Perceptions Of Executive Female Leaders In Athletics

Lynnette Y. Johnson
University of Mississippi

Follow this and additional works at: https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd

Part of the Higher Education Commons

Recommended Citation
https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd/617

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of eGrove. For more information, please contact egrove@olemiss.edu.
PERCEPTIONS OF EXECUTIVE FEMALE LEADERS IN ATHLETICS

A Dissertation in Practice
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
in the Department of Higher Education
The University of Mississippi

by

LYNNETTE JOHNSON

May 2018
ABSTRACT

In 1981 the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) developed the designation of Senior Woman Administrator (SWA) within the membership. With the addition of women’s athletic programs in the NCAA starting in the 1981-1982 season, the NCAA knew there was a need to guarantee at least one executive woman was seated at the decision-making table to support the new female teams (NCAA SWA brochure, 2011). Title IX legislation was already a decade old when the NCAA added women’s teams and the platform to grow women in sport was forefront (Glazor-Raymo, Townsend, & Ropers-Huilman, 2000, p.184). Today, there are women in leadership roles throughout intercollegiate athletics, but with all the opportunities that exist there is still a predominately male presence at the highest executive level (Lapchick, 2017, p. 1). For example, today only five “Power 5” female athletics directors out of sixty-five opportunities exist (Macur, 2015). This study will use a phenomenological approach, to interview top ranking women that hold executive level athletic leadership positions to describe in depth their “lived experiences” of rising to leadership positions in a predominately male, competitive environment.
DEDICATION

This research and doctorate degree is dedicated to:

My husband and daughters, Tal, Alex and Sami. They agreed to embark on this three-year adventure with me. The three of them have been a great support throughout my hours away from home to attend class, to study, to conduct my research and to write my dissertation in practice. I am sure they thought about complaining, but never said anything to me as I worked. I want my daughters to understand what they are capable of, and that they are never to think their gender should hold them back from any goal they set.

My biggest fans: mom and dad. You have always supported me, throughout my athletic career, my educational career, and my business career. You never wavered from the message that I could do whatever I wanted. As a woman competing in a man’s profession, you always took my phone call, as I needed a supportive ear to listen more than to be given advice. More times than I can count you both just let me cry and followed with it will it be “OK.”

My Ole Miss mentors: These mentors included Leroy Mullins, Dr. Gloria Kellum, Mary Ann Connell Esq., Dr. Linda Chitwood, Pete Boone and Warner Alford. They each have provided me with so much support and guidance throughout my 29 years on campus. I would not be the leader that I am today without your time, inspiration, recommendations and most of all patience.

My dear friends: Dr. Suzanne Byrd, Bonnie Caver. Taylor Mott, Allyson Best and Dr. Donna Strum, these strong accomplished women have set a standard in their fields. They are
women that are proven leaders in their disciplines and have their own voice. I admire each of you for the accomplishments that you have attained.

Thank you, for all the love and support.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

At the beginning of this three-year adventure, I was nervous about embarking on a doctoral degree, 25 years removed from my last collegiate educational experience. Dr. Jamil Northcutt would walk into my office weekly and ask if I have applied for the GRE yet. He continued to tell me that the hardest step was the first step. I am not so sure he was right about that but I am sure thankful to him for his continued question.

I would like to start with thanking my faculty and dissertation in practice committee members. This experience was truly a challenge. It stretched my growth as a leader and educator. I would like to thank Dr. John Holleman for his continued support and leadership of our new CPED Educational Doctorate. I would like to thank Dr. Phillis George for your strong ever present female voice that I could listen to and learn from all day. Dr. Holleman and Dr. George ventured into the new CPED program and I am forever appreciative. I would like to thank Dr. Neal Hutchins who said to write on athletics, you have the access. I want to thank Dr. Kirsten Dellinger for agreeing to take time away from her busy days to step into my world and give invaluable input in my study. Finally, I want to thank Dr. Amy Wells Dolan, my advisor and Dissertation in Practice Chair. Dr. Wells Dolan has helped me find my educational voice. I told her my greatest academic weakness and fear was writing. She has spent countless hours reading and giving me great feedback. She listened to my family journey and career maneuvers.
as I made it through the three year process. She provided unbelievable support to me and the entire cohort.

I would like to thank Cohort One. I cannot name each of you, but we were 40 something strong and I enjoyed getting to know the amazing people and educators you are. Jennifer Saxon, Peter Tulchinsky, Bradley Baker and Kyra Kendrick, the car rider five, I could not have made it through class and driving to Jackson without your clarity.

I would like to thank my family for their belief in me during this process. To my girls, who kept asking if I was done with my paper yet? My in-laws, Jim and Jean, they have never questioned my drive to be excellent in everything I do. To my husband, who tried to help me edit my homework and papers. We decided our marriage was more important than his editing and opinions, so he lasted one paper but his support continued.

Finally, I would like to thank the 10 female executives. You took the time to tell me your stories and fully discuss your careers. I was so amazed at your lives and stand in awe of your accomplishments.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MANUSCRIPT 1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Frameworks</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Mobility</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Efficiency</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Equality</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of Literature</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational influence of power/structure</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micro-aggressions/treatment</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intangibles attributes to executive positions</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Phenomenon</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods and Procedures</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance of the study</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF REFERENCES</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF APPENDICES</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MANUSCRIPT 2</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic information</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant profiles and overview</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lori</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debbie</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barb</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawn</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tami</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maci</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Phenomenon themes</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early life influences</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early athletic experience</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathway to SWA</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of an SWA</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD or not to be an AD</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors/Sponsors</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal versus External positions</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF REFERENCES</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF APPENDICES</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MANUSCRIPT 3</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Findings</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving practice to enhance equity, ethics and social justice</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase number of female administrators advancing to deputy</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWA role</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease self-delimitations</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations to aspiring female administrators</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies for Enterprise Change</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECTION</td>
<td>PAGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF REFERENCES</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF APPENDICES</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1  Total Generated Revenues and Expenses by Sport Division I-FBS….61
Fiscal Year 2015- Median Values, Men’s Programs

TABLE 2  Total Generated Revenues and Expenses by Sport Division I-FBS…..62
Fiscal Year 2015- Median Values ,Women’s Programs

TABLE 3  NCAA Identification Leadership Positions within …………………..23
Division IA Intercollegiate Athletics

TABLE 4  Demographics 1…………………………………………………………..76

TABLE 5  Demographics 2…………………………………………………………..76
INTRODUCTION

A woman leading a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) elite college athletic department is a rare occurrence. For example, significant conversation marked the 2016 NCAA Division IA football season and The College Football Playoff (CFP) when the football teams led by Jennifer Cohen and Sandy Barbour, athletics directors at the University of Washington and Penn State University, respectively, reached an elite level bowl game designated as the New Year’s Day Six Bowls (Macur, 2015; Women Leaders in College Sports, 2016).

This registered as a notable achievement because these six bowls are placed in the most prominent television slots for bowl games, as listed on the College Football Playoff (2017) website, and have the biggest payout to each institution playing in the contest. In addition to the elite bowl game, The University of Washington football team earned one of the four slots, that are voted on by a committee, to have an opportunity to play for a national championship for that year (Women Leaders in College Sports, 2016). Frankly, it was a huge deal for these two female athletics directors to lead programs where their football teams stood out at this elite level (DeShepper, 2016). The intent of this dissertation in practice is to identify themes and clear suggestions to help guide more women that desire to advance through the athletics leadership hierarchy to hold the athletics director position.

The athletics department’s expectation and the national perception is for the elite level NCAA Division IA programs, is to compete for conference championships, New Year’s Day Six
Bowls, and The College Football Playoff. The significance of Jennifer Cohen, a female athletics director, leading the University of Washington football program to one of the four College Football Playoff spots and the opportunity to play for a national championship was ground breaking for intercollegiate athletics and female leaders. Athletics Directors that lead their football teams to this level are highly respected amongst their peers, are considered elite, and are most often male, as the research shows (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Lapchick, 2017; NCAA, 2017a). Sandy Barbour was asked how she could manage a big-time football program because women didn’t play football. She stated, “The fact of the matter is, we manage it the same way we oversee wrestling, or ice hockey or some other sport we have in place” (DeShepper, 2016, p. 1). At the elite level of intercollegiate athletics in the United States, men hold most of the athletics director positions (Burton, 2014). It is also a trend that men hold the head coaching positions of the women’s sports at this level, and, they are nearly exclusive in all of the coaching slots for men’s sports (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012; Harris, 2017).

Sport leadership has been and is predominately male (Burton, 2014; Lapchick, 2017). At the Division IA level of collegiate athletics, there are currently only 34 female athletics directors out of 352 prospective positions (NCAA, 2017a). The highest level of Division IA athletics, just developed via the NCAA structure, is “The “Power 5” autonomy,” made up of the most powerful and financially lucrative conferences (Southeastern, Atlantic Coast, Big Ten, Big Twelve and Pacific 12). There are only four female athletics directors out of 65 institutions included in this group of five conferences. These female leaders are: Jennifer Cohen (University of Washington), Sandy Barbour (Penn State University), Heather Lyke (University of Pittsburgh), and Kay Yow (North Carolina State University) (Women Leaders in College Sports, 2016; Pittsburgh Panthers, 2017). Football is the largest revenue producing sport at the elite level, and
the last ten football national championship programs were from the “Power 5” autonomy,” led by male athletics directors (College Football Playoff, 2017; NCAA, 2017a). How can institutions, athletic departments, male and female colleagues advance more women into athletics director positions in the culturally defined elite NCAA athletic programs? As a long-standing female executive administrator with unique perspective and experience, the opportunity to advance has been “allowed” to a certain point within the institution and athletic department that I work. A goal of this study would be to educate male and female athletic administrators of opportunities to advance more women into the highest executive athletic position of athletics director.

Athletics has been male-dominated from the beginning, including The Olympic Games in Athens, Greece in 1896. Women were not allowed to participate in sports and only in very rare occasions were permitted to watch the men compete (Olympic, 2017). In 2017, over 120 years later, women and girls can compete in athletics, but female athletes are not seeing people like them reach the top-level administrative positions at the highest level of NCAA intercollegiate athletics in significant numbers, despite the gains of women and girls in opportunity and participation in athletics over time (Lapchick 2017). Burton (2014) concluded that women, “are underrepresented in all facets of leadership at all levels of sport” (p. 155).

The NCAA could see the growth of women in sports and wanted to continue to grow that platform by adding women’s teams, when Title IX legislation was already a decade old (Glazor-Raymo, Townsend, & Ropers-Huilman, 2000). The NCAA is a not-for-profit organization that governs intercollegiate athletics; institutions voluntarily choose to be a member of the NCAA and follow the policies that the member institutions collectively decide (NCAA, 2017h). Title IX legislation is a federal law enacted in 1972 to avoid discrimination based on sex in any
federally funded education program or activity (Department of Justice, 2017). In 1981, the NCAA developed the designation of Senior Woman Administrator (SWA) within its membership. With the addition of women’s athletic programs in the NCAA starting in the 1981-1982 season, the NCAA knew there was a need to guarantee at least one executive woman was seated at the decision-making table, ostensibly to support the new female teams (NCAA SWA brochure, 2011). Title IX has a broad-based application across educational programs, including employment practices and sexual harassment. The athletics compliance of Title IX has been the most recognized section of the law until the recent headlines regarding sexual misconduct on collegiate campuses (Almasy & Shah, 2016; Almasy, Said & Allen, 2016; Armour, 2017; Wu, 2016). Athletics and Title IX expects that any federally funded institution or activity does not discriminate on the basis of sex and is held to the specific standards that they must reach both annually and long-term to maintain compliance (Title IX, 2017; NCAA, 2017c). The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) is the governing federal body that oversees the compliance of Title IX (Department of Justice, 2017).

Acosta & Carpenter’s (2014) report revealed a 2-to-1 ratio of men to women in leadership roles throughout NCAA intercollegiate athletics, which is interesting as there is not a 2-to-1 ratio in participation numbers between male and female student-athletes. At the NCAA Division IA level of intercollegiate athletics currently, there are 83,036 female student-athletes competing in 29 different sports and 94,637 male student-athletes competing in 24 different sports (NCAA, 2017a). Across all three NCAA divisions, 211,886 female student-athletes and 274,973 male student-athletes participate in sport (NCAA, 2017a), but on average only 43.4% female head coaches lead their teams, fewer than two female administrators per department are
there to support the teams and only 22.3% female athletics directors head departments (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014).

I have worked at the same institutions for 29 years and have held a role of an administrator for 21 of those years. The athletics directors that I have reported to have all been men. It is one of my assumptions that this is a theme for most women within their intercollegiate athletics career. An improvement across athletics would be an intended outcome of this study to have more women have the tools and resources to pursue becoming athletics directors at the highest level of NCAA athletics. It would not be fair to desire more women to aspire and pursue athletics director positions but not prepare them along the way.

During my first few years in the Assistant athletics director/SWA role, I was the only female executive amongst nine men. During that time if a female perspective was needed for any reason, there was only one voice speaking. It took more than five years before another female administrator was seated at the table with me. I was asked to take time from my maternity leave to help recruit her to our institution. Clearly, the male administrator running the search and the prospective female executive thought interacting with another female in leadership was important to the hire. If more women are going to advance to executive leadership, then there will need to be more support for women at the entry level.

For decades, the education arena has mirrored “the strain at the core of any liberal democratic society, the tension between democratic politics (public rights) and capitalist markets (private rights), between majority control and individual liberty, between political equality and social inequality” (Labaree, 1997, p. 41). The NCAA exemplifies these tensions between democratic politics and capitalist markets, as described by Labaree (1997). In fact, the amateur model of the NCAA has been called into question over the past ten years (NCAA, 2017e;
Presently the NCAA has been managing several high-profile lawsuits based on the perception of intercollegiate athletics existing as a “big business” versus the historic academic and amateur model (Johnson, 2017; NCAA, 2017d; NCAA, 2017e; Solomon, 2014). The revenue generated by the NCAA is scrutinized at every turn; the student-athletes in the highest profile and financially sound sports are asking how they can be “compensated” for the revenue generated from their performances and images.

The institutions that make-up the NCAA are attempting to be revenue producing athletic departments. However, as (Tables 1 and 2, Appendix) clearly show, there are only two sports that are producing a profit at the Division 1A level: football and men’s basketball. In the business of Intercollegiate Athletics and the NCAA, money is power, and power is a hegemonic masculine characteristic (Burton, 2014). The NCAA data has shown over the last several years that only a very small number of athletics departments are generating revenue above their expenses (NCAA, 2017b). The amount of money being generated at the “Power 5” level has the potential to put strain on the leaders within intercollegiate athletics. Has the pressure of building a financially powerful athletic department irrevocably driven intercollegiate programs from a preoccupation with public benefit (democratic equality and social efficiency) of sport to its private benefit (social mobility)? Has the hegemonic characterization of power and financial prowess been too much for women to overcome to achieve high-level leadership?

June 2017 marked the 45th anniversary of Title IX, and the headlines still read: “Women in athletic departments: welcomed or marginalized?” (Voepel, 2017). Although men, as athletics directors have surrounded themselves with many women in mid-level leadership roles, it appears that the negative perception of women leading a financially powerful athletic department has resulted in very few women with the opportunity to be the top leader (Macur, 2015; Burton,
Women in athletic departments have to find a way to work with football in some capacity if they want to improve their advancement opportunities, and that is sometimes problematic (Voepel, 2017). Sandy Barbour (Penn State University) explained that “those [Power Five AD jobs] are coveted” even though there are a lot of men and women that are talented enough to hold these positions. Barbour concluded that women have a greater challenge because there is a smaller pool to draw from that have the experience (Voepel, 2017).

My first career in athletics was in sports medicine as an athletic trainer. I was “allowed” to work with the football team as a health care provider. The head football coach allowed me access to the practice field, the game field and the program. Even though the head football coach was not in charge of the athletics department or the institution, it was understood he determined who was allowed around his program and on the field. This significant decision and sponsorship by the head football coach was a key driver to my access for the rest of my career at the institution. I was named the first female head athletic trainer in the Southeastern Conference that oversaw all sports including football. It was an exciting promotion until the athletics director and the head football coach came down and suggested that a man work directly with the team versus me. I questioned their decision but was in no position to take a stand. I remained the leader of the department and worked with football but on a day to day basis the male athletic trainer had the direct contact and access with the football coach. The national headline of a female being put in charge and promoted quickly became a story of just another female being marginalized.

After 18 months as the head athletic trainer an opportunity to move into higher administration materialized. When I met with the Athletics director and told him of my interest in the vacant Assistant athletics director/Senior Woman Administrator (SWA) position, he knew
I had worked successfully with football and had the respect or at least the perceived respect of many male colleagues and football staff. What is so interesting about this move from Head Athletic Trainer to Assistant athletics director/SWA, the new position moved from working with football and men’s sports regularly to only women’s programs because of the accompanying role of the SWA. My decision to move to administration at that time, in my mind, was a move up the hierarchy ladder; however, it actually ended up changing my access to the highest profile sport and hence the general access within the department.
EDUCATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

The Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate (CPED) was conceptualized in 2006 by Dr. Lee Shulman and was backed by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (CPED, 2017). Shulman wanted to develop a new educational doctorate model for the professional practitioner. The final project came to life in 2007 with a small cohort of 25 schools and limited funding. The concept for the program was to combine rigorous coursework in combination with solving a work place problem (“problem of practice”) within the doctoral candidate’s (practitioner) realm. The candidate’s “problem of practice” would be studied, data analyzed, and “real” solutions proposed within a dissertation in practice format (CPED, 2017).

The Project has over 80 institutions that have agreed to follow the core mission and the core principles of the CPED consortium. The University of Mississippi became a CPED member in 2011 as a Phase II institution. The first graduation class for The University of Mississippi’s CPED program is anticipated May 2018. The overall core mission of the project is to develop well-rounded scholarly educational practitioners. The core principles of the framework, equity, ethics, and social justice are constructed into each member institution’s core doctoral curriculum and are to be incorporated within the scholarly practitioner’s dissertation in practice manuscripts (CPED, 2017).

This dissertation in practice will touch on each construct of the first of the CPED core principles, namely equity, ethics and social justice. Athletics is historically a male-dominated
profession, and when only men hold the top positions within an institution or a profession, then equity and social justice cannot be accomplished (Burton, 2014; Lapchick, 2017). Men dominating the athletics profession at the highest leadership positions raise ethical questions of how and why (Acosta and Carpenter, 2014; NCAA, 2017a)? As a result, the main participants in this study are women, and the study will look at previous research and current perspectives of the participants regarding how to move women into higher administrative positions and ultimately the athletics director positions within intercollegiate athletics.

In a very recent ruling in a lawsuit against the University of Iowa, Jane Meyer, the former Senior Associate Athletics Director/SWA was awarded a $1.43-million-dollar settlement after she claimed her male athletics director discriminated against her, when he hired a man over her for 70 thousand dollars more than her salary, prior to dismissing her in 2015 (Emmert, 2017). The last CPED principle, ethics, may be revealed within this study if policy and procedures within the hiring or institutional hegemonic structure still exist, and hiring and management processes need to be adjusted or changed. The Iowa case described a situation where a male was hired and promoted over the long-standing female administrator (Emmert, 2017); the pro-plaintiff verdict certainly raises questions about the equity and ethics involved in the institution’s hiring and promotion practices. This is a very interesting case as it relates directly to this study’s problem of practice and my experience as the scholar-practitioner. I have worked in the athletics department for 29 years total and 21 years as an executive administrator. In 2010, the athletics director decided to elevate a male colleague that had less athletics experience than me and pay him over 60 thousand dollars more than my annual salary. The position was never advertised and the promotion was never discussed with the executive staff or me as a co-ranking executive. I did not file a lawsuit or lodge an internal complaint. Alternately, Jane Meyer took on a huge
personal and professional risk to pursue the lawsuit. Lawsuits and internal complaints are not the norm for female administrators, however I would hypothesize that what is common is for the female administrator to feel marginalized in the gendered space and find no avenue for relief.

There are competing purposes for higher education that shape the institutional missions and educational approaches of colleges and universities. David Labaree’s (1997) “American Struggle Over Educational Goals” succinctly identified and articulated these competing views about higher education as: Social Mobility, Social Efficiency and Democratic Equality. These three frameworks defined by Labaree (1997) have dominated academic analysis of educational policy (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015). While critics of Labaree, including Dowd & Bensimon (2015), have argued that his frameworks don’t fully address racial inequities within the educational system, Labaree’s framework offered me a starting place for identifying the equity, social justice, and ethical issues arising in this study of leadership in intercollegiate athletics.

Social mobility considers education a consumer commodity, which places higher educational institutions in direct conflict with each other, promoting the social class benefits derived from earning a degree at a particular university. This type of competition places the emphasis on the individual good and the consumer value of the college degree versus the learning behind the degree. This appearance makes a college degree the main mechanism for distributing wealth in society through a Darwinian competition for certification and career advancement, which directly speaks to the critical analysis against Labaree offered by Dowd & Bensimon (2015). “Strength in numbers” and “survival of the fittest” can be thought of in a couple of different ways in perspective to women in athletics leadership: the very thin number of women in the top leadership positions and the limited number of women working with the top revenue sport, football (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Voepel, 2017). How can women’s career
paths be altered to build their resumes to compete with men for these positions if they are drastically out-numbered by men striving for these same positions (Voepel, 2017; NCAA, 2017a)?

One may deduce that if men are in the positions to make the hiring decisions then the glass ceiling may be more difficult to break. Jackson, O’Callaghan & Adserias (2014) spoke to the multiple layers of complexities of the glass ceiling in trying to explain the total effect it can have on individuals. This dissertation in practice will gather some perceptions of the experiences of executive women as they have navigated the water of the gendered work environment of athletics. Jackson et al. (2014) discussed the glass ceiling as a “hidden” system of discrimination that can marginalize women and people of color. In this way the glass ceiling is less about the qualification of the employee and more about social conditions in the workplace, job requirements, and cultural biases. The glass ceiling research that Jackson et al. (2014) referred to has many different layers and their research surrounding the glass ceiling effect in higher education shows the reality that faculty and administrators of color cannot be distributed equally across all institutions. However, the commonalities in experiences between faculty and administrators of color and women in athletics administration can be useful as a possible outcome of this dissertation in practice to help direct more women in athletics to aspire to advance up the executive ladder.

The glass ceiling is not broken if only four women hold “Power 5” athletics director positions out of 65 opportunities. I believe that men have to bring women to the table, why, because they are in charge and if they do not, then it will never happen. I would suspect that the four female athletics directors if interviewed, would point to a moment in their career or two that a man gave them access that moved them forward. This moment gave them the platform to
showcase their skills and decision-making abilities proving their capability of managing the athletics director’s position. This does not mean that women would or should do the job the same or even better than a man, but at some point, there needs to be a recognition that women can do the job and should get the opportunity to try.

A current headline: “The price of failure: Husker football’s 3-year revolving door may cost $16.4 million in payouts to coaches, A.D.” (Ruggies & Kaipust, 2017). This article discussed the fall from power of the historical powerhouse division IA football program, The Nebraska Huskers and the grave financial impact of firing and hiring head coaches in addition the male athletics directors that hired the football coaches over the last 12 years. At no time during this 12-year period did Nebraska hire a female athletics director to see if she could do better. Now I realize this is very simplistic at its core but I would argue that a female athletics director could do no worse than the multiple male athletics directors have done.

Social Efficiency defines education as the mechanism to keep societal cogs moving. In this view, institutions should prepare students to move into the workforce and keep the economy running like a fine oiled machine. This conception of the purpose of higher education places the emphasis on the greater good versus the individual good. The demand to increase the revenue from intercollegiate athletics justifies a social efficiency viewpoint within the realm of athletics operations, i.e., do what is necessary to maximize revenue. Yet how can the greater good within intercollegiate athletics thrive when the financial and operations decisions are being tipped toward two sports: football and men’s basketball (NCAA, 2017b)?

Title IX is 45 years old, and there is still a clear divide between the haves and the have-nots (men’s sports versus women’s sports) (Voepel, 2017). The numbers of women moving into the higher leadership positions are moving in the right direction over time, but women holding
the top position of athletics director is still moving at a snail’s pace. This is compared to the continued acceleration of the revenue and expenses linked to intercollegiate football and men’s basketball at the highest levels, as referenced in (Tables 1 and 2, Appendix B). The recent headlines of the NCAA men’s basketball FBI scandal again shows the level to which intercollegiate athletics is moving at a rapid pace and the revenue, salaries and the power of the coaches involved impacts intercollegiate athletics…not for the positive (Rapaport, 2017).

Democratic Equality is centered around the idea that education should have a role in promoting good citizenship, responsibility and civility. From this viewpoint, the educational system is a starting point for providing each student the opportunity to be prepared to be a quality citizen (Labaree, 1997). Title IX strives to provide the same opportunity to the under-represented sex, which in athletics is women (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Sandy Barbour, one of only four female athletics directors at the “Power 5” level, feels that the world of intercollegiate athletics is “coming to understand more and more the value of different voices and perspectives” (Voepel, 2017). This is the ever-present conversation, but yet work still remains as the documented numbers of women in the top leadership positions and head coaching positions demonstrate disparity in opportunity (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Harris, 2017; NCAA, 2017a).

Labaree’s framework fits and fuels the national or majoritarian view of how to analyze educational policy, but Dowd & Bensimon (2015) believed there is a blind spot within the three frames toward racial inequities. This oversight could be replicated in the practice of leadership in intercollegiate athletics with leaders—easily holding the majoritarian view—continuing to overlook the racial gaps because they don’t believe they exist (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015). This study is primarily focused on gender and the executive female leader, however another topic of
importance that could come out of this study are ethnicity and inclusion. The data shows that leaders of color are very limited at all the NCAA levels and especially the division IA level. If the data is broken down by ethnicity the women of color are really at a leadership disadvantage. Dr. Richard Lapchick is the director of The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES) housed at the University of Central Florida. TIDES focuses on studying intercollegiate athletics and the diversity or lack of it within the NCAA ranks. The most recent research just published from TIDES, November 2017, supports the continued conversation over lack of diversity within athletics leadership, which includes coaches. Numbers tell the story: 86.6 percent of all NCAA institution presidents are white and 72.3 are men: 77.7 percent of all athletics directors are white: 90 percent of the conference commissioners are white and as the data shows, male as well (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Lapchick, 2017; NCAA, 2017a). Overall, Lapchick (2017) said that Whites hold 342 (86.6%) of the 395 positions in leadership available. He went on to say these percentages do not match the demographic percentages of the student-athletes competing on the sport teams at these universities. Finally, Lapchick (2017) stated, “terribly low grades recorded in 2017 reflect the stagnation of movement and continued dominance of White men in the leadership roles affecting who is hired in college sports” (p. 2). Professional sports are ahead of collegiate sports still in 2017 providing more opportunities for women and people of color in leadership positions and this has not changed since the TIDES report published in 2014 (Lapchick, 2014; 2017). Thus, a critical analysis of Labaree’s frames warrants critique in this study given the hegemonic, male-centered culture that exists in athletics. Are the male athletics directors and the institutional leaders aware of what they are doing to overlook opportunities for female administrators to advance?
American society has put forth the idea that it is important and beneficial to advance the notion of equal access to opportunities for each student? If historical institutional racial bias is not broken down, then transforming the racial inequities within the institution is almost impossible, and in, effect, inequality is preserved (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015, p. 15). Female administrators will not be advanced to top positions or have the same opportunities to advance into the higher positions if this same type of historical institutional bias is not identified and addressed.

Baez (2000) offered another critical view of the majoritarian conceptions, when he spoke of the “critical agency” of institutions regarding the promotion and support of minority faculty. His overall concern involved the service component of tenure and argued that it placed more burden on faculty of color (Baez, 2000). Faculty of color are often asked to do more for their race as well as fill typical service obligations. In this way, faculty of color are often paraded out into public to show a public display of diversity but have remained unsupported in bids for tenure (Baez, 2000). I would attest that this perception may be made of male athletics directors surrounding themselves with mid-level female administrators (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; NCAA, 2017a). In a similar fashion, these mid-level female administrators may perform heavy lifting for the operations and maintenance of intercollegiate athletics, including student-athlete support and supervision of coaching personnel, but they do not advance to the top positions. Baez (2000) wrote “without such agency, traditionally-subordinate groups will never share equally society’s resources, and social institutions will continue to maintain advantages for whites and males” (p. 387). Baez (2000) continued referencing the embedded practices and policies that are in place to “allow” this discrimination to continue on collegiate campuses. One can argue that talent is not the deterrent to women moving up the leadership ladder or the tenure
ladder on campuses. Graves (2016) agrees that both conscious and unconscious bias coupled with gender and ethnicity stereotypes impede access to leadership roles. He believes that unconscious bias is just a “means for allowing white male corporate decision makers in their continued participation in exclusionary practices” (Graves, 2016; para 4).

This study does not specifically address the educational systems or processes related to academic hiring; however, the definitions of Labaree’s frameworks along with the critical views (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Baez, 2000) of his frameworks are helpful to me in exploring the CPED principles of equity, social justice, and ethics in intercollegiate athletics for this CPED-influenced Dissertation in Practice.

Social Mobility

Women in intercollegiate athletics leadership positions are often placed in secondary administrative roles like Senior Associate Athletics director down to Assistant athletics director positions, but they cannot easily move up to the top spot of athletics director. Acosta and Carpenter’s (2014) data revealed that in large athletic departments that have more than 20 mid-level administrators, women occupy less than a third of these positions. Although women in these positions are vital to the athletic department and are able to maintain second tier positions and perform support tasks for years, their decision-making authority and autonomy is limited to the scope of second tier positions. This can vary from institution to institution, but as the data has shown, women are not in the athletics director roles with the ability to distribute this executive power (Lapchick, 2017; NCAA, 2017a).

There is an implicit engrained bias concerning women and their ability to lead an entire athletic department (Sagas & Cunningham, 2004). The authority of the SWA is tied directly to the position within the department where she works. The SWA is not a position but a title that is
given to a woman in the department that the athletics director chooses (NCAA SWA brochure, 2011). One could say why is there not a title for the Senior Black Administrator or the Senior Male Administrator. Unfortunately for intercollegiate athletics women are the only staff singled out within the department and given a special designation. The SWA does not have to be a sport administrator but needs to have the authority and the autonomy to provide the administrative support intended from and for the position. Therefore, the expectation from the NCAA is that the designated female leader “SWA” is a member of the senior leadership team (NCAA SWA brochure, 2011). When the executive female leader is not given the authority to fulfill the job duties of an executive leader, does that undermine her ability to thrive within the department? At one point in the mid-1990’s there were athletics directors that actually tried to designate male administrators as the SWA. In my opinion, they were completely disregarding and disrespecting the intent of the role. This was discussed at my own institution and a colleague school in our league prior to my promotion to SWA.

The embedded institutional organizational structure or socio-cultural dynamics of athletics may limit the ability of women, including SWAs, from moving within the department’s organizational hierarchy--further downplaying women’s and SWAs’ authority, prohibiting their experience, and curtailing opportunity. With these types of embedded organizational barriers in place, female administrators or designated SWAs are looking to find their own outlets to develop leadership skills or advancement opportunities. This makes sense because the NCAA has claimed that only 30% of SWAs are being provided any type of leadership training prior to being named to this role or elevated to administration, when, on the other hand, 80% of athletics directors are receiving leadership training or mentoring prior to their promotion (NCAA SWA brochure, 2011).
However, Yiamouyiannis & Osborne (2012) indicated that “significant leadership development training and career-advancement training” may not be enough to overcome the “potential structural barriers that exist within the organization that continues to prohibit women from advancing” (p. 11). To better understand the phenomenon, researchers have explored the relatively limited number of women in senior administrative positions by looking at the individuals and their motivation, leadership abilities, and skill sets (Whisenant, Pederson & Obenour, 2002). Simply put: regardless of what women bring to the table, this study showed that of the 207 participating athletics directors, the belief that male athletics directors would be more successful than female athletics directors was significant (Whisenant et al., 2002).

How can quality conversations happen if there is not an intentional directive from a University Chancellor/President to make the effective diverse hire? Just think of America’s investment in athletic competition at all levels and it is apparent that “sport is one of the most prominent and hegemonic social institutions and cultural practices in society today” (Lapchick, 2017; Whisenant et al., 2002). The national perception is that men will be more successful as athletics directors than women (Whisenant et al., 2002, p. 288). However, if the organizational characteristics and practices don’t change at the macro level of leadership, then women can’t rise to the athletics director level. The perception is that women don’t know football and therefore cannot oversee a major collegiate football program. Other perceptions include but are not limited to: women can’t make the tough decisions; women are too emotional in their decision-making; women don’t have the experience; women will choose their family over work responsibilities; women will not stay in the role after they become mothers (Cunningham & Sagas, 2008). Williams and Dempsey (2014) developed four areas that they believe women are working to break though in the workplace; “prove it again,” “tight rope,” “tug of war,” and
“maternal wall.” Women have to prove over and over again that they are competent to do the work required, women are held to a double-bind effect, they are held to a tug of war on assimilating to the masculine traditions and how to “be” a woman or “be” a man within those rules and finally the maternal wall places strong negative tag on women that choose to have children or lead to questions if she doesn’t. Williams & Dempsey (2014) say women face penalties for violating societies boundaries for the expectations of women in the work place and the stereotypes described do not fit the “norm” established for quality leaders (p. 8). The “presumption-of-competence” effect is compounded by gender stereotypes (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2009, p. 68). This belief could add to the disadvantage of the executive women attempting the climb up the leadership organizational ladder.

All things being equal, men will get hired over women at the administrative leadership positions because of the presumption that men are “quality leaders” (Cunningham & Sagas, 2008). Whisenant et al. (2002) explained the oppressive nature of this presumption: “Hegemonic masculinity is the acceptance of masculinity as the defining characteristics of western society that places women in a lower social position. In a society of hegemonic masculinity, women are considered off limits in certain areas, sport being one of the most obvious” (p. 286). Even outside of intercollegiate athletics in the political or business world, women are dealing with similar biases. It is hard for men to identify with the fact that women have a more difficult path rising to top management. For example, women in the world of business are also not rising past certain management levels due to the effect of discouragement and lack of support of male colleagues (Devillard, Sancier-Sultan, & Werner, 2014).

Athletics directors report to the executive leader (Chancellor or President) on a collegiate campus. This may be another point where the institutional hiring and promotional practice can
exclude or disenfranchise women. The University of Texas president has shown recently that he was not willing to promote a woman to the highest executive leadership position in athletics, which would include the oversight of an elite football program. Chris Polonsky is the Women’s Athletics Director at the University of Texas; she has held this title for 15 years and has been a part of the Texas athletics department for over 29 years. Polonsky sits alone as an athletics director as the TIDES research defined, in a separate women’s department that does not oversee football (Lapchick, 2017). Texas’ President, Greg Fenves, has hired two men in the athletics director role within the last four years and chose not to elevate Chris Polonsky at either opportunity. Also, within that time frame, two football coaches were hired to run the very lucrative and elite football program. Polonsky was not given the opportunity to fill the executive position, which then would provide the leadership and decision-making authority to hire the football coach. President Fenves chose to hire a personal-injury attorney over the long-standing respected female executive (Macur, 2015). This type of decision begs the ethical questions of how and why this is happening within the institution’s hiring and promotion practices. In response, Macur (2015) offered the critical insight that the decision defied reason when she wrote, “this is big-time college sports we’re talking about, and since that has long been an elite men’s club, logic isn’t necessarily given” (para 4).
Table 3  
NCAA Identification of Leadership Positions within Division IA Intercollegiate Athletics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position Title</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Director of Athletics</td>
<td>1,087</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>1,583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Director of Athletics</td>
<td>1,397</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>1,985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Athletics</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chancellor/President</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The data are adapted from the (NCAA, 2017a) Retrieved from http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research

Social Efficiency

Social Efficiency defines education as the mechanism for keeping society up and running. The commentary centers around how education should produce citizens that are prepared to work as laborers in factories, mechanics, and electricians, or even as scientists or engineers to name a few. This frame differs from the social mobility frame where it is concerned with higher education not preparing students to be economically productive and only being concerned with degree attainment. Society will be harmed in this frame if it does not produce the appropriate number of citizens prepared for the workplace. On the surface, this sounds reasonable from a political standpoint, but here is where critical analysis enters.

Can social efficiency and social mobility co-exist with ethnic equality? Who will get the opportunities to attend the colleges of their choice to earn “appropriate” college degrees? What ethnic groups get placed into which vocational courses to help society keep moving? How will education keep society moving if the resources put forth within higher education are not managed in direct support of equitable hiring practices, equitable promotion opportunities and equitable support of the faculty who teach and motivate the students? The tension comes about between these two frames depending on whether they are working to obtain a college degree or a
vocational education (Baez, 2000). Dowd & Bensimon (2015) gave several different examples in their equity scorecard and the guidelines for how to make significant equity-minded decisions. Their book directly asks the question about embedded institutional policies and procedures that continue the cycle of racial inequity. The same ethical question can be asked within athletics. Why aren’t women getting equitable opportunities to advance within the workplace or hired into athletics director roles? I cannot help but wonder if these concerns rest at the seat of an institution’s highest office. Higher education institutions house intercollegiate athletics as one part of a total enterprise. Could the institutional hiring and promotion practices and the dominant culture of intercollegiate athletics be a significant blind spot in higher education, especially when the prevailing mentality supports a win at all cost business model?

The question was raised earlier how embedded institutional policies and practices that inhibit the growth of the under-represented minorities can start to be recognized and addressed. Do the difficulties and solutions point to allocation and use of fiscal resources? It has been said, “follow the money.” Where are resources being consumed on campuses? For example, Baez (2000) questioned the academic cultural bias against faculty of color. Athletics is very diverse on the fields and courts of play, but look down the benches and tour the website staff directories; the lack of gender and ethnic diversity starts to show (NCAA, 2017a). The Lapchick (2017) report from TIDES stated, that campus leadership receives a D+ for hiring practices for race and for gender an F (p. 1). Athletic staff minorities within the administrative workforce are women and people of color (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Lapchick 2017; NCAA, 2017a).

One doesn’t have to look very far to see where the money is made and spent in the “Power 5” intercollegiate athletic world. The elite football programs are generating millions of dollars of revenue and at the same time consuming them in expenses like coaches’ salaries,
facility up-grades, and, most recently as the headlines indicate, infraction case penalties (The University of Mississippi NCAA case site, 2017). For example, the University of Mississippi athletics department has a current infractions case that has an estimated cost upward of 15 million dollars that could include lost ticket revenue, fund raising revenue, conference revenue, and attorney expenses. In the response to allegations, the University announced the football team would impose a post season bowl ban for the 2017 season, which is an immediate revenue loss of eight million dollars. The NCAA final sanctions were just released to the University and an additional bowl ban for 2018 was added. The financial impact of this sanction could be another eight million dollars added to the estimated 15 million revenue loss (The University of Mississippi NCAA case site, 2017). Another example stands out with the University of Louisville men’s basketball program being sanctioned with a penalty to vacate wins for 108 games to include an NCAA National Championship. These sanctions require a pay back to the NCAA of all the revenue the University of Louisville received during the NCAA basketball championships, which could be in the millions (NCAA, 2017f).

Athletics is only one portion of the higher education enterprise as discussed earlier. Where will these athletics departments and institutions make up this revenue? Will costs be distributed onto the student body in tuition or student fee increases, other athletic programs’ budgets reduced, or will the fans see increased ticket prices? Each institution has a different established connection and management of the athletic department’s fiscal responsibility. Common sentiment argues these are not gender or race-based decisions, but business decisions. As previously discussed, there exists a shared perception that women cannot lead at a high level and make these types of hard decisions as well as men, can, especially in intercollegiate athletics (Whisenant et al., 2002; Macur, 2015). Yet arguably male leaders who dominate athletics

25
director positions and the masculine-centered culture they have maintained, have brought higher education institutions to the place where intercollegiate athletics ostensibly cost the entire education enterprise both in considerable resources and goodwill. The reality is that women have not been in the top leadership role in any significant proportion to make these so-called business decisions. This is a situation worth more critical analysis.

Are experienced faculty getting passed over for tenure and promotion to administrative roles? Are experienced female administrators getting passed over for promotions or hired into athletics directors’ positions? Are institutions and athletics valuing something else in higher education in place of experience? Is there true fiscal accountability at the highest levels of intercollegiate athletics? For example, the University of Texas President Greg Fenves, along with two of his chosen male athletics directors, Steven Patterson and Mike Perrin, fired and hired multiple football coaches in a five-year period. The revenue consumed paying out the football coaches’ contracts and negotiating the new football coach’s contract is staggering. The University of Texas is liable for millions. Mack Brown’s buy-out was 2.76 million, and Charlie Strong’s buy-out was 10 million (Rovell, 2013; USA Today, 2016). Tom Herman, the current head football coach, has a contract valued at 28.75 million over a five-year term (Berkowitz, 2016). During the 2017 cycle of “Power 5” football coaching changes made by male athletics directors the estimated total buyouts across these institutions is nearing 70 million dollars (Berkowitz, 2017).

Again, the question is raised, would a female leader have made these types of decisions or hires? We simply cannot know the answer to this question because women have not been given the opportunity in athletics to be athletics directors as men have and to make these types of business decisions. (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Lapchick, 2017; NCAA, 2017a).
Democratic Equality

The Democratic Equality frame is centered around the idea all citizens have the right to a quality education that promotes responsibility, good citizenship, and civility (Labaree, 1997). Critics argue that accessibility and affordability are deterrents to the ability for all citizens to receive this opportunity. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayer (2011) stated, “inequality in education is the most pressing issue in diversity in the U.S.” (Santamaria, 2014, p. 348).

Diversity, inclusion and equity in higher education is a hot topic on campuses (Gardner, 2015). Mr. Crow, the president of Arizona State University, wanted to take action on this situation, stating, “thinkers in public administration should stop postulating theories and start offering prescriptions for complex organizations” (Stripling, 2015, para. 3). Mr. Crow has pushed the limits in resetting the mindset of higher education. He believed that higher education must be open to more citizens and the opportunity to move at one’s own pace can offer a better experience. Arizona State University has grown from around 55 thousand students to over 80 thousand students on all campuses. He is recruiting scholarship aid from corporate sponsors like Starbucks to help supplement students’ federal financial aid when tuition costs are not completely covered (Stripling, 2015). Mr. Crow is rocking the boat in higher education. I am not sure if his method is the correct method, but as with the greatest leaders in our society, he is trying. Stripling (2015) explained the radical nature of Mr. Crow’s philosophy; “with his ideas, he seeks to upend the natural order of academe, in which universities derive prestige from the proportion of students they exclude” (para. 1). In this way, Mr. Crow is shaking up the status quo in higher education to enhance inclusion and opportunity by offering more diverse learning models, and he is taking a risk by doing this in a “top down” sort of way. Will we have more presidents take the perceived risk of hiring more women into the athletics director position?
The media attention given to the protests and racial discourse that erupted during the fall of 2015 on several university campuses (University of Missouri, Baylor University, Yale University) has brought concerns of inclusiveness, equity, and diversity on many campuses to the forefront (Armour, 2017; Brown, 2016; Jones, 2016; Wu, 2016). The students on these campuses questioned the executive leadership at the highest levels about how and if their institutions were promoting an atmosphere of inclusion. The students challenged whether their campuses made claims of offering diverse climates that were not in reality, diverse. Ultimately, responsibility for campus climate starts at the top with the executive leadership team (Gardner, 2015).

Intercollegiate departments are not insulated from these conversations. Baylor, Yale, Missouri, Minnesota and Tennessee had their sport team issues front and center of the national media conversation because of the executive leaders’ decisions regarding each of their teams. (Almasy & Shah, 2016; Almasy et al., 2016; Armour, 2017; Wu, 2016). Students, notably including, student athletes, responded in a very public and negative manner to the leaders’ decisions (New, 2017). For example, football teams on the University of Missouri and the University of Minnesota campuses threatened to boycott football games in protest of how a majority of their team perceived the leadership dealt with students’ concerns about campus issues or direct team issues. Had the football players decided to boycott a football game, there would have been revenue loss for the athletic department and the university. On each of these campuses, chancellors/presidents, athletics directors and head football coaches were dismissed or stepped down for their mismanagement in the midst of public outcry. The most recent public outcry was the management of the hiring process of the head football coach at The University of Tennessee. The fan base did not like the candidate that the male athletics director was going to
hire so they conducted a media protest. Ultimately the athletics director was fired after only four months on the job and the female president hired a former football coach immediately without running a search because of the intense pressure (Bonesteel, 2017). When will women get the opportunity at greater numbers to sit in the top leadership positions and have the opportunity to make executive decisions? I would argue a woman could do no worse than the brand embarrassment and financial strain placed on these institutions.

If the institution does not have the right “look” or “make-up” on their leadership team, are they genuinely, leading the critical conversations in the right direction (Santamaria, 2014)? Mary Francis Berry, a former chair and member of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, said “the student protestors are looking for more black people, a reduction in overt racism and micro- and macro-aggressive behavior” (Jones, 2016, p.6). Berry went on to say, “they want more students who look like them, more faculty who look like them, and they want people to be treated differently” (Jones, 2016, p. 6). Berry understands the importance of diversity in executive leadership positions. If the student body or the student-athletes are not seeing a diverse make-up of the leadership team, that can affect their feelings toward the decisions made by these leaders. This will also increase their perceived micro-aggressions. In particular, this study seeks to put forth the perspectives of executive female leaders in intercollegiate athletics that are attempting to move-up through the organizational structure to explore potential limits to their access and full participation and opportunity (Acosta & Carpenter 2014; NCAA, 2017a; NCAA, 2017g).

Nobody will know if these incidents on campuses could have been handled differently with more female executive leaders in place; but at what point will the leaders of higher education institutions address concerns about gender in leadership, and when will female leaders
get the chance to have a sufficient voice in the mix to perhaps offer a different executive decision?

How will intercollegiate athletics promote full citizenship for all student-athletes within the collegiate environment (and ultimately in US society) when it teaches that males are to dominate and that revenue-generation is the most important aspect of sport? Why would universities permit this sort of teaching? To what extent are higher education institutions gendered organizations, too? Can the intercollegiate athletics model of male dominance be changed and more specific white male dominance be changed (Harris, 2017; NCAA, 2017a)? Higher education, and especially the academic side, can be the leader for intercollegiate athletics if there is a change within the executive composition at the institutional level. If white males are consistently the dominant hires, making the final decisions on collegiate campuses including intercollegiate athletics, then how can all campus citizens feel equality of opportunity?

How will intercollegiate athletics model for its female student-athletes and female coaches, or, as Labaree (1997) discussed, “its citizens,” if men are constantly in the final decision-making seat? Donna Lopiano, former chief executive of the Women’s Sports Foundation, stated; “How about blaming the leadership of the nation’s universities? (which you guessed it, is also mostly men)” (Macur, 2015, para 13). Out of 107 division IA president’s positions only 18 women hold the top spot, to the tune of 17% (NCAA, 2017b). It takes a strong leader to make a decision to hire someone that doesn’t look like them or think like them (Macur, 2015). It is easy to make the traditional choice or (some think) the easy choice.

A woman’s presence at top athletic management positions steps on the “norm” that men carry the higher status, ability to manage, and the perception that women are better suited in lower-level management positions (Powell, 2012). But as history has shown, even with the
enactment of Title IX, if only men or mostly men have the final say in many decisions, that can impact where the money will be distributed, which employees receive promotion, who is hired as a head coach, what facility is built, how teams travel, then women lose (Harris, 2017; NCAA, 2017b).

In response to these dominating forces, there often becomes a perceived pressure on the female leaders and female student-athletes within each department to be better, if not perfect, in a perpetually losing and self-defeating battle for equity and inclusion against inordinate odds. In sum, the deck is stacked against them because the “common obstacle for female leaders is that they often lack the presumption of competence according to their male peers” (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2009, p. 68). Does this negative executive leadership in higher education disenfranchise women and women faculty of color, stopping them in their tracks in an ostensibly futile attempt to climb the ladder and break the “glass ceiling?”
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The current review of literature has considered the earliest research that defined management characteristics that separate male and female leaders. This research also defined several topics that are considered barriers to women rising to top leadership positions in the world of business, and these barriers may apply to the experiences of intercollegiate athletics female administrators. The literature review is intended to continue to uncover possible strategies for women in intercollegiate athletics aspiring to move up the ladder to hold higher level executive positions as well as athletics director titles.

Virginia Schein (1973; 1975) developed and conducted the first research concerning characteristics of leadership surrounding sex and gender. Her breakthrough research started the conversation in 1973 and was revisited in 1975 with results surrounding the prerequisite theory that men are more successful middle managers and leaders based on specified characteristics that a man possesses versus a woman. Schein (1973) designed a descriptive index that was used to determine 92 characteristics of adjectives and descriptive terms. She then had them ranked based on positive, negative or neutral attributes linked to male and female middle managers. Some results of the characteristics that are defined to be male were: emotionally stable, aggressive, leadership ability, self-reliant, direct and desires responsibility. The characteristics related to women were: understanding, helpful, aware of feelings of others, sophisticated and neat. Some of the neutral characteristics were: tactful, creative, courteous, intelligent and
competent. The participants then made the determination that characteristics, attitudes and temperament related to the male attributes were a template for more successful management compared to the characteristics that were attributed to females. Another interesting result important to this study, is when the participants, including the women, were asked to choose a male leader or a female leader, a male leader was chosen based on the attributes that are thought to be characteristic of a more successful leader (Schein, 1975).

As this type of research has continued throughout the last 40 years, The Schein Descriptive Index remains a principal tool to determine sex and gender stereotypes of successful leaders. Unfortunately, even after over 40 plus years of women working in the corporate world and intercollegiate athletics, the research still confirms Schein’s original research published so many years ago. Traits that are attributed to men are the sought-after characteristics to high-level leaders across professions (Robinson, 2016; Powell, 2012; Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012; Cundiff & Vescio, 2016; Burton et al., 2009). The next few paragraphs will discuss the attributes of these male-dominated characteristics within sport, why they are sought after, how women have tried and failed to attain those attributes, and ultimately if women are going to advance to top leadership positions in intercollegiate athletics.

Organizational influence of power/structure

Sport is a gendered space (Burton, 2014). The passing of Title IX clearly set the example that law had to intervene just to allow for the possibility of a “level playing field.” In regard to the leadership space, there is no law to account for the historical domination of hegemonic masculinity in intercollegiate sports. To access the organization power structure, one has to look no further than the past.
The numbers show men have held the power positions within the sport organization and are able to make senior leadership positional decisions (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Lapchick, 2017; NCAA, 2017a). If women are not in positions of power: to mentor, to coach, to sponsor, to promote or to hire other women, executive male leaders can choose to overlook women for the highest-level positions and continue to place them in entry and mid-level administrator roles. History has shown this hiring practice continued to happen; therefore, the embedded organizational barriers have not changed.

Can change happen if the institutional structure has been so rooted in the “social norms” of men as the accepted leader? When a leader states he believes in “gender equity” and points to all the female coaches or mid-level female administrators he has hired, he may just be playing into the hegemonic masculine mentality. It is just okay if we allow women to be a part of the leadership team, but at what point is the institutional leadership going to break the “glass ceiling” by empowering more women to be the leader of the team? Burton (2014) revealed that women are hired as leaders when they conform to a gendered “fit” … “that is not young children, well educated, previous high-level jobs, flexible personal schedules, and behaved properly as defined by the male leader” (p.157). However, when women attempt to convey that they have some of the perceived male leadership attributes, they are often in a “double-bind” (Robinson, 2016 p. 109). In this way, women who make a concerted effort to take on some of the designated perceived male leadership attributes like assertiveness find themselves to be thought of as to “too aggressive” for a woman, and if they are collaborative, then they are “lacking confidence” in the decision-making process (Robinson, 2016). This continues to show how some male leaders can set boundaries while in the decision-making chair to hire or place women into leadership roles.
with characteristics that they deem passive and give these women gendered normalcy positions (Burton, 2014). This is turn can possibly provide fewer opportunities for stronger, more assertive women seeking these slots hence experiencing the “double-bind” (Robinson, 2016).

**Micro-aggressions/treatment**

Sport is one of the longest standing male-dominated enterprises. In intercollegiate athletics women, student-athletes, and employees face both types of discrimination: access and treatment discrimination. Burton (2014) defined access discrimination as the exclusion of certain groups and treatment discrimination of these same groups when denied the appropriate resources within the organization to be successful (p. 161). As colleges and universities need women’s sports for equity and NCAA compliance purposes, but also to attract and enroll female students generally, and high-achieving female students in particular, female student-athletes are not going away anytime soon (NCAA, 2017g). The NCAA demographics continue to show an increase in female sport offerings and participation numbers (NCAA, 2017a). Female leaders, whether in head coaching positions or especially in female administrator positions, often have to weed through the subtle-to-overt range of sexist and discriminatory experiences (Basford, et al., 2014). Women in the work place recognize these micro-aggressive statements that are directed at them personally or often witness to these statements made to other colleagues. They then struggle with how to decipher the intent and move forward with their work. Manifestation of negativity and constantly dealing with micro-aggressions begins to impact performance. Each woman experiencing this type of work environment, whether it is a daily occurrence or placed in a strategic moment, often reacts and internalizes the effects differently. For example, some women have personal attributes that help insulate them from certain discriminatory statements directed at them. Other female leaders may appear more offended and respond more defensively
if another woman is receiving intentional or unintentional micro-aggressive statements (Basford, et al., 2014). When faced with this type of decision point, i.e., whether to speak their minds or sit quietly, many female leaders are concerned that they will be perceived as pushy, overbearing, or defensive if they choose to speak.

*Intangibles attributes to executive positions*

Increased visibility, effective decision-making, exuding confidence, taking risks, conveying independence, practicing resourcefulness, limiting life choices, and mastering strategy and communication, are just a few key attributes identified by Robinson (2016) that are being used by many business women to assist them in their daily interactions with co-workers in their attempt to navigate their advancement into the C-suite, which is the chief executive level. The respondents interviewed told their stories as they worked to enter the C-suite. They spoke of the importance of their interpersonal relationships in combination with the intangible attributes listed above, and how they were used in different scenarios throughout their administrative careers to achieve their goals.

For example, a female leader exhibiting confidence in an important meeting can make herself more visible in the eyes of her male boss as demonstrating leadership. As discussed previously, a woman showing the male-identified leadership attribute like being able to make a decision, has been an indicator of their confidence and in their ability. Female leaders have to be willing to continue to be visible, make decisions and not be afraid to fail, to continue to identify with the male-identified attributes (Robinson, 2016). Not making a decision versus failing at the decision made is a risk-taking consideration for female leaders. Some female leaders may want to wait on concrete information and details to back-up their decision-making, which may be perceived by others as a moment of hesitation in making a decision and going out on that limb.
(Ibarra & Obodaru, 2009). Accountability for their decisions and willingness to take risks will increase the visibility of a female leader and bring the respect of her peers and colleagues. With each positive decision made with appropriate results, a female leader can work closer to breaking “the glass ceiling” and continue to chip away at the hegemonic masculine sport world.
CENTRAL PHENOMENON

To investigate the experiences and perspectives of executive female administrators to explore attributes that may enhance or inhibit the advancement of female leaders in wanting to advance to the athletics director position.

- What are the experiences of executive female administrators designated NCAA role of Senior Woman Administrators?
- How do the perceived female leadership attributes, enhance or inhibit the advancement of female leaders in Athletics, including the role of SWA?
- Why are executive female administrators designated as SWA not advancing at a higher rate to the seats of Athletics director at NCAA Division IA institutions?

Methods and Procedures

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of executive female administrators in athletics to explore what factors may enhance or inhibit female leaders from moving into higher positions within intercollegiate athletics most importantly the highest position of athletics director. The study takes a phenomenological stance to compile personally conducted interviews of the “lived experiences” of selected executive female leaders also designated as Senior Woman Administrators. The qualitative methods have included conducting audio-recorded interviews, observations during the interviews, and collecting demographic information about the participants’ backgrounds.
Procedures

NCAA collegiate female administrators served as participants for the study. The potential participants met the following criteria to be invited to join in the study. The participants had the NCAA designation of Senior Woman Administrator, at least 10 years of intercollegiate athletics experience, and were currently employed at a NCAA Division 1A institution.

“Lived experiences” of the participants were made up of many different elements which did include longevity in a work place, similarities of experience levels, and holding the same role of SWA, this in turn compiles the meaning and depth of their experience (Seidman, 2013). The central phenomenon was designed to extract some conclusions around why female administrators are not advancing at a higher rate and what attributes limit or enhance this movement. The participants’ years of experience, level of experience and NCAA divisional experience were sought to increase the possibility for robust and forthcoming data that have been brought back to the central phenomenon with some possible resolutions.

Two more criteria were used to determine the invited participants, but were not considered a mandatory: diversity in ethnicity and diverse institutional affiliation. All participants worked within an NCAA collegiate athletic department, but the study included participants that have worked for more than one institution and participants that have spent their entire administrative career at one institution. The criteria selected was to provide each participant that was invited had a certain level of assumed autonomy within their work environment to provide a rich and robust history of work and personal experiences. These criteria allowed the pool of potential candidates to have reached a level in their career due to
multiple components; thus, these were the female administrators that had much knowledge to share and contribute to this study.

The research was benefitted by the researcher’s personal knowledge and insider experience in intercollegiate athletics. Over 21 years of collegiate experience, the researcher developed a network of high level executive female administrators. In addition, institutional websites provided very detailed biographies of administrators at a majority of NCAA Division IA institutions. As intercollegiate athletics is generally closed to researchers due to the high level of media scrutiny surrounding coaches, staff and student-athletes, the inside perspective of the researcher likely helped the participants feel more comfortable about disclosing personal experiences and perspectives. The researcher personally selected and invited the ten Senior Woman Administrators who participated in the study.

Prior to the interviews, each participant was informed of the study in person or by a phone call. The participant received communications describing the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, description of her role in the study, and an assurance of confidentiality. The participant was asked if she would be willing to be interviewed. The interviews with ten ranged from thirty minutes to approximately two hours. The consent to participate (Appendix C), release to be recorded (Appendix D), and the demographic sheet including questions for the interview (Appendix E) was emailed to the participant. The participants signed and returned the forms to the researcher.

Data Collection

Each participant was interviewed in person at a site that was convenient for her or by skype. The researcher was prepared to go to each participant’s workplace and conduct the interview in their private office. However, with the busy schedules that are expected of these
executive administrators, if their schedule and the researcher’s did not align then the interview was conducted at another location or by facetime/skype. The goal was to place each participant in an environment that she was comfortable to speak genuinely.

*Interview Process/Procedure*

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format (Keegan, 2009). Interview questions were open ended questions to help the participant provide her personal stories, recollections or opinions. The interview questions were developed with the central phenomenon in mind. As I spoke with the interviewees, I probed or followed up with additional questions with the intent to gather further information to provide more robust data collection. Each participant was encouraged to speak freely and not to feel obligated to stay specifically on the interview questions. The intent of eliciting the “lived experience” of the participants through a phenomenological approach was to gain as much knowledge of their experiences that the executive female administrators would like to share for the study.

*Data Analysis*

Each recorded interview was transcribed verbatim by a professional company, VoiceBase Inc. The transcribed document was then emailed to the subject from the researcher to allow her to review the document for accuracy. I read and listened to each interview and made some field notes regarding the researcher’s memory of observations and moments within the interview that may be relevant to the participant’s perceptions of the topics related to the central phenomenon. Each transcript was uploaded to MAXQDA Pro (data analysis company) for data analysis. To interpret the larger meaning of the phenomenon from the interviews, I looked for similarities (common themes) and differences (discrepant accounts) within the participants’ experiences that were recorded.
RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

The athletics director is the highest-ranking position in the athletic department. The numbers show that in 1972 right before the enactment of Title IX, there were over 90% female athletics directors over-seeing only women’s programs (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). When the NCAA merged with women’s athletic programs, the numbers of women athletics directors shrunk as men were place in the position of athletics director in the merged model. In 2014, there were 22.3% female athletics directors over all athletic programs. The numbers decrease by half at the highest level of Division I to 10.6% (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). At present, the number of female athletics directors has dropped to 17.7% across all NCAA Division IA programs, 6.2% at the football bowl subdivision level and 8% at the new elite “Power 5” level (Lapchick, 2017).

The NCAA defined the role of the Senior Woman Administrator in 1982 (NCAA SWA brochure, 2011). The intent was to place a woman at the leadership level to bring a voice to the thousands of female student-athletes involved in college athletics and to work to keep the playing field as “fair” as possible. The numbers show across the three NCAA divisions that as the number of female athletes have risen, the number of female leaders has not (NCAA, 2017a). In fact, the numbers show that 11.3% of athletic programs at the NCAA level “lack any female anywhere in the administrative structure”(Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). The fact that there is even a program that doesn’t have a women administrator in 2017 is mind boggling (NCAA, 2017a).
The continued question is why? This study endeavors to take the data from the “lived experiences” of ten executive level SWAs and identify similarities and differences in their experiences to be explored as themes, and further elucidated as recommendations to support women administrators who aspire to executive positions.

To me, the need for a study of the role of women in the male-dominated profession of sport is vital. The general perception that women should only lead women is no longer valid. The number of articles, studies, and general conversation over the last 40 years demonstrates that: one, the role of women in sport leadership has not been effectively addressed, and two, it is still worthy of exploration when considering question of equity, ethics and social justice.

Participation of girls and women in sport has continued to grow with the enactment of Title IX, but unfortunately the law didn’t put a caveat in place to make sure that enough women would be there to lead and coach the increase in female student-athletes. My 12-year-old daughter asked me when we watched a women’s volleyball match on television. Why are men allowed to coach the women’s teams but women are not allowed to coach the men teams?

This manuscript has shown in the athletic enterprise of NCAA Division IA institutions, female leaders have been and are still underrepresented at the executive levels and are not present at the highest administrative position, the athletics director (Lapchick, 2017; NCAA, 2017a). Leadership research has shown that women are viewed to have very different leadership traits in comparison to their male counterparts (Schein, 1973;1975). Research has shown the traits that men possess are desired and sought after to lead businesses and athletic departments (Burton et al., 2009). The manuscript shows women have a tougher pathway to develop the coveted traits for leadership, they are passed over for promotions, and receive less leadership training than their male counterparts. The manuscript has given many examples of how a more
diverse executive leadership team may effect decisions encircling the athletic department and ultimately the institution. There are many capable executive women that could lead NCAA Division IA athletic departments and this study was designed to help impact the female executive that aspired to be athletics directors and the institutional leadership making a more broad-based decision on their athletics director decision.

Moving forward, manuscript two will discuss the robust findings from the participants that were interviewed. The manuscript will bring forward similarities and differences described in the emergent themes. The findings will be laid out for the reader to join the researcher in accessing the possible next steps and strategies.

Manuscript three will revisit the findings and lay out three drivers and several focal recommendations for the aspiring executive female administrator, institutional administrators and male executive administrators to employ in their everyday administrative experiences to provide more tools for female administrators to move up the athletic enterprise organizational ladder to the highest position, athletics director.
LIST OF REFERENCES
REFERENCES


College Football Playoff. (2017). Retrieved from
http://www.collegefootballplayoff.com/
http://www.collegefootballplayoff.com/revenue-distribution


Harris, T. (2017). *Study: Most of women’s college coaches are white and male.*


Doi:10.1002/ir.20052


http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/inclusion/title-ix-frequently-asked-questions#how


National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2017g). Retrieved from
http://www.ncaa.org/sites/default/files/TitleIX45-295-FINAL_WEB.pdf

http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/media-center/ncaa-101/what-ncaa


Rovell, D. (2013, December). Mack Brown’s buyout only 2.75M. *ESPN* Retrieved from

Ruggies, R., Kaipust R. (2017, November). The price of failure: Husker football’s 3-year revolving door may cost $16.4 million in payouts to coaches, A.D. *Omaha World-Herald*

Retrieved from


LIST OF APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: DEFINITION OF TERMS
APPENDIX A

Definition of terms

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA): is a member led organization that is committed to providing student-athletes with opportunities for life-long success and overseeing a commitment to their well-being. The seven core values are:

- The collegiate model of athletics
- The highest levels of integrity and sportsmanship
- The pursuit of excellence in both academics and athletics
- The supporting role that intercollegiate athletics plays
- An inclusive culture
- Respect
- Presidential leadership (NCAA, 2017h)

NCAA Division I: This is one of the three divisions apart of the NCAA, this division is comprised of schools that have the biggest student bodies and covet the larger sport program budgets. This then allows them to offer more scholarship opportunities and a broader range of opportunities for the student-athlete population. The institutions within this division are still expected to maintain the highest academic standards and maintain compliance integrity (NCAA, 2017h).

“Power 5” autonomy: The NCAA has designated five major conferences as the Autonomy schools, which has been nicknamed the “Power 5.” These conferences include the PAC-12, Big Ten, Southeastern Conference, ACC and the Big 12. There are a total of 65 institutions among these five conferences. They can vote in separate legislation from the other NCAA Division IA institutions to enhance the experience of their student-athletes.

New Year’s Day Six Bowls/The College Football Playoff: Theses six bowls are Orange Bowl, Peach Bowl, Cotton Bowl, Fiesta Bowl, Sugar Bowl and the Rose Bowl. Each bowl has a sponsor that buys the rights over time to brand the bowl like the Allstate Sugar Bowl. These are
the top payout bowls to the two institutions and the conferences in which the teams reside and they are placed in the most prime time television slots for viewing each bowl season. The six bowls are part of The Football College Playoff and rotate to host the top four seeds as voted on by the playoff committee. The two teams that win the bowls hosting the playoff games then are eligible to play in the final championship game of the year, and the winner is the Football National Champion (College Football Playoff, 2017).

The Carnegie Project for Educational Doctorate (CPED): A higher educational program developed in 2007 with the intent of providing educational practitioners an option to obtain a terminal degree. The program has over 80 institutions admitted to the program offering the educational doctorate that combines a rigorous curriculum and a dissertation in practice model of developing a “problem of practice,” researching this problem and analyzing the data to provide meaningful solutions. The University of Mississippi joined the project in 2011 as a phase II institution (CPED, 2017).
APPENDIX B: TABLES
Table 1  
Total Generated Revenues and Expenses by Sport Division I-FBS  
Fiscal Year 2015- Median Values  
Men’s Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sport</th>
<th>Generated Revenue</th>
<th>Expenses</th>
<th>Net Revenue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baseball</td>
<td>$440,000.00</td>
<td>$1,664,000</td>
<td>$926,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>$5,712,000.00</td>
<td>$5,808,000</td>
<td>$271,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowling</td>
<td>$-</td>
<td>$-</td>
<td>$-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crew</td>
<td>$-</td>
<td>$-</td>
<td>$-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equestrian</td>
<td>$-</td>
<td>$-</td>
<td>$-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fencing</td>
<td>$30,000.00</td>
<td>$256,000.00</td>
<td>$207,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Hockey</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football</td>
<td>$21,602,000.00</td>
<td>$16,385,000</td>
<td>$5,231,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golf</td>
<td>90000</td>
<td>$576,000.00</td>
<td>$332,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gymnastics</td>
<td>$93,000.00</td>
<td>$776,000.00</td>
<td>$155,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice Hockey</td>
<td>$882,000.00</td>
<td>$2,496,000.00</td>
<td>$624,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacrosse</td>
<td>$668,000.00</td>
<td>$1,711,000.00</td>
<td>$748,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rifle</td>
<td>$-</td>
<td>$43,000.00</td>
<td>$43,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rugby</td>
<td>$-</td>
<td>$-</td>
<td>$-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sand Volleyball</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skiing</td>
<td>53000</td>
<td>$528,000.00</td>
<td>$437,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>$122,000.00</td>
<td>$1,001,000.00</td>
<td>$612,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Softball</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>$85,000.00</td>
<td>$1,002,000.00</td>
<td>$587,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td>$67,000.00</td>
<td>$630,000.00</td>
<td>$444,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track&amp;Field/Cross Country</td>
<td>$70,000.00</td>
<td>$1,043,000.00</td>
<td>$636,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td>$138,000.00</td>
<td>$824,000.00</td>
<td>$560,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Polo</td>
<td>$204,000.00</td>
<td>$708,000.00</td>
<td>$356,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrestling</td>
<td>$127,000.00</td>
<td>$1,007,000.00</td>
<td>$559,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>$176,000.00</td>
<td>$619,000.00</td>
<td>$375,000.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The data are adapted from the “NCAA website” (2017b) Retrieved http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research/finances-intercollegiate-athletics
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sport</th>
<th>Generated Revenue</th>
<th>Expenses</th>
<th>Net Revenue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baseball</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>$328,000.00</td>
<td>$2,861,000.00</td>
<td>$2,010,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowling</td>
<td>$24,000.00</td>
<td>$359,000.00</td>
<td>$170,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crew</td>
<td>$116,000.00</td>
<td>$1,557,000.00</td>
<td>$1,064,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equestrian</td>
<td>$139,000.00</td>
<td>$1,772,000.00</td>
<td>$113,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fencing</td>
<td>$51,000.00</td>
<td>$424,000.00</td>
<td>$213,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Hockey</td>
<td>$48,000.00</td>
<td>$1,092,000.00</td>
<td>$734,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golf</td>
<td>$73,000.00</td>
<td>$564,000.00</td>
<td>$353,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gymnastics</td>
<td>$116,000.00</td>
<td>$1,206,000.00</td>
<td>$890,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice Hockey</td>
<td>$224,000.00</td>
<td>$1,913,000.00</td>
<td>$1,504,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacrosse</td>
<td>$167,000.00</td>
<td>$1,264,000.00</td>
<td>$685,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rifle</td>
<td>$29,000.00</td>
<td>$72,000.00</td>
<td>$40,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rugby</td>
<td>$71,000.00</td>
<td>$219,000.00</td>
<td>$88,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sand Volleyball</td>
<td>$16,000.00</td>
<td>$202,000.00</td>
<td>$108,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skiing</td>
<td>$54,000.00</td>
<td>$580,000.00</td>
<td>$414,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>$101,000.00</td>
<td>$1,175,000.00</td>
<td>$758,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Softball</td>
<td>$114,000.00</td>
<td>$1,155,000.00</td>
<td>$749,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>$70,000.00</td>
<td>$1,048,000.00</td>
<td>$722,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td>$54,000.00</td>
<td>$688,000.00</td>
<td>$437,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track &amp; Field/Cross Country</td>
<td>$87,000.00</td>
<td>$1,279,000.00</td>
<td>$792,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td>$106,000.00</td>
<td>$1,229,000.00</td>
<td>$743,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Polo</td>
<td>$61,000.00</td>
<td>$844,000.00</td>
<td>$638,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrestling</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>$36,000.00</td>
<td>$245,000.00</td>
<td>$87,000.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The data are adapted from the “NCAA website” (2017b) Retrieved [http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research/finances-intercollegiate-athletics](http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research/finances-intercollegiate-athletics)
Table 3  NCAA Identification of Females Holding Leadership Positions within Division IA Intercollegiate Athletics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position Title</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Director of Athletics</td>
<td>1,087</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>1,583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Director of Athletics</td>
<td>1,397</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>1,985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Athletics</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chancellor/President</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The data are adapted from the (NCAA, 2017a) Retrieved from [http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research](http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research)
APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM
APPENDIX C

Consent Form

Consent to Participate in Research
Title: Perceptions of Executive Female Leaders in Athletics

Investigator
Lynnette Y. Johnson
Department of Education
Guyton Hall
The University of Mississippi
(662)915-7303

Advisor
Amy Wells-Dolan, Ph.D.
Department of Education
Guyton Hall
The University of Mississippi
(662)915-5710

Description:
This research is being conducted as part of a dissertation requirement for an Educational Doctorate. This study will use a phenomenological approach, to interview women that hold executive level athletic leadership positions. The study is asking them to describe in depth their “lived experiences” of their career path to leadership positions in a predominately male, competitive environment.

Associated Time:
Interview time approximately one hour.

Risks and Benefits:
There are no known risks associated with this study. The IRB has determined that this study fulfills the human resources subject protections obligations required by state, federal and university policies. No identifying information about you will be made public and any views you express will be kept completely anonymous. There should be no benefit expected from participating in this study.

Confidentiality:
Research team members will have access to your records during the transcribing of the interview data. We will protect the confidentiality of your information.

Right to withdraw:
You do not have to volunteer for this study, and there is no penalty if you refuse. If you start the interview and decide that you do not want to finish, just tell the interviewer.

IRB Approval-Protocol #17x-070
The University of Mississippi Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed this study. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant or research, please contact the IRB at (662)-915-7482 or irb@olemiss.edu.

Statement of Consent:
I have read the above information. I have been given a copy of this form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions, and I have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

________________________________Signature of Participant __________Date

________________________________Printed name
APPENDIX D: RELEASE FORM
APPENDIX D

Release Form
The University of Mississippi

For valuable consideration, I do hereby authorize The University of Mississippi, its assignees, agents, employees, designees, and those acting pursuant to its authority (‘UM”) to:

- Record my participation and appearance on audio tape, voice memo (phone recorder) or other audio recording device. (“Recording”)
- Use my name, likeness, voice and biographical material in connection with these recording.
- Copy, reproduce, perform, display or distribute such Recordings (and to create derivative works from them) in the whole or in part without restriction or limitation in any formant or medium for any purpose which The University of Mississippi, and those acting pursuant to its authority, deem appropriate.
- I release UM from any and all claims and demands arising out of or in connection with the use of such Recordings including any claims or defamation, invasion of privacy, rights of publicity, or copyright.

Name: _____________________________________________

Address: ____________________________________________

Phone #: ____________________________________________

Signature: ___________________________________________
APPENDIX E: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION
APPENDIX E

Demographic Information

Name:

Current title and role:

Total years of athletic experience:

Years of experience as SWA:

Undergraduate degree/institution attended:
Graduate degree/institution attended:

Collegiate athletes: yes or no

First generation college student: yes or no

Career prior to your additional responsibility as SWA:
  • Title/role:

Topics and Questions of Conversation

Talk about where you grew up and your path to a collegiate education.

At what point in your career did you consider athletics as a career path?

At what point in your career did you get the opportunity to become a SWA?

Talk about your current job responsibilities and departmental role.

What was the pivotal moment in your career path to the position you hold today?

Talk about the mentors or people that have supported you in your career.

To what extent have these mentors been men or women?

To what extent have micro aggression influenced your leadership in your role and your relationships in the workplace?

When it comes to your gender in the workplace, how frequently are you mindful of or reminded that you are a woman in your role?
To what extent to you think the SWA role enhances or inhibits your opportunity for advancement?

To what extent to you think the SWA role enhances or inhibits any female’s ability for advancement?

To what extent to you think the perception female administrators can’t lead football inhibit female administrator’s advancement?

What roles does gender play in your approach to problem-solving and your leadership style?

To what extent are you aspiring to become an athletics director or a “Power 5” athletics director?

Tell me about any limiting factors that you believe restricted your path or altered the path you wanted to take?

What would you say to an aspiring female who would like to work in athletics administration?

What would you tell a woman considering an SWA role?
MANUSCRIPT 2
INTRODUCTION

It is astonishing to comprehend that in 2018, 45 years after the enactment of Title IX, and 37 years after the designation of the Senior Woman Administrator’s (SWA) role by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), that women only hold 20% of the athletics director positions (NCAA, 2018). The athletics director is the highest ranking and most powerful position across intercollegiate athletics. As a female athletic employee of 29 years including 21 years in executive level administration, I feel the responsibility to educate and enhance the development of women that aspire to become athletics directors. If I knew in the start of my career what I know now, about the interworking of intercollegiate athletics and the appropriate ways to maneuver my career path to pursue an athletics director’s position, I might be one now. This career experience led me to conduct this research study. The expectation of this study will be to prepare more female executives in athletics to become transformational leaders, have the appropriate experiences, and develop the needed attributes to become athletics directors.

Schein’s (1973) research defining male and female managerial attributes, explored the expectations of hiring authorities and concluded that male attributes are desired in managerial and leadership positions. Unfortunately, Schein’s research is still valid today more that 45 years later (Powell, 2012). Title IX was enacted in the same year that Virginia Schein was exploring the perceptions of women in managerial roles. Today, we are still discussing the same
perceptions of female managerial attributes. This leaves women to make decisions in the workplace on how they are going to model their leadership attributes. Will they take the positively perceived path of taking on male attributes to advance up the organizational ladder or not (Williams & Dempsey, 2014)?

The hegemonic arena that society has allowed to developed over time around intercollegiate athletics, has created an unequitable space for women to reside. How can multiple decades of social injustice be reversed and a transformational shift of women into more leadership positions take place, when women don’t hold the positions of power: presidents and athletics directors (Lapchick, 2017)?

The intent of this qualitative study was to evaluate in robust detail, the perceptions of ten executive female athletic administrators, each with ten plus years of athletic experience. This qualitative study combined a naturalistic inquiry and a phenomenological approach to illuminate the lived experiences shared by NCAA female athletic administrators. Their rich experiences and perceptions within intercollegiate athletics were documented and analyzed. This format allowed for a small number of standard demographic questions and assorted distinct interview questions to investigate the experiences of the female executive leaders. The interview questions were developed to link back to the problem of practice and the central phenomenon. The perspectives of executive female administrators were collected to explore common themes and discern suggestions to help guide women that desire to advance through the athletics leadership hierarchy to hold the athletics director position.

Each participant was engaged by the researcher to speak about their experiences that led them to pursue an undergraduate education and the decision or circumstance that prompted them to an athletics administration career. The executive women interviewed spoke of their individual
mentors, experiences in the work place, perceptions of what they think about the SWA that came before them, their current role as an SWA, and whether they believe there is a valid need for the SWA role in intercollegiate athletics now. Each participant was asked to focus on her desire to pursue an athletics director’s position. Finally, each woman described some of her reflections about becoming an executive female leader or holding the athletics director position to share with aspiring women administrators.

Central Phenomenon

- What are the experiences of executive female administrators designated as NCAA Senior Woman Administrators?

- How do the perceived female leadership attributes, enhance or inhibit the advancement of female leaders in Athletics, including the role of SWA?

- Why are executive female administrators designated as SWA not advancing at a higher rate to the seats of Athletics director at NCAA Division IA institutions?
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

During the interview process, demographic data was obtained from each participant. The following standard information collected: the total years of athletic experience, the total years of SWA experience, whether or not she was a college athlete, whether or not she was a first generation college student, ethnicity, institutional longevity, what degrees she holds, and if she works at the “Power 5” level. Table 4 and Table 5 identifies the pseudonyms that were assigned to the participants by the researcher and their demographic data. Participants were very open and forthcoming during their interview process; but the researcher informed them that their identities were being protected, so pseudonyms were chosen for each participant. The researcher has also taken additional steps to conceal the identities of the participants if her general details could give her identity away (Seidman, 2013). Finally, the researcher has sent to the participant the demographic tables and her individual narrative. This has enabled her to read the entire document prior to submission to ensure she is comfortable with the outcome (Seidman, 2013).

Participants

Data was compiled from ten current executive female athletic administrators with the designation at the SWA at her institution. All participants were current administrators at NCAA Division 1A athletic departments with six of the women at institutions that are identified as “Power 5” conferences. There are five Black participants and five White participants, and all the participants have more than ten years of overall athletic experience. The women are employees
at institutions from varying regions of the country, and their background history and lived experiences add more layers of regional experiences that bring robust perceptions to convey.

Finally, eight of the participants were collegiate athletes and two were first generation college graduates.

Table 4 Demographics 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>1st generation college student</th>
<th>Collegiate athlete</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debbie</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawn</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barb</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tami</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lori</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maci</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 Demographics 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Total years of athletic experience</th>
<th>SWA years of experience</th>
<th>Current Institution “Power 5”</th>
<th>Institutional Longevity Administrative career</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>Four institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debbie</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>One institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawn</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>Three institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>One institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>One institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>Two institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tami</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>Two institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lori</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>One institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maci</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td>One institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>One Institution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PARTICIPANT PROFILES AND OVERVIEW

The participants in this study were by all accounts very accomplished, effective and successful women in their athletic administrative careers and at their respective institutions. With the study parameter of at least ten years of athletic experience, each of these participants brought a wealth of maturity, observation, understanding, and knowledge of their lived experiences.

The participants shared frank perceptions and very detailed stories. Seidman (2013) cautioned researchers to be as true to the participant profiles as possible unless the researcher feels that transition words or elimination of some oral speech needs to take place. Seidman (2013) recommended bracketing such changes as necessary to identify the narrative adjustments. As expressed earlier, each participant has had the opportunity to review their profile to guarantee they were comfortable with what was being written and portrayed, and that their privacy was being preserved (Seidman, 2013).

Hannah

Hannah began her lived experience talking about education and its importance in her family. It was a given in her family that she would attend college. Her dad was an electrical engineer for a major chemical company, so they lived in a town where there were a lot of scientists. Her mom was a giver, investing in the community; she started the first swimming program for mentally handicapped and physically disabled individuals. Hannah’s parents
divorced early when she was young, but family values and faith remained strong driving forces throughout her life. The divorce was hard on the core family, and Hannah felt she needed to work extra hard in school to make her mom proud.

Hannah entered college as a sophomore as she tested out of her freshman year. She met her husband early in her collegiate career, and they decided to marry after five months of dating. She admitted, “I was a little bit shocked about that, but it was just meant to be, and I had a great confidence in him. It worked; it’s been 39 years, and it’s been good.” Hannah found herself pregnant during her senior year and had to take a leave from her education. She and her husband had two children before Hannah returned to complete her degree in business.

Hannah was not a college athlete, but she enjoyed swimming, downhill skiing, and waterskiing. Athletics administration was not a career that she aspired to hold or was even in her sight. Hannah stated her dream job was to work for a major corporation. She and her husband had two children. They decided she would stay at home with the children which ended up being for ten years. During that time, she started a stationary business in her home. The business had a presence in 34 stores in 30 cities. But as the family grew and the business grew, a two-bedroom apartment for a family of four was not suitable.

Hannah remembered her first job in athletics, “A secretary’s job in the athletics department where I received my degree opened up, and I applied.”

Hannah had a bigger vision in mind for her aspiring career. During the interview process for the secretary’s position, the search committee asked her what goals she had. Hannah recalled thinking, “I want your job.” She decided to accept the athletics’ clerical position, and was promoted to an executive secretary within a year. Hannah knew she wanted more. She was working on eligibility and financial aid, when some issues with the computers and the software
happened in the department. Hannah made the decision to take on the computer dilemma while still holding her current position. Hannah’s clerical position was eliminated after a department strike took place. The department did not want to lose a talented employee so created the first full time compliance position. She agreed to accept the first compliance position in the athletic department and in the conference. She stated: “That really launched my career as an athletic administrator.” Hannah had drive and she left the secretary’s role behind her.

This compliance position served Hannah well. She discovered she could make the tough decisions. She remembered a time when she was put in a difficult situation. She was asked to do something, that she could not live with. A decision had to be made though, and the outcome could place her job at risk. She recalled, “I was very scared. I had a family and kids who needed my income and I thought I might be fired if I refused.” When she refused and told the athletics director he could sign the form, she found her resolve. This was a defining moment in her early career that anchored her set of core values.

Her next stop was the number two compliance position at a “Power 5” university, with a well-known football coach. Hannah remembered, “For whatever reason, my boss kept me out of football. He would say, “Well they’re not used to women over there in administrative positions, they only work with women who are clerical, so I’m protecting you.” Then one day her supervisor couldn’t attend a meeting with the head football coach. The head coach said “If you don’t have the meeting when scheduled, then I will not reschedule.” Hannah’s supervisor decided that she would have to conduct the meeting by herself.
Hannah recalled:

I was scared frankly, because at this point, I was just a bit intimidated. I didn’t know what to expect. I took a positive mindset and practiced the meeting for a couple of weeks prior to conducting it. I would place yellow sticky notes on my wall with the head coach’s name and the other staff attending and went over in my head how the meeting would go. It was a very successful meeting, and the head coach thanked me several times. The football director called my boss and suggested that I attend all the meetings thereafter.

Hannah was starting to develop her administrative style. She wanted to provide support to the coaches and to the student-athletes with whom she worked. She reasoned, “I like to come alongside of people.” Hannah had a way of developing her relationships so her coaches and bosses trusted her. “I didn’t have to ever be heavy handed, I didn’t have to be seen as the bad guy. I could be seen as a partner,” said Hannah.

Hannah’s career was on the move again but continued in the compliance department. Her second “Power 5” institution recruited her to bring her extensive compliance and personal experience to their campus. She and her husband decided to move their family.

Compliance is a very high impact role and can drain you over time. The stigma of the “rule” administrator is often tough. As she transitioned into her second major college athletic department with a very visible football program, she had to make a very concerted effort to let the head football coach know she was going to do her job, but also that she was going to help him with his team goals. Hannah explained to me, “I think being a woman has been an advantage because I’m not in competition with the coach. I’m not questioning his x’s and o’s. I’m really there to support them and come alongside them.” After many years as an executive compliance administrator, she needed a new challenge but wanted to stay within athletics. Hannah turned her attention to her third “Power 5” campus but with a very different administrative experience to be managed.
Hannah had an opportunity to combine her years of compliance and personal skills at her third “Power 5” institution, and that is where she resides today. Hannah can still use her compliance administration skills but she is not the day-to-day compliance director. She does not miss the 2:00 a.m. phone calls dealing with issues. Hannah has a very holistic departmental role now and is designated the SWA. She has a vital seat at her institution’s leadership table and at the conference affiliation leadership table to speak for all athletes. She is a member of campus committees, conference committees, and NCAA committees, which provides her a vast reaching representation.

Lori

Lori was a highly recruited division IA student-athlete. She experienced the recruiting competition from five of the top programs in her sport. They competed hard to recruit Lori to their institutions for her athletic and academic ability. Lori’s athletic excellence would take her a distance away from her hometown and to an understanding of college experience that neither of her parents had an opportunity to experience. Lori was a first-generation college student on both sides of her family. Her elite athletic ability secured her an athletic scholarship which help her receive the opportunity to earn a college degree.

Lori competed for a female head coach. The head coach was also designated the SWA for the athletics department. Because her coach was in the SWA role, Lori knew that position existed although she didn’t really know what the role meant at the time. She felt her coach was a strong leader. Lori felt that her coach would have provided the same leadership in her administrative SWA role, as well. The department decided to create an new administrative position. They moved the SWA designation to this new female administrator. This allowed Lori’s head coach to return to solely coaching and not splitting her time with administration and
appointed that female executive the SWA. It was not uncommon during this time in athletics, that female head coaches would hold the SWA designation.

Athletics was a clear part of Lori’s undergraduate experience, but she was not necessarily considering it for a career. In her senior year, she was visiting a former teammate whose husband was an attorney. He suggested to Lori that she try law school after college, and she thought “why not.” An opportunity to stay at her alma mater and work as a graduate student was offered to her. The athletics academic department had an opening for a graduate assistant. This provided aid for her to attend law school. Lori decided to accept this opportunity and pursue a law degree. Lori spoke about the importance of not accumulating debt while obtaining her two degrees. Athletics was a vital partner in that accomplishment.

The first pivotal point in Lori’s career came when she was finishing law school. Her institution was hosting a conference championship. The associate conference commissioner was on campus for the championship, and Lori had the opportunity to visit with her about her future. The associate commissioner suggested that she apply for one of the conference’s three paid internships. Lori finish her law degree but was not interested in practicing law, so she applied for the conference internship. She loved athletics and law and had contemplated how she could combine them.

The conference internship provided Lori the opportunity she desired, namely to combine her law degree and work in athletics. Halfway through Lori’s internship, the conference commissioner decided the conference would take on a process that would serve all NCAA division IA institutions. He asked Lori to manage this process. She transitioned to the compliance side of the conference office. This was a full-time role and gave her a broad-based look at all conference compliance institutions.
The second pivotal moment in Lori’s executive career came when her alma mater approached her. This conversation was not about her elite athletic ability this time, but to return as an executive compliance officer. Lori accepted and returned back to campus to build the compliance department from the first policy up. She did not join the institution as the SWA. There was already an executive female administrator in that role, so Lori settled into her compliance leadership position.

Lori’s compliance desire was gone. Compliance is a high stress role. After six years and a NCAA infractions case, Lori was ready to move on. She made the decision that she was going to pursue another career choice, but still hopefully in athletics. The department’s incumbent SWA decided to leave the university. Lori was at the right place at the right time to make her career change, without moving to another institution. She was offered a sport administrator position which included the SWA designation. Lori is currently finishing up her 21st year in athletics.

Debbie

Academics and discipline were stressed in Debbie’s family, because her dad was a Lieutenant Colonel. Because of her height, everyone thought she was automatically an athlete. Debbie did not start playing a sport until she was 12. She believed because she started later in her athletic career, she didn’t burn out like a lot of athletes do today. She tried her [sport] because it provided her time with her dad when he returned from the Gulf War. Debbie recalled, “It gave us an opportunity to spend some time together. He had been gone and so that’s how I fell into [sport] and used it as platform to get to [university].” Pursuing a doctoral degree was the core goal of her academic plan, and her sport was a platform for her to access her education.
Debbie never considered a career in athletics, but an injury during her athletics career added an extended year of academic opportunity. During a practice in her last year of eligibility, a vice chancellor on campus stopped by to speak to her. She knew who he was but had not had much interaction with him up to that point. He told her he was looking for an athlete to fill a newly created position. He came to practice to offer her the position. She found out many departmental staff were talking on campus of her abilities and her personal attributes as a student-athlete. Debbie was just finishing up her master’s degree, and she knew this would be an opportunity to work on her doctorate. She finished her college athletics career, graduated with a master’s degree on a Friday, and started a new career in athletics on the following Monday.

The newly created position was designed to allow Debbie to rotate throughout the department working within student affairs. The vice chancellor wanted her to gain a broad-based experience within the department and acquire multiple experiences. Two weeks into her new position, a need arose to support the women’s basketball program as an academic advisor. Debbie was asked to shift to fill that important need and she accepted. She focused on learning her new role in academic affairs and began her doctoral program.

Debbie was named the director of compliance and assigned sport administration after a new athletics director was hired. She had very limited experience to tackle her new job duties. She relied on her more than six years of institutional knowledge and colleagues she trusted to help her in that new position.

A pivotal moment in Debbie’s administrative advancement came when the current SWA left for a new institution. The SWA role was added to her existing responsibilities. Was it the right place at the right time or by default? Debbie continued to question her abilities. Debbie
had to start realizing the impact she had made at her institution, as a student-athlete, as an academic counselor, as a compliance director and now the SWA.

Debbie was the youngest SWA around the table of 11 experienced executive women. She remembered feeling very young, “I was like 25 and sitting there, in awe of the women like yourself and the people who embraced me. She understood the moment, “The SWAs are really important to my professional development because it offered me a space. I didn’t even realize at first why this space was so important in our professional development and even personally.”

Debbie’s ascension into executive administration came very quickly. She expressed again that she felt that she moved into to these positions by “default.” Debbie talks about the environment, staff and colleagues that supported her. They “poured into me,” teaching me so many experiences. Her personal intangibles were what she believes fueled her progress. People trusted her. They knew she cared about this place. She managed her work and colleagues in a highly professional manner.

A turning point in Debbie’s administrative rise was her move to direct the compliance office. She said, “It really stretched me kind of out of my comfort zone. I started to feel more confident because it didn’t feel like I was following into someone else’s spot. It felt like I was responsible for creating something.” Debbie spoke of her father’s confidence in her. He would tell her that she was smart. Her dad could never understand why she struggled with confidence.

Debbie is now the highest-ranking executive administrator at her institution other than the athletics director. She built her career on hard work, taking the opportunities offered to her and trusting in her abilities. She is a leader on her campus and in the conference. One of her most impressive feats is staying true to her goal and obtaining her doctorate.
Barb

Barb is a single parent adding another element to navigating through the enterprise of intercollegiate athletics. She began as an academic counselor, assigned to work with a major college football program. She remembered, “I had to figure it out and make sure that nothing could get in the way of me doing my job. When the phone rang at 8 o’clock at night, or 9 o’clock at night, if there was a question that had to be answered, I did.”

Barb’s dream was to be a director of an athletic academic unit. Barb’s mom was a school teacher, so growing up around academics was a natural fit for her career. In the mid 1990s, there were not a lot of women working around major college football programs. She excelled in this space because she was no-nonsense. She believed, “I gave the student-athlete, mostly football players, options if they asked me for help.” She simply gave them the information to make their decisions. Barb supported them, gave them good information and hugged them. She learned about their families, girlfriends and their struggles. The student-athletes watched her raising her child alone and making it work. Her child would often be sleeping in her office at night while she was working. Barb recalled, “I think that is why they felt a kindred spirit to me. They knew I was single. They came from single homes, so they knew how hard it was for their moms. There was a connection.”

The expectations of a major college football coach are hard to manage however, Barb understood those expectation. She would drive her child three hours to her mom’s house Friday morning and then drive herself back to school to catch the football charter flight that afternoon. She would then attend the game on Saturday, return late Saturday night on the charter flight, and again Sunday drive roundtrip three hours again to take care of her child. Barb believes she was successful working with football as a woman, because the head football coach never saw her
miss an event. She said, “It didn’t matter if it was a morning event, a recruiting event, or a football game, I was there. He knew, I knew my business.”

Barb’s SWA moment came when the sitting SWA retired. Barb wasn’t sure she wanted to step into that role. She had accomplished her dream job of running an academic unit. This was a pivotal decision for her career growth. She would have to leave direct contact with major college football program, to have a more executive administrative role within the department. The new position would also provide her more time to be with her child.

Barb decided that the advancement opportunity was worth leaving her dream job and direct contact with football. The SWA role was a very different experience for Barb. She was more removed from the student-athletes. She didn’t like this and it took some time for her to adjust to how she would need to connect with the student-athletes in this position. Her new position was now supervising the women’s sports programs. Her time demands changed from spending evenings in the academic center to attending a lot of athletic competitions. Barb described, “Soccer and volleyball are during the same season. I would leave a volleyball game to get to soccer match. It was hard, because you’d leave at halftime at one match to get to the other match.”

Barb has worked for four male athletics directors. Each athletics director had a different vision for the department. Her last two athletics directors wanted to divide up sport administration to multiple executive administrators. This took some of the women’s teams from Barb’s oversight and assigned them to other male administrators. She felt this was to grow the experiences of more administrators and provide the student-athletes more direct support.

Barb worked hard to advance her career. Her path to executive leadership working with football, as a single mom was difficult. Driving six hours round trip twice on a weekend to take
care of your child’s needs is hard to imagine, let alone experience regularly. Barb understood what it would take to do her job at the highest level so the football coach, the athletics director or a colleague could not say she was not doing her job. Barb believed,

When I became SWA, I said I had to take on the attitude of a man because I could not wear my emotions on my sleeve. I was going to be like a man in this position. Nothing would get under my skin. Nothing would bother me. It was what it was.

Mary

Mary’s collegiate playing experience was part of small athletic department. She knew there were athletic administrators; however, they were not visible to her. She knew the athletics director, but just barely. She was unaware of administration and detail of running an athletic department. Mary decided to pursue a law degree after her undergraduate experience.

She choose a law school at a very large university. The athletics department was an extremely large intercollegiate program as well. She had a first-hand knowledge of athletics as an athlete; however, she didn’t understand or get to see all that went into running a athletics program during her undergraduate experience. She had an opportunity during her law education to interact with the athletics department, and the multi-facet enterprise started to become visible to her. She volunteered in the department between her second and third years of law school. This volunteer experience launched her interest in athletics to a possible career choice. Mary realized that there were people in specific positions managing each area in athletics, such as compliance. She started to see the athletic profession through a business lens not an athletic lens.

Law seemed to be the natural fit in the department of athletics compliance. Compliance takes a set of circumstances, then analyzes them, and then helps come to a set of recommendations within the rules and regulations. This seemed a perfect fit for Mary’s career. After law school graduation, Mary headed back to her home state. She accepted an internship in
athletics compliance and started to demonstrate her abilities in the compliance role. After her internship had concluded Mary started her career in another city and institution in her home state. Mary was a high achiever and she was promoted quickly. She accepted a sport administration role and oversight of more internal departments. After the exposure to multiple departments outside of compliance, Mary realized compliance was not her passion.

Mary met her husband while in law school. He was from that area of the country, and Mary was from the west coast. They were living in Mary’s home state but together decided the next career move needed to move their family more central to both families. Mary pursued a conference office position that was more centrally located to both families. It was important to Mary that the new position not only meet their family’s need but also offer her career advancement.

The conference position allowed Mary to leave athletics compliance behind. The job duties charged her with the logistics and management of running the conference championships. Mary also had a seat at the leadership table with multiple institutions, administrators, and athletics directors. These additional robust experiences at the conference office, linked with her compliance experience and sport administration prepared her resume for the next opportunity. A large college athletics department similar to her law school had a administrative position open. This was a career changing opportunity for Mary and she accepted.

Mary’s current position is a very high level administrative role with multiple functions in the athletics department. The athletics department is a stand along entity from the main campus; therefore, a lot of functions normally shared by a large cohesive unit are duplicated with in their department. Mary explains the department runs all the human resources, informational technology functions and departmental policies separate from the main campus. Mary applies
her law degree to oversee internal areas, is the liaison to the campus attorney and is assigned
sport administration. She now has a resume positioned for an athletics director role.

Olivia

Olivia wanted to play sports when she was a kid; however, the school she attended didn’t
offer female sports. Her dad worked for the school, and she would go to practice and play every
day with him. Olivia’s mom went to the superintendent to inquire about adding female sports at
the school. This was in the early 1970s and Title IX was just on the books. The country was not
yet prepared to support female athletes. The superintendent let her mom know that female sports
were not to be added at that time.

However, Olivia still wanted to participate in sports, especially basketball. Her dad
accepted a new position at a different school district, and female sports were offered there.
Women’s basketball was still six on six in this area of the country—three players on defense and
three on offense. Olivia had been practicing for this moment to take the court. She was the new
kid on the block, playing for her dad, in a small town put a lot of focus on her to succeed or fail.
He decided to not start Olivia and bring her off the bench because he had an upper class team. A
complaint was filed on Olivia’s behalf that her dad was “mistreating” her by not playing her. It
was a tough time for her entire family as they negotiated the school drama. Sport was an
important part of their family life.

Fast pitch softball was the next addition to Olivia’s sport interests. Her high school was
one of the few that didn’t have football, so several of the boys and girls decided to form a fast
pitch softball team. There was a men’s league locally so the pitching was excellent and their
team was talented.
Olivia was recognized as a talented athlete. Olivia was recruited to play basketball and softball in college. She had several scholarship offers from multiple institutions. She knew from an early age; however, she wanted to follow in her dad’s footsteps and coach. She decided to compete in college basketball for her hometown college and stay close to family. Olivia still loved fast pitch softball but her school did not offer fast pitch softball. Olivia competed in collegiate sports prior to the NCAA adding women’s sports in 1982. Olivia had professional career opportunities to continue to play basketball overseas, she also wanted to coach. She decided to stay in school, finish her degree, and pursue her career goal. Olivia became a high school coach, like her dad. She stayed in her home state, close to her parents, and to her college. She was very well known and respected in her community.

Olivia knew her father-in-law before she met her husband, because he was a volunteer coach during her undergraduate years. Her father-in-law informed her of an opportunity to return to her alma mater. A new female sport was just added, fast pitch softball. The job posting required a master’s degree. Olivia didn’t have a master’s degree, so she couldn’t pursue the position.

The athletics administration had to think outside the box if they wanted Olivia to coach their first softball program. They decided to offer her a graduate coaching position. She could purse her graduate degree, and coach the team at the same time. Her salary would be her tuition. This was a pivotal point in her career. Would she stay at the high school level or make the move to college athletics? The decision was hard, but Olivia and her husband decided to take the significant pay cut and take this career-changing opportunity.

It was a crazy summer for Olivia, they just cut her loose with the program; she had to travel and an hour each day to campus, attend class, and somehow find a way to recruit a team
full of collegiate softball players. She remembered, “The first game in the history of our program. Our pitcher threw a no-hitter and we won. We were 500 in my first year. It was funny, too, because I had some classes with some of my players.”

One of Olivia’s first experiences with the SWA role was as a colleague. The volleyball coach was also the SWA. The volleyball coach decided to only work in administration and left coaching. Olivia remembered the athletics director’s position opened in the department. The SWA decided to apply. The search committee chose her to take the job, but the university’s president said, “no way I’m having a female in charge of football.” The president’s solution: create two athletics directors positions, one for men’s sports, and one for female sports. Olivia expressed it was difficult to have two leaders. The male athletics director began to establish himself as the leader of the department. The transition in the department back to one athletics director was a difficult time. Olivia didn’t know who was the designated SWA. The female athletics director could technically be in that role, but after the transition back to one leader, there didn’t seem to be a designated SWA.

The university was about to embark on a NCAA divisional transition from II to I, which would also include a new athletics director for the department again. The department needed an SWA for the transition so the president made sure a woman was named the SWA. The athletics department seemed to be in transition for quite some time and so the president didn’t consult the department before the divisional transition.

Olivia tired of coaching after ten years. She was aware of a possible new position for compliance developing with the transition plan. She made the inquiry, and sent word of her interest. They hired her for the assistant compliance position; in addition asked her to assist the
SWA. This added help was news to the SWA who had not been told that Olivia was going assist her. The situation was not ideal, but the women managed.

Olivia was about to lose count of how many athletics directors she had worked for, and now they were naming another. Olivia was used to the angst and transition by now. The president decided not to run a full search and named the athletics director himself. He chose a former football coach with zero administrative experience. The SWA was struggling to receive any support from the athletics director. Olivia was on the front line with the SWA. She decided to kept her head down and stay low on the radar.

The new athletics director didn’t have a plan for the divisional transition; and he really didn’t seem to care how it happened. The SWA decided to confront him. The athletics director did like the discussion, and decided right then it would be her last day. He announced to Olivia that she was the compliance director, and would now oversee all women’s sports. The irony in his actions was he did not name her the SWA at that time. The department continued through the transition to Division IA without an SWA at the campus leadership table, or the conference leadership table. Then one day out of the blue, he named an accountant outside of athletics to be the SWA. Olivia said he never called the title SWA he always called it the “SAW.” The accountant didn’t stay long after. After she left the department, the athletics director walked into Olivia’s office and named her the “SAW.” She remembered the moment laughing, “I am the SAW. I had no duties whatsoever as the SWA. I didn’t get to go to any meetings.”

Olivia remembered how the athletics director made women feel,

This was right after he got hired and he brought in and administrator in with him, and he goes “I’ve to get rid of all these women.” There are too many women around here, I’ve got to bring somebody in that’ll be on my side. And he goes out and hires this guy that didn’t have a clue and made him his second in charge.”
Olivia has worked for seven athletics directors. She will never forget the first meeting with athletics director number seven. After he was hired, he asked questions about the divisional transition that they couldn’t answer. He had true administrative experience and understood the magnitude of his role. He finally made a legit SWA role. He asked Olivia to fill it. Olivia recalled, “A legit position with legit responsibilities and legit sport oversight. Going to the meetings having a voice, being able to walk into his office and voice an opinion. He’ll ask for opinions, and values your opinion.”

Since then, Olivia has been an ever-present administrator for her school. She oversees compliance, event management for assigned sports, and has sport oversight. She doesn’t negotiate contracts for her team’s head coaches or gets involved in budget preparation, but she overall is much more involved in the department than ever before. The biggest difference for her is her athletics director’s confidence in her to make a decision. Olivia finally has an athletics director that respects her abilities, and with whom she enjoys working.

Dawn

She was raised in a middle-class family in a northern state. She grew up with two very hard-working parents. Her mom’s emphasis on education was unmistakable. She knew that an education would enable her daughter to take the next step in her life. She also knew the value of an education allowing her daughter the control to pursue her choice of careers.

Dawn was an athlete and said she was not a strong student. She commented, “Being a high school student athlete, [in her state] there are standards you have to meet, plus my mother, my grandparents, they were pretty strict. They said, ‘you’re going to pass these classes, no matter what.’ Even though she was not the strongest of students, she knew college was a priority
because of her family support. Dawn explained, “I figured out by the end of it, I already had what I needed from an academic standpoint to be a collegiate athlete.”

Dawn was recruited regionally to compete in her sport, but it was an outdoor sport and she thought competing in the snow didn’t make sense. She decided if she was to compete in collegiate athletics; the South was where she wanted to be. Dawn’s mother wanted her to attend an historically black college (HBCU) because of the size and individual attention for education.

Athletics as a career was on Dawn’s mind during her deliberation over an undergraduate degree choice. She decided on marketing and public relations. She thought that would allow her to enter athletics. However, Dawn’s path to athletics began through compliance. Her experience with compliance as a student-athlete led her in this direction. She went to the athletics compliance office to seek an answer to a question she had one day. She doubted the answer to the question. She wanted to research the question herself and found the answer in the NCAA manual.

Dawn wanted to use her educational experience in marketing and public relations to promote her sport. She helped develop ideas around promoting and bringing fans to their events while going to classes. Time seems to fly, and it was time for Dawn to determine what would come next after graduation. She realized compliance intrigued her. “That’s when I realized, okay, I’m going to do this. I’m going to figure out this compliance thing. I ended up getting a graduate assistantship in compliance. That’s when I was full-throttle, this is what you’re going to do.”

Dawn’s athletics career in compliance was off to the races. She would move multiple times over the next several years, gaining invaluable experience at three institutions. She was not the SWA at any of those institutions. She made her latest career move and added more than
a compliance role when she took on included administrative responsibilities. Dawn is a sport administrator, a compliance administrator, and the SWA. Dawn is very driven and soaks up all the expertise she can from her colleagues. Each of her institutional moves were based on an opportunity to grow, and get a different type of experience personally and professionally.

*Tami*

Tami was a first, a first-generation college student in her family, the first of two Black female student-athletes, at her institution, and in her sport. Tami desired to be a lawyer. An athletics career, however, steered her away for over 25 years, but the urge to attend law school has always existed.

While in college her head coach was trying to help her and had a couple coaching opportunities line up for her. Plus an opportunity to stay at her alma mater and pursue a master’s presented itself. She was still considering law, as her institution had a law school on campus. Tami was frustrated, and she knew her coach was as well with her, because she was not ready to make a firm decision. She felt an obligation to her coach. He was a mentor and trying to help. The athletics director sent for Tami to come and speak to him. Tami shared, “Why I was sent to the athletics director, to this day, I don’t know. I don’t know if [coach] had a conversation with him or if the athletics director said to him, “I want to talk to her about this job opportunity.”” She went to speak to the athletics director. The athletics director explained a new area of athletics that was developing and her interest in law may be a perfect for the new area. Tami remembered the next piece of advice the athletic told her, “He said young lady, best advice I ever got and I always pass it on to people. It doesn’t hurt to listen.” Tami in that moment still was not listening and convinced herself that she’d go to law school. However, she didn’t make it to law school.
Instead, she accepted the new opportunity in compliance and the internship at the conference office. Tami shared, “And that one opportunity opened for me because the athletics director said it don’t hurt to listen, and for whatever reason, he picked me to say that too.” After two years of the internship at the conference office, the law still called, and she decided not to look for a position outside of athletics. However, Tami had mentors looking out for her. A mentor was putting her name up for athletic positions. Tami again took the athletics director’s advice and decided to listen to the opportunities.

She listened about a new position at the mid-western institution in a predominantly white community. She wasn’t sure about moving there but thought, as she recalled, “I really never had to think about it, because in my personal life, I would be surrounded by Black people.” She decided to take the new position but much to her surprise, there were no Black people. She found out that the Black community wasn’t even 1% of the population. Tami thought, “I did not think it would bother me as much as it did, and it did. I could see why the Black students struggle there, because I was struggling.”

Tami was not feeling comfortable with her position for multiple reasons. She was now working for a different supervisor. The supervisor that recruited her to the athletic department left to take a new job. The new supervisor was providing her with a different level of support. She wanted the student-athletes that she was assigned to work with to be successful yet they were continuing to struggle. She understood why within this community that didn’t look like them. Also, the Black athletes were not seeing the same expectations for their success. The life experience and expectations looked very different to them.

Tami was a single mom. The toll of moving to a region and community that did not have people that looked like them starting to really take a toll. Tami was able to manage how she
was handling her concerns and work space, however, her child was not having the same success. This brought Tami to a crossroads. A decision that effected more than just her needed to be made.

Tami left athletics. She moved her family to Germany to work for a foundation. Personal medical issues would send her family back to the United States, and back to her home town, and without a job. Fortunately, she battled her illness successfully. She was now ready and needed to look for a new job. Her college coach and mentor again stepped up to support her. He called to inform her of a position near her home.

Tami was called and interviewed for the position, but then never heard back. She began to wonder if they had filled the position with another candidate. A month went by, and the athletics director called her back but and offered her a different position than the one for which she had interviewed. He offered her an Associate Athletics Director position for Olympic Sports, which also included the SWA role. Tami has been at the institution for more than 21 years. She has provided a solid support system for the student-athletes she supports. Her personal career has looked publicly to grow as she has received multiple promotions in title but the compensation behind these promotions was limited.

Maci

Maci was one of seven siblings, one sister and five brothers. Education was stressed in Maci’s family. All seven siblings went to college. Competing and participating in sports was also a part of her family culture. Her dad owned a sporting goods store. One looking in from the outside would think she was destined to be somewhere in athletics. However, Maci wanted to be an accountant. This was also a career learned from the family business. She witnessed this career option first-hand through her family’s sporting goods store.
Maci was introduced to a different and very specific athletic career path in high school. The athletic trainer at her school that provided medical care for the student-athletes intrigued Maci. She decided to change her career path and pursue a sports medicine degree and sit for the national exam to practice athletic training. This started her career in collegiate athletics.

Maci started her athletics career in sports medicine at a large division 1A collegiate sports program. The department placed a lot of expectations on their teams, and her role as an athletic trainer included other responsibilities in team administration during that time. The spouse of the head coach of the team she worked observed her work ethic and auxiliary organization skills. When he decided to accept a new role at and another the university, he invited Maci to go. She had a decision to make, leave athletic training behind and move into an administrative role. She assessed her position and acknowledged that the long-standing director in sports medicine was never going to leave. She realized that her ability to move up at her current institution was not likely to become available. Maci and her husband took a chance and moved their family to another state, to another institution where she began a completely new career path in athletics.

Maci embarked on her new role in executive administration. She had a position that oversaw sport teams plus held the role of SWA. Maci talked about her growth from an assistant athletics director to her current role as deputy athletics director:

I think a lot of that had to do with transition. I don’t know how many athletics directors you’ve been through, but I have been through seven or eight. And when they changed their model, the structure would [change]. At one point in time I oversaw 15 of our 17 sports. I went from assistant to associate, I think to senior associate to deputy director, I can’t remember. And sometimes it was more responsibility, different responsibility, model changes, whatever it might be with a new athletics director coming in.

Maci has been at her current institution for 21 years. She completed her doctorate in 2011 to add to her resume and qualifications. Along the way, Maci has experienced working for two female athletics directors, which is very unique. Maci emphasized the distinctive nature of
her experience: “I’ve been pretty lucky, now I’ve worked for two female ADs, so that pretty cool.”

Laura

Laura went to college because all her friends did. Most of her friends were older so she watched them go to the Local State University, so Laura decided that was where she was to attend college. “I’m going where they are,” she said. Laura wanted to be out on her own and her mom said when she turned 18 she could move out. Her 18th birthday came, so she packed up and moved out. It was not that expensive to attend the Local State University. Laura remembered, “Tuition at Local State University for 12 credits was $150. I can work all summer at camps, quit my job and pay for school.” Playing a sport was also part of Laura’s undergraduate experience. She was not the star player but enjoyed her experience. She realized that she could attend college debt free with this blueprint. Laura was out on her own, attending college with her friends and she paid her own way.

After Laura was done with her undergraduate degree, she needed to decide whether to continue at her hometown university or venture out. She was offered two job opportunities. She remembered, “one with red algae and one with people.” Laura decided; “I was like: people…algae… people…algae and I chose people.” Laura developed a tutor program within the athletics department. However, she discovered she wanted more, which included a graduate education. She made her decision to leave home and Local State University. She headed to the northeast and worked on her master’s. It was there she started her first full-time career in athletic academics. She spent four years at this institution and was able to develop her first experience in athletics administration.
Time to head west; Laura’s career sent her to yet another corner of the United States. She was about to start her 17-year career as a high-level female administrator including the role of SWA. She found out that her new athletics director didn’t know what an SWA was or what that role entailed. She worked for two athletics directors during her early executive administrative years. Both men did not know what the SWA role entailed, how important is was, or what she should do in that role. Laura recalled the conversation:

Athletics director #2 that was hired in, but he really didn’t understand the SWA role either. He came to me, literally, he says this, “I don’t know what the fuck SWAs do, but just do it.” That was my first day with him. We obviously figured it out.

She held the interim title of athletics director last year during the search for the new director. She agreed to hold that title after a meeting with the president of the university, agreeing that if she cast her name in the pool for the athletics director position and was not chosen then she would have to leave. She didn’t want to risk her position as she loves her school and the student-athletes she impacts. Laura has worked 20 plus years at this institution and holds a high ranking title of Deputy Athletics Director.
CENTRAL PHENOMENON THEMES

Following examination coding of the verbatim interview transcripts, listening to full and sections of the interview recordings, and following up with the participants as needed, several prevailing themes emerged. These commonalities are divided into three areas: early life influences, early athletic experiences, and perceptions of an SWA.

Figure 1 Findings’ Themes

Early life influences
- Family
- Undergraduate experience
- Pathway to athletics

Early athletic experience
- Early administrative experience
- Pathway to the SWA role

Perceptions of an SWA
- Discriminate spaces: gender and ethnicity
- AD or not to be AD
- Mentors/sponsors
- Internal vs. External

Early life influences

All of the participants had a strong understanding of the importance of completing their college degree. They were raised in families that had strong opinions on the value of education. A college degree was the ticket to successful life. Eight of the women grew up in families that
had parents with a college education and the value of a college degree was made crystal clear. Two of the participants were first-generation college students with their families stressing the importance of a college degree regardless of their educational level. Nine out of ten participants had athletics as a staple of their family growing up. Eight of the ten participants competed as a collegiate athlete.

Of the eight participants that competed at the collegiate level, several didn’t necessarily consider pursuing athletics as a career. Each of these women had athletics as a primary component of their educational experience and life, but only a few had an expectation athletics being their career path. While their stories varied in how each woman entered their careers in athletics, the ultimate sentiment of enjoying the opportunity to be a part of intercollegiate athletics is consistent. The ten women interviewed average over 22 years of athletic experience, whether their career started immediately after college or developed over time. My story mirrors several of these executive administrators. I was a high school athlete, a collegiate athlete and a career in athletics was my career goal. My career goal was not necessarily to work my way up the organizational chart to an athletics director. For me, the opportunities to continue to advance my career were presented; I took each advantage of each one. A vivid impression from the interviews was the consistent concern for the student-athletes, and the coaches and the staff with whom the participants worked.

*Early athletic experience*

In my observation, it is not uncommon for women to enter athletics in roles that focus upon internal responsibilities versus those that require attention to external responsibilities and departments of intercollegiate athletics. Internal responsibilities are specific to human resources, sport administration, compliance, sports medicine, and academics. External responsibilities
encompass communications, ticketing, marketing, fund raising, and fiscal management. All of the participants interviewed entered their career focusing on internal responsibilities in athletics. Seven of the ten women entered athletics by way of the compliance department. Compliance is born from the NCAA membership developing rules and regulations that each member school must adhere to. Lori and Mary have law degrees. The perception is that law and compliance has been a pathway for attorneys entering athletics.

Each participant entered athletics as the career opportunity presented itself. She didn’t necessarily pick her position; in some ways the position picked her. Only one participant, Maci, who was a certified athletic trainer had a specific career path entry point in mind when she entered athletics. They all followed their opportunities and made the most of each of them. For example, Dawn had a curiosity as a student-athlete that led her to compliance. She explained: when she asked a question of compliance at her school, she thought; “I want to make sure I am getting the correct answer so I would research it myself.” This experience led entry point into athletics through the compliance department even though her degree was in marketing and promotions.

Barb, Laura and Debbie entered their careers through academic support. As noted earlier, no specific career entry point was desired by the participants, a door opened and they walked through. Barb’s family influence as educators guided her to academics. Laura earned a biology degree but she realized she enjoyed people more than plants. Laura and Debbie had a higher educational degree experience in conjunction with their initial athletics career. Laura’s earned a master’s and Debbie earned her doctoral degree.
Pathway to the SWA role

There was never a feeling from any of the participants that they were disappointed with their entrée' point into athletics. None of the women specifically revealed they had a goal of becoming an SWA. Because the SWA role was not a stand-alone position, it would have been hard to directly pursue it. In each of the participant’s lived experience interview, she had the role added to her position at different points in her administrative advancement. Each participant had an intent of doing a great job for their student-athletes and their department.

Satisfactory performance in their assigned positions, in addition to their intangible personal attributes, led to their appointment the SWA role.

Each participant had a path to the SWA role and there are a few similarities on their ascension to this role. Four of the ten participants were promoted into the SWA role. This was similar to my route, my pathway to becoming a SWA. In my case, the SWA decided to retire at the end of the academic year. I scheduled a meeting with the athletics director to discuss my interest in the position. I didn’t interview or apply for the position, I was simply named the SWA. I found out randomly as I stood by the University’s chancellor on the football practice field at a bowl game. He and I were chatting during practice and he told me of his decision to elevate me to SWA. I was to remain the head athletic trainer for the remainder of the academic year and then transitioned to the new Assistant Athletics Director/SWA position.

Debbie was the youngest of the ten SWAs to be promoted into the role. She had only been in a fulltime position for two years when the role was added to her responsibilities. Debbie states she felt she became the SWA role by default. During our interview, we discussed that our work ethic, relationships with the coaches and the student-athletes in addition to our loyalty and love for the institution were evident to the athletics director and that he did not need to look past
us. She understood her value but the nature of her appointment still troubled her. She reiterated, “I think that people can trust me. I know that I care about this place, I think I’m professional but that, “by default concept,” is something I have to work through.”

Debbie and I still hold the SWA roles at our institutions 13 years and 19 years respectively.

Lori was working her internal administrative compliance role. The SWA took a new position as an athletics director. Lori indicated in her interview that she was at a point in her career where she wanted a new direction. Timing sometime enhances opportunity. Lori’s department needed her to make the transition to sport administration and into the SWA role.

All four of the SWAs promoted at their institutions into the SWA role were also student-athletes and alumni of their universities. It would be interesting to explore across all SWAs, whether they played intercollegiate sports, stayed at their alma mater or eventually returned to become the SWA. It would not surprise me if the percentage was strong across athletics as shown by this small sample.

Four participants applied for a new position that also included the SWA role, their specific job duties remained internal but had added sport administrative oversight responsibilities. Mid-level male and female administrators do not normally have sport oversight at the intercollegiate level. Team oversight is often reserved for the upper administrators that have more experience to manage the teams assigned to them. The SWA role often has sport oversight as a responsibility regardless of the female administrators other duties.

The ten female executives interviewed work with men and women’s programs designated the “Olympic teams,” currently none of the women have oversight of football, baseball or men’s basketball. Maci and Laura have been designated as interim athletics directors for their institutions so for a short period of time they had oversight of the entire department. The SWA
is not a job but a designation. It is in addition to a women’s administrative job duties. When I was promoted to the assistant athletics director/SWA, I was assigned the ten woman’s programs. Eventually, I was assigned men’s programs, but it was after six years of administrative work and the retirement of a male administrator before the opportunity came. It is very common for the SWA to only work with women’s programs or the designated “Olympic teams.” Examples of “Olympic teams” are the track and field, golf, tennis, and soccer programs.

Although, SWAs work with all programs in their day to day responsibilities through their internal responsibilities, like compliance or academics (Burton, et al., 2009).

The two SWA’s that were invited by a male colleague to take a new role at another institution, included the SWA role. Maci had to make a decision to move her family of four at that time across the country or remain an athletic trainer. Maci knew her current position had limited growth. They decided to make the career change. Laura was ready for a new challenge so she accepted the new role. This does not surprise me that Laura had to move to have the opportunity to advance. This is probably not uncommon in the fields of academics and business.

Perceptions of an SWA

Olivia’s institution was a very gendered space. Women in coaching positions and administrative positions didn’t feel valued or wanted in the department. Olivia was a long-time coach at her institution and had the opportunity to move into administration. The position became available unfortunately when the athletics director, in a power move, fired the sitting SWA. The athletics director, after dismissing the SWA, walked into Olivia’s office and assigned her the management of the compliance department. However he did not name her the SWA at the time. His leadership was so distant that he didn’t realize the department went without a female leader for the remainder of his tenure. Luckily, for the athletic department, it was a short
tenure. Olivia stayed in her lane realizing that she needed to just do her job. She continued to support the teams, the coaches and her colleagues.

Laura went from one coast to the other to pursue a different opportunity which included the SWA role. The first athletics director she worked with did not know what an SWA was or what she should do. Unfortunately, she had this experience twice while trying to grow the SWA role at her university. Laura remembered a moment when the athletics director was going to move her office away from the executive area, “There was a time when the athletics director was going to move my office upstairs. I am like no, I’m not. You can’t move the SWA out of this space because it sends a message about how you feel about women and he didn’t move me.” It has taken Laura years of experience, but she now understand her gendered space. She is still trying to change the gendered space. Laura understands now, “I am bolder in this space now, if they want to come after me it will be retaliation.” Hannah had a similar experience, she remembered,

When I went to [University X], I had the worst car, the worst office. And really, I didn’t care, because that stuff doesn’t matter to me. I don’t define who I am based on what kind of car I drive, but I knew that’s what the guys see. I was strategic and worked out a trade of offices, so within a year I had a really nice office, I was driving a better car.

These are great examples of working incrementally behind the scenes to change the perception of the gendered space. I can tell you from experience deciding to step forward in these spaces is not as not as easy as typing these quotes. In a department defined by a dominant male-centered culture, it is very difficult to disagree with the male supervisor and why should women have to? The real question is why were Hannah and Laura placed in these decision points at all?

The institutional longevity of a majority of these executive leaders, demonstrates that to stay at their university and work is key for female athletic leaders. There were many periods during my 21 years as an executive leader, I thought it would be better at another university. My
question always returned the same answer. I would still be outnumbered as a woman. At least in the position I held, I felt like I was building the affinity and respect of my male colleagues.

Working within a gendered space is a delicate balance (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). On one hand, you are expected to show leadership, make executive decisions and give important opinions. However, how can that be accomplished, if there no one else at the leadership table that looks like you or understands your perspective? As a woman in intercollegiate athletics holding the executive leadership role, you have to have a confidence to speak up. Early in my administrative career, my opinion was consistently contradicted by male colleagues who were sitting at the table. Many of the participants in this study have experienced the same gendered environment and we were left to make one of two decisions: do we speak up again and defend our opinion or do we just sit quietly and blend into the wood work?

Burton et al. (2009) affirmed that women face discrimination when holding management and leadership positions. One explanation for why women suffer from discrimination in leadership involves the problem of sex-matching, where women are matched to positions based on the high number of women already holding the positions. If few women are in athletics’ leadership positions, then it appears that women simply don’t match up with leadership positions.

The latter was found to be the case in the field of corrections where women have been relegated to low level and low paying roles more often than men (Britton, 2003). In corrections and law enforcement, men are allowed to train and hold the higher paying positions such as the correctional officers and police officers. Although women aspire to assume different roles within this field, they are often relegated to fill pre-designated positions, or are not getting the appropriate training for the higher-level positions because there is no road map for training them
This problem is exacerbated by women not seeing themselves as holding these types of positions as they are growing up or going to school because there are few female role models.

Schein (2007) explained that such a gender disparity has cascading effects. She argued, “Gender stereotyping of the managerial position fosters bias against women in managerial selection, placement, promotion and training decisions” (p. 7). Furthermore, if a woman engages in male leadership characteristics such as being aggressive, independent and self-confident, then she is evaluated less favorably. Yet, if a female leader shows what may be considered to be female leadership characteristics, then she is held to a standard of not having the “right” attributes. I come to the conclusion based on my 21 years of executive leadership experience, that this places female executives in a double-bind.

Burton et al. (2009) discussed how women that develop or work to possess the representative traits or behaviors considered to be those of a strong manager, she can be negatively viewed, even when she is successful. For example, when Tami was considering an SWA job, the athletics director made a statement to her mentor about the type of woman he wanted for the position. Tami recalled that her mentor told her, “he’s interested in you, but he doesn’t want one of those females that is going to be a hell raiser and I know how feisty you are.”

Most of the participants in the study described memorable experiences which they attributed to gender. The extent to which these participants articulated an analytical stance about this varied based upon a number of factors including but not limited to the male colleagues with whom they had worked, their own personalities and the responsibilities and role the SWA played within her specific workplace.
Five of the participants were Black, adding ethnicity in an already gendered space could at times increase the layers of power through which participants had to manage. Debbie said, “I’m thinking, White men dominate the environment, I am a Black woman and there are still things that happen that remind me of that.” Tami told me about her experience at her first institution where her position was created specifically for her. She was in a community that was predominantly White and she was brought into interact with the predominately Black student-athletes. Along the way, she experienced some less than desirable interactions with the football staff. I asked her the extent to which she felt that the job was created for her based upon her ethnicity versus her gender. She responded, “But I don’t know if it has more to do with me being a woman or Black. And if I’m maybe honest, I probably would say it had more to do with me being Black because I could see these young guys are my future. They’re the future of people that look like me.” Debbie expressed that she often felt singularity of her identity. She revealed, “Whether I was on a campus committee or maybe a conference committee. Without saying a word, there is an understanding, when you walk into the room and you are the only African-American, and are the only female.” This is a profound observation made from her perspective, based upon her ethnicity and gender. This underscores the pioneer nature of Black women at the executive level in intercollegiate athletics.

AD or not to be an AD

All the women chosen for this study were current SWAs and held executive level positions within their athletic departments. Each of these women could be on a path to become an athletics director. Five of the participants indicated they would like to pursue an athletics director position. A few of the participants felt that there time has passed them by to become an athletics director. The participants that indicated they would like to continue to pursue an
athletics director’s position voiced different strategies for how they would approach their pursuit. They indicated that the strategy for seeking an the athletics director position would have to include which NCAA divisional level they pursued. Again, if you don’t see someone that looks like yourself holding that type of position, then how can you easily set an approach to obtaining that goal? As the NCAA record shows, not many women hold division IA athletics director positions and there are even fewer at the “Power 5” level (Lapchick, 2017; NCAA, 2017b).

Six participants revealed that they had made career decisions based on their family needs and how it would affect them. Regarding the quest for the athletics director position, families and their personal timing arose as discussion points for all the women. For example, Mary has been pursued to become an athletics director. Her current financial package is as good or better than most NCAA division 1A athletics directors right now, so she has little financial incentive to leave her position. She has the desire to become an athletics director, but she holds a well-paid, high-level position currently and her family is happy. When I asked Mary if she would like to be an athletics director, she decisively answered:

I do, within the right parameters that we have already established, absolutely. It needs to be a good job. They are not all good jobs. I am from the west coast so going west, that would be what I want to do. That would be important and a place that it is set up for success.

Debbie is a deputy athletics director and is the number two administrator in her department. Her reputation and resume is strong for pursuing the top position. She has also interviewed for a couple of athletics director positions but found the timing did not fit her family or career desires.

It is my thinking that the perceptions of female leaders can place us in a box. We may not break the glass ceiling because we start to believe we shouldn’t get the position, can’t see ourselves in the position, or feel that we are not worthy of the position. Debbie wants to be the
athletics director at her institution. She loves her institution, the student-athletes and the culture that it represents but she wonders if she is worthy.

Schein’s (2007) explained that the underlying premise of “think manager-think male,” can derail women’s aspirations. This type of thinking still exists throughout intercollegiate athletics and as Schein (2007) noted, this can explain why the efforts of women to move into the management roles are still difficult. As affirmed by several of the participants, they have made some of their career moves based on family concerns. Schein (2007) alluded to women’s opportunities at senior levels of management needing to focus on designing the work itself to help facilitate family and work-life balance. I would contend that if men are still in the highest-level management roles then work-life balance will not be a predominant concern.

Mentors/sponsors

Each of the participants vocalized the importance of mentors in their career success for varying reasons. All of these women but Maci have worked for only male athletics directors in their careers. Because of the predominance of males, the participants spoke about the importance of men being a part of moving women in the athletic leadership realm. Men possess a majority of the athletics director positions so they have the power to promote women from the mid-manager positions to assistant athletics director, senior associate athletics directors and deputy athletics director positions. The deputy athletics director titles are designated the “number two” positions within athletics. They have an unwritten job duty of football supervision for the men that hold these positions. Three of the participants in this study are deputy athletics directors but do not oversee football. To a participant, significant football contact is a key component to advancement within the athletics management enterprise to the highest seat.
Clearly football makes or breaks opportunity. Female athletics directors at the “Power 5” level are being judged by their football programs’ success. The female athletics director’s elevation into the athletics director seat was made possible on their ability to work with or work in football. Therefore, I would contend that a male athletics director along the way allowed the women that rose to the athletics director position access to football in some capacity. This is sponsorship versus mentorship. I would also contend that these female athletics directors are held to higher standards than their male counterparts on their interactions with the football program and head coaches.

My career advancement has been marked by both positive and a negative football coach experiences. Early in my sports medicine career, I explained that the head football coach allowed me onto the practice field and he valued my input and publicly supported my abilities. It takes men to sponsor women into the football space. Alternately, just six years ago the football coach asked my supervisor, to not work with me. This single request has detrimentally hurt my career to this day. I have tried to climb out of the negative perception that football coach didn’t want to work with me, the only senior female executive.

*Internal versus External positions*

All of the candidates hold internal positions within their departments (compliance, human resources, academics, sports medicine, and sports administration) versus external positions (development/fund raising, fiscal management, marketing, ticketing and communications). All the participants believe that filling externally-focused positions put all athletic administrators in a better position to become athletics directors. It is a perception of all the participants, and I agree, that a majority of women enter athletics through internal positions. The NCAA (2018) survey recently validated the veracity of this perception.
Debbie and Mary want to be athletics directors but you can see by their comments that decisions are going to be based on an amalgam involving salary, family concerns, quality of position, their feeling of worthiness, and an opportunity-- if given to pursue the position they deem desirable. Schein (2007) confirms this list of decision points for the women to move, “Over the years, these job demands and requirements have become acceptable and assumed necessary behaviors” (p. 14). I asked Debbie if she thought that male administrators would think through all of these intangibles? “Heck no,” Debbie said.” I agreed with her. Collectively we have observed that men will take a position for the title and move through the athletic echelon quicker than a woman. This could be one way women can limit themselves in their quest for the top position.

Laura has been an interim athletics director at her institution. She managed the entire department through a football season, and she knew that she could do the job. What was an interesting spot in her pursuit of an athletics director’s position was before she took on the interim position, she asked her president if her application would be considered for the permanent slot. He was supportive right up to stating that if she didn’t get the job she would more than likely need to move on. She took that as a clear message: don’t apply. She handled the interim position and came through that knowing she could do the job at the highest level. Laura would consider an athletics director position but she her thought process would place her back at her alma mater or near home. She also expressed a feeling that we are 10-15 years, away from having a wholesale change in the thinking that White males make the best athletics directors. For the participants in this study who want to be athletics directors, this would time out their opportunities. In my opinion, athletics would be missing out on a lot of talent,
Regardless of gender. Just think about this that during the 10-15 years, how many more men will get the opportunity to hold the athletics director positions over these women and others.

Each of the participants discussed how important mentors are and were in their growth as administrators and in their athletic careers. A lot of the mentors’ male and female have the ability to give their mentees opinions or to provide a reference. As Lori recounted, she was not really considering athletics while in law school but an opportunity to work as a graduate student in athletic academics sent her back into athletics, giving her an opportunity to see athletics differently besides being an athlete. Lori talks about how her mentor brought an opportunity to her and that she benefited from this opportunity.

Lori felt that she was more task-oriented and that she had watched her mentors versus sitting down and having one on one conversations with them. I would agree with Lori, it has been hard for me to have a general conversation with a male colleague. I presume that when women are in meetings with their male counterparts they have a very direct meeting. Men have more in common and may to sit around and chit chat. How does one woman break into the conversation? In this way, male mentors for women are mentoring women differently by speaking to their colleagues about the abilities of the female administrator. Whereas men are building friendships with colleagues, I would say that women rarely experience true friendships. This is a form of sponsorship mix with mentorship. In my experience, as an executive administrator working with more men than women, idle chit chat is not part of my day with the male administrators.

A comment came up during one of the participant’s interview regarding the concept of being considered “one of the guys.” She commented on the perceived comfort level of the male administrators that she worked with being the only women in the room with conversation that
went a bit too far. She revealed that they would tell a crude joke or drop the “f-bomb” and not think anything of it in her presence. As she and I talked about this topic, we discussed that we had shared this experience. We discussed that we chose not speak up at the moment it was happening or at any moment afterward. We agree that early in our careers, we had made the conscious decision that being “one of the guys” was a good thing. We were allowed in the room and we had felt like we were part of the conversation. I will say now looking back at over 29 years of experience in a male-dominated profession that it might not have been the best to just allow this to happen or at the very least continue. To this day, I still feel a level of discomfort with the male colleagues that I work with. It is very difficult to curb an inappropriate conversation going on when you were party to it for so long. This has to stop though if more women are going to advance in leadership levels, because in my opinion it inhibits more than it helps. I have to tell the stories of what is right and wrong, so the cycle is broken, if I am going to be the female leader I want to be, and advance young female and male administrators. It is very difficult to have a male driven conversation as a woman, but women do every day in athletics. The awkward moments when a female administrator is trying to make conversation with male counterparts or her male boss is exhausting: I know.

How are women in gendered professions going to move up the organizational chart? This manuscript described ten very accomplished women and their pathways into the athletic profession, their climb into executive administrative positions along with their perceptions of their designated role of SWA. Virginia Schein (1973,1975 & 2007) over a 34-year period has researched and discussed how there are clearly defined attributes that supervisors value in management positions. Yet these attributes are not perceived as being held or visible in women. If the attributes are revealed in a female executive then she is placed in compromising situations
to wade through with male and female colleagues (Burton et al., 2009; Schein, 2007; Williams & Dempsey, 2014). How can more women advance to the athletics director position if they have to manage through all of these layers to be successful?

Manuscript three will revisit the findings of the study then lay out three drivers and several focal recommendations for the aspiring executive female administrator, institutional administrators and male executive administrators to employ in their everyday administrative experiences. These recommendations are designed to provide knowledge to female administrators that want to advance up the athletic enterprise organizational ladder to the highest position, athletics director.
LIST OF REFERENCES
REFERENCES


LIST OF APPENDICES
### Table 4 Demographics 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>1st generation college student</th>
<th>Collegiate athlete</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debbie</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawn</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barb</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tami</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lori</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maci</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5 Demographics 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Total years of athletic experience</th>
<th>SWA years of experience</th>
<th>Current Institution “Power 5”</th>
<th>Institutional Longevity Administrative career</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>Four institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debbie</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>One institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawn</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Three institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>One institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>One institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>Two institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tami</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>Two institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lori</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>One institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maci</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td>One institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>One Institution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

It is no secret that athletics is historically a male-dominated enterprise (Lapchick, 2017; Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Olympic, 2017). Proof lies in the necessity for the federal law of Title IX enacted in the 1970s to set guidelines that prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex under any educational program receiving federal funding. In the world of athletics this law usually affects women (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; NCAA, 2017a). Also at the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), the addition of the Senior Woman Administrator (SWA) role in the 1980s was designed to ensure there was at least one female executive at the leadership table to support female athletes (NCAA SWA brochure, 2011). Last, studies of intercollegiate athletics completed the by the NCAA (2017a), The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES) (Lapchick, 2017) and Acosta & Carpenter (2014) recording the number of men holding the positions of coaches, mid-level administrators, athletics directors and institutional presidents testify to the significant gender imbalance in the enterprise. Men are leading NCAA programs at the most influential positions such as Deputy Athletics director and Athletics director positions (Lapchick, 2017). There are only four female athletics directors out of 65 opportunities at the highest NCAA level designated as the “Power 5.” Why is there a minuscule number of women leading NCAA Division IA athletic programs particularly at the highest-levels the “Power 5” and how can more women that aspire to be athletics directors move into these most coveted positions (Lapchick, 2017)? Men are setting the tone and the majority of
the decisions because they outnumber women in leadership in athletic departments level by holding the highest ranking the positions and this is solidified by predominately male institutional leadership that holds the president positions (Lapchick, 2017).

There is considerable documented research over the last 20 years detailing the differences between men and women’s leadership attributes (Burton, 2014; Ibarra & Obodaru, 2009; Schein 2007). It is interesting that the attributes defining leadership and the differences between male and female leaders have not really changed over this time. The traits that Schein (1973) identified as feminine or those that women portray are thought to be negative in the leadership realm. These traits include understanding, helpfulness, employee centered and intuitive. Men are thought to be emotionally stable, aggressive, self-reliant and direct. The traits that are attributed to men are the established characteristics that are sought after to run athletic departments (Burton, 2014). Schein (1975) conducted a study of male and female middle managers in a business setting. This study asked men and women to choose a preferred leader based on the attributes that they perceived are best to lead. It was very interesting that the results showed both genders chose the male attributes to be what they perceived to be the successful attributes to lead (Schein, 1975). Yet, women who are more present at mid-management level positions are not afforded the opportunity to make executive level decisions and therefore, their ability to be seen as an effective leader stays limited. Can institutional bias and certain practices along with the executive women’s approach begin to change the hiring outcomes of athletics directors at the Division IA level especially the “Power 5” level?

Williams and Dempsey (2014) identified four obstacles that they believe women in leadership roles are navigating through daily in management positions. The obstacles or metaphors identified were “prove it again,” “tight rope,” “tug of war,” and “maternal wall.”
These four representations paint a picture that resonated with me as an executive female leader. Williams and Dempsey (2014) characterized these four concepts in simple realistic terms. First, women are constantly proving they can lead but don’t get the benefit of banking great decisions; they continually have to prove themselves again and again. Secondly, women are in a double-bind effect on how they should behave on the “tight rope” whether they should express male leadership traits or stay true to themselves. A third depiction is that they must play “tug of war” in the workplace, an effort which requires full assimilation into the man’s world and acting like a man or expressing masculine attributes in the work place. The executive women would in effect want to be viewed through the lens as a male leader leaving the female leadership attributes behind. Finally, women hit the “two-sided maternal wall” which is a barrier imposed when the decision to become a mother will impair her ability to be an effective leader or to do the work required. The “other” side of the maternal wall is not to have children. Here the executive woman has to constantly explain; why she doesn’t have children. If an executive woman decides to pursue advancement in her career and takes on any of these four obstacles then she can “face the penalties for violating societies boundaries” (Williams & Dempsey, 2014, p. 8).

The money that is generated and spent by men’s sports at the highest NCAA level is well documented by the NCAA and sports media (NCAA, 2017b; USA Today, 2015). Money defines the power sports and places them in higher importance within the department. However, recent headlines describing the 70 million dollars needed to cover buyouts for football coaches or an athletics director being fired from his position in less than 4 months because of his mismanagement of the head coach football hiring process, or even multiple high-profile men’s basketball coaches losing their coaching positions after a two-fold FBI investigation involving fraud and bribery signify the need for changes in athletics culture and decision-making
To no one’s surprise, women leaders were not involved in any of these headlines because women do not hold the majority of high level NCAA athletics director positions at the “Power 5” level (Lapchick, 2017).

This manuscript will combine the experience of the scholarly practitioner, summarize the perceptions of the ten executive female leader’s interviews, assess the literature and combine the recent headlines to set out some recommendations for strategies and practices to support the advancement of more female leaders that aspire to be athletics directors. The strategies from this dissertation in practice will provide guidance for breaking through some of the embedded organizational barriers and the overriding impression that women cannot lead consistently the highest, most powerful NCAA level programs.
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The ten female participants were dynamic and accomplished women in the field of athletics and at their respective institutions. They were very engaged and forth coming in their interviews and each would like to see more women advance into executive leadership positions including athletics director positions, if the executive woman chooses to pursue. The combined findings from the interviews have led me to identify three drivers to enhance aspiring female leaders to executive level positions and several suggestions to foster change in the overall enterprise bias.

As required for the study, each participant had ten plus years of athletic experience and each held the SWA role at their institution at the time of the interview. Eight of the ten participants competed in intercollegiate athletics while pursuing their undergraduate degrees. All of the participants’ administrative responsibilities involved internal responsibilities versus external responsibilities which, include compliance, academics, sport administration, human resources and sports medicine. Seven of the ten participants specifically entered athletics administration through the area of compliance.

All participants believed that the SWA role provided them an avenue to an entry seat at the executive table and believed in the importance of the role. However, six of the ten believed that the SWA role can be a delimiting factor in their pursuit of movement up the organizational ladder and into the athletics director position. Unfortunately, women can be in a “catch 22” with
the role: once the female administrator is designated in the SWA role, it is often the only role that she is seen as performing. The actual title of the female executive disappears and each and every time she is introduced it starts with SWA versus executive associate athletics director, for example. Each of these participants have a very important and impactful position at their institution but most are often and only identified as the SWA. This introduction is based primarily on the executive leaders’ gender versus her specific job duties or scope of authority. Their actual title gets lost in the SWA designation regardless of the longevity and depth of experience of the participants have at their respective institutions.

However, the participants expressed strong concern about the title being removed all together from intercollegiate athletics. The participants evinced a lack of trust in the athletic enterprise that should not be taken lightly, given the longevity and depth of experience of the participants with their respective institutions and knowledge of intercollegiate athletics’ culture. If the SWA role was removed for example, the participants expressed fear that access to the executive leadership table might be eliminated as well. Frankly, my strong assertion entering into this study was that the SWA role needed to be removed. However, after this study, I agree with the ten participants that the SWA role is an avenue to gain access to the administrative leadership table and the removal could be catastrophic to the continued growth of women in athletics.

Men lead athletics departments with such disparity that nine of the ten participants have only worked for male athletics directors. The participants have an average of 22 years’ experience in athletics and not seeing more women in the athletics director position during their career may contribute to a feeling that they lack an avenue to the athletics director position. This may be why only five of these female executives would still consider pursuing an athletics
director position. Some of the participants felt that they have reached the point in their careers that the effort to pursue an athletics director position has passed them by. Is this because they held the SWA role for too many years and were not taken seriously by their colleagues or supervisors? Or did they suffer from a lack of role models from not seeing more female athletics directors during their careers? This is difficult to discern as each participant had unique experiences and made different choices.

Alternately, all of the participants spoke very highly of mentors and sponsors that they have encountered during their careers. Each of the women have had male and female mentors along the way. They each spoke to the importance of building vital relationships. Mentors helped them build a network to showcase their abilities. The chance to attend leadership and athletic based conferences provide networking and learning opportunities. Scholarly literature indicated that women are not provided the same level of opportunities to network and attend conferences in general and that women have to work to make this happen for themselves in gendered spaces (Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012).

Participants relayed varying experiences about the impact of their gender. For example, not all the participants felt they experienced micro-aggressions during their career that impeded their growth. The national headlines of the sexual harassment on Capitol Hill and the entertainment industry is another look into gendered spaces and how hard it can be for women to navigate (Buckley, 2017). As a woman in a male-dominated space, I have learned that women have to decide if they are going to speak up and risk their position or manage through the micro-aggressive comments and the decisions made. In addition, the female administrator will be required to decide whether or not she will take on traditionally-masculine traits of leadership.
Although the latter can again be a delimiting factor for the growth of the female leader as Williams and Dempsey (2014) discussed calling it “tight rope” that women face.

Current events demonstrate that the act of one women stepping up is vital step for calling attention to ending the most extreme abuses of a male-dominated workplace culture (Chira & Einhorn, 2017). One of the female Ford plant workers stated, “If one person doesn’t stand for everybody, then it’s just a continual cycle” (Chira & Einhorn, 2017). This is shown by women that continue to come forward now and tell their stories of harassment in politics and entertainment (Buckley, 2017). Regardless of whether a woman speaks up, it is my assumption that her continued presence in the space allows for more women to enter. Women are not growing at a rapid rate in athletics director positions, but the more that women enter into the athletic organizational structure and are given the resources to maneuver, then women will be athletics directors at a greater rate.

*Improving practice to enhance equity, ethics and social justice*

The purpose of this manuscript was to ultimately relay three drivers and the adjoining strategies to enhance female athletic administrators’ advancement through the athletic enterprise. The following chart depicts these drivers and strategies, with the detail for each within the rest of the manuscript.
Figure 2: Strategies (Individual)

Increase # of female administrators advancing to deputy athletics director positions

- Networking:
  - *attend conferences
  - *apply for leadership internships
  - *be collaborative

- Add more external duties:
  - *fiscal management
  - *fund raising
  - *facility/event operations

- Increased exposure to football

- Be willing to move to gain a promotion

SWA role

- Could be a self-delimiting factor based on perception of role

- Provides immediate seat at the executive table

- Understand the expectation of this role within your specific department

- SWA role: to be or not to be

Decrease self-delimiting factors

- Not moving due to family

- Not applying for higher level positions

- Not willing to take a lateral move for an advanced title

- To be an athletics director or not to be
Increase number of female administrators advancing to deputy athletics director positions

The deputy athletics director’s position, is listed as the “number two” administrator in the athletics. The administrator who fills this position is presumed to have the competence and ability to run an athletics department including football in the athletics director’s absence. The deputy athletics director title is the first considered on resumes as the position that is ready to be interviewed and considered for an athletics director position. To move into athletic positions, more women must hold the title of deputy athletics director.

There are six executive titles that are viewed in the intercollegiate athletics enterprise as the organizational ladder for mid-level management. These executive titles include Assistant athletics director, Associate Athletics director, Senior Associate Athletics director, Executive Associate Athletics director and Senior Executive Associate Athletics director and Deputy Athletics director. If an athletic leader would like to pursue an athletics director’s position then they must work their way up the organizational ladder while building their administrative authority and responsibility.

Table 3 depicts executive titles and the number of men and women across the NCAA Division IA that hold these titles. Unfortunately, the research titles do not match the actual titles that current athletics executive leaders hold. The NCAA has decided to only given two options of mid-management level titles when conducting their research (NCAA, 2018). As institutional leaders, male athletics directors, and female administrators are trying to decipher what this research means and how it can be used to improve the athletic enterprise, if the titles don’t match the current demographics then the research cannot be a true indicator of titles. The NCAA research is so important in data collection for its’ member institutions, but if this is not corrected then their data could be deemed unusable.
Across all levels of the NCAA, if women aspire to be an athletics director then they must continue to work their way up the organizational ladder to the deputy athletics director role.

Three of the women interviewed hold the title of deputy athletics director along with the SWA role. The position places them at the highest level within the NCAA athletic enterprise before the athletics director role. Each of these participants have held their positions for a significant period of time but lack football supervision.

Table 3  NCAA Identification Leadership Positions within Division IA Intercollegiate Athletics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position Title</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Director of Athletics</td>
<td>1,087</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>1,583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Director of Athletics</td>
<td>1,397</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>1,985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Athletics</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chancellor/President</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The data are adapted from the (NCAA, 2017a) Retrieved from http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research

One of the ten participants, Hannah, stated: “I think one of the things that holds women back is the fact that they don’t have experience with football.” Along with this, athletics directors should recognize more female leaders are ready to fill more high-level positions. All ten participants hold internal duties and lack significant contact with football programs. Both of these become a limiting factor when the athletics director is making the decision of who is elevated or hired in as the deputy athletics director. For example, the deputy athletics director position at the University of Mississippi is vacant. I aspire to hold this position and have talked to my supervisor about my interest. In the past decade, I have been passed over twice for the highest-ranking position, as two different male athletics directors decided to hired a male administrator with the same number of years’ experience as me, but with external experience and
ostensibly exposure to football. Currently, I am competing for elevation to the deputy athletics director position with two internal candidates that are male. Each has less overall experience than I do, but they both have external experience in fund raising, communications or strategic planning. My experience is internal as a sport administrator and in, human resources, academic oversight and contracts management. Is my gender or fulfillment of the SWA role limiting my competitiveness for this position? Perhaps my care for the internal responsibilities places me in a part of the enterprise that is perceived as women’s proper place? Or is it simply a lack of football supervisory experience? Maci, a deputy athletics director explained the preeminence of football in the preoccupations of athletics directors. She said, “athletics directors don’t necessarily all take basketball, but for the most part the athletics directors take football and men’s basketball when they delegate out the responsibilities. I think they tend to delegate them out to who looks like them or looks like the coach. So, I can’t look like them, so that doesn’t happen.”

Two of the participants that are deputy athletics directors had the experience of supervising football for an interim period of time, and two held the interim athletics director’s position at their institutions. After their time in the interim roles, the female executives were not hired as the full-time athletics directors. None of the ten women in this study have day to day oversight of the football program. Laura talked about her interim experience and her president’s comments about her pursuing the athletics director’s position, “This last time round as interim through a football season, I knew I could do it. It was very much a confidence booster. I asked the president, if I would apply, would you seriously consider my application? He goes; {Yeah, kiddo, but if you didn’t get hired then you probably need to go.} So, I’m like, mmm…no…I’m not applying, with that being the message.”
Increasing exposure to football is a vital resume component for women aspiring to move up the athletics hierarchy and having a competitive resume for an athletics director’s position. The money and power of major division IA are wrapped around football (NCAA, 2017b). A recent headline puts the University of Iowa again at the forefront on this conversation; “In a male-dominated field, Iowa deputy AD Barbara Burke has stood out. But when will her shot come” (Emmert, 2018)? The article comes on the heels of the discrimination lawsuit won for 6.5 million by the former SWA and head lacrosse coach against the department. Jane Meyer the former SWA was the highest-ranking woman in the department until she was reassigned. These two experiences of executive women within the same athletic department show the double-bind that women are trying to maneuver through in the male-dominated space of athletics. Burke sits “in wait” on her turn to run a major athletics department, though clearly she has the experience (Emmert, 2018). What is the message to women trying to aspire to be athletics directors?

The revenue that is generated as seen on (Table 1, Appendix B) is a key factor that decision-makers are accessing when hiring their next athletics director. Maci relayed earlier in her interview that men are looking to hire employees that look like them and that doesn’t bode well for women competing for the athletics director positions, perhaps even in the presence of 18 female presidents at the Division IA level (Lapchick, 2017). The SWA role is perceived as an internal role and often with oversight for women sports.

Female executives need to consider seeking external operations positions and moving to another institution to increase their responsibilities with key area of oversight, increase their football exposure, and advance up the executive organizational chart. Strategically, women need to consider this as an important factor if they would like to become an athletics director. Still, six of the ten participants discussed a career decision that was made that impacted their family
maybe as much or more so than their own aspirations for career advancement. In this way, women are very thoughtful and bring many factors into consideration for career decisions such as: how do I best support my family, can I take a salary cut for a key position; should I re-locate and take a risk if things are good where I am, and should I make a lateral move.

Other components required for enhancing the advancement of female leaders in athletics involve increasing networking, mentoring (guide, consultant, confidante, teacher) and sponsorship (backer, promotor, underwriter) opportunities. There is a saying “it is not what you know; it is who you know” that gets you a job, a promotion or the “seat at the table.” Mary says, “Making sure I worked with people that cared about me. Again, some of that was foresight and some of that was luck.” Being good and competent at what you do is important, but in intercollegiate athletics getting the “thumbs up” from the right individuals is just as important. Executive women that are ready to pursue athletics director positions need to improve their positioning for advancement by declaring their intent and sending the signals along with their mentors/sponsors to make their aspirations known.

Female leaders need to attend national conferences, be visible and network with male and female colleagues. If I had to do my administrative career all over again, I would attend more conferences and engage in networking. Getting to know other colleagues in any profession is important but it is invaluable to assist in movement throughout the industry of athletics. Mary in her interview agreed, “Find those people that interact with you and that have a legitimate interest in you.” Being strategic in how peers and employees view the female leaders within the department is a key factor in sponsorship and networking. Hannah spoke to the value of working with other colleagues, who were mostly men, and finding a connection with them so they would be inclined to recommend her for hire to their colleagues.
SWA Role

A national conversation about the practicability and implementation of the SWA role needs to take place. I have mentioned earlier in this narrative that the executive women interviewed in this study had varying opinions on the desirability of this role. Does service in the SWA role box female administrators into a perceived set of qualities, skills, and experiences that later deter her as an executive from advancing within the larger athletic organizational structure? Why is only one woman in the department designated for the role with a corresponding seat at the executive table?

Representative of this ambivalence, six of the ten women in this study believed if they could find a way to eliminate the SWA role that they would, however with much reservation. As an SWA for 19 years, I often wonder how removing of the SWA role would affect the movement of women into higher administrative positions. Mary agreed during her interview, “I would love it to go away. Because it’s a designation and it’s not a set of responsibilities, it is not a job title, it is simply a designation.”

Yet, the concern for eliminating the SWA role is agreed upon by all the participants in the study. Historically, the participants all believe that it was a vital role when it originated in the 1980s. The role has unquestionably brought the presence of female leaders into a male-dominated profession. During Laura’s conversation she said, “That title (SWA) seems interesting. I don’t like it necessarily, but I think we need it because if we don’t have it, I don’t trust the system. At times I do trust it and at times, I don’t. We need to be at the conference table.” All participants believe as I do that if this role was not developed then there would have been limited push or no push at all to have a women involved in the decision-making, ostensibly
representing female athletes. Debbie, an African-American participant voiced the confounding dilemma:

To some degree I have an issue with the whole SWA title. I don’t think any of us would feel good about a senior minority administrator or senior black administrator, or a senior gay administrator. There is something about this that just should be no more. And the sad part is that if we were to get rid of the SWA designation, some people would not have any women at the table still.

As stated earlier in the study, there was a time even after the SWA title was developed by the NCAA that athletics directors were trying to justify naming a male administrator into the role. This was the case at the University of Mississippi, right before I was promoted to the position in 1998. A male administrator was assigned the retiring SWA’s responsibilities. Ultimately, the athletics director finally realized that a woman should hold the title of the Senior Woman Administrator. If the SWA role had been dismissed at that time (26 years after the enactment of Title IX), then it would have been an easy path for intercollegiate athletics to then exclude women. Hannah underscored the value of the role when she said, “It there wasn’t a specific position, many of us would not be at the table, would not be in the meeting and being exposed to the conversations. It’s a “catch 22” because it can be limiting when we end up being relegated to just the SWA role. If you are the SWA you are only doing Olympic sports.”

It is very difficult to override the main impression that women can’t manage the largest revenue producing sport because they didn’t play football (Macur, 2015) and cannot be trusted to make the decisions needed to provide critical leadership (Burton et al., 2009; Schein,1975). I think it would be an interesting question to ask male athletics director if they played football and how that has affected their leadership of the sport. The ten female executive female leaders interviewed for this study had at least ten years of collegiate experience but not one has direct supervisory role with football at the time of the study. Football at the “Power 5” level produces
revenue in the millions of dollars for the athletic departments and on the whole football is also
the greatest consumer of the budget. Athletics directors are constantly balancing the needs of the
entire department with the persistent demands of maintaining a highly competitive football
program. However, as women are perpetually excluded from this sport leadership opportunity,
will they be able to develop the skills required to make the critical decisions?

What should happen to the SWA title? On the 45th anniversary of Title IX in 2017, a
roundtable discussion was published of four executive female leaders. In the article, they all
agreed about the importance of the SWA role (Women Leaders in Collegiate Sports, 2017).
Each of the SWAs spoke to the access the role provided them into their leadership position and
the continued expectation to place a woman in the decision-making arena. The possibility for it
to be removed from the NCAA is unnerving. If the SWA role is removed, then the possibility of
not having at least one woman at the table could become a reality. More than the concern for the
limited responsibilities of the role, a larger concern for the participants is the possibility of the
role not being available for future female leaders. The landscape of intercollegiate athletics is
not ready for this shift yet. The SWA role provides a critical access point to senior leadership
even at the pace, one woman at a time.

Decrease self-delimitations

Career decisions for women do not just encompass career goals. Each of the participants
discussed the personal aspects of each of their career decisions. Working women make personal
and family decisions intrinsically as they consider career advancement impacting their rise
through the athletic enterprise. Mary is an executive at a “Power 5” athletic department. She has
a prominent position in the department and financial security. She explained; “I am not willing
to take a job just to get the next job. Maybe that’s why women don’t take transitioning their families around to different places.”

Mary has the ability to be strategic in her next move because of her status and financial stability. There is a moment in a “Power 5” executive female’s pursuit of an athletics director position that financial stability can cause pause to pursuing a mid-major athletics director positions or a deputy athletics director position. For women leaders in “Power 5” institutions, the mid-major athletics director salaries could involve a pay cut or lateral pay move. Mary acknowledged that, she is not interested in taking a job, just to get the next job. For her, a career move does not just encompass the title of athletics director even though she aspires to eventually be one. Her personal career goals and family happiness is unquestionably involved in her decision.

This is an interesting dynamic for female administrators. If female athletic administrators continue to require the fulfillment of more intangibles a motivation for their career decisions, especially if they aspire to the athletics director position, they will get left behind. I believe women have to make their decisions more simple and direct. It becomes more difficult though for that female executive depending on the number of intangibles she needs to manage in her life. Why are executive athletic female administrators not willing to take a lateral financial move for an advancement up the administrative ladder? Hannah said, “Defining value from a financial standpoint is different for women. I think we can define it differently.” I have not considered pursuing a career move for over 20 years. I have two girls, they are in a great school district, we have great friends and my salary and benefits is top 20 in the “Power 5”, as compared to colleague SWAs.
It is important to note that their financial reference point was defined by the SWA salary survey versus the actual job of executive associate athletics director--an important distinction. If the male salaries for the executive associate athletics director position were included in the survey, then the numbers would begin to skew. For example, my salary starts to pale in a comparison with those salaries of executive associate athletics directors. Like Mary, I would not consider a lateral move financially to improve my organizational status. I, too, make personal and family considerations with my career opportunities. My participants affirmed the fact that it is not an uncommon decision for executive women that have families and especially children in primary and secondary schooling to put their careers goals on hold for their family. Half of the participants in this study desire to continue to move up the organizational ladder in their careers but would stop short of pursuing an athletics director position. The other half still want the opportunity to became an athletics director but the athletics director position they would pursue must fit all their career and family needs—and this may be a very difficult bill to fill.

As executive athletic female leaders are making the personal and professional decisions to advance through the athletic enterprise they must get into the pipeline to be hired. If women are not applying for athletics director positions then they will most certainly not be hired into those positions. Search firms keep a pool of candidates that are interested in becoming deputy athletics directors and athletics directors. If the pool is saturated with male candidates, then women especially those without external responsibilities or football experience, will not stand out. One way to know if this is the case, might be to conduct a study of the number of female candidates consistently applying for open athletics director and not getting hired. Another study could be to investigate the number of women versus men in the pipeline to be hired into athletics director positions, including their overall experience level or executive experience at non-elite
institutions. My educated guess would be men are outnumbering women more than 2-1 in applications and the difference in level of experience would be a greater range for the men than women in the pool, with women having a higher mean in year of experience prior to application. Women may be more reserved when getting involved in a search and men may pursue an athletics director job more eagerly at earlier points in their careers.

Decide early in your career if you want to be an athletics director. This advice is valid for men and women aspiring to this position, but essential for women. This study has focused on more women becoming athletics directors, but if a female executive doesn’t want to pursue the position then she needs to understand that career decision early. For example, Maci has the most experience of the participants interviewed and she indicated that she feels like she is beyond the pursuit of the athletics director position now. The effort to place herself in the pipeline is not something she is interested in now. I am 29 years into my career and I am afraid this pipeline has passed me by as well. I didn’t make the decision early enough with full awareness to put the career pieces in place to pursue the top job.

Recommendations to aspiring female administrators

A highly gratifying aspect of my inquiry involved the opportunity to interview my female colleagues in athletics about their perspectives and experiences. With over 20 years of experience in the enterprise of intercollegiate athletics, the participants were asked to share recommendations for aspiring female administrators. During this part of each interview, the participants had the opportunity to lend their robust experiences and turn them into valuable recommendations for current and future female athletic administrators. As each participant emphasized the importance of mentorship in their careers, this moment in the interview allowed the accomplished women to reach the next SWA. Each of the recommendations is targeted for
the aspiring female administrator as she maneuvers through the male-dominated world of intercollegiate athletics.

Each of the participants was asked to share advice for aspiring executive female leaders. Have your core values set, understand what you are willing to do or not do by setting your integrity line, one that you are not willing to cross. Know who you are working for and with and the expectations that are set for the institution and the department. As with any career, there will be a time when you will be placed in a moment or have to make a decision that will test the core values that you have set. Be true to yourself and your integrity, once you make a decision to cross your that line then it becomes impossible to return to baseline.

First impressions are important. Be competent in the work that you do and the position that you hold. Not everyone is trying to help you, including other women in your profession or that you work with. Do your homework, and make sure when you come to the leadership table you bring vital and important information. Be willing to speak up and let the leadership table know you are prepared. Speaking up in a gendered space is critical.

Learn the roles of others to understand and know where they are coming from. This puts more tools at your disposal. This is where executive women have to show savviness. If a women has the opportunity in the executive arena to make a decision and it is the wrong decision, she may not get a second chance, so must be well-prepared. Women in a masculinized space are held to higher expectations than that of their male counterparts (Emmert, 2017; Macur, 2015). Aspiring women need to understand the expectations set from the leadership, the space that they are in, the people they are working with to construct how to be prepared for difficult conversations.
Learn to manage people and bring them along within the profession. A large part of being prepared to interact within a constrained environment is learning how to have crucial and tough conversations. Women need position themselves in their departments that colleagues want their opinions and invite them into tough conversation bringing their vital knowledge. Think about the power of gender socialization: even women thought men would make better leaders (Burton, 2014). Furthermore, Williams & Dempsey (2014) discussed as one the four obstacles representing the “tug of war” that women in leadership roles experience, is that they will need to decide if they will choose to take on traditionally masculine leadership attributes. Ultimately what does that mean within the executive space for women? This means careful attention to authentic personal presentation. Will taking on certain attributes advance a career or just make it more difficult to stay in the space? In this way, the participants said women have to have a thick skin and not let things bother them.

Find a safe space to release, whether that is with a trusted colleague, at home with a partner, or roommate. If you expect the space that you work in to be fair then you will encounter a frustration that will set in over time. Finding people that you interact with and you want to interact with is crucial in the gendered enterprise of athletics. This is not to say that the enterprise is set up to make all spaces that women work unfair or difficult but it is historically a male-dominated environment where women are held to higher expectations. With few women leaders to set the example for other aspiring female leaders, the overall number of experienced women versus men can and does limit women in the profession (Lapchick, 2017).

Persistence is a must within the athletic enterprise. Athletics is a zero-growth business, which means there are no new athletic departments that are being developed, as athletics is encompassed within higher education. There is also not a lot of movement within positions
across athletics. The 20 plus years of experience within the participant pool and their average 12 plus years of experience as SWAs and the longevity of these women at their institutions shows the lack movement and limited opportunities for new women to be hired.

Arguably, the key factor in building the resume to an athletics director is finding a way to add external experience, football supervision or significant contact, fund raising and fiscal management. This is especially important if you entered the athletic profession through an internal position.

*Strategies for Enterprise change*

Figure 3 Strategies (Enterprise)
Thinking about changing an entire enterprise and eliminating institutional bias is an overwhelming project. Scholarship has shown over decades that athletics is a gendered space (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Burton et al., 2009; Emmert, 2017), and with the TIDES research released recently, that has not changed (Lapchick, 2017). After listening to hours of interviews from the very strong and ground-breaking executive women, I have a few recommendations that could be impactful over time. It will take the men in decision-making roles to support women in all professional roles but especially leadership roles and come along side of them to precipitate the change of the male-dominated cultural of intercollegiate athletics. In concert, it will take women maneuvering themselves within the organizational structure to construct their resumes to be ready to pursue openings when presented. Anita Hill has spoken to the overwhelming culture that has come to the surface surrounding the entertainment industry and she reminded us that, “there is no blueprint right now for ridding an industry of sexual harassment. At least not yet” (Buckley, 2017). In this way, I think this parallels the magnitude of the long-standing gendered culture of intercollegiate athletics. Current articles discussing the pervasive sexual harassment on Capitol Hill, the entertainment industry and the powerful car industry of America are a stark reminder that money and power can be intoxicating and can affect the entire enterprise if they are not controlled (Buckley, 2017; Chira & Einhorn, 2017). The newly formed commission in the entertainment industry is tasked with tackling the issue of sexual harassment (Buckley, 2017) may be informative for creating one within the athletics environment. The Commission is being led by some of the industry’s male and female leaders and it is designed for them to come together to discuss how sexual harassment hurts the industry in a multi-faceted way. This is a great time to challenge the NCAA to create a similar commission focused upon the way male hegemony hurts the entire industry in a broad way. Perhaps a minority hiring commission could
take on the clear lack of female leadership and ethnic leadership at the top levels of athletics and institutions (Lapchick, 2017; NCAA, 2017a). Perhaps, the NCAA could take the lead by educating search firms on the lack of minority leadership and suggesting how to diversify their candidate pools when presenting to the committees and college presidents making the hiring decisions for athletics director positions. The NCAA could suggest a “Rooney Rule” to its membership mirroring the National Football League (NFL). This rule enacted in 2003 requires NFL franchises to interview at least one minority candidate during the head coaching hiring process (Dubois, 2017). This may not initially increase the number of women advancing into athletics director positions but it will begin to place women’s resumes in the mix and more women will interview to showcase their abilities. A clear set of recommendations or at the very least good conversation on how to move the membership forward to look more like the student-athletes it serves.

The NCAA can engage the recent survey results on the SWA role (NCAA, 2018) and make impactful recommendations on the future of this title and or how it can continue to be developed. As my researched showed, the ten participants have strong views on both sides of the value of the SWA role. I believe we are at a pivotal point regarding the SWA role and how it inhibits the movement of the highest ranking executive women into the athletic director position. Yes, it gave women the initial entrance to the executive table but it looks as if we are stuck in lower to middle section of the athletic enterprise organizational chart.

Institutional leadership can take the suggestions from the NCAA commissions on best practices for hiring more diversity in top athletics leadership. The enactment of the “Rooney Rule” within the institutional hiring practices to bring more women and minority candidates into the interview process may not move more into the athletic director positions, however; more
minority candidates will be in the pipeline for future positions. Second, athletic directors need to bring their SWAs to important leadership meetings especially with the campus leadership. This puts the female executives in important conversation to be seen by leaders that maybe in positions to hire athletic directors in the future. Finally, institutions that choose to engage search firms to assist in their hiring processes need to set clear expectation on the diversity of the pool of candidates to be reviewed.

Women Leaders in Collegiate Sports is a longstanding leadership organization dedicated to developing and connecting women in collegiate sports. They need to play a larger role in communicating with the NCAA and search firms regarding advancing women through the organizational structure of collegiate athletics. The purpose listed on their website is “We champion women leaders” (Women Leaders in Collegiate Sports, 2017). Women Leaders in Collegiate Sports could have an entire section of their website dedicated to advancement through the collegiate organizational enterprise. The sections could be divided into different levels so the female leaders can choose which level they aspire to obtain but clearly have the athletic director option defined. There needs to be a more collaborative effort between the NCAA, Women Leaders in Collegiate Sports, National Association of College Director of Athletics and the search firms. In my experience, search firms have their pool of clients they are trying to move into specific roles and to be directed by the hiring authorities and educated by the athletic organizations on more diverse pools over time can be very impactful. Ultimately, each entity is much more powerful working together than working independently.

On Monday October 23, 2017, The University of Virginia announced Carla Williams as their new athletics director. It was a historic day for women in sport as Carla Williams is the first African American female and the fifth woman to be named an athletics director at the
“Power 5” level. How and why did Carla Williams get hired over a male candidate? I believe she followed some of strategies and practices discussed in this manuscript.

Carla’s demographics are very similar to several of the participants interviewed. She was a collegiate athlete, she entered athletic administration through the internal side of athletics via academic support, and she was elevated to an SWA role along with her executive duties. Carla is also a parent of three children, who set a plan to become an athletics director while raising her children. I would say the first man to come along side of Carla to support her pursuit of an athletics director’s position was her husband. He supported her and now is moving with her to become a history-making athletics director. The male athletics director at the University of Georgia and the head football coach also supported her pursuit as well. Carla had the opportunity to work with football. Mark Richt the head football coach, at the University of Georgia, requested working with Carla and the athletics director agreed (Saavedra, 2017). Carla was elevated to the deputy athletics director at Georgia. She ultimately decided to remove the SWA role from her title. This opened the door to elevate another female administrator to the SWA role.

Carla now had built a resume that would garner the interest of institutions looking for a new athletics director. The University of Virginia made the decision to hire Carla Williams. It is my educated belief that Carla was very smart and strategic in her career decision to build a resume that would position her to be competitive with male candidates for athletics director positions.

The last piece of the puzzle on her historic hire is that the President at Virginia is a woman, Teresa Sullivan. How did this piece play a role in Carla’s hire? I am not sure we will
know how this piece played into the hire as only 18 women are presidents lead at the Division IA level.

The University of Tennessee’s president is female and she made a quick decision to fire the male athletics director after four months on the job and hire a former football coach within hours (Bonesteel, 2017). The researcher’s assumption is that Carla Williams’ hire at the University of Virginia demonstrated that a president looking at a multitude of factors--not just gender--when hiring her next athletics director helped mitigate the effects of institutional bias. However, without further research and more women obtaining athletics director positions, we will not know.

In conclusion, for the next scholarly practitioner to have new research to unpack and more female athletics directors to interview, the enterprise of athletics at the NCAA division IA level needs to find a way to take the lead in providing more information to women and minority candidates on how to prepare for leadership, communicate to search firms and institutional hiring authorities strategies to increase their pools with more female candidates. Female administrators that aspire to advance up the male-dominated NCAA athletic enterprise need to build an early strategy that covers all the intangible factors that are important to them. The women leaders must begin early in their careers to purposefully construct their experiences, fully understand their work space, and decide how the SWA role will affect their advancement. Women leaders must understand how networking and sponsorship is vital and making sure the right individuals are advocating for them. As was just shown through Carla Williams’ historic hire, she was strategic with her resume components and sculpted a compelling narrative for her qualities to be a “Power 5” athletics director. My optimism prevails that the perceptions of ten executive
leaders and their experiences combined with the suggested strategies for practice will bring more woman leaders to the executive table as the athletics directors.
REFERENCES


Lapchick, R. (2017). The 2017 DI FBS Leadership College Racial and Gender Report Card: collegiate athletic leadership gets a D+ as it is still dominated by white men. Retrieved from 
http://nebula.wsimg.com/ad2f35c9f4915087b67da2f08830d43a?AccessKeyId=DAC3A56D8FB782449D2A&disposition=0&alloworigin=1


National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2011). SWA Brochure, senior woman administrator, understanding the designation and her role on your senior management team. Retrieved from 

http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research

http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research/finances-intercollegiate-athletics


LIST OF APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: TABLES
### Table 1: Total Generated Revenues and Expenses by Sport Division I-FBS Fiscal Year 2015 - Median Values

#### Men’s Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sport</th>
<th>Generated Revenue</th>
<th>Expenses</th>
<th>Net Revenue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baseball</td>
<td>$440,000.00</td>
<td>$1,664,000</td>
<td>$926,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>$5,712,000.00</td>
<td>$5,808,000</td>
<td>$271,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowling</td>
<td>$-</td>
<td>$-</td>
<td>$-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crew</td>
<td>$-</td>
<td>$-</td>
<td>$-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equestrian</td>
<td>$-</td>
<td>$-</td>
<td>$-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fencing</td>
<td>$30,000.00</td>
<td>$256,000.00</td>
<td>$207,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Hockey</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football</td>
<td>$21,602,000.00</td>
<td>$16,385,000</td>
<td>$5,231,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golf</td>
<td>90000</td>
<td>$576,000.00</td>
<td>$332,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gymnastics</td>
<td>$93,000.00</td>
<td>$776,000.00</td>
<td>$670,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice Hockey</td>
<td>$882,000.00</td>
<td>$2,496,000</td>
<td>$629,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacrosse</td>
<td>$668,000.00</td>
<td>$1,711,000</td>
<td>$748,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rifle</td>
<td>$-</td>
<td>$43,000.00</td>
<td>$43,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rugby</td>
<td>$-</td>
<td>$30,000.00</td>
<td>$30,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sand Volleyball</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skiing</td>
<td>53000</td>
<td>$528,000.00</td>
<td>$437,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>$122,000.00</td>
<td>$1,001,000</td>
<td>$612,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Softball</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>$85,000.00</td>
<td>$1,002,000</td>
<td>$677,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td>$67,000.00</td>
<td>$630,000.00</td>
<td>$444,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track&amp;Field/Cross</td>
<td></td>
<td>$1,043,000</td>
<td>$636,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Polo</td>
<td></td>
<td>$70,000.00</td>
<td>$621,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrestling</td>
<td>$127,000.00</td>
<td>$1,007,000</td>
<td>$590,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>$176,000.00</td>
<td>$619,000.00</td>
<td>$375,000.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The data are adapted from the “NCAA website” (2017b) Retrieved [http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research/finances-intercollegiate-athletics](http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research/finances-intercollegiate-athletics)
Table 3  NCAA Identification of Females Holding Leadership Positions within Division IA Intercollegiate Athletics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position Title</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Director of Athletics</td>
<td>1,087</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>1,583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Director of Athletics</td>
<td>1,397</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>1,985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Athletics</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chancellor/President</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The data are adapted from the (NCAA, 2017a) Retrieved from [http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research](http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research)
LYNETTE Y. JOHNSON

EDUCATION:
- Masters of Education, July 1990, University of Mississippi
- Bachelor’s of Science, December 1988, East Carolina University

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS

DEPUTY ATHLETICS DIRECTOR FOR SPORTS & ADMINISTRATION, March 2018-
EXECUTIVE ASSOCIATE ATHLETICS DIRECTOR, July 2009 – February 2018
SENIOR ASSOCIATE ATHLETICS DIRECTOR, October 2002 – June 2008
ASSOCIATE ATHLETICS DIRECTOR, July 2001 - September 2002
ASSISTANT ATHLETICS DIRECTOR, July 1998 - June 2001

- Manage day to day internal operations of the department
  - Senior Woman Administrator
  - Member of Athletic Director’s Executive Management Team
  - Supervise Athletics Human Resources
  - Supervise Athletics Academic Support Services
  - Assist in Facilities/Event Management for assigned teams
  - Liaison with Compliance Office
  - Coordinate Gender Equity
  - Budget authority for assigned teams/supervised areas

- Directly supervise eight (9) head coaches for the following athletic programs:
  Women’s Basketball, Men’s and Women’s Tennis, Men’s and Women’s Golf, Women’s Soccer, Softball, Rifle and Volleyball.
  - Conduct annual evaluation of Head Coach.
  - Negotiate contract and compensation package for recommendation to Athletics Director.
  - Conducted numerous head coaching searches/recommendation for hire (19).

HEAD ATHLETIC TRAINER

- Directed all aspects of health care for 18 intercollegiate athletic programs.
- First female Head Athletic Trainer for all programs (including Football) in The Southeastern Conference
LYNETTE Y. JOHNSON

ASSOCIATE HEAD ATHLETIC TRAINER
May 1996 - January 1997

› Served as acting Head Athletic Trainer.

ASSISTANT ATHLETIC TRAINER
January 1993 – May 1996

July 1990 – July 1992

› Assisted Head Athletic Trainer with all aspects of health care for 18 athletic programs.
› Primary sport coverage for Football and Women’s Basketball.

GRADUATE ASSISTANT ATHLETIC TRAINER

› Primary sport coverage for Women’s Basketball, Volleyball and Track and Field

Wingate University, Wingate, NC

ASSOCIATE ATHLETIC TRAINER
INSTRUCTOR, DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION

› Supervised the inception of the Sports Medicine Academic Curriculum; taught nine (9) academic hours.
› Assisted Head Athletic Trainer with various athletic training room functions and provided athletic training coverage for home intercollegiate athletic events

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS / CERTIFICATIONS:

› Founding/Legacy Member, Chancellor’s Council on Women in Philanthropy, University of Mississippi
› Retired, Certified Athletic Trainer, National Athletic Trainer’s Association (NATA)

COMMITTEES:

› Member, The Southeastern Conference Executive Committee
  (August 2007 – 2008)
› Member, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I Softball Committee
  (September 2002 - September 2004 and September 2014 - September 2018)
› Member, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I Central Region Women’s Soccer Committee (July 2002-July 2006)