An Investigation of Future Sport Managers’ Perceptions of Affirmative Action Strategies and Beneficiaries.

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Since its inception in 1965, affirmative action has been a highly controversial issue in the United States. It was originally implemented to rectify past discrimination and prevent future discrimination, but no definitive definition of affirmative action was advanced. Organizations were merely instructed to take “affirmative action” to ensure that all current and future employees were treated fairly in the hiring process. Due to no consensus on what affirmative action is, or is not, people formulate their own working definition of affirmative action based on past experiences and prevalent discourses about affirmative action (Kravitz & Platania, 1993). As a result, positive or negative attitudes toward affirmative action are highly determined by the person’s affirmative action policy schema (Nacoste, 1994). The validity of the policy schema is irrelevant; perceptions determine reactions.

All collegiate athletic organizations in the US are required to have affirmative action programs; thus, given the low percentage of racial minority administrative staff members (9.5% Black, 1.3% Asian, 2.4% Hispanics) and head coaches (9% Black, 0.7% Asian, 1.9% Hispanics) working in collegiate athletic departments (NCAA, 2010), an increase in the number of affirmative action and diversity initiatives is foreseeable. Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to examine future sport managers’ (i.e. graduate sport management students) perceptions of affirmative action and affirmative action beneficiaries.

Graduate students from nine universities in the midwest and southwest regions of the US, were asked to provide their own personal definition of affirmative action and how affirmative action has impacted them and other racial groups. The qualitative section of the survey was followed by the participants rating statements about perceptions of affirmative action on a 5-point Likert scale. Statements were adapted from Cohen and Sterba’s (2003) arguments on why racial preference is wrong and bad and arguments made in defense of affirmative action. Sample statements include “affirmative action involves hiring and promoting a certain number (i.e. quota) of ethnic minority applicants”, “affirmative action involves increasing efforts to recruit qualified ethnic minorities applicants (e.g., by recruiting at schools with many ethnic minority students or advertising in ethnic minority newspapers, etc.),” and “affirmative action involves employment decisions favoring the ethnic minority applicant, when a majority and ethnic minority applicant have equal qualifications.” Additionally, study participants were asked about ethnic groups that should benefit and/or actually benefit from affirmative action policies, perceived workplace discrimination for different ethnic groups, and perceived workplace racial representation. Respondents completed all of the measures with regard to eight target populations: Asian males and females, Hispanic males and females, African American males and females, and Caucasian males and females.

Sport management grads are potentially the future leaders in collegiate athletic departments; therefore, garnering their perceptions of affirmative action is important as their views can influence the diversity culture of the department. Accordingly, results will be discussed in relation to the implications for women and racial minorities in collegiate athletic departments and for the support of affirmative action/diversity initiatives in the workplace.