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## **Title IX and the Impact on Athletic Leadership for Women**

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Women slowly entered the higher education setting in the late 1700's with a main focus of learning how to be better Christian wives, mothers, and teachers (Pasque & Errington Nicholson, 2011). For entertainment and social purposes, women began participating in events such as horseback riding, showboating, swimming, tennis, bowling, and archery (Bell, 2007). Women were discouraged from participating in any athletic activities beyond these activities because it was thought that there would be a decrease in a woman's fertility and femininity through strenuous acts (Bell, 2007; Cohen & Kisker, 2010). It was not until 1896 that the first intercollegiate competition occurred for women: a basketball game between University of California Berkley and Stanford (Bell, 2007).

Following this first intercollegiate event, there was a slow increase in interest, recognition, and acceptance for women's participation in athletics at the collegiate level, despite the fast gains of men's intercollegiate sports. The inequities that existed between men's and women's athletic teams were tangible on college campuses. There was an imbalance in the number of women's programs compared to men's, and the former often received little to no financing from the institution. Additionally, separate athletic departments were established in which separate male and female administrators ran each department. At the time, the segregated departments allowed for a great deal of opportunities for women to be leaders and administrators for women's athletics (Pasque & Errington Nicholson, 2011).

Gender inequities between athletic departments received a great deal of scrutiny and were thought to be rectified by the passing of Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972. The execution of Title IX expanded opportunities for female students in higher education yet had a profound impact on women in athletic leadership. According to Sax and Arms (2008), "...the implementation of the Title IX policies has also provided women with unprecedented opportunities in many areas of campus life, most notably athletics" (p. 24). The purpose of this document is to provide a history of the Title IX of Education Amendments Act of 1972, discuss the impact of Title IX on athletics and female administrators and to use feminist thought to frame the effect of this legislation. Finally, we will provide strategies for improving gender equity for women in collegiate athletic programs.

### **History of Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972**

The passing of Title IX was preceded by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited discrimination based on race, color, national origin or religion in all federally assisted programs, but did not include sex discrimination. Six years following the passing of this act, congress held the first hearings on sex discrimination in higher education which led to the development of Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 which was passed on June 2, 1972 (Pasque & Errington Nicholson, 2011). Title IX of the Education Amendments Act states the following, "no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance" (NCWGE, 2012).

The intent of the law was to promote gender equity in all areas including access to higher education, career education, education for pregnant and parenting students, employment, learning environment, math and science, sexual harassment, standardized testing and

technology, and athletics (NCWGE, 2012). A popular thought is that Title IX is an entitlement program when in fact, it offers no special benefits for girls and women. It simply provides guidelines, procedures, and tools for addressing inequities and discrimination which can impact male and female students' abilities to have a positive and successful experience in the educational system (NCWGE, 2012).

The passage of Title IX followed the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s and provided support for a significant change in policy and the purpose of educating women (Pasque & Errington Nicholson, 2011). There was an increase in focus on civil rights and civil liberties for all, supporting the development of the second wave of feminism and making the passage of the policy much more timely and powerful. The clear recognition that inequalities existed within government funded programs, especially collegiate athletics, was a positive step to fostering an environment of equality at institutions of higher education. Greendorfer (1999) suggests "the legal mandate creates tension with the hegemonic construction of gender as well as with the constellation of sporting practices that privilege males" (p.69). This tension was evident in the implementation of Title IX policy. Despite the fact that only 4% of the legislative text relating to sport, institutions across the nation routinely challenged Title IX on this issue (Greendorfer, 1999). The impact of Title IX permeates higher education as a system, a transformational change which is evident today.

### **Impact of Title IX on Collegiate Athletics**

There is little debate about the benefits of Title IX for women's equality in higher education; however, there continues to be debate over how and if the policy impacts men's athletic programs. The law requires that institutions treat men's and women's athletic programs equally with regard to participation, scholarships, and benefits. There is no requirement that institutions spend the same amount of money on women's programs as men's programs, but that the opportunities are equal (NCWGE, 2012; Sawyer, 2009). In 1972, women's programs received 2% of athletic budgets and scholarships were non-existent. As of 2009-2010, 40% of athletic budgets supported women's programs and 48% of scholarship dollars at Division I institutions supported female athletes (NCWGE, 2012).

College athletics continues to struggle with the ramifications of creating gender equitable spaces in sport. Eliminating sex discrimination in athletics is challenging given the male positive socialization evident in athletics. The most celebrated teams in collegiate athletics are male, in spite of team performance and losses in revenue (Greendorfer, 1999). Social constructs historically limit women's sports as a matter of maintaining femininity (Bell, 2007; Cohen & Kisker, 2010). The effects are far reaching, "sporting practice is a cultural production of the idealized male image transmitting messages of power symbolically represented by muscular strength -- as well as other socially constructed meanings attached to the male body and masculine gender role" (Greendorfer, 1999). Challenging idealized social constructs threatens collegiate athletics in that it is forced to disrupt the status quo (Greendorfer, 1999). As a result, the response to Title IX as it relates to college athletics is contentious.

The implementation of Title IX resulted in the development of several athletic teams in order to promote equity and there was a dramatic increase in the number of women participating in athletics. In the 2010-2011 year, the number of female-student athlete participants was six times that of pre-Title IX (NCWGE, 2012). Yet, statistical equality has yet to be achieved as women represent 57% of the national collegiate student body, but only 42% of intercollegiate athletics (Rhoads, 2004; Acosta & Carpenter, 2010).

It is often overlooked that the implementation of Title IX not only had an impact on student-athletes, but it also affected staff members. Prior to the passage of the policy in 1972, 90% of women's teams were coached by females and today 43% of women's teams are

coached by a female. Additionally, the passing of Title IX led to the development of significant barriers for women in athletic leadership, which will be discussed in further detail below (Pasque & Errington Nicholson, 2011).

### **Impact of Title IX on Women in Athletic Administration**

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Title IX of the Education Amendments Act were incredible accomplishments in the fight for civil justice, especially through the lens of liberal feminist scholarship. These federal changes represented a systemic change that supported the philosophical ideal that the playing field was leveled for female student athletes and women leaders in athletic administration (Pasque & Errington Nicholson, 2011). However, as Nidiffer (2002) describes, separatism took shape which led to the decline of spaces controlled by women to further systemic oppression of women's sport and its established female administrators.

The NCAA was one of the most vocal detractors of Title IX legislation. Forced to comply with the law, the organization made a concerted effort to take control of women's sport, disabling the former women's governing body for athletics (Greendorfer, 1999). In an effort to placate the organization, the senior women's administrator role evolved out of the NCAA takeover (Greendorfer, 1999).

### **History of Female Athletic Administrators**

Athletic administration developed as a result of the agencies governing athletics and the need for organization with the growth of intercollegiate athletics. According to Pasque and Errington Nicholson (2011), the role of the women's athletic director did not exist on campuses until the 1960s. These women were considered 'guardians of women's health' and were often time physical educators who held faculty appointments. The athletic director role is thought to be the most prestigious within an athletic department as the position holds the most power and control over athletics (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010; Wright, Eagleman & Pederson, 2011)

Prior to the passing of Title IX, athletic departments were typically segregated and administration of each department was gender specific. Female athletic directors led 90% of women's athletic programs (Pasque & Errington Nicholson, 2011). As stated earlier, this granted many women faculty status and the ability to participate at an administrative level. Following the implementation of Title IX in 1972, many men's and women's athletic departments were combined to create one department. As stated by Hult (2009), this meant that many women athletic directors were demoted to secondary leadership positions or out of administrative positions entirely (Pasque & Errington Nicholson, 2011). Marxist feminist scholarship supports the notion that capitalism is to blame for the inequalities that exist and that because fewer positions were available when departments combined, women were typically viewed to be at the bottom and were either cut of their positions or transformed into a lesser position (Pasque & Errington Nicholson, 2011).

The loss in leadership positions for females in higher education is not unique for women in athletic departments. Paque and Errington Nicholson (2011), state "women have historically faced significant limits on access to leadership roles since male and female students started being educated together" (p. 34). Often, women reach some sort of barrier blocking women from achieving more in their professional lives, often referred to as a glass ceiling, glass wall, or a glass floor (Ballenger, 2010; Bonawitz & Andel, 2009). Traditionally, women have other barriers and complications that inhibit their ability to rise to the top. According to Pasque and Errington Nicholson (2011),

The demands of a balancing family responsibilities, fears surrounding the sexual orientation of the deans and directors and the influence that may exert on their students, and social constructed barriers such as the 'old boy's network' also offer important explanations for the underrepresentation of women leaders in higher education today (p. 43).

The socially constructed barriers and culture of athletics have created an environment in which many women struggle to obtain and maintain their identity (Wright, Eagleman & Pederson, 2011). Yet, many women are successful contributors in various positions within athletic administration.

### **Current Climate for Female Athletic Administrators**

Of the 348 member institutions of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), females represent 34.9% of athletic administration staff (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010). The NCAA is the most notable and widely discussed organization for collegiate athletics; however, there are several other governing bodies which are not represented in that figure. Many of the other governing agencies represent small liberal arts institutions, community colleges and many religious affiliated institutions.

The NCAA is divided into three divisions, Division I, II, and III based on financial ability to give athletic scholarships and also size of institution (Matheson, O'Connor, & Herberger, 2012). At all Division I institutions, women hold 8.4 percent of athletic director positions (Pasque & Errington Nicholson, 2011; Sander, 2011). To compare to other female administrators in the academy that have a prestigious role, in 2006, 23 percent of college presidents were female (Sander, 2011). Additionally, Acosta and Carpenter (2010) report that 4.2 percent of Division I institutions do not have a lone female administrator at all.

The lack of female representation in collegiate athletic departments is alarming; yet, again not unique as higher education has traditionally followed patriarchal domination. Male dominated leadership can be found in many other professional areas and woven into faculty and administrative positions across the academy. It is known that traditionally, men and women have differences with leadership styles; yet, the qualities women have can be as valuable to organizations as that of men (Ballenger, 2010; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1986). There is a cultural normalization that women are weak and that physicality and power should be used in traditional leadership settings (Dean, Bracken & Allen, 2010). Additionally, male normative communication is a preferred manner of leadership on collegiate campuses and leaders are expected to be direct, assertive, and dominant (Dean, Bracken & Allen, 2010). Athletics is based in rules, rituals and performance expectations which typically feed into the stereotypical male leadership style (Greendorfer, 1999). When women do not appear to possess these male-dominated qualities, they often are not considered for leadership positions which in turn affect the structure of athletic administration.

When Title IX was passed and athletic departments combined leadership positions, women had to adapt to assimilating to the traditional role of male figures or improve their status through dramatic efforts, referred to as superperformance (Dean, Bracken & Allen, 2010). Often, these efforts allow women to be recognized for their contributions, but create an imbalance in traditional gender qualities that are important in the workplace (Pasque & Errington Nicholson, 2011). Yet, these changes can promote work environments in which females prefer to work under male leadership because they have been conditioned to do so, questioning the notion of legitimacy (Dean, Bracken & Allen, 2010).

The discrimination and oppression on women in athletic administration can be supported by radical feminist scholarship. Cultural radical feminism explains that "the root cause of the problem is not femininity, but the low value that patriarchy assigns to feminine qualities"

(Pasque & Errington Nicholson, 2011, p. 6). While there have been improvements since 1972 in the number of women in athletic administration, there is a significant amount of work that needs to be done in order to create equal representation of leadership positions.

Transformation of departments needs to occur in order to accept that women's leadership qualities are as effective, but different, from that of the preferred male-dominated leadership style. Strength is valued in several forms and a change in perception could arguably alter the way athletic administrative leadership is viewed and valued (Pasque & Errington Nicholson, 2011). One way in which athletic administration has supported the role of females in athletic departments is through the position of the senior woman administrator.

### **Senior Woman Administrator**

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) created the position of the Primary Woman Administrator (PWA) in 1982 in order to help assist in the transition of men's and women's athletic departments (Tiell & Dixon, 2008). The role transitioned into the Senior Woman Administrator (SWA) in the 1991-1992 academic year but was not given a clear, uniform definition until 2006. The development of a position specifically for a female in an athletic department within NCAA institutions was a huge step in leveling the playing field, promoting gender equity, and providing female role models for women in collegiate athletics (Hatfield, L. & Hatfield, L., 2009; NCAA, 2010).

According to the NCAA (2010), the SWA position needs to be filled by a female in the department who can also hold an additional position within the department. Often, the SWA role is filled by a current athletic administrator, coach, or athletic trainer. The position is designed to deal primarily with women's issues in order to promote and maintain gender equity in all operational areas of the department (Gill-Fisher, 1998). The woman in this role often holds other non-departmental leadership tasks like administration of intramurals for the campus, serving as the liaison for Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC), and party planning (Hatfield, L. & Hatfield, L., 2009; Tiell, 2004).

There are current debates over the duties, significance, and relevance of the senior woman administrator. Some of the conversation revolves around the notion that there has not been a need to identify a senior male administrator, some institutions do not designate a SWA, and the actual decision-making abilities of the SWA are unclear (Tiell & Dixon, 2008). The development of this position was a positive step for women in athletics and allows a lone female to have a leadership role; yet, the aforementioned issues might bring in to question the actual practicality of this position.

### **Suggestions to Increase Women in Athletic Administration**

Significant time and attention still needs to be dedicated to improving the representation of women in leadership positions at collegiate institutions. It is known that women can be valuable to organizations and that proper mechanisms must be in place in order to allow women to flourish in leadership positions and fight the inequalities that exist (Ballenger, 2010; Pasque & Errington Nicholson 2011). In order to decrease the existing gender inequalities and improve the leadership opportunities for women in athletics, there needs to be a change in leadership development and mentoring.

### **Leadership Development**

As discussed, women have taken roles in athletic departments that have been subordinate to that of their male counterparts which has led to less representation in leadership positions. Research by Nidiffer (2002) suggests that integrating frameworks for male and female

leadership should be viewed as normative and valuable indicating that a woman's leadership skills need to be viewed and implemented as a valuable asset to any athletic department. Despite this, the climate for leadership development is low both in numbers of female leaders, and opportunities for intentional programs (Dean, Bracken, and Allen, 2010). Pasque and Errington Nicholson (2011) contend that women fail to reach higher levels of leadership due to the historical separations in education by gender. Women continue to feel isolated and unique in position and leadership styles, and as a result are slow to exhibit gender normative leadership characteristics. The opportunity for growth has not gone unnoticed. Several programs have been implemented to provide opportunities in leadership development. Common themes from research on these programs suggest the need for effective mentorship, the development of a network, introductions to professional organizations, job training and career planning (Dean, Bracken, and Allen, 2010). Literature on the subject also suggests that the success of these leadership programs is dependent of the affirmation of gender normative leadership styles, the normalization of women in athletic leadership roles, and the replacing of value judgments which socialize traditional female leadership traits as inferior to males (Pasque and Errington Nicholson, 2011).

### **Mentoring**

Mentoring is a complex process that involves many components to be factored in determining effectiveness both from the mentor's perspective and the protégé's perspective. Cahill (1996) stated that the process of mentoring as a component of the professional-socialization process may influence how individuals prepare themselves and develop various values, skills, knowledge, and attitudes throughout their academic and professional careers. Hence, the importance of mentoring is recognized across disciplines in both academic and professional settings. This can prove to be quite important in terms of female administration as mentors and finding and cultivating the development of future leaders.

Halfer and Sullivan (2008) took a look at the effectiveness of a mentoring program for new graduates just entering the workforce. They found a higher job satisfaction rate with those in mentoring programs to those not, predominantly due to the ease of transition and professional support they received. Thus the importance of modeling and professionalization by someone of the same gender would seem an important process to consider. With the low representation of women in athletic administration, same gender mentors are difficult to find. While women can find mentors in male figures, Scandura and Williams (2001) found that protégé's reported greater role modeling behaviors in same-gender mentorships than in cross-gender mentorships which could be due in large part to the interpersonal comfort of the mentoring relationship (Allen, 2005). Women in athletic departments need a greater representation of other females in order to provide mentors, role models, and a guiding path to obtain leadership positions.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

There is no question that gender inequities exist within collegiate athletics today. Significant improvements have been made since the passing of Title IX; yet, many would argue that the changes have not been enough. Inequalities continue to exist for female student-athletes on college campuses and most notably, there is a significant discrepancy in the balance of genders within athletic administration. As other areas of higher education receive attention for the existing gender discrimination, it is important that the inequities within athletic administration be at the forefront of concern. Female staff members and administrators provide significant opportunities for mentorship and role models for young female student-athletes. If student-athletes interact with more women in athletic leadership, perhaps there

will be an improvement in the number of women who continue to climb through the glass barriers that continue to exist today.

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