Comparing Career Advice for Women and Men Aspiring to Leadership Positions in Intercollegiate Athletic Administration

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Socio-Cultural - Diversity (College Sport)
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)
Abstract 2019-431
Saturday, June 1, 2019
4:00 PM
Room: Napoleon D1

Researchers have continuously documented the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in intercollegiate athletics (Acosta & Carpenter, 2016). In order to understand this phenomenon, scholars have examined the career experiences of women aspiring to leadership positions in intercollegiate athletic administration (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Bower & Hums, 2013; Moe, Schaubroeck, & Feltz, 2016; Whiteside & Hardin, 2011). Career experiences include career paths, greatest challenges, most desirable aspects of the job, least desirable aspects of the job, career goals, and career advice. The present study, however, extended the career advice research line to examine not just women, but men as well, and focused on career advice current male athletic administrators could offer to men and career advice current female athletic administrators could offer to women aspiring to leadership positions in intercollegiate athletics. Career advice most commonly aligns with Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) which aims at explaining how individuals achieve career success. Career advice may provide expectations of the job, guidance on overcoming challenges, and what women and men may need to do to achieve leadership positions in intercollegiate athletics.

The Female Sport Management Career Survey (FSMCS) was sent to 6134 men (n=4318) and women (n=1834) working in intercollegiate athletic administration via Survey Monkey. In order to maximize return rate, surveys were emailed twice, with three weeks separating the distributions. A total of 1275 (N=1275) usable surveys were returned (women = 497 and men = 778) for a return rate of 20.8%. The participants worked in intercollegiate athletic administration at NCAA Division I, II, III, NAIA, and NCCAA schools, and junior colleges. The majority of the women in the study were (a) associate athletic directors (37.9%) at the Division I level (45.9%), (b) an average age of 45-54 (30.2%), and (c) had an average income of $40,000-$59,999 (30.7%). The majority of the men in the study were (a) athletic directors (34.6%) at the Division I level (48.7%), (b) an average age of 35-44 (32.5), and (c) had an average income of $60,000-$79,999 (28.3%). Means for the demographic and career experience data were calculated using SPSS 19.0. Qualitative data were analyzed using a three-step content-analytic procedure (Wolcott, 1994).

Several themes emerged from the qualitative data whereby comparisons could be made between the career advice offered by men to men wanting to work in intercollegiate athletic administration and by women to women wanting to work in intercollegiate athletic administration. Both men and women expressed the importance of gaining experience particularly early in one’s career by volunteering or interning, working hard, and developing networks. One unique theme offered by the men to men wanting to work in intercollegiate athletics but not by women to other women was to learn specific job responsibilities within athletics such as business and financial management skills, the types of responsibilities one typically needs to become an athletic director. Results suggest future research focus on how this gendered difference might affect the ability of women to move into more significant leadership positions in intercollegiate athletics.