Understanding the Career Paths and Experiences of Division I-A Athletic Directors: A Phenomenological Study

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UNDERSTANDING THE CAREER PATHS AND EXPERIENCES OF DIVISION I-A ATHLETIC DIRECTORS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Harold Thomas Swift

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of The Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Educational Leadership, Research and Technology Advisor: Donna Talbot, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University Kalamazoo, Michigan
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The focus of this study was to understand the career paths and experiences of Division I-A Athletic Directors. There are only 120 of these coveted positions in the country. The limited research on how to obtain this position led to this investigation.

This research examined the career paths of 10 Division I-A ADs male (five African American and five White) and their experiences reaching their position. A qualitative phenomenological approach was used as the methodology. One-on-one phone interviews were conducted using open-ended interview questions that elicited information from each participant. The Social Cognitive Career Theory and Critical Race Theory were the theoretical frameworks used as the lens in the data analysis process.

Data analysis produced three major themes and several sub themes, some of which were supported by previous research. As in other studies, the majority of the participants were former college student-athletes and coaches, and they also held graduate degrees. Some of the necessary skills and experiences to obtain an athletic director’s position were business acumen, networking skills, and volunteering opportunities. Although, participants agreed that the skills and experiences were important to acquire, some participants also acknowledged the importance of being “called” to the position.
In addition, the data reveal several factors pertaining to the lifestyle of an athletic director. ADs work extended hours, have supportive families, and must have thick skin and a sense of humor to handle the negative criticism from fans and alumni. Moreover, an emergent theme for holding this position was having the “right fit” with the university and the athletic department. According to the participants in this study, race was not a factor in obtaining their current athletic director positions.

According to the Social Cognitive Career Theory, all the participants demonstrated high self-efficacy based on their education, skills, and experiences they acquired in pursuing and obtaining their Division I-A athletic director positions. While none of the participants openly acknowledged the role of race in their careers, a few of the African American ADs shared specific stories about the impact of race as they pursued or considered accepting their positions.
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Harold Thomas Swift
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this study is to understand the career paths and experiences of Division I-A athletic directors. I examined the career paths of 10 (five African American and five White) Division I-A ADs and their experiences reaching their AD position. The position of a Division I-A Athletic Director (AD) is the highest position of authority within a collegiate athletic department. Only 120 AD positions exist and each year one of these becomes vacant due to several reasons, the most common are: lack of success with the athletic program or a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) violation. Being the overseer of the university’s athletic program, the AD holds full responsibility for its success or failure, which makes this prestigious position very volatile as well as difficult to obtain, especially, at the Division I-A level.

The question is what is the career path to this position? Few studies have been conducted on the career patterns of Division I-A athletic directors. The empirical research that exists consist of a quantitative study that focused on the personal characteristics of Division I-A ADs and a grounded theory study that examined the career patterns of female, minorities, and White male ADs (Parrish, 2003; Selby, 2001). Though these two studies may have shed some light on the dynamics of the AD position, much is still unknown about the career paths and experiences of the climb to this prestigious and highly visible position.

According to Richard Lapchick, an expert in sport issues, (2009 Racial and Gender Report Card College Sport) Whites hold an overwhelming percentage of
athletic director (AD) positions at the Division I (90%), II (92%), and III (97%) levels, respectively. The pipeline for future athletic directors is predominantly White as well. The associate athletic director positions, like the AD position, are dominated by Whites in Division I (89.2%), Division II (88.8%), and Division III (96.4%) (Lapchick, 2010).

On the playing field the African American student-athlete representation is more prevalent than the African American Division I-A AD representation. In 2009 Division I athletics, African American males made up 25% of the total male student-athletes and African American females comprised 15.1% of the total female student-athletes (ncaa.org, 2010). However, these statistics do not reflect the representation of African Americans in leadership positions within Division I-A athletic departments.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) views the scarcity of African Americans in key functionary positions (decision making or leadership positions such as athletic director (AD), assistant athletic director, head coach, etc.) at NCAA Division I institutions as a major concern (ncaa.org, 2010). Based on the current statistics and NCAA concerns, having a greater understanding of the career experiences of African American and White male Division I-A ADs is compelling.

Research is limited regarding the advancement of African Americans in athletic administration. Only a few studies could be found that researched the issue of the low representation of African Americans in AD positions at NCAA institutions. These studies focused on the retention and recruitment of African Americans in sport administration positions at NCAA institutions. Taylor (2001) studied six African Americans in athletic administration positions or Faculty Athletics Representatives
(FAR's) at Division I-A institutions, and Myles (2005) focused on the barriers pertaining to the absence of color in athletic administration at Division I-A institutions. None addressed the career paths and experiences of the African American Division I-A ADs. This study will attempt to bring new knowledge of this phenomenon.

Understanding this phenomenon may be beneficial for the following reasons:

1. It may provide vital information for hiring committees on the necessities needed to be a Division I athletic director.
2. It may bring a new perspective for aspiring athletic administrators on how to plot their career paths to become athletic directors.
3. It may provide information for sport management programs to evaluate their curricula to insure their students receive the necessary education, skills, and experience in athletic administration.
4. The information may be used to assist existing support systems such as NCAA minority recruiting programs, Black Coaches and Administrators (BCA), and other athletic administration mentoring programs.
5. It will add to the literature on the career path of Division I-A athletic directors.

For the purpose of this study career path is defined as a planned progression of jobs within an organization or a professional field leading to the realization of career goals (encarta.com, 2009). The focus of this study was to understand the career paths and experiences of obtaining the position of a Division I-A athletic director. By
using a phenomenological approach I was able to get to the “true essence” of this phenomenon. This required in-depth interviews with the participants (five African American ADs and five White ADs) using effective interviewing questions to extract the “rich” data from the participants. The research design will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Next, I provide descriptions of the athletic director’s responsibilities, required competencies, and compensation packages of a Division I-A AD.

**Background of Study**

**Athletic Directors**

Overall, the role of AD has many facets that require an extraordinary individual to be competent in many areas in order to manage and sustain a successful athletic program. The day-to-day responsibilities of university athletic departments are delegated to the athletic directors by university presidents. The AD position is the highest authoritative position within the athletic department (Leith, 1983; Taylor, 1992). Typically, ADs are responsible for:

- Day-by-day operation of the athletic department
- Hiring and firing coaches
- The business management of the athletic department
- Welfare of the student-athletes and the integrity of the university’s athletic programs
- Maintaining compliance with the institutional, conference and NCAA regulations

With this amount of responsibility the success or failure of a university’s athletic programs ultimately rests on the shoulders of the AD. This complex position requires
a person competent and capable of managing several departments and staff. Collegiate ADs are required, usually, to have at least a Bachelors degree, but a Masters degree is preferred with experience in administration of collegiate level athletics programs including budget preparation, facilities management, strong marketing and communication skills, and experience supervising athletic coaches and office staff (ncaa.org, 2009).

From dated publications, we know that the majority of collegiate ADs began their careers as college athletes or coaches (Fitzgerald, Sagaria & Nelson, 1994; Shoji, 2004). In the past, athletic directors were notable coaches selected based on their recognition in the university (Duderstadt, 2003); often, these ADs brought a competitive understanding of athletics, but lacked the financial savvy to handle the business side of operating an athletic department. Due to the changing nature of athletic departments; university presidents are now looking to hire candidates (preferably from the business sector) with a range of skills and experience: leadership, fiscal management, personnel relations and public relations (Duderstadt, 2003; Parkhouse, 1991). These ADs are responsible for self-supporting entertainment businesses, while maintaining acceptable academic values of the universities, conferences, and NCAA.

Athletic programs at colleges like the University of Michigan or Ohio State University are Division I-A programs and are Bowl Championship Series (BCS) eligible. Programs of this nature are considered to be the pinnacle or elite athletic programs and have multi-million dollar budgets for their athletic departments, which make the AD positions at this level desirable to obtain. Division I-A universities are
defined as football schools with fairly elaborate programs that meet minimum attendance requirements:

- 17,000 people in attendance per home game, or 20,000 average of all football games in the last four years or
- 30,000 permanent seats in their stadium and average 17,000 per home game or
- 20,000 average of all football games in the last four years or
- Be in a member conference in which at least six conference members sponsor football or more than half of football schools meet attendance criterion) (ncaa.org, 2009).

Another reason Division I-A AD positions are in demand is the compensation package afforded to the fortunate few. The median expected salary of a typical AD position is $100,348 annually (salary.com, 2009). The Ohio State University athletic director makes $648,000 annually and oversees an athletic budget of more than $115 million (columbusdispatch.com, 2009). Compensation packages and perks (house, cars, golf memberships, etc.) of that magnitude are not the norm, but are possible if the athletic programs are continually successful. Like a successful CEO, it could be presumed that successful ADs are sought after by other universities to turnaround their unsuccessful athletic programs and are usually paid handsomely for their services. For those two reasons alone the AD position becomes an alluring position to obtain. But what is the career path to this intriguing position?

The literature has shown that obtaining the proper education and experience are critical to achieving the position of a Division I-A AD (Fitzgerald, Sagaria &
Nelson, 1994; Schneider & Stier, 2001). Two other important contributors to help obtain the position of a Division I-A AD are mentors and support systems. A *mentor* is defined as somebody, usually older and more experienced, who advises and guides a younger, less experienced person. Another definition for mentor is a senior or experienced person in a company or organization who gives guidance and training to a junior colleague (encarta.com, 2009). Both of these definitions are appropriate to consider when examining the career paths and experiences of Division I-A ADs or any other professional.

Mentoring is viewed as an essential component to the development of a successful AD. In fact, several professional associations were created to insure this guidance is available to nurture aspiring athletic administrators. The National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics (NACDA) and the Division I-A Athletics Directors Association (D1A) are associations designed to help assistant, associate ADs, and newly appointed ADs prepare for the AD position by providing mentors and fostering relationships with other veteran ADs. The mentor acts as a support system for the junior colleague to help address certain issues and situations pertaining to not only the AD position, but in other facets as well (e.g., personally, socially, etc.). The mentoring relationship, if fostered properly, will provide the mentee with:

- Confidence in handling new situations and making important decisions in administering an athletic department.
• A network of influential references to refer to when applying for future AD positions, which confirms the adage of “it’s not what you know, but who you know.”

Other support systems exist, specifically, to address the low representation of minorities in leadership positions in the athletic administration profession. The Black Coaches and Administrators (BCA), National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Fellows Leadership Development Program, and the NCAA Leadership Institute for Ethnic Minority Males and Females are programs created to provide aspiring minority athletic administrators with the professional education and experience needed to be a potential AD candidate. Also, these programs provide mentoring and networking opportunities for minorities, which may not be prevalent at their institution of study or employment. Overall, these programs realize the lack of minorities in leadership positions in athletic administration is a concern and are attempting to afford the same opportunities to minorities that Whites have.

Even still, having the proper education, experience, and mentor/networking connection does not guarantee that one will obtain a Division I-A AD position. Yet, others have skipped the more traditional process of obtaining this position completely. For example, Pat Kilkenny, former athletics director of the University of Oregon, attended the University of Oregon, but did not complete his undergraduate studies. His biography on the university’s website focuses on his business acumen and not his educational or athletic administrative experience background (goducks.com, 2009). Yet, he was in charge of a Division I-A athletic program, whose football and basketball programs are consistently in the running for the
national championship, and oversaw a multi-million dollar budget. He may have been an exception to the rule, but nonetheless, he was a Division I-A AD, which makes this phenomenon of the career path of a Division I-A AD all the more important to understand.

**About the Researcher**

This topic is significant to me, because my overall goal in life is to be a Division I-A athletic director. My concerns about conducting research on a personal topic focused on the fear that my closeness could cloud the research and contaminate the results as well as hinder or prevent my opportunity to establish myself within a Division I-A athletic department. After speaking with my advisor and tweaking my approach to the topic, I was reassured that the direction I was taking on the subject matter would be beneficial not only to me, but other individuals, especially minorities pursuing a career in athletic administration.

My personal connection to this topic has been one of perseverance and humility. Since 1996, after I completed my Master of Arts in Physical Education, I have pursued a career in athletic administration to no avail. For years I applied for entry level positions and internships within a collegiate athletic department trying to gain the necessary experience to move up the organizational structure. Unfortunately, I was unable to obtain a position.

After numerous rejections I decided to write all the Division I-A athletic directors in my state. My question to them was “how can I become an athletic director?” Fortunately, one athletic director responded to my plea. In a two page letter.
he so graciously explained to me what I needed to do in order to make it up the ranks to becoming an AD.

In his letter he emphasized what he looks for when considering a potential employee for his athletic department. The two critical characteristics are: collegiate experience specifically relevant to the position vacancy (this is central to success); and collegiate references willing and able to articulate their capabilities. He stated "luck" sometimes plays a key factor in obtaining an athletic administration position. Often positions are filled within an athletic department with existing employees or interns, because of familiarity with job responsibilities coupled with timing.

He also stressed the importance of interning and volunteering to gain the needed experience to apply for future positions as well as networking with senior athletic administrators. He viewed networking as a vital link to my professional growth and involvement.

In conclusion, he advised me to subscribe to the NCAA News publication and continue to apply for positions to obtain my objectives. But the most important advice he gave me was to remember that this journey was going to take a lot of sacrificing, both lifestyle and family sacrifices, to get my foot in the door.

This letter not only motivated me to pursue my goal of becoming an AD, but also gave me a blueprint on how to do it. After trying to secure an internship position at any level in a collegiate athletic department, I tried to gather experience by taking a position in recreation administration as the director of adult athletics for a city on the other side of the state. This position allowed me to gain experience in overseeing an
athletic program from every aspect. While this knowledge and experience were valuable, it still was not university related.

After realizing this position was not fulfilling my professional objectives I applied to the Western Michigan University Educational Leadership doctoral program. I believed that obtaining my doctorate would give me the credentials to pursue my desire to teach at the collegiate level and allow me to obtain a graduate assistant position or internship in the athletic department to gain the experience I have been seeking.

During my doctoral entrance interview one of the professors asked me what my professional goals were and I shared my dream of becoming an AD. Unknown to me, my educational background was strikingly similar to his and he too, at one time, desired to be an AD. He shared his testimony with me as well as some words of encouragement, but in the end he told me to have a back up plan in case I was unable to obtain an athletic administrative position. Obviously, he was familiar with the difficulty of acquiring a position within a collegiate athletic department.

When it came time to decide what topic I would research for my dissertation there was no doubt that I wanted to examine the career paths and experiences of Division I-A ADs. In particular, this optimistic approach will provide valuable information for other aspiring athletic administrators and students pursuing careers in athletic administration.

**Epistemology**

Epistemology or “theory of knowledge” is the study of knowledge. It asks the questions: What is knowledge? How do we know what we know? (Crotty, 1998). A
researcher’s theoretical perspective is derived from his/her epistemological approach, which determines the researcher’s methodology and methods (Creswell, 2003). Being an African American male, I view the world from a minority perspective. Knowing my African American heritage and how Blacks have persevered and progressed through years of oppression and racism has positively impacted my self-identity. Instead of having a pessimistic view of the world it has given me the optimism to overcome barriers and strive for excellence in everything.

My epistemological belief spreads across three philosophical tenets. They are constructivism, constructionism, and subjectivism. Constructivism believes we learn from our lived experiences as we adapt to the world (Rockmore, 2005). I believe I have learned most of life’s important lessons through experiencing them. For example, I have read numerous books on the dissertation writing process, but I have learned more through the actual writing experience than from the readings. This leads me to my constructionist perspective.

Constructionism believes the world we experience and the people we find ourselves to be are first and foremost the product of social processes. It is through our daily interactions in our social life that we create knowledge (Burr, 2003; Cromby & Nightingale, 1999; Gubrium & Holstein, 2008). Again, in my dissertation writing process my advisor has been instrumental in the development of my research and my thinking. She has educated me on the phenomenological discipline and how to conduct empirical research through our weekly meetings, in which, she questions my approach to things causing me to have to justify my actions based on the literature.
Through our interactions I have gained a better understanding of how to approach and write my dissertation.

Finally, subjectivism holds that the nature and existence of every object depends solely on our subjective awareness of it (Trainer, 1991). It is used to acquire new knowledge based on existing personal knowledge and experiences that are or are not available for public inspection (House, 1978). With this study of the career paths of Division I-A ADs it would behoove me to not assume anything about their career paths to obtaining the AD position. I had to bracket my preconceptions of this phenomenon and keep an open mind when interviewing the ADs. Their experiences bring new knowledge to this vague topic.

My personal belief is that one can learn from others’ lived experiences as well, but as we mature we begin to construct our own interpretation of the world through our own lived experiences.

**Theoretical Perspective**

As stated earlier, a researcher’s epistemological approach influences his/her theoretical perspective (Crotty, 1998). My theoretical perspective is influenced by critical race theory (CRT). CRT is a framework that explores and examines racism in society that privileges “Whiteness” as it disadvantages others because of their “Blackness.” It confronts “race neutrality” in policy and practice, and acknowledges the value of the Black voice that is often marginalized in mainstream theory, policy and practice (Hylton, 2009).

Sport sociology literature suggests that sport is a microcosm of the larger society (Leonard, 1998). This would suggest that racism is prevalent in the world of
sports. The influence of CRT on my psyche has led me to question whether racism has deterred African Americans and other minorities from obtaining positions of leadership within Division I-A university athletic departments. The underrepresentation of African Americans in Division I-A athletic director positions (7.5%) reinforces my assumption.

Having a better understanding of CRT, I reflected on my own disappointing personal experiences of trying to break into collegiate athletics. I noticed how CRT unknowingly impacted my perspective of the underrepresentation of African Americans in athletic administrative positions. Witnessing my White colleagues land entry-level positions and paid internships, while I constantly received rejection letters was very frustrating for me. I attributed some of their successes and my failures to a CRT perspective that emphasizes that race, in the U.S., privileges Whites. It was those experiences that strengthen my belief in CRT.

Although CRT has influenced my theoretical perspective, I will attempt to bracket my assumptions in order to not taint my investigation of understanding the career paths of Division I-A athletic directors.

My Approach

As stated earlier, my research approach is directly influenced by my epistemology and theoretical perspective. I see qualitative research as a means to understand one’s experience as naturally as possible through the participant’s interpretation. This approach allows the researcher to be innovative and work within researcher-designed frameworks. Also, for advocacy-participatory writers, there is a desire to pursue topics of personal interest allowing the marginalized people to have a
voice and possibly creating a better society for them and everyone (Creswell, 2003). As an African American male pursuing a career in athletic administration, I felt my personal connection to this topic and professional endeavors made a qualitative approach the appropriate methodology to use for this research. Detail of the chosen methodology is discussed in Chapter 3.

**Conceptual Framework**

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) provides a framework to understand the career paths and experiences of Division I-A athletic directors. The SCCT derived out of Bandura’s social cognitive theory (SCT) is a learning theory based on the ideas that people learn from watching others in action. SCCT adopted Bandura’s (1986) triadic reciprocal model of causality. This model holds that personal attributes, external environmental factors, and overt behavior each operate in interactive sets of variables that mutually influence one another (Lent & Brown, 1996). The connected variables that influence an individual’s career choice are: self-efficacy, outcome expectations and personal goals (Stitt-Gohdes, 1997).

I chose the SCCT for several reasons. First, the SCCT research has been centered on math and science careers and other domains, but very little has been conducted on the athletic administration field. I was only able to locate one study using the SCCT in the athletic administration field and none on Division I-A athletic directors. This study would extend the research base on SCCT into the athletic administration domain.

Secondly, the primary samples used in majority of the studies are White. Few SCCT studies have focused on African Americans as the sampled population. The
sampled population from the SCCT study on athletic administrators was African American women, but this study will comprise both African American and White male ADs. Again, this would extend the empirical research base of SCCT.

Thirdly, I agree with its principle of one’s self-efficacy either strengthens or weakens one’s belief of whether or not they can or cannot accomplish a desired goal. Henry Ford, the great businessman, once said “whether you think you can, or that you can’t, you are usually right.” I hold this to be true even as I progressed through the dissertation phase of my doctoral program. It was the intellectual and emotional support that my dissertation chair, other professors, and family members impressed on me along the journey that strengthened my self-efficacy to believe that I could accomplish completing my doctorate.

Finally, I believed that the influential factors such as one’s socioeconomic status, role models/mentors and race impacts one’s career choice. I worked with at-risk students for over 20 years and witnessed the impact that these influential factors conjoined assisted in or deterred a student’s career choice.

In my experience, the African American male students I have worked with aspired to become professional athletes, but lacked all of the influential factors of the SCCT such as an education, financial resources, and mentors. Without those influential factors their goals were merely dreams that were reinforced from watching their favorite African American professional athletes on television. As time passed, their beliefs about becoming professional athletes changed due mainly to the lack of education and other influential factors; eventually they shifted their career choices to pursuing illegal endeavors, such as drug selling. This was a career choice that seemed
attainable since they it saw daily in their neighborhoods, modeled to them on how to perform the illegal transactions.

Like the students I worked with, I had dreams of playing professional sports as a youth. Fortunately, my parents instructed me to pursue my education with the same vigor as I did athletics. My testimony could have been different had I not had the influential factors addressed by the SCCT. I was fortunate enough to have an education, resources, and guidance from my parents and mentors to help me achieve all that I have accomplished. Yet to this day, it is still those influential factors that enabled me to pursue my doctorate. For these reasons, I felt the SCCT was an appropriate lens to explore the career paths and experiences of Division I-A athletic directors.

Focus of the Study

As stated earlier, the purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the career paths and experiences of Division I-A athletic directors.

Research Questions

Overall, this study intended to examine the career paths and experiences of Division I-A ADs. This study was based on the following research question: What are the career paths and experiences of the Athletic Directors in obtaining an Athletic Director position at a Division I-A institution?

a) What factors assisted them in obtaining their athletic director position?

b) What previous experiences did they draw upon as they selected and implemented strategies to pursue an Athletic Director position?

c) What, if any, influence did race have in their career choice and development
in obtaining an athletic director position?

d) What support systems did they use to them you in obtaining an athletic director position?

e) What challenges did they encounter in their journey to secure an athletic director position?

Significance of Study

As stated earlier, the information obtained from this study can be helpful for several reasons. First, it may help aspiring athletic administrators and students on how to understand the career path that has lead to a successful Division I-A AD position. Second, it may provide valuable information for hiring committees on the necessities needed to be a Division I-A AD. Third, it may provide information for sport management programs to review their curricula to insure their students receive the necessary education, skills, and experience in athletic administration. Fourth, it will add to the literature on the career patterns of Division I-A athletic directors. Finally, the information can be used to assist existing support systems such as NCAA minority recruiting programs, Black Coaches and Administrators (BCA), and other athletic administration mentoring programs.

Limitations of Study

This study used a sample drawn from a minute population of potential participants that had experienced the researched phenomenon. There are only 120 Division I-A AD positions available in the U.S.; of those positions, only nine are held by African American men. In my study, I interviewed five of the nine African
American Division I-A Ads in the country; protecting the participants identities yet providing a full and accurate depiction of their voice was arduous. A wealth of information was obtained from the 10 participant sample but I had to make compromises in what I discussed in an effort to maintain my participants’ anonymity.

**Definition of Terms**

**Black or African American:** A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as "Black, African Am., or Negro," or provide written entries such as African American, Afro American, Kenyan, Nigerian, or Haitian.

**White:** A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as “White” or report entries such as Irish, German, Italian, Lebanese, Near Easterner, Arab, or Polish.

**Ethnic Minority:** a group that has different national or cultural traditions from the majority of the population.

**NCAA Division I-A:** Also known as Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS). Schools that have football are classified as Div. I-A or I-AA. I-A football schools are usually fairly elaborate programs. Div. I-A teams have to meet minimum attendance requirements (17,000 people in attendance per home game, or 20,000 average of all football games in the last four years or, 30,000 permanent seats in their stadium and average 17,000 per home game or 20,000 average of all football games in the last four years or, be in a member conference in which at least six conference members sponsor football or more than half of football schools meet attendance criterion. Div. I-AA teams do not need to meet minimum attendance requirements.
**Senior-level Administrators:** Associate Athletic Directors and above (Associate, Senior Associate, Director of Athletics and Senior Woman Administrator). Those in decision-making, power positions in the athletic department.

**Athletic Administrative Positions:** Positions in the athletic department, which include the athletic director, assistant or associate athletic director, business manager, academic advisor, compliance officer, sports information director, and ticket manager.

**Athletic Director or Director of Athletics:** The highest-ranking administrator in an institution’s athletic department.

**Mentor:** Individuals that usually have senior experience, that at the college level contribute time, interest, and emotional support over a period of time to further the career of a junior person, or protégée. These mentor relationships have traditionally been seen as informal, intense, and personal relationships between two individuals who are generally within the confines of the same organization.

**Faculty Athletics Representatives (FAR):** The faculty athletics representative is a member of the faculty or an administrator who holds faculty rank who is designated by the chief executive officer to represent the institution and its faculty in the institutions relationships with the NCAA and its conference.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the career paths and experiences of Division I-A athletic directors. While phenomenological studies are supposed to be free from preconceived notions about the phenomenon being studied, a dissertation requires that the researcher understands the literature that frames the topic being investigated. As stated earlier, there is limited literature specifically addressing the attainment of Division I-A AD positions. The literature that is available, and is summarized in this chapter, focuses on the educational expectations, experiences, and support for increasing the minority representation in Division I-A athletics administration. This chapter also provides information on my theoretical frameworks: Critical Race Theory and Social Cognitive Career Theory.

Educational Attainment

The job of athletic director (AD) is the top position in college athletic administration. The AD is the CEO of the athletic department and everyone in the athletic department (including coaches) work for him (Taylor, 1992). The main responsibility of the AD is to provide student athletes with the facilities and opportunities to compete at the highest level of their ability. This requires ADs to be proficient in many areas. According to Leith (1983) ADs need to be competent in a variety of skills and well versed in multiple job related tasks.

Collegiate ADs are required to have at least a Bachelors degree, but a Masters degree is preferred with experience in the administration of collegiate level athletics programs including budget preparation, facilities management, strong marketing and
communication skills, and experience supervising athletic coaches and office staff (ncaa.org, 2009). A study by Fitzgerald, Sagaria and Nelson (1994) examined the career patterns of male and female NCAA Division I, II, and III athletic directors. They discovered that 96% of the participants received a Bachelors degree, 170 (85%) achieved a Masters degree, and 43 (21.5%) completed a Doctorate.

Schneider and Stier’s (2001) study sought to understand how formal and informal education is related to the success of the AD at the collegiate/university level. More specifically, this study sought to determine the perspectives of university presidents on the necessary content area and level of education, essential to the success of the college/university ADs. This quantitative study attempted to solicit participation of all of the presidents of the NCCA affiliated colleges and universities throughout the United States. Out of 318 surveys sent out, 161 were returned by Division I presidents for a 50.6% return rate; 135 of 248 Division II presidents returned surveys for a 55.2% return rate; and 210 of 395 Division III presidents returned surveys for a 50.8% return rate.

They found that 81.4% Division I presidents believed a Baccalaureate degree was most essential and 94.1% saw a Masters degree as being at least important. Doctoral degrees and certificates beyond a Masters degree were viewed as not very important or irrelevant (Schneider & Stier, 2001; Taylor, 2001).

The current status of athletic administration among (NCAA) colleges and universities suggest that occupational demands are being placed on sport administrators at an increasing rate (Bradley, 1993; Lea & Loughman, 1993; Neilsen, 1990). Copeland and Kirsch (1993) recognized the increasing responsibilities and the
inherent demands of contemporary sport in order to maintain competitive programs. Cleave (1993) found intercollegiate administrators perceived their jobs as becoming more competitive.

Schneider and Stier (2001) stressed the importance of prospective ADs obtaining a formal education through specific college/university courses in order to become knowledgeable as an AD. Courses deemed most pertinent for ADs were athletic administration, legal liability, facilities and equipment, and communications (Hall & Bradwin, 1989).

Schneider and Stier (2001) stated that colleges and universities must recognize the need for potential ADs to be competent in the areas of fundraising and promotions. Hatfield, Wren and Bretting (1987) found NCAA ADs should also be educated in business management and marketing. This type of philosophy has led aspiring ADs to seek Masters of Business Administration (MBA) degrees as well as university sports management and administration programs incorporating more business management courses and sports marketing courses into their curriculum. Not to mention, more universities are seeking the Commission on Sport Management Accreditation (COSMA) for their sport management programs. This specialized accrediting body promotes and recognizes excellence in sport management education in colleges and universities at the baccalaureate and graduate levels (www.cosmaweb.org).

Prior research has confirmed a Masters degree in sports administration/management or business administration is the preferred educational level required to be considered an eligible Division I-A AD candidate. Also, current
findings determined ADs should be educated and proficient in the areas of business management, marketing, fundraising, legal liability and communications. These courses were viewed as essential in order to be a successful Division I-A AD.

**Career Path**

The career pattern to becoming an athletic director at a Division I-A institution for the majority is one of upward mobility. There is not a blue print for those aspiring to become ADs to follow. In the past, most ADs were former celebrated head football coaches and were appointed ADs as a gesture of respect for years of service and commitment to their respected colleges/universities (Duderstadt, 2003). Their university presence brought insurmountable dollars of donations from alumni and the university’s surrounding community. But with the changing expectations and educational requirements of the AD position more ADs are Senior Athletic Administrators climbing the ranks to the head position.

There is not much information provided on the career patterns of successful ADs. One study in particular by Shoji (2004) focused on the identification of Division I ethnic minority senior-level athletic administrators and patterns in their career paths. Another study by Fitzgerald, Sagaria and Nelson’s (1994) used a sociological career trajectory model to examine the career patterns of 200 male and female NCAA Division I, II, and III athletic directors.

Shoji’s (2004) study was to identify patterns and characteristics common among the career paths of Division I ethnic minority administrators as well as to identify all ethnic minority senior-level athletic administrators. The research questions that guided the study were: Are there patterns in the career paths that
minority administrators took to get to their current position? Who are the minority senior-level administrators in NCAA Division I? The participants in this quantitative study were 60 ethnic minority athletic administrators, 38 men and 21 women. He found the most common first job among respondents within athletic administration was as a coach (head, assistant or graduate assistant). Intern positions were also one of the top first jobs among respondents. A few participants were able to begin their careers at senior-level positions. Shoji recognized that this may be due to the individual’s prior working experience to enable them to step into senior-level jobs. The most significant factor among the respondents was 76.7% of them competed in college athletics.

Fitzgerald, Sagaria, and Nelson’s (1994) study sought to examine the career patterns of male and female NCAA Division I, II, and III athletic directors. From previous literature, the normative career pattern to become an AD is a five-position sequence that begins with collegiate athlete; progresses through high school coach, collegiate coach, and associate or assistant director; and culminates with athletic director. This quantitative research was designed to focus on: 1) whether the normative career pattern was applicable to current athletic directors, 2) did the career patterns of athletic directors differ depending on the NCAA Division (I, II, or III) or their institution, and did the career patterns followed by male athletic directors differ from those followed by female athletic directors.

A sample of 285 ADs was solicited from all three divisions of NCAA athletics. Included in that sample were 66 female ADs and 219 male ADs. One of the major conclusions was that competing as a collegiate athlete and coaching at the
college level were the two most frequent experiences underpinning the AD position. These findings support those of Shoji’s (2004) study.

The lack of research available on the career patterns of ADs justifies the significance of further studies to be conducted to understand this phenomenon. Two things are certain about the career path of becoming an AD. One, former players tend to pursue careers within athletic administration and secondly, coaching experience is perceived as a positive attribute in becoming an AD.

**Mentoring**

According to Wickman (1997), mentoring is the relationship of a senior individual who is willing to give time, interest and emotional support to further the career of a junior person. Moore and Salimbene (1981) define the mentoring relationship as an intense, lasting, and professionally centered relationship between two individuals in which the more experienced and powerful individual, the mentor, guides, advises, and assists in any number of ways the career of the less experienced, often younger, upwardly mobile protégé. By this definition the mentor/protégé relationship requires both parties to be respectful of each other, compatible, and willing to sustain the relationship over time. The benefits of this mentoring relationship are invaluable to the protégé.

A wealth of literature supports the value mentoring provides for individuals in the workforce. Dreher and Ash (1990) suggest two main benefits of mentoring to the protégé. First, the protégé has access into the necessary social networks that exist within organizations. This allows the protégé to connect with key decision makers and showcase their skills more visibly. Also, it allows the protégé to be involved in
informal conversations creating a comfortable relationship with key decision makers. Second, the protégé is able to closely observe the experienced mentor at work providing an invaluable learning experience. These benefits may help advance the protégé’s career more rapidly.

Whitely, Dougherty, and Dreher (1991) identified mentoring as an influential factor in the promotion of individuals within organizations. They found that mentored individuals were promoted at a higher rate than those who had not been mentored. This supports the idea that mentoring provides the learning experience, skills, and relationships for upward mobility.

Van-Eck and Jeanquart (2000) stress the importance of aligning with other professionals and organizations in order to enhance one career. In their study they found that mentorship had a positive influence on the mentee at different career stages. They found having a single source of mentoring was the most successful in regards to productivity with a mentor in the organization in early careers. Most importantly, those professionals who did not have mentors were not as successful.

**Athletic Administration Mentoring**

In the athletic administration profession the importance of mentoring is beneficial and necessary for the career advancement of aspiring athletic administrators. Lehouller’s (2007) qualitative study of six female athletic directors examined the role of mentoring. This phenomenological study examined the role of mentoring in the professional lives of female intercollegiate athletics directors. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews and analysis of the data revealed that
the participants benefited tremendously from their meaningful mentor/protégé relationship.

To fill this void, the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics (NACDA) and the Division I-A Athletics Directors Association (D1A), athletic director mentoring associations were formed. NACDA, which was founded in 1965, was created to serve as the professional association for those in the field of athletics administration, providing educational opportunities and serves as a vehicle for networking and the exchange of information to others in the profession (nacda.com, 2009). Three of the guiding principles this organization emphasizes to meet its mission are:

1. To provide continuing education opportunities through NACDA's management institute and other programs and events.
2. To develop programs of strong and viable advocacy on behalf of the profession.
3. To enhance opportunities for ethnic and gender minorities in the profession through a variety of initiatives and programs.

NACDA allows athletic administrators, student-athletes, and students to further their education in sports management by attending their specialized institutes (Management/Leadership Institute and Sports Management Institute), workshops, or conventions. NACDA’s growth helped to spin-off several athletic administrative associations such as the National Association of Athletic Development Directors (NAADD), National Association of Collegiate Marketing Administrators (NACMA), and the Division I-A Athletic Director Association (D1A).
The D1A, created in 1986, is organized to address the lack of professional development opportunities for Division I-A athletic directors. Division I-A ADs recognized the need to collaborate and create a unified philosophy for all Division I-A athletic departments to abide by. The D1A five point philosophy main emphases are to assure student-athletes receive the necessary support to be successful academically and athletically (d-1a.com, 2009). In order to accomplish this mission the D1A developed a mentoring program for novice and veteran ADs to provide them with support and guidance from the association in matters pertaining to any athletic administrative issue.

It is through the D1A mentoring program that novice and veteran ADs are matched together to provide support for the inexperienced AD; 75 Division I-A ADs volunteer their assistance to this mentoring program to provide the following services:

- New ADs can ask for a mentoring team of Division I-A ADs (One AD, a couple, several, etc) to visit the school and provide an analysis of the current operational efficiency.
- New and veteran ADs may need someone to call who will provide advice.
- An AD who is working on a special project or development of a specific part of their athletic administration, and needs a mentoring team to visit the school to look at a particular area of the operation;
- An AD who has difficulty in getting institutional support or understanding may ask a mentoring team to visit the school to validate the athletics operation.
Occasionally, member institutions request that a peer review team visits their campus to analyze the general athletics administration or to study specific parts of the athletics operation (d1a.com, 2009). Overall, the D1A mentoring program continues to be beneficial to the professional development of novice and veteran Division I-A ADs.

**Minority Athletic Administration Mentoring**

As stated earlier, the potential benefit of professional mentoring is essential to the advancement of an aspiring athletic administrator. But for aspiring African American athletic administrators, the mentors are few. With only nine African American ADs at Division I-A institutions few same-race mentors are accessible for African American students to interact with.

Taylor’s (2001) study on the retention and recruitment of African Americans in sport administration positions at NCAA institutions investigated the hiring practices of African Americans holding athletic administrative positions, their perceptions of the hiring practices, and how they viewed the athletic administrative opportunities for minorities. A qualitative approach was used to conduct the study with a sample of six African American athletic administrators, four male and two female. Face-to-face interviews were conducted. The data analysis revealed that having mentors can guide more African Americans to positions in athletic administration.

To address the lack of African Americans in Division I-A AD positions the NCAA established the Fellows Leadership Development Program (NCAA Fellows Program). The NCAA Fellows Program was developed with the specific goal of
enhancing the employment and leadership opportunities for racial/ethnic minorities and women at the senior management level of intercollegiate athletics administration (ncaa.org, 2009).

The NCAA Fellows Program provides specific professional experiences that are supposed to enable minority participants with the opportunity to further develop their talents and abilities, and to mesh these skills with their professional aspirations. The program was designed to foster leadership within intercollegiate athletics (ncaa.org, 2009). During this 18-month program each fellow is assigned an NCAA executive, a conference commissioner and/or athletics director mentor at their sponsoring institution. Under the tutelage of their mentor, the fellow will:

- Work under the direction of an NCAA executive mentor.
- Study with the athletics director, etc., at the sponsoring institution. Gain insight into the administrative decision-making process at the highest levels of intercollegiate athletics.
- Gain overall understanding of intercollegiate athletics and the impact of intercollegiate athletics within the organization.
- Attend annual NCAA Convention, workshops, seminars and other Association-related meetings.
- Participate in advances for all NCAA fellows. These advances will include seminars led by national leaders on the latest theories and practices in athletics administration. Special training will include areas of marketing, public relations, budgeting, booster relations, leadership training, compliance, fundraising and management training.
The possible benefits for the NCAA fellow are exposure to every facet of athletics administration, the opportunity to solve problems at a higher level of complexity, participation in various conferences, and the opportunity to interact with a mentor. Ultimately, the experience gained from this program is supposed to enhance the NCAA fellow’s opportunities for advancement to a Division I-A AD position.

**Minority Support Systems**

Other associations and programs are available to assist aspiring African American and minority AD candidates improve their athletic administrative skills and networking opportunities to obtain a Division I-A AD position. Two of the most recognizable programs and associations are the NCAA Leadership Institute for Ethnic Minority Males and Females (Institute) and the Black Coaches & Administrators (BCA).

The Institute was designed to address the critical shortage of senior-level professionals of color in athletics administrative staff at NCAA member institutions and within conference offices (ncaa.org, 2009). This 12-month leadership training and skills development program is supposed to prepare the member with the experience and competencies in selected areas (e.g., human resource management, media relations, finance and fundraising, etc.) through completion of four professional development sessions, practical work and a week-long intensive workshop taught by a diverse group of consultants and leaders in business, higher education, and intercollegiate athletics at the NCAA national office in Indianapolis, Indiana.
This enriching experience is only available to minority participants who are currently working within the athletics department of an NCAA member institution. Qualified candidates must have at least three years of athletic administrative experience or transferable administrative experiences and a desire to develop professionally as an administrator in sports, in particularly, an AD (ncaa.org, 2009). The possible benefits of attending the Institute mirror those of the D1A Mentoring program (e.g., experience, mentoring, networking, etc.) and possibly serve as a highlight on the resume of an Institute graduate.

Formerly known as the Black Coaches Association, the BCA is a non-profit organization whose primary purpose is to foster the growth and development of ethnic minorities at all levels of sports both nationally and internationally. The BCA’s focus involves the concerns of its colleagues in professional sports, NCAA (Division I, II, and III), NAIA (Division I and II), junior college and high school levels (bcasports.cstv.com, 2009). This 20 year old organization’s mission is to:

- To address significant issues pertaining to the participation and employment of ethnic minorities in sport in general and intercollegiate athletics in particular.
- To assist ethnic minorities aspiring to have a career in athletics through educational and professional development programming and scholarships.
- To provide youth and diverse communities the opportunity to interact positively with the BCA as a corporate citizen and community builder through a variety of alliances.
One possible benefit of being a member of the BCA is that it has been in the forefront of the effort to enhance the employment opportunities and professional development of the ethnic minority professional. Institutions seeking qualified minority candidates for vacant positions within their athletics department refer to the BCA for recommendations. The other possible benefits are the online BCA Newsletter, bi-monthly e-mail publications, online job search, and the networking opportunities through meeting other BCA members (bcasports.sctv.com, 2009).

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) evolved as several lawyers recognized the slow rate at which laws were changing to promote racial equality (Delagado & Stefancic, 2001). Inspired by the civil rights movement and using the philosophy of the Critical Legal Studies, CRT movement encompassed a broader focus of racial inequality (Delagado & Stefancic, 2001). This group of legal scholars, including Derrick A. Bell, Charles Lawrence, Richard Delgado, Lani Guinier, and Kimberle Crenshaw, openly criticized the legal system's use of laws to develop and maintain racially based social and economic oppression (Taylor, Gilborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009).

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), CRT has several tenets. First, racism is normal in U.S. society. It appears natural and ordinary to people in the culture. CRT holds that the social arrangement, which ranks Whites over people of color, serves as a psychic and material purpose for Whites. Also, this tenet holds that color-blind policies only address the obvious forms of racism, but does little to combat the everyday forms of racism that people of color experience.
The second tenet is also known as material determinism or interest convergence (Bell, 1980). This tenet holds that White elites will tolerate advances of people of color only if it promotes White self-interest. Criticalists, like Derrick Bell, proposed civil rights litigations such as *Brown v. Board of Education* resulted more from the self-interest of elite Whites than a desire to help Blacks.

The third tenet called social construction, according to Delgado, “holds that race and races are products of social thought and relations.” (2001, p. 7). Society has created these races and racial categories, and uses or not uses them when convenient. These racial stereotypes have no genetic basis or influence on traits such as ones personality, intelligence, and moral behavior. CRT recognizes how the dominant society has racialized different minority groups at different periods of time, according to shifting needs. Popular images and stereotypes of minority groups have changed over time as well.

The other themes within the social construction tenet are the intersectionality and anti-essentialism. Anti-essentialism dismantles the concept of each race having its own origin and identity as people’s identities intersect at various points (e.g., of race, gender, disability, or political affiliation). It suggests that everyone at some time can have coinciding identities and bonds.

The final tenet concerns the unique voice of color. This element of CRT appears to contradict the anti-essentialist thesis, because it holds that people of color have different histories and experiences with oppression they are more competent to speak about race and racism. Narratives used to recount their experiences of racial oppression, also known as storytelling, are critical. As stated earlier, my theoretical
perspective is grounded in CRT and will be used as a lens in understanding the career paths and experiences of the Division I-A ADs. With sport being a microcosm of our society justifies using CRT as a lens for this study (Leonard, 1998).

**Social Cognitive Career Theory**

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) was derived out of Bandura’s social cognitive theory (SCT) from research conducted by Lent, Brown, and Hacket (1996). SCCT emphasized three social cognitive constructs important to career development: self efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1996; Stitt-Gohdes, 1997).

Self-efficacy is the belief that an individual can influence one’s own thoughts and behaviors (Bandura, 1986). It asks the question: Can I do this? The four building factors of self-efficacy are: performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and physiological states and reactions (Lent & Brown, 1996). Outcome expectations are what one believes will be the consequences of certain behaviors. It asks the question: If I do this, what will happen? This behavior is influenced by one’s ability or capability as well as the expected outcome. Personal goals are concrete decisions to pursue a specific activity and reach a specific outcome. It begs the question: How much do I want to do this?

As stated earlier, SCCT proposes that career choice is influenced by the beliefs the individual develops and refines through four major sources: personal performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and physiological states and reactions (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996; Stitt-Gohdes, 1997). These aspects work together in the career development process by an
individual acquiring an expertise or ability for a particular endeavor and success is the outcome. This reinforces one’s self-efficacy or belief that the use of this expertise/ability will result in more success, leading to the developing of goals involving this expertise/ability.

The process begins in early childhood and continues throughout adulthood and as one focuses on past accomplishments a career goal is formed (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996). The success of the process is based on the individual’s belief that the expertise/ability has valued compensation and a high success rate. The probability of more success than failure increases the self-efficacy and reinforces the career choice. But if one perceives the barriers as significant and a low rate of success is the outcome this will deter one from pursuing a career using this expertise/ability (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996; Stitt-Gohdes, 1997).

Typically, individuals have an understanding of what areas they are competent in by their teenage years. This helps to narrow down the career choices. But it is through learning experiences that one’s abilities are shaped, self-efficacy and outcome beliefs are impacted, and career choices are weighed.

SCCT is different than other career development theories, because it addresses the following influential factors: the self-system, individual belief, socioeconomic status, gender, educational background, familial background, and role models/mentors. Most importantly, the influence race has on the selection and development of an individual’s career (Brown, 1995; Stitt-Gohdes, 1997). Social Cognitive Career Theory will provide another lens to explore the career pathways and
experiences of Division I-A athletic directors incorporating the personal, social, and environmental influences on their career development.

**Summary**

The athletic director position is the highest position in college athletic administration. Also perceived as a CEO, ADs have to be proficient in many areas including budget preparation, facilities management, strong marketing and communication skills, and experienced in supervising athletic coaches and office personnel (Leith, 1983; Taylor, 1992). Prior research on the career paths of the AD position found that having a Bachelors degree was a prerequisite and obtaining a Masters degree was seen as an important necessity from the perspective of university presidents (Fitzgerald, Sagaria, & Nelson, 1994; Schneider & Stier, 2001).

The career path to becoming an athletic director at a Division I-A institution is one of progression. In the past, most ADs were former celebrated head football coaches, but more current research has revealed a five-position normative career pattern to this position (Duderstadt, 2003). From previous literature, the career pattern for an AD began as a collegiate athlete; progressed through high school coaching, collegiate coach, and associate or assistant director; and culminated with athletic director (Fitzgerald, Sagaria, & Nelson, 1994; Shoji, 2004).

In the athletic administration profession the importance of mentoring is as beneficial and necessary for the career advancement of aspiring athletic administrators. Past research found that ADs benefited tremendously from their meaningful mentor/protégé relationships they had along their journey to obtaining
their AD positions (Lehouller, 2007; Taylor, 2001). Several associations and NCAA programs were developed to meet this mentor void such as D1A and NACDA.

Due to the low representation of minorities in functionary positions in college athletics the NCAA formed two programs to address this concern: Fellows Leadership Development Program and the Leadership Institute for Ethnic Minority Males and Females. Other minority support systems such as the Black Coaches and Administrators exist to to foster the growth and development of ethnic minorities at all levels of sports, most importantly, the collegiate level.

Finally, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is one of two frameworks used in this study. CRT originated out of the civil rights movement, but it encompasses a broader focus of racial inequality. This framework explores and examines the racism in society that privileges Whiteness as it disadvantages others because of their “Blackness” (Hylton, 2009). It has several tenets to it, the main belief of CRT holds that racism is a part of everyday life and is ingrained in our society, including college athletics (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Another framework used in this study was Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). SCCT derived from Bandura’s, Social Cognitive Theory, holds that personal attributes, external environmental factors, and overt behavior each operate in interactive sets of variables that mutually influence one another (Lent & Brown, 1996). The connected variables that influence an individual’s career choice are: self-efficacy, outcome expectations and personal goals (Stitt-Gohdes, 1997). SCCT addresses influential factors such as educational background, role models/mentors, and the influence race has on the selection and development of an individual’s career.
(Brown, 1995; Stitt-Gohdes, 1997). Applying this lens to examine the career paths and experiences of the Division I-A ADs allowed me to better understand this phenomenon.

The next chapter explains the chosen methodology, the sample, data collection process, and the data analysis procedure.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study examined the career paths and experiences of Division I-A athletic directors. The following research question and subquestions guided this study: What are the career paths and experiences of the Athletic Directors in obtaining an Athletic Director position at a Division I-A institution?

a. What factors assisted them in obtaining an athletic director position?

b. What previous experiences did they draw upon as they selected and implemented strategies to pursue an Athletic Director position?

c. What, if any, influence did race have in their career choice and development in obtaining an athletic director position?

d. What support systems did they use to assist them in obtaining an athletic director position?

e. What challenges did they encounter in their journey to secure an athletic director position?

This chapter describes the qualitative methodology used to investigate the above research questions and is organized accordingly: phenomenological inquiry, key assumptions, rationale for phenomenological study, participant selection and criterion, and the phenomenological method procedure.

Phenomenological Inquiry

According to the founder of phenomenological philosophy, Edmund Husserl, phenomenological inquiry is the “return to the things themselves.” Phenomenological
method’s focus is on the people’s perceptions of the world in which they live and what it means to them (Langdridge, 2007). It requires the researcher to identify the “essence” of the human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by the individuals in a study (Creswell, 2003). The researcher must set aside all prejudgments or any doubt about the natural attitude or biases of everyday knowledge (Creswell, 1998; Langdridge, 2007). This process is known as “epoche” or “bracketing.” The researcher is the instrument and the data is collected through extensive interviewing of the participants. Once the data is collected the researcher analyzes it by taking it through the phenomenological reduction process (Langdridge, 2004).

The phenomenological method procedure involves: the epoche or bracketing, phenomenological description, phenomenological reduction, and phenomenological interpretation. All of these steps will be discussed in further detail in the procedure section.

Key Assumptions

According to Orbe (1998), the phenomenological research method as a human science is based on six assumptions. The first assumption of phenomenology is that the researcher uses his/her subjective experiences as data to the study, unlike quantitative research where the researcher is supposed to be objective. Second, is that phenomenology’s goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of everyday experiences. Third, contrary to quantitative research, where its purpose is to prove or disprove hypotheses, phenomenology seeks to discover and explore.
The fourth assumption is that in phenomenological research use of broad research questions allows for participants to be partners of knowledge with the researcher, because of the many situations and meanings that the participants may produce. Also, the open-ended interview questions play a vital role in the promotion of inductive exploration of the participant's experiences (Orbe, 2000). Fifth, phenomenology focuses on the lived experiences of a group of people that have experienced the same phenomenon. In quantitative research the individual may refer to people, animals, or things being studied, while in phenomenology the person is the only focus of study.

The sixth and final assumption is that phenomenology attempts to describe and report the participants’ experiences without manipulating any information. The researcher acts as an outlet for the voices of the participants.

**Rationale/Fit of Phenomenological Inquiry**

Few studies have been conducted on the career paths and experiences of current Division I-A athletic directors. Using a phenomenological approach to understand the career paths of Division I-A ADs made for an appropriate study. A phenomenological study coincided with my epistemological and theoretical perspectives, mentioned in Chapter One.

**Sampling**

Judgmental sampling, also known as purposive sampling, was used for this study (Charles & Mertler, 2002). This type of sampling was appropriate for qualitative research, where the homogeneous participants are recruited who share the
experience being investigated (Langdridge, 2007). For a phenomenological study it was essential that the participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2003).

For this study, the criterion was that participants held the position of Athletic Director at a Division I-A institution in order to participate. Also, participants were screened by race and gender. Only White and African American males were selected to participate in the study.

The participants were chosen based on their fit of the criterion of the study. Five African American and five Caucasian male Division I-A Athletic Directors were solicited to participate in this study. All of the participants were selected based on their professional position and their ability to share their career paths and experiences in-depth. This provided rich information to conduct the study. The most important factor was the quality of the data gathered (Langdridge, 2007).

**Participants**

The participant search was concluded after soliciting the first tier of participants. No follow up was needed to solicit participation. Due to the high visibility of the participants a condensed description of the participants is used in order to try to protect their identity.

All 10 (five African American and five Caucasian males) participants hold the position of a Division I-A athletic director at a NCAA member institution. Their career paths to obtaining an athletic director position ranged from being college student-athletes and graduate assistant interns in the university’s athletics departments to pursuing athletic administration careers from the external, corporate world.
Nine out of 10 participants held senior staff administrative positions before obtaining their Division I-A AD positions. Overall, the 10 participants have a combined total of 71 years of athletic administrative experience as Division I-A ADs. Given the short tenure of the average Division I-A AD, this is a remarkable feat for such a volatile position.

As mentioned, several of the participants were former student-athletes and coaches in college. Seven out of 10 participants were former college student-athletes either at the Division I, II, or III levels and two out of 10 participants were former Division I-A college coaches. Also, eight out of 10 participants hold graduate degrees including MBAs and MAs in Sports Administration and Management.

The 10 participants had some commonalities in their career paths, but each one had a unique aspect to how they were able to obtain their Division I-A AD position. The most interesting commonality among all 10 participants was that being a Division I-A AD was not a position they sought after initially in life.

Procedure

Data Gathering

Initially, 110 potential participants were identified to participate in the study. They were identified by using the NCAA website and the current Racial and Gender Report Card: College Sport (RGRC), which verified their Division I-A status. The NCAA website listed the universities that currently had Division I-A status as well as the universities links to their athletic departments and ADs contact information. The RGRC listed the current African American Division I-A ADs. I cross-checked the information with the NCAA website to obtain the contact information of the ADs.
Next, I grouped the potential participants into three groups of 25, based on their years of experience as Division I-A athletic directors. The purpose of this strategy was to insure the experience gaps were not too wide, creating artificial differences because career paths and experiences of a 20-year veteran AD are almost necessarily different than a first year AD.

The first group of potential participants contacted consisted of the Division I-A ADs with five or less years of experience: it was expected that their career ladder would be freshest in their minds since the attainment of their positions was most recent. If I did not receive enough participants out of the first group I would solicit from the second grouping of potential participants. Each of the potential participants in the second group contacted had six to ten years of experience as a Division I-A AD. Again, based on the responses from the second group potential participants may be solicited from the third grouping. The third group of potential participants each had 11 or more years of experience as a Division I-A AD. All 11 African American ADs were contacted due to the small pool of African American candidates.

Next, I contacted the participants by telephone/email, informing them of the study inviting them to participate (Appendix A). If two weeks passed without any response, I would follow up with the potential participants by telephone seeking their participation (Appendix B). The respondents were sent an informational packet consisting of a consent form, background and purpose of study (Appendix C).

Next, after receiving the respondents consent form to participate, all respondents were scheduled for interviews either by telephone/email contact. Due to the respondents' availability and locations the interviews were conducted by
telephone. A recording device was used to capture the interviews over the phone. All participants were sent the interview questions in advance to allow time for reflection of the questions (Appendix E). Each interview took approximately 45 minutes to 1 ½ hours to complete. Follow-up questions were not needed.

In conclusion, each participant was assigned a numerical code to protect his identity. The interviews were recorded & transcribed and each participant received a copy of his own transcript to verify the information and check for clarity of ideas expressed.

Below is a step by step process of the conducted data collection.

Step 1: I identified 110 Division I-A athletic directors using the NCAA website and the current Racial and Gender Report Card: College Sport (RGRD). The NCAA website listed the universities that currently had Division I-A status as well as the universities links to their athletic departments and ADs contact information. The RGRC listed the current African American Division I-A ADs. The researcher cross-checked the information with the NCAA website to obtain the contact information of the ADs.

Step 2: I sent invitations to potential participants.

Step 3: I made follow up calls to potential participants.

Step 4: I sent consent forms and background of study information to respondents to the invitation.

Step 5: I sent interview questions to the respondents.

Step 6: I conducted interviews with participants.
Step 7: I transcribed recorded interviews.

Step 8: I followed up with participants to check accuracy of transcriptions.

**Data Analysis**

A phenomenological approach was used to analyze the collected interviews. Each interview was analyzed individually and analyzed with the other interviews as a group to search for the universal themes of the experience. The structural procedure is as follows.

**Phenomenological Description**

As the researcher, I was educated in the philosophical precepts of phenomenology and bracketed my personal experiences as mentioned in Chapter One. The next step of phenomenological description involved the data collection and presentation. As stated earlier, the purpose of phenomenology was to describe the lived experience without altering any data to explain it (Creswell, 1998; Langdridge, 2004). The interviews were guided by several open-ended questions. The essential questions were constructed to elicit specific desired information (Berg, 2004).

**Phenomenological Reduction**

Phenomenological reduction was the next step in the procedure. This process required me to read and re-read the interviews for overall meaning, while bracketing my preconceptions of the phenomenon. During this process I horizontalized the text throughout the analysis. I continued to repeat this process to uncover the layers of meaning for each participant. Once this process was concluded I began the verification process. This process required me to take the analysis back to the text to check that it made sense in the context (Langdridge, 2007). The final stage required
me to write a textural description of what was experienced in the phenomenon and a structural description of how it was experienced (Creswell, 1998).

**Phenomenological Interpretation**

The last stage of the phenomenological procedure was synthesizing. This involved the production of individual structural descriptions for each participant and then one general structural description (Langdridge, 2007). By synthesizing the psychological units of meaning I identified the key elements of the phenomenon being described and then wrote a brief chronological account for each participant. This is commonly known as the individual structural description. The next step was to take the individual structural descriptions and cross-reference them to identify the invariant properties to produce a general structural description. The final general structural description was the culmination of the analytical work described and represented the essence of the phenomenon being studied (Langdridge, 2007).

Below is a step by step process of the data analysis.

Step 1: I bracketed or epoche my preconceived experiences to best understand the experiences of the participants in the study.

Step 2: I practiced my interviewing procedures and questions by conducting mock interviews. First, I interviewed my dissertation chair to allow her to critique my interviewing techniques and correct any inadequacies in my procedures or questions. All refining of the interviewing procedures and questions were documented and submitted to HSIRB for approval. After receiving approval, I conducted another mock interview with a community college athletic director. Although he was not a Division I-A athletic director
he had a wealth of knowledge of collegiate athletic administration. This mock interview was recorded so that I could review the recording with my dissertation chair to check for interviewing technique appropriateness; if necessary, changes would have been made and again submitted to HSIRB for approval, I also wanted to be sure the recording device was adequate.

Step 3: I began to conduct the initial interviews with the participants. After the first couple of interviews I reflected on the interviewing processes and data. I met with my dissertation chairperson to share my interviewing experience as well as receive feedback.

Step 4: I continued with the remaining interviews.

Step 5: After completing the first interviews I transcribed them. I then read and reread each participant’s verbatim interview transcript for overall meaning, while horizontalizing the text throughout the analysis.

Step 6: I repeated the horizontalization process until I uncovered the layers of meaning for each participant.

Step 7: I found and listed statements of meaning for each participant. I grouped the statements into meaning units or clusters.

Step 8: Next, I verified the analysis to the text to check that it made sense in the context.

Step 9: I consulted with my dissertation chair to review the original transcripts and my data analysis process to check for appropriateness and accuracy with the raw data as well as for feedback on the data analysis process.

Step 10: I wrote a textural description of what was experienced in the
phenomenon and a structural description of how it was experienced.

Step 11: I wrote a general description of the experiences that represented the
“essence” of the phenomenon being studied.

Step 12: I reported the findings using a narrative presentation of the “essence”
of the experience.

Trustworthiness

The diversity of qualitative methodologies and the different methods of
judgment have created much debate about the validity of the discipline. Little has
been written on the validity of phenomenological inquiry, but what has been written
emphasizes the Husserlian position on validity. Husserl’s position was that
knowledge does not exist in itself but is correlated with subjectivity and so can only
be claimed in the context of a subject apprehending the world (Langdridge, 2007).
Therefore, it is critical that I’m fully present to the phenomenon being studied and
have a solid understanding of the experience being described. I can accomplish this
through the phenomenological reduction process.

Polkinghorne (1989) produced a list of five guidelines for validity that I used
to establish confidence in the findings of the research. They were:

1. Did the interviewer influence the contents of the subject’s descriptions in such
   a way that the descriptions do not truly reflect the subject’s actual
   experience?

2. Is the transcription accurate, and does it convey the meaning of the oral
   presentation in the interview?

3. In the analysis of the transcriptions, were there conclusions other than those
offered by the researcher that could have been derived? Has the researcher identified these alternatives and demonstrated why they are less probable than the one decided on?

4. Is it possible to go from the general structural description to the transcriptions and to account for the specific contents and connections in the original examples of the experience?

5. Is the structural description situation-specific, or does it hold in general for the experience in other situations?

Using these guidelines insured that the research was valid and the “true essence” of the phenomenon was identified and accurately interpreted.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This study examined the career paths and experiences of Division I-A athletic directors. In Chapter I, the foundation of the study was introduced by supplying background information on this phenomenon and the epistemology, theoretical perspective, and conceptual framework used in the study. In conclusion, the research question that guided the study and the significance of the study were disclosed.

Chapter II presented the literature review, which provided an overview of the past research on the career paths of Division I-A ADs. The literature found on the career paths of Division I-A ADs addressed the educational attainment, career path, mentoring, and athletic administration mentoring associated with becoming an AD. Also included, was research pertaining to the advancement of African Americans in athletic administration. It addressed minority athletic administration mentoring and minority support systems.

Chapter III described the methodology and procedures used to conduct the investigation. The phenomenological approach was selected as the methodology of choice. This approach allowed the researcher to get to the “true essence” of this phenomenon. Also, this chapter presented the procedures used to select and solicit the participants as well as how the data was collected and analyzed.

Chapter IV provides the findings of this study by presenting the major themes, and emerging themes identified during the data analysis of the interviews.
**Themes**

The three themes represented the most extraordinary themes and subthemes recognized during the data analysis. These three major themes were: 1) career aspects to becoming an athletics director; 2) the unknown realm of the athletics director position, and 3) the elephant in the room.

The theme, "career aspects to becoming an athletics director," consists of subthemes that can be recognized in past research on the career paths of college ADs. These major subthemes were also recognized in this qualitative investigation, which supports the validity of the themes.

The theme, "the unknown realm of the athletics director position," includes emergent subthemes that were uncovered through the data analysis of the participants’ transcribed interviews. These emerging themes were unexpected by the researcher and have not been mentioned in previous findings on the career paths of college ADs. This makes these themes even more valuable for understanding the career paths of Division I-A ADs.

The final theme, "the elephant in the room," captured the impact race may have on the hiring of African Americans as Division I-A ADs. These key themes are detailed in Table 1, Summary of Themes.
Table 1

**Summary of Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub Themes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I. Career Aspects to Becoming an AD</strong></td>
<td>A. Business Acumen 101</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1. Fundraising &amp; Generating Revenue</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Handling Personnel</td>
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<td></td>
<td>B. The Power of Networking</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1. It Takes Skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Genuine Relationship</td>
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<td></td>
<td>C. Giving to Receive</td>
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<td><strong>II. The Unknown Realm of the AD Position</strong></td>
<td>A. Called to Lead</td>
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<td>B. Family Matters</td>
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<td>2. Support System</td>
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<td>C. If the Job Fits Take It</td>
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<td></td>
<td>D. All that Glitters Isn’t Gold</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>III. Race: The Elephant in the Room</strong></td>
<td>A. Leveling the Playing Field</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>1. Current Statistics</td>
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<td>2. Past and Present Perceptions and Challenges</td>
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Career Aspects to Becoming an Athletics Director

The participants in this study shared stories about their career paths and experiences to becoming Division I-A athletics directors. Their experiences highlighted how they were able to acquire their positions by building successful resumes. This section introduced the sub themes from their stories: business acumen 101, the power of networking, and giving to receive.

Business acumen 101

The careers of all 10 participants would not have been possible without a sound understanding of the “business” of collegiate athletics. Through hard work and due diligence they were able to comprehend the dynamics of collegiate athletics and obtain their Division I-A AD positions. According to the participants, this was made possible by their strong skill sets in the areas of business management, fundraising and generating revenue, and personnel management.

Several of the ADs stressed the importance of having a strong business background as a necessity for any AD.

And then the business skills are essential. You know...personnel management, budget management, umm...detailed work...all that stuff. You know...is essential. And so umm...you gotta have that business acumen. (Mr. Purple)

I believe that pursuing a business background umm...I think is paramount. (Mr. Yellow)

Mr. Orange believed that it would not only be beneficial to have an in depth understanding of the business of collegiate athletics, but also its legal implications as well.
I would say, if someone is asking how you prepare for it. I'd say get a good smattering of either business or law or both. And knowledge of sport...I think you have to understand the business of athletics and when I say the business of athletics, in particular, college athletics. (Mr. Orange)

While the participants have articulated the significance of a business background, one of the major responsibilities of a Division I-A AD is the ability to raise funds and generate revenue. ADs are asked to raise monies for stadium developments, athletic scholarships, and other development projects.

More and more there is ah...tremendous pressure on athletic departments to be able to be self sustaining and to not rely as much on institutional support and, in fact, many schools like the University of (name of school) are self supporting completely and don't get institutional or state funds. So that person has to have an understanding as to how the financial picture falls into place and supports the athletics program and then how to generate revenues that support the program etc... (Mr. Pink)

This requires an individual with exceptional fundraising and entrepreneurial skills. All 10 participants viewed fundraising and generating revenue as necessary skills to have as a Division I-A AD.

If you can demonstrate that you know the revenue streams...you know how to mine those revenue streams and maximize those revenue streams. Obviously if you're someone that's had experience in those areas, that's to me a plus. (Mr. Blue)
Mr. Brown realized, after being overlooked for other AD positions, that he lacked experience in fundraising and managing revenue streams; so in his next position he negotiated that he be given the opportunity to assist in those areas to gain this needed exposure.

*I didn’t have...you know...and people say you always have to have fundraising experience. I think that is key. I didn’t have a lot of fundraising experience.*

Basically, you know...negotiate with my boss and allow me to get some fundraising experience to; while I was at (Name of University). (Mr. Brown)

As mentioned, the art of fundraising is an essential skill to have in order to be successful as an AD. A person has to be comfortable with asking donors for large donations to be in this position.

*What I find is a lot of people umm...really are not comfortable with fundraising and asking people for money and if you’re not comfortable with that you will not be successful in this business. (Mr. Yellow)*

Another important attribute that is vital for an AD to have is the ability to manage personnel. Several of the participants shared in their stories the need to be able hire the right people for their athletics staff or fire individuals performing below expectations. Mr. Brown believed that experience in hiring and firing coaches is a requisite in being a Division I-A AD.

*One of your major jobs as an athletic director is hiring and terminating coaches, so you need some experience with that before you get to the top level in my opinion. (Mr. Brown)*
University President’s and search firms seeking qualified AD candidates desire potential ADs to have some experience in supervising coaches.

*I was given the opportunity to supervise coaches. I think that's what people want to know is, have you hired and fired coaches and how do you do that, what's your experience in that. You know its managing personnel. (Mr. Blue)*

The managing of personnel is critical to successfully operating an athletics department. Responsibilities have to be delegated to other staff members to ensure all facets of the athletics department run smoothly. Mr. Orange understood early on that utilizing his staff’s talents to their full potential would allow his athletics department to be successful.

*Don't try to do everything. You know my view of it is the talent that I...would I rather have the talent so that I can do everything or would I rather have the talent that I can hire good people and let them do what they do well. I'd rather have the second one. Because I think if you don't have that power to delegate you're never going to get anything done. (Mr. Orange)*

Not hiring the right people can be detrimental to the success of an AD’s athletics department. When universities are under question for a NCAA violation the person under scrutiny is the AD. All the ownership of responsibility lies on him/her. Mr. Yellow believed that an AD has to clearly state and represent the goals and expectations of the university to his/her staff in order to instill institutional control within the athletics department.
You have to be very keen on knowing and hiring the right people. You have to set the culture for the department based on the goals and mission of the institution and then you have to develop that voice. You need to have institutional control. And then after you do that; you have to inspect what you expect. And then I think that most people do not inspect what they expect. The ones who find themselves in difficulty and they have not hired the right people. (Mr. Yellow)

The 10 participants shared similar stories on the importance of having a business acumen to be a successful Division I-A AD. They felt that their solid foundation of the business of athletics, ability to raise money and mine the revenue streams, and to manage personnel were all instrumental skills to their success as ADs. Having the skills and experience in those areas were strongly recommended by all ten participants as prerequisites to become a Division I-A AD.

Mr. White candidly explained it best when he stated, “it’s a CEO position where you’re running a multi-million dollar business on a day to day basis. Try to be as good in all those things that you can.”

The power of networking

The cliché, “it’s not what you know, but who you know” is partially true when it comes to landing a career in college athletics. As mentioned, business acumen is important, but the power of networking can open doors of opportunities, according to the participants. The athletic administration field is a profession of networking. These sentiments were expressed by Mr. Red. He utilized his relationships with his peers and mentors to not only learn from them, but also positioned himself to obtain his Division I-A AD position.
Number one is just networking... This is a profession of networking and so getting involved in umm... other opportunities whether, in my case, it was CABMA, which is the College Athletics Business Management Association and also became very involved in NACDA. (Mr. Red)

The significance of networking for ADs was presented as being just as important to do as in any other profession.

It's just important for athletic directors to be connected. So to have... you know... as many connections as possible and getting to know as many... other people that are in our industry. And I don’t think that there’s any industry in the country that’s not like that in some fashion... you know... it’s who you know as much as what you know. (Mr. Green)

Mr. Blue never intended to pursue a career in athletic administration while in college, but once he realized he could do this for a living he used networking as the pathway to his AD position.

I think that networking... I ah... think that once you get into it and you see where you want to go you’ve got to network yourself. (Mr. Blue)

Mr. Brown found networking with the search firms to be very beneficial in his professional climb to becoming an AD. He believed that getting connected with key decision makers at the search firms was instrumental in putting him on the radar as a potential AD candidate.

Another strategy is just being in a very highly network with the search firms. You know... the major search firms... Parker Search, Bob Bodine... umm... those are the two major ones that I’ve connected with and I’ve been involved with searches that
they’ve conducted...umm...that’s critical. I think, especially on this level. You have to be involved in networking and that’s with the search firms and you know...it’s not just about who you know; it’s about who knows you. (Mr. Brown)

As illustrated, several of the participants have implied to the effectiveness of networking, but they also shared a commonality on the tactfulness of how the networking process should be done. They believed that networking should be based on true relationship building and not about selfish gain. Mr. Red actually created a nickname for people he felt were strictly opportunistic, in regards, to building a relationship with him.

Can you network with the right people and not have it be artificial, but have it be...have it be somewhat real...umm...Cause I think there’s a lot of...I call them plastic people...there’s a lot of plastic people out there that are just trying to network for the sole purpose of getting ahead and that’s one way to do it it’s just not who I am. (Mr. Red)

Networking should be about building positive relationships and showing general concern for others well being.

Well, I’m a big fan of networking. And to me networking is not calling people when you need something. Ah...it’s kind of a continuing staying in touch ah...following their career ah...when they have successes...you know...drop them a note. (Mr. White)

As stated, networking is a relationship building process that is communal and ongoing between two or more people. Like any other relationship, it takes time and attention to evolve. Mr. Yellow started his athletic administration career later in his
professional life. He quickly realized that networking was critical for advancement in this profession. Mr. Yellow did not let his late entrance into the profession deter him from networking with people in the industry that could assist him.

*They came up through the sports administration ranks and so there early on they were able to network and get to know people. Where I came in very much later in my life, in my career where I didn’t know anybody and nobody...you know...there weren’t many people that knew me and so it was a matter that I needed to really reach out and network and find people and be able to find advocates. (Mr. Yellow)*

According to all 10 participants, networking in the field of athletic administration was impactful in their professional advancement. They all concurred that they used networking then and now to further their knowledge base in the business of college athletics as well as their careers.

Also, all the ADs believed that networking should be genuine and sincere and not only for selfish gain. It should be based on personal concern and well being of an individual and not on what that person can give or do for someone.

*Giving to receive*

Through the shared stories of the participants it was clear that breaking into the business of collegiate athletics is difficult to accomplish, but it can be done. One strategy that several of the participants used to get involved in the industry was by volunteering their time to work at athletic events. Volunteering allowed several of the participants to not only get their foot in the door, but learn how collegiate athletics operate as well as gave them exposure to influential people within the industry.
Mr. White found his passion for athletic administration by volunteering to work university athletic events.

Met a guy who was working at the University of (Name of college) and through a friend got to talking to him about getting interested in college athletics and he suggested I come down and start...you know...just poking around there doing a bunch of volunteer stuff. So I did. So I started volunteering down there and I fell in love with college sports. (Mr. White)

Mr. Blue’s desire to learn about the intricacies of college athletics led him to volunteer at as many athletic events he could. His exposure to these events gave him the knowledge and experience he was looking for to include on his resume.

Early on I volunteered to work extra. I volunteered to work events...ah...other thing...I tried to get as exposed to as many things in the athletic department that I could. And I tried to help out in other areas even if they weren’t involved in the ticket office. If they needed volunteers for the Fiesta Bowl and they need volunteers for you know...the gymnastic meet, volunteers for the PAC-10 championship, I tried to attend as many of those things as I could to expose myself. (Mr. Blue)

I think what helped me is that I used to volunteer a lot, because if there was an event...a sporting event...I would go and be the administrator of the day and I wasn’t looking for any money. I wasn’t looking to get paid or anything else. Anytime I could volunteer in my department or do some things where it’s going to help me gather some knowledge and experience that I could put on my resume, I did that. (Mr. Yellow)
Several of the participants acknowledged that volunteering boosted their resumes and gave them the experience and exposure to influential people that would later assist them in getting their foot in the door. Mr. Blue claimed that his exposure from volunteering allowed him to increase his network of influential people.

*I tried to attend as many of those things as I could to expose myself. Not only networking, but expose of myself to other events, other sports, other coaches, people like that and I think that you just...as much of that as you can do, comes back to help you. You know... those types of things add to your resume and they also help you with your network.* (Mr. Blue)

According to several of the participants, athletic administration is an industry that one has to pay their dues and learn from the grass roots in order to gain the knowledge and experience of collegiate athletics. In turn, volunteering will eventually be beneficial to the professional growth of an aspiring athletic administrator.

*So you know...I mean...there’s...there’s a lot that has to happen that you’re not going to get paid for doing this to gather experience umm...so you can move forward.* (Mr. Yellow)

By taking the initiative to volunteer and learn how collegiate athletics works may give one an advantage over an individual without this experience when applying for athletic administrative positions. Mr. Purple has reviewed numerous applications and resumes for openings within his university’s athletics department and he admitted that potential candidates that have collegiate athletics experience are given more consideration for the vacant position than those candidates that have no collegiate experience.
And then as you're going to college; undergraduate or... or in graduate, find a way to work in athletics. Ah... even if it means volunteering. Umm... you know... when resumes come across my desk those students who ah... apply for entry level positions, who have their undergraduate or masters degrees and they worked in an athletic department, in event management or financial affairs, compliance or whatever, when they've worked in those areas they have a leg up. And ah... that's an important thing ah... to do. (Mr. Purple)

As mentioned, several participants found it beneficial to volunteer to gain the knowledge and experience of how collegiate athletics operate. Although the work may have been for no pay, the experience and exposure gained would prove to be favorable for them in the future. Through their volunteer experiences they were afforded the opportunity to be exposed to many influential people and expand their network base. This would serve as a plus on their resume as well as when applying for entry level positions or promotions.

The Unknown Realm of the Athletics Director Position

In the previous section we learned that there were certain professional skills and characteristics the participants had obtained, prior to becoming Division I-A ADs, that were significant in them being hired for this prestigious position. Yet, there is more to the Division I-A AD position that past research has not emphasized, such as the unseen encumbrance of the AD position. This unknown realm of the AD position is typically overshadowed by its' financial benefits and perks. This section will address these unrecognized issues.
The unknown realm of the athletics director position described how these participants were called to become ADs, the affects their professional positions have on their families, and the recognition of what university is the best fit for them to be successful. Also, it described the behind the scenes criticism and extensive work that comes with being a Division I-A athletics director. Therefore, the emerging subthemes emphasized in this section were: the calling, family matters, if the job fits take it, and all that glitters isn’t gold.

Called to lead

One of the overarching themes that emerged through the interviews was the belief that the participants “were called” to be athletic directors and that the position chose them. A majority of the participants believed they were called to be an AD without even pursuing the position.

I didn’t really have a strategy, I’m not sure from my perspective these positions are something you...that you seek. I think they seek you. (Mr. Black)

You know it’s kind of funny. I’m not sure that I did pursue it. I think it pursued me. It happened to fall into that. (Mr. Orange)

Mr. Purple had other aspirations for his future and had no intentions of becoming an athletics director. He was using his business degree in the private sector when he was introduced to athletic administration from a mentor.

I really didn’t pursue it I just kind of happened in to it. My umm...my goal in college was always to work in the private sector and so I umm...that was what my business degree was for and at the end of the day that was what I chased.
Mr. Brown was going through a career choice dilemma when he stumbled across an opportunity in his alumni athletic department. It had never occurred to him that he could have a career in athletic administration.

*You know...with me I've just been fortunate and blessed. I really fell into this umm...profession. It was almost accidental.* (Mr. Brown)

Mr. Yellow’s recollection of how he entered athletic administration was similar to the other participants as well. He stated,

*I definitely believe that he (GOD) has a plan and that this is what his plan has been for me.*

He truly believed his purpose is by divine order and his mission is to help young people through his leadership in athletic administration.

*I believe that this was a calling for me to give back what people have given to me in my life and the opportunity I think is one of the greatest...areas that we can reach our young people is through athletics and through that we can promote that...it’s more than athletics...you know...academically, responsibility, and leadership wise that...there’s probably no better forum in our society today that allows us to have...cast our nets broad and be able to deal with as many young people as we can to promote education and responsibility.* (Mr. Yellow)

Mr. Yellow’s journey to his position was one of perseverance and determination, but he knew that he was pursuing his destiny and nothing would deter him from it. He recalled,

*I wasn’t going to quit. Umm...and I wasn’t going to be defeated. And if I had to do it for the rest of my life I would just continue to interview. And umm...that*
ah...I put my faith in God that someone was going to see that I was deserving and I would be good at doing this and that it was gonna happen. (Mr. Yellow)

Although other participants pursued and strategized to obtain a Division I-A AD position, these participants believed they were called to be ADs. They either had no intention of becoming an AD or they were contemplating their professional future and were led to a career in athletic administration. For some, the transition into their destined position evolved with no or very little challenges; while for others, it took perseverance and “stick-to-itiveness” to reach their calling.

**Family matters**

Several of the participants commented that the work hours of an AD are not your typical 9 to 5 banker’s hours. It requires hard work and extremely long hours. Most of the time, ADs will work on the weekends, late weeknights, and sometimes holidays. This makes raising a family very difficult with one parent always away for work reasons.

One...very tough on family and I think if I would’ve...you know...I was fortunate that I was able to get in quite a few years initially umm...not being married and then certainly not having children...umm...if had I had children or been married right out of college I think it would’ve been very tough. (Mr. Red)

Mr. Pink was very candid when he shared his perspective of the extensive hours an AD spends at work and the expectations that come with the position.

A person that is oriented toward a 9 to 5 sort of mentality ah...a 9 to 5 approach to their career umm...with weekends off is going to be in for a culture shock, because we work, particularly during the academic year, we meaning senior
administrators, middle managers, and others that are supporting roles with a sports program, it's not unusual to work 12 to 15 hours days and nights. It's not unusual to work on weekends; in fact, you have to work on weekends, because that's when the games are played. Ah...you could be working on Thanksgiving day. You could be working on Christmas day, New Years Eve, Easter, ah...your birthday, your Mom's and Dad's birthdays, your anniversary, and like Barnum and Bailey the show goes on. (Mr. Pink)

His vivid description of the countless time spent away from the home and family confirmed the stress that the AD position may cause on the family unit. But regardless of the occasion, it is the ADs responsibility to be present at the university athletic functions and engagements.

Applying for vacant AD positions took on a whole new meaning, when the participants had families. They had to take into consideration whether or not they would like to move their families to a new community and have them get acclimated to new surroundings. This hindered some participants from applying for certain AD vacancies due to family circumstances.

Then you gotta also make family decisions. You know...I'm married at the time, had two kids, and there was a period of time I didn't pursue any jobs, because my kids are trying to finish high school. And it was important for me and my kids to finish high school then it was to pursue athletic director jobs. (Mr. Blue)

Mr. Green also declined several positions, because he was concerned about moving his family to a new location and how it would affect them.
And ah...two of them I said thanks, but no thanks. Ah...just because I didn’t
think...in talking with my wife that these were opportunities that we felt were best
for our family or circumstances. (Mr. Green)

On one occasion, Mr. Blue accepted an AD position offer, but would later
retract his acceptance due to not wanting to move his family.

At first I took the position Harold and then I couldn’t sleep all night and I
knew...I knew I couldn’t do it. I knew it was the wrong thing. I called the school
back...the school president back and just said I can’t...I can’t move my kids and
this and that...and I was really at peace with my decision. I think it was the right
decision for me. (Mr. Blue)

Although some participants viewed having a family as being a challenge in
their professional development, it was evident that other participants viewed their
families as a significant support system. Some saw their families as being
instrumental in encouraging them and giving them the emotional support to persevere
through trying times. Mr. Black saw his family as the primary support system for
him.

Family. I really never had a mentor...early felt mentor. Ah...or role model...that’s
really not kind of how I think, so anyway support systems are primarily good
family. (Mr. Black)

Mr. Purple shared mutual feelings about his family support. He humorously
recalled the support systems that were in place when he began his career in athletic
administration,

Besides my wife, (Laughter)...there weren’t a whole lot you know. (Mr. Purple)
Several of the participants deemed having an understanding and supportive family is essential in their profession. As mentioned, the family has to be accommodating, because the AD position is one that requires a significant amount of time away from home.

*Ah...and our family's' understand that ah...so having just a willingness to do whatever is required to do. Whenever the mail has to be delivered.* (Mr. Pink)

Mr. White’s wife was a former college athlete, so she understands the rigorous schedule her husband is under and the lifestyle that comes with the position.

*My family is very supportive. I have a very supportive wife. She was a college athlete as well. So you know...I mean...so my...our whole family system is...been impacted by sports pretty significantly. I think you have to have a supportive family like I said. I think that’s really important.* (Mr. White)

Being a Division I-A Athletics Director has significant affects on the family unit. It requires an extensive schedule, which means less time spent with the family due to athletic obligations. Having a family while pursuing a Division I-A AD position can be a challenge when seeking AD vacancies, because of family situations and circumstances at the time that can prevent one from applying for the position.

On the contrary, the family unit can be an important support system. Several participants commented that their family was the only support network they had and that it is imperative to have a supportive family in this profession, because it is a lifestyle.
If the job fits take it

It takes more than just having the credentials, skills, and experience to be able to obtain a Division I-A AD and be successful. According to several of the participants one has to be able to distinguish if they are the right fit for a university to be a successful Division I-A AD.

I knew I could do associate...senior associate athletic director's job and I knew that I could then do that other job...I think I just have the confidence, it was just a matter of the timing and going to a place I was going to be...I was going to fit into and have a chance to be successful. And I think those are important things...you know...I've turned down opportunities, because they were places I couldn't see myself at. At one of them I didn't think I could be successful at with the way they had it structured. (Mr. Blue)

Knowing where you fit requires knowing who you are. Many of the ADs acknowledged that one has to know who they are when applying for an AD position, because it can determine whether you get the position as well as whether you are successful at that university.

I think just understand who you are and where you fit. I tell people don't apply for jobs that you don’t fit or you don’t really want. If you're running after something, because you want the title that's the wrong reason to take that job or you’re running after a job, because of money. Don’t go there because of money. Go there because that’s the job you can be successful at. (Mr. Blue)

These similar sentiments were shared by Mr. White when he recalled the first
time he started applying for vacant AD positions. He recognized his ability and competency to be able to do the job, but he also considered the networking and affiliation connections that go into the selection of the candidate for the position when he was searching for AD positions. Understanding these factors, he realized where he would fit best and applied for those positions that he felt he realistically could obtain.

Realized okay I'm in a position where I can think about starting to apply for jobs, but I wanted to be realistic about the job. You know...I'm not going to get the AD at UCLA...you know...from the Senior Associate AD position at (Name of University), unless I had some real ties out there to UCLA, which I don't. And so I knew you have to know who you are, you have to know where you fit, and what's realistic. (Mr. White)

Mr. White's realistic awareness of his skill set and compatibility with certain universities made it easier for him to be aggressive in seeking those available AD opportunities. Also, he acknowledged the downside of not being aware of these attributes and how over applying for positions can have a negative impact on ones reputation.

So that's why when this job at (Name of University) came open, that's when I realized this was an opportunity here that fit within my skill set and also you know...it was realistic from what they were kind of looking for. I could fit that bill. So I wanted to be...when I found those good opportunities that fit me, then I was going to be aggressive in going after those. But I wasn't going to waste my time or anyone else's time or you never want to be that guy out there that's applying for every job. That's a bad place to be, both with your current employer
as well as with other people out there. So I think you have to be picky and...you know...you only got so many bullets in the gun, you got to use them carefully.

(Mr. White)

There are some AD positions that are labeled as being impossible to be successful at. Mr. Orange stressed being selective in what AD position one seeks and not be overzealous to take any position just to have the title, because one may get an impossible job to be successful at and the perception of incompetence will be placed on him or her.

The other thing I would say is be careful about the job you select. You know...don’t buy into this I’ll take any old beat up job just to get to that level, because if it’s an impossible job to get done then you’re going to be classified as not getting the job done. (Mr. Orange)

Knowing who you are and where you fit as an AD is very vital in not only selecting an AD position, but determining whether or not one can be successful in the position at certain universities. Several of the participants expressed that they knew who they were as an individual and this self-awareness enabled them to pursue AD positions that best fit them and their skill set. In turn, this allowed them to be successful at their job.

Also, duly noted by the participants was the ability to understand their fit within the pursuing university’s culture and not accept positions just for the title, but making sure they were opportunities that they could be successful at.
All that glitters isn't gold

Being in a high profiled position leads many to have a misperception of the responsibilities of an AD, which leads to unwarranted criticism and pressure from alumni, fans, and the like. These critics assume the ADs are overcompensated for being able to view sporting events and hire and fire coaches. They are not aware of all the other duties that go along with the AD position. These thoughts were articulated by several of the participants when they recalled the criticism that comes with holding the AD position. Mr. Red mentors aspiring athletic administrators and the first thing he tries to prepare them for is the realization of behind the scenes pressure that comes with the AD position.

What makes you want to be an AD, because there's a lot of crap that comes with the job that you know...my senior associate ADs don't have to deal with? And you know...the best job I ever had was when I was Deputy Athletics Director at [Name of University], because I got all the perks of being AD, but the bullets went at [Name of AD]. And now the bullets hit me. (Mr. Red)

Mr. Red touched on how being a senior administrator was less complicated and demanding than being an AD. When he held that position he was not responsible for the success or failure of the athletics program, which allowed him to dodge the criticism he now receives being the AD in charge. Other participants echoed similar feelings when they recalled the negative aspects of the AD position.

The best job I've ever had in college athletics was when I was the second guy, because I wasn't ultimately...I wasn't going to be held responsible or accountable for everything that happens here. At the end of the day I could go home and say
“damn I don’t know why he did that or why she did that.” You know...and be free with it. And then I had my own little world and I was good with that as long as I was good in my area I didn’t have to worry about anybody else and so there’s a lot of truth to that. (Mr. Yellow)

The inner workings and behind the scenes labor that goes into administering collegiate athletics is something that the public is not privy to. They only see some of the perks of the job (e.g., attending athletic events, compensation) and believe this is all the AD position entails. But there is much more to the position as several participants shared. The AD position is a 24-hour a day job that requires constant flexibility and immediate attention to unexpected situations if needed.

This is not a job, this is a life style...being an AD. My phone rings at odd times. I’m...you know...sometimes dinner gets interrupted...I’m on the phone for 45 minutes dealing with something. You know I think that’s something that umm...may be underrated with people. That’s the part of the job I think that a lot of people don’t see. What they see is an AD’s job it pays well. They’ll go to a lot of games. They hire coaches. That’s what they see, but what they don’t see is...you know...all the other stuff that happens behind the scenes everyday to try to ah...you know...try to move the needle, then things blow up in your face and you gotta adjust. So I think that’s the unseen part of the job. (Mr. White)

Mr. Yellow’s perspective of the public’s misperception of the AD position was very similar as well. He articulated that the general public, including his friends, believe that his job is one of entertainment; they are not aware of the endless hours that he works to make sure his athletics department operates successfully.
And a lot of people...you know...think they want to do this and when they really see what happens and that it's not attractive. Just like I got people here and I got people outside, my friends, where they think all I do is roll out balls and slap people on the butt and say good game and I got three months off in the summer.

This summer I'm busier than ever. (Mr. Yellow)

The summer time is typically slow when it comes to collegiate athletic events, but this period of the year, by far, is not down time for ADs. The summer is spent preparing for the next school year and attending conferences to educate themselves on NCAA rule changes and networking with their peers. Although Mr. Brown was able to take his family to California to attend the (NACDA) conference, it is still a working trip and networking opportunity.

As a matter of fact, I...even when I go to NACDA in about ten days, it's out in Anaheim and it's going to be great and I'm taking my family. But I'm going to be working while I'm out there too, because I have to continue to network, continue to try to connect with people who umm...you know...can help me in my climb.

(Mr. Brown)

The life of an AD behind the scenes can be lonely and stressful as the participants have mentioned. In order to deal with the criticism and unsought opinions from the public, an AD needs a good sense of humor and thick skin, according to several of the participants.

And always...always...always have a good sense of humor, because you're going to need it. Love the job, but there are days when you want to say “Can you really
believe that?” and you just go in the back and laugh and say “yeah I can.” (Mr. Orange)

Mr. Pink elaborated on the type of unwarranted advice and comments he receives from the university’s fans and how he is able to disregard those antagonistic opinions.

I would say one of the necessities umm...that I understood early on was that to be in this sort of position, to be in this sort of role, required ah...a very thick skin...my email is filled with emails, again telling me what I should or shouldn't have and how I need to run the program and etc... If any of that stuff bothers me or impacts the confidence that I have in myself to do the job here and run the department umm...I don't belong. And ah...because it comes every single day it's part of the territory. (Mr. Pink)

The atmosphere behind the scenes for an AD is one of overextension and constant criticism. As mentioned, being an AD is a lifestyle choice that many are not aware of, so the misinformed are judgmental of the AD. The critics assume that the AD position is one of privilege and luxury, but they are ignorant to the exhausting hours and hard work ADs put in to make sure the fans have a pleasant collegiate athletics experience.

Seemingly enough, the participants found having thick skin and a good sense of humor were important characteristics to have for a Division I-A AD. They understand the pros and cons that come with the AD position and are able to withstand the negative criticism from the alumni, fans, and other critics.
**The Elephant in the Room**

The world of sports has been said to be a microcosm of our society. Unfortunately, racial discrimination and banishment are part of the fabric of sports in America. Although the current President of the U.S. is African American, more progress is needed to level the playing field in society, sports included. Several NCAA programs and minority athletic administration associations have been instrumental in addressing the inequality in college athletics. The *elephant in the room* addressed the past and present issues race has played in the advancement of African Americans as Division I-A ADs.

**Leveling the playing field**

As stated in the literature review the NCAA has made a conscience effort to address the low percentage of African Americans in key functionary positions such as the athletic director position, but according to the *2009 Racial and Gender Report Card: College Sport*, there were only 11 African American male ADs out of the 120 Division I-A programs and 99 Caucasian male ADs. Since that report was published two African Americans have resigned from their AD position, which brings the total of African American male ADs to nine. Those AD positions were replaced by White males, which brought the total of White male ADs to 101.

These AD statistics of African Americans are disproportionate to the representation of African American student-athletes participating in revenue generating sports; where African American male student-athletes account for 46.4% of the Division I-A football players and 60.4% of the Division I-A basketball players (Lapchick, 2010). This presents a case of African Americans being able to play
collegiate sports, but unable to hold leadership positions within the athletic
department, in particular, the AD position.

Understanding this concern, the NCAA has established several programs to
promote diversity among their member colleges and universities such as the
Leadership Institute for Ethnic Minority Males and Females, which is designed to
prepare potential minority AD candidates for the AD position by taking them through
intensive training on the essential competencies of the AD position.

Being competent and experienced on the business of collegiate athletics are
the factors search committees and university presidents are looking for when hiring
an AD according to majority of the participants. Most of the participants feel that the
color of one’s skin is no longer a deterrent to becoming an AD.

I mean it’s the same thing. You get your foot in the door...you gotta work
hard...you gotta keep building your resume...you gotta network...you gotta
volunteer at some of these events...you gotta do the professional development
when you can...that’s fits

in... (Mr. Blue)

No, absolutely not! Umm...I’m a big believer that ah...you know...in this business
the nice thing about ah...athletics is it’s a diverse field...certainly at the high
administrative level it’s not as diverse as it should be, but ah...but I think there’s
a lot of opportunity here for ah...for diversity for people that are good. (Mr.
White)
I mean I've seen the differential in hiring in certainly from a coaches' standpoint from time to time...ah...when it comes to ah...minorities, but ah...when it comes to administrative hires umm...I haven't...(Mr. Green)

When questioned whether their professional advice to individuals pursuing careers in athletic administration would differ if they were addressing a young African American male, eight out of the 10 participants responded, “No.”

Race relations have changed over the years since the Civil Rights movement and many minorities, African Americans in particular, have made great strides not only in the world of sports, but in other professions as well. The challenges African Americans face today in pursuing a career in collegiate athletic administration are not as overt as in the past.

Ah...today...umm...the challenges are not the same as when I came through.

Ah...the athletic departments across this country are much more diverse.

Ah...so...umm...the barriers aren't there, so I would tell anybody the same thing.

(Mr. Purple)

In the past, African Americans were not given the opportunity to hold a Division I-A AD position, but were often used as Affirmative Action candidates during the interviewing process to comply with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) guidelines, which makes it illegal to discriminate against a job applicant or an employee because of the person's race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy), national origin, age (40 or older), disability or genetic information (eeoc.gov, 2011).
There were people out there that umm...you know...covertly were not supportive of us, but was never overt. And at the end of the day you know...I didn’t face many racial barriers. Umm...until I started pursuing umm...you know...jobs that I applied for...when I was...I had figured out at (Name of University) I had done all that I could do and I started applying. And at that time the Affirmative Action/EEOC was stronger than it is today. Schools couldn’t even umm...do interviews without having a minority in their pool. So umm...a couple things, one, I found that I was umm...you know...that candidate all the time that affirmative action candidate and not a serious candidate for some of the schools. Umm...but I learned from those experiences by being in the interview, answering questions, asking questions and so I got better with my interviewing skills, but at the end of the day I knew some of the schools I interviewed at ah...they weren’t going to hire me. And it’s just ah...the times were different so. Ah...beyond that I didn’t face many other obstacles. (Mr. Purple)

Mr. Purple was able to use his negative interviewing experiences productively for future interviews to come and eventually obtain a Division I-A AD position. His story is evidence of the progress African Americans have made in obtaining leadership positions in collegiate athletics, but some challenges still persist for African American ADs.

And of course, obviously, race...umm...I...as much as society...as far as it has come...a Black president and now all those things; there’s still amount of backlash when it comes to us, especially if your...African American...people...some people are threatened by that...some people think you’re sitting at the table
just because you are black. Umm...you know...and I experienced it today. I’ve experienced it from the highest levels, but I think I know how to deal with it...you know...and I deal with it professionally and at the end of the day though it’s all about the results and we have been able to produce incredible results here.

Now...if...without the results this would be a far more challenging environment...

(Mr. Brown)

With good results comes job security with the AD position, but with bad results comes the possibility of being fired. The history of African American ADs being fired and rehired at another Division I-A university as the AD is highly unlikely. African American ADs are not typically recycled after having an unsuccessful tenure at another college, but White ADs are generally given second and third chances at the position. African American ADs and potential ADs need to be aware that this may be their only opportunity in the AD role.

And I would say realize that ah...whatever chance you get, wherever you get it you should operate under the assumption you’re not going to get a second chance. So in other words, watch your Ps and Qs. I mean...I think that to a degree this is a profession, from what I’ve seen, that they recycle their people. I mean...you know...White ADs who’ve lost their job, they get other chances. (Mr. Orange)

So I think that’s key and then also for us and this would be for anybody else, but I’m telling you...you have to keep your nose clean. Umm...and when I talk to young, up and coming coaches I always talk about that. You have to you know...err on the side of being cautious, watch who you socialize
with...umm...just everything. You know...watch the events you attend, what
pictures you end up in, and umm...because those things can destroy us, because
people...they're not going to give you anything. White, Black or other, but there's
a perception of an African American male that we all know about...stereotypes in
the United States, especially one that's young, and so ah...you have to try to avoid
a lot of those things if you're going to rise in this business.(Mr. Brown)

The progression of African American males reaching the Division I-A AD
position has improved due to efforts by the NCAA implementing professional
development and mentoring programs for minority candidates as well as society’s
changed perception of African Americans in leadership positions overall. These types
of programs and society’s changing perspective of the African American male have
contributed to the incline of hiring African American males as Division I-A ADs.

A majority of the participants agreed that experience and an understanding of
the business of collegiate athletics are determining factors in whether or not a person
is hired as a Division I-A AD and not a person’s race. The old illegal interviewing
practices used to comply with the Affirmative Action/EEOC guidelines may not be as
prevalent, but challenges still exist for African American ADs and potential ADs.
African American ADs and aspiring African American administrators should work
under the assumption that they are under constant observation by university decision
makers, alumni, and fans. Also, they should strive to do their best at their current AD
position, because history is against them being rehired at another Division I-A
university or college as the AD.
Summary

The study provided insight into the career paths and experiences of 10 Division I-A athletic directors. All of the participants had unique stories of how they were able to acquire their AD positions. Several of the ADs were introduced to the athletic administration field through playing as a student-athlete or volunteering as a student intern, while some made career changes after realizing their passion for college athletics. However, since their entry into the world of collegiate athletics, they were able to use their transferable skills to climb to the pinnacle position of AD. Overall, this study allowed the 10 ADs to have a voice on how they were able to negotiate and accomplish this feat.

The first subsection of this chapter reviewed what the participants considered career aspects to becoming an athletic director such as the need to have business acumen, the power of networking, and the value of volunteering. Consistently echoed was the need to have business acumen. All of the participants proclaimed that having a solid business background is essential as well as understanding the revenue streams of college athletics. Generating revenue is one of the main responsibilities of an AD, so it is important to have some experience in fundraising.

According to several of the participants, the field of athletic administration is one of networking. Connecting with other ADs and influential people in search firms by building genuine relationships helped several of the participants move forward in their athletic administrative careers. Also, joining associations such as CABMA and NACDA proved to be beneficial for networking purposes for many of the participants.
The value of volunteering was stressed by many of the participants as a way to get their foot in the door of college athletics as well as gain resume experience. Several participants exclaimed how they were able to gain the knowledge of how collegiate athletics operates. Also, by volunteering they were able to build their resume and network of people, which were deemed as important factors when applying for other athletic administrative positions.

The second subsection addressed the unknown realm of the athletics director position, which consisted of influential factors that AD’s and their family’s experience that are not recognized by people outside the college athletics world. These emerging themes came through their shared stories and exposed the mysterious and calculated decisions they made to become ADs and as active ADs.

For some of the participants they believed they were called to the profession of athletic director. A couple of the ADs were experiencing successful careers in the for-profit sector with Fortune 500 companies before they made career changes into college athletics, while a few others found themselves at the crossroads of their professional careers and were compelled to pursue their passion of college athletics.

The AD position is a lifestyle that can affect the family unit in a positive or negative way. For some of the participants having a family was a challenge when applying or accepting other vacant AD positions, because they did not want to move their family. While for others, families were viewed as their only support system to turn to in difficult times.

Choosing the right vacant AD position to apply for and accept was viewed as essential for being a successful AD. Many of the participants commented on choosing
the right AD position that fit their skill set and to not take any AD job just for the title, because some jobs were impossible to be successful at. Also, knowing who you are was seen as a must when choosing what AD job to pursue.

The AD position comes with a lot of behind the scenes criticisms and stresses that most individuals are unaware of. Many of the participants shared how they have to deal with constant criticism from alumni, fans, and others. Having a good sense of humor and thick skin are necessary traits to have in order to maintain ones sanity as a Division I-A AD.

Along with the criticism from others, some of the participants disclosed that the long hours that the position requires can be stressful as well. According to several ADs, the AD position is not for the “9 to 5” type of individual, because the job demands around the clock attention and accessibility.

The final subsection focused on the elephant in the room, which is the disproportionate number of African American male to White male ADs at Division I-A institutions. Current statistics show there are nine African American male Division I-A ADs, while White male ADs hold 101 out of the 120 Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) college AD positions. The NCAA has established several professional development and mentor programs to address this concern. Programs designed to promote diversity such as this have helped to change society’s perspective of African Americans in leadership positions in sports and other professions.

According to a participant, it was typical for African Americans to be interviewed for AD positions in order to comply with the Affirmative Action/EEOC regulations, but never really be given serious consideration for the job. Today, it
seems that hiring committees, search firms, and university presidents select candidates based more on their experience and understanding of the business of collegiate athletics and not their race.

The advancement of African American males in collegiate athletic administration positions is recognized, but the challenges they face still exist. According to some of the participants, African American male ADs should assume that they may have only one opportunity to demonstrate their abilities as a Division I-A AD and should be cautious of their actions at all times. The chances of an African American male AD being fired and rehired as a Division I-A AD is unlikely, but White male ADs have been given this opportunity on several occasions.

The chapter concludes with a summary discussion of the data findings in relationship to the research questions that guided the investigation. The next chapter will include a discussion on several issues relevant to this study: summary, discussion of findings, implications and recommendations for future study.

Research Questions

This qualitative investigation on the career paths and experiences of Division I-A athletic directors, also explored to see what effect, if any, race had on the career paths of African American and White male Division I-A ADs. I designed interview questions to address the research questions that were used to guide this qualitative investigation. The research questions were then supported with data derived from the participants’ one on one interviews. The findings of these research questions are as followed:
What factors assisted them in obtaining an athletic director position?

The factors that assisted the participants in obtaining their athletic director positions consisted of their business acumen, networking with influential decision makers and other ADs, and volunteer experiences. All 10 of the participants believed that their understanding the business of collegiate athletics was a significant factor in obtaining their Division I-A AD position. According to the participants, having experience on how to mine the revenue streams and fundraising are essential to becoming an AD. Generating funds to help support the athletic department, in some cases totally sustaining the athletic department, is a significant responsibility of the AD.

The ability to hire and manage coaches and other personnel was seen by the participants as a prerequisite experience to have in order to become an AD. Hiring and terminating coaches are regular occurrences for Division I-A ADs, so having the skills to handle the media coverage and inquisitive, sometimes intrusive, alumni requires an individual with experience in handling these situations.

Networking with influential decision makers in the athletic administration field and other ADs were key factors in the participants obtaining their Division I-A AD position. Knowing other influential people in the athletic administration field and having them speak highly of their work created opportunities for them to be selected for AD openings. With only 120 Division I-A AD positions available, it was important for the participants to network and build positive relationships with other ADs and other influential people to gain the exposure and recognition for future AD positions.
The other factor that contributed to the participants being able to obtain their AD position is their volunteer experiences. They were able to learn the intricacies of college athletics through their volunteer experiences as well as build their networks by working with influential people in the athletic department, at hosted collegiate sporting events, or at AD conferences. The participants expressed the importance of volunteering as a door opening opportunity and a resume building experience that would pay dividends when applying for other athletic administrative positions in the future.

*What previous experiences did they draw upon as they selected and implemented strategies to pursue an Athletic Director position?*

The participants’ strategies used to obtain their AD position consisted of volunteering, networking, and acquiring senior staff positions. As stated earlier, volunteering was a factor for the participants’ in obtaining their AD position, but it was also a strategy they used to gain the necessary experience to build their resumes to become qualified candidates for a Division I-A AD position.

Also, networking was another strategy they used to expose themselves to other ADs, as well as influential decision makers in the athletic administration profession. Attending conferences and workshops where they mingled with other ADs and demonstrated their leadership skills were some of the networking strategies the participants used to connect with other ADs and build their network.

Another important strategy the participants implemented was acquiring a senior staff administrative position. A senior staff position is typically classified as an assistant AD position. Obtaining a senior level position placed the participants’ in
leadership positions, which gave them perceived leadership to search firms and other ADs that could recommend them for vacant AD positions.

What, if any, influence did race have in their career choice and development in obtaining an athletic director position?

Race was an elusive factor in this study. According to all of the White participants, race had no influence in their career choice or development in obtaining their AD position. As for the African American participants, when asked directly, they stated that race had no influence in their career choice; however, two out of five participants addressed how race influenced their development in obtaining their AD position throughout the interviews. One African American participant felt his White colleagues initially treated him condescendingly, because of his race. He felt they treated him with less respect, because they believed he was in his position only because of his race. As an African American man, he believed he had to be better than his White colleagues in order to get an opportunity as an AD.

The other African American participant found out after interviewing for several AD jobs that he was considered an “Affirmative Action” candidate and that he was never really a true candidate for the vacant AD positions for which he interviewed. Despite the covert tactics used against him, he chose to use these interviewing experiences as opportunities to hone his interviewing skills and not let it deter him from obtaining his goal of becoming a Division I-A AD.

Overall, all 10 participants stated that race had no influence in their career choice, but two out of 10 participants spoke about how race influenced their development in obtaining their AD position.
**What support systems did they use to assist them in obtaining an athletic director position?**

The support systems that assisted the participants in obtaining their Division I-A AD positions consisted of mentors, athletic administration organizations, and their families. Nine out of 10 participants recognized a mentor as being supportive in their professional development in obtaining their AD position. The mentors provided insight on the intricacies of collegiate athletics and constructive criticism on the participants deficiencies to prepare them to one day become an AD. In addition, some of the participants credit their mentors for providing personal advice and encouragement during turbulent times in their lives.

Another support system used by the participants was athletic administration organizations such as the Black Coaches and Administrators Association (BCA), Division 1-A Athletic Directors’ Association (D1A), and other NCAA sponsored organizations. According to the participants these associations provided them with administrative tools and knowledge on the business of collegiate athletics.

Being a member of the different associations not only educated them on the compliance rules and regulations of collegiate athletics, but allowed them to network with other ADs and display their leadership skills by presenting at roundtable discussions or chairing committees at organizational conferences. Ultimately, they contributed being a member of the different associations as being beneficial to their professional development to acquiring their AD positions.

Lastly, the participants acknowledged their families as a major support system that assisted them in obtaining their AD positions. Several of the participants spoke
highly of their spouses’ selflessness supporting them in their career development. Having a supportive spouse to provide encouragement after AD interview rejections and comfort after working extended hours at a sporting event were common ways the participants felt their families supported them. Also, the participant’s recognized the fact that their spouses were the main parental support in raising their children, because their work was very time consuming and required them to be away from home for prolonged periods of time.

What challenges did they encounter in their journey to secure an athletic director position?

The participants recognized the limited AD positions available, family relocation and race as the challenges they encountered on their journey to secure their AD positions. All 10 participants commented that obtaining a Division I-A AD position is difficult strictly based on the statistical probability of being one out of 120 ADs. With statistics being a significant opposition, the participants understood it would require them to distinguish themselves among the multitude of individuals applying for the vacant AD positions.

The participants challenge of acquiring one out of 120 Division I-A AD positions was only compounded by the decision to relocate their families to a new environment. Several of the participants expressed it was a challenge to decide to accept or not accept an AD position based on whether it was an appropriate move for their families. Uprooting their families was a decision some of the participants made, while others decided it was important for their children’s well-being to stay in their
current community and finish school with their friends before seeking vacant AD opportunities.

The last challenge pertained to the participants’ race. All 10 of the participants stated that race had no influence on their career choice of becoming a Division I-A AD, but two out of 10 talked about race presenting a challenge to obtaining their AD position. Two African American participants described their career paths as atypical from most of their colleagues. One participant believed he was treated with undue disrespect from his university colleagues, because of their perception that he attained his position due to his race. His work ethic and knowledge along with successful results won over their respect, but that did not discount their initial treatment of him. He believed that if he had not been successful, they would have continued to treatment him poorly.

The other participant’s challenging career path involved covert interview tactics to prevent minorities from obtaining Division I-A AD positions. He explained that he had discovered his interviews were merely protocol hiring practices to fulfill Affirmative Action compliance and that the hiring committees were never truly interested in appointing him as their university AD. He remained positive and turned his interviews into constructive learning experiences for future interviews.
CHAPTER V
IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study sought to understand the career paths and experiences of Division I-A athletic directors. The following research question and subquestions guided this study: What are the career paths and experiences of the Athletic Directors in obtaining an Athletic Director position at a Division I-A institution?

a. What factors assisted them in obtaining an athletic director position?
b. What previous experiences did they draw upon as they selected and implemented strategies to pursue an Athletic Director position?
c. What, if any, influence did race have in their career choice and development in obtaining an athletic director position?
d. What support systems did they use to assist them in obtaining an athletic director position?
e. What challenges did they encounter in their journey to secure an athletic director position?

This chapter provides a discussion of the conclusions, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research on the career paths and experiences of Division I-A athletic directors.

Summary of the Study

Through purposeful sampling methods, 10 (five African American and five Caucasian) Division I-A male athletic directors were selected to share their stories about their career paths and experiences to becoming a Division I-A athletic director.
A phenomenological approach was used as the investigative research design. In this qualitative study, open-ended questions were used to interview the participants to capture their stories. Also, reflective notes and biography information from university websites of the participants were used for data analyses. The data analyses process required reading and re-reading the interviews for overall meaning, while bracketing any preconceptions of the phenomenon.

During the data analyses the text was horizontalized throughout the process and repeated to uncover the layers of meaning for each participant. Once the horizontalization process was concluded the analysis was verified by taking it back to the text to check that it made sense in the context (Langdridge, 2007). Finally, a textural description of what was experienced in the phenomenon and a structural description of how it was experienced was written (Creswell, 1998). The next section will address these conclusions.

**Discussion**

The results of this qualitative investigation derived a major theme: career aspects to becoming an AD. This included three sub themes: business acumen 101, the power of networking, and giving to receive. Also, two emergent themes were identified through the data analysis of the interviews: the unknown realm of the athletics director position and the elephant in the room. The unknown realm of the athletics director position consisted of four sub themes: the calling, family matters, if the job fits take it, and all that glitters isn’t gold. Finally, the elephant in the room was a theme pertaining to the influence of race. The sub theme leveling the playing field addressed the low numbers of African American male Division I-A ADs and the
challenges they face. Each sub theme was examined using the chosen frameworks, Critical Race Theory and Social Cognitive Career Theory.

**More of What We Already Know**

Past research on ADs, discovered that ADs have similar characteristics. One of those characteristics is being a former student-athlete or coach or both. As mentioned in the overview of this study’s sampled participants, several of them were former student-athletes and coaches in college. Seven out of 10 participants were former college student-athletes either at the Division I, II, or III levels and two out of 10 participants were former Division I-A college coaches. This supports the findings of Fitzgerald, Sagaria and Nelson (1994) that competing as a college athlete and coach were the two most frequent experiences underpinning the AD position.

Another consistent characteristic pertained to the ADs’ educational attainment. In this study, eight out of 10 participants hold graduate degrees ranging from MBAs to MAs in Sports Administration and Management. Several participants stressed obtaining advanced degrees in business and law, because the education and experience from these disciplines are used more often than most as an AD. This supports the Schneider and Stier (2001) study that found having a Masters degree as being at least important for ADs to have from the university presidents’ perspectives.

Although those characteristics were consistent with past research on ADs, the major themes revealed in this qualitative study pertained to the skills, experience, and education the Division I-A ADs have acquired and how they were able to use their credentials to obtain their AD positions. This theme and subthemes were consistent with recent and past literature on the career paths of ADs, which constituted them as
major themes. The three important factors that all of the participants found essential in obtaining their Division I-A AD positions were: having business acumen, the ability to network, and the value of volunteering.

Division I-A ADs are considered CEOs of university athletic departments, because they are responsible for overseeing multi-million dollar athletic budgets. It is their responsibility to generate revenue through fundraising for athletic projects, as well as through the sale and promotion of the university’s brand to ensure their student-athletes are provided the necessary resources for competing at the highest level. This requires an individual with solid business acumen.

All of the participants believed that the foundation of their success, as an AD, is their sound understanding of the business of collegiate athletics. They recognized having business acumen was a necessary skill to not only obtaining their AD positions, but also being successful in it. This is consistent with the findings of a study by Hatfield, Wrenn, and Bretting (1987), where they found that NCAA athletics directors and professional sport managers deemed educational courses in business management to be most important for career preparation in athletic administration.

All 10 participants viewed fundraising and generating revenue as necessary skills to have as a Division I-A AD. Several of the participants sought out positions that would allow them to gain experience in fundraising and handling revenue streams, because it would show their ability to manage and create money for the athletic department. This supports Schneider and Stier’s (2001) findings that budget and finance courses were believed to be most important by 61.9% of the Division I presidents interviewed in their study. Also, Grappendorf and Lough (2006) also
identified oversight of budgets, fundraising, and development activities as key antecedents to career progression for athletic directors.

The other business management skill the participants’ believed was vital in order to be a successful Division I-A AD was the ability to manage personnel. This encompasses hiring and firing coaches and athletic administrative personnel as well as overseeing athletic events. The participants stressed the importance of hiring the right people for the jobs and allowing them to thrive in their positions of expertise. If their vision is properly defined and expressed to personnel, the participants felt they could count on their staff to meet or exceed their performance expectations.

This corroborates Huggins’s (1996) article that examined an informal survey of NCAA university presidents and the characteristics they look for when hiring an AD. In the survey the presidents revealed that they look for individuals who can develop, evaluate, and implement short-term and long-term plans; are capable of managing complex financial issues and budgets; and have the ability to direct a large and diverse staff, including coaches and have an effective human resource talents for dealing with parents, students, faculty, alumni, booster groups, and sponsors.

From a CRT perspective, an African American AD’s ability to generate revenue and fund raise may present a challenge since racism is ingrained in our culture and part of our everyday interaction (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The fans and alumni of universities in less diverse environments may not be comfortable with people of color in leadership positions, specifically the AD position, thus preventing them from attending sporting events or contributing to any athletic fundraising initiatives. However, this societal thought did not hinder the African American
participants in this study from obtaining their Division I-A AD positions, but may present a challenge to other aspiring minority athletic administrators.

Another important skill to acquire is the art of networking. Like any other profession, the athletic administration industry is one of networking. Several of the participants found the best way to network was through attending athletic administrative conferences. Schneider and Stier (2001) found that these informal educational areas of sport/administrative clinic attendances were believed to be at least important by 80.5% of the Division I-A university presidents surveyed in their study. Participants in Grappendorf and Lough’s (2006) study of female Division I-A ADs also emphasized the importance of networking and joining committees to be more visible among the ADs and other influential decision makers in athletic administration.

It was through attending these professional development opportunities that nine out of the 10 participants were able to not only educate themselves on the dynamics of collegiate athletics, but also network with other ADs and promote their leadership abilities. The participants in Wicker's (2008) qualitative study of African American women athletics administrators expressed the same professional advantage of networking at conferences and seminars.

Through a CRT lens, the challenge for aspiring African American male athletic administrators would be access to this network. With only nine out of 120 ADs being African American males, aspiring African American ADs may have to rely on an introduction from a White AD currently in this “fraternity.” This holds to the CRT tenet of interest convergence (Bell, 1980; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-
Billings, 2009). It would require a White AD to open the door for an African American to have the privilege of being a part of a predominantly White male network. For those that are not fortunate to make this connection, how do they gain access this exclusive network?

Even the current established NCAA programs designed to assist minorities in athletic administration require the minority candidates to hold a position within a college/university athletic department for at least 3 years in order to participate in the programs. The NCCA programs designed to assist minorities may be presenting as many hurdles to gaining access to an influential network as they eliminate. This is similar to how affirmative action laws address blatant forms of discrimination, but do not recognize the subtle discriminatory acts (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Having equal access to this network may be beneficial to not only aspiring African American male ADs in obtaining a Division I-A AD position, but it may potentially help the White male ADs and influential decision makers build genuine relationships with these potential candidates.

Another contributing factor for several of the participants in obtaining their AD positions was the experience gained from volunteering. Several of the participants’ were introduced to the profession through volunteering, while other participants’ volunteered to gain sport oversight experience and network. Volunteering at revenue generating sporting events, conference tournaments, and bowl championships were viewed as important events to not only learn how college athletics operate, but be able to network with influential individuals within the athletic administration industry. Contrary to the participants’ opinions on the benefit
of volunteering, Schneider and Stier’s (2001) study revealed that Division I presidents believed field experiences to be not very important or even irrelevant for the success of athletics directors.

However, in Grappendorf and Lough’s (2006) study, athletic director participants expressed that experience and visibility among other ADs and influential decision makers are crucial to the advancement of one pursuing a career in athletic administration. Shoji’s (2004) study of the career patterns of Division I ethnic minority senior level athletic administrators found that the participants’ second most frequent entry-level job in athletic administration was as an intern. These findings correlate with the views shared by this study’s participants. In conclusion, these studies support the belief that volunteering is beneficial to gain access into the athletic administration industry, but also to acquire experience and attain access to an influential network.

**New Revelations of the AD Position**

Through this investigation of the career paths and experiences of Division I-A ADs, several esoteric factors pertaining to the lifestyle of an AD were disclosed. These emerging themes shed new light on the intrinsic and extrinsic influences an AD encounters that the average person is unaware of and the impact it has on their families.

The first emergent sub theme discussed was the belief that the participants “were called” to be athletic directors and that the position chose them. Five of the 10 participants believed that their Division I-A AD position selected them and that they were destined to be ADs. Similar sentiments were reflected by the ADs interviewed
by Hawes (2000), where they concurred that athletic administration needs to basically be a “calling” for ADs, because one has to love what they are doing. Exuding a passion for the position is considered a necessity; this was also shared by the participants of this study.

The next sub theme that was uncovered was the impact the lifestyle of an AD has on the family. Countless hours for a Division I-A AD is spent away from home working extended hours during the week and on the weekends. Nine of the participants expressed the AD position required extended hours and was not a “9 to 5” type of job. As mentioned, the Division I-A AD position is a lifestyle that affects the family unit due to the insurmountable time commitment placed on the position.

All of the participants stressed that having a supportive wife and family were very instrumental in them obtaining their Division I-A AD position. The participants of Grappendorf and Lough (2006) study echoed the same remarks. They believed the AD position was extremely time consuming and it could compete with family time. This would require a very understanding family.

Another unknown particular of the career paths of Division I-A ADs that emerged from the data was recognizing what AD position was the best fit for the participants to be successful at. Several of the participants acknowledged knowing who you are and whether your personality and skill set were a good fit with the culture of the university were important factors to determining whether or not to apply for an AD position.

With only 120 Division I-A AD positions in the country, the opportunities for obtaining an AD position is narrow when you include the probability of an unfit
match or an athletic department that is impossible to be successful at due to the
current structure. Several of the participants emphasized taking an AD job just for the
title and not truly evaluating whether or not they could be successful at the university
would be a career ending decision. Mr. Orange stated that taking an impossible job to
turn around and not getting it done would place a stigma of being incompetent on that
AD.

According to Dutch Baughman, current executive director of the I-A Athletic
Director Association, ADs need to be adaptable and comfortable in many different
types of environments. These surroundings include the university president’s office,
alumni functions, and faculty senate meetings to name a few. The AD has to be able
to influence these individuals and others who have an interest in the athletics program
in a positive way. Fitting in with different types of environments and people is
necessary for athletic administrators at any level (Baughman, 2000).

The sub theme "the right fit" holds another meaning when viewed through
CRT. From a CRT perspective, African American ADs and aspiring minority athletic
administrators have to be conscious of the cultural factors surrounding the
college/university they are considering to apply to. Is the campus culturally diverse?
Is the faculty on campus culturally diverse? If so, how significant is it? Have they
hired minorities in the past for leadership positions or will I be the first? Are the
neighboring communities culturally diverse? Unfortunately, these are some of the
questions African American ADs and aspiring minority athletic administrators have
to consider, because racism is difficult to manage and is prevalent in higher education
institutions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Accepting positions at unresponsive
institutions, culturally, could be a professional land mine that could destroy their careers in athletic administration.

Secondly their decision impacts their family’s lives too. As stated, there are areas in the United States that are still racially hostile and purposely segregated. Raising a family in these hostile environments would not be conducive for a healthy educational experience; also it could be damaging to their family’s physical, psychological, and social health (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

The final emerging theme concerned the behind the scenes life of a Division I-A AD. Being the head of a university athletic department requires a person with thick skin and a good sense of humor to deal with the criticism from fans and alumni. A majority of the participants commented on the negative criticism they receive from fans and alumni after team losses. The criticism comes in the form of emails, phone calls, and sometimes in person. This is one of the reasons that the Division I-A AD position requires a person that is strong-willed and self-motivated to persevere through these times of feeling unappreciated and loneliness.

Several of the African American AD participants alluded to the derogatory racial comments they receive from fans and alumni via phone messages or emails. From a CRT perspective, U.S. society has constructed and integrated stereotypes of African Americans as being lazy, incompetent, and untrustworthy to name a few; these beliefs still linger in the psyche of White society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). As one African American participant stated,

"But there's a perception of an African American male that we all know about...stereotypes in the United States, especially one that's young, and so
ah...you have to try to avoid a lot of those things if you’re going to rise in this business” (Mr. Brown)

So having thick-skin and a good sense of humor for an African American AD means to not only be able to ignore derogatory racial slurs and comments, but deal with and defy society’s constructed stereotypes of their competencies in order to be successful as a Division I-A AD.

Several of the participants acknowledged that their lives were much easier when they were an Associate AD, the second in charge of the athletic department. Now, being the head of the athletic department makes them accountable for the overall success or failure of the athletic department, as well as makes them a visible target for criticism.

Parrish’s (2003) descriptive study of Division I-A ADs found that the AD position, like many other athletic administrative positions, is a thankless job and those that pursue such a position must recognize that. According to Kotzur (2003), there are 15 principles to bear in mind as an athletic director. Three out of the 15 principles pertain to handling negative criticism from others. They are:

1. One can’t please all the people all the time.
2. See a complaint as an opportunity, not a threat.
3. Being an AD is the best job in the world.

These principles support the belief that one needs to be passionate about being an AD in order to withstand the moments of the job that are not so appreciated. As some of the participants have stated, the criticism comes with being the leader of the university’s athletics department, but so does the need to be accessible 24 hours a day
to handle any concern or problem that may occur. Not to mention, an AD is always on
duty, representing their university in and out of the office (Parrish, 2003).

Many of the participants expressed that they spend many late night hours
managing their athletics departments to provide an enjoyable athletic event
experience for their fans. According to Bechtol, ADs spend 25% of their working
time after hours and on the weekends, which makes the AD job more than a full-time
position (Bechtol, 2002). Additionally, when emergencies occur, ADs are called to
lead their staff through the situation to ensure that the athletic event can resume as
normal, if at all possible.

Even during times of sports inactivity, such as the summer, ADs are busy
educating themselves on the new NCAA compliance rules and regulations to make
sure their athletes and coaches stay compliant and avoid any unnecessary sanctions.
Several of the participants explained that their busiest time of the year is during the
summer months when they have to attend conferences and get prepared for the
upcoming fall season sports. This supports the findings that the AD position is a time
consuming lifestyle that requires an individual who is passionate about the job,
strong-willed and self-motivated, and has a supportive family that can endure the
absence of their spouse/parent. (Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; Parrish, 2003).

Changing Slowly but Surely

Although we are living in the 21st century with our first African American
President, the issue of whether or not African Americans are capable of holding
leadership positions is still prevalent. These same perceptions hold true in college
athletics. In the past, African Americans had to overcome numerous obstacles to play
college sports, but today they hold coaching, functionary, and AD positions at some colleges and universities. Currently there are nine African American Division I-A athletic directors out of the 120 AD positions. This is a decline from 11 African American male ADs at the beginning of fall 2010 while White male ADs increased from 99 to 101 (ncaa.org, 2011).

What was once a 9.2% African American Division I-A AD representation is now a 7.5% representation, increasing the gap between White male ADs and African American male ADs. The odds of obtaining a Division I-A AD position is improbable in itself due to the sparse opportunities. But if race is not a factor in the hiring process then why are there not more African American ADs? That makes this recent decrease of African American ADs even more significant.

According to eight of the 10 participants, they were not aware if race presented a challenge to obtaining a Division I-A AD position today for minorities. The African American participants from Triuett-Theodorson (2005) and Taylor (2001) studies believed that racial discrimination did not hinder them from becoming an athletic director as well, but like the participants of this study, their skill set and work ethic contributed to their success of obtaining their AD positions.

If one's skill set and experience are the contributing factors for obtaining a Division I-A AD position and according to the NCAA Leadership Institute of Ethnic Minority Males and Females, there are numerous qualified African American male AD candidates. Then what accounts for such a disproportionate ratio of White male ADs to African American male ADs at all Division levels?
Viewing the data from a CRT lens, race has an influence on the hiring practice of ADs. One tenet of CRT is that racism is normal and ingrained in our society to the point it looks normal to us (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). This may be the reason why the majority of the participants stated that race is not a factor in obtaining a Division I-A AD position. The White participants are the recipients of “White privilege,” which may explain for their lack of awareness (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Hylton, 2009). According to Taylor, Gillborn, and Ladson-Billings, “Whites cannot understand the world that they themselves have made. Their political, economic, and educational advantages are invisible to them and many find it difficult to comprehend the non-White experience and perspective that White domination has produces” (2009, p. 4).

Unfortunately, during the time of this research two African American ADs resigned from their positions for conduct detrimental to their universities. This concerned several of the African American participants; they questioned whether these experienced African American ADs, who were terminated, will be offered another opportunity at another Division I-A university as an AD. African American ADs have not been recycled in the AD profession, while White colleagues have been afforded numerous opportunities after failing at other universities as ADs. This is another example of how “White privilege” is present in the AD profession, but unrecognizable to Whites (Hylton, 2009).

Several of the African American participants stressed that they conduct themselves as if this is their only opportunity at their position. They believe they are not held at the same standard as their White colleagues and there is no room for error
for them. Yet, according to the majority of the participants race has no influence on obtaining an AD position; however, the fear of being fired for not maintaining a higher standard than their White AD colleagues lingers in the back of the mind of several of the African American participants. This psychological strategy is the result of the social arrangement that ranks Whites over all people of color (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). This interest convergence established White ADs at the forefront of the position, while African American ADs that have benefited from the help of Whites downplay the influence race has in the hiring of a Division I-A AD.

Another African American participant shared his experiences of being interviewed for AD positions, only to find out he was never a serious candidate in the eyes of the hiring committee, merely an Affirmative Action interviewee. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) would classify this form of discrimination as the “color-blind” or “formal conception of equality” because it gives the appearance of equality when actually there is racially discriminating motive at play. Unfortunately, this unethical form of interviewing minority candidates may still exist according to a participant in Taylor’s (2001) study, where he/she was put on a list so that institutions could say that they attempted to recruit him/her knowing they were not ever interested in hiring him/her. Yet still, it must be stated that the majority of the African American participants from Taylor’s (2001) study and this study articulated the perspective that race does not have an influence in the hiring of an AD, even the participants that were discriminated against.

In conclusion, several African American participants alluded to race being a challenge and shared stories that demonstrated this; however, they verbalized the
perspective that race was not a hindrance for obtaining a Division I-A AD position. These mixed messages led me to believe they could not be as candid as they wanted due to their visible positions for fear of being identified.

"Maybe there's a point in time that we could have that bigger discussion [about race]." *(Mr. Pink)*

Or could it be that their beliefs have been altered since they have entered this "brotherhood" of Division I-A ADs? Needless to say, the influence of race was an elusive factor in the career paths and experiences of the participants obtaining their Division I-A AD positions, but the current disproportionate ratio of White male ADs to African American male ADs speaks to the presence of "White privilege."

Changing these statistics can only begin once the beneficiaries of this privilege, White male ADs, acknowledge the influence race has on the hiring of a Division I-A AD.

**Looking through Social Cognitive Career Lenses**

Understanding the career paths of the Division I-A AD participants has reinforced established findings as well as revealed some unique data. Professional prerequisites such as business acumen, the ability to network, and volunteering were all deemed as essential skills and experience to have to obtain an AD position; while uncelebrated characteristics of the job were confessed, it brought new light to an often glamorized occupation. Observing the discovered themes through the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) framework, several conclusions were drawn to the understanding of this phenomenon.
As mentioned, the major theme of the study consisted of attributes the participants believed contributed to their AD attainment. One of the skills they accredited to their success was their business acumen. Some of the participants’ acquired their business management education formally through higher learning instruction as well as working in the corporate sector. Others were able to gain their business acumen experience through on the job training, while working an entry-level athletic administrative position, interning, or volunteering.

The participants’ formal education helped give them a business management foundation, which coincides within the framework of SCCT where there are external or objective factors such as educational experiences. Some participants sought advanced degrees, once they established that they wanted to pursue a career in athletic administration. According to Lent, Brown, and Hackett (2000) the degree to which an individual is exposed to quality educational experiences can influence career development positively.

Although the participants viewed their formal education as an influential factor in obtaining their AD position, the experience gained from on the job training proved to be just as important. These learning experiences enabled the participants to acquire the business acumen to be able to run an athletic department. This supports SCCT that personal performance accomplishments and vicarious learning are key variables in building an individual’s self-efficacy (Lent & Brown, 1996; Stitt-Gohdes, 1997). The combination of the participants’ education and experience influenced their career choice by increasing their self-efficacy in understanding the business of collegiate athletics (Stitt-Gohdes, 1997).
Once the participants understood that a career in athletic administration was a possibility, they continued to educate themselves on the business of collegiate athletics through networking and volunteering. They realized the importance of exposing themselves to influential individuals in the industry to showcase their leadership abilities and knowledge of collegiate athletics, most importantly, the opportunity to interact with other ADs and other influential decision makers.

The benefit of the participants networking and volunteering to obtain their AD positions encompassed several variables within the SCCT. Through networking the participants were able to increase their self-efficacy by displaying their skill set at conferences (performance accomplishments), viewing other veteran ADs at work (vicarious learning), and interacting with other ADs (social or verbal persuasion) (Bandura, 1986; Lent & Brown, 1996). The outcome expectation of their networking was the belief that they would be recognized by other ADs and influential decision makers within the athletic administration field for future AD considerations (personal goal) (Stitt-Gohdes, 1997).

By volunteering, the participants were able to hone their skill set and educate themselves on the business of collegiate athletics through hands on informal training (performance accomplishments) as well as observe the inner workings of collegiate athletics (vicarious learning) (Lent & Brown, 1996). Volunteering not only increased the participants knowledge and experience, but also their self-efficacy of pursuing a career in athletic administration.

While the major themes recognized in this study focused on the skills and experience needed to obtain a Division I-A AD position, the emergent themes
revealed certain unknown characteristics of the position such as being “called” to be an AD, the impact the position has on the family, selecting an AD position that fits, and dealing with the negative criticism that comes with the position. Three out of four of these themes could be depicted as deterrents to the participants pursuing careers as Division I-A ADs, while one addressed the destined fate of some of these participants becoming ADs.

The participants shared that the AD position is more than a job—it is a lifestyle due to the time commitment it requires. They understand this now, because they have experienced it. One can assume that nine out of 10 participants were quite aware of the expected hours the position entailed, because of their career trajectory through the athletic department’s administration. Their career progressions allowed them to witness (vicarious learning) the extensive work hours their ADs worked. Yet, knowing this expectation of the job did not deter the participants from pursuing a Division I-A AD position (personal goal) (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996; Stitt-Gohdes, 1997).

Another factor the participants had to consider was the impact the job would have on their families. Several of the participants voiced that their spouses and families are very supportive of their careers and that the AD profession requires a supportive family. This family support (verbal persuasion) eased the challenge of balancing family and profession responsibilities. It could be concluded that the family support of the participants increased their self-efficacy and gave them the drive to ignore the challenges of the job to continue to pursue an AD position (personal goal) (Bandura, 1986).
Another reason the participants could have high self-efficacy is based on the fact that they were able to obtain one of the 120 AD positions available (ncaa.org, 2011). This requires perseverance as well as patience. The participants shared that finding the right AD position is important, in order to ensure that one is successful. Also, the participants stated they had to consider their families when applying for AD positions. Again, these challenges did not deter the participants’ from pursuing an AD position.

Under SCCT, the probability of more success than failure increases the self-efficacy and reinforces the career choice. But if one perceives the challenges as significant and a low rate of success is the outcome this will deter one from pursuing a career using this expertise/ability (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996; Stitt-Gohdes, 1997). According to the SCCT, the participants self-efficacy should have decreased due to the challenges they had to face and deterred them from pursuing the AD position; instead, they continued pursuing careers as Division I-A ADs contradicting the SCCT.

Another contradiction to the SCCT is that negative social persuasion did not decrease the self-efficacy of the participants and deter them from pursuing the AD position (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996; Stitt-Gohdes, 1997). The participants shared that having thick skin and a good sense of humor are important to have as an AD, because the position is a “thankless job” and the criticism comes from all angles. Nevertheless, aware of the constant criticism the AD position may present, the participants continued to pursue careers as ADs. This supports the conclusion that the participants have high self-efficacy.
The final emergent sub theme pertained to the participants being “called” to the AD position. Five of the participants expressed that the position pursued them. Two out of five participants’ did not apply to become ADs; they were sought out for the position. The other three participants were taken off their previous career paths only to be divinely led to becoming Division I-A ADs. The essence of being “called” to a career choice fits within the SCCT, because it requires an individual with a high self-efficacy (Stitt-Gohdes, 1997).

The SCCT may not apply to the two “called” participants who were sought after for the AD position, because their career goal was not to become an AD. However, it is safe to assume they possessed high self-efficacy, acquired from their past educational and professional experiences. As for the other three participants, they still had to pursue the AD position they were “called” to. Believing that they were destined to be ADs provided them the inner strength (self-efficacy) to continue to pursue their destiny of becoming an AD (personal goal) (Bandura, 1986; Stitt-Gohdes, 1997).

The final theme addressed whether race has an impact on the hiring of ADs. Eight of 10 participants’ were not aware if race presented a challenge to obtaining a Division I-A AD position today for minorities; while two participants expressed that race does play a role in the hiring of an AD. Comparing the current ratio of African American male ADs to White ADs (nine African American to 101 White ADs) may lead one to agree with the two participants’ (ncaa.org, 2011).

SCCT recognizes that race is an influential factor in the selection and development of an individual’s career (Brown, 1995; Cheatham, 1990; Kerka, 1998;
Yet, the low African American AD representation did not deter the five African American participants from pursuing a Division I-A AD position. Some of the African American participants experienced discriminatory actions during interviews and on the job; still they continued to pursue their goal of obtaining a Division I-A AD position. This would suggest that they have a high self-efficacy to withstand the challenges they endured to reach their goal of becoming an AD.

**Research Implications for Practice**

As stated earlier, I believe the findings of this study may have implications for educators, athletic administrators, and aspiring athletic administrators. Not to mention, the benefits search committees and existing support systems such as the NCAA minority recruiting programs, Black Coaches and Administrators (BCA), and other athletic administration mentoring programs may receive from these findings. The participants experiences suggest that a business acumen, networking, and volunteering were important career aspects to becoming a Division I-A AD.

Understanding the business of collegiate athletics was deemed a necessary experience to have by the participants. Sports Management graduate programs and MBA programs need to focus their course offerings on courses specifically targeted to address the financial side of collegiate athletics. Courses on fundraising and generating revenue should be taught to give the aspiring athletic administrators a clear understanding of how the business of collegiate athletics operates. Also, courses on business and personnel management should be offered to expose the students to the management skills needed to lead an athletics department; from managing support staff to hiring and firing coaches.
The ability to network with other ADs and influential people within collegiate athletics was essential for the participants to obtain their Division I-A AD position. They were able to network through attending seminars, workshops, and other professional development programs. The NCAA need to continue to offer their professional development programs for aspiring athletic administrators as well as look at offering more opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students to have exposure to other ADs and influential people within collegiate athletics. This will allow them to learn from people within the industry and showcase their skills and talents.

The NCAA, BCA, and other athletic administration mentoring programs need to continue to provide professional development opportunities for minorities such as the NCAA program, Leadership Institute for Ethnic Minority Males and Females. This program helps those minorities currently holding positions within collegiate athletic departments to broaden their skill set to become an AD, but they need to include other programs for those minority graduate and undergraduate students who do not have a foot in the door of college athletics to give them the exposure and experience needed to become a Division I-A AD.

The participants were able to experience the inner workings of collegiate athletics by volunteering to work in collegiate athletic departments and events or at conference sponsored events. Collegiate athletic departments need to provide more opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students to intern within the athletic department and work athletic events to gain invaluable athletic administrative experience.
Collegiate athletic departments and their college’s sports management and business administration programs need to collaborate to ensure their students are receiving an academic experience that is aligned with the professional expectations of working in college athletics. This could include providing internships and volunteering opportunities specifically for students in the college’s sports management and business administration programs for required graduating credits as well as course projects designed to assist with different divisions of the athletic department. This volunteering exposure should be meaningful in order to help an aspiring athletic administrator with building his or her business acumen, network, and understanding of the business of collegiate athletics. As for aspiring African American athletic administrators, this would guarantee an opportunity for an internship or volunteering experience and the same exposure as their White colleagues.

Sport management programs across the country have recognized the demand of students pursuing careers in athletic administration and are realigning their curricula to assure their students receive the proper education and experience necessary to be successful as athletic administrators. Programs such as these are typically certified by the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM), a sports management association which promotes and encourages athletic administration research and professional development (nassm.com, 2011).

Overall, the shift in sport management curriculums and their NASSM certifications are designed to prepare students pursuing careers in athletic administration on the latest research and trends in sport management.
Research Recommendations

After the completion of the study I concluded that the study could be used to further the research on the career paths of Division I-A athletic directors. The findings obtained from the study were pivotal and intriguing and can be used by those pursuing careers in athletic administration. To further expand the research on the career paths of Division I-A athletic directors, the following recommendations are suggested for further study:

1. Compare and contrast the experiences of Division I-A athletic directors and Fortune 500 CEOs. The findings could reveal the quality of work-life issues for both positions are similar between the non-profit and for-profit sectors.

2. Examine the experiences of compliance directors at Division I-A institutions and their career paths to becoming athletic directors. The findings could show the barriers that prevent compliance personnel from becoming athletic directors.

3. Examine the impact the NCAA Leadership Institute for Ethnic Minority Males and Females has on the hiring of minorities as athletic directors. The findings could illustrate that there is no difference on the hiring of qualified minority athletic director candidates.

4. Compare and contrast the experiences of the spouses of Division I-A athletic directors and university presidents. The findings could depict similar lifestyles and family challenges the spouses face as partners of prominent university officials.
5. Examine the shift of hiring CEOs to be athletic directors from the perspective of a university president. The findings may show that the skills and expectations are similar and the transition from the business world to the academia environment is fluent.

6. Examine the perspectives of minority student-athletes pursuing careers in athletic administration through the lens of the Social Cognitive Career Theory. The findings could display the student-athletes have low self-efficacy due to the low percentage of minority athletic directors as role models and mentors.

In conclusion, I believe the discovered factors; business acumen, the ability to network, and volunteering experience are essential to have in order to obtain a Division I-A AD position. Also, understanding the hidden aspects of the AD position provided an introspection of the lifestyle of an AD. Most importantly, the elusiveness of race as an influential factor on the hiring of a Division I-A AD in this study substantiates the need for further investigation on this subject.
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Company.


Appendix A

Initial Email/Telephone Script to Potential Participants
Appendix A

Initial Email/Telephone Script to Potential Participants

Dear______ :

My name is Harold Swift and I am inviting you to participate in a study on understanding the career paths of Division I Athletic Directors. This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership through Western Michigan University. I am the student investigator in this study (269) 808-3450, htswift@hotmail.com. The supervising professor is Dr. Donna Talbot (269) 387-5122, donna.talbot@wmich.edu.

You are being invited to volunteer as a participant because you are an athletic director at a division IIA institution. If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a 60-to-120-minute face-to-face or telephone interview session. In-person interviews can be conducted at your institution or an off-campus site of your preference where you will be asked questions regarding your career path experiences to obtaining your athletic director’s position. You may also be asked to participate in follow-up conversations, if clarification of your initial interview is necessary. Email may also be used to contact you throughout the study, however clarification of information will be done by telephone, unless you have a private email account that you are willing to use for this purpose.

Keeping data confidential is the norm. Interview responses will be strictly confidential. This means that your name will not appear on any papers on which information is recorded. Respondents will be identified using either pseudonyms or in generic terms (e.g., “As one athletic director explained . . .”), and other identifying information will be masked.

I will be contacting you within the next week to discuss your possible voluntary participation in this study. If you decide you are interested in learning more about the study, please feel free to respond to this email. I will follow up this email with a telephone call to schedule a phone meeting with you to discuss in more detail this study and to provide you with a written consent form for your review. If, after our phone meeting, you consent to participate in this study, I will ask for your signature on the consent form and to return it to me via U.S. mail.

A follow-up meeting can be scheduled for the interview. You will also receive the interview questions in advance so you can be prepared to respond to them, should you decide to participate.

If you have any questions, you may contact either me or Dr. Donna Talbot, as indicated above. Thank you for considering possible participation in this study.

Sincerely,
Harold T. Swift
Appendix B

Script for Follow-up Phone Call to Potential Participants
Appendix B

Script for Follow-up Phone Call to Potential Participants

Hello, my name is Harold Swift. I contacted you via email approximately a week ago regarding possible participation in a study on understanding the career paths of Division I Athletic Directors. As I indicated in the email, this study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of my Ph.D. in Educational Leadership through Western Michigan University.

Your participation in this study would be voluntary, although very much appreciated. The results of this study may be of interest to you as an athletic director at a division IA institution and may be beneficial in assisting the NCAA and other mentoring and recruitment programs as well as university presidents and search committees in hiring athletic directors. Most importantly, this information will aid in further educating aspiring athletic administrators and students pursuing careers in athletic administration.

I am calling to see if you have had an opportunity to read the email and if you have considered whether you would like to participate in this study. You may also have some questions regarding the study, which I will be happy to answer at this time.

Should you decide to participate in the study, I ask that you please sign the Consent Form and return it via U.S. mail. Once the consent form is signed, the interview can begin. Once again, your participation in this study will be greatly appreciated. May I schedule a meeting at this time to discuss the consent form and your possible participation?

Thank you and I look forward to meeting with you soon. Please feel free to contact me via phone at 269-808-3450 or email at htswift@hotmail.com if you have any questions prior to the meeting.

OR

Thank you for considering participating in this study. I understand you are not able to participate and appreciate the time you took to speak with me and to read the information regarding the study.
Appendix C

Introductory Letter/Consent Form
Appendix C

Introductory Letter/Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study about the career paths of athletic directors at Division I-A institutions. The study is being conducted by Harold T. Swift, a doctoral student in Higher Education Leadership at Western Michigan University, under the direction of Dr. Donna Talbot, his dissertation chair. The following information is being provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in this study or decline participation. Also, withdrawing your participation during the study will not affect your relationship with the researchers or Western Michigan University.

The purpose of the study is to understand the career paths of Division I-A Athletic Directors. The expected benefits of this study are: 1) to provide vital information for hiring committees on the necessities needed to be a Division I athletic director; 2) to bring a new perspective for aspiring athletic administrators on how to plot their career path to become an athletic director; 3) to provide information for sport management programs to review their curriculums to insure their students receive the necessary education, skills, and experience in athletic administration; 4) to assist existing support systems such as NCAA minority recruiting programs, Black Coaches and Administrators (BCA) and other athletic administration mentoring programs; 5) add to the literature on the career path of Division I-A athletic directors; and 6) the opportunity for the student researcher to participate in a qualitative study.

If you would like to participate, please sign the form and email back your response or mail back to the student researcher. I will conduct face-to-face or telephone interviews, which will take approximately 1 to 2 hours and possible follow-up interviews. Audio recording equipment may be used to ensure accuracy of the information received and written transcripts of all interviews will be produced. You may request the interviewer to turn off the audio recorder at any time during the interview.

Please be assured that your interview responses will be held in the strictest confidence and all efforts will be taken to protect your anonymity. The recordings and interview transcripts will be stored and locked when not in use in the residence of the researcher for a period of one year following the completions of the interviews. At that time the audio recordings will be destroyed. The written transcripts will be stored on the campus of Western Michigan University for at least a period of three years. Potential risks or discomforts associated with this study are minimal. Per your request, findings from the research will be provided after completion.
For questions regarding the rights of research participants, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (269-387-8293). Any other questions about this study, please feel free to contact the student researcher, Harold T. Swift, at (269) 808-3450 (cell) or by email at htswift@hotmail.com. You can also contact Dr. Donna Talbot, the Chair, at (269) 387-1000 or email at donna.talbot@wmich.edu.

This consent form has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right hand corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep for your own records.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Witness</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Interviewer/Researcher | Date
Appendix D

Script for Potential Interview Follow-up Phone Call to Participants
Appendix D

Script for Potential Interview Follow-up Phone Call to Participants

Hello, _____________________

Thank you once again for agreeing to participate in the study of understanding the career paths of Division I Athletic Directors. Your participation in this study is very much appreciated.

In attempting to summarize the information collected during your interview, I have a few follow-up questions for clarification purposes. As a reminder, please refer to the copy of the consent form you signed when you agreed to participate. At that time, I indicated that you do not have to participate in any follow-up if you choose not to do so and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

Are you willing to participate in this follow-up? (Pause for response) If so, is this a good time for you? (Pause for response) If not, can we schedule a time that would be most convenient for you? (Pause for response) (Note: I may contact them by email to ask when a good time would be to call them.)

Once the time has been established, I would indicate the following:

As a follow-up to the question on ________________, you indicated ________________. Could you clarify (fill in whatever the question/clarification may relate to for this participation).

Thank you so much for your time. Once I have completed my summary of your interview, I will be sending it to you for your review, to insure its accuracy. Please feel free to contact me at any time to discuss the study, ask questions, or for any other reason related to the study. You may contact me by telephone at 269-808-3450, or email at htswift@hotmail.com. You may also contact Dr. Donna Talbot at 269-387-5122, donna.talbot@wmich.edu.
Appendix E

Interview Protocol – Athletic Director
Appendix E

Interview Protocol – Athletic Director

Project: Understanding the Career Paths of Division I Athletic Directors: A Phenomenological Study

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

Thank you for consenting to participate in this study. I would like to record this interview to ensure the study is as accurate as possible, and I would like to remind you that during any point of the interview, you may request that the tape recorder be turned off.

Questions that you will be asked to respond to:

1. Tell me a little bit about your career path up to date.

2. What were some of the influential factors that lead you to pursue a career in athletic administration?

3. What strategies did you use, if any, to obtain your athletic director position?

4. What were the support systems that assisted you during your career path up to now?

5. What were the “Necessities” needed to obtain your athletic director position?

6. How did you acquire these “Necessities?”

7. What barriers, if any, did you encounter that challenged you on your career journey?
8. If you had to repeat your career over, what would you do differently?

9. From your perspective what are the “Necessities” needed to obtain an athletic director position today?

10. What advice would you offer today to individuals pursuing a career in athletic administration?

11. Would that advice differ if you were addressing a young African American man?

12. Are there other comments or issues important to your career development that you would like to share?
Appendix F

Interview Protocol/Student Researcher – Athletic Director
Appendix F

Interview Protocol/Student Researcher – Athletic Director

Project: Understanding the Career Paths of Division I Athletic Directors: A Phenomenological Study

Time of interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:
Position of Interviewee:

Thank you for consenting to participate in this study. I would like to record this interview to ensure the study is as accurate as possible, and I would like to remind you that during any point of the interview, you may request that the tape recorder be turned off.

Questions that the subjects will be asked include:

1. Tell me about your career path up to date.
   a. Job titles
   b. Responsibilities

2. What were some of the influential factors that lead you to pursue a career in athletic administration?
   a. Athletic
   b. Education
   c. Role models/mentors

3. What strategies did you use, if any, to obtain your athletic director position?

4. What were the support systems that assisted you during your career path up to now?
   a. NCAA/institutional
   b. Role models/mentors
c. Family/Friends

d. Organizations

5. What were the “Necessities” needed to obtain your athletic director position?

6. How did you acquire these “Necessities?”

7. What barriers, if any, did you encounter that challenged you on your career journey?
   a. Personal
   b. Sex
   c. Race
   d. Resources
   e. NCAA/institutional

8. If you had to repeat your career over, what would be different?

9. What are the “Necessities” needed to obtain an athletic director position today?
   a. Education
   b. Skills
   c. Experience

10. What advice would you offer today to individuals pursuing a career in athletics administration?

11. Would that advice differ if you were addressing a young African American man?

12. When did you know that you would obtain a Division I-A athletic director position?

13. Are there other comments or issues important to your career development that you would like to share?
Appendix G

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Approval Letter