Where Are the Division I Female Athletic Directors?: A Social Cognitive Career Investigation

Janelle Wells, University of Florida

While gender inequalities have declined, several occupations continue to be segregated (Tomaskovic-Devey, Zimmer, Stainback, Robinson, Taylor, & McTague, 2006). Particularly in sport organizations, a call for leadership diversification persists (Brooks & Althouse, 2007; Cunningham, 2007) because women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010; DeHass, 2007). Traditionally, athletics has been a field dominated by males (Anderson, 2002; Edwards, 1973; Sage, 1998) especially at the highest leadership position, Athletic Director (AD), within NCAA Division I institution athletic departments (Lapchick, 2009). At the start of the 2009 athletic season, there were four female ADs at Division I Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) in the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) (Lapchick, 2009) and only 9% across all Division I institutions (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010). Hence, the goal of this study was to reveal and illustrate how gender may influence the intentions of women senior athletic administrators (e.g., deputy AD, executive associate AD, senior associate AD, associate AD, senior woman administrator (SWA), and assistant AD) becoming NCAA Division I ADs.

Since scant research has explored the influence of gender on career development in sport (Cunningham et al., 2005; Cunningham et al., 2007; Cunningham & Singer, 2010), multiple theoretical frameworks (e.g., homologous reproduction, hegemony, social dominance, and social cognitive career theory) were collectively used to explain the lack of female ADs and the intentions of women leaders becoming Division I ADs. Homologous reproduction is the process of selecting or promoting an individual who has similar social and/or physical characteristics as the majority (Stangl & Kane, 1991). Homologous reproduction has been found in employment practices of athletic directors (Stangl & Kane, 1991; Whisenant & Mullane, 2007), principals (Lovett & Lowry, 1994), women head coaches (Aicher & Sagas, 2009; Sagas, Cunningham, & Teed, 2006). Specifically in athletic administration, male hegemony (Fink, 2008; Whisenant, 2008; Whisenant et al., 2002) has limited the advancement of women. Hegemony theory (Gramsci, 1971) has evolved into a social theory where individuals of a certain group accept their unfair treatment as commonsense (Whisenant, Pedersen, & Obenour, 2002). Hartley (1982) suggests the power of one group over the other occurs by acceptance, not by force. According to Sage (1998) sport has become one of the most hegemonic social institutions in society and the social ideologies have been found to reinforce institutional power structures and societal status (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007). Thus, social dominance theory (SDT) (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Sidanius, Levin, Frederico, & Pratto, 2001) is on both the structural and individual factors contributing to group-based oppression (Sidanius et al., 2004). Personal discrimination and systematic institutional drive oppression (Sidanius et al., 2004) and perpetuate ideologies (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007) of the disenfranchised group (i.e., women leaders).

Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory was a foundation for the development of SCCT (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). In sport literature, SCCT has been used to examine the intentions of undergraduates entering the sport and leisure industry (Cunningham et al., 2005), assistant women coaches becoming head coaches (Cunningham et al., 2007), and student-athletes entering the coaching profession (Cunningham & Singer, 2010). SCCT consists of six variables: self-efficacy, outcome expectations, choice goals, vocational interest, supports, and barriers.

The adapted SCCT questionnaire (Bandura, 1986; Cunningham et al., 2007; Doherty & Johnson, 2001) was used to collect data from 167 NCAA Division I senior level athletic administrators. To access the senior athletic administrators, we obtained emails from athletic websites. Descriptive and reliability statistics were calculated for each of the variables, and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was tested to explore group differences between leaders and the SCCT variables. On average, the participants were 44 years old (SD = 9.9) with an organizational tenure of seven years (SD = 6.4) and an occupational tenure of 13 years (SD = 7.6). The majority of senior athletic administrators identified themselves as White (79%), male (53%), and former student-athletes (52%).

MANOVA revealed significant variations between male and female senior athletic administrators, Wilks’ $\lambda$=.50, F (6, 158) = 26.25, p < .001. Univariate analyses also found significant effects for self-efficacy F (1,163) = 6.52, p < .001.
(women: M = 5.79, SD = .95; men: M = 6.11, SD = .62); outcome expectations $F(1,163) = 14.79, p < .001$ (women: M = 5.17, SD = .80; men: M = 5.62, SD = .71); barriers $F(1,163) = 120.40, p < .001$ (women: M = 4.27, SD = .76; men: M = 2.85, SD = .88); vocational interest $F(1,163) = 13.86, p < .001$ (women: M = 4.63, SD = 1.82; men: M = 5.64, SD = 1.64); and choice goals $F(1,163) = 16.98, p < .001$ (women: M = 3.98, SD = 1.95; men: M = 5.21, SD = 1.88). Relative to men, women had lower self-efficacy, outcome expectation, vocational interest, choice goals and faced more barriers. In agreement with Lent et al. (1994), the presence of barriers and negative outcomes expectations facing women, lowers their interest and choice goals of becoming Division I ADs. These results are similar to previous sport SCCT literature suggesting men had greater interest (Cunningham & Doherty, 2005) and minorities faced more barriers (Cunningham & Singer, 2010). Overall, results indicated men and women do differ in their choice goal of becoming a Division I AD, which may imply women do not see becoming a Division I AD as a viable career option. Future endeavors should explore the materialization of barriers confronting women leaders through a qualitative approach.