Career Goals and Expectations of Female Intercollegiate Athletic Administrators

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Abstract

Sport management researchers have sought to understand and address the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in intercollegiate athletic departments. Studies suggest a male-dominated organizational structure and socio-cultural barriers as factors related to women's inability to advance to senior leadership positions. This qualitative study provides a better understanding of the dynamic processes contributing to women's career expectations and goals in intercollegiate athletic administration. Twenty female NCAA Division I assistant and associate athletic directors were interviewed. The findings of this study suggest professional interests and values play important roles in a woman's choice to pursue the title of Athletic Director.

Introduction

In the last five years, the percentage of female senior-level administrators (assistant and associate athletic directors) at National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I institutions has increased by 2.7%, while Divisions II and III have experienced declines (Lapchick, 2013). The overall percentage of women moving from senior-level administration to the executive-level position of Athletic Director (AD) has also decreased. Between 2008 and 2012, the overall percentage of female Athletic Directors across all NCAA institutions declined from 21.3% to just over 20% (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Moreover, roughly 11% of NCAA intercollegiate athletic departments have no female representation at either the executive- or senior- levels of administration (Acosta & Carpenter).

As such, sport scholars and practitioners have grown increasingly concerned about the underrepresentation of women in the administrative pipeline, as well as factors contributing to the decline (Burton, Grappendorf, & Henderson, 2011; Cunningham, 2008; Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; Grappendorf, Lough, & Griffin, 2004). The pipeline refers to senior-level title positions of assistant athletic director and associate athletic director (Grappendorf et al., 2004; Lapchick, 2013). The associate athletic director title may also include terms such as executive, senior, and/or deputy. Individuals holding senior-level positions are perceived to be more likely to achieve an executive-level Athletic Director position than those in professional administration (e.g., academic advising, compliance, life skills) because the skill sets associated with senior-level administration, such as budgeting, fundraising, and supervisory responsibility, are perceived to be more transferable to the position of Athletic Director (Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; Lapchick, 2013). Thus, senior-level positions are perceived as training grounds for the executive-level Athletic Director position (Lapchick). Similar to trends in business (Catalyst, 2014), however, the proportion of women in senior and executive-level administration in intercollegiate athletics as compared to men indicates a stagnation, if not decline, in the number of women seeking these positions.

Frome, Alfeld, Eccles, and Barber (2006) suggested the decline of women in senior- and executive-level management is evidence of a leaky pipeline – a phenomenon often attributed to

factors consistent with male-dominated industries. Studies in sport management have attributed low numbers of women in managerial positions to male-dominated organizational structures and subsequent socio-cultural factors such as gender, race, role incongruity and perceptions of leadership, and work-life balance (Bruening et al., 2008; Burton, Barr, Fink, & Bruening, 2009; Burton et al., 2011; Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; Inglis, Danylchuk, & Pastore, 2000; Whisenant, Pedersen, & Obenour, 2002). Undoubtedly, organizational structures and socio-cultural factors affect women's work experiences. More research is needed, however, to better understand how the relationship of organizational structures and socio-cultural factors affect career goals and expectations. Thus, exploring career goals and expectations from the perspective of female administrators currently working in college athletics may illuminate how women perceive and negotiate opportunities and challenges related to organizational structures and socio-cultural factors in pursuit of those goals. Furthermore, understanding how women perceive and negotiate important factors in their careers may also bring awareness to how career goals and expectations form and change. Finally, exploring how women's career goals form and change also has the potential to reveal factors affecting the careers of women in intercollegiate athletics that have yet to be explored.

Theories on career choice and development provide helpful frameworks for understanding how entrenched perceptions, social roles, and organizational structures affect a woman's career choice and decision-making process. Thus, career choice and development theories provide interpretive frameworks for understanding the career experiences of women in intercollegiate athletics.

Theoretical Framework

Initial career development theories were grounded in the psychological constructs and social experiences of White men (Holland, 1959; Weiss, Dawes, England, & Lofquist, 1967). Similar to career research conducted with men, initial studies with women focused on psychological characteristics such as personality, intellect, motivation, and occupational "fit," but did not address what, how, or why social contexts affected the career orientation of women. Furthermore, career development studies attributed differences in occupational choices to differences in gender and the construction of self-concept (Lent, Brown, & Hacket, 1994), but did not address how or why the differences existed.

Social contexts and the identities associated with such contexts are likely to significantly impact career decisions and trajectories (Astin, 1984; Brown, 2002; Lent et al., 1994). People make sense of the world through social contexts and identities. Hence, social contexts and variables contributing to the construction of personal and professional identities are important to consider when examining the career development of individuals, especially women (Astin; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Coogan & Chen, 2007; Fagenson, 1990).

Exploring a woman's career development and decision making process are important because those processes are much more complex than for a man (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Coogan & Chen, 2007). For example, women must contend with overt and covert gendered social and work expectations, which have the potential to influence and change career choices, aspirations, and goals (Astin, 1984; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987). Thus, historical frameworks and the objectivity of traditional career theories do not allow for or adequately address the nuanced experiences of women in the workplace (Betz & Fitzgerald; Coogan & Chen, 2007).

In recent decades, researchers have emphasized a more subjective approach to observing career choice and development (Elder & O'Rand, 1995; Johnson & Mortimer, 2002; Savickas, 2002, 2005). The subjective approach recognizes the influence of individual identities (e.g., gender, race), social roles (e.g., employee, mother, spouse), relationships (i.e., collegial, familial, peer), and organizational structures (e.g., opportunity for advancement, hiring practices, formal and informal networks) on career decisions. As such, modern career theories focus on *what* career decisions people make and *why* people make such decisions (Savickas, 2002, 2005). Uncovering the meaning of factors influencing career development has the potential to reveal exactly how and why people make decisions (Savickas, 2005). In other words, a more subjective approach to career is not designed to *predict* career paths, but to interpret and understand the decisions and choices individuals make based on their perceptions of social realities in the context of career development.

This study employs career construction theory and social cognitive career theory (SCCT) (Lent et al., 1994; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000) to interpret how individual, institutional, and social relational forces influence career goals, expectations, and decision-making of women in senior-levels of intercollegiate athletic administration. Furthermore, these theories recognize the role of supports and barriers in career development, but also acknowledge the role of human agency. As such, the researchers in this study acknowledge that the career choices women make may be constrained by individual, institutional, and social relational factors (Eccles, 1994). We propose that while women working in athletic administration do not have a choice over which of these factors actually exist in their workplace environment, they do have a choice in how such factors affect their career expectations and goals (Astin, 1984; Fagenson, 1990).

Career Construction Theory

Career construction theory was designed to answer two questions: What do people do? And why do they do it? (Savickas, 2002). Career construction theory explores career development from an integrated constructionist and contextualist perspective. The constructivist perspective suggests people construct *representations* of reality, but not reality itself. The contexualist perspective asserts that adaptation to various environments drives career development. When examining an individual's career, the integration of constructionist and contextual perspectives "focuses attention on the interpretive processes, social interaction, and negotiation of meaning" (Savickas, 2005, p. 43). Thus, career construction theory was not designed to predict career paths. Instead, it should be used to understand the decisions and choices individuals make based on perceptions of social realities. As such, career construction theory is comprised of three components – (a) vocational personality, (b) career adaptability, and (c) life themes (Savickas, 2005).

Vocational personality consists of the career decisions an individual makes based on career-related abilities, needs, values, and interests. Career adaptability represents an individual's ability to cope with current and future developmental tasks, career transitions, and personal traumas. Life themes influence people to make meaningful choices about work roles. For example, Eccles (1994) advised, "occupational choices are not made in isolation of other life choices, such as the decision to marry and have children, and the decision to balance one's occupational behaviors with one's other life roles." (p. 605). Therefore, uncovering the meaning of factors such as work-related responsibilities, job transitions, and personal life experiences has the potential to reveal *why* people make certain career decisions.

Career construction theory offers a framework for interpreting a person's career life course through the integration of vocational personality, career adaptability, and life themes. It is unclear, however, how vocational personality, career adaptability, and life themes affect an individual's career expectations and career goals. Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1994) attempts to explain the "dynamic processes and mechanisms through which (a) career and academic interests develop, (b) career related choices are forged and enacted, and (c) performance outcomes are achieved" (p. 80).

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

SCCT compliments career construction theory in that it helps build conceptual linkages between the individual, the context of work, life themes, and the influence of perceived supports and barriers on career expectations and goals. SCCT recognizes social realities are different for each individual based on personal characteristics, contextual factors, and behavior (Lent et al., 1994). Lent et al. identified three social cognitive constructions – (a) self-efficacy beliefs, (b) outcome expectations, and (c) career-related goals – as central to understanding the career development. These constructions contribute to a person's career decision-making process as they relate to (a) the formation of career interests, (b) career aspirations and goals, and (c) persistence toward career goals (Lent et al.).

According to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy refers to the manner in which people assess their abilities to carry out specific courses of action to achieve a performance level or goal. Self-efficacy helps people make decisions about situations in the contexts of particular environments. Researchers also suggest that self-efficacy determines responses to personal and professional obstacles (Bandura, 1986; Lent et al., 1994, 2000). Self-efficacy has also been found to be a predictive element in career related choices (Cunningham, Bruening, Sartore, Sagas, & Fink, 2005; Stringer & Kerpelman, 2010) and as a mediator in the perception of career barriers (Cunningham, Doherty, & Gregg, 2007; Lyons, Brenner, & Lipman, 2010).

Outcome expectations are personal beliefs about anticipated consequences of particular behaviors (Lent et al., 1994). As a result, expectations are often predicated on assessments of self-efficacy. For example, Cunningham et al. (2005) employed social cognitive career theory to explore student intentions to enter the sport and leisure industry. Results indicated that self-efficacy and positive outcome expectations were related. That is, students with high levels of self-efficacy also had higher and more positive ideas about their future careers. In addition, self-efficacy and positive outcome expectations were positively related to choice goals and vocational interests; vocational interests were also positively associated with choice goals.

Finally, goals aid in the organization of behavior (e.g., career plans, decisions) and the likelihood that desired career outcomes will be achieved (Lent et al., 1994). The formation of goals also helps people maintain performance over an extended period of time. Perceptions of self-efficacy and outcome expectations provide not only a bridge for understanding past and future behavior, but also an understanding of how and why career goals are formed. Therefore, individuals have the ability to proactively construct their environment based on their self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and career goals. However, Lent et al. (1994) contended that personal and contextual variables influence each of the three social cognitive constructs.

In SCCT, personal variables include gender, self-efficacy, human capital (e.g., education, skill set), career interests and values, and socialization. Contextual variables – perceived barriers or supports within a given environment (Lent et al., 1994) – should be considered when evaluating

a career decision in a given situation. Barriers and supports – real or perceived –may include personal characteristics, structural factors (e.g., opportunities for advancement and promotion, discriminatory hiring practices, organizational policies inhibiting work/life balance) and/or social relational determinants (e.g., relationships with supervisors, colleagues, family and friends; informal networks). Behaviorally, career theorists (Astin, 1984; Lent et al., 2000; O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005; Savickas, 2005) suggest women employ coping efficacy strategies to reduce the perception of conflict between the self and the structure in question (e.g., work, family, organizational policies) (Lent et al., 2000; Savickas, 2002). Coping self-efficacy helps people make decisions about situations in the contexts of particular environments (Lent et al., 1994, 2000). Individuals with "a strong sense of coping self-efficacy…are more likely to persevere toward their goals" (Lent et al., 2000, p. 46). Thus, women may negotiate barriers and supports by either (a) changing career goals or (b) developing coping efficacy to persevere toward previously established or newly formed career goals. Career goals aid in the organization of behavior, such as career plans, and the likelihood that desired career expectations and aspirations will be achieved (Lent et al., 1994). Lent et al., however, contended that personal and contextual variables influence coping self-efficacy, career goals, and persistence toward goals.

Together, Career Construction Theory and SCCT provide a framework for examining the influence of personal and contextual factors which affect behavior and individual choice in relation to understanding career expectations, goals, and decision making. While research has focused on perceptions of women in athletic administration, few studies have attempted to identify career goals or assess the manner in which personal and contextual variables and coping efficacy influence career expectations, goals, and decision-making for women in intercollegiate athletics.

Career development of women in intercollegiate athletics

A significant amount of research exists on the barriers and supports affecting the careers of female coaches and administrators in intercollegiate athletics. Barriers to women's career development in college sport include: gender and gender role stereotypes (Burton et al., 2009; Burton et al., 2011; Grappendorf et al., 2004), homologous reproduction (Aicher & Sagas, 2009; Whisenant et al., 2002), limited skill development or limited access to developing skill sets (Hoffman, 2010), limited access to networks and mentoring relationships (Bower, 2009; Lovett & Lowry, 1994), and work-life balance (Bruening et al., 2008; Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Sagas & Cunningham, 2004). Other studies have found factors perceived to support and promote the career development of women. Mentoring relationships (Bower, 2009) and collegial support (Inglis et al., 2000), industry knowledge and experience (Grappendorf et al., 2004), and networking (Greenhill, Auld, Cuskelly, & Hooper, 2009) have been found to contribute to women's interest and tenure in intercollegiate athletics. Each support and/or barrier – singular or combined – has the potential to influence career expectations and goals (Astin, 1984; Coogan & Chen, 2007; Lent et al., 1994).

While these studies shed light on women's work experiences in intercollegiate athletics, research germane to this population has been limited to (a) coaches (Greenhill et al., 2009; Knoppers, 1992; Walker & Bopp, 2011), (b) the senior woman administrator (SWA) (Hoffman, 2010; Schneider, Stier, Henry, & Wilding, 2010; Tiell, Dixon, & Lin, 2012), (c) female Athletic Directors (Grappendorf et al., 2004; Grappendorf & Lough, 2006), or (d) women who have left the field of intercollegiate athletics (Inglis, et al., 2000). These studies reflected the experiences and perceptions of women who are not in or have chosen to leave administrative positions, as

well as women who have already achieved the title of Athletic Director. Further, extant research has identified a number of dynamic factors shaping the work experiences of women who work in intercollegiate athletic administration. The current study expands on these factors to offer a better understanding of how personal and contextual factors shape the career expectations and goals of female athletic administrators. Additionally, this study explores whether or not the title of AD is a career goal for women working in intercollegiate athletics and how particular factors influence decisions these women make about career advancement.

Many studies on female Athletic Directors seem to hold an underlying assumption that the position of Athletic Director is a career goal for women in the intercollegiate pipeline (Hoffman, 2010, 2011; Inglis et al., 2000). Such an assumption is common to a culture in which career advancement is perceived as vertical mobility in an organizational hierarchy (Hall, 2002; Oplatka & Tamir, 2009). A few studies (Grappendorf et al., 2004; Sagas & Cunningham, 2004), however, have suggested that promotion and advancement to the position of Athletic Director in intercollegiate athletics is not a career goal for women. Moreover, few studies have explored the careers of women in the administrative "pipeline" of NCAA Division I college athletics. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the career experiences of female assistant and associate athletic directors to gain a better understanding of how personal and contextual variables influence the respective career expectations and goals of women working in intercollegiate athletics.

Method

The current study was part of a larger investigation exploring the career development of women in intercollegiate athletics. This particular component of the study investigated career expectations and goals of women in senior-level (assistant and associate athletic directors) management positions in intercollegiate athletics. As research in career development has evolved, career theorists (Lent, et al., 1994; Savickas, 2002) suggested using a qualitative approach to identify and understand the dynamic of cultural and social contexts including race, gender, education, organizational structure, and social relationships that influence personal preferences in career choice and, ultimately, career development. Therefore, a qualitative design offered an appropriate framework for capturing the complexity of career experiences from the perspective of women in intercollegiate athletics. Participants discussed their experiences, which allowed the researchers to capture and describe the participants' perceptions, feelings, judgments, and meaning-making (Creswell, 2008; Patton, 2002). As such, researchers were able to understand and interpret the meanings of career experiences, as well as how and why certain experiences may affect career expectations and career goals. This understanding may provide insight as to why women are not better represented in executive positions.

Participants

The population for this study included women in senior-level management positions in intercollegiate athletics at NCAA Division I member institutions. The sampling frame included senior-level female administrators working at NCAA Division I (non-football, FCS, and FBS) member institutions in the Midwest. The researchers identified Midwestern universities via the NCAA website (NCAA, 2012). Midwestern schools were selected so the interviewers could conduct as many face-to-face interviews as possible. Participants for this study were selected using purposeful criterion sampling. Participants were female, currently employed as an

assistant or associate athletic director at an NCAA Division I institution; listed as "athletic administration" on their respective athletic department websites; and, at least 30 years of age. O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005) suggested using age as a primary sampling criterion to explore the life course of a woman's career because women at this age (30 years) have already encountered a range of "choice points" (O'Neil & Bilimoria) in occupational development (e.g., changing jobs, promotion and advancement) and life development (e.g., starting a family, moving closer to an aging parent). Women who met the study criteria were then randomly selected for participation.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) recommended sample selection to the point of redundancy, or saturation. Data saturation ensured research questions were answered and the data collected were credible (Patton, 2002). Seidman (2006) also suggested sampling sufficiency. Sufficiency requires the researcher to collect enough data from a range of individuals such that individuals outside the sample can connect to the experiences of the participants in the study (Seidman). Sufficiency also enhanced the trustworthiness of this study.

Twenty women participated this study. Table 1 provides aggregated data on study participants. Table 2 offers individual demographic data and participant pseudonyms.

Table 1. *Participants' Careers in Intercollegiate Athletics (Aggregated)*

Data	
Age	30 to 61 (Avg. 42)
Race	16 White, 3 African-American/Black, 1 Hispanic
Education	18 Master's degree or higher
Marital status	12 married/partnered, 8 single
Children	8 participants w/ at least one child
Career length (avg.)	16.4 years
	Assistant AD, 12.3 years
	Associate AD, 19.3 years
Current title (avg.)	4.2 years
Current institutional affiliation	9.4 years
Titles/Salary ranges	Assistant AD (8), $40,000-$90,000
	Associate AD (12), $60,000-$100,000+
Areas of responsibility	Internal (16)
	External (4)
Interest in AD position	Yes (5)
	Not sure, but not Division I (3)
	No (12)

Sixteen of the 20 participants had primary responsibilities in internal operations. Hoffman (2011) defined internal operations as advising and academics, compliance, event management, facilities, academic and student services, sport supervision, and supervision over departments including strength and conditioning and sports medicine. Four participants worked in external operations (Hoffman), with primary responsibilities in fundraising and development, marketing and promotions, sports information, budgeting and finance, ticketing, and media relations.

Table 2. *Participant Demographic Data and Pseudonyms*

Pseudonym	Yrs of Experience	Title	Division	Salary	Seeking AD?
Judy	17	Associate AD	FBS	>$100,000	No
Donna	18	Associate AD	I	$60-69,999	No
Lynda	17	Associate AD	I	$60-69,999	No
Tina	13	Assistant AD	I	$50-59,999	No
Jenny	17	Associate AD	FBS	>$100,000	No
Roberta	15	Associate AD	FBS	$90-99,999	No
Tracy	12	Associate AD	FBS	$70-79,999	No
Cindy	22	Associate AD	FBS	$90-99,999	No
Mary	6	Associate AD	FBS	$70-79,999	Yes
Barb	26	Associate AD	FBS	>$100,000	Yes
Amanda	18	Assistant AD	FBS	$80-89,999	No
Vera	19	Associate AD	I	>$100,000	Yes
Jane	14	Assistant AD	FBS	$60-69,999	No
Fritz	27	Associate AD	FBS	>$100,000	Yes
Julia	8	Assistant AD	FBS	$60-69,999	No
Ashley	2	Assistant AD	FCS	$50-59,999	No
Margaret	24	Assistant AD	I	$80-89,999	No
Lindsey	8	Assistant AD	FBS	$50-59,999	No
Leslie	33	Associate AD	FBS	>$100,000	Yes
Sharon	11	Assistant AD	FCS	$40-49,999	No

Data collection

Participants engaged in semi-structured interviews from January 2012 to June 2013. Each interview addressed four main areas, including the participants' (a) career path, (b) perceptions of supports and barriers in career development, (c) adjustment strategies in career development, and (d) career expectations and goals. The interview guide included open-ended interview questions such as, "Tell me what you perceive to be the most important supports to your career," "Describe some of the challenges you have encountered in your career," "Please describe some of the most positive moments you have experienced while working in intercollegiate athletics," "Tell me some of your career goals and describe if/how they have changed over time." Participants were also asked to share their five and ten-year career goals, as well as advice they had for younger women seeking to advance in intercollegiate athletic administration. Prior to data collection, a pilot study was conducted. The wording and order of questions in the interview guide were refined based on the results of the pilot study. Interviews, conducted in-person or over the phone, lasted approximately 60 to 85 minutes and were transcribed verbatim. Participants also supplied a resume ad a brief description of their day-to-day responsibilities. Pseudonyms were selected by participants to maintain confidentiality.

Data analysis

Given the large quantity of transcript data from respondent interviews, two faculty members and a graduate assistant engaged in a two-cycle coding process to aid in data reduction (Saldana, 2009). During initial coding, the researchers engaged in multiple deductive and inductive coding methods (Saldana). The codes derived from the first-cycle of coding were added to a "start list" (Miles & Huberman, 1994) with themes already deduced from the literature. During the second cycle of coding, the researchers reorganized related codes into broader themes through pattern

coding (Saldana, 2009). Pattern coding was particularly appropriate for the second cycle of coding because it is designed to examine patterns of causes and explanations of human behavior (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In addition, this approach to coding illuminated new perspectives on the career development of women in intercollegiate athletics and male-dominated professions.

Following each coding cycle, the researchers convened to debrief on the data analysis, compare codes or themes, and clarify findings and meanings of coded data. Debriefing aided in establishing the trustworthiness of the data as it allowed researchers to reflect on personal assumptions and biases as well as reactions to participant experiences (Patton, 2002). Additionally, triangulation of multiple sources of data including interviews, resumes, and personal job descriptions from multiple participants also enhanced the credibility of this study (Patton).

Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the career experiences of female assistant and associate athletic directors to gain a better understanding of how work opportunities and challenges affected the career expectations and goals of women in the intercollegiate athletic administration "pipeline." Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2002, 2005) and Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1994, 2000) were employed to build conceptual linkages between the individual, the context of work, and life themes, on career expectations and goals of women in college athletic administration. The findings of this study shed light on the social contexts and variables contributing to the construction of professional identities (Astin, 1984; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Coogan & Chen, 2007; Fagenson, 1990) and career decisions of women in college athletic administrative positions.

When asked to reflect on their career goals upon entering intercollegiate athletic administration, 13 of 20 respondents identified pursuing the title of an NCAA Division I Athletic Director as a career goal. At the time participants were interviewed for this study, 15 women stated definitively they had no interest in being an Athletic Director at the NCAA Division I level, while five indicated a desire to pursue the position of Athletic Director. Interestingly, the five women who are now pursuing the title of AD did not identify the role as a goal at the outset of their work in college athletics. This finding is evidence of the dynamic interplay between career experiences and a reorganization of career goals (Lent et al., 1994). In other words, the women in this study had experiences that resulted in a reimagining of career goals. Based on their intended career path, study participants were identified as and will be referred to hereafter as Career Associates (CA) (n=15 women) or Future ADs (n=5 women). The five Future ADs indicated a desire to achieve the title of Athletic Director at an NCAA Division I institution, while the fifteen Career Associates had no interest in becoming Athletic Directors. The following section identifies participants' career goals and the variables influencing their career decisions.

Career goals

Career goals help people organize, guide, and sustain their own behavior, while also providing a mechanism to exercise personal agency (Lent et al., 1994). Regardless of career path (i.e., Future AD or Career Associate), women in this study identified two primary career goals: (a) to advance within an athletic department to a position of influence and (b) contribute to the development of student athletes. Participants perceived advancement in two ways. Future ADs (n=5) participants defined "advancement" as vertical mobility in the organizational hierarchy.

Career Associates (n=15), on the other hand, defined advancement as earning more responsibility in an athletic department, but did not attach increased responsibility to a more prestigious job title or vertical advancement within the organizational structure. Instead, these participants perceived greater responsibility would provide more opportunities to have a "voice" in the departmental decision-making process.

Advancement

Future ADs had experiences that encouraged them to pursue the position of Athletic Director. Vera began her career in academic advising and had few aspirations to be the AD in an athletic department. Over time, her goals changed:

> Over that 16-year time period my goals changed. "Maybe, I would like to become a director of athletics one day." So that was my path, I would say probably six, seven years into my time at (university) I started thinking about, "You know, I may want to take this on. I may want to take on the role of an athletic director." At that point I started thinking how can I best get there?

Fritz and Martha advocated and negotiated for responsibilities that would not only make them indispensable to their respective departments, but would also make them more attractive candidates for an Athletic Director position. Additionally, Future ADs felt responsible for changing the male-dominated culture of intercollegiate athletics to one that is gender inclusive. Jenny explained, "I think it's (a woman's) job to change the culture and the structure." For example, when Fritz reached her position in the athletic department (i.e., associate athletic director) and assumed responsibility over human resources, she described exercising authority to evaluate and implement family-oriented policies at the suggestion of female *and* male employees. For Future ADs, advancing through the organizational hierarchy offered them more responsibility, but also the ability to facilitate change within the department and possibly the entire college sport industry.

The perspective shared by Future ADs reflects Ely and Meyerson's (2000) third frame to approaching gender equity, which suggests organizations have "differential structures of opportunity and power that block women's access to advancement" (p.110). Contrary to previous research (Gatrell & Cooper, 2007; Gregory, 2009), the Future ADs in this study actively sought higher-level organizational positions to discuss issues such as resource allocation, gender equity, or organizational policies that may directly affect their position and/or the position of other women in the organization. Ely and Meyerson, however, did not suggest women alone should seek change in organizational structures. Instead, men and women should work together to break down structural barriers (e.g., organizational policy) to encourage equitable treatment, opportunity, and participation. Moreover, Itzin and Newman (1995) found that "numbers alone" do not bring about organizational change. Business and industry, however, are undergoing a period of "massive cultural change" resulting in a "transformation of existing structure and hierarchies, which open up spaces in which women can seek to influence the organization of the future" (Itzin & Newman, p. 11). A shift in industry culture will eventually lead to a change in organizational structure. Several participants suggested a shift in the culture of intercollegiate athletics is occurring, but organizational structure was still identified as a potential barrier to career development.

Student-athlete development

Regardless of definition, all 20 of the women in this study sought to advance their careers because they perceived advancement would help them fulfill another career goal – contributing to the development of the student-athlete and the student-athlete experience. For example, early in her career, Judy had aspirations to be an Athletic Director, but her career goals changed. She explained,

> When I first got into the business when I was 22 years old and I was like "I'm going to be an AD. That's what I'm going to do. I'm going to be an AD. I'm going to be a Division I athletic director. That's what I want to do." As I've gone through the business and I've learned more and I've experienced more, but I really like the internal aspect of it. The interaction with student athletes, the internal side of the business. I can do that without being an AD.

Similar to Judy, other Career Associates sought positions in which they worked closely with student-athletes. More often than not, these positions were internal (Hoffman, 2010) to the athletic department. Career Associates indicated positions in internal operations offered more interaction with student-athletes.They perceived the position of Athletic Director as being more removed from the day-to-day student-athlete experience. Moreover, similar to findings in other studies on women in management (Corby & Stanworth, 2009; Oplatka & Tamir, 2009; Wentling, 1996, 2003), Career Associates did not want the responsibility of having to make the "final" decision or perceived their personalities to be a mismatch for a position in external operations. For example, of the 16 participants in internal operations positions, 13 expressed a greater interest in working "behind the scenes" or as a "number two."

Undoubtedly, the participants' perceived attraction to internal operations might be attributed to societal constructions of gender roles perpetuated in a male-dominated industry (Duehr & Bono, 2006; Schein, 2007). Studies in sport management also suggest the structure of athletic departments perpetuates gendered stereotypes not only of internal and external positions, but also the people who hold those positions (Burton et al., 2009; Burton et al., 2011; Hoffman, 2011). Other research suggests the real and perceived male-dominated structure of organizations in and out of sport may preclude women from pursuing top-level management positions (Kanter, 1977; Knoppers, 1992; Smith, Santucci, Xu, Cox, & Henderson., 2012). If we consider the role of personal agency, however, it is important to note participants in internal operations chose those positions because they more closely aligned with their personality characteristics, career interests, and goals. The role of choice and aligning vocational personality supports Savickas' (2002) Career Construction Theory in that the women in this study constructed their careers based on interests, values, and experiences (i.e., career adaptability) in the workplace. Despite varying definitions of advancement and a common goal of contributing to the development of student-athletes, all 20 participants entered the field of intercollegiate athletics with common expectations. Understanding expectations is important because career goals are often mediated by career expectations (Astin, 1984). In other words, what people *expect* from their careers and what they *actually experience* can potentially affect career goals.

Career expectations

Lent et al. (1994, p. 381) defined expectations as "personal beliefs about the consequences or outcomes of performing particular behaviors." Two primary categories of expectations emerged

from participant interviews: (a) job-related expectations and (b) personal expectations. Job-related expectations included perceptions of the professional skills, effort, and commitment required for a career in intercollegiate athletics. Personal expectations included how positive or negative perceptions of and experiences in intercollegiate athletic administration aligned with personal and professional goals.

Job-related expectations

The participants' early career experiences included internships and entry-level positions in intercollegiate athletics. These positions provided opportunities to (a) learn and develop skills perceived to be more marketable for the next position and (b) interact with student-athletes. Positions often required the women to take on multiple roles including compliance, sport supervision, student and academic services, and/or event management. In these early roles, women gained experience and thus were more socialized into internal operations. Julian described herself as "a one-man (sic) band." Amanda described her experience at a small school with a "small staff, doing a whole lot of everything. It was a good place to get your feet wet because you got your hands in everything." The idea behind working in such positions was that women would build the skill sets necessary to advance; thus, affecting the lives of student-athletes. A more advanced skill set was particularly important to women interested in becoming Athletic Directors. For example, Vera explained:

> I knew I had to develop the skills in the areas of fund raising. I knew that was really important. I didn't have an MBA. I didn't have the business background. But the ability to develop relationships; work with people, energetic person….I thought really working on the fundraising side on behalf of the university and also the department, I thought was an area I could develop some skills.

Skills and job competencies are critically important to career development, expectations, and goals (Wentling, 2003; Whitmarsh, Brown, Cooper, Hawkins-Rogers, & Wentworth, 2007). When women engage in education and training, they develop skills and competencies that may increase performance quality, self-efficacy, and the likelihood they will persist in the face of obstacles (Wentling, 2003). Gaining relevant, practical experience and education to obtain a skill set necessary for advancement is also a common theme in literature pertaining to the careers of women in sport organizations (Grappendorf et al., 2004; Greenhill et al., 2009; Hoffman, 2010; Hums & Sutton, 1999).

Many participants also discussed the expectation of long work hours and travel, identifying long workdays, weekend commitments, travel requirements, and other after-hours engagements (e.g., fundraisers, community benefits) as challenges. For some, the long work hours contributed to burn out or boredom, while other participants described stress-related health problems. Some of the health problems included insomnia, hives, high blood pressure, and anxiety. Vera described college athletics as a culture of "grinding and pounding," while Roberta considered the industry "a fast-paced, all in your face, all day long business." The long hours caused audible frustration for Vera, "You have to put in so many hours to be perceived that you're doing something, which I think is crap." Equating long work hours to the perception of "doing something" may also be indicative of women attempting to "prove" themselves in a male-dominated environment. This type of behavior is typical of "token" women in male-dominated professions (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Kanter, 1977; Whitmarsh et al., 2007), including sport management (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2008; Grappendorf et al., 2004). As a result, women in senior management positions may feel pressure to "prove" their abilities to colleagues

(Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; Grappendorf et al., 2004; Whitmarsh et al., 2007) through extraordinary activities such as successful risk-taking or leading organizational change (Itzin & Newman, 1995; Kanter, 1977). For women in leadership positions like Athletic Director, extraordinary activities carry a level of career risk since such activities require enhanced visibility.

As a result of the long work hours, irregular schedules, and travel requirements, participants described experiencing conflict between their roles as employees and family members or friends. As Judy explained, "You sacrifice at home because of the things that you like in your job." Three women discussed how their single and/or divorced relationship status may be a function of the demands of their jobs because work-life balance is "very difficult." The strain of long hours and travel schedules was particularly acute for two of the women. They were actively considering moving to a school at a lower NCAA divisional level. Despite frustration with time and limited work-life balance, all participants acknowledged the extensive time commitment was something they expected upon entering the profession. Despite previous studies (Bruening et al., 2008; Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Inglis et al., 2000) identifying work-life balance as a factor for attrition from the field, none of the participants in this study expressed an immediate interest in leaving the field of college athletics because of difficulties balancing professional and personal lives.

Personal expectations

Personal expectations included how positive or negative perceptions of experiences in intercollegiate athletic administration aligned with personal and professional goals. As discussed, the women in this study described pursuing a career in college athletics because they wanted to positively influence the lives of student-athletes. In other words, women expected a career in intercollegiate athletics would provide them the opportunity to influence the student-athlete experience. Personal expectations for work in intercollegiate athletics were epitomized by Jenny's quote, "I thought everyone would have the student-athletes' best interest in mind." Several women in this study suggested that the values reflected in the actions of the NCAA were in direct conflict with the values the organization itself espouses. While the women recognized college athletics is a business, the fear was that student-athletes were no longer a focus; instead, the priority is financial gain. As Tracy explained,

> I think particularly with some of the things we've seen in the last couple months with the direction the NCAA is heading, particularly at the FBS level, it raises my concerns even more about what we're doing and where we are and what the balance is for our students. … I think that FBS is growing further and further away from what my philosophy is on that.

Women described Division I athletics as "out of control," "excessive," "too political," "all about the money," and the NCAA as an organization moving to a "more business-oriented NBA model." Cindy suggested NCAA legislation is being created and enacted too quickly "without very much thought" about consequences for student-athletes and the viability of their respective sports. Barb also described NCAA policies as leading programs in the wrong direction. Finally, Roberta indicated the state of college athletics is the result of "a few men leading the charge and dragging us places that, in our hearts, women in this business know is not the right way."

Personal expectations strongly influence how women constructed their careers in athletic administration. Specifically, participants' vocational personalities (e.g., career interests, values,

needs, abilities) (Savickas, 2005) seemed to influence how and why women chose to follow their respective career paths as Career Associates or Future ADs. For example, for Career Associates and Future ADs alike, the perception that student athletes were no longer the primary focus reaffirmed their career goals for advancement. The difference between Career Associates and Future ADs was the end-point. Career Associates did not feel it was necessary to reach the position of Athletic Director to contribute to student athlete development. Rather, the Career Associates felt they could influence student athlete development by obtaining more departmental responsibilities and having a stronger voice in departmental decision-making. Interestingly, while many Career Associates discussed feeling as though they had a "voice" in decisions of the department, few could offer examples of how they were contributing to active change. By achieving the title of Athletic Director, however, Future ADs described feeling that sitting in the Athletic Director chair would allow them the opportunity to affect institutional and NCAA policy that would, in turn, affect the student athlete experience.

By applying Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2005) to this example, we can begin to see how vocational personality and like themes (e.g., work responsibilities) begin to influence the decisions participants make about their future career plans. For Career Associates, we begin to uncover subtle barriers in organizational structures and social relationships that, in combination with their vocational personality, may preclude them from seeking the position of Athletic Director. Despite similar perceived barriers, Future ADs seek opportunities that help them align personal expectations and vocational personality, so that they may create an environment in which they could foster and create change. This process is indicative of how participants' career goals and expectations changed based on their respective experiences (Lent et al., 1994, 2000). The process of negotiating and coping with changes in career goals and expectations is addressed in the following section.

Negotiating career realities

When confronted with differences between career expectations and realities, individuals "with a strong sense of coping self-efficacy (i.e., beliefs regarding one's capabilities to negotiate particular environmental obstacles) are more likely to persevere toward their goals" (Lent et al., p. 46). Future ADs were more likely to exhibit coping efficacy (Lent et al., 2000), while Career Associates tended to reimagine career goals (Savickas, 2002). The process of negotiating career realities in conjunction with career expectations contributes to an understanding of how women utilize resources to overcome challenges. Negotiation strategies also provide insight into factors affecting career decisions. Despite differences in their career trajectories, Career

Table 3. *Negotiation Strategies and Coping Mechanisms of Career Associates and Future ADs*

Data	Career Associates	Future ADs
Characteristics	Refined career interests	More defined career path
	Change in work priorities	Change in work priorities
	Career stabilization	Active pursuit of AD position
Negotiation Strategies	Skill Acquisition Engage network of mentors and supervisors Self-reflection	
Career path	Do I want the AD position? Do I have what it takes to get there? Do I really want to do what it takes?	How do I get to the AD position? What skills do I need to get there? How can I acquire those skills? What is the next best career move?

Associates and Future ADs negotiated career expectations and realities in similar ways including: (a) skill acquisition, (b) engaging in a network of peer and traditional mentors, and (c) self-reflection. A summary of the negotiation strategies of Career Associates and Future ADs is presented in Table 3.

Skill acquisition

Participants perceived skill acquisition as an important component to career advancement. More importantly, women perceived the acquisition of skills as the ultimate support. In other words, the women in this study felt if they had a strong work ethic and could learn new skills, they would advance through the organizational hierarchy or earn more departmental responsibility. Corby and Stanworth (2009) as well as Wentling (2003) found that opportunities to acquire skills and experience were vitally important to women seeking or already in management positions. Furthermore, skills and job competencies are critically important to career development, expectations, and goals (Wentling, 1996, 2003; Whitmarsh et al., 2007). Developing skills and competencies can improve performance quality, increase self-efficacy, and facilitate the likelihood women will persist in the face of barriers (Wentling, 2003). Several women in this study mentioned feelings of increased self-confidence when they assumed more responsibility and described feeling affirmed when colleagues recognized them for their work.

Engaging a network

Another form of negotiation included engaging a network of mentors and supervisors to discuss career strategies and career concerns. O'Neil, Bilimoria, and Saatciolgu (2004) suggested seeking career guidance could result in rapid career advancement and development for women. The findings of this study suggest participants are interested in career advancement in intercollegiate athletics, but definitions of advancement differ. Regardless of definition, such an interest in career advancement may result in more women in decision-making positions or women with more decision-making power in their current roles because they have a more in-depth understanding of the field. Second, the network is another way to maintain interpersonal relationships, another support identified in this study. The relationships women developed through networks and mentoring were important in helping women manage career experiences, expectations, and goals. Participants described their networks as sources of camaraderie, commiseration, and change.

Self-reflection

Self-reflection also played an important role in the negotiation of supports and barriers. During self-reflection, participants tended to evaluate their current experiences within the context of their career expectations and goals. Generally, women engaged in self-reflection when seeking guidance from a mentor, encountering a barrier, or considering the possibility of a change in responsibility or position. O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005) suggested the process of self-reflection is a characteristic of the career phase "pragmatic endurance" or "reinventive contribution." Pragmatic endurance acknowledges the multiple responsibilities women encounter both personally and professionally (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005).

Career (Re)Definition

Finding alignment

As Career Associates progressed through their careers, specific career goals – such as a title or distinct responsibilities (e.g., SWA) – became less defined. Priorities changed as women gained more experience, developed personal lives, or felt as though the direction of the NCAA as a governing body was increasingly suspect. Perhaps this is a function of the "Establishment" phase of career development (Savickas, 2002). Establishment represents stabilization in a job and career. As the social and work worlds become more parallel, a person may seek more opportunities (e.g., greater responsibilities, advancement, better person-environment fit) within his/her organization or in another organization. Toward the end of the Establishment stage, an individual may begin to contemplate the "next steps" in his/her career. According to Savickas (2002), "Individuals reach a point where taking care of what they have established, that is, maintaining, becomes more important than advancing in new directions" (p. 179).

Other women in this study represent the "Management" phase of career development (Savickas, 2002). During the Management stage, an individual may ask him/herself, "Is this the career I want to pursue for the next 25 years?" It is at this stage that occupational responsibilities and the vocational self-concept are re-evaluated. Savickas (2002) describes this process as "re-finding, not refining, the self" (p. 179). Participants also described being "less driven by money" and more focused on job responsibilities, personal growth, and support.

As Tracy discussed, "As I've gotten older, it's much more about who I work for than what the job is, which was more important when I was younger." When Judy began her career in intercollegiate athletics, she had a timeline – assistant AD by 30, associate AD by 35, and eventually an Athletic Director. She no longer wants to be an Athletic Director. Instead, Judy described being more concerned with

> What kind of influence am I making? What kind of impact am I making? Where can I make the best use of my skills and use of my time but still feel like I'm not stagnant. I'm not going to stay here just because I'm comfortable here and I like it here. I still want to make a difference. I want to continue to grow.

Roberta described a similar experience in which she began to consider, "How does this job fit who I am? How does it fit in the greater scheme of what I want to be when I grow up?"

Advocating for self

Future ADs**,** Martha, Barb, Vera, and Fritz, stated they would like to be Athletic Directors in NCAA Division I athletic departments. While these women described similar barriers and supports affecting their career development, they tended to be better advocates for themselves, forward-thinking, and optimistic. Vera, Martha, and Fritz described situations in which they actively asked supervisors and mentors for more responsibility. Fritz, a senior athletic director at a private university, has worked in her athletic department for over two decades. During that time, she has worked with five Athletic Directors. In each circumstance, Fritz advocated and negotiated for responsibilities that would not only make her indispensable to the department, but would also make her a more attractive candidate for an Athletic Director position. She described one moment in which a new Athletic Director came in and wanted to reorganize the department. The AD offered Fritz several options including business operations. Business operations

entailed supervision of all departmental budgets – an area with which she had no experience. She accepted the offer and later parlayed the experience into working with the University's capital campaign, which entailed developing a master plan for the construction of several athletic facilities. Fritz explained that advocating and negotiating for responsibilities gave her "the freedom to understand a little bit more what's possible -- how (I) can change things up, (I) had a much better grasp of how to make something happen."

Vera and Martha, both pursuing intercollegiate athletics as a second career, explained that early career experiences helped shape their interests in becoming an Athletic Director. When each woman realized her new career goal, she engaged in a planning process, which involved self-reflection and informational interviews with colleagues. Vera and Martha described asking themselves introspective questions such as "How do I get (to the AD position)?" "What will it take to get there?" Vera and Martha also conducted informational interviews with current Athletic Directors, including supervisors and mentors. These two women wanted to know "What's the next BEST move?" "How can I add football?" "What other skills do I need to acquire?" The primary difference between Future ADs and Career Associates was in the questions they asked themselves and others based on their perceptions of the responsibilities of the Athletic Director. Career Associates were more likely to ask themselves "Do I want the AD position?" "Do I have what it takes to get there?" "Do I really want to learn that skill?"

Crant (2000, p. 436) suggested employees who "take an active role in their approach toward work" exhibit proactive behavior. Proactive people "actively seek information and opportunities for improving things; they don't passively wait for information and opportunities to come to them" (Crant, p. 437). In this study, Future ADs sought opportunities to "build" or "create." For example, a former coach and aspiring architect, Barb described being attracted to "projects." She explained

> Every place I've ever gone needed to be built and so (I'm) building it. If we're not building, I'm bored out of my ever loving mind. … I'm more of a creator than a competitor, there are a lot of people in this industry that sit back. (p. 16)

The women in this study provided a wide range of perspectives on their career paths and aspirations. It is interesting to note how the Career Associates and the Future ADs chose to navigate through their respective careers and how their goals and expectations evolved as a result of their work experiences. These results present interesting insight on participants' perceptions of their place in an intercollegiate athletics career, both as individuals and for women generally in this industry segment.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, data collected from the women in this sample cannot be generalized to other senior-level female managers in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics. While common patterns emerged, some of which are reflected in other sport management studies, the perspectives shared were unique to the participants in this study. To address this limitation, interviews were conducted to the point of saturation. Findings were also presented in a manner that represented the voices, feelings, and actions (Patton, 2002) of participants. Second, the sample for this study was limited to women in a specific region of the United States. Not only should future research include a broader range of geographic locations within the United States, the global sport industry would benefit from more research on the career experiences of women in other countries. Third, data collection was limited to one interview per

participant. Glesne (2008), however, advised conducting one-time interviews with more people rather than conducting two or three interviews with fewer people over a more extended period. Finally, this study sought to understand the breadth of career experiences, expectations, and goals of female senior-level managers in intercollegiate athletics. As such, the researchers did not directly focus on other aspects of personal and professional identity (e.g., race, sexual orientation, socio-economic class). Given the limited research in these areas, future studies may seek to understand how various identities shape career goals and expectations (Knoppers & McDonald, 2010).

Furthermore, research on women in intercollegiate athletics suggests gender as a barrier to professional growth and advancement (Burton et al., 2009; Burton et al., 2011; Grappendorf et al., 2004). Other studies suggest power is gendered and favors men in sport organizations (Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2007; Sartore & Cunningham, 2007). To better understand the role of gender in intercollegiate athletics administration, it is important to also understand the career development of men. Until we explore the career experiences and perceptions of men – and examine areas such as values incongruence or work-family balance, for example – it is difficult to adequately assess the role of gender in the career development of individuals pursuing careers in intercollegiate athletics. Previous research in other male-dominated industries suggests perceptions of gender may be changing (Duehr & Bono, 2006; Smith et al., 2012). Thus, examining career development from a male perspective might also offer insight into how perceptions of gender in intercollegiate athletics administration have evolved.

Conclusion

This study provides a better understanding of the dynamic processes contributing to women's career experiences, expectations, and goals in intercollegiate athletic administration. Participants sought work responsibilities that matched their professional interests and perceived abilities. They also perceived these positions aligned with their career goals. Additionally, professional goals changed over time when participants encountered important career (e.g., changing jobs, opportunity to learn a new skills set) and/or life events (e.g., having a child, desiring more work-life balance). All of the women in this study encountered points in their careers in which they chose to (a) pursue or continue on the path to Athletic Director or (b) seek other opportunities in college athletics.

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