

**Voices that matter: The experiences of black women athletic administrative interns**

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**Poster  
Abstract 464**

In their 27-year analysis, Acosta and Carpenter indicated that more women participated in intercollegiate athletic teams "than ever before" (Acosta & Carpenter, 2006, p. 1). However, the number of women serving as athletic administrators has continually decreased since 1972. In 1991, the Glass Ceiling Commission was established to generate a study about the invisible barriers that have prevented qualified ethnic minorities and women from obtaining these administrative positions. The objective of the commission was to provide organizations with methods to "increase opportunities for women and minorities to foster [their] advancement to management and decision making positions" (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995, p. 2).

The commission concluded that organizations should, "demonstrate a commitment for diversity; include diversity in all strategic plans; and prepare minorities and women for senior positions" (p. 13-14). Though the commission outlined methods to better the environment for women and minorities within the corporate hierarchy, the resolutions are applicable for women of color involved in athletic administration (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). Similar to the guidelines provided by the commission (1995), the National Collegiate Athletic Administration has sponsored various program opportunities for women and persons of color to be included in the athletic administration arena. In 1991, the NCAA developed the Minority Opportunities and Interests Committee (MOIC) "to monitor trends [and the] NCAA membership to work to increase the proportion of minority and female administrators and coaches" (DeHass, 2004, p. 8). To meet the needs of ethnic minorities and women involved with the NCAA, the Division III Ethnic Minority and Women's Internship Grant was implemented in 2001. The philosophy of the internship program is to encourage young interns to rise to the challenge as an underrepresented individual in the profession of athletic administration. Taken broadly, this is similar to W. E. B. Du Bois' theory, The Talented Tenth in that Du Bois developed a term and a definition for individuals who would be "people who would utilize their knowledge to improve the status of the black masses" (Foner, 1970, p. 86). It was Du Bois' vision for underrepresented minority groups to have individuals who would uplift men and women within the race in the form of higher education. Du Bois believed that the exceptional members of the Black race would come to the aid of their brothers and sisters. Du Bois' idea of uplift is particularly important with regard to Black women, who have been traditionally silenced in research literature and in athletics in general. Hooks defined the silence of the Black woman as "the silenced of the oppressed - that profound silenced engendered by resignation and acceptance of one's lot" (hooks, 1981, p. 1). The oppression of Black women in society can be dated as far back as their "sexual exploitation . during slavery. over the course of hundreds of years" (hooks, 1981, p. 53).

The purpose of the current study was to examine the experiences of Black women who were participants in the NCAA Division III Ethnic Minority and Women's Internship Program at various institutions in 2006-2007. Through the use of W.E.B. Du Bois' Talented Tenth theory, these experiences were analyzed in terms of an understanding of leadership and possession of leadership attributes.

Participants took part in a phenomenological interviewing process which examined their past athletic involvement, present administrative responsibilities as a NCAA Division III Ethnic Minority and Women's Intern, and future aspirations in the field of athletic administration. Phenomenology is a qualitative method that enables a researcher and a reader to thoroughly understand the lived experiences of a participant (Creswell, 2003). Bruening (2000) and Benton (1999) concluded that the voices of Black women in the field of athletics had been silenced and that, "qualitative methods allowed the reader to understand the meaning of the experiences of Black women in leadership roles who have been shaped by both race and gender" (Benton, 1999, p. 34).

In the study, the participants responded to two journal stems: 1) How would you define leadership? What leadership qualities do you possess? 2) As a young woman of color and a future leader, do you believe you have a responsibility to other women, persons of color, and others in the field of athletic administration? Finally, participants created a collage of words and pictures describing how they perceived themselves and how others perceived them.

The data collected from the in-depth interviews, journal stems, and collages produced ten themes. These themes were based on terms used by the participants and, along with the researcher's observations, helped to create a domain analysis worksheet (Spradley, 1979). Themes included identity, family, measure of success, leader, upliftment, cultural disconnection on campus (physical/emotional), perceptions of Black women, internal experiences of Black women, and successful intern.

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This study recognized how Black women in the field of athletic administration hold themselves to some accountability to uplift others and their visions of leadership. It is imperative to recognize the multiple layers these participants carried as being a Black, a woman, a leader, and a professional. The qualities participants identified for success and leadership coincided with the attributes of upliftment cover term. However, the data also indicated many of their experiences of cultural disconnection on campus (physical and emotional), the perceptions of Black women, and the internalized experiences of being a Black woman. The inner strength for the participants in this study transcended from family values and their identities.

This qualitative investigation provided insight into the lives of three Black women athletic administrative interns associated with the Division III Ethnic Minority and Internship Program. The participants in this study provided valuable information for future mentors and supervisors about issues concerning the identity of race and gender in the workplace. Though these are not the experiences of all Black women interns in the field of athletic administration, it is important to acknowledge the disparities, internal challenges, and successes of those less represented. Furthermore, this study acknowledges some perceptions about Black women in the profession and the forced assimilation of some Black women which are equivalent to the Benton (1999) and Bruening (2000) studies.

Future research could examine the impact of mentors on women who have succeeded in acquiring jobs in athletic administration and whether or not race and gender or both have served as mediators in mentoring process. Also, more studies could be conducted on institutional discrimination and access discrimination in athletic administration at the DII and DIII levels of the NCAA. These analyses have been conducted at the Division I level but not at the other divisions. Furthermore, more quantitative analyses could be done that might attempt to explain the process of acquiring leadership skills by women of color who have been subjected to stereotypes and other negative byproducts of the socialization process.