Over the past four decades, participation rates within college sport have increased exponentially. According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Sports Sponsorship and Participation Rates Report, since 1983 and each decade following, participation rates (for all NCAA levels) increased a total of 60% for women to 205,021 student-athletes and 21% for men to 267,604 student-athletes as of 2014. Given this increase in college sport participation around the United States, an increase in college sport commercialism has followed (Jozsa, 2013). This commercialism led to greater responsibilities for administrators to meet financial goals and especially for coaches to compete for the best talent. Areas of enhanced responsibilities for coaches include student-athlete recruitment, revenue generation, team travel, budgeting and fundraising (Frey, 2007). Additionally, team competition has steadily become more national and less local as the offerings of sports, especially for basketball. Digging into the same report noted above by the NCAA, the number of NCAA basketball teams increased 32% for women and 31% for men. In response to these additional demands, Division I coaches are often hiring a Director of Basketball Operations (DOBO) to focus on the day-to-day business and operations of the team.

While the DOBO is becoming a fairly common position on Division I basketball staffs, little research exists related to the position and those who occupy it. The DOBO is a relatively new position and it is quite possibly a position whose duties were never purposely designated, but rather resulted from the coaching staff delegating less important daily tasks related to the business operations of the team. Related to this, Smith, Madsen, Gentile and Wayne (2014) uncovered a moderate amount of role ambiguity amongst DOBOs in a previous research, but unexpected results arose from the role ambiguity line of inquiry in the form of gender differences in the career aspirations of male and female DOBOs. Additionally, there is no known research that has looked at the future career aspirations of DOBOs in college athletics. The DOBO position seems to be transitional and perhaps entry-level, but it is not clear what career logically follows once one has gained experience as a DOBO. Therefore, our research questions became:

1. What are the future career aspirations of those currently employed as DOBOs?
2. Does the DOBO position adequately prepare the individual for the career they aspire to?
3. Are there gender differences in the future career aspirations?

The current study collected data from 149 NCAA Division I DOBOs from men’s (68) and women’s (81) teams using the Role Ambiguity Scale (RAS) developed by Beauchamp, Bray, Eys and Carron (2002). Using a 9-point Likert-type scale system (1-strongly disagree and 9-strongly agree) respondents were asked to rate four areas of their position in regard to ambiguity. Demographic data was also collected as was information related to job responsibilities and their future career aspirations. The response rate for the current study was 38.3%.

The data will be considered within role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934). According to role congruity theory, societal forces often push women and men to fill different social roles and pursue different careers that line up with stereotypical gender expectations. Burton, Barr, Fink and Bruening (2009) previously found support for this theory among athletic administrator positions. Additionally, symbolic interactionism tries to explain why men and women seem to choose different social roles and careers along gender lines. According to this theory, rather than having actual free choice, our identities are formed based on gendered societal expectations (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007). Therefore, women and men are likely to form their identities through the gender socialization process which may produce differing career aspirations of DOBOs.

This research contributes knowledge to the popular, but ambiguous administrative position of the DOBO. Implications from this research are anticipated to come in the form of improved mentoring and development of the DOBO in the direction of their career aspirations. In addition, this research may help to further the understanding of the gendered differences in athletic employment.