



Athletic Diversity and Inclusion Officers and Institutional Entrepreneurship

Ajhanai C.I. Keaton
University of Louisville

Laura J. Burton
University of Connecticut

Jennifer E. McGarry
University of Connecticut

NCAA Division I athletic departments have pervasive issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. A possible remedy is the adoption of Athletic Diversity and Inclusion Officers (ADIO). Diversity leaders are espoused to challenge and address inequitable organizational contexts. The current study examined if Black women ADIOs have the agentic abilities to lead and enact divergent DEI practices in their Division I athletic departments. Drawing upon institutional entrepreneurship, we demonstrate the complexities of leading divergent change related to DEI in Division I NCAA collegiate athletic departments, the difficulties of ADIOs achieving legitimacy, and highlight how dominant organizational actors serve as barriers to ADIO's introduction of divergent DEI practices. Lastly, the race-gendered identity of ADIOs in this study hindered their ability to achieve a successful subject position. These findings demonstrate that a ADIO's desire for divergent change, does not guarantee it.

Keywords: Institutional entrepreneurship, athletic diversity and inclusion officers, Black women, Division I athletics

Institutional entrepreneurship is concerned with how unique institutional actors (or organizations) have agentic abilities to alter particular institutional arrangements (Battilana et al., 2009; Leca et al., 2008; Maguire et al., 2004). The following two characteristics are central to institutional entrepreneurship: Actors must seek to implement institutional change that diverges from their institutional norms and actors actively participate in the implementation of this divergent change (Battilana et al., 2009). A (potential) emerging institutional entrepreneur in collegiate athletics are diversity, equity, and inclusion professionals (Kluch et al., 2022; Wright et al., 2021) or Athletic Diversity and Inclusion Officers (ADIO) (Keaton, 2020; Keaton & Cooper, 2020; Keaton, 2022). An ADIO is a sport organizational leader whose responsibilities are to create, maintain, and lead diverse, inclusive, and equitable organizations (Keaton, 2020; Keaton, 2022). The ADIO position resembles the varying iterations of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer roles in higher education institutions and corporate business domains (Leon, 2014; Nixon, 2017; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013; Wright et al., 2021). DEI Officers are tasked with “fixing” or addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) issues within their respective organizations, and in doing so, they must challenge existing norms and practices of marginalization in their respective contexts (Marana 2016; Nixon, 2017; Norris-Hill, 2020). Since 2013, select NCAA athletic departments have adopted ADIO positions (Keaton, 2020), but a proliferation of these positions has ensued following national racial unrest related to the heinous murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbury, and too many others (Keaton & Cooper, 2022; Notre Dame University Athletics Communications, 2020; University of Iowa Athletics, 2020; Swim et al., 2022).

Many inaugural ADIOs held other administrative roles in their respective athletic department or collegiate athletics broadly (Keaton, 2020; University of Notre Dame Athletics Communications, 2020; University of Iowa Athletics, 2020). Consequently, ADIOs are essentially hired to challenge organizational norms and practices they themselves are navigating, or possibly maintaining. Given this precarious dilemma, the purpose of this study was to advance the theoretical prescriptions of institutional entrepreneurship through the organizational experiences of Black women ADIOs. By centering how ADIOs navigate collegiate athletic departments as espoused hired organizational disruptors or change agents (Leon, 2014; Keaton, 2020; Nixon, 2017; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013) (i.e., institutional entrepreneurs), we sought to further improve understandings of institutional theory as a tool to create more diverse, inclusive, and equitable sport organizations.

Literature Review

Emerging Scholarship on Athletic Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officers in Sport Organizations

The adoption of DEI professionals and ADIOs in sport organizations is an emerging phenomenon (Keaton & Cooper, 2022; Keaton, 2022; Kluch et al., 2022; Swim et al., 2022; Wright et al., 2021). Research studying this unique population in college sport organizations has documented their experiences as adverse, due in part to how these positions came to be adopted (read: hostile socio-political context) (Keaton & Cooper, 2022; Swim et al., 2022), *who* holds these positions (read: individuals with salient marginalized identities) (Keaton Kluch et al., 2022), and how the nature of engaging in DEI work in higher education is a political endeavor (Griffin et al., 2019; Nixon, 2017). According to Kluch et al. (2022), there are five prevalent

barriers that hinder ADIOs from advancing DEI work in their respective organizations: (a) structural barriers, (b) cultural barriers, (c) conceptual barriers, (d) emotional barriers, and (e) social/relational barriers. Their work brings attention to the complexity of the ADIO position, as these leaders perceive barriers on multiple levels, personal and systemic. ADIOs navigating personal barriers is evident in the work of Keaton (2022), as she found that Black women ADIOs draw upon their marginalizing intersectional experiences of racism and sexism to inform their perceptions of organizational inclusivity. Such a reality highlights how the identity of *who* is engaging in DEI leadership can be intimately linked to their social identities, which in the case of Keaton's participants, led to emotional fatigue as ADIOs and captures the realities of personal barriers from the work of Kluch et al. (2022). Consequently, as ADIOs become more prevalent in sport organizations, the amount of emotional distress the positions places upon them is relevant to their capacity to lead the charge of creating more inclusive organizational contexts (Keaton, 2022; Kluch et al., 2022).

Scholarship on ADIOs brings attention to these organizational leaders either being hired to or taking it upon themselves to change, fix, and alter organizational contexts to be more diverse, more inclusive, and more equitable (Keaton, 2022; Kluch et al., 2022; Swim et al., 2022). In fact, this is the nature of how DEI leadership positions came to exist in higher education (Keaton, 2020; Leon, 2014; William & Wade-Golden, 2013), as universities appointed DEI Officers to specifically address why students and faculty from historically marginalized backgrounds continued to have sustained adverse experiences (William & Wade-Golden, 2013). The historicity of DEI Officers has positioned contemporary DEI leaders to be *perceived* as individuals who must "fix" their organizations by challenging and bringing attention to the varying inequities that exist (Griffin et al., 2019; Leon, 2014; Nixon, 2017). Consequently, these aforementioned perceptions lead to the impetus of this of this scholarship. If diversity leaders are perceived as or take it upon themselves to alter their organizations to be more inclusive (Keaton, 2022; Kluch et al., 2022), then through the theoretical prescriptions of institutional entrepreneurship, do they have the agentic ability to achieve such an aim?

Black Diversity Leaders and Persistently White Organizational Contexts

DEI Officers are espoused to be organizational leaders who *should* challenge the marginalizing practices and structures in their organization, but their approach to doing so is often questioned by diverse stakeholders, like students, faculty, and administration. A DEI Officer can struggle to be *legitimate* to their own prescriptions of DEI, while simultaneously struggling to be a *legitimate* administrator who stays within the bounds of institutional expectations (Griffin et al., 2019) – To which complicating their *subject position*¹(Hardy & Maguire, 2017). For example, participants in Griffin et al., (2019) desired to be disruptive social justice leaders who challenged their universities to meaningfully address structures and practices that maintained marginalization for varying communities on campus. These participants discussed while they had a social justice agenda, many influential stakeholders at their universities hindered their efforts to actualize their social justice efforts (Griffin et al., 2019). These types of experiences led to Norris-Hill (2020) questioning to what extent Black DEI Officers are used as *tools* to placate to White institutions' agendas, rather than *tools* seeking to eradicate the marginalization extant in

¹ Institutional entrepreneurship scholarship refers to a subject position to refer to the unique positionality actors have to influence institutional fields or organizational contexts.

White institutions. She draws upon Audre Lorde's (2007) Black feminist essay, "The Master's Tool Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" to equate the DEI Officer position in persistently White institutions to be a *tool* of master not intended to eradicate systemic racism or dismantle White institutions. Thus, White patriarchal institutions will not provide marginalized people with the appropriate *tools* (i.e., resources and institutional power) to eradicate racist and patriarchal systems that benefit those in power (Norris-Hill, 2020). Is, then, the ADIO position a *tool* of master or a *tool* that can eradicate the embedded nature of varying types of marginalization extant in collegiate athletic departments (Cooper et al., 2020; Keaton & Cooper, 2022; Melton et al., 2022)? Such a framing aligns with the purpose of this paper, which focused on the positionality of Black women ADIOs to lead divergent change in their organizations through the through the theoretical prescriptions of institutional entrepreneurship. While this work aligns with and builds upon previous analyses centering ADIOs (Keaton, 2020; Keaton, 2022; Kluch et al., 2022; Swim et al., 2022), this paper sought to advance theory, through the leadership experiences of Black women ADIOs.

Black Women Leadership in Collegiate Athletics

Black women coaches and administrators working in historically Black universities and colleges (HBCU) and historically White institutions (HWI) have shared how their racial and gender identity hinders their career ascension (Bruening & Borland, 2010; McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017; Price, Dunlap, Eller, 2017; Walker & Melton, 2015). Walker and Melton (2015) bring attention to how Black queer women assistant coaches' professional experiences are simultaneously entangled in systems of racism, sexism, and homophobia. Thus, their professional experiences were not informed by one system of marginalization but several (see Crenshaw, 1989). Black women coaches' professional experiences being adversely informed by several marginalizing systems resulted in these coaches attempting to conceal their queer identity, in an effort to limit the totality of being Black, a woman, and queer. Price et al. (2017) discussed how White women administrators had more in common with White male ADs, as Black women do not share a racial or gender identity with White male ADs who play a vital role in the hiring process and these race-gendered differences lead to cultural misunderstandings and marginalization in the workplace. Keaton (in-press) examined what it *means* to be a Black woman ADIO who leads DEI efforts in Division I organizational contexts that have been documented as racist and sexist. Her work found that these leaders reluctantly embodied the *Strong Black Woman* trope, as the ADIO position required them to be *strong enough* to experience and *strong enough* to address marginalization as a DEI leader. Lastly, although Black women ADs are leading HBCUs athletic programs in predominately Black organizational contexts, their experiences of gender marginalization and sexism persisted, as these leaders navigated being perceived as the *Angry Black woman* and their gender identity led to assumptions about them rarely being assumed to be the AD (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). Consequently, previous scholarship has documented how Black women leaders in college sport cannot avoid how racism and sexism inform their leadership experiences.

Theoretical Framework

Institutional Entrepreneurship

DiMaggio (1988) argued that divergent change in organizational contexts could occur when actors with appropriate resources and opportunity could envision the need for divergent

conditions. *Institutional entrepreneurship* involves the leveraging of resources and one's positionality to create new, or transform existing, organizational arrangements (Garud et al., 2007; Maguire et al., 2004). An institutional entrepreneur must be actively involved in the change they seek to implement. The entrepreneur's desire to lead divergent change signals their awareness of existing conditions (Hardy & Maguire, 2017; Leca et al., 2008). For an institutional entrepreneur to imagine divergent conditions, they must "break away from scripted patterns of behaviour" (Dorado, 2005, p. 388). Hence, institutional entrepreneurs have the ability to see the patterns and behaviors of their organization and actively attempt to create new patterns and behaviors that challenge the status quo (Leca et al., 2008).

Political savviness is necessary for successful and strategic entrepreneurship, particularly as these actors pinpoint and address institutional problems (Leca et al., 2008; Maguire et al., 2004) and are perceived as being institutional non-conformists (Lepoutre & Valente, 2012). According to Maguire et al. (2004), institutional entrepreneurs, "frame grievances, diagnose causes, garner support, provide solutions, and enable collective action in a strategic manner" (p. 660). Thus, some argue that institutional entrepreneurship is more likely to occur when uncertainty persists and crises place pressure upon an institutional field (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Maguire & Hardy, 2008). Others found that the less institutionalized a field is, the more likely successful entrepreneurship will occur (Avetisyan & Ferrary, 2013; Child et al., 2007). These perspectives demonstrate the significance of context and (de)institutionalization in the pursuit of divergent change.

Hardy and Maguire (2017) argued the role of an institutional entrepreneur is best suited for less dominant institutional actors, as these actors would be more motivated to alter conditions that do not benefit them directly. For example, dominant actors benefit from institutionalized practices and processes, making them less motivated to re-imagine arrangements that would alter their prowess (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Maguire & Hardy, 2008). In the context of this study and based upon previous literature, Black women ADIOs are conceptualized as less dominant actors, due to their race and gender identity (Keaton, in-press; Walker & Melton, 2015) and the contemporary adverse experiences of ADIOs (Kluch et al., 2022). In the context of this study and based upon previous literature, dominant actors are conceptualized as White, male, and hold decision-making positions, like AD and Head Coach (see Keaton & Cooper, 2022; Lapchick et al., 2021).

Institutional entrepreneurship addresses the issue of agency in institutional theory (Lu & Heinze, 2021) and essentially poses the following question: If the norms and ideological perspectives of institutional actors is influenced by their institutional environment, then what agency can an institutional actor (in the case of this study, an ADIO) actually enact in their respective athletic department given their positionality within institutional structures? Such a question is aimed at addressing the institutional deterministic and the paradox of embedded agency aspects of institutional theory, which prescribes organizational actors as guided by the norms and practices of their respective field, and therefore do not actually have the agentic abilities to challenge these norms and practices.

As previously mentioned, non-dominant (read: less influential) institutional actors are more willing to engage in efforts to re-imagine *new* institutional conditions (Hardy & Maguire, 2017). This aspect of institutional entrepreneurship is relevant to ADIOs, specifically Black women ADIOs in Division I collegiate athletics, as White and male athletic administrators overwhelmingly hold institutional power in the field via prominent leadership positions, in comparison to Black and women administrators (see Lapchick, 2020). Thus, this marginality on the axis of race and gender may lead ADIOs to possess innovative approaches to imagining diverse and inclusive norms and practices in college athletics. The creation of these positions has

been accompanied with the assumption that ADIOs are *supposed* to alter the marginalizing practices of their respective athletic departments (and be provided the resources and freedom to accomplish this aim) (Leon, 2014; Weisman, 2020), and their experiences doing so is worthy of more research.

Given the complexities of the ADIO position (Kluch et al., 2022; Keaton, 2022), in this work, we considered how ADIOs engage in change efforts and maintain their status as *legitimate* diversity leader, while also being perceived as a *legitimate* collegiate athletic administrator aligned with the institutionalized norms and practices of their athletic departments. According to institutional theorists, *legitimacy* is a "...generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). Thus, for an ADIO, legitimacy is two-fold. In order to be a *legitimate* diversity leader, ADIOs must inequitable conditions in their respective organizations (e.g., lead divergent change) (Leon, 2014; Nixon, 2017; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). However, ADIO's institutional entrepreneurship may position them as *illegitimate* actors because their aims are "too disruptive" for their respective athletic departments (Keaton, 2020). Hence, this two-fold reality of legitimacy (proverbial double-edged sword) for ADIOs is captured in the purpose of this study.

By drawing upon institutional entrepreneurship, we examined if ADIOs perceive themselves as institutional entrepreneurs in their inaugural ADIO position. There are two research questions guiding this study:

RQ 1: What characteristics of an institutional entrepreneur are exhibited in the leadership experiences of ADIOs?

RQ 2: What barriers (if any) impede the institutional entrepreneurship of ADIOs?

Research Methodology

Participants and Research Context

The ADIO position is in an emergent state at the collegiate sport level, as the position is not yet adopted in all NCAA affiliated institutions (Keaton & Cooper, 2022; Wright et al., 2021). This current scholarship is a part of a broader study examining how Black women ADIOs lead DEI efforts and make sense of their position in college sport organizations documented as racist and sexist. Other projects apart of this broader study, phenomenologically studied how Black women ADIOs made sense of self in the position and how their race and gender identity informed organizational inclusivity. This project extends analyses on Black women ADIOs by studying how these leaders engage in challenging/shaping organizational dynamics to create more inclusive, diverse, and equitable contexts as DEI leaders.

Although other identity groups hold the ADIO position, Black women were purposively selected in an effort to advance and center Black women experiences, specifically given Black women ADIOs use their marginalizing experiences as expertise to conceptualize the nature of their work (see, Keaton, 2022). There is limited research that solely advances the experiences of Black women in sport scholarship (see, Bruening, 2005; McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017; Walker & Melton, 2015; Price et al., 2017). Often times, their experiences are analyzed in tandem with other marginalized groups. However, explicitly centering Black women advances what is unique to their plight, rather minorized groups as a whole.

At the time of data collection, there was an estimated 30 ADIOs in Division I athletic departments. This study conducted three semi-structured in-depth interviews with 16% of the available Division I ADIO population, resulting in a sample size of five. Given there are limited ADIOs in Division I athletics, this study was attentive to protecting the anonymity of participants by not providing extensive details about the organizations they work in, especially as each participant shared concerns about their identity not being protected.

Each participant identifies as a Black woman. At the time of data collection, each participant held their position for at least 6 months and had previous professional experiences in collegiate athletics for at least two years. All participants work in athletic departments that are historically and persistently White and male dominated. Each participant was familiar with embedded collegiate athletic department norms, policies, and structures related to DEI. Lastly, each participant attained at least a bachelor's degree. Although more details about the participants and their organizations may be desired, doing so jeopardizes their anonymity and does not align with our epistemological perspectives of qualitative research. Given the small number of Division I college sport ADIOs, even stating what conferences participants are affiliated with would expose their identity. The pseudonyms create for participants are Jalyiah, Serenity, Nia, Monique, and Kayla.

Research Design and Data Collection

A basic interpretative qualitative study (Merriam, 2002, 2009) seeks to achieve a “basic” understanding of a particular phenomenon. The phenomenon of study is ADIOs’ agentic ability to lead divergent change as it relates to DEI in their respective athletic departments (Merriam, 2009). A basic qualitative study allows for “multiple constructions and interpretations of reality” to hold true (Merriam, 2002, p. 4). Thus, divergent, and convergent experiences of participants will be shared. Given the aims of this research, we deployed a *critical and interpretivist paradigmatic lens* (Tracy, 2020). The participants’ unique perspectives were centered and the possibility of participants to hold disparate interpretations of their experiences as ADIOs was understood (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2002). We applied a critical lens because participants had marginalized intersectional racial and gender identities that would be relevant to their organizational experiences (see Collins & Bilge, 2020). Moreover, a critical lens is imperative, given previous sport scholarship finds that Black female administrators experience sexism and racism while holding leadership positions (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017; Walker & Melton, 2015) and describe Division I athletic departments as deeply racialized and gendered organizational environments (Cooper et al., 2020; Keaton & Cooper, 2022).

This study includes 15 interviews, as each participant completed three in-depth interviews that ranged from 60-90 minutes. Interview one examined participants’ perceptions of ADIO job responsibilities. For example, participants were asked, “What types of DEI matters are you responsible for?” Interview two focused on how participants’ identities (race, gender, other personal characteristics) were relevant to their leadership agendas as ADIOs (Leca et al., 2008). Participants were asked, “Is there anything unique about being a Black woman diversity leader in a sport organization?” Interview three addressed to what extent participants sought to alter their institutional environments (Battilana et al., 2009; Maguire & Hardy, 2017). For example, participants were asked, “How much authority do you have in your position and how much authority would you like to have?”

Data Analysis

Data was thematically analyzed (Bruan & Clarke, 2022) using deductive/inductive tactics (Saldaña, 2016) in the NVivo qualitative data analysis software. Deductive codes were predetermined and rooted in the literature on institutional entrepreneurship (Hardy & Maguire, 2017). Based upon the literature, the first author determined six critical aspects of institutional entrepreneurship and these became the initial six deductive codes to which the data was analyzed through. These initial deductive codes were: a) realization of new institutional arrangements (DiMaggio, 1988; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), b) paradox of embedded agency (Seo & Creed, 2002), c) breaking away from existing rules, norms, and patterns (Battilana, 2006; Battilana et al., 2009;), d) leveraging resources (Hardy & Maguire, et al., 2017; Maguire et al., 2004), e) political savviness (Guard et al., 2007; Maguire et al., 2004) f) balancing perceptions of legitimacy (Leca et al., 2008; Maguire & Hardy, 2017). While these deductive codes were insightful, applying inductive concept codes based upon the unique experiences of each ADIO brought attention to issues of race and gender in their leadership experiences. The first author then engaged in the iterative process of condensing deductive and inductive codes that shared a similar interpretation. After merging similar deductive and inductive codes, the first author transitioned to abstraction, which is the process of pairing “like with like” (Tracy, 2020). This resulted in category development and a creation of sub-categories. For example, all codes capturing barriers hindering ADIOs’ ability to introduce new norms and practices were grouped together, then the first author organized barriers based upon their attributes and characteristics. The first author then engaged in comparative analysis to solidify theme development and examine how participants’ organizational experiences converged and diverged from one another (Saldaña, 2016). Once these themes were established all three authors convened in a peer debriefing session to review codes, their transition into categories, and examined if the determined themes aligned with data excerpts. The second and third author contributed to the conceptualization of the project, participating in the analysis of the data, writing the findings section, and articulating the practical implications of findings.

Trustworthiness and Positionality Statement

Each author studies race and gender issues in sport organizations and is attentive to how organizations purport marginalization extant in the broader polity. The lead author identifies as a Black feminist, critical, and institutional scholar. The lead author sharing a race and gender identity with participants created a sense of shared understanding in the interview space and strengthened the analyses of this broader project, as she could relate to this storytelling that often centered upon being hyper-visible yet feeling invisible. The second scholar identifies as a gender scholar who challenges how gendered stereotypes adversely impact organizational actors’ perceptions of women leadership in organizations. The third scholar has meaningfully contributed to the literature on Black women in sport and has drawn upon critical theories and methodologies to address varying forms of marginalization in sport. Each scholar brought a unique critical lens to analyze the data, given their respective research interests and work. While the second and third author did not a racial identity with participants, their lived experiences as women were attuned to gender nuances extant in the data and our use of peer briefing enabled us to question one each other’s interpretation of the data. As white women, we acknowledge our racial privilege shapes our beliefs and views and provides a certain level of power and access. We continually reflect on these privileges, to self-analyze, and then act. While we have experienced gender discrimination, we do not claim to understand the experiences of our

participants. Throughout this project, we have actively engaged and reflected on how our whiteness shaped our perspectives of the women in this study, an essential element of engaging with intersectionality as white scholars (Haynes et al., 2020).

To ensure trustworthiness, the authors deployed several strategies, like providing *thick and rich data* excerpts and having each participant complete multiple interviews (Tracy, 2020). *Confirmability* is evident in the analysis process, as author two and three reviewed and questioned how codes were determined, transitioned into categories, then solidified as themes. We presented diverging and converging participant experiences, to which addressing the issue of *authenticity* (Tracy, 2020). Lastly, the purpose of this study was to engage in *conceptual development*, which is the aim of building upon theory to offer new insights. We sought to extend what is theorized about institutional entrepreneurship through the realities of Black women ADIOs. Tracy (2020) discusses how *conceptual development* is an aspect of producing credible, rigorous, and ethical qualitative research.

Discussion of Findings

Athletic Diversity and Inclusion Officers as Institutional Entrepreneurs

Each ADIO aligned with the attributes of an institutional entrepreneur (Maguire & Hardy, 2017), demonstrating the agentic ability to challenge prescriptions and interpretations of DEI in their respective organizations. Four themes address research one: a) Introducing *New Norms, Rules, and Practices of DEI*, b) *Balancing Perceptions of Legitimacy*, c) *Leveraging Athletes, Athletic Directors, and White Administrators to Support DEI*

Introducing New Norms, Rules, and Practices of DEI

Institutional entrepreneurs must be attentive to existing norms, in an effort to actively participate in introducing new norms, rules, and practices (Maguire & Hardy, 2017). The ADIOs in this study perceived the norms in their organization as maintaining structural marginalization. Thus, Each ADIO sought to “change [marginalizing] systems (Serenity),” “dismantle [inequitable] structures (Monique),” and promote “equity across [all areas of their athletic department] (Kayla),” particularly on the axis of race and gender. Kayla and Monique focused on addressing pay inequity between men and women administrators (Sveinsson et al., 2022). Monique shared,

And individuals are coming to talk to me about inequities in terms of their salaries, access to resources, and inequitable treatment. And when I kind of shift their focus and say, "Hey, that's the structural stuff I am trying to work on but y'all want to start a book club. I'm not running a book club."

Monique introduces a counter perspective of DEI, as it is more than “running a book club”, and she seeks to address structural inequity like salary disparities. Similarly, Jalyiah questioned the norm of engaging with, and accepting gifts from who she characterized as “racist ass donors.” For Jalyiah, accepting such gifts is being complicit in supporting a racialized organization (Keaton & Cooper, 2022). Jalyiah stated,

So, I want to set the tone across the board to where, we can't have and accept gift from racists ass donors who think that they're the Mark Cuban's of college sports because they

donate and have this very transactional ability to just come and watch and take advantage of the space because they are giving money to a university to support these student athletes.”

Nia sought to address “the DNA” of her organization:

I am seeking to create systemic and behavioral change [related to DEI]. I am seeking to influence the DNA of who we are as an organization and how we reflect what we care about in ways that really hold DEI in prominence.

As an institutional entrepreneur, she sought to lead divergent change through a structural lens, with the intent of this altering how actors engaged in DEI. Jalyiah also applied a structural lens to how she attempted to lead divergent change in her athletic department and directly challenged broader institutional logics, like Black athletic labor in the NCAA model (Keaton & Cooper, 2022). Jalyiah shared a story about challenging a men’s basketball coach:

...because this is what you tell them (Black male athletes) when you're recruiting them, that they're gonna go to the NBA. That's all that they can focus on. Therefore, they have no interest or desire to engage in anything else that is going to help them develop as a human being. And because you've (men’s basketball head coach) told that to them, you've enforced that [they] are here for basketball [not education].

For Jalyiah, encouraging the holistic development of Black athletes is diverging from the norms of her organization and Division I collegiate athletics broadly (Cooper & Cooper, 2016; Foster, Singer, Cooper, 2022). Jalyiah perceived herself as a disruptor in her organization because she is going to “come in and provide a different perspective that is going to change the way [her athletic department] might view [issues of DEI]”. Relatedly, Kayla was concerned about Black coaches being hired to lead “failing programs” and sought to use her positionality as an ADIO to disrupt this inequitable and racially discriminatory practice (Turick & Bopp, 2016):

...if you are hiring (racial) minorities...specifically in the coaching world, you see more minorities hired [to] failing programs...but they're not gonna get a second chance if they [and the program] continue to fail. So, we can't create this cycle or continue to perpetuate this cycle where we're putting [racial] minorities in positions where they're gonna fail.

Nia perceived her “higher imagination for the possibilities [of a more inclusive athletic department]” as distinguishing her from her colleagues, but worried about the “risks” of challenging the inequitable embedded norms and practices of her organization.

Serenity directly addressed the conundrum of being *embedded in* and a *contributor to* the norms in her organization, while also attempting to disrupt these norms:

I don't know if I fully make sense of this because systemically, I have operated in this (her athletic department’s norms) for so long. Like, let's just say, I thought about this. What if, what if we literally could start all over? Like we're just knocking the whole system down. Part of me was like, what would that be like? You know, there was a small part, a big part of me, I have to say, that was like a little nervous. Because I don't know what that actually looks like.

The excerpts shared demonstrate how each ADIO sought to implement divergent ways of operating in their athletic departments, a critical aspect of institutional entrepreneurship (Maguire & Hardy, 2017).

Balancing Perceptions of Legitimacy

ADIOs push for divergent change positioned them as *illegitimate* to many of their colleagues (see Hardy & Maguire, 2017), mostly senior-level administrators. Hence, the notion of being “a disruptor, but not an agitator” (Nia) was a prominent aspect of ADIO leadership and a detriment to ADIOs’ *subject position*. Subsequently, the ADIO position was inherently political, and participants struggled to balance the challenges that come with leading divergent change, as they had to balance other institutional actors’ “comfort” (Nia). These dynamics align with how Maguire & Hardy (2017) discuss institutional entrepreneurs needing to be political savvy to balance being legitimate enough to resist and implement norms. Jalyiah illuminated the complexity of the situation: “I’m trying not to ruffle feathers but like, my job says I am supposed to ruffle feathers. So now I have to figure out a way to like, tell you you’re being racist without saying you’re being racist.” Jalyiah attempted to find a balance with how disrupting she can be, as calling her colleagues “racist” may harm her relationship with them and have consequences upon how they perceive her as acting *appropriately* (read: legitimately, see Suchman, 1995). Kayla was weary of how to discuss racial inequity in a manner that did not lead to White athletes and White colleagues interpreting that she was calling them racist. Thus, there is a calculated “push and pull” (Nia) that ADIOs engage in an attempt to not jeopardize their legitimacy. Nia elucidated:

I feel like the thing that makes it difficult with this job is the leadership team (e.g., senior-level administrators). So, my Athletic Director is supportive, and I have to be careful about how much I draw him in... Because the alternative is that I’m seen as an enemy of the people... Among the [senior-level] leadership team. Right? And so, we’re always walking this fine line, right? What’s the push and pull? I don’t see anybody else carrying that.

Nia discussed how balancing the “push and pull” led to her exerting “a great deal of emotional energy” (Kluch et al., 2022), while also illuminating the complexity of ADIOs attaining a *subject position* that enables them to be a legitimate ADIO and legitimate athletic department colleague.

Furthermore, ADIOs discussed the need to be tactful and approach people “the right way,” (Nia) as their legitimacy depended upon it. Nia discussed how “showing up with an invitation is better than showing up like a hammer” and Serenity explained that there is a particular way to push for divergent change:

If you’re talking about systems. I’m like, we’ve got to change the culture. Not like forcing it in their faces and like stick it in there like that. But hey, [Athletic Director] we really want to have this (DEI) be part of who we are. When you talk about culture of athletics...who are we going to be as [Goldigger] athletics?

Serenity and Nia need to be tactful to maintain their relationships with various stakeholders. Relatedly, Jalyiah discussed how she cannot push for divergent change forcefully, as “you can’t always march through the front door to get to the problem.” Jalyiah explained:

... Sometimes you gotta get a ladder and you gotta put it up against the house. You got to go through that tiny little door up on the third floor. Wiggle your way in there, maybe break the window. I mean you gotta like subtly creep down the stairs [to push for divergent change].

Her analogy illuminates the need to be politically savvy as a change agent (Hardy & Maguire, 2017,) as Jalyiah shared how “changing norms is all about strategy and not necessarily winning the small battles because that’s not gonna ultimately win the war.” She also discussed how her efforts to lead divergent change involved having to consider numerous stakeholder groups and their aims as “everyone has their own priorities and there's different pressures based off of who it is, where it's at, who is involved.” She shared an example of hosting an event focused on social justice and how it made some stakeholders “uncomfortable”:

There's this consistent political bullshit that we have to waiver through. That makes it really hard [to lead divergent change]. Its anxiety driven because there's just so many different parties that you have to consider...I have to navigate who is this person? What is their tie to the university? How do I talk to them? Is this a conversation where I get to educate?

Jalyiah highlighted the difficulties of balancing perceptions of legitimacy because different stakeholders’ priorities come with distinctive pressures (Maguire et al., 2004) and also notes how this causes her to have anxiety (Kluch et al., 2022).

Several participants had to manage how their intersecting race and gender identities were exploited to *maintain the legitimacy* of their athletic department. Two participants, Jalyiah and Monique, questioned and were frustrated by, how their Black womanhood was utilized to bolster the legitimacy of their organization. Both spoke to how the mere adoption of a Black woman ADIO led to colleagues perceiving their athletic department as inclusive. Jalyiah sarcastically shared:

...and that's when the shiny coin description comes in. It’s like “yeah show me off and show that you have me” and I’ll do a great twist out and put some really great red lipstick on and look cute and show up as your, you know, the shiny Black woman that you have, but then you don't allow me to do the work that actually needs to be done to start to shift the culture of this place.

She is cognizant of being tokenized, but not utilized to alter the organizational conditions of her athletic department. Institutions of higher education tend to engage in symbolic gestures of DEI without fully committing to structural change (Norris-Hill, 2020). Like Jalyiah, Monique questioned how her identity as a Black woman was used to maintain the legitimacy of her athletic department:

So that's kind of another part is that like, was [I] the easy choice of, "All right, let's just go get us a Black woman. It'll be fine. You know, optics will be great. And she's a qualified one." You know? I mean, these things went through my mind throughout the search process.

Consequently, for Black women ADIOs, the “consistent political bullshit (Jalyiah)” of leading divergent change in athletic departments extended to how their identity bolstered the legitimacy of the athletic departments they sought to disrupt.

Leveraging Athletes, Athletic Directors, and White Administrators to Support Divergent Change

Institutional entrepreneurs leverage resources to complement their efforts in leading divergent change (Hardy & Maguire, 2017). For the ADIOs in the study, resources are influential actors in their organizations, like Athletic Directors, athletes, and White athletic administrators. Participants leveraged the organizational power of these organizational actors to support their entrepreneurship. Kayla explained how she leveraged her Athletic Director’s institutional power to bolster her entrepreneurship:

[My Athletic Director] was like, “One, I’ve told everyone you’d be here to lead the efforts [of DEI]. But at the end of the day, I need to be the Chief Diversity Officer.” He was emphasizing the fact that, like, *he* needs to lead the efforts because he knows that people are gonna follow him. So, he has to be bought into what this is and I really appreciated that he knew [that]. But the way he said it, it was just like, he needs to be the biggest advocate for [the ADIO position], which is, which was a really good indicator to me that I was gonna be in a good spot.

Although Kayla perceives her Athletic Director as being supportive, given her identity as a Black woman, it is difficult to ignore how her leadership (read: labor) can be co-opted to assist in the legitimization of her Athletic Director as a committed leader to DEI, such an act captures the *invisible* and *emotional labor* of women in sport organizations (Sveinsson et al., 2022). Similarly, Jalyiah stated that the support of an Athletic Director is a “game changer” for how ADIOs lead and disrupt embedded and sustained norms of inequity. All participants discussed the importance of leveraging the institutional power of their Athletic Director, but only Jalyiah and Kayla perceived their entrepreneurship to *truly* be supported by their Athletic Director. Nia and Kayla were the only participants to discuss leveraging White administrators’ social capital to assist their efforts in leading divergent DEI-specific measures. Kayla shared how her desires for a more inclusive athletic department alone cannot disrupt marginalization in her organization:

And if [ADIOs] really want to make change, like we (ADIOs) can scream and shout as much as we want, but the way that power and privilege is set up [in collegiate athletics], until we have the majority, which is White men, White people in general, actually caring about this, we’re not going to make change.

Kayla perceived support from White administrators as critical to her leadership, highlighting the racial hierarchy of her athletic department. Interestingly, Jalyiah was the only participant who discussed the importance of leveraging the institutional capital of Black athletes. She shared how “get[ting] the player, the right players (i.e., Black athletes) in [her] corner” enhances her ability to lead divergent change because their buy-in gets the attention of senior-level administration and coaches. Jalyiah perceived Black athletes to hold the power in her athletic department and discussed how lobbying their support is a critical resource for leading divergent DEI-related change.

Barriers to ADIO Institutional Entrepreneurship

While ADIOs demonstrated the ability to make sense of challenge marginalizing practices and norms in their organizations. These leaders experienced an immense amount of resistance leading other actors to follow their pursuits. They discussed how their organizations and its respective actors were *too* embedded in their ways to adopt and uphold the norms and practices they introduced. Therefore, ADIOs were attempting to *engage* in institutional entrepreneurship and may be doing so for quite some time, as their desire for divergent change does not guarantee it (Micelotta et al., 2017). Consequently, there are three themes addressing research question two: a) Senior-level administrators as barriers to entrepreneurship, b) Structure of the ADIO is a barrier to entrepreneurship, and c) The paradox of embedded agency.

Senior-Level Administrators as Barriers to ADIOs' Institutional Entrepreneurship

All five participants discussed how senior-level administrators' resistance or lack of interest in supporting DEI efforts hindered or stalled their introduction of new norms and practices. Monique shared “the core of what our problem is, is our senior leadership not buying into and being a part of the change and the shift that we need to make.” She shared numerous accounts of senior-level leadership “intentionally or [unintentionally]” disrupting her ability to lead her athletic department away from scripted patterns of exclusivity. Relatedly, Nia stated senior-level administrators are her “biggest hindrance:”

...my counterparts are the biggest hindrance to not only my work having its place in athletics, but [a hindrance to] evolving the industry, right? Like folks on a leadership level have a really myopic view...so part of what I've challenged is we're not a community like we say we are, we talk about [being one] and that's actually a joke.

Nia became so aggravated with how senior-level administration actively resisted her introduction of divergent practices that she stated, “...if I have to center your comfort, then you actually should have somebody else in this job who's going to develop programs and initiatives that may or may not effect change over time.” Nia's efforts to lead divergent change were embraced by senior-leadership if her efforts focused on “programs and initiatives” not structural change. Similarly, Jaliyah was trusted to lead programs, but not address policy issues:

So, I think “trust” is relative and contextual...they trust you to create some like student athlete affinity groups or student support groups. But if you're talking about like altering policy or engaging with donors, for whatever reason there's gonna be a lot more correspondence -- said nicely. And even sometimes [senior-level administrators] just saying, “NO! We're not doing that.” That was my experience.

Like Nia, Jaliyah perceived her entrepreneurship as welcomed if it was not engaging in disruptive ventures, like creating more inclusive policies. Similarly, Monique's entrepreneurship was safe to lead programmatic efforts, like book clubs and diversity trainings:

I can go do a workshop. I can go do a training. I can paint a picture on the wall. It doesn't matter. I can do whatever I want but it only goes so far because I have limitations. [My efforts are] not getting into senior leadership [spaces]. So, when I think about having to ask for permission to do things, that's been very much a challenge for me.

Monique perceived her ability to lead was hindered due to a lack of senior-level administrative support, as her efforts are not “not landing in a space where structural change can happen.”

Senior-Level Leadership: Whiteness and Patriarchy. ADIOs’ entrepreneurial desires illuminated how organizational actors, particularly White and male senior-level administrators, sought to maintain particular institutional arrangements (Keaton & Macaulay, 2023). Jalyiah, Monique, Nia, and Kayla explicitly discussed how projections of whiteness and sexism by senior-level administrators hindered their ability to lead divergent change. Thus, these three leaders were able to interpret how race and gender logics were upheld by actors to maintain racial and gendered status quo (Keaton & Macaulay, 2023). Their efforts to disrupt racial and gender power structures in their athletic departments were met with resistance, as Nia stated, “There are a significant number of people trying to protect their power and their (racial) privilege at the expense of everyone else in the department.” Hence, the ADIOs desire for divergent change disgruntled dominant actors, specifically White and male senior-level administrators, and coaches. Nia shared how her entrepreneurship was stalled by White men using their racial power to say “I don’t see you, I don’t hear you. Why do I hear a yapping noise?” Like Nia, Jalyiah perceived racial privilege and sexism to disrupt her ability to lead DEI divergent change:

I find that White men, men in general, they just use their power when they don’t wanna do what you want. They want to do what they want. They use their positionality and say, “Hey I’m going to silence you because we’re not doing that and I don’t even have to give you the time of day to even try to reconcile with that.” This has happened to me multiple times.

Relatedly, Kayla shared that White organizational actors’ concerns about *who* should be engaging in “this work” (i.e., creating organizational inclusivity) hindered her ability to lead divergent change, as her White colleagues made comments like, “I don’t know where to start. I shouldn’t be doing this.” Kayla’s entrepreneurship had to overcome the barrier of White administrators’ taking offense to being told they have racial privilege. Kayla asserted:

We don’t have anything against you because you’re a White male. We’re just saying, if you acknowledge [your privilege], like, we can grow with you. So I think there’s this notion that DEI is like, a separate thing and it’s, like, trying to divide us. And it’s trying to take away from these people to give to these people that is really kind of frustrating.

Interestingly, Kayla’s White colleagues do not see themselves as viable options for engaging in DEI work, but hindered Kayla’s ability to do so. A part of the oppressive ideology of whiteness is the belief that scarcity of power and resources drives decision making and structural arrangements. If any change reduces or shifts racial power dynamics, then it is viewed as problematic and halted (Nichols, 2004). Nia experienced White women senior-level administrators using the politic of “nice” to protect their racial privilege:

So, niceness is not kindness. I expect everyone to be kind but particularly White women...And this is where I think White women harm us in this [DEI] work. They use their niceness as a means to manipulate and as a means of having power and influence...My Athletic Director acknowledges what I’m saying, but I think he has so many things that he’s focusing on, he doesn’t know how to focus on this.

Nia's experiences highlight how dominant institutional actors rarely prompt divergent change because doing so negates those actors' organizational prowess (Hardy & Maguire, 2017; Leca et al., 2008; Maguire & Hardy, 2009). Nia shared how whiteness hindered her ability to introduce more inclusive norms and practices and depicted her Senior Woman Administrator as a "... fragile, nice White woman who has built her social and political power on agreement and nicety..." Nia was the only participant to illuminate how White women maintained institutional arrangements with their racial privilege, and given the nature of diversity leadership positions, Nia perceived this barrier as her responsibility to overcome.

The Structure of the ADIO Position is a Barrier for ADIOs' Institutional Entrepreneurship

When ADIOs pushed for divergent change, they were positioned as *illegitimate* and their agentic ability to *realize* and *break away* from patterns (Battilana et al., 2009; Dorado, 2005) of inequity did not guarantee new patterns and norms of inclusivity would ensue (Micelotta et al., 2017). Therefore, even as institutional entrepreneurs, there is the "possibility that change agents may not succeed in their intended endeavor" (Micelotta, 2017, p. 1893). Nonetheless, these five ADIOs are institutional entrepreneurs (Battilana et al., 2009; Hardy & Maguire, 2017; Leca et al., 2008), but their entrepreneurship has yet to embed, transform, and institutionalize divergent DEI norms, practices, and structures in their respective athletic departments.

Participants shared how not being a part of the senior-leadership team, being a one-person department, and confusion regarding the job responsibilities of ADIOs all served as barriers to their entrepreneurship. Essentially, the ADIO position was structured in manner comfortable for *master* (i.e., White dominated athletic departments) (see Norris-Hill, 2020). For Monique, discusses her lack of power:

So [I have] zero authority in my role. You can take the title away, all of it away, no authority, no power... Like, you know, there's major issues with our hiring process and things like that, but I have no authority or power to actually change it. And the people who do, um, I'm not in those spaces. So, I have to give this message to a space where they have to carry my message for me.

Monique believed she had a well-intentioned title, but the title did not align with the authority she needed to lead divergent change. Monique was concerned not only about the structure of her position, but ADIOs broadly, as she posed the following question: "Why wouldn't your diversity leader be on your senior leadership [team] as well? And a majority [of ADIOs], I would say, as I start to look across the country, a majority are not [on the senior leadership team]." Like Monique, Nia was deeply troubled by the structure of her position:

You can't afford me and you can't afford this work. And I feel some sense of harm in that because, now that I'm here and now that we've kinda raised our expectations, I don't have what I need, right? I don't have the tools that I need to do my job. I'm struggling to figure out how do I anchor this framework into our culture when it's just me, right?

Nia was troubled about being a one-person department. Like Monique and Nia, Kayla's ability to embed DEI practices and norms throughout the athletic department was constrained:

I do wish that I was on senior staff. I have a direct line to the Athletic Director, so I talk to him, you know, whenever I need him. However, I wish I was on senior staff solely to be in the know and to be able to bring DEI to everything that we do, if that makes sense. Like instead of hearing about something after the fact, like, “well, oh, we probably could have did this”...[Because] a lot of [DEI] work in [our athletic department] so far for myself and colleagues has been reactive to the [inequities] that have gone in the world or are going on at people's campus.

Kayla insisted that if *she* was on the senior-level leadership team, she could lead divergent change in a proactive manner, rather than from a “reactive” standpoint. Moreover, there was a shared frustration between Nia and Kayla about being a “one-person shop [or department].” Kayla stated, “...cause a lot of times right now . . .it's a one-person shop. So that's adding another layer to it. You're asking one person to serve hundreds of individuals on a (laughs) variety of topics, and we are by ourselves.” Jalyiah was also concerned about a majority of ADIO positions not being on the senior-level leadership team and made a comparison to Senior Woman Administrator leadership. Jalyiah and Nia shared several instances of *Title IX* and other gender specific issues arising in their athletic departments, but when they sought to enact their entrepreneurship, there was confusion as to *who* addresses these matters, as the Senior Woman Administrator in their department had a history of doing so. Thus, for Jalyiah and Nia, the ADIO position did not have clear boundaries or explicit collaboration guidelines for overlapping issues. Therefore, none of the five participants perceived their leadership position, as structured, to allow for them to lead divergent change. Monique captured the reality of all the participants by stating, “So I think that [organizational leaders] also have to weigh like, “‘Yeah, [inclusion is] important. Let's hire someone.’ But like, are you setting them up to be successful?”

The Paradox of Embedded Agency

Participants’ institutional entrepreneurship illuminated the “paradox of embedded agency” (Seo & Creed, 2002), as ADIOs perceived *institutional determinism* (see Battilana et al., 2009) hindering organizational actors in their athletic departments from supporting divergent organizational practices. Consequently, ADIOs perceived actors in their athletic departments as *too embedded* in organizational norms and practices to “interrupt the patterns [of inequity] (Nia).” The following excerpts highlight the tension between *institutional determinism* and *agentic* behavior. Serenity illuminated the relevance of institutional determinism:

You got these structures that have been in place forever, right? Because that's the system in which we were indoctrinated into, so that's the way it is. And so, when you want to change something, you must go through a lot.

Serenity continued to discuss how actors in her athletic department, and at times she herself, struggled to imagine new organizational contexts. She brings attention not only to the deterministic aspect of organizational contexts, but also the difficulties of deinstitutionalization in athletic departments (Cunningham, 2009). Similarly, Nia described the complexity of challenging organizational actors to interrupt the patterns they have been indoctrinated *into* and *by*:

Largely because we don't wanna interrupt the patterns that we have. We are comfortable in the lane that we've created for ourselves and no one, and I don't wanna say no one, sounds melodramatic, but it *feels* like no one expects otherwise, right?

Nia's frustration can be attributed to institutional determinism and institutionalization as the norms and patterns that her athletic department has established are more influential than her subject position to lead divergent change. Relatedly, Jalyiah shared how difficult it is for organizational actors to challenge the norms they have created and maintained, as she asserted, "I would argue there's like this level of control folks have to give up in order to challenge what the created norm is, what the created norm has been. People aren't really willing to do that." Monique questioned if she could influence divergent change with the same organizational actors who had no interest in practicing inclusivity *before* her position was implemented:

...if these weren't conversations we were having before and the same people were in the room, *if* they weren't happening before and those same people are here now... you know, what would lead anyone in our department to believe that things would be different because [of an ADIO]?

Like Nia and Jalyiah, Monique perceived there to be tension with her entrepreneurial efforts and how norms, practices, and structures become embedded in organizations. Moreover, Monique questioned her own agentic abilities and positionality, as she recognized she has been a part of, and embedded in, the collegiate sport system she seeks to change. She questioned her ability to truly "dismantle" the norms, practices, and structures of inequity in collegiate sport, given how pervasive and deeply embedded these patterns are. Her analogy is a picturesque display of the paradox of embedded agency:

Um, and how do you measure [change] ...Should we be trying to, you know, drain the ocean and refill it with, with, you know, clean water? Um, or do we just steer as far as we can from like the deep end of the racism? (laughs) You know? And like just how do we operate best in the, in the structure that's here if we can't dismantle this?

Thus, Monique processing how to make do or "operate best in the structure that [exists]," illuminates the tension extant with seeking to lead divergent change in structures that inhibit one from doing so (Foster et al., 2022; Keaton & Cooper, 2022).

Implications and Conclusion

By drawing upon institutional entrepreneurship to examine the ADIO position, we found that an ADIOs' desire/intent/pursuit for disruption does not guarantee disruption occurs, but rather the race-gendered identity of the entrepreneur has implications upon their ability to alter organizational contexts (Micelotta et al., 2017). Moreover, one's ability to engage in entrepreneurship related to DEI is dependent upon their status in an organization. Consequently, ADIOs highlight that institutional entrepreneurship is a process, or rather a journey, as they can break themselves, not their organizations, away from practices of inequity.

Through the perceptions of ADIOs, it was apparent structures and norms that benefit White and male administrators are *too institutionalized* for their singular agentic abilities, specifically Black women ADIOs, to which addressing the prevalence of *structural barriers* in the leadership of ADIOs (see Kluch et al., 2022). These leaders experienced resistance to their

attempts to challenge norms, practices, and structures, specifically on the axis of race and gender. Henceforth, “what may appear to be new and valuable to one social group (ADIOs) may seem threatening to another” (Garud et al., 2007, p. 960). Consequently, “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde, 2007, p. 2). Like Diversity Officers in higher education contexts (Norris-Hill, 2020), the ADIO position as a *tool* is not structured in a manner that can dismantle the *master’s house*, as ADIOs in this study were a one-person department, lacked financial resources, and *some* do not hold senior-leadership positions, mirroring the findings of Kluch et al. (2022). Thus, we suggest future scholarship studying how the ADIO position becomes a tool of *master* by way of institutional work (Nite & Edwards, 2021), as ADIOs perceived athletic department actors as desiring to maintain organizational conditions. Although Jalyiah and Monique were leaders seeking divergent change, their respective organizations used their identity as Black women to practice institutional maintenance. It was as if hiring Black women diversity leaders gave their respective athletic departments the permission to resist divergent change and maintain the norms and practices of their athletic department. This study highlights how the ADIO position, for *some* athletic departments, is used as a “frame” or marker of an inclusive organization, as Black women ADIOs bolster organizational “optics” as a tool of *master* (read: legitimacy, see Keaton, 2020).

ADIOs sought to challenge the marginalizing norms and practices of their athletic department, but their pursuit of change was outmatched by *institutional determinism* (Seo & Creed, 2002; Garud et al., 2007). Participants were unsuccessful attaining a subject position (Maguire et al., 2004) that enabled them to be a *legitimate* diversity leader and a *legitimate* athletic department colleague, mirroring the experiences of Diversity Officers in higher education (Griffin et al., 2019; Marana, 2016; Nixon, 2017). We question if Black women ADIOs can achieve the necessary subject position to be perceived as legitimate, given the racialized and gendered dynamics of athletic departments and *who* holds power in these organizational contexts (Keaton & Cooper, 2022; Price et al., 2017; Walker & Melton, 2015). Such an issue brings attention to the *social/relational* barriers extant in Kluch et al. (2022). Kluch and colleagues discuss how ADIOs leading DEI with marginalized identities creates barriers because their identities do not align with the majority of identities who do have power. The ADIOs in this study are missing attributes, a dominant racial identity, that *could* bolster their legitimacy with necessary stakeholder groups, like participants in Maguire et al. (2004). The ADIO position needs to be elevated to senior-level administration as Black women ADIOs cannot alter their salient identities. Doing so, positions ADIOs, more importantly Black women ADIOs, to *possibly* gain legitimacy by being in spaces “where structural change can happen (Monique).”

There appeared to be a discursive struggle/tension regarding what ADIOs were hired to do in their respective athletic departments. Participants sought to “change [marginalizing] systems” but more dominant organizational actors seemed to believe that ADIOs should solely lead programmatic (e.g., student-athletes affinity groups, book clubs, DEI trainings) or less disruptive efforts. These conflicting interpretations of the ADIO position have implications for ADIO leadership. If they are hired to conduct programmatic efforts, then the participants in the current study are operating outside the scope of their job responsibilities. However, if they are hired to “change [marginalizing] systems,” then dominant actors are resisting change they claim to desire. Thus, addressing the discursive tension regarding ADIO job responsibilities is necessary for the legitimacy of the position and the individuals who fill it.

Moving forward, Athletic Directors must intentionally present the ADIO as an extension of their leadership, as their institutional power has the potential to legitimate the ADIO position to dominant organizational actors. Additionally, hiring an ADIO, specifically Black women

ADIOs, does not validate a commitment to creating and sustaining inclusive athletic departments. Given the emergent state of ADIOs (Keaton, 2020), Athletic Directors must be deliberate about how they discuss and present the position to other organizational actors, as an Athletic Director's interpretation of what an ADIO is tasked to do (e.g., "change [marginalizing] systems" or engage in programmatic efforts) can also support legitimizing an ADIO who challenges marginalizing structures and practices. Lastly, Nia perceived her Athletic Director as too busy to address how whiteness disrupted her ability to introduce divergent practices/perceptions of DEI. Given how difficult organizational change related to DEI is in collegiate athletic departments (Keaton & Cooper, 2022; Kluch et al., 2022; Singer & Cunningham, 2012), ignoring whiteness as a barrier to an ADIOs' entrepreneurship exacerbates how whiteness is taken for granted in these organizational contexts (Keaton, 2022; Vadeboncoeur & Bopp, 2020). Hence, ADs can assist the entrepreneurship of ADIOs by not letting opportunities to challenge whiteness passively slip by, if they intend to advocate for ADIOs who are "dismantling [inequitable structures] (Monique)."

Lastly, the resistance to ADIOs' entrepreneurship leads us to also question the legitimacy of statements avowing a desire for equity in Division I athletic departments (Foster et al., 2022; Keaton & Cooper, 2022; Ofoegbu & Ekpe, 2022; Rockhill, Howe, Agyemang, 2021), especially as each ADIO affiliated athletic department held protests or made public statements claiming to support racial equity and gender equality. Thus, this scholarship highlights how NCAA college sport is not only illegitimate related to issues of amateurism and commercialization (Southall & Staurowsky, 2013) and student-athlete safety (Nite & Nauright, 2020), but also divergent change related to DEI.

Limitations and Future Directions

The current study solely examined the organizational experiences and perceptions of Black women ADIOs. Although the data provided illuminated the complexities of their leadership, examinations of divergent change are strengthened by including perspectives from varying stakeholder groups and over an extended period. Thus, this study could be bolstered by including varying data collection methods and additional participants, possibly student athletes and senior-level administrators. However, given the topic, gaining access to do so, may be difficult.

Researchers should study how White, male, and senior-level administrators interpret and make sense of ADIO leadership, given ADIOs perceive these actors to be resistant to their introduction of more inclusive practices. Future scholarship should conduct longitudinal studies on athletic departments with ADIOs to examine not only how norms, practices, and structures evolve or are maintained since the adoption of the position, but to also understand how ADIOs' barriers, resources, and perceptions evolve or are maintained (Keaton, 2022; Kluch et al., 2022).

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