LIVED EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN IN COLLEGIATE ESPORTS LEADERSHIP

by

Kim S. Johnson

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Kim S. Johnson

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Jesús H. Trespalacios, Ph.D.   Chair, Supervisory Committee

Brett E. Shelton, Ph.D.   Member, Supervisory Committee

Chareen Snelson, Ed.D.   Member, Supervisory Committee

The final reading approval of the dissertation was granted by Jesús H. Trespalacios, Ph.D., Chair of the Supervisory Committee. The dissertation was approved by the Graduate College.

DEDICATION

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ABSTRACT

A leadership gender gap exists in politics, business, and higher education, and there appears to be one in collegiate esports. Researchers have conducted studies on some aspects of esports; however, we know little about women's experiences leading collegiate esports programs. The purpose of this qualitative study - a descriptive (transcendental) phenomenology – was to explore and describe the essence of women's lived experiences in leading collegiate varsity esports programs at higher education institutions. In-depth interviews were the research method. Seven women employed as collegiate varsity esports coaches or directors described their historical context, present experiences in the profession, and how this experience is meaningful. NVivo qualitative software was used for organizing, analyzing, and coding data for themes and commonalities. This preliminary work led to the development of textural and structural descriptions and, finally, the essence of women's experiences as collegiate esports coaches and directors. Ultimately, the essence of the lived experiences of a woman in collegiate esports leadership funneled down to meaningful managing with excellence using skills developed through previous life experiences. Meaningful managing with excellence is that "condition or quality without" which being a woman in collegiate esports leadership "would not be what it is."

Keywords: esports, collegiate esports, women in esports, women coach esports, women in esports administration, women breaking barriers, women in higher education leadership, women in collegiate athletic leadership, women in leadership, leadership gender gap

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

What is it like for a woman to coach or direct a new, rapidly growing competitive collegiate sport whose foundation is communication technology, collaboration, recreation, competition, and bridges between the real and virtual worlds? A sport known for inclusiveness and open to any gender, but where most players and those serving in leadership positions are males? Because a leadership gender gap exists in collegiate esports as it does in other areas of higher education (Cantu-Lee, 2013; Lu, 2020), business (Northouse, 2013), and other fields, women in collegiate esports leadership is a topic worthy of exploration.

Some women break through barriers to serve in leadership positions. In collegiate esports, around 10% of those leading programs are women. What we can learn from these women may provide information, support, inspiration, and motivation to young women seeking leadership positions in esports and other fields. The purpose of this descriptive (transcendental) phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences and describe the essence of what it means to be a woman involved in teaching, learning, and leading as a varsity esports coach or program director in higher education.

Because there is no specific literature on women leading collegiate esports programs, the literature review lays a foundation for exploring this topic. The review began with an exploration of the literature on women breaking barriers, specifically in higher education academic and athletic leadership, because these topics relate to and are

similar to this study's focus. It is no secret that women are underrepresented in higher education and academic and athletic leadership (Kies, 2014). The literature about women breaking barriers in higher education suggests how or why some women have overcome hurdles, and it also discusses obstacles that continue to be a problem. However, as time passes, women are working even harder, rising above obstructions, and taking on new challenges (Gray, 2020; Kobla & Li-Hua, 2017). One such opportunity is coaching or directing collegiate varsity esports programs. Next in line for examination were two additional elements foundational to the literature review: esports research in general and esports studies related to gender, which yielded valuable background information for an inquiry on women in collegiate varsity esports leadership. The review examines esports' definitions and highlights the " sport's history."

It has multiple names, but esports is defined as collaborative video game competitions (Darvin et al., 2018). Historically, esports began early in arcade play in the 1980s (Borowy & Jin, 2013). Around the same time that esports gained popularity in the United States, it picked up steam in South Korea (Kim et al., 2020). Esports now realize explosive growth at all levels of competition and in all industry sectors (Darvin et al., 2020). As a result, it is a topic that has become increasingly popular with researchers (Reitman et al., 2020). The review encompasses documentation of the major themes of a rapidly increasing body of esports studies, including studies on women's experiences as esports players (Ruvalcaba et al., 2018). However, until this research design, no studies have focused on women serving in a collegiate esports leadership role – coaching or directing a varsity program.

Statement of the Problem

As there is in business (Northouse, 2013), higher education administration (Cantu-Lee, 2013; Lu, 2020), and collegiate athletic administration (Samuel, 2020), a leadership gender gap exists in collegiate esports as well. Although researchers have conducted studies on some aspects of esports, including issues involving gender, player and spectator experiences, definitions, history, and status as a sport (Castillo, 2019; Cullen, 2018; Malvone, 2020; Ruotsalainen & Friman, 2018), the role of collegiate varsity coaches and directors has not been the focus of an esports study. Therefore, we know little about women's experiences leading collegiate varsity esports programs. Learning about these women's experiences in a leadership role is essential as they are role models and mentors for other women. Their experiences may provide insight into how the leadership gender gap may be tightened or closed or how we may negate or supersede stereotypes. Women serving as esports program leaders are involved in teaching, leading, and managing players and programs in a high-tech atmosphere. It is likely that these women coaching or directing esports did not come into the position as players first, although some might have (Salo, 2017). Women in this role work in a male-dominated culture, and they have learned some things about how to navigate it. This study provides a stage for these women who are collegiate varsity esports leaders allowing us to understand the essence of their experience through themes they have in common.

Giving voice to these women may illuminate problems they have encountered during their careers or provide solutions to issues that many women confront on the path to serving in leadership. Sharing these experiences may help educate men working in

these environments on how they may support women seeking to break barriers to positions of authority. Women need support from other women as well. These stories may show women how they can better assist each other. Providing a platform for these women to share their experiences may also motivate or inspire others seeking to break barriers leading to more significant opportunities.

Purpose of the Study and Research Question

The purpose of this descriptive (transcendental) phenomenological study was to explore and describe the essence of women's lived experiences in their role in leading collegiate varsity esports programs at institutions of higher education. Leading collegiate varsity esports programs involves coaching or directing university-sanctioned esports teams or programs. Participants were seven women employed as collegiate varsity esports coaches or esports program directors at a college or university. During three consecutive in-depth interviews, the participants discussed their historical context related to their role in collegiate esports leadership, present experiences in the profession, and how this experience is meaningful (Seidman, 2019). NVivo was the qualitative software application for storing, organizing, analyzing, and coding transcripts. The "modified van Kaam method" of data analysis guidelines provided by Moustakas (1994, p. 120) is a systematic process for revealing themes and commonalities across participants. Exploration of the data through Moustakas' (1994) steps for analysis resulted in a description of the essence of women's experiences as collegiate esports coaches and directors.

This qualitative study, where "phenomenological methods are used to illuminate phenomena and reveal complexities of different experiences" (Peoples, 2021, p. 23), described the essence of esports leaders' experiences. As the essence springs from what these women do, how they came to be doing it, and how it is meaningful, these descriptions may benefit educators, esports athletes, coaches, directors, administrators, and educational technologists in fields similar to or related to higher education and esports. This study may help support women seeking leadership positions in esports or higher education and possibly enlighten others in these fields. In addition, the study may potentially begin to fill the gap in esports literature where coaching and directing in collegiate programs is concerned. The research question, "What are the lived experiences of women serving as leaders of collegiate esports programs?" was the basis for this phenomenological study.

Theoretical Framework

The chosen theoretical framework for this descriptive (transcendental) phenomenological study was phenomenology. Though there are multiple types of phenomenology, the two most prevalent philosophies are those of Edmund Husserl and his student, Martin Heidegger. Husserl is known as the father of phenomenology (Peoples, 2021). Peoples (2021) said that phenomenological philosophy is the primary theoretical framework for guiding a phenomenological research study. Peoples (2021) explained that Husserl's phenomenology, also known as transcendental or descriptive phenomenology, demands that phenomenological philosophy is the only framework for this type of study. In contrast, Martin Heidegger's phenomenology, a departure from Husserl's form known as hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology, allows for a

secondary framework as a lens for viewing the data (Peoples, 2021). Therefore, depending on the variety of phenomenology chosen, other theoretical frameworks may be used secondarily as a lens for viewing the experience.

Though variations of phenomenological studies exist, the descriptive (transcendental) phenomenological philosophy and methodology guide this study for several reasons. First, the descriptive (transcendental) form of phenomenology is appropriate for human science in education (Cartwright et al., 2018) and educational technology (Cilesiz, 2009, 2010; Valentine et al., 2018), and it is a relevant approach for studying groups who may be underrepresented (Cartwright et al., 2018; Newsome, 2019). In addition, researchers using Husserl's version of phenomenology benefit from detailed data analysis procedures outlined in Moustakas (1994) and are recommended for beginning researchers by Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell (2004). Further, Cilesiz's (2009) descriptive (transcendental) study in educational technology mirrors the vision for this study's methodology – from the criterion sampling to the interviewing model and the steps for data analysis. Reading this study cemented the decision to use the descriptive (transcendental) phenomenological approach.

Due to the selection of Husserl's approach to phenomenology, a single framework was applied to this inquiry – appropriately, that of phenomenological philosophy. As there are no studies pinpointing women in collegiate esports leadership, this study was exploratory and should not be boxed in or tethered down by expectations leveraged by additional frameworks (Peoples, 2021). Therefore, data emerged naturally from the conversations with participants, followed by careful and thoughtful analysis (Seidman,

2019), which was instrumental in achieving "a pure essence of the phenomenon," as Husserl ascribes (Peoples, 2021, p. 30).

Interviewees shared detailed descriptions of their experiences as women in collegiate varsity esports leadership, the focal point of three consecutive in-depth discussions. With descriptive (transcendental) phenomenology, bracketing or epoché was used to isolate the researcher's experience, knowledge, and judgment from the participants. Bracketing or epoché is where the "researcher puts himself in the position of becoming a stranger in a strange land" (Peoples, 2021, p. 30) as if seeing things for the very first time (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). The researcher puts aside assumptions, not taking anything for granted based on prior knowledge, giving full attention to the interviewee and the present moment. The researcher intentionally notes any previous understanding of the topic and purposely views incoming data from the participants as new information, asking for clarification as needed and avoiding relying on prior knowledge or assumptions to understand what is meant by a term or a statement, or an experience (Peoples, 2021). Some wonder if bracketing or epoché is even possible. Other researchers have compared the epoché process to a type of meditative exercise. If a thought enters the researcher's mind, they can acknowledge it and set it aside (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). To aid this process, transcendental phenomenologists may keep a journal to assist with bracketing (noting biases) and metacognition (thinking about one's thinking during analysis) (Peoples, 2021).

The current reality, known as a horizon, cannot be bracketed (Peoples, 2021). Moustakas (1994) emphasized that researchers should consider every horizon as having "equal value" (p. 118) before data reduction. At the onset of analysis, the researcher

codes horizons or substantive statements about the experience from the corpus for further study through phenomenological reduction (Cilesiz, 2010; Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Next, invariant constituents or meaning units or themes emerge from participant statements as the researcher discards "repetitive and vague expressions" (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015, p. 7). Textural descriptions are drafts written for participants based on experiences with the phenomenon - the noema or the what of the study - which correlates with the noesis and the study's how (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). More specifically,

> "noesis refers to the act of experience such as perceiving, feeling, thinking, remembering, or judging. Noema refers to the object of the actions, such as the perceived, the felt, the thought, the remembered, the judged. Together, they make up the consciousness of the experience." (Cilesiz, 2010, p. 496).

Emphasized in Husserl's philosophy, a primary element of this consciousness is intentionality – an awareness of how things appear (Peoples, 2021).

Next, through imaginative variation, researchers view and reflect on participants' experiences from different perspectives and then assign meaning that yields structural descriptions that will ultimately lead to the generation of the essence of the experience (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). The conclusion of the analysis yields a composite of these textural descriptions and synthesized structural descriptions for the participant cohort. Finally, a process called "intuitive integration" will produce a synthesis of these elements and give rise to the meanings and essences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100) – in this case, women in collegiate esports leadership.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

Peoples (2021) argued that researchers should not highlight assumptions because there is no place for descriptive (transcendental) phenomenology bias. Therefore, as this study is a descriptive (transcendental) phenomenology, there is no documentation of assumptions. For this type of phenomenology, the researcher sets aside bias through the process of epoché or bracketing, as mentioned in the theoretical framework section (Peoples, 2021).

A limitation of this study was the sample size. The study included seven participants. Though that is a small number, it meets the suggested number of participants for a phenomenological study. Seven participants yielded enough data for saturation - the point where participants added no new information (Peoples, 2021). As the interviews with the first six participants ended and another prospective interviewee decided not to participate, consideration was given to concluding the study with six participants. However, a seventh participant shared their experiences because the goal was to include five to eight participants and because an additional woman indicated that she wanted to participate. Practical information emerged during the seventh interview. However, no new themes were added. Based on the data provided during the interviews, a description of the essence of the participants' experiences is uncovered and made known. As this sample was small and phenomenology is not for generalizing (Peoples, 2021), whether this description would apply to all women leading collegiate esports programs cannot be sure. The essence of this experience pertains to these participants at this moment (Moustakas, 1994).

The scope of this study encompassed solely the experiences of women employed in collegiate varsity esports leadership. Therefore, the descriptions of experiences in collegiate esports leadership brought about by interviewing these participants were not generalizable to the entire population of collegiate esports coaches and program directors. The experiences of men serving in this capacity will remain unknown until someone chooses to engage this topic with male participants. Likewise, although esports has several levels where coaching and directing programs is a profession, the focus here was on the collegiate level. The participants were women a college or university employs as coaches or directors of a varsity esports program. The experiences of high school and professional esports coaches and directors will have to be the focus of a future study.

Significance of the Study

Esports has snowballed in all sectors, including the addition of varsity programs by many universities. Therefore, the topic is timely and relevant (Tracy, 2010). Esports is an exciting and popular research topic, with researchers having covered many facets of the subject matter. This study bears significance since women's collegiate varsity esports coaching or directing is an under-representation area and a gap in the literature. This study may interest those currently serving in collegiate varsity esports leadership, university personnel considering implementing a varsity esports program, or those considering a career in collegiate esports leadership. Because the participants in this study were women leaders in higher education, others who might be interested in this study are women currently working in or considering a career in higher education - in academic, athletic, or educational technology leadership. In addition, practitioners and researchers interested in informal teaching and learning using communication technology

or virtual teams may find this study compelling. Researchers interested in esports culture and esports concerning gender may also be interested. Due to under-representation issues for women in this arena and other areas, this study was also an opportunity for women to share their experiences and encourage young women to seek leadership positions.

Definition of Terms

descriptive (transcendental) phenomenology

Descriptive (transcendental) phenomenology is Edmund Husserl's original form of phenomenology. This variety of phenomenology does not allow for other theoretical frameworks as lenses for viewing lived experiences. The researcher uses epoché or bracketing to carefully isolate the participant's experience as described (Peoples, 2021).

epoché

Epoché or bracketing is the setting aside of biases, assumptions, and even prior knowledge in the effort to view an experience as brand new – "becoming a stranger visiting a strange land" (Peoples, 2021, p. 30).

esports

Esports are collaborative video game competitions (Darvin et al., 2018).

hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenology

Martin Heidegger developed hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenology, an offshoot of descriptive (transcendental) phenomenology. Heidegger was a student of Edmund Husserl (Peoples, 2021).

horizontalization

Each experience is a horizon. Horizontalization is where the researcher gives each bit of data equal consideration of importance to the project (Moustakas, 1994).

imaginative variation

Imaginative variation is when meaning is assigned by reflecting on participants' experiences from different perspectives yielding structural descriptions, ultimately leading to the generation of the essence of the experience (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004).

intentionality

Intentionality involves deliberately giving purposeful attention toward an object (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). In phenomenology, intentionality reflects the relationship between the object and the appearance of the object in one's consciousness (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015, p. 6).

invariant constituents

Invariant constituents are meaning units or horizons, or themes that the researcher separates from the entirety of participants' statements during analysis (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015).

Metacognition

Thinking about one's thinking *(Peoples, 2021).*

noema

The noema is the what of the study (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). "Noema refers to the object of the actions, such as the perceived, the felt, the thought, the remembered, the judged" (Cilesiz, 2010, p. 496).

noesis

The noesis is the how of the study (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). "Noesis refers to the act of experience such as perceiving, feeling, thinking, remembering, or judging (Cilesiz, 2010, p. 496).

phenomenological reduction

Phenomenological reduction is the purposeful use of bracketing or epoché. It intentionally sets aside previous notions regarding the phenomenon (Peoples, 2021).

phenomenology

Phenomenology is one of five qualitative research approaches. There are several variations of phenomenology, and each explores the lived experiences of participants who have all experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles et al., 2020).

Title IX

The U.S. government enacted Title IX to help level the playing field for women who desire to participate in collegiate sports. As a result of Title IX, colleges and universities must offer equal access to competitive sports opportunities for women as

they do for men. Equal access occurs by schools providing the same number of sports for women as they do for men (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014).

Summary

While it is uncommon for women to serve in the highest leadership positions in business, higher education administration, and athletic administration, some women have broken through barriers to lead in this capacity. There appears to be an under-representation of women in esports leadership as well. The purpose of this descriptive (transcendental) phenomenological study was to explore and describe the lived experiences of seven women who were coaches or directors of collegiate varsity esports programs.

Husserl's phenomenological philosophy was the chosen approach for this study for several reasons, and according to Husserl's tradition, the theoretical framework for this study was phenomenology. With descriptive (transcendental) phenomenology, the researcher uses bracketing to set aside assumptions and biases. The true essence of the lived experiences is untainted, and the researcher constructs a description of the essence of the experiences.

The study allowed several women to share their experiences in collegiate esports leadership, and then the analysis uncovered common themes to be illuminated. Those who may benefit from this study are those also serving in this capacity or working in politics, business, higher education, or athletic administration – anywhere that there is an underrepresentation of women in leadership. The following chapter contains the foundation of this inquiry, a review of the literature.

CHAPTER TWO: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Women have broken through barriers to obtaining high-level leadership positions in business, higher education, and academic and athletic administration; women tend to be substantially underrepresented in these areas. Likewise, women are underrepresented in esports leadership as well. Some women coach, direct, and coordinate esports at the collegiate varsity level; however, little is known about their experiences as collegiate varsity esports programs leaders. This literature review provides some background on women in higher education leadership and some background on esports to set the stage for studying this topic.

First, a search commenced using the following keywords: esports, collegiate esports, women in esports, women coach esports, women in esports administration, women breaking barriers, women in higher education leadership, women in collegiate athletic leadership, and women in leadership. Google Scholar was the primary database used. Searches were also conducted using databases available through the Boise State University library and the John Brown University library. In addition, Connected Papers (n.d.) was a valuable tool used to find prior and derivative works. The collection of pertinent articles resides in the reference management application, Mendeley. Next, PDF versions of the pieces were exported from Mendeley and imported into the qualitative data analysis application, NVivo 12, for review using a qualitative analysis technique. The availability of PDFs in NVivo 12 provided convenient storage, reading, highlighting,

and annotation. After reviewing the articles, they were either kept in the collection or set aside.

Next came the selection of several categories for themes. In NVivo 12, the researcher creates nodes, essentially codes or theme containers for marking qualitative data in the program. The first nodes came from headings from the preliminary outline. Additional nodes came from typical article headings such as purpose, methods, participants, research questions, key outcomes, limitations, and further research. Reading and coding the articles led to the addition of more nodes and then reorganization by merging and nesting as needed. Familiarity with the text came through reading and coding them two times, and then writing commenced. While writing each section, it was helpful to refer to each node/theme for data from each article on one page. When searching for a page number, it was handy to have the PDF in NVivo 12. Data can be sorted and queried in any number of ways as well. For example, NVivo 12 generated the Word Cloud in Figure 1 using the Word Frequency Query function. It illustrates the frequency of words used in coding articles with the various themes or nodes for this literature review.

Figure 1   Word Cloud from Word Frequency Query Using NVivo 12

To learn more about the problem – a gender gap in administrative leadership - this literature review begins with discussing women breaking barriers in organizational leadership, particularly leadership in higher education within academic administration and athletics administration. Because collegiate esports leadership exists in this culture, getting some background about this work environment makes sense. Next, the discussion moves to esports, beginning with esports in academia. Then a look at various definitions of esports is provided, followed by a brief history of the "sport," its rapid growth, and a discussion about whether esports is considered a sport. An examination of esports culture is next, including esports in learning, toxicity, gender, and inclusiveness. Afterward, the discussion shifts to esports at the professional and high school levels. Finally, the review concludes by discussing collegiate esports, collegiate esports leadership, women in collegiate esports leadership, and final thoughts.

Women Breaking Barriers

Recent events bring the idea of women breaking barriers to light. 2020 marked the 100th anniversary of the 19th amendment, which gave women the right to vote. Second, the recent death of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg brings to the forefront

other achievements that have leveled the playing field where women are concerned. Advancements have been made over the years. Some women have broken through barriers and reached the top levels of leadership in their careers in business, academia, and athletics (Bower et al., 2015; Kobla & Li-Hua, 2017; Northouse, 2013). However, even though women are breaking barriers, perhaps even at a faster pace than in the past (Kobla & Li-Hua, 2017), much of the literature pointed in another direction – that of the specific barriers and underrepresentation (Kies, 2014) in multiple areas (Gray, 2020; Northouse, 2013).

The low percentage of women in high-level leadership positions illustrates that many women have not had that experience of breaking barriers (Northouse, 2013). Though the "presence of women in leadership roles or on Boards of Directors has proven to have positive implications on an organization's effectiveness" (Gray, 2020; Semenova, 2020), many women face obstacles in their career path to high-level leadership positions. There are still barriers to be broken (Nelson, 2020), and some hurdles are those faced by female students early on in their careers - during their college experience (Kies, 2014).

Barriers that women face in obtaining leadership positions, in general, include struggles with networking opportunities (Kobla & Li-Hua, 2017) and the tendency for men to employ those very similar to themselves (Bower et al., 2015). Other barriers include actual and perceived differences in the leadership skills of men and women (Kies, 2014; Lu, 2020; Semenova, 2020), more difficulties for women in balancing family and work, and the glass ceiling phenomenon (Hakim, 2016). Furthermore, once women achieve a leadership position, they may face other barriers, including a lack of recognition for successes and, in some cases, less pay (Kies, 2014; Kobla & Li-Hua,

2017; Semenova, 2020) and less power (Semenova, 2020). To help diminish these barriers, some organizations assist women with professional development opportunities and advocacy (Kobla & Li-Hua, 2017).

Because this review aims to lay a foundation for a study on women in collegiate esports leadership, the following two sections will explore women and leadership in higher education and women directing collegiate athletics since all three reside in higher education.

Women in Academic Leadership

Women serve in higher education leadership at the nation's universities and community colleges (Cantu-Lee, 2013), but a leadership gender gap exists. For instance, women serve as presidents at 30% of colleges in the United States (Nelson, 2020). While it is tremendous that women are working in this role, that percentage is small. That means the presidents are men at 70% of colleges (Nelson, 2020). Women also serve as vice presidents, chief financial officers, deans, and department heads, but again at a lesser percentage than men (Cantu-Lee, 2013; Lu, 2020). Thus, even though a more significant number of women possess higher levels of education than men (Gonzalez, 2020; Gray, 2020; Lu, 2020; Nelson, 2020) and have experience working in higher education, a smaller percentage of women make it to the top positions (Cantu-Lee, 2013; Lu 2020). Underrepresentation of women has been the subject of several studies, and the problem is not only here in the United States, but around the world (Gray, 2020; Lu, 2020), as seen in similar studies from Uganda (Gray, 2020), China (Lu, 2020), and Mexico (Gonzalez, 2020). In addition, researchers see identical issues in business, media, and politics (Lu, 2020).

Diehl (2014) noted that barriers to serving in higher-level academic administration might be "institutional, individual, and social" in nature. Cantu-Lee (2013) suggested that the problem is systemic and deeply rooted in institutional policies and procedures. Barriers to women in higher education are like those women face in business. Obstacles to women achieving high levels in academic leadership include real and perceived differences in leadership styles (Eagly et al., 1992), communication styles (Hakim, 2016, as cited in Nelson, 2020), and networking issues (Kobla & Li-Hua, 2017). Women also struggle with balancing work and family life (Lu, 2020) and face a pipeline deficit (Nelson, 2020) and stereotypes – such as "emotional, hormonal, and unintelligent" (Cantu-Lee, 2013, p. 11). Women have been described as relational, talkative, and sensitive (Pounder & Coleman, 2002) and as having a lack of confidence, competitiveness (Cubillo & Brown, 2003), and ambition (Lu, 2020). In addition, Diehl (2014) suggested that the glass ceiling phenomenon exists across all occupations and institutions. The glass ceiling is a term that describes an "invisible barrier preventing women from ascending into elite leadership positions" (Northouse, 2013, p. 353).

According to Gonzalez (2020), women may weigh their family responsibilities heavier than men, or the community expects them to do so. Because of stereotypes, some people may perceive women as neglecting family when seeking higher roles in leadership. As a result, some women may not choose to go in that direction. Due to choices between school and family, some women may later complete their degrees, and their degrees may not be those that would lead to academic administration. In addition, women in leadership may not be able to attend after-hours business functions as

men do because of the responsibilities at home, thus negatively affecting career success (Gonzalez, 2020).

Men and women may lead differently due to their various leadership traits and styles (Gonzalez, 2020; Northouse, 2013). Women may have leadership traits, such as collaborative, less aggressive, supportive, adaptable, and democratic, which can be valuable assets in educational leadership (Park, 1996). In addition, women leaders may use more of a transformational style, which is highly desirable for institutions seeking change (Nelson, 2020). Literature about women in collegiate sports leadership tells a similar story of barriers to high-level leadership and underrepresentation (Samuel, 2020).

Women in Sports Leadership

A problem exists at all levels of athletic administration as Massengale (2009) explained, "women are underrepresented in leadership areas in professional sport (Lapchick, 2006, 2007), intercollegiate sport (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014), and interscholastic sport" (Whisenant, 2008). Researchers have found the barriers in this field (Gray, 2020) are obstacles similar to those seen in "media, business, and politics" (Lu, 2020, p. 6). Some of those barriers are "gender stereotypes" in leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p.94), shortage of mentoring and networking opportunities (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007), family and work balance, pay discrimination, "the old boys club" (Schneider et al., 2010, p. 16), lack of respect (Stangl, 1991), intense scrutiny (Samuel, 2020) "glass ceiling" (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 6), "homologous reproduction" (Stangl, 1991, p. 47), and "Queen Bee Syndrome" (Derks et al., 2011, p. 1243). "Queen Bee Syndrome" is when a woman serving in leadership does not wish to support other women trying to make their way into leadership positions (Derks et al., 2011, p. 1243).

Barriers that women face may be structural, those outside of a person's control, such as discrimination. Discrimination may hinder access by denying a person access to resources or a position, or discrimination may show as mistreatment of people (Cunningham et al., 2021). Other barriers may be individual, such as a person's mindset that may keep them from excelling (Gray, 2020).

One might assume that the underrepresentation of women should not exist in athletics due to the passing of Title IX. Surprisingly, the number of female collegiate athletic directors plummeted after the enactment of Title IX in 1972, followed by implementation in 1978 (Samuel, 2020). Though this enactment has been a positive for women athletes, it has not been an improvement across the board for the most part. More sports are available for women now, and many more are playing collegiate sports (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). However, there is a profound deficit in a career in coaching or directing athletics (Whisenhunt et al., 2005, Samuel, 2020; Semonova, 2020).

Before Title IX, women directed 90% of women's athletic programs (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014), and women coached most women's teams. When the government implemented Title IX in 1978, schools merged men's and women's athletic departments in most cases, and the leadership position usually went to the male athletic director (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). In some football-related instances, athletic directors may be retired football coaches due to the weight given to revenue-producing athletic programs (Kies, 2014).

Now, the number of women serving as athletic directors is deficient – in 2012, that percentage was 22.3% (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Looking at the figures for Division I Athletic Directors, in 2014, only 10% were women. Even more dismal, 11.3%

of colleges have no women in athletic administration (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). The number of women coaching women's sports has also diminished, leading to fewer women coaching in the future. Fewer women serving in collegiate sports leadership is an unfortunate, unforeseen effect of intentionally developing something to improve women's situations. Women athletes are more likely to see coaching as an employment option if they played for a woman coach than a male coach (Everhart & Chelladurai, 1998). Muffat McGraw, women's basketball coach at the University of Notre Dame, expressed these sentiments in the following excerpt from a 2019 interview.

> How are these young women looking up and seeing someone that looks like them, preparing them for the future? We don't have enough female role models, we don't have enough visible women leaders, we don't have enough women in power. Girls are socialized to know . . . gender roles are already set . . . And when these girls are coming up, who are they looking up to tell them that that's not the way it has to be? And where better to do that than in sports? All these millions of girls who play sports across the country, they could come out every day, and we're teaching them some great things about life skills. But wouldn't it be great if we could teach them to watch how women lead? . . . So yes, when you look at men's basketball and 99 percent of the jobs go to men, why shouldn't 100 or 99 percent of the jobs in women's basketball go to women? Maybe it's because we only have 10 percent women athletic directors in Division I. People hire people who look like them, and that's the problem (Samuel, 2020, p. 7).

The lack of women leaders in politics, business, higher education, and athletic administration speaks to the essential nature of studies focusing on women's leadership,

emphasizing those conducted by women (Lu, 2020). Research studies focusing on women athletic directors at the collegiate level in the U.S. have been light, at least up through 2015. However, more literature exists on women leading professional athletic programs in Europe (Kies, 2014). More women sharing their experiences in collegiate sports leadership will keep the issue from falling by the wayside (Inglis et al., 2000). Though not a substitute for in-person mentorship (Bower & Hums, 2009), perhaps women researchers helping women leaders share their stories through such studies will affect change. These researchers describe the successes and difficulties of role models and describe leadership opportunities for women in business, higher education administration, collegiate athletics administration (Kies, 2014; Samuel, 2020), or even collegiate esports.

Esports

The following few sections provide an overview of esports' presence in academia and several variations of the definition of esports and the history of esports. Discussion regarding the rapid growth of esports and the status of whether esports is considered a sport follow.

Definition of Esports

Esports is just one name for this activity, also known as "electronic sports, cybersports, gaming, competitive computer gaming, virtual sports" (Jenny et al., 2017, p. 1), and professional gaming (McTee, 2014). There is no single definition of esports that everyone subscribes to (Freeman & Wohn, 2017). Wagner's (2006) widely cited definition reads, "esports is an area of sports activities in which people develop and train mental or physical abilities in the use of information and communication technologies"

(p. 3). In their discussion of previous definitions, Darvin et al. (2020) called it "competitive video gaming competitions that take place in person and/or in an interactive online environment" (p. 36), and Reitman et al. (2020) also cite Hamari and Sjobloom's (2017) definition, " a form of sports where the primary aspects of the sport are facilitated by electronic systems; the input of players and teams as well as the output of the eSports system are mediated by human computer interfaces" (p. 213). Freeman and Wohn (2017) discussed these competitions in virtual worlds, where teams must complete collaborative tasks at high speed. Railsback and Caporusso (2019) stated that "electronic sports (eSports) is a novel type of competition and spectator entertainment that pits individuals or teams playing video games in front of a large crowd attending the show in person or remotely" (p. 1). According to Ruvalcaba et al. (2018), "esports reconceptualizes sports as a combination of competition, ability, and digital technology" (p. 1). Simply put, "E-sports commonly refer to an organized and competitive approach to playing computer games" (Witkowski, 2012, p. 350). There is a complexity to esports because it is new and an aggregate of technology, society, economics, and sport (Jin, 2010).

The various definitions are similar in that they revolve around esports' technical, organized, competitive, and game aspects. Differences in the definitions arise when adding a level of complexity by including the mention of training, location - virtual worlds, interactive online environment, and the addition of remote or in-person viewers.

Esports Increased Presence in Academia

As esports has grown in popularity, esports research has also increased, though it is still early in the game (Darvin et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2020; Reitman et al., 2020; Salo, 2017; Stout, 2020). Esports literature doubled in quantity in 2012, and growth continues

to be steady (Reitman et al., 2020). Esports research covers various disciplines such as

sports science, psychology, business, sports management, law, gender studies, and

technology (Reitman et al., 2020). Many esports studies provide a definition of esports, a

brief history of esports, a discussion of whether esports is a sport, compare it to

traditional sports, and discuss the types of games that make up esports (Funk et al., 2017).

Several studies examine the role of esports in developing highly desirable and

transferable soft skills such as communication, teamwork, collaboration, and problem-

solving (Castillo, 2019; Richard et al., 2019; Rothwell & Shaffer, 2019; Wagner, 2006;

Whalen, 2013). Common themes of recent studies discuss male dominance in esports, the

lack of women players, and the toxicity of the computer gaming culture as explorations

involving esports shift to examining esports communities and culture (Castillo, 2019;

Lopez-aranguren, 2017; Lopez-Fernandez et al., 2019; Reitman et al., 2020; Ruotsalainen

& Friman, 2018; Witkowski, 2014). While researchers may examine players'

experiences, other researchers may focus on the affairs of the viewers (Ruotsalainen &

Friman, 2018). Studying the experiences of those in esports leadership and, specifically,

women in esports leadership has not attracted much attention from researchers.

History of Esports

The history of esports coincides with advances in communication technology and

may be nostalgic for some who participated early. For example, Wagner (2006) spoke of

esports as an offshoot of the shift from an "industrial society to an information and

communication society" (p. 3), and Malvone (2020) made a similar point in the following

quote.

The technological society of the 21st century makes esports the natural leader in

sport viewing and participation in society today. The days of football and our

industrial society and baseball and our agrarian lifestyle are now things of the

past. Esports will be the dominant sport in our society until society shifts again (p.

33).

Though some say that esports began in the 1990s with "competitions founded by league

promoters," Borowy and Jin (2013) suggested otherwise (p. 2255), saying that video

game competitions go back to the early '80s, the days of arcade games and players

inserting their initials to denote their scores and to see who held the highest scores

(Borowy & Jin, 2013; Castillo, 2019). The gaming community and culture began playing

games such as Centipede, Pac-Man, Donkey Kong, Frogger, and Galaga (Borowy & Jin,

2013). Arcades occasionally hosted local tournaments to determine local game

champions. During the early '80s, sports, marketing, and technology yielded

opportunities for arcade game professionals even to gain celebrity status (Borowy & Jin,

2013).

The first known video game competition goes back to 1972, with a group of

Stanford students playing a game called Spacewar (Kim et al., 2020). In 1980, Atari, the

producer of Space Invaders, put on one of the first video game tournaments – The First

National Space Invaders Competition in New York and included several other regions,

yielding over 10,000 players (Kane & Spradley, 2017). The U.S. National Video Game

Team from the mid-'80s consisted of the best arcade players. Even esports shows on

television have been around since the '80s (Borowy & Jin, 2013).

In the early '90s, video game violence became an issue. The Entertainment

Software Association (ESA) was formed in 1994 because government officials sought a

standardized rating system for video games (Wilcox, 2011). The Entertainment Software

Rating Board (ESRB) system is still in place. Levels of ratings include E for Everyone,

E10+, T for Teen, M for Mature 17+, AO for Adults Only 18+, and RP for Rating

Pending (ESRB, 2021).

Following the arcade phase, players gathered in conference spaces or convention

centers to set up and compete in Local Area Network (LAN) competitions (Näsström &

Arvérus, 2019; Kim et al., 2020). Communication between team members playing

together evolved into a strategic part of the game. Once the internet was widely available,

competitions could be held virtually with players worldwide, and esports' popularity

exploded (Holden et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2020; Taylor & Witkowski, 2010). Esports

games generally fit into one of several categories, including "real-time strategy,

multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA), first-person shooter (FPS), racing, fighting, and

sports games" (Hamari & Sjoblom, 2017).

Fans demand esports coverage, so now ESPN has an esports section on its

website, and some cable channels televise esports programming (Holden et al., 2017;

Rothwell & Shaffer, 2019; Ruvalcaba et al., 2018). In addition, fans may interact with

players and other fans via streaming on Twitch, "an online broadcast and socialization

platform" (Devia-Allen, 2017, p. 8), and YouTube, by adding comments to the stream

(Keiper et al., 2017; Malvone, 2020; Ruvalcaba et al., 2018). Lee and Schoenstedt (2011)

divided esports development into two eras; "the arcade era and the internet era" (p. 39).

Before the internet began, video games became more popular as entertainment for the

home (Skoglund, 2018; Castillo, 2019) with gaming consoles and personal computers.

During the internet era, tablets or phones provided new options (Kim et al., 2020).

During the internet era, at the professional level, top players have the opportunity to win substantial cash prizes (Lipovaya et al., 2018; Andre et al., 2020). In addition, professional sports leagues are investing in esports growth by starting their esports teams (Kim et al., 2020). Professional esports athletes began recording matches and practice sessions to reach fans, strengthen their brand, and contribute to the gaming community. Moreover, there has been a positive response – people like to watch esports as much as they enjoy playing them (Zolides, 2015). Viewership escalated when capabilities became available technologically for live streaming matches on YouTube and Twitch (Holden et al., 2017; Richard et al., 2019). Not only professionals but collegiate players and teams (Richard et al., 2019) and many other avid amateur gamers make videos and provide live streams of practices, matches, and tips (Zolides, 2015).

Collegiate esports programs are an outgrowth of the popularity of esports (Keiper et al., 2017). It began in 2014 with Robert Morris University recognizing esports as a sport and offering gaming scholarships (Andre et al., 2020; Jenny et al., 2017). In one short year, the number of collegiate programs surged from 40 to more than 200 in 2017, with some offering part to full scholarships (Keiper et al., 2017). Esports at the high school level are also growing (Tseng, 2020). Educators recognize how esports contribute to soft skills development in a STEM learning environment (Richard et al., 2019; Rothwell & Shaffer, 2019). In 2018, the number of high schools participating in esports went from 200 to over 1200 (Rothwell & Shaffer, 2019).

The growth of esports in the United States is just one side of the story, the western side. In the East, South Korea is credited with greatly influencing esports beginning in the late 1990s. StarCraft's popularity helped make South Korea an international leader in

esports early on (Kim et al., 2020; Wagner, 2006). Within this generation, a robust community of gamers influenced increased broadband availability and provided a head start on broadcasting, resulting in players with celebrity status (Jin, 2010; Railsback & Caporusso, 2019; Wagner, 2006). A noted difference between esports in the U.S. and South Korea is that in the U. S. players prefer first-person shooter (FPS) games, while players in South Korea prefer multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) games (Wagner, 2006). Esports has indeed grown internationally. Part of international esports growth is due to the establishment of the International e-Sports Federation in 2008, rising from nine countries to 42 countries quickly (Jenny et al., 2017; Thiborg, 2009).

<u>Rapid Growth of Esports</u>

Esports as an industry has experienced expeditious growth (Malvone, 2020; McTee, 2014)) during the past ten years (Darvin et al., 2020). The development encompasses the viewers, games, the gear, the competitions, the venues, the broadcasts, and players at every level – recreational, collegiate, and professional. In America, there are an estimated 150 million gamers (Bowles, 2018). The popularity of video games among young people is evident in all demographics. The Pew Research Center found that "97% of adolescents, aged 12 to 17, played some form of a digital game" (Pew Research Center, 2008). "Worldwide, esports spectators number close to 500 million" (Kim et al., 2020). Esports is becoming the chosen sport of millennials. Given the technological advances and fewer children competing in traditional sports, esports fill the gap in competitive sports (Malvone, 2020). Countries experiencing the most growth in esports are typically those with a higher GDP – more expendable time and money- and those who see the potential for investing in esports (Kim et al., 2020).

Players enjoy playing, but people also enjoy watching others play (Andre et al., 2020; Lee & Schoenstedt, 2011; Railsback & Caporusso, 2019; Rothwell & Shaffer, 2019; Thiborg, 2009). This desire to watch others playing esports has led to explosive growth in streaming and broadcasting esports events (Rothwell & Shaffer, 2019), with coverage that rivals any sporting event with commentary, graphics, stats, and interviews (Railsback & Caporusso, 2019). Even the live in-person events are drawing huge crowds in large arenas. Esports has become a billion-dollar industry (Tseng, 2020). Economically, video games and esports have surpassed all other forms of entertainment (Castillo, 2019; Holden et al., 2017; Tseng, 2020). Esports is very popular with spectators, and so viewership of esports has surpassed all other forms of traditional sport (Funk et al., 2018; Malvone, 2020), including special events such as the Super Bowl (Näsström & Arvérus, 2019) and NBA playoffs (Railsback & Caporusso, 2019). The consumption of esports is just one similarity between esports and traditional sports.

Esports as Sport

In esports research, there has been plenty of discussion about whether esports is a sport (Malvone, 2020). Some say yes, and some say no. There are various criteria for an activity to be declared as a sport. It depends on which list one looks at to determine (Holden et al., 2017). Title IX requires several criteria for an activity to be deemed a sport. One holdback for esports may be the perception of multiple governing bodies – the same reason competitive cheer has not achieved sport status (Jenny et al., 2017).

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) met in 2017 and suggested recognizing esports as a sport based on four criteria. Then in 2019, it backtracked on that statement because esports is not representative of traditional sports (Kim et al., 2020).

Esports will appear at the 2024 Olympics, not as official events but as demonstrations (Schaffhauser, 2019). There are legal considerations as well. If esports is indeed a sport, there would be specific legal ramifications. Sports organizations must follow guidelines and rules by falling under the sports label (Holden et al., 2017).

As with many generalizations, esports athletes must counter the stereotypes conveyed. For example, some may think of gamers as unambitious or lazy; however, "esports competitors are likely closer to professional athletes than to the perpetuated stereotype of video games being played by overweight teenagers huddled in dark basements" (Holden et al., 2017, p. 47). In truth, quite the opposite of this stereotype is true. Many esports athletes develop their physical fitness to withstand the demands of practice and play in such a stressful environment (Kari et al., 2019). Though some may consider it passive, it is not the same as reading a book. There are time-outs and breaks between quarters or halves in traditional sports, but in esports, there are no breaks (Railsback & Caporusso, 2019). Because of the levels of stress involved, it is crucial to study how esports affect players' health (Andre et al., 2020), just as with other sports.

Traditional sports and esports share many attributes. Both require practice, strategy sessions, and dedication to become better. Traditional sports and esports allow students to develop skills that benefit them throughout life, such as teamwork, communication, collaboration, confidence, self-esteem, strategy, initiative, and networking. Both allow students to represent their school with their skills and talents (Shelton & Haskell, 2018). Both have a recreational level but rise to a more competitive athletic level of play in tournaments (Carbonie et al., 2018). Both traditional and esports attract corporate sponsors and schedule significant competitive events in arenas to attract

spectators (Lee & Schoenstedt, 2011). When players talk about competitive esports, they talk about them similarly to how they talk about traditional sports – using much of the same vocabulary (Freeman & Wohn, 2017). This quoted list makes a compelling case for recognizing esports as a sport.

> eSport features many of the trappings of traditional sport, including professional players, teams, uniforms, coaches, managers, agents, leagues, competitions, marquee events, endorsement deals, player transfer fees, colour commentators, highlight reels, college scholarships, and a darker side with match fixing, doping, and gender-related disputes (Jenny et al., 2017).

> There are also some differences between esports and traditional sports, such as a complete reliance upon technology in esports (Kaytoue et al., 2012). The public may more readily accept traditional sports. The physical fitness aspect may make them more acceptable. Another difference is that video game play is labeled as addictive or highly aggressive – not so much like traditional sports (Jonasson & Thiborg, 2010). Esports draw spectators worldwide, whereas traditional sports rely on fans in the U.S. (Devia-Allen, 2017).

> Some requirements to be considered a sport include a "governing body, formal record-keeping, setting guidelines, and promotions and encouragement of fair competition" (Borowy & Jin, 2013). Other suggested requirements to be considered sport include at least two of the following: "physical activity, practiced for recreation, an element of competition, and have a framework of an institutional organization" (Rodgers, 1977, as cited in Hallmann & Giel, 2018, p. 15). "General acceptance" is another suggested criterion (Gratton & Taylor, 2000, cited in Hallman & Giel, 2018, p. 16).

Though esports are widely accepted as a sport by many entities, the case has not been decided officially (Holden et al., 2017).

Esports Culture

In addition to violence, video gameplay receives other negative attention. Some say playing video games may result in addiction, aggression, reinforcing stereotypes, social problems, poor physical fitness, and lack of academic engagement (Bryce & Rutter, 2002). Alternatively, on the positive side, playing video games helps gamers feel alive, engaged, focused, and successful (McGonigal, 2011). A discussion of additional positive aspects of esports associated with learning follows.

Esports and Learning

As gaming has become more popular, educators and instructional designers have been trying to capitalize on some aspects of gaming or gamification in designing learning experiences to elicit desired effects. Some effects include adaptability, initiative, cognitive effort, concentration, new skills, problem-solving, prosocial behaviour, and well-being (Adachi & Willoughby, 2012).

Esports can be a learning ecology – a space where individual learning occurs and teams learn collaboratively (Richard et al., 2019). An esports learning environment can be considered a cognitive apprenticeship (Collins et al., 1989) where learning mastery comes about through physical training and several types of reflection that, over time, yield expert players, prepared to meet any adversary (Bransford et al., 1989). It is an avenue for developing the soft skills desired by employers today. Collegiate esports players practice and fine-tune their communication, collaboration, problem-solving, and rapid and strategic decision-making skills (Lipovaya et al., 2018; Richard et al., 2019).

Coordination and cooperation are additional skills honed during play (Lipovaya et al., 2018). Esports communities are, in essence, communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) – people passionate about what they do and spend time working together to improve skills by sharing information (Richard et al., 2019). Inspired and motivated by each other,

> "Twitch and game streaming are important to gamers in an affective relationship, which makes audiences want to participate and stream their own gaming experiences. Twitch and streaming constitute communities of practice where the roles of mentorship and apprenticeship take part in the production of learning" (Burroughs & Rama, 2015, p. 3).

Players communicate with each other before, during, and after every match. They review and reflect on their work as individuals and as a team. They receive feedback from coaches and learn from the experts (Richards et al., 2019).

As players master mechanical aspects of the game, they begin to develop an "awareness of and ability to negotiate the game around the game" (Donaldson, 2017, p. 440) known as metagaming. Metagaming is where the player has developed a higher level of expertise. Designers have noticed this strategy and begun to incorporate metagaming in websites and other products to attract more elevated levels of engagement (Kim, 2010).

> Esports players may exhibit varying talents and strengths, and coaches and directors use their expertise to build effective teams. As with many types of teams, such as in the workplace, "eSport teams are a mix of two types of teams — high-performance teams and decision-making and knowledge-intensive teams.

The teamwork involved in them occurs in highly competitive, stressful, and intense virtual environments that demand fast decision making and action taking associated with physical (both virtual and non-virtual) activities" (Lipovaya et al., 2018, p.5).

These communication, collaboration, teamwork, and high-speed strategic decision-making skills are valuable and transferable to other areas (Wagner, 2006).

Social Media

Social media plays a big part in esports at all levels. Esports directors, coaches, and managers use social media for marketing, recruiting, and maintaining and attracting sponsorships. Players use it for branding and networking (Bowles, 2018). Teammates communicate using the Discord application for chats and other social media. They also use Twitch and YouTube to review their work and look for new strategies from experts (Richard et al., 2019).

Those are the positives – ways social media benefits esports and other athletic programs. There can be harmful and abrasive comments left by those in opposition to the program's or players' success (Kim, 2017), resulting in esports' reputation of toxicity.

Toxicity

A common theme in esports literature is the ongoing toxicity or cyberbullying in the computer gaming culture (Adinolf & Türkay, 2018; Sengün et al., 2019; Tseng, 2020). Online hate may include accusations, humiliation, swearing, or promoting violence that may dissuade participation in the online activity (Salminen et al., 2018). Turning off the chat or leaving the game is one way online toxicity may be averted (Sengün et al., 2019). Toxicity diminishes the enjoyment of playing a game, negatively

affecting performance (Adinolf & Türkay, 2018). Toxicity in the gaming culture is one reason for the lack of women playing esports competitively (Ruvalcaba et al., 2018). The added pressure of competing as a female may be overwhelming and undesirable. Some women opt for anonymity - to not use voice chat or use Gamertags, which do not let on the player's gender to play against male players while simultaneously avoiding harassment (Bryce & Rutter, 2002; Skoglund, 2018).

Themes in video games are often violent or masculine. Female characters in video games are sparse (Burgess et al., 2007; Darvin et al., 2020), and women characters that are available may play a subordinate role and are rarely the lead characters. Those present are hyper-sexualized or illustrate stereotypes (Bryce & Rutter, 2002; PaaBen et al., 2017) which may promote "objectification of women" (Bryce & Rutter, 2002; Burgess et al., 2007), and women who are serious esports athletes may find this representation of women repelling. How designers represent women as characters within games, on game covers, and in other advertising may contribute to an environment that results in risqué comments (Consalvo, 2012). Men who play these games may become more accepting of women portrayed or treated in this manner (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009). Further, it may negatively influence the culture of the gaming environment (Ruvalcaba et al., 2018) and possibly carry those effects outside of the virtual world (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009; Burgess et al., 2007). Some game developers consciously try to portray women characters in a better light – less sexual and appropriate attire (Batchelor, 2015).

One high-profiled instance of toxicity in 2014 is Gamergate (Darvin et al., 2020; Tseng, 2020). Women in the gaming industry sought to "improve gender equity in esports spaces." They faced harassment and hostility from some men in the gaming

culture (Wingfield, 2014). Offenses included publicly sharing personal information, derogatory comments, and even threats to their safety (Tseng, 2020).

The anonymity of players and spectators on platforms such as Twitch may help to bring about more frequent derogatory comments and more hurtful hate speech aimed to a greater degree at women and members of other underrepresented groups (Darvin et al., 2020; Nakandala et al., 2017; Tseng, 2020). Not all toxic comments are sexual. Other harmful words relate to new players, minorities, religion, disabilities (Tseng, 2020), homophobia, demeaning remarks about skills and performance (Gao et al., 2017), and cheating (Adinolf & Türkay, 2018).

Several studies have analyzed Twitch and other platform comments to examine toxicity in esports. Researchers have studied players' experiences, spectators' experiences, and players' and spectators' behavior in the form of words (Darvin et al., 2020). Twitch comments differ based on the gender of the streamer (Nakandala et al., 2017). Indeed, a problem with "cyber harassment" in esports must be addressed (Phidd, 2018). Several game companies have mechanisms in place to curb the problem. They have guidelines for reporting bad behavior (Tseng, 2020). Sometimes this results in players losing their right to play the game. Some games have purposely avoided providing a voice chat option to discourage harassment of women (Tseng, 2020). There has also been an effort to combine forces between the game companies to develop a universal code of conduct.

For comments from spectators, game companies may need to take other steps to improve the culture, such as removing anonymity (Tseng, 2020) and encouraging those who had bad experiences to try once again (Phidd, 2018). It is in the interest of all

involved in esports to rectify the toxicity problem and remake the space as an inclusive and inviting environment (Darvin et al., 2020). After all, women make up about half of the gaming community and a third of spectators (Tseng, 2020).

<u>Gender</u>

Much of the literature about esports at least mentions gender somehow (Gao et al., 2017), whether that is about male dominance in esports, the lack of women competing in esports, the objectification of women in video games, or the hostility and harassment directed at women players in esports.

<u>Male-dominated</u>

Traditional sports are male-dominated entities or spaces, and esports is no different. Several studies characterize traditional sports as displaying hegemonic masculinity – maintaining power over underrepresented groups (Darvin et al., 2020; Ruvalcaba et al., 2018). Ruotsalainen and Friman (2018) discussed Taylor's (2012) explanation of the blending of hegemonic masculinity in traditional sports that emphasizes physicality and geek masculinity of esports, which embraces technology into the current culture in gaming spaces -hegemonic geek masculinity.

Esports is a male-dominated activity on every front (Zolides, 2015). "Males are more likely to identify as gamers" (Hao et al., 2020; PaaBen, 2017, p. 430) than women who play video games. As mentioned previously game designers create with the male audience in mind, and a largely male-dominant culture excludes women from gaming spaces (Borrowy & Jin, 2013; Bryce & Rutter, 2002; Darvin et al., 2020; Skoglund, 2018).

Women and Esports

Much literature about women in esports reports harassment and sexual harassment faced by women competing in gaming environments. For discussion of this theme, refer back to the section on toxicity. In esports literature, it is common to discuss the lack of female team members at every level of competitive esports (Borrowy & Jin, 2013; Darvin et al., 2020; Kari et al., 2019). Though there is a lack of women playing in competitive esports, the number of women who play video games is about equal to the number of men who play (Bryce & Rutter, 2002; Gao et al., 2017; PaaBen et al., 2017) and women spectators are close to 40% (Interpret, 2020).

Many studies explain some of the barriers that women players face in what is said to be a male-dominated sport. Some of these barriers are like those women face in business, higher education administration, and collegiate athletic administration – other male-dominated environments. Data shows that 42% of women own consoles (Pew Research Center, 2015) and play video games (Bryce & Rutter, 2002). However, they may prefer less violent games than their male counterparts. They may choose the social side of games over intense competition (Darvin et al., 2020; Gao et al., 2017).

Some female gamers want to play down their gender, compete, and be judged only by gaming skills (Cullen, 2018). Such is the story of a South Korean professional gamer – the first woman signed to an Overwatch League team, Kim "Geguri" Se-Yeon (Cullen, 2018; Ruotsalainen & Friman, 2018). She does not wish to be known as a girl gamer, role model, or representative of female gamers (Choi et al., 2019; Cullen, 2018). "My dream is to be a pro gamer. Outside of that, I do not want to be any symbol or something" (Geguri, 2017). Others embrace the idea of being a role model for women

gamers. Some female players play on women's teams.

Stakeholders on the business side of esports have been attempting to promote women's competitive gaming opportunities. For example, in the following quote, Holden et al. (2017) explains:

Various game manufacturers, event promoters, and team executives have begun an early push to increase the numbers of female professional gamers; unlike other leagues that have often launched ill-conceived female-friendly marketing ploys to attract consumers, esports stakeholders are seeking to expand actual participation of females at the highest levels of competition (p. 67-68).

As more women play and compete in esports, we may no longer regard computer gaming as a male activity. Women's gaming skills and overall technical prowess should not be considered less than (Bryce & Rutter, 2002; Choi et al., 2019; Cullen, 2018). Many young women play; perhaps they will be representing their college teams in the future (Castillo, 2019).

Improving Esports Culture Through Inclusiveness

Though esports has some areas that need improvement, it has much potential for inclusiveness. Railsback and Caporusso (2019) stated, "eSports is one of the most inclusive sports that exists. It is completely unbiased toward gender, size, weight, race, or even religion: anyone can sit down and be included" (p. 6). However, currently, some issues get in the way of this ideal, particularly toxicity and underrepresented groups.

Despite the current gaming culture, between 70 and 85% of U.S. males want to see more female adolescents playing video games. So perhaps the stereotype of esports being a male-only activity will become a thing of the past. It seems that young males no

longer ascribe to it (PaaBen et al., 2017).

For continued growth in the esports industry, inclusiveness will be crucial. It will take a concerted effort to root out hostility in gaming spaces, making them more inviting to female and minority players (Richard et al., 2019). Doing so will positively affect future growth in the industry (Darvin et al., 2020). One step in this direction came about in late 2019 with the collaborative development of some principles of fair play introduced by the ESA. Known as the "universal esports principles for fun and fair play," the tenets cover four areas: "safety and well-being, integrity and fair play, respect and diversity, and positive and enriching game play" (Tseng, 2020, p. 211). The development of these principles is encouraging because the ESA members are 40 highly influential companies in esports. Perhaps this step will lead to a "universal code of conduct" (Tseng, 2020).

Castillo (2019) discussed esports and community building, especially among collegiate players. Just as with traditional sports, in esports, the community gives players "a sense of belonging" (Castillo, 2019, p. 27; Taylor, 2015) to something bigger than themselves (Shelton & Haskell, 2018). A spirit of comradery develops over time (Kim et al., 2020). In gaming communities, players practice social skills, which may transfer into other areas of life. As a result, communities outside the gaming community benefit from students proficient in these social skills (Castillo, 2019). Thus, there is potential for growth and improvement in the inclusiveness area.

Professional Esports

Esports' high-stakes professional level draws the most attention with high dollar prize money (Funk et al., 2018; Keiper et al., 2017; Zolides, 2015), flashy gaming arenas, and players reaching celebrity status (Zolides, 2015). The owners of the games run the

esports tournaments – gaming companies such as Riot, Blizzard, and others (Funk et al., 2018). Some governing bodies, such as the Esports Federation, oversee some aspects of professional esports. Players have coaches and managers and practice for long hours (Kari et al., 2019). They tend to focus on mastering a single game and perhaps some of those similar to it (Zolides, 2015). Players of any age may participate in tournaments, so no minimum or maximum age requirements must be met (Kane & Spradley, 2017). However, younger players tend to have a physical advantage (Zolides, 2015).

Though the prize money can be pretty lucrative, many players must supplement their winnings with other avenues of income (Agha, 2015). Sponsorships are essential to individual players (Zolides, 2015) and teams alike (Malvone, 2020), and corporate sponsors are stepping up (Keiper et al., 2017), not just in the United States but also in South Korea (Lee & Schoenstedt, 2001). Branding is also an essential element in professional gaming. Players capitalize on their brands with social media and streaming and create videos using Twitch and YouTube (Zolides, 2015). Those who manage their branding and media well may find future work in "coaching, managing, and media careers" when competitive play is no longer an option (Zolides, 2015, p. 44). For females, gender may play a role in branding and promoting their online persona (Zolides, 2015). Though esports competition is open to women players, and many women play esports, few compete at the top levels of the sport (Darvin et al., 2020; Ruotsalainen & Friman, 2018; Tseng, 2020).

Esports can serve a community economically as well. For example, esports events can draw large crowds as a spectator sport which benefits the tourism or hospitality industry (Jenny et al., 2017). In addition, capitalizing on esports events encourages job

growth in technology, software engineering, marketing, and event management (Fong & Trench, 2019).

<u>High School Esports</u>

High schools have added esports to their list of sanctioned sports in many states, and the numbers are growing (Rothwell & Shaffer, 2019). High schools may work with organizations such as Play Versus to provide a standard set of rules for several games, and which handles the scheduling of matches. Students practice and compete in computer labs at their schools. High school esports players find inspiration and motivation that carries over to their academic work with better attendance and grades (Rothwell & Shaffer, 2019). In addition, there is the benefit of sharpening the soft skills that come with playing esports – communication, teamwork, problem-solving, strategy, decision-making, and collaboration (Rothwell & Shaffer, 2019). Finally, esports provides a sense of community (Kim et al., 2020) and pride in representing the school in sports.

Collegiate Esports

Over the past few years, colleges and universities have added esports teams. Programs often begin as student-led club teams (Keiper et al., 2017, Richard et al., 2019). They may develop into university-sanctioned varsity programs which offer scholarships to attract and retain players (Richard et al., 2019). In more extensive programs, club-level teams are farm teams that supplies players to the varsity teams. College teams may play in simple computer labs or state-of-the-art esports arenas with broadcast capability and room for fans (Castillo, 2019; Funk et al., 2018). It is an opportunity to collaborate with even more students, with some of them providing technical support, streaming support, and casting the matches (Shelton & Haskell, 2018). Robust esports programs help support

the missions of computer science, communications, and business programs. Due to the interest in esports, schools are beginning to offer academic courses and programs related to esports, such as esports management, marketing, and game design (Malvone, 2020; Shelton & Haskell, 2018).

<u>Benefits for Institutions</u>

Just as there has been rapid growth in esports in general, there has been rapid growth in the number of club and varsity teams formed at colleges and universities in the United States. In some schools, the athletic department oversees esports. The esports program may be part of an educational technology department like Boise State University or another academic department (Shelton & Haskell, 2018). Keiper et al. (2017) pointed out that with large companies acting as esports sponsors and anticipated attendance and fan support, developing a program is potentially a win economically.

Governing bodies and organizations that support collegiate esports exist at the varsity and club levels. The National Association for Collegiate Esports (NACE) is a governing body for the varsity level (Andre et al., 2020; Shelton & Haskell, 2018). University members may expect support in developing varsity programs, including help with scheduling, discounts on gear, and consultations with experts. NACE awards players, teams, coaches, and programs at the end of each year. Various other organizations assist with scheduling scrimmages and matches at the club level. One such organization is TESPA, formerly the Texas eSports Association (Castillo, 2019; McTee, 2014). This organization has been helping high schools and student-led collegiate teams compete in organized leagues (Shelton & Haskell, 2018).

Universities benefit from esports programs by attracting students with a valuable skillset – "teamwork, critical thinking, and technical skills" – students whom they may not reach without an esports program (Rothwell & Shaffer, 2019, p. 5). Universities may also see benefits from esports in "revenue generation, Title IX compliance, and diversity" (Keiper et al., 2017, p. 11). Esports athletes may be male or female. There are no quotas or requirements for how many men or women may be on a team. Men and women esports players do not have any physical advantage over the other. However, since women may also play on female-only teams, adding women's esports teams to an athletic program can balance men's and women's programs as prescribed by Title IX (Kane & Spradley, 2017).

Benefits for Students

Students now can play video games for scholarship money at many universities (Kauweloa & Winter, 2019; Richard et al., 2019; Rothwell & Shaffer, 2019). Like any other college athlete, collegiate varsity esports athletes sign letters of intent, abide by team rules, receive academic support, and receive gear (Keiper et al., 2017). Of course, benefits are specific to each college program.

Playing video games does not have to be a solitary pastime. Collegiate esports programs draw gamers out of their dorm rooms and into an interactive campus gaming community (Castillo, 2019; Skoglund, 2018). Teammates may meet regularly for strategy sessions (Richard et al., 2019). They are getting a chance to build relationships while doing something they love (Skoglund, 2018), becoming more skillful as players and teammates (Richard et al., 2019).

As discussed in other parts of this review, desirable skills in today's job market are the same skills developed through participation in esports teams; skills such as teamwork (Näsström & Arvérus, 2019), communication, and collaboration (Richard et al., 2019). Other benefits of video game play include "competition, challenge, diversion, fantasy, social interaction, and arousal" (Sherry & Lucas, 2003 as cited in Przybylski et al., 2010, p. 162).

A difference between an esports college athlete and an athlete in other sports is that collegiate esports players may earn prize money for competitions. Prize money contributes toward the athlete's tuition. If the winnings exceed the amount needed for education, the money applies toward living expenses (Kane & Spradley, 2017).

As players progress in their skills, there is the possibility of winning valuable prizes, playing professionally (Castillo, 2019), or working in the esports field when finished with collegiate play. Some jobs in the esports field include broadcasting, streaming (Salo, 2017), coaches, managers, "game designers, programmers and developers, animators, audio engineers, writers, interpreters and translators, video game testers, technical support specialists, producers, marketing managers, market research analysts, and sales representatives" (McKay, 2018).

Challenges

Even with all the positives, there are some challenges in adding varsity esports programs at colleges and universities. For example, students must keep grades at a prescribed level, practice schedules must be manageable, and the culture must be inclusive (Funk et al., 2018). Additionally, since playing video games is known for being

sedentary (Keiper et al., 2017), countering that with a physical fitness aspect to an esports program is an added challenge.

<u>Collegiate Esports Athletes</u>

With so many high schools adding esports programs and teams, college programs will begin to see students with esports team experience making their way to the college ranks (Keiper et al., 2017). Demographics of esports players include some diversity, but many players are white males. Korean and Asian-American males are another prevalent group in esports (Keiper et al., 2017; Richard et al., 2019). To increase diversity in athletic programs, adding esports may bring in more students of this demographic (Jenny et al., 2017). There are women, but the numbers are low in the upper levels of competitive ranks.

Leadership in Collegiate Esports

With varsity esports being a reasonably new activity and the programs varying widely in size, those serving in collegiate esports leadership positions may come from diverse backgrounds. In addition, they may act in multiple roles. As a result, experience with esports may vary widely among these leaders. Varsity esports leaders are responsible for coaching, management, communication with stakeholders, virtual team leadership, and building the program's culture.

<u>Coaches - Players First?</u>

As with other sports, coaches and directors were often players first. Since esports is such a new field, most esports coaches did not play this sport in high school. Some esports coaches may have participated in esports in college, and some may have competed professionally before becoming collegiate esports coaches (Salo, 2017)**.** Still,

others have arrived in this position in other ways. Directors of esports programs may be athletic directors who have adopted this emerging sport, or they may be leaders in academic departments that somehow relate to esports and who have taken on the project of developing an esports program at their college or university. As more women compete in esports, there will likely be an increase in women in esports leadership (Darvin et al., 2020).

Leadership Roles in Esports

Several leadership roles are essential to esports programs for ensuring success. These include captain, coach, and manager (Lipovaya et al., 2018). Skoglund (2018) discussed attributes desired of a team captain. These include good memory, analytical prowess, and being highly strategic, valuable as the captain often takes care of the play-calling for a team (Lipovaya et al., 2018).

Some duties of the esports coach include assessing the competition, developing strategies for upcoming matches, and motivating and inspiring the team (Lipovaya et al., 2018) before, during, and after the round. Preparing the team includes physical and mental preparation (Kim et al., 2020; Railsback & Caporusso, 2019; Skoglund, 2018). Other coach duties relate to "recruitment, budget, marketing, conflict management, and compliance (Stevens, 2020, p. vi). Conflicts sometimes arise from competition between team members for roles or positions or the desire to be named the MVP (Lipovaya et al., 2018).

Handling the marketing issues, event registration, and communicating with sponsors are duties that usually fall to the team or program manager (Lipovaya et al., 2018). They typically handle these tasks outside of the competitions. Other managerial

duties include scheduling, communicating with stakeholders, and team development (Näsström & Arvérus, 2019). Managers work to ensure team cohesion, that everyone communicates and gets along with each other (Näsström & Arvérus, 2019).

Successful virtual team leadership depends on four key factors: good communication, understanding, role clarity, and leadership attitude. Effective leaders recognize each teammate with individual feedback and problem-solve with the entire team (Preston, 2020). As esports teams are virtual teams, esports leadership must communicate well to succeed. In addition, they need to be adaptable to each roster of players – building relationships with each player and the team (Preston, 2020). Skoglund (2018) stated, "A great deal of pastoral work goes into managing and maintaining an esport team" (p. 33). Much coaching can be compared to pastoring – leading, teaching, guiding, healing, inspiring, and motivating.

They must build a culture that inspires growth and figure out how to motivate each player to greatness (Preston, 2020). As a team, they practice "corporate strategizing" where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts (Skoglund, 2018). "Exceptional critical thinking skills" set elite players apart (Railsback & Caporusso, 2019, p. 7), and communication skills are essential. Communication is worked on continually, and when new players come in, it disrupts the flow (Skoglund, 2018).

Leadership qualities deemed highly important for coaches include "accountability, leading by example, and confidence" (Preston, 2020, p. ii). There are two main coaching styles: a supportive autonomy style and a more controlling style. Some say the supportive style is better received and more often recommended, and the controlling type should be used only when necessary (Preston, 2020).

Coaching does not typically become available in esports until later in a player's progression as an esports athlete, either as a member of a school team or a professional team. As a result, players work on their skills on their own up until this time. The opposite is true of many traditional sports, where players receive some coaching from the beginning stages (Salo, 2017).

Concluding Thoughts - Women in Collegiate Esports Leadership

As mentioned in the introduction, there is a lack of literature on women in collegiate esports leadership. Background information establishes a foundation for this research topic. This background information includes literature on women in leadership and women serving in leadership in related areas such as higher education administration and collegiate athletic leadership. Much of this literature describes barriers women face in male-dominated work cultures. Because of these barriers, only a few women reached the top leadership positions in academic administration or collegiate athletics administration. Therefore, women are underrepresented in these high-level roles.

While there is literature exploring esports, there is no focus on leaders except perhaps one article that addresses some aspects of being a coach or a manager. However, it is still not the focus of the article. Much of the literature explores esports, relays definitions, and discusses how esports compares with traditional sports. There are studies on esports in general – providing an excellent overview of esports and discussing the sports' rapid growth. Finally, studies explore the affordances of using esports as a viable medium for acquiring soft skills such as communication, strategic thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and teamwork. Though researchers mention esports potential for soft skills development in much of the literature, there is not an abundance of literature

focusing on this aspect of esports. As it is fascinating and relevant to esports and education, soft skill development in esports is a good area for further research. Researchers have studied players in esports, including women, spectators, and the games themselves. An aspect of esports that has received much attention in the literature is gender. Several themes fall under gender: male domination of the sport, underrepresentation of women at the top levels of competition, the toxicity of the gaming environment, and how game designers portray women characters in video games.

An area lacking in the esports literature is esports leadership – the experiences of directors, coaches, and managers – male and female. All would be possible areas for future research. It is a new field, so there are still plenty of unturned stones. Women serve as athletic directors, conference leaders, managers, and coaches in collegiate esports leadership. However, few know about their background experiences, the barriers they have broken through, their day-to-day work, and how it is meaningful. There is a gap in esports literature where women serving in collegiate esports leadership is concerned. As esports is known to be a male-dominated activity, will some of the barriers seen in other male-dominated environments be ones that women in collegiate esports leadership have experienced? Will some obstacles women face in business, higher education administration, and traditional collegiate athletic leadership affect those coaching, directing, or leading this new sport? Does the fact that esports is new mean that these old problems may be a thing of the past, not affecting women in this new culture? Does a small number of women competing in esports affect the number of women leading? How do women in esports leadership address the toxicity present in the gaming culture? Women in collegiate esports leadership and those involved in any facet of the esports

industry, higher education, and those studying women in leadership may seek answers to these questions. The topic may interest women serving in esports leadership, women esports athletes, and even those involved in other women's athletics or academic administration areas.

"The personal stories of women can be employed as a means for them to define who they are on their terms, which can be used to dismantle stereotypes and other negative perspectives" (Royster, 2000, as cited in Samuel, 2020). The quote above describes how a phenomenological study of this topic may be informative and perhaps a meaningful contribution toward solving some of the gender equity problems related to the literature (Gray, 2020). In addition, it may inspire women to confidently approach career options in higher levels of leadership in any male-dominated field.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this descriptive (transcendental) phenomenological study was to explore and describe the essence of women's lived experiences in their role in leading collegiate varsity esports programs at institutions of higher education. Chapter 3 contains sections on the research methods' design and rationale, the researcher's role, the participants, and the location. Also included in Chapter 3 are descriptions of instrumentation, procedures, and data collection information. Finally, the chapter explains data analysis steps and strategies for maintaining validity, reliability, and ethics.

Design and Rationale

After considering various qualitative approaches for exploring lived experiences of women who serve in collegiate esports leadership, a phenomenological approach was the best approach for answering the research question. With phenomenology, the researcher collects and analyzes the lived experiences of several participants who have experienced the same phenomenon looking for commonalities. Then the researcher drafts a rich description encapsulating the essence of these experiences, which helps us understand their meaning more distinctly.

A social constructivist worldview was foundational to this project. Phenomenology has been used in many fields and is an appropriate approach for education (Cilesiz, 2009, 2010; Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and educational technology

research (Cilesiz, 2009, 2010; Valentine et al., 2014). Because "the purpose of phenomenological research is to generate the lifeworld experiences of a certain population," (Peoples, 2020, p.47) phenomenology is a fitting choice for answering research questions that elicit life experiences. Researchers use phenomenology to explore participants' experiences with a phenomenon or concept. In addition, those examining the experiences of a particular profession may use phenomenology, which is the case with this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This qualitative study employed a descriptive (transcendental) phenomenological approach to learn about women's experiences as coaches or directors in collegiate esports leadership. Athletic directors and coaches are first educators about the business of teaching and learning. As esports is grounded in communication technology and collaboration, this topic is appropriate for study in educational technology. The focus is on women because of the gender gap in leadership positions. The leadership gender gap is pervasive across higher education administration, collegiate athletic administration, business, politics, and media (Lu, 2020). It exists in the United States and worldwide (Gray, 2020; Lu, 2020; Gonzalez, 2020). Though the chosen participants in this study are women and the literature reviewed in preparation for this study touches on some themes common to studies about women, this study is not a feminist study per se.

Phenomenology has two main types. The first is known as Edmund Husserl's phenomenology - descriptive (transcendental) phenomenology. A student of Husserl, Martin Heidegger, developed a second version known as hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenology (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016). Others present alternatives and recommendations to phenomenological research - studies such as Friesen's (2014)

interpretative phenomenology. Further, Valentine et al. (2018) suggested three main types, adding post-intentional or post-structural phenomenology to the two original versions. They put forth the related philosophical underpinnings for each kind of phenomenology to support phenomenological researchers in educational communications and technology (ECT).

Also, to support phenomenological researchers in education and educational technology, Cilesiz (2010) described the process of conducting descriptive (transcendental) research and listed phenomenological studies about experiences with technology. Cilesiz (2010) also shared ideas for future research about lived experiences with technology, including successful integration, new classroom technologies, problematic computer use, and "lived experiences of video games" (p. 505). Accordingly, lived experiences of women who are leaders of collegiate esports programs fit well as an appropriate idea for descriptive (transcendental) phenomenological research.

Cilesiz's (2009) descriptive (transcendental) study on teen use of internet cafes applied a methodology comparable to the goals of this present research. Cilesiz (2009) used criterion sampling and Seidman's (2019) three in-depth interviews method. Cilesiz's (2009) study clearly illustrated the practice of using Moustakas' (1994) guidelines for data analysis, and it showed how phenomenology was practical for answering the research question about lived experiences. Other descriptive (transcendental) studies illustrate the phenomenological process as well, including Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell's (2004) study of the experiences of the "ripple effect" in a leadership training program and Blodgett-McDeavitt's (1997) exploration of the meaning of technology training participation. These studies illustrated the appropriateness of using the descriptive

(transcendental) phenomenological approach for examining lived experiences of a shared phenomenon in education, technology, or leadership. Further, using this method in these studies yielded the desired result – answering the research question with a composite description of the phenomenon's essence (Cilesiz, 2009; Blodgett-McDeavitt, 1997; Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell, 2004). The goals achieved by these researchers contributed to validating the decision to adopt a descriptive (transcendental) phenomenological approach for the present study.

The primary question guiding this study was - what are women's lived experiences serving as leaders of collegiate esports programs? Leading an esports team or an athletic program is challenging and complex, especially considering this sport's highly technical aspect with reliance on gaming computers, video, and streaming. Teaching and learning are essential components, as are recruiting, competition, collaboration, and broadcast and social media interactions. Moreover, women who are esports coaches, program coordinators, or athletic directors may be conducting a sport in which they did not compete as a player. At this point, esports players and leaders are primarily men. However, some women are serving in these roles.

Because leading esports is a complex endeavor, specific descriptions and stories can help us understand the essence of this phenomenon - what this experience looks like, feels like, and sounds like, and what that all means. Executing this study as a descriptive (transcendental) phenomenology provided rich descriptions of women's experiences as leaders of esports programs at colleges and universities. The textural and structural descriptions generated from the analysis of three in-depth interviews with seven women

who have experienced the phenomenon showed keen insight and understanding of the very essence of experiences shared by these women who serve in this role.

<u>Role of the Researcher</u>

Researchers approach studies from unique contexts and may participate in their studies in varying roles or levels of involvement. To promote trustworthiness and transparency, the researcher may discuss or disclose their role in the study, and this practice is particularly true with qualitative studies where the researcher may have more opportunities to inject their opinion or thoughts into the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Participants should know the type of involvement to expect from the researcher in the study, and readers should have this information as they embark upon reading a study. Therefore, in the following paragraphs, a Role of the Researcher section will discuss my background and role in this study.

I am a doctoral candidate studying educational technology at Boise State University. Since my research methods study began, I have been intrigued by and drawn toward qualitative studies. I enjoy stories and the stories behind the stories, often preferring them over statistical facts and figures. Since 2016, I have been employed as an instructional designer in the office of teaching and learning at another university. In my work in higher education, my previous service in K-12 education, and my educational technology study, I have had an ongoing interest in game-based learning and gamification.

Esports caught my attention several years ago as I noticed the Boise State University varsity esports program, which began in the Educational Technology

department at the University. My experience with esports includes co-presenting on esports at a local educational technology conference and organizing several LAN and virtual tournaments. I have met with campus decision-makers to share information and a vision for esports as a club sport and possibly as a future varsity program. Additionally, I am a co-sponsor of the esports club at my University. However, I am not a gamer.

Because I did not have a relationship with any participants, I shared my background information and interest in esports before conducting the interviews. My knowledge and experience with esports aided in building rapport with the participants and allowed me to understand their experiences better, as described during the interviews. Because I was familiar with esports, before interviewing, I noted and deliberately laid aside any preconceptions or assumptions about collegiate esports through bracketing (Peoples, 2021), further explained in the data collection section.

Participants and Location

The seven participants were a criterion sample - they met specific criteria. In this case, they were women who were leaders in collegiate varsity esports programs at various institutions of higher learning across the nation, serving as coaches, directors, or coordinators. Each of these women had experience with the phenomenon – of leading a collegiate varsity esports program. The recommended number of participants for phenomenological studies varies; however, typically, the number falls between "3 to 4 participants to 10 to 15" (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Sufficiency, one of the traditional data collection criteria, may be met through as few as five participants (Seidman, 2019). Peoples (2021) suggests that doctoral students interview eight to 15 participants for a phenomenological study. For this study, the minimum number of five participants came

from the low end of the ranges cited by Seidman. Eight is the approximate number of participants for the upper end of the participant range – though that remains fluid - keeping in mind the importance of manageable data management by limiting the number of participants and at the same time aiming to meet the primary goal of data saturation (Seidman, 2019; Peoples, 2021). According to Peoples (2021), data saturation is more critical in qualitative studies than adhering strictly to a projected number of participants. Seidman (2019) points out that in-depth interviews can be highly fruitful. Since there were three in-depth interviews with each participant, the extra time spent with each participant may have led to saturation with fewer participants than in studies with only one discussion per participant (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Information about this study was sent to the National Association for Collegiate Esports (NACE) organization for distribution to its members to generate an initial pool of participants. This information included an invitation to women coaches or directors of collegiate esports programs inviting them to participate in the study. Interested parties may respond to the invitation through email. In addition, invitations were emailed directly to women identified through the NACE member database or an online search that met the participant criteria. Once potential participants were identified, they received detailed information about the study via email. Because participants lived anywhere in the country, interviews were via Zoom web conferencing conducted from a studio at work.

<u>Instrumentation</u>

As for many qualitative research studies, the researcher was the main instrument for collecting data, and in-depth interviewing was the chosen method. The in-depth

interviewing consisted of three semi-structured interviews with each participant, preferably within a two-week window, per Seidman's (2019) qualitative interviewing model. Having three interview sessions – each with a particular focus - with each participant allowed ample time for the participant to think deeply about each of their experiences and provide detailed descriptions of them. Detailed reports of their experiences yielded a complete data collection, which enriched the study. Seidman's (2019) three-interview process uses the first session to focus on past experiences, a second session to focus on recent experiences, and a third session to focus on the significance or meaning of the phenomenon – in this case, a woman leading a collegiate esports program. Allowing each topic to be the focus of a session yielded more complete descriptions.

In preparation for the interviews, participants received the protocol for each interview laying out a general direction for each session (See Appendix C). Interview protocols guided discussions as each session had a specific purpose. The protocol provided general guidance for beginning and directing each conversation. The purpose of the first interview session was to become familiar with the context of the participant's experience with collegiate esports leadership. What experiences in their personal history led them to this point in their career? How did they become a leader in collegiate esports? This context set the stage for the second interview. The second interview session built upon the first one, with the participant describing their lived experiences as a collegiate esports director or coach. What is a typical day like from beginning to end? What are their memorable experiences in this position? The process allowed for seeking detailed descriptions of experiences. During the third and final interview session, participants

could describe how or why serving in collegiate esports leadership is meaningful. How is it significant? How does it matter in the context of their past or future (See Appendix C)?

In addition, the Seidman (2019) method of in-depth interviewing with three interviews per participant has the advantage of allowing time for reflection for the interviewer and the interviewee before the remaining two sessions. These follow-up sessions ensured opportunities for clarification or to probe for further detail. Using Seidman's (2019) method of three in-depth interviews over a couple of weeks aided in building rapport and provided continuity and ample time for participants to fully share their lived experiences as women in collegiate esports leadership.

Procedures

The complete research proposal was sent to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Boise State University for expedited review. After the IRB grants approval, NACE received the recruiting email to share with its members, and interested parties received contact information. Several potential participants received the recruiting email directly (See Appendix A). Participation in the study was voluntary. Potential participants received invitations to schedule the interview Zoom sessions, a consent form (Appendix B), interview protocols (Appendix C), and Zoom meeting links. Participants provided consent before the first interview began. Before the interview, there was a time of reflecting and intentionally putting previous notions aside or bracketing them to approach all data as new information.

Upon greeting, I reviewed the purpose of the study and the benefits and drawbacks of participating and shared a brief biography of my background, interest, and

experience with esports (Cilesiz, 2010). I decided to use my bio for opening the first meeting rather than overloading the participants with documents before the interview. Though the video is optimal for visual cues during a conversation, the participants chose whether to use their camera during the recorded interview. An audio recorder was available for a backup audio recording during the Zoom sessions. Zoom session recordings were via the Record to Computer option, which yields video and audio recordings. Once Zoom and the audio recorder began to record the reading of the introduction of the topic from the interview protocol, the interview proceeded.

Initially, the plan was for audio transcripts to be edited following the interview and sent to the participant for review before the next session. Each participant would have the opportunity to look it over and delete anything they would like to delete. They could also expand upon or revise their statements. Reviewing the transcripts or video and reflecting on the session would reveal items to revisit for clarification or probe more deeply in the next session.

However, editing the transcripts between interviews was impossible due to a tight interview schedule. Instead, I briefly reviewed the unedited transcript before the following discussion. Reviewing the transcripts or video and reflecting on the session brought to mind the previously discussed experiences and revealed items to revisit for clarification or to probe more deeply in the next session.

I opted to record the Zoom sessions to the computer instead of the cloud to have the recordings right away and for privacy; therefore, Zoom transcripts were unavailable.

Instead, I uploaded the audio files to the dictation tool in Microsoft Word to generate the initial transcripts. Then I edited those myself.

After the interview process, participants received all three edited audio transcripts for review. Each participant had the opportunity to review the transcripts and delete statements. They also had the chance to give feedback, expand, or revise their comments. Each participant received a gift card as a token of appreciation for participating.

Data Collection

In the tradition of descriptive (transcendental) phenomenology, epoché or bracketing by the researcher is necessary to isolate the information gleaned during interviewing to keep the participants' experiences untainted by biases or prior knowledge of the researcher (Peoples, 2021). Bracketing, in this case, included reflecting on learning and experiences with esports – taking note of those things in a reflective journal and purposely setting aside any preconceived notions and biases. If prior knowledge and experiences should return to mind, the researcher must eliminate them to give full attention to the interview as if receiving all brand-new information. Bracketing or epoché is where the "researcher puts himself in the position of becoming a stranger in a strange land" (Peoples, 2021, p. 30) as if seeing things for the very first time (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). It is vital to receive clarification from the participants about their experiences and not rely on the researcher's previous experiences or understanding of the topic.

Following Seidman's (2019) phenomenological interviewing method, I collected data through three semi-structured interviews with each participant over four weeks. Data

saturation is the main objective of data collection. It is the point of interviewing participants where they add no new data (Peoples, 2021), or the researcher is not learning anything decidedly new (Bertaux, 1981, as cited in Seidman, 2019). Fusch and Ness (2015) added that "saturation is reached when there is enough information to replicate the study" and when "further coding is not feasible" (p.1408); when there are no new themes. Several planned strategies should help bring about data saturation, similarly-structured interviews, bracketing, and probing questions (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Therefore, this study's design for data collection may advance data saturation. Consideration of data saturation continued throughout the coding process.

<u>Interview Questions</u>

The interviews were semi-structured in that each of the three interviews had a particular theme centered on lived experiences - not perceptions, not opinions – only experiences. To avoid sharing perceptions and beliefs, participants should "reconstruct the experience" or "tell a story," and the researcher should "ask for concrete details" (Seidman, 2019, p. 93-95). Participants received interview protocols listing each discussion's theme and general questions (See Appendix C). The first interview uncovered how the participant got involved in esports in the context of their personal history. How did they find themselves in this type of work? A second interview built upon this unique history served to record experiences - the day-to-day details - of what an esports leader does. Finally, a third interview delved into each participant's meaning of these experiences.

<u>Journaling</u>

In addition to the interviews, jotting notes in a reflective journal throughout the project helped me achieve two primary goals. Though not required, journaling can assist with bracketing or removing bias. Journaling also can serve as a receptacle for metacognitive reflection, which improves clarity when studying a phenomenon (Peoples, 2021). Peoples (2021) suggests incorporating some metacognitive exercises in journaling to support phenomenology. Combining data - interview recordings, transcripts, and reflections - will make for a richer collection (Peoples, 2021).

<u>Data Analysis</u>

Initially, the plan was to analyze data using Moustakas' (1994) guidelines – modified van Kaam's method (p. 120), as illustrated in Figure 2.

Data Analysis Flowchart - Modified van Kaam Method (Moustakas, 1994, p.120-121)
Listing and Preliminary Grouping
Reduction and Elimination
Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents
Final Identification of the Invariant Constituents and Themes by Application: Validation
Construct Individual Textural Description
Construct Individual Structural Description
Construct Individual Textural-Structural Description
Develop a Composite Description of the Meanings & Essences of the Experience of the Group as a Whole

Figure 2   Original Data Analysis Flow Chart

Alternatively, data analysis proceeded using Moustakas' (1994) guidelines (p. 180-181), as illustrated in Figure 3. This slight deviation in the analysis procedures is discussed further in Chapter 4. Moreover, my modifications to the step descriptions in Figure 3 may improve the clarity of the process utilized.

Data Analysis Flowchart (Moustakas, 1994, p.180-181)
Phenomenological Reduction: Listing and Elimination of Invariant Constituents
Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents
Final Identification of the Invariant Constituents and Themes by Application: Validation
Theme Condensation Through Merging and Nesting Using NVIVO
Construct Individual Textural Descriptions and Composite Textural Description
"Seek possible meanings" Through Imaginative Variation (p.97-98)
Construct Individual Structural Descriptions and Composite Structural Description
Develop a Composite Textural-Structural Description, the Meanings & Essence of the Experience

Figure 3   Modified Data Analysis Flow Chart

First, the process of phenomenological reduction that began with bracketing continues with examining each participant's experience statements or horizons. Each horizon will have an equal value from the onset (Moustakas, 1994). Invariant constituents, also known as horizons or statements, describe a portion of the experience and can be labeled (Moustakas, 1994). The comments or horizons which are insignificant – those things that are repetitious, unclear, or are perceptions or opinions, or do not apply to the phenomenon are set aside (Moustakas, 1994; Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). Next, sort significant statements according to themes as "phenomenology tends to look at data thematically to extract essences and essentials of participant meanings" (Moustakas, 1994; Miles et al., 2020, p. 21). There may be overarching themes related to the primary

focus of each interview session, such as historical context, daily experiences, and meaning. More descriptive themes may be nested within these higher-level themes or other themes added to this level during analysis. As the list of themes emerges, participants' statements are coded to the themes, essentially grouping them within the core themes (Moustakas, 1994).

At this point, taking a second look at the invariant constituents and themes and ensuring they are explicit in the complete interview transcriptions and compatible is a recommended validation process. If the statements and themes do not pass the validation test, they should be removed (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological reduction phase concludes by forming in-depth textural descriptions of the themes and horizons for each participant based on the perspective of their experiences as leaders of collegiate esports programs. Descriptions should include examples in the original phrasing from the interview transcripts (Moustakas, 1994). A synthesis of participants' individual textural descriptions yielded a composite textural description (Moustakas, 1994).

Next, the goal of imaginative variation is to "seek possible meanings" and "uncover(ing) essences" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97-98; Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). Reflect on each of the participant's descriptions of their experiences while viewing them through varying "perspectives, imagination, positions, roles, or functions" to generate a structural description for each of the participants (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97-98; Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). That is to look for the experience's underlying structure, or as Moustakas (1994) questions, "how did the experience of the phenomenon come to be what it is" (p. 98)? Moustakas (1994) suggests considering structures such as "time, space, bodily concerns,

materiality, causality, relation to self, or relation to others" concerning the phenomenon (p. 99).

First interviews with participants that focused on personal history and provided context for their current work were helpful during this process of discerning the "how" of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Writing individual structural descriptions for each participant led to the generation of a composite structural description, a slight diversion from the original plan. Instead of creating structural descriptions for each participant and then integrating them with their textural descriptions to yield seven textural-structural descriptions, integrating the structural descriptions produced a composite structural description (Moustakas, 1994, p. 181). Additional explanation concerning this deviation in methodology is in Chapter 4 (Peoples, 2021, p.76).

Data analysis concludes with a "synthesis of meanings and essences" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). The participants' meanings and essences held in common are where the overall essence of the phenomenon appears (Cilesiz, 2010). Husserl (1931, p. 43 as cited in Moustakas, 1994) describes essence as "that which is common or universal, the condition or quality without which a thing would not be what it is" (p.100). Upon completing the analysis, the result is a rich, transparent composite textural-structural description that expresses the essence of women's experience in collegiate esports leadership as the fruit of this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Using Software

In addition to using the software for coding journal articles for the literature review and data storage and organization, NVivo 12 software is perfect for coding the data for this research project during the data analysis process. Computer-Aided

Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), such as NVivo 12, does not analyze the

data for the researcher, but it does greatly help with organization, coding, annotating, and

efficiency. The NVivo 12 database organization can use a folder for each participant.

Then upload original interview files, original and amended transcriptions of each

interview, and notes from the reflective journal to the folders in the NVivo 12 database.

Tools within the software program make it easy to search data and codes and conduct

various queries. Further, the software makes it possible to design concept maps and

graphics within the program (Miles et al., 2020). The researcher may store all research

materials in one place.

<u>Validity and Reliability</u>

Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest several validation strategies to employ

throughout the project, such as asking a "valid phenomenological question" and

analyzing genuine experiences as opposed to perceptions and opinions (p. 272). In

addition, this study sits on the foundation of phenomenological philosophy. Reflexivity

and bracketing through journaling separated the researcher's position from the

participants' experiences throughout the interviewing and analysis process (Creswell &

Poth, 2018, Moustakas, 1994, Peoples, 2021). Since the interview process included three

meetings, there was a chance to build a working relationship with participants, further

validating the project (Seidman, 2019). Another key was to use questioning strategies for

phenomenological study validation and evaluation criteria (van Manen, 2014). Once

interview transcriptions were available, participants received copies of their transcriptions

to review. At this point, participants may edit the transcription as desired before data

analysis begins. Allowing participants to review and edit the transcripts was a form of

member checking, offering further validation (Cilesiz, 2010; Seidman, 2019). Using data analysis procedures outlined by Moustakas (1994) provides greater validity and reliability.

Finally, several "Big Tent" strategies lead to high-quality qualitative research. These strategies from Tracy (2010) included: ensuring the topic is "worthy of study, has rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, is a significant contribution, is ethical, and provides meaningful coherence" (p. 840).

Ethics

Consideration of the participants were at the forefront throughout the project, ensuring procedures wer followed carefully at each step. IRB approval signaled the project's beginning. The consent form and a list of the main topics for discussion for each interview were available in advance. Participants returned signed consent forms and scheduled interviews at their convenience. Before the first interview began, there was a discussion of the study's purpose, benefits, and drawbacks. Participants chose whether to record just audio or audio and video, making every effort to ensure privacy. The discussions were very fluid, allowing for follow-up and new questions based on the participants' responses. Following the interviews, uploading the files to NVivo 12 and a portable hard drive for security and backup was a vital step. Original and amended transcriptions were stored in NVivo 12 and backed up on the portable hard drive in participants' folders labeled by number for privacy within the NVivo 12 software. The next step was to schedule the remaining interviews with each participant. Finally, in the spirit of reciprocity, each participant received a token of appreciation for participating in the study.

Summary

Careful attention went into the design of this qualitative study. A phenomenological approach was the best method for answering the research question. Details involving participants, location, instrumentation, and data collection were strategic for reaching data saturation. Moustakas (1994) outlined steps for data analysis as a guide, and, at the same time, they employ several strategies to help ensure reliability and validity. These strategies include researcher reflexivity, participant member checking, and "Big Tent" strategies (Tracy, 2010). Ethically, respecting the anonymity and privacy of participants was of utmost importance as this research project proceeded according to carefully outlined procedures. Table 1 is a display that highlights pertinent aspects of the project. The actual results of the data analysis are in Chapter 4.

Table 1   **Summary Table**

Summary Table	
Research Problem	A leadership gender gap exists in collegiate esports as in other areas of higher education, academic and athletic administration, and business.
Research Question	What are the lived experiences of women serving as leaders of collegiate esports programs?
Mode of Analysis	Moustakas's (1994) guidelines for data analysis – (p. 180-181) were substituted for his modified van Kaam's method (p. 120).
	Phenomenological reduction
	Sort invariant constituents into descriptive themes by coding in NVivo
	Validate statements and themes
	Form in-depth textural descriptions for each participant
	Generate a composite textural description
	Use imaginative variation to identify the underlying structure
	Generate structural descriptions for each participant
	Generate a composite structural description
	Synthesize composite textural description and composite structural description to uncover the essence of the experience
Impact	Discover the essence of what it means to be a woman in collegiate esports leadership.
	Learn about women's experiences in a leadership role
	Hear from role models and mentors for other women.
	Gain insight into how the leadership gender gap may be tightened or closed or how stereotypes may fade.
	Learn how to navigate work in a male-dominated culture.
	Giving voice to women leaders allows us to understand the essence of their experience through themes that they have in common.
	Illuminate problems and solutions faced during career trajectory or current career.
	Learn how men and women can support women seeking to break barriers.

	Learn how men and women can support women seeking and serving leadership positions.
	Motivate and inspire others to break barriers to leadership opportunities.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

Chapter 4 addresses the data collection and the findings and links the results to the transcendental phenomenological framework. A description of the analysis processes and a discussion of validity and reliability close the chapter. This study was guided by the primary research question: What are women's lived experiences in collegiate esports leadership? To answer this question, participants shared their personal history, their lived experiences in collegiate esports leadership, and how their work is meaningful during three semi-structured interviews. Six final themes emerged through this phenomenological study's data collection and analysis processes. The construction of each participant's individual textural description followed coding and is associated with these six themes: managing tasks, managing facilities, managing people, interfacing with various groups of people, women in leadership, and the work environment.

Each participant's personal history and significance of their work contributed to the formation of their individual structural descriptions - providing a structure of how this phenomenon of being a woman in collegiate esports leadership came about. A synthesis of this data across participants yielded composite textural and structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994, p. 180-181). Finally, a textural-structural description or essence of the phenomenon became apparent. The essence of the lived experiences of a woman in collegiate esports leadership is meaningful managing with excellence using skills developed through previous life experiences.

Setting and Participant Demographics

Three separate interviews were conducted with each participant individually via web conferencing using the Zoom application from a private studio at work. Participants scheduled the sessions at their convenience and attended the sessions from their choice of location. The interviews were conducted primarily in the mornings and early afternoons over four weeks. Participants had the choice of whether or not to use their cameras during the interviews. One participant chose to keep her camera off. The Zoom application encountered a connection problem during one interview; however, it was temporary. There were no other problems with the technology, and the audio and video quality were excellent.

The participants were all women falling in the age range between 18 and 45. They varied in ethnicity, and their education ranged from some college to master's degrees. Titles held by the participants varied but included either head coach, director, or coordinator in the language. Individual descriptions of participants will not be shared to avoid the identification of the participants.

Data Collection

There were 21 interviews, three with each of the seven participants. Before each session, preconceptions were purposely noted in the reflection journal and bracketed or set aside. Participants submitted signed consent forms and reviewed the project's purpose and specifications before the first interview. The first two sessions with each participant were approximately 45 minutes in length. The third sessions were 20-30 minutes in length.

The first interview sessions centered on the personal history or historical context that prefaced the participants' experiences in collegiate esports leadership. A second interview with each participant focused on their actual experiences as leaders of collegiate esports programs. With intentionality, participants described their memories or "mental representations" of the actual experiences (Jacob, 2019) of leading a collegiate esports program. The third interview session targeted their work as leaders of collegiate esports programs and how it was meaningful to them. Collected data reached saturation with seven participants as no new themes emerged (Peoples, 2021).

The Zoom application made audio and video recordings available. In addition, an audio recorder provided backup. File storage for research items exists in two places for safe-keeping: a portable hard drive and a private password-protected personal computer. When not in use, a heat-proof lockbox houses the materials. Transcripts were generated from the audio files using Office 365 dictation and then checked and edited for accuracy. Each participant received edited transcripts for their records, providing an opportunity for further input. Thus, the first careful reading of the data concluded.

Peoples (2021) mentions that differences between the planned methodology and the methodology followed could be explained in Chapter 4 (p. 76). Following is an explanation of two departures from the planned methodology described in Chapter 3. A deviation from the original data collection plan was that participants received the transcripts at the culmination of the interviews instead of directly following each interview because of the time required to edit each transcript and the tight interview schedule. With multiple interviews per week, it was impossible to make the edits between discussions. Instead, a brief review of the previous session's transcript took place before

beginning a second or third interview session. Therefore, the last session was top of mind allowing for probing or follow-up questions and clarification if needed.

Secondly, there was a slight deviation from the planned analysis process described in Chapter 3. Chapter 3 mentioned writing seven individual textural descriptions and seven individual structural descriptions, then compiling seven textural-structural descriptions, and finally crafting a description of the essence of what it means to be a woman in collegiate esports leadership (Moustakas, 1994, p. 120-121).

However, Moustakas'(1994) outlines another approach to the essence in his analysis processes and methodology on pp. 180-181 of *Phenomenological Research Methods*. He presents multiple data integration sequences to yield the phenomenon's essence (p. 120-121, 180-191). It is similar to the approach Peoples (2021) describes with writing individual situated narratives, then a unified general narrative, and finally a general description. I diverted to Moustakas'(1994) integration sequence from p. 180-181 for efficiency.

Therefore, following the composition of seven textural descriptions and seven structural descriptions for participants, I wrote a composite textural description and a composite structural description. Next, synthesizing these two descriptions yielded a composite textural-structural description, the sought-after essence or "underlying meaning" of the experience (Adu, 2016; Moustakas, 1994, p. 180-181).

Findings

During the analysis process, posts were made in a reflection journal in NVivo to bracket preconceptions and to note emerging ideas. In a presentation on NVivo for data analysis in phenomenological studies, Dr. Philip Adu (2016) suggested collecting

significant statements in an Excel document before uploading it to NVivo for coding. That became an efficient first step in the analysis process.

In this case, significant statements have to do with participant experiences with collegiate esports leadership. Significant statements do not contain opinions or perceptions (Moustakas, 1994). Equal consideration is critical when analyzing significant statements, also known as horizons in phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). Each participant had a row with three columns on the Excel document, one designated for each interview session. The numbered significant statements from the transcripts were transferred to the appropriate Excel document section while discarding irrelevant comments, a process known as phenomenological reduction (Moustakas, 1994). Thus concluded a second, careful reading through of the transcripts. By this time, the data was becoming familiar. Once the Excel document was complete, the coding process began with uploading the data into NVivo.

When using NVivo, the researcher creates nodes or containers, labeling them for each theme. The first nodes or themes created were personal history, work duties, and work significance. These themes covered the main topics for each of the three interview sessions. Then nested within those three themes, additional topics created included probable themes such as education, gaming, and technology. I used a mixture of deductive and inductive coding (Saldana, 2016). Next, coding proceeded with assigning each horizon or significant statement to a relevant code or newly created nodes or containers, with some descriptive or topic-driven and some process-driven (Saldana, 2016).

Merging or nesting the codes, nodes, or containers into themes was part of the data condensation process. During this process, themes emerged within the three areas (three interviews) – personal history, work duties, and work significance. These themes were primarily conceptual or named processes (Saldana, 2016). The managing tasks theme is more conceptual, while parent and child codes nested within the theme tend to be more descriptive (Saldana, 2016). Pattern coding further condensed data to a manageable number of pertinent themes (Saldana, 2016). Figure 4 illustrates coding in NVivo for what became the managing tasks theme from interview two.

Figure 4   Image from Coding Process Using NVivo

The completed process yielded a final list of themes for each area. The second interviews were the main focus since they were about their actual experiences as a woman in collegiate esports leadership. This information was helpful when writing the individual and composite textural descriptions. The other two interviews with each participant served as supporting information that was helpful when writing the individual and composite structural descriptions. Finally, integrating the composite textural and structural descriptions led to the final product, a composite textural-structural description or essence of the phenomenon.

Final Themes

After coding the data and condensing the themes, seven themes arose from the first interview, which focused on personal history. The themes included extracurricular, family living, gaming, learning, overcoming, volunteering, working, and skills. For clarification, an explanation of each of the themes follows. The extracurricular theme pertains to the participants' youth activities. These include activities such as youth groups, athletic teams, other competitive teams, music, dance, and student council. Family living is a theme based on the influences of the participants' families. Were the parents supportive of gaming? What family activities were prevalent? Were gender norms expressly taught? What about interactions with siblings? The gaming theme encompasses the participants' history with gaming. It covers types of games played, gaming communities, playing with friends, and club involvement.

The learning theme focuses on the participants' formal and informal education. This theme covers early schooling through college, majors, technology, and other informal learning. Overcoming is a theme based on overcoming obstacles, whether

personal issues, male dominance, toxicity, or school or work issues. The volunteering theme captures any volunteer work experiences. Volunteer opportunities may extend to responsibilities for an activity such as athletics or perhaps volunteering with an online community or esports club. The working theme encompasses previous employment experiences. Skills pertain to skills mentioned by participants. Each of the participants shared experiences that coded to these themes. Data from these first interviews provided context for the phenomenon of women in collegiate esports leadership, which helped construct the individual and composite structural descriptions.

After coding the data and condensing the themes, six prevalent themes emerged from the second interview, which focused on their lived experiences as women in collegiate esports leadership. The themes included managing tasks, managing facilities, managing people, interfacing with people from various groups, women in leadership, and the working environment. All participants discussed experiences tied to these themes, which led to the formation of the individual and composite textural descriptions.

After coding the data and condensing the themes, five themes arose from the third interview, which focused on how the participants' work was meaningful to them. The themes included being grateful for the support, laying a foundation for future work, leading as a female role model, pride in accomplishment, and serving the greater esports community. This information was critical in generating the individual and composite structural descriptions and solidifying the composite textural-structural description or essence of the phenomenon – women in collegiate esports leadership.

<u>Final Themes Descriptions and Examples</u>

Descriptions of the themes that emerged from the second interview targeting specific work duties or experiences as women in collegiate esports leadership follow with quotes from the various participants that illustrate the overall scope of each theme.

<u>Managing Tasks</u>

Women who are leaders of collegiate esports programs' lived experiences include overseeing various managerial tasks that involve marketing, scheduling, planning, budgeting, and policies and procedures. Each of these tasks is multi-faceted. For instance, marketing includes promoting the brand, the teams, events, and tryouts. Scheduling involves scheduling competitive matches, scrims, practices, tournaments, tryouts, co-sponsored events, and meetings. Planning includes setting short-term and long-term goals for all aspects of the program and planning special events. Budgeting may be simple for a smaller program but very complex for a larger program. Formal or informal policies and procedures must be created or adopted and are vital to every facet of the program. Below are several participant quotes that show the range of the managing tasks theme.

- "Like I have to be scheduling the production and the casting if that is to be happening."

- "I am a one-woman show here. OK, so this is - so I am doing that, and that is - most of our teams here do that because our marketing is not a big department."

- "I am the person, you know, typically answering all channels of social media and phone calls, emails, making the website as well, and just making sure that we

have a plan for the campaigns that …go out."

- "I really have a hard time with esports because I do not get a schedule ahead of time. It is very all over the place where people are like, hey, we need to reschedule - like my League team is still trying to reschedule tonight, and that is absolutely driving me crazy. Like why did we not work on this four days ago? I would rather have it worked out and then move forward."

- "So, we do restructure our handbook and our guidelines and policies - pretty much we will be each semester, but that is just going to change as we grow the program."

- "Then I try to go into my budget. I try it at least once or twice a week. I am doing my number checking. I am making sure that everything is being reconciled."

- "I put everybody's practice times and competitions, and that way they have a place - a central place that they can go and see - where they can look to see if anyone is in the room or if it is being utilized because I want them to access it all the time."

Managing Facilities

Women who lead collegiate esports programs' lived experiences include managing esports facilities, ranging from a competitive space, a practice space, and maybe a casual gaming space. Some programs repurpose computer labs for their esports space. Some facilities are arenas built specifically for esports competition. Often, there is

a nearby practice space and possibly an additional space for casual gamers for which esports leaders are responsible. For smaller programs, the competitive space may be available to casual gamers when not in use.

Managing facilities includes scheduling the facilities for competition, practice, casual use, and special events. Leaders oversee the maintenance of hardware and software on the gaming computers. They may take care of it themselves, have someone from IT assist, or pay for gaming management software to take care of these needs. Leaders must maintain policies for public health, whether that has to do with spacing, sanitizing, or masks, as in 2020. They may use signed agreements, ID entry, and security cameras to control access and security. Leaders must solve any issues that arise in the facilities. Esports facilities are busy on nights and weekends, so leaders are often present.

- "…we got some flooding in our room and mold and all. It was insane."

- "Yeah, so janitorial usually comes in to …take out trash and stuff like that. I usually …vacuum the space and things like that, but they handle trash at least. And then I disinfect PCs …I also make sure all the computers are updated."

- "We can during *open hours* only, though after *open hours* we close it off to the students, so that …the student body is not pestering or bothering the players …kind of a benefit of being on the varsity team is that you do have the use of that space, and it is a privilege."

- "We have cameras set up, so if I think that anything is an issue or something

along those lines, then …I can check with campus safety, and we can figure it out. But other than that, because there is always something going on in the evening, usually a manager is there. …we cannot watch the space 24/7, but usually, people respect it, 'cause you know we are providing free stuff for people to play on …there has never been a case of theft or anything along those lines just because like there is, there is no point. There is no point to it. So, people are usually very, very respectful regarding that. We are aware it is a community space."

- "I actually made their lives a lot easier because I said I need you to get my building online. And then I will be able to manage everything else after that. So, I actually hire a company that maintains all of the machines in here. It does all the updates. So, all of that is managed by a group that's located elsewhere that remotes in every day in order to make sure that I'm at tip-top shape. If I have an issue, I send a message to them, and they fix it right away."

- "We work with IT ...they handle all the updates and things. However, we started practice, and they did not really have the updates correct, so we all had to do it ourselves.

- "Yes, so we have a door that separates it out, and so we have TVs and …couches and stuff in that room. And then people can sit down and watch on the TV while we have noise-canceling headphones and a door separating the two. And then the

varsity players will be playing in this space while the casters are casting. It is pretty close by."

Managing People

Women leaders of collegiate esports programs' lived experiences include managing students, paid and volunteer staff, and coaches involved in the program. Students may be competitive players, club members, or casual gamers. Leaders must hire staff members and coaches and, at times, let them go. Leaders rely on good communication skills to teach, train, motivate, and inspire each group of people and set expectations. They must schedule players and workers and ensure everyone is present and does their job.

Organization skills are essential, especially with large numbers of players and workers. Some players are on scholarship, and some are not. Leaders must keep up with how their students are doing academically and make decisions about eligibility. Some workers receive compensation, and some are volunteers. There may be work studies and interns. Managing such a variety of people adds to the challenge. The leader must help to settle disputes that arise between players or workers.

- "Exactly, we have a really large group of students, so right now, I have about 50 to 60 who are across our competitive teams. Probably like 50. And then we have our club, which is about 100. It is climbing …this is just the start of a new esports club on campus, but in our server, on our campus, we have just recently hit several hundred members."

- "So, I am searching for the people that I can help either elevate them in those

areas because I cannot teach them the overwhelming gameplay …that is not my job. I need them to be the game experts, but I can at least help you with the soft skills.”

- “They have never competed in a college event before, so I have to be there on their first and then to get them started because they have no idea what to expect. They do not know how to log into the game to meet with their opponent in the chat box. It is like those are things that - it is a new experience, and that is what I am there for.”

- “We have more teams of heavily dominated men, and some of the pushback that we get - we always wonder …if - would they say this to us if we were male coaches?”

- “I do take note that a lot of people do not like to be called out in meetings and stuff like that, so usually I take it up one-on-one. I am a big one-on-one kind of person.”

- “…'cause I have one player who is still struggling with herself that she does not think she is good enough, and that is hard for me 'cause that is how I felt. But I keep trying to tell her that it doesn't matter. You should still try out. We will still find a spot for you no matter what.”

- "Eventually, I would like to have more game coaches, single-game coaches. I do have two student assistants that are kind of coaching a game, so to speak, and then my captains help out too. So, there is a lot of people managing and doing stuff, but there is some stuff that I just cannot offload yet."

- "I usually get probably one or two emails a week asking if there are volunteer opportunities. We do have them, but we usually try and keep those for students first, and then if we need outside."

- "It is pretty much an ongoing interchange …we will be messaging pretty much all day long in the staff chat. We make sure that if there are questions, they are being addressed right away. If there is …a really big thing …a new change or process that needs to be implemented, we will call a meeting so that we all have everybody's attention."

Interfacing with Various People Groups

Women who are collegiate esports program leaders lived experiences include interfacing with students, faculty, staff, administration, other clubs, sponsors, teams, departments, leagues, other coaches, and mentors. Leaders rely on communication, networking, and interpersonal skills as they navigate communication among various groups. Contact may be in person or online through web conferencing or social media. Approval, funding, programming, staffing, recruiting, and success of the esports program may rely on successfully sharing their vision with these groups.

Leaders are esports advocates and may have opportunities to educate faculty members, administration, other departments, clubs, and community members about the purpose and benefits of esports on a college campus. They may collaborate on special events with other departments or clubs. They may meet with current or future donors and sponsors about additional funding. Interaction with other teams or league officials may occur during tournaments and with other coaches and directors at conferences. Leaders have mentors in and out of esports that they lean on for support and advice.

- "I do work ancillary with other clubs…so I have done some workshops with them… you know whoever happens to…want to reach out and talk esports or …lean into stuff that may work with us and their goals."

- "He and I do our thing. We connect every once in a while. We talk about things …mutual respect in the industry. In professional organizations, I have a couple of people that I like to just …shoot items to specifically."

- "We really see a shift in whatever those thoughts were, so we are constantly doing education and re-education of the different groups on campus that we think it is important to work with."

- "I do try to keep in touch with as many people as possible, the president included."

- "IT is very hands-on with us in terms of …setting things up. But, they do not really need to be with us day-to-day because we have very tech-savvy students, so

we have a good relationship with them."

- "I do a lot of the administrative …talking to people, so we have budgeting and things and talking to IT, talking to HR to hire people like the student worker, getting …paying stuff with payroll."

<u>Women in Leadership</u>

Women leaders of collegiate esports programs' lived experiences include leading by building, serving, influencing, and inspiring others locally and in the greater esports community. Some leaders are constructing their programs from the beginning, some are taking over very new programs, and some may be working with more established programs – though esports is still very new overall. Being a woman in this position – part of the 10%, can be a driver for success.

Some leaders offer consultations to schools trying to start programs. They serve on boards, are invited to participate in discussion panels, and speak on podcasts, offering their knowledge, expertise, and hard work to benefit the greater esports community. They desire to represent women well and receive recognition for their work. As they perform their work in the public eye on campus or outside their school, they inspire young women and draw them to the gaming community, making it more inviting.

- "I also think that they get a little bit more encouragement when they see someone who is a female in the leadership position… making sure there is an inviting environment."

- "A lot of the media requests that I get are to specifically talk about being a woman

in esports. Like if it is a panel, it is usually women in esports. It is never …we want you to talk on a panel because your team is really successful."

- "My LinkedIn has really exploded with people wanting to do podcasts or interviews, and it is because there are so few female directors."

- "… it is kind of one of the motivating factors of trying to prove people wrong …that women can do these jobs, and we can do it well."

- "I am always there to get started … I am the one that makes sure that people understand the expectations of this program,"

- "I was invited to sit on their …board."

- "I still use that when I …especially when I consult with other schools."

- "I started the program from scratch…and managed competitive teams, budgeting, program structure, all of the things you can think of."

- "I have to …advocate for esports and why it is important and how are we engaging the students …I am an advocate. I am an educator to make sure that people understand the importance of what we are doing."

<u>Work Environment</u>

Women who are collegiate esports program leaders' lived experiences include wearing many hats for long and unusual hours in a creative, rapidly-growing, fast-paced, and understaffed environment. Typical days are not typical. The schedule can be erratic and may include work on nights and weekends. Because the programs are snowballing, staffing may fall short and leave directors or coaches with extended hours, and additional facilities may be required.

Leaders accomplish various tasks and manage multiple groups of people and facilities, as mentioned in the abovementioned themes. They try to keep up with the creative side of esports marketing with content creation, streaming, and social media. Esports as a whole is fast-paced. Leaders must keep up with new rules, multiple leagues, and games' popularity shifts. For collegiate esports directors and head coaches, peers are mainly males in their twenties and thirties. Players are mainly males as well. Esports is so new that it is uncharted territory. There is no guidebook, so coaches and directors write it as they go.

- "Outside of her, I think the mass majority of them are all in their 20s."

- "And college esports at the time was not built out like it is today. It really was, even now - it is still a very Wild West..."

- "Our league rules for NACE change daily sometimes, and so trying to stay on top of that. …people always ask the question, where do you want to be in five years, or where do you think esports will be in five years? And you cannot equate to

that. It is where will esports be in three months? In five months, in one - even one year? You cannot tell. New leagues pop up all the time. New rules are set, and so just trying to stay on top of that is a job itself."

- "I do not know that I have …all the time, that is - I work all the time. I am trying to find a balance, so I actually have like downtime and an outside life."

- "So, like tonight, they are streaming. So technically, I do not stop working until they are done streaming."

- "Yeah, I have already asked to expand our facility because we are really busting right now, and we need more PCs to be able to offer the students adequate training that they need right now."

- "I prefer it that way because we know that esports is kind of like a little bit of a weird schedule. It is a lot of after-hours and weekend stuff, so I do not want to …take up too much of their daytime hours outside of those meetings and the assignments that they need to do in those hours."

Textural and Structural Descriptions

The next part of the modified Van Kaam's phenomenological analysis method includes creating textural and structural descriptions for each participant based on the themes (Moustakas, 1994). The textural descriptions are the "what" of the lived experiences, and the structural descriptions are the "how" of the lived experiences

(Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). In this case, the textural descriptions cover the data from the second interview with participants, where they described what they do as leaders of collegiate esports programs. The structural descriptions spring from the textural descriptions and through the process of "imaginative variation, analysis, and reflection" (Copen, 1993, p. 65 as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 135).

Imaginative variation is where the researcher looks for "underlying structures and possible meanings" behind the lived experiences, perhaps considering the context, demographics, and other factors (Adu, 2016). Moustakas (1994) asks the question, "how did the experience of the phenomenon come to be what it is" (p. 98)? In writing the structural descriptions, there was the consideration of data from the first interview with participants, where they discussed their personal history leading up to their current position, and from the third interview, where participants discussed how their work was significant to them. The information from each of these interviews clarified how their experiences came about.

A starting point for writing textural and structural descriptions for each participant was exploring different ways to view the data for the individual participants. After trying several ways to view the coding for individual participants, it turns out that NVivo's hierarchy charts worked well. The first step was to create a composite hierarchy chart, as seen below.

Figure 5 below is an image of a hierarchy chart created in NVivo that illustrates the coding for all themes coded for all participants. It paints a clear picture of the themes that emerged during the analysis.
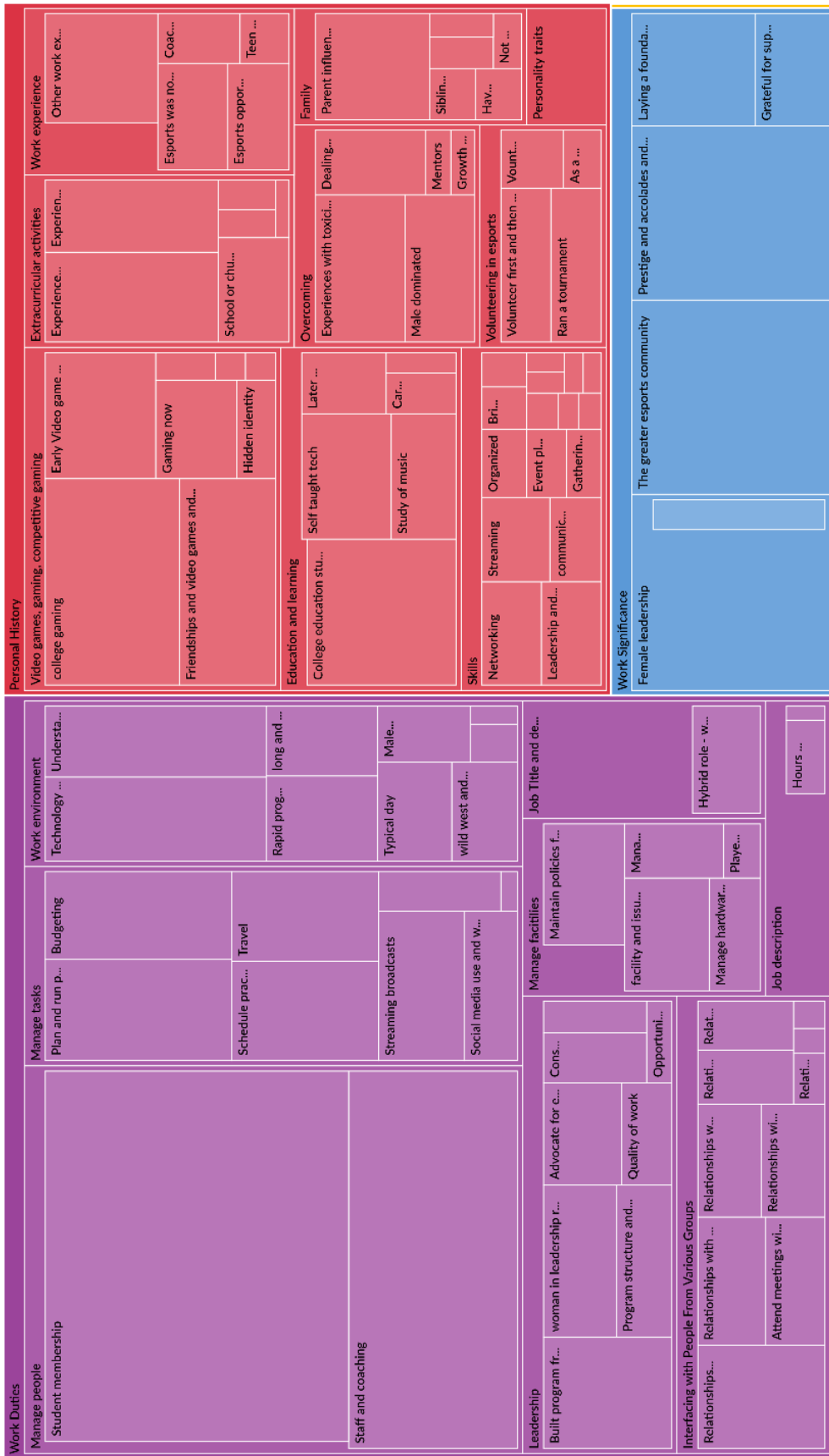
Figure 5   **Hierarchy Chart for All Participants**

the hierarchy chart feature, NVivo has a slide bar for selecting how many levels of coding

to show in the chart. On one end, it indicates the three overarching themes, as seen in red,

purple, and blue. Red represents the work duties theme, purple shows the personal history

theme, and blue depicts the work significance theme. The deeper shade of color indicates

a more significant number of statements coded to the theme.

A glance provides an excellent visual of the amount of coding for each area. Upon

moving up the slide bar from there, it is possible to view all of the levels of coding used

as they are nested in parent themes. The labels are easier to read within an image with

fewer levels showing. Likewise, with more levels of coding showing, it is more difficult

to read the titles within the image. The slider bar setting for this project was level three.

Although the labels are somewhat challenging to read in a Word document at 100%,

zooming in brings the detail into better view. While working in NVivo, the chart is

dynamic and is very helpful in exploring themes and moving between the various levels

and charts to view greater detail. It is possible to see all references or statements coded to

a theme simply by right-clicking on it and selecting View References. The theme

properties can be reviewed by right-clicking on a theme, showing a theme description. In

addition, it is simple to export a chart as an image.

Though the hierarchy chart for all participants and all themes is a great asset,

creating hierarchy charts for individual participants was invaluable when writing textural

and structural descriptions for each participant. Generating hierarchy charts for individual

participants made it possible to visualize the amount of coding coded for each

participant. As presented in the participants' hierarchy charts (Figures 5 through 11), the

orange section represents coding from the second interview about work duties for the

individual hierarchy charts. The blue area shows coding from the first interview, which focused on personal history. The gray section depicts coding from the third interview about work significance. A deeper color indicates a greater number of statements coded to the theme.

Again, the references or statements from each participant were available with a right-click on the theme. Discovering that this dynamic visual tool was available made the analysis process less daunting, and using the tool streamlined the process. Likewise, having all the significant statements for each participant organized on one page in the Excel spreadsheet was a helpful resource used repeatedly. Following are textural descriptions with each of the final themes, hierarchy charts, and structural descriptions for each participant. Each of the following participant's textural and structural descriptions may include summarizing, paraphrasing, and quotes. The textural descriptions are tied to each theme and contain some verbatim language (Peoples, 2021)."

Textural Description for P1

P1 Manages Tasks

She utilizes multiple apps to manage the program and feels she has much support. "I am preparing all of our month of October and pretty much the rest of the year's schedule for the next three months." P1 is preparing a calendar with all the teams' competitions and practices. Each day she checks email and schedules and communicates to staff. She oversees social media and websites, ensuring messaging goes out as needed. She spends time with the budget one to two times per week, ensuring everything is as it should be. She has been with the program from the ground up, helping design facilities, "managing competitive teams, budgeting, program structure, oversight, recruiting,

tryouts, and scheduling." She schedules scrimmages, plans events, and helps out with
player development. She is planning their first fundraiser at this time.

P1 Manages Facilities

She has a facility to manage. For instance, she states, " I have to train all my staff
on what to do, who is when, who is where, who does what." She is planning to expand
the facilities and anticipates an expansion in staff. She relies on gaming software
management to keep things running smoothly.

P1 Manages People

The program includes competitive teams, the club, and an even more significant
number of members on the server. The coaches are nonplayers selected through an
interview process. Others may come from the community as a volunteer. For instance, "A
lot of people think that they can coach gaming just because they are a gamer, but that is
not the way it always is. You have to be able to do interpersonal skills and deal with
conflict and all of that stuff. So, I am searching for the people that I can help either
elevate them in those areas because I cannot teach them the overwhelming gameplay…
that is not my job. I need them to be the game experts, but I can at least help you with the
soft skills."

Students know the expectations that they are committing to from the outset. There
are grade expectations because of league requirements. P1 is very proud of her players
and their academic accomplishments. They spend 15 – 20 hours per week or 3 – 4 days
and do their schoolwork outside. Most of the competitions are virtual, and the teams do
not travel at this point. She understands that the players are new to collegiate competition
and teaches them how to log into a game and connect with the other team in the chat. She

ensures that players are on time, getting into the game, and that streaming is happening as it should.

The program is developing its broadcasting team. P1 encourages students to be involved in esports in "non-player roles such as graphic design, social media, broadcast, analyst, support, health and wellness, and player development." Some training is through constant communication, and other training is hands-on. Even still, much of the learning is on the go. The workers go through training and must carry a high level of responsibility and trust, and they need to be able to make confident decisions when P1 is not present. The workers will then bring their experiences forward into their future work. She feels they have done an excellent job advocating for health and wellness. Some adjustments came about during COVID. Volunteers were not able to help out during that time.

P1 Interfaces with Various Groups of People

She has a good relationship with her supervisor, who connects with upper administration. She is also making connections with sponsors in the community. She is the esports advocate between the school and community and fields many questions from the public about esports. She expects to do more external community building as she has more help with the internal tasks.

She partners with other departments and externally with other schools to plan events. For instance, "If a department reaches out to me, I may be planning an event for them, or I am collaborating with them." She meets with new students by giving webinars or individually either virtually or in person. She attends campus meetings as she has

additional responsibilities with another department. P1 shares ideas with mentors in collegiate, professional organizations, and other gaming organizations.

<u>P1 is a Woman in Leadership</u>

She wants everything to be high quality, so she applies the knowledge from her education and former experiences to ensure that happens. She sees the importance of promoting the brand of the institution, the students, and herself with everything she does. She has not experienced much pushback, but she sees the opportunity and necessity to advocate for esports and educate students, professors, and the community on why esports is essential for engaging students and recruiting.

She is the face of the program, "So, there are things that I have to do to advocate for esports and why it is important and how are we engaging the students and showing data and numbers that are coming in the facility. How am I making an impact in our community? Am I putting out articles for the community to understand that? Why did we bring esports here." P1 establishes expectations, attends tryouts, determines rosters, sends out schedules, and works with the student coaches/managers. She is learning what works and does not, adjusting and adapting ideas from other programs. The handbook is constantly changing.

P1 has been happy to have seen quite a few female members in some capacity, and she thinks they are encouraged by having female leadership – making sure the environment is inviting. She is working on more programming for female gamers. Frequent conversations around respect and the occasional uncomfortable conversation keep the topic of doing our job well and not judging concerning sex on the forefront, and there has not been pushback.

P1's Work Environment is Similar to Other Esports Programs

Typical days are not standard – some days, nothing on the agenda may receive attention because esports have many tasks. Work goes on into the evenings and weekends and even through summer: "The summertime is when I would say it is my off-season for teams, but it is my on-season all the time because I have to recruit players to come in. I am getting ready for the next year. I am doing content programming. Yeah, there is no time off." Since she is building a foundation for the program, she has to spend time. She thinks she will not have to be there so much once things are more established.

Figure 6 is a hierarchy chart created in NVivo that illustrates the themes coded for Participant 1 (P1). The chart makes it clear that discussing P1's work duties or experiences (orange) was most informative. Personal history or context (blue) was next, and then the significance of her work (gray). Within work duties or experiences, managing people was the most heavily-weighted theme.
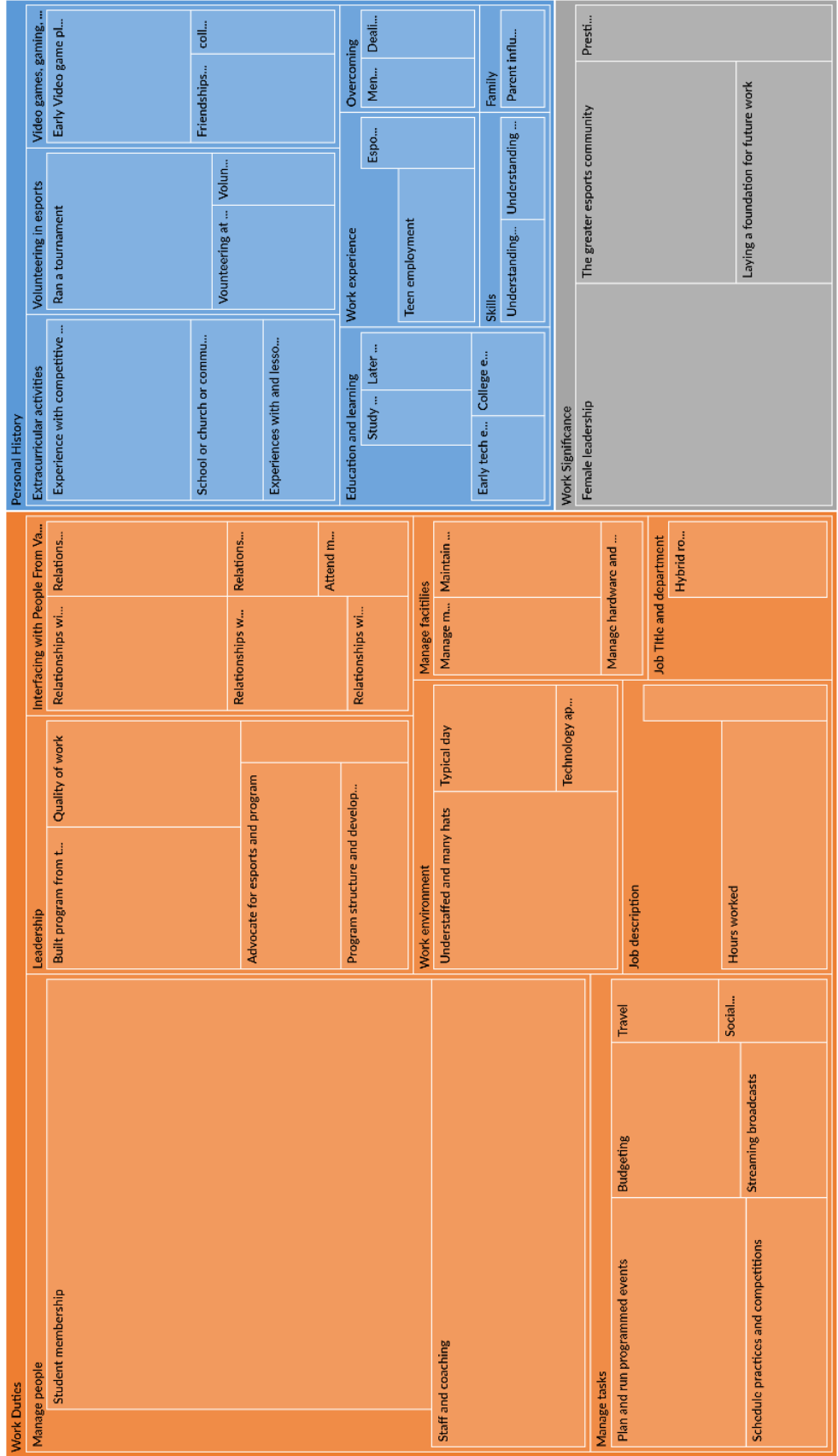
Figure 6   **Hierarchy Chart for Participant 1 (P1)**

<u>Structural Description for P1</u>

P1's personal history provided a foundation that supports her work as a collegiate esports leader. Her involvement and experience with athletics show in her approach to administrating the program at her university. Through athletics and personal experience, P1 understands how to overcome adversity. Her management skills stemmed from early observances of family and community life and were honed through her studies and work experience and are noticeable in how she conducts the esports program she leads.

She has always enjoyed video games but got to know esports as a volunteer in college. She has a strong work ethic and is no stranger to long hours. In addition to being a student and an athlete, she made time to work too. She recognizes that leading an esports program is similar to being an entrepreneur - investing time in building a successful venture is necessary. In looking at what she finds significant about her work, she requires excellence for the program she leads now and for laying a foundation for her future and future work. She sees that as a leader, she has the opportunity to inspire younger females to follow her lead and not let obstacles hinder their progress. She sees that she has a chance to impact her program and the esports community.

<u>Textural Description for P2</u>

<u>P2 Manages Tasks</u>

She relies on her calendar for herself and as a program director and specifically likes how it syncs to her devices. "That is probably the biggest tool I would say that is needed just day-to-day, 'cause it is not just our matches or practices, but it is also all of our student meetings, all of our staff meetings, media appearances, internal meetings …without that, I am lost."

P2 Manages Facilities

For instance, "Then our student lead who takes care of a lot of operation stuff on the ground. I mean, she does a lot of everything," including helping oversee the arena with other student staff and coaching staff.

P2 Manages People

The coaching staff and student staff make up the leadership of the program. Some help run broadcasts and help with study halls. They have student-run broadcasts – a great learning experience in an encouraging environment for the students. P2 seeks out feedback from the students to make improvements. Commentators, observers, producers, and community managers help run community events. "Then it is captains and team captains and team managers who are still technically student-athletes, but they take on more of a leadership role on their teams."

P2 Interfaces with Various Groups of People

She is involved in meetings with interns, staff meetings, broadcast team, and content team, with assistant coaches and her supervisor. "Very often, we will get reached out to by businesses trying to sell us something or to involve us in something. And you know, if it is just something that does not align with our goals or if it ends up creating more work for us, I will generally make the decision of like, no, we are just not going to do that at this time."

P2 is a Woman in Leadership

She leads many meetings, but she also tries to include students as much as possible and encourages them to try new things and keep learning instead of staying with the same type of task all the time. For significant decisions, she relies on assistants as

needed. They feel free to express their opinions; final choices often come from these group discussions. These discussions help them see things from various angles. The leadership team makes decisions that make good business sense. She can make difficult decisions when it is for the program's good. "Not just me, but at the end of the day, it is like I still have to be the face of these decisions, and that can be tough. Not just as a woman in esports, but for anyone in this kind of position."

As one of few women in this position, she receives invitations to speak on panels about esports. The invitation is often about being a woman in esports rather than her program or success. She would hope it is because she does her job well. It drives her to push even harder for success.

P2's Work Environment is Similar to Other Esports Programs

For instance, "This is uncharted territory. I mean not just for women, but for anyone in this kind of varsity esports director role. I mean, there is no playbook on this. You write the playbook, and you hope you do it right." She uses Discord for a lot of their work and with staff and students. Tweetdeck is another vital application, as is the campus suite of software. Project management and social media apps are helpful.

Figure 7 is a hierarchy chart created in NVivo that illustrates the themes coded for Participant 2 (P2). The chart indicates that the P2 offered more significant statements relating to personal history than to work duties (experiences) and work significance. Within her account, overcoming was the most powerful theme, and within the work duties topic, managing people was the most prevalent theme.

Personal History

Overcoming

Experiences with toxicity in ... | Male dominated

Growth mindset - a ... | Dealing with challeng...

Skills

Gathering feedback | communicat...

Networking | Bringing pe...

Leadership and busin... | Ability to o...

Delegate responsibiliti...

Work experience

Esports opportunities outside...

Esports was not my plan and ...

Video games, gaming, competitive gaming

Friendships and video games and espor... | Early Video game ...

Extracurricular activities

Experience with competitiv... | Experiences with...

Family

Parent...

Volunteering in esports

Vounteering at conventions and ev... | Ran a tournament

Education and learning

Later tech education | College education stu...

Family...

Work Duties

Manage people

Staff and coaching | Studen...

Leadership

woman in leadership respr...

Quality o... | Program... | Growth ...

Consulting wit... | Built program ...

Mana...

Stre...

Bud...

Work environment

Technology applications and tools

wild we... | Male d...

Work Significance

Female leadership

Camraderie because of shared experie...

The greater espor... | Prestige and accol...
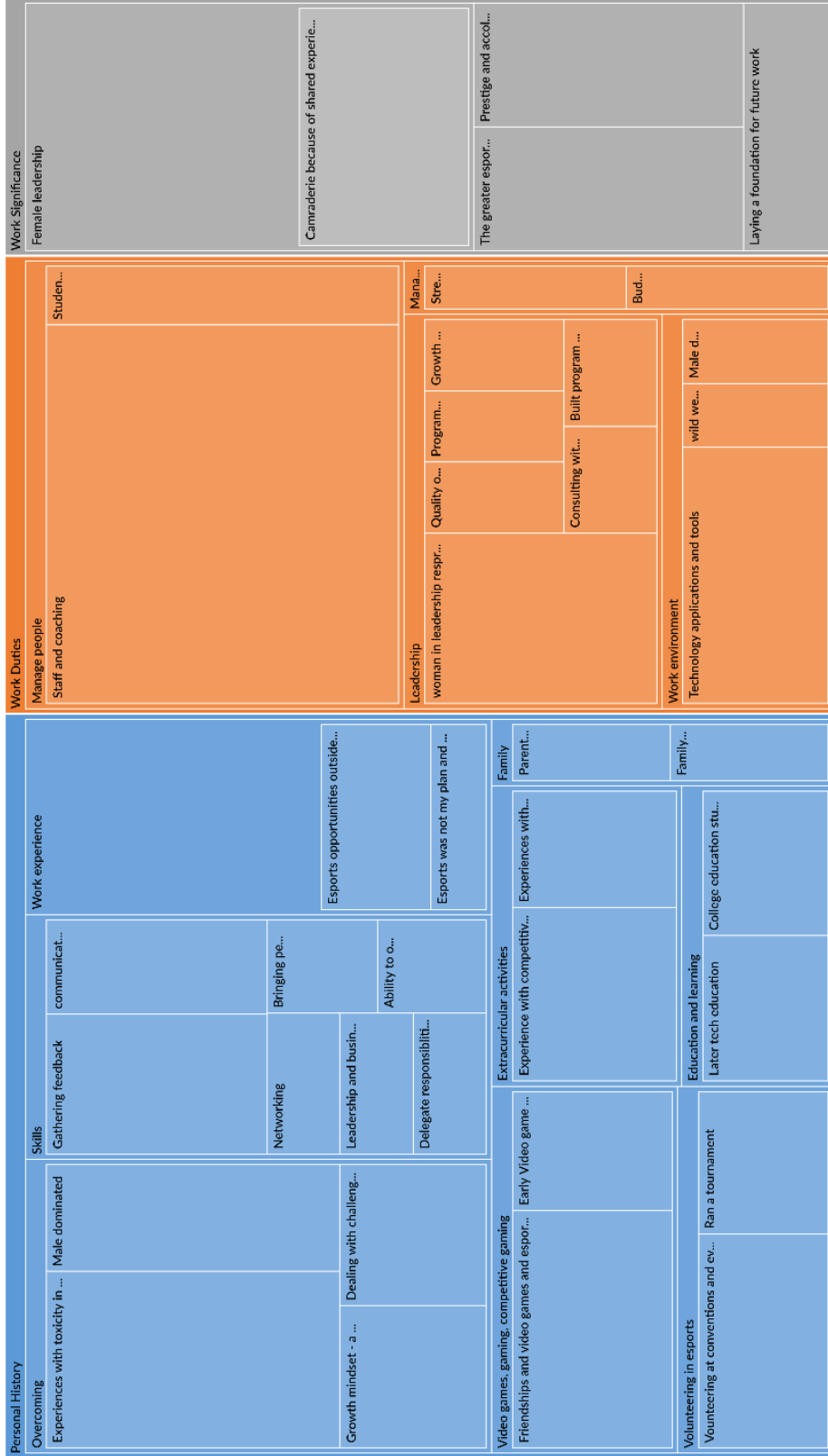
Laying a foundation for future work

Figure 7   **Hierarchy Chart for Participant 2 (P2)**

Structural Description for P2

P2's interest in stories of athletes and "unexpected ways of winning - outliers or oddities" in sports and her collegiate studies have provided a natural foundation for her work in esports. Her customer service experience and marketing interest have helped her "to be a better leader." P2 values complete and efficient information – particularly on websites. As a result, she takes time and effort to provide details and communicate clearly. The intersection of communication and technology fascinates her.

She "played online games with online communities" as she grew up, and her family played games, though knowledge of competitive gaming did not come until college. She learned some competitive strategies by participating in a couple of extracurricular activities and learned valuable lessons while observing her siblings' activities. She enjoys planning and marketing esports events and values "bringing people together." She has had to learn how everything works for LANs, though networking with people can be uncomfortable. She developed other skills such as delegation, problem-solving, and gathering feedback. These skills have been helpful as an esports club member and volunteer and work experiences along the way to her current role as a leader in collegiate esports.

She has experienced adversity in her family life, esports club life, and work. With that, she has learned to be an overcomer. Her experience being a woman in a male-dominated club and industry gave her opportunities for overcoming. Women were about 10% of her club, and none participated in competitive teams. She still remembers someone critiquing her work and uses that as motivation to be deliberative and put in the extra effort.

Other women she knows or meets have had the same experiences, which keeps her pushing to excel. She finds it meaningful to be one of few women in this position. That has kept her in esports as she sees that she can be influential and hopes more women enter the role. Moreover, there is a level of prestige as well. P2 receives invitations to speak – though she is proud to represent women, she would prefer recognition for her work.

She has a strong sense of social justice and a history of standing up for what is right and making sure gaming is accessible and friendly to all – at collegiate and scholastic levels. She sees herself and others like her as outliers and does not shy away from discussing complex topics. She is not all talk, though – and prefers to do something to make a difference.

<u>Textural Description for P3</u>

<u>P3 Manages Tasks</u>

She sets up competitions and works to advance the program. Games are rescheduled in esports frequently. As that is unsettling, P3's program attempts to avoid it. She receives progress reports periodically. Some instructors do not support athletics and do not complete their progress reports correctly. Students are supposed to attend a required number of hours of academic support per week, depending on their situation. It is difficult to compete with programs with more to offer, so she is trying to get an early start on recruiting this year and expects better results.

They began with streaming only some titles. P3 is negotiating better streaming support and is recruiting volunteers. She has not taken on the role personally because she might be unable to stop. Budget responsibilities will increase as the program becomes

more established. She is figuring out transportation for several trips. As staff comes on board, she is "learning how to delegate… it's hard to be super type A and be like here, do it. So, I think that that's a struggle for my own self to learn" so slowly, she will pass on the social media responsibility with some oversight and try not to micromanage.

P3 Manages Facilities

For example, no one was cleaning the space, so she put in a request for that. Team leaders must adapt quickly to keep up with updates: "I pretty much have an esports room, and so then I put everybody's practice times and competitions… they can look at to see if anyone is in the room or if it is being utilized because I want them to access it all the time." She has set guidelines on which teams can practice and when. Sometimes teams practice off-campus due to limited space.

P3 Manages People

She uses a Discord for communication with staff. It would be challenging to know every game deeply, so she depends on captains and student assistants to help with coaching. One staff member heads up the streaming effort – executing from P3's suggestions, and he coaches one of the teams. In addition to adding staff, she has had to let staff members go if they were not doing what was needed. She does not want to overwork volunteers. Sometimes subs help out with the stream: "I tried to sub in some of the lesser ranked teams to see how it would work, and we lost the game, and I am pretty sure that is because I subbed in somebody and was trying to be nice and be different than traditional sports because I participated in traditional sports, so I know what it is like to, you know, be not the best on the team and be good, be a hard worker, so I wanted to try to avoid that."

P3 is known to communicate well, but some students have trouble keeping up with communication. Some students have adapted well, and others not so much as it can be difficult adjusting from playing for fun to being accountable team members. She is thinking of narrowing her field. Some players may move into support roles as competition for positions stiffen. She encourages players to compete, enjoy it, and look for ways to get better - focusing on a couple of things simultaneously. Skill improvement is a priority right now. She encourages healthy habits such as proper sleep, hydration, and staying active. She loves that the students have their gear and are proud to wear it. It makes others want to join the team. "People want to be them." She is excited that students can play for their school, doing something fun and unique.

<u>P3 Interfaces with Various Groups of People</u>

Working through HR to get help takes some patience. They work with IT for updates but do things themselves sometimes because it saves time. P3 has talked with a local organization about sponsorship, and she occasionally gets email offers. She prefers meeting with people rather than through web conferencing for a "better exchange of energy…body language." P3 visits local school teams as it fits her schedule. The program started with current students, but she also seeks outside students. P3 has connected on campus and has the support of most people. She offers to educate those who seem unsupportive. P3 has male and younger mentors in collegiate esports. She has also developed camaraderie with other female esports leaders to run things by. They share similar experiences with male-dominated teams and may have experienced occasional pushback.

P3 is a Woman in Leadership

She started the program and understood building from the ground up and achieving. She describes her work as more of a director role than actual coaching and actively looks for better strategies and ways to improve. She teaches students how to be successful while dealing with a frantic schedule as an esports player. She advocates for off-campus students. She has not experienced toxic behavior in collegiate esports leadership and mentions a group of men in esports leadership who want the best for esports and want to help women. She is frustrated when men try to speak for women's experiences and with being only included in the quota. "I think it is cool to be able… to speak on these panels and represent women so they can see that they are not alone and other people are doing it." Problems remain, so they have to keep discussing these issues. She may be a role model and an encourager for young women she never meets. That makes it worth repeating. She feels that her speaking performance is improving and that offers will continue to come since she relates well with people.

P3's Work Environment is Similar to Other Esports Programs

She desires to establish a strong program and is pleased to see extensive growth quickly. She stays organized using Discord, Google suite, and several other applications. Though P3 works long hours, she is looking for balance. Practice times, competitions, and streaming are situated around class times and may go late. She describes esports as a "rocket ship taking off" and that everyone is "kind of like gold rushing to it." Even the games themselves change quickly. The busyness of esports keeps her from additional departmental duties.

Figure 8 is a hierarchy chart created in NVivo that illustrates the themes coded for Participant 3 (P3). According to the chart below, P3's interviews offered more significant statements about her work duties or experiences as a woman in collegiate esports leadership than the number of comments regarding her personal history or work significance. The managing people theme was most prevalent within the topic of work duties.
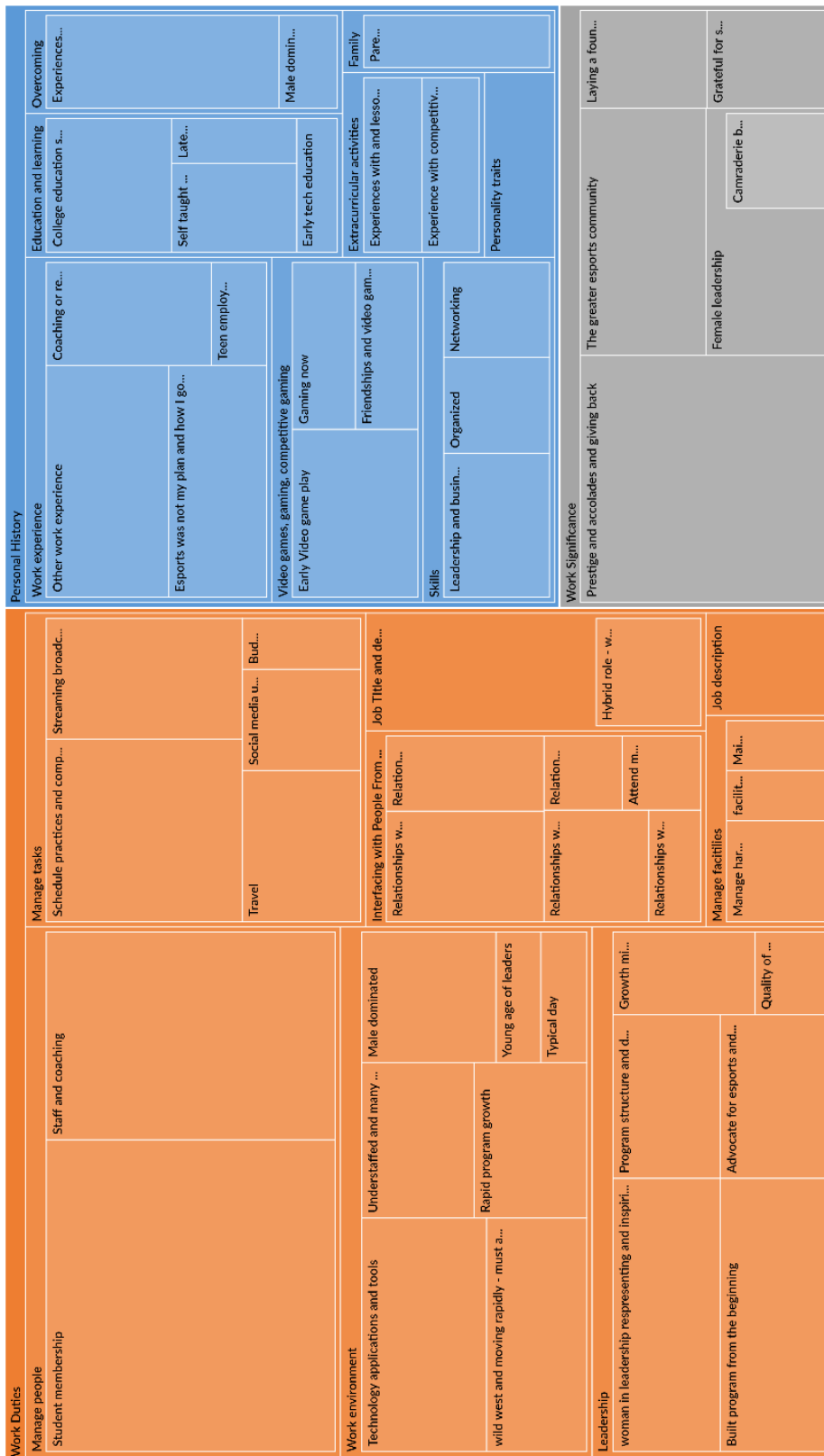
Figure 8   **Hierarchy Chart for Participant 3 (P3)**

Structural description for P3

P3 is highly competitive and came to collegiate esports leadership with a background in athletics and related work. She brings lessons from her coaches that she hopes to implement over time. P3 has a unique perspective because of her experience in a growing sports program and experiencing the support that comes with success. She also spent several years working in a high-stress environment, has perfected the art of interacting well with people, and understands the power of networking "past the surface level." She likes to be organized and enjoys being proactive.

Her family supported video gameplay, and she started when she was young. Since then, she has always enjoyed gaming in her downtime, though she preferred to keep that to herself or her gaming friends until recently. She is glad that gaming is more accepted these days. She built her computer and taught herself minimal coding, but she has always been someone to go to for tech help. She knows how to interact and communicate with people and uses this skill to her advantage. She has experienced toxicity (usually from men) in gaming but points out that it is generally not personal. She does not shy away or back down in those situations, whether the words are hostile, sexual, or dismissive. She is a competitor and enjoys proving she can be better than men.

She loves coaching and is grateful to have the opportunity to coach at the collegiate level and to have a chance to inspire players, as she experienced. She is an overcomer and points out that one does not have to let one's situation "dictate who you are." She finds significance in being in the 10%, being an example for young women, and doing her best "to do things perfectly." She enjoys sitting on panels and letting other

women see that they have friends in the field and that others have experienced the same things.

She is proud of the success of her program and finds the support of the administration refreshing and gratifying. She thinks that she has more support than coaches at other schools and appreciates that. She is excited that esports is considered a sport and hopes to continue with the program's success and may pursue further education when the time is right. She is grateful to have this opportunity and never guessed that this work is what she would be doing. She feels that her experience in athletics gave her this opportunity in esports.

Textural Description for P4

P4 Manages Tasks

She oversees tryouts, arranges the teams, and appoints captains who primarily lead the teams. Players mostly come by word of mouth, but P4 hopes to recruit more as scholarships are available. She receives academic alerts for the players and then meets with at-risk students to discuss the situation. They keep the space in order. Travel is minimal.

The program is not expensive, and they can usually accommodate needs. "We are planning to do some fundraising with our Smash events… running a campus LAN… we are in the ideating stage for that right now." League membership is the most considerable expense for the program. Students receive their first jersey free. P4 occasionally buys social media advertising, snacks, or dinner after an event.

Teams come from the interests of current or incoming students. They do an online tryout during summer and another tryout and interview on campus. The prospective

player plays with the team or perhaps with others trying out. Several players observe with P4. She can usually tell if the player will be a good fit. Attitudes make a difference, and achievement goes along with that. They can go from good to outstanding in play and in leadership too.

P4 Manages Facilities

Some planning and purchasing happened before P4 came on board, but she was involved with some planning and design work. The beginning of the year is busy with "getting rooms set up… we got some flooding in our room and mold and all. It was insane!" They have converted lab spaces - one for PCs and one for more of a lounge with Switch consoles. It is also from where they stream. She divided the PCs between the two rooms during COVID, but things are returning to normal.

P4 Manages People

They meet weekly to check-in and discuss the week's assignments. Both P4 and the staff prefer to keep meetings to a minimum since esports has an unusual schedule with evenings and weekends. They often discuss things like rescheduling a match or picking up loaner items. She has noticed some burnout caused by the pandemic – with players and others struggling to manage things more than before.

Captains see that teams are prepared and present for the games. They check in, play, and some even stream. "Work studies do stuff outside of the team like manage… running errands, or they will help people do things like keep the lounge room open for guests. They manage social media. They create graphics, they… do a lot of stuff that I cannot do… with the hours in the day." Volunteer numbers are up this year. They are trying to build a pool of streamers and bring on a staff writer. Streaming has been a little

sporadic since graduating several streamers. They have some new ones, and others are learning, but others would be helpful to bring on board. These skills add value to a resume, so P4 tries to make it as official for her volunteers as she can for them.

Students spend at least five-eight hours per week between games, scrims, practice, and meetings. "It is driving me nuts to just find another day for that, so like I have made the compromise this season to before they play their games have everybody in the same room or Discord channel, and we meet… so that has worked out well this year." P4 recently offloaded the social media responsibilities as she needs to put her energies elsewhere but oversees it while they learn.

P4 Interfaces with Various Groups of People

The upper administration and donors support esports; some companies have partnered for coaching and gear. Others are curious and ask lots of questions. P4 has not experienced any "negative feedback about it, " except perhaps about scholarships. P4 consults with those whose job it is to find sponsors. IT set everything up, and some IT work studies help with the day-to-day tech issues.

P4 appreciates her supervisor/mentor's leadership approach and notes that an element of trust is necessary when administrators may not be knowledgeable in esports. As changes occur, leaders must build new relationships. She attends department meetings bi-monthly. P4 works with captains to set up schedules, then they keep things going and execute the plan. "I do a lot of the administrative-like talking to people, so we have budgeting and things and talking to IT, talking to HR to hire people like the student worker, getting - you know paying stuff with payroll." She also interfaces with tournament and league officials and supplemental coaches.

P4 is a Woman in Leadership

This leadership role encourages female students, showing them that "esports is not just a boys' sport." She leads meetings weekly. "It is a little bit of a misnomer across the field; many coaches get put into the title when they are not coaching. They are directing." Coordinating seems more appropriate when considering the duties performed – managing people and resources and interfacing with campus personnel. Many players have above-average health regimens, but some students cannot add one more thing.

P4's Work Environment is Similar to Other Esports Programs

P4 serves in two roles at the University. P4 uses Discord, prefers Google apps, and uses Outlook calendar. "Obviously, we use Twitch. We use Streamlabs with Twitch in order to make that a better experience through OBS." They also use Photoshop, Illustrator, and Premiere for video editing. Individual teams decide on their app use. At times there are 12-hour days. Evenings and some weekends are for events with students. P4 must be there some nights, and the captains can run things on other nights. Summers are for "preparing for the season." In addition to the competitive teams, she does joint programming with other groups and clubs on campus.

Figure 9 is a hierarchy chart created in NVivo that illustrates the themes coded for Participant 4 (P4). The chart indicates that for P4, managing people was the most prevalent work duties theme, followed by the work environment and interfacing with people from various groups themes. The greater esports community was a frequent theme in work significance discussion.
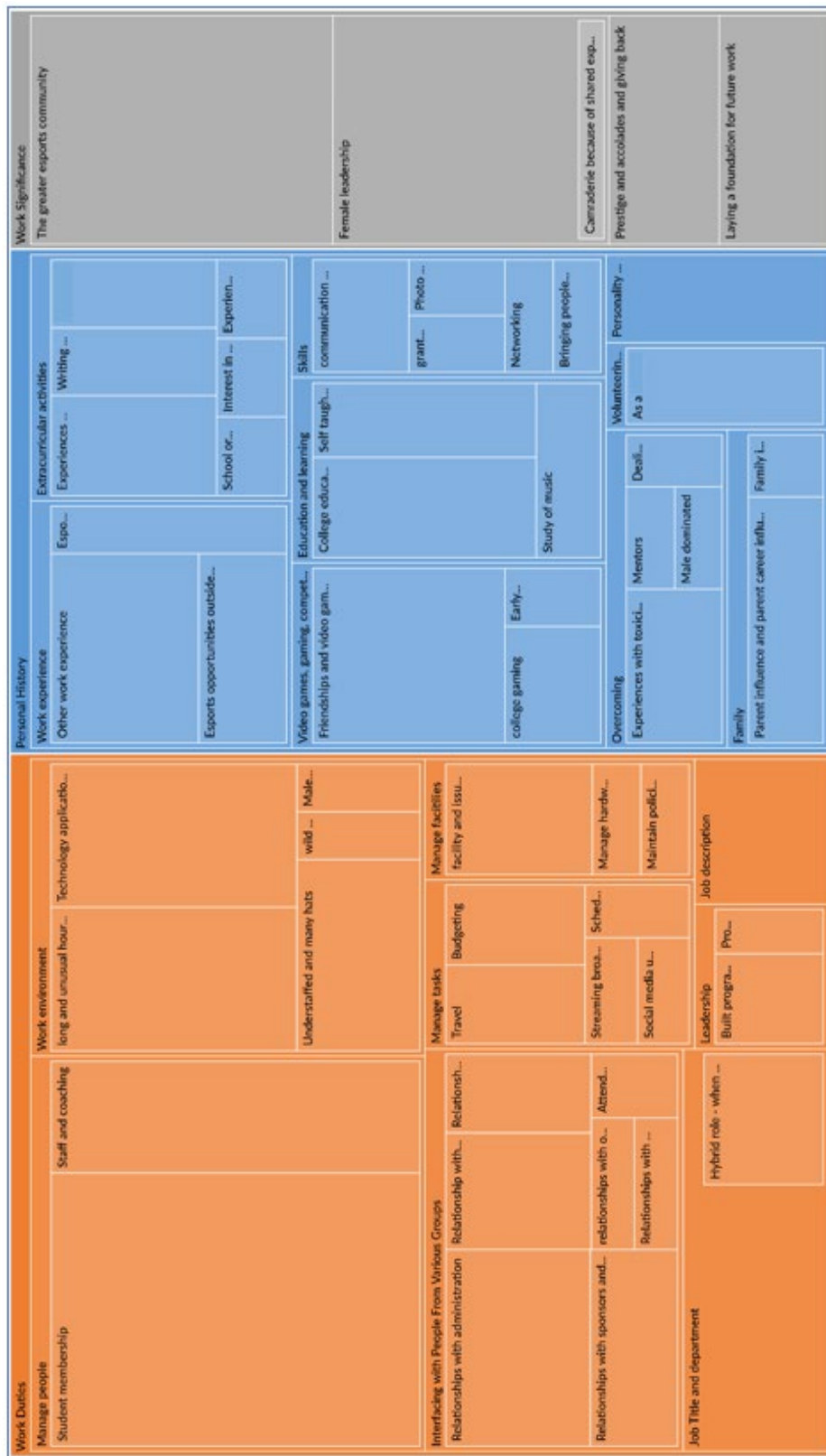
Figure 9   Hierarchy Chart for Participant 4 (P4)

Description for P4

P4 remembers the sense of caring displayed by her athletic and music activities leaders. Though P4 has been a PC gamer all of her life and played fighting games with friends on arcade consoles, she does not claim to be highly competitive. Later, she was more involved with competitive PC games. Her family was supportive of gameplay. She appreciates the relationships built through gaming and notes that it was usually more men involved than women.

In addition to gaming, she was involved in other personal and community activities. She gained some technical skills such as photo and video editing, coding, and web design that have been instrumental in her work as a leader in esports. P4 has worked in the field for some time. She has a background of varied experiences through her full-time employment and related free-lance projects that she brings to her current role as a leader in collegiate esports.

Experiences at home and abroad give her perspective of the esports world at large, and she has had the opportunity to work with college students during much of her work life. Her education and interest in related projects also contribute heavily to her coach or program leader skillset. She has had challenges to overcome concerning her career and has done so. She has experienced toxicity in esports and feels strongly about helping women feel supported and safe. Even though women may be one of ten in the room, she is starting to see changes in attitudes for the better.

She enjoys people, but not necessarily promotion through social media. She is busy and does what she can, but being experienced in esports, she is realistic about time constraints. She is proud of the accolades she has received for her work and opportunities

to serve on panels. She has mentors that inspire her and have been helpful all along. She has a strong work ethic and believes in a job well done.

She sees it is significant to represent women in esports well, especially since few women are in similar positions. She hopes it will be the norm one day and is doing what she can to make it happen, including making it a safe place in the esports community or recruiting for teams on campus. She is proud of being able to serve in this way and loves it despite being challenging.

Textural Description for P5

P5 Manages Tasks

She keeps the program running by taking care of all administrative tasks. The leagues determine the schedule and set up matches. At times, there are weekend tournaments too. Anyone can request to reschedule, which poses a problem sometimes. They try to adhere to their Twitch broadcasting plans by avoiding rescheduling requests. Other tasks include checking match readiness and ensuring all players remain in good standing. If anything is slipping, she meets with the student, explains possible consequences, and looks for ways that they can help the student achieve their goals. She checks students' eligibility as it differs from other programs and keeps up with progress. Handbook changes occur regularly, and students must sign them as they join the program.

In the evening, she prepares for the broadcast and keeps an eye on the chat. Spectating and producing the broadcast has now been offloaded to someone else. She is present to assist if any issues arise during the evening matches. With streaming, "each game is different." With Rocket League, it is mainly automatic, but with League of

Legends, there are some differences between playing and spectating modes. The streamer may have to make selections throughout the game with other games. Because of COVID, not much travel has taken place. Almost everything is online, which saves on the budget too.

She will advertise recruiting and host tryouts before the end of the semester (Fall 2021). P5 announces tryouts to the gaming community and on social media before the season, and she utilizes several recruiting platforms in her quest for new players. Students are a little anxious about tryouts before the spring semester as rosters may change due to transfers or other students joining the program. It is similar in the summer, although they also put on open houses for those curious about the program and the university. These have netted new players in the past.

She manages a budget for the program, which is new for her, but she likes to get approval for large purchases from her supervisor. She handled social media initially, but with the growth and additional hires, someone else is taking care of it. She is still involved somewhat with scheduling and content by attending frequent meetings. Scheduling practices and for matches "is complicated if you do not have enough PCs." She tries to make sure everyone has the time that they need. They have some hours available to all students and other hours blocked off for competition and practices – one of the perks of being a competitor. They have had a few fundraising ventures, but not too much.

P5 Manages Facilities

After discussing detailed plans, a smaller board approved funding and provided facilities. There is a space where players can watch videos for up to two hours per week.

They also have a training space that any student may reserve when not in use by the teams. There is a streaming room nearby. Currently, fans must view team play through Twitch; however, there are plans for a stage and a viewing room. She would like to make some changes in the design of their training space, which may happen during an expansion. The janitorial service takes care of servicing the area. The room is not easy to find and must be a destination.

P5 Manages People

Many students tried out, and the program had a strong start. Twenty hours per week is the maximum time players can put in for practice, VOD, and matches. Two practices and one VOD are required each week. They also acquire some coaching from outside sources and some student coaches. They like to involve students in social media, coaching, content, and broadcasting as much as possible. They also have some internship opportunities and volunteers. In addition to the varsity program, there is a general gaming community and clubs.

The priority is for students to graduate, so they limit practice and play. They also track progress and have helpful resources if needed. P5 tries to instill in players and staff the importance of a positive culture. She described an instance where the shout casters were kind and supportive, even facing a loss. It was an example that toxic behavior is unnecessary and has a negative reward. She makes a strong point when screening shoutcasters and gives reminders when needed. People in the program know that respect is a priority here.

She relies on an assistant coach and can leave things with them when needed. P5 tries to keep things balanced between the teams, and due to the rapid growth, she is still

getting acquainted with some players. Some she knows better than others due to the time those teams spend in the lab. She is proud of all the teams; her goal is to provide them with resources and opportunities.

Currently (Spring 2022), three are coaching, plus a student volunteer, so "everyone is covered." There are several female participants; however, the number is small. She plans to focus more on that demographic in the future. The women in the program play on different teams. Leagues handle scheduling those matches, and both teams must agree on rescheduling. Captains usually set up the games. If possible, they have scrims during practices. If not, they do "solo queuing or just do ranked matches." For their scrims, they try to use teams from the leagues or collegiate teams so that the standards remain constant for their activities. P5 receives requests to volunteer regularly; however, she tries to keep those opportunities for students if possible. They may use some outside shoutcasters. She feels they may have pushed one team too fast to be an official team during the time of rapid growth.

She wonders if she were to make a mistake if people would think it was because she was a woman or some other reason. Sometimes a thought comes that "maybe a male could have done this better" or "a player might feel more comfortable talking to a male instead of me." There has only been one issue where someone questioned her being in this position. She has gotten past it but did not enjoy criticism from people that did not know her qualifications.

P5 Interfaces with Various Groups of People

They work well with IT, but they have people who are the first-line troubleshooters in the program. They are trying to attract some sponsorships, so she

attends meetings with sponsors. She felt welcomed into the leagues, and people wanted to know how it was going for her. She has a connection at the professional level that has been someone helpful to consult with to bounce ideas off. "And it is nice to be able to talk to them and collaborate with them because they are professional teams … he has that career professional advice that if I need someone to go to, I can, but so he is not just a friend or a business partner, he is someone that I can actually talk to."

<u>P5 is a Woman in Leadership</u>

Her role is more of a director position than coaching the teams. P5 was part of early discussions about esports at the school and how a move from club to varsity should commence. "Administration has been supportive," and people were generally supportive of the endeavor, though several have questioned certain shooter games. P5 and her staff responded to these questions by saying that the environment is safe and the activity is "constructive, entertaining, and good for students."

P5 does not feel that players are too concerned about whether she is male or female, but she is getting a good amount of media attention because there are few women in collegiate esports leadership. People want to get the story and learn of her successes and struggles. She enjoys the notoriety of being a female in collegiate esports leadership and is receiving more invitations through social media. She is unsure if it is because she is a woman or a leader in esports. She points out that men may not remember that women face difficulty playing when they are "constantly berated and traumatized." As a result, when she receives congratulations for getting this position, it can cause some good and some bad feelings. She says that being a female is not an issue in the leagues and hopes that continues. She stays current professionally through virtual conferences every week

because everything changes quickly. She does some consulting with other schools –

aiding or advising. She has been helping some high school students trying to start

programs.

Moreover, it is not easy to manage with a part-time director. She points out that

many do it as a side job or have other duties and directorship. She has additional

responsibilities too, but currently, the focus is on esports.

<u>P5's Work Environment is Similar to Other Esports Programs</u>

The growth has been rapid, and requests have been made for expansion to meet

the students' needs. Some students have to practice at home or elsewhere due to

overcrowding. They are exploring their options. She speculates that her hours are around

60 per week. She tries to keep mornings for herself; after that, the workdays go into the

evening hours. She tries to be available if needed for weekends, and some weekends are

busier than others, depending on if there are tournaments.

League rules change frequently, and new leagues form. She says new varsity

programs are overwhelmed with interest, questions, and growth. They have even won

several awards. She notes some "struggles and growing pains," but with the extra help,

they can offer a complete program to students.

Figure 10 is a hierarchy chart created in NVivo that illustrates the themes coded

for Participant 5 (P5). The chart indicates that the themes of managing people and

managing tasks were frequent during the work duties or experiences discussion. The

education and gaming themes were most prevalent during the discussion of personal
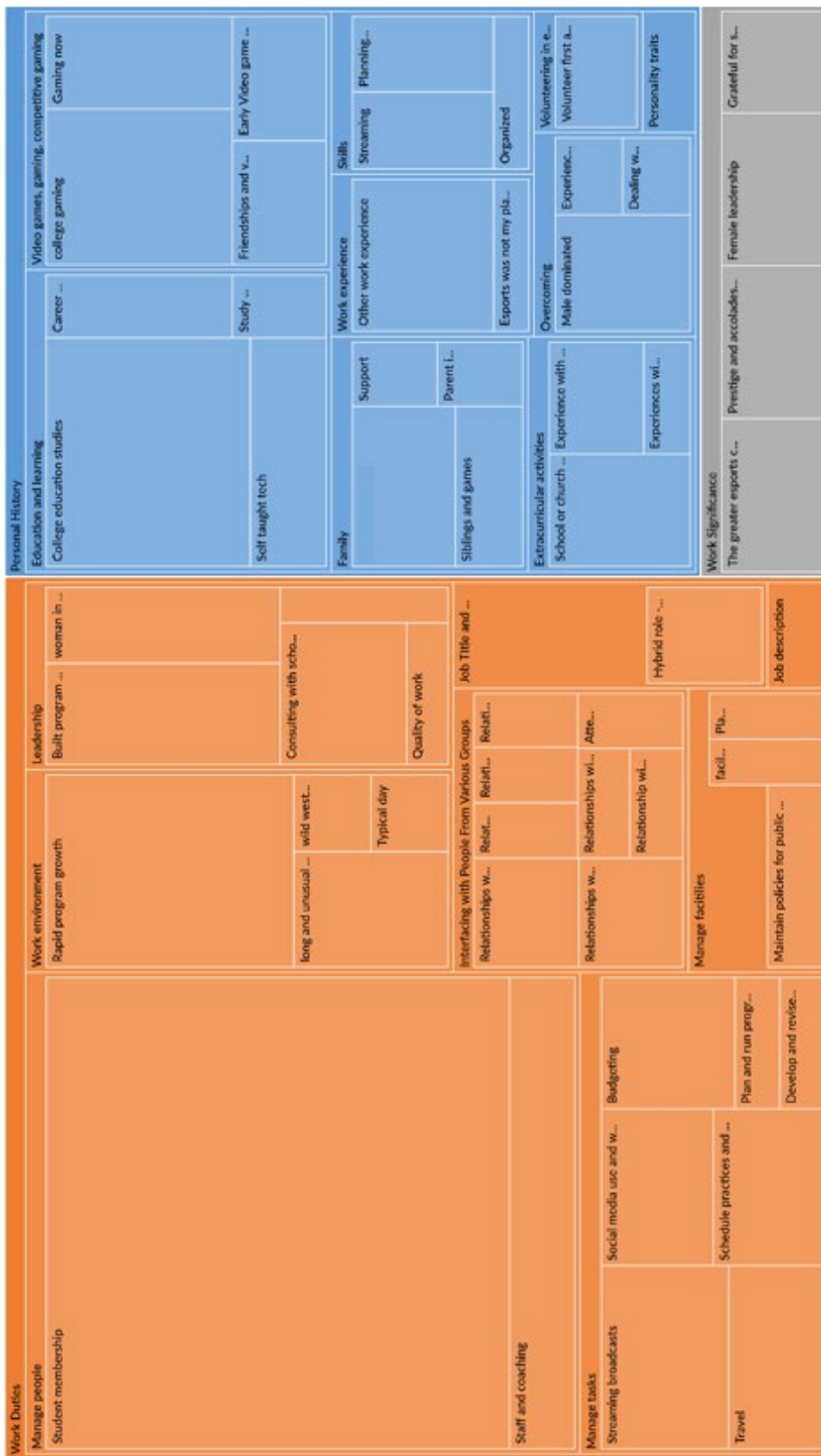
history.

Figure 10   Hierarchy Chart for Participant 5 (P5)

Description for P5

P5 exhibited leadership in youth activities and her previous work experience. Like others, P5 has "been a gamer her whole life." She mainly played with her family. She began with consoles and later built her PC. After starting with a major typically dominated by males, she switched due to feeling self-conscious. There are some regrets as she quickly realized she was on a level playing field. She is not a "tech guru" but adapts to technology well with a bit of insight. She played multiple sports and participated in other extracurricular activities as well. She takes from traditional sports and applies it to esports since there are many similarities.

Her experiences have been positive, except in the online game space. She experienced toxicity in the gaming space in college, which was intimidating and has somewhat affected her because she does not use a mic in the space. P5 booked internships and other activities to stay busy while in school. These experiences have helped prepare her for her current work. She enjoys planning events and organizing things, leading to her continuing her education. For a time, she dabbled in streaming, but she did not have the time to continue it. She says a few women entered her chat when streaming. She perceives a career gender gap and tries to encourage girl players.

She knows various facets of esports, and "this position is her dream come true." She is grateful to her mentors and communicates to them how they have impacted her life. She has helped build this program from the beginning, though she did not know whether she would be leading the program at that time. In addition to running her program, she is an advocate for esports and provides support to schools wishing to start programs.

She appreciates the support she has received from family members, and her family is her motivating force for working so hard. They provide firm support and help cover the home front. As time goes on, things seem to be smoothing out some. She is proud to have been named to serve in the leadership of an organization outside her school. She is thankful to have been asked and proud to represent females and to inspire young women.

<u>Textural Description for P6</u>

<u>P6 Manages Tasks</u>

She uses several technology tools in her role, primarily for "marketing and project management." These include Hootsuite, Buffer, Mailchimp, Asana, Click Up, and Monday.com. Then there are the University-specific ones for compliance. The program utilizes a skeleton calendar with the usual significant events to have a general plan for the year, beginning and ending with summer camps. This calendar gives everyone an outline for the year. Detailed resources are available to carry out the plans.

In addition to this strategic and well-organized flow, she likes to take charge and get things done, but she had to learn to give something up and delegate. She handles much of the administrative work for the program and is instrumental in planning how to do so. She regularly coordinates significant events for the program. All of these activities are in addition to supporting the competitive teams.

Though she has had more than one title, her duties have changed little over time. It was and has always been a conglomeration of responsibilities. Marketing and communication duties are hers as well. P6 does not track students' eligibility as someone on staff takes care of that along with other student support services. Simple tech issues

are handled by those in the program and then elevated to technology services when necessary. P6 addresses the in-between needs as she has experience building computers. Traveling with the teams is not her role; however, she works on most of the arrangements for team travel. She is the credit card holder, so she does most purchasing for the program.

Furthermore, she handles anything financial with the school. She reports income to the university to allocate those funds to esports. Each day she goes through her email, addresses things that come up, and talks to several people asking questions about esports on the phone. She keeps an eye on Discord as the "first responder." She responds to social media and so answers many recruits' questions. However, most communication with recruits is with someone else on staff. P6 manages events that the program hosts, and she sees that everything runs well.

<u>P6 Manages Facilities</u>

"I mean the first year…I would stay sometimes as long as, like you know eight to 12 hours just in the arena focused on making sure that students knew what to do. You know, supervising, making sure there is an adult in the room." She spent more time there when the facility was new but now relies more on student staff to oversee things. More recently, P6 meets regularly with the facilities staff. The facility serves casual gamers and competitive teams. They have a broadcast area too. While all of this activity is happening, she problem-solves anything with the facility. Tournaments and other events for clubs keep the space busy. During COVID, just the teams had access and some players from home. It was unclear what the policies would be going forward, so flexibility was vital.

P6 Manages People

As events come up, P6 trains the new people and then has meetings every so often to ensure everything is on track for the project. Everyone feels free to pitch new ideas in Discord. If people are on board, they plan to bring it about using the available systems already in place to happen in an organized way. She leads the charge and then trains staff on how to use applications. They do not do many meetings with everyone, but they have many small group meetings. And then Discord meets the need to be in touch when people work independently.

She seeks the best way to work with partners from the beginning and continues throughout the collaboration. They noticed that students were affected when they had to participate remotely due to COVID and that there has been improvement in teamwork with a more in-person activity. Also, since the pandemic began, there have been some changes in the division of labor. As wellness is an essential facet of the program, support staff provide fitness training and counseling. There are some game-specific coaches as well. Students are responsible for the casting and streaming of all the broadcasts. Several interns support in other areas such as graphic design, written and video content, and partner relations. Other students help to staff the facility when leadership is not there.

P6 is the go-to person for students for questions and training. "So, I sit on the stage with the students. It also makes it really easy for both scholarship players and interns and arena staff to just kind of walk up to me there and ask me questions or get advice on stuff, so that is easy for me." Managers take responsibility for scheduling changes and scheduling scrims and practices.

P6 Interfaces with Various Groups of People

She describes a good relationship with the IT department and some people who go beyond to provide good support. They handle what they can on their own. However, software issues receive support from IT services. She interfaces with the administration on campus, especially finance, admissions, and HR. She describes receiving task support from student affairs so they do not have to go to outside sources. She talked about how groups change over time and that relationships depend on the leaders. Sometimes things go well, and other times people do not "understand the value of what we are doing, and we just have to take time to educate them."

They look for opportunities to collaborate with other groups on campus to offer "joint programming." Due to esports popularity, the facility has become part of "the tour," and campus groups are finding ways to incorporate esports into their programming. It is seen as a tool to "assist with recruitment." Collaboration with other schools happens when hosting significant events such as conferences and tournaments. She attends anywhere from "one to four different meetings every day," either on campus or remotely. They have some sponsors and partners for the program.

P6 is a Woman in Leadership

She usually takes the lead in keeping it all organized and moving forward. The program administrators check in weekly to apprise everyone of their progress on various projects. Then they do some more formal check-ins every quarter as an evaluation to give feedback and share ideas for future projects. Because of her role as a leader in esports, P6 often receives invitations to serve in other capacities that will benefit women who desire to participate in athletics or esports. She values being able to make things more equitable,

inclusive, and diverse and seeks ways to contribute to that ideal. P6 faced adversity as a club leader and has learned to deal with those situations positively.

Now she can focus more on the other aspects of growing the program. She stressed the importance of pitching or educating strategically those who might "have a say in whether the programming stays or goes." Occasionally, they get asked to share about the program and address concerns that may have come up. She helped outline policies for the facility, behavior, game decisions, and suggestions for the facility design. She does not travel much but maybe speaks at conferences or sits on panels. Many of these are virtual too. The esports program is a big supporter of esports at the scholastic level. They started putting resources online to help other schools get started in esports.

<u>P6's Work Environment is Similar to Other Esports Programs</u>

Discord is the primary communication tool since the students know it well and Google Drive. Of course, there are also opportunities to learn on the fly. In her current role, she wears many hats. "Also, I am checking Discord pretty much from the moment I woke up to the moment I went to sleep …for anything that might be happening in the arena, whether I'm in there or not."

Figure 11 is a hierarchy chart created in NVivo that illustrates the themes coded for Participant 6 (P6). According to the chart, significant statements coding to work duties or experiences and personal history themes had approximately the same frequency. The managing tasks and managing people themes were most prevalent in the work duties conversation. Gaming was the popular theme during the discussion of personal history.
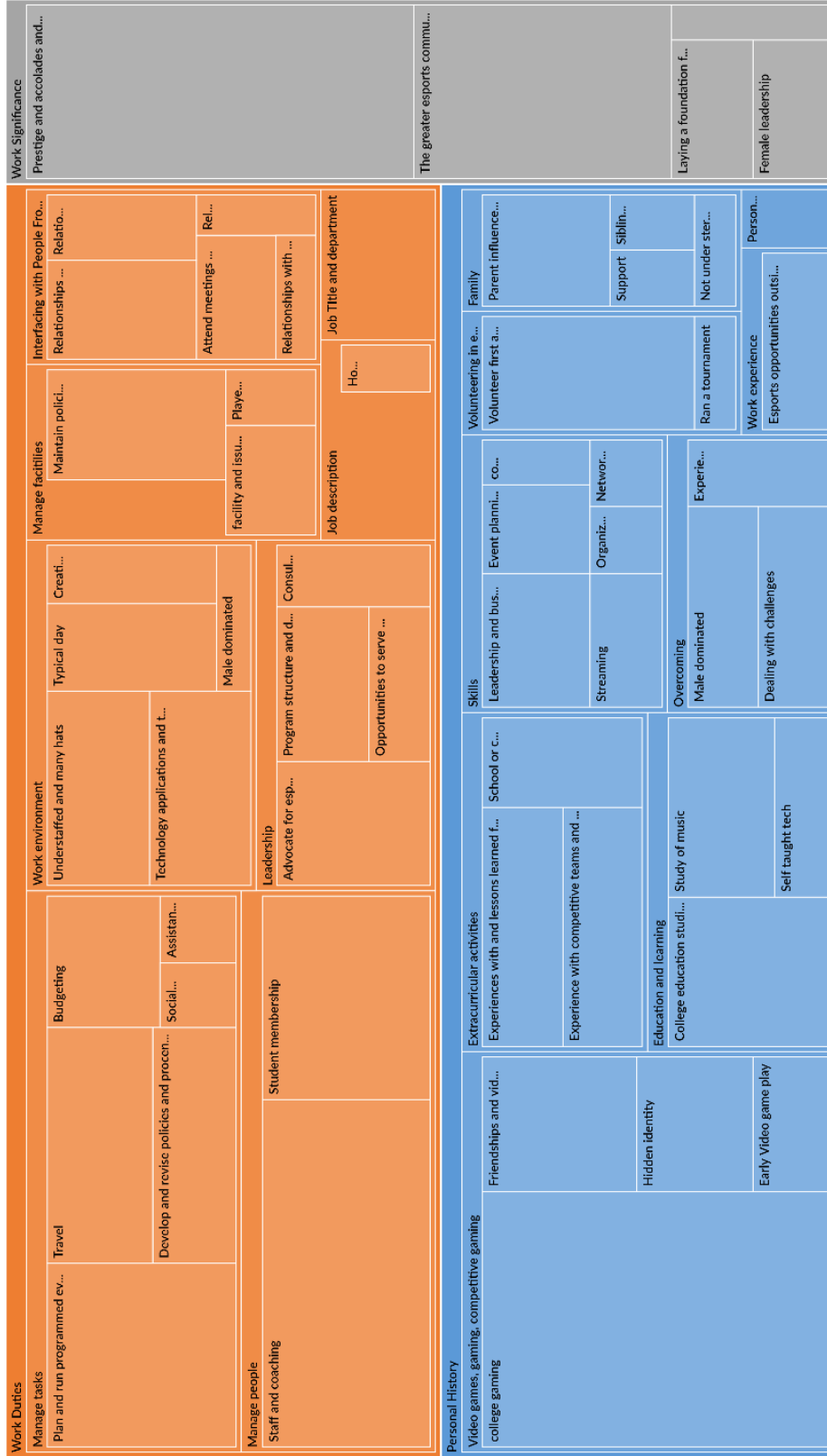
Figure 11   Hierarchy Chart for Participant 6 (P6)

<u>Structural Description for P6</u>

P6 has been a learner and a leader all along. She is always interested in learning new things. She has always liked to organize and delegate and report. She admired her teachers and had good relationships with them and sees their influence in her work today. She considers the impact of her parents and their careers as well. She would help the leader with various extracurricular activities, events, and volunteers. Always trying "to make things better." She has competed and performed with a group and on her own. These experiences built confidence to be ready to step up when needed – even when just one of few females in the group.

She began using technology when she was young and has always been interested in its various aspects. People naturally come to her for support. P6 has been gaming for her whole life. She had some relatives that played, and her parents were supportive. She was not raised with stereotypes that girls cannot play video games. Because of her gaming experience, she was not intimidated by boys at school and liked to compete with them. Some girls who were friends played, but they kept it quiet. She used a hidden identity for some time and did not use voice chat. After negative experiences with voice chat, she does not use it much except for work. She learned the value of community in gaming and began contributing and developing skills. Since a male-dominated environment was commonplace in her youth, she developed ways to deal with it, so it is not a problem in her work now. She can be confrontational if needed and forgiving when needed.

In high school, she volunteered with gaming communities and had some experience organizing events. She discovered contributions she could make with a social

media group – later turned club - for the game she liked to play. For her contributions, she was known as a leader within the group. She was involved with hosting large viewing parties and LAN parties, not just on campus. She contributed to the development of varsity and casual gaming on campus and moved from volunteer to paid leadership, her technical savvy contributing heavily to the effort. P6 sees this work as a dream job – moving from volunteer to compensated leader.

Moreover, being a woman leading in this capacity has become increasingly meaningful. Mentoring local students and building relationships with students and educational leaders from elsewhere are gratifying. Watching the growth has been exciting. Speaking opportunities and "connecting" from across disciplines and "contributing knowledge" to those groups "has been her favorite part." Her admiration for educators makes working closely with many now incredibly gratifying. In addition, she appreciates getting to see the results of the work of her peers from different cohorts.

<u>Textural Description for P7</u>

<u>P7 Manages Tasks</u>

Before the semester started, it was mostly preparation for the season – registering or renewing league memberships and contacting workers about their arrival on campus. League deadlines come early, sometimes even before students arrive. Sometimes she must negotiate that, and tryouts must happen as soon as students are on campus. Rosters must be determined and submitted by the extensions provided by the leagues. Once completed, P7 will turn her attention to programming. She says she is "basically their first line of IT" and keeps computers generally updated, but she does not do the

individual games. She sanitizes keyboards, mice, and headsets. She orders jerseys and checks rosters.

Plans are for the program to be self-sufficient eventually, but that may take a little time. P7 warns about not booking too many matches. She plans activities that high school students may attend and visit the space. Other than that, they promote the program during orientation and advertise it. She has been known for getting sponsorships in the past, and she is currently considering what she can do and sees the advantage of being a varsity program when it comes to asking for funding. There is a grade requirement for players. She checks on them, and they can still practice if they do not meet the requirement. They may not participate in official matches, however. P7 handles the budget for travel, but there is a department that assists with the arrangements. So far, it is just once a year, but more people will travel as the program grows.

<u>P7 Manages Facilities</u>

Recently, there has been some disagreement about using the lab space. It is set aside for competitions but has been available for casual gaming. They have a glassed-in streaming room within the varsity space and broadcast matches to Twitch while mindful of permissions and delay requirements. They are starting to build a following with some staff tuning in to Twitch and are planning to set up a viewing area on campus. The current space is not easy to find, so that is one reason she is looking at an additional space. Adding another casual space would make the practice space more exclusive to roster members and used for limited special events. P7 likes to see the area used as much as possible. Those on the player roster naturally have more time to use the space. So,

there is a reward for competing. Players realize it is a privilege to have and respect this space.

She does not have time to track different games' patches, so there might be a slight delay with an update, but it is not a big issue. She controls access to the building through ID badges. So if a student is not in good standing, she may cut access. All students must sign the lab policies agreement for initial access to the building. When students sign the policy, they agree to "respect people" and "respect the space." As far as care of the space, she vacuums and disinfects computers. It stays clean. The custodial services remove trash regularly. P7 said she must wear a mask when people are in the lab.

P7 Manages People

They try to meet at least four times annually and can pull together at the last minute for emergency meetings. They use Discord to communicate most needs, so the discussions are to get feedback from the group and discuss P7's requests that maybe have not come up in Discord yet. She may share ideas and ask for the opinions of the rest of the staff. They also brainstorm ideas for improving the program and receive team updates. Needs are requested. Recently, they came up with an idea for an anonymous feedback form for reporting misuse of the lab when staff is not present. P7 realizes that people often do not want to be the center of attention in a meeting, so she meets privately with them for individual situations. She values opportunities to meet with each individual.

There are a couple of contracted game coaches for the program. Being able to invoice them for their hours keeps it simple and makes sure it fits the budget. Some other teams do not have coaches as the teams are solid. The program has someone who does

their artwork and is now filling in on social media. Each of the teams has a manager. She would like a couple more managers for other games, but one of the managers is flexible and will cover when needed. Because they know the games, they assist with tryouts and assembling rosters. P7 appreciates the help because there are games that P7 does not know well. She appreciates their work and "really enjoy(s) them."

They have a tech person who handles the streaming. Students support the teams by volunteering to cast. They have a lot of fun, which is a great way to connect with the program. One student volunteer teaches beginners how to play one of the games, and other volunteers like to help however they can. One player taught groups of parents and grandparents to play a game during a parents' weekend. The program has some official teams that receive more support and some unofficial teams that may receive some help. Some teams are more competitive than others. Some compete virtually, while some compete in nearby tournaments. Unofficial teams are newer or maybe ones where the game is controversial due to the themes. They can use the space and receive a little funding, in any case. Some titles have two teams. In addition to conference play in the spring, the program has teams competing in two national leagues. Only one team is competing in multiple leagues.

Smash just competes locally and practices in the adjoining spaces equipped with consoles. P7 explains that overall, it is not too difficult to manage. Players and casual gamers must follow the guidelines set for the esports space or risk losing access. When the room is set aside for practice or matches, they must follow the schedule respectfully. She relies on managers in the evening and weekend hours and security cameras when leadership is unavailable. They may receive a warning on a first minor offense, but for

something more serious, she revokes the student's access. They do not offer scholarships at this time, but that is a future goal.

P7 Interfaces with Various Groups of People

Her supervisor helped start the program, continues to advocate for the program, and makes resources available to help. She meets with her supervisor weekly to share her goals and detailed plans that may require assistance in return for suggestions and feedback. The meetings are often verbal, but budgeting requires documentation instead of idea-sharing. Her supervisor provides recommendations for contacts. She attends department meetings monthly and reports on what is happening in her area.

P7 engages various staff for ideas on improving the program and increasing notoriety and inclusivity. She collaborates with student workers to make schedules for the lab to block it off when needed. IT steps in for things she cannot fix. She communicates with leagues. The community is helpful. Commenting on a parenting event, "it was fun and an excellent opportunity to share the program and answer questions. Some were enthusiastic, and some were curious as this is still new."

She collaborates with faculty and staff from other departments assisting some with special technology projects or seeking expertise about wellness for her program. P7 is working with the student activities director to explore the possibility of making a new casual gaming space. It would be good PR for the esports program and give students who do not have access to gaming gear the opportunity to try it out. She forged a relationship with the university president and shared with her about esports during a special lab event. Later she received positive feedback about the encounter. She tries to connect with as many people as possible in hopes that all of this networking will pay off in the future

with approval for specific program goals. She has not had negative experiences in this position and describes the community as "really great." Furthermore, she speaks the same of the collegiate esports community.

P7 is a Woman in Leadership

She "makes sure everything runs the way it should." Not everyone is happy about the increased traffic in the lab. P7 appreciates their feedback; however, she is firm on this decision. Casual gaming is where future competitors and support begin. Competitive players first play a game because it looks fun. She sees the importance of the "casual voice." She sees the importance of serving the casual gamer to grow the competitive side. She says, "it makes a big difference when you open a casual space."

P7 has an outside leadership role, including decision-making, public relations, and scheduling. P7 is exploring options for other league play as she was not entirely pleased with the administration of one league but is happy with another so far.

She has noticed that when women serve in leadership, they tend to pull in more women. She has seen that happen more than once, followed by more women getting involved. She finds it intriguing and hopes to see it more. She acknowledges gatekeeping but states that "most gatekeeping is an illusion." She feels that a "few bad apples may overshadow a communities' welcoming nature." When someone like her is in charge, students feel more comfortable sharing about a problem and know that she will take care of it. She wants every program to have women in leadership to help make the space feel safe. When negativity arises, she does not back down. She is willing to do whatever it takes to keep the space safe.

<u>P7's Work Environment is Similar to Other Esports Programs</u>

The most used application for her is Discord. Not only does she use it for the program, but she uses it personally. Constant use makes it a little challenging to get a break, however. She also relies on Outlook and Zoom for people outside of Discord. Twitch is a connection used for broadcasting in the esports world. Spring is the busier season for this program. The support staff is accommodating – "keep(ing) it from being my business all the time." The program has seen rapid growth and has outgrown the facilities, which are busy every evening. She loves doing this work and has maintained a regular schedule. She is pretty careful to keep communication on the weekend to a minimum – letting people know when she is not working.

Figure 12 is a hierarchy chart created in NVivo that illustrates the themes coded for Participant 7 (P7). The work duties or experiences discussion and the personal history discussion yielded more significant statements than the work significance discussion. The managing people and the managing tasks themes were coded more frequently for P7 than the other themes.
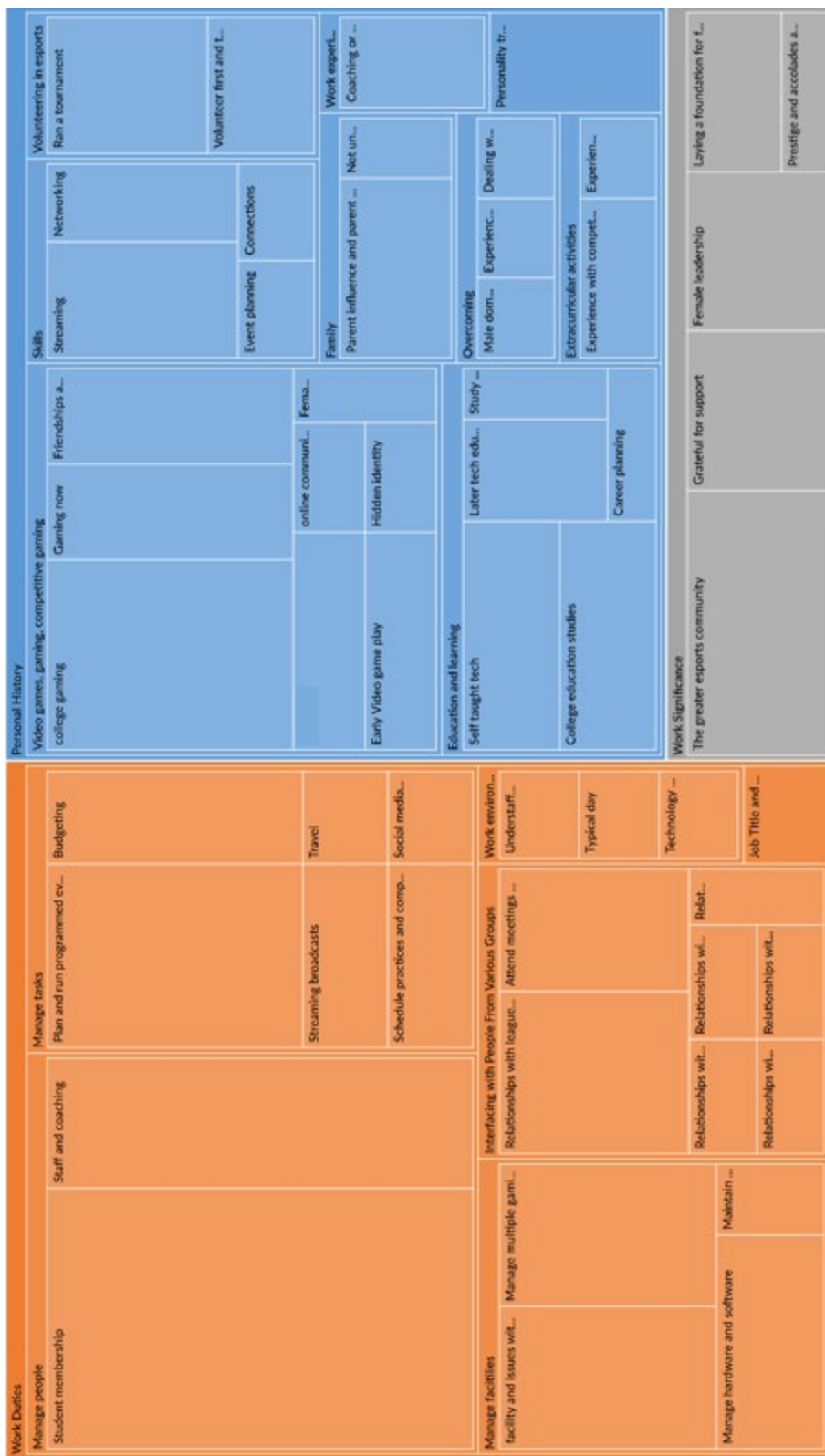
Figure 12   **Hierarchy Chart for Participant 7 (P7)**

Structural Description for P7

P7 has a background in athletics participating in multiple sports, grew up immersed in technology, and is competitive. Video games and online communities were part of her childhood; her parents supported that. Experiences were positive, though she understands things could have turned out differently for her as a young player in the space. She was raised not to be fenced in by typical gender norms and had the freedom to explore her interests and was encouraged to do so. Her interest in esports did not come about until college, and she became involved as a club volunteer and a competitive player. She is comfortable with technology as she has built her PC. At the same time, she did some streaming as well. She dabbles with cutting-edge streaming technology and still enjoys "playing some shooters." She is happy to see more females playing and using microphones in one game. She spent much time helping organize significant events and growing the program at her school.

She has experienced and observed some negative communication in the gaming space and proactively seeks to remedy it. She recognizes that sometimes gaming communities have a negative stigma when they are friendly and may have a fringe "bad apple." She tends to take the lead or take charge and does not shy away from experiences that might seem daunting. She will stand her ground and "bark louder" and does not let fear get in the way. She thrives in "uphill battles" situations and finds them entertaining. P7 sees the importance of networking, but she prefers to visit in person over social media.

She values her school's culture and brings her experiences to her current role leading a collegiate varsity program for which she is grateful. She hopes for eventual recognition as a leader, not a female leader. Because P7 has seen the effect of having a

female in a leadership position – noticing that it tends to draw in other women, she wishes to see that in more organizations. Though it can be challenging in this position, she seems to balance work and her personal life effectively.

Composite Textural and Composite Structural Descriptions

      The next step in the analysis process was integrating the individual textural and structural descriptions into composite textural, and composite structural descriptions, as Moustakas (1994) outlines on pp.180-181, is the final part of the analysis.

      Composite Textural Description

      Women serving in collegiate esports leadership manage a variety of tasks. They communicate with all stakeholders, hold tryouts, develop rosters, and schedule practices and matches. They check grades, manage budgets, raise funds, and plan team travel. They also oversee broadcasts and social media and carry out scheduled programming within the program and with other groups.

      Whether the gaming space is a lab or an arena and whether there is an additional space for casual gaming, all of these women are responsible for managing their facilities. They set policies and expectations for the facilities and ensure that technology is updated, effective, and efficient. Coaches and directors solve problems of tight schedules and space shortages to meet the players' needs. They collaborate with staff in managing the facility.

      Each of these women manages groups of people within the collegiate esports programs. They manage the players and teams, coaches, and other staff members. Some manage interns and volunteers. They adjust to serve the needs of these various groups and ensure that everyone is showing up and doing their part to have a successful program.

They hold meetings as needed. They (or designated others) watch how students perform academically, helping them remain eligible for competitive play. Leaders expect students and staff to respect one another and keep the game space a positive, toxicity-free zone.

Women in collegiate esports leadership interface with people in various groups. Those may be on-campus players, student workers, coaches, volunteers, other departments, and administration. Off-campus, they may interact with other coaches, league personnel, sponsors, donors, and students outside their organization. Four of these women built their programs from the very beginning. All seven women created or helped create the structure of their program and programming that reaches outside the bounds of their competitive teams. They advocate for esports on campus, in the community, and beyond.

Leaders desire quality and well-organized programs and want to represent women well in all they do. Off-campus, directors and coaches serve on panels, boards, and outside leadership with pride. They value setting an example for young women showing that a role in esports and leadership roles are attainable for them and that it's possible to overcome adversity and achieve.

The "wild west," "a gold rush," "an uphill battle," and "uncharted territory" are all metaphors used to describe a work environment where programs see fast-paced growth, limited space and equipment, and ever-changing rules and schedules. Though some leaders are approaching middle age, many are young. Their staff members tend to be young, and the space tends to be male-dominated. Programs are often understaffed, and leaders must wear many hats and be fluent with many apps and tools to accomplish

various tasks. These leaders are jacks-of-all-trades and bring visions of jugglers and plate spinners to mind.

Figure 13 is a hierarchy chart created in NVivo that illustrates the themes nested within the Work Duties theme for all participants. The most frequent theme coded from the second interview with participants was the managing people theme, followed by the managing tasks theme, and then the work environment theme.
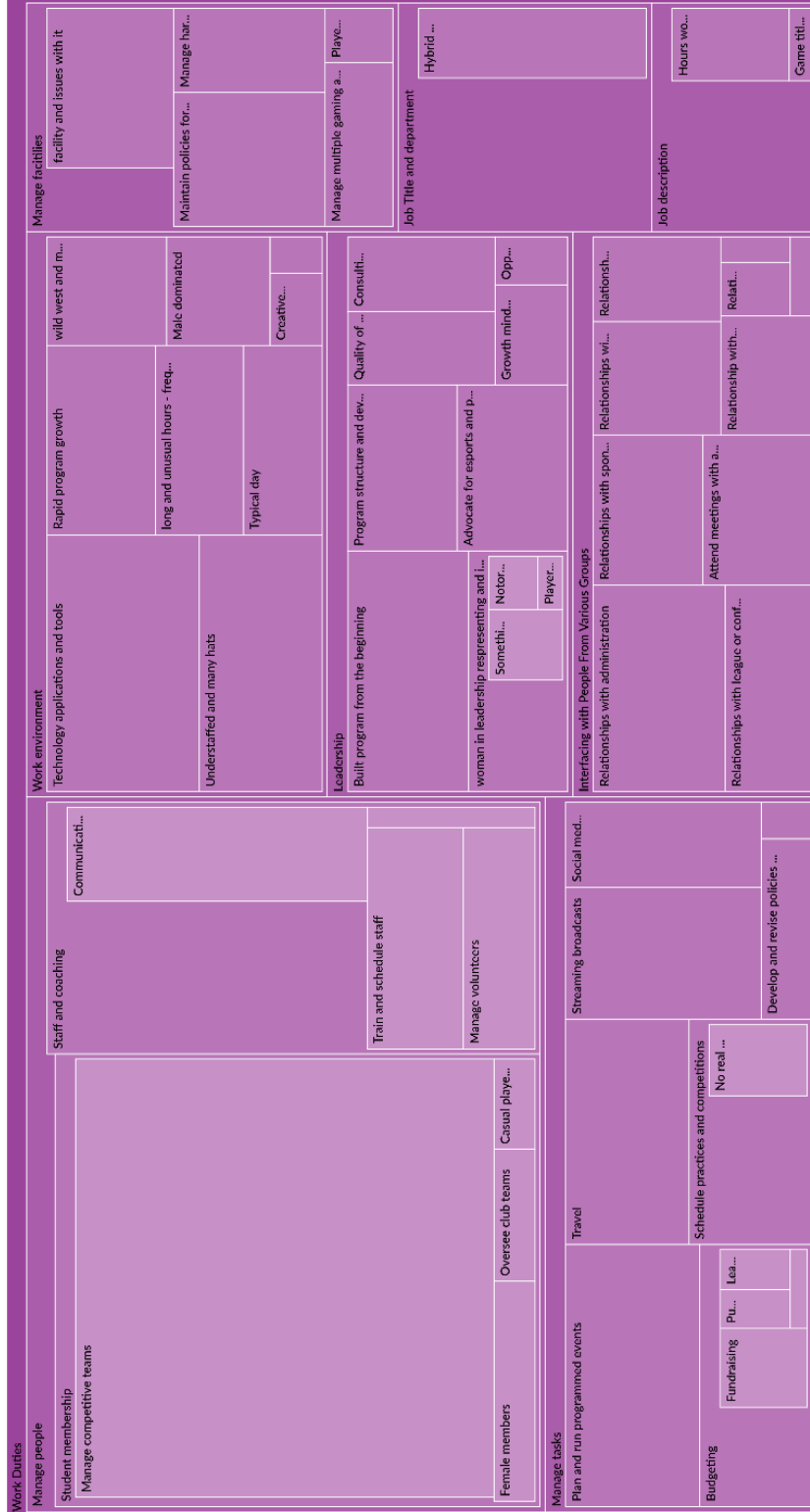
Figure 13   Hierarchy Chart for All Participants - Work Duties Themes

Composite Structural Description

The propensity for women's experiences in collegiate esports leadership may stem from several factors. Collegiate esports leaders have a background of participating in the least one sport and at least one or more other extracurricular activities. During these activities, there were opportunities to develop soft and leadership skills and observe coaching and teaching. All of these skills play out in their work as collegiate esports leaders.

Their parents' work inspired these women in collegiate esports leadership, and they valued their home life growing up. They appreciate that typical gender norms did not box them in, and as a result, they enjoy the freedom and confidence to play and work in male-dominated environments. Their families are significant to them, and it is not unusual for them to sacrifice their desires for their families when needed. Women who lead collegiate sports programs have played games all of their lives. Their families have been supportive of gameplay and may be gamers themselves. Through their gaming experiences, they see the value of gaming for enjoyment and the gaming community for building relationships. They have learned how to navigate difficult situations and toxic behavior.

Women who lead collegiate esports programs are self-motivated learners. Their computer science and technology knowledge exceeds that of the traditional teacher or coach. Many have built their computers and websites, learned to code, and stream and edit video. These are valuable skills for those leading collegiate esports programs. Women who lead collegiate sports programs are overcomers. Many of these women leading collegiate esports programs began their work in esports as volunteers with

collegiate clubs or outside organizations or gaming communities. As volunteers, they gained valuable experience, skills, and confidence that would be a foundation for their work in esports. Some went on to be paid employees of the organizations they volunteered with at first.

Their previous work experience has paid off as they brought their skillset to collegiate esports. These women have mentors both in esports and out that have provided support, suggestions, and a person to bounce ideas off. They appreciate strong leaders in the community that also require excellence.

Figure 14 is a hierarchy chart created in NVivo that illustrates the nested within the Personal History theme for all participants. Gaming, education, and skills were the most prevalent themes coded during the first interviews focusing on personal history.
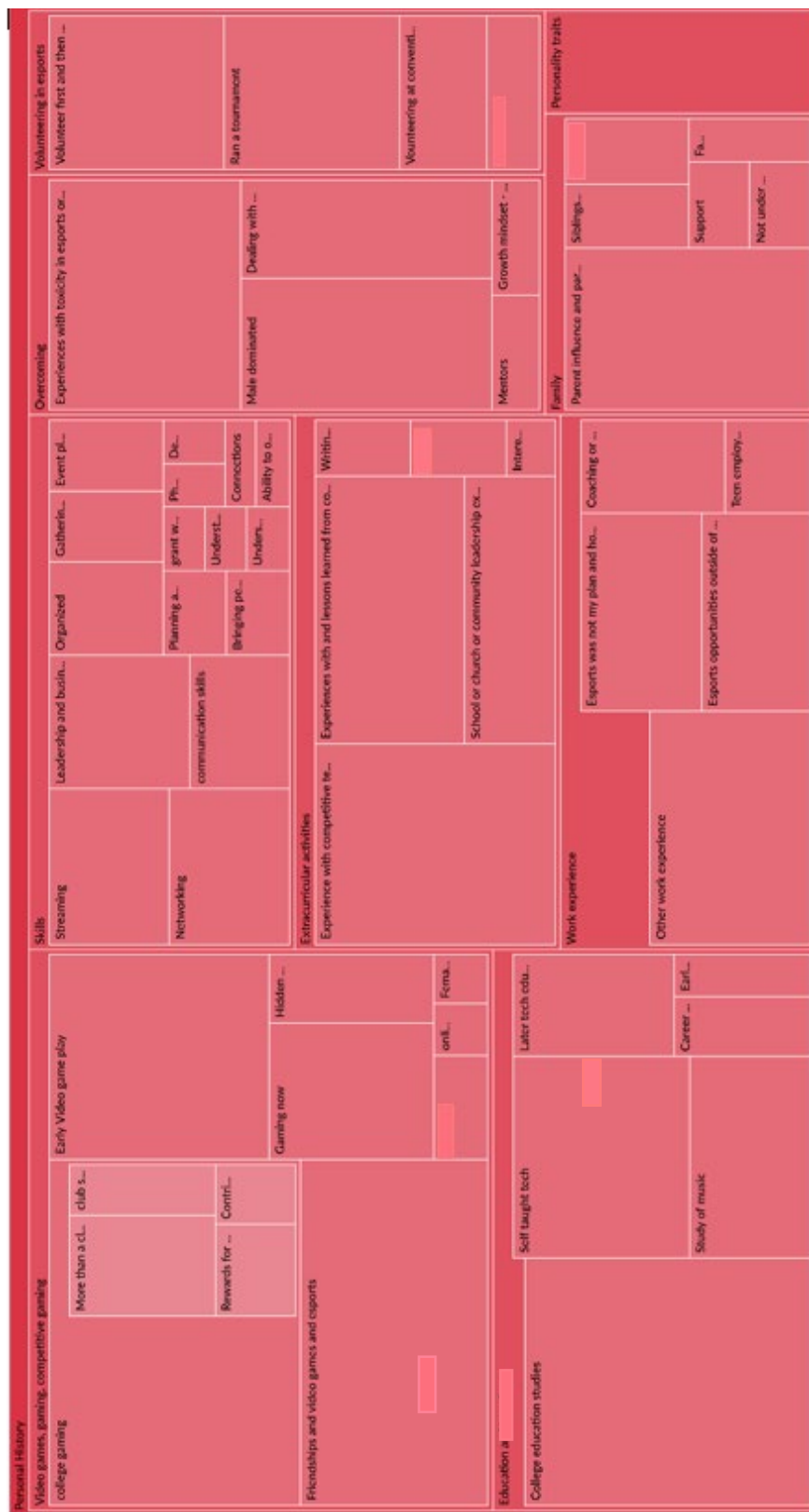
Figure 14   **Hierarchy Chart for All Participants – Personal History Themes**

<u>Composite textural-structural Description = Essence</u>

Data analysis concludes with a "synthesis of meanings and essences" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). The participants' meanings and essences held in common are where we can see the overall essence of the phenomenon (Cilesiz, 2010). Husserl (1931, p. 43 as cited in Moustakas, 1994) describes essence as "that which is common or universal, the condition or quality without which a thing would not be what it is" (p.100).

Women serving in collegiate esports leadership find this esports adventure exciting. They resemble the past's revolutionary, trailblazing pioneer women or today's risk-taking entrepreneurs leading startup ventures.

Figure 15 is a hierarchy chart created in NVivo that illustrates the nested within the Work Significance theme. The chart below indicates that the most prevalent themes during the third interview focusing on work significance were the female leadership theme and the greater esports community theme.

155
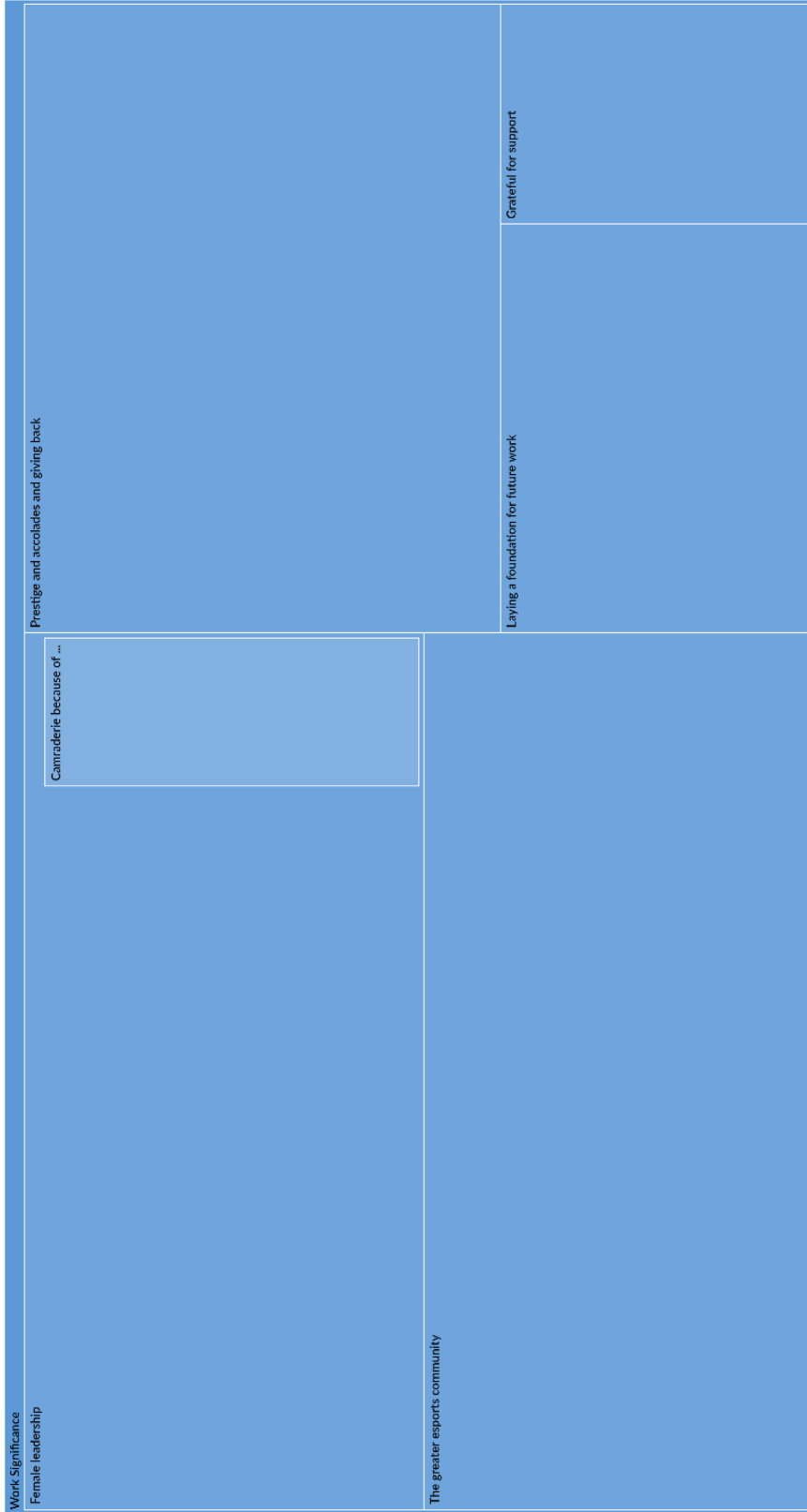
Figure 15   Hierarchy Chart for All Participants – Work Significance Themes

They find significance and meaning in their work as they strive to build successful programs, some from the ground up. They feel that they must fight harder to prove themselves as female leaders, and a kind of fierceness comes with that. They take pride in their accomplishments and feel honored to be one of a few women who serve in this role. There is some notoriety, and they receive frequent invitations to participate in panels and other speaking opportunities. They are grateful for the opportunities, though they intensely desire to be seen and asked about their excellent work over being a leader who is a female.

They appreciate being a role model for women, especially young women hoping to draw more women into the gaming space. They want to represent women well. They care about their students and desire to serve the whole person and develop inclusive and diverse programs. They are grateful for their opportunities and support from their institutions, mentors, and families. They take on additional duties such as making gaming more accessible and helping other schools develop esports programs, whether K-12 or collegiate. They take the initiative to make the game space a safe space free from toxicity for the greater esports community.

With an eye toward the future, they are honing a valuable and applicable skillset to other fields as they lay the foundation for their future work. These women do it with confidence, grace, and excellence, whether it is putting in the extra effort and time to construct a program from the ground up, manage rapid program growth, or improve culture in the gaming community.

Figure 16 is a hierarchy chart created in NVivo to show the amount of coding for all codes coded to all participants. According to the composite chart, there is a heavy

emphasis on the managing themes for women in collegiate esports leadership – whether managing people, tasks, or facilities.
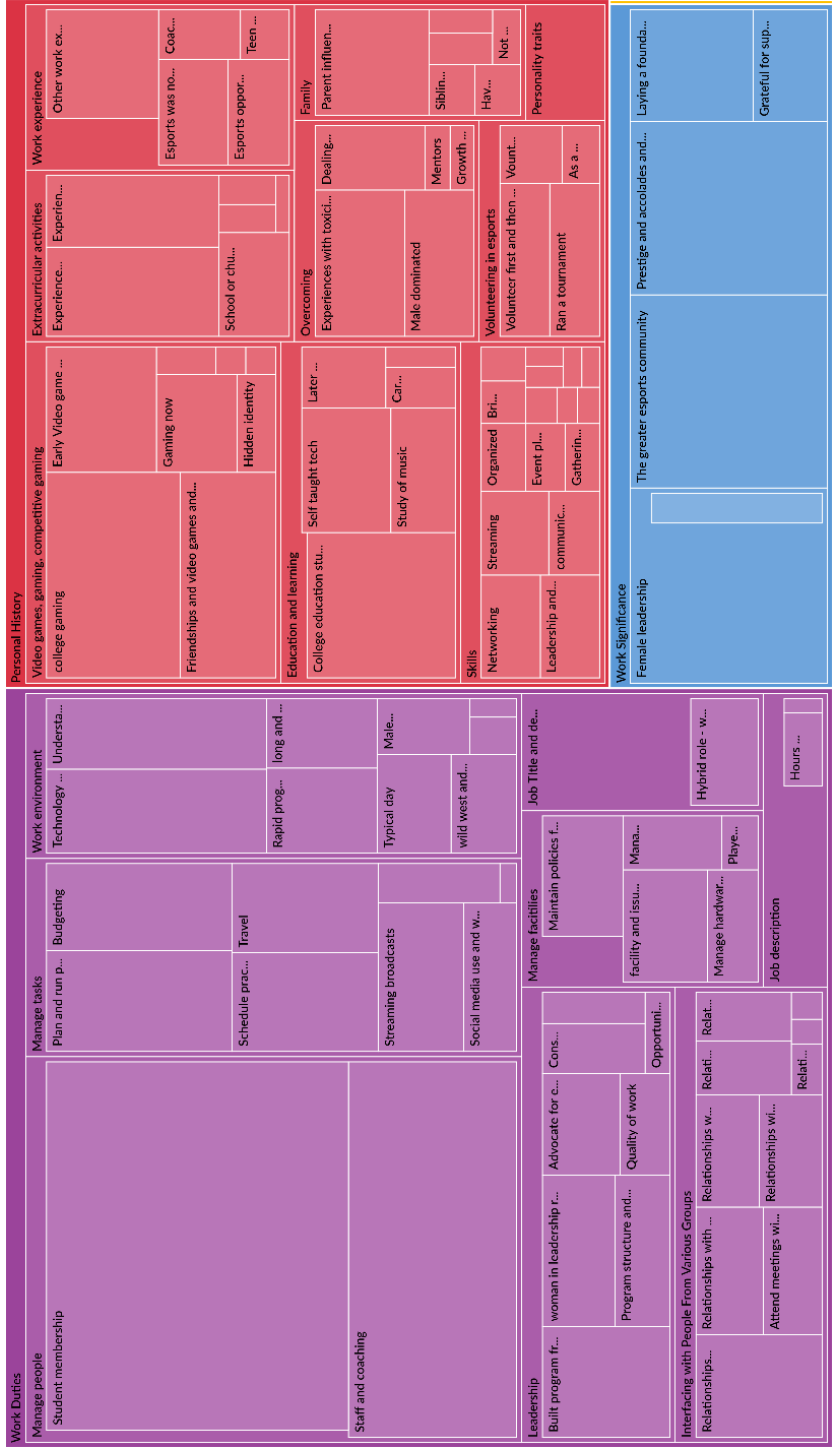
Figure 16   Hierarchy Chart for All Participants – All Themes

Through this study of women's experiences as leaders of collegiate esports programs, seven women have shared the historical context for their present work, their experience as leaders of collegiate esports programs, and how it is meaningful. During the analysis, pertinent themes emerged. We learned what esports leaders do, how they came about doing it, and its significance. Women leading collegiate esports programs enjoy overcoming challenges and love to learn. They have technical prowess and are courageous, strategic, driven, flexible, organized, and reflective. Administering, leading, managing, teaching, and coaching are essential elements of this phenomenon.

However, the essence of the lived experiences of a woman in collegiate esports leadership boils down to meaningful managing with excellence using skills developed through previous life experiences. Meaningful as they represent women. Managing, but not everyday managing – more like managing like a startup CEO. With excellence, as women in leadership are under the microscope, they do not want to make mistakes (Women Gaining Ground in Academia, 1994). Husserl (1931, p. 43 as cited in Moustakas, 1994) describes essence as "that which is common or universal, the condition or quality without which a thing would not be what it is" (p.100). Meaningful managing with excellence is that "condition or quality without" which being a woman in collegiate esports leadership "would not be what it is" (1931, p. 43 as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 100).

Validity and Reliability

Several strategies for validity and reliability were listed in Chapter 3 and implemented during data collection and analysis.

Credibility

The use of several strategies contributed to the credibility of this study. The study, set on a foundation of phenomenological philosophy, centered around a "valid phenomenological question." It was limited to experiences rather than just perceptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 272). Participants shared their experiences during three individual interviews. Having multiple discussions allowed for time to develop a rapport, follow up on previous questions, and have plenty of time to share experiences in a relaxed environment (Seidman, 2019). For member-checking, each participant received edited transcripts to review (Cilesiz, 2010; Seidman, 2019).

Also, Chapter 3 included several "Big Tent" strategies for high-quality qualitative research by Tracy (2010). These included: ensuring the topic is "worthy of study, has rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, is a significant contribution, is ethical, and provides meaningful coherence" (p. 840). Women in collegiate esports leadership are worthy of study, and a phenomenological study is undoubtedly rigorous. This study is a significant contribution as a platform for women to share their experiences, and these experiences were studied and shared sincerely and ethically.

Transferability

Running this study with similar participants with similar experiences may result in similar findings; however, there were only seven participants, and "phenomenology is

not meant to be generalizable" (Peoples, 2021). Therefore, it is possible, but one cannot assume that every similar group would have similar results.

Dependability

Chapter 3 included explicitly detailed plans for carrying out this research project, including Moustakas' (1994) steps for analysis, and I followed the procedures carefully, noting any slight deviations. It is possible that the themes and the essence yielded from this study may emerge again if the study were conducted again with a similar population and constructs. There were two departures from the original plans; one during data collection and one during data analysis.

First, rather than providing the edited transcripts to the participants following each interview, participants received the transcripts following their last discussion due to a tight schedule. Secondly, I chose to write a composite textural description and a composite structural description and synthesize them into the final textural-structural description or essence instead of writing seven textural-structural descriptions and then integrating them. The alternative process comes from the outline of analysis processes and methodology in Moustakas, (1994, p. 180). A detailed explanation of this minor change is in the Findings section.

Confirmability

Throughout the entire data collection and analysis process, avoiding bias projection into the project was a priority. Before interviewing, a time of reflection on personal experiences with the phenomenon brought forth any preconceptions, allowing one to note them purposely and set them aside – a process known as bracketing or epoche (Creswell & Poth, 2018, Moustakas, 1994, Peoples, 2021). Further, the reflective journal

was a valuable tool during the analysis phase of the project, again for setting aside preconceptions and being mindful of when bias interrupted the workflow. The result was reflection, review, and a fresh start with a clearer perspective.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction

A leadership gender gap exists in many professions (Northouse, 2013). It is a

significant problem that is widespread and ongoing. In esports, it is no different.

Researchers have examined many facets of esports (Castillo, 2019; Cullen, 2018;

Malvone, 2020; Ruotsalainen & Friman, 2018); however, women leading collegiate

esports programs is a new topic for exploration. Providing a conduit for the stories of

these leaders is essential as they are role models for other women (Everhart &

Chelladurai, 1998; Growe & Montgomery, 1994; Samuel, 2020). The purpose of this

qualitative study - a descriptive (transcendental) phenomenology - was to explore and

describe the essence of women's lived experiences in leading collegiate varsity esports

programs at colleges and universities.

Chapter 5 reviews the research process and participants' experiences within the

transcendental theoretical framework along with a brief summary of the findings, then

focuses on the relationship between the findings and the literature. A discussion of

assumptions, limitations, recommendations for future research, implications, and some

concluding thoughts follow.

Summary of Research Process and Findings

A series of three in-depth interviews (Seidman, 2019) with seven participants

answered the primary research question: What are women's lived experiences in

collegiate esports leadership? Participants received encouragement to share details of

their actual experiences, avoiding discussion grounded in opinions or perceptions (Peoples, 2021). When conducting a descriptive (transcendental) phenomenological study, it is customary to use bracketing to approach the data as fresh and new – free from preconceptions (Peoples, 2021). Chapter 3 explains this exercise in detail as this action preceded each interview and analysis session.

Data analysis followed procedures outlined by Moustakas (1994, pp. 180-181). Significant statements from the transcripts were uploaded into the NVivo software for coding and condensing the invariant constituents into predominant themes during phenomenological reduction. The first interview gathered personal history, the second interview focused on experiences as a leader in collegiate esports, and the third interview discussed work significance (Seidman, 2019).

The first interview focused on collegiate esports leadership in the context of the participants' life history by exploring how the participant arrived at this experience of collegiate esports leadership. The seven themes prevalent from the first interview regarding personal history were extracurricular (activities), family living (influence), gaming (history), learning (education), overcoming (success over barriers), volunteering (volunteer work), working (previous employment), and skills. Themes from the first interview contributed to the descriptions of how the current experiences came about.

The second interview concentrated on details of the present lived experience as a collegiate esports leader by investigating the actual work accomplished as a college esports coach or director. Six themes emerged from the second interview involving current work duties or experiences: managing tasks, managing facilities, managing people, interfacing with people from various groups, women in leadership, and the work

environment. These themes exemplify the actual experiences of women in collegiate esports leadership.

The third interview pinpointed how the participants' work was significant by exploring how serving as a woman in collegiate esports leadership is meaningful to them (Seidman, 2019). The following five themes arose during the third interview discussing work significance: grateful for support, laying a foundation for future work, leading as a female role model, pride in accomplishment, accolades, and prestige, and serving the greater esports community.

After coding the significant statements from each interview and condensing the themes, phenomenological reduction concluded with creating individual textural descriptions relating to the themes of the six work duties or experiences from the second interviews. Textural descriptions explain the "what" of the experiences (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Next came the production of individual structural descriptions through reflection on the personal context from the first interviews and ideas from the third interviews, a step known as imaginative variation. Structural descriptions describe the "how" of the experiences (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004).

Melding the individual descriptions led to composite textural and structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, synthesizing these two resulted in a composite textural-structural description or the essence of the experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Ultimately, the essence of the lived experiences of a woman in collegiate esports leadership funneled down to meaningful managing with excellence using skills developed through previous life experiences. Each of the descriptions mentioned above and further

discussion of the essence of women in collegiate esports leadership is available in Chapter 4.

Interpretation of Findings: A Dialogue with the Literature

As stated in Chapter 2, there is no previous literature on women in collegiate esports leadership, although esports literature as a whole is mushrooming in many topic areas (Darvin et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2020; Reitman et al., 2020; Salo, 2017; Stout, 2020). Gender and esports culture are frequent topics of discussion in much of the esports literature (Gao et al., 2017), including themes such as male dominance, the lack of women competitors, the portrayal of women in video games, or toxicity aimed at women players in esports (Castillo, 2019; Lopez-aranguren, 2017; Lopez-Fernandez et al., 2019; Reitman et al., 2020; Ruotsalainen & Friman, 2018; Witkowski, 2014). This study is essential as it spotlights seven women who have bridged the gender gap in administrative leadership, breaking barriers as others have done in business, academia, and athletics (Bower et al., 2015; Kobla & Li-Hua, 2017; Northouse, 2013). In addition, this study also helps to fill a gap in esports literature regarding collegiate esports leadership, especially about women serving in this role.

Participants in this study contributed to the esports literature by supporting this project. Their experiences offer an inside look at their struggles and successes in leadership positions in collegiate athletics (Kies, 2014; Samuel, 2020). Studies where women researchers assist women leaders in sharing stories, will help keep the issue of barriers and underrepresentation (Gray, 2020; Kies, 2014; Northouse, 2013) at the forefront and thereby may contribute to change (Inglis et al., 2000).

An overview of the subject of esports lays a foundation for the study in Chapter 2. Though women in collegiate esports leadership are not the entire focus of the literature review, some subtopics in the literature review relate to themes that emerged in this study. Therefore, findings involving women in collegiate esports leadership extend the esports literature involving these subtopics. Following is a discussion of how the themes that came to light in this study relate to the literature presented in Chapter 2.

<u>From Interview One</u>

<u>Extracurricular</u>

All of the participants described involvement in extracurricular activities in their youth. All of them participated in athletics, most competitively and the remaining recreationally. Most participants were involved in music activities, others in dance and other activities. Participants have lasting memories of their coaches and lessons learned through these activities, which may transfer to their current work in esports.

Many athletic directors and coaches were players of their sport first. However, with esports being so new, even though many directors and coaches played video games in their youth, most did not play high school esports, "an organized and competitive approach to playing computer games" (Witkowski, 2012, p. 350). Such is the case with the seven participants. None of them competed in esports in high school. Some were involved with esports clubs in college. There may be a few collegiate esports coaches today that competed in esports while in high school. Some may have competed in esports in college, and some as professionals (Salo, 2017) or semi-pros. That number most likely will grow as esports matures.

<u>Family Living</u>

All participants described having the support of parents on video game play. Many of their parents played, too, as playing video games on consoles and personal computers became a popular form of home entertainment (Skoglund, 2018; Castillo, 2019). Participants also discussed the influence of family values, family activities, parents' careers, and relationships with siblings. Several participants mentioned that they could function well in male-dominated environments because of their experience with male siblings or their families did not adhere to traditional gender norms. Several participants explained how their parents' careers influenced their interests and contributed to their work ethic and skills development.

<u>Gaming</u>

All participants played or played video games and have since they were young. All participants described playing games as something done with someone, bringing people together. They played with parents, siblings, friends, or a combination. Some started on consoles before migrating to PC gaming. Each participant's gaming experiences vary slightly according to their generation's place on the gaming history timeline and what happened to be popular and available to them at the time. Esports culture and community are vital to each of the participants.

Each participant has experienced toxicity in online gaming or gaming culture concerning gender. Esports literature often speaks to toxicity in gaming culture (Adinolf & Türkay, 2018; Sengün et al., 2019; Tseng, 2020). Online hate may include accusations, humiliation, swearing, or promoting violence that may dissuade participation in the

online activity (Salminen et al., 2018). It usually comes in the form of caustic comments left by adversaries (Kim, 2017), tarnishing esports' character.

Some participants mentioned standing up for others on the receiving end of toxic behavior because of gender and other factors. Tormentors may direct abrasive talk at new players, minorities, religion, disabilities (Tseng, 2020), sexual orientation, skills and performance (Gao et al., 2017), and sidestepping rules (Adinolf & Türkay, 2018). Women and other underrepresented groups receive this behavior due to the anonymity of some online platforms (Darvin et al., 2020; Nakandala et al., 2017; Tseng, 2020).

Some participants mentioned not using mics, validating what the literature says; some women prefer anonymity - not using voice chat or identifiable Gamertags to hide gender to avoid harassment (Bryce & Rutter, 2002; Skoglund, 2018). Two other ways to avoid toxicity are not to use the chat or exit the game (Sengün et al., 2019). Toxicity is unpleasant and affects play (Adinolf & Türkay, 2018). Toxicity in the gaming culture is one reason for the lack of women playing esports competitively (Ruvalcaba et al., 2018), a thought reiterated by one of the participants.

<u>Learning</u>

All participants described their learning experiences and their college majors and how that learning related to esports or how it empowers the work they do today. Many of them discussed learning about technology either formally or informally. On the informal side, many had built their PCs, and several had taught themselves some level of coding. Several participants had done some streaming, video production, and content creation, as is common among gamers who want to share their expertise (Zolides, 2015). Several others built websites, developed written content, and moderated discussion forums. These

experiences with communication and information technology and the valuable skills developed along the way are beneficial as "esports reconceptualizes sports as a combination of competition, ability, and digital technology" (Ruvalcaba et al., 2018, p. 1).

<u>Overcoming</u>

Participants discussed several issues that contributed to the overcoming theme. One issue was male dominance in esports. Another was lack of respect (Stangl, 1991) or toxicity in gaming culture. Other issues were overcoming personal situations in life (Cunningham et al., 2021) and being under intense scrutiny as a woman (Samuel, 2020). Each of these is a type of barrier.

Topics covered in the literature review began with a discussion about barriers and underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in organizations and higher education – academic and athletic administration (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Cantu-Lee, 2013; Gonzalez, 2020; Gray, 2020; Hakim, 2016; Kies, 2014; Lu, 2020; Nelson, 2020; Northouse, 2013; Samuel, 2020). The participants mentioned several times in the interviews being "one of ten in a room" or the "10%" in their previous experiences or current work in esports. This percentage is lower than the 22.3% of women serving as athletic directors in 2012 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). It is closer to the 10% of women serving as Division I Athletic Directors in 2014.

Northouse (2013) points out that the low number of women in leadership shows that many women have not broken barriers. It is not surprising in this case, as most esports coaches and competitive players are male. As more women feel comfortable

competing and see more women in leadership roles, the number of women in leadership should increase (Everhart & Chelladurai, 1998).

Volunteering

Some participants volunteered with online gaming communities during their youth, and some volunteered with collegiate esports clubs during their college years. Many of today's varsity programs began as student-led club teams (Keiper et al., 2017, Richard et al., 2019). Some participants offered their expertise to other organizations on a volunteer basis. These opportunities provided valuable experience in planning and hosting events and managing and marketing. In several cases, these volunteer experiences led to paid leadership positions with the organization or university – roles such as director or head coach of esports.

Working

Salo (2017) notes that esports coaches may be former collegiate or professional esports athletes before moving into coaching. However, the participants are not former collegiate esports athletes, and though some had played competitively, none were full-time professional players before arriving at their current positions. Chapter Two stated that directors of esports programs may be athletic directors or academic department chairs who have taken on the project of developing an esports program at their college or university. However, the participants in this study arrived in this position in other ways. Some participants had already worked in esports or collegiate esports before taking on their current positions. Some worked in different fields previously. Each of them brought experiences from their previous work that is valuable in their current job. The number of women in collegiate esports leadership is likely to increase as the number of women

competing in collegiate esports increases (Darvin et al., 2020). Table 2 is a display that highlights pertinent findings from the first interview.

<u>Skills</u>

The participants described having previously developed skills such as social networking, leadership, business, communication, event planning, streaming, and bringing people together. These skills are valuable assets for those leading collegiate esports programs and likely profoundly affect their programs. A related concept in Chapter Two stated that the "presence of women in leadership roles or on Boards of Directors has proven to have positive implications on an organization's effectiveness" (Gray, 2020; Semenova, 2020).

Table 2   **Summary of Findings from Interview One**

Summary of Findings from Interview One	
Extracurricular	All participants described involvement in extracurricular activities in their youth. All of them participated in athletics, most competitively and the remaining recreationally. Most participants were involved in music activities, others in dance and other activities. Participants have lasting memories of their coaches and lessons learned through these activities, which may transfer to their current work in esports. None of them competed in esports in high school. Some were involved with esports clubs in college.
Family Living	All participants described having the support of parents on video game play. Many of their parents played, too. Participants also discussed the influence of family values, family activities, parents' careers, and relationships with siblings. Several participants mentioned that they could function well in male-dominated environments because of their experience with male siblings or their families did not adhere to traditional gender norms. Several participants explained how their parents' careers influenced their interests and contributed to their work ethic and skills development.
Gaming	All participants play or played video games and have since they were young. All participants described playing games as something done with someone, bringing people together. They played with parents, siblings, friends, or a combination. Some started on consoles before migrating to PC gaming. Each participant's gaming experiences vary slightly according to their generation's place on the gaming history timeline and what happened to be popular and available to them at the time. Esports culture and community are vital to each of the participants. Each participant has experienced toxicity in online gaming or gaming culture concerning gender. Some participants mentioned standing up for others on the receiving end of toxic behavior because of gender and other factors. Some participants discussed not using mics in game.
Learning	All participants described their learning experiences and their college majors and how that learning related to esports or how it empowers the work they do today. Many of them discussed learning about technology either formally or informally. Many had built their PCs, and several had taught themselves some level of coding. Several participants had

	done some streaming, video production, and content creation. Several others built websites, written content, and moderated discussion forums.
Overcoming	Participants discussed several issues that contributed to the overcoming theme. One issue was male dominance in esports. The participants mentioned being "one of ten in a room" or the "10%" in their previous experiences or current work in esports.
Volunteering	Some participants volunteered with online gaming communities during their youth, and some volunteered with collegiate esports clubs during their college years. Some participants offered their expertise to other organizations on a volunteer basis. These opportunities provided valuable experience in planning and hosting events and managing and marketing. In several cases, these volunteer experiences led to paid leadership positions with the organization or university in esports.
Working	The participants are not former collegiate esports athletes, and though some had played competitively, none were full-time professional players before arriving at their current positions. The participants arrived in this position in other ways. Some participants had already worked in esports or collegiate esports before taking on their current positions. Some worked in different fields previously. Each of them brought experiences from their previous work that is valuable in their current job.
Skills	The participants described having previously developed skills such as social networking, leadership and business skills, communication skills, event planning, streaming, and bringing people together.

From Interview Two

Managing Tasks

All participants described experiences with managing tasks such as scheduling,

planning, tryouts, tracking eligibility, fundraising, and policies and procedures. They also

described "recruitment, budget, *and* marketing responsibilities" (Stevens, 2020, p. vi).

Marketing issues, registration for events, and communicating with sponsors are duties

that may fall to the team or program manager (Lipovaya et al., 2018) or director or head

coach. These tasks are similar to those used for running an athletic program housing

multiple sports or a small business with several lines, as each esports program has various

teams. Streaming is another task that directors and coaches must manage as they struggle

to keep up with the streaming schedule as demand for streaming esports continues to

grow (Rothwell & Shaffer, 2019). Some programs reside in an athletic program that

provides an established system. Other programs live in IT, student development, or an

academic department (Shelton & Haskell, 2018), where a system may need to be built or

revised for managing an esports program.

Managing Facilities

All participants shared their experiences managing esports facilities, whether

small or large, competitive or casual. Railsback and Caporusso (2019) describe esports as

" a novel type of competition and spectator entertainment that pits individuals or teams

playing video games in front of a large crowd attending the show in person or remotely"

(p. 1). Venues ranged from simple computer labs to esports arenas for fan support and

equipped for broadcasting matches (Castillo, 2019; Funk et al., 2018). Coaches and

directors schedule the space, maintain health policies, and deal with any issues. They

mentioned streaming some or all of their matches, so the facilities also have a broadcast

area to manage. Management includes keeping games, software, and hardware up to date

as this sport entirely relies on technology (Kaytoue et al., 2012). Some participants

describe the rapid growth and facing a shortage of space and computers for students,

making scheduling facilities more difficult.

<u>Managing People</u>

Each participant discussed managing students, paid and volunteer staff, and coaches involved in their esports programs. Esports communities are, in essence, communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) – people passionate about what they do and spend time working together to improve skills by sharing information (Richard et al., 2019). Successful virtual team leadership depends on four key factors: good communication and understanding, role clarity, and leadership attitude. Influential leaders recognize each teammate with individual feedback and problem-solve with the entire team (Preston, 2020; Shachaf & Hara, 2005). All participants related that communication with staff and players is frequent through in-person or virtual meetings and on Discord.

The participants described experiences with onboarding, training, team building, scheduling, and conflict resolution. Esports leadership must communicate well to succeed. In addition, they must be adaptable to each roster of players – building relationships with individuals and the team (Preston, 2020). Skoglund (2018) stated, "A great deal of pastoral work goes into managing and maintaining an esport team (p. 33). Much coaching can be compared to pastoring – leading, teaching, guiding, healing, inspiring, and motivating the players and the staff.

They must build a culture that inspires growth and figure out how to motivate each player to greatness (Preston, 2020). As a team, they practice "corporate strategizing" where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts (Skoglund, 2018). "Exceptional critical thinking skills" set elite players apart (Railsback & Caporusso, 2019, p. 7), and communication skills are essential. Communication is worked on continually, and when

new players come in, it disrupts the flow (Skoglund, 2018). They ensure team cohesion in which everyone communicates and gets along (Näsström & Arvérus, 2019).

Some duties of the esports coach include evaluating opponents, developing strategies, and encouraging the team (Lipovaya et al., 2018) before, during, and after the match. Most of the head coaches and directors hired part-time coaches or professional players as needed for coaching specific games. That may include preparing the teams physically and mentally (Kim et al., 2020; Railsback & Caporusso, 2019; Skoglund, 2018).

There is a lack of female team members at every level of competitive esports (Borrowy & Jin, 2013; Darvin et al., 2020; Kari et al., 2019). Castillo (2019) discussed esports and community building, especially among collegiate players. Just as with traditional sports, in esports, the community gives players "a sense of belonging" (Castillo, 2019, p. 27; Taylor, 2015) to something bigger than themselves (Shelton & Haskell, 2018). A spirit of comradery develops over time (Kim et al., 2020). Collegiate esports programs draw gamers out of their dorm rooms and into an interactive campus gaming community (Castillo, 2019; Skoglund, 2018). Teammates may meet regularly for strategy sessions (Richard et al., 2019). They are getting a chance to build relationships while doing something they love (Skoglund, 2018), becoming more skillful as players and teammates (Richard et al., 2019). Broadcasting matches bring even more students into the collaboration, with some providing technical support, streaming support, and casting the games (Shelton & Haskell, 2018).

<u>Interfacing with People from Various Groups</u>

Participants described meeting with people from various groups, including students, faculty, staff, administration, clubs, donors, sponsors, teams, departments, leagues, mentors, and other coaches/directors. They work with students who are players, captains, coaches, and managers. Some have additional non-student staff that may receive pay or volunteer. They advocate for esports among faculty, staff, administration, donors, sponsors, and the community as one of their duties includes communicating with stakeholders (Näsström & Arvérus, 2019). Is esports a sport? In esports research, whether esports is a sport is frequently discussed (Malvone, 2020). At least one participant spoke to this aspect directly, and most of them indirectly, as day in and day out, they fulfill the role of esports advocate on their campuses and in their communities, sharing why it is vital to engagement, recruitment, and retention.

Of course, there are interactions with the esports community – leagues, teams, and other program leaders. The National Association for Collegiate Esports (NACE) is a league for the collegiate varsity level (Andre et al., 2020; Shelton & Haskell, 2018). University members may expect support in developing varsity programs, including help with scheduling, discounts on gear, and consultations with experts. Most participants mentioned the importance of their experiences with mentors in and out of collegiate esports and expressed an appreciation for other women leading collegiate esports programs. Queen Bee Syndrome is not a problem in this circle as the women genuinely support one another (Derks et al., 2011, p. 1243). The literature review discusses scholastic, collegiate, and professional levels of esports. Many participants in this study have visited or plan to visit local high schools to share information about their programs.

<u>Women in Leadership</u>

Participants lead by building quality programs, serving on boards and panels, public speaking, and influencing and inspiring others. They are passionate about eliminating toxicity in the gaming space and educating their students along these lines. An inclusive program is a top priority for them, as esports is known for that. Railsback and Caporusso (2019) stated, "eSports is one of the most inclusive sports that exists. It is completely unbiased toward gender, size, weight, race, or even religion: anyone can sit down and be included" (p. 6). Though they value representing women and advocating for diversity and inclusion, several participants mentioned a desire to also sit on panels for their successes. A lack of recognition is a barrier some women face even after achieving a leadership position (Kies, 2014; Kobla & Li-Hua, 2017; Semenova, 2020).

Some participants provide assistance, resources, or mentoring to high schools just starting esports programs. The number of high schools offering competitive esports is increasing (Tseng, 2020). With advances in technology and participation in traditional youth sports waning, competitive esports help to fill the gap (Malvone, 2020). Several participants relayed that being a woman in this leadership position was a draw for females as it made the space more inviting. One should not underestimate women's gaming skills and overall technical prowess (Bryce & Rutter, 2002; Choi et al., 2019; Cullen, 2018). Many young women play games, and perhaps one day, more of them will represent their schools on esports teams (Castillo, 2019).

<u>Work Environment</u>

As rapid growth and frequent changes are commonplace in esports, these participants are constantly adjusting. Esports as an industry has experienced expeditious

growth (Malvone, 2020; McTee, 2014)) during the past ten years (Darvin et al., 2020).

Coaches and directors describe frequent game schedule changes and league rule changes.

Changes in the popularity of games may mean changes in teams. They work long and

varied hours juggling tasks. Many colleagues are young as this career path is new, and

most are male. All of the participants state that the majority of their players are males.

Esports is complex partly because of its newness. Participants point out that there is no

guide on how to do this work. Further, esports is a conglomeration of technology, society,

economics, and sport (Jin, 2010). Table 3 is a display that highlights pertinent findings

from the second interview.

Table 3 **Summary of Findings from Interview Two**

Summary of Findings from Interview Two	
Managing Tasks	All participants described experiences with managing tasks such as scheduling, planning, tryouts, tracking eligibility, fundraising, and policies and procedures.
Managing Facilities	All participants shared their experiences managing esports facilities, whether small or large, competitive or casual. They schedule the space, maintain health policies, and deal with any issues. They mentioned streaming matches, so the facilities also have a broadcast area. Some participants described the rapid growth and facing a shortage of space and computers, making scheduling facilities more difficult.
Managing People	Each participant discussed managing students, paid and volunteer staff, and coaches. All participants related that communication with staff and players is frequent through in-person or virtual meetings and on Discord. They described experiences with onboarding, training, team building, scheduling, and conflict resolution. Most of the head coaches and directors hired part-time coaches or professional players as needed for coaching specific games.
Interfacing with People from Various Groups	Participants described meeting with people from various groups, including students, faculty, staff, administration, clubs, donors, sponsors, teams, departments, leagues, mentors, and other coaches/directors. They work with students who are players, captains, coaches, and managers. Some have additional non-student staff that may receive pay or volunteer. There are interactions with the esports community – leagues, teams, and other program leaders. Most participants mentioned the importance of their experiences with mentors in and out of collegiate esports and expressed an appreciation for other women leading collegiate esports programs. Many participants in this study have visited or plan to visit local high schools to share information about their programs.
Women in Leadership	Participants lead by building quality programs, serving on boards and panels, public speaking, and influencing and inspiring others. They are passionate about eliminating toxicity in the gaming space and educating their students along these lines. An inclusive program is a top priority for them, as esports is known for that. Some participants provide assistance, resources, or mentoring to high schools just starting esports programs. Several participants relayed that

	being a woman in this leadership position was a draw for females as it made the space more inviting.
Work Environment	Participants are constantly adjusting to rapid growth and constant changes. They describe frequent game schedule changes and league rule changes. Changes in the popularity of games may mean changes in teams. They work long and varied hours juggling tasks. Many colleagues are young as this career path is new, and most are male. All of the participants state that the majority of their players are males. Esports is complex partly because of its newness. Participants point out that there is no guide on how to do this work.

From Interview Three

Grateful for Support

All participants expressed gratitude for their support from administrators, supervisors, donors, sponsors, mentors, faculty and staff, fans, other coaches/directors, and family. According to the literature, women may find a shortage of mentoring and networking opportunities (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). To minimize that barrier, some institutions assist women with training and support (Kobla & Li-Hua, 2017). "Queen Bee Syndrome" (Derks et al., 2011, p. 1243) does not appear to be an issue with the participants, as they described receiving support from other women in esports.

Laying a Foundation for Future Work

They strive for excellence with an eye toward the future. All participants expressed enjoyment of esports and a desire to continue working in esports. Several participants discussed how skills honed while doing this work could transfer to future career opportunities if esports disappeared. In the same way, esports players are also developing and improving marketable skills through playing esports that are valuable to employers.

Esports can be a learning ecology – a space where individual learning occurs and teams learn collaboratively (Richard et al., 2019). An esports learning environment can be considered a cognitive apprenticeship (Collins et al., 1989) where learning mastery comes about through physical training and several types of reflection that, over time, yield expert players, prepared to meet any adversary (Bransford et al., 1989). It is an avenue for developing the soft skills desired by employers today, such as communication, problem-solving, collaboration, teamwork, and high-speed strategic decision-making skills (Lipovaya et al., 2018; Richard et al., 2019; Wagner, 2006).

Leading as a Female Role Model

As the gaming space flourishes (Malvone, 2020; McTee, 2014), they are making esports history as pioneers - some of the first women coaches and directors in the space. All participants acknowledge and appreciate being one of a few women serving as directors or head coaches of collegiate esports programs. Participants realize that they may inspire young women they do not know to follow their example. Their personal stories "can be employed as a means for them to define who they are on their terms, which can be used to dismantle stereotypes and other negative perspectives" (Royster, 2000, as cited in Samuel, 2020).

Though not many ties to the professional level with these esports leaders, one participant mentioned that she would like to see more women seek to play at that level. Though esports competition is open to women players, and many women play esports, few compete at the top levels of the sport (Darvin et al., 2020; Ruotsalainen & Friman, 2018; Tseng, 2020).

Pride in Accomplishment, Accolades, Prestige

All of the participants are proud of their accomplishments. Being part of an underrepresented group can be challenging. Once women win a position in leadership, they may face other barriers, including a lack of recognition for success (Kies, 2014; Kobla & Li-Hua 2017; Semenova, 2020), lack of respect (Stangl, 1991), or intense scrutiny (Samuel, 2020). It has brought the participants some notoriety and speaking invitations. They hope the invitations are for their expertise and not only for gender. They appreciate offers to serve on boards and panels and are proud of their awards. A couple called it a dream job.

Serving the Greater Esports Community

The participants readily share resources with other programs, whether collegiate, scholastic, fledgling or veteran. All participants are interested in helping the greater esports community by encouraging safety, well-being, inclusiveness, and accessibility, first with players and staff in their programs and as they get a chance to speak and share with others in the space. As noted in Chapter 2, it will take a collaborative effort to eradicate malevolence in gaming spaces, making them more inviting to all players (Richard et al., 2019). Positive change in this effect will contribute to future development in the field (Darvin et al., 2020). Table 4 is a display that highlights pertinent from the third interview.

Table 4   **Summary of Findings from Interview Three**

Summary of Findings from Interview Three	
Grateful for Support	All participants expressed gratitude for their support from administrators, supervisors, donors, sponsors, mentors, faculty and staff, fans, other coaches/directors, and family. They described receiving support from other women in esports.
Laying a Foundation for Future Work	They strive for excellence with an eye toward the future. All participants expressed enjoyment of esports and a desire to continue working in esports. Several participants discussed how skills honed while doing this work are transferrable if needed later.
Leading as Female Role Model	They are making esports history as some of the first women coaches and directors. All participants acknowledge and appreciate being one of a few women serving as leaders of collegiate esports programs. Participants realize that they may inspire young women to follow their example.
Pride in Accomplishment, Accolades, Prestige	All of the participants are proud of their accomplishments. Being part of an underrepresented group can be challenging. Participants receive some notoriety and speaking invitations. They hope the invitations are for their expertise and not only for gender. They appreciate offers to serve on boards and panels and are proud of their awards. A couple called it a dream job.
Serving the Greater Esports Community	The participants share resources with other programs of all sizes and levels. All participants are interested in helping the greater esports community by encouraging safety, well-being, inclusiveness, and accessibility, first with players and staff in their programs and then outside the institution.

The participants' experiences shared in this study significantly extend the literature on esports, specifically about women serving in collegiate esports leadership. In addition to themes from their actual work experiences, the study also highlighted themes rising from their personal context and work significance (Seidman, 2019). Therefore, esports literature is also extended in areas related to these themes.

As a thematic array may be used as a visual summary of analysis (Miles et al., 2020), the thematic array displayed in Figure 17 illustrates the relationships between the interview topics and themes and overall essence of being a woman leading a collegiate esports program. Personal history affects our current work and how we see it as meaningful and both are structures that uphold our current work experience and along with that experience make up the essence of the experience.
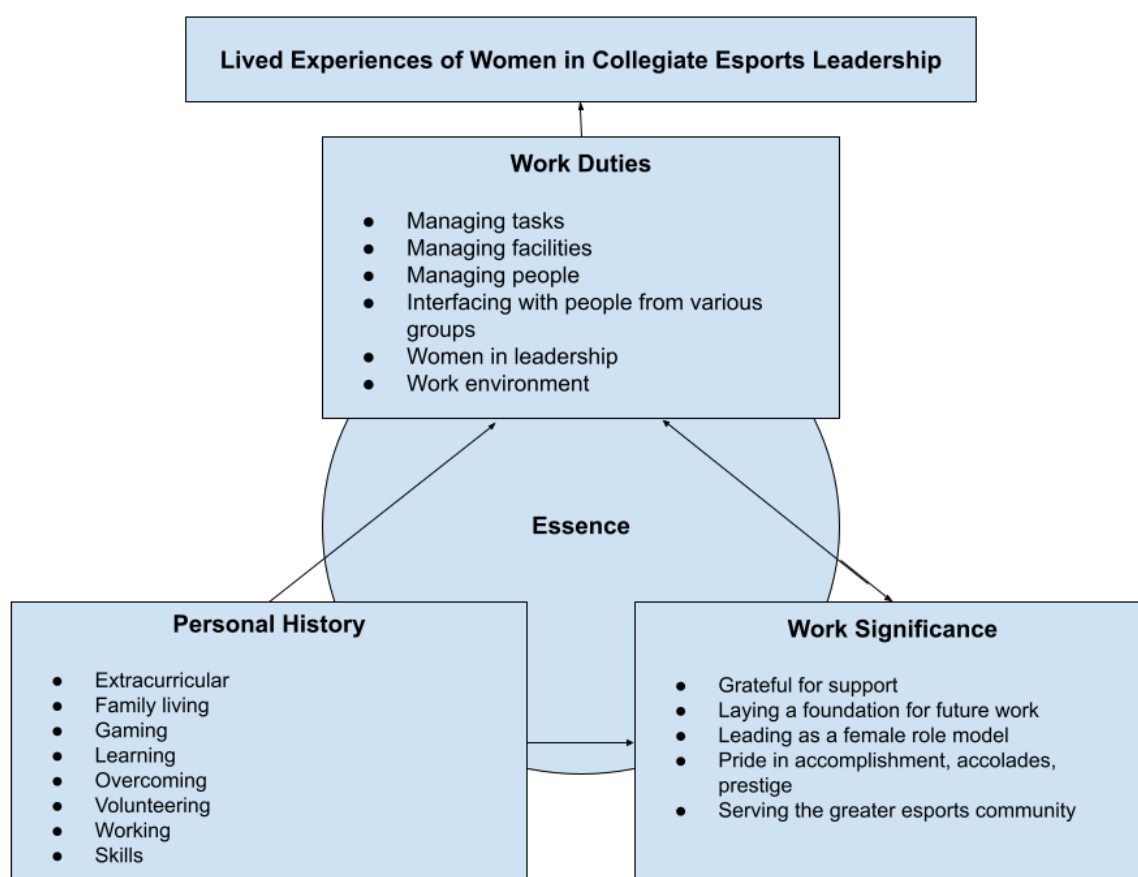

Figure 17   Thematic Array: Lived Experiences of Women in Collegiate Esports Leadership

As the study covered much ground, pinpointing several takeaways may be helpful. Table 5 displays some key takeaways.

Table 5   **Key Takeaways**

Key Takeaways
- Women in leadership positions are role models that attract and influence young women.   - Leading a collegiate esports program is exciting, challenging, and satisfying.   - Leading a collegiate esports program requires knowledge of gaming or esports and managerial, organizational, interpersonal, and technical skills.   - Women leaders of collegiate esports programs do not allow discomfort that might come from being in the 10% to prevent them from leading, serving, and achieving.   - Having experienced or witnessed toxicity, women who lead collegiate esports programs are determined to build a welcoming, inclusive, and toxicity-free gaming environment.   - Leading a collegiate esports program does not require prior experience competing in collegiate or professional esports or being a specific game expert.

The essence of being a woman in collegiate esports leadership condenses down to managing – however, not just managing, meaningful managing with excellence using skills developed previously, as is explained in Chapter 4 and the conclusion of Chapter 5.

<div align="center">

Assumptions

</div>

As stated in Chapter 3, assumptions are to be set aside or suspended when conducting a transcendental phenomenological study. Bracketing or epoché is the researcher's process to unmask preconceptions or biases and set aside or suspend the assumptions (Moustakas, 1994; Peoples, 2021). As mentioned in Chapter 4, bracketing of preconceptions occurred during the project's data collection and analysis phases. Therefore, assumptions before the interviewing process were bracketed or set aside during a brief reflection period (Moustakas, 1994; Peoples, 2021). If anything of this nature arose during the analysis process, a moment of reflection, review, and redirection kept assumptions or bias at bay.

During phenomenological reduction, there were a couple of instances while contemplating whether to designate certain statements as significant that bracketing proved to be an effective strategy. For example, a participant's statement initially seemed insignificant to the project. In my mind, I thought this information was interesting, but it didn't seem applicable to this research. The participant went into detail about the department that houses her program. However, while reflecting, I realized that the participant thought it was important enough to mention it. It was an experience – not an opinion or perception – so I should include it. It was a stark reminder to be careful with each statement or horizon, considering each one of equal importance (Moustakas, 1994; Peoples, 2021).

With intentionality, participants described their memories or "mental representations" of the actual experiences (Jacob, 2019) of leading a collegiate esports program. During the data collection, several items stood out. One was that most participants mentioned building their personal computers. While one might assume that collegiate esports program leaders would be somewhat tech-savvy, building a personal computer requires more technical interest and expertise. That interest and expertise with technology are vital in the field of esports. Karadakis and Painchaud (2022) pinpointed technology management as a key competency for esports professionals, and it "encompasses general technology proficiencies, hardware, software, cybersecurity, and document management" plus use of "several applications and software such as Adobe, coding excel, streaming (i.e., Twitch, YouTube), casting, programming/game engines, as well as being aware of and the ability to adapt and quickly come up to speed on emerging

esport applications" such as Discord (p. 91). Each of the participants possesses this key competency.

Another item that stood out was that each participant acknowledged male dominance in the field or toxicity in gaming culture. Generally speaking, these are two different issues. Male dominance speaks to men vastly outnumbering women. Toxicity refers to the negative behavior of some. In this case, we are talking about the male-dominated online gaming space, so most toxic behavior comes from males. These women noted that men tend to outnumber women significantly in gaming communities, on esports teams, directing esports programs, administration, and in the gaming industry. Being in the minority in a male-dominated culture can be intimidating; courage and determination are necessary survival skills listed by Growe and Montgomery (1999). Though all describe the interactions with men in collegiate esports administration as positive, they have previously experienced toxicity in the online gaming community.

As stated in Chapter 2, toxicity online hate may include accusations, humiliation, swearing, or promoting violence that may dissuade participation in the online activity (Salminen et al., 2018). Sometimes harassment may be sexual and occasionally hateful, and sometimes the offense is being dismissive. One participant stated that it is usually from men. Another said, the community is generally good; there are just a few bad apples. Each came at it from an overcoming perspective rather than as a victim. However, some participants said they still do not use a mic in games. Though the toxic experiences were unpleasant and male dominance may be uncomfortable, they have learned mechanisms to cope and navigate those situations and not cower.

A third striking area is that the participants are proud to be one of few women leading collegiate esports programs and see the importance of being role models, "using their power to empower others" (Growe & Montgomery, 1999, p. 3). However, at the same time, they seem weary of this type of attention. They would prefer credit for their quality work and successes over recognition for being women in the position. These leaders "are not just women leaders, but simply leaders – leaders who should be recognized for their good work" (Growe & Montgomery, 1999, p. 9).

Limitations

A limitation of this study is that the sample is seven participants. The number of women in collegiate esports leadership is not large, and not everyone invited to participate in the study responded to the invitation or agreed to participate. Though the sample size is somewhat smaller, data reached saturation as no new themes were needed (Peoples, 2021). The findings of this study are particular to this group of women at this specific time (Moustakas, 1994). Though the results may seem typical, they cannot be generalized across the population of women in collegiate esports leadership.

Recommendations for Future Research

In phenomenology, the horizon is the current situation, and "the horizon cannot be bracketed"; therefore, some revelations may become apparent later (Peoples, 2021, pp. 82-83). One recommendation for future research based on the findings of this study would be to repeat the process with this group of women in two to three years. Chapter 2 explained that esports is experiencing rapid growth within programs and as a whole as more programs come on board. The work environment theme from the second interviews revealed the rugged, fast-paced, and draining schedule for esports coaches and directors.

Most of them were putting in a lot of time and effort in their positions as they were building the foundations of new or newer programs and thinking that things would ease up some as the programs became more established. It would be helpful to see whether that was the case - if they could take more time off and lead a more balanced life after the program became more established.

Another recommendation for research that sprung from the findings of this study from the work environment theme would be to explore the compensation for collegiate esports coaches and directors as one participant spoke of how it is a topic of discussion among leaders and about the gravity of the situation. In Chapter 2, there was a mention of esports' profitability; however, there was no discussion of collegiate coaches' and directors' salaries.

Chapter 2 highlighted the importance of young women having an opportunity to observe women in leadership positions to increase the number of women in leadership. A third recommendation for further research arose from the women in leadership theme in the second interviews. These women were aware of their influence on young women and how their presence in a leadership position is a draw to young women. Again, it would be relevant to revisit this study to see the impact of their leadership in a few years with the same women or other women fitting the same criteria. Can they describe specific instances where young women joined a team, took on support positions, or became leaders in the gaming space?

Male dominance in esports is discussed in Chapter 2 and appears during the second interview with participants. A fourth recommendation is a future study with these

or other women to learn about future experiences as "one out of ten" in the room. Will the ratio change in the coming years? If so, how much?

A fifth recommendation arises from a limitation of this study as it is a phenomenology. With phenomenology, only experiences are examined, not opinions or perceptions. Perhaps, researchers would consider conducting a cross-case study with this group or a similar group reviewing the perceptions of women leading an esports program. Table 6 is a display that highlights pertinent aspects of the project.

Table 6   **Summary of Recommendations for Future Research**

Summary of Recommendations for Future Research	
Work/life balance	Revisit the work environment theme with this group in a few years
Compensation	Explore esports directors' and coaches' compensation
Impact of leadership	Explore the impact of women in esports leadership on young women's roles in esports
"One out of ten" in the room	Will the ratio of women to men change over the coming years?
Opinions/perceptions	A cross-case study to reveal perceptions of women in esports leadership

Implications

Though esports literature is experiencing rapid growth, there are few studies targeting collegiate esports leadership. Esports research covers many aspects, but a focus on leadership has not been a primary focus of researchers. Before now, a gap in the literature existed concerning women's lived experiences in the collegiate esports director or head coach role. This study helps fill a gap in esports literature about women leading collegiate esports programs; however, a gap exists regarding men in collegiate esports

leadership. Through studying these women's lived experiences, several implications are apparent. These include the underrepresentation of women in leadership and esports, toxicity in the gaming space, and fair compensation and work-life balance for collegiate esports leaders.

Underrepresentation of Women in Leadership

There is an underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in business, higher education (Northouse, 2013), and in this case, collegiate esports. This study provides a platform for women to share their experiences in a leadership position, which empowers other women to be leaders (Growe & Montgomery, 1999). Several participants mentioned being in the 10%. The findings in this study may inform, motivate, or inspire women to break whatever barriers they face to achieve a previously seemingly unreachable leadership position. The more women serving in these leadership roles, the more women will be drawn to these positions and see that it is possible and that they can do it (Growe & Montgomery, 1999). Moreover, they can do it well!

Underrepresentation of Women in Esports

These women serving in collegiate esports leadership are examples for other women. They all appreciate the opportunity to represent women on their campus, in the greater esports community, and beyond. They are showing other women how to navigate male-dominated work environments. As they continue to serve, they realize that they are creating inviting opportunities for young women to participate in collegiate esports as a player or in a support role and perhaps leading a program of their own (Growe & Montgomery, 1999).

Toxicity in Online Gaming

Each woman in this study experienced or witnessed negative behavior in the online gaming space or esports gaming culture. As leaders, they lead with a desire to create a warm and welcoming gaming environment for all, and they do it by educating their players and demanding excellence.

Esports Leaders' Hours and Compensation

Though data collection missed targeting compensation of collegiate esports leaders, participants described their varied duties, hours, and staffing. Since their situations are similar to running a start-up business, most are willing to do whatever it takes and put in many extra hours. Perhaps this study will shine a light on this issue so that collegiate esports leaders will receive the compensation, support, and work-life balance they deserve to continue to serve students well as they grow their programs.

Conclusion

Through this study of women's experiences as leaders of collegiate esports programs, seven women have shared the historical context for their present work, their experience as leaders of collegiate esports programs, and how it is meaningful. During the analysis, pertinent themes emerged. We learned what esports leaders do, how they came about doing it, and its significance. Women leading collegiate esports programs enjoy overcoming challenges and love to learn. They have technical prowess and are courageous, strategic, driven, flexible, organized, and reflective. Administering, leading, managing, teaching, and coaching are essential elements of this phenomenon.

However, the essence of the lived experiences of a woman in collegiate esports leadership boils down to meaningful managing with excellence using skills developed

through previous life experiences. Meaningful as they represent women. Managing, but not everyday managing – more like managing like a startup CEO. With excellence, as women in leadership are under the microscope, they do not want to make mistakes (Women Gaining Ground in Academia, 1994). Husserl (1931, p. 43 as cited in Moustakas, 1994) describes essence as "that which is common or universal, the condition or quality without which a thing would not be what it is" (p.100). Meaningful managing with excellence is that "condition or quality without" which being a woman in collegiate esports leadership "would not be what it is" (Husserl, 1931, p. 43 as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 100).

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Greetings.

My name is Kim Johnson, and I am a doctoral candidate at Boise State University. I am conducting a research study to explore the lived experiences of women in collegiate esports leadership. This includes women who are coaches or program directors of varsity esports at a college or university. I am emailing to ask if you would like to participate in this research project. Participation is completely voluntary, and your answers will be anonymous. Your participation will help us learn more about this topic from the perspective as a woman serving in this type of leadership position.

If you are interested in participating, please read the attached Informed Consent Form carefully. If you choose to participate, please sign the form and email it to Kim Johnson (kimjohnson59@u.boisestate.edu).

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me (kimjohnson59@u.boisestate.edu) or my faculty advisor, Dr. Jesús Trespalacios (jésustrespalacios@boisestate.edu).

Thank you for your time.

Kim Johnson

Doctoral Candidate

Boise State University

APPENDIX B

BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY

INFORMED CONSENT

Study Title: Lived Experiences of Women in Collegiate Esports Leadership
Principal Investigator: Kim S. Johnson   **Co-Investigator: Dr. Jesus Trespalacios**

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and it will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

➢ **PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND**
You are invited to participate in a research study to learn more about the lived experiences of women in collegiate esports leadership. The information gathered will be used to better understand the essence of being a woman serving as a coach or director of a collegiate esports program. You are being asked to participate because you are a woman who is coaching or directing a varsity esports team or program at the collegiate level where the program is a member of NACE.

➢ **PROCEDURES**
If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in three interviews within a period of a couple weeks. Each interview will last up to one hour. During the interviews, you will be asked about your history that sets the context for your work in esports, what you do as a leader of an esports program, and what that experience means to you. The interview will be video and/or audio-recorded via Zoom. Whether or not to use the camera is up to you.

➢ **RISKS**
Some of the questions asked may make you uncomfortable or upset. You are always free to decline to answer any question or to stop your participation at any time. Should you feel discomfort after participating and you are a Boise State University student, you may contact the University Health Services (UHS) for counseling services at (208) 426-1459. They are located on campus in the Norco Building, 1529 Belmont Street, Boise ID, 83706.

➢ **BENEFITS**
There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information that you provide may be helpful to women and others serving in higher education, collegiate athletics, and in esports programs at various levels. It may also be helpful to students interested in participating in collegiate esports.

➢ **EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY**
Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The members of the research team, and the Boise State University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) may access the data. The ORC monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

Your name will not be used in any written reports or publications which result from this research. Data will be kept for three years (per federal regulations) after the study is complete and then destroyed.

➢ **PAYMENT/COMPENSATION**
You will receive a gift card as a token of appreciation for participating in the study.

➢ **PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY**
You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

➢ **QUESTIONS**
If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, you should first contact the principal investigator at kimjohnson59@u.boisestate.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Boise State University Institutional Review Board (IRB), which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the board office between 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM, Monday through Friday, by calling (208) 426-5401 or by writing: Institutional Review Board, Office of Research Compliance, Boise State University, 1910 University Dr., Boise, ID 83725-1138.

DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT
I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand I can withdraw at any time. I have received a copy of this form.

_____   _____
Printed Name of Study Participant   **Signature** of Study Participant   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date

APPENDIX C

Lived Experiences of Women in Collegiate Esports Leadership
Interview Script and Interview Questions

Interview Session 1

"Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today."

"The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore and describe the essence of women's lived experiences in leading collegiate varsity esports programs at institutions of higher education. Researchers have conducted studies for some aspects of esports, however little is known about women's experiences in leading collegiate varsity esports programs as a program director or coach. A leadership gender gap exists in politics, business, and higher education, and there is one in collegiate varsity esports as well. As leadership positions in higher education and collegiate athletics are typically male dominated, this study exemplifying women in collegiate athletic leadership may inform and inspire women who seek leadership roles in these and other fields where there may be underrepresentation. Additionally, this study will help to fill the gap in esports literature where collegiate esports leadership is concerned."

"The interview consists of a couple demographic questions followed by some open-ended questions and possibly several follow-up questions. It will last up to 60 minutes, and we will record the discussion to make sure that it is recorded accurately."

"Do you have any questions for me before we begin?"

Demographic Questions

1. What is your age?

a. 18-25 years old

b. 26-35 years old

c. 36-45 years old

d. 46-55 years old

e. Over 55

2. Please specify your ethnicity.

a. Caucasian
b. African - American
c. Latino or Hispanic
d. Asian
e. Native American
f. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
g. Two or more
h. Other/Unknown
Prefer not to say

3. What is the highest level of school you have completed?

a. Bachelor's degree

b. Master's degree

b. Doctorate

Open-ended Questions for Interview Session 1 - Adapted from Cilesiz (2009); Seidman (2019)

Focus: Your experience with collegiate esports leadership in the context of your life history (Seidman, 2019)

- How did you arrive at this experience of collegiate esports leadership?
- Tell me about your career trajectory.
- Tell me about your prior leadership experiences.
- Tell me about your prior experiences with esports.
- Tell me about your education experiences.
- Tell me about your experiences in athletics.
- Tell me about your experiences with technology.
- Reconstruct…
- Tell me a story…

Thank you for participating, and for assisting us in learning more about the essence of collegiate esports leadership from a woman's perspective.

Interview Session 2

"Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today."

"The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the essence of women's lived experiences in leading collegiate varsity esports programs at institutions of higher education. Researchers have conducted studies for some aspects of esports, however little is known about women's experiences in leading collegiate varsity esports programs as a program director or coach. A leadership gender gap exists in politics, business, and higher education, and there is one in collegiate varsity esports as well. As leadership positions in higher education and collegiate athletics are typically male dominated, this study exemplifying women in collegiate athletic leadership may inform and inspire women who seek leadership roles in these and other fields where there may be underrepresentation. Additionally, this study will help to fill the gap in esports literature where collegiate esports leadership is concerned."

"The interview consists of some open-ended questions and possibly several follow-up questions. It will last up to 60 minutes, and we will record the discussion to make sure that it is recorded accurately."

"Do you have any questions for me before we begin?"

Open-ended Questions for Interview Session 2 - Adapted from Cilesiz (2009); Seidman (2019)

Focus: The details of your present lived experience in collegiate esports leadership – "your actions, observations, seeing, feeling, hearing…" (Seidman, 2019, p. 22)

- Is there anything you wish to revisit from the first interview?
- What do you do as a collegiate esports coach or program director?
- Reconstruct your day from beginning to end.
- Tell me a story about…
- Is there anything else you wish to share?

Thank you for participating, and for assisting us in learning more about the essence of collegiate esports leadership from a woman's perspective.

Interview Session 3

"Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today."

"The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore and describe the essence of women's lived experiences in leading collegiate varsity esports programs at institutions of higher education. Researchers have conducted studies for some aspects of esports, however little is known about women's experiences in leading collegiate varsity esports programs as a program director or coach. A leadership gender gap exists in politics, business, and higher education, and there is one in collegiate varsity esports as well. As leadership positions in higher education and collegiate athletics are typically male dominated, this study exemplifying women in collegiate athletic leadership may inform and inspire women who seek leadership roles in these and other fields where there may be underrepresentation. Additionally, this study will help to fill the gap in esports literature where collegiate esports leadership is concerned."

"The interview consists of some open-ended questions and possibly several follow-up questions. It will last up to 60 minutes, and we will record the discussion to make sure that it is recorded accurately."

"Do you have any questions for me before we begin?"

Open-ended Questions for Interview Session 3 - Adapted from Cilesiz (2009); Seidman (2019)

Focus: What does your work as a woman in collegiate esports leadership means to you (Seidman, 2019)

- Is there anything you wish to revisit from the first two interviews?
- What does it mean? Or how does it matter? What is the significance?
- What is the meaning of your work in the context of your past or future?
- Is there anything else you wish to share?

Thank you for participating, and for assisting us in learning more about the essence of collegiate esports leadership from a woman's perspective.

APPENDIX D

Women in Collegiate Esports Leadership (Interviews)

Codes

Name	Description	Files	References
Personal History	How did you arrive at this position?	0	0
Education and learning		1	1
Career planning		1	3
College education studies	Collegiate esports leaders have had some college education.	1	26
Early tech education		1	2
Later tech education		1	6
Self-taught tech		1	13
Study of music	Collegiate esports leaders studied music as a child, teen, or while in college - composition, vocal, or instrumental.	1	9
Extracurricular activities		0	0
Experience with competitive teams and individual competition	Collegiate esports leaders have experience with competing in athletics, music, dance, xxxxxx, or xxxxx.	1	18
Experiences with and lessons learned from coaches and teachers	Collegiate esports leaders were athletes who learned lessons from their previous coaches.	1	15
Interest in xxxxx hung out with xxxxx club		1	1
Xxxx xxxx		1	2

Name	Description	Files	References
School or church or community leadership experience	Collegiate esports leaders had school leadership experiences in clubs or student councils.	1	9
Writing for the school newspaper		1	2
Family	Collegiate esports experiences with family	0	0
Family issues and responsibility		1	2
Having children		1	3
Not under stereotypical gender roles		1	2
Parent influence and parent career influence on gaming, technology, and opportunity.		1	15
Siblings and games		1	3
Support		1	2
Overcoming	Collegiate esports leaders overcome difficult situations and gain strength.	0	0
Dealing with challenges		1	9
Experiences with toxicity in esports or gaming spaces	Collegiate esports leaders have experienced toxicity in esports or gaming spaces.	1	16
Growth mindset - a desire and willingness to learn		1	2
Male-dominated		1	12
Mentors		1	2

Name	Description	Files	References
Personality traits		1	9
Skills	Collegiate esports leaders exhibit skills needed in this environment.	0	0
Ability to operate in a crisis		1	1
Bringing people together and building communities		1	2
communication skills		1	5
Connections		1	1
Delegate responsibilities		1	1
Event planning		1	3
Gathering feedback		1	3
grant writing		1	1
Leadership and business skills		1	7
Networking		1	7
Organized		1	4
Photo and video editing, building websites, coding		1	1
Planning and problem solving		1	2
Streaming		1	7
Understanding of finance through the family business	Collegiate esports leaders have a good understanding of finance from helping with and observing the family business.	1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Understanding of higher ed, athletics, recruiting	Collegiate esports leader has a good understanding of higher education, collegiate athletics, and the recruiting process.	1	1
Video games, gaming, competitive gaming	Collegiate esports leaders' experiences with gaming	0	0
college gaming		1	17
club sport		1	3
Contributor to esports club - then an officer		1	2
More than a club - a grassroots event organization		1	6
Rewards for club success		1	3
Early Video gameplay		1	16
Female players		1	1
Friendships and video games and esports		1	23
Gaming now		1	8
Hidden identity		1	4
online community		1	1
xxxxxxx		1	2
Volunteering in esports	Collegiate esports leaders may have begun their work as volunteers.	0	0
As a writer		1	3
Ran a tournament	Collegiate esports leader ran a tournament as a volunteer.	1	10

Name	Description	Files	References
Volunteer first and then a staff member	Collegiate esports leader was a volunteer first and then became a staff member and later a director.	1	10
Volunteering at conventions and events	Collegiate esports leaders have experience volunteering at esports conventions, coaches' clinics, and LAN events.	1	5
Work experience	Collegiate esports leaders' experience in the workforce.	1	6
Coaching or refereeing		1	5
Esports opportunities outside of school		1	8
Esports was not my plan and how I got this job	Collegiate esports leaders did not expect to find themselves in this line of work and sometimes came to this position in unexpected ways.	1	9
Other work experience		1	14
Teen employment	Collegiate esports leaders held volunteer or paying jobs during their teen years.	1	3
Work Duties	What do you do in your work?	0	0
Interfacing with People from Various Groups	Collegiate leaders in esports interface with people from a variety of groups such as students, faculty, staff, administration, other clubs, sponsors, other teams, departments, leagues, and mentors.	0	0
Attend meetings with a variety of people	Collegiate esports leaders attend campus meetings, meetings with administration, meetings with students and staff, and meetings with sponsors, donors, other schools, suppliers, and recruits. Meetings may be in person or virtual.	1	9

Name	Description	Files	References
Relationship with IT, athletics, and other departments.	Collegiate esports leaders develop and maintain relationships with IT, athletics, and other departments including student development.	1	6
Relationships with administration	Collegiate esports leaders develop relationships with administrators on campus.	1	15
Relationships with faculty and staff	Collegiate esports leaders develop relationships with faculty and staff on campus.	1	6
Relationships with league or conference leaders	Collegiate esports leaders may develop relationship with conference leaders or even become conference leaders.	1	10
Relationships with mentors	Collegiate esports leaders value the relationships they have with mentors.	1	8
relationships with other clubs		1	1
Relationships with players		1	2
Relationships with research partners	Collegiate esports leaders collaborate with researchers to collect data on various aspects of esports.	1	1
Relationships with sponsors and donors and partnerships	Collegiate esports leaders may develop relationships with sponsors and donors to the program.	1	9
Job description	Job descriptions for collegiate esports leaders encompass many areas and can be described in a multitude of ways.	1	12
Game titles and teams		1	1
Hours worked	Collegiate esports leaders work varying hours.	1	5
Job Title and department	Collegiate esports leaders may be known by various titles.	1	19

Name	Description	Files	References
Hybrid role - when the esports job title is part-time	Coaches or directors in collegiate esports leadership may split their time between esports and other duties within their department or between departments. Sometimes the pay is low and some recommend that a dedicated person hold this role.	1	9
Leadership	Collegiate esports leaders lead by building, serving, influencing, and inspiring others locally and in the greater esports community.	0	0
Advocate for esports and program	Collegiate esports leaders are the lead advocate for esports on campus and for their programs and reach out to support other causes as well.	1	10
Built program from the beginning	As this is a new frontier, some directors are the first in their position at a university and build the program from the ground up.	1	16
Consulting with schools and universities	Collegiate esports leaders may consult with K-12 schools or other universities - helping them as they begin to develop their own esports programs. Universities may show interest in hiring these leaders to lead their programs.	1	6
Growth mindset and professional development	Collegiate esports leaders have a growth mindset and seek to continue developing professionally.	1	4
Opportunities to serve outside the organization		1	2
Program structure and development	As the lead administrator of the program, collegiate esports leaders plan and organize the program structure and development.	1	10

Name	Description	Files	References
Quality of work	Collegiate esports leaders take pride in their work and want it to show excellence.	1	6
Women in leadership representing and inspiring women	Collegiate esports leaders represent other women in the space and may also inspire and encourage young women to follow.	1	6
Notoriety		1	2
Players don't seem to care if the leader is male or female		1	1
Something to prove because not seen for skill	Collegiate esports leaders are chosen for panels often to address the topic of being a woman in the space as opposed to being included to discuss their program.	1	4
Manage facilities	Collegiate esports leaders manage esports facilities which may range from a competitive space, a practice space, and maybe a casual gaming space. This includes scheduling, maintaining hardware and software, maintaining policies for public health, and dealing with any issues that arise.	1	4
facility and issues with it	Collegiate esports leaders may have issues with their facility that must be dealt with - cleaning, xxxxxxxx, etc.	1	11
Maintain policies for public health	Collegiate esports leaders may have to implement University policies regarding the pandemic and other health issues.	1	11
Manage hardware and software	Collegiate esports leaders are often the first line of IT for their facility. They may also loan items to other departments occasionally.	1	7
Manage multiple gaming areas	Leaders in collegiate esports may manage multiple gaming areas including competitive gaming areas, casual pc	1	6

Name	Description	Files	References
	gaming areas, console gaming areas, board game areas, and xxxxxx.		
Players use of facilities		1	2
Manage people	Collegiate esports leaders manage students, paid and volunteer staff, and coaches involved in the program.	1	2
Staff and coaching	Collegiate esports leaders usually have some type of staff and coaches.	1	25
coaching for improvement	Collegiate esports leaders coach their players toward improvement.	1	2
Communication	Collegiate esports leaders have important conversations with their coaches and staff.	1	16
Manage volunteers		1	9
Train and schedule staff	Collegiate esports leaders design policies and procedures for staff. They also train and schedule staff to support the program and events.	1	12
Student membership	The number of students in a program can vary widely.	1	1
Casual players casual voices		1	2
Female members	Female members make up about 10% of the total membership.	1	5
Manage competitive teams	Leaders in collegiate esports programs manage competitive teams for various game titles, possibly even multiple teams per game title.	1	9
Captains and managers continue and execute plans	Collegiate esports leaders rely on captains and managers to continue and execute plans.	1	2
Communication with players	Collegiate esports leaders must communicate with their players.	1	13

Name	Description	Files	References
Official teams and prospective teams	Collegiate esports leaders differentiate between their official teams, prospective teams, and club teams.	1	2
Player development	Collegiate esports leaders deal with various player development issues including grades, behavior, discipline, and mental health.	1	7
Diversity, inclusion, toxicity		1	1
Grades		1	11
Health and Wellness		1	8
Remote play during the pandemic	Collegiate esports leaders provided gear for students who needed it during the pandemic when play and practice took place at home. Remote play took its toll on players - lower morale and performance.	1	2
Team rules and facility rules		1	4
Practice		0	0
Practice times		1	2
Scrims		1	1
VOD time -review own and upcoming opponent video		1	2
Pushback		1	2
Recruiting	Collegiate esports leaders recruit students for their competitive teams.	1	24
Gender		1	1
Oversee tryouts and make rosters assign captains	Collegiate esports leaders oversee tryouts.	1	7

Name	Description	Files	References
rosters		1	2
Scholarships		1	2
Oversee club teams	Collegiate esports leaders may support club teams as well as varsity teams. Sometimes club teams are a sort of farm teams.	1	3
Manage tasks	Collegiate esports leaders oversee a variety of managerial tasks that involve marketing, scheduling, planning, budgeting, and policies and procedures.	0	0
Assistance with paperwork and compliance		1	1
Budgeting	Collegiate esports leaders manage the budget for the program which may also include a community game center in some cases.	1	6
Fundraising	Collegiate esports leaders may need to pad their budgets with fundraising efforts.	1	5
League fees		1	2
Order jerseys		1	1
Purchasing		1	2
Develop and revise policies and procedures - handbook		1	5
Plan and run programmed events	Collegiate esports leaders may plan and run additional campus events for engagement.	1	19
Schedule practices and competitions	Collegiate esports leaders organize a calendar of practices and competitions	1	10

Name	Description	Files	References
No real schedule	Unlike other sports, esports matches can be rescheduled at the drop of a hat sometimes causing chaos.	1	5
Social media use and website	Collegiate esports leaders must communicate with fans and families using social media and keep the website updated	1	9
Streaming broadcasts	Collegiate esports leaders may oversee the broadcast of matches on Twitch.	1	14
Travel	Collegiate esports leaders oversee travel for teams and staff.	1	15
Work environment	Collegiate esports leaders wear many hats for long and unusual hours in a creative rapidly growing fast-paced understaffed male-dominated work environment where a typical day is not typical at all and peers are mainly in 20's and 30's.	0	0
Creative problem solving	Collegiate esports leaders look for creative ways to solve problems and to make things better and they encourage input from staff as well.	1	2
long and unusual hours - frequent nights and weekends	Collegiate esports leaders tend to work long and odd hours that frequently include nights and weekends.	1	9
Male-dominated	Collegiate esports leaders are working in a male-dominated field.	1	6
Rapid program growth	Some collegiate esports programs grow very rapidly.	1	11
Technology applications and tools	Collegiate esports leaders use a variety of technology applications to accomplish a wide variety of tasks.	1	21
Typical day	Collegiate esports leaders have some basic tasks that they complete daily.	1	8

Name	Description	Files	References
Understaffed and many hats	Collegiate esports leaders wear many hats and may lead programs that are understaffed - or may have to wait for additional staff to relieve the load at some point.	1	17
wild west and moving rapidly - must adapt quickly	Collegiate esports leaders must be ready for anything and adapt to changes quickly.	1	7
Young age of leaders	Collegiate esports leaders tend to be younger - 20's and 30's.	1	1
Work Significance	How is this work meaningful or significant to you?	0	0
Female leadership		1	34
Camaraderie because of shared experiences		1	7
Grateful for support		1	8
Laying a foundation for future work		1	15
Prestige and accolades and giving back		1	35
The greater esports community		1	40