The Impact of Title IX on Women’s Leadership in Collegiate Sport

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In 1972, Congress passed Title IX of the Education Amendments Act with the intent to prohibit gender-based discrimination in institutions receiving federal financial assistance. Although Title IX has increased playing opportunities for female athletes, it has had an adverse effect on women in leadership positions. For instance, in its 2018 gender report on leadership in Division I FBS athletics, the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES) reported that women accounted for just 40.1% of coaches across all women’s sports, 31.6% of university faculty athletic representatives, and 9.2% of athletic directors (Lapchick, 2018).

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of Title IX on female leadership roles through the lens of gender role congruity theory and to identify social norms perpetuated within contemporary sport leadership structures. The underlying preference for male leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Grappendorf & Burton, 2014) and two types of prejudice, communal (associated with subordinated status) and agentic (associated with higher status; Conway, Pizzamiglio, & Mount, 1996), can help explain the lack of women in collegiate leadership positions.

Applying this theoretical framework, a historical research approach was used to analyze Title IX compliance and the effect of its passage on female leadership. This study also focused on the concept of the Glass Cliff (Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Haslam, 2005) to address stereotypes and expectations of women in leadership of sport. One prevalent stereotype is that women placed in leadership positions are more likely to fail (Brescoll, Dawson, & Uhlmann, 2010) or lose their position even which achieving success or exceeding job expectations. An analysis of Title IX compliance in relation to the administrative gender diversity of institutions can provide a picture of current leadership in collegiate sport.

Findings showed that following the passage of Title IX, participation, funding, and opportunities increased for female athletes (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012; Wilson, 2017). However, organizational practices that marginalize women in leadership roles or promote men through increased resources and opportunities, have become institutionalized norms (Burton, 2015). Furthermore, social expectations shaped by gender role congruity, communal and agentic attributes, and lack of Title IX compliance have restricted the acceptance of women in sport as leaders.

The creation of more female programs led to an influx of female participants and a demand for coaches (Wilson, 2017). Provided this opportunity, men entered women’s athletics, as athletic departments that were previously separated, integrated into one (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012). Their prevalence in coaching and other leadership positions brought the promotion of male superiority over female athletes and athletic departments, and the perception of athletic role models was now dictated mostly by men (Conway et al., 1996). Findings of this research can provide points of emphasis for Title IX compliance, as well as direction for collegiate athletic departments, in order to reverse these perceptions and norms; therefore, promoting women to agentic leadership positions that can inspire future leaders to follow in the footsteps of their role models.