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Equity and Discrimination in NCAA Athletic Departments: Perceptions of Senior Women Administrators

William F. Stier, Jr., Robert C. Schneider, Timothy J. Henry, Gregory E. Wilding

Abstract

Perceptions of Senior Woman Administrators (SWAs) were sought regarding areas of equity and discrimination in NCAA Athletic Departments. A five point agree / disagree Likert-scale survey was electronically mailed to all NCAA Senior Woman Administrators (SWAs) throughout the United States. Of the 841 surveys mailed, 406 were returned for a 48.3% return rate. To determine differences in the distribution of Likert-scale questions by demographic variables the Kruskal-Wallis rank test was used at a 0.05 nominal significance level. Significant differences with regards to Likert-scale items of agreement / disagreement were found between the following SWA demographics: marital status, reporting structure, and highest level of education completed. Significant differences between demographic variables were noted for eight of the twelve areas of equity and discrimination. Overall, the top three discrimination factors were: family responsibilities disadvantage women more than men, women are paid less than men for comparable positions, and it is more difficult for women to advance than men.

Although women have made great strides in professional advancement in intercollegiate athletic departments many challenges and obstacles still remain. Lack of equity with male administrators and discrimination against women in athletic departments are subjects of concern. These issues may involve areas such as pay equity, rules of behavior, advancement of females, and being treated equally with males, among others.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) created the position of Senior Women Administrator (SWA) in 1981 in order to ensure the representation of women and also to have a women's voice within administrative ranks of athletic departments (Hawes, 2002). The creation of the SWA was viewed as a major step forward in the professional advancement of women in athletic departments. However, concerns remain that women employed in intercollegiate athletic departments still face numerous areas of inequity and episodes of discrimination. This national study examined SWA's perceptions of selected factors that indicate areas of equity and discrimination by others in their work setting. Many studies have been devoted to investigating

the roles and responsibilities of the SWA position but there is little literature examining areas of equity and discrimination of women employed in NCAA athletic departments. The present study helps to fill this void by surveying SWAs of all NCAA colleges and universities.

Previous literature investigating women employed in athletic departments reveals that the issue of equity and discrimination is ongoing. These women are dealing with many areas of discrimination and challenges within their daily duties. Dupree, Willis, and Pettaway (2006) found that female intercollegiate athletic directors and director's of women's intercollegiate athletic programs are faced with major professional challenges including stereotyping, institutional structures, the continued dominance of men, and sport ideologies.

Schneider (2009) reflects that the tradition of gender discrimination against women in university athletic departments continues through the dominance of males in athletics and their placement of roadblocks to prevent the advancement of women in intercollegiate athletics. Supporting this notion, Arnold and Shnew (1997) stated that the lack of female representation among upper-management positions can add to the likelihood that women can be discriminated against. This thought is also reflected by Doyle and Hind (2006) who find that the presence of a glass ceiling impedes the upward mobility of women.

Role congruency theory can be used to examine the challenges surrounding women working within intercollegiate athletic departments (Grappendorf, Lough & Griffin, 2004). This theory proposes that a prejudice exists against potential female leaders because leadership ability is more stereotypically attributed to men than to women (Eagley & Karau, 2002). Women in SWA positions may be perceived as only possessing the characteristics necessary to be successful in communal roles. Communal characteristics include being affectionate, helpful, kind, sympathetic nurturing, and gentle (Grappendorf et al, 2008).

Extensive literature demonstrates that gender wage gaps and inequitable pay entitlements affecting women still exist (Schneider, Stier, Henry & Wilding, 2010; Alksnis, Desmarais & Curtis, 2008; Hogue, Yoder & Singleton, 2007). These wage gaps exist in spite of the Equal Pay Act of 1963 which required that men and women in the same work place are provided equal pay for equal work (U.S Equal Employment, n.d.).

Balancing the obligations of family responsibilities and those of the workplace can be problematic for many women (Arnold & Shinew, 1997; Schneider et al, 2010). Arnold and Shinew (1997) separated barriers to career advancement for women into two categories: on the job and home responsibilities. The on the job barriers included being perceived as not being as committed as men, exclusion from informal communications networks, and the absence of effective time management training.

The purpose of this study was to investigate SWAs perceptions of selected factors that indicate areas of equity and discrimination by others in their work setting.

Method

Subjects

Subjects consisted of all employees who held the title of SWA in all NCAA athletic departments throughout the United States. The SWA is the highest ranking female involved in the management of an NCAA institution's intercollegiate athletics program according to the *NCAA Division I Manual 2008-09* (2008). In the case of this national research study SWAs, in fact, are acutely aware of gender equities and inequities in athletic departments and thus serve as a most insightful sample from which to ascertain perceptions.

Questionnaire

A five point Likert-scale questionnaire was developed that included statements regarding SWAs perceptions of areas of equity and discrimination. The content of the questionnaire was determined based on the collaborative efforts of three researchers and the current literature. Two outside experts in the areas of gender equity confirmed the appropriateness of the content and also provided feedback relative to the format of the questionnaire. Following a process of validity that included grading questions for relevance and content, the reviewers deemed appropriate the questions included in the study.

A cover letter was electronically mailed to each SWA. Included in the cover letter were directions to self-administer the survey and a hyperlink allowing for immediate access to the survey. It was made clear in the cover letter and adhered to throughout the study that participation of the SWAs was voluntary and not restricted on the basis of race, gender, age, or any other characteristics.

Anonymity of the SWAs and their institutions was preserved by creating an internal numeric code for each returned survey that was not linked to the

subjects' email addresses. Confidentiality of all information provided, including responses, was maintained as it was stored in a secure location.

Sample Size and Rate of Return

At the time of the mailing the total number of NCAA athletic departments, regardless of classification, was 1050. It can be assumed that each athletic department has an SWA because the SWA position is required by the NCAA. Electronic mail addresses were available on athletic department Websites for 841 SWAs; thus our sample size was 841. Of the 841 SWAs who were e-mailed the link for the on-line survey, 406 returned the surveys for a 48.3% return rate. Survey research rates are typically very low, often around 48% for mailed surveys (Ransdell, 1996) and between 27-32% for email surveys (Marks, 2005).

Data Analysis

To determine differences in the distribution of Likert-scale questions by demographic variables the Kruskal-Wallis rank test was used at a 0.05 nominal significance level. The calculation of frequencies and relative frequencies were used to summarize all variables and all analyses were performed using SAS version 9.1.3.

Results

Demographics of the SWAs

The responses to the SWA demographic questions revealed the following SWA profile. SWAs are most likely female (99.74%), Caucasian (86.4%), married (46.06%), without children (58.63%), employed 1-5 years (54.96%), currently employed at a Division II institution (39.13%), reporting to the athletic director (92.11%), holding a master's degree (74.87%), and earning between \$45,000-\$55,000 per year (20.88%).

Overall

Table 1.0 displays the overall rates at which all SWAs (N=406) agreed / disagreed that selected factors demonstrate areas of equity and discrimination in NCAA athletic departments. The statement regarding equity and discrimination that is agreed upon by the highest number of SWAs (when collapsing the strongly agreed and agreed categories) was *family responsibilities disadvantage women more than men* at 85.7%. *Women are paid less than men for comparable positions* was the second most agreed upon factor (75.5%) of equity and discrimination.

At least half of the SWAs agreed with the following statements regarding the areas of equity and discrimination in NCAA institutions: *it is more difficult for women to advance than men, more women should be hired as employees, women work harder than men to achieve equal status, and the glass ceiling prevents women from advancing more often than men.*

The following three statements were disagreed (when collapsing the strongly disagreed and disagreed categories) upon by the most numbers of SWAs: *men are more competent than women (89.1%), women are treated equally as men (56.2%), men tend to distance themselves from women (32.1%).*

For three of the statements the SWAs assumed a neutral position by selecting neither agree nor disagree. These statements were: *women's definitions of success are masculine based (44.5%), women's definitions of career development are masculine based (43.3%), and men tend to distance themselves from women (38.9%).*

Table 1.0 Rates of SWA Perceptions of Factors of Equity and Discrimination

Factor	Rank	SA	A	N	D	SD
Family responsibilities disadvantage women	1	32.3	53.4	10.7	2.5	1.0
Women are paid less than men for comparable positions	2	22.7	52.8	15.6	8.2	0.8
More difficult for women to advance	3	20.5	51.1	17.2	10.4	0.8
More women should be hired as employees	4	24.6	46.5	25.9	1.5	1.5
Women work harder to achieve equal status	5	21.3	43.7	28.9	4.6	1.5
Glass ceiling effect	6	9.2	46.2	27.8	15.3	1.5
Rules of behavior are more relaxed for men than women	7	6.4	35.0	32.7	21.6	4.3
Womens definitions of success	8	2.8	33.2	44.5	18.3	1.3
Womens definitions of career development	9	2.3	32.8	43.3	20	1.5
Women treated equally as men	10	5.6	24.7	13.5	50.9	5.3
Men tend to distance themselves from women	11	2.8	26.2	38.9	30.0	2.1
Men are more competent than women	12	0.5	0.3	10.2	40.2	48.9

Note: SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; N=Neither Agree Nor Disagree; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree. P<.05

Marital Status

Table 2.0 displays the SWAs by their marital status (single, married, partnered, and divorced) and the rate at which SWAs in each marital status category agreed or disagreed with the areas of equity and discrimination within NCAA Athletic Departments. When focusing on the SWA demographic of marital status, significant differences were found between Likert-scale items for each of the following areas of equity and discrimination: women are treated as equal to men, it is more difficult for women to advance than men, family responsibilities more often disadvantage women than men, men are more competent in athletic department positions than women, and women are paid less than men for comparable positions.

Table 2.0 Rates of SWA Perceptions of Factors of Equity and Discrimination by SWA Marital Status

Factor	Marital Status	SA	A	N	D	SD
Women treated equally as men	Single	5.1	24.4	13.5	51.3	5.8
	Married	6.7	28.9	14.4	45.6	4.4
	Partnered	2.9	11.4	14.3	65.7	5.7
	Divorced	5	15	0	70	10
Women are paid less than men for comparable positions	Single	24.5	52.3	15.5	7.1	.7
	Married	19.0	52.0	16.2	11.7	1.1
	Partnered	25.7	54.3	20	0	0
	Divorced	38.1	57.1	4.8	0	0
Men are more competent than women	Single	.64	0.64	12.8	41.0	44.9
	Married	0.6	0	10.2	41.2	48.0
	Partnered	0	0	0	31.4	68.6
	Divorced	0	0	9.52	38.1	52.4
Family responsibilities disadvantage women	Single	23.1	56.4	15.4	3.9	1.3
	Married	37.4	52.0	7.23	2.2	1.1
	Partnered	37.1	54.3	8.6	0	0
	Divorced	52.4	38.1	9.5	0	0
More difficult for women to advance than men	Single	24.4	50.6	15.4	9.6	0
	Married	15.5	48.6	22.1	12.2	1.7
	Partnered	25.7	68.6	5.7	0	0
	Divorced	28.6	42.9	9.5	19.1	0

Note: SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; N=Neither Agree Nor Disagree; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree. $P < .05$ Note: Of 393 subject sample, 39.7% of SWAs were single, 46.1% married, 8.9% partnered, and 5.3% divorced.

Highest Level of Education

Table 3.0 displays the SWAs by their highest level of education completed (4 year higher education degree, master's degree, doctoral degree, high school degree, and 2 year higher education degree) and the rate at which each of the SWAs, when classified by the highest degree they hold, agreed or disagreed with the areas of equity and discrimination. A significant association between highest level of education and the following areas of equity and discrimination was found: women are treated as equal to men, more women should be hired as employees in athletic departments, it is more difficult for women to advance than men, rules of behavior are more relaxed for men than women, the glass ceiling prevents women from advancing more often than men, and women are paid less than men for comparable positions.

Table 3.0 Rates of SWA Perceptions of Factors of Equity and Discrimination by Highest Level of Education

Factor	Education Level	SA	A	N	D	SD
Women treated equally as men	4 Year Degree	7.9	30.2	14.3	44.4	3.2
	Masters	4.8	24.5	13.6	51.7	5.4
	Doctoral	0	13.8	10.3	65.5	10.3
	High School	33.3	33.3	0	33.3	0
	2 Year Degree	33.3	33.3	33.3	0	0
Women are paid less than men for comparable positions	4 Year Degree	23.4	46.9	17.2	12.5	0
	Masters	22.3	54.5	15.8	6.5	1.0
	Doctoral	31.0	55.2	6.9	6.9	0
	High School	0	0	66.7	33.3	0
	2 Year Degree	0	66.7	0	33.3	0
Glass ceiling effect	4 Year Degree	6.3	39.1	39.1	12.5	3.1
	Masters	8.22	48.2	26.3	16.1	1.03
	Doctoral	27.6	48.3	17.2	6.9	0
	High School	0	0	66.7	33.3	0
	2 Year Degree	0	33.3	0	66.7	0
Rules of behavior are more relaxed for men than women	4 Year Degree	1.6	32.8	37.5	20.3	7.8
	Masters	6.8	35.7	31.6	21.8	4.1
	Doctoral	13.8	41.4	31.0	13.8	0
	High School	0	0	66.7	33.3	0
	2 Year Degree	0	0	33.3	66.7	0
More difficult for women to advance than men	4 Year Degree	10.9	57.8	15.6	15.6	0
	Masters	21.0	49.8	18.6	9.5	1.0
	Doctoral	41.38	48.28	6.9	3.45	0

More difficult for women to advance than men	4 Year Degree	10.9	57.8	15.6	15.6	0
	Masters	21.0	49.8	18.6	9.5	1.0
	Doctoral	41.38	48.28	6.9	3.45	0
	High School	0	33.3	33.3	33.3	0
	2 Year Degree	0	100	0	0	0
More women should be hired as employees	4 Year Degree	21.9	40.6	32.8	1.6	3.1
	Masters	24.8	46.9	25.5	1.4	1.4
	Doctoral	34.5	55.2	10.3	0	0
	High School	0	33.3	66.7	0	0
	2 Year Degree	0	33.3	33.3	33.3	0

Note: SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; N=Neither Agree Nor Disagree; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree. P<.05. Highest Education Completed by SWAs was: 4 Year Higher Education Degree, 16.2%; Masters Degree, 74.9%; Doctoral Degree, 7.4%; High School Degree, 0.8%; 2 Year Higher Education Degree, 0.8%.

Reporting Structure

Table 4.0 displays the SWAs by their reporting structure (president, athletic director, and "other") and the rate at which each of the SWAs, when classified by their reporting structure, agreed or disagreed with the area of equity and discrimination. The responses to *family responsibilities more often disadvantage women than men* was found to significantly depend on the reporting structure of SWAs.

Factor	Marital Status	SA	A	N	D	SD
Family responsibilities disadvantage women more than men	The President	28.6	71.4	0	0	0
	The Athletic Director	33.3	53.61	10.0	2.2	0.8
	Other	20.8	41.7	25.0	8.3	4.2

Note: SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; N=Neither Agree Nor Disagree; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree. P<.05. SWAs reported to: President, 1.8%; Athletic Director, 92.1%; and to other, 6.1%

Years of Experience

When categorized according to years of experience as a SWA (0-5, 6-10, >10), none of the statements regarding equity and discrimination demonstrated a statistically significant association.

NCAA Division

When categorized according to their NCAA Division (DI, DII, DIII), none of the statements regarding equity and discrimination demonstrated a statistically significant association.

Discussion

It is clear from the findings of this study that SWAs employed in intercollegiate athletic departments perceive that they encounter areas of inequity and discrimination within their work settings. The most highly agreed upon (strongly agree and agree) area was that *family responsibilities disadvantage women more than men* at 85.7%. These findings would support the thought of Arnold and Shiner (1997) that balancing the obligations of family responsibilities and those of the workplace can be problematic for many women. The notion that family responsibilities are a primary issue facing SWA's also supports the statement from McKay (1999) that sport organizations are not sensitive to family responsibilities.

Interestingly, this factor also elicited significantly different responses when marital status was considered. SWAs that reported their marital status as single strongly agreed with this statement at a rate of 23.1% while SWAs reporting as married (37.4%), partnered (37.1%) and divorced (53.5%) strongly agreed at a much higher rate. SWAs reporting to the athletic director also more strongly agreed with this statement than those with other reporting structures. These figures would seem to make sense considering that single SWAs typically would not have the same family responsibilities as those that are married or partnered. It also should be noted that the SWAs reporting themselves as divorced strongly agreed that family responsibilities most disadvantage women. This may in part be related to the fact that those that are married, partnered or divorced may be more likely to be involved in motherhood and raising children. Correll, Benard, and Paik (2007) conducted a study related to the discrimination and employment of mothers. The study concluded that employers discriminate against mothers but not fathers and also found that mothers were penalized on a host of measures, including perceived competence and recommended starting salary. Schneider et al. (2010) suggests that if women hold the primary

responsibility of raising children, then workload revisions might be considered as a means to prevent burnout of women employees and help to promote work-life balance. Rosenfield (1988) found that women were confronted with family obligations, such as getting married, having children and having the desire to spend more time with the family.

The second most agreed upon perception of inequity and discrimination was *women are paid less than men for comparable positions* (75.5% strongly agreed or agreed). Wage discrimination has been an ongoing issue for women for many years. Numerous researchers have concluded that gender wage gaps and inequitable pay entitlements affecting women still exist (Schneider et al, 2010, Alksnis, Desmarais, & Curtis, 2008; Hogue, Yoder & Singleton, 2007). The area of wage disparity is further elicited amongst the SWAs reporting themselves as divorced. Divorced SWAs strongly agreed or agreed at a rate of 95.2% while single (76.8%), married (70.9%) and partnered (79%) women agreed at significantly lower rates. It appears that in spite of many efforts to close the perceived salary disparity between men and women, further efforts must be made.

When examining specific demographic factors among the SWAs, marital status was an important factor in the SWAs perceptions on a number of factors of equity and discrimination. One of the areas of significant difference was on the perception of *it is more difficult for women to advance than men*. Partnered SWAs strongly agreed or agreed with this statement at much higher rate (94.3%) than single (74.9%), married (64.1%) or divorced (81.4%) women. This supports an earlier finding by Schneider et al (2010) that partnered women felt strongly that prejudices against lesbians was a factor in preventing women from advancing in administration. This may also be reflective of the generalized gender discrimination against lesbians that continues to be pervasive throughout the United States (Schneider et al, 2010).

Another statement that elicited differences among marital status was that *men are more competent than women*. Partnered SWAs disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement at a rate of 100%, which was significantly higher than the other groups, although the majority of the other groups also disagreed with this statement. It would appear from this statement that the partnered SWAs feel more strongly about the ability of women to perform in intercollegiate athletic departments than the single, married, or divorced SWAs.

Partnered and divorced SWAs viewed the statement *women are treated equally to men* quite differently than single or married SWAs did. Divorced (80%) and partnered SWAs (71.4%) strongly disagreed or disagreed that women are treated equally as men while married and single women did not disagree at nearly as high a rate. It can be inferred that episodes of discrimination experienced by partnered women and societal stigmas associated with divorced women may help to explain the fact that these groups felt they were not treated equally with men.

The highest level of education reported by the SWAs also significantly influenced their perceptions of equity and discrimination. SWAs reporting their highest level of education as a doctorate strongly agreed or agreed with five of the statements surveyed at markedly higher rates than those with lower levels of education. These areas were: *more women should be hired as employees in athletic departments, it is more difficult for women to advance than men, rules of behavior are more relaxed for men than women, it is more difficult for women to advance than men, and women are paid less than men for comparable position*. This may be attributed to the thought that those with doctoral levels of education typically aspire to higher level administrative positions (athletic director) and although they feel that they are completely qualified for these positions, there are still relatively few women athletic directors. Two of the areas that were significant for the doctorate level SWAs (*it is more difficult for women to advance than men* and *it is more difficult for women to advance than men*) are particularly interesting and concur with previous literature. Hoffman (2010) states that despite the benefits of the SWA position for a few women this role limits the advancement of a critical mass of women. She also states that multiple duties associated with the SWA position reinforce the role of the SWA as a terminal position, implying that it is difficult for SWAs to advance to athletic director positions. Schneider et al. (2010) points out that the chances of SWAs advancing might be restricted simply because of the lack of administrative positions available that would be considered positions of advancement. This can be a factor because many SWAs are either associate or assistant athletic directors and the only position of advancement is that of the athletic director.

Conclusion

This study further illuminates the ongoing battles for female athletic administrators within the intercollegiate athletic ranks. Although the position of the SWA was created to integrate women into the governance of women's athletics the professional advancement of women in athletic departments

continues to be a challenge. In spite of recognition and acknowledgement of areas of discrimination facing women administrators, SWAs in this study highlight many areas where they are still experiencing factors of inequity and discrimination. The common themes were that women with family obligations are disadvantaged in their roles as SWAs and that multiple factors are preventing women from advancing in their professional roles and attaining equal pay status as men. Athletic directors should make every effort to promote work-life balance in their athletic department staff and continue to promote equitable pay and work conditions for female employees.

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