

Successful When Given the Opportunity: Investigating Gender Representation and Success Rates of Interscholastic Athletic Directors

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Abstract

Historically, males have almost exclusively controlled sport (Cashmore, 2000). While this control has been evident on the playing field (Sage, 1998) and in the media's coverage of sport (Kinkema & Harris, 1998), it has also been prevalent in all levels of administration positions in sport (Coakley, 2001). In intercollegiate athletics, the difficulties women have encountered in their attempts to assume management roles have been examined in detail (Acosta & Carpenter, 2002). This struggle has also taken place within the more grassroots level of sport governance: interscholastic athletics. The purpose of this study was to assess the status and success rates of interscholastic athletic directors (ADs), with a primary focus on gender. Athletic directors from 423 high schools in two states participated in this study. The preliminary results of the study confirmed the expected findings that hegemonic masculinity was entrenched within the governance of interscholastic athletics as evident in that 90% of the athletic directors were male. When assessing the success rate of the ADs, the results revealed that females who had penetrated the glass-ceiling of athletics management were as successful as their male counterparts, when success is measured as the rate of advancement. The findings indicated that when given the opportunity to serve in administrative positions, females will find success in interscholastic athletics governance.

For centuries, women have found the world of sport to be dominated and controlled by men (Cashmore, 2000). This male dominance of sport has mirrored most other institutions within American society. In the past, early laws initiated and upheld male control in society in general (i.e., women could not own property, operate a business, vote, etc.) (Coakley, 2001). The institution of sport was no different, as women were frequently banned from watching and, when that barrier was broken down, then discouraged from participating. As a result of this male domination, females have been limited and even at times excluded from participation (Sage, 1998). Furthermore, females who have been able to break through the participation barrier have often been given under-represented and biased coverage by the sports media (Kinkema & Harris, 1998).

Beyond the participation and media coverage inequities, women who have aspired to leadership positions in sport management have been buffeted because of the control males have held at nearly all levels within the administration of sport (Coakley, 2001). At the collegiate level, when women were heavily involved in the management of sport, they were often only accountable for female athletics. The segregation of women's athletics from their male peers was systemic within most institutions, demonstrated by the dual governance of intercollegiate athletics. Women were under the umbrella of the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) while the National Collegiate Athletic

Association (NCAA) governed men. Having to fend off Title IX challenges to football and other male dominated programs, NCAA member institutions gained control of women's athletics, which resulted in the demise of the AIAW in the early 1980's. The outcome of the consolidation was the dramatic reduction in the number of females in upper management positions of athletics. Over the past three decades, while the number of female athletes increased, the number of senior female sport administrators declined (Coakley, 2001). In the year 2000, women administered only 18% of women's athletic programs and held only 17% of the athletic director positions (Acosta & Carpenter, 2002). The absence of senior female administrators has not only taken place in intercollegiate athletics, but also at the more grassroots level of interscholastic athletics governance.

Interscholastic Athletics

The position of athletic director is the top administrative post within the athletic departments of high schools. The importance of interscholastic athletic directors cannot be understated as they are often closely associated with the success or failure of athletic programs (Schneider & Stier, 2001). Athletic directors, who are generally placed in charge of managing the day-to-day operations of the high school sports, have been fixtures in most athletic programs since the 1960's (Keller & Forsythe, 1984). The dramatic rise in the commercialization (Sage, 1998) and the number of sports and athletic participants has led to the increased status—and associated increase in responsibilities and expectations—of interscholastic athletic directors (Read, 2000; Schneider & Stier, 2001).

While both girls and boys have increased their participation rates in high school athletics, the most dramatic rise in sport participants has been associated with girls. According to the National Federation of State High School Associations, over the past 30 years, the number of boys participating in high school sports has grown by

only 5% while the number of girls participating has grown at a rate of over 900% (*NFHS News*, 2001). In 1971, there were approximately 4 million student athletes - 3.7 million boys (93%) and less than 300,000 girls (7%). By the 2001-2002 school year, there were 3.9 million boys (58%) and 2.8 million girls (42%). Furthermore, as pointed out by the *NFHS News* (2001), participation rates by girls have increased for 12 consecutive years. The numbers above do show that, while there is still room for achieving gender equity and full compliance with Title IX, significant progress has been made on the interscholastic athletic playing field. However, Title IX compliance has magnified the lack of compliance with Title VII issues. Gender equity within the administration of interscholastic athletics has failed to keep pace.

Gender of Athletic Directors

Although there has been a dramatic increase in the number of females participating in high school athletics, the same cannot be said for female interscholastic athletic administrators. While data regarding the gender makeup of participants is readily available, there is a dearth of information regarding the number of females and males in athletic administrative positions. The authors of this study found no state or national governmental agency that collects or stores specific demographic data related to the administrators of interscholastic athletics. Of all the criteria used by the Office of Civil Rights to enforce Title IX at the interscholastic level, none specifically applies to sport administrators. Within the United States' Department of Education document, "Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Compliance Report," no data related to administrators are requested and reported (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Furthermore, the state coaching and athletic directors associations guard the limited demographic data that are in existence.

Within the academic community, very few studies have examined athletic directors at the high school level (Schneider & Stier, 2001; Stier

& Schneider, 2001). Fewer still have noted the gender makeup of interscholastic athletic directors (Martin, Kelley, & Dias, 1999). Of those investigations of this population, all have revealed the field to be predominantly the domain of males. Oliphant (1995) noted that 98% of the Iowa athletic directors in their study were male, and in Virginia high schools, females represented only 16% of the total population of athletic administrators (Heishman, Bunker, & Tutwiler, 1990). Moose's (1996) study added that males made up 96% of the North Carolina high school athletic directors.

Within their discussion of high school sports, three noted sport management scholars (Masteralexis, Barr, & Hums, 1998) stated that, "the need and demand for well-run sport programs have never been greater" (p. 159). With each high school needing an athletic director, numerous vacated positions exist for qualified candidates each year, regardless of gender. As noted by Schneider and Stier (2001), the trend today, "is to seek out candidates for the position of AD who are trained and who have meaningful experience in the management and administration of sports programs" (p. 213). However, similar to the obstacles noted by Coakley (2001) for females pursuing management careers in intercollegiate athletics, there are major barriers for women to overcome in order for them to join the ranks of those upper-administrative individuals who make the critical decisions in interscholastic athletics. Hall, Cullen, and Slack (1989) pointed out that the issues of power and sexuality need to be examined in order for there to be any understanding of the gendered structuring of sport organizations. Therefore, this study follows their lead by applying the concepts of hegemony and hegemonic masculinity to the rate of advancement of males and females into the most senior role in interscholastic athletic administrative positions.

Hegemonic Masculinity

The modern concept of hegemony includes not only the expression of the interests of a ruling

class, but also contains the idea of acceptance as commonsense by those in practice subordinated to it (McKay, 1997). It can be viewed as a society's simple acceptance of the status quo. According to Sage (1998), sport is one of the most prominent and hegemonic social institutions and cultural practices in society today. Sport has been so tied with males that athletics and masculinity have almost become synonymous (Kane & Disch, 1993). Sport, as a hegemonic institution, naturalizes men's power and privilege over women (Sabo & Jansen, 1992). This is evident not only on the playing field, but also in the coaching and administrative arenas of sport (Schell & Rodriguez, 2000). This hegemony is then further produced, reproduced, and sustained in other cultural institutions and practices (e.g., the mass media).

Hegemonic, or normative, notions of masculinity (i.e., dominance over women and other men, physical strength, bravado, competitiveness) are evident in societal institutions where males attempt to separate themselves from and hold power over females (Kane & Disch, 1993). Hegemonic masculinity is the acceptance of masculinity as the defining characteristic of western society that places women in the position they are (Connell, 1995). In such a society, women are considered off limits in certain areas, sport being one of the most obvious (Segrave, 1994). Women are kept out or limited because sport, through its emphasis on masculinity, affirms male power and control (Schell & Rodriguez, 2000). The powerlessness of women and other subordinated groups is explained away as commonsense or the natural order of things (Donaldson, 1993). Thus, sport—both for participants and administrators—is considered the generic preserve of men.

Researchers have explained the relatively limited number of women in senior administrative positions in sport, "by looking at the individual and her motivation, leadership ability, and skills" (Slack, 1997, p. 8). While much of this literature focuses on how women need to change in order to more comfortably and easily fit into the male-dominated field, scholars have also proposed that

women, rather than adapt, should challenge the hegemonic masculinity found in organizations (e.g., Mills & Tancred, 1992).

Coakley (2001) pointed out seven reasons why women are under-represented in major decision-making positions in sport. Several of those reasons were that men have solid sports connections with other men through established networks and men often have more strategic professional connections. There also exists subjective evaluation criteria in job searches which make women appear less qualified (Hovden, 2000), such as athletic director positions being incorporated into the responsibilities of head football coaches (Whisenant, 2002). Furthermore, limited support systems and professional development opportunities exist for women. Sport organizations have corporate cultures not readily open to the different sporting viewpoints offered by some women (Pastore, Inglis, & Danylchuk, 1996). Lastly, issues surrounding sexual harassment exist within sport settings, and as noted by McKay (1999), sport organizations often are not sensitive to family responsibilities. While each of these issues may individually act as a barrier to the entrance and advancement of females in athletic management, the cumulative effects of these limitations suggest that, according to Coakley (2001), "unless there are changes in the cultures of sport organizations, gender equity will never be achieved in the [administrative] ranks" (p. 220).

Scholars have examined the gendered nature of sport organizations and suggested that changes must occur in the hiring and promotion practices of these organizations (Hall, Cullen, & Slack, 1989). While organizational culture may be strengthened by the recruitment and selection of a homogeneous group of people that fits the organization's mission and goals, such practices are problematic as they can work to exclude women from higher administrative positions (Slack, 1997). This systemic exclusion is referred to as the "homosocial reproduction of managers" (Kanter, 1977). "Organizations tend to find attrac-

tive those candidates who resemble present members in style, assumptions, values, and beliefs" (Schein, 1985, p. 235). Women have been limited in their advancement into upper management positions in sport as a result of these organizational barriers (Hall, Cullen, & Slack, 1989).

Measuring Success

Measuring success can be an easy task when clearly defined quantitative indicators exist. Examples include coaches who are measured against their win-loss records, athletic departments measured against graduation rates, or the level of compliance with Title IX. When measuring the individual or personal success of interscholastic administrators, the task becomes more abstract. Difficulties in measuring individual success are perpetuated by the need to utilize objective measures that minimize the influence of qualitative factors that may be too individualized or qualitative. Qualitative factors tend to be subjective variables that concern themselves with emotional or individual perceptions of issues as they relate to quality of life concerns or job opportunity and satisfaction (Powell & Mainiero, 1992). Quantitative factors focus on measurements such as salary, title, positioning within an organization or industry, individual performance indicators, tenure, loyalty, age at the time of promotion, or rate of advancement. One such methodology used by researchers is the Managerial Achievement Quotient (MAQ). The MAQ is an achievement index used by management scholars (e.g., Hall, 1976; Luthans, Rosenkrantz, & Hennessey, 1985) in studies measuring achievement and success within the business community. The MAQ quantifies achievement or success, by taking into consideration the individual's position or level within an organization and the individual's age at the time the person assumed the rank or position (rank divided by age). The MAQ is based upon the assumption that the higher an individual is within his/her organization, and the younger he/she is, the more successful the individual is perceived to be. There-

fore, for many administrators, organizational level and age are established subjective benchmarks for career or individual success.

For this study, the MAQ was modified to be reflective of the organizational structure within interscholastic athletics. The success ratio was calculated by dividing the UIL classification of the administrator's athletic program by the AD's age at the time they assumed their current position. For example, an AD who manages a 5-A program at age 30 would have a higher success ratio ($5 / 30 = .167$) and be perceived as having achieved a higher level of success or success ratio than an AD who at age 50, began managing a 3-A program ($3 / 50 = .060$).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the success ratio of interscholastic athletic directors, with a primary focus on gender. Slack (1997) pointed out that, "despite the obvious lack of women in leadership positions in sport organizations, there has been little attempt within our field to look at the gendered nature of leadership in sport" (p. 303). Of those limited investigations in sport management, most have focused on the gender distribution, characteristics, and competencies of coaches. This study sought to specifically examine the gendered nature of leadership in sport by examining the advancement rate, or the success ratio, of female and male high school athletic directors. The hypothesis for the study was, the success ratio of interscholastic athletic directors would not differ as a result of gender.

Methodology

The subjects for this study were interscholastic athletic directors from school districts and high schools within two states on the gulf coast of the United States. To ensure a random sampling of the population, all school districts and high schools within the states were assigned numbers and selected utilizing a random numbers table. A self-administered survey was then sent to the attention of the school or district's athletic

director. The survey requested demographic data which included gender, ethnicity, the AD's current age, age at the time he / she assumed their current position, the school or district's UIL classification, and information on any positions or duties in addition to AD which the person was accountable for while serving in their current role of AD. The absence of gender identities of the athletic directors prevented any attempt at stratification to account for gender.

In anticipation of limitations resulting from unequal sample sizes due to gender, independent samples t-tests were to be used for all analyses. In the event the results for Levene's Test for equality of variances were significant, indicating the assumptions of equal variances were violated, equal variances were not to be assumed. An alpha level of .05 was to be used for all analyses.

The success ratio was determined for each athletic director, using a hybrid of the Managerial Achievement Quotient (MAQ). For this study, the success ratio took into account the age of the subjects when they assumed their positions and the classification alignments of their programs within each state.

Results

Of the 1000 athletic directors selected for participation in this study, 428 returned useable surveys for a response rate of 42.8%. Of the 428 responses, 90% of the respondents were male ($n=385$), and 10% were female ($n=38$). The finding of the study was that a difference in the success ratio of athletic directors existed when comparisons were made based upon gender. The success ratio of female athletic directors ($M=.097$, $SD=.060$) was greater than the success ratio of their male peers ($M=.090$, $SD=.039$). The finding of an independent samples t-test revealed that the data had violated the assumption of equal variances (Levene's Test Statistic = 18.712, $p < .001$). The t-test, after being adjusted for this violation, revealed that the difference was not significant ($t(-.627)$, $p=.534$, two-tailed). The researchers failed to reject the hypothesis.

Table 1.

Demographics of Interscholastic Athletic Directors

Variable	Gender		All AD's
	Male	Female	
Gender (n)	390	38	428
Success Ratio (M)	.090	.096	.091
Years of Tenure (M)	7.6	4.2	7.3
Age When Position Assumed (M)	39.8	38.53	39.7
Current Age (M)	47.0	42.8	46.7
Additional Duties (n)			
Head Football Coach (H-FB)	106	0	106
Teacher	80	15	95
Coach (Other than H-FB)	73	6	79
Administrator or Other	68	11	79
No Other Duties	47	6	53

Conclusions

Because males accounted for 90% of the athletic directors in this study, the management of interscholastic athletics appears to be the generic preserve of men. As with other studies pertaining to interscholastic athletic directors (e.g., Oliphant, 1995; Whisenant, 2002), the gains seen in participation rates among females at the player's level have not been seen at the athletic director's level. However, despite the lack of proportional representation of females within the ranks of interscholastic athletic directors, the females who have risen to the senior administrator level in this study were more successful than their male peers when using the MAQ as the measure of success. Future research should center on whether or not the barriers female face are systemic to the interscholastic athletics environment, or the result of entrenched gender bias and hegemonic masculinity.

Further analyses of the data collected indicated most respondents, 88%, held an additional position or had other responsibilities beyond that of

athletic director. The largest percentage of male respondents (28%) indicated they were also the head football coach. The remaining male respondents were teachers (21%), administrators (15%), coaches of sports other than football (19%), or had no additional duties (13%). None of the female athletic directors served in a dual capacity as the head football coach. Most female athletic directors (40%) held teaching positions. The remaining female respondents reported that they were administrators (21%), coaches of sports other than football (16%), or fulltime athletic directors without any additional duties (16%).

Several insights into the administration of interscholastic athletics were revealed within this study. First, as resolved by the primary focus of the study, females were as successful as males in the AD role when measured against the MAQ. Second, females have rates of tenure once in the role comparable to their male peers. Third, the vast majority of interscholastic athletic directors (87%) have collateral duties in addition to their primary role. Fourth, coaching duties appear to be

an essential part of the AD role with 44% of the respondents indicating they were either the head football coach (H-FB) or held a coaching role other than that of H-FB coach. This fourth insight may well reveal the influential and hegemonic barrier that females face when entering the AD ranks.

Combining the athletic director position and the head football coach position appears to be a major barrier to women serving as interscholastic athletic directors. By constructing the athletic director job description to include a football coaching position, most, if not all, women are systemically disqualified, eliminating even the opportunity for consideration. Exclusion from consideration, intentional or not, reinforces and perpetuates the stronghold of hegemonic masculinity that is so pervasive within the governance of athletics and sport in general.

There are several reasons why it is important that women are visible and equally represented in athletic director positions. First, equity in administrative hiring and promotions is simply a matter of fairness. Whether on the playing field or in the administrative offices, equity should be clearly evident. Second, young females need to see women in decision-making administrative positions in order to help them define sports and sport participation as important in their futures (Coakley, 2001). With the vast majority of men in leadership positions some may conclude that the abilities and contributions of men are more valued than those of women (Coakley, 2001). As Ligutom-Kimura (1995) established, the conclusion to devalue women in this way hampers the progress toward gender equity in sports. With career choices often influenced by cultural sex-typing of occupations (Bandura, 1997), the lack of female role models may negatively impact the perceived efficacy in employability by potential female sport administrators. A self-imposed removal from consideration from candidacy for open athletic director positions by females reaffirms and entrenches hegemonic masculinity in sport. Third, there is also a trickle

down effect in hiring decisions. As Acosta and Carpenter (2002) revealed in their study of intercollegiate athletics, the women's programs that had women athletic directors had a higher proportion of women coaches. Networking with women in administrative positions will help to increase the number of female subordinates, trainees, and colleagues. Fourth, Lumpkin, Stoll, and Belier (1999) stated that an increase in female representation is needed as females contribute to athletics unique perspectives, styles, and skills by their ability to build "relationships through encouragement, flexibility, delegation, and nurturing—traits more characteristic of females" (p. 186).

While some possess a spirit of optimism, few claim that equitable hiring of female athletic directors is something that will happen soon. As Coakley (2001) points out, "job equality in most sport organizations will not come until today's twenty-year-olds are grandparents" (p. 219). Until women are given a chance, hegemonic masculinity will continue to dominate and control interscholastic athletics.

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