job. I’ve got you all the way.” And I’m like, “Okay, are you sure? You’re
not just saying that?” And she’s like, “No, here’s what I see in you. I see you with
a vision and direction to bring about some change that’s needed. You have the
student need focus center, in front. You have such a diverse experience with the
programming side of things that you can understand all the different needs of
intramurals and sport programs and outdoor and those type of things.” And then
she gave me an interesting... it’s a little puppet of a whale and “whale done” by I think it’s Maxwell I cannot remember for sure, John Maxwell. But she gave me that with a little note about what she could see, “You critically think, you communicate.” Sometimes I over-communicate (chuckle). She said, “You take time to listen to people and hear what they need instead of just telling them what they need. You’re going to be great at this.” And I think that confidence in me is something that I’ve always carried with me.

Not only was Sam’s mentor helping build the foundation for Sam to move into her next role, but this encouragement also set the stage for success when new challenges or new jobs arose.

In a similar vein, some questioned whether they would have had the confidence to apply if the opportunity had not presented itself. For example, Lisa reflected,

I’ve always been curious about, if other women needed this prompt to look at themselves as ready for the next level. I don’t know if I would have gone there without someone asking me if I would apply. So I had been approached by a director at another institution that asked if I would apply for their Associate Director of Programs position, and started telling me why he thought I would be the best person for that position. So started getting interested in applying. The other director mentioned it to my current boss at the time. And so, in order to retain me, I got promoted here (chuckling). So that’s how I first moved into the associate director position. While I was the Associate Director of Programs, that’s kind of the number two position, you’re really running day-to-day stuff, while the
director is driving all the agendas, you know, you’re really into that number two execution position. So while I was doing that, my director at the time got promoted to an assistant vice president position, and I was asked to step into the interim role. And so when I moved into the interim role, again, not thinking I would at all be prepared to do a director-level position, I felt like it’s a large school, we have a lot that we do within rec sports facilities and programs. And I don’t know if I actually thought that I could do this job. So I don’t think I would have applied if it hadn’t played out the way that this played out. And so after doing the job in an interim role for a semester, they asked if I would move into it permanently, which so I always kind of wonder, like, because I didn’t apply for it. And these positions just kind of open up, paths open for me. I wonder if I would have had the confidence to think about applying for these, but I don’t know.

Throughout Lisa’s story as well as the other stories highlighted thus far, obtaining the director position was a blend of timing, opportunity, encouragement, and the development of confidence.

Interestingly, others were not sure if they wanted the director position at all. Marie shared, “I became interim executive director. And flat out said, ‘No, there’s no way I’ll ever take this job permanently.’”

Similarly, Rachel explained, “I never wanted to be the director; I saw the politics involved. And I’m like, ‘You know what, that is not my wheelhouse. I don’t have the patience for that.’” In both of these cases, the participant’s hesitation to take on the director role was a result of worry over the work and life interface as well as the politics.
involved with working in more senior administration within higher education. Emma, too, shared,

He was the director here for 35 years, I knew him through NIRSA. And, you know, we did a series of aspiring director workshops together with four other folks. And so I knew him really well. And I remember, like, three years ago or so, maybe four years ago, I remember him saying, “Hey, I don’t have that many more years left; I sure would love to see someone like you interested.” And I remember saying, “No, I’m fine. I’m never living in [location omitted]. Politics are wacky.”

Eventually, all three participants did become directors at the institutions to which they were referring. Marie became the director as a result of “encouragement and confidence from the staff here; I did decide to pursue this job in a more permanent space... I began to see over that time that I could design some boundaries that worked for me as a person.”

Rachel explained the process she experienced as she transitioned to her director position.

I was the interim director for four years until finally, one of my direct supervisors came in and said, “You’ve been interim for like, three, four years. That’s ridiculous, we are going to make this permanent.” And I said, “Whatever you need to do, but I will tell you, I am not applying for the job. So go recruit, do whatever you need to do to follow the campus policy, but I’m not going through a whole recruitment process at this point.” And he said, “Oh, well, you know, this or that, I’m going to get a waiver. And we’re just going to make this happen.”
And I think by the policy, because I’ve been interim for so long, the system defaults you permanently. I don’t know what the deal was. But anyway, so with that said, Yeah, I became the permanent director. I guess by default.

For Emma, it was a combination of factors that finally facilitated her transition to her current director role.

I think it took the struggle of [school omitted] to be open to that. And then, you know, when the pandemic hit… And so, anyway, that made it much easier to listen to the tap on the shoulder and kind of reevaluate what matters. And again, you know, I’m a firm believer in “life’s too short” to be in a place that doesn’t align with values and goals and belief sets and that kind of thing. So that being said, when I came down here for the interview last November, I remember telling my husband, “I’m 10% in, you know. I’ll kick myself if I don’t look at it, but I’m 10% sure.” When I came for the interview and realized that I had colleagues and student life that was very much aligned with values and belief systems and really in a place to make a difference, then I was like, “Oh, you know, maybe this could work” and [the city] was very different from what I expected it to be.

Despite the uncertainty, while transitioning to their director roles, Marie, Rachel, and Emma shared in later stories how they have experienced job satisfaction. This will be expanded upon later in this chapter. Interestingly, this category, opportunity knocks, drew attention to how obtaining the director role was not on many of the participants’ radars. Some questioned if they would have even applied for the position if it had not, “I don’t want to say it fell in my lap, but it more or less did” (Joanne). Others even expressed
hesitation to accept the director role due to politics and other leadership challenges associated with the position. In fact, many of the participants inferred, if not outright stated, that it was happenstance and, some hard work, that landed them in the director role.

Ultimately the theme, “I was very aware of being the only woman:” navigating the cycle of sexism by examining their positionalities, highlighted the ways in which the participants navigated their positionalities (i.e., their gender) within the campus recreation space. The embedded nature of sexism was apparent throughout the system, their interpersonal relationships with those in power, and even in their job opportunities.

“Relationship-Focused:” Women’s Ways of Developing Their Own Leadership Styles

The second theme constructed from the participants’ narratives was “Relationship-Focused:” Women’s Ways of Developing Their Own Leadership Styles.” The predominant leadership style described by the participants was the collaborative leadership style with an emphasis on relationship building and authenticity. As leaders of their campus recreation departments, several stories were shared about challenges they experienced in this context. More specifically, these challenges focused on their interactions with the personnel they oversaw as opposed to challenges surrounding the power dynamic with their own supervisors, as discussed in the previous section.
Collaborative Leadership Style

When asked about their leadership, all of the participants described their leadership style as collaborative in nature. “Innately kind of collaborative, democratic leadership style,” shared Joanne.

Lisa reflected similarly, “I like consensus when it’s available…it’s a relationship-focused style.” As did Rachel, “I tend to value and want to collaborate.”

And Sam explained, “I’m the kind of person who wants to create consensus, wants to bring teams together, looking at people’s strengths. How do you build the best team with their strengths?”

Marie, then, expanded,

I really like to give ownership and autonomy to the people that work for me. If you were hired to do this job, I really want you to do it, and I want you to feel like you are responsible and you own it. Balancing that with the need to have the knowledge that I need to speak for them. But I view my job here as, my responsibilities are to provide vision, to provide resources to carry out that vision, and to reduce the barriers for people to carry out their vision and my vision. That’s how I really view my job. I’m a work in progress on... I aspire to give them all of the autonomy, all of the authority, and to sit back and let them do it. And I think in some areas, I’m kind of pushing in a little bit and saying like, “No, you’re doing it wrong,” but I’m also, at the end of the day, responsible. So finding the balance where they see that I’m not coming in to do it for them but yet guiding them as they grow and learn as a full-time professional how our university has to
work and how the rules and the laws in our state work. Putting in those safety
nets.

Sarah echoed this by saying, “It’s my job to find opportunities, remove barriers,
and then encourage and support.”

Emma also used the word “collaborative” to describe her leadership, but similar
to Jenny and Michelle, all three felt compelled to say something along the lines of, “It
depends on who you’re supervising and what they need, and also what your role is.” (Michelle).

“It’s morphed, right,” (Emma). Emma continued,

It has to do with, it’s different with different size organizations, for sure. And as
much as I would love to be super collaborative at all times, as organizations are
larger, it just isn’t possible to be as collaborative as I would like. And so I try to
be positive for sure, regardless of, you know, whatever, and value people first.

Jenny explained her thoughts from the perspective of what each individual needs,

“I think that you have to lead situationally.” She continued,

You have to meet people where they are. And some people need lots of direction,
and some people don’t need very much direction. So, I’m gonna say my
leadership style is situational, to the person’s needs and to the department’s needs,
whether we’re developing a program or starting something new. You have to take
in all the different parameters and form a strategy of how we are going to go from
here to here.
Even though some of the participants used different words to describe their leadership, the common thread throughout their responses reflected a collaborative leadership style. There was a particular focus on building relationships, valuing the individual, and providing guidance where needed.

This particular focus, an important component of collaborative leadership, highlighted the participants’ commitment to authenticity. This led to stories about the importance of adhering to their values within their leadership. Emma said,

“I’m going to make mistakes. I’m going to continue to learn, and so I’m cool with things being challenged. I think what is challenged is the critical piece. And again, coming back to values, being challenged is a really tough pill to swallow. And so, I had a staff member at [school omitted], challenge my values around [DEI]. And that’s just like, “Come on. (with emphasis)”

Michelle, too, took the time to express, “I’m not always right…I am 100% a flawed leader.” For both Emma and Michelle, part of their authenticity was not only recognizing their own humanness but also expressing the importance of transparency and humility in their leadership.

Sam shared how important it was for her and her team to remain authentic and steadfast in their values. “We focus on our values, our values as a department. We use those values to speak to our budget; we speak to relationships.”

Throughout each participant’s descriptions of their leadership style, there was special attention given to their collaborative nature, the value of relationships, and being
authentic within their leadership and to their values. In the final moments of her interview, Sam expressed, “I think as a woman leader to be able to be vulnerable and show emotion is okay. And I think being authentic and true to yourself on how you relate to people and how you work with people.” She concluded,

I think just knowing that I can be vulnerable, that I’m gonna say it like it is, and sometimes an F-bomb does come out. And not that I need to swear to be cool (laughing). But sometimes, you just need to express to people, “I actually don’t like how this is happening. I’m not a fan of the decision.” But guess what? “We’re going to dig in, and we’re going to do the best we can to deliver what we’ve been asked to deliver.” And so check the emotion, go get it all out, and then let’s do our work. And really, that’s how I work and who I am.

Leadership Challenges

After establishing the participant’s leadership styles, this category, leadership challenges, captured many of the stories related to the participants’ experiences leading others. These challenges included the COVID-19 pandemic, personnel difficulties, and issues with the university community.

COVID-19. For many, the first story that came to mind was related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Jenny recalled, “I mean, at the senior level leadership, like where I am now, I think the pandemic has been the most stressful.” She continued,

Mediocrity is not an option. And I think what’s happened during the pandemic or what happened during the pandemic in higher education, particularly, but I even see it... I think all of higher education but in collegiate rec. We had people who
came into coordinator positions who did their GA position all during COVID. And they think that that standard is working from home in their pajamas over Zoom.

For Jenny, the return to work has been the biggest challenge. Navigating these new expectations set by her workforce. “I guess people just demanded, higher education, entry level, aspiring folks, just demand that their lives be different…how I frame excellence and quality must change.”

Marie struggled to lead her team virtually due to all the outside demands and circumstances each individual was experiencing. She said,

So you tell me, “global pandemic, we got to shift online, we gotta go home.” I’m in. Let’s go, let’s do it. And not everybody is like that. And then, when you’re remote, how do you support the people that report to you who are low functioning and struggling? How do you support them? And initially, I had people who were really struggling with their emotional or mental health during that time, and I had people who were parenting three-year-olds and trying to trade off parenting with their partner and so they might need a meeting at 6 am or 8 pm. And navigating, “What? What? (with emphasis). Why am I starting work at 6 am and still working at 9 pm at night at home, in a pandemic!? That was very hard. That time period was very hard because people just really struggled and it was very hard to engage and try to support folks who were struggling when you couldn’t see them; you don’t know what the depths of the struggle is. And then of course, losing people
and supporting, there’s just no good way to do it. There’s no answers. There’s no right way. It just stinks.

For Joanne, her pandemic challenges resulted from continual uncertainty. She said,

More recently, with the pandemic, some tough decisions were made at the institutional level that directly impacted the department. Having to navigate that and luckily, we got through it, but had to take some hits along the way. So it was a tough year and a half there. That was some of the toughest... because there’s so much uncertainty, right? There’s still some uncertainty.

**Personnel.** Other instances of leadership challenges came as a result of personnel difficulties. “Personnel, anything involving personnel, I just never knew at what volume and depth this role have to deal with personnel issues,” exclaimed Rachel. She continued, “Things that come forward involving folks that you thought you knew, and ‘Wow, no idea.’ Resulting in severe, either legal or disciplinary ramifications. I think that’s been the most stressful for me.”

Emma shared a recent interaction between herself and one of her coordinators. She explained,

So one of our senior leadership team members…the one with the least amount of experience…he’s only been in his role for 18 months. He, I mean, [the previous director] is his mentor; is everything he wants to be. And so the offices here, or at the Rec Center are…it’s an amazing administrative space, but it’s all glass, like everybody’s offices. So I have one wall in my office, it’s three-sided glass, it’s
like a fishbowl. And for a variety of reasons, I’ve had folks in my office that have had emotions for... you know, like, one was leaving on their own accord, but just kind of upset about it. And it’s like, “Man, I just do not feel comfortable having people sit on this couch, crying in my office with everybody walking by.” So I decided that we were going to put some, translucent film up, so you could still see that there were people in the office but not see who it is. And so when I told our facilities guy, “Hey, I want to look at putting some of that translucent screen, you know, film?” He was super (with emphasis) resistant. And I’m like, “Whoa, dude.” “Well, we need to be able to see” (imitating a lower voice). I said, “Well, let’s choose one that lets you see that there’s someone in the office, but just not maybe what’s going on in there.” And so I found that very interesting. I’m like, “Okay, this isn’t about the film, right? It’s about the fact that [the previous director] designed these offices with great intention in 1994 when the tech industry was booming, and collaboration spaces were the thing.” Right? I tried to be patient with [the facilities guy], and, you know, say, “Hey, I think these were appropriate for when this was built, but less so now.” And you know, so he’s coming around; it’s just taking time.

For Marie, she shared a story that occurred during the time she was the associate director. She recalled,

There was a group of folks in leadership, they were all on the assistant director level, who were getting together for coffee like every couple of weeks, and it, from what I understand, sort of turned into this coffee meetup where there was a
lot of complaining. And that turned into “let’s write a formal document of complaints.” So they came back to the director at the time, or I guess the title was executive director and brought their two-page document of complaints that really pointed how much they had dislike for myself and [name omitted], who was my counterpart at the time. And it was shocking to me. I mean, I had said to my supervisor a couple of weeks before that, “something’s happening because no one’s talking to me. No one’s making small talk. I don’t know what’s going on.” And I’ve still never seen the list. I don’t really care to see the list. He let me know that it existed, that he had it. And it was a pretty awful couple of weeks, just he kept, my supervisor would come into my office and say, “This is crap. I don’t believe any of this. I don’t want to give this any energy.” And then a day or two later come in, “I think I figured out what you’ve done wrong. Why they don’t like you right now.” And initially, I was very devastated. And then after a couple of days, I was just like, “Forget this. I still have to come to work and do my job. What is happening (with emphasis)?” And I sat in here and I said to him finally, “Are you satisfied with my performance?” And he said, “Yes.” And I said, “Okay, then what? What now?” And in the end after this transpired over a couple of weeks, or a month, one by one, some of the folks who helped author this list were like, “I actually don’t want to be a part of this. I don’t want to do anything with this. I don’t want this.” And there were like two left at the end. And one of them asked me to go to coffee, and they cried and apologized because they didn’t
bring it to me personally. I still don’t know what the problem was, still to this day
don’t actually know what the problem was.

**University community and colleagues.** There were also challenges around
gaining buy-in from the university community. Sam explained,

> When I changed a basketball league that had been mostly faculty/staff. I said,
> “We need to start running an overall league not just for the faculty/staff.” So we
> started creating that drop-in opportunity like the one I talked about at the other
> job. Students started to come and started to be a part of it. We also did it at
> lunchtime because it’s somewhat of a commuter, not all commuter, but it’s a huge
> campus, so a lot of people. So we did a lunch-hour one and an evening one. And
> the lunch-hour one, they literally all went to the dean, wrote letters to the
> President that I ruined their basketball (laughing). Maybe did a little too much too
> fast because I also said we’re no longer gonna play shirts and skins because that is
> not inclusive as well. And maybe they weren’t ready for that in 2004. So my first
> sit-down with my boss, the dean, and he said, “Well, I think politically you could
> have had conversations with key people to set them up, key men, to set them up to
> help the other men.” He didn’t say “men,” he just called them “people,” but
> they’re all men. “To be able to adjust to this.” I looked at Matt and said, “Are you
telling me that in a school with almost 60,000 students, that a group of 20 men
that are paid by this university are going to change the student experience, or
would you rather have a student experience?” So I said, “I can talk to them, but
they’re just going to come back to you; they’ve already jumped over me. I really
feel that you and I need to have the conversation with them together, and I need you to demonstrate support.” And he just kind of looked at me and went, “Oh, I think this is why we hired you.” (laughing) Because I was just like…it was really one of my first bold, I felt bold, I felt, “Oh god did I just...” like I walked away I went, “Oh my gosh, I was authentically myself but did I go too far? Did I talk about that?” Afterward, a couple of years in, he said, “I just remember the first time you walked in and you said, ‘This is not what you hired me for. You hired me to create a student experience.’” And he goes, “I respected you before I hired you, but I respected you even more after you did that.” And I’m like, “Oh my gosh, for like two years I thought I overstepped the line, right?” And he gave me no indication in those two years that I did because he was always very supportive and was excited to see what was happening. But I always felt like that was the first time I had actually said, and I don’t think I ever did that at [school omitted]. I never had done that as an associate director or anything. But I was like, “If this is really going to be about students, then I’m the one that’s going to be able to do that.” So that was the example, probably the biggest in my head. There were little small, micro aggression-type things, and people nitpicking or trying to take little swipes or knock me in the knees a little bit. But just smaller things that were just happening, but once Matt stood with me on that larger topic, it moved through some things, and we started increasing our number of students. When I first started, we had about 8,000 students and when I left we were pushing 25,000, like contact with different students, unique students involved. So I think I did my job.
Yeah, it was literally in our conference room because I scheduled it on my turf. And Matt joined the meeting, he was at the meeting when they all came in, and they were all kind of surprised because they came in like (gesturing), they saw the agenda as they were walking in, but when they realized Matt was there as well. And then they all just talked to Matt and Matt’s like, “It’s not my meeting.” And I’m like, “Thank you, Matt.” And I said, “I want to respect that you want an activity. And I want that for you, too, because it’s important to be healthy.” And I said, “We have students that also want that activity as well in that space. That’s what their fees pay for. So how can you help me help the students to be more active and more involved?” Well, some of them just pushed back from the table (gesturing pushing back) and literally burning lasers through me. But there were one or two that were like, “Oh, you want some advice from us?” So, they kind of latched on to the reach of, you can help me help the students. And then others, you know, they’re like, “we’re never coming back here again,” and were really vocal. I think back now, they were probably in their 50’s then so, I think of my 80-year-old dad saying stuff now and I’m thinking they were, they were just, saying things like... and I know now the word would be “privileged,” But at that time, it wasn’t the word they used. But the two that stuck with us, actually, became advocates through the years that I was there. The one guy said, “Well, I probably graduated before you were born.” And I’m like, “Oh, what year did you graduate? Did you graduate from [school omitted]?” And he’s like, “Yeah, 1964.” And I said, “Well, your degree and I are the same age.” So you know, I just tried
to approach it, not like I brought my power with me, but as in, “You understand that if you run to him (referencing Matt), you’re not gonna get anything because we’re in alignment,” is really what I was trying to do. So yeah, it was bumpy along the way, but lots more students were engaged and involved.

Throughout this story, Sam’s leadership was being challenged by others in the campus community. In this context, she had the authority, and the prerogative, to change student-fee-funded programming as she saw fit. Not only was the lunchtime basketball league not inclusive to students in general, but it was also not inclusive to women. Yet, she faced significant pushback and microaggressions.

In a different story Sam shared, she has also been challenged by a woman colleague. She explained,

I wanted to advance wellness, I can’t remember if I talked about this, but I wanted to advance wellness. And I could see a vision of how we could do some things and put things together. And I was just checking around, talking to different people, and another woman took that as a threat. She is the director of the Health Center. That was her role, and what was I doing in her lane? Actually, I didn’t get that from her directly. I got it through the VP we both report to. And I was told that wellness wasn’t my lane and that I needed to get out of it. I needed to stop trying to advance wellness at [school omitted] because it was [her] job. And that wasn’t in my profile. And I was like, “well, that makes no sense at all.” Yeah, and it was this weird... so my style of leadership is to get people engaged and excited and point forward; I can see where we’re going down the road. I don’t know how
we’re getting there, but I’m excited to have people with those skills and abilities to help us build the steps along the way and get there. And my enthusiasm for that was taken as trying to take over, and that was another woman who went sideways directly to the boss, to the VP, to say, “push her out of that.” we still haven’t advanced anything, by the way, that was four years ago. The challenge to my leadership that I felt in that, I felt disrespected (with emphasis). So disrespected as, one, having been in this profession for over 30 years and was currently the president-elect of NIRSA. In my full on role in helping to write the wellness research statement where we were working with NASPA, NACA, ACHA, the college health. We were working with a lot of organizations to create this wellness statement. That was our wellbeing statement, that was about if you’re going to do research, let’s put a lens on it, let’s put a wellbeing lens on it. If we’re going to try to do some collaborative work across organizations, health and wellbeing is so important, mental health and all of those components. So I’m leading this nationally, and then I’m being told on my own campus to get out of that lane? He didn’t give me a lane to go to, by the way, he was just like, “not your lane, not your lane.” And so I was insulted, I felt disrespected. I have a...am I allowed to swear in your thing? I have a fucking Ph.D.!

Throughout this theme, “relationship-focused:” women’s ways of developing their own leadership styles, one learned about how the participants developed their leadership style as well as the challenges they faced while executing their leadership.
The participants prided themselves on their collaborative, relationship-focused leadership style while also feeling frustrated by the pushback they received from those they led.

“Life is Bigger Than Just Work:” Work and Life Interface

The third theme constructed from the participants’ narratives was “Life is Bigger Than Just Work:” Work and Life Interface. The participants shared stories about the continued process of finding balance. Over the course of their careers, many of the participants expressed stories related to how their roles as directors of campus recreation have benefited themselves and their families. Some also expressed how the impact of their work satisfies them despite significant sacrifices made throughout their careers and feeling unsatisfied with higher education as a whole.

Finding Balance

In the process of finding balance, stories were shared about the intentional process of setting boundaries. Joanne said, “I think it’s just a matter of being intentional about setting boundaries. For example, I don’t check email when I leave work, after work hours. It’s not that I’m not reachable. If there’s an emergency, I absolutely will respond.” She continued,

I can’t necessarily turn off my work brain, so a lot of times, I’m still thinking about or processing things work-related outside of work, and outside of work hours. But being intentional, setting boundaries, and being clear with those. I don’t check emails. I don’t generally send emails after work hours, and I don’t want staff to; I don’t expect them to respond.
In this process of setting boundaries, Joanne also described the importance of managing the expectations and boundaries from supervisors,

I think that expectation for boundaries goes both ways. You have to manage that down and up. I don’t want to have to deal with a request from our division leadership after-hours unless it’s an emergency. So kind of making sure that those boundaries are also set from a higher-ups approach.

Rachel, too, spoke about the intentionality about establishing the balance between work and home. She said,

So the way that I ended up trying to keep that balance was really, intentionally taking time off like so vacations would be, at times it would be fun vacations, but vacation sometimes would be that she and I would go to Girl Scout camp for a week.

Sarah took a slightly different approach and sought to describe her experience as an integration rather than a balancing act. She explained,

Not “balanced” as much as “integrated.” And I... and I really appreciate you rescheduling with me to talk today versus yesterday. For me that that’s been a huge part of it is that, as I mentioned learning things from my predecessor, I don’t define myself as “Director of Campus Recreation.” That’s one of my identities, and that’s part of my overall picture of me. But I don’t have one of those, I guess in my mind, a hierarchical sense of, “I’m a mom, I’m a wife, I’m a daughter, I’m a sister, I’m a director....” But then I also know that in order for me to feel good about my week coming up and how my family situation works. One of my
favorite times is Sunday night from 9 to 10 on my couch or in my recliner, where I plan out my week as to what I want to accomplish, what I want to get done, and what I want to do. And some people are like, “Oh, it’s still Sunday. It’s still your time.” It’s like, “Mmm, no.” Because by taking that hour Sunday night as part of my routine, the rest of my week is so much better, you know? And so for me, it’s just that, it’s that interconnectedness of... I like what I do, you know, and I guess that’s the other part of me too, and why it doesn’t define me, that’s not all I am. It’s supposed to bring me joy. It’s supposed to bring me happiness, but I also... I’m in charge of that, you know? And so just try to map those experiences where they intersect, but they don’t, they don’t have to have like, “Well, you’ve spent 80 hours at work, so now you need to spend 80 hours here.” I don’t, I don’t operate that way.

When Sarah spoke about integrating all the various aspects of her life she explained how her identity is greater than just her job. It’s the intersection of all the parts of her coming together to bring her joy.

On the other hand, for some of the participants, this is a work in progress, “I’m working on it, but I don’t work all weekend. I don’t work at night generally when I’m at home. That that’s a balance that works for me” (Marie).

Sam shared,

I’ve actually put more boundaries on it, than I did when the kids were younger. I actually try to get out of the office a little bit earlier than I used to. I don’t commit to as many things on the weekends as I used to. And so we find time, find things
to do around the area in the evenings and those kinds of things. So right now creating a balance.

For both Marie and Sam, they were experiencing significant life changes, which were upending their previous sense of balance. Marie had recently adopted her daughter, so navigating that transition into motherhood has caused her whole schedule to be upended. Her new normal and her new sense of balance were still being established. Sam was on the opposite end of motherhood; her youngest son recently started college. So determining a new sense of balance for her and her husband was also a work in progress.

In all situations, the work environment and the support received from supervisors and peers were pivotal for the participants. “I always had supportive supervisors in that too, which is huge when you have that flexibility and the opportunity,” shared Sarah.

Lisa also expressed how important the flexible work environment is for her and her family. She said,

I think from a flexible work environment, this is the right kind of place for me because I’ve got a supervisor who believes heavily in family, he’s just a big supporter of making time and space for your family. He has, in almost every single evaluation I’ve ever had with him, he talked to me about, “You can’t get time back. So make sure that you’re investing your time into your husband and your relationships with your kids and your time with your kids.” And so, anytime that I take time off, and I manage my own calendar, so there’s a lot of flexibility to be able to figure out how to do it myself.
For Michelle, an important part of the support she received was in her ability to bring her children to work with her occasionally. While at her institution, it is typically against policy her supervisor allowed her to do so anyway. She shared,

I was very fortunate that my supervisor allowed for them to be at work. So if I had a swim meet that started at 6 am, they would be here with me before the swim meet started. Then I would take them to daycare and then leave in time to get them. It was perfectly fine for me to leave at five o’clock every day because I had to pick them up at 5:30 or I had to pay a late fee. You know I wasn’t being paid very well when they were little and daycare...daycare is very expensive! Childcare is high dollars. So I think that there was a balance… I believe it is against university policy for your children to be at work with you. At the same time, we don’t work in eight to five. We don’t work a schedule in which allows families to really care for their children. And we don’t pay enough for people to pay for extra childcare, in my opinion. You know, if somebody’s making $42,000, they’re right above the poverty line. And so, it was not something that I expected when I was hired, as part of the job, that I would be able to bring my children to work. But there were some fun nighttime events, and he was like, “Just bring him. Let him be here. You’re teaching swim lessons, have him come to swim lessons.”

Finally, stories were shared about the importance of having a supportive partner or close family to help care for their children. “I have it an excellent partner in my spouse, where we, we truly share the parenting responsibilities. And so I’ve just been extremely fortunate that way,” explained Sarah.
Lisa also referenced her supportive spouse by sharing,

I have a spouse that, we’re good about sitting down and going through the weekly calendar and figuring out who can do what. We’ve got our kids into a million activities after school and so we’re, it’s, I’ve got a really willing partner. He works full time too, and he’s meeting heavy as well. He’s the vice president of product for a technology company and his schedule is equally as crazy but at different times so we work well together.

While Rachel was a single mother, she expressed how lucky she was to live close to her family. She said,

It definitely was a challenge. I’ll share with you that I divorced when she was probably one month old… so it’s really been the two of us; luckily, my immediate family, my mom and my sister live close by, so as she was growing up, they were always around and available.

Ultimately, the key components of finding and maintaining balance between their work and home lives consisted of a few different components. They relied on their own intentionality of setting boundaries but also the flexibility of their work environment and their supervisors. The support from their families was crucial in this pursuit as well.

**Work-Life Benefit?**

This category brings to light the various ways in which the participants benefitted, or not, from their work within campus recreation. In many ways, their position afforded them the ability to access recreational facilities, set good examples for their families, and embrace the joy of being around college students. In other ways, the participants shared
how the impact of their work satisfied them. Yet, there was a sense of hesitation when asked about their job satisfaction. The impact of their job on the campus community assuaged the incredible hard work, long hours, and struggle they experienced throughout their careers.

Many of the participants’ stories related to the true benefit(s) associated with being the director of campus recreation. Some described the benefits of being around college students and having access to recreation. “My personal life benefits from that because it’s kept me young,” Jenny exclaimed. She continued,

I decided college is so fun that I could get paid to come back to college every day. And now I just get paid to come to school, and so I’ve benefited from working in higher education because like, who doesn’t? Like who doesn’t like to be around people who are driven? Think about this, every day, we come to our college campuses, and the person, the young person that’s coming here, has dreams and aspirations about what they want to be next. They want to be a doctor or a lawyer or a social worker, but you know what? They got to get through this class and that class and this test and that paper and those are daily things. So, when you are around somebody who wants to be better tomorrow than they were today. I’m on fire. Like that is fun.

Rachel, too, explained that “I always like coming to campus, seeing students. I mean, everybody was learning and growing; it was a very positive environment.” She continued,
The environment, the diversity. I mean, I’m biracial, my mom’s Asian, and my dad is Caucasian. And I just feel like there’s such acceptance, and you meet people of all sorts, shapes, and kinds. Everybody’s here. And I don’t think that I would be as confident as an individual without having been in this environment as much as I have these last 40 years.

Like Jenny and Rachel, Marie also described the personal benefits of interacting with college students,

I find a lot of value in the opportunities I have to interact with college students. I learned a lot from them. It’s very interesting to stay in the know about what’s happening…people in that 18 to 24 range. There’s just so much value in that experience. And it helps me in my personal life by staying in tune with what’s really happening in the world. What is it really like? …And I hope that as my child grows up, I’m able to be a better parent to her because I am seeing what’s happening with current college students. I know it helps me be a better aunt to my nieces and nephew because they’re 17, and I can talk to them realistically about what it’s like to finish high school and go be an adult. I know what it’s like, right? I see it every single day.

In addition to the benefits Marie experiences from learning from college students, she also explained that “My husband is a type one diabetic. So managing his health is incredibly important. And I have used my leverage to influence him to come and use our facilities.”
Access to the campus recreation facilities and activities was another key component of the benefits enjoyed by the participants.

Lisa shared,

Living in a college town, first of all, is such a fun way of raising kids. There’s just always, whether it’s sports, or plays, or just cool college kids that my kids think they get to hang out with. I think just living... Just being in a college town. It’s so fun to raise kids here, and there are little festivals all the time. There’s just stuff that they get to do because of where we live. And then working in Campus Recreation. I’ll give an example, during the winter, when we shut down and some of our maintenance staff might, they might not be the ones that are going to do the walkthrough every day. Then I’ll come up to walk through and check the facilities, and so, of course, you bring the kids up to the gym, what better place? It’s not like, “We have to go to my mom’s work and sit in an office.” They’re like shooting baskets running around, and so I think having the facilities that we manage, they see it as a fun place.

Emma explained something similar in that her kids would enjoy riding on the gator with her at work. “They knew all of our staff, we had big parties in our backyard...they loved it; they had access to 30, mid-20-year-olds...that gave them all the attention they could ever want.” Even Emma’s husband benefited because he “played every intramural sport there was to play, even until, like, four years ago.”

Sam felt that her children and husband have greatly benefited from her career as well. She shared,
I think being in higher education, gave my kids access that other kids don’t have to see what it’s all about. I was a first gen student, so like I didn’t have much guidance. So I think for one, it’s been able to show my family what could be and what you could access and what you could go do. I think, for my husband, it’s in some ways, given him this ability to be with the kids in a very different way than if I hadn’t been working in this field and in this job. He has actually got to be the stay-at-home dad and be with the kids and got that experience. And he’s probably more of the personality for it than me (chuckling). I love my kids, but I don’t know, if I could have stayed home every day with them. I needed something.

Let’s see what else... I think, for us, even just living in two different countries, we had that opportunity for my job to take us back to Canada. My kids experienced growing up in the states and partly in Canada; I think that that’s been a benefit of the job. And I think just access to recreation and those type of things. They know what’s out there, and they go look for it now. My husband’s also in recreation, so he has a recreation degree, as well. So he has worked Parks and Rec a lot, and now he works at Boys and Girls Clubs. So I think my kids have always been, “Mum and dad have always gone back and helped with things in the evening or on the weekends.” We used to volunteer with organizations with minor baseball or Girl Scouts, Girl Guides in Canada, and so my kids see that “Oh, the way that mom organizes and talks to people at work, she helps the baseball organization do that too.” Or that kind of thing. Those have been some of the benefits of the skills
that I’ve learned in this to take to the community and help the community be better.

In this story, Sam also alluded to the importance of how some of the skills she has learned in her career are transferrable to other areas of her life.

Beyond the benefits of being around college students and having access to education and recreation, others described how the impact of their work brought deep satisfaction, which benefited them beyond their work life. Emma explained,

I actually feel like it’s a privilege to have the work that we do. It’s such a tangible thing, in terms of impact, that we can point to really tangible outcomes of how we’re impacting students and student life on campuses… For example, a student at [school omitted], came back to me, gosh, maybe 10 years later, and he was in our industry for a while... And he just said, “You don’t know this, but I was really struggling my freshman year, my first year, and I had a job at the dining commons, and it was miserable and awful.” And somehow, he got involved. And then, he was one of those cases where he got super involved and then went into the field and did very, very well. And that narrative of, “The way you treated me and the way you modeled leadership impacted my entire career path.” It’s like, “Whoa!”

Emma was deeply touched by the individual who reached out to express their gratitude. It was also a reminder for her of the positive impacts of campus recreation that happen daily for many students.
Jenny also shared the significance of the work she and her team does for the campus community,

You know, it’s not without its stresses and challenges, but at the end of the day, it’s about relationships and connections. And I honestly know that what I do matters. I may not know everybody’s story that comes in and out of here as a student who uses the facility. But what I do matters; what we do as a rec team, it matters. It makes a difference in the lives of people every single day. And that’s like, dang! It can’t get much better than that.

And Sam reaffirmed the significance of campus recreation for the student population. She said,

I love being able to create environments and experiences for students. So they can discover more about themselves and find their people. They’re gonna remember this versus biology class, right? We know that from research, but helping that is satisfying to me.

Although the participants reflected fondly on the impact of their work on the campus community, this also highlighted that embedded in the nature of their work were the difficulties of working in higher education. Sam expressed,

I’m not satisfied in higher ed because I truly believe higher education needs to change. And they need to recognize that their systems and structures are blocking access to a lot of people and that the structure of how you learn needs to evolve.

She continued,
My “not satisfied” is this little personal part inside of me that I think I can be; I can help other people in a way more than when I’m helping students right now. Plus, I miss being with the students. Some days, I just put myself on the schedule for intramurals and go out there and hang out. And actually I do. They know who I am. Because I’m always I’m out, I go hang out, and check things out. And our student employees in the building are like, “Oh, here comes [Sam] to chat for a while (laughing). But I do love what I do. And we focus on our values, or our values as a department. We use those values to speak to our budget, we speak to relationships, we know that we’re educators even though this part of campus is like “Oh, that’s just where you go play.” You know, but we what we value and what we value for each other. And so I think I’m satisfied there, but I’m not satisfied when I have to go beyond my department when you have to go meet with across campus.

Marie echoed this dissatisfaction with higher education. Particularly from the perspective of the realities of the current structure of the system,

I really enjoy what I do, but I feel like sometimes, with the amount that I have in front of me that I can’t get done every day, it’s a lot. You know, if I went to the private sector, would I be paid twice as much? Or could I work in the private sector and make what I’m making now and do half as much?

Finally, despite the benefits and satisfaction, and dissatisfaction experienced as a result of their roles, there were stories shared about the sacrifices made throughout their careers.
Rachel recalled a time she was sacrificing a lot to advance her career, yet wished she had been more present for her daughter,

I would say probably when I was going through some of my earlier transitions, getting more responsibility, the portfolio was growing, more people that I’d be in charge of, and more programs or revenue to generate. And my daughter was young, right? There were probably times when I was really working way more hours than I should have and not being there for her as much as I could have. I know when she was in junior high, for instance, there were some things that she was working through. I mean, it’s just a crazy age. God bless any junior high teacher… But yeah, I know there were some things happening, and I just, at that point, wish I had more time to be with her because I think she really needed me... and... needed somebody, and if I wasn’t there, it was “I want to go talk to somebody about my feelings.” And I was like, “That should be me,” but then I wasn’t really available. So I feel bad about that. And I think a lot of that had to do with just I need to be on the job; I have to get back to work. So if I could relive that little period, I would probably have done things differently.

Michelle chuckled, reflecting on her career and the sacrifices she and her family made, “I guarantee you my children will say this, not as present as they probably wanted me.” She explained that many times her children had to wait longer than usual to be picked up from daycare because of the long, non-traditional work hours. “I probably didn’t need to work as hard as I did, but I like to work…I think it’s just wanting, the desire, to do things for the people that are around me. That motivates the work,” she
reflected. Here we see the tension that so many of the participants felt - the sacrifices made as a result of the nature of the work, and the reflection that maybe they worked harder than necessary alongside the benefits, satisfaction, and motivation they gained from their job.

“Rhythm of Back and Forth:” Negotiating Personal and Professional Impact of Being Women Leaders

The fourth theme constructed from the participants’ narratives was the “rhythm of back and forth:” negotiating personal and professional impact of being women leaders. Stories were shared about major life hardships and the physical manifestations of these and other stressful experiences. Importantly, several of the participants expressed the importance of developing resilience and practicing self-care in the face of those hardships and work stress.

Collision of Life and Work

Outside of the day-to-day negotiations of family activities and work responsibilities, many of the participants experienced significant life hardships that directly collided with their work. Stories were shared about the difficulties they faced and the perspective they gained. Three participants expressed navigating the challenges of having a sick child

Emma shared, “Our daughter had struggled tremendously with mental health challenges… I mean, really awful anxiety, depression, with OCD.” She continued,

There were so many during [my daughter’s] stuff where my husband and I would be like, “I gotta go; I have an appointment.” So many.
Yet, as a result of this significant life hardship, Emma explained,

Once we got through [my daughter’s] stuff, I think it shifted my perspective so dramatically that... like now, if she were to call, I would probably be like, “Oh, hey, can you wait a second?” And they know during the workday, sometimes it’s hard for me to answer, but if they call, I’m gonna answer, and so they treat that with the right respect… I let people know, on the front end, “Hey, I will interrupt meetings if I need to,”…

Lisa also experienced the difficulties of navigating work responsibilities due to a sick child. She shared,

A couple of years ago, five years ago now, I was in the director position, and my daughter was diagnosed with diabetes; it was a very abrupt situation where she was in the hospital for multiple days and then came out of a hospital. It’s like, your life will never be the same because she will never be able to eat another bite of food without managing insulin... that’s just... and so whatever was going on, she was we rushed her to the hospital. There was no plan of I’m not going to be in office for the week, we’re going to be in the hospital with her and then coming back. I couldn’t put her back in daycare because no one was trained to manage diabetes at her daycare specifically, so she had to come with me everywhere. And that was the summer before she started kindergarten.

She explained that as a result of being pulled in two different directions during this time, she sometimes felt guilty about not doing enough at work. Yet, “The team here rallied and had my back for everything, and to this day, that’s how everybody is here.
When something happens that you need to drop everything and prioritize something else, then people step in and pick it up.” She continued, “It’s a team around me that really is balancing life together.”

Similar to Emma and Lisa, Sam, too, had to care for a sick child. Sam’s daughter was diagnosed with cancer twice while she was the director of campus recreation at her first institution.

She was in the [location omitted] hospital, which was like three blocks from my office. And so the interesting thing is, I thought, so it happened twice. So we had a first round and then it came back in the second round. So I thought I could go; after we got through this first part, I thought I could hang out with her. She was having her morning treatment, and then she’d be hanging out with nurses. And I go back to the office...and then I come back. I don’t know why on earth I thought I could do it, but I kept doing it. But I couldn’t really function because my heart and my brain were still over at the Children’s Hospital. And I don’t think I was... I think my staff cared, but I think it got to a point where they’re like, “You just need to take some time off because you’re not helping us. And please know that we care, but you also aren’t emotionally functioning well when you’re here.” And so I was actually able to take three months off; …There was a program where you could actually take up to three months’ leave for an illness of a family member with the full benefits and pay. So I ended up doing that. And that gave me the reprieve, I think, to get focused back on my family and my daughter and try to... try to not be so... thinking I could do both, back and forth... Sometime in the same
two years... my son got checked into the boards in hockey from behind, and he ended up... boarding him off the ice and neck brace and everything. Yeah, that’s called trauma! … And then the second time... cancer came back within three months of being clear. And so that second time, we almost had this rhythm of, she did her thing and then while she was sleeping, I would go back over to the office, work with my team and actually kind of get into helping them. And then I would walk back across campus to the hospital, and it was kind of this rhythm of back and forth. And it’s more because I cared about my team, than I cared about what was happening in the rest of the college. And it was about... we created this whole Live Well Program at that time… that helped me, as in, we have a goal of doing things with students and we’re taking what we’re doing and we’re... at that point we were reaching students. And I think I was able to latch on to that joy of work. And then when the other stuff got too stressful and I got through a meeting, I would escape… It was from August 2011 till July 4; she calls it her independence day, her last chemo treatment of 2013.

Sam found her rhythm throughout this experience with her daughter, yet the mental and emotional strain was significant. She expressed that the stress of having a sick child is significantly distinctive from other types of stress, but it was hard to put into words. Yet, during this time, being able to find some joy in her work was helpful in her coping process.

Other participants experienced different types of hardships. For Marie, this was in the form of a failed adoption. She said,
[This] plays into the pre- and post-failed adoption. Because when that happened, I had this view when the baby was placed with us, I was like, okay, until we’ve passed this five-day revocation period where birth mom can’t change her mind, I’m just going to fake... I’m just going to pretend like I’m still working. I’m not going to tell everyone because I don’t want to make it a thing. And then in the midst of that, some things started happening. And I contacted him and was like, “I can’t do this. Tell everyone not to contact me. I don’t want to talk about this.” I went cold turkey for five weeks and had no contact. Didn’t check my email. No nothing.

She, too, experienced a shift in her perspective as it related to how she viewed herself in the workspace. Marie found that “Nothing happened. There was no fallout from that. And so that was very freeing...”

Throughout these stories of significant hardship, the participants described a shift in their perspective. In many ways, these experiences seemed to rightly order their priorities. As Marie explained, taking care of herself and her family did not come with a huge fallout. Not only was she able to pick up where she left off when she returned to work, but she also expressed how she has prioritized other life events with the same results.

**Physical Manifestations of Stress**

As a result of many of the hardships and stressful life experiences shared in the previous category, nearly all participants expressed stories about the physical manifestations of stress. In this context, “life” refers to all aspects of life, as many of the
participants were not able to tease apart which stressors (i.e., work or life) were causing their stress-related health challenges.

Jenny shared her struggles with major anxiety for a couple of years, “It was anxiety at work… I had personal things going on. So that was a little bit of a combination of personal life affecting work and work affecting personal life.” She continued,

I was sitting in my office one afternoon, one evening actually working late. And I got a call on the radio, it was sitting on my desk, that we had had an accident in the climbing gym. I hadn’t felt well kind of all day. I just felt weird and so I went downstairs to the climbing gym. Everything was fine. This kid torqued his elbow, it was gross… Then I started to walk back to my office, and my boss, I’m talking to him, and all of sudden I started to like see the world just go (gesturing). And my heart, I was having PVCs, premature ventricular contractions. And so they thought I was having a heart attack. So this EMS lady was like… “Here, chew all this aspirin,” and so I was like, “Ohkayy…” So yes, my work impacted my health because for me, part of that was I was contemplating figuring out my personal life, my partner and work and I was having an anxiety attack.

Emma, too, described a mental health challenge. For some context, she explained that as a result of her daughter’s severe mental health challenges, her daughter was admitted to a residential treatment place with intensive clinical intervention, which was “super transformational.” Yet, Emma said,

She went there as sick as a kid could be, you know, several suicide attempts. And really, you know, when you think of the worst of mental health, that’s what we
were in for five years. Right? And so you know, what happened, I think, and it took me a minute to unpack this at [school omitted] was, I think I needed a massive reset button because I actually think I had PTSD from... our house that we lived in of, “Oh, gosh, yeah, that’s where I had to pull her off the roof.” So it wasn’t even so much the job; it’s just life circumstances.

Emma ultimately ended up changing jobs. She moved to a different part of the country. However, there was a year in which Emma lived separately from her family due to her daughter finishing high school. “Which ended up being really, really, really good for me as an individual.”

Sam shared that she has experienced significant stress-related health issues. Regarding her daughter’s cancer treatment, “Balancing with my daughter and the stress at work... I probably really hurt myself physically, physically and mentally; obviously, mentally, it was really hard.” Throughout her career, Sam also shared other significant stressful experiences that she directly linked to health complications. For example, when she gave birth to her daughter, there was no FMLA available. She was only given three weeks’ leave; fortunately, she was able to catch Christmas break.

Right before [going back to work], I want to say on that Saturday, my face started feeling like, “I should take some Benadryl or something,” it was really odd. And so I ended up going to the doctor on a Monday morning, and they’re like, “Stress has most likely caused this half-face paralysis [Bell’s Palsy].” And I don’t know if the combination of having a young child and going back to work...

She was ultimately able to get her Bell’s Palsy under control with medical intervention.
A bit later in her career, Sam started experiencing vertigo. She shared how it manifests during stressful times,

The first time it happened was in a really stressful time at [school omitted].

Shortly before I applied for the job at [school omitted], in that where I couldn’t change anything, couldn’t do anything. Interestingly enough, do you know the book Five Dysfunctions of a Team by Patrick Lencioni? So I had the leadership team, at [school omitted], including the director, read that book. Because we were just struggling with the director to see his role in how we were functioning. And so I met with him and said, “Hey, did you finally get the book,” I didn’t say, “finally,” but “You got the book read and want to see which character...” because there are five characters in the fable, “Which character, are you?” And he’s like, “Well, none of them.” And I like, “No, we all contribute to dysfunction. We all have a role.” Right? And so literally, it was [inaudible]. I went home, and it was like, “I don’t know what to do with this.” He doesn’t see himself and the stress of it was building up. This is why I started to look for another job. And the Monday morning and I literally stood up and fell over, I had vertigo so bad. I couldn’t stand up. And at that time, I was like, “Oh, my God, what happened? What weird thing do I have now?” But interestingly enough, as stress ramps up at work, I get vertigo on my left side... So in ‘18, when I was here, and he [her supervisor] was telling me that wellness wasn’t in my lane [a story shared in a previous theme]. I actually had some vertigo starting, and I’m like, “Oh my gosh, it’s my body
saying, ‘Listen to me, you dumb idiot. Take care of yourself. The stress isn’t worth it. Shut it down.’

If general mental health struggles, Bell’s Palsy, and vertigo was not enough, Sam also described her struggle with sleep apnea.

The other stress thing is what I just discovered, and apparently, it’s probably been for more than four years, even pre-COVID, but it’s ramped up over COVID. A little bit with my age, too, is sleep apnea. But I had no idea like 47 times an hour, I wasn’t breathing. My doctor’s, like, “Here’s the combination of things... So this stress that you’re putting on yourself with...” I mean COVID was like, we were open, we were running, but nobody on campus wanted to partner and that kind of thing. And then she’s like, “Age and other things.” But I feel like my body tells me to just, “I’m gonna lay you down on the floor until you smarten up, get a clue that you’re doing too much.” And your body is like, “We can’t take this; we need to recharge.”

Although, Jenny’s Emma’s, Sam’s stress-related health challenges were a direct manifestation of their life experiences, Marie and Rachel explained that stress can cause some of their pre-existing conditions to flare. For Marie, stress would manifest itself physically in her body. She shared,

It’s triggered different relapses with an eating disorder that I’ve struggled with. It’s not the cause; that’s not the root cause of those things. But before I had better behavioral outlets or coping mechanisms or therapy, the stress in my job would exacerbate or bring those things to the surface.
Rachel shared a story when her ulcerative colitis, a chronic condition, was triggered and the difficulty of getting that under control.

I do know that there is some research that connects stress to a condition that I have ulcerative colitis. And there was a period where I think I was working way too much. I wasn’t paying attention to my health. I wasn’t probably exercising, eating right, getting enough sleep and had a couple of years where my condition really was triggered and it... I didn’t have to go to the hospital, but I was definitely seeing many specialists and elevating my medication routines to try and get on top of it. Just physically just worn down. But wouldn’t stop. You know, that’s the other crazy part of that equation, right?

Despite the difficulty of her situation, Rachel expressed that even though she was so worn down and her body was reacting to the stress, it was incredibly difficult for her to stop working so hard.

Michelle also described a time when her identity as a “hard worker” collided with her second pregnancy.

I got pregnant with [my daughter]. That was a harder pregnancy. I am a hard worker. And at the time we were doing a ton of swim meets and summer conferences. I got pregnant with [my daughter], I think in January, so wasn’t due until October, and in that time span, I did six swim meets that were weekend-long, one of which was the [conference omitted] swim meet. During one of those things, we had these really heavy relay take-off pads that sat on top of the blocks, and I lifted one up and after that I had... I thought I was gonna lose [my daughter]
had a little bit of bleeding. I made some bad choices as a parent, as a pregnant lady. I didn’t lift those up after that; that was someone else’s job to do that. So during those six swim meets, those summer conferences was ridiculously hot…so [my daughter] was a sick baby in general. I think at my 20-week ultrasound there was not enough fluid to sustain her. So I went to a high-risk doctor; the high-risk doctor said, “You know your baby may have Down Syndrome or Spina Bifida or one of those things on the triple screen, ask your doctor.” Asked the doctor…She didn’t; everything was fine. But it was just a bad, a bad experience. I was not feeling well. I was very fortunate... Oh, this was the other thing, I gained four satellite pools during that time. So I had two where the [location omitted] field complexes, one where the creamery is, and one at [location omitted]. So I was fortunate that they gave me a third graduate assistant to help me manage all of those many things. But [my daughter], I had to get steroid shots, I finished my last big swim meet, and [my daughter] came about… water broke the next Monday, was in the hospital for a week. They wanted to get to 32 weeks. So she came out at 32 weeks. Three pounds, six ounces (tearing up). I was out of work for four months.

During this period of time, Michelle was the breadwinner of her family. She also expressed her enjoyment of working hard and how that was fulfilling and motivating. For Michelle’s story, her difficult pregnancy was much more complicated than a direct link to her stressful work experiences. Obviously, straining and lifting heavy objects during pregnancy can directly affect the health of a pregnancy, as Michelle experienced. One
may also assume that due to her high-risk pregnancy, she may have needed to be on some semblance of bed rest. Unfortunately, the pressure to work, the desire to work, and perhaps other unshared factors potentially exacerbated her high-risk pregnancy.

Fortunately, not all participants shared stories about significant stress-related health challenges. However, that is not to say they were not affected by stress in other ways. Lisa explained, “There are certain times when I will run myself into the ground and not get enough sleep. And I think I have kind of conditioned myself to live off of that lesser sleep time (chuckling).”

Sarah shared, “The other day my eye was twitching, which I know is fully from stress, and I need to breathe and go work out, so that’s not happening…some physiological effects of not handling things on my plate at certain times.”

Ultimately, when asked, every participant shared a story about how stress manifests itself in their bodies. Whether it was a significant health complication or a more minor eye twitch, each participant has been overwhelmed by stress to the point where their bodies’ defenses cannot maintain the pressure under which they are operating. This leads to the final category of the fourth theme where stories of resilience and self-care are shared.

**Importance of Resilience and Self-Care**

The category of the importance of resilience and self-care captured the ways in which the participants defined resilience, how one obtains resilience, and some of the strategies they used to care for themselves.
**Resilience.** For all of the participants, when asked to define what resilience means to them, they used much of the same adage we hear across the board when considering resilience. Sarah, Marie, and Lisa were more to the point in their response.

“The ability to navigate and cope with the set of circumstances that you’re given at that time,” said Sarah.

“To be able to bounce back from a setback a little bit faster, or just feel the speed bump in the road and keep going,” defined Marie.

Lisa said, “Bouncing back and still being able to thrive.”

Other participants spent a bit more time considering the question, offering additional insights, even questioning resilience altogether. Both Emma and Michelle expressed the necessity of resilience.

Emma responded,

Resilience is about having enough sense of self and that sweet spot, to be able to accept feedback as gifts, to be able to accept rough patches in life or professionally. To know, this too shall pass. To have faith in yourself and those around you that you’ll figure your way out of it. Even if it takes a little bit longer, challenging situations sharpen our resolve and really help us distill what’s important to us. When [it] gets too long. We prioritize, and we take care of things that are the most important. When we’re faced with challenges or struggles, we prioritize, and we take care of the stuff that matters the most to us. And so, I think resiliency is an outcome from necessary struggle, quite frankly. And so I think oftentimes, particularly like my generation of parents, and forward, we’re trying
to protect our kids from anything bad and “Ooh, what a disservice.” A huge disservice and struggle make people capable, quite frankly.

Michelle explained,

We spend a lot of time talking about how do we help students to be resilient?
Well, the only way you can help someone to be resilient is for them to go through some shit, right? I mean, that’s just, you have to figure out how you’re going to manage your shit (laughing)…Who are they on the other side?

Jenny said

Showing up, not quitting, realizing that I’ll find another gear. Or I might have to downshift, or I have to just pretend that I don’t care. Or... And that gives you bandwidth to just recover and gain perspective. And then I think, I really think if I had to... what resilience to me is, “If you quit, they win.” So persistence.

Sam not only shared her definition of resilience, but she was willing to be vulnerable and shared more details of how she worked through the challenges of her daughter’s cancer treatment,

Resilience to me is... this is gonna sound really cliche, but it’s getting up more than you fall down. You are going to have the moments where you’re so low that you can’t see it, but you know that you can still take another step and go to the next day. And you know that you can, and whether you have somebody to support you or not, that you actually can have that inner strength to not crumble and get back up. I’ll just share a really intimate thing with you, when [my daughter] was sick. In the morning at the hospital, I had to have a shower, and quick, in our
room and everything, because I had to get out of the shower before the doctors came in. Because they came in on rounds. But the shower was where I cried, and the shower was this place where I would just fall apart. But it was literally like, as I stepped out of the shower, I was back. And I don’t know how to describe it to you, what resilience is to me in any other way other than you need to have that moment to be okay, with not being okay. You need to let the feelings go over you. But you can’t live in that emotion all the time. If you live in the emotion all time, then you’re never going to be able to see what’s next. Yeah, I don’t know how else to describe it.

Joanne shared both her definition of resiliency as well as how she works through hard times and cares for herself through yoga,

I don’t know if “stick-to-itiveness” is technically a word but being able to work through the hard times. I think when things are going really well, we don’t really talk about resiliency because we don’t necessarily need to utilize that; we don’t need to be resilient when things are going really well. So when things are getting really hard and there are challenges being able to, and I think some specifics that have helped me be resilient, is tying back to my well-being, to taking time off if I need to take time off, to get some physical activity, some movement. One of the things that have been really important in my life, really throughout my career in collegiate recreation, is yoga. And being able to spend some time on my yoga mat to get, it just puts me in a good place. I think resiliency is getting through,
working through, and a lot of that is acknowledging, “Oh, hey we’re going through a tough time.”

Finally, Rachel offered a different perspective on resilience. Rather than embracing that resilience is always good, she questioned it. Rachel explained,

I think resilience can show up in a couple of different ways. And I don’t know if it intersects with tenacity to a certain degree. And I sometimes think about resilience. I mean, it’s a good thing, but when do you need to stop? It’s becoming harmful. Yeah, I mean, things will happen in life, right? And a lot of it is out of our control, and those things that are in our control, that you have decision and agency over, you do the best with what you have in front of you to make whatever choices. And sometimes it works out and sometimes it doesn’t. Yeah, you can beat yourself up and go around and around and around and stay focused on that, or just understand it didn’t work out in the way that we had hoped or whatever, and lift up and see a new opportunity coming. So in a way, resilience to me kind of plays out like that. And I’ve talked to my daughter about this a little bit, too, because I sometimes see that she gets so wrapped up in, “It should have been this way, and why didn’t it work out.” And then she gets into the spiral, and I’m just like, “Hang on a minute. Horrible that that happened. We wanted it to go a different way. But know that if we keep our head down, we’re missing all these opportunities that are flying over our head. So let’s just let that go. Look up and now there’s going to be something new and maybe even better.” So to kind of have that wherewithal to be able to sort of take that mental view, I think, helps us
get through these things that sometimes happen to us, or organizations or whatever, that are unexpected, not quite the way we want it. But it’s not going to stop us from progressing forward.

When pressed for more, Rachel detailed,

Yeah, I guess for me, I think like, let’s say you’re trying to get up the hill, right? And you keep stumbling, but you’re gonna get up, and you’re just gonna keep on going. And you know, there’s a certain amount of drive and resilience, like, I’m going to just make it, but maybe you’re not meant to make that hill. You know? Maybe it’s time to say I’m not going to make that hill, and you know what? That’s okay. And we’re going to walk around the base of the hill and get to the other side, this way instead, not over the top, because you will drive yourself into the ground trying to stick with the same approach. That make sense?

Throughout each description of resilience, it was apparent that resilience is born out of necessary struggle, working through hard times, persistence, and bouncing back from setbacks.

**Self-Care.** Part of working through those hard times and developing resiliency involved being intention in practicing self-care. Jenny was trite when she said, “Fake it ‘til you make it.”

Both Michelle and Rachel explained the importance of not being too sensitive to what others say about them. Michelle said,

I try not to be as sensitive about what others say to me. I think that’s something that I was able to learn working for my former director. And I was told that I’m
not a very tactful person; I usually say what I think. You just have to let people say what they need to say sometimes and then decide how much value you’re going to place on what they say.

Rachel then shared,

I’m a pretty practical person. I think as a result, I don’t really take a lot of stuff personally. So people could be stabbing me in the back, talking about me behind my back. I just don’t even get involved with the drama. I’m just like, we got to get this done. And we got to keep going forward. So I don’t ruminate on that stuff.

Lisa also took a calculated approach and focused on compartmentalizing tough situations. For her, it was important to focus on becoming educated and handling the situation to the best of her ability before addressing her emotions. Then, she was intentional about practicing gratitude.

Marie shared the importance of managing her mental health, “I see a therapist regularly that has been a huge part of me managing my reactions, managing my perspective on the power that other people have over me, and how I feel about myself.”

Rachel, Joanne, and Sarah all utilized physical activity to care for themselves. “I’ve had plenty of miles swimming,” said Rachel.

Sarah shared, “I enjoy my exercise, and that’s my time.”

“Being able to spend some time on my yoga mat… it just puts me in a good place,” expressed Joanne.

Emma explained the importance of perspective,
Just really coming back to, “Okay, at the end of the day, we’re providing super impactful, important experiences, but we’re supposed to be about fun, we’re supposed to be about elective activities that people are choosing to be a part of, and what energy do we bring that attracts that energy back to us. And so I think that, again, trying to treat our work as important, but not ourselves; and having levity and fun… We’re not brain surgeons. And not curing cancer. What we do is important, but not too high, not too low. Like, stay in the zone of an appropriate context. What we’re doing is really impactful. You know, and I do think we probably save lives sometimes in very subtle ways. But, I’m not the dude keeping a guy from being paralyzed.

Like, Lisa, Emma also described her focus on gratitude and practicing that every day.

I also have a gratitude app on my phone. So every morning, I get a text that has a little passage, if you will, that just makes you think differently about gratitude. And then, at the end of the day, prompts you to write three good things that happened that day. And for me, that’s super important to stay grounded.

Finally, Emma explained the importance of managing one’s emotions and the choice we have in how we respond to situations.

I talk to our staff all the time; we get to choose our emotional bandwidth and how much emotional bandwidth we allocate to something. And so trying not to react too strongly in a negative way to situations, in a repetitive negative way. We get
to choose, we choose our bandwidth. We choose our emotional bandwidth. And so I just tried to remind myself of that, too.

For Sam and all of her experiences with significant stress-related health challenges, she shared a few different ways she practices self-care. She explained,

It’s almost when it’s realizing...I can feel the vertigo coming on, and I’m like, “Okay, it’s time for what I like to call a pink fuzzy slipper day or two. I have sick leave for a reason.” Turn off all the things that are dinging around me, and I’m just going to go read and relax and not engage in work. Try to get reset, try to strategize how I’m going to approach what had been causing me stress, and try to figure out how I am going to diffuse some of that. And then come back and try to reset.

Sam also explained the importance of managing her emotions, which was a newer form of self-care for her.

Rather than just letting it all swirl up, I need to get the emotion out. And then I need a partner who can just let me vent and use whatever words I want to use. And it doesn’t have to always be my husband, my partner. I have some trusted friends whom I can do that with, and they know that they don’t need to respond. And then I’ll be okay, so then I can go to the strategy. And what I mean by strategy is “Nothing has to be this; we can take pieces of it off,” and I’ve read one of the books I really love. It’s called, Everything’s Figureoutable by Maria, I can’t remember her last name… starts with an F. But it’s like, “Okay, if you’re trying to figure this out, you are going to be stressed because you just don’t know where to
start.” So I need to write, I will take a big piece of easel sticky paper. And I’ll write everything out. And then I kind of whittle it down to, here’s my first step. I just really started doing that.

And finally, like Joanne, Sam also started practicing yoga to further acknowledge her stress.

I actually started doing restorative yoga, which is really about using the floor or the wall, the chair as support for your body, and it’s about centering and calming and you do poses for a long time. There’s not a lot of balancing or downward dogs or anything. It’s literally crook knee pose, or half frog lying on the floor for two or three minutes. But it’s really helped me. I can go to class whirled up from work, leaving work thinking, “Okay, what do I need to do tomorrow,” get to class, and I could fall asleep in 15 minutes.

In all cases, the participants had cultivated intentional ways to engage in self-care. This, in conjunction with their perspectives on resilience, helped facilitate a way in which they were able to navigate through the challenging times of their lives and careers.

Overall, the participants shared a myriad of stories that truly captured their campus recreation experiences, particularly their roles as directors of their departments. This was evident through their stories of navigating gender discrimination and difficulties with interpersonal relationships; developing their leadership and the corresponding leadership challenges, integrating their work with their life; and overcoming significant personal hardships. Despite all of these seemingly tumultuous experiences, all
participants expressed a sense of purpose and joy in the work they do to serve their campus communities.

Chapter Summary

This chapter started with a narrative introduction of each participant that included a brief overview of their career in campus recreation. These narrative introductions outline the similarities and differences between the participants to provide context to the stories shared. The remainder of the chapter was devoted to detailing the four main themes along with the corresponding categories I constructed in data analysis.

The four themes were (a) “I was very aware of being the only woman:” navigating the cycle of the system by examining their positionalities; (b) “relationship-focused:” women’s ways of developing their own leadership styles; (c) “life is bigger than just work:” work and life interface; and (d) “rhythm of back and forth:” negotiating personal and professional impact of being women leaders. The chapter provided participant stories for each theme and its categories. The “I was very aware of being the only woman:” navigating the cycle of the system by examining their positionalities theme spoke to the ways the participants experienced their gender within campus recreation. It included the categories systemic sexism; interpersonal struggle with supervisors, predecessors, and others; and opportunity knocks. The “relationship-focused:” women’s ways of developing their own leadership styles theme highlighted the unique ways in which the participants identified as women leaders in campus recreation. It included the categories collaborative leadership style and leadership challenges. The “life is bigger than just work:” work and life interface theme detailed how the participants viewed this
interface and how it fluctuated between balance, benefit, and conflict. This theme included the categories finding balance and work-life benefit?. The final theme, “rhythm of back and forth:” negotiating personal and professional impact of being women leaders, demonstrated how their position as women leaders influenced their physical and mental health. The participants shared the importance of overcoming these hardships. This theme included the categories collision of life and work, physical manifestations of stress, and importance of resilience and self-care.

The fifth chapter of this dissertation will start with a discussion of the study and its relation to academic literature from the fields of recreation and sport management, sociology of sport, and public health. Included will be a discussion pertaining to the study’s limitations as well as its implications for practice and policy.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This dissertation explored the narratives of women who are directors of campus recreation departments at Power Five conference institutions. Nine women from nine different universities across the United States shared their stories of working within campus recreation. Their stories not only showed the challenges of navigating the system as women, but they also shared how their unique perspective as women shaped their leadership style. Though difficult to negotiate their work-life interface and the health challenges that arise from stress, these women expressed their passion for their work and the impact this has on those whom they lead. The fifth chapter of this dissertation begins with a summary of the study followed by a restatement of the guiding research questions. This will be followed by how the research findings relate to the four guiding research questions. Next, the chapter will discuss the implications of this study for practice and policy. Finally, limitations and recommendations for future research will be discussed.

Study Summary

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of women directors of campus recreation departments in the Power Five conference institutions. Specifically, I examined their career development, resilience, and health in response to stressors, such as the work-life interface and gender discrimination. The study was guided by four research questions:

1. What narratives do women leaders in campus recreation have about their leadership experiences?
2. What narratives do women leaders in campus recreation have about the work-life interface?

3. What narratives do women leaders in campus recreation share about their career evolution?

4. What narratives do women leaders in campus recreation share about their career satisfaction?

The study was guided primarily by Career Construction Theory (CCT; Savickas, 2005) as it not only acknowledges the unpredictable and nonlinear nature of careers, but it acknowledges the complex factors that influence one's career journey. This was particularly important when considering the nonlinear nature of women’s career paths. Additionally, this study was bolstered by an understanding of hegemony and critical feminist theory (Pringle, 2018; Scraton, 2018). Both provided additional secondary frameworks through which to explore women’s experiences navigating leadership positions. An understanding of critical feminist theory was useful when discussing constraints imposed by dominant power structures within campus recreation (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002).

Nine women who identified as directors of campus recreation shared their stories related to their careers and related life experiences. A narrative interview guide was created. Following Kim’s (2016) guidance, two-phased narrative interviews were conducted. Data analysis consisted of narrative thematic analysis (Riessman, 2008). From the data analysis, I constructed four themes: (a) “I was very aware of being the only woman:” navigating the cycle of the system by examining their positionalities; (b)
“relationship-focused:” women’s ways of developing their own leadership styles; (c) “life is bigger than just work:” work and life interface; and (d) “rhythm of back and forth:” negotiating personal and professional impact of being women leaders.

**Discussion**

The discussion of the research findings is organized by research questions. Research Question 1 focused on narratives shared by the participants about their leadership experiences. Research Question 2 focused on how participants negotiated the intersection of their work with their life. Research Question 3 focused on the narratives the participants shared about their career evolution. Finally, Research Question 4 focused on how the participants conceptualized their career satisfaction. The discussion section concludes with the limitations of this study.

**Research Question 1**

The first research question of this study was: What narratives do women leaders in campus recreation have about their leadership experiences? The intent of this question was to gain an understanding of the various circumstances that influence one’s leadership experiences, specifically from the perspective of being a woman leader. We know that women leaders, particularly in the recreation and sport spaces, experience sexual harassment, contrapower harassment, incivilities, and bullying in their workplaces (e.g., Fink, 2016; Taylor et al., 2018a; Taylor et al., 2018b; Taylor et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2018d). This may lead to limited leadership opportunities, poor work satisfaction, pervasive mental and physical health issues, and a higher likelihood that women will eventually exit the workplace prematurely (Hindman & Walker, 2020).
Interwoven throughout the participants’ experiences were stories about their interpersonal relationships and how they impacted their leadership experience. These relationships took on two primary identities – relationships with those in power and relationships with those they supervised. First, the participants shared stories that detailed the constant negotiation of power. This manifested in interactions with their supervisors, predecessors, individuals from the athletic department, and others. Sam’s story about her interaction with one of her supervisors was particularly poignant.

I’m trying to describe the body language. So just laid back, kick back, knee cross-legged crossed men, pushed back from the table, nonchalantly making decisions… Parts of that leadership were like, it was like I was invisible at times. It was like I wasn't at the table… Just disrespected things that the students wanted to do and that I thought we would be really good to be engaged in; or using our spaces for activities and things like that. They would be like, "Oh, [Sam], you just go off and do that with the students. We're too busy for that… Even the Dean himself, he would turn and look at me... And I think I was asking, I was asking for, within the marketing & communications, to be included in a promotion thing for athletics to try to bring more students into the rec side of it. And he actually said in front of all these other men, "Don't beg." I just looked at... I know that I tried to, "Don't let them see that face, [Sam]; don't let them see your face. Don't let him know he got to you,” right? … He would just look at me disgustedly and say things like, he wanted to be... This is how I described him... He's like the kid that never got to sit at the cool kids table. But now he got to be the leader at the
cool kids table. So he was gonna let everybody know that he's the leader and he's going to treat you like you don't matter unless you prove, or are of use to him… I was operating so different to my core… it was just so against who I am and my values of… I just couldn't deal with it… I look back now, and I think he wanted to just dump us and change it, and he had all his people he wanted to put in, but if he moved a woman with a Ph.D. out of that role and collapsed it under something else. Like collapse me under athletics or something else, it would be too obvious that women are leaving, or women are not being respected in their roles.

As highlighted by Hindman and Walker (2020), when women experience sexism in the workplace, they have more difficulty completing routine job responsibilities.

Additionally, as mentioned above, these experiences lead to poor work satisfaction, poor health, and a higher likelihood that women will eventually exit the workplace.

For Sam, her experience with the supervisor discussed above troubled her so deeply that she nearly exited the workplace. She recalled a conversation with a colleague. “She [Sam’s colleague] goes, ‘His term is going to be up. It'll be five years.’ And I'm like, ‘I don't think I can last five years. This is tearing me apart.’” Sam did end up working with this supervisor for nearly five years; however, several of her female colleagues did exit the workplace during her supervisor’s tenure.

The assistant dean, she had been there a long time, like 20-plus years. And she moved to be the assistant provost at [the university] down the road, and ended up being provost at [school omitted]. It was obvious that as the assistant dean and him as the dean, it was really obvious that her voice wasn't being heard either…
She chose, but she chose to leave, I think, because of the culture. And then the other one, she no longer was the, I think it was, the title was Assistant Dean for Graduate Education. She stayed in the department but was no longer in a leadership role. So, she went back to her research.

Unfortunately, Sam’s experiences are not uncommon across male-dominated spaces. At least 62% of women say that harassment is a problem in their industry (Parker, 2018).

Another way to conceptualize harassment in the workplace is through the lens of workplace bullying. As we saw in Sam’s story, she experienced “persistent, verbal, and nonverbal aggression at work that include[d] personal attacks, social ostracism, and a multitude of other painful messages and hostile interactions,” all of which define workplace bullying (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006, p. 406). For five years, Sam was subjected to this onslaught of bullying by her supervisor. Not only did she seriously consider quitting, but she did alter her behavior at times to attempt to avoid conflict. Both of these tactics are well used by individuals trying to resist workplace bullies (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006).

Along with the interpersonal relationships with their supervisors, several of the participants highlighted stories about predecessors who lingered within the organization after retirement. Sam also shared a story about her interaction with a predecessor that was troubling.

The first day I started, [George] met me at the office door. This is the director that had been there 32 years, and he was going to do some overlapping with me... he was going to help, he was going to show me where things were and stuff like that.
He shows me to my office, and he shows me where my desk is and how he has his desk set up in the corner and his contract was for six more months. So he was just going to work in there with me for six months.

Sam was not the only participant who indicated a slow, uncomfortable transition of power. Several of the participants spoke about following in the footsteps of a white male who had held the role of director for over 30 years. Like Sam’s story, there were times when the predecessor was kept on in an advisory capacity, maintained a physical presence within the facilities, or transitioned to another role on the university leadership team. There are several reasons why their predecessors may have remained in close proximity to the university and their previous role as director. Much of the difficulty in transition may be due to the complex process of retirement, particularly when one retires from a several-decade career. Several if the participants used the phrase, “it was their identity” when recalling their predecessor. Of course, the retirement intentions of the participant’s predecessors were simply speculative, as the participants did not know why their predecessors retired. Only that they had held their positions for a long time, and did not seem to leave the university quickly.

Retirement, according to Feldman (1994), occurs over a long period of time and is often not simply a single point in time. As we know, work is of central importance as it gives life purpose and direction (Oakman & Wells, 2013). Perhaps one of the biggest components of the participant’s predecessors' lengthy retirement was work centrality. Tziner and colleagues (2014) summarized that a high work-centrality person is so embedded in their work that it becomes part of their identity. This has been known to
increase job satisfaction and facilitate later retirement intentions and actual retirement (Browne et al., 2019).

Both Emma and Rachel were dissatisfied with their interactions with the athletic department. In each of their stories, a representative from the athletic department (i.e., athletic director, associate athletic director) made financial demands. For example, Emma said, “Athletics came to the table with no money. They wanted students to fund [a new natatorium] through a recreation fee.”

We know that the relationship between campus recreation departments and athletic departments can be fraught (Stier et al., 2010). Often this is due to discrepancies in budget allocation that favors intercollegiate athletics over campus recreation.

In addition to the financial demands made by the athletic department, both Emma and Rachel shared that the representative from the athletic department with whom they were dealing regularly excluded them from discussions related to the financial matters that concerned campus recreation. Emma explained,

And all these yahoos started talking about the natatorium. And I was waiting…

But when the deputy [athletic director] then jumped in ahead of me, just, “What in the world is going on here?” So anyway, during the entire meeting, I talked one time [with emphasis] about our facility. Oh, my God. It was bizarre. Like it was the most egregious example of sexism [with emphasis].

Rachel shared a similar story,

Rec sports has resources that these other two departments [athletic department and physical education department] want. And so, you know, those guys would
contact me and… it's, "Well, we need XYZ." And then I would say "Well, unfortunately, that's not going to work for us because we've got our priorities, and so we can't help you; or we can give you this instead." Well, they didn't want to hear that. So of course, it's like all of a sudden... they kick it up to the Vice Chancellor… then I get the sense of, there's this “good old boys club.” …Luckily, the Vice Chancellor…will parrot what I've already told those two guys, but it's this assumption that because it's the “old boys club,” somehow they're gonna go ahead and work around it. Right? That's just irritating…

Talk about the “old boys club” is not new in the field of recreation and sport management. It has been studied pervasively, yet “its insidious and powerful operation has received little scrutiny” (Fisher & Kinsey, 2014, p. 45). Therefore, Fisher and Kinsey (2014) sought to shed light on this phenomenon from a feminist perspective. They utilized the term homosocial desire, the “emotional and irrational power in male bonding behavior… unrecognized, invisible, taken for granted, these behaviors are nevertheless about power and exclusion” (Fisher & Kinsey, 2014, p. 50), to conceptualize the old boy's club within academia. Homosocial desire supports hegemonic masculinity (Krane, 2001). Fisher and Kinsey (2014) asserted that this contributed to the closeness between men, and it excluded all outsiders (i.e., women). In fact, as more women were present within the management team, more homosocial desire, and “old boys club” behaviors were displayed. Women in their study were aware of the activities of the old boys club and reported feeling excluded, patronized, or ignored. All of this was reported by the current study participants.
In addition to the interactions with individuals with more power than the participants, they also shared stories that detailed their interactions with members of the campus community. Sam struggled to gain buy-in from members of the campus community. One of the first things Sam did as the new director was overhaul a lunch-hour basketball league. At the time, it was dominated by a group of male faculty members, yet Sam felt it needed to better include students. “They all went to the dean, wrote letters to the President that I ruined their basketball (laughing),” She recalled. This situation was ultimately resolved, but not without a contentious meeting. She explained,

I scheduled it on my turf. And Matt [Sam’s supervisor and ally] joined the meeting, he was at the meeting when they all came in, and they were all kind of surprised because they came in like (gesturing), they saw the agenda as they were walking in, but when they realized Matt was there as well. And then they all just talked to Matt and Matt's like, "It's not my meeting." And I'm like, "Thank you, Matt." And I said, "I want to respect that you want an activity. And I want that for you, too, because it's important to be healthy." And I said, "We have students that also want that activity as well in that space. That's what their fees pay for. So how can you help me help the students to be more active and more involved?" Well, some of them just pushed back from the table and literally burning lasers through me. But there were one or two that were like, "Oh, you want some advice from us?" So they kind of latched on to the reach of, you can help me help the students. And then others, you know, they're like, "We're never coming back here again," and were really vocal.

266
A common thread throughout a few of these stories was the presence of a male ally. It was important for the participant’s supervisor (i.e., vice chancellor) to support her when she was challenged by other male colleagues. Male allies have the ability to “enact change in an organization’s culture by supporting the advancement of women while influencing attitudes and behaviors” (e.g., Madsen, Townsend, & Scribner, 2020, p. 255). A few of the key components of this allyship were outlined by Madsen and colleagues (2020), which were present in many of the stories shared by the current study participants. These components included assigning women challenging assignments, facilitating leadership development, and fostering professional relationships (Madsen, Townsend, & Scribner, 2020). Additionally, when considering the male-dominated landscape of recreation and sport spaces, Moser and Branscombe (2022) spoke to the critical nature of male allyship. Male allies were “uniquely helpful in reducing the negative effects of underrepresentation of women” (Moser & Branscombe, 2022, p. 379). In their study, with a male ally, not only were women able to anticipate the same amount of inclusion and support from their coworkers, they were able to anticipate less workplace hostility and isolation. All of these were benefits experienced by the current study participants.

Importantly, Moser and Branscombe (2022) raised the concern about benevolent sexism; however, their participants perceived their male allies as empowering figures rather than paternalistic figures. This, too, seemed apparent in the current study participant’s descriptions of their male allies in that they valued autonomy-oriented, empowering support from their male allies (Wiley & Dunne, 2019).
A story that seemed important to share within the context of interpersonal relationships was yet another from Sam. Different from the other stories shared thus far; this story focused on Sam's interaction with another female colleague.

I wanted to advance wellness. And I could see a vision of how we could do some things and put things together. And I was just checking around, talking to different people, and another woman took that as a threat. She is the director of the Health Center. That was her role, and what was I doing in her lane? Actually, I didn't get that from her directly. I got it through the VP we both report to. And I was told that wellness wasn't my lane and that I needed to get out of it. I needed to stop trying to advance wellness at [school omitted] because it was [her] job. And that wasn't in my profile. And I was like, "Well, that makes no sense at all." … My style of leadership is to get people engaged and excited and point forward… I'm excited to have people with those skills and abilities to help us build the steps along the way and get there. And my enthusiasm for that was taken as trying to take over, and another woman went sideways directly to the boss, to the VP, to say, "Push her out of that." … I felt disrespected (with emphasis). So disrespected as, one, having been in this profession for over 30 years and was currently the president-elect of NIRSA. In my role, I helped write the wellness research statement where we worked with NASPA, NACA, ACHA, the college health. We were working with a lot of organizations to create this wellness statement… if you're going to do research, let's put a wellbeing lens on it. If we're going to try to do some collaborative work across organizations, health and wellbeing is so
important, mental health and all of those components. So I'm leading this nationally, and then I'm being told on my own campus to get out of that lane? He didn't give me a lane to go to, by the way, he was just like, "Not your lane, not your lane." And so I was insulted, I felt disrespected. I have a...am I allowed to swear in your thing? I have a fucking Ph.D.!

For Sam, this experience influenced how she led her team. She goes on to explain how she has strived for creativity in continuing to pursue wellness initiatives on campus without interacting with her colleague.

In leadership, we know that women often fall victim to the Queen Bee phenomenon (Sterk et al., 2018). Due to the nature and feeling of scarcity within the industry, and experiences of gender discrimination, there is the need to protect one’s professional position at all costs. This involves integrating oneself into masculine organizations and separating oneself away from other women (Cushman, 2019). Another woman entering the fray may feel threatening to some women; therefore, women who demonstrate queen bee behaviors often seek to separate themselves from the negative aspects of their social identity (Sterk et al., 2018). Additionally, women who demonstrate these behaviors may also be more concerned about achieving their own goals and are worried about having to sacrifice their successes at the hands of another woman (Markovits et al., 2017). Sam’s story highlighted many of these traits. Her colleague was seemingly threatened by Sam’s enthusiasm and success, thereby complaining to their shared supervisor and limiting Sam’s success.
Research Question 2

The second research question of this study was: What narratives do women leaders in campus recreation have about the work-life interface? This question intended to gain an understanding of how the participants negotiated the intersection of their work responsibilities with their other life roles. One theme that came out in the narrative thematic analysis was the “life is bigger than just work:” work and life interface. For many of the participants, the tension between work and life was a consistent negotiation. It was apparent that the various types of work-life interface were present: balance, conflict, and enrichment.

Women, specifically, are constantly engaging in this tension. Many of the participants expressed their intentionality when setting boundaries. Within this intentionality, the participants did not necessarily rely on the term “balance.” Similar to Taylor and colleagues (2018c) findings related to female conference commissioners, some of the participants preferred to talk about the integration of work and life because balance implied an unrealistic expectation to be equal. Sarah said, “I just try to map those experiences where they intersect, but they don't have to, ‘Well, you've spent 80 hours at work, so now you need to spend 80 hours here.’ I don't operate that way.”

Additionally, those with children under the age of 18 expressed the struggle of balancing work with life (Lopez et al., 2020). Marie has a daughter who is nine and a half months old and she shared this struggle, “I'm wondering at what point I'm going to find a rhythm... I was very dedicated was my exercise before…I haven’t figured out how to incorporate exercise back because I don’t want to wake up at 5 am.” This struggle was
exacerbated by the reality that campus recreation employees routinely work more than 47 hours per week and are often burdened with unanticipated responsibilities (Lopez et al., 2020). Marie also noted that in her interview, “I feel like sometimes, with the amount that I have in front of me, that I can't get done every day.”

We know that women often experience the “second shift” (Hochschild & Machung, 2012) in which they leave their day job and engage in several hours of labor at home (e.g., taking care of children). Michelle referenced this periodically throughout her interview.

There's just this, "You're gonna take care of the kids" type of mentality. I married someone that does construction-type work; he's an electrician. And so he has helped but not taken the, "Oh, the kids need their checkup, or they need to get their teeth cleaned." That's not something that he's really played a part in unless I absolutely couldn't take off of work.

As is inferred by the “second shift” (Hochschild & Machung, 2012), often the burden of negotiating work and life conflict falls on women (Dixon & Bruening, 2005). Similar to Dixon and Bruening’s (2007) study investigating Division I female head coaches, the participants in this current study described their personality traits as “driven,” yet also expressed guilt over not “getting to be a mom” (Michelle). For many of the participants they held tension between striving to be a good mother while also pursuing their career goals.

We also saw the struggle women often face when striving to incorporate their own healthcare into their work-life interface. Michelle also explained,
Not getting enough rest, not taking time to go to the doctor. But I think that's, any woman has the same problem, especially people that work hourly. Because of asthma, I have to go to the doctor two times a year for it; go to the dentist two times a year. Then you go for your health exam, that's another doctor's visit. Then you go for your gynecologist check-up, that's another visit. And then you add: my children need to get their teeth cleaned twice a year, and my children need a health exam once a year and then God forbid they're sick and out here and there. So I think that's probably an area where you just don't, you don't take care of yourself as you should. I definitely can tell you that I did not take care of myself when I was pregnant with [my daughter], and that contributed to a lot of the health issues that I had, and why she came so early.

As Michelle hinted, what was particularly troubling throughout many of the interviews was the significant health challenges the participants experienced as a direct result of their stress at work. The types of work stress that impacted the participants’ health may have varied. For some of the participants, they could have experienced what some researchers understand as overperformance exacerbated by the concept that minority groups (i.e., women) tend to have fewer resources and less power and status than dominant groups (i.e., men) (Kentta et al., 2020). Burke (2002) claimed that when women experience more gender-related stress both at work and at home, they report higher instances of harmful health outcomes.

When women share their emotional experiences due to sexism in the workplace, often, they utilize words like anxious, angry, rattled, discouraged, and disgusted
(Hindman & Walker, 2020). Sam shared that she experiences vertigo when “stress ramps up at work.” Ultimately, Sam’s vertigo resulted from five years of significant sexist, dysfunctional leadership at the hands of her supervisor mentioned above.

Struggling in an environment with significant sexism, dysfunctional leadership eventually takes its toll on an individual. We know there is a link between years of significant stress and health outcomes. During stressful situations, the body has physiological responses that become activated; when this happens, the body experiences allostatic load. Allostatic load represents the wear and tear the body takes on in response to these physiological responses. Although this can be adaptive for acute stress, chronic activation of this system can leave a person susceptible to stress-related diseases (Juster et al., 2010). Types of stress-related diseases include, but are not limited to cardiovascular disease, anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, reproductive health issues, and eating disorders (McEwen, 2008; Nelson & Burke, 2000).

Despite these grim health experiences, several of the participants did express the benefits to their health their job provided. This was specific to the advantage of working in wellness and working on a college campus around young people (Edwards, 2013). “Who doesn't like to be around people who are driven. Think about this, every day, we come to our college campuses, and the young person coming here has dreams and aspirations about what they want to be next... It’s kept me young,” shared Jenny.

Finally, we know that women often find that their work benefits, or enriches, their families. Many expressed how important it was for their families to have access to recreation and the campus recreation facilities. It was important to them to set good
examples for their children. Sarah shared, “I'm able to model [for her children] what we champion in our mission of ‘enhancing the educational experience for lifelong wellness.’” Greenhaus and Powell (2006) termed this work-life enrichment. They described this relationship as being bidirectional in that work experiences improve family experiences and vice versa. Michelle, Emma, and Lisa all shared stories of when their children came with them to work and enjoyed playing at the pool or on the court. Emma, specifically, shared how she takes information gleaned from her young adult children and applies it to interactions with her student-staff.

**Research Question 3**

The third research question of this study was: What narratives do women leaders in campus recreation share about their career evolution? The intent of this question was to gain an understanding of how the participants navigate their career development. Most participants’ career evolution followed the traditional campus recreation linear path. Often individuals in campus recreation begin as undergraduate staff. After graduating, most transition to graduate school and have a graduate assistant position. From there, they obtained an assistant director position, then an associate director position, and finally, the director position. Like other areas of higher education, those seeking to advance their careers must relocate. Sam explained, “In order to move to a director's level, you have to actually move. You have to go somewhere else... Higher Ed requires you to move out to move up.”

Even though Henderson and colleagues (2013) found positive changes for women in recreation in terms of attainment of leadership positions, career longevity, and
satisfaction, more women had taken on additional care responsibilities at home, and fewer women were aspiring to senior management positions. Sam also spoke about the current status of women leaders in campus recreation, and she echoed this comment from Henderson and colleagues (2013).

There's this gap with me and just behind me of people ready to take on those roles. I would say people got tired of waiting, and women especially were like, "I can go do something else, and I can be creative and find something…" There are just so many positions men have held for so long; most people have gone either to another industry that their skills are really good at from higher ed, or they've gone into other places in higher ed. Like they've moved into student involvement or engagement, or career development, or they've moved into teaching. They moved away from this field because there was nowhere to go.

Sam explained that, while NIRSA president, she was trying to engage the next generation of women. Rachel, too, had a vested interest in the future of the leadership of campus recreation from a diversity perspective. She expressed, “My biggest fear is exiting this position, and they're going to put another typical, I mean, not for nothing, the best-qualified candidate, right? But when the pool is heavily weighted in one particular way then another, the likelihood will be…”

One of the biggest challenges facing our organizations today is obtaining and maintaining diversity. Gender inequality is institutionalized, especially in recreation and sport organizations. We know that people have different ideas about male and female leaders, which leads to more favorable attitudes toward male leaders. In turn, there is
more difficulty for women to advance to leadership positions (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Walker et al., 2017). Cunningham (2008) spoke to this challenge. He called for diversity management strategies to create change, not merely focus on the desired end state of ending institutionalized gender inequality.

There is a constant tension in this space because we know how important diversity is for our organizations (Cunningham, 2008). Yet, women are being looked over as leaders despite the strides made across industries. As explained by Sam, women have exited the industry because they had to wait so long for the older generation, of predominately white men, to retire. Women often exit the workplace due to feeling unchallenged, and the inability to move up in the organization (Nelson & Burke, 2000). Eagly and Carli (2007) spoke to the importance of preparing women for management with increased responsibilities. This includes placing women into roles that feed into senior management. Often women have to change companies to land jobs that afford these opportunities (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Interestingly, although all of the participants followed the aforementioned career trajectory, with some minor deviations, only three participants expressed that their career goal had been to attain the director position. All others indicated that, while happy to be the director, it was not their original intent. Some cited happenstance and “right place, right time.” Others shared how they were simply open to opportunity. This, along with comments made pertaining to the confidence and the encouragement needed to apply for the director position spoke to the bigger issues surrounding hegemonic femininity and faux empowerment.
When thinking specifically about the uncertainty of applying for the director positions, a few of the participants expressed they were uncertain they would have had the confidence to apply without the encouragement of others. This brought to mind hegemonic femininity and popular feminism and their effects on maintaining the status quo for how women should act. More specifically, these comments made by the participants about confidence or lack thereof were reminiscent of the work Banet-Weiser (2018) and Banet-Weiser, Gill, and Rottenburg (2020). Our society is singularly focused on fixing women and girls, particularly from a confidence perspective. When considering popular feminism in the workplace, it is fueled by messages such as obtaining self-confidence, which makes it corporate-friendly and commodifiable (Banet-Weiser, Gill, & Rottenburg, 2020). Therefore, the idea is that women and girls have lost their confidence, so their mentors must bolster them up and stand beside them as they fix themselves and engage in the backbreaking pursuit of gaining confidence. However, our society is not doing anything to change the social structures that cost women and girls to "lose" their confidence in the first place. If anything, the opposite seems to be happening. In this context, we are celebrating that the participants had the confidence to apply for their director roles while also allowing gender discrimination in the workplace to persist.

**Research Question 4**

The fourth research question of this study was: What narratives do women leaders in campus recreation have about their career satisfaction? The intent of this question was to gain an understanding of how the participants reconciled the challenges they have faced throughout their careers and found satisfaction. Nearly all expressed satisfaction
when directly asked. However, there were moments of hesitation in their responses. Many feel their careers have benefited their families and made a positive impact on their communities. Similar to the findings from Smith and colleagues (2012) narrative analysis of women’s perceptions of their careers in parks and recreation. Many of the participants in the current study expressed a desire to help others by making a difference and this was a source of motivation. It is also important to note that often individuals with loftier titles tend to express greater job satisfaction due to higher salaries, more responsibility, and autonomy (Stier et al., 2010). Lisa and Michelle, in particular, shared how important it was that they had autonomy over their schedules as they strived to balance work and life.

Of course, to obtain a more accurate account of satisfaction among the participants of this study, we needed to conduct a job satisfaction survey from a quantitative research approach. Therefore, the understanding of the participant’s job satisfaction in this study is limited to their verbal responses.

When work is considered meaningful, it can positively influence a person’s job satisfaction. Although none of the participants utilized the word “meaningful” in their stories, one could draw parallels between the other words and phrases expressed by the participants. For example, Jenny shared,

It's not without its stresses and challenges, but at the end of the day, it's about relationships and connections. And I honestly know that what I do matters… It makes a difference in the lives of people every single day. And that's like, dang! It can't get much better than that!
We know that meaningfulness, recognizing that one’s work matters, can be a motivational and relational construct for women leaders in higher education (Mayer, Surtee, & Barnard, 2015). It has been found that when leaders in higher education feel their work plays a significant role in student development, this meaningfulness is essential to their lives (Mayer, Surtee, & May, 2015). Furthermore, work is more meaningful to an individual when their values and strengths are congruent with the values and strengths of the organization (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Arieli, Sagiv, & Roccas, 2020). As such, when the participants in this study described the impact of their work on the campus community and student development, they utilized words that echoed their leadership style and value system. In the aforementioned quote by Jenny, she tied together the importance of relationship building (one of her values) along with the meaningfulness of her work. Jenny’s perspective as well as others like it, can be helpful for women leaders to cope with work challenges, which can promote wellbeing.

Interestingly, only one of the participants expressed the importance of her religion as it related to her career experiences. One of the participants identified as an atheist, but all others did not express that their religion had much impact on their job satisfaction or tenure in the field. In fact, several referenced growing up Catholic, but no longer identified in that way. When asked about their spirituality, many had difficulty expressing what that meant to them. However, upon deeper probing, several of the participants shared spiritual practices that have been instrumental throughout their careers. These practices included being in nature and participating in yoga or other types of exercise.
This sentiment shared by the participants was congruent with what we know about religion and spirituality culturally. According to Cooperman of the Pew Research Center (2022), over the last 15 years, the share of adults identifying as Christian (including Catholics) has dropped by 15 percentage points. Additionally, they reported that between the ages of 15 and 29, it is estimated that 31% of Americans who were raised Christian become religiously unaffiliated (Cooperman, 2022). Importantly, not all conceptions of spirituality must be linked to religion; rather, spirituality has become more differentiated from religion (Hill et al., 2000). Therefore, one can identify as spiritual, but not be religiously affiliated.

Additionally, spirituality intersects with meaningfulness, purpose, and calling in the literature. Mayer, Surtee, and May (2015) linked spirituality with meaningfulness, which constitutes experiencing oneness and purpose in one’s career and life (Bloch, 2005). When considering one’s career as a calling, adhering to this calling may increase job satisfaction through commitment to and meaning in work (Duffy et al., 2012). Finally, Tisdell (2003) argued that spirituality moves toward authenticity, which all of the participants in this dissertation study referenced in their interviews. Tisdell (2003) explained that in particular to women's spiritual development, spirituality is related to the development of a more authentic self. Authenticity means, “having a sense that one is operating more from a sense of self that is defined by one's own self as opposed to being defined by other people's expectations” (Tisdell, 2004, p. 32).
Career Construction Theory and Its Application to the Current Study

CCT was the primary theory guiding this dissertation study. It provided a helpful framework through which to explore how women navigated their career decisions and career trajectories within campus recreation. CCT provided a social constructivist lens (Savickas, 2005) as a way to examine personal characteristics and social contexts that informed the development of personal and professional identities of women leaders.

CCT answers two questions: (1) What do people do? and (2) Why do they do it? Which "focuses the attention on the interpretive processes, social interaction and negotiation of meaning" (Savickas, 2005, p. 43). CCT encompasses three components: (1) vocational personality, (2) career adaptability, and (3) life themes. Helpfully, Hums and Hancock (2016) summarized that CCT is used to understand the choices individuals make based on perceptions of social realities in relation to vocational self-concepts.

Vocational Personality

Vocational personality is aspects of an individual’s needs, values, and interests as they relate to their careers (Savickas, 2005). Individuals develop their personalities from a young age as they are influenced by school, family, and their neighborhood. Studies have shown that gender role socialization, personality, and self-efficacy contribute to career development (e.g., Burke, 2007). Specific to the current study population, "for women, in particular, gender role socialization and associated cultural expectations influence the career decision-making process" (Hancock & Hums, 2016, p. 200).

Within all of the participant’s stories, gender role socialization and cultural expectations were present. Often, the participants expressed limited confidence when
considering applying for a more advanced position. As discussed earlier, our society is focused on the idea that women and girls have lost, or do not have confidence (e.g., Eisenstein, 2017; Banet-Weiser, Gill, & Rottenburg, 2020). Within this rhetoric is the notion that we must fix the confidence levels of women and girls (Banet-Weiser, Gill, & Rottenburg, 2020). One way this is “fixed” is through the expectation that mentors must bolster them up and stand beside them as the women fix themselves and gain their own confidence in pursuit of leadership positions.

Additionally, several of the participants expressed guilt when they were unable to balance work and life appropriately. We know that due to the cultural expectations of gender roles, a disproportionate burden falls on women within work-life conflict (Dixon & Bruening, 2005). Similar to the findings of Dixon and Bruening (2005), traditional, hegemonic sociocultural definitions of work and success were pervasive in the workplace. This made it difficult at times for the participants to negotiate that tension between work and life.

Despite these difficulties, many of the participants described themselves as “hard worker” or “achiever.” These traits were born out of early life experiences. Michelle, specifically, noted how her childhood experiences prepared her for many of the challenges she had experienced throughout her career thus far.

**Career Adaptability**

Career adaptability "emphasizes the coping process through which individuals connect to their communities and construct their careers" (Savickas, 2005, p. 48). It references an individual's coping ability relating to developmental tasks and contextual
factors (Savickas, 2005). For the participants, the process of obtaining the director position was relatively straightforward. All moved through their careers, beginning as undergraduate workers before ascending the ladder of graduate assistant, assistant director, associate director, and finally director. “The grand story of career synchronizes individuals to their culture by telling them in advance how their work lives should proceed and prompting them to stay on schedule” (Savickas, 2005, p. 50). In other words, each of the participants essentially followed the appropriate "script," which allowed for the necessary developmental tasks and the ability to cope with learning new skills.

Within that script, is a reflection of constraints and facilitators in one's career and how that individual responds to those experiences (Savickas, 2005). A variety of contextual factors can influence career goals. Importantly, the participants shared the necessary steps they took to set themselves up for success if the director’s chair became available. Each participant expressed an openness to new experiences and the development of knowledge as they pursued this advancement in their careers. Through these experiences and educational opportunities, the participants conveyed a sense of self-efficacy, which is important for career success.

**Life Themes**

Life themes pertain to an individual's experience of meaning, purpose, and life circumstances (Savickas, 2005). These themes matter in one's career because individuals give meaning and purpose to their work. Importantly, life themes are the narrative component of CCT.
Narrative inquiry and CCT are complimentary, given the life themes component. The participants acted as the authors of their own lives. They narrated their experiences by expressing goals, directing behavior, and placing meaning on the activities in which they participated (Savickas, 2013). Throughout the interviews, the participants were vulnerable about why they made specific career decisions. Often these “whys” intersected with other life roles (Savickas, 2005). Marie, for example, made strategic career choices so that she could live closer to her family while her dad was sick.

When taking into consideration all three components of CCT, I was able to gain an understanding of the “what,” “how,” and “why” the participants constructed their careers in the ways that they did. CCT was an essential primary theory for this study as it sought to consider the holistic construction of the participant’s careers, and it was the assumption that the women in this study would recount multifaceted career stories. They did so with depth and complexity. The stories they shared with me illustrated strategy and risk-taking as well as passion and heartache.

Limitations

This dissertation study was not without its limitations. First, I asked the participants about their job satisfaction. Although they provided insightful answers, the understanding of the participant’s job satisfaction in this study was limited to their verbal responses as this was strictly a qualitative study. Further research could strive to unpack this further by using an established job satisfaction quantitative instrument.

Interestingly, the culture in which the participants worked turned out to be an important component of their experience. The purpose of this study was not to assess the
organizational culture of campus recreation departments, so I was not prepared to probe further. Due to this, I may have missed important details related to the participants’ experiences that would have been helpful in co-constructing their stories.

Additionally, there were some time constraints while conducting this dissertation study. While I was able to have about two, total hours with each participant, the process of building rapport and walking through an individual’s stories with detail takes significant time. There were times in the interview process which I had to choose between staying on schedule and probing a story further. Unfortunately, in an effort to respect the participants’ time and to adhere to my IRB, I may have missed important information that would have also been helpful in co-constructing their stories. In many ways, each research question needed its own interview time block.

Finally, due to geographic limitations, all the interviews were conducted via Zoom. This served as a great way to interview my participants, as the convenience and comfort of Zoom perhaps allowed the participants to speak more freely (Oliffe et al., 2021). All of the participants had their cameras on, so I was able to observe the participant’s body language and facial expressions to add context to their interviews. I was also able to interview more women from all over the country, which would not have been financially feasible otherwise. Of course, in-person interviewing can be preferred for better rapport building and allows for observation of full body-body language as well as environmental observations (Irani, 2018). Additionally, as with all technology, there is the risk that technological challenges may arise (Oliffe et al., 2021). More than once, the video or audio feed cut out momentarily, which disrupted the flow of thought and
conversation and may have led to lost information. Overall, in-person interviewing is preferred as it bolsters the integrity of the interview experience.

**Implications**

Despite the limitations described in the previous section, the findings of this dissertation have important implications for practice, policy, and future research in the fields of recreation and sport management and public health.

**Practice Implications**

The findings of this dissertation have implications for practice in the recreation and sport management field and the public health field. These implications are related to preparing the next generation of women leaders, addressing health outcomes, and highlighting the transition to a wellness-based campus recreation model.

A few of the participants spoke about the current status of women within campus recreation. Rachel expressed concern about being replaced by a White male upon her retirement. Sam explained that she saw a mass exodus of women in recent years. She felt this was because many of those women did not see advancement opportunities. At that time, many of the directors who are finally retiring had held their positions for decades. It is imperative that we are preparing the next generation of women leaders and being intentional about it in advance. Retirement conversations need to happen a few years in advance, and within those conversations, there needs to be consideration given to who might fill that role. Not only should those conversations be happening, but actions need to be taken to better train women, people of color, and others, so they are ready to fill those roles once they become available. This will require “the creation of support systems,
endorsing the importance of mentorship and allyship, and exploring women’s intersections of identities” (Lucia & Padgett, 2021, p. 113).

We know that mentorship is important for the support and advancement of women in the workplace (e.g., Bower, 2008b; O’Neil et al., 2018). One of the areas of consideration is determining best practices when navigating Queen Bee Syndrome (Hardin et al., 2022). This is two-fold because not all women are destined, or desire, to be great mentors. Thus, women should not always be relegated into mentoring roles. With this in mind, there remains a need to shift the organizational culture to not only prioritize a positive, inclusive environment for women, but also an environment that does not convey a feeling of scarcity and competition when it comes to women holding positions of power. This in turn will help facilitate an environment in which women are willing and able to support other women.

In terms of male allyship specifically, we know that this “holds promise in helping alleviate gender imbalances within the workplace…because men have more power and status in organizations…[and] efforts to advocate for gender inclusion and parity tend to be viewed more positively by others” (Yoon et al., 2023, p. 1, 2). Importantly, male allyship can serve a dual service. When viewed from an enrichment-based perspective, men who become allies increase their relational wellbeing at work as well as increase the wellbeing of women in their workplace (Yoon et al., 2023). As such, trainings or initiatives should be implemented that focus on facilitating male allyship. Trainings would include privilege awareness, which can allow for introspection and “a
recognition of one’s social positionality as a guiding influence on their allyship efforts” (Yoon et al., 2023, p. 7).

Importantly, the National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA), the leading organization in collegiate recreation, is uniquely situated to meet these needs as they provide significant professional development opportunities, research opportunities, and social networking opportunities.

Given the context of higher education broadly, we know that mental health is a huge topic of conversation across institutions. Importantly, this needs to be addressed among staff and faculty in addition to the students. Findings from this dissertation can help inform employee wellness programs. Within student affairs, there is often a department or an office of health and wellness. A subsect of that department engages directly with employees through an employee wellness program. The challenge, of course, is to not continually place the ownness on the shoulders of aspirational women to improve their own circumstances (e.g., Eisenstein, 2017). As was heard throughout the interviews, the participants often faced significant work and life conflicts. Adding one more extracurricular in pursuit of wellness is not always attainable. Therefore, those employee wellness programs must be creative when striving to meet the needs of women in leadership positions. Nelson and Burke (2000) called for these programs to provide appropriate professional care that is geared toward the unique needs of women (e.g., eating disorders).

Other ideas include providing on-site childcare options for women who want to pursue exercise on campus. Some of the participants in this dissertation study expressed
not wanting to exercise on campus because they preferred more privacy. In this case, the employee wellness program could make referrals to partnering facilities.

Interestingly, according to a few of the participants, there is a movement in campus recreation focused on transitioning away from a sole focus on recreational sports toward a more wellness-based structure. One of the participants even shared that she hopes to change the title of her department to include “wellness” in the coming years.

Currently, campus recreation is the facilities, services, and activities within the broader field of recreational sports that cater specifically to college and university campuses, according to NIRSA (2008). However, out of their strategic planning process in 2011, one of the strategic values includes health and wellbeing. NIRSA (2020) recognizes that wellness is an emerging service for many institutions, and it is a collaborative effort that brings together many departments across campus. “By recognizing the connectedness of physical health to brain health and productivity, recreation professionals are positioned to have a strong presence in campus wellness initiatives” (NIRSA, 2020). Already, NIRSA (2020) suggests offering acupuncture, childcare services, cooking classes, lactation rooms, massage, mental health services, nutrition counseling, career development, and spiritual wellbeing. The findings from this dissertation can help further inform the services provided through an employee wellness program, so they are geared specifically for women.

**Policy Implications**

The findings of this dissertation also have implications for policy in the recreation and sport management field and the public health field. As mentioned above, these
findings may help inform employee wellness programs. We know that women often experience work and life conflict; therefore, there must be policy changes as well to help facilitate holistic care of women employees. This may include flexible work hours, the ability to work from home as needed, access to on-campus childcare options, and freely being able to have their children at work with them if necessary. The more policy allows for better integration of work and life, the easier it becomes for women to participant in employee wellness initiatives.

In Cunningham’s (2008) call for a commitment to diversity initiatives in sport organizations, he provided guidance on how to achieve a culture of diversity. The most important guidance he offered was the necessity of systemic integration and instituting gender diversity plans. For campus recreation, this involves making diversity training a priority and part of the mission, values, and goals of the department, which is within NIRSA’s strategic plan (Kaltenbaugh et al., 2017). “By making diversity a central part of the organization, it factors into all strategic decisions, from who is hired, to the products and services offered” (Cunningham, 2008, p. 142).

Finally, it is important to critique the department’s activities both informal and formal. This includes making changes to policies that are gendered and advantage men over women (Cunningham, 2008). Based on the findings of this dissertation, one suggestion involves making workload an organizational indicator of wellbeing and equity. More than one participant in this study expressed the additional labor they take on in terms of mentoring and “mothering” those they supervise. We know that women are often pigeonholed, and expected to engage voluntarily, in these caregiving roles, which
are often undervalued. Therefore, work of this nature should not only be compensated equitably but be distributed equitably as well (see also Reid, 2021).

Additional policies related to gendered departmental activities may include work flexibility, the ability to work from home, additional considerations made for maternity leave, equitable hiring practices, and changes in policies that prohibit children in the workplace. Saujani (2022) outlined, “nine ways to make the workplace work for women” (p. 116), and gave suggestions on what, specifically, these policy changes may entail. Some examples she suggested include providing free or subsidized on-site childcare or an annual childcare subsidy to help offset the enormous cost of childcare. She cited a statistic that single parents “may spend up to thirty-seven percent of their income” (Saujani, 2022, p. 123). Along these same lines, Saujani (2022) suggested giving parents paid time off for their children’s illnesses. This might look like allowing employees to accrue sick days as they work. Finally, policy changes need to be made to lengthen paid maternity leave, as well as implement protections against the motherhood penalty. Saujani (2022) used the term “maternal wall” and said, “the maternal wall bias shows up in…microaggressions to poor performance evaluations to being passed over for jobs, assignments, or promotions” (p. 139).

Particularly in higher education, there has been a push for health in all policies. The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) has a health education and leadership program that calls campus leaders to address health-related issues across the campus community. One of the ways this is happening is through the Okanagan Charter, which is an international charter for health-promoting universities and
colleges. Universities that are part of this charter are committed to “infus[ing] health into everyday operations, business practices, and academic mandates” (Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting Universities and Colleges, 2015, p. 2). By doing so, the goal is to create compassionate campus cultures, commitment to wellbeing and social justice, and improve the health of the campus community (Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting Universities and Colleges, 2015). Based on the findings of this dissertation, there are already leaders across the country who are working toward this integration of wellness in all they do. The work of the participants, alongside other higher education professionals, should facilitate more colleges and universities to sign on to the Okanagan Charter, demonstrating their commitment to health and wellness across campus.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

As this was one of the first studies to explore the experiences of women directors of campus recreation departments, future research needs to be done to fully understand their leadership experiences. This study just scratched the surface of understanding how women’s careers and campus recreation compare to women’s careers in intercollegiate athletics. Based on the stories shared by the participants, clearly, they are subjected to similar types of work stress (i.e., work-life conflict, high-pressure jobs, and non-traditional work hours).

Although some campus recreation departments are housed under athletics, many are located within student affairs. As such, women leaders in campus recreation departments in these situations may be shielded from the deeply ingrained, sport-specific
instances of incivility, which often includes sexism, harassment, and hostile work environments (e.g., Bartos & Ives, 2019; Fink, 2016; Karami et al., 2020; Lapman et al., 2016; Lorenz et al., 2019; Mohipp & Senn, 2008; Taylor et al., 2018a; Taylor et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2018). However, higher education has its fair share of ivory tower, male-dominated systems. Therefore, a deeper look at how women in campus recreation interact with the greater university staff community is important. Several of the participants in this study referenced interactions with other department leaders as well as deans and vice-chancellors. Furthermore, the participants also referenced interactions with other campus recreation directors within their conference. Although this study sought participants from all Power Five conference institutions, future research could consider the impacts of regionality on women’s experiences and focus specifically on comparisons across conferences.

As indicated in a previous section, a clear understanding of job satisfaction could not be obtained as the findings were qualitative in nature. It will be important to conduct a quantitative study to gain clarity about women leaders’ job satisfaction in campus recreation. Utilization of a validated instrument would be helpful.

In conjunction with job satisfaction, an understanding of quiet quitting and how it appears among those working in campus recreation departments is important. “Quieting quitting has gained popularity online as a way of combating mental health challenges and promoting self-care” (Zhang & Rodrigue, 2023, p. 191). Quiet quitting is not always about slacking off, but more about setting boundaries and not completing extra work without compensation (Liu, 2022). In recent years, there has been an increase in actively
disengaged employees in the U.S., reaching 18%, with more than 50% of the U.S. workforce engaging in quiet quitting (Zhang & Rodrigue, 2023). What are the trends in campus recreation? What can departments do to promote healthy boundaries and wellbeing and reengage employees? This is particularly relevant as more individuals from Gen Z enter the workforce because the lowest levels of engagement are reported by Gen Z and Millennials (Zhang & Rodrigue, 2023).

Similarly, I inquired about the participants’ religiosity and/or spirituality during the interviews yet it was difficult to elicit full stories. Therefore future studies could devote more attention to how women in campus recreation conceptualize their spirituality in the workplace, and how they do, or do not, employ spiritual practices during stressful life experiences.

We know that mentorship is particularly important for women and their career development in sport-related spaces (Bower & Hums, 2013; Wells & Hancock, 2017). We also know that the act of mentoring others often falls on the shoulders of women (Reid, 2021). Additionally, we know that mentoring work does not always count toward service expectations (Reid, 2021). Thus, women are not always interested in or motivated to mentor other women. Therefore, it is important to further unpack mentorship for women in campus recreation. What does this look like currently? Who is doing then mentoring in campus recreation? What are the benefits? How can we make mentorship more effective for all involved?

Finally, this study was only able to capture the experiences of nine women with an average age of 52 years old. All but one identified as Caucasian. Additionally, all but
two disclosed heteronormative relationships. Due to this small snapshot of the population of women leaders of campus recreation, these findings cannot be generalized. As such, seeking a more diverse pool of women as well as those who identify as LGBTQ+ is imperative to the advancement of the field of campus recreation. This will involve engaging in more strategic sampling and diversity-focused research practices.

Summary

Chapter Five of this dissertation began with a summary of the study and a restatement of the guiding research questions. This was followed by how the research findings related to the four guiding research questions as well as how the research findings fit into the broader scope of the literature informing this study. This chapter continued with a summary of the limitations of the study. Finally, this chapter detailed the implications of this study for both practice and policy in the recreation and sport management and public health fields. It concluded with suggestions for future research. The next and final chapter of this dissertation will provide a conclusion to the study. It will summarize the literature and methodology as well as the key findings and discussion.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

This dissertation was organized into six chapters. The first chapter provided an overview of the study and the study’s purpose. Chapter Two detailed the important literature that provided context and a foundation for this dissertation study. This included literature related to women in leadership, gender discrimination, the work-life interface, health implications for women leaders, as well as job satisfaction, spirituality, and resilience. The second chapter also detailed the guiding theories for this study. Career Construction Theory (CCT; Savickas, 2005) was the primary theory, and it was supported by hegemony and critical feminist theory (Pringle, 2018; Scraton, 2018). Chapter Three focused on the methodology for this dissertation. It included an overview of qualitative research and research design. It then expanded upon narrative inquiry and its data collection and analysis methods for this dissertation. The fourth chapter detailed the findings of this study. Included were the narrative introductions of the participants as well as many of their stories. Finally, Chapter Five discussed how the research findings related to the four guiding research questions. Included was also a discussion about the implications of this study as well as limitations and recommendations for future research. This final chapter, Chapter Six, will provide an overview of this dissertation and provide a conclusion to the study.

Study Overview

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to understand the experiences of women directors of campus recreation departments in the Power Five conference institutions. Specifically, I examined their career development, resilience, and health in response to
stressors, such as the work-life interface and gender discrimination. This study was
guided by four research questions.

5. What narratives do women leaders in campus recreation have about their
   leadership experiences?

6. What narratives do women leaders in campus recreation have about the work-life
   interface?

7. What narratives do women leaders in campus recreation share about their career
   evolution?

8. What narratives do women leaders in campus recreation share about their career
   satisfaction?

Up to this point, significant research has been done on women in sport leadership
positions as they relate to the work-life interface and workplace discrimination. While
most workers feel tensions with the work-life interface, studies have shown that the
conflict between work and family is tricky to navigate in sport-related environments (e.g.,
Taylor, Huml, & Dixon, 2019). Some of the factors that cause conflict include a culture
of sacrifice, extreme pressure to succeed, and high competition for jobs (e.g., Dixon &

We know that women in leadership positions are subjected to sexual harassment,
contrapower harassment, incivilities, and bullying in their workplaces (e.g., Attell,
Brown, & Treiber, 2017; Fink, 2016; Johnson & Beasley, 2022; Taylor et al., 2018a;
Taylor et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2018). We also know that
discrimination leads to poor work satisfaction and a higher likelihood that women will eventually exit the workplace (Hindman & Walker, 2020).

Nevertheless, less work has been done in its sister discipline, campus recreation. A handful of studies have looked generally at the demographic breakdown of campus recreation as well as the career paths of women in campus recreation. However, there is a dearth of literature about women’s lived experiences in campus recreation leadership positions. In 2021, Lucia and Padgett completed a phenomenological study on the career trajectories of women in campus recreation. They offered an initial understanding the lived experiences of women in this field. They suggested that in their career trajectories, the participants expressed the need for mentors and allies, and often faced barriers related to organizational culture. Lucia and Padgett (2022) called for “further research about women’s lived experiences working in collegiate recreation departments” (p. 114). This dissertation study began addressing their call by adding to their qualitative work through narrative inquiry. The goal was to consider how the experiences of women directors of campus recreation converged and diverged from the experiences of women in sport leadership positions (e.g., Smith et al., 2012). By doing so, the field of recreation and sport management can better serve this population in the future.

Secondly, this study examined how women’s experiences as campus recreation directors impacted their health positively and negatively. There has been minimal attention given to the health implications of women working in recreation and sport. However, we know that the experience of sexism and gender discrimination in intercollegiate athletics can negatively affect one’s mental health (e.g., Hindman &
Walker, 2020). As such, this study sought to begin discussing health and wellness for women directors in campus recreation. Additionally, some researchers are calling for more interdisciplinary work between the fields of recreation and sport management and public health (see Eime et al., 2015; Librett et al., 2007). This study linked the two disciplines from a female employee health perspective. Specifically, NIRSA (2020) and NASPA (2004) have taken a more directed look at health and wellbeing promotion within higher education. NIRSA (2020) specifically recognizes the role campus recreation departments play in the holistic care of the campus community.

Finally, this study added to the work-life interface literature by responding to the call from Lopez and colleagues (2020). These researchers highlighted that women in campus recreation reported higher rates of work-life conflict. This finding came after acknowledging that campus recreation employees are usually satisfied with their work circumstances yet feel burdened by the long hours and unanticipated added responsibilities. Lopez and colleagues (2020) suggested further qualitative research to unpack the unique aspects of the campus recreation workplace that may diverge from the dominant, intercollegiate athletics literature in recreation and sport management.

**Guiding Theories**

Career Construction Theory (CCT) along with critical feminist theory and hegemony, allowed me to explore women’s experiences navigating leadership positions. CCT provided a social constructivist lens as a way to examine the personal characteristics and social context that informed the development of the participant’s identities (Astin, 1984; Savickas, 2005). Critical feminist theory added to the constructivist nature of CCT
by striving to identify constraints imposed by dominant power structures (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002). Importantly, narrative inquiry and CCT are complimentary because individuals act as authors of their own lives by expressing goals and placing meaning on the activities in which they participate (Savickas, 2013).

**Methodology**

The use of narrative inquiry “provides researchers with a rich framework through which they can investigate ways humans experience the world depicted through their stories” (Mertova & Webster, 2020, p. 1). It allowed me to collect stories about women-specific experiences in campus recreation and privilege those stories, as one of my goals was to give voice to individuals who do not always have a voice.

I engaged in semi-structured interviews with nine women who were campus recreation directors in the power five conferences. I completed a two-phased interview with each participant (Kim, 2016), which means I interviewed each participant twice. After initial listening, transcription, and reading the interviews, I engaged in narrative thematic analysis (Reissman, 2008). The goal during this analysis was to maintain the story as a whole. Reissman (2008) described this as “theorizing from the case rather than from component themes (categories) across cases” (p. 53). It was important to focus on what each participant said rather than the how, whom, or for what purposes. In each case, prioritizing each participant’s story was essential to understanding the unique career experiences of women in leadership in campus recreation. I utilized Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis to work through this process.
Findings and Discussion

After completing data analysis, I constructed four themes: (a) “I was very aware of being the only woman:” navigating the cycle of the system by examining their positionalities; (b) “relationship focused:” women’s ways of developing their own leadership styles; (c) “life is bigger than just work:” work and life interface; and (d) “rhythm of back and forth:” negotiating personal and professional impact of being women leaders. Each theme had corresponding categories. “I was very aware of being the only woman:” navigating the cycle of the system by examining their positionalities included the categories of systemic sexism; interpersonal struggle with supervisors, predecessors, and others; and opportunity knocks. “Relationship focused:” women’s ways of developing their own leadership styles included the categories of collaborative leadership style and leadership challenges. “Life is bigger than just work:” work and life interface included the categories of finding balance and work-life benefit?. “Rhythm of back and forth:” negotiating personal and professional impact of being women leaders included the categories of collision of life and work, physical manifestations of stress, and importance of resilience and self-care.

Importantly, the findings informed the guiding research questions of this dissertation. Chapter Five was organized by research question. Research Question 1 focused on narratives shared by the participants about their leadership experiences. Many of these narratives highlighted the continued struggle women leaders face in male-dominated spaces. The participants shared their struggles with interpersonal relationships as well as the importance of allies and mentors.
Research Question 2 focused on how participants negotiated the intersection of their work with their life. Many of the participants shared the difficulty of truly finding a balance between their work and their lives. They expressed that it was an intentional process of negotiating that tension. Several of the participants shared significant life and work stressors they have had to negotiate during their careers. Unfortunately, these participants also detailed challenging health issues they have had to navigate due to those stressors. Despite all of that, many shared the benefits (i.e., life enrichment) they received from their jobs. These included access to wellness resources and facilities as well as feeling like a good role model for their children.

Research Question 3 focused on the narratives the participants shared about their career evolution. Most of the participant’s career trajectories followed the traditional campus recreation paths. In terms of the current status of women in campus recreation leadership, while all participants were optimistic, they indicated that there is still much work to be done to ensure women are being prepared for leadership in these spaces.

Finally, Research Question 4 focused on how the participants conceptualized their career satisfaction. Their satisfaction was evident in the positive impacts they have made on their campus communities. Yet, this was an area in which a quantitative approach would have been a more useful approach.

Implications

Despite some of the study’s limitations, namely the lack of diversity among the participants, this dissertation has important implications for practice and policy in both recreation and sport management and public health fields. Importantly, there is a need to
better prepare the next generation of women leaders. This includes providing strategic professional development opportunities as well as key conversations about leader succession. It was troubling to hear from Sam that many women have exited the field because they felt there were not any opportunities for career advancement. If we do not better prepare this next generation, Rachel’s fear will become a reality. Despite all the progress women have made, if no women are waiting and prepared in the queue for leadership succession, those positions held by women will fall back into the hands of men, qualified men, but men nonetheless.

Additionally, this dissertation speaks to the importance of employee wellness initiatives. The participants had clearly experienced significant health complications due to stressful work and life circumstances. Yet, simply adding programming is not enough. Oftentimes women are overburdened with both work and home responsibilities that adding other activities to their schedules is not necessarily the answer. These programs and initiatives need to be geared strategically and specifically for women. NIRSA (2020) suggests offering acupuncture, childcare services, cooking classes, lactation rooms, massage, mental health services, nutrition counseling, career development, and spiritual wellbeing.

In terms of policy implications, there is always room for improvement in diversity initiatives. This includes instituting gender diversity plans (Cunningham, 2008). By incorporating these plans, changes in policy can be made to amend previous policies that are gendered and advantage men over women. Based on the findings of this dissertation, some of these policies may include work flexibility, the ability to work from home,
additional considerations made for maternity leave, equitable hiring practices, and changes in policies that prohibit children in the workplace.

Finally, in higher education, there has been a push for health in all policies. One of the ways this is happening is through the Okanagan Charter, which is an international charter for health-promoting universities and colleges. Universities that are part of this charter are committed to “infus[ing] health into everyday operations, business practices, and academic mandates” (Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting Universities and Colleges, 2015, p. 2). Based on the findings of this dissertation, there are leaders across the country who are committed to this work. By committing to integrating health and wellness across campuses, we can radically change the landscape of the mental health crisis gripping higher education.

**Future Research**

In the future, research should focus on continuing to unpack the experiences of women directors of campus recreation departments. This includes seeking a more diverse pool of participants. Future research should also strive to gain a better idea of women campus recreation director’s job satisfaction as well as their pivotal role in the advancement of higher education. Researchers can also strive toward determining wellness initiatives that are advantageous to women leaders as well as focus on specific, critical policy changes that are lasting.

**Summary**

In summary, this doctoral dissertation sought to unpack the experiences of women directors of campus recreation in the power five conference institutions. Through the use
of narrative inquiry, I gained an intimate understanding of the lived experiences of nine unique women. In doing so, I was given the opportunity and the privilege to learn from my participants as they shared their career journeys, their family stories, their heartaches, their passions, and their aspirations.
LIST OF REFERENCES


306


https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700119842555


https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X027007004


https://thesportjournal.org/article/a-history-of-women-in-sport-prior-to-title-ix/


https://doi.org/10.1177/089124396010002002


Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity. (n.d.). *Women in sport leadership: Board Snapshot.*

https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-0038412657&partnerID=40&md5=b98a361930e3d32d86a5938f75c1beb2


https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1027/1016-9040/a000124


https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12238

10.1080/07053436.1992.10715412


Kentta, G., Bentzen, M., Dieffenbach, K., & Olusoga, P. (2020). Challenges experienced by women higher performance coaches and it’s association with sustainability in the

https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2019-0029


https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2063


https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.1992.10484051


328


329


333


https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00905


https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327582ijpr1503_1


https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1996.tb00815.x


Shepherd-Banigan, M., Bell, J. F., Basu, A., Booth-LaForce, C., & Harris, J. R. (2016). Workplace stress and working from home influence depressive symptoms among


“You should be flattered!”: Female sport management faculty experiences of sexual harassment and sexism. Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal, 26(1), 43–53.
https://doi.org/10.1123/wspaj.2017-0038


Yager, G. M. (1983). *Attributes, career aspirations, and achievement expectations of women intramural-recreational sports professionals*. The Ohio State University.


https://doi.org/10.3390/merits3010012
APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Protocol

**Women Directors of Campus Recreation Departments in the Power 5 Conferences**

We are interested in learning about the career experiences of women campus recreation directors at institutions in the Power 5 Conferences. These types of experiences may be different for different women. We are interested in your opinions and thoughts, and there are no right or wrong answers to any questions. If you do not know how to answer a question or choose not to answer, that is okay. You are free to stop the interview at any time. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time. There will not be any consequences. Your information will be completely confidential, and a pseudonym will be used so that you cannot be identified in the future. Do you have any questions before we begin?

**Demographic Questions**

- How long have you been in the field of campus recreation?
- How long have you been a director?
- Where is your current institution?
- What is your official title?
- What is your education level?
- Where is your department “housed?” (e.g., student affairs, student life, athletics, etc.)
- What is your race and ethnicity?
- How do you identify yourself in terms of your gender? (What’s your gender identity?)
- When and where were you born?
- What is your spirituality and/or religious identity?
- What is your current relationship status?
- Do you have children?
- What is your general socioeconomic status?

1. RQ 3: What stories do women leaders in campus recreation have about their career evolution?
   a. Tell me your story of how you got into this field.
   b. Tell me about any leadership experiences before this one.
   c. Tell me about your leadership now.
   d. Tell me your story of how you became the Director of Campus Recreation.
      i. What were some of your dominant feelings during this journey?
      ii. Who were the key players in your journey?
   e. Can you identify the most important events that occurred during your campus recreation journey so far?
      i. Of these events, which would you consider to be most beneficial to your journey?
      ii. Of these events, which would you consider to be the most stressful for you throughout your journey?
2. **RQ 1:** What stories do women leaders in campus recreation have about their leadership experiences?
   
a. How would you describe your leadership style?
   
i. Tell me a story of someone who was influential in your leadership development
   
b. High point of your leadership experience?
   
c. Low point of your leadership experience?
   
d. How do you think your gender influenced your career journey?
   
e. What is your perception of Campus Recreation in terms of gender?
   
i. What is your personal experience and tell me about that?
   
f. Can you identify a story in which your leadership was challenged?
   
g. Tell me about your important turning point(s) in your leadership development?
   
h. Do you have any stories related to your gender and your leadership style?

3. **RQ 2:** What stories do women leaders in campus recreation have about work-life interface?
   
a. You told me about your family earlier. How are you balancing work and life?
   
i. Tell me what you do at work and what you do outside of work
   
ii. How would you describe your work and life intersection?
   
   b. Can you identify a story (or stories) in which your work and your life intersected?
i. Can you tell me a story of when there was a conflict between your work and your life?

ii. Can you tell me a story of when you felt balanced between your work and your life?

iii. Can you tell me a story of how your work life and your life-life benefit one another?

c. Do you have a story about a time in which your work affected your health?

4. RQ 4: What stories do women leaders in campus recreation share about career satisfaction?

   a. You have been in this field for BLANK years, tell me if you are satisfied?

      i. Tell me about that? Or tell me if not?

   b. Throughout your time as a director, can you identify the most important events that have influenced your career satisfaction?

   c. Can you identify a story or stories about how you have overcome difficult times in your career?

      i. Can you detail the strategies you utilized to overcome this event?

   d. Are there any events or points in your journey where you thought about quitting or doing something different?

5. Wrap Up

   a. From your perspective, is there anything else you think I should know about this topic?
b. Is there anything I did not ask that I should have?

Thank you for your time!

(1st Interview): The next step for me is to transcribe this conversation. I will omit all identifying information and generate a pseudonym for you (if they did not select one themselves). I look forward to our second conversation. Does DATE and TIME still work for you? Great! Have a great rest of your day.

(2nd Interview): As I indicated last time, I will transcribe our conversation and omit all identifying information. After I complete the transcription, I will combine both interviews into one document and email you a copy. You are welcome to make any edits to the transcript as well as provide additional feedback. I greatly appreciate your time and willingness to participate in my study. I will be in touch in the next week or so. Thank you!
Appendix B

IRB Outcome Letter

May 19, 2022

Steven N Waller
UTK - Coll of Education, Illh, & Human - Kinesiology, Recreation and
Re: UTK IRB-22-06909-XM
Study Title: Career experiences of women directors of campus recreation: A narrative inquiry

Dear Steven N Waller:

The Human Research Protections Program (HRPP) reviewed your application for the above referenced project and determined that your application is eligible for exempt review under 45 CFR 46.101, Category 2 with limited IRB review: Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if the information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by 411(h)(7).

Your application has been determined to comply with proper consideration for the rights and welfare of human subjects and the regulatory requirements for the protection of human subjects.

Therefore, this letter constitutes full approval of your application (version 1.3) as submitted, including the following documents that have been dated and stamped IRB approved:

- Women in Campus Rec Informed Consent v 1.1
- Women campus rec guides v 1.0
- Women campus rec Recruitment E-mail v 1.0

Note: Signed informed consent forms are to be retained for at least 3 years following the close of the study.

You are approved to enroll a maximum of 15 participants. Approval of this study will be valid from 05/19/2022.

Any revisions in the approved application, consent forms, instruments, recruitment materials, etc., must be submitted to and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. In addition, you are responsible for reporting any unanticipated serious adverse events or other problems involving risks to subjects or others in the manner required by the local IRB policy.

Approval of this study is valid for three years. If a Study Update Form is not submitted in iMedIRIS and approved by the IRB prior to 05/19/2025, the study will be automatically closed by the IRB and no further study activity will be permitted until a Study Update Form is received. Please be sure to also submit a Study Closure Request (Form 7) when all research activity, including data analysis, has been completed.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board | Office of Research & Engagement
1534 White Avenue | Knoxville, TN 37996-1529
865-974-7697 | 865-974-7400 fax | irb.utk.edu

[University Logo]
Appendix C
Recruitment Email

Hello __participant’s name__. 

My name is Emily J. Johnson. I am a doctoral student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in Sport Management. Myself, and my advisor, Dr. Steven Waller, are conducting research on the career experiences of women directors of campus recreation. I am inviting you to participate because you have been identified as woman director of campus recreation at a Power 5 conference institution.

Participation in this research includes an approximately two, one-hour recorded video conference interviews about your career experiences. After your interview is transcribed by a myself, you will receive a copy of your interview that you will be asked to review to ensure accuracy, which will conclude your commitment to this study.

There are minimal risks associated with this study, and, Although there may not be any direct benefit from your participation in this study, the primary benefit of this study is increased awareness and deeper understanding of the career experiences of women directors of campus recreation. Participation is completely voluntary, and you would be able to drop out of the study without penalty at any point.
If you have any questions or would like to participate in the research, I can be reached at ejohn112@vols.utk.edu or Dr. Steven Waller can be reached at swaller2@utk.edu or 865-974-1279.

Thank you,

Emily J. Johnson, M.S.
Appendix D

Informed Consent

Consent for Research Participation

Research Study Title: Career Experiences of Women Directors of Campus Recreation: A Narrative Inquiry
Researcher(s): Emily J. Johnson, M.S., University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Steven Waller, Ph.D., University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Why am I being asked to be in this research study?

We are asking you to be in this research study because you identify as a woman director of campus recreation as a Power 5 Conference Institution.

What is this research study about?

The purpose of the research study is to gain a deeper understanding of the career experiences of women campus recreation directors.

Who is conducting this research study?

This study is being conducted by researchers at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

How long will I be in the research study?

If you agree to be in the study, your participation will last for approximately 3 hours: two, one-hour interviews and a review of your transcript for accuracy.

What will happen if I say “Yes, I want to be in this research study”?

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to complete two recorded interviews approximately one-hour each using video conferencing software. You will be asked about your career experiences related to your role as a campus recreation director. After the recording is transcribed, you will be asked to review your interview to ensure accuracy.

What happens if I say “No, I do not want to be in this research study”?

Being in this study is up to you. You can say no now or leave the study later. Either way, your decision will not have any impact on you.

What happens if I say “Yes” but change my mind later?

Even if you decide to be in the study now, you can change your mind and stop at any time.

If you decide to stop before the study is completed, contact either Emily J. Johnson at ejohn112@vols.utk.edu, or her advisor, Dr. Steven Waller at swaller2@utk.edu or (865) 974-1279. If you withdraw from the study at any point, your data will be destroyed.

Are there any possible risks to me?

There are minimal risks involved with participating in this study. Participants may recall experiences in the past that were negative in nature, and questions that are personal in nature may cause discomfort. You can decline to answer any question. All names and affiliations will remain confidential to decrease the loss of confidentiality. However, due to the small number of
women directors of campus recreation, there is a risk of identification. You will be assigned a pseudonym, and that will be used for any direct quotation used. Additionally, Otter.ai, a web-based transcription software, will be used to assist in the transcription of your interview. Otter.ai does pose some data security risks as the transcripts uploaded to Otter may be used by Otter for machine learning, testing, tuning, optimizing, validating, or otherwise enhancing the analytics, models, or algorithms underlying the service. Therefore, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed once it is shared with Otter online.

Are there any benefits to being in this research study?

You may not directly benefit from your participation in this research study. The primary benefit of this study is increase knowledge about the experiences of women directors of campus recreation. Societal benefits include a deeper understanding of the role of the topic.

Who can see or use the information collected for this research study?

We will protect the confidentiality of your information by keeping data stored securely and only made available to persons conducting the study unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. If information from this study is published or presented at scientific meetings, your name and personal information will not be used.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information of what information came from you. Although it is unlikely, there are times when others may need to see the information we collect about you. These include:

- People at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville who oversee research to make sure it is conducted properly.
- Government agencies (such as the Office for Human Research Protections in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), and others responsible for watching over the safety, effectiveness, and conduct of the research.
- If a law or court requires us to share the information, we would have to follow that law or final court ruling.

What will happen to my information after this study is over?

We will not keep your information to use for future research. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be deleted from your research data collected as part of the study. We will not share your research data with other researchers.

What else do I need to know?

About 15 people will take part in this study. Due to the small number of participants in this study, it is possible that someone could identify you based on the information we collected from you. If we learn about any new information that may change your mind about being in the study, we will tell you. If that happens, you may be asked to sign a new consent form.

Who can answer my questions about this research study?

If you have questions or concerns about this study, or have experienced a research related problem or injury, contact the researchers at Emily J. Johnson, ejohn112@vols.utk.edu, or her advisor, Dr. Steven Waller at swaller2@utk.edu or (865) 974-1279.

For questions or concerns about your rights or to speak with someone other than the research team about the study, please contact:

Institutional Review Board

IRB NUMBER: UTK IRB-22-06909-XM
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 05/18/2022
IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 05/18/2025

362
I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the chance to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have more questions, I have been told who to contact. By signing this document, I am agreeing to be in this study. I will receive a copy of this document after I sign it.

Name of Adult Participant  Signature of Adult Participant  Date

Researcher Signature (to be completed at time of informed consent)

I have explained the study to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information described in this consent form and freely consents to be in the study.

Name of Research Team Member  Signature of Research Team Member  Date

IRB NUMBER: UTK IRB-22-0909-XM
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 05/16/2022
IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 05/18/2025
Appendix E

Follow-Up Email

Hello __participant’s name__,

Thank you so much for your interest! I have included a scheduling link: https://calendly.com/emily_johnson/women-in-campus-rec-interviews

Next steps:

1. Please use the above link to sign up for a time for the interviews. I believe you will need to use this link twice to sign up for two different, one-hour interviews.

2. If you are willing and able to proceed, I have also re-attached the informed consent form to this email. Please review it, make note of any questions you may have, sign it if you are comfortable, and send it back to me. We will review it at the start of our first interview.

3. You will be provided a Zoom link/calendar invite for each of the interviews.

4. After our interviews, I will finalize the transcripts of our conversations and send them back to you for you to review.

Looking forward to (hopefully) meeting you!

Thanks again,

Emily
Appendix F

Interview Protocol Outline

Interview Guide Outline

Women Directors of Campus Recreation Departments in the Power 5 Conferences

1. Series of Demographic Questions

2. Series of question about career path
   a. How you got into the field
   b. How you became director
      i. People who helped (or hurt) along the way
   c. Important events in your career

3. Series of questions about leadership experiences and style
   a. Low and high points of leadership experience
   b. Leadership style? How did you develop it?
   c. How has gender influenced career/leadership journey?

4. Series of questions about work-life interface
   d. How would you describe your work and life intersection?
   e. What do you do outside of work?
   f. How does work affect your health?

5. Series of questions about career satisfaction
   g. Important events that have influenced your career satisfaction
   h. How have you overcome difficult times in your career?
      i. Strategies? Resilience? Spirituality? Other?
Appendix G

Member-Checking Email

Hello __participant’s name__,

Thank you so much for speaking to me this summer about your experiences as a director of a campus recreation department. I really enjoyed learning about you!

I have attached the transcript from our time together. I have worked to remove any information that would identify you within this transcript and have given you a pseudonym. If you find any identifiers or information you are uncomfortable having in the transcript, if you have comments, or see any other changes you would like me to make, please feel free to use the "track changes" feature in Word, or send me your feedback in an email.

Additionally, if you would like to share additional anecdotes that come to mind as you read through, that would be welcomed.

If you could please provide any feedback you have for me by [two weeks after this email is sent], I would be immensely grateful.

Thank you so much,

Emily
Appendix H

Narrative Thematic Analysis Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IN VIVO CODES</th>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>THEME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shifted my perspective dramatically</td>
<td>Finding balance</td>
<td>&quot;Life is bigger than just work:&quot; Work and life interface</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interrupt meetings if I have to</td>
<td>Finding balance</td>
<td>&quot;Life is bigger than just work:&quot; Work and life interface</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premature ventricular contractions</td>
<td>Physical manifestations of stress</td>
<td>“Rhythm of Back and Forth:” Negotiating personal and professional impact of being women leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most egregious example of sexism</td>
<td>Systemic sexism</td>
<td>“I was very aware of being the only woman:” Navigating the cycle of the system by examining their positionalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My heart and brain were still at Children’s Hospital</td>
<td>Collision of life and work</td>
<td>“Rhythm of Back and Forth:” Negotiating personal and professional impact of being women leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Much more than the work or the job</td>
<td>Finding balance</td>
<td>&quot;Life is bigger than just work:&quot; Work and life interface</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix I

Codebook for Narrative Thematic Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Example In Vivo Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I was very aware of being the only woman:” Navigating the cycle of the system by examining their positionalities</td>
<td>Systemic sexism</td>
<td>• “microaggressions”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• “old boys club”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• “women are not being respected”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal struggle with supervisors, predecessors, and others</td>
<td></td>
<td>• “constant battle with athletics [department]”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• “the disrespect”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• “he’s a legend”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity knocks</td>
<td></td>
<td>• “needed a job”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• “got lucky”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• “encouraged to apply”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Relationship-Focused:” Women’s ways of Developing their own leadership styles</td>
<td>Collaborative leadership style</td>
<td>• “open and transparent”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• “collaborative, democratic”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• “create consensus”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership challenges</td>
<td></td>
<td>• “wouldn’t communicate”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• “challenge to my values”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• “continued to lie”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Finding balance | • “intentionally setting boundaries”
• “supervisor believes in family”
• “flexibility” |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Work-life benefit? | • “kept me young”
• “access to recreation”
• “meaningful impact” |
| Collision of life and work | • “kept getting pulled away”
• “all things collided”
• “not getting to be a mom” |
| Physical manifestations of stress | • “not enough sleep”
• “bells palsy”
• “body saying ‘listen’” |
| Importance of resilience | • “yoga”
• “get emotions out”
• “practice gratitude” |
VITA

Emily JoAnn Johnson grew up in Littleton, Colorado after spending the first few years of her life in Anaheim, California. After high school, she attended Baylor University in Waco, Texas where she was in the Honors College and majored in Health Science Studies. It was then she had her first exposure to research as she completed an honors thesis to culminate that experience. Upon graduating, Emily opted to continue her education in the Master of Public Health (MPH) program at Baylor University. During the first year of that program, she was the Fitness Graduate Assistant. Due to her experiences working in campus recreation, she re-evaluated her graduate education and opted to pause the MPH program and pursue a Master of Science (MS) in kinesiology with a concentration in sport psychology and motor behavior at the University of Tennessee. During her MS, Emily completed a thesis about women who participate in serious leisure, which solidified her enjoyment of qualitative research and interest in women’s experiences in recreation and sport. Ultimately, she decided to pursue her PhD in Sport Management as well as complete her MPH at the University of Tennessee in order to study the intersection of holistic health and women in recreation and sport. Emily will graduate with her PhD in May 2023.