In her court: The meaning of advancement to women administrators of NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics departments

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Since the enactment of Title IX in 1972, female student-athletes have gained thousands of opportunities to compete in intercollegiate athletics in the United States. However, within intercollegiate athletics administration, statistics indicate that women have little representation in non-coaching, upper-management positions. According to the 2005-06 Ethnicity and Gender Demographics report, produced by the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA), less than 20 percent of all member institutions have a female athletics director; and among Division I institutions, women comprise less than 10 percent of athletics directors. Also, women make up less than 35 percent of the associate athletics directorships across all divisions and less than 30 percent of those in Division I. To understand the realities of career advancement for women administrators in intercollegiate athletics, it is important to gain understanding from the women who are working in that profession.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to learn the meaning of "advancement" from their standpoints, by asking them to tell of their realities and experiences, as they perceive them, in their own words. The researcher conducted interviews with eight women administrators from NCAA Division I athletics departments about their careers in intercollegiate athletics. The researcher recorded, transcribed and analyzed the interviews for common themes and shared meanings regarding advancement, using open, axial and selective coding procedures.

Two major findings were: 1) the participants' shared understanding and expression of their career experiences and advancement processes as a "journey", and 2) the participants' mutual emphasis on of getting one's "foot in the door" in order to progress to each phase of their career and advancement journeys. Common themes related to these findings that also coincide with sport, gender and communication literature include: career preparation through sport-related internships and educational programs, interpersonal communication with coaches and other administrators, assistance and resistance from male colleagues and supervisors, networking, role models and mentors, and work-life balance. Research on the meaning of advancement to women administrators in intercollegiate athletics enlightens discussion regarding gender disparities in athletic administration, informs policy intended to address those disparities, and adds to the body of knowledge in the growing discipline of sport studies. And, if conducted in a manner that recognizes the voices of those who experience the multiple realities of the intercollegiate athletics life-world, then this research will provide scholars and practitioners with meaningful information from the best experts available.