Women have historically been underrepresented in positions of power within athletic administration. Only 14% of all high school athletic directors are women (Dombeck, 2018). Not only are women underrepresented, but they are also often marginalized (Whisenant, Pederson & Obenour, 2002) and more likely to face antagonistic workplaces (Cunningham, 2008). These circumstances make women in athletic administration potentially vulnerable to the effects of gender stereotype threat. There is a lack of research on barriers to success for women in prep athletic administration. Thus, the purpose of this study is to assess the effect of stereotype threat on females in this domain.

Stereotype threat has been defined by Aronson, Quinn, and Spencer as “the discomfort targets feel when they are at risk of fulfilling a negative stereotype about their group; the apprehension that they could behave in such a way as to conform the stereotype – in the eyes of others, in their own eyes, or both at the same time” (p. 85-86, 1998).

Negative stereotypes threaten the groups they target by creating a pressure to succeed which may lead to a disruptive state that ultimately undermines performance and dampers the aspirations of group members in the domain (Spencer, Logel, & Davies, 2016). Aramovich (2014) adds that when individuals are made aware of a negative stereotype threat regarding their ability, those individuals actively monitor their environment for cues suggesting the stereotype threat will be confirmed while mentally working overtime to suppress the negative thoughts and anxiety associated with the stereotype.

Stereotype threat has primarily been studied in the context of intercollegiate athletics. Whisenant, Pederson and Obenour (2002) report that “there are major barriers for women to overcome before they can join the ranks of upper-administrative individuals who make the critical decisions in intercollegiate athletics” (p. 485). One such barrier may be leadership stereotypes. Leadership positions are perceived as stereotypically masculine, and Eagley and Karaue (2002) propose that women are evaluated less favorably when compared to men in both their potential for leadership positions and their actual behavior in leadership roles.

Steele (1997) proposed features of stereotype threat, including group identity, belonging uncertainty, extra pressure to succeed, and group reputation threat. Scarlata (2019) used these to develop the Gender Stereotype Threat Instrument for Collegiate Athletic Administration (GSTICAA). The scale was tested for reliability using a panel of experts, and a pilot test analyzing item-to-total correlations and Chronbach’s alphas were used to establish validity.

The current study uses a revised version of the GSTICAA, changing the frame to high school athletics through modifying the stems. Demographic questions, including gender identification, were included in the final survey. The survey was sent to 1,232 high school athletic directors. Results from the GSTICAA will be statistically compared with the demographic data, primarily identified gender.

Through recognizing barriers, strategies can be employed by educating leadership on issues confronting women in this field. Ultimately, if issues associated with stereotype threat can be addressed, more women will be retained in the profession, and young professionals will consider careers in athletic administration.