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CAREER COMMITMENT OF FEMALE MID-LEVEL LEADERS IN THE TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY APPROACH

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Career Commitment of Female Mid-Level Leaders in the Tourism and Hospitality
Industry in the State of Florida: A Narrative Inquiry Approach

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Abstract

The tourism and hospitality industry (THI) is the leading industry in the state of Florida's economy, yet it faces challenges related to workforce retention and leadership diversity. The aim of this dissertation was to explore the career commitment of female mid-level leaders within this industry, focusing on the factors influencing their commitment to their careers in the THI. This study involved in-depth interviews with three female mid-level leaders working in the THI in the state of Florida, using a qualitative research method with a narrative inquiry approach. The findings revealed that these leaders are driven by a profound passion for the industry, alongside their own resilience and adaptability. Key motivators include mentorship, opportunities for connecting with guests and employees, advocating for others, and maintaining personal integrity. Despite their commitment, the participants expressed concerns about corporate politics, achieving work-life balance, gender-based challenges, and the future prospects of their careers and the THI as a whole. This research contributes to understanding the unique experiences of female mid-level leaders in the THI and highlights the need for organizational strategies that support career commitment and address gender-specific challenges. The study's insights may inform industry practices, helping foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for female leaders.

Keywords: career commitment, female leaders, hospitality, narrative inquiry, tourism

Dedication

      I dedicate my dissertation to the past, present, and future female leaders in the tourism and hospitality industry: the trailblazers, the crusaders, and the visionaries, and to my students, who have the responsibility and opportunity to improve the industry.

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To my family and friends, thank you for understanding that it would take me days to reply to messages and that free time was not a luxury I had. Thanks to our sweet dog, Houdini, and our crazy cat, Cali Joan, for making me take breaks and keeping me company while I worked on this research study.

More than thanks to my parents in heaven, for giving me this insane work ethic, a passion for people's stories, empathy, and the love of both reading and writing. When I was a kid, I told my dad that I would write a novel one day. Well, here is my non-fiction novel, Mom and Dad.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Tourism and hospitality (TH) represent the largest industry globally, currently employing 272 million people, with a peak of 334 million in 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2022). The TH business is a worldwide industry that comprises a wide range of businesses, including restaurants, hotels, cruise lines, event planning, and ecotourism (Walker, 2020). TH is the fifth largest industry in the United States, employing 15.5 million people, including 8.2 million female employees (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). Although the industry employs people from diverse backgrounds (Clevenger & Singh, 2013), gender diversity is a concern, as fewer women than men achieve mid-level leadership positions (Castell Project, 2022).

The tourism and hospitality industry (THI) is growing, leading to an increased demand for employees (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). However, mid-level female leaders are currently lacking in the THI, creating a gender imbalance that is particularly evident in the lodging and restaurant sectors of the THI, where male general managers (GMs) are prevalent (Ali et al., 2022). A need exists to increase the number of female mid-level leaders employed in the THI to address the concerns over gender imbalance (Castell Project, 2022).

As demonstrated in Table 1, there is a large disparity between female and male hourly employees and entry-level leaders, compared to female and male mid-level leaders, particularly evident in the THI lodging and food sectors. The lack of gender diversity is a critical issue, with a majority, 78%, of THI organizations claiming to prioritize having more women in leadership positions. However, the current statistics show that only 29% of the total TH leadership positions are currently held by women (Castell Project, 2022). This discrepancy highlights a disconnect between what TH organizations claim as an organizational priority and the representation of women in leadership roles (Brien et al., 2015). The career commitment of women who ascend to leadership positions and those who do not may serve as a differentiating factor (Carvalho et al., 2018; Gonzalez-Serrano et al., 2018).

Table 1

Percentage of Females Employees in THI Hourly and Leadership Roles

	Hourly Roles	Entry-level Leadership	Mid-level Leadership	Source
Hotels and Lodging	70.3%	47.6%	34.3%	U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022; Zippia, 2023a
Restaurants		61.2%	37.8%	U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022; Zippia, 2023b
Host/Hostess	84.3%			U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022
Server	68.2%			U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022
Food Service		48.5%		U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022
Chef			22.8%	U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022
Cook	40.2%			Castell Project, 2022
Baker	64.8%			Castell Project, 2022
Tourism & Hospitality Industry			20%	Castell Project, 2022; Krivkovich et al., 2022

Given the disparity in the representation between entry-level and mid-to-high-level leadership positions, it is essential to understand the factors contributing to the long-term commitment to careers in the industry. Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation study was to explore the factors that influence the career commitment of female mid-level leaders in the THI. The aim of this study was to identify factors contributing to career commitment in the industry by conducting a narrative analysis of female mid-level leaders in various positions in the THI.

THI is the largest employer globally (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2022), ranking as the fifth largest industry in the United States (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022) and the leading industry in the state of Florida in terms of economic impact (Visit Florida Research, 2023). However, the current distribution of leadership positions within the THI indicates that only 29% of all leadership

roles are occupied by women, with females employed in approximately 20% of the mid-level leadership roles in the industry (Castell Project, 2022). The underrepresentation of women in leadership highlights the need to explore their career commitment within the THI (Ali et al., 2022; Nagar, 2021; Remington & Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018).

Blau (1985) described career commitment as an individual's dedication and loyalty toward their chosen profession or vocation. This commitment influences mid-level leaders' decisions to continue employment in their respective fields rather than change careers. Mid-level leaders opt to remain in their chosen industry due to their passion for the industry and a personal identity cultivated through a desire to develop one's career (Ferdian et al., 2022). Consistent with this finding, Yuliawati and Teonata (2022) proposed that career commitment, heightened job satisfaction, and reduced turnover intention are connected.

Addressing the underrepresentation of female leaders within the THI necessitates a thorough examination of the viewpoints and narrative testimonies presented by the current mid-level female leaders (Ali et al., 2022; Cassel et al., 2018; Gebbels, Gao, et al., 2020; Nagar, 2021). Without an active engagement with these narrative accounts detailing the career commitment of female mid-level leaders, the gender leadership gap in the THI will persist (Cassel et al., 2018; Gebbels, Gao, et al., 2020). Ali et al. (2022) and Nagar (2021) underscored the imperative to delve into the individual narratives of female leaders within the THI to understand the factors that drive their career commitment.

Statement of the Problem

Without a comprehensive understanding and acknowledgment of the career commitment and insights of female mid-level leaders in the THI, the gender disparity in leadership roles between women and men will likely continue (Ali et al., 2022; Gebbels, Gao, et al., 2020). Voices of female mid-level leaders in the THI regarding the factors contributing to their career commitment are lacking, concerning their career commitment (Ali et al., 2022; Mooney, 2020; Nagar, 2021).

This study encompassed an exploration of their viewpoints and narrative testimonies to understand their career commitment to the THI.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research was to explore what factors contribute to the career commitment of three female mid-level leaders working and with at least 10 years of work experience within the THI in the state of Florida based on narrative stories from the participants. The focus of the study was on their career commitment and factors that contribute to their career commitment to the THI. A narrative inquiry approach was employed to explore the participants' stories concerning career commitment and the factors that have shaped their career commitment in the THI, drawing upon the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Clandinin (2006). A description of the career commitment and narratives of female mid-level leaders employed in the THI could help improve recruitment strategies and foster the advancement of women in the THI.

Research Question

The research question that guided the problem of practice herein was the following: What factors contribute to the career commitment of purposively sampled female mid-level leaders currently working in the tourism and hospitality industry?

Significance of the Research

In Florida, the THI contributes $101.9 billion to the economy, making TH the chief industry in the state (Visit Florida Research, 2023). The THI accounts for 1.2 million jobs in the state of Florida (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022), compensating employees with $57.2 billion in total wages (Visit Florida Research, 2023). The demand for TH employees in Florida is projected to grow at a rate of 29.3% (Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, 2022).

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the existing research and the business practices of THI organizations by filling a gap in the literature about the career commitment of

female mid-level leaders in the THI (Ali et al., 2022; Nagar, 2021; Remington & Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018). Previous research focused on either female hourly employees or female senior-level leaders, overlooking female mid-level leaders (Carvalho et al., 2018), a population this study involved. Segovia-Perez et al. (2019) recommended that future research should include the perceptions of women at various levels of leadership to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the gender dynamics within the THI.

Practical Implications

This study may impact the field of TH by providing insights into the career commitment of female mid-level leaders, increasing the retention of these leaders and preparing them to fill future leadership roles (Gebbels, Gao, et al., 2020). Insights gained from this research can inform and guide TH organizations in adjusting their policies and processes to effectively recruit, support, and retain female mid-level leaders (Segovia-Perez et al., 2021). The insights garnered from this study can also potentially help create a more inclusive and diverse leadership landscape within the THI (Gebbels, Gao, et al., 2020; Thomas & Ely, 1996). The global growth within the THI necessitates understanding the narratives and career commitment of female mid-level leaders to effectively advance and retain females as the need for leaders increases. If TH organizations fail to recognize and comprehend the career commitment of these female mid-level leaders, they may grapple with challenges related to recruitment and retention.

Conceptual Framework

The concept of career commitment guided this study, which involved interviewing female mid-level leaders in the THI. Blau (1985) described career commitment as an individual's attitude toward their vocation, including a chosen profession, and it plays a role in leaders' decisions to remain in the THI. Given the THI's high turnover rate of 84.9% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022), it was imperative to understand the factors contributing to female mid-level leaders' career commitment to the THI.

Career commitment encompasses the dedication and allegiance exhibited by an individual in relation to their chosen vocation or profession (Blau, 1985). This concept signifies an individual's devotion to fulfilling their career paths (Colarelli & Bishop, 1990). Exploring career commitment can help discern the factors that drive individuals to pursue long-term professional goals and maintain a commitment to their chosen vocations (Blau & Boal, 1989; Nagar, 2021).

Cicek et al. (2016) elucidated career commitment with three rationales: (a) alignment with future aspirations, (b) its role as a status symbol, and (c) its embodiment of a motivation level emphasizing the need for achievement power in one's profession or vocation. First, a career aligns with an individual's aspirations for their future. One's career commitment is predicated on their envisioned future career trajectory. This linkage emphasizes the role forward-thinking and long-term goals play in forming an individual's dedication to their profession or vocation. Second, a career can be a status symbol for personal advancement and prestige. This symbolic nature of a career means that its importance is manifested in individuals' lives outside of work, using it as a measure of personal success and societal contribution. Lastly, career commitment epitomizes a level of motivation for achievement power. The imperative for achievement power becomes molded within the individual, driving them to excel in their chosen field (Cicek et al., 2016).

The role of gender in career commitment has not been studied in relation to female mid-level leaders within the THI. Prior research lacks an exploration of the influence of gender on career commitment in the THI. Mooney et al. (2016) recommended future research on the intersection of long-term careers and gender in the THI. The current study was founded on career commitment as a conceptual framework to explore how gender influences career commitment among female mid-level leaders in the THI. Exploring the concept of career commitment among female mid-level leaders in the THI may provide insights into the factors that compel women to sustain their employment in the THI. Understanding their motives may increase the number of women pursuing and maintaining employment in the THI, supplying staffing needs as the industry expands.

Methodology and Research Design

I used a qualitative narrative inquiry design to explore the career commitment of female mid-level leaders within the THI. The infrequent use of narrative inquiry in THI research makes it a valuable tool for empowering participants to share their experiences and uncover hidden narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry allows open discussions, fostering an environment of collaborative interpretation between the researcher and the participants (C. C. Wang & Geale, 2015). Rooted in storytelling, narrative inquiry is an introspective cyclical process transitioning from the participants' storytelling to research documentation restorying the narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The analysis includes three dimensions: interaction, continuity, and situation, providing a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences within their sociocultural contexts, temporal links, and situational influences (Clandinin, 2006). These dimensions offer a robust framework for interpreting and understanding lived experiences.

The aim of this study is to explore the career commitment of female mid-level leaders in the THI in the state of Florida using the narrative inquiry approach. Narrative inquiry not only provides an ethical lens and fosters theoretical developments, but it also allows stories to evolve and augments the role of language in interpreting the world and relationships (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). By employing semistructured interviews, I aimed to gather rich, nuanced narratives that offer insights into the participants' career commitment, within their sociocultural contexts, temporal linkages, and situational influences.

Participants

The participants recruited and selected were female mid-level leaders in the THI. The selection criteria (Suri, 2011) for the participants included (a) a minimum of 10 years of work experience in the THI, (b) currently holding a mid-level leadership role in the THI, (c) identifying as female, and (d) demonstrating a willingness to participate in the study. Eligible participants had also to be employed within the THI in the state of Florida. The participants' level of education and ethnicity were not considered in this study's participant recruitment and selection

process. The sample consisted of three participants, with the actual number determined by the point of saturation, following guidelines from Creswell and Creswell (2018).

Data Collection

Data collection for this study occurred using semistructured interviews, focusing on the career commitment of female mid-level leaders in the THI. The narrative inquiry approach allowed these leaders to share personal stories and reflections (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), contributing to the understanding of career commitment. The semistructured interviews were framed by the research question, allowing participants to provide in-depth insights into their thoughts and emotions regarding their careers. Before the interviews were conducted, the participants received the interview questions, an informed consent form, a confidentiality agreement, and an invitation to participate, with instructions not to pre-script answers to retain the spontaneity of their responses. Depending on the participants' preferences, interviews occurred in-person or via Zoom web conferencing software and were anticipated to last about an hour each. I employed probing techniques as needed, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the participants' career commitment, as Kedroske et al. (2020) noted.

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed via the Otter AI transcription service application for in-person and virtual interviews. I cross-verified these transcriptions against the original recordings to guarantee accuracy, including verbal fillers, pauses, and utterances (H. Collins et al., 2019). Nonverbal cues were also noted in a researcher-owned journal, as they provided additional insight into participants' emotions and emphasis during interviews (Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

The analysis method for this research was inductive, chosen due to a noticeable literature gap regarding narrative inquiry in TH research, specifically with female mid-level leaders in the THI (Ali et al., 2022). The inductive method starts with observations, which are then generalized into broader categories (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). After analyzing all transcripts, I used comparative analysis to compare story arcs from all interviews to identify core narratives (Greckhamer et

al., 2018). I also conducted a cross-case analysis, a procedure used to identify common themes across narratives (K. J. B. Anderson et al., 2010). This process involves continually shifting between the data and its interpretation in an iterative process (Costantino, 2001).

Findings were presented in a restorying format, where I retold the participants' narratives, incorporating identified themes, as Mulholland and Wallace (2003) described. The restorying also involved the integration of their reflections on the research process and interpretation of participants' narratives (see Bell, 2002). To ensure trustworthiness in the current research, I applied Guba and Lincoln's (1989) four criteria: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. This process helped validate the research and ensure it accurately represented the participants' stories, as noted by Creswell and Miller (2000).

Ethical Considerations

In narrative inquiry, the researcher is obligated to safeguard the participants' privacy, dignity, and welfare (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Throughout the current study, I was guided by the ethical considerations outlined in the Belmont Report: (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice (Sims, 2010). Each participant received comprehensive details of the study, including its purpose, procedures, potential risks, benefits, and their rights as participants. The participants were also provided with detailed study information and informed consent forms before the interviews, with full rights to decline participation at any point (Xu et al., 2020). During potentially uncomfortable moments, a previously established support strategy was deployed (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). This study also involved obtaining Institutional Review Board approval from Southeastern University and entailed the researcher's dual role of maintaining a close yet professionally distant relationship with the participants (Jackson, 2021).

A researcher's commitment to ethical practices fosters trustworthiness and transparency throughout a study (Morse, 2015). Along with maintaining rigorous ethical standards, I kept a reflexive journal to document personal thoughts, biases, and influences that may arise during the research process (Ortlipp, 2008). This

approach was used to reinforce the researcher's neutrality and increase the credibility of the study (Orange, 2016).

I anticipated the interviews to last approximately 1 hour. In-person interviews were recorded on a researcher-owned digital recorder and transcribed using the Otter AI transcription service application, with Zoom web-conferencing software interviews recorded and transcribed using the Otter AI transcription service application. Following the transcriptions, the recordings were deleted and transcriptions were securely stored on a researcher-owned, password-protected computer, using participant-chosen pseudonyms for confidentiality (Surmiak, 2018). Transcriptions will be destroyed after 3 years. Data analysis involved hand-coding.

The current study's validity was assessed based on Guba and Lincoln's (1989) criteria for academic trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Techniques such as prolonged engagement, observation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), use of thick descriptions, audit trails, and reflexive journaling, ensured trustworthiness. Member checking also enhanced the reliability of the findings (Morse, 2015). The aim of this study was to faithfully interpret and convey the narratives of female mid-level leaders in the THI.

Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study was related to its focus on interviewing three female mid-level leaders in the THI within the state of Florida. Ali et al. (2022) and Nagar (2021) recommended studying leaders at various levels, not just senior and executive positions. The level of data saturation in qualitative research varies (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Choosing three participants was considered realistic for capturing the individual stories of the participants, consistent with recommendations in the literature (Baker & Edwards, 2012; Fusch & Ness, 2015). The participants were purposively snowball sampled from various organizations within the THI, including but not limited to restaurants, hotels, and theme parks. I used semistructured interviews to enable the participants to share their stories.

Narrative inquiry allows participants to share their stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The primary objective of the current study was to explore the factors that influence the career commitment of female mid-level leaders within the THI in the state of Florida. Amplifying the voices of these female leaders was crucial to promote the recruitment, retention, and advancement of more female leaders. The narrative inquiry approach aligned with this goal, honoring participants' narratives in the findings (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

I opted against using a case study approach for this study because it would have confined the research to studying a single individual, organization, event, or entity, thereby restricting the ability to explore the narratives of female mid-level leaders in various TH organizations (Campbell, 2015). Case studies frequently necessitate workplace observations, which may interfere with the collection of narrative stories and introduce potential researcher bias (Campbell, 2015; Harrison et al., 2017). Nagar (2021) and Segovia-Perez et al. (2019) suggested the use of a narrative. I did not employ phenomenology because the purpose of this study was not based on the meanings behind the participants' lived experiences. Phenomenological research entails theorizing the meaning of human experience (Cypress, 2018). In other words, engaging in phenomenological research requires the scholar to become familiar with the philosophical moorings of their interpretations of human experience (Cypress, 2018). Unlike phenomenology and grounded theory (Cypress, 2018; Guetterman, 2015), which are focused on analyzing emergent themes from data, narrative inquiry allows the exploration of the storied experiences of individuals (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

It is important to note that the current study has several limitations. First, qualitative research is often criticized for its potential bias, small-scale nature, reliance on anecdotes, and perceived lack of rigor (C. Anderson, 2010; Johnson et al., 2020). Consequently, the findings of the present study may not be generalizable to a larger population (C. Anderson, 2010; Johnson et al., 2020). Second, conducting and analyzing interviews was time-consuming, and the results could not be statistically verified, making it challenging to investigate causality (C. Anderson, 2010). Third, research quality was dependent on the researcher's skills

and may be influenced by their biases (Johnson et al., 2020). Fourth, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality of the participants was problematic in the results section (C. Anderson, 2010). Fifth, the presence of the researcher during interviews may have affected the participants' responses, and maintaining rigor was challenging (Johnson et al., 2020). Finally, scholars often consider qualitative research less scientific than quantitative research, and presenting the findings visually can be difficult (C. Anderson, 2010).

The current study was limited to female mid-level leaders in the state of Florida's THI. Entry-level and senior-level leaders, as well as male leaders and hourly employees, were not included in the interviews. The findings cannot be generalized to other industries, as TH has unique characteristics such as unconventional working hours, shift work, and inconsistent schedules. The parameters of the THI differ from those of other industries due to its 24-hour operating nature (Carvalho et al., 2018; C. Ryan, 2015). Therefore, attempting to mirror other industries with traditional operating hours would be challenging, and the impact of work-life balance may vary in other industries.

I made a deliberate decision not to explore the career commitment of male mid-level leaders in the THI. This choice stemmed from the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions within the THI, with men holding 80% of the mid-level leadership roles (Castell Project, 2022; Krivkovich et al., 2022). This study concentrated on exploring the factors that influence the career commitment of female mid-level leaders within the THI in the state of Florida. Acquiring an understanding of female mid-level leaders' career commitment within the THI may ensure the presence of female leaders in the industry in the future.

Definition of Terms

The terminology used in this study is defined here.

Tourism and Hospitality Industry: A global industry that consists of multiple business types, including restaurants, hotels and lodging, cruise lines, airlines, events and festivals, meeting and convention planning, ecotourism, and

theme parks, often operating 24 hours a day 7 days a week (Reynolds et al., 2021; C. Ryan, 2015).

     Entry-level Positions and Roles: Hourly positions that report to entry-level leaders. Positions include but are not limited to cooks, pastry cooks, servers, front desk clerks, hosts, hostesses, attendants, event planners, coordinators, crew members, flight attendants, and tour guides (Reynolds et al., 2021).

     Entry-level Leaders: Managers who work as front-line supervisors with limited responsibilities and autonomy in the day-to-day operations of a TH organization. Entry-level leaders manage entry-level hourly employees as direct reports (Reynolds et al., 2021).

     Mid-level Leaders: Managers who manage entry-level leaders reporting directly to them. They have increased responsibilities and the autonomy to make decisions. These leaders delegate tasks to entry-level leaders. This leadership category includes GMs; regional, area, state, national, operations managers; chefs; area chefs; chef de cuisine; and other leadership titles, depending on the organization (Reynolds et al., 2021; Walker, 2020).

     Senior-level Leaders: Managers above the mid-level manager role. These managers are rarely involved in the day-to-day operations. Instead, they oversee the financials, processes, and idea development. These leaders also delegate responsibilities to direct reports. Typically, senior-level leaders are C-suite leaders titled as chief executive officer, chief operations officer, or chief financial officer. Senior-level leaders can have other leadership titles, such as director, depending on the organization (Boone et al., 2013).

Summary

     This chapter included an overview of the THI, specifically focusing on the gender demographics of hourly positions and leadership roles. The disparity between female employees in hourly roles and female leaders in the THI was highlighted. The THI's elevated employee turnover rate of 84.9% emphasizes the need to advance female employees into leadership roles (Park & Min, 2020; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022).

This study involved a qualitative narrative inquiry methodology to address the extant literature gap (Ali et al., 2022; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Nagar, 2021). The aim of this study was to explore the factors that influence the career commitment of female mid-level leaders in the THI. Unlike previous studies in this field that were predominantly based on quantitative approaches (Brandt, 2018; Gatling et al., 2020; Gonzalez-Serrano et al., 2018), the use of narrative inquiry in the current study provided a novel perspective (Ali et al., 2022; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Though previous literature has focused on different approaches to study the career commitment of female leaders in the THI (Ali et al., 2022; Nagar, 2021), this study contributes to the field of research by following the narrative inquiry approach. Chapter 2 includes a review of the existing literature concerning career commitment in the THI. It is imperative that the voices of female mid-level leaders are amplified to sustain and augment the representation of female leaders in the THI. The insights and perspectives female mid-level leaders provide are paramount for devising effective strategies to foster gender equality in leadership within the THI.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Career commitment, rooted in Blau's (1985) seminal work, is characterized as a blend of unyielding allegiance and pursuit of professional growth, a construct further enriched by insights from Cicek et al. (2016). London (1983) detailed elements including career identity and resilience. A gap exists in the extant literature in understanding the stories about career commitment of female mid-level leaders within the THI (Gebbels, Pantelidis, et al., 2020). The research focus has been on the anticipatory career commitment of graduating students and interns (Atef & Balushi, 2017), not the exploration of female mid-level leaders' commitment within THI. Gebbels, Pantelidis, et al. (2020) noted a connection between career commitment and turnover intentions. In a parallel manner, Ali et al. (2022) asserted the need for the narratives of female leaders in the THI as a scarcity of insights into the career commitments of female mid-level leaders persists.

Databases and Keywords Used

The information in each section is presented in a hierarchal structure, commencing with the overarching theme of career commitment and culminating with the gap in the literature concerning the career commitment of female mid-level leaders in the THI. A literature review was conducted employing a series of Boolean searches. Initial search parameters encompassed terms, such as *career path*, *career development*, and *career calling*, and further incorporated the following industry-specific terms: *hospitality*, *tourism*, *restaurant*, *hotel*, *resort*, and *theme park*. Subsequent Boolean searches were expanded to emphasize gender-related and geographical nuances, integrating keywords, such as *female or women managers*, *female or women leaders*, *gender*, and *Florida*. Specific searches zeroed in on the term *career commitment*. Comprehensive literature retrieval was executed across a myriad of online databases, academic journals, periodicals, and publicly available reports. Databases, such as Business Source Complete, EBSCO, Elsevier, Emerald Insight, ERIC, Hospitality and Tourism Complete, JSTOR, ProQuest, Sage Journals, and ScienceDirect, as well as reports from the Castel Project, the

World Travel and Tourism Council, and the United States Census Bureau constituted the core of the sources consulted.

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol was based on the research question and grounded in the literature. The following research question was the basis for the interview questions:

RQ: What factors contribute to the career commitment of purposively sampled female mid-level leaders working in the tourism and hospitality industry?

Interview questions:

1. What story or stories can you describe that led you to work in the tourism and hospitality industry?
2. What story or stories would you tell someone if they asked you to describe your path and current role in the tourism and hospitality industry?
3. Tell me a story or stories about the people, events, and experiences in your life that have contributed to you continuing to work in the tourism and hospitality industry.
4. How would you describe in a story the events and experiences that have impacted your career as a female leader in the tourism and hospitality industry?
5. Describe your future aspirations and goals for your career.
6. What else would you like to share about your career in the tourism and hospitality industry that we have not discussed?

Career Commitment

Career commitment, as delineated by Blau (1985) and supported by additional studies (Cicek et al., 2016; Colarelli & Bishop, 1990; Ferdian et al., 2022; London, 1983; Yuliawati & Teonata, 2022), refers to an individual's dedication to their chosen career. This allegiance to a career represents an enduring attachment, evidenced by the continuous pursuit of professional goals (Blau, 1985;

Colarelli & Bishop, 1990). Cicek et al. (2016) identified three pillars of career commitment: (a) an individual's vision of long-term professional aspirations; (b) its function as a status symbol, designating social prestige; and (c) its representation of the motivation for achievement power within one's chosen profession or vocation. Comparatively, London (1983) categorized three intersecting domains of career motivation: career identity, career insight, and career resilience. The groupings of three dimensions of career commitment and career motivation (Cicek et al., 2016; London, 1983) parallels the culinary principle of plating food ingredients in odd numbers to achieve aesthetic appeal (Styler & Lazarus, 2006; Woods et al., 2016; Zellner et al., 2011).

Chefs are trained to strategically plate food ingredients in odd numbers, often in a quantity of three, to enhance the sensory experience of their diners (Zellner et al., 2010, 2011). Odd-numbered plates resonate with the human brain, generating visual interest and engagement (Woods et al., 2016). The analogy to culinary practice (Styler & Lazarus, 2006; Woods et al., 2016; Zellner et al., 2011) illustrates the holistic nature of the convergence of the domains of career commitment (Cicek et al., 2016; London, 1983). The multidimensional aspects of career commitment provide insights into an individual's allegiance to their industry (Cicek et al., 2016; London, 1983). Similarly, the food ingredients on a plate combine to create a holistic and balanced meal (Styler & Lazarus, 2006; Woods et al., 2016; Zellner et al., 2011).

Career commitment is characterized by an individual's demonstrated dedication and loyalty toward their selected vocation or profession (Blau, 1985; Cicek et al., 2016; Colarelli & Bishop, 1990; Ferdian et al., 2022; London, 1983; Yuliawati & Teonata, 2022.). This concept signifies a deep-seated attachment where individuals consistently strive to realize their career trajectories (Colarelli & Bishop, 1990). The study of career commitment can provide insights into the factors propelling individuals to pursue their long-term professional goals and remain employed in their chosen fields (Blau, 1988; Colarelli & Bishop, 1990). Blau (1985) delineated career commitment as the extent of an individual's allegiance and fidelity to their selected profession or line of work. Such a

commitment plays a pivotal role in shaping the choices of mid-level leaders when deciding to persevere in their extant domains instead of considering alternative career trajectories. The inclination of these leaders to remain anchored in their current sector can be attributed to a profound industry passion and a constructed personal identity (Colarelli & Bishop, 1990; Ferdian et al., 2022). Career commitment is also rooted in an individual's aspiration to enhance and align career aspirations within a specific sector (Ferdian et al., 2022). Yuliawati and Teonata (2022) posited an interrelationship between career commitment, increased job satisfaction, and reduced job turnover.

Cicek et al. (2016) postulated three rationales of career commitment: (a) an individual's vision of long-term professional aspirations; (b) its function as a status symbol, designating social prestige; and (c) its representation of the motivation for achievement power within one's chosen profession or vocation. Comparably, London (1983) identified three integrated domains for career motivation: career identity, career insight, and career resilience. Career identity refers to the centrality of an individual's career in shaping their overall identity. First, Cicek et al. posited that career commitment resonates with an individual's vision of long-term objectives within their chosen field. Second, a career often transcends its functional role and serves as a symbol of personal success and societal contribution, thereby reinforcing the importance of career commitment in an individual's extraprofessional life. Lastly, Cicek et al. asserted that career commitment is linked to the motivation for achievement power, which compels individuals to achieve excellence in their chosen fields.

The interaction of career identity, career insight, and career resilience influences an individual's career motivation (London, 1983). Career motivation is influenced by a multidimensional construct that comprises personal and situational factors. London (1983) identified three integrated domains for career motivation: career identity, career insight, and career resilience. Career commitment and career identity are often associated with achievement power (Cicek et al., 2016). Career identity refers to the centrality of an individual's career in shaping their overall identity. It entails understanding how their career role defines who they are. Career

insight, another aspect, is the degree to which an individual possesses realistic perceptions of themselves and the organization they work within. Career insights are often linked to career aspirations and goals (London, 1983). The third personal characteristic, career resilience, exemplifies an individual's ability to withstand career disruptions and challenges in an unsatisfactory work environment. London's research provided insights into the complexities of career motivation that influence an individual's career decisions and actions.

Career commitment is associated with sectors such as nursing and teaching. The career commitment of nursing professionals is shaped by internal factors, such as dedication, as highlighted by Blau (1985), and external pressures, including family and economic needs, as asserted by Ye et al. (2023), collectively influencing nurses' decisions to commit to their profession. In his seminal research, Blau examined the relationship between the tenure of nursing professionals and career commitment. Blau's findings revealed a positive correlation between career commitment and the tenure of nurses, indicating that increased years of tenure are associated with a heightened dedication to the nursing profession. Nurses who are vested are committed to their careers, indicating that they are not contemplating a career change.

In contrast, in a recent qualitative study, Ye et al. (2023) observed that career commitment among nurses in China was not primarily driven by passion but involved a pragmatic decision influenced by family and financial responsibilities. Using semistructured interviews, Ye et al. found that many nurses, either persuaded by others or transferred to nursing after underperforming in a different major, remained in the profession due to economic and familial pressures. A participant, A22, said:

> I really didn't want to continue nursing at that time … Before 2013, nurses could take part in the national postgraduate entrance exam of clinical medicine, I took the exam twice, but failed both. Then I did not try anything else. I felt that I had no ability to do anything except nursing. (Ye et al., 2023, p. 7)

Despite the challenges associated with low pay, low social status, elevated health risks, long hours, and a heavy workload, many nurses commit to their careers to support their families instead of considering changing or actually changing careers (Ye et al., 2023). One participant, A7, noted the lack of respect for nurses, saying, "Not just patients. The whole medical system lacks respect for nurses. In our hospital, all the doctors, the head of the ward all look down upon nurses, although we are in the multidisciplinary team" (Ye et al., 2023, p. 6). The majority of the respondents accepted their role as nurses and committed to their careers in nursing to support their families (Ye et al., 2023). Participant A22 stated,

> We had a child, and we needed money to raise him. I had to seriously consider what would happen to my family if I quit nursing. I could not afford the risk. I decided to stop looking for other jobs. (Ye et al., 2023, p. 7)

The participants interviewed did not commit to their careers out of a passion for nursing but instead to support their families (Ye et al., 2023). The juxtaposition of the insights offered by Blau (1985) and Ye et al. (2023) underscores the complexity of career commitment among nurses and different generational cohorts.

An individual may exit a job not due to a lack of commitment to the organization but in pursuit of another career that offers personal and professional fulfillment (Blau & Boal, 1989; Goulet & Singh, 2002; Siostrom et al., 2023; Watters & Diezmann, 2015). Career commitment takes precedence over organizational commitment when an individual's purpose and identity are linked to their career endeavors rather than their organization affiliation (Blau & Boal, 1987). Blau and Boal (1989) showed that an individual may choose to leave a position not due to a lack of job involvement or waning organizational commitment but rather because of a desire to transition to a different career that offers personal and professional growth. The motivation to change careers is often rooted in the pursuit of new challenges, the desire to acquire new skills, or the realization of untapped potential (Goulet & Singh, 2002). Individuals might perceive a career change as an opportunity to achieve work-life balance or engage in a profession that aligns more closely with their core values (Siostrom et al., 2023).

Siostrom et al. (2023) analyzed 27 studies focusing on the global teacher shortage and the transition of individuals from other careers into teaching. Changing circumstances, characterized by work-life balance, career dissatisfaction, and the influence of external events, were identified as a central theme affecting career transitions into teaching (Siostrom et al., 2023). Fifteen studies underscored the desire to achieve work-life balance as a reason for switching careers to teaching (Siostrom et al., 2023). Respondents were attracted to teaching due to shorter workdays, holidays off, and accessibility to employment, facilitating childcare needs and work-life balance (Siostrom et al., 2023). Career dissatisfaction, documented in 11 studies, stemmed from boredom, alienation, isolation, or a lack of purpose or meaning in their industries (Siostrom et al., 2023). Poor working conditions and long hours also caused dissatisfaction in the respondents' careers, prompting individuals to consider teaching as a new career path (Siostrom et al., 2023).

Six studies highlighted the role of external events, such as the 2008 global economic recession (Watters & Diezmann, 2015) and the COVID-19 pandemic (Liu-Lastres, Huang, et al., 2023), in driving career changes. The esteemed status of teaching as a profession that contributes meaningfully to the community influenced some individuals to transition into a teaching career (Siostrom et al., 2023). The intellectual rigor and societal contribution of teaching drove individuals to change careers to teaching (Siostrom et al., 2023).

Goulet and Singh (2002) examined the factors influencing career commitment. Their findings suggested positive associations between job involvement, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction with career commitment (Goulet & Singh, 2002). In contrast, fear of job loss negatively affected career commitment (Goulet & Singh, 2002). However, job fit showed a positive relationship (Goulet & Singh, 2002). Moreover, Goulet and Singh observed some evidence supporting the relationship between work ethic and career commitment, as well as between achievement and career commitment.

Goulet and Singh (2002) researched other variables, such as family involvement and the number of dependents. However, these variables did not

demonstrate a significant impact on career commitment in their research. Fostering a conducive environment for professional growth and development is needed to amplify career commitment (Goulet & Singh, 2002). A well-structured workplace facilitates the enhancement of skillsets and augments an individual's allegiance to their career (Goulet & Singh, 2002). In a study conducted by Taylor et al. (2022), evidence was presented demonstrating a negative correlation between elevated levels of career commitment and the intention of employees to transition to other industries. Taylor et al. posited that this correlation can be attributed to the culture of overwork in many industries, including the THI (Lv et al., 2022; Tan et al., 2020). The demands of the overwork culture may disproportionately impact women, rendering them more inclined to consider career change (Taylor et al., 2022).

The following topics and research on career commitment influenced my first interview protocol question: Tell me a story about the things and experiences in your life that have made you want to continue working in the THI. Career commitment is described as the manifestation of an individual's unwavering dedication to a chosen professional path, a construct documented in extant literature (Blau, 1985; Cicek et al., 2016; Colarelli & Bishop, 1990; Ferdian et al., 2022; London, 1983; Yuliawati & Teonata, 2022). This concept embodies an attachment characterized by persistent efforts directed toward the attainment of career objectives (Colarelli & Bishop, 1990). An exploration of career commitment offers perspectives into the motivational elements steering individuals to pursue and remain in positions within their designated industries (Blau, 1988; Colarelli & Bishop, 1990). Blau (1985) articulated this construct as reflective of an individual's loyalty to a particular occupation or professional trajectory.

The following topics and research on career commitment influenced my second interview protocol question: Is there anything else you would like to share about your career and life in the THI that we have not discussed? In the context of mid-level leaders, career commitment is instrumental in informing their decisions to remain within their existing industry rather than transitioning into alternate industries (Blau, 1985; Taylor et al., 2022). Career commitment is shaped by a

combination of loyalty to the industry and a well-crafted personal professional identity (Colarelli & Bishop, 1990; Ferdian et al., 2022). This construct also encompasses an individual's efforts to refine and synchronize their professional aspirations with the dynamics of a specified industry (Ferdian et al., 2022). Yuliawati and Teonata (2022) identified an association intertwining career commitment, elevated levels of job satisfaction, and a reduction in job turnover, underscoring the multifaceted implications of this construct within the professional milieu. This association illustrates the multi-dimensional impacts of career commitment in shaping occupational trajectories and organizational landscapes (Yuliawati & Teonata, 2022).

Career Commitment in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry

Previous research on career commitment in the THI has focused on TH students and their intentions to work in the industry, disregarding the role of gender (Ferdian et al., 2022; Kusluvan et al., 2022; Lv et al., 2023; Qu et al., 2021). Ferdian et al. (2022) investigated the relationship between Millennial culture and the perceptions of TH graduates in Indonesia. The researchers acknowledged that Millennial culture had a limited impact on the graduates' perception of the hotel industry workplace and their career commitment (Ferdian et al., 2022). Instead, the findings suggested that career commitment was more strongly associated with factors, such as working hours, working environment, and salary. Kusluvan et al. (2022) examined the influence of occupational stigma and occupational self-esteem on students' career commitment in Turkey's THI. They found that occupational stigma and self-esteem are related to career commitment (Kusluvan et al., 2022). The researchers also found that occupational stigma, marked by the negative perception of roles within the THI, adversely impacted career commitment (Kusluvan et al., 2022).

Lv et al. (2023) discussed the effect of perceived occupational stigma on the students' self-esteem, which is exacerbated by the societal and cultural pressure to obtain prestigious employment. Comparatively, Lv et al. obtained similar results as Kusluvan et al. (2022) from a survey of 928 TH students from 31 universities in

China. The researchers posited a prevailing issue where students, after completing their internship, exhibit reluctance to commit to a long-term career within the THI. This aversion is attributed to the occupational stigma and perception of the work as dirty (Lv et al., 2023). It is rooted in China's cultural and societal norms, where TH occupations are stereotyped as low-status and unrespectable (Lv et al., 2023). For university graduates, who are expected to attain respectable employment, engagement in the THI is viewed as a deviation from these expectations (Lv et al., 2023). The cultural and societal norms steer TH graduates away from the THI, regardless of their personal inclinations or the growth of the THI (Lv et al., 2023). Conversely, Jia et al. (2021) examined the career commitment of TH interns post-internship through a survey of 782 TH students in 12 higher education institutions in Taiwan with different outcomes. Internship completion, consisting of 6 months to 1 year of practical hands-on experience in a TH organization, was a graduation prerequisite (C. J. Wang, 2021).

C. J. Wang (2021) identified a positive correlation between higher levels of self-efficacy and the interns' commitment to pursuing careers within the THI, attributing the increase in self-efficacy to the experiential learning acquired during the internships (C. J. Wang, 2021). Qu et al. (2021) also conducted a study in China to examine the relationship between job satisfaction and career intentions among hotel interns. The researchers identified seven key factors related to the hotel internship experience: internship achievements, mentorship and assessment, interpersonal relationships, compensation, hotel features, hotel internship programming, and curriculum requirements (Qu et al., 2021). Their findings indicated that internship achievements, interpersonal relationships, and curriculum requirements influenced students' career commitment within the THI (Qu et al., 2021).

The anticipated growth in the THI is juxtaposed with the ongoing challenge of high employee turnover within the THI (Park & Min, 2020; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022; Zhang et al., 2021). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022) projections, the addition of 1.9 million jobs in the TH sector is expected to account for 23.1% of all new TH jobs projected by 2031. The demand

for TH employees in the state of Florida is also expected to experience sustained growth, projected at an annual rate of 29.3% (Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, 2022). The existing literature has addressed turnover intentions in the THI (Park & Min, 2020; Zhang et al., 2021). The high turnover rate in the THI, 84.9% compared to an average of 47.2% in other industries, emphasizes the importance of understanding the factors that influence the career commitment of TH employees (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). Employee turnover presents a high-cost burden, approximately $12,000 per employee, highlighting the need to retain employees in the THI (Zhang et al., 2021). Job dissatisfaction often predicts turnover intention from the job and possibly the industry, as Zhang et al. (2021) identified. Factors, such as emotional exhaustion, inadequate job resources, work-life imbalance, and burnout, have also been found to influence turnover intentions (Park & Min, 2020). The high demand for employees within the THI facilitates the ease of movement for TH employees between organizations (Gebbels, Pantelidis, et al., 2020; Park & Min, 2020).

The transition of TH leaders from the THI to careers in other industries can be attributed to low remuneration and work-life imbalance (Gebbels, Pantelidis, et al., 2020; Park & Min, 2020). Gebbels, Pantelidis, et al. (2020) illustrated the issue of career switching by interviewing former TH employees in the United Kingdom who vacated their TH careers. The participants cited inadequate wages and long, inconsistent working hours as factors that impacted their work-life balance (Gebbels, Pantelidis, et al., 2020). One participant, Mark, highlighted the discrepancy in earnings within the THI, stating, "When I realized the guy washing dishes was earning more money than me, I was an F&B manager" (Gebbels, Pantelidis, et al., 2020, p. 133). The erratic work schedules typical in the THI also exacerbated the work-life imbalance of its employees by hindering their ability to plan for social engagements (Gebbels, Pantelidis, et al., 2020). Another participant, Jane, encapsulated the compounding of factors and asserted, "It's a combination of major things … I just realized I was already tired of this … you don't have a life … plus the job was not getting gratifying" (Gebbels, Pantelidis, et al., 2020, p. 133). Additionally, the journey of professional progression into leadership roles in the

THI is difficult due to the lack of remuneration and work-life balance (Gebbels, Pantelidis, et al., 2020). This challenge impacts the career commitment of TH employees and leaders, often precipitating their exit into other careers (Gebbels, Pantelidis, et al., 2020).

Understanding career commitment is essential, considering the factors influencing turnover intentions in the THI. Career commitment encapsulates an individual's psychological attachment and long-term orientation toward their career trajectory, reflecting their vocational identity (Blau & Boal, 1989). Blau (1985) described career commitment as an individual's dedication and loyalty to their chosen profession or vocation. Comparably, individual attitudes, including loyalty and dedication, are aspects of career identification, job involvement, and career planning that influence career commitment (Zhu et al., 2020). Therefore, exploring the factors impacting career commitment in the THI is necessary to gain deeper insights.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted career commitment within the THI (Austin & Donley, 2023; Couch et al., 2022; Liu-Lastres, Huang, et al., 2023; J. Sun et al., 2022). Austin and Donley (2023) conducted a study in the rich hospitality location of Orlando, Florida. They surveyed 454 TH employees during the COVID-19 pandemic and found that 40% of the respondents struggled to cover their basic living expenses, including housing, food, and healthcare. However, a critical examination of Austin and Donley's research exhibits bias against the political structure of Florida. Bias is evident in the interpretation of the study's findings, necessitating a judicious examination of the results to mitigate the influence of the inherent bias.

An exacerbation in gender disparity in work hours occurred during the COVID-19 period (H. Collins et al., 2022; Croes et al., 2021). Couch et al. (2022) examined the *COVID motherhood penalty* phenomenon, which underscores a prevailing societal expectation for women to stay at home and cater to their children due to school and daycare shutdowns triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. The availability of remote work is limited in service-based and customer-facing industries such as TH (C. Collins et al., 2020; Liu-Lastres, Wen, et

al., 2023). Consequently, women were compelled to choose between their careers or staying at home to care for their children during the pandemic (Couch et al., 2022). This disparity is not merely a numerical concern, but it also resonates deeply with broader issues of gender equity and socioeconomic implications.

The COVID motherhood penalty not only foregrounds the embedded traditional gender roles in society but also underscores the inadequate infrastructural support for working mothers (Couch et al., 2022). The over-reliance on women for domestic and caregiving responsibilities during crisis periods can lead to long-term economic repercussions (H. Collins et al., 2022). Women, who were already grappling with the gender pay gap (Buchholz, 2021; Chung et al., 2017), found their career trajectories further derailed due to the disproportionate burdens placed upon them (Meara et al., 2020). A wider societal issue emerged wherein the structures in place were ill-equipped to address abrupt changes in work and home dynamics (Albiter et al., 2021). The inability of many companies to offer flexible working conditions or additional support, coupled with the societal pressure on mothers to shoulder increased domestic responsibilities, has potential long-term impacts on women's career progression and overall economic standing (Lv et al., 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic also contributed to the phenomenon known as the Great Resignation (Couch et al., 2022; Croes et al., 2021). Liu-Lastres, Wen, et al. (2023) examined the Great Resignation phenomenon within the THI and observed that a higher proportion of female employees, as well as those from the Millennial and Generation Z cohorts, left the THI compared to other demographic groups. In the United States, the differential in working hours between genders surged from a pre-pandemic 20% to 50% during the pandemic, as noted by C. Collins et al. (2020). C. C. Chen and Chen (2021) surveyed 607 employees within the THI in the United States. The results of this study illustrated that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic manifested in these participants in several ways, including financial duress, social isolation, and heightened anxiety. The participants' personal agency and overall well-being declined, paralleled by an upswing in depression and a diminishing commitment to their careers (C. C. Chen & Chen, 2021). Female and

younger employees experienced a more pronounced adverse impact than male and senior employees (C. C. Chen & Chen, 2021). Leaders in the THI who faced furloughs were less adversely affected compared to their counterparts who were laid off (C. C. Chen & Chen, 2021).

The following topics and research centered on career commitment influenced my interview protocol question: Can you tell me a little about yourself and describe your path to your current role in the THI? Numerous mid-level leaders in the THI have pursued higher education, enrolling in universities to study the THI (Lv et al., 2023; Qu et al., 2021). Mid-level leaders' progression within the THI is often characterized by transitioning from hourly positions, driven by an aspiration to ascend into leadership roles (Gebbels, Pantelidis, et al., 2020).

The following topics and research centered on career commitment influenced my third interview protocol question: Tell me a story about the things and experiences in your life that have made you want to continue working in the tourism and hospitality industry. The turnover rate of 84.9% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022) in the THI surpasses that in many other sectors (Park & Min, 2020; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022; Zhang et al., 2021). In their research, Lv et al. (2023) and Jia et al. (2021) focused on TH students, examining their commitment to prospective careers within the THI. They observed that a segment of these students was reconsidering and altering their career paths even before their initial jobs in the THI (Jia et al., 2021; Lv et al., 2023). Qu et al. (2021) studied the experiences of interns within the THI to decipher their predispositions toward remaining in the THI post-graduation. The COVID-19 pandemic has acted as a precipitating factor for the Great Resignation. An exodus from the THI was apparent, with individuals opting to leave the THI to join alternative industries or electing to remain at home to fulfill familial and childcare obligations (Couch et al., 2022; Liu-Lastres, Wen, et al., 2023).

The following topics and research centered on career commitment influenced my fourth interview protocol question: Please share the stories and experiences in your life that have impacted your career as a female leader in the THIas a female leader. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a paradigm shift

toward remote working across many industries (H. Collins et al., 2022). However, the service nature of the THI does not enable remote work (H. Collins et al., 2022). The COVID motherhood penalty phenomenon gained prominence, highlighting the societal expectation for women to default to domestic roles, particularly caregiving for children and families after the widespread closures of schools and daycares during the COVID-19 pandemic (Couch et al., 2022; Liu-Lastres, Huang, et al., 2023). This scenario underscored the juxtaposition of the adaptability of various industries to remote work and the THI's inherent constraints in aligning with this work modality (Couch et al., 2022; Liu-Lastres, Huang, et al., 2023).

Career Commitment of Leaders in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry

The trajectory of career commitment for leadership roles in the THI typically involves progressing from hourly entry-level positions into leadership. Leaders often commence their careers in hourly positions, transitioning into entry-level leadership and eventually advancing to mid-level and senior levels of leadership within the THI (Ramadan & Karanikola, 2021). Eighteen of the 20 GMs interviewed by Ramadan and Karanikola (2021) conformed to this conventional career path and possessed university degrees in TH. Comparative research conducted by Cassel et al. (2018) and Ramadan and Karanikola confirmed a prevailing sentiment among participants: Hands-on experience within the THI was often prioritized over holding an academic degree in TH.

The participants in several studies posited that a key strategy for garnering practical experience entailed a willingness to relocate, whether it was within their present TH organization or another (Cassel et al., 2018; Ramadan & Karanikola, 2021; Zopiatis & Theocharous, 2022). However, leaders situated in geographically remote and smaller locales identified a persistent challenge: the dilemma of relocating to an entirely different region or forgoing the opportunity for promotion to higher leadership levels. Cassel et al. (2018) highlighted the challenge faced by participants situated in geographically remote areas of Sweden. The limited availability of leadership positions in the THI, combined with a low rate of management turnover, resulted in diminished opportunities for career advancement.

A similar theme emerged in Zopiatis and Theocharous's (2022) study conducted among TH leaders on the island of Cyprus. Due to its insular nature, Cyprus offers limited pathways for leadership advancement in the THI. One respondent from Zopiatis and Theocharous's research, designated as Interviewee 9, remarked, "After three or four years, I realized that there was no room for me to advance, other than to the general manager's position. But the current GM was a long way from retirement…so I decided to leave" (p. 847). Ramadan and Karanikola (2021) posited that relocation, though presenting potential opportunities, does not guarantee promotions, enhanced benefits, or salary increases. A relocation move can be a burden to the families of the TH leaders by forcing them to uproot their lives (Zopiatis & Theocharous, 2022).

Leaders within the THI face a myriad of challenges that can adversely influence their career commitment. A study by W. Chang and Busser (2020) that involved hospitality employees in the United States highlighted several of these challenges, notably, the extensive work hours, inadequate compensation, and the issue of an unfavorable work-life balance. Gebbels, Pantelidis, et al. (2020) interviewed former TH employees in the United Kingdom to discern the reasons for their departure from the THI. The respondents alluded to insufficient remuneration and long work hours, which hindered their ability to maintain a harmonious work-life balance. The inconsistency of work schedules further exacerbated the difficulty, impeding their capacity to schedule future activities or engage in social interactions. Within this study, one participant, Joanna, expressed, "There were days I was there 8 days a week … I can't do this anymore hence one of the reasons why I left, I've got 2:1 hotel degree, I am not putting up with this" (Gebbels, Pantelidis, et al., 2020, p. 133). Another interviewee, Claudia, articulated her dilemma as follows: "I wanna have a career, I love the hospitality industry, but not at the cost of friends, family, health, but that just happened" (p. 133).

In a comparable study, Zopiatis and Theocharous (2022) explored the career commitment of former hospitality managers in Cyprus. The industry's nature of working during antisocial hours emerged as a predominant theme, underscoring the challenges leaders face in securing a desirable work-life balance. One respondent

from Zopiatis and Theocharous's study, referred to as Interviewee 9, a male, commented, "Hospitality management requires an extensive amount of time at work … it's the nature of the job … but you cannot work 6 days a week, over 12 hours a day" (p. 845). Echoing a similar sentiment, Interviewee 1, also a male, observed, "This is what everyone says … it's either family or being at the hotel all day. You cannot have both" (p. 846).

The gender pay gap represents a global issue in the THI (Oliver & Sard, 2021). Brandt (2018) examined wage disparities within the THI in Sweden. Brandt analyzed data gleaned from Statistics Sweden. These data, sourced from the nationally recognized public official statistics database, MONA, were employed to juxtapose the remunerations of THI employees against their counterparts in other industries. Brandt's research revealed that, on average, employees within the THI in Sweden, receive remuneration packages lower than those received by their counterparts in many other sectors. In comparison, the United States has a range of salary scales. Entry-level leadership roles within the THI contrast with chefs in terms of average annual compensation (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). Similarly, food service managers and lodging managers display a differential in their respective average earnings (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023).

The gender pay gap is also evident in the state of Florida. In Florida, entry-level leadership roles in the THI receive slightly higher compensation than culinary roles such as chefs (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). Notably, general and operational managers in all other sectors, including technology and human resources, consistently outpace the THI in terms of remuneration. Analyzing senior-level managerial roles further underscores this discrepancy, with lodging managers typically earning more than food service managers. However, when contrasting these roles with parallel positions in all other sectors, the relative under-compensation within the THI becomes evident (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). Central Florida's metropolitan regions of Orlando, Kissimmee, and Sanford demonstrate distinct salary variations compared to broader state metrics, with lodging managers in these regions notably earning more than their counterparts in the food service industry (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). Such variances

underscore the geographical nuances inherent in wage distributions, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Comparison of Average Annual Salaries for Various Leadership Roles in the United States, the State of Florida, and the Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford Metropolitan Area.

Leadership Role	United States ($)	State of Florida ($)	Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford Metro ($)
Entry-level THI Leadership Roles	41,020	41,200	41,220
Chefs and Culinary Leaders	60,210	58,860	65,660
Food Service Managers	67,130	73,500	74,450
Lodging Managers	73,230	86,350	98,150
General and Operational Managers – All Other Industries	122,860	113,350	115,690

Note. Data obtained from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023).

Leaders in the THI grapple with challenges such as extended work hours, inadequate pay, and unfavorable work-life balance, as identified by W. Chang and Busser (2020). Supporting this assertion, Gebbels, Pantelidis, et al. (2020) found, through interviews with former TH employees in the United Kingdom, that inconsistent work schedules and prolonged hours compounded the work-life balance, leading to career dissatisfaction. Echoing these findings, Zopiatis and Theocharous (2022) noted the antisocial working hours inherent in hospitality management in Cyprus, emphasizing the difficulty leaders encounter in achieving a favorable work-life balance.

Mid-level leadership roles, such as GM, also come with personal and professional challenges (W. Chang & Busser, 2020; Ramadan & Karanikola, 2021). These challenges were discussed in a qualitative study conducted by

Ramadan and Karanikola (2021). Based on interviews with GMs of luxury hotels in Dubai, Ramadan and Karanikola contended that these positions, although prestigious, come with substantial responsibilities. A reflection from a participant, Participant 2, elucidated the personal cost:

> I received my first GM offer when I was in the industry for 14 years. For about six or seven years, I didn't want to be a GM, because I have two kids and a family. And knowing myself, I will spend even more time in hotels if I am GM, so I didn't want to take the position. (p. 32)

These challenges, cited consistently by both female and male leaders, serve as primary motivations for exiting the THI. The subsequent exodus of seasoned TH leaders results in a talent deficit, threatening sustainable employment within the THI. Notably, leaders who demonstrate resilience and success with personal and professional challenges exhibit a stronger inclination for career commitment within the THI (W. Chang & Busser, 2020).

Despite these challenges, the THI nurtures an array of highly valuable soft skills that are appealing to other industries. These skills include crucial proficiencies, such as adept communication and problem-solving capabilities, which are highly appealing to other industries, especially retail and finance (W. Chang & Busser, 2020). This cross-industry desirability potentially eases the transition of TH leaders into other industries, further compounding the issue of talent drain (W. Chang & Busser, 2020). Zopiatis and Theocharous (2022) also highlighted the transferability of interpersonal skills acquired within the THI to diverse sectors. This transferability suggests that although the THI cultivates leadership competencies that benefit other industries, it concurrently poses the risk of a talent drain (Zopiatis & Theocharous, 2022). A study by Ramadan and Karanikola (2021) underscored the importance of these soft skills but emphasized the need for THI leaders to refine their active listening skills. However, although TH leaders may flourish in soft skills, they can sometimes lag in technical competencies, particularly those related to technology (W. Chang & Busser, 2020). Therefore, both Ramadan and Karanikola and W. Chang and Busser (2020)

collectively argued that continuous learning and upskilling are needed within the THI to foster career commitment for leaders.

The following topics and research centered on career commitment influenced my fifth interview protocol question: Tell me a story about the things and experiences in your life that have made you want to continue working in the tourism and hospitality industry. Mid-level leaders in the THI are burdened with more responsibilities compared to their entry-level leaders and hourly counterparts, increasing the demands of their roles (W. Chang & Busser, 2020; Ramadan & Karanikola, 2021). The expectation of long and inconsistent work schedules disrupts the balance between professional and personal life (W. Chang & Busser, 2020). The challenges are intensified by low wages (W. Chang & Busser, 2020) and unsociable working hours (Zopiatis & Theocharous, 2022), exacerbating the pressures experienced by these leaders in the THI.

Career Commitment of Female Leaders in Tourism and Hospitality Industry

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (2022), the THI represents the largest employer worldwide. In the United States, the THI ranks fifth in size, based on data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022), and holds the top position in Florida in terms of economic impact (Visit Florida Research, 2023). Yet, a closer look into the leadership distribution within the THI reveals a gender disparity. Women hold 29% of the top leadership roles and approximately 20% of mid-level leadership positions (Castell Project, 2022). Given the gender disparity in leadership roles, addressing the factors influencing career commitment is crucial.

This underrepresentation of female leaders prompts further exploration into women's career commitment within the THI, as suggested by Ali et al. (2022), Nagar (2021), and Remington and Kitterlin-Lynch (2018). Remington and Kitterlin-Lynch examined the roles of eight female leaders within the THI, ranging from regional directors to vice presidents. Their research highlighted the scarcity of female leadership in the industry, which also influenced their small sample size. Similarly, Ali et al. and Nagar highlighted the need to focus on individual narrative

stories of female leaders in this field to comprehensively understand the factors that contribute to their career commitment. Therefore, there is a need to explore further the stories of female mid-level leaders in the THI to understand their career commitment.

The existing literature has predominantly highlighted the challenges faced by women in securing leadership roles in the THI, as discussed by Remington and Kitterlin-Lynch (2018). However, a gap exists in the literature related to the career commitment of women who have successfully overcome these challenges and achieved mid-level leadership positions (Ali et al., 2022). Remington and Kitterlin-Lynch identified a range of challenges that women face in attaining leadership positions within the THI, including: (a) the struggle to achieve work-life balance; (b) a lack of organizational commitment from employees; (c) insufficient support systems and mentorship opportunities; (d) a scarcity of female role models; and (e) systematic challenges to advancement, such as gender stereotypes and the prevalence of the old boys' networks, which can negatively impact women's career commitment.

Despite the disparity between the espoused priority of having female leadership in the hospitality and tourism industry, little research has been conducted from the perspective of female leaders in the TH (Ali et al., 2022; Carvalho et al., 2018). Ali et al. (2022) and Nagar (2021) explained that future research should focus on the individual narrative stories of female TH leaders to gain their perspectives. In contrast, Carvalho et al. (2018) conducted interviews with six female managers who have successfully overcome the challenges and achieved senior-level leadership roles in the industry. Carvalho et al. explored the female senior-level leaders' perceptions of gender-related issues within the THI. A participant named Teresa, when probed about the prevalence of gender-based discrimination within the THI in Portugal, replied, "Oh, totally … If you call that discrimination, then I would say that, well, that's what call discrimination, that's a face, that's a fact" (p. 412). This sentiment of inequity is further reinforced by another participant's account. The participant reported an incident wherein a female manager, appointed to a hotel in Portugal after her male predecessor, was

remunerated at a rate approximately 40% lower than that of the male manager. However, these female leaders credited the factors that encouraged them to remain committed to their careers in the THI (Carvalho et al., 2018).

The participants identified intrinsic qualities, education, and external support as factors that helped them break through the glass ceiling. These women acknowledged characteristics such as being adventurous, motivated, hard-working, and determined as reasons they broke the glass ceiling in the THI (Carvalho et al., 2018). They also cited earning degrees from higher education institutions as a factor (Carvalho et al., 2018). Maria, one of the participants, believed that "women need degrees much more than men, since men's credibility does not depend on that" (Carvalho et al., 2018, p. 407). External support also emerged as a theme in the participants' narratives (Carvalho et al., 2018). They recounted the role of supportive senior managers who acknowledged their contributions and potential (Carvalho et al., 2018). Assistance at home, whether facilitated by their partners or hired help, was also reported as a factor that enabled these female leaders to achieve work-life balance (Carvalho et al., 2018). Paula and Luisa asserted that there was a more equitable division of household duties between genders (Carvalho et al., 2018). Luisa posited, "I want to believe that not having children does not need to be a strategy to reach a top position anymore" (Carvalho et al., 2018, p. 409). This perspective illustrates the dynamics of gender roles and supports the career commitment of female leaders, regardless of their family or parental circumstances.

In previous studies, researchers predominantly employed quantitative research designs to examine issues faced by women in the THI, such as the glass ceiling concept (De Silva & Thulemark, 2022; Gonzalez-Serrano et al., 2018), the gender pay gap (Casado-Diaz et al., 2022), work-life balance (Khanna, 2012), discrimination (Russen et al., 2021b), sexual harassment (La Lopa & Gong, 2020; Ram, 2018), stereotypes (Brescoll, 2016; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Koburtay & Syed, 2019), and tokenism (Guldiken et al., 2019). Further complexities for female leaders emerge from the phenomenon known as the queen bee syndrome (Derks et al., 2016), the old boys' network (Allemand et al., 2021), and the double bind

phenomenon (Pizam, 2017). The queen bee syndrome is a phenomenon wherein female employees exhibit a lack of support for and, at times, actively subvert the advancement of their female colleagues, particularly in contexts concerning leadership elevation within organizational settings (Derks et al., 2016; Faniko et al., 2016; Staines et al., 1974). This term is metaphorically derived from the entomological observation that within a beehive, only one dominant female entity exists, referred to as the queen bee (Staines et al., 1974). In contrast, the old boys' network refers to an informal, often entrenched, system of relationships and alliances among male professionals, typically established during their formative years or early career stages (Allemand et al., 2021). This network, predominantly characterized by mutual support and loyalty, can influence decisions and access to opportunities, often at the exclusion of those outside this fraternity, including women (Allemand et al., 2021). Lastly, the double bind phenomenon denotes a dilemma wherein a female leader faces two conflicting demands, such that adherence to one inherently violates the other (Pizam, 2017).

Leaders are expected to be assertive and confident, yet female leaders who practice these traits are often labeled bossy or aggressive (Pizam, 2017). In contrast, being accommodating as a female leader can be perceived as ineffectiveness or weakness (Pizam, 2017). Stereotypes exacerbate the double bind phenomenon. Women committed to their careers are considered cold or unlikable (Pizam, 2017). Female leaders who are friendly may be deemed incompetent (Pizam, 2017). Consequently, female leaders are often caught in the double bind phenomenon, making them prone to criticism and negative outcomes (Pizam, 2017).

Existing studies also include extensive discussions of issues contributing to gender inequity within the THI (Casado-Diaz et al., 2022; Clevenger & Singh, 2013; Fleming, 2015; Gonzalez-Serrano et al., 2018). Clevenger and Singh (2013) and Gonzalez-Serrano et al. (2018) detailed the glass ceiling, which represents an invisible barrier to promotions, and how it impedes women's progression into management positions in the THI. The most cited challenge for female leaders in the THI was the glass ceiling concept. Segovia-Perez et al. (2019) interviewed 30

female THI executives in Spain who identified the glass ceiling as a discriminatory factor against women being promoted. One participant, Interview 15, said, "Many people still don't understand that women want to progress and become executives" (Segovia-Perez et al., 2019, p.188). De Silva and Thulemark (2022) termed the glass ceiling a cement ceiling for female chefs attempting to advance their careers.

Casado-Diaz et al. (2022) and Fleming (2015) researched the gender pay gap, underscoring the disparities in management salaries between men and women, which has been a subject of considerable discussion in the literature. Researchers have shed light on the systemic hurdles of the glass ceiling (Clevenger & Singh, 2013; Gonzalez-Serrano et al., 2018) and the gender pay gap (Casado-Diaz et al., 2022; Fleming, 2015) that women encounter in their pursuit of career growth and equal opportunities within the THI. Collectively, current research in the THI lacks a gender equality focus (Gebbels, Gao, et al., 2020).

Carvalho et al. (2018) and Segovia-Perez et al. (2019) conducted studies on female executive leaders who successfully overcame the glass ceiling in the THI. In the United States, a gender pay gap exists, with women earning approximately 83 cents for every dollar men earn (Casado-Diaz et al., 2022; U.S. Department of Labor, 2023). Female mid-level leaders in the THI face challenges in achieving a work-life balance due to the industry's demanding nature, irregular schedules, long working hours, and limited flexibility (Khanna, 2012). These factors hinder female leaders' ability to manage personal and professional responsibilities effectively (Khanna, 2012).

The work does not cease once women transition from their workplaces to the confines of their domestic environments. It is crucial to highlight the intricate equilibrium many women attempt to maintain between their professional and personal obligations (Albiter et al., 2021; Khanna, 2012). Cultural intricacies, especially in regions marked by pronounced gender wage disparities, such as Morocco and India, typically position women as the primary caregivers and domestic custodians (United Nations, 2022; World Economic Forum, 2021). This dynamic frequently leads women to perceive their home responsibilities as a metaphorical *second shift*—a continuation of work characterized by meal

preparation, childcare, laundry, and other household duties (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). Notably, the underlying sociocultural norms often deter women from seeking assistance in navigating these domestic tasks (Cave & Kilic, 2010). The exertion associated with this second shift is magnified within sectors such as the THI, as TH leaders frequently engage in prolonged periods of at least 12 or more hours of standing and walking (Albiter et al., 2021; Morgan & Pritchard, 2019).

The intensity and demands of TH leadership compound the physical and emotional exhaustion women experience, often leaving minimal energy for domestic responsibilities (Cave & Kilic, 2010; Morgan & Pritchard, 2019). This duality of roles presents a paradox wherein women, despite their significant contributions to the workforce, continue to grapple with entrenched sociocultural expectations at home (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). The persistent nature of these expectations infringes upon women's well-being and curtails their potential for professional advancement and personal development (Cave & Kilic, 2010). The cumulative effect of such a dualistic life can lead to increased stress, decreased job satisfaction, potential burnout, and a waning commitment to their career (Albiter et al., 2021; Morgan & Pritchard, 2019).

This dynamic interplays with the broader structural challenges of gender-based discrimination. Discrimination against women in the THI is evident as employers often stereotype women by assigning them hourly roles and overlooking them for leadership positions (Brescoll, 2016; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Koburtay & Syed, 2019; Russen et al., 2021b). Tokenism also arises as a reverse discrimination phenomenon that promotes women into leadership solely to fulfill diversity quotas (Guldiken et al., 2019). The queen bee syndrome also emerges, where women fail to support and actively undermine their female peers in the workplace, particularly in relation to leadership promotions (Derks et al., 2016; Faniko et al., 2016; Staines et al., 1974). Similarly, the old boys' network perpetuates exclusionary practices against women in the THI (Allemand et al., 2021). This network, consisting predominantly of men, systematically excludes women from leadership promotions, denies them mentorship opportunities, and conducts meetings outside

of regular working hours or at locations that may not be easily accessible to women (Allemand et al., 2021).

Sexual harassment often manifests as an instrument of control wielded by men, constraining women predominantly to hourly wage or entry-level leadership roles (La Lopa & Gong, 2020; Mooney et al., 2017; Mutari, 2018; Ram, 2018). A transactional dynamic exists where men dangle the prospects of advancements, superior work schedules, and additional professional benefits in exchange for specific favors (La Lopa & Gong, 2020; Mooney et al., 2017; Moskin, 2020d; Ram, 2018). This quid pro quo culture is notably prevalent within the THI (La Lopa & Gong, 2020; Ram, 2018). Recent disclosures about the Court of Master Sommeliers, an esteemed wine certification consortium, shocked stakeholders within the THI (Moskin, 2020a). Disturbingly, several male master sommeliers are alleged to have pressured female aspirants into intimate relationships as a quid pro quo to attain the master sommelier designation, the highest ranking in the Court (Moskin, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d). In an interview, Madeleine Thompson indicated her decision to abstain from the Court's certification process, attributing it to instances of harassment she experienced from several male master sommeliers (Moskin, 2020a). Thompson articulated, "Sexual aggression is constant for women somms. We can't escape it, so we learn to live with it. It's a compromise we shouldn't have to make" (Moskin, 2020a, p. 2). Such prejudicial practices and harassment, pervasive across various echelons of the THI, are particularly egregious when women who resist these overtures are hindered from career progression (Moskin, 2020a; Mutari, 2018; Ram, 2018). Female TH interns also experienced higher rates of sexual harassment than their male counterparts during their internship programs (La Lopa & Gong, 2020). Ram (2018) examined the acceptance of sexual harassment, bullying, and violence in the THI, and found that it is more commonplace in the THI than in other industries.

Finally, female leaders find themselves in a precarious position known as the double bind phenomenon, where they are unfairly labeled for their behavior (Pizam, 2017). Female leaders face scrutiny for being perceived as overly aggressive, whereas male leaders are encouraged and praised for assertiveness

(Pizam, 2017). Female leaders in the THI face various challenges, ranging from the glass ceiling (Carvalho et al., 2018) and the gender pay gap (Casado-Diaz et al., 2022) to work-life balance (Khanna, 2012), discrimination (Russen et al., 2021a), tokenism (Guldiken et al., 2019), the queen bee syndrome (Derks et al., 2016; Faniko et al., 2016; Staines et al., 1974)), the old boys' network (Allemand et al., 2021), and the double-bind phenomenon (Pizam, 2017). These challenges hinder female leaders' professional growth and advancement within the THI, considering their impact on career commitment.

The following topics and research centered on career commitment influenced my sixth interview protocol question: Please share the stories and experiences in your life that have impacted your career as a female leader in the tourism and hospitality industry. Female leaders in the THI face different challenges from those encountered by their male counterparts (Carvalho et al., 2018; Remington & Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018). Gonzalez-Serrano et al. (2018) discussed the glass ceiling phenomenon, making it more difficult for women to achieve leadership roles. The gender pay gap causes a variance in wages between male and female leaders in the THI (Casado-Diaz et al., 2022). Multiple researchers examined the various issues women face in the THI, including work-life balance (Khanna, 2012), discrimination (Russen et al., 2021b), and the old boys' network (Allemand et al., 2021).

Gap in Research and Problem

The aim of this study was to add to the current research by addressing a gap in the literature about the career commitment of female mid-level leaders in the THI, as mentioned by Ali et al. (2022), Nagar (2021), and Remington and Kitterlin-Lynch (2018). Past studies have focused on either female hourly workers or those in senior leadership roles, leaving out the mid-level female leaders (M. K. Ryan et al., 2016). This gap is what this research addressed; a narrative inquiry approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) was used to explore the career commitment of female mid-level leaders in the THI (Carvalho et al., 2018). Segovia-Perez et al. (2019) suggested that future research should consider the perceptions of women at

various leadership levels in the THI to facilitate a more encompassing comprehension of gender dynamics within the THI.

The gender disparity in leadership roles within the THI is linked to the limited acknowledgment of the career commitment and perceptions of female mid-level leaders. Several studies underscore this oversight and its implications (Ali et al., 2022; Gebbels, Gao, et al., 2020). A gap exists in the literature, as research on the perspectives of female mid-level leaders in the THI concerning the factors that foster their career commitment is lacking (Ali et al., 2022; Mooney, 2020; Nagar, 2021). Addressing this lacuna in research is critical to promoting a more inclusive leadership landscape in the THI. Only by understanding and valuing the factors that influence career commitment among female mid-level leaders can the THI take informed steps to bridge the gender divide in leadership roles.

The following topics and research centered on career commitment influenced my interview protocol question: Please share the stories and experiences in your life that have impacted your career as a female leader in the tourism and hospitality industry. Ali et al. (2022), Nagar (2021), and Remington and Kitterlin-Lynch (2018) emphasized the need to explore the career commitment of female leaders in the THI. Segovia-Perez et al. (2019) believed that females at all leadership levels, including mid-level leadership, should be part of future research. Female leaders within the THI encounter distinct challenges compared to their male peers (Carvalho et al., 2018; Remington & Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018). Gonzalez-Serrano et al. (2018) studied the glass ceiling phenomenon, highlighting the challenges women face in ascending to leadership positions in the THI. Casado-Diaz et al. (2022) discussed the gender wage gap, indicating a noticeable wage differential between male and female leaders. Various scholars have probed into the multifaceted issues confronted by women in the THI, such as the struggles with work-life balance (Khanna, 2012), encounters with discrimination (Russen et al., 2021b), and navigating the entrenched old boys' network (Allemand et al., 2021).

Summary

A research gap exists regarding career commitment within the THI (Gebbels, Pantelidis, et al., 2020). Although researchers have examined the career commitment of students entering the THI, they have not explored the career commitment of mid-level leaders currently working in the THI (Gebbels, Pantelidis, et al., 2020). Gebbels, Pantelidis, et al. (2020) argued that career commitment influences employee turnover intentions within the THI. They further suggested that an employee's waning interest in their job could precipitate a decrease in career commitment to the THI.

Narratives of successful female leaders in the THI should be amplified, serving as both inspiration and a testament to the potential achievements of women (Ali et al., 2022). Sufficiently understanding and acknowledging the career commitment and insights of female mid-level leaders in the THI may help address gender disparity in leadership roles. Current research lacks an exploration of the career commitment of female mid-level leaders with at least 10 years of experience in the THI.

Addressing the scarcity of female leaders in the THI requires attention to the perspectives and narrative accounts of current mid-level female leaders (Ali et al., 2022; Cassel et al., 2018; Gebbels, Gao, et al., 2020; Nagar, 2021). The deficit of female leaders in the THI will continue unless someone listens to the perceptions and narrative stories of career commitment from current mid-level female leaders in the THI (Cassel et al., 2018; Gebbels, Gao, et al., 2020). Ali et al. (2022) and Nagar (2021) emphasized the need to focus on individual narrative stories of female leaders in this field to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to their career commitment. Given the dearth of literature in this field, further exploration was warranted in the current study to enhance the understanding of the challenges, opportunities, and aspirations faced by women in mid-level leadership positions within the THI (Ali et al., 2022; Nagar, 2021).

Chapter 3 – Methodology

The methodology for this study was qualitative, with a narrative inquiry research design (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I used purposive snowball sampling to recruit three participants for interviews. Snowball sampling facilitated the identification of these participants who shared characteristics with other female mid-level leaders, particularly within a large corporation. I conducted semistructured interviews comprising of open-ended interview questions with female mid-level leaders, allowing them to share their stories about their career commitment to the THI. Asking additional follow-up questions, as desired, ensured a comprehensive discussion of the participants' career commitment to the THI and helped fully capture their stories. Depending on participant preferences, I conducted the interviews in person or via Zoom web-conferencing software. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour. Before each interview, I provided each participant with an informed consent form, which they read, completed, and signed before being interviewed. The aim of this study was to explore the career commitment of women who have advanced beyond entry-level positions within TH organizations in the state of Florida.

Research Question

I sought to understand the personal experiences and perceptions of female mid-level leaders in the THI within the state of Florida. The research question that guided the problem of practice of this study included the following: What factors contribute to the career commitment of current female mid-level leaders working in the tourism and hospitality industry?

I used a qualitative narrative inquiry approach to answer the research question. My focus was on exploring the career commitment of female mid-level leaders in the THI, countering the predominance of existing quantitative research (Gatling et al., 2020). A narrative inquiry approach enabled the participants to share personal stories and experiences, thereby revealing previously hidden narratives and filling a research gap (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) described this research method as collaborative, with both the researcher

and participants engaged in the narrative restorying, enhancing the understanding of the participants' lived experiences (C. C. Wang & Geale, 2015). The three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry with interaction, continuity, and situation, facilitates a comprehensive analysis of the narratives, providing in-depth insights into the career commitment of female mid-level leaders within the THI and their sociocultural, temporal, and physical contexts (Clandinin & Huber, 2010).

Methodology and Research Design

The research methodology for this study was qualitative, in contrast to the existing quantitative research on female leaders in the THI (Gatling et al., 2020; Khanna, 2012; Santhanam et al., 2015). A qualitative methodology was most suitable for the current study, considering the purpose of the research and the research question (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Kwok, 2012; Kwok & Muniz, 2021). This study involved an exploration of the career commitment of female mid-level leaders in the THI. A quantitative method could not provide the context and depth to understand the thoughts, emotions, and motivations that female mid-level leaders in the THI have.

The aim of this study was to fill the research gap by exploring the career commitment of female mid-level leaders in the THI using the narrative inquiry approach described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). The narrative inquiry approach allowed the participants to share their stories about their career commitment within the THI (Kwok & Muniz, 2021; Luo & Ren, 2020). Mura and Pahlevan Sharif (2015) determined that narrative inquiry was rarely used in TH scholarly research. Ali et al. (2022) also pointed to a need for narrative inquiry research in the TH field. C. C. Wang and Geale (2015) discussed how narrative inquiry empowers participants to provide insights and share previously concealed narratives. As the aim of this study was to comprehend the voices of female mid-level leaders in the THI, the most effective method to understand their perspectives was to listen to and interpret their narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

A narrative inquiry approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) was employed in this study. Narrative inquiry enhances the understanding of participants'

experiences by facilitating their narration of personal stories (Clandinin & Connelly). This research approach entails collecting and analyzing narratives, stories, anecdotes, and personal experiences (Clandinin, 2016). The researcher asks open-ended questions to comprehend the individuals' stories during the interviews (Clandinin & Connelly).

Narrative inquiry is a complex methodology wherein the researcher and participants collaborate to create the narrative restorying (C. C. Wang & Geale, 2015). Both parties interpret the narratives through validation checks during data collection and analysis (Clandinin et al., 2017). The researcher gains insights into the participants' lives by actively collaborating with them during the research process (C. C. Wang & Geale, 2015). The researcher's restories of the participants' narratives were influenced by the participants' stories, along with their personal, social, and political backgrounds (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Narratives are a primary mode of communication with its roots in storytelling, a tradition as old as human civilization (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Huber (2010) identified narrative inquiry as a way of exploring an individual's experiences. Narrative inquiry encompasses a cyclical and introspective process that transitions from the participants' storytelling of real-life experiences, known as field texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), to preliminary and definitive research documentation (Clandinin & Huber, 2010).

The three dimensions of narrative inquiry are interaction, continuity, and situation (C. C. Wang & Geale, 2015). Interaction involves individuals' engagement with their sociocultural contexts, shaping their experiences and narratives (Clandinin, 2006). Interaction provides insights into their interpretation of these experiences within their social environments (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Continuity links past, present, and future experiences within a temporal dimension of narratives and connections (Clandinin, 2006). Identifying themes, patterns, and transitions within these narratives provides an understanding of the participants' narratives to gain insights into the individuals' experiences within the temporal framework (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). Situation considers the social, cultural, and environmental place where narratives and experiences occur, helping

researchers understand how the factors of physical location, social relationships, cultural norms, and historical events shape experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). These three dimensions of interaction, continuity, and situation provide a narrative analysis framework, enabling researchers to interpret participants' lived experiences (C. C. Wang & Geale, 2015). Table 3 contains details of the three dimensions of interaction, continuity, and situation.

Table 3

Narrative Inquiry Three Dimensions

Dimension	Aspect	Description
Interaction	Personal	Internal experiences of individuals, including their feelings, hopes, and personal ethics.
	Social	Influences from external sources, such as other people, societal norms, and cultural contexts.
Continuity	Past	Memories and experiences from the past and how they influence the narrative.
	Present	Current experiences and feelings, and their impact on the unfolding story.
	Future	Anticipated experiences and potential future plotlines in the narrative.
Situational	Situation/Place	Physical landscape and setting, including spatial and topological boundaries that shape the narrative context.

Note. Adapted from "The power of story: Narrative inquiry as a methodology in nursing research," by C. C. Wang and Geale (2015).

Narrative inquiry highlights ethical considerations and fosters the development of new theoretical perspectives of individuals' experiences (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). The practice of narrative thinking as the story evolves and acknowledging that the narrative may alter as it is recounted is integral to this methodology (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). The application of language to comprehend the world, determine the relationships between entities, and make sense of them is the focus of narrative inquiry. Therefore, in the current study, I explored the career commitment of female mid-level leaders in the THI in the state of Florida by conducting semistructured interviews to capture their narratives.

Setting

I conducted interviews with the participants through Zoom web conferencing software. Each participant chose their interview location (Gagnon et al., 2015). Interviews took place in a comfortable and safe environment, as Clandinin et al. (2017) recommended. The interview location may impact the participants' responses (Elwood & Martin, 2010).

Participants and Purposeful Sample

The participants included female mid-level leaders currently employed in the THI. I used the criterion sampling method (Suri, 2011) to establish specific prerequisites for participation in this study. These criteria include the following: (a) having a minimum 10 years of experience, (b) currently holding a mid-level leader position, (c) identifying as female, (d) willing to participate in the current study, and (e) working in the THI in the state of Florida. The participant's level of education and ethnicity was not part of the eligibility criteria for this study.

The sampling approach in this study involved purposeful sampling methods, including snowball and criterion sampling (Patton, 1990; Suri, 2011). I anticipated that participating female mid-level leaders would recruit more potential participants from their networks, achieving snowball sampling (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). This self-perpetuating process allows a network-based expansion of the participant sample.

Lastly, I used convenience sampling due to my professional connections in the THI, which affords access to potential participants fitting this study's criterion (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). These sampling methods were selected to fulfill the need for gender-specific and role-specific participants, my connections in the THI, and the ability to expand the participant pool through the participants' networks. The current study included a targeted sample of female mid-level leaders from the THI, providing a relevant dataset for the research purposes.

Data Collection

I collected data by conducting semistructured interviews, using a researcher-developed interview protocol instrument. The interview questions were designed to address the following research question: What factors contribute to the career commitment of current female mid-level leaders working in the tourism and hospitality industry? I conducted a pilot-test interview with one participant to improve the interview protocol, including the questions and the sequencing of the questions (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). This pilot-test interview helped validate the interview protocol's relevance and effectiveness, revealing opportunities for question reformulation or reordering questions as necessary (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Qualitative data collection in this study involved conducting semistructured interviews (Baugh et al., 2020; Englander, 2012; Kwok & Muniz, 2021), with the researcher serving as the primary instrument for collecting the data. The research approach employed was narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), focusing on female mid-level leaders in the THI to explore their career commitment. Through these interviews, the participants had the opportunity to share their stories, providing insights into their thoughts and emotions regarding their career commitment (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; Poole, 2021). I interviewed three female mid-level leaders within the THI, following the recommendation by Creswell and Creswell (2018) to interview a minimum of one person for a narrative inquiry approach. Baker and Edwards (2012) further explained that no magic number of participants exists. Mason (2010) and Malterud et al. (2016)

recommended interviewing participants until an information saturation point is obtained. The goal is to continue the interviews until saturation is achieved (Baker & Edwards, 2012; V. Braun & Clarke, 2021).

The data collection process involved semistructured interviews using a narrative inquiry approach, allowing female mid-level leaders to share their personal stories and reflections on their career commitment to the THI, considering personal, social, time, and place factors (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Previous researchers, such as Ali et al. (2022) and Nagar (2021), recommended employing the narrative inquiry approach to gain a deeper understanding of leaders' narratives. Each participant received in advance the interview questions, the informed consent form, the confidentiality agreement, and the letter to participate in the study. They also received instructions instructing them to read and contemplate the interview questions. However, they were advised not to write down their responses in advance to prevent the elicited responses from mirroring the structured nature of survey answers, thereby ensuring a more organic and spontaneous discourse during the interview. The interviews occurred in person or via Zoom web-conferencing software, depending on the participants' preferences, as Elwood and Martin (2010) recommended. I anticipated each interview to last approximately 1 hour, and participation was voluntary. Probing techniques (Kedroske et al., 2020) were used to ensure that participants' career commitment was fully explored.

Data Analysis

Interview transcripts were generated using the Otter AI transcription service application for the interviews conducted via Zoom web-conferencing software. I then cross-verified these transcriptions with the original interview recordings to ensure accuracy and verbatim representation, which included filler words, pauses, and utterances, such as "um" and "er" (H. Collins et al., 2019, p. 654). Incorporating nonverbal cues can also contribute to comprehending the participant's emotions and emphasis during the interview (Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

The data analysis method for these interviews involved inductive analysis. This choice was motivated by a notable gap in the literature pertaining to narrative

inquiry in TH research, particularly concerning female leaders in the THI (Ali et al., 2022). The inductive analysis method begins with specific observations and then moves into broader generalizations, thus resulting in categories (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Each interview constituted a unique narrative, as Moser and Korstjens (2018) explained. These individual narratives were subsequently coded paragraph by paragraph, broken up into the stories shared by the participants (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). I read each narrative transcript multiple times to identify the story's narrator, setting, timeline, main events, and the reasons behind these events (Dey, 1993; Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Genuine insights can only be formed when the researcher is deeply immersed in the data (Polit & Beck, 2004). The narrative story arc is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Narrative Story Arc

Note. Adapted from *How to craft an engaging arc for your story* by K. Edens, 2023 (https://prowritingaid.com/art/320/Are-You-Ready-to-Draft-Your-Story-Arc-.aspx).

Applying inductive analysis (Moser & Korstjens, 2018), I read each transcript individually and segmented it into narratives corresponding to the story's arc, per Clandinin and Connelly (2000). During this textual data analysis, the research question served as a guiding principle (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). I used an open coding approach, which involves extracting headings from each story (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Open coding is the process of breaking down, examining,

comparing, and categorizing data (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). These headings were then used to group related categories of textual data (Dey, 1993; Elo & Kyngas, 2008). The development of these categories assisted in narrative depiction, comprehension enhancement, and knowledge creation (Cavanagh, 1997). Through the interpretation of the interview transcript data, I could ascertain which pieces of textual data should be clustered into categories, as Dey (1993) explained. This process led to abstraction, a process of providing a general description of the research topic by generating categories (Polit & Beck, 2004). Some paragraphs may belong to more than one category (Dey, 1993).

After reviewing and analyzing all transcripts, I compared the narrative arcs from all participant interviews, aiming to identify core narratives. Narrative arcs refer to the thematic segments derived from each interview transcript, representing the distinct aspects of a participant's narrative, which are integral in tracing the arc of their personal career commitment (Bishop, 2012). This method facilitates a comparative analysis across the narratives in the research, enabling the extraction of core narratives through the juxtaposition of various participant interviews (Greckhamer et al., 2018).

I also conducted coding or categorization and labeling data, performed cross-case analysis to identify common themes, patterns, or trends across multiple narratives (K. J. B. Anderson et al., 2010), and carried out narrative analysis, which involves the assessment of each narrative (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Conducting cross-case analysis may reveal patterns that are not apparent in individual narratives (K. J. B. Anderson et al., 2010). This procedure is iterative, with the researcher navigating between the data and their interpretation of it (Costantino, 2001).

The findings are presented in a restorying format, where the researcher retells the participants' stories, integrating identified themes and patterns (Mulholland & Wallace, 2003). This restorying may be done in a narrative form, chronological form, or a thematic form (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). The researcher's voice might also be incorporated into the findings, providing

reflections on the research process and interpretation of the participants' narratives (Bell, 2002).

Trustworthiness

The rigor and validity of qualitative research can be assessed by applying Guba and Lincoln's (1989) four criteria for trustworthiness in academic studies, which are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility focuses on accurately representing the participants' constructed realities, achievable through prolonged engagement, observation during interviews, and member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability entails examining whether the findings can be applied to other contexts or other participants (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Thick, detailed descriptions of the research context, participants, and methods can aid in determining the applicability of the findings (Morse, 2015).

Dependability addresses the stability of the data over time and conditions (Shenton, 2004). A detailed audit trail that involves documenting the decision-making processes, methodological choices, and analytic steps used throughout the study can ensure dependability (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Transparency allows peer researchers to comprehend and evaluate the research process (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Finally, confirmability is validating that the characteristics of the researcher's data are unbiased and can be verified by others (McGinley et al., 2021). Maintaining a reflexive journal, notating the researcher's thoughts, biases, and influences during the research process, enhances confirmability (Ortlipp, 2008). Reflexive journaling supports the researcher's neutrality and bolsters credibility (Orange, 2016). By adhering to Guba and Lincoln's (1989) four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, the trustworthiness of the current study was strengthened.

I incorporated member checking, a crucial process to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; McGinley et al., 2021). The individual narratives obtained through the interviews were interpreted to effectively convey the stories and voices of the female mid-level leaders in this study. The participants had access to their narratives, which I restoried to validate

that their stories and themes had been accurately captured (Mero-Jaffe, 2011). Member checking also served as an opportunity for the participants to ensure that the restorying reflected the statements they made during the interview, as Tafazoli and Meihami (2023) highlighted. In the interviews, I provided the participants the opportunity to tell their stories.

Interview Process and Ethical Considerations

The current study incorporated a specific demographic of participants: female mid-level leaders who were employed in the THI. In adherence to the criterion sampling strategy (Suri, 2011), these participants had to fulfill a set of clearly defined preconditions for their inclusion in the research. The parameters for eligibility included a minimum of 10 years of employment in the THI, occupying a mid-level leadership position, self-identification as female, and willingness to contribute to the current study. Eligible participants also had to be employed within the THI in the state of Florida at the time of this study. However, it is important to clarify that the participants' education level and ethnic background were not considered as part of the selection criteria for this research.

In line with the selection strategy, this study involved purposeful sampling methodologies, which included criterion and snowball sampling techniques (Patton, 1990; Suri, 2011). As Moser and Korstjens (2018) explained, the snowball sampling method relied on the anticipation that participating female mid-level leaders would act as recruitment agents, identifying and introducing additional potential participants from their respective professional networks. This method involved a self-perpetuating cycle that fosters a network-driven expansion of the participant sample. Lastly, I employed convenience sampling, leveraging my professional networks within the THI to identify prospective participants who met the study's inclusion criteria, as Moser and Korstjens (2018) suggested.

The choice of these sampling methods was purposeful, intending to cater to the requirement of gender-specific and role-specific participants. Furthermore, these methods capitalized on my existing professional ties within the THI and facilitated the broadening of the participant pool through the subjects' professional

networks. In implementing these methodologies, I aimed to amass a highly targeted sample of female mid-level leaders from the THI, thereby generating a dataset that was optimally suited to the purpose of this research.

Data collection for the current study involved semistructured interviews to gather insights from female mid-level leaders regarding their career commitment within the THI. Broad open-ended interview questions (Weller et al., 2018) were used to elicit their personal narratives about their career commitment. I asked additional follow-up questions, as necessary, to ensure a comprehensive discussion of their career commitment (Kedroske et al., 2020). The interviews occurred either in person at a predetermined location or via Zoom web-conferencing software, depending on participants' preferences. In-person interviews were held at a location chosen in advance by the participants, per Herzog's (2005) suggestion.

Narrative inquiry includes the obligation to maintain the privacy, dignity, and welfare of the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Approval from the Institutional Review Board of the university, which in this study was Southeastern University, is required before conducting interviews. A researcher has a dual role of cultivating a close relationship with the participants while maintaining a scholarly professionalism (Jackson, 2021). Participants should be contacted before the interviews with information about the specifics of the study, such as the duration, location, involved activities, and the time commitment (Xu et al., 2020). The participant should be provided with the informed consent form after this information is conveyed (Xu et al., 2020).

The participants were provided with an informed consent form to review and sign before the interview, as Xu et al. (2020) proposed. Each participant received a signed copy of the informed consent form. The participants had the right to decline the interview at any stage in the process. I had a strategy ready in case a participant felt uncomfortable during the interview, either offering the participant a break, terminating the interview, or seeking external support resources beyond the interview context (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). I conducted the interviews and anticipated each interview to last approximately 60 minutes.

To ensure accurate documentation, the in-person interviews were recorded on a personal Sony ICD-PX240 portable digital recorder. Transcription of the in-person interviews occurred through the Otter AI transcription service application. Interviews conducted through Zoom web conferencing software were transcribed directly using the Otter AI transcription service application. Once transcribed, I deleted the interview recordings and securely stored the transcriptions on a password-protected personal computer. The participants' names were replaced with culturally aligned pseudonyms of their choosing in the transcriptions to ensure their privacy and protect their confidentiality (Surmiak, 2018). The pseudonyms were used in all records and files. The transcriptions will be destroyed after 3 years. I performed coding of the transcriptions by hand.

The Belmont Report contains ethical guidelines for safeguarding human participants involved in research studies (Sims, 2010). The Report includes three guiding principles that researchers must adhere to when recruiting and interviewing human participants: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Miracle, 2016). The principle of respect for persons emphasizes the preservation of the autonomy and dignity of the participants (Adashi et al., 2018). The principle dictates that, during recruitment, the researcher must ensure that potential participants are aware of their right to decline to participate in the proposed study (Sims, 2010). Moreover, to support informed consent, participants must be provided with comprehensive information about the proposed study, including its purpose, potential risks, benefits, and their rights as participants (Cassell, 2000).

Beneficence, the second principle, necessitates the researcher to strive to minimize potential harm while maximizing benefits for the participants (Beauchamp, 2020). In the recruitment phase, the researcher should thoroughly consider the prospective benefits of the proposed study for both participants and the broader academic discourse (Adashi et al., 2018). The research objectives should align with the well-being and interests of the participants (Sims, 2010). Any potential risks or discomforts during the interview process should be proactively mitigated by the researcher (Miracle, 2016).

Justice, the final principle, emphasizes equitable distribution of the benefits and burdens of research (Sims, 2010). The researcher must avoid discrimination and bias in participant selection during the recruitment process (Miracle, 2016). The criteria for selecting participants should be rooted in the research question and objectives, thereby ensuring the selection of a diverse range of participants (Adashi et al., 2018). The researcher should endeavor to represent different voices and perspectives in the proposed study, reinforcing the inclusivity of the research (Sims, 2010).

Informed consent is a critical element of the research process, which should be ensured by the researcher (Sims, 2010). Equally vital is carefully balancing the potential benefits and risks, practicing fairness, and promoting inclusion during participant selection (Cassell, 2000). The principles of the Belmont Report aid the researcher in safeguarding the rights, well-being, and autonomy of the participants while simultaneously minimizing potential harm (Beauchamp, 2020).

Summary

The THI has an imbalance between male and female mid-level leaders (Castell Project, 2022). A factor determining whether persons of a particular gender obtain leadership positions may be their career commitment (Blayney & Blotnicky, 2017; Gonzalez-Serrano et al., 2018). Exploring the stories of their career commitment within the THI of female mid-level leaders by conducting semistructured interviews may provide insights into retaining female leaders in the THI. This chapter included a discussion of the research question, interview questions, interview protocol, and ethical considerations, along with data collection and analysis strategies. The results and findings of these interviews are detailed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 – Findings

This chapter contains the stories of three female mid-level leaders in the THI in the state of Florida, Daisy, Iris, and Rose, focusing on the factors contributing to their career commitment. I restoried the narratives of these female leaders, unearthing both shared and distinct themes that underscore their commitment to their TH careers. Each interview was treated as an individual story, according to Moser and Korstjens (2018). The analysis involved reading each transcript several times to identify key elements such as the narrator, setting, timeline, main events, and motivations behind these events, a procedure supported in research (Dey, 1993; Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Each interview transcript was read and dissected into distinct narratives that trace the storyline of each participant's experiences, consistent with narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The overarching research question guided the data analysis and ensured that the exploration remained focused and relevant (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). I employed an open coding technique, identifying and extracting key themes from the narratives. After completing the initial analysis of all transcripts, I undertook a comparative review of the narrative arcs from all interviews. My aim was to identify common themes, patterns, or trends that emerged across the narratives by conducting a cross-case analysis to discover insights not immediately apparent in individual accounts (K. J. B. Anderson et al., 2010).

The data analysis of the interview transcripts was structured using the narrative story arc depicted in Figure 2. This approach enabled me to restory the participants' narratives, aligning them with the story arc's framework. Figure 2 was adapted from Edens (2023). The research question that guided the problem of practice herein included the following: What factors contribute to the career commitment of purposively sampled female mid-level leaders currently working in the tourism and hospitality industry?

Figure 2

Narrative Story Arc

Note. Adapted from *How to craft an engaging arc for your story* by K. Edens, 2023 (https://prowritingaid.com/art/320/Are-You-Ready-to-Draft-Your-Story-Arc-.aspx).

Process

I used a handmade easel and storyboard, built by my husband, Lee Harrelson, to lay out and restory each participant's narrative. The easel was constructed from miscellaneous remnants of wood from previous projects. The storyboard was a 4' x 5' section of Owens Corning Pink Panther Foamular 150 R-5 foam board insulation sheathing. My husband glued builder's paper on the foam side to prevent a potential mess from the foam board and to allow handwriting on the storyboard. I printed the interview transcripts from the Otter AI transcription service application after verifying the accuracy of the transcripts. Cutting the participant's speaking portions from the printed transcript, I used pushpins to place each portion on the storyboard and moved around their responses to craft each story, following the narrative story arc in Figure 2. After completing the restory format, I numbered each part of the interview transcript. This process of verifying, printing, cutting, and restorying the interview transcript on the storyboard was repeated for each participant. The storyboard, easel, and Daisy's restoried interview transcript are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Storyboard and Easel for Data Analysis

Participants

The participants in this narrative inquiry qualitative research study were recruited using the purposeful sampling strategies of convenience, snowball, and criterion-based sampling (Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Patton, 1990; Suri, 2011). The rationale for choosing these sampling techniques was to specifically target participants based on gender and leadership role, use my professional network within the THI, and broaden the sample pool via participant referrals. The selection criteria did not include the participant's level of education or ethnicity. Convenience sampling leveraged my industry connections within the THI to identify suitable participants, as Moser and Korstjens (2018) suggested. The participants included three female mid-level leaders currently employed in the THI in the state of Florida. The leaders ranged in age from their 30s to mid-60s. All three leaders have a minimum of 20 years' experience in the THI, higher than the required 10 years' experience in the THI. The leaders were working at the time of this study and had worked in various sectors of the THI, including restaurants, hotels, events, catering, spas, cruise lines, and a government agency.

Daisy's Story

Setup

My first interview was with Daisy, a female mid-level leader, with over 20 years' experience, in her mid-40s currently working as a manager in the cruise line sector of the THI. Daisy's narrative offers a glimpse into the paths that lead to career commitment. Her entry into the THI was serendipitous rather than planned. Daisy's journey began in young adulthood, a stage in life characterized by uncertainty and exploration, while attending a community college, a place for self-discovery and career exploration. Daisy shared her initial absence of a clear career path during this part of her life. Reflecting on the choices she made without an end goal, Daisy felt the societal and internal pressures to choose a career path. Her narrative underscores the interplay between personal aspirations, external influences, and the events that shaped her career commitment. Daisy began her story by sharing the events that led to her choosing to work in the THI:

> So quite honestly, no, I didn't. I was going to a community college. I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life. Umm, I thought I wanted to be a spokesperson for a police department. So, I was actually taking classes in criminal justice, but I was kind of wasting my parents' time and money, okay. And I kind of you know, at the time, I hadn't gone away to college, after high school, stupid guy I was dating, you know, the typical, like 18 years old, you know, how cool you're doing. So, I was 20 when I saw the poster on the wall, [at my] community college, for the [internship program] And I just thought it sounded like something cool. So, I love I actually love this story because I was working in a grocery store at the time. So, my boss, I told him that I'd have to go to I had to go like an hour away to another school, not my school to learn about it. So, they said it was an info session. Umm and so I went to work in the morning, you know, my jeans and sweater thinking I'm truly going for an info session, and I get there and there's all these people in suits and ties and it turns out that they were actually interviewing for the full [internship program], the full [internship program] presentation. So, I got my I listened to the session I got my

interview time for like two hours later I went to the mall. I bought an outfit at [clothing store], changed in the [quick service restaurant] bathroom and went back and had my [internship] interview. So that was how it all started. So, it was I wouldn't say it was more by chance than by anything. And the fact that I was looking you know, just looking to move from a small town looking to expand my horizons a little bit and just see what else there was out there. And then once I started obviously never left.

Inciting Incidents

Daisy's story continued with the inciting incidents that led to her decision to commit to a career in the THI. She transitioned into a full-time role at the dinner show location where she started her internship. This period in her career was marked by increased learning and responsibility, including managing the location by herself on busy night shifts. Her leadership abilities and natural aptitude for managing restaurants led to lateral moves and promotions. Daisy's first lateral move was to a front desk management role, which she sought to advance her career and facilitate a personal relationship with the GM of the dinner show restaurant. The front desk manager role provided Daisy with valuable insights into the hotel side of the THI. However, she missed the busy environment of managing a restaurant and returned to restaurant management at a different hotel. She stated:

> So, I went to the [internship program] for four months at the [dinner show location]. Umm, and then I went full time there for probably just under a year, after my [internship]. Obviously, I enjoyed the job. I was one of two [interns]. And I was you know, I was taking charge kind of, the manager used to leave on Saturday nights and leave us there to close up the place like so I kinda I could tell it was a natural fit for me. Umm, and then from there I was promoted in that same location, as you know, what happened there. My leader but of course we were not together until after I moved away. So I was in that same location for close to three years and then I was just kind of looking you know, again looking for a change also looking to get away from him so that we could actually date. So, then I became a front desk manager for probably about a year or so at this also [same hotel]. Learned it

was an entirely different ballgame from food and beverage. You know, learned a lot and enjoyed a lot of parts of it, but there was also a lot of down time which I missed like the constant hustle and bustle of the restaurant business. So, I ended up going back into it as a restaurant manager at [a different hotel] for probably two years.

Daisy encountered challenges in a new role as a spa salon and fitness center manager. She faced resistance from a spa director with a leadership style different from her approach. The competitiveness of the spa salon and fitness center sector was evident in the queen bee syndrome traits (Derks et al., 2016) exhibited by the spa director. Daisy was tasked with teaching the spa director the organization's culture. However, the spa director was not receptive to Daisy's assistance. Instead, she levied unfounded accusations against Daisy and made decisions that lacked integrity. Daisy was forced to advocate for herself and report the spa director to senior leaders. This incident helped Daisy learn about managing a spa salon and fitness center as well as managing interpersonal conflicts and upholding professional standards. Daisy remarked:

Yes, so when I, but the funny thing is that it was actually the spa director when I was opening the spa [salon and fitness center] and she was female as well. But she had a very hard time adapting to the [organization's] culture. And so, and you know, they made it clear, like my role was that I needed to help her to understand the culture. But I also I don't know, you know, I think after the fact and learning more about the spa industry, it's a very cutthroat type of industry. And so, she wanted nothing to do with anything I had to say. She also wasn't used to having like in spas, they basically have a manager you know, like a spa crew but don't have a lot like levels in between. She wanted to be able to you know if if I wanted to move a towel set up in the lounge that I had to have her permission first like so that was challenging, but if it got to a point where there was some integrity things that I had tried to address myself and I ended up going to get those two GMs, one person for one resort. one for the other. We had to sit down, the four of us together, lay it out on the table. But she was of course you know,

telling stories about me that were not true at all and I needed a chance to understand what I was dealing with. I think I mean, it kind of all came full circle and she lasted longer than I thought she would last but but I never had like they were never the ones in question but I had to with her directly. Yes, I definitely had to advocate for myself. But I had to make sure with leaders higher up that I wasn't like I was running in tattling, but it had to be brought up to the next level or else it's never gonna go anywhere.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, while Daisy was furloughed from her job, she seized the opportunity to diversify her skill set by obtaining a real estate license. This decision demonstrated Daisy's resilience and adaptability, as well as her ability to leverage the soft skills she acquired in the THI. Daisy reflected on her success in real estate and contemplated the future direction of her career, weighing the decision to return to the THI or remain in the real estate industry post-pandemic. She stated:

But I will say coming back after COVID Especially because like to get my real estate license during that time. I had a really successful first year. I was I mean, I debated right you know, is it the right thing to do coming back. Is it what I want to do?

This section connected different stages of Daisy's career, highlighting her adaptability, leadership skills, and the interplay between personal and professional life. Her narrative showcases a journey of continuous learning, adaptability, and the importance of personal agency in career commitment. The next section covers Daisy's career actions.

Actions

Daisy's career trajectory was influenced by pivotal experiences and people who shaped her professional ethos and career path. Tyler started as a challenging yet inspiring leader under whom Daisy served as an intern and restaurant manager. Daisy realized the value of Tyler's passion for the THI and his high standards, despite her initial struggles and feeling unfairly critiqued. This early part of Daisy's career was formative, marked by managing a large and seasoned team, addressing employee issues, and creating impactful guest experiences. Notably, Daisy recalls a

poignant moment at the restaurant where they executed an unforgettable experience for a terminally ill guest, reinforcing her commitment to the THI:

> So earlier on, I mean, obviously, you know, when I worked for [Tyler], he was he was really tough on me. So, I was a fairly new [restaurant manager] at the time, and I like there was days I would leave there going like what the hell is wrong with this guy? And you know, he, like he's, oh, you didn't do this? You didn't do that. And then there you know, I think I don't think he realized how that operation was tough to run because I was the only [restaurant manager] there I was there five days a week. I mean he would you know, be there for parts of the show and whatever. But working with all your, you know, I was I was at that location. It was 2001. I had 26 full time servers and 20 of them have been in that location since before I was born. I remember that was like, yeah, you're obviously dealing with a lot of [employee] issues, a lot of that. But he was also very, you know, the fact that like, his passion for the business even before we were, you know, when he was just my when I knew him as leader, whatever. But, you know, that was always very inspiring. And then I think it was the guests too. You know, I just have you have those guest experiences like I can remember one of the [dinner show location]. Probably one of my earlier ones where I was able to, you know, I felt like I was really able to make a difference. And we had been able to, I think there was a you know, someone was terminally ill with cancer, and we were able to get the dancers to pull them up on stage and just to see, you know, see what it meant to them. So even you know, yeah, you go you know, you'd go for a couple of months at a time or obviously the food and beverage industry is not easy, and you're you're working nights and it's exhausting, but then you have those like, you know, sprinkled in here and there and I think that was always kind of like just a reinforcement that this is why I'm doing what I'm doing and this is what made me want to do it. [Holly] obviously was a huge, you know, huge part of my career. She's now an SVP or yeah, she's no she's VP of [a multi-unit

location]. I still do get together with her like every, you know, couple times a year. But she's always been a good sounding board for me.

Another influential leader in Daisy's career was Holly, a mentor who guided her with candid and practical advice. Holly's mentorship was instrumental in Daisy's professional development, helping her navigate workplace presentation and conduct. She helped Daisy create her personal brand by demonstrating and reinforcing positive leadership traits. Daisy recalled:

Umm, during that time, I think I, I worked for [Holly] who really became a mentor for me. Umm, I was, I was kind of I was a little bit more and I, you know again, I was like alright, it's kind of slow here. I remember her telling me pretty, pretty clearly if I wanted to continue in a professional role, I needed to stop wearing short skirts and stuff, you know, and grow up a little bit.

Daisy stated that she has encountered differing cultures and workplace dynamics in her current leadership role. Gender and cultural nuances were connected to networking and relationships within the cruise line. Daisy observed that career progression often depended on who one knew, rather than on merit. She realized this divide when a department she was managing was reassigned to another leader without inquiring whether she was interested in continuing in the role. However, the decision did not decrease Daisy's career commitment, saying:

Yes, so there's definitely a lot of but here it's not just female versus female and male. It's more the cultural piece of it as well. So we have very strong, senior, very senior level leaders that have are very opinionated and, you know, basically if they have some candidate that they want it doesn't really nothing else really matters, like you know, so it's navigating through that it's also not as [politically correct] is probably a little more [the other organization] is probably a little bit better balanced with some of the appropriateness of things. So here is definitely a little bit more under the radar and you know, things a lot of things just happen sometimes. So I will say, you know, it's, I haven't like lost positions to others or whatever. But you know, like, I was overseeing here's a good example. I was overseeing

concierge for a while because food and beverage took it over. And then another leader came in off the ships and like I wasn't given an option if I wanted to, like move into the concierge for all like another leader that worked with all these others that being all these others just came in and was given the role. So, it was you know, so that that that's where I would say you definitely still see some discrepancy but it's definitely more about who you know. And there's a lot of thinking of the best way to say it. There's a lot of things. Yeah. It depends. You know, what happens, what's convenient for people and what how it benefits them.

This section encapsulated the essence of Daisy's experiences, tracing her journey as a new leader learning under a tough leader to understanding the intricate dynamics of the workplace. It highlighted the importance of mentorship, resilience in the face of challenges, and the complexity of navigating professional environments. The next section covers the milestones in Daisy's career journey.

Climax

Daisy's journey within the THI is marked by pivotal moments of growth and recognition. A turning point came when she heeded Holly's advice to adopt a more professional style and approach. These changes led to tangible career advancements. Daisy developed a secret shopper role, an endeavor that demonstrated her innovative thinking and commitment to improving service quality. This initiative underscored Daisy's adaptability and desire to embrace new challenges. Recognizing Daisy's potential and dedication, Holly promoted her to a restaurant GM position. This promotion was a career milestone and validated Daisy's hard work and professional transformation. Daisy's story was as follows:

So, I took her advice I tried to put on a more, you know, professional approach and so after that, being there for a couple of years, I was able to do the [secret] shopper role, which was, I created that at the time. So that was about eight months. And from there, [Holly] promoted me to [general] manager. So, you know, she, she gave me always, was very good with feedback. Gave me a lot of feedback.

Daisy reflected on the human interactions, stories, and relationships forged during her career, stating that these experiences and people truly motivated and fulfilled her in her career. The most rewarding aspect for Daisy was not the operational side of running restaurants but the connections made with people—the staff, the crew, and the guests:

> There's been, you know, again, like the cast, the crew engagement and the guests like is what really, yeah. It's I wouldn't say I'm out I've done this because I love running restaurants or I love it, you know. It's more about the people that you meet.

Daisy's journey was, however, not without its challenges. Despite her extensive experience and proven track record in the THI, she often found herself having to prove her capabilities due to a perceived lack of onboard ship experience, a common requirement in the cruise line sector:

> But that's for me, like the you know, really the big where I've had to prove myself more has been because I don't have because I don't have that direct ship experience that 98% of everybody else who works in the office has. I mean, obviously, at this point, before COVID I sailed like 70 something times, so I'm sure. At this point, I'm probably 110 I mean, so it's not like I don't understand the role, but that's always like the if there's ever a question about something Well, you didn't work on board. So, it's, it's more having to prove myself from that point that like I can still have the knowledge and understanding of what happens even if I didn't physically work on board.

This situation underscored a broader issue within the cruise line culture, where career advancements sometimes were based on tenure rather than merit. Daisy observed that many onboard positions were filled based on seniority rather than competency, saying, "Yeah, definitely within the onboard positions, there's more people are in these positions just because it's their turn. Not because they necessarily deserve them."

This section connected key moments in Daisy's career, emphasizing her personal development, the impact of mentorship, and the challenges of navigating workplace dynamics. Her narrative illustrates Daisy's journey from receiving

critical feedback to achieving a pivotal role, all while confronting and overcoming THI stereotypes and biases. The next section covers Daisy's successes and failures in her career.

Successes and Failures

Daisy's tenure as an area manager at hotel restaurant and subsequent transition to a multi-unit location marked a period of professional growth. This phase was Daisy's first foray into multi-unit management, encompassing leadership roles at various restaurants including a buffet style restaurant and a barbecue restaurant. Daisy thrived in this environment, despite challenges such as working under a demanding GM. The culmination of this phase led Daisy to manage spa salons and fitness centers. Daisy embraced the challenge and adapted her leadership style to suit the spa environment. This role was a contrast to the loud and busy world of food and beverage, requiring a sensitive and empathetic approach with employees. She noted:

> Umm, so I was at [hotel restaurant] as area manager for by just about two years. And that's kind of seemed to be the trend at the time anyway, usually every few years, they would move you from location to location. And then went over to [multi-unit location]. It was my first [multi-unit] experience. For a while at [buffet style restaurant] and then another probably a year and a half at [barbecue restaurant]. Loved the [multi-unit] piece of it. That was a time when [multi-unit location] was going through some transitions had a very challenging, umm GM that was external. Remember, you know remember and the cool thing about that experience was so at the very end she ended up she ended up leaving a company or something and so they were you know they're looking for a new food beverage GM and I had recommended to our park VP [Holly] and said oh my gosh, she's exactly what this team needs. So, I always like joke that I kind of give myself credit for getting [Holly] promoted to GM. So worked for her again, obviously a little bit of a different capacity where she was the park, umm, the park GM and then I was tapped on the shoulder to open the spa salons fitness centers when they became [organization] owned and operated. And it was

something that I knew nothing about the business they were looking for an area manager that had the [organization] experience in order to balance the spa director who they were bringing in external so that was consisted of the two main spas, the [hotel one] and [hotel two]. And then we had seven resort fitness centers that have massage rooms. Plus, three salons. So, there was a lot of highs and lows in that experience. Umm, I was the first one brought in. So, I was working with a line of business person who had some spa experience and we had a very short timeline and I don't think that. Looking back, I think the company had expected that the third party was going to continue their contract for longer than they were but we only wanted to offer them a short contract so they said forget it. It's no value to us. So, we're kind of put into a situation where we had to figure it out and get it open but it was you know, I really enjoyed learning the new business side of it. Umm, it couldn't have been more extreme from food and beverage you know, you're used to the kitchens, everybody's pretty loud and whatever. At the spas, if I looked at, you know, I looked at somebody the wrong way and they start crying. I had to learn how to adjust my leadership style definitely for that. Umm, so I did that for about two years and then it's always been on the two year mark more or less. And then this cruise line position was open and I decided I was gonna go for it. I thought I had no chance in hell because you know, nobody ever leaves the cruise line. I went in for I'll never forget I went in for my first interview. And it was the director who's from the UK … The chef who's from [UK country], and the beverage manager who's from [European country]. And I sat there for an hour, and I left there and my like, my head just spinning going What the heck was that? Like? Usually, you can get a gauge of how things went, and it was the most random bizarre interview I'd ever had. Umm, and they called me back the next week to interview with somebody else on the team that hadn't been there. So, I don't know, it was, I always say, you know, it was right time, right place. I did feel like I kind of clicked with them well, even though I didn't know anything about their business and that was 2014

so I came in as [restaurant operations] manager. And then, uh, just before COVID in 2020, I was promoted to manager of [restaurant operations]. So still within you know, a lot of the same areas of responsibility, but obviously just taking it to the next level a lot more of a strategy and planning and we also knew at that time, you know that we were starting to plan for new ships then. Then I was furloughed in May of 2020. Yep. And came back. No, April 2020. And then I was furloughed for 14 months. Umm, yeah. So I was brought back in June of 21. And basically, this was looking back on all the experiences. This was the one that like everybody goes, why did we ever do that? They brought me back and then they said within five days, I had to go to [Europe] to reopen the first ship that was reopening. And I needed to be there for five or six weeks. So, I did it. And I it was really hard. Like I didn't realize how hard that was going to be coming back. But that's a whole other story afterwards. So, I did that. And then right on the heels of that we basically got all four ships reopened and then from COVID and we went into the new ship, opened the fifth ship. And yeah, there we are. Now we're getting ready to open a new island. We've got three, two more ships in the immediate future and another one after that. And that's kind of where I've been.

The transition to a cruise line position brought new dimensions to Daisy's career. She initially faced skepticism because of her lack of onboard ship experience, a common prerequisite in the industry. However, Daisy's adaptability and deep understanding of TH operations enabled her to overcome these doubts. She stated:

And then after in terms of like, as I you know, as I grew the first couple of years in the cruise line, it was like, I just loved every second of it, because it was so different. I'm sailing a lot like I was meeting so many people, of course, as every industry is like it's very political here and especially shoreside. I would say even more so because our dynamics, like our SVP, and many of the senior leaders have they all worked in another cruise line prior to coming to [organization]. So they all have a lot of history together.

So I was the only female on the food and beverage team and I was the only American for a while. So, you know, like, I mean, the team's hilarious and I there was so many, like, so many memories and times but it also can be a little bit tough sometimes just because I, you know, it could lead to me feeling like I was on an island by myself sometimes as well having not worked on board not done, you know, not done this, not done that.

Daisy's journey with the cruise line has been marked by a series of highs, such as the exhilaration of opening new ships and expanding into new territories, and lows, including the challenges of being furloughed during the COVID-19 pandemic and the intense pressure of reopening ships post-furlough. Despite these hurdles, Daisy's resilience and commitment shone through, especially in her involvement with the opening of a new ship and the planning of future expansions. Throughout this journey, Daisy has navigated the complexities of the cruise line sector, including the political dynamics of being the only American and one of the few females in a predominantly male, international team. These experiences not only honed Daisy's professional skills but also enriched her understanding of diverse workplace cultures and dynamics. She recalled:

Looking back, there's a lot of things just the industry in general did I think that they were just so afraid that but glad that's over with. What else can I tell you. Opening the ship was by far the most probably the coolest experience. So, I guess I went to Germany for about seven days when it was probably about two or three months out from from opening. I'd opened restaurants before but obviously it's very different opening a ship. The shipyard itself I mean, just like you kind of stand in the hall and you're it's just like, you're looking at things with awe, because everything is just so massive. And so, I got to do that and then I went back for the actual opening. Of course, we were way behind the timeline. I mean, COVID put everything behind.

And we had to be they had to get us out of the river in Germany by a certain date because then there's these birds that nest so they can't they won't send ships through but like this two month period of time so even though the ship

wasn't really ready to go, they moved it out anyway. Yeah, otherwise it would have been like two full months behind. So, lots of great moments in my career.

These paragraphs contained details of Daisy's career journey, highlighting her ability to adapt to new roles and challenges, her contributions to team dynamics and leadership, and her resilience in the face of industry-specific challenges. Daisy's narrative underscores the multifaceted nature of career commitment in the THI. The lessons Daisy gained from each role are covered in the next section.

Falling Action

Daisy has consistently drawn valuable lessons from each role, using them to grow and adapt to new challenges. The experience at the spa salons and fitness centers, for instance, though demanding, was instrumental in developing Daisy's ability to manage diverse personalities. This skill proved invaluable in her subsequent role in the cruise line sector, where managing a diverse team was required. She noted:

> Absolutely. And I feel like from everything, you know, I can definitely look back on each each experience itself and see where I grew from it. What I learned from it, you know how like, obviously the spa [salon and fitness center] experience was, you know, that was really challenging at times, but it helped me to learn, I worked with very different personalities and different units. So, I think it made me more successful coming into into this role where both in the office and on board that obviously the team is so diverse, you know, a lot of really solid like ship experience for you know, so that people that opened the first ship with us in [year]. We have such a wealth of knowledge and information on there that it's amazing.

Daisy's ability to appreciate and leverage this diversity is evident in her work with the hotel operations team, where efforts to maintain a balanced team composition were a priority. This commitment to diversity extended beyond gender to include various nationalities, especially in onboard positions, reflecting an effort to create an inclusive work environment. Daisy recalled:

So, we I mean, our team has grown a lot. So, I'm on the hotel operations team, which is food and beverage is part of but so even within food and beverage, like we have one female who she does our menus, she's a menu manager. I mean, it's still majority male, I would say and then we have in the office now our SVP and GM of [the cruise line] is a female and there's definitely been more of a push on like are the VP of entertainment that was just promoted is female. She got she came off the ship. But I think again, the cruise industry has just been so heavily influenced on the male side.

The physical demands roles in fast food outlets, however, presented challenges in achieving a perfect gender balance, underscoring the complexities of attaining a diverse workforce in a physically demanding sector. She noted:

And we try, like that's one thing before COVID, we were always very good with our diversity mix is like trying to keep on each shift trying to make sure that we had you know that you would never have a server team with your server, assistant server, both the same nationality. You know, especially our onboard positions. That has been a focus over the past several years to increase the female headcount in some roles, definitely easier to do than others. Now, you know, obviously after COVID with visas and like the world just going crazy, it became a lot you know, then then it was just for about a year and a half it's just like getting whoever we could to the ship so that's what we're trying to get back to that point. But a lot of our onboard roles too like [fast food] is my area, but I such as [fast food] attendants. It's very physical. So, you know, I say I don't want I don't want that 50/50 mix because it just it puts too much burden on the rest of the team because a lot of it is more. I mean, just from a physical standpoint, like standards easily lets it pass all day long. So, you know, some of the board I think still are trying to find the balance. Having the having a good female presence but not having it overwhelm the operation there…

So, like these positions, they're like seven, usually about seven month contracts. So, working every single day, they get they get time off in a in a 24 hour period, they have to have 10 hours off and six of those hours have

to be consecutive. Like basically their sleeping time. But that's that is it. That's the maritime, the MLC compliance law, and so maybe think about that every single day for that, and then then they have eight to 10 weeks break after that seven to eight month contract. Like I mean, that's just one that's a [fast food] position. It varies, but even your dining servers are like six months at least. And I mean, again, working you know, usually averaging about 84 hours a week.

They're working together, living together. I mean, just that was a big that was interesting for me to learn that piece of it because obviously, we're all going to try to keep very separate, you know, work is work and personal is personal but on the ship, you can't do that because that that is their personal as well. So, you know, just but they do a good job of balancing that I would say.

Daisy's narrative takes a dramatic turn with her experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly when she was tasked with reopening the first ship post-lockdown. The stringent quarantine measures and the intense pressure of this undertaking were compounded by a stressful incident where Daisy was mistakenly identified as having close contact with a COVID-19-positive individual. This experience, involving additional quarantine time in a hotel and the subsequent panic and confusion, was a moment of reflection for Daisy, making her question her decision to return to the cruise line after a 14-month furlough. The intensity of this situation and the emotional toll it took highlight the unforeseen challenges and personal sacrifices often encountered in the THI, especially in unprecedented times such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these hardships, Daisy's ability to look back and find humor in the situation and her continued commitment to the THI demonstrate her remarkable resilience and dedication. Her narrative went as follows:

Umm, yeah, I have kind of a funny story I'll share that happened after COVID. So, after I sent to the UK, I had I had to quarantine for seven days in the hotel first. And then at the time, you had to do like a day three test, day five test, and a day seven test. And then once you got your day seven

test, you could go then you're good to go on the ship. So that was like it I mean, I had no balcony or anything and they put the fear of God in you like that if you left the hotel, you were fired, like it was really was twofold. So, the National Health whatever the European national health, they said after day five, you could come out of quarantine. [The organization] said you can't like you can't even leave your room until after you're going on the ship. And so I did that like I ran like a half marathon in my room one day in place because I was so bored like I just was trying to fill the time, trying to figure out stuff to do, so then I get to the ship and of course at that time, everything masks all the time, like crew really. I mean, of course we had could engage with them but like we couldn't have dinner with the crew or the officers like they were very separated anyway, that was every shoreside there was trying to keep everybody in their own little bubbles. So, I was on board for a couple of days and then this guy came off the first side. They changed the process at some point so that you could take the you took your day five test, and then you if that was negative then you got on board and then you still have to take your day seven test, but you could do it from on board. So, I sat sat down with this guy because he was finishing his lunch. We chatted for a few minutes or whatever. So that evening I'm in the hotel directors meeting and he gets a call and he's like, oh, yeah, she's, yeah, okay, she's here. Yeah. So, he says, hey, you need to go back to your room. You've you've been around somebody that tested positive. So, and they were like doing, tracing having someone What do you mean? So, I go to my room right away. They told me it was this guy [Samuel], that he had, he had tested positive, obviously false positive, because on day 7, you couldn't come back as positive. So right away, I think there was two other people, himself and then I was like the only other one that they said was a close contact because I had sat with them. So they came right away. They came to my room tested me I was negative. And they so this is early on, when they still didn't know what they were doing. They're like doesn't matter that you had a negative now you have to, we're gonna they brought you the whole

like and also I can even send you a picture. You can use it if you want to, but for like hazmat suit, basically said, you need to pack your bags, you're going to a quarantine room for 10 days, even though you tested negative and he was like everybody was negative. It was just the fact that and I lost it like this was maybe within 10 days of coming back like after being again being off for 14 months like nothing like I didn't realize how much I wasn't into it and just not you know, in like a great headspace. I'm in my I'm in my little hazmat suit. I'm starving because I remember at the end of the day and I'm calling and I had a bottle of wine in my room, and I didn't even have a glass like I was drinking the wine out of the bottle. I call the hotel director and I'm like, I don't even care if I'm negative like I'll quit right now get me home so you can just get me off the ship like I don't I lost it like I was freaking out. So, he's like, I don't think we can at this point and it's now it's too far into the process already because you know you've been like said to be a close contact. So, they moved me they come and move me I mean literally five people in hazmat suits. They move me down to this room. And finally, after three hours, the doctor calls I said I just have one question. I thought it was 15 minutes for close contact. They're like yes, it is. I said I sat with a guy for five minutes because he had finished his lunch. I sat down we chatted for a few minutes, and he got up and left and we're like oh, we didn't know that. We'll go ahead and take you off the list.

Looking back on it now it's kind of funny, but I mean, I legit like my boss is on board. He's calling me going like what are you okay? I'm like, No, I'm not okay. I literally just want to quit and go home. It's probably my biggest moment of going What the heck did I do? Why did I really like why did I come back?

This section highlighted Daisy's adaptability and resilience in the face of diverse challenges. Daisy's story is a testament to the complexity of career commitment in dynamic and demanding industries, including the THI, especially during extraordinary circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The next section covers aspects of Daisy's career commitment.

Resolution

Daisy's career, a blend of stability and change, reflects a thoughtful balance between her role in the THI and a growing interest in real estate. Although contemplating a full-time shift to real estate, Daisy remained anchored by the appeal of her current position, which offered a unique and satisfying professional experience. This duality of interests underscores Daisy's adaptability and openness to exploring diverse career paths while appreciating the value of her current role in the THI. She noted:

> I'm still doing the real estate as well. I like it. I mean, there's definitely been a couple of times I thought about do I just want to do that full time, but obviously with the market being unpredictable, and I have a pretty cool gig here, too. I can't really complain, so.

The heart of Daisy's commitment to the THI, as she noted, lay in the relationships with the shipboard teams. Her admiration for the crew's hard work and dedication was a constant source of inspiration and motivation for her, particularly highlighted by the resilience shown by the crew during the COVID-19 pandemic. These experiences reinforced Daisy's decision to return to the THI and continue making a positive impact for crewmembers and guests. She observed:

> But as soon as I got on board the ship, for me, and even now in this role, the shipboard teams are the ones that like I. That's why I do what I do because they are, you know, the hardest working most everybody. I mean, everybody from your entry level crew, to your hotel directors, your senior leaders like just the nicest group of people that you can ever work with. So whenever you know, especially after COVID, knowing what they were going through on board and all that they had done, we had to quarantine seven or 10 days in the hotel and these guys did multiple different quarantines two weeks here two weeks there, they're like and just you know, so that's why I came back really. And even to this day, like that's why whenever I'm on the ships with that with those teams, they're the ones that you know, truly are appreciative of what we do for them and they're the ones that make a difference for the guests.

Daisy has navigated workplace dynamics in her leadership roles, which has been an integral part of her professional journey. Encountering challenges such as the boys' club mentality and having to earn the respect of a colleague who also vied for her position, Daisy has had to assert her capabilities and leadership style:

So, I had, there was one … manager in particular when I came into the role that had applied for this role as well. So definitely has the experience on board and so I don't know if that was I don't think that was necessarily just more like the male female. I think I had a hard time with him because he thought he thought he should have been in the role as opposed to me. So, he was a really tough one to break it took me by far the longest to you know, not now we have great, you know, get along wonderful. But it definitely to earn his respect took a long time, like I would say, at least. I've definitely had. Up until recently, I've had situations where, you know, the boys' club is definitely so you know, we were on the opening of the ship and all of a sudden, you know, all the guys, I'm invited sometimes but then all the guys are going to [restaurant] for dinner and you know, but it's it was the ones that have always kind of grown up together and there's no question that that's still common...I mean, even like, my boss is great. He's the nicest guy in the world. He'll do anything for anybody. But is he part of that? Yeah, yes. Absolutely … Yes, absolutely.

These difficult experiences have not dampened Daisy's ambition. Daisy looked forward to interviewing for a senior manager position in recruiting within the cruise line, aiming for continued growth and new challenges. This aspiration to move into a more strategic role, possibly even a director position, reflects Daisy's desire not only to grow professionally but also to contribute meaningfully to the cruise line's evolution. The potential shift in focus from shipboard operations to recruitment and strategy indicates her versatility and eagerness to explore various facets of the cruise line sector. Daisy remarked:

I would like to I mean, I would like to be promoted to director I am actually interviewing on Wednesday for a senior leader, senior manager position, still within the cruise line, but of recruiting not sure if it'll work out or not,

but I definitely am looking to, I love what I do. I don't want to really leave this realm of things. But I definitely don't want to just sit there and do the same thing for you know, even even if I continue to make a difference. I want to keep growing. So it's, I think if I get out from underneath the SVP I'm under now, it'll be a lot easier…

Yeah, so we'll see. I mean, I'm not I'm also not I don't know I'm kind of taking these next couple of years to see how things go with the obviously we're growing a lot and we you know, it's kind of I think it's hard we're, we were so mom and pop for so long that you know, now that we've already grown [more] ships we'll basically have doubled by 2025. Umm, so, I don't know if I want to I mean, at this point, I would like to become a director and stay here but I'm also not putting like all my eggs in the basket either. So yeah, I mean, you know, again, the corporate the corporate BS I'm trying to just play it by ear. I mean, I'm not you know, letting out any opportunities, but I'm also I'm not active on LinkedIn, but I also know I could probably go, if I want to stay within cruise lines, I could probably go to another cruise line and get, you know, a pretty decent position with my experience. Just seeing where it goes right now…

It would kind of be about the same amount of travel. They go on the ships a little bit it wouldn't be as much on the ships it would be more going to like you're working with the procurement allies and the different countries. More like country trips. And then I think that like that team there, it's again, it's a growth position. So, they're expanding so like then I have like seven or eight recruiters under me. But you know, it's more like, again, I'm kind of strategy based but still leading a team, which is also something I do miss something in this role is I have the dotted line to people on the ships, but I don't have I have one person that was hired just before COVID was then laid off. And I just got that position again. So, like, I haven't had that, you know, direct team in a while, which I kind of miss.

Daisy draws inspiration from the success of female hotel directors on the ships who have risen through the ranks and now excel in their roles, thereby

challenging traditional gender norms in the industry. These role models not only provide a source of motivation but also demonstrate the possibilities for career advancement within the cruise line. Despite the challenges of navigating a male-dominated environment and sometimes feeling isolated, Daisy maintains a sense of independence and self-assurance, choosing to engage on her own terms. Returning to office life post-COVID-19, with the office's open floor plan and lack of personal workspace, presented yet another adaptation for Daisy. The change in work environment, though not ideal, was another aspect of the evolving corporate landscape that Daisy navigated, underscoring her flexibility and resilience in the face of continuous change in the workplace. She noted:

> So, I will say I will say you know, I think watching one thing that's pretty inspiring as a female is watching a lot of the hotel directors onboard, I shouldn't say a lot, but a few of our probably strongest hotel directors are female. One came from food and beverage. She was a dining server worked her way up to you know, restaurant manager, dining room manager, somebody that I've been pretty close to and she was just promoted to hotel director in this past year. So that, you know, again, that's the onboard team. It's just a very different level of inspiration but like, you know, just being on board with them, like seeing, you know, seeing her now and how she runs circles around the other hotel directors like it's kind of cool to see because you do have, you know, you have a lot of good hotel directors, but you also have like, some of these guys were like what the heck are you thinking, you know, so, it's nice to see that there's, you know, there is opportunity for them. And I think so they're looking at like the whole picture like, not just because it's somebody that I you know, I know well that I feel like, you know, you look at what they have, they have the respect of everybody. They have the respect of the captains. They have you know, the teams I mean, and they have the, you know, very, very much the soft skills to go that's lacking a little bit especially, you know, in on board positions…
> I mean, you know, I, I don't enjoy being back in the office four days, that's for sure. That was kind of that was the one nice thing that came out of

COVID. And they did away with all of our offices and its open floorplan. Yeah, it's, I mean, we don't have our own desk. You don't have anything so I'm responsible for ordering china like you know, sourcing all the new china and tabletop stuff for new ships as they come out yet I don't have a desk to put something in a drawer…

That was that was definitely, umm, I don't think I've ever had other you know, then again, little things here and there with just more use. You see the little, it's not even a clique, but you see the *boys' club* here more, umm, but never having to like that's where I just, you know, I'm bigger. I can do my own thing too. You know, I have my own friends, I don't need to be like caught up in their circle all the time. So I kind of you know, I bounce in and out of different the different you know, atmosphere, I guess you could say. But I don't like yeah, I don't need to be stuck up their ass either.

This section connected the different aspects of Daisy's resolution phase, highlighting her reflections on past experiences, current challenges, and future aspirations. Daisy represented a leader who is evolving, learning, and seeking new opportunities for growth within the THI. A summary of Daisy's narrative is presented in the next section.

Summary of Daisy's Narrative Story

The narrative illustrated the career journey of Daisy, a female leader in her mid-40s working as a manager of dining standards in the cruise line sector of the THI. Daisy's entry into the THI was unplanned and began during a period of uncertainty in her young adulthood while attending community college. Her career path was influenced by both personal aspirations and external factors. Daisy's first job in the THI was an internship that later transitioned into a full-time role at a dinner show restaurant. Her leadership skills led her to occupy various positions, including managing restaurants and a front desk at a hotel. Her career was shaped by experiences and mentors, notably Tyler, who inspired her despite initial challenges, and Holly, who provided professional guidance. A pivotal moment in her career was a transformative experience with a terminally ill guest. Daisy's resilience and adaptability were highlighted by her progression through different

roles, including managing spa salons and fitness centers, which honed her ability to manage diverse personalities. This skill benefited Daisy in her current role as a manager of dining standards in the cruise line sector. Daisy's career has been marked by a combination of stability and change.

Summary of Key Factors Contributing to Daisy's Career Commitment

Daisy's narrative exemplified several key factors that contributed to her career commitment in the THI. The themes of resilience, adaptability, being proactive, pursuing opportunities, increasing her skill set, mentorship, and a connection with people emerged in Daisy's narrative. Her resilience and adaptability were evident in numerous situations, as highlighted in her early roles managing foodservice and spa salons, as well as her ability to navigate the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic in the cruise line sector. Daisy was proactive and pursued learning and growth opportunities, seeking promotions and taking on challenging roles. She broadened her skill set with roles beyond foodservice throughout her TH career, including hotel front desk management, cruise line leadership, and co-managing spa salons and fitness centers. Daisy has had influential leaders who served as her mentors. An early influential leader, Tyler, who initially frustrated her, later became a source of inspiration due to his passion for the THI. Holly, who provided critical feedback and guidance to Daisy, influenced her professional growth. These relationships underscore the importance of mentorship in career commitment. Daisy's connection with people, both guests and employees, also increased her career commitment. The opportunity to make a tangible difference in people's lives resonated with Daisy and reinforced her commitment to the THI. These combined factors of resilience, drive, ambition, mentorship, and personal connections underpin Daisy's commitment to her career in the THI.

Daisy's Final Emergent Themes that Contribute to Career Commitment

Daisy's career commitment within the THI is underpinned by three key themes that emerged from her narrative, ordered from strongest to weakest factor.

Resilience, Adaptability, and Proactive Growth. Daisy showcased resilience through various challenges, from managing foodservice and spa salons to

navigating the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in the cruise line sector. Her ability to persevere and adapt in adverse situations highlights her commitment to her career. Daisy actively sought learning and growth opportunities, consistently pursuing promotions and taking on challenging roles. In the spa management role, which was very different from her food and beverage background, Daisy had to adjust her leadership style to be more sensitive to the emotional nature of the work. This adaptability allowed her to succeed in a new environment. Her proactive approach contributed to her career commitment within the THI.

Continuous Learning, Mentorship, and Professional Growth. Daisy's career progression extended beyond foodservice, encompassing roles in hotel front desk management, cruise line leadership, and managing spa salons and fitness centers. This diversified skill set reflects her commitment to her career through continuous growth and versatility. Daisy benefited from influential leaders who served as mentors. Tyler, initially a source of frustration, later became an inspiration to her because of his passion for the industry. Holly provided critical feedback and guidance, which influenced Daisy's professional development. The mentorship of Tyler and Holly positively impacted Daisy's career commitment.

Human Connection and Relationship Building. Daisy's dedication to making a tangible difference in the lives of both guests and employees strengthened her commitment to the THI. Her ability to connect with people and positively impact their experiences reinforced her dedication to her career. Daisy has maintained close relationships with her mentors over the years. She spoke positively about the shipboard teams she works with, describing them as hard working and nice. She felt a strong connection with the cruise line crewmembers, especially after seeing what they endured during the COVID-19 pandemic, which helped motivate her to return after being furloughed. The relationships provided Daisy with motivation, support, and a sense of purpose. These meaningful connections with leaders, employees, and guests have reinforced her passion for the THI. Daisy's ability to build strong interpersonal connections is a key factor in sustaining her career commitment in the THI.

Advocacy, Integrity, and Overcoming Gender-based Challenges.
Daisy's resilience in navigating the male-dominated THI and proving her abilities
has contributed to her career commitment. She described having to navigate a
"boys club" culture at times, where she felt excluded from certain social and
professional circles dominated by her male colleagues. This exclusion drove her
into being proactive in carving out her own path. As one of the few females in
leadership roles on the cruise line, Daisy faced the constant need to prove her
abilities, especially because she lacked direct shipboard experience like many of
her peers. When faced with a difficult director who did not respect her, Daisy
advocated for herself and escalated the issue to higher leadership to address the
integrity concerns. This ownership of the situation demonstrated her willingness to
advocate for herself. Despite the gender-based obstacles, Daisy remained
committed to the THI. Her resilience in navigating these challenges, proving her
worth, and continuously developing her skills strengthened her long-term
dedication to the THI. Overall, Daisy's ability to overcome the gender dynamics in
this male-dominated industry through her adaptability, advocacy, and resilience
was a key factor in sustaining her career commitment over time.

Summary. The combination of resilience, adaptability, drive, ambition,
advocacy, and strong interpersonal connections underpins Daisy's unwavering
commitment to her career within the THI. These factors interplay to fuel her
passion and dedication to excel and make a meaningful impact within her field. The
factors included in Table 4 address the research question, "What factors contribute
to the career commitment of purposively sampled female mid-level leaders
currently working in the tourism and hospitality industry?" Appendix E contains N-
Vivo quotes from Daisy's narrative that exhibit the factors that contributed to
Daisy's career commitment to the THI.

Iris's Story

Setup

My next interview was with Iris, a female chef in her mid-60s. Iris has
worked in the THI for her entire career, beginning with family-owned restaurants.

She graduated from culinary school. Her career blossomed after moving to Florida with her husband, where they both were employed by the same TH corporation. Iris stated:

> I think what led me to it to be in it was basically birth. You know, I think you know because my dad is from I think I was telling you, you know, we're from a line of restauranteurs, family restauranteurs and still do have cousins that have restaurants in the area. And like I always loved to cook I mean there's a picture of me crawling into a cabinet and there's flour in the cabinet. That's a bag that's bigger than I am and I've loaded from head to toe, making dough balls … And you know, I was always you know, I had the Easy Bake Oven. I was always helping my mom bake cookies and then my my mom and my grandmother, my mom and dad side. My grandmother you know cooked in one of the restaurants and made all the soups, so she was a really great cook. My mom was not a really great cook. My dad was more the cook of the family. But my grandmother, my mom's mom, you know she was you know, home cook and very interested when my mom started having my brothers my grandmother and I went to a lot of different things and so I still have recipes at Christmas that are the family legacy recipes and you know making cookies and you may have even when you came out for food and wine probably if I had cookies, tasted some of those cookies. And then as I went into grammar school, you know I learned how to sew and I liked sewing I always the the the career path, whatever I would have taken, I think always had to do with hospitality or domestic type of things because, you know, I was always cooking. I was always the friend that would bake cookies. You know, even as a kid, you know, I always did that and because of being around the restaurants and because of being around social events that always had food. I can't remember a time that I didn't cook and then when I got my Easy Bake Oven, that was independence, you know, whatever I wanted with this life. Yeah, so I would make pretzels and cakes and I mean there's pictures of this stuff, you know, my family, you know would take pictures and things and then a lot of stuff I

just remember and then you know when I got into grammar school or high school I enjoy once again the home economics. And I really liked sewing because I was doing sewing parallel with that. And at one time, I had wanted to be a seamstress for rock and roll bands. True story. And so I went to design school. But then I was always working to make a living in restaurants, all throughout high school, all throughout when I could start working, you know, 14, actually I forged my birth certificate to work and then they caught it and then they had to let me go and then I turned of age and then I could work. But I always loved the connection of people in the hospitality business. I loved the people. It's almost kind of, you know, a misfit of groups of people … I've always loved the differences of people and hospitality and food and beverage is all about that … I started working at a [fast food restaurant]. I worked at a [buffet restaurant]. I worked at a [table service restaurant]. My dad had a place and anytime there was opportunities to make extra money, I would do like make eclairs in my kitchen and selling to restaurants … I liked to create things … we would have our friends over and you know, I would bake cookies … Then to find out ancestries like on my mom's side, the immigrants that were coming from Europe, one of my great great grandpas…was a cook on the ship … And it's something that comes natural. It doesn't come natural to a lot of people. I realized, you know, because there's been so many people that are in the hospitality business. You know, I'm like, why are you in this business? If you don't like people, you know, if you really, you know, you're more of a person that you know, people are burdens, you know, they I mean, they'll take care of people and but it's not it's not their gift, you know, the be a programmer for computer you know, to where you can solve, you know, troubleshoot and different because there's so many other types of jobs that can make people happy. You know, and so it's like hospitality is a tough business and it's a 24/7 and, you know, it has to really come from the heart and a lot of the skills you can teach people. But it really the teaching, and then for it to actually be an application that comes

from the heart, because you're gonna have all these theories of stuff and talk about it. But if the person genuinely doesn't follow it, they probably are not best suited for certain things. And yeah, there's money to be earned. But like I was saying before, I've never chased money. I've always chased what I really enjoyed and love to do, and the money came you know, so yeah.

Iris has a lifelong passion for THI, particularly the culinary sector. Her influence stems from her family's background in the restaurant sector of the THI. Iris's childhood memories include cooking and helping in the kitchen. She recalled making dough balls and baking cookies with her Easy Bake Oven. Iris discussed her family's immigrant history, mentioning an ancestor who was a cook on a ship from Europe. She also enjoyed sewing and considered a career in fashion design, even attending a design school. However, her continuous role in restaurants, beginning at age 14, drove her career commitment to the THI. She gained experience working in various types of service, including fast food, buffets, and table service restaurants. Iris also baked and sold eclairs to local restaurants for extra income. Her passion and commitment to the THI are rooted in her enjoyment of connecting with diverse people in the industry.

Inciting Incidents

Iris discussed her journey in the THI, specifically within the culinary sector. Gender dynamics and workplace challenges played a role in her career development. She discussed her wedding to Daniel, a fellow chef, and their subsequent intertwined career path. Iris defined herself as a chef who is female as opposed to a female chef. She demonstrated resilience and adaptability in being shorter than her male counterparts in the kitchen. Iris recognized the importance of hard work, resilience, and adapting to her work environment. She remained committed to her career in the THI, saying:

> When Daniel and I had decided to get married, that was 37 years ago…we were just gonna go to Vegas and get married and my father was like, you can't deprive me of my only daughter because I'm the oldest and the only daughter…so we had a really nice wedding but it was very family oriented…And then my brother made the cake because he was a chef at the

time … very Italian themed kind of family style reception … just under 100 people at the wedding because we're from a fairy good size, Italian family … And you know, it was weird that they all had restaurants and bars, you know?

And you know, I often wonder if I had come out to [corporation] by myself and not with with [Daniel] because when we first came out, you know, the job that was offered to me and the job that was offered to him, were very different. was a temporary hire. His was a full time. However, [Daniel] was working at the executive house in [city]. I had more experience, you know, working in other restaurants. So he had the title of chef. I was basically a line cook overseeing different things. So, you know, that could have been the separation. They, the recruiter saw that both of us had potential, but he was offered that position, because he was in a chef role. I'll you know, I'll never know because I was older than him too. So I don't because we're like four years different than four years older than him. But in the industry, I never, I never refer to myself. Like as a female chef, I always refer to myself as a chef that is female. That was always in my mind. So I never wanted anybody to give me special one, whatever. Just because I may not have been as big or as strong. I would figure out ways to compensate that I could still get the job done even though I had to reach taller or you know, because so many of the males that I worked with, and there were some females, you know, it was like living in land of the giants. You know, and and I kind of laughed because full circle at [government agency]. There's three of us women that are sometimes in the kitchen, and the two guys are tall and I can I'm like, okay in the land of the giants decided to put the five pounds sugar thing all the way up. I can't reach it. And then I kind of like, make a comment to them, and different things like that, but I don't think in my career at [corporation], I don't know, you know, because there there were executive chefs, you know that were in position. Maybe those people would have a better understanding because I've been told sometimes well you're like one of the pioneers. And I'm like, yeah, you know, Julia Child

was a pioneer. You know, some of the people that I worked with, under the ACF who have passed on, they were the pioneers. They may have had to work a little bit harder to prove themselves, but once they proved themselves, you know, they they were given opportunities and, you know, most people whether you're male or female, once you're given the opportunity, you either soar with it, or you're, you know, it's up to you you might have to work a little bit harder. But there's a lot of people, male and female and cultural differences that have had to work harder, you know, so, you know, I think about the you know, back in the day you know, where … you know, it's just people worked hard. And if you worked hard, you earn certain things except for the people that were born into the privileged areas, you know, and that's life. You know, there's always gonna be somebody who probably doesn't deserve it, but because their mom or dad or brother or sister, but I never really experienced that because I wasn't afraid to work hard. And I think that's, that's the whole thing. You know, as is that and I if I didn't have the talent, if I didn't know how to do it, I will find out how to do it. And if there was anybody that gave me any crap, we would have a cooler chat. I will tell you there were some nice cooler chats that I've had with males that probably weren't appropriate. But I don't think that they would ever tell anybody, because it would be like [Iris] said. But you have to have a thick skin, you know, I mean, it's like I see even some younger people right now and they're like, oh, you know, and it's like, you know, and it's not appropriate anymore for me to say this, put your big girl pants on, but I used to say put your big girl pants on or your big boy pants on.

Iris reflected on her career, focusing on the physical demands and gender-based challenges in the culinary sector. She demonstrated resilience and adaptability by overcoming her height challenge in kitchens. She identified as a chef who happens to be female. Her experiences offered a perspective of the complexities faced by women in a male-dominated sector of the THI. Iris believed in a strong work ethic and working hard.

Actions

Iris discussed the evolution of her career, highlighting her transitions into new roles and responsibilities. She reflected on leading a beverage program despite her initial lack of knowledge about beverages. Iris appreciated the support of her network, a group of female leaders, who helped her excel in her responsibilities. She demonstrated creativity and strategic thinking for the beverage program and festivals. Iris also discussed the glass ceiling and disparities in how employees were treated during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. She advocated for recognizing and nurturing talent. Iris also expressed discontent with the corporation's handling of the festivals and events, feeling that the corporation fell short of the high standards she had upheld and strived for during her leadership. Her reflections exhibited a disconnect between her personal values of excellence and the corporation's execution of its initiatives. She remarked:

> I was kind of like you're cordially invited to now do this, you're cordially invited to now do that because the role had changed and leadership was like, Oh, they can do this. Oh, they can do that, you know, and, and I didn't necessarily have the skill sets, but I knew I could figure it out because I had a great networking you know, especially when when I had taken on the on the beverage program. I mean, beverage was not my forte, I knew people because I was a chef. But when all of a sudden you know, [multiple locations] involved, develop recipes and all that other stuff. You know, I look back to those days and I think I count my blessings because I have people like you and other people that you know, were showing me all this cool stuff. And at the time, most everybody really didn't know anything. And I just took the ball and ran with it. You know, we came up with some really awesome especially the [festival]. Yeah, you know, because I had visions on on things and then I in my mind, you know, since nobody was establishing what the different festivals were, you know, I was kind of like well [one festival] needs to be at least 75% wine you know, or more. [Another festival] is, you know, like, anything that's brewed. You know, it's timing here. Yeah. Yeah, it could be ciders. It could be beer, it could be and

then [other] festival. That's where the cocktails come in, because it's really [fancy]. And different things like that. And then [different festival] kind of have their own holiday comforts and, you know, blogs and different things like that. But then, when all the other people started, you know, like, oh, I want an opinion on this. Oh, and they wanted to build their own team. It was like, now, I mean, you know, it's like the festival and the [other] festival. I really don't know, menu or [place] other than they have a stamp of a [place] because there's a lot of beverages and brews for [festival]. Yeah. And I was I was counting and I don't think even think there's 50% now. You know, but that's not that's not for me. I don't, that's not my world. That's whoever else's world but we all in the day. We really wanted to strive for excellence for these events that would sustain them, that people would say, Oh, I've got to make it on my bucket list to the festival. Well, the buckets are established but the sustainability of it. I don't know if it will because all the other festivals that are [other corporation] and you know, [another corporation], they're kind of the same, you know, so it's like choose your [location] and then there's no events anymore…

But um, like I said, I feel very fortunate. I in my own mind, don't don't feel that you know, I had any any issues and I was very blessed to be around a group of people because even when we were the [corporation] divas of food and and we did those those cool things which you can't be called the [corporation] divas anymore, because that's socially inappropriate because divas is a negative…

The thing is and there's no proof around this, but there were glass ceilings there were like people be you know, earmarked as is you know, they might have done something wrong at one point or they pissed somebody off and then all of a sudden you know, you're you're on the the other list of you know, and you always you know, you try really hard and then unless you get somebody that's that will go to battle for you. And even then it's sometimes there's caps with it. And because I even see right now, you know, like people that survived COVID And how were the some of those

people not not that you want to judge people, but their performance levels were were not as good as others. And then there were some people that I worked with directly that were superstars and they tried to get back into the company. And they were marked. I mean, they were clearly marked. And you know, and I would mentor them and say, you know, just move on, you know, it's like you've got so much talent that you can apply yourself and make a difference and it's it's the loss of that organization and those people if they don't see that, you know, because there's so many people that are just so short sighted on things. And and it makes me sad, because the true essence of excellence requires people that will stretch and there's a lot of people that that don't want to take that risk. And you know, and I've always been, you know, as long as it's safe, you know, safety is always number one, and it's not illegal. You know, those two things kind of go hand in hand. But even company policies a lot of them don't necessarily follow the route of safety. It's its opinion. You know, and so I found myself a lot of times, especially, you know, towards the end of my career there, you know, like, golly, you know, I guess you guys really don't want to soar like eagles and but you say you do you know.

Iris discussed leading a beverage program without prior expertise. However, she succeeded in this role with the support of her network of female leaders. Her innovative approach was evident in developing beverage recipes and programs for various festivals and events, where she strategically differentiated each event. Iris also addressed workplace challenges, including the changing dynamics of teams and the presence of a glass ceiling. She continued by highlighting the unequal treatment of employees by the corporation, particularly post-COVID-19. She believed that capable individuals were overlooked and advocated for the recognition and cultivating of talent. Iris expressed her disappointment in the corporation's failure to maintain standards of excellence with the festivals and events that she invested time and energy to build. She also contemplated the dissonance between her goals and the corporation's execution of the festivals and events.

Climax

Iris reflected on her unexpected retirement from the corporation. Although the separation was professionally handled, complete with retirement benefits, including a watch, Iris felt heartbroken as the retirement was not on her terms. Referring to her retirement as a "COVID cut," Iris expressed her lifelong approach of being open to opportunities rather than pursuing economic gain. She chose not to reapply to the corporation post-COVID-19. Instead, she secured a chef position at a government agency. Iris also drew strength from her Christian faith. She remained committed to her career in the THI in her culinary role. Iris reflected:

> I have to pinch myself I get real giddy because, you know, it's like, I would have never thought on I thought I was going to basically retire at 65 from [corporation]. But in 2021, my role was retired. And I got the call, basically, you know, I was on furlough and then I was at retirement age and, and they, you know, they, they were very good about how the how the exit was. So I can't really complain and I'm, I'm retired. I've got my retirement watch and I've got my retirement benefits. And so, you know, the separation was really great, but it was still very heartbreaking because it wasn't under my conditions. Right. You know, I don't know that I really wanted to retire. I was frustrated. But everybody gets frustrated with their job, you know, at one time or another. But the separation was you're cordially invited to retire…
>
> You know, when I got the COVID cut, and I say that and that's probably a very bad thing to say because you know, my I am retired and it is a choice. But, you know, it's it's, it's like when things happen, you know, and you surround yourself by people that you know people that you feel comfortable with and, and other opportunities come about, you know, and so that's that's kind of my story. I've never I've never chased money. And I've always been open to opportunities. If people offered them to me, you know, as long as it wasn't illegal, immoral. I always go back to those…Is it the right thing to do, all the other stuff comes secondary…

And, you know, it's like you can't find something for me out there with all the skill sets that I have and whatnot. And, you know, it was bothersome, but like I said, the separation was handled extremely well. extremely professional. I don't feel bad about that part of it. I just feel bad that I didn't have a choice. But I did have a choice to go back. You know, I could have applied for some jobs once jobs became available. But at that point, I was just, I was cooking for the [government agency].

You know, it was it was sad when my retirement came. However, there's other things that I'm doing right now, that and I'm a very big person of faith. You know, God has a plan for all of us. We might not know and through the sorrows and through the hardships, it makes you stronger. And I would never be cooking for the [government agency].

Iris discussed her unexpected early retirement from the corporation. She expressed heartbreak over the departure, although she acknowledged that the exit process was well managed and respectful. Iris was frustrated that she was not able to choose her retirement timing. However, she appreciated the professionalism with which her separation from the corporation was handled. She chose not to seek reemployment with the corporation when jobs became available, opting instead to work as a chef for a government agency. Iris found solace and strength in her Christian faith, believing that every experience was part of a larger plan. Her faith and flexibility led her to new endeavors, such as cooking for the government agency, demonstrating her resilience and adaptability.

Successes and Failures

Iris reflected on her time leading festivals and events, emphasizing her strategies in managing budgets and resources. She discussed situations where she had to assert her authority and expertise, especially when her background as a chef was unknown. Iris challenged the corporation's rules to find creative solutions, employing her adaptability and positive approach to problem-solving. She also shared anecdotes about adapting her communication style for diverse groups, including a time when she used strong language to connect with individuals. Her career is marked by adaptability, innovation, and assertiveness. Finally, Iris

attributed her successes to a combination of skills, adaptability, and a strong belief in doing what is right, fair, safe, and legal. She shared:

> But it's things like that and and once again, I kind of go back to I I've never looked at myself. And there may have been opportunities that you know, it's like, oh, we need to make meet a quota. I'm sure in the board room. There's a lot of dialogue, especially in today's world. I know there is because around cultural groups around you know, different things and a lot of times, you know, it's almost kind of the white male is being overlooked even though they might have the talent. It's kind of in a full circle type of thing … And so, you know, I like I said, I've been very fortunate. I've had some really great mentors, been around different people that when and if situations have happened, you find a way to overcome it and you know, don't don't put your focus on that put the focus on the million other things that are wonderful. And if you feel that you're an environment that's toxic, like that, get out, down you have those choices, and I've always made choices, that if I didn't feel right about it, if I felt that I wasn't being recognized for the work, you know, I move on. Life is full of a lot better than negative…

> That was always the most challenging part of the festival, the organization of all of that, you know, the [locations], the chefs, you know, would have to come up with different ideas and kind of make it interesting in the beverages…

> [Now it is] very cookie cutter disappointing and so, you know, with you know, now moving forward, you know, went went 2019 was going in, I was doing all the pencil work and whatnot for the festival. So much was being cut anyways, with the new leadership and things that they were cutting. I had. I was always very mindful from the budgeting perspective. So if somebody says, Oh, it's costing too much for airfare, or the chef's I would figure out ways to try to utilize as I called it, [Monopoly] money, whether it's … tickets, because it really didn't cost anything. But the leadership that I was working under started saying, Oh, but it does have this value. Well, is is the money going out of [corporation's] pocket into the air or is it

recycling into the [corporation] pocket? And to me, if it's recycling, it's making money. So, but if it's going up into the air outside of the bubble, you know, and no one can ever understand that. You know, and it's like, if I were to give tickets out, you would think that I was making a cardinal you know, sin and these people would be spending money and they would be doing marketing, you know, free they would be blogging and stuff like that. We're now people are charging all of that. And early on and you know, the social media. I mean, I'll never forget one celebrity chef. I got into so much trouble for because of what I provided them and he was doing all this social media at the resort he was staying at and this is a celebrity chef on the Food Network. Actually, there's three of them that I can I you know, I really don't like to name names, three of them that I knew were doing this and I know that if they were hired by a company, sometimes their salary would be close to a three or six digit to do that stuff. Right? And if you put down my line item, what it costs us to bring them there was mostly making money. And when so many people didn't understand that. I was just like, man, you people are really messed up my opinion, subjective. And you know, I started to kind of like, you know, all the costs that are affecting the festival are because, uh, your labor costs or, you know, internal things. And if you could have seen the spreadsheets I was like, no matter how hard I would try on this side, it was never going to work out because I don't think that people wanted that anymore. And they were so convinced that the [locations] were the drive. The [locations] are like the QSR of a big operation. The tada moments, were the [parties]. Were all of those events that required, you know, celebrity chefs and whatnot. And that's, you know, right now, that's what people are like, is that ever going to come back and in [corporate location] already started to bring it back. So, but I don't know that the leadership that currently oversees [festival], they may bring it back because they have to, once the festival [location] opens up, but it will be ran by entertainment because I don't think and that will be interesting, because entertainment's costs are very expensive. Very expensive. And I remember

being at a fundraiser volunteering, and I ran into somebody who still works for entertainment. And we were talking about the festival and I said, you know, you know, she does booking you know, for any of the conventions. I don't know if she's still there now, because it's been two years but we were talking each because that, you know, the chefs, they cost so much money. She said I had [celebrity chef] and you know, he wanted this but our convention group really wanted and I said, Yeah, I know, I know what it's like, you know, I said, I never paid ever since I had been in my role since 2007. never paid any of our celebrity chefs and she goes, she was like, you never paid them. I said, No, I did value in kind. And I gave them the best opportunity I could with the [corporation] experience. And I never worked through their their agents. I typically you know, would and they did their agents didn't like it because they didn't get commission, commission or anything like that. But I was able to work with people, you know, that I work directly with them … And so often in our business people start with no even though they say they don't they start with no and work towards yes. And I've always been a believer, as long as it's safe and not truly illegal that you're going to be thrown in jail. Everything else is fair game, even company rules because sometimes you can you can work with the rules. Rules are there in place to kind of keep order, but you can work through rules. If you show if we show a case as to why there could be an exception to the rule. And you know, I always I always followed those guidelines. And if it's safe and legal, we're okay. And let's figure out how we can make it happen so that everybody's happy. And that's how you know, especially [festival]. That's how I survived all those years and I really didn't give up. I really didn't care about what some of the other leaders, the naysayers were. And I always surrounded myself by you know, like [Harley Davidson] was a big yes person I loved working with bless his soul, you know, but he was a yes person and he always got them to say yes. To him and I would have these meetings. And if it wasn't for him, you know, [champagne] by the glass would not still be part of the festival because he was the one you

know…I know that they're, they're spending money when people will spend 50 $60 for a two ounce pour of even certain types of you know, like, Oh, what was what was the what's a two ounce or one ounce? $400 Yes, it's a it's a spirit. [cognac]. And then people will throw down you know, the, I mean, look at what people gamble with. And it's just it's regular people that are not millionaires, but they want to have the opportunity to taste and explore those finer things, but they can't drop $1,000 on a bottle, you know, or even, you know, 250 $300 on a bottle, but they'll drop $50 to you know, and I said, we're at that cusp, and hey, you're great. And so he pushed the envelope on it. Oh my God, we got so much pushback and finally he was just like, we're making it happen. And and it's still by the glass over and the festival. And that [locations] they would say oh, we're not selling a whole lot of it but it made more profit. You know? And then like, you didn't sell 1000 of them. But this you sold 1000 of and you made the same amount of money of selling 100 of these. Which would you rather, you know, right labor to do? Less labor, less storage. You're moving less product around less chance of breaking it and all those other issues. And then oh, I don't know the guest experience, you know, is there like but it sounds to me like 5% versus you know, 50% of you know, the sales and I'm like, don't look at the percentage look at it the money that's going in the bank. Right, and this drives me nuts, stuff like that. You know how and and at the end of the day, you know, finance, it's driven by the people and how they want the numbers to look…

You know, it's like, you know, I feel like I said, I feel very fortunate with all my successes that I've had through the graces of the Lord above, you know, I was able to overcome if there were any, any issues, and I tried to always do it appropriately. Even Even if [festival] sometimes, you know, it's an event manager and I'm sure you ran across the, you know where you would be doing something and you have some arrogant person, you know, kind of come off at two and I had some chefs that, you know, kind of overseeing them and, and having them try to do things and you know, and I they didn't

know that I was a chef. And there was one person in particular and I always hate to have to resort to this, but it was being a real asshole to the point to where I was almost like going to say, You know what, I will tell your guests that you can't be here for whatever reasons and I can actually do a demo in your place. And I said, you should Google search me. You know, I've been to the [Chef] House cooking there and I've done different things that there's actually on the internet that states certain things. So if you want to continue this conversation, you can pack your bags and get the hell out of here, because I really don't care. Once but you got to stand your ground. You know, you can do it in a professional way. Or you can resort and I do this as a last resort, you know, to kind of what I you know, I don't like to swear, I prefer not to swear I prefer to try to stay but can I swear? Absolutely. I mean, I have a mouth that's as filthy as a truck driver. You know if it needs to come out, but I just choose not to, you know, it's like when I was cooking for [corporation] and, and once again, you know, this group of people, they were all [military] and I mean very elite group. We were we were in a very remote kind of place. Nobody knew we were there. We were in quarantine with this group for 14 days. And like I said, these are hardcore. Rescue recovery people that have seen the bowels of the earth and things you know, so they're very abrupt and every other word has happened this and after that, and you know, and and I was in the morning so I would set up you know, everything in the morning, and they would be you know, in the morning, you know, shooting the breeze and using their words and one morning, after we all kind of get to know each other. You know, it wasn't the first week but the second week, they're like, man, [Iris], you've never you know, you're always just so pleasant and you know, you never curse or whatnot. And I looked at them both. And I said, Well, I worked at fucking [corporation] for 30 years. They both you know, were shocked because it just rolled out of my mouth and I say you see my fucking tattoo. Do I say stuff like that normally, but I don't want to, but to break the, you know, I also don't want to present myself as I'm better than you. Right, you know, because I didn't

want to because I was like, oh, are they thinking that I'm above you know

all of this and you know, some kind of a snob that doesn't use all this

information. And stuff like that. And that and that's where I felt the

conversation was kind of going so I wanted to break the ice. And that was a

good icebreaker.

Iris discussed her innovative leadership of festivals and events. She leveraged in-kind payments instead of cash to attract celebrity chefs, a cost-effective strategy later challenged by the corporation. Iris highlighted having to assert her authority and defend her culinary expertise. She and a peer offered expensive champagne and spirits by the glass to generate revenue, which was a new concept for the corporation. Iris shared stories that showcased her flexible communication style, including her use of strong language to connect with a group. Her career is defined by innovation, adaptability, assertiveness, and a commitment to fairness and creativity in the workplace.

Falling Action

Iris discussed the impact of age and workplace setbacks on her confidence. She also reflected on the corporation's slow decision-making process, hindering changes at the festivals and events. Iris found the corporation's politics exhausting. She shared about not being chosen for her desired roles, which taught her to control her emotional response and move forward in her career. Iris reflected on the corporation's decision to reduce labor, especially among older employees, during the COVID-19 pandemic. She highlighted the importance of a strong support network and seeking out opportunities. Iris discussed her involvement with a charity organization, where she mentored teenagers and taught spice blending classes. The classes built the teenagers' confidence, which was important to Iris. She also taught hospitality courses at a college, where she sometimes encountered politics similar to her previous corporation. Iris shared:

And even as a 60, you know, 67-year-old person, my confidence level can

get kicked to the backside really quickly. But what I've learned to do is

control that and then get through my emotional status, and then move on,

because there were jobs that I did want and other people got them and I could never understand well, I'm just as good as them, you know …

So the interesting thing and not only that organization, but with many corporations, the way that the separation of people and I understand under the circumstances because you know, they they were unprecedent times people had to figure out how to stay afloat. And let's face it, labor is typically you know, one of the most expensive and liabilities you know, with any organization but the interesting thing is so many people cut people who were very hard workers, and even in my age category, you know, 55 or above. And those people, a lot of them kind of felt the same way I did. And when everything started to reopen, you know, it's like once you go through the emotional of like, they don't want me anymore, even though I'm sure that's not the case. You know, I you know, I'm just making that up, that as a human being, we are creatures of emotion, you know, and then you're not accepted any longer. If there's a whole emotional thing, regardless of how wonderful they may have made it, there's still an emotional thing. And so when that happens, you are either in a crisis mode where some people that's where they go off the deep end and they be have substance abuse or they have other emotional type of things or you fight you know, it's a it's it's a fight or flight What do they say fight or flight or fight? Yeah, type of situation. And depending upon the temperament. You know, some people really search with inside themselves and if they have a good, good network of people around them. There are so many opportunities, in this world…

Yeah, it's like and you know, when it's when it's interviews or things like that, it's like painful because then you see it, it's like, and the other day I had to do an interview for this [charity] organization, and I'm really afraid to see what it looked like because they put me on somewhat the spot. And it was about volunteering and getting the teens more involved at the neighborhood center…It's a pantry and it's actually more than a food pantry. It's an area that the people of the neighborhood who need help can go to in times of need, whether it's food, whether it's clothing, you know, they have small,

incidental type of things. It's certainly expanding that I've been volunteering there. Since I since you know, I was on furlough. And so in 2020, I did a lot of volunteer but then in 2021, when I started to do other things, I wasn't volunteering as much and then [charity] was doing a piece. What I love about this organization and I love about [her], is she's been passionate about it's been a slow, slow, slow beginning. But the organization now because it's been around for a while. You're starting to see teens that were part of the organization come back to help mentor some of the teens or do some of the programming and, and kind of share the word out there. Because it is it's you know, it's really it's such a hard it's hard to get the word out. And then teens are so you know, their time is very limited between school and then you know, and parents filters, a lot of different things and want to make sure that I get volunteers for that. They have to go through background checks and all this other stuff. So, you know, [she's] very particular about it, because she gets grants and whatnot. But you know, it's so cool to see the teens build their confidence, you know, and if I can help in some way through food and beverage, and that's why I do the spice blending classes. And it's a blast because at first, you know, they're all like, I have my spices out there. And by the end, you think that I was Gordon Ramsay judging, you know, because they're like putting all these spices together and tasting them and I have popcorn that they dip in oil so that they can taste it says how is it that you know, and they they have their other students in the class they tasted you know, they give a pain. It's really cute. But you know, at first they don't have the competence and I'm like, this is this is a free zone. You know there's no buddy judging you or anything like that. This is this is your time to what do you like what do you not like, you know, it's okay. And and there's other classes during summer [mini classes] too. You know, they have that we had the police chief come out and with the canines, and we have just different people from the community, you know, help the organization and, and it's it's fun to collaborate with all of them. And once again, you know, like right now their focus is on setting students up for

success and thinking about career building. So next week, they have people of the community that will come together and talk about, you know, how they, how they started their careers. And it's kind of like a round robin where everybody is introduced and then the teens can go to the different tables and then network a little bit and then it's fun. You know, it's a lot of fun, and there's not a lot right now. I think summer [mini classes] over the three Tuesdays, we may have had like 200 teens, but the 200 teach you know, so it's not huge. But it's it's, it's turning to resonate, which is really good and it gives the teens something to do other than their classwork and they network with each other, you know, different schools…

You know, it's interesting because it still hasn't, I mean, most companies, it still hasn't changed. You know, I talked to different people, you know, with businesses and whatnot, and it just kind of cracks me up because sometimes I listen to them, and I get exhausted just listening to them … politics sometimes especially, you know, when you were doing stuff with our [vendors] and, and the festival and you would, there would be decisions that the team that we thought could make the decisions our team, and then all of a sudden everybody has a stake and blah, blah, blah, and it's like, towards the end I was just like, man, the festival is going to be over … before you can make a decision on something…

Yeah, the interesting thing, and, you know, being in the academic community, and I enjoy facilitating classes for the students, but the politics it's exhausting. It's just exhausting. It's so reminds me of [corporation] and you know, you been involved with [corporation] for as many years.

Iris spoke about the challenges of maintaining confidence when faced by professional setbacks, particularly when overlooked for roles. She reflected on the corporation's trend to reduce labor costs during the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected older employees, including her. Iris underscored the importance of controlling her emotions and leveraging her support network. Her volunteer experience with a charity highlights her desire to build confidence in younger generations. Iris touched on the exhaustion she felt due to the politics in the

corporate and academic environments, drawing parallels with her experiences at the corporation and the college where she taught part-time. She discussed her frustration with the bureaucratic delays in decision-making. However, Iris's passion for teaching and mentoring students was evident, demonstrating her dedication to contribute to the THI despite challenges.

Resolution

Iris reflected on her career journey and hoped that she proved herself worthy of her achievements and positions. She reiterated that she always voiced her opinion, which she believed contributed to her early retirement from the corporation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Iris enjoyed her current roles, including working with students at a charity and a college, volunteering at a charity, and her chef role at a government agency. She noted the detailed requirements for her current chef role and discussed the family-like atmosphere she had with the crewmembers. Her team at the government agency has been recognized for their service. Iris shared:

> And I would hope that in my career, that I've proven myself worthy of everything that I've earned and all the positions that I've received, you know, and I know I'm kind of going around in circles with the answer, but I really never, never felt that I've seen some situations that are concerning, and I've always expressed my opinion once again, why probably didn't survive. COVID at [corporation] but you know, people need to know the truth and if that's the perception of something, they need to know it. And I would always want to know if if I was doing something that I didn't know, you know, especially if it was a negative impact to somebody…
> And I'm like, you know, I love what I do right now of, you know, with my students and my volunteer work, and even at the [government agency]. We get our [assignment] from [government agency]. You know, it'll say okay, crew, like yesterday, I got an email crew aid will be no earlier than February 15. How many of you are going to be able to, you know, provide support, and then they start, you know, saying, This is what the expectations are. You have to have your updated flu shot, your updated COVID shot. If you

can't do that. The [government agency] doctors and nurses need to go through an approval process. So fill out your paperwork. And then as it gets closer to the dates, they'll start to do retraining, if there's any because with us being food service, there's usually like little snippets, and it's so cute because it's very animated, you know about the [government employees] you see these [government employees] and they're going into their, you know, quarters, cause they have to be in quarantine, you know, 14 days before they [leave] because they can't be sick. And so they're in their first seven days at [government office] and then they fly to [other government office] and then they go to the [employee] quarters out here. And that's where they get familiarized with just the processes, they'll have dress rehearsals and whatnot. We're all in quarantine together, and we cook them breakfast, lunch and dinner. And the quarters is their home. You know, so they come in and out, you know, with their pajamas or barefoot and you know if they want hot cocoa or whatever they so we get to like a family and it's just so cool. You know and recently we've we've gotten awards, because our small but mighty team has created and it's not us it's actually the food lab in [government office], but they oversee us and then they give us direction. But we're all retired chefs by trade. I think now there's only one person that's under 60 It's like the geriatric committee but it's a lot of fun and you know, they sometimes you know, sometimes the [employees], they're very to themselves, you know, and then sometimes they're very, very talkative and they'll let us take pictures, we can't post the pictures. There's a lot of NDA stuff that we have to sign. But, you know, it's like I look at these pictures and the little comments that they'll make or even like, recently, they've been making comments in their, in their debriefs after [leaving] like [team] just came down from the [location] because [someone] had gone up and…the director that oversees the project … [of] food service workers. And the interesting thing is that either … we were debriefing about you know the…food that was…there because they develop and make all the food for the six months that the [employees] are … there and then they

come out here when we are cooking for them and then we have recipes from their dieticians and from their people that develop it over at [government office] and apparently, you know, [someone] and one of the other [employees] was like behind the food while we were over at [government office] and you know, and then they were like, yeah, it was really great. You need to compliment the chefs over there. And they didn't even that wasn't even one of the questions about the food service. And [employee] quarters it's all about you know, the technical stuff, you know, when they're [on assignment] and when they're still they're bringing their experience at [employee] quarters now into the fold, which I thought was wow, what a big honor. Because, I mean, we're, we're just they're cooking and making sure that they're comfortable. But it's becoming a little bit more on the human side. You know, we're we're getting to know them and we're celebrating birthdays with one time. The director who oversees the [employees] and selection, he comes into the kitchen and he's got his computer. And he's like, Hey, I've got some people that want to say hi to you guys. And it was the crew off at the [location] and they're like so it's like, can you send us some of that this or that they'll make you know, comments or miss your cookies because we made cookies for them every day. There's a lot of traditions based upon the 60s and even the [old] program that have now come into the new because for 10 years they didn't use the facilities for any [assignments] because after the [old] program, there were [employee assignments]. So you know, in 2020 was when they started to ensemble, a small group and there's really only six of us that have these credentials that cook for the [employees] right now. So you know it's kind of kind of a neat credential to have. I'm sure they'll be a bench to do more because it's the commercials ... They kind of do their own thing. I'm sure they will. And they have former employees or employees that are part of their organizations that know and they work with [government office] on what the protocols are. But like we were the ones that cooked for the first commercial. That was a couple years ago and that was really interesting.

The first commercial crew, so you know, it was kind of helpful, but the second crew, they did some internal things, but they still have to follow all the guidelines with what what [government agency] expects of them. But it's pretty cool. You know, and like I said, if the thing then, and with [corporation], this wouldn't have happened. You know? It's kind of like, [Daniel] still works at [corporation] and he'll come home and he'll be talking about different things I'm like, exhausted. Honey, you can join me cooking for the [government agency], retire…

And now, you know, as you know, because I'll be 65 in March. And so then I go on Medicare, and I don't have to worry about, you know, the insurance costs and I'll be able to start to collect my pension. I was very fortunate. To be part of a generation where pensions were there. You know, and even when I was in my teens working, I always made a commitment. And so, I have I have pensions from when, you know, I was working in [city]. It's not it wasn't a big pension, but I kept the money in the bank, and you know, it's grown like five times from what it was back then. So, you know, I say all that because I never chased the money, but I worked hard. Money was there. I used common sense or tried to, to always live within my means.

And then now, you know, towards a later chapter of my life, it's given back, it's like, I want to try to teach the younger generations, whether it's teens 20s 30s 40s or even 50s. Because, you know, there's there's people up until, like, 55, that they're not quite ready to retire yet. And, you know, it's like, how do you how do you manage to get yourself so that you can live the rest of your life and healthy? Yeah, and you know, and I'll tell you been around [healthy people], you learn a lot too, and it's so inspiring because they're there, you know, it's like, I don't feel like I'm 65 But I've worked around people that are 65 and older. And they seem younger than me. And it's all about, you know, keeping a positive attitude, trying not to indulge in those things that you would like to indulge too much to check on stuff. But it's really about surrounding yourself by positivity. And people that are toxic, because there's so many people that are toxic, and if they are toxic, trying to help

them not be toxic, you know, but don't fall into their traps. Yeah, it's so easy, you know, to fall into their traps.

Iris reflected on her career in the THI. She discussed being grateful for receiving pensions as part of her financial plan. Iris restated that she never chased money, but instead, worked hard and lived within her means, which has afforded her financial stability, even with an unexpected early retirement from the corporation. She remained focused on giving back and teaching younger generations about the THI and how to build confidence. She also indicated being inspired by healthy individuals at the government agency. Iris stressed the importance of a positive attitude, avoiding indulgence, and surrounding oneself with positivity. She revealed that she continues her career commitment to the THI, and has returned to her roots in the culinary sector of the industry.

Summary of Iris's Narrative Story

Iris, a chef in her mid-60s, recounted her lifelong career commitment in the THI. Her career began in family-owned restaurants and continued post-culinary school when her husband, Daniel, also a chef, and she moved to Florida. Both Daniel and she were hired into different culinary roles by the same corporation. Iris's early cooking experiences and her family's history in restaurants shaped her commitment to the culinary sector of the THI. Iris has been employed in the THI since the age of 14. Her connection to people has enhanced her commitment to the industry. Iris discussed the challenges posed by gender dynamics and workplace issues, identifying herself as a chef who is female, rather than a female chef. She exhibited resilience in adapting to challenges in male-dominated kitchens. Iris embraced opportunities, including leading a beverage program without prior knowledge in the area, relying on a support network and demonstrating strategic thinking and creativity. She noted the presence of a glass ceiling in the THI and advocated for recognizing and nurturing talented individuals. Iris expressed discontent with the corporation's handling and decision-making process for events and festivals. Her unexpected early retirement from the corporation during the COVID-19 pandemic, although professionally handled, was emotionally challenging, as it was not on her terms. She rebounded and secured a role as a chef

at a government agency, along with teaching part-time at a college and volunteering with charity. Iris is fulfilled by teaching and mentoring the younger generation. She reflected on her achievements and positions within the THI and hoped that she proved herself worthy. Iris's narrative underscores her adaptability, resilience, and commitment to nurturing future talents in the THI.

Summary of Key Factors Contributing to Iris's Career Commitment

Iris exhibits a commitment to her career in the THI, particularly in the culinary sector, marked by a passion rooted in her family background and childhood experiences in cooking. This intrinsic motivation has been central to her career commitment. Demonstrating resilience and adaptability, Iris has effectively navigated various challenges and transitions, such as adapting to physical constraints in the kitchen and assuming leadership roles in new domains including beverage programming. Her career is characterized by a continuous pursuit of growth and learning, evident from her initial involvement in family-owned restaurants to her leadership roles in a large corporation. A key aspect of her career commitment is her advocacy for fairness and recognition in the workplace, particularly in addressing gender dynamics and challenging the glass ceiling. This advocacy highlights her dedication not only to her personal development but also to the improvement of the THI. Iris's role as a mentor demonstrates her dedication to fostering the next generation of culinary professionals, underscoring her commitment to the THI. Her integrity has guided her career choices and aided in embracing change and new opportunities. Iris maintained work-life balance by enjoying personal interests. She overcame gender-based challenges by advocating for herself and others. Iris focused on her career in the THI, having faith that the money would follow. She noted that she has always enjoyed working with people and enjoys the social aspect of the THI. Iris navigated the politics of the corporation even when frustrated. Overall, Iris remained committed to her career in the THI through her resilience, adaptability, and passion for the industry.

Iris's Final Emergent Themes Contributing to Career Commitment

Creative and Entrepreneurial Pursuits. Iris's career commitment is founded in her love for cooking and the culinary arts, a passion she traced back to

her childhood and family's involvement in the restaurant sector. Iris's intrinsic motivation has been a driving force throughout her career. Her love of cooking and bringing people together through food and hospitality was ingrained from a young age, stemming from her family's background in the restaurant industry.

Resilience, Adaptability, and Proactive Growth. Iris demonstrated resilience and adaptability, qualities essential for her sustained commitment to the THI. She consistently showed the ability to navigate and thrive in various situations, whether adapting to physical challenges in the kitchen or transitioning to new roles such as leading a beverage program. Iris has welcomed change in her career, particularly during her career at the corporation. She continued to embrace opportunities post-retirement from the corporation. Iris showed resilience in overcoming challenges, including gender-based obstacles, and adaptability to her evolving career path in the THI.

Continuous Learning, Mentorship, and Professional Growth. Iris's career path demonstrated a continuous pursuit of growth and learning. Her willingness to take on new challenges and expand her skill set highlights a commitment to her career from her early days working in family-owned restaurants to leading large-scale programs in a corporation. Iris's role as a mentor also indicates a commitment to giving back to the THI by nurturing the next generation of culinary talent. She transitioned from being a learner working at family-owned restaurants to becoming a teacher and mentor for current and future TH employees. Iris remains open to taking on new roles and developing new skills, even when unsure of her abilities, demonstrating a commitment to continuous learning and growth.

Advocacy, Integrity, and Overcoming Gender-based Challenges. Iris has remained true to herself and her values throughout her career. She chose career paths that aligned with her beliefs and moral compass. Iris advocated for fairness and the recognition of talent in the workplace. She navigated and overcame challenges in a male-dominated industry and often had to advocate for herself and other females. Iris addressed gender dynamics and challenged the glass ceiling, underscoring her commitment to not only her career but also the growth of the THI.

She has prioritized safety, legality, and transparency, refusing to compromise her values, reinforcing her career commitment.

Work-Life Balance, Personal Fulfillment, and Life Events. Iris sought to balance her career with personal interests, hobbies, and her family. Iris discussed pensions, retirement, financial stability, and planning for the future. She reiterated that her commitment to her career in the THI was not affected by her income. Iris indicated that she is driven by an internal desire to do excellent work rather than external factors such as money or recognition, sustaining her career commitment over many decades.

Human Connection and Relationship Building. Iris shared that she finds joy in working with others and providing exceptional hospitality experiences, aligning with her core values. She has a deep appreciation for the diverse array of people she connected with through hospitality work, finding joy in the social aspects. Her lifelong passion for cooking and bringing people together through food demonstrates how relationship building is central to her career commitment within the THI. Iris noted that she enjoys creating memorable experiences for guests and treating all people with kindness, further highlighting the importance of human connection in sustaining her career commitment to the THI.

Corporate Politics, Operational Challenges, and Industry Dynamics. Iris underscored the challenges and frustrations of navigating the politics of the corporation. She remained steadfast in her career commitment regardless of corporate politics.

Summary. Iris's career commitment within the THI is ingrained in her family background and culinary experiences from her childhood. Her intrinsic motivation has sustained her career commitment. Iris's resilience and adaptability have also aided her through challenges in the THI. Her professional growth and continuous learning enabled Iris to lead teams in kitchens and festivals. Iris has built on her childhood learnings, adding experience to her resume. She has advocated for fairness and recognition for others in the TH workforce, including addressing the glass ceiling. Iris's mentorship and influence continue to guide talented individuals in the THI. Her authenticity has enabled her to embrace new

opportunities such as finding employment after her retirement. She engages in activities that bring her fulfillment and aid in achieving work-life balance. Iris has overcome gender-based challenges throughout her career, and she defined herself as a chef who is female instead of as a female chef. Iris's commitment to her career in the THI has enabled her to secure her financial needs. She navigated corporate politics with strategic thinking throughout her career. The themes of career commitment offer a perspective on Iris's career journey in the THI, underscoring her resilience, adaptability, and continued commitment to the industry. Her commitment continued beyond her retirement from the corporation, extending into her current role as a chef with the government agency and a mentor for future THI leaders.

The factors that address the research question are depicted in Appendix F. The research question was, "What factors contribute to the career commitment of purposively sampled female mid-level leaders currently working in the tourism and hospitality industry?" Appendix F contains N-Vivo quotes from Iris's narrative that exhibit the factors that contributed to her career commitment to the THI.

Rose's Story

Setup

Rose, a hotel owner and GM in her late 30s, was the next interviewee. She has worked almost two decades off and on in the THI; however, she continues to return to the THI. Rose shared:

My dad owned a restaurant and I was seven and I worked the cash register. And I just remember it being so fun so cool … I grew up in the restaurant industry and my dad did restaurants and which made me realize I never wanted to work in restaurants, manager level. But originally, I you know, went to school at the University … and you know, throughout, like high school and the beginning of college, I actually did retail work. And then at one point, I just got a job as a server. And I really liked it. It was, you know, that hectic environment that like kind of keeps you on your toes. And I actually, I think I was traveling somewhere and I stayed at one of my my

friend was like a server at a resort out in [state]. And I just loved it. So much. And I was like, I want to work in hotels, because at the time I my degree was in advertising. And then I started taking all these advertising classes and I was like, this is so boring, and eventually changed my major to hospitality and I got a job as at the front desk at a [suite hotel] and my first hotel job so you know, I liked the hospitality aspect of it. I grew up in it talking to people things like that. So I was like, I'm gonna you know, I'm gonna work for like large scale hotels and be a resort manager one day about how I ended up here. And so I was started working at the front desk and and I was like, 19. It was my first hotel job. I was going to school at the University … for hospitality. There's like a business degree with a minor in hospitality.

Rose's career commitment to the THI began with her formative childhood experiences operating the cash register at her father's restaurant. However, Rose's initial foray into the workplace involved a job in retail, although she was later employed as a server at a restaurant. She enjoyed the high-energy and engaging foodservice environment. A visit to a resort where a friend was employed generated her interest in working in the hotel sector, a pivotal moment in Rose's career commitment to the THI. Rose switched her college major from advertising to business with a minor in hospitality. She secured an entry-level job at the front desk of a hotel and aspired to become a resort manager. Rose's inclination toward interacting with others, combined with her ambition, education, and personal development, drove her commitment to the hotel sector of the THI.

Inciting Incidents

Rose continued her career working in various hotels and moving around the country for promotion opportunities. She achieved her goal of becoming a resort manager at the age of 23. She was hired as the GM of a hotel property in the southeastern United States. Rose confronted obstacles and seized opportunities as a female leader in the THI. She shared:

And then when I graduated, I had bought I had gotten promoted to like front desk supervisor at the [suite hotel], and then when I graduated, I wanted to

get out of [my hometown], really bad. And so I took a job in [nearby city], because one of my friends out there, and I was like the front desk manager for a [small hotel] that was opening. I never opened anything. So, I thought that would be fun, you know? So, I went from like a 300 room full service property to like it was like, maybe 75 room property. It was not the right move looking back, but that's fine. And then I eventually got promoted to like, Assistant GM and the property, the company I was working for there were a management company called … Hotel Group. And they're based in [nearby city], but they kind of had they had, at the time, maybe 20 properties like in the southeast area, and they needed a GM for property in [southeastern city]. And I was I was like, 23 at the time. And I didn't have any kids. I was single and it was really easy to just like pick me up and move me around. So I went over there. I was kind of the interim GM for that property after about a year and a half of being at the in [nearby city] area. And after about a month of being an interim, GM, they made me an offer and I was the the general manager. So by the time I was 23, I was a general manager of my own property. It was a [all suites hotel] and it was like 100 rooms. I did that for two years. I'm originally from [my hometown], so I kind of wanted to go back that way. And so they put me on a property in the Inn in [other city]. So, they moved me there. And then so that was after two years and then a year in [larger city]. Then I got an opportunity to work for a company called Hospitality, running their Inn in [Florida city]. And so, I was a GM of like, gosh, it was a small property. It had maybe 80 rooms, but it was an Inn. It had the food service side. I you know, as a server in high school, I mean, in college worked at [casual steakhouse], and then my dad's and had all this experience. So, I was able to talk my way into that one.

So, I think at the beginning, it was like helpful that I was a female. I don't know why. I have no data to back that up. But I didn't have kids or a husband to take care of. And so that was I was the perfect person to just be

a GM because I didn't have kids and have nothing to worry about. I could work at the property, you know, 90 hours a week and it's no problem. And then front, so that was, I've worked for Hotels for about three years, and I moved to Hospitality in [Florida city]. I was there for a little over a year and then I met my now husband at a conference and Hospitality, we both worked for Hospitality. And then he got a job in [different state]. So, they knew that I wanted to work in [different state] to be closer to him. So, they moved me to [different state] to work at a Suites and they're like, hey, this property is gonna get sold but you know, maybe you can, you'll be you'll probably be able to stay on. I was like, Okay, well, I wasn't. The property the property sold but then they did not keep me. So, I started working for like a one ownership group, maybe they had two hotels. They were I was a general manager. They were turning it from a [hotel] to a full service [hotel]. And it was the worst experience of my life. And I ended up I forgot; I don't remember the company name. I only worked there for like 30 days. He was he had asked me he asked me to do? Oh, one of the rooms had bedbugs. And so I wanted I was calling their exterminator because bedbugs happen in hotels. And he was like no, just go get some bedbug bombs from the grocery store and I was like yeah, I quit. And so I ended up getting a job here in [Florida city] as a general manager for an Inn, for a company called Hotel Group. And I was their very first woman GM. And yeah, and it was another awful experience for about eight months. And it was just the lack of respect for women. I don't think I think I was the literal one and only female GM.

But when I was the woman, the first woman GM for that property, the only reason they hired me was because I was part [other ethnicity]. So, if I would have been a 100% white woman, they would not have hired me. I know that for a fact. Because they were [different ethnicity]. And so, they saw me as someone who like thought more like them because I had this like, kind of foreign background even though I'm from the United States. My mom's white, my dad's, my dad's [other ethnicity]. And so like, I could play up that

factor of it, and they thought that I would be more subservient. I think maybe is the term and then in actuality, they're like, oh, never mind. We thought she was gonna be subservient, but she isn't. Right, that and that's, I mean, obviously, that is like an emotional reaction to them. I don't actually know. But I was their only woman GM, and I'm, they still have never hired a woman GM. So, because I wasn't I was like, this is I'm not gonna just do something that you asked me to do for the sake of doing it. Like I'm not gonna do that. I'm not gonna cower or be afraid of you like and I think that that's what they were hoping like, oh, we can turn around … And I like started a coup. I got like three people to quit at once. They would make me work six days a week. And I was just like, why we're slow this weekend. I'm not going to come in on a Saturday if I don't need to.

Rose's rapid career progression, marked by promotions and transitions between various hotel management companies, hotel brands, cities, and states, highlights her adaptability and ambition within the THI. Her willingness to relocate and take on different roles in several geographic areas underscores her career commitment within the THI. She reflected on her moves as learning experiences with challenges and rewards. Rose discussed the gender dynamics and cultural identity in the THI. She posited that her gender, coupled with being single and childless, might have facilitated her frequent relocations for various leadership positions. She reflected on how her mixed cultural and ethnic heritage may also have influenced securing a GM position. However, Rose encountered instances of gender bias and discrimination at hotels where respect for women was lacking. Her refusal to perform unethical tasks, such as inadequate measures to combat bedbugs, emphasizes her integrity. Rose's experiences and mobility in pursuit of leadership roles show the challenge of maintaining work-life balance in the THI. Her career commitment was marked by rapid professional growth, geographical moves, and the intersection of gender and cultural identity in shaping her career trajectory within the THI.

Actions

These challenging experiences led Rose to temporarily leave the THI. She earned her master in business administration (MBA) and secured work at a children's toy manufacturer. Rose shared:

> And at that point I actually got out of the hotel industry. I went back and got my master's degree. I worked for a toy [children's] company that manufactured [children's toys] and I was an account manager, and I was making like no money but it was a lot of fun. And that's where I kind of fell in love with marketing. Because I did a lot of their like social media marketing stuff like that and creating artwork and stuff. I worked there for a couple of years while I was getting my master's degree. I got my MBA and then when I graduated from that in between all that and I got married have a husband, three kids, stepchildren. And then I went in and did hospitality recruiting. So I got recruited for that. I did that for six months and it was just so ungodly, boring. I interviewed people eight hours a day sitting at a desk, and I was like I hate this. And so eventually I got pulled back into I was always talking to hospitality people. And so, it really made me miss the hotel world and the business of it but I knew I was like I don't know, if I want to go back to operations. I don't want to be a GM. Because when you're a GM, you're basically like a glorified babysitter. And I just wasn't ready to get back to that. So, I ended up working at an Inn oceanfront property, which kind of ran like a resort. So, it's kind of like backwards, going in that direction. I wanted to go in. Umm, I was a revenue and sales manager. And I did that for a couple of years. And I really wanted to go the revenue management route. So, I was kind of hanging around hoping I would get back because I was really bored. I was overqualified for the job. The GM was constantly you know, hey, can you help me with this? Why don't you go into operations, you should be on our side, whatever. But I learned a lot about revenue and sales and then I was in a really bad car accident about [several] years ago, driving to work, and I ended up being like bedridden for like six months. And they let me work from home. So, I

actually worked from home during revenue management stuff, which was

kind of unheard of. And I felt like that's a testament to, like how much like

how good I was at my job with them. And then when it was time to come

back or like Okay, that's enough. We can't do that anymore. Even though

I'm just sitting at a desk, like Yeah, I'm not making this commute anymore

because I was living in [Florida City] and it was a long drive, like an hour

and a half.

Rose's role at the children's toy manufacturer spurred her interest in marketing, particularly in social media and creative artwork. Although the job was not financially rewarding, Rose gained experience that would benefit her later career choices. Her personal life evolved, with marriage and stepchildren. Rose remained in contact with friends in the THI. She briefly worked in hospitality recruiting, which she found monotonous. However, Rose's interest in the THI remained strong and she chose to return to the hotel sector, albeit not as a GM. She chose a position as a revenue and sales manager at an oceanfront hotel property, which operated similarly to a resort. Rose found this role more intellectually stimulating and aligned with her education and interests. During this time in her career, an automobile accident led to a prolonged period of convalescence. Rose's employer allowed her to work remotely due to her valuable skill set, an unusual arrangement at that time. However, after several months, the hotel leadership team decided that Rose must return to office at the hotel property. The combination of a long work commute and the aftermath of the accident led Rose to reassess her job, considering her work-life balance and personal well-being. Rose's adaptability and personal growth were grounded in her desire to achieve work-life balance.

Climax

Rose chose to quit her job as a revenue and sales manager for the oceanfront hotel property. Her decision was influenced by her employer's cessation of remote work options after her recuperation period from the automobile accident. Rose shared:

Yeah, and I decided to quit, and I was gonna start my own like, kind of like

a like a task force company for hotels, because I have such a wide range of

skill sets. I was like, do the task force for people who you know maybe it's an independent hotel, they want to go on vacation I can like pop back and like watch their hotel I'm you know, I use social media, whatever and then the pandemic happened. And I still stuck with doing social media. I had about six accounts, six hotels, I did social media for and that was boring. Because I have to have people, I get bored easily but it was like behind a computer doing it and I really it got me to do my creative stuff like making graphics, photography and stuff like that. But it just wasn't social media just doing that full time just wasn't really where my head was at where my heart was at. And then I actually went into real estate and did marketing for a real firm here in town. And that's where I really learned way more about marketing and that's when I got around all these real estate transactions. And then a year later, I was like, let's get an Airbnb. We have the savings. We have some money for my payout from the wreck [auto accident] … And then so I was like let's get a couple of Airbnbs and rent them out. And then when I started looking at hotels, like motels I was like, let's get a motel and so quickly went from let's get an Airbnb for some passive income to let's rent out a whole hotel. And that's here I am today. Right like I'm a very ADD person.

Rose continued her career commitment to the THI, launching a task force business for hotel companies, including managing hotel properties during owner vacations and building the hotels' social media presence. She conducted marketing for a real estate company as part of her task force business. Rose and her husband then considered purchasing and renting Airbnb properties. She transitioned from researching Airbnb properties to considering motel properties. Rose and her family decided to purchase and manage a motel property. Rose's self-identification as a person with attention deficit disorder underscores her fast-paced approach to career and business decisions, marked by a continuous search for engaging and fulfilling work that aligns with her interests and skills. She demonstrated entrepreneurial qualities, adaptability, and pursuit of individual passion.

Successes and Failures

Rose reflected on work-life balance, gender expectations, customer relations, and operational challenges in the THI as follows:

But when you're, you know, still stepmom so I'm still not feeling that like role of theirs for other people to help take care of these kids. If something happens, like if someone's sick or whatever. But I could see how like a GM who's a young parent or something like that, like this is not going to be a great industry for them to be in because there's a lack of sensitivity to hey, I gotta go take care of my kid or I'm not gonna be able to come into work today because my kids sick or, you know, God forbid you bring your child to work with you. It's like, no, you know what I mean? And I would help that after the pandemic, that kind of behavior is a little bit better.

And I think that is part of the reason why you don't see. I don't know how to word this in that industry in the hotel industry. They don't see their team members as people. And then when like your human starts showing, it's like, no, can you just do the work and like, I don't really care. So that the higher you go up as a woman and the expectation of a woman is do it all be like, be the person for the family, the caretaker for the family, be the caretaker for everyone? And the higher you go up, the harder the more like, I don't know how to what I'm trying to say. I'm not very eloquent with my words, but it's harder for women to be like, hey, I also have all this stuff to do. I can't just work 90 hours a week and and the expectation for anyone to do that is unrealistic…

Now that I have my own property, it's, it's a lot better. So, my property is digital. So, we don't have I don't have to be there every day. So, but it is just me and two other housekeepers. So, if I need to have set it up to if I need to go to a soccer game, or go to a soccer game, like I figured, you know, I figured out a way to force that work life balance into this property. So, my family is gonna come first, over any over a guest, like that's just life. You know what I mean? Everybody should and guests should understand that too. I know what these bigger properties. You don't really think about the

other person on the other side of being like an actual person. They're literally there to serve you. But I've been, you know, people will call me and yell at me for something and I'm like, hey, you want to stay here? You can go somewhere else. Right? ...

Like co-workers and stuff like that are fun … Like, why are customers like there's some customers that are really great and make it all worth it? But then there's some that you're just like, who do you think you are? ...

Like, it's also training, like making sure that you're training your guests not to be complete psychos to like these big brands ... It's oh 100% satisfaction and it's totally screwed up everything. Because I guess thinks that they can come in and harass an employee and treat them like garbage to get what they want. And it's not the higher-level ups working with the guests. So of course, they don't care like as long as we're making money, it's fine. So, it's like it's a it's a lot of factors. I don't even remember what your original question was. I went off on a tangent…

Oh, yeah. I mean, there's the exceptions like I've plenty of friend GMs who are just like the best and treat their team members, right. But part of it is have a lot of thoughts going to read part of it is also not keeping up with technology. So, there's these redundant processes that maybe don't require as many people but then there's also companies who are just trying to make their bottom line and make more money. So, I mean, when I was working at the Inn in [north Florida], the front desk had to check in people's 160, 180 rooms. They had to check in people, take room service orders, also man the text messages because all of a sudden there's this like enforced text message saying, so they're putting all this on the front desk and not hiring more people. So, like, how many how can we make this one person do everything? And I think a lot of that was from this is just my opinion. There is no fact behind this at all. I was working in the industry, and but when after 9/11 and you know travel was down, they had to start they took a lot of demand the middle people apart like so you have your your line level. And then you have all these other people and then you have maybe like your

your ops manager, your general manager, they took all those middle people away and put a lot of the resource and then just kind of split up the jobs. So, like, I mean, at a hotel. I was a general manager. I had to watch the I had to work the desk a couple of times a week. Because they're like, hey, we can work we can it can work this way if we take away all these other extra people. And so, when the business started coming back, I don't think they ever really filled in those gaps. They just kept it streamlined.

Rose reflected on balancing her work responsibilities with her personal life, providing a female perspective on the expectations for women. She discussed the insensitivity of some hotel leaders toward family-related emergencies, making it difficult for women who are the primary caregivers at home. Rose discussed hotel managers' unrealistic expectations for employees to prioritize work over family. She noted that owning her motel has allowed her to establish work-life balance. Rose prioritizes family commitments without compromising her work responsibilities. She also discussed the operational and customer relation challenges within the hotel sector. Rose criticized the entitlement of some customers, exacerbated by corporate hotel policies focused on customer satisfaction, which can lead to the mistreatment of hotel employees. She emphasized the importance of training customers to respect employees to maintain a healthy work environment. Rose also discussed operational inefficiencies such as understaffing at hotel front desks, which overloads employees with extra responsibilities. She highlighted the need for a balanced and humane approach to hotel management. Rose also discussed work-life balance, gender expectations, and customer and operational issues in the hotel sector of the THI.

Falling Action

Rose contemplated her career commitment in the THI, emphasizing her personal and professional growth. She underscored her passion for the THI and her endeavor to attain work-life balance, an accomplishment in an industry where achieving work-life balance is a challenge. Rose shared:

But it all came full circle with me on my own property. Yeah. Like I had that operations experience. I have the sales experience and the revenue

experience. I have the marketing experience. And, you know, being a GM of a smaller property. You do it all anyway. And so, it all really prepared me for this moment. It [my MBA] probably is probably the only reason why I got a loan, they're like, oh, she actually knows what she's doing and she's invested a lot into this career…

Sometimes I'm like, why did I do this to myself? I kept coming back because it was kind of like an adrenaline like hotels are kind of like an adrenaline rush. Nothing's different. Every like everything is different every day there it's not like this like clock in clock out type deal. So, everything that makes you want to stay in the hotel industry also is the reason why you want to leave the hotel industry. So, it's kind of but it's something I've invested a lot of my career to, and it's something I know like I could sit here and talk hotels with someone for two hours without ever getting bored. It's like never boring to me. So, it just kind of kept like, I would do something different. And then it was always just kind of in the background pulling you know, back in, because it is it's exciting. It's those the thing that sucks about the hotel industry is the people that you work for in the hotel industry. It's not the hotel industry. It's the you know, the people who want you to work six days a week who treat you like a workhorse rather than an actual person like that's all industry is so behind and how they treat their employees that it's like it's it mind boggling to me. And there are so it's like a it's almost like a caste system than a hotel. I don't know if that's the right word for it. But you know, this level is better than this level. And the ownership thinks they're like better than everyone else and then you have the management groups. So, it's just all but if you strip all that away that hotel industry, it's great. So, the reason why I was like yeah, let's do this. I was excited about being an owner. And like now I have a couple of people that work for me. And I'm hoping that I'm like really helping create them like a really nice work life balance. I know everyone says like, oh, we have great work life balance. And I'm like, no, you don't. You're lying. You actually really don't care. But yeah, so that was the reason why I kept getting away from it. But

then everything else would bring you back to it. And so now having my own property. I don't know if I could go back and work for a hotel company ever again. Because I would be like, why are y'all doing the stuff that you do? It's so stupid. Just to be real.

Rose attributed her successful transition to owning her motel property to her diverse background in hotel operations, marketing, and revenue and sales management. Her GM experience at multiple hotels and her MBA qualifications were instrumental in obtaining a loan for the motel property. Rose revealed that she has applied her knowledge and experience to creating her ideal motel property. She faced challenges in her career journey with hotel management companies, entitled customers, and work-life balance. However, the positive guest relations and hectic environment kept pulling Rose back to the THI. The shift from hotel employee to motel owner provided Rose an opportunity to implement humane and effective management practices. She embraced and incorporated technology in the motel's operations. Rose indicated that she doubts that she will work for another hotel company in the future, having experienced the empowerment of owning and managing her own property.

Resolution

Rose discussed innovation in hotel management, large-scale operations challenges, and future aspirations in her continued career commitment to the THI:

I have the best rating in [Florida City] for hotel it's like I have the best customer service because someone doesn't need to be standing there for 10 hours a day to make it work. You know what I mean? Like use your use your technology make the technology work for you. But then there's these big hotel chains and these big brands that are just like behind the eight ball because they're such a big brand. It takes a lot to roll something out…

Like, I mean, right now we're trying to decide if we should sell the hotel or not. And my husband was like, what would you do? I was like, no, I would probably go into consulting to be honest. And just do my own thing and because all these people are buying motels that aren't hotel people.

I mean, like, we should turn you should put a like a restaurant in there. And is it like this flat roof and I was like, no, no, I would never run a restaurant. It's too hard. I literally don't know how restaurants make money. Honestly, it's I don't know how we're making money. But yeah.

Rose noted that her motel has earned high customer service ratings by using technology rather than traditional, labor-intensive methods. Her innovative management ensures quality customer service without a manned front desk. Rose discussed the challenge of large-scale hotel chains making changes slowly due to their size. She pondered the possibility of selling her motel and shifting to consulting for other independent motels and hotels. Rose noted that some motels are purchased by individuals with no experience managing a property. This potential career change reflects Rose's desire to seize an opportunity in the THI by leveraging her expertise. She continued her stance against managing a restaurant, citing the difficulty in generating profit. Rose revealed that she prefers to focus on the hotel sector of the THI. She embraced technology, which demonstrates adaptability and agility and reflects on where her career commitment aligns with her personal strengths and industry needs.

Summary of Rose's Narrative Story

Rose's early career began with exposure to the THI through her father's restaurant, sparking an initial interest in the field. She realized she did not want to pursue restaurant management, leading to a shift in her career focus. Her career path in the THI is marked by various roles, from the hotel front desk to eventually becoming a hotel GM and owner. She earned an MBA, which contributed to her professional growth and understanding of the THI. Rose's adaptability and willingness to embrace various roles both outside of and within the THI have driven her career commitment. Her experience includes working in different capacities and locations, reflecting a flexible approach to her career. She also highlighted the challenges of balancing a career in the THI with her personal life, especially as a stepmother, and critiqued the industry's often insensitive approach to employees' personal needs.

An entrepreneurial opportunity in Rose's career came with the ownership of her motel property. This venture allowed her to apply her experience in an autonomous and fulfilling way. She emphasized the use of technology in enhancing guest services and the advantages of being a small-scale operator compared to larger hotel chains. Rose also discussed the possibility of transitioning to consulting, recognizing the changing dynamics in the THI and her potential to apply her expertise. She addressed the challenges and drawbacks of the hotel industry, including the treatment of employees, outdated management practices, and the hierarchical nature within hotel organizations. Her story is one of adapting, continuous learning, entrepreneurial spirit, and striving for work-life balance in the THI.

Summary of Key Factors Contributing to Rose's Career Commitment

Rose's enthusiasm for the THI has kept her committed to her career. Her ability to find aspects of the industry that she considers engaging reflects her career commitment. Rose's career evolution in the THI and hotels is the strongest driver of her career commitment. Her flexibility to embrace various roles and ability to adapt to different settings and challenges highlight her resilience and personal development. Rose has overcome stereotyped gender expectations in the THI. Her ability to recognize the importance of balancing her professional and personal life, especially in an industry known for its demanding schedule, sustained her career commitment. Rose's transition from employee to property owner demonstrates her entrepreneurial spirit, enabling her to apply her experience. Rose's insights and critiques of the THI have encouraged her to develop best practices for her employees. Her pursuit of an MBA and continuous effort to learn and grow within the THI have contributed to her career commitment. Rose's educational background provided her with essential skills and knowledge that directed her career path. Her experience leading teams and overcoming operational challenges strengthened her career commitment, as highlighted by adaptability and continual striving for growth in a changing industry.

Rose's Final Emergent Themes Contributing to Career Commitment

Resilience, Adaptability, and Proactive Growth. Rose has navigated various challenges, including gender bias and a serious car accident, demonstrating her resilience and ability to adapt to changing circumstances within the THI. Her adaptability and personal development led her to pursue an MBA. She acquired marketing skills by working at a children's toy manufacturer and built upon her marketing savviness at a real estate agency. Her role as a revenue manager at a resort-type hotel added to her skill set. Rose's progression from her father's restaurant to currently owning a motel property underscores her resilience. She advanced her career and returned to the THI after developing skills in other industries. Rose achieved the role of hotel GM at the age of 23, a young age for this accomplishment in the THI.

Advocacy, Integrity, and Overcoming Gender-based Challenges. Rose's experiences as a female in a predominantly male-dominated industry highlight her resilience and adaptability. She discussed the challenges and biases she faced, including instances where her gender impacted her career opportunities. Rose remained committed to her career despite encountering bias and discrimination.

Work-Life Balance, Personal Fulfilment, and Life Events. Rose's reflections on the demanding nature of the THI, particularly in the early stages of her career, highlight her career commitment. Her later emphasis on prioritizing family over work indicates a shift in her personal values, underscoring the ongoing challenge of balancing professional aspirations with personal responsibilities. However, Rose achieved work-life balance that allows personal fulfillment and professional success. Her personal life events, such as meeting her husband and a vehicle accident, influenced her career path, demonstrating that career commitment is not a linear journey. Rose shifted her professional goals and roles in response to the life changes of the automobile accident and becoming a stepmother, but she remained committed to the THI.

Corporate Politics, Operational Challenges, and Industry Dynamics. Rose shared her perspective on the operational and ethical practices within the hotel sector of the THI, including guest service policies, the treatment of employees, and

the structural hierarchies within hotels. She shared the challenges of leading teams and guest interactions, including staffing issues and technology, while maintaining operational efficiency and service standards. Rose iterated the value of empathy, flexibility, and innovation in interactions with people. Her holistic approach to leadership demonstrates her commitment to her career and to the development of her employees. Rose's willingness to critique THI practices and navigate operational challenges underscores her commitment to the THI.

  Human Connection and Relationship Building. Rose's background in the THI, starting from restaurant work and shifting into hotels, demonstrates that her passion for interacting with people and providing excellent guest services has contributed to her career commitment within the THI. She mentioned feeling drawn back to the hotel industry because of the "adrenaline rush" and the fact that "nothing is ever boring," implying that the people-focused nature of the THI is what keeps her engaged and committed. Rose's frustrations with the hotel industry stem from a lack of respect and empathy from management toward employees, indicating that human connection and work-life balance are key factors in her career commitment. Her decision to pursue owning a motel property was motivated by her desire to create a positive work environment and culture, where she can prioritize treating her employees well and maintaining work-life balance. Human connection and relationship-building are a core part of what drives Rose's career commitment to the THI, despite the challenges she has faced. Her passion for interacting with people and providing superior services is a key factor in her career commitment.

  Creative and Entrepreneurial Pursuits. Rose's interest in marketing and desire to be more hands-on in her work suggests she is motivated by the creative and problem-solving aspects of the THI. Rose indicated that she integrates marketing and technology in creative ways at her motel property. Her ability to incorporate learnings from outside the THI demonstrates her creativity and commitment to the THI. Rose demonstrated her entrepreneurial spirit by starting a task force company. Her frustration with the poor management practices and lack of work-life balance in the hotel industry motivated her to purchase and manage a

motel property, where she could create a positive work environment for her employees. Rose's entrepreneurial drive, career experience, and industry knowledge underscore her career commitment to the THI.

Summary. Rose's narrative encapsulated themes of her career commitment within the THI. Her dedication to her career is underscored by her ability to adapt, achieve work-life balance, overcome challenges, and contribute to the THI. Rose's career journey exemplifies how career commitment can evolve over time, influenced by personal growth, industry changes, and life circumstances. Her career path was characterized by resilience, adaptability, and personal and professional growth that consistently redirected her back to the THI, indicative of her career commitment within the THI. The factors in Appendix G help answer the research question: What factors contribute to the career commitment of purposively sampled female mid-level leaders currently working in the tourism and hospitality industry? Appendix G contains N-Vivo quotes from Rose's narrative that exhibit the factors that contributed to Rose's career commitment to the THI.

Summary

This chapter contained the narratives of three female mid-level leaders, Daisy, Iris, and Rose, and the key factors that have contributed to their career commitment within the THI in the state of Florida. The narrative story arc enabled me to restory the narratives of these three female leaders in the THI. Their varied career paths highlight the similar and different themes that demonstrate their career commitment. Daisy's career started with her unexpected entry into the THI, which evolved from internships to leadership roles in various sectors of the THI including restaurants, hotels, and spa and fitness centers, culminating in her current role in cruise line leadership. The key themes in Daisy's career include the importance of mentorship, the ability to navigate change particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the pursuit of growth opportunities. Daisy's story highlighted how personal connections and the ability to make a difference in others' lives have contributed to her commitment to the THI.

Iris reflected on her lifelong dedication to the culinary sector of the THI, starting in family-owned restaurants and advancing through various roles to become a chef. She overcame challenges related to gender dynamics. Iris's passion for cooking, combined with her resilience and embracing new opportunities, contributed to her career commitment. Her advocacy for fairness and recognition within the THI, alongside her mentoring role, underscores her commitment to fostering future talent and challenging corporate politics.

Rose's career commitment to the THI began with helping in her father's restaurant and evolved into a career path that included hotel management and ownership. The key themes of adaptability, continuous learning, and the pursuit of a work-life balance contributed to Rose's career commitment within the THI. Her entrepreneurial spirit led her to purchase a motel, enabling Rose to apply her experiences, with an innovative focus on customer service and technology. Rose revealed that she contemplates a future in consulting for other motel owners, reflecting on her potential contributions to the industry's changing dynamics. The three narratives of Daisy, Iris, and Rose exemplify the diverse pathways to career commitment in the THI. Their stories highlight the themes of career commitment within the THI.

In this chapter, the narratives of Daisy, Iris, and Rose, three female mid-level leaders in Florida's THI, were explored to identify the factors contributing to their career commitment. I reinterpreted their stories, revealing both commonalities and unique experiences that highlight their career commitment. Each narrative was analyzed as an individual story, with multiple readings of the transcripts. I extracted key themes and conducted a comparative analysis of all narratives to discover the overarching themes and insights, a crucial process in narrative inquiry (K. J. B. Anderson et al., 2010). The analysis was structured with a narrative story arc framework that allowed a restorying of the participants' experiences. The guiding research question helped probe into the contributing factors to the career commitment of purposively sampled female mid-level leaders in the THI, aiming to explore their career journeys.

The themes in Table 4 address the following research question: What factors contribute to the career commitment of purposively sampled female mid-level leaders currently working in the tourism and hospitality industry? These themes are discussed in Chapter 5. Table 4 contains the themes drawn from each participant's narratives that exhibit the factors that contributed to their career commitment to the THI.

Table 4

Overall Emergent Themes of Career Commitment

Theme	Participant(s)
• Resilience, Adaptability, and Proactive Growth	Daisy, Iris, Rose
• Human Connection and Relationship Building	Daisy, Iris, Rose
• Advocacy, Integrity, and Overcoming Gender-based Challenges	Daisy, Iris, Rose
• Continuous Learning, Mentorship, and Professional Growth	Daisy, Iris
• Work-Life Balance, Personal Fulfillment, and Life Events	Iris, Rose
• Creative and Entrepreneurial Pursuits	Iris, Rose
• Corporate Politics, Operational Challenges, and Industry Dynamics	Iris, Rose

Chapter 5 – Discussion

Career commitment represents an individual's dedication to their chosen career (Blau, 1985; Colarelli & Bishop, 1990). Grounded in Blau's (1985) seminal study and supported by empirical research (Cicek et al., 2016; Colarelli & Bishop, 1990), career commitment is an individual's unwavering allegiance to their profession or vocation, with a pursuit of professional growth and development. Key dimensions of career commitment include long-term professional goals, social prestige, and the drive for achievement (Cicek et al., 2016). Comparably, London (1983) identified career identity, career insight, and career resilience as the domains of career motivation. However, external circumstances can also influence career commitment, as observed in the factors underpinning nurses' career commitment in China (Ye et al., 2023) or individuals transitioning from other careers into teaching (Siostrom et al., 2023). Personal convictions, professional aspirations, societal pressures, and external events also impact career commitment (Siostrom et al., 2023; Ye et al., 2023).

The THI offers a range of diverse roles and global opportunities, catering to various interests and skills, including hotel management, event planning, travel services, sales and marketing, food and beverage, and recreation and leisure. Global opportunities exist in international hotel chains, cruise lines, luxury resorts and spas, airlines, tour operators, destination management companies, cultural and heritage sites, adventure and eco-tourism, consulting and advisory services, and education and training institutions. These roles and opportunities highlight the global reach of the THI, allowing TH leaders to explore different facets of the industry, experience various cultures, and contribute to the worldwide TH landscape.

TH organizations should understand the factors that influence the career commitment of female mid-level leaders to cultivate a dedicated workforce. This commitment involves a combination of emotional attachment, long-term engagement, and a willingness to invest effort and resources into their careers. It is influenced by various factors, including personal values, work environment, and

professional goals. High levels of career commitment are often associated with increased job satisfaction, enhanced performance, and resilience in the face of career-related challenges. Women hold only 29% of leadership positions in the THI (Castell Project, 2022). This gender disparity underscores a gap between the stated priorities of TH organizations to achieve gender equality and the actual representation of women in leadership roles (Brien et al., 2015). The career commitment of women who achieve leadership roles compared to those who do not may be a key factor in this discrepancy (Carvalho et al., 2018; Gonzalez-Serrano et al., 2018).

Blau (1985) and Ferdian et al. (2022) discussed career commitment, emphasizing the significance of individual dedication to a chosen career path. Their work illustrated how long-term professional aspirations and the pursuit of status and achievement are pivotal to career commitment. Blau and Ferdian et al. highlighted the importance of adaptability and commitment in navigating various roles within the THI, from entry-level to leadership positions. The growth trajectory within the THI illustrates a shift in roles and interests, progressing from hourly positions to leadership roles. This progression indicates not only professional growth but also creative adaptation to new responsibilities and challenges. Ramadan and Karanikola (2021) traced the career ladder in leadership within the THI, from hourly positions for beginners to senior leadership roles, providing insights into the progression and associated challenges. Their research highlights the nature of leadership and management styles, reflecting personal and professional development within the industry. Although their paths were different, all three participants started in hourly roles in the THI and rose to leadership positions.

Rose's career in the hospitality industry evolved from helping in the family restaurant to her current position as a motel owner. Beginning in restaurants, she advanced to front desk and management roles in hotels, becoming a GM at age 23. Her career encompassed positions in revenue management, real estate marketing, and social media consulting for hotels and other organizations, equipping her with the marketing, operations, and financial skills necessary for her current role.

Despite challenges such as work-life balance and gender bias, her commitment to the THI deepened, as she was drawn back to the industry after exploring other fields.

Similarly, Iris's career evolution underscores a commitment to the THI, marked by a willingness to embrace new roles. This mindset led her to numerous roles at a global company, reinforcing her career commitment. She managed and planned large-scale events, including beverage pairings, staffing, vendor relations, and talent management. This role enhanced her capabilities in personnel management and media interaction, facilitating her transition to her current culinary role with a government agency. She stated, "When one door closes, another opens," demonstrating resilience and a proactive approach to job changes.

Daisy's journey through unexpected opportunities and challenges highlights the development of her career commitment. Her account of her internship interview process exemplified the unexpected opportunities and adaptability required in career progression. She recounted attending an information session in casual attire only to find out it was an interview for an internship program, prompting her to buy a new outfit and secure an interview. Daisy's career required her to manage individuals older than herself and leaders with less knowledge of the company. Daisy reflected:

> I was one of two interns … I was taking charge kind of, the manager used to leave on Saturday nights and leave us there to close up the place like so I kinda I could tell [leadership] was a natural fit for me.

These experiences presented opportunities for Daisy to develop her leadership skills. Daisy has remained with the company since her internship, returning after a temporary layoff due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Problem Statement

The gender gap in leadership within the THI could be due to a lack of understanding of the career commitment and experiences of female mid-level leaders. Female mid-level leaders' perspectives on the factors that contribute to their career commitment are lacking in research, particularly in the context of the

THI. Without understanding the perspectives of the factors that contribute to career commitment, the efforts to bridge the leadership disparity between women and men in the THI will continue (Ali et al., 2022; Gebbels, Gao, et al., 2020). The narratives of female mid-level leaders about their career commitment remain underexplored, despite their potential to inform strategies for fostering gender equality in leadership roles within the THI (Ali et al., 2022; Mooney, 2020; Nagar, 2021). Even though TH is the largest industry globally, a gender disparity exists in mid-level leadership positions, with women occupying approximately 20% of mid-level leadership roles, despite constituting a majority of the hourly positions within the THI (Castell Project, 2022; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify and explore the factors that influence the career commitment of three female mid-level leaders within Florida's THI. The participants had a minimum of 10 years of experience in the THI. The aim of this research was to discover factors that shape three female mid-level leaders' career commitment in the THI by capturing and analyzing their narrative accounts. I employed a narrative inquiry approach, as advocated by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Clandinin (2006), to delve into the narratives of these women, focusing on the factors that have influenced their commitment to the THI. Understanding their stories is crucial for developing more effective recruitment and promotion strategies for advancing women's leadership in the THI.

Research Question

The research question that guided the problem of practice herein included the following: What factors contribute to the career commitment of purposively sampled female mid-level leaders currently working in the tourism and hospitality industry?

Themes

By employing the narrative inquiry methodology and the conceptual framework focused on career commitment, I identified the following seven themes:

(a) resilience, adaptability, and proactive growth; (b) human connection and relationship building; (c) advocacy, integrity, and overcoming gender-based challenges; (d) continuous learning, mentorship, and professional growth; (e) work-life balance, personal fulfillment, and life events; (f) creative and entrepreneurial pursuits; and (g) corporate politics, operational challenges, and industry dynamics.

Resilience, Adaptability, and Proactive Growth

Resilience, adaptability, and proactive growth impact career commitment within the THI. Employees in TH often experience unfavorable environments, frequent disruptions, and the need to develop skills that allow them to thrive in unpredictable circumstances. These factors require a blend of resilience and adaptability, enabling professionals to stay committed and continuously grow in their careers (Blau, 1985; Ferdian et al., 2022).

Resilience, the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties, is critical in industries known for their demanding environments, such as the THI. Resilience empowers individuals to withstand challenges and remain committed to their careers (Nyugen et al., 2023). When employees adopt resilient behaviors, they develop the ability to recover from setbacks, ensuring that career growth continues even during disruptions such as economic downturns or global pandemics (Baum et al., 2020). Female mid-level leaders in the THI face challenges, such as long hours, high levels of emotional labor, and gender discrimination. Resilience enables these leaders to withstand pressure and pursue their career goals (Kara et al., 2012). Resilient leaders are more likely to maintain high levels of job satisfaction and stay committed to their career even in adverse situations (Andrade et al., 2021).

Adaptability, however, facilitates quick responses to new trends, technology, and market demands. Adaptable workers can shift their strategies or roles based on new industry requirements or trends, helping sustain their career commitment (Carty, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic underscored how career adaptability helped leaders in TH transition to new roles and industries (W. Chang & Busser, 2020) or update their skills to remain relevant (Rivera et al., 2021). The ability to adjust to new job roles, technological innovations, and changing customer preferences is essential for career growth in these industries. Female mid-level

leaders who demonstrate adaptability tend to be better equipped to take on leadership roles, thereby enhancing their career commitment (Gebbels, Gao, et al., 2020). Adaptability also allows leaders to balance work and family life, which is a concern in the THI (J. S. Lee et al., 2015).

Finally, proactive growth refers to self-improvement and career development opportunities. A proactive approach encourages leaders to take charge of their career trajectories, seeking out learning opportunities and ways to innovate within their roles, fostering career commitment (Nyaupane et al., 2020). The THI is subject to fluctuating market demands, seasonal trends, and economic instability. Female mid-level leaders who actively seek training, mentorship, and leadership opportunities in the THI tend to have a higher level of career commitment (Huo, 2021; Pollitt, 2014). These leaders are motivated to overcome barriers to achieve their career goals. Therefore, female leaders who engage in proactive career development are more likely to remain in the THI and exhibit higher levels of job satisfaction (Liu et al., 2020; N. K. Ozdemir et al., 2023).

Resilience, adaptability, and proactive growth impact the career commitment of female mid-level leaders in the THI. These traits help leaders navigate challenges, foster long-term career development, and maintain a high level of engagement with their careers. Therefore, resilience, adaptability, and proactive growth enable female mid-level leaders to overcome challenges, adapt to complex work environments, and seek growth. Adaptability and resilience are crucial for career commitment within the unpredictable environment of the THI (Reynolds et al., 2021; C. Ryan, 2015). These qualities align with London's (1983) concept of career resilience, which is defined as the capacity to endure career disruptions and adjust to changes in the working environment. London (1983) further emphasized that resilience and adaptability are integral components of career motivation, underscoring the importance of adapting to setbacks and challenges within one's career.

The career commitment of all three participants highlights their adaptability, resilience, and proactive pursuit of growth, as each embraced new opportunities, took on unfamiliar roles, and continuously sought to expand their

skills and responsibilities within the THI. Daisy's adaptability and resilience were shaped by her diverse experiences in the THI, requiring her to adjust her leadership style and tackle challenges such as reopening a ship in the UK after a 14-month furlough during the COVID-19 pandemic. Her proactive commitment to career growth is evident in her pursuit of new opportunities, including an internship that she used to launch her career, and her willingness to take on unfamiliar leadership roles, such as a senior manager position in the cruise line industry. Similarly, Iris embraced new opportunities even when uncertain of her abilities, trusting in others' confidence in her potential, which led her to roles such as cooking for a government agency and finding personal fulfillment in her work. Rose's career commitment was driven by her pursuit of increasing responsibilities, becoming a hotel GM at a young age, and relocating for new roles, whereas her adaptability led her to earn an MBA, start a consulting business, and transition to other sectors when seeking new challenges.

Human Connection and Relationship Building

Human connection and relationship-building are vital in shaping career commitment within the THI, an industry inherently focused on people. The success of a mid-level leader's career often depends on their ability to foster strong interpersonal relationships with senior leaders, employees, and guests. Building these relationships fosters a sense of belonging, emotional support, and job satisfaction (Mustafa et al., 2021), which are essential to maintaining career commitment and overcoming industry-specific challenges, such as high turnover and stress (Heo et al., 2018; Lu et al., 2016). Therefore, relationship-building skills are crucial for female mid-level leaders in the THI, where teamwork and guest satisfaction are critical. Their relationships with peers affect their job satisfaction and performance (Yadav & Dhar, 2021). Such connections also help female leaders develop resilience and identify career progression opportunities in what has traditionally been a male-dominated industry (Mooney, 2018).

Positive leader-member relationships, team cooperation, and trust-building also enhance employee satisfaction and career commitment (Liao et al., 2009). Building relationships with peers and senior leaders fosters a sense of support that

drives mid-level leaders' dedication to their careers. Strong workplace relationships also contribute to a culture of empowerment and collaboration, where mid-level leaders feel valued and engaged. This sense of belonging increases resilience and adaptability, strengthening long-term career commitment (Schwaiger & Zehrer, 2022).

Building relationships with guests plays a crucial role in career commitment. Frequent guest interactions allow employees to develop meaningful connections, leading to higher job satisfaction and a stronger sense of purpose (Cheung et al., 2014). The emotional rewards of positive guest interactions further solidify a leader's career commitment to the THI (Cain et al., 2018). A connection with people is intrinsic to the THI, which is fundamentally people-centric (Walker, 2020). The interpersonal skills acquired in the THI are highly transferable to other industries, enhancing career advancement opportunities (W. Chang & Busser, 2020). These skills are essential for navigating the THI's career landscape, strengthening career identity, resilience, and commitment (Blau, 1985; London, 1983).

The careers of the participants are driven by their passion for connecting with people, whether through creating memorable guest experiences, fostering positive interactions, or engaging with diverse groups in the THI. Daisy's commitment to creating memorable guest experiences is evident in her narrative about a restaurant event where she felt she truly made a difference. Her passion for positive interactions extends to her work with cruise line crewmembers. Rose's career is fueled by her love of interacting with people, a passion rooted in her childhood when she spent time in her father's restaurant, which drives her enthusiasm for working in large-scale hotels, where the people-focused environment excites her. Similarly, Iris's career commitment is deeply tied to her love of connecting with diverse groups of people, a passion that started in her childhood and continues through her work in the THI.

Advocacy, Integrity, and Overcoming Gender-based Challenges

The theme of advocacy, integrity, and overcoming gender-based challenges are pivotal in shaping the career commitment of female mid-level leaders in the

THI. Historically, males have dominated the THI, making the career path to senior leadership challenging for women (Sharma & Kaur, 2019). However, advocacy and integrity have played key roles in overcoming these barriers and promoting a culture of inclusivity and fairness (Jadnanansing et al., 2021). Advocacy amplifies the voices of female mid-level leaders, challenging the status quo and fostering gender equality (Iversen et al., 2020). Women in leadership often serve as advocates, mentoring other women and creating a supportive network that promotes career advancement and commitment (Dashper, 2020).

Integrity is another factor in shaping career commitment, as it is essential for building trust and credibility in the workplace (Gatling et al., 2020). Female mid-level leaders who maintain their integrity can break stereotypes, establish a culture of fairness and respect, and strengthen their career commitment and that of other women in the organization (Brescoll, 2016). By upholding integrity, these leaders create environments where fairness prevails, further encouraging women to persevere in their careers (Koburtay & Syed, 2019).

Overcoming gender-based challenges is also essential for women to remain committed to their careers in the THI. The gender inequality (Couch et al., 2022) and discrimination (Russen et al., 2021b) that female mid-level leaders face often leads to reduced job satisfaction and high turnover rates (Chahal & Poonam, 2017; Kara et al., 2018). However, addressing these challenges through advocacy for policy changes and gender equality initiatives can create environments where women feel empowered to commit to their careers (Moswete & Lacey, 2015). Advocacy, integrity, and overcoming gender-based challenges lead to empowerment for female leaders, enabling them to thrive in the THI (Movono & Dahles, 2017).

The empowerment of women through advocacy and integrity is further emphasized in studies on female leadership experiences (Remington & Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018; Ruiz-Palomo et al., 2020). Advocating for inclusive and equitable workplace practices for female leaders is critical, particularly considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender roles within the workplace, such as the COVID motherhood penalty (Couch et al., 2022). The pandemic underscored

the urgency of addressing these issues to foster a balanced and fair workplace (Couch et al., 2022; S. L. Li & Zhang, 2022).

All three participants managed gender-based challenges in their careers, using integrity, transparency, and advocacy to challenge biases, foster diversity, and create supportive environments in the male-dominated THI. Daisy navigated a *boys' club* culture and worked to prove her capabilities without prior onboard ship experience, consistently challenging gender roles and advocating for diversity in leadership. Iris emphasized transparency and honesty by addressing biases and celebrating differences, while also highlighting the importance of leaving toxic environments and choosing workplaces in which one's value is recognized. Rose, as the first female GM at a hotel property, demonstrated integrity by refusing unethical requests, such as using bedbug bombs instead of proper extermination, and advocated for better work-life balance and respect for female leaders. She fostered a supportive workplace, setting boundaries with guests and ensuring a healthy work environment for her team.

Continuous Learning, Mentorship and Professional Growth

The theme of continuous learning, mentorship, and professional growth is essential in shaping the career commitment of female mid-level leaders in the THI. The THI is marked by gender disparity, which requires female mid-level leaders to engage in professional development and mentorship to ensure career longevity and advancement (N. Sun et al., 2023). Continuous learning helps leaders stay competitive and adapt to the ever-changing demands of the THI (Carty, 2021). Female mid-level leaders who participate in professional development opportunities, such as skills training and certifications, are more likely to remain committed to their careers as they gain confidence and competence in their roles (Liu, Gao, Zhu, & Jin, 2021). This ongoing learning not only enhances their technical abilities but also positions them for leadership roles (Pollitt, 2014).

Mentorship plays a critical role in the career progression of female mid-level leaders in the THI. Mentors provide guidance, support, and networking opportunities that can help women overcome barriers to advancement (Burke & Mattis, 2005). Mentees in structured mentorship programs that provide professional

support achieve higher levels of career commitment and success in overcoming gender-specific challenges (Scerri et al., 2020). Mentorship offers female mid-level leaders insights into navigating organizational hierarchies, enhancing their resilience and career focus (C. Li et al., 2017). Relationships with mentors and peers not only provide emotional support but also facilitate access to career advancement opportunities, fostering greater career commitment (Mooney et al., 2016).

The challenges faced by women in the THI underscore the need for mentorship (Couch et al., 2022). Mentorship and support networks are crucial for helping women overcome institutional barriers and enhance their career commitment (Ye et al., 2023). London (1983) suggested that mentorship enhances career identity, insight, and resilience. Support networks and professional relationships aid in overcoming the challenge of occupational stigma (Kusluvan et al., 2022; Lv et al., 2023).

Professional growth is also essential for retaining female mid-level leaders in the THI. When organizations provide clear pathways for promotion and leadership opportunities, female leaders are more likely to remain committed to their career (Russen et al., 2021b). The lack of professional growth opportunities, coupled with inadequate mentoring, often hinders women's advancement in the THI (Gonzalez-Serrano et al., 2018; Man et al., 2009). Therefore, fostering an environment that promotes continuous professional development impacts the career commitment of female mid-level leaders.

Mentorship played a pivotal role in shaping the careers of Daisy and Iris, providing them with guidance, opportunities, and support that reinforced their commitment to the THI. Daisy credited mentors such as Holly, who provided valuable feedback for professional growth. Similarly, Iris recognized the importance of mentors in continuous learning and now values mentoring others as an adjunct hospitality professor and volunteer.

Work-life Balance, Personal Fulfilment, and Life Events

The theme of work-life balance, personal fulfillment, and life events profoundly impacts the career commitment of female mid-level leaders in the THI.

The THI is a demanding industry, often requiring irregular working hours, making it difficult for female leaders to maintain a balance between their professional and personal lives. Extended work hours, inadequate compensation, and unfavorable work-life balance are persistent issues for female mid-level leaders in the THI (W. Chang & Busser, 2020; Gebbels, Pantelidis, et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these challenges, particularly for female leaders who had to navigate the challenge of balancing career commitment and family responsibilities (Couch et al., 2022; Liu-Lastres, Wen, et al., 2023). The phenomenon of the COVID motherhood penalty highlighted the societal expectations for women to default to caregiving roles after the widespread closures of schools and daycares, further complicating work-life balance and career commitment for female leaders (Couch et al., 2022).

Work-life balance is essential for women in hospitality, as balancing professional responsibilities with personal and family commitments is a key factor in career sustainability (Albiter et al., 2021; Catalyst, 2022). When organizations in these sectors actively promote work-life balance, it positively affects job satisfaction and career commitment (Liu, Gao, Zhu, & Qiu, 2021). Flexible work arrangements and support for family-related commitments foster a more inclusive environment, encouraging women to stay in their roles (Bayazit & Bayazit, 2019; Khanna, 2012).

The impact of personal fulfillment on career commitment highlights the importance of reducing excessive workloads and stress within the THI (Mansour & Tremblay, 2018). The THI provides opportunities for job satisfaction through guest interaction and service delivery (Ashton, 2018). However, when workloads and stress undermine this sense of fulfillment, it can negatively affect career commitment (Vong & Tang, 2017). Female leaders who experience job satisfaction in their roles are more likely to remain engaged and committed to their careers (Book et al., 2019).

Life events, such as marriage, childbirth, and family care responsibilities, influence career decisions for female mid-level leaders (Shi & Shi, 2022). These events can create challenges in maintaining career momentum, often leading to

potential breaks or adjustments in career paths (Dewi et al., 2023). Support offered by organizations during key life events, such as maternity leave, childcare assistance, and flexible scheduling, contributes to higher levels of career commitment among female leaders (Kim & Gong, 2017; Moyeenudin, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic forced many female mid-level leaders in the THI to reconsider their career commitment (C. C. Chen & Chen, 2021). In Orlando, Florida, 40% of hospitality employees struggled to cover basic living expenses during this period (Austin & Donley, 2023). The Great Resignation phenomenon saw a higher proportion of female employees, particularly from the Millennial and Generation Z cohorts, leave the THI compared to other demographic groups, signaling the pandemic's profound effect on career commitment (Liu-Lastres, Wen, et al., 2023).

Geographical factors also influence career commitment in the THI. The need to relocate for job opportunities presents another challenge, as seen in TH leaders in Cyprus, where the island's insular nature limits leadership advancement opportunities, often necessitating relocation for promotions (Zopiatis & Theocharous, 2022). Therefore, geographical locations and the availability of job opportunities also impact career progression and commitment within the THI.

Both Rose and Iris navigated their careers in the THI by making strategic choices that balanced personal fulfillment with professional demands, with Rose shifting away from hotel operations to prioritize her family and Iris emphasizing financial prudence to pursue roles driven by passion rather than necessity. Rose was initially drawn to the fast-paced and social aspects of hotel work; however, she transitioned to roles in revenue management and sales to avoid the demanding lifestyle of a hotel GM. As a female GM, she faced unrealistic expectations to work long hours without regard for her personal life, which influenced her decision to leave hotel operations and later return as a motel owner, where she could prioritize her family. Alternatively, Iris emphasized financial prudence throughout her career, allowing her to pursue meaningful roles, and continued to find fulfillment in hospitality, including a role of cooking for a government agency after retirement from a corporation.

Creative and Entrepreneurial Pursuits

Creative and entrepreneurial pursuits influence the career commitment of female mid-level leaders in the THI, as leaders engaging in these pursuits often seek to break traditional gender barriers and create innovative solutions to overcome challenges in the THI. Entrepreneurial activities provide autonomy, allowing female leaders to craft their career paths. Female entrepreneurs harness creativity, take ownership of their businesses, and pursue innovative solutions to industry challenges. Entrepreneurship allows flexibility and personal agency, increasing job satisfaction and long-term dedication. Entrepreneurial orientation among women leads to improved business performance and strengthens their commitment to the THI (Ribeiro et al., 2021).

Creativity is essential for developing new services, products, and guest experiences in the THI (J. H. Chang & Teng, 2017). Female leaders with an entrepreneurial mindset are often at the forefront of introducing innovative business practices (Clerkin, 2017). Leaders with entrepreneurial orientation are more likely to innovate and take risks, enhancing their sense of accomplishment and commitment to their roles (O. Ozdemir & Erkmen, 2022). This drive for creativity and entrepreneurship empowers women to address systemic barriers, such as gender inequalities, which continue to persist in the THI (Patwardhan & Venkatachalam, 2012). Women in the Mpumalanga Province of South Africa tourism sector faced gender-based challenges but were able to advance their careers through entrepreneurial activities on the borders of the Kruger National Park, promoting gender equity in the THI (Ngomane, 2023).

Creative pursuits and shifts in interests also impact career commitment, presenting both challenges and opportunities. A career in leadership necessitates flexibility to explore diverse interests (Center for Creative Leadership, 2017). Leaders find motivation in applying their creativity to develop innovative solutions and optimize processes (Andrade et al., 2021). TH leaders who are encouraged to engage in creative activities tend to experience enhanced job satisfaction and motivation (Ann & Blum, 2020; Kara et al., 2012). These activities foster innovation, problem-solving, and a sense of fulfillment (Lu et al., 2016).

Conversely, the repetitive execution of monotonous tasks can lead to disengagement and dissatisfaction (Andrade et al., 2021). Leaders lacking opportunities for creative expression or the flexibility to pursue changing interests may experience diminished job satisfaction, leading them to seek alternative employment or transition to different careers (Mustafa et al., 2021).

The ability to identify and seize opportunities, even amidst operational difficulties and societal perceptions, exemplifies entrepreneurial drive. This adaptability, coupled with career commitment, reflects an entrepreneurial spirit. Leaders in the THI must navigate an evolving environment, anticipate future trends, and adjust their career strategies accordingly (Blau, 1985; Ferdian et al., 2022). This practice mirrors the entrepreneurial processes of innovation and market adaptation, further cementing the connection between creativity, entrepreneurship, and career commitment (Cicek et al., 2016).

The career paths of Rose and Iris were deeply influenced by their evolving passions, with Rose's creative shift toward marketing and Iris's lifelong love for culinary arts playing key roles in shaping their long-term commitment to the THI. Rose's career commitment was shaped by her evolving creative interests and shifts in focus. While working for a toy piano company, she discovered her passion for marketing, which she later pursued during a hiatus from the THI. Her marketing skills, combined with her other talents, eventually led her to own and operate a motel. Iris's love for the culinary arts, sparked in childhood, fueled her lifelong commitment to the THI, driven by a passion for cooking and uniting people through food rather than seeking monetary gain. Her enthusiasm for hospitality and creating memorable experiences through food has been a central theme throughout her career.

Corporate Politics, Operational Challenges, and Industry Dynamics

Corporate politics, operational challenges, and industry dynamics impact the career commitment of female mid-level leaders in the THI. The THI is characterized by hierarchical structures, gender biases, and adverse operational environments, which can either facilitate or hinder the career commitment of female leaders. Women in the THI face institutional and organizational barriers,

such as limited access to leadership roles due to entrenched corporate politics. Female mid-level leaders encounter obstacles when trying to ascend to higher management positions, largely due to their exclusion from influential networks and male-dominated decision-making processes (Ali et al., 2022; S. Braun et al., 2016). These political forces can diminish the leaders' motivations and commitment, especially if they feel that career progression is stifled by factors beyond their control.

The operational intensity of the THI, characterized by long hours, demanding guest interactions, and fluctuating work conditions, poses additional challenges for female leaders. Female mid-level leaders experience difficulty balancing operational demands with personal and family commitments, which can lead to career burnout (Gebbels, Gao, et al., 2020). However, when organizations implement strategies, such as flexible working hours and support systems, career satisfaction and retention rates among female leaders can be improved. Operational challenges are a key factor in shaping career commitment, as women must constantly navigate the demands of the THI while attempting to maintain work-life balance.

The nature of the THI, with trends like technological advancements and shifting consumer expectations, requires female mid-level leaders to adapt and develop new skills to remain competitive. Leaders who successfully adapt to these changes often report higher levels of career commitment. However, industry-wide gender biases, including the gender pay gap and limited mentorship opportunities for women, continue to pose barriers to career growth and commitment (Fessler, 2018; Mwashita et al., 2020). Overcoming these structural barriers is essential for fostering the career commitment of female mid-level leaders in the THI.

Operational challenges and global events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have also impacted the THI. The pandemic's effect on the industry and its leaders exemplifies how global challenges drive new opportunities and necessitate continuous learning (Austin & Donley, 2023; Couch et al., 2022). Subsequently, leaders within the THI were compelled to rethink their strategies and operational models, aiding in crisis management and innovation. The COVID-19 pandemic

catalyzed change in the THI (K. Lee et al., 2022; Liu-Lastres, Wen, et al., 2023), requiring high levels of adaptability and resilience (Baum et al., 2020). This upheaval pushed leaders to redefine their approaches, contributing to a more flexible industry (Giousmpasoglou et al., 2021). High turnover rates and the Great Resignation of leaders leaving the THI also continue to affect the workforce (Park & Min, 2020; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022).

The experiences of Iris and Rose highlighted the challenges of navigating workplace politics, leadership resistance, and work-life balance in the THI, shaping their career commitment. Iris expressed her frustration with workplace politics that hindered her career advancement, despite her talent and experience. She felt that the risk-averse nature of leadership stifled innovation and her efforts to introduce new ideas were often met with resistance, leading her to feel "stalled" at the chef level, despite her culinary degree and family experience in the restaurant industry. Rose also struggled with poor employee treatment and a lack of work-life balance in the hotel industry, which influenced her decision to leave and pursue other careers. However, her return as a motel owner allowed her to create a better work environment for her team, emphasizing work-life balance and a positive workplace culture. Despite these challenges, Iris and Rose remained committed to the THI, finding meaning in their work and continuing to adapt and grow in their careers.

Implications for the Tourism and Hospitality Industry

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the existing body of research about female leaders within THI organizations by addressing a notable gap in the literature concerning the career commitment of female mid-level leaders in the THI sector (Ali et al., 2022; Nagar, 2021; Remington & Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018). Previous studies have focused on female hourly employees or female senior-level leaders, overlooking the experiences and career commitment of female mid-level leaders (Carvalho et al., 2018), which this study addressed. Segovia-Perez et al. (2019) highlighted the importance of including the perspectives of women at various leadership levels to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of gender dynamics within the THI.

The existing literature underscored the necessity to share the narratives of female leaders within the THI (Ali et al., 2022; Nagar, 2021).

      Career commitment, as defined by Blau (1985), is an individual's enduring attachment to their chosen profession, characterized by the continuous pursuit of professional goals. This commitment reflects a long-term, intrinsic motivation to develop and advance within one's career (Camilleri et al., 2023). Additional research has further expanded on Blau's initial concept, offering a more nuanced understanding of the factors that contribute to career commitment across different contexts (Cicek et al., 2016; Colarelli & Bishop, 1990; Ferdian et al., 2022; London, 1983; Yuliawati & Teonata, 2022).

      Cicek et al. (2016) identified three key pillars of career commitment: (a) an individual's vision of long-term professional aspirations; (b) career commitment as a status symbol of social prestige; and (c) its role as a motivating force for achievement within a profession. The current research not only supports these pillars in the context of female mid-level leaders in the THI but also adds important gender-specific dimensions. For instance, my findings suggest that for female mid-level leaders, their vision of long-term professional aspirations is not only about personal achievement but also about breaking down gender barriers and serving as role models for other women. This finding expands Cicek et al.'s research by highlighting the dual commitment to personal and societal progress that female mid-level leaders often embrace.

      London's (1983) framework of career motivation, comprising of career identity, career insight, and career resilience, adds another important layer to the understanding of career commitment. My findings align with London's model, particularly in how career identity is central to female mid-level leaders' career commitment. However, my research extends London's concept by highlighting how female mid-level leaders in the THI must often develop greater career resilience than their male counterparts due to additional challenges, such as gender bias and the balancing of work and family responsibilities. Thus, although career resilience is a vital component of career commitment for all professionals, the

current study underscores its heightened significance for women in mid-level leadership roles.

Ferdian et al. (2022) focused on external factors, such as working hours, salary, and the work environment, as key drivers of career commitment, with less emphasis on cultural or generational factors. The current research not only confirms the importance of these external factors but also reveals that for female mid-level leaders in TH, career commitment is tied to organizational support systems that address gender-specific challenges. Mentorship programs, leadership development opportunities, and policies that promote work-life balance are critical in fostering long-term career commitment for women. This finding extends Ferdian et al.'s research by incorporating a gendered perspective into the discussion of career commitment.

Yuliawati and Teonata (2022) identified a positive association between career commitment, job satisfaction, and reduced turnover. My findings support this view and suggest that for female mid-level leaders, career commitment is not only a personal endeavor but also a reflection of organizational culture. Women in leadership roles are more likely to exhibit a strong career commitment when they feel supported by inclusive organizational policies. This finding highlights the multifaceted nature of career commitment, reinforcing Yuliawati and Teonata's argument, and adds the insight that gender-inclusive practices are essential in retaining female leaders.

The current research builds upon the work of Blau (1985), Cicek et al. (2016), Colarelli and Bishop (1990), Ferdian et al. (2022), London (1983), and Yuliawati and Teonata (2022), confirming many of their findings regarding the factors that contribute to career commitment. However, I also expand these frameworks by offering a gender-specific perspective on career commitment, particularly within the context of female mid-level leaders in the THI. By exploring the unique challenges and support systems that influence women's career trajectories, the current research provides a deeper understanding of the multidimensional nature of career commitment and its implications for leadership development and organizational retention strategies. By adding a gendered analysis

within the THI, this study highlights the unique factors that contribute to the career commitment of female mid-level leaders, thereby positioning my work as a valuable contribution to both theory and practice.

The current research not only confirms what has been previously discovered but also introduces new insights and perspectives, particularly regarding the career commitment of female mid-level leaders in the THI. This study uncovered seven key themes that provide significant insights into the career commitment of female leaders in the THI. These themes build upon the existing literature while introducing new dimensions that enhance the understanding of the complex factors influencing career commitment of female mid-level leaders in the THI.

Resilience, Adaptability, and Proactive Growth. Resilience has been identified as a crucial factor for women navigating leadership in male-dominated industries, such as THI (Carvalho et al., 2018; London, 1983). My findings confirm that resilience is a core component of career commitment for female leaders, especially when overcoming gender-based challenges. However, the current research adds to this by highlighting the importance of adaptability and proactive growth as intertwined elements of resilience. Female mid-level leaders who continuously adapt to changing industry conditions and proactively seek growth opportunities demonstrate stronger career commitment. This finding extends existing theories by showing how adaptability functions alongside resilience in promoting career commitment.

Human Connection and Relationship Building. The importance of relationships and human connection in leadership roles has been touched upon in the literature (Carvalho et al., 2018), but not fully explored as a critical factor for career commitment in the hospitality industry. The current research revealed that building strong relationships, both within the organization and with clients, stakeholders, guests, and other industry professionals, is a key driver of career commitment for female mid-level leaders in the THI. These human connections provide emotional support, mentorship opportunities, and professional networks that are essential for overcoming challenges in the industry. Female mid-level leaders who prioritize and excel in relationship-building report higher levels of

satisfaction and commitment to their careers. This finding expands the existing literature by emphasizing the role of emotional and professional networks in sustaining career commitment, particularly in people-oriented industries such as TH.

Advocacy, Integrity, and Overcoming Gender-Based Challenges. Gender-based challenges, such as the glass ceiling, gender pay gap, and discrimination, are well documented in the THI (Casado-Diaz et al., 2022; Remington & Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018). Advocacy and integrity have been mentioned as important qualities for female leaders. My findings indicate that advocacy, both for oneself and for other women, is an influencing factor of career commitment for female mid-level leaders in the THI. Women who actively work to overcome gender-based challenges and advocate for more equitable work environments demonstrate stronger commitment to their careers. This finding extends the literature by showing that advocacy is not only a response to gender-based challenges but also a proactive element in maintaining career commitment and promoting industry change.

Continuous Learning, Mentorship, and Professional Growth. Previous studies have emphasized the role of mentorship and continuous learning in leadership development (Carvalho et al., 2019; Remington & Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018). Women in the THI face unique challenges in accessing professional growth opportunities and mentorship. My findings expand on this research by demonstrating that female mid-level leaders' career commitment is tied to their engagement in continuous learning and professional development. Mentorship plays a crucial role in navigating industry-specific challenges, and access to these resources is critical for career progression. The current research suggests that mentorship is not only a supportive factor but also a driving force behind the sustained commitment of female mid-level leaders in the THI, reinforcing the need for structured mentoring programs.

Work-Life Balance, Personal Fulfillment, and Life Events. The challenge of balancing work and personal life is a barrier for female leaders in the THI, as noted by Khanna (2012) and Carvalho et al. (2018). Work-life balance

remains a key factor influencing women's career decisions. My findings not only confirm that work-life balance is critical to female mid-level leaders' career commitment but also add that personal fulfillment and impactful life events, such as family changes or personal milestones, also play pivotal roles. Women who achieve balance and find personal fulfillment in their leadership roles are more likely to remain committed to their careers. This finding emphasizes the need for organizations to support work-life balance through flexible policies to retain female leadership talent.

Creative and Entrepreneurial Pursuits. The literature includes discussions on how women's career trajectories in the THI often involve shifts into entrepreneurial roles due to the limitations of traditional corporate structures (Ali et al., 2022; Carvalho et al., 2018). Entrepreneurial drive has been discussed in the context of career evolution within the THI (Ali et al., 2022), where female leaders often need to innovate or pursue entrepreneurial ventures to advance. The current research adds nuance by showing how entrepreneurial drive not only leads to career evolution but also sustains commitment to the THI. For female mid-level leaders, the entrepreneurial path represents a means to achieve both personal and professional fulfillment, further embedding their commitment to the THI. This finding contributes to the understanding of how career commitment can evolve and be reinforced through entrepreneurial ventures. This research also highlights that for female mid-level leaders, creative and entrepreneurial pursuits are not only pathways to professional advancement but also components of career commitment. These pursuits provide a sense of autonomy and empowerment, reinforcing women's commitment to their careers. These findings add a new dimension to the existing understanding of career commitment by emphasizing the role of creativity and entrepreneurship in sustaining leadership careers in the THI.

Corporate Politics, Operational Challenges, and Industry Dynamics. Researchers have acknowledged the impact of corporate politics and operational challenges on female leadership progression in the THI (Casado-Diaz et al., 2022; Pizam, 2017). These dynamics can hinder women's access to leadership roles and career advancement. The current research suggests that despite these challenges,

female mid-level leaders who are adept at navigating corporate politics and understanding the operational complexities of the THI exhibit stronger career commitment. This finding extends the literature by showing that industry-specific knowledge and the ability to handle corporate politics are key factors in sustaining career commitment, particularly for women who face added gender-based obstacles.

The seven themes identified in the current research contribute to the theoretical understanding of career commitment for female leaders in the THI by both confirming and extending existing frameworks. Resilience, adaptability, continuous learning, and advocacy emerged as critical factors in sustaining long-term commitment, whereas work-life balance and personal fulfillment are essential for managing the unique challenges women face in this industry. These findings provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to career commitment for female mid-level leaders in the THI, highlighting the need for organizational policies that support mentorship, professional growth, and gender equity in leadership.

The themes connect to the existing literature while emphasizing the new insights the current research brings to the study of the career commitment of female mid-level leaders in the THI. This work built on previous studies while offering new perspectives, particularly regarding gender dynamics, work-life balance, and entrepreneurial pursuits. This study addressed the existing gap in the literature by exploring the career commitment of female mid-level leaders within the THI in the state of Florida. By focusing on this specific demographic, the research provides valuable insights into their career trajectories and commitment levels, contributing to a deeper understanding of career commitment within the THI.

Practical Implications

This study has the potential to influence the THI by providing insights into the career commitment of female mid-level leaders. Such insights are crucial for enhancing the retention of mid-level leaders and equipping them to assume future leadership positions (Gebbels, Gao, et al., 2020). The findings from this research can serve as a foundational guide for TH organizations, enabling them to refine

their policies and procedures to effectively recruit, support, and retain female mid-level leaders. The insights obtained from this study may also help foster an inclusive and diverse leadership environment within the THI. Given the global expansion of the THI, it is imperative to listen to the narratives of female mid-level leaders to promote their career commitment, especially as the demand for leaders intensifies. Without a thorough understanding of the career commitment of these female mid-level leaders, TH organizations may encounter obstacles in both recruitment and retention efforts. Consequently, this study underscores the necessity for TH organizations to recognize and address these issues to ensure sustainable leadership development and organizational growth.

Occupational stigma and societal perceptions of hospitality jobs encompass the negative attitudes and beliefs held by the general public regarding the value, status, and nature of work within the THI. These perceptions impact the attractiveness of careers and the commitment of individuals working in the THI. Occupational stigma in the context of TH jobs includes several elements (Lv et al., 2023). Primarily, these roles are often perceived as low-status positions that lack the prestige associated with other professions. This stigma is exacerbated by the belief that these positions require minimal skill and offer limited career advancement opportunities. The transient nature of employment within the THI, characterized by high turnover rates (Afsar et al., 2018), also contributes to the perception that TH jobs are temporary rather than long-term career choices. The working conditions often associated with hospitality jobs, including irregular hours, physical demands, and low wages, lead to the perception that the work is less desirable compared to other industries.

Societal perceptions of hospitality jobs are shaped by broader cultural, social, and economic factors. Media representation plays a role in reinforcing negative stereotypes, often highlighting the less glamorous aspects of the THI, while neglecting the potential for fulfilling careers. A misconception exists regarding the economic value of hospitality jobs; despite the contributions of the THI to the economy, these roles are often undervalued. Moreover, a prevailing belief that hospitality jobs do not require advanced education contributes to the

perception that TH roles are less intellectually demanding and, therefore, less prestigious. Cultural attitudes in some societies further compound these perceptions, where service jobs, including those in hospitality, are historically viewed as less desirable.

The combination of occupational stigma and societal perceptions can have several detrimental effects on the THI. Negative perceptions make attracting and retaining talented individuals in the industry challenging, resulting in high turnover rates and a dearth of skilled leaders. Workers within the THI may feel undervalued and underappreciated, reducing their commitment to TH careers. This lack of career commitment can hinder the development of professional pathways and discourage investment in employee training and development.

Iris provided critiques and recommendations for the THI based on her experiences. She expressed disappointment with the management of events at her former employer, noting a lack of innovation. According to Iris, events have lost their "magical" and bucket-list appeal, necessitating a revitalization to restore their allure. Iris also critiqued the short-sighted leadership within the THI, highlighting how budget cuts and an unwillingness to take risks limit its potential. She emphasized a visionary approach that celebrates diversity rather than adopting a *one-size-fits-all* mentality, as celebrating people's differences can benefit the THI by fostering an inclusive environment. Iris also stressed recognition and growth opportunities for talented individuals to retain them and use their skills. She revealed her willingness to leave her position if her contributions were not acknowledged, underscoring a critical implication for the THI: the risk of losing talented individuals if it fails to foster a culture of recognition and provide ample growth opportunities.

Iris's passion for creating memorable experiences and her commitment to treating all individuals with kindness through hospitality are values she believes to be vital for the THI. The THI can attract and retain talented mid-level leaders by adhering to these values. Lastly, Iris highlighted the need for flexibility in utilizing diverse skills and viewing challenges as opportunities for growth rather than

obstacles. Her adaptability suggests that the THI must embrace this flexibility to survive in an ever-changing environment.

Rose contended that the THI has compromised its integrity by prioritizing profits over employee well-being, resulting in burnout and staffing shortages. She expressed frustration with the industry's treatment of employees and its tolerance of difficult customer behavior. Rose criticized the lack of work-life balance, particularly for women, and denounced poor management practices, such as unrealistic work hours and expectations. However, she acknowledged that some TH organizations are making strides toward improvement through efficient use of technology. Rose expressed her hope that by sharing her experiences, she can contribute to positive changes in how the THI treats and supports its workforce. Reflecting on her business, she stated, "Now having my own property. I don't know if I could go back and work for a hotel company ever again. Because I would be like, Why are y'all doing the stuff that you do? It's so stupid." Rose has created a better work environment and she intends to inspire industry-wide reform.

Daisy advocated for the dissolution of the "old boys' network" within the THI, emphasizing the need for support from both male and female leaders. She was critical of the exclusionary nature of the "boys club" dynamic (Allemand et al., 2021), which she has navigated throughout her career. She described her experiences with favoritism and internal agendas, stating, "You see the little, it's not even a clique, but you see the boys club here more…"

One of the challenges Daisy faced was navigating a male-dominated culture as she recounted being left out of social outings among male colleagues. She also discussed the need to prove herself and earn respect from colleagues, "But that's… always if there's ever a question about something 'Well, you didn't work on board.' So it's, it's more having to prove myself from that point." Daisy has also faced corporate politics, agendas, and favoritism within the cruise line sector, including resistance from a male leader who felt entitled to her leadership position. Her experiences underscore the importance of addressing these challenges to foster a supportive workplace.

Daisy has had to adapt to various roles, sectors, locations, and leadership styles throughout her career. She noted that when she worked in the spa sector, "I had to learn how to adjust my leadership style definitely for that." She has also confronted integrity issues with a difficult spa director: "But it got to a point where there was some integrity things that I tried to address myself and I ended up going to get those two GMs, one person for one resort. One for the other."

The COVID-19 pandemic posed a significant challenge for Daisy, particularly when returning to work after a 14-month furlough. She reflected on this period, stating, "Coming back after COVID especially because [I got] my real estate license during that time. I had a really successful first year [in real estate]." This transition was difficult, yet she demonstrated resilience and adaptability by pursuing a new career path during the furlough and chose to return to the THI after the furlough.

Gender diversity in TH leadership roles offers several benefits, including increased profits, higher levels of satisfaction, and improved employee retention (H. S. Chen et al., 2021; Clerkin, 2017; O. Ozdemir & Erkmen, 2022). Hotels are more profitable when led by female executives (M. H. Chen et al., 2021). Female leaders also enhance their followers' job satisfaction, organizational dedication, and employee engagement while reducing burnout (Clerkin, 2017). Additionally, organizations led by female leaders exhibit lower risk-taking tendencies than organizations with male leaders (O. Ozdemir & Erkmen, 2022).

Strategies for cultivating career commitment among female mid-level leaders within the THI include support and empowerment from senior-level leadership (Gebbels, Pantelidis, et al., 2020). Enhancing job satisfaction also bolsters career commitment and should start with the current generations employed in the THI (Goh & Okumus, 2020; Taylor et al., 2022). Promoting equal domestic responsibilities, creating inclusive workplace environments, eliminating the gender pay gap as Iceland has accomplished, and advocating for flexible working arrangements offer opportunities to alleviate the disproportionate burdens shouldered by women (Cave & Kilic, 2010; Fessler, 2018; Morgan & Pritchard, 2019). Neglecting these imbalances impedes the career commitment of women and

hampers the collective advancement of societies and economies (Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Khanna, 2012).

Limitations

It is vital to recognize the constraints inherent in the qualitative methodology adopted in this doctoral study. Qualitative research is critiqued for its susceptibility to bias, limited scale, reliance on narrative evidence, and a lack of methodological stringency (C. Anderson, 2010; Johnson et al., 2020). These critiques underscore the challenge of extending the study's conclusions beyond the immediate research context (C. Anderson, 2010; Johnson et al., 2020). The process of gathering and analyzing qualitative data, particularly through interviews, is notably labor-intensive and lacks the capacity for statistical validation, thereby complicating efforts to establish causative relationships (C. Anderson, 2010). The credibility of qualitative inquiries heavily depends on the researcher's expertise and impartiality, which could potentially skew the research outcomes (Johnson et al., 2020). The issue of safeguarding participant confidentiality and anonymity is a concern in the presentation of findings (C. Anderson, 2010). The influence of the researcher's presence on participant responses introduces an additional layer of complexity to preserving methodological integrity (Johnson et al., 2020). Compared to quantitative approaches, qualitative studies are often perceived as less scientifically rigorous, posing challenges in the graphical representation of data (C. Anderson, 2010).

This study is intentionally focused on exploring the experiences of female mid-level leaders within Florida's THI, excluding other demographic groups and organizational levels. The distinctive operational characteristics of the THI, such as nontraditional work hours and variable schedules, limit the transferability of the study's insights to different industries (Carvalho et al., 2018; C. Ryan, 2015). Given the THI's continuous operation, comparing these findings with those from industries that operate within standard business hours is not conducive.

The limited sample size of three participants also restricts the ability to generalize the study's findings to the broader population. The omission of

minorities is noted, and further examination of the existing literature is required. Given that all participants were female, extrapolating these findings to male mid-level leaders in the THI poses a challenge. The selection criteria did not consider the participants' level of education, which could influence the outcomes of the study. The participants' career experiences spanned several sectors of the THI, including lodging, foodservice, and cruise lines. Throughout their careers, the participants engaged in various other sectors of the THI. The THI contains diverse sectors, including lodging, foodservice, cruise lines, airlines, event management, and recreation, further complicating generalizations of the findings. The THI also encompasses various subsectors such as agritourism, ecotourism, cultural tourism, sustainable tourism, sports tourism, and religious and spiritual tourism. This diversity underscores the complexity of making broad generalizations from the study's results.

The exploration in this study was purposefully narrowed to address the underrepresentation of women in leadership within the THI, where men occupy approximately 80% of mid-level leadership roles (Castell Project, 2022; Krivkovich et al., 2022). My aim for the current study was to contribute to the broader goal of enhancing female leadership representation in the industry's future by focusing on the factors that influence the career commitment of female mid-level leaders in the THI in the state of Florida. This targeted exploration was designed to uncover critical factors that could promote gender diversity and inclusivity in leadership within the THI.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several avenues for future research emerge, given the limitations and specific focus of the current study on female mid-level leaders within the THI in the state of Florida. These suggestions are intended to address the gaps identified in the present study, expand the understanding of career commitment in the THI, and contribute to the broader discourse on career commitment in leadership. The recommendations for future investigations are discussed in this section.

Future research could expand upon the findings presented here by addressing several key areas, given the methodological limitations inherent in the qualitative approach of this study. First, further researchers might explore the potential for bias, scalability, and the subjective nature of narrative evidence within qualitative research. Addressing these concerns could involve incorporating quantitative methods or mixed-method approaches to enhance generalizability and methodological rigor (C. Anderson, 2010; Johnson et al., 2020). The qualitative insights could be complemented by quantitative measures as a way of validation and further generalizability of the study. Surveys and statistical analysis of data could give a wider view of the prevalence of the problems identified and, with that, help in establishing causative links.

Future researchers could also study how motivation theories, such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943), Herzberg's two-factor theory (1959), or Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (1985), impact the career commitment of female mid-level leaders in the THI. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) suggests that individuals are motivated by fulfilling basic needs and progressing toward self-actualization, which may influence female leaders' career commitment when they find belongingness and purpose in their roles. Similarly, Herzberg's two-factor theory (1959) distinguishes between hygiene factors, such as salary and working conditions, and motivators, such as recognition and advancement (Herzberg, 1966). Future researchers could explore whether intrinsic factors, including personal growth or external challenges such as work-life balance, impact the career commitment of female mid-level leaders in the THI. Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (1985) emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness, suggesting that providing female leaders with control over their work, mastery in their roles, and supportive relationships could influence their career commitment in the THI. Understanding how these theories apply to career commitment may provide insights into what drives female mid-level leaders to remain committed to their careers in an industry known for its high demands and gender-specific challenges.

The scope of this study, focusing specifically on female mid-level leaders within the THI in the state of Florida, suggests a need for research that includes a wider demographic, encompasses various organizational levels, and spans different geographical locations. The limited participant pool in this study underscores the necessity for research involving larger and more diverse samples. Future studies could include narratives from minority groups and male leaders to provide a more comprehensive understanding of leadership dynamics within the THI. Examining the influence of educational backgrounds on career commitment within the THI could also yield important insights. The scope could be widened to include other states or countries relative to influences of regional cultures and policies.

Future researchers could examine career commitment across the THI's diverse sectors, the potential impact of technological advancements, and the benefits of cross-industry comparisons to highlight challenges in career commitment. Subsequent research could be focused on exploring leadership experiences within the sectors and subsectors, given the THI's extensive range from lodging and foodservice to agritourism and cultural tourism. Such studies could help identify challenges and opportunities for career commitment within the various niches of the THI. Cross-industry comparisons on the career commitment of leaders to industries outside of the THI, in particular those industries with more traditional operational hours, could offer a wider comparison of career commitment. A cross-industry comparison could reveal some of the specific and common factors affecting career commitment amongst various industries. Comparative studies across industries with different operational characteristics, such as those with standard versus nonstandard work hours, could offer valuable insights into the transferability of findings and the unique challenges faced by leaders in the THI. Further research may also be conducted to examine how technological advancements may increase the influence of technology in the THI and how the inclusion of technology may affect career commitment.

Finally, this research highlights the underrepresentation of women in mid-level leadership roles within the THI and contributes to the goal of enhancing female leadership representation, suggesting that future studies may focus on

organizational policies, psychological and social factors, and the post-COVID-19 recovery's impact on the career commitment of female leaders in the THI. Future investigations could be conducted to further explore strategies to promote gender diversity and inclusivity in leadership within the THI. Future research can play a role in advancing gender equity in leadership across the THI by focusing on the factors that influence career commitment among female leaders and identifying effective interventions.

Research attention could be directed at how effective organizational policies and initiatives have been in driving gender equity further in the leadership in the THI. This study may involve looking at the effects of flexible work arrangements and gender diversity initiatives. Psychological and social factors might be further examined to explain how these factors affect the career commitment of female leaders in the THI. For example, the self-efficacy theory, the social support systems, and the organizational culture, among others, may be considered as having a relationship to the career commitment of female leaders in the THI. The long-run impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on future career commitment could be investigated in the THI. Studies could also focus on recovery strategies and the impact on the career commitment of female leaders.

Future research on TH leaders and career commitment should involve an examination of the existing theoretical and empirical underpinnings and adopting a forward-looking perspective. An integration of emerging trends, technological influences, and the evolving nature of work and organizational structures into academic and practical discourse is suggested. Career commitment serves as the conceptual framework integrating individual aspirations, organizational imperatives, and societal influences in an intersection of mutual influence and development.

Summary

The THI should work toward an inclusive and equitable workplace environment that enables female mid-level leaders to thrive and contribute by recognizing and addressing the challenges they face. By identifying the factors that

have facilitated women in overcoming challenges and achieving success in leadership roles, TH organizations can establish initiatives and strategies to support the career commitment of female mid-level leaders within the THI (Gebbels, Gao, et al., 2020). Efforts to combat discrimination, challenge stereotypes, and promote supportive networks can help overcome challenges and enhance career commitment within the THI (Koburtay & Syed, 2019; Russen et al., 2021b). Exploring the career commitment of female mid-level leaders can foster gender diversity and inclusion in leadership positions within TH organizations (Gebbels, Gao, et al., 2020).

The deficit of female leaders in the THI is likely to endure unless stakeholders actively engage with and implement the insights derived from the narratives about career commitment shared by current mid-level female leaders within this and future studies (Ali et al., 2022; Nagar, 2021). Scholars and TH organizations should work collectively to research and implement strategies that promote mid-level leadership gender equality within the THI. Researchers need to prioritize research about gender equality (Ali et al., 2022; Remington & Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018). TH organizations should create inclusive work environments to advance female leadership recruitment and development within the THI (Gebbels, Gao, et al., 2020). Addressing these issues requires concerted efforts from THI leaders, educators, and policymakers to reshape perceptions, enhance the image of TH careers, and create more supportive and rewarding work environments. By doing so, the THI can improve talent attraction and retention, foster career commitment, and support the development necessary for a sustainable THI.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol Questions

The research question is the basis for the interview questions.

RQ: What factors contribute to the career commitment of purposively sampled female mid-level leaders working in the tourism and hospitality industry?

Interview questions:

1. What story or stories can you describe that led you to work in the tourism and hospitality industry?

2. What story or stories would you tell someone if they asked you to describe your path and current role in the tourism and hospitality industry?

3. Tell me a story or stories about the people, events, and experiences in your life that have contributed to you continuing to work in the tourism and hospitality industry.

4. How would you describe in a story the events and experiences that have impacted your career as a female leader in the tourism and hospitality industry.

5. Describe your future aspirations and goals for your career.

6. What else would you like to share about your career in the tourism and hospitality industry that we have not discussed?

Appendix B

Recruitment Letter

Dear Leader,

My name is Amy Bernard Harrelson, and I am a student at Southeastern University in Lakeland, Florida. As part of my Ph.D. degree program, I am conducting research to learn about your role as a female mid-level leader within the tourism and hospitality industry in the state of Florida, with a minimum of ten years employed in the tourism and hospitality industry, regardless of previous roles in the industry. I would like to learn about your career experiences and your career commitment.

If you are available, I would love to invite you to participate in an interview that will take 60 minutes. The interview can be conducted in-person or via Zoom web conferencing software, whichever is convenient for you.

All information collected will remain anonymous and will be kept in a secure, password-protected computer file. Your responses will be kept confidential and will be coded for anonymity with a pseudonym of your choosing. You have the right to withdraw your answers at any time. You will have the opportunity to review the narrative developed from your responses.

Access to the anonymous results will be provided upon request so that you may benefit from the findings. You will receive a copy of the final dissertation paper.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please feel free to contact me at 407.461.6241 or amharrelson@seu.edu. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Amy Bernard Harrelson

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research interview on TBD, 2023.

You were chosen for this interview because of your experience as a female mid-level leader within the tourism and hospitality industry in the state of Florida, working in the industry for a minimum of ten years. Please read this form and ask any questions you have before agreeing to take part in the interview.

This interview is being conducted by a researcher named Amy Bernard Harrelson, who is a doctoral student at Southeastern University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this interview is to better understand the career commitment of female mid-level leaders within the tourism and hospitality industry in the state of Florida.

Procedures:

If you agree, you will be asked to participate in an audio- or video-recorded interview, lasting approximately 60 minutes.

Voluntary Nature of the Interview:

Your participation in this interview is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want to be interviewed. No one in the tourism and hospitality industry will treat you differently if you decide not to be interviewed. If you decide to join the interview now, you can still change your mind later. If you feel stressed or uncomfortable during the interview, you may halt the interview at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

Risks and Benefits of being Interviewed:

There is minimal risk of psychological stress during this interview. If you feel stressed or uncomfortable during the interview, you may stop at any time. There are no benefits to you from participating in the interview. The interviewer will benefit by practicing interviewing skills.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for participating in this interview.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include or name or any identifying information in any reports of the interview.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher's name is Amy Bernard Harrelson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via email at amharrelson@seu.edu. If you want to communicate privately about your rights as a participant, you can contact Dr. Joshua Henson, associate professor and committee chair for this dissertation, at jdhenson@seu.edu. You may also contact Dr. Bethany Peters, adjunct professor and methodologist for this dissertation, at bdpeters@seu.edu. You can also contact the Southeastern University Institutional Review Board directly at irb@seu.edu.

The researcher will provide you with a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have received answers to any questions I have at this time. I am 18 years of age or older, and I consent to participate in the interview.

Printed Name of Participant

Participant's Written Signature:

Appendix D

IRB Approval Letter

SOUTHEASTERN
UNIVERSITY

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

DATE: October 10, 2023

TO: Joshua Henson, Bethany Peters, Amy Harrelson

FROM: SEU IRB

PROTOCOL TITLE: Career Commitment of Female Mid-level Leaders in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry

FUNDING SOURCE: NONE

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 23 BE 14

APPROVAL PERIOD: Approval Date: October 10, 2023   Expiration Date: October 9, 2024

Dear Investigator(s),

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human subjects has reviewed the protocol entitled, Career Commitment of Female Mid-level Leaders in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry. The project has been approved for the procedures and subjects described in the protocol pending the following changes:

- Please add researchers' and IRB (irb@seu.edu) contact information to the informed consent.

Any changes require approval before they can be implemented as part of your study. If your study requires any changes, the proposed modifications will need to be submitted in the form of an amendment request to the IRB to include the following:

> Description of proposed revisions;
> *If applicable*, any new or revised materials;
> *If applicable*, updated letters of approval from cooperating institutions

If there are any adverse events and/or any unanticipated problems during your study, you must notify the IRB within 24 hours of the event or problem.

At present time, there is no need for further action on your part with the IRB.

This approval is issued under Southeastern University's Federal Wide Assurance 00006943 with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). If you have any questions regarding your obligations under the IRB's Assurance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Russell Floyd
Chair, Institutional Review Board
irb@seu.edu

Appendix E

Daisy's Factors of Career Commitment

Theme	N-Vivo Quotes from Daisy's Interview
Resilience, Adaptability, and Proactive Growth	"I got my interview time for like two hours later I went to the mall. I bought an outfit at Express, changed in the Taco Bell bathroom and went back and had my [internship] interview."
	"I went to Germany for about seven days when it was probably about two or three months out from from opening. I'd opened restaurants before but obviously it's very different opening a ship."
	"I was 20 when I saw the poster on the wall, [at my] community college, for the [internship program] And I just thought it sounded like something cool."
	"So, then I became a front desk manager for probably about a year or so at this also [same hotel]. Learned it was an entirely different ballgame from food and beverage."
	"I can definitely look back on each experience itself and see where I grew from it."
Continuous Learning, Mentorship, and Professional Growth	
	"I went to Germany for about seven days when it was probably about two or three months out from from opening. I'd opened restaurants before but obviously it's very different opening a ship."
	"Umm, during that time, I think I, I worked for [Holly] who really became a mentor for me."

	"She's now an SVP or yeah, she's no she's VP of [a multi-unit location]. I still do get together with her like every, you know, couple times a year. But she's always been a good sounding board for me."
Human Connection and Relationship Building	"And then I think it was the guests too. You know, I just have you have those guest experiences like I can remember one of the [dinner show location]. And we had been able to, I think there was a you know, someone was terminally ill with cancer, and we were able to get the dancers to pull them up on stage and just to see, you know, see what it meant to them."
	"But then you have those like, you know, sprinkled in here and there and I think that was always kind of like just a reinforcement that this is why I'm doing what I'm doing, and this is what made me want to do it."

Daisy's Emergent Factors of Career Commitment

Theme	N-Vivo Quotes from Daisy's Interview
Resilience and Adaptability	"I got my interview time for like two hours later I went to the mall. I bought an outfit at Express, changed in the Taco Bell bathroom and went back and had my [internship] interview."
	"I went to Germany for about seven days when it was probably about two or three months out from from opening. I'd opened restaurants before but obviously it's very different opening a ship."
Proactivity and Pursuit of Opportunities	"I was 20 when I saw the poster on the wall, [at my] community college, for the [internship program] And I just thought it sounded like something cool."
	"So, then I became a front desk manager for probably about a year or so at this also [same hotel]. Learned it was an entirely different ballgame from food and beverage."
Skill Set Expansion	"I can definitely look back on each experience itself and see where I grew from it."
	"I went to Germany for about seven days when it was probably about two or three months out from from opening. I'd opened restaurants before but obviously it's very different opening a ship."
Mentorship	"Umm, during that time, I think I, I worked for [Holly] who really became a mentor for me."
	"She's now an SVP or yeah, she's no she's VP of [a multi-unit location]. I still do get together with her like every, you know, couple times a year. But she's always been a good sounding board for me."

Appendix F

Iris's Factors of Career Commitment

Theme	N-Vivo Quotes from Iris's Interview
Creative and Entrepreneurial Pursuits	"I always loved to cook. I mean, there's a picture of me crawling into a cabinet and there's flour in the cabinet…I had the Easy Bake Oven. I was always helping my mom bake cookies." "I've never chased money. I've always chased what I really enjoyed and love to do, and the money came. You know, it's like hospitality is a tough business and it's a 24/7, and you know, it has to really come from the heart." "But my grandmother, my mom's mom, you know she was you know, home cook and very interested when my mom started having my brothers my grandmother and I went to a lot of different things and so I still have recipes at Christmas that are the family legacy recipes and you know making cookies and you may have even when you came out for food and wine probably if I had cookies, tasted some of those cookies."
Resilience, Adaptability, and Proactive Growth	"I didn't necessarily have the skill sets, but I knew I could figure it out because I had a great network…especially when I had taken on the beverage program. I mean, beverage was not my forte…I just took the ball and ran with it." "The separation [from the corporation] was handled extremely well…But I did have a choice to go

	back…At that point, I was just, I was cooking for the [government agency]."
Continuous Learning, Mentorship, and Professional Growth	"I never refer to myself as a female chef, I always refer to myself as a chef that is female…I would figure out ways to compensate that I could still get the job done." "I always loved to cook... I was always helping my mom bake cookies...I worked at a [fast food restaurant], a [buffet restaurant], a [table service restaurant]...I would make eclairs in my kitchen and sell them to restaurants." "You know, and so it's like hospitality is a tough business and it's a 24/7 and, you know, it has to really come from the heart and a lot of the skills you can teach people. But it really the teaching, and then for it to actually be an application that comes from the heart, because you're gonna have all these theories of stuff and talk about it. But if the person genuinely doesn't follow it, they probably are not best suited for certain things." "I would mentor them and say, you know, just move on, you know, it's like you've got so much talent that you can apply yourself and make a difference and it's the loss of that organization and those people if they don't see that." "And then now, you know, towards a later chapter of my life, it's giving back, it's like, I want to try to teach the younger generations, whether it's teens 20s 30s 40s or even 50s." "If people offered them to me, you know, as long as it wasn't illegal, immoral. I always go back to

Advocacy, Integrity, and Overcoming Gender-based Challenges	those…Is it the right thing to do, all the other stuff comes secondary."
	"But, you know, it's it's, it's like when things happen, you know, and you surround yourself by people that you know people that you feel comfortable with and, and other opportunities come about, you know, and so that's that's kind of my story.
	"I had some chefs that... didn't know that I was a chef. And there was one person in particular... I was almost like going to say, 'You know what, I will tell your guests that you can't be here for whatever reasons and I can actually do a demo in your place."
	"The thing is and there's no proof around this, but there were glass ceilings there were like people be you know, earmarked as is you know, they might have done something wrong at one point or they pissed somebody off and then all of a sudden you know, you're you're on the the other list of you know, and you always you know, you try really hard and then unless you get somebody that's that will go to battle for you. And even then it's sometimes there's caps with it."
	"But in the industry, I never, I never refer to myself. Like as a female chef, I always refer to myself as a chef that is female. That was always in my mind."
	"I look back to those days and I think I count my blessings because I have people like you and other people that you know, were showing me all this cool stuff. And at the time, most everybody really didn't

know anything. And I just took the ball and ran with it."

"But in the industry, I never, I never refer to myself. Like as a female chef, I always refer to myself that was a chef that was female. That was always in my mind. So, I never wanted anybody to give me special treatment, whatever. Just because I may not have been as big or as strong. I would figure out ways to compensate that I could still get the job done even though I had to reach taller or you know."

"I will tell you there were some nice cooler chats that I've had with males that probably weren't appropriate. But I don't think that they would ever tell anybody, because it would be like [Iris] said. But you have to have a thick skin, you know, I mean, it's like I see even some younger people right now and they're like, oh, you know, and it's like, you know, and it's not appropriate anymore for me to say this, put your big girl pants on, but I used to say put your big girl pants on or your big boy pants on."

Work-Life Balance, Personal Fulfillment, and Life Events

"I've always loved the connection of people in the hospitality business. I loved the people. It's almost kind of, you know, a misfit of groups of people…I've always loved the differences of people and hospitality and food and beverage is all about that…I started working at a [fast food restaurant]. I worked at a [buffet restaurant]. I worked at a [table service restaurant]. My dad had a place and anytime there was opportunities to make extra money, I would do like make eclairs in my kitchen and selling to restaurants…I liked to create things…we would

have our friends over and you know, I would bake cookies."

"And now, you know, as you know, because I'll be 65 in March. And so then I go on Medicare, and I don't have to worry about, you know, the insurance costs and I'll be able to start to collect my pension. I was very fortunate. To be part of a generation where pensions were there. You know, and even when I was in my teens working, I always made a commitment."

Human Connection and Relationship Building

"I never chased the money, but I worked hard. Money was there. I used common sense or tried to, to always live within my means. And then now, you know, towards a later chapter of my life, it's given back, it's like, I want to try to teach the younger generations, whether it's teens 20s 30s 40s or even 50s."

"I loved the connection of people in the hospitality business. I loved the people. It's almost kind of, you know, a misfit of groups. of people. Because I never was in a cliquish group, even though some people have have said Oh, you are always with this clique. No, I've always my whole life. I have always loved the differences of people. And and hospitality and food and beverage is all about that."

"I was always cooking. I was always the friend that would bake cookies. You know, even as a kid, you know, I always did that and because of being around the restaurants and because of being around social events that always had food. I can't remember a time that I didn't cook and then when I got my Easy Bake

Corporate Politics, Operational Challenges, and Industry Dynamics	Oven, that was independence, you know, whatever I wanted with this life."
	"The thing is and there's no proof around this, but there were glass ceilings there were like people be you know, earmarked as is you know, they might have done something wrong at one point or they pissed somebody off and then all of a sudden you know, you're you're on the the other list of you know, and you always you know, you try really hard and then unless you get somebody that's that will go to battle for you. And even then it's sometimes there's caps with it."
	"…politics sometimes especially, you know, when you were doing stuff with our [vendors] and, and the festival and you would, there would be decisions that the team that we thought could make the decisions our team, and then all of a sudden everybody has a stake and blah, blah, blah, and it's like, towards the end I was just like, man, the festival is going to be over…before you can make a decision on something…"

Appendix G

Rose's Factors of Career Commitment

Theme	N-Vivo Quotes from Rose's Interview
Resilience, Adaptability, and Proactive Growth	"I grew up in the restaurant industry and my dad did restaurants, which made me realize I never wanted to work in restaurants, manager level." "So by the time I was 23, I was a general manager of my own property. It was a [all suites hotel] and it was like 100 rooms." "I went back and got my master's degree. I worked for a toy [children's] company that manufactured [children's toys] and I was an account manager, and I was making like no money but it was a lot of fun." "And so eventually I got pulled back into I was always talking to hospitality people. And so, it really made me miss the hotel world and the business of it but I knew I was like I don't know, if I want to go back to operations." "I ended up working at an Inn oceanfront property, which kind

of ran like a resort. So, it's kind of like backwards, going in that direction I wanted to go in."

Advocacy, Integrity, and Overcoming Gender-based Challenges

"But when I was the woman, the first woman GM for that property, the only reason they hired me was because I was part [other ethnicity]. And so, they saw me as someone who like thought more like them because I had this like, kind of foreign background even though I'm from the United States…And it was just the lack of respect for women. I don't think I think I was the literal one and only female GM."

"They thought that I would be more subservient. I think maybe is the term and then in actuality, they're like, oh, never mind. We thought she was gonna be subservient, but she isn't…I wasn't I was like, this is I'm not gonna just do something that you asked me to do for the sake of doing it. Like I'm not gonna do that. I'm not gonna cower or be afraid of you like and I think that that's what they were hoping like, oh, we can turn around… Because they were [different ethnicity]."

Work-Life Balance, Personal Fulfillment, and Life Events

"I was the perfect person to just be a GM because I didn't have kids and have nothing to worry about. I could work at the property, you know, 90 hours a week and it's no problem."

"My family is gonna come first, over any over a guest, like that's just life. You know what I mean? Everybody should and guests should understand that too… But it is just me and two other housekeepers. So, if I need to have set it up to if I need to go to a soccer game, or go to a soccer game, like I figured, you know, I figured out a way to force that work-life balance into this property."

" And then I met my now husband at a conference and Hospitality, we both worked for Hospitality. And then he got a job in [different state]. So, they knew that I wanted to work in [different state] to be closer to him. So, they moved me to [different state] to work at a Suites."

"But I learned a lot about revenue and sales and then I was in a really bad car accident about

Corporate Politics, Operational Challenges, and Industry Dynamics

[several] years ago, driving to work, and I ended up being like bedridden for like six months. And they let me work from home."And then when it was time to come back or like Okay, that's enough. We can't do that anymore. Even though I'm just sitting at a desk, like Yeah, I'm not making this commute anymore because I was living in [Florida city] and it was a long drive, like an hour and a half. I decided to quit, and I was gonna start my own like, kind of like a task force company for hotels… And then a year later, I was like, let's get an Airbnb. We have the savings. We have some money for my payout from the wreck [auto accident]…"

"It's almost like a caste system than a hotel. I don't know if that's the right word for it. But you know, this level is better than this level. And the ownership thinks they're like better than everyone else and then you have the management groups… It's not the higher-level ups working with the guests. So of course, they don't

care like as long as we're making money, it's fine."

"It's oh 100% satisfaction and it's totally screwed up everything. Because a guest thinks that they can come in and harass an employee and treat them like garbage to get what they want."

"I don't know if I could go back and work for a hotel company ever again. Because I would be like, why are y'all doing the stuff that you do? It's so stupid. Just to be real."

"Like, it's also training, like making sure that you're training your guests not to be complete psychos to like these big brands."

"Like, why are customers like there's some customers that are really great and make it all worth it? But then there's some that you're just like, who do you think you are?"

"Oh, yeah. I mean, there's the exceptions like I've plenty of friend GMs who are just like the best and treat their team members, right."

"I grew up in the restaurant industry and my dad did

Human Connection and Relationship Building

restaurants and which made me realize I never wanted to work in restaurants, manager level. But originally, I you know, went to school at the University of [city], and you know, throughout, like high school and the beginning of college, I actually did retail work. And then at one point, I just got a job as a server. And I really liked it. It was, you know, that hectic environment that like kind of keeps you on your toes."

"And I was like, I want to work on hotels, because at the time I my degree was in advertising. And then I started taking all these advertising classes and I was like, This is so boring, and eventually changed my major to hospitality and I got a job as at the front desk at a [suite hotel] and it was my first hotel job so you know, I liked the hospitality aspect of it. I grew up in it talking to people things like that. So I was like, I'm gonna you know, I'm gonna work for like large scale hotels and be a resort manager one day…"

"I went back and got my master's degree. I worked for a toy

Creative and Entrepreneurial Pursuits

[children's] company that manufactured [children's toys] and I was an account manager, and I was making like no money but it was a lot of fun. And that's where I kind of fell in love with marketing. Because I did a lot of their like social media marketing stuff like that and creating artwork and stuff."

"And I really wanted to go the revenue management route. So, I was kind of hanging around hoping I would get back because I was really bored. I was overqualified for the job. The GM was constantly you know, hey, can you help me with this? Why don't you go into operations, you should be on our side, whatever."

"But it all came full circle with me on my own property. Yeah. Like I had that operations experience. I have the sales experience and the revenue experience. I have the marketing experience."

"And then so I was like let's get a couple of Airbnb IDs and rent them out. And then when I started looking at hotels, like motels I

was like, let's get a motel. And then when I started looking at hotels, like motels I was like, let's get a motel and so quickly went from let's get an Airbnb for some passive income to let's rent a whole hotel."

"I mean, right now we're trying to decide if we should sell the hotel or not. And my husband was like, what would you do? I was like, no, I would probably go into consulting to be honest."

Appendix H

Career Commitment Themes

Theme	Participant(s)
• Resilience, Adaptability, and Proactive Growth	Daisy, Iris, Rose
• Human Connection and Relationship Building	Daisy, Iris, Rose
• Advocacy, Integrity, and Overcoming Gender-based Challenges	Daisy, Iris, Rose
• Continuous Learning, Mentorship, and Professional Growth	Daisy, Iris
• Work-Life Balance, Personal Fulfillment, and Life Events	Iris, Rose
• Creative and Entrepreneurial Pursuits	Iris, Rose
• Corporate Politics, Operational Challenges, and Industry Dynamics	Iris, Rose