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# Senior Woman Administrator: The Definition, Challenges, Influence, and Perceptions

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SENIOR WOMEN ADMINISTRATOR:
THE DEFINITION, CHALLENGES, INFLUENCE, AND PERCEPTIONS

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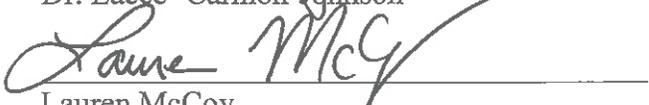
By
Jacqueline McGill

May 2017

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## THE DEFINITION, CHALLENGES, INFLUENCE, AND PERCEPTIONS

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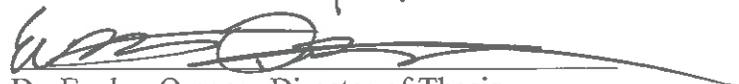
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SENIOR WOMEN ADMINISTRATOR:
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School of Kinesiology, Recreation & Sport          Western Kentucky University

Diversity efforts implemented by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) hope to improve the Association through the addition of multiple voices in athletics. Notably, the Senior Woman Administrator (SWA) designation is intended to encourage and promote the involvement of female administrators in meaningful ways in the decision-making process in intercollegiate athletics. This role, created under Article 4.02.4 of the NCAA constitution, is to be filled by the highest ranking female in each NCAA athletic department or member conference (Levick, 2002; Raphaely, 2003). Given the evolving definition and nature of the SWA designation and of female managerial roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002), there exists a question as to whether the SWA designation has provided the scope of decision-making and authority suggested in the NCAA definition of the designation. Research must show if SWAs are able to use their power and give different opinions. It must also uncover if there is still a need for the SWA role and if the title is still appropriate for this designation.

**Chapter 1**

**Introduction**

The Senior Woman Administrator (SWA) designation is intended to encourage

and promote the involvement of women administrators in meaningful ways in the

decision-making process in intercollegiate athletics. This role, created under Article

4.2.4  of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) constitution, is filled by

the highest-ranking woman in each NCAA athletic department or member conference

(Levick, 2002; Raphaely, 2003). The main purpose of this study was to figure out if

SWAs are given the power to make decisions within their athletics department or if SWA

is just a title.

The NCAA established the SWA designation to promote women in high-ranking

positions. The NCAA hoped to improve diversity efforts by implementing the SWA by

the addition of a female voice in athletics. The inclusion of women in meaningful,

decision-making positions within their respective athletic departments was the intended

outcome of the legislation established by the SWA designation (Claussen & Lehr, 2002;

Sweet et al., 2006). The hope was that this position would promote the decision-making

of females and give them a voice that they did not have prior to this role. However, there

is still a question if they have a voice today in their respective athletic department. The

purpose of the SWA position is to bring diverse voices to the table along with

encouraging female representation, but are the voices being heard?

Although all NCAA member institutions are required to have the position of a

SWA, this role is best filled by a woman with ample amount of experience in

intercollegiate athletics and with sport oversight. Not to minimize the importance of the

advocacy functions indicated, but it is the crossover into the overall scheme that women

are looking for in the position of the SWA; this female voice at the table, many times the only female voice, provides a diverse view and a different perspective (Stallman cited in Copeland, 2005). To increase the number of women serving in leadership roles, the NCAA legislated that each member institution designated a SWA to function as part of the athletics department's management team (Hawes, 2002; NCAA, 2002). Acosta & Carpenter (2014) found that 11% of athletic departments do not have female representation, meaning Article 4.02.4 is not being strictly enforced and the role that women play in athletics is questionable. The NCAA does not have a violation mandated for the athletics department without a designated SWA. As the NCAA mandated each institution have a SWA, there was not anyone that enforced that rule.

SWAs also are supposed to have any departmental task and be a part of the senior management team. Claussen and Lehr (2002) found that SWAs had little decision-making authority in marketing, development, promotions, and sponsorships, thus, limiting the scope of their involvement. If SWAs see their role as primarily dealing with women and their issues, then it can be considered difficult to persuade others that they need access to the other operations of the athletic department (Gill-Fisher, 1998).

Today, considerable effort is still aimed at understanding the role of SWA for those who are already in, or who aspire to fill, senior administrative roles in athletic programs because of the changes that have occurred since the consolidation of the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women and NCAA in 1982 (Copeland, 2005; Hosick, 2005). In order for SWAs to be effective administrators, their role must be clearly understood; they must also have adequate levels of influence on administrative strategies and courses of action within athletic departments, and not just on issues related

to gender equity and women's sports (Gill-Fisher, 1998; NCAA, 1994; Watson, 1994). When an SWA is excluded from discussions beyond gender equity, compliance, or academic advising, the role of the SWA is limited and the entire athletics department is deprived of the insight this person can provide to enhance the experiences of all.

Until the role of the SWA is clearly understood, both the SWA and her constituents will continue to be frustrated with the results of her leadership. Those who are already in, or who aspire to fill, senior administrative roles in athletic programs may have a clear understanding of the role and function of the SWA as it is intended, but those working with the SWA, including coaches, athletic administrators, and university administrators are often unclear as to the role and function of the SWA (Hatfield & Hatfield, 2009). Unless action is taken to clearly understand this position, the results will have little impact (Watson, 1994). Tiell and Dixon (2008) highlighted that one of the debates over the significance of the SWA designation is whether the identified duties and responsibilities (to ensure representation of women's interests and to monitor gender equity efforts) were meant to limit SWAs to a gender-specific role in an administrative governance structure.

Studying the perceptions regarding the roles and tasks of the SWA is ideal for further exploration into how the role congruity theory applies to women in leadership positions in the intercollegiate athletics industry (Tiell & Dixon, 2008). Given the evolving definition and nature of the SWA role and of female managerial roles in general (Eagly & Karau, 2002), there exists a question as to whether the SWA title has provided the scope of decision-making and authority suggested in the NCAA definition of the designation.

The purpose of this study was to figure out if the role was still necessary, if there was a need for a title change, and if there was a need for a new definition. The first part of this study sought to provide a more clear explanation of what the title actually means to the women fulfilling the title. The second part of this study was to explore what type of responsibilities was part of the SWA title. The third part of this study explored if the senior woman administrators are given power and if they are were comfortable exercising the power given to them by the legislation. The fourth part was to see senior woman administrators were able to promote the involvement of female administrators and enhance female representation.

These questions were answered by breaking down the roles, responsibilities and perspectives of senior woman administrators in athletics. This examination helped to uncover if there is still a need for the SWA role and if the title is still appropriate for this designation. It is anticipated that athletic administrators and people in leadership positions will use this study to inspect the role of the SWA on their campus. It is also expected to support these women in contributing decision-making ideas and providing overall power to the athletics department. This would make the SWA a valuable member to the department and fulfill the proper designation by the NCAA.

**Chapter 2**

**Introduction**

For women in intercollegiate athletics, there is a lack of representation at many institutions. Along with representation, there are many difficulties associated with success for females in leadership positions. Women are often expected to work twice as hard to prove themselves without accompanying benefits. Title IX was created and implemented to provide women with equal opportunities that their counterparts received. This chapter will provide an overview of literature on the history of female participation, barriers associated with women in leadership positions, and an extensive overview of the SWA.

**History of Female Participation**

Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972, states that "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" (20 U.S.C. 1681). Title IX has been fairly successful at increasing the sport participation numbers for females of all ages (Senne, 2016). However, that rate has not translated into increased percentages of women employed in college athletics. Only 20% of all athletic departments have female athletic directors, and only 10% of Division I schools are led by female athletic directors (Littlefield, 2015). Among the 65 Power Five schools, the Atlantic Coast Conference now has two of the only four female athletic directors leading these programs, with the Southeastern Conference and Big 12 still being the only conferences without one (Kercheval, 2017).

The percent of female athletic directors at all divisions has been on a decline (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012). Past research reveals several factors contributing to the low numbers of women employed in athletics: gender role conflicts, work-life conflict, and the masculine nature of the work environment (Madsen & Bruening, 2010). There are many barriers that are caused by the nature of athletics and society. For example, time and family commitment are some of the most commonly cited barriers and while not all females are married, partnered or have children, those women do not often cite family obligations as a major barrier (Bracken, 2009; Dixon & Bruening, 2007).

**Women Having Difficulties with Success**

Women with backgrounds in physical education organized and coached athletic opportunities for women, and did so through organizations like the Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (ClAW) (1966-1972) and the AIAW (1971-1983) (Buzuvis, 2015). These organizations provided opportunities for women's leadership of women's athletics, and they espoused an athlete-centered model of sports rooted in educational values that was distinctly different from the competitive, commercial model of the NCAA (Staurowsky, 2011).

Lopiano (2016) explained that to ensure Title IX compliance and financial savings, most of the collegiate men's and women's athletics programs in the country were merged under single administrative structures with the director of the men's program taking the top administrative position. Due to this, women lost the development of women's programs and women administrators lost decision-making power. The women who were once able to promote the development of women's athletics programs and uncover and publicly expose program inequities have either disappeared or are now

working under male athletics directors (Lopiano, 2016). A number of the women coaches and administrators are fearful of losing their jobs because they are scared they will be a push over or they will be too strict with their words. There is a constant issue with females of how to be assertive and a good leader without coming across as too abrasive and rude. As for some male administrators, they make it hard for women to be a successful leader due to the duty of trying to be assertive and respected without being considered pushy and conceited.

These rapid changes related to Title IX and the different governing bodies of women's sports lead to the decline of female leaders in the industry. Some left head coaching and other leadership positions rather than compromise their values, while others were likely seen as unqualified to coach newly created women's teams that were expected, like their male counterparts, to win at all cost (Hasbrook et al.,1990). Due to these circumstances, men were attracted to the new positions in women's sports. Since there became more opportunities to coach women's teams, men took that as an advantage and wanted these new positions. Since more men received these opportunities, another barrier limited the success of future women seeking head coaching or high leadership administrative positions (Buzuvis, 2015).

When an organization or athletics program has a woman that is successful and has great accomplishments it is more likely they will hire more women in the future. However, according to Lopiano (2016), women coaches and administrators also confront a very common and insidious underground campaign stemming from the lesbian or unfeminine stereotype applied to women who engage in sport or wish to gain access to previously male-dominated professions (construction, police, military, etc.). Society

demands compliance to the enforced gender order. When these gender norms are violated, it is common for labels such as "lesbian" to be given (Wilde, 2006). It is not intended for people to feel this way or do these things. It happens because people are not educated on gender diversity and the easiest thing for them to do is relate to or hire people who look like them and those whom they form innate associations. Employers sought candidates who were not only competent but culturally similar to themselves (Baer, 2014).

Another problem women faced once entering intercollegiate athletics was retention and promotion. Women reported being "set up to fail" by the assignment of "hidden" job responsibilities and expectations that did not appear on paper (Inglis et al., 2000). Buzuvis (2015) reported women were more likely to be saddled with the responsibilities that are not as valued within the department. Gender equity, for example, is marginalized as an issue of concern for female staff, not the entire department (Inglis et al., 2000). Along with possibly hidden job duties, women's job responsibilities may place them outside the direction of higher levels of administration and leadership. For example, men are given job responsibilities they can succeed in and are able to move up the leadership ladder so they can be well-rounded candidates for high leadership positions (Inglis et al., 2000). Women are also assigned to oversee women's sports and excluded from oversight of revenue-producing sports (Inglis et al., 2000). A similar tendency was reported by women who serve as senior associate athletic directors at Division I institutions, who were kept at arms' length when it came to the facets of the job that serve as a proving ground for future athletic directors (Hoffman, 2011).

Recent studies of female head coaches and athletics administrators (Staurowsky & Weight, 2011, 2013) reveal a retaliatory culture that combines subtle pressure and outright threats to silence and control women in the athletic workforce, discouraging their advocacy on behalf of female athletes and themselves, undermining Title IX compliance efforts, and jeopardizing women's ability to succeed. Staurowsky (2016) further explained women in sport also encounter in-group favoritism, which refers to male athletic directors being inclined to hire from within their established and familiar networks. These networks are composed primarily of male applicants and candidates. In their analysis of women's representation in athletics through the lens of homologous reproduction, Stangl and Kane (1991) concluded that the gender of the athletic director did have an effect on the hiring of women: Female athletics directors hired more women than did male athletic directors.

There is minimal research about the success of women as athletic administrators because very few women currently hold these positions in athletic departments within the NCAA (Crawford-Crooks et al., 2016). However, there are many theories about the challenges presented to women in athletics. Women face many barriers in pursuing careers in intercollegiate athletics, including salary, lack of opportunity (Weiss & Stevens, 1993)**,** the old boys' club, the lack of an old girls' club, gendered organizations (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2008; Kamphoff, 2010; Stangl & Kane, 1991), family and time commitment (Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Kamphoff, 2010; Pastore, 1991; Weiss & Stevens, 1993)**,** lack of mentors, burnout and administrators' perceptions of a lack of qualified female candidates (Everhart & Chelladurai, 1998). To understand the gender gap in college athletics, we must first understand the interconnected nature of sport,

power, and gender in our society. Sport has, from its origins, operated as a means to ascribe power to men, by creating the highly visible, symbolic linking of power with masculinity in a way that makes that association appear natural and legitimate (Messner, 1988; Willis, 1982). As a result, the ways in which women are denied access to sports and its associations with power are largely unquestioned and unseen (Buzuvis, 2015).

According to Buzuvis (2015), the hegemonic nature of this phenomenon means that men and women alike perpetuate the association of masculinity and power through sports and that men are dominant in that context. Women are excluded from opportunities within sports. Whether their interest suppressed by external social forces that make their actions appear to be internal and argentic, or their opportunities to engage in the sporting enterprise are constructed on different terms so as to pose no threat to the gender order.

As many sport scholars have acknowledged, the gender imbalance in coaching and athletic leadership is an important social problem because it is rooted in the hegemonic masculinity of sport (Buzuvis, 2015). The stereotypes, role conflicts, and job constraints all operate to construct the appearance that women are less qualified, and less interested, in positions of athletic leadership, so that the narrow associations between sport, leadership, and masculinity remain unchallenged. Women are likely underrepresented in intercollegiate athletic leadership because their presence is always beneath that of their counterparts. Not only does their presence suggest, "that the field of coaching is a legitimate option with respect to employment, but the visibility and responsibility associated with coaching implies that women are capable of leadership positions of any kind" (Stahura & Greenwood, 2002, p. 2). Determination and willingness must continue to eliminate double standards for leadership jobs and to reward

women with such jobs of power that is necessary for advancement of women in leadership positions.

Rhode and Walker (2008) suggested that there were three broad reasons for the diminishing role of women in coaching, including work-home conflicts, adverse stereotypes (revealing racism, discrimination against minorities, and ageism), and in-group favoritism. The intersections between work and family life highlight the time-intensive and pressured environments that often characterize college work places (Staurowsky, 2016). Another problem for women in athletics is the lack of inclusiveness along with an open environment. Staurowsky (2016) explained, the gender bias witnessed by young women entering the profession distills at times into an expectation that women in athletic departments will remain compliant and will not raise issues associated with Title IX compliance, gender equity, and equal treatment.

**Lack of Representation**

When Title IX was enacted in 1972, more than 90% of women's college teams were coached by women. Forty-three years later that number has fallen to 40%; progress on the sidelines has fallen well behind the standard set on the court (Barrett, 2016). A study conducted in 2015 showed the percentages of female coaches in women's sports of basketball, volleyball, tennis and soccer. In the 2014-15 season, 58.6% of all Division I women's basketball head coaches were female — no other sport with at least 300 Division I programs had a majority of female head coaches; 43.5% of volleyball coaches were female, 37% of tennis coaches were female and 26.5% of soccer coaches were female (Barrett, 2016). While women's basketball surpasses the other sports, the percentage of female head coaches in the sport has been on a steady decline. As the

number for female head coaches may sound impressive, the number decreases significantly for other NCAA divisions.

According to Sports Business Journal, from January 2016 through March 2017, there have been 52 Division I athletic director jobs filled, and eight of them have been women (Smith & Broughton, 2017). There are now 33 women sitting in Division I athletic director chairs out of 351 schools (Smith & Broughton, 2017). The fact that, in 2017, less than 10% of athletic directors at the Division I level are women suggests that mergers expanded the jurisdiction of male administrators of men's athletics at the expense of female administrators of women's athletics (Hoffman, 2011). Women are more likely to hold positions within college athletics administration that are relegated to support positions such as academic advising, compliance, marketing, life skills, and sports information (Coakley & Donnelly, 2008).

Women fill less than a quarter of head coach and athletic director positions in college athletics, including those who coach women's teams (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012). Acosta and Carpenter (2012) also reported that the percentage of colleges with no women serving in the athletic department administration was at an all-time low of 9.2%. With every NCAA institution mandating a SWA, the fact that almost ten percent of athletics departments still do not have female representation is contradicting the NCAA's meaning behind the designation.

Although women continue to make progress toward better representation in college athletics, the percentage of women in administrative roles in college athletic departments has remained relatively low. Since 1980, the percentage of female athletics directors has hovered below 20%, exceeding that number only once in 2008 when women

held 21% of athletic director positions. In 2015, of the 313 athletic directors in Division I sports, only 37 of them were women. Of the 65 universities in the Power Five conferences, only four employed women as their athletic director. Women are still behind when being considered for these jobs, because sports are 20 years behind corporate America (Macur, 2015). One may argue that these top administrators need to open their minds and hire someone who might not look exactly like the traditional choice.

The National Association of Collegiate Women Athletics Administrators (NACWAA) is the premier leadership organization that empowers, develops, assists, celebrates, affirms, involves, and honors women working in college sports and beyond (NACWAA, 2017). According to Acosta and Carpenter (2014), within the departments that were led by women, the percentage of female coaches was higher than in those headed by men. Specifically, in Divison I departments led by women, 46.8% of coaches were female, compared with 43% in departments led by men. In the other two divisions, an even greater disparity existed (Vollman, 2016). This prevents other women from seeing female role models in positions of decision-making and leadership.

Research shows that it is more common for Division I programs with male athletic directors as opposed to those with female athletic directors (Drago et al., 2005; Welch & Sigelman, 2007) tend to hire those who are similar to themselves. This leads to homologous reproduction within athletic department (Sagas & Cunningham, 2004; Stangl & Kane, 1991). This provides an explanation as to why many athletic departments led by men have fewer women in positions of leadership (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012; Stangl & Kane, 1991; Welch & Sigelman, 2007). Athletic departments tend to be skewed, holding a much smaller number of women than men (Morris et al., 2014). In skewed

organizations, those in the minority are considered tokens and contend with pressures to conform to the norms of the majority to be accepted. When perceived as tokens, members of the minority group are less likely to stay in the organization (Claingbould & Knoppers, 2008; Kane & Stangl, 1991). While homologous reproduction may happen to varying levels within athletic hiring, the sparse number of women in the field may result in an environment that is not conducive to retaining the women that are hired (Morris et al., 2014). Women have had opportunities to engage in intercollegiate competition, however these opportunities have been less frequent and less rewarded because of the fewer resources received by women then those given to men.

Division I athletics include high profile sports such as football, and the hiring authority in big-time Division I schools assumes that a woman cannot understand football and therefore would not make a good administrator, and yet there are some good examples where this stipulation has been wrong (Vollman, 2016). Efforts must continue to expose and suppress the bias and stereotypes that infect hiring decisions, to eliminate double standards and job constraints, to affirmatively address and compensate for women's greater family demands and unique vulnerability, and to compensate for women's lack of existing power and social capital that is necessary for advancement and success in college athletic leadership (Buzuvis, 2015). Although more girls and women are participating in sport with female student-athletes represent about 43% of the student-athlete population (Irick, 2014), a large number of female athletes are unable to learn from, relate to, or even see a female in an administrative position of high authority. It is crucial for athletes to relate to people in the field that look like them so that they can learn from them and realize they too can be successful.

Unfortunately, the women who led the fight for equal opportunity and those who should have rightfully followed them into jobs in coaching and athletics administration have instead felt the backlash (Lopiano, 2016). It has been a difficult time for women in athletics and higher administrative roles. There are many people concerned with the declining number of women in the athletic professions. The coaching of men's sports is almost completely led by males and women's sports are also presently also dominated by males. However, there are no signs of these numbers changing any time soon. Attracting more women into the profession and educating them to be prominent administrators is a problem that needs to be examined.

According to Patti Phillips, the Chief Executive Officer of NACWAA, women are getting some of the leadership opportunities in athletic administration and are making huge strides. The number of women hired into leadership positions increased drastically in the last three years. However, when looking at the overall numbers, the percentage points are not moving in the same dramatic fashion (Vollman, 2016). Little to no progress has been made in the amount of women serving as athletic directors. According to NACWAA data, from 2006 to 2012, the amount of female athletic directors only increased overall by 1.3%. Overall, women comprise just 20.3% of all administrative roles in college athletic departments (Vollman, 2016).

Women continue to fight for the rights to have gender equity as a whole in college athletics that includes: participation opportunities, scholarship dollars, operating dollars, and salaries. Even though female students comprise 57% of college student populations, female athletes received only 43% of participation opportunities at NCAA schools which accounts for 63,241 fewer participation opportunities than their male counterparts (Irick,

2014). According to the NCAA in 2014, although the gap has narrowed, male athletes still received 55% of NCAA college athletic scholarship dollars (Divisions I and II), leaving only 45% allocated to women (Irick, 2014). When examining median expenses per NCAA Division I institutions, women's teams receive only 40% of college sport operating dollars and 36% of college athletic team recruitment spending; the median head coaches' salaries at NCAA Division I-FBS schools are $3,430,000 for men's teams and $1,172,400 for women's teams. This is a difference of $2,257,600 (Bracken & Irick, 2012).

**The Senior Woman Administrator**

The AIAW was one of the biggest advancement for women's athletics on the collegiate level. The AIAW was founded before Title IX, which gave women and opportunity to participate equally in athletics. The NCAA initially had no interest in women's athletics or women administrators. The AIAW focused on the female student-athlete's education, not on athletic performance, and thus rejected the 'win or die' attitude of the NCAA. Instead, the AIAW emphasized participation in sport as the most important aspect and de-emphasized winning (Sperber, 1990). Instead, the AIAW with nearly 1,000 member schools, governed women's collegiate sports. The AIAW continued the rules established by the Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics for Women, intended to prohibit unethical practices that were observed in men's sports (Hunt, 1977). When the United States Congress passed Title IX of the Educational Amendments in 1972, the law served to create equitable opportunities in education, but made no specific mention of athletics. However, the regulations and subsequent court decisions required college to provide equitable opportunities for both genders in collegiate athletics.

Following a one-year overlap in which both organizations staged women's championships, the AIAW discontinued operation and most member schools continued their women's athletics programs under the governance of the NCAA (Grundy et al., 2005). In 1981, the NCAA took over women's championships from the AIAW. With the lack of women in intercollegiate athletics administrative positions, the NCAA designed a senior female staff member in 1981, the same time the NCAA began providing championships for women's sports. This position, known as Primary Woman Administrator (PWA), was to assist universities with the transition to the soon-to-be merged men's and women's athletic departments (Hawes, 2002; NCAA, 2002). In 1990, a Gender Equity Task Force under the supervision of the Committee on Women's Athletics (CWA) for the NCAA officially changed the PWA designation to SWA effective for the 1991–92 academic year (Tiell & Dixon, 2008). A formal definition of the SWA was created under Article 4.02.4 of the NCAA constitution (Levick, 2002) with 2006 marking the first year a uniform definition appeared in Division I, II, and III manuals.

Bylaw 4.02.4.1 says, an institutional SWA is the highest-ranking female involved in the management of an institution's intercollegiate athletics program. An institution with a female director of athletics may designate another female involved with the management of the member's program as a fifth representative to the NCAA governance structure (NCAA, 2006). With the new legislation, it mandated that every institution must have a SWA. The position is intended to ensure representation of women's interests, experience and perspective at the institutional, conference and national levels (NCAA, 2011). The purpose of this new designation was to provide female athletic administrators

with representation and decreased involved with intercollegiate athletics. It is important to understand the evolution of the SWA designation. With the new designation in place, the merging of the athletic department was supposed to show the roles of the athletic director and administration to accompany both genders that were now represented in the athletic department, instead of focused only on one gender.

Although all institutions are required to have the position of a SWA, she should have ample amount of experience and sport oversight. This in turn should make her a qualified candidate for an athletic director's position; however there are still an extremely low amount of female athletic directors. The good ole boys' club could be playing a role with the SWA position being nothing more than a title that has been mandated by the NCAA, as it appears that very few SWAs are actually in positions and given authority to act on what the position is intended to do and have a say in decision-making. Historical information has helped clarify that the initial purpose of designating an individual as the PWA was to help with the transition of female personnel during the merger of the AIAW with the NCAA (Hawes, 2002; NCAA, 2002), ensuring them at least some voice in the governance of the newly merged system.

With the title PWA changed to SWA, there were suggestions that were made to believe that this would have helped the perception of women in the athletic departments of member NCAA institutions. Over a decade later, however, one may question if the SWA designation is still a necessity in athletic departments or if departments have progressed to where such designations are no longer a necessity; in additional does the role of the SWA needs further clarification and/or expansion in order to ensure that

SWAs hold roles and perform tasks that are congruent with their abilities and skills, not simply ones that are assumed strengths according to gender norms (Tiell & Dixon, 2008).

Given the evolving definition and nature of the SWA designation and of female managerial roles in general (Eagly & Karau, 2002), there exists a question as to whether the SWA designation has provided the scope of decision-making and authority suggested in the NCAA definition of the designation. As a result, one of the main purposes was to explore the roles, responsibilities, duties, and perceptions of the SWA. The research questions helped to better describe the responsibilities of SWAs, their power or lack of, what the title actually means to the person who holds the title, and if the designation is still deemed appropriate.

**Chapter 3**

**Research Design**

       "Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). The individual experience is placed in strict focus in order to discover a specific theory of behavior or pattern of behavior (Creswell, 2007). According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), "qualitative research does not entail making statements about relationships between a dependent variable and an independent variable, as is common in quantitative studies, because its purpose is not to test hypotheses" (p. 41). Rather, qualitative research sets a research target on a particular phenomenon deemed worthy of study and identifies exactly what the researcher wants to know about this phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

       The research design for this study was an instrumental case study design. An instrumental case study is the study of a case (e.g., person, specific group, occupation, department, organization) to provide insight into a particular issue, redraw generalizations, or build theory (Stake 2000). The instrumental case study is a tool that facilitates understanding of a particular phenomenon. It allows researchers to use the case as a comparative point across other cases in which the phenomenon might be present (Stake, 1995). According to Yin (2003, p.2) "the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena" because "the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events." Individual interviews were the chosen method of data collection because the

purpose of the study was to explore roles, responsibilities, and perspectives of a SWA. Interviews provided a depth of information with respect to each individual.

**Participants**

The sample consisted of NCAA Division I SWAs. To maintain consistency of the size and type of athletic department, SWAs were only selected from Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) Schools. The sample size was (N=10) and chosen by the researcher to provide a sample size large enough so that the criteria of sufficiency and saturation of information were achieved (Seidman, 1998). Participants were not asked to identify their race or marital status. Based on the athletic department website biographies of the ten participants, there were five Senior Associate Directors of Athletics, one Executive Associate Director of Athletics, two Associate Director of Athletics, one Assistant Director of Athletics, and one Assistant to the Director of Athletics. A purposeful sampling method (Patton, 1990), namely criterion sampling, was used to gather data from information-rich participants. Specifically, a criterion for this study was SWA verified through the conference and university athletic website.

*Table 1.*

| Participant | Title |
|---|---|
| Participant 1 | Senior Associate AD |
| Participant 2 | Senior Associate AD |
| Participant 3 | Assistant to the AD |
| Participant 4 | Associate AD |
| Participant 5 | Associate AD |
| Participant 6 | Associate AD |
| Participant 7 | Senior Associate AD |
| Participant 8 | Senior Associate AD |
| Participant 9 | Senior Associate AD |
| Participant 10 | Executive AD |

**Procedures**

      After gaining approval from the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects (See Appendix 1), the researcher began to contact potential participants for the study. The researcher located participants by randomly picking Division I conferences and choosing three Senior Woman Administrators to contract and recruit for the study. The researcher chose randomization to get a variety of participants with different opinions. The researcher emailed all SWA's with details of the interview. Ten responded to the invitation to participate and the researcher then randomly chose three other SWA's to complete the interview. The details of the email included: their willingness to help, a phone interview between 20-30 minutes, and that it was completely voluntary. However, the information collected would be kept confidential between the researcher and the advisor.

      After the participants were informed of the interview via email, an interview was scheduled at a convenient time for the participants. The primary researcher conducted all of the interviews. At the start of each interview, the researcher explained the purpose of the study, and that the conversation would be recorded. The participant was then again assured confidentiality would be maintained throughout the research project and reminded that at any time during the interview they did not have to answer any questions they were not comfortable with and had the right to withdraw and terminate the interview at any time with no negative repercussions.

      To build rapport with participants, interviews began with a simple question about the participant's background in intercollegiate athletics (Fontana & Frey, 2000), and then continued with the interview guide. Interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. Each participant was interviewed for approximately 15-40 minutes. Promptly

following the conclusion of each interview, the interviewer spent 10-15 minutes

reflecting on the interview, and took notes referencing the behavior of the interviewee

and anything else the interviewer thought was relevant.

**Interview Guide**

A general interview guide approach was used, allowing for a conversational

approach and a degree of freedom in getting information from participants. This approach

also ensured that the same general areas of information were collected from each

interviewee. Initially, open-ended questions were asked of participants. When questions

are open-ended, the participants have more opportunity to discuss topics and modes of

discourse that are familiar to them (Eder & Fingerson, 2005).

The interview guide (See Appendix 2) acted as a framework in which the

interviewer used the developed questions to conduct the interview process (Patton, 2002).

In creating the interview guide, the researcher first created an outline of the relevant

topics and generated lines of inquiry, followed by the creation of relevant questions for

each item (Berg, 2009; Patton, 2002). The interview guides were developed based on the

research questions, and subsequent women in sport-related research. The interview guide

was first pilot tested on two senior administrators one current and one former (the pilot

interviews were not used for analyses) that resulted in a few questions being reordered

and/or reworded. The interview protocol began with warm-up, non-threatening questions,

designed to develop rapport (Berg, 2009). The questions then progressed to the more

essential questions (Berg, 2009). The final questions allowed the participants to add any

remaining information or clarify or elaborate on any responses given during the

interview.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness was established using an audit trail, employing member checking, and peer debriefing. An audit trail was constructed to document the progress of research from the start to its completion (Carcary, 2009). Creditability was established by using prominent methodologies such as allowing the data to speak to the findings, and providing rich and thick descriptions regarding the settings of the interviews, details of each subject interviewed and the procedures (Shenton, 2004). In an effort to ensure honesty among participants, each was given the opportunity to withdraw participation from the study at any time. This was done to ensure that those who wanted to take part in the study did so willingly and as a result, freely offered information (Shenton, 2004). In the interviews, the researcher implemented iterative questioning (returning to previous statements mentioned during the interviews) to check for contradictions, and unintentional untruthful statements (Shenton, 2004).

The researcher also engaged in peer debriefing sessions, where discussions about the plan of actions for the progression of research occurred. Peer debriefing was done by presenting sections of the analysis to a member of the thesis committee throughout the analytical process. Bi-weekly meetings were held for the researcher to further explain the process of arriving at the findings as well as the meaning of the findings and discuss those findings with the committee member. Feedback was incorporated into the analysis where appropriate.

The research team consisted of three assistant professors in addition to the lead investigator, all of who had qualitative data analysis experience as well as similar research backgrounds in studying leadership in sport. The research team members

engaged in meetings and discussions concerning the interpretation of coding and results. The team was also used as a source to generate critical feedback in assisting to achieve trustworthiness.

Dependability was acquired through the clarity of the research questions, paradigms, and analytical constructs (Shenton, 2004). Crosschecking of codes with research team members and discussion of results interpretations assured dependability. Member checking was also conducted to confirm the accuracy of the data by ensuring that the participants felt as though their interview summary was what they intended to say (Shenton, 2004). This gave participants the opportunity to offer further explanations if wanted or needed. Conformability was accomplished (1) through the clarity and reproducibility of the study as a result of the detailed description of methods, and by (2) the clear link addressed in the study's research questions, research findings, and conclusions.

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative analysis strategies consider the implications of cultural, social, and historical context for their evaluation findings, consciously thinking holistically (Patton, 2002). Grounded theory involves a constant interchange between the data collection and analytic processes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Development of the analytic process was ongoing from the beginning of the investigation. Raw data verification refers to the process of going back and comparing the theory against the raw data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Grounded theory uses detailed procedures for analysis, which consist of three phases of coding - open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin,

1990). Coding is where the researcher attaches labels to segments of data that depict what each segment is about (Charmaz, 2006). Analysis began with the main researcher conducting open coding by going through the transcripts line by line to provide salient categories of information (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).  Specifically, the researcher examined individual words, phrases, and sentences from the transcribed interviews.

After open coding which served to develop the preliminary categories, consensus and peer debriefing began as the main researcher and the members of the research team independently coded and analyzed the data in order to enhance trustworthiness. Members conducted axial coding which combined the data in new ways to form more inclusive categories. In other words, we related categories and concepts to each other (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Lastly, the main researcher and one other member of the research team did selective coding. This is where main categories were selected and systematically related to other categories. Researchers followed the guidelines below as recommended by Strauss (1990): (a) category's centrality in relation to other categories, (b) frequency of a category's occurrence to other data, (c) its inclusiveness and the ease with which it related to other categories, (d) clarity of its implications for a more general theory, (e) its movement toward theoretical power as details of the category were worked out, and (f) its allowance for maximum variation in terms of dimensions, properties, conditions, consequences, and strategies (as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 290).

Various strategies were used to test and confirm interpretations. Multiple data sources were used such as interviews and notes (e.g., notes on participants' demeanor, flow of conversation, major points of view, and so forth), and clarification of responses at

the end of each section (Gray, 2003; Keats, 2000). Evidence and member checking with participants was maintained throughout. An experienced research team helped with analyses and assisted with confirming findings and interpretation.

Once the analysis was completed, a matrix was completed. The matrix served as a diagram that assisted the researcher to visualize the findings. Results were written up by themes and show the relationships between themes.

**Assumptions**

There were two major assumptions for this study. The first assumption was that all participants understood the questions asked and answered honestly. The second assumption was that all participants were able to think critically about their values and perception in their role as a SWA. These assumptions would help the credibility of this data.

**Chapter 4**

**Research Question 1**

What are the perceptions of the SWA role?

*Figure 1 Concept Map.*
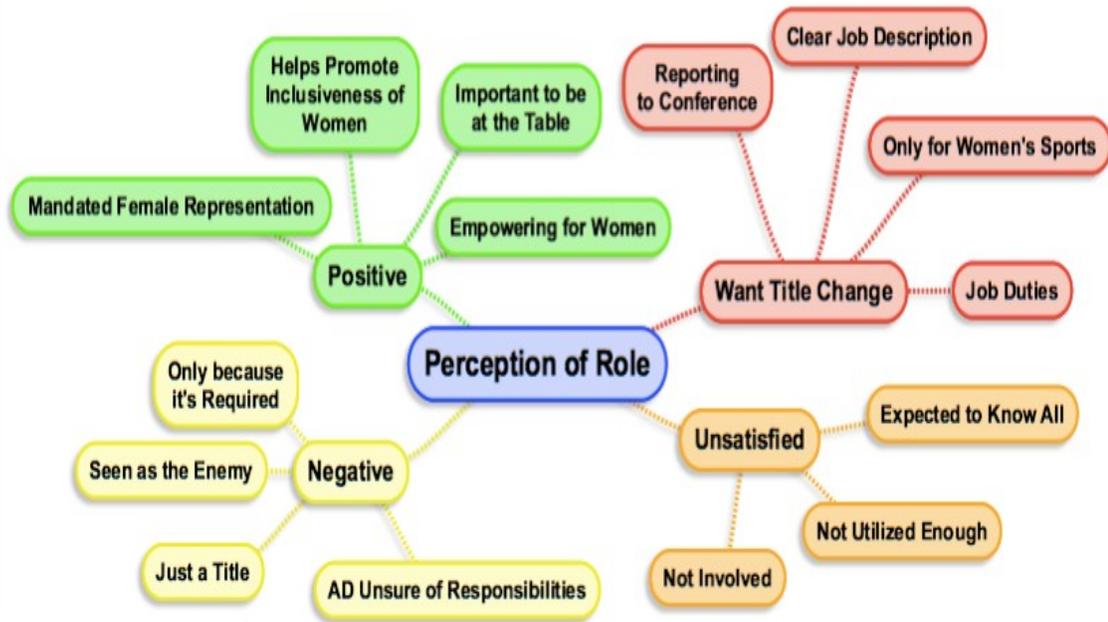


*Perception of Role*

The first finding was the perception of the SWA role. When participants answered questions on their perceptions of the role, a few different themes were found such as wanting a title change, unsatisfied with the role, positive perceptions, and negative perceptions.

Some SWAs thought the title needed to be changed to something different because the title can be misleading.

"The title is a little frustrating sometimes because people always think you are over women's sports and I have to define it and say I am the SWA but that doesn't mean I am over women's sports." (Participant #4)

"Many on the outside think that it means you are in charge of female sports, which is not accurate." (Participant #7)

"The first couple of years I had the title I just had it, they didn't want me to do anything with it." (Participant #5)

"To me there's not a perfect answer because I don't think you can give it a particular job description so I almost don't have an issue with the way it's written right now, it's just not a perfect system." (Participant #2)

"There's not a true definition of a SWA other than the one I told you which is the highest ranking female. There's not a job description in it that's common to all schools." (Participant #2)

There were some SWAs that were not satisfied with their position. Some of the SWAs did not feel like they were being utilized enough but were still expected to know everything.

"I feel like I have some good insight on things and I don't know if I am being utilized enough." (Participant #4)

"Part as a sport administrator, on other campuses the sport administrators are much more involved with things like contracts with shoes, contracts with clothing and coaches' contracts. Here, I feel like my role is very separated and feel like I am used as a support system if the coach has an issue but beyond that I am not learning anything or gaining anything." (Participant #7)

Certain SWAs thought the perception of the role was negative. Some thought they were just in the position or that the title was given to them just because it was required.

"You know I wonder if people think that the only reason I'm in this position is that they require it." (Participant #1)

"I feel like because of the SWA title, you can get put in a position where you've got to maneuver around it so you're not seen as the enemy. So at some points I question whether the SWA title is good because it's seen as you're the one person that's championing for women, so it's your fault if they don't get something. Instead it should be everybody's responsibility to fight four equity among our sports programs." (Participant #3)

"The title is a little frustrating sometimes because people always think you are over women's sports and I have to define it and say I am the SWA but that doesn't mean I am over women's sports." (Participant #4)

"I have always been listened to. Probably besides my first boss which really didn't know what to do with me." (Participant #5)

Many of the participants thought the designation was good to have. Women in

leadership positions may not be at the table if this position was not mandated.

"I do think there are a lot of places that would slip back into not paying attention if the role wasn't there." (Participant #2)

"The role is still important because we are in the room we are at the table. Maybe at some other places unfortunately you wouldn't be at the table so it is necessary. It is unfortunate that we are not at the table automatically." (Participant #4)

"Would it go away completely if it wasn't mandated, let's be honest maybe. I would like to say we don't need it legislative but it is probably good just in case. Unfortunately that me be one of the first positions to go if you are looking to cut something." (Participant #5)

"The school of thought is if they took it away, our SWA meetings would be men instead of women. I always say it's good because it helps protect the opportunities for women to go to meetings, the small select groups and discuss." (Participant #6)

"I think it is absolutely appropriate because it is empowering for women and it ensures representation of women's interest. It is good to have different perspectives of male and female. Women in athletics must have a voice so that is why I feel like it is really important because it helps promote the inclusiveness of women in athletics. It is a very male dominating industry so I think this role is critical and it's my job to make sure that everyone's points of views are heard and valued." (Participant #8)

"I think the need is there. I don't think women are where we want to be as far as being viewed equally and being represented equally across athletics. It is still a very male dominated and male driven field. We are not at a place where men and women are reaching the same heights and are athletic directors if that's where they want to be or senior leadership positions outside of the SWA. We need to maintain that and continue to push for gender equity and growth with minorities and women." (Participant #9)

In summary, when looking at the perception of the SWA role, major themes of wanting a title change were, unsatisfied with the role, negative perceptions and positive perceptions emerged. The subthemes under wanting a title change were working on things to report to the conference, make a clear job description, clarify she's not only for women's sports, and clarify job duties. The subthemes under unsatisfied with the role were, expected to know all, not utilized enough, and she's not involved. The subthemes under negative perspectives were, only because the designation is required, she's seen as the enemy in the department, SWA is just a title, and the athletic director is unsure of the responsibilities the SWA is supposed to have.

**Research Question 2**

What does the SWA definition mean to the designee and are they given the opportunities that the definition mandates?

*Figure 2 Concept Map.*



*Defining SWA*

The second finding was defining the SWA designation. When participants were asked questions based on the definition of the SWA, a few different themes were found such as responsibilities, professional development, and conference role.

There are some responsibilities that SWAs are given. Many of the participants were in charge of sport oversight, Title IX, and equity for women's sports.

> "I have sport administration responsibilities with men's and women's cross country, men and women's track, women's soccer, women's basketball, and women's volleyball." (Participant #1)

> "I'm the voice that kind of comes in and makes sure that we're looking at how does this affect the women's side of sports if we do this." (Participant #2)

> "Title IX, and then I'm the Deputy Title IX Coordinator for the university." (Participant #3)

> "I oversee Olympic sports depending on the gender."(Participant #6)

> "I am the sport administrator for softball and soccer." (Participant #7)

> "I have sport oversight of women's basketball, volleyball, men's and women's track and field/cross country." (Participant #8)

> "I'm on the Senior Administrative Staff, that meets with the athletic director. That deals with marketing, fundraising, business, money and the communications." (Participant #10)

Some SWAs report to the conference or must work closely with them. All SWAs meet with their conference during the year and have conference calls.

> "I think our role basically on that group is our meetings, where we stay in the loop." (Participant #1)

> "I actually get a little frustrated because when we go to SWA meetings at the conference, a lot of things I'm being asked questions about are just the things that I don't oversee at the institution. So it's a little bit harder for me to talk to them. What's frustrating to me is when attending these meetings they sometimes talk about some very detailed academic stuff or other areas and want my answers on it and I just didn't feel like I was the appropriate person on our staff to answer those questions because it wasn't my area that I'm in charge of." (Participant #2)

"We have two meetings a year, and a conference call where we do anything the sport coaches vote on and move forward with." (Participant #3)

"It (SWA role) doesn't require me to report to the conference office but it has been very helpful because we review committee reports for each sport and what each sport is discussing. Then we get to make our own recommendations of each of those topics, so I get to stay in the loop of what is going on across all sports in our conference." (Participant #7)

"The conference office, we meet as SWA's. We meet twice a year or so. I think that reporting just deals with a lot of best practices." (Participant #10)

Some SWAs were able to go to professional development. However, some are not able or are only able to go if they are approved.

"If I ask for them, but we are in a budget crisis right now, so we are really pulling back on all our professional development." (Participant #3)

"I am allowed to go to NACWAA or whatever but unfortunately because of other responsibilities I don't always get to go as much as I would like." (Participant #5)

"If they are approved they are paid for." (Participant #6)

"Due to budgetary constraints the athletics department has done away with professional development unless it is required for a certification or in order to keep your certification." (Participant #7)

In summary, when breaking down the definition of the SWA, there were three themes: responsibilities, conference role, and professional development. The subthemes under responsibilities were Title IX, sport oversight, and equity for women's sports. The subthemes under conference roles were limited knowledge of everything going on in the athletics department and visibility without impact. The subthemes under professional development were only if needed for certification, not encouraged to attend professional development, can't attend due to budget cuts, and they are paid for if they are approved.

**Research Question 3**

What challenges do SWAs face?

*Figure 3 Concept Map.*



*Challenges*

The third finding uncovered some challenges SWAs face within the designation. A few different themes were found such as departmental culture, becoming a SWA, others perceptions, and duties/responsibilities.

There were some SWAs that mentioned their departmental culture does not look good. In these departments, there was a lack of females, minorities, or both.

"We have two women on the associate AD's group." (Participant #5)

"For me, the atmosphere is very frustrating because in upper administration meetings I am the only female and there is not a big commitment to diversity in our department and that is so important for a department. I would like to see more females and minorities from different backgrounds so we can get different ideas from different people. (Participant #7)

"Looking at our athletic department administratively, our diversity doesn't look good. Meaning there's not a whole lot." (Participant #10)

There was not a direct path to becoming a SWA. For some the title was just given

to them but for others they worked in different areas of athletics before becoming the

SWA.

> "I was asked if I wanted to be the SWA and so I took on the title and stayed in my role. I was included in a few more meetings and did a few more important things in the department that I didn't do before." (Participant #1)

> "The SWA role is obviously the one thing mandated by the NCAA and probably everyone's background is very different." (Participant #5)

> "When they said you have to have a SWA, I was the only female in the coaching field around here." (Participant #5)

> "So I think as my coaching experience, working as a marketing intern, working in special events and in fundraising it made me ready for this SWA position." (Participant #8)

> "I was told I have to be the SWA. They didn't really define what that meant, or that entailed, so that's what I sort of started doing." (Participant #10)

> "The first couple of years that I had the title I just had it, they didn't want me to do anything with it." (Participant #5)

> "It was mandated that you have a SWA and they just slapped in on whomever the female was around." (Participant #10)

> "There was a conference school I worked at where I was the only female in the athletic department full time. I never really appreciated having to identify as a woman in my title. I understood why they did it, and I think initially it was a good way to get one in it if you're trying to force them to put women into sport." (Participant #6)

Many people have their own perspective of the SWA and what she does. Some of

these perceptions are true; however, some of them are incorrect.

> "I would like to see more opportunities for women in our field and it's frustrating. Everyone expects the SWA to be the mother of the department and that's so frustrating." (Participant #5)

"As far as decision making, policies in the department and probably I guess the balance to the department. That's kind of what my role has been, and so that's what it means, the senior woman leader of the department." (Participant #1)

"Many on the outside think that it means you are in charge of female sports, which is not accurate." (Participant #7)

"If you're a woman you're automatically just associated with women's sports." (Participant #6)

The duties and responsibilities the SWAs have were very confusing and were different on every campus. There were not set job responsibilities, which leave people confused about what they were supposed to be doing.

"Most of the student-athletes here would not know what the SWA role is either because I don't look at it as somebody that they really need to know and it's not because I care if they do." (Participant #2)

"There's no real consistency from institution to institution of what the SWA does so it just depends on what the institutional needs are and what the AD deems are the responsibilities." (Participant #9)

"I feel like when you're a female you have to prove yourself even more. Because athletics is such a male dominated profession." (Participant #4)

"Where did you get it from?.. I didn't know we had one (definition)." (Participant #10)

"So like the EADA report, gender equity in athletics could have been housed with the SWA but was housed with the Deputy AD." (Participant #9)

In summary, when breaking down the challenges SWAs face in the designation there were four themes, departmental culture, becoming a SWA, others perceptions, and duties/responsibilities. The subthemes under departmental culture were seen not heard and the lack of diversity. The subtheme under becoming a SWA was qualifications. The subthemes under other perceptions were only in charge of female sports and she is the female leader of the department. The subtheme under duties and responsibilities was the unclear duties and responsibilities the SWA is supposed to have.

**Research Question 4**

How much influence, power, and opinions do SWAs have within their department?

*Figure 4 Concept Map.*
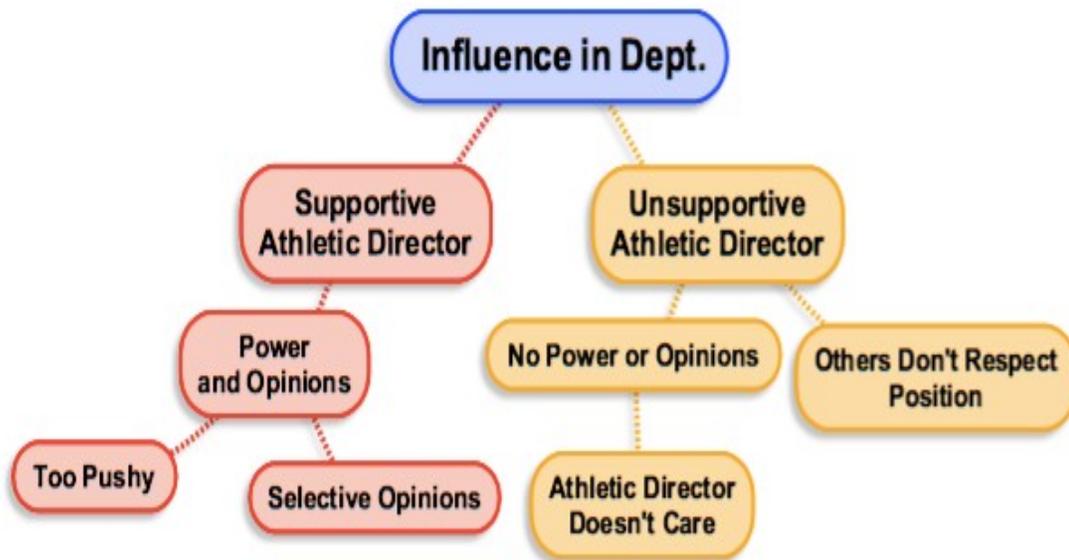


*Challenges*

The fourth and last finding was the influence within the department. The SWAs perception of influence within the department was dependent on the support from their athletic director.

If the athletics department has a supportive athletic director, then the SWA is given power and opinions. Along with power and opinions, the athletic director wants to hear what she thinks and she's expected to come up with creative ideas.

> "For me, I do feel like I have been allowed the power but I will say that there are a lot of people in our profession that are frustrated because they don't get all the opportunities they would like so that is an area that we have to keep working for." (Participant #5)

"People don't usually like when I throw my opinions but I always say what other people are thinking and nobody wants to say it." (Participant #4)

"I do in most regards. There are some things that I don't have any discussion with. Those things that I don't have decisions on are not like major, major items." (Participant #1)

"Sometimes I struggle to find the balance as being assertive but coming across as too pushy." (Participant #7)

If the athletics department has an unsupportive athletic director, then the SWA is not given power and the athletic director doesn't want to hear her opinions. In this situation, the department is set on only one idea and different opinions are not viewed favorably.

"I think there are some schools out there that allow power, different opinions, and opportunities. Then there are some that are a little bit further behind the times." (Participant #2)

"We are set on this is how things have been done for so long and even when people bring suggestions to the table they aren't willing to consider them. Speaking with others I just wish there was more from the top down to change the dynamics and the culture of the department." (Participant #7)

"As a sport oversight I'm just a support system. I don't have power and can't exercise my opinions. I'm not involved in meetings where decisions are made. I don't have professional development paid for and there's no diversity so it's hard to bring in suggestions about diversity. (Participant #7)

"No one said how they felt because he had already made up his mind so people just stopped trying because he didn't care what you said." (Participant #4)

"The environment that we have here, opposing opinions are not viewed favorably. There have been multiple times that I have brought up topics in meetings that have been dismissed and then later brought up to the AD through some other means besides me and then brought for discussion but when I brought it to the table the prior three times I was dismissed." (Participant #7)

"No, I'm not involved in any meetings where decisions are made." (Participant #7)

"There's situations where you don't have an athletic director that's supportive and all they care about is football and men's basketball. If you don't have a supportive athletic Director, you're hung up to dry." (Participant #3)

"I do feel like based on my role I should be in the head meetings because based on how the conference office approaches us and the NCAA they believe that we have some input in major decisions and we are making decisions on behalf of our institution but depending on the school I don't know if that's necessarily the reality." (Participant #7)

In summary, when breaking down the influence the SWA has within the athletics department, it was dependent on the support from their athletic director. The sub theme under supportive athletic director was the SWA does have power and can give opinions in the athletic department. The sub themes under unsupportive athletic director were the SWA doesn't have power, her opinions were not welcome, and others don't respect her position.

**Chapter 5**

This study was designed to determine if the Senior Women Administrator's role was still necessary, if there was a need for a title change, and if there was a need for a new definition. The first part of this study sought to provide a more clear explanation of what the title actually means to the women fulfilling the title. The second part of this study was to explore what type of responsibilities was part of the SWA title. The third part of this study explored if the senior woman administrators are given power and if they are were comfortable exercising the power given to them by the legislation. The fourth part was to see senior woman administrators were able to promote the involvement of female administrators and enhance female representation. These questions were answered by breaking down the roles, responsibilities and perspectives of senior woman administrators in athletics.

Given the evolving definition and nature of the SWA designation and of female managerial roles in general (Eagly & Karau, 2002), there exists a question as to whether the SWA designation has provided the scope of decision-making and authority suggested in the NCAA definition of the designation. This examination helped to uncover if there is still a need for the SWA role and if the title is still appropriate for this designation. It is anticipated that athletic administrators and people in leadership positions will use this study to inspect the role of the SWA on their campus. It is also expected to support these women in contributing decision-making ideas and providing overall power to the athletics department. This would make the SWA a valuable member to the department and fulfill the proper designation by the NCAA.

Using qualitative research, the researcher sought to explore participants, thoughts, opinions, and perceptions of the value of the SWA. SWAs shared their opinions and

perceptions of their role, influence, challenges, and issues with the definition. This segment of the discussion will revisit research questions, and the main themes of the data. In this section, the researcher will synthesize and discuss the findings.

**Perceptions of SWAs**

A perception of SWAs was that they are only in charge of women's sports. As SWAs should have ample amount of experience in sport oversight, she should not only have oversight of women's sports. The SWA position was made to provide equity amongst men's and women's sports, not just women's. In order for women to work their way up the ladder into higher leadership positions or athletic director roles, they must have oversight of men's sports and revenue generating sports. However, a lot of SWAs were only in charge of female sports. Since their title had *woman* in it, participants believed that people thought she only wanted equity for women's sports. This perception is wrong because the SWA is supposed to help in providing equity to both male and female student-athletes. However, many of the SWAs mentioned they look at the way things are ran for their women's sports or are in charge of equity for women's sports. As the SWAs personally believed the perceptions are false, the duties with regard to women's sports of the SWAs are in fact sometimes true.

There was a strong perception that women cannot understand the sport of football and therefore they needed to stick to sports they could relate to (Vollman, 2016). Yet, this perception was not always true. Women need to have the same opportunities to oversee both men's and women's programs. In order to break that perception, it is necessary for SWAs to gain more oversight in men's sports.

**The Need of a Title Change and a Clear Definition**

Some SWAs wanted a title change because the title can be very deceiving and the job duties can be very confusing. There is not a set job description, which leaves SWAs and their athletic directors puzzled. SWAs are supposed to have any departmental task and be a part of the senior management team. Claussen and Lehr (2002) found that SWAs had little decision-making authority in marketing, development, promotions, and sponsorships, thus, limiting the scope of their involvement. The title needs a more definitive definition and there needs to be a clear description of the job responsibilities associated with SWAs. There has not been anyone in charge of enforcing whether SWAs are given the rights that the designation they were intended to have. Therefore, there needs to be someone that monitors the opportunities that are or are not given to the SWAs to better fulfil the roles and thus enhances this designation.

The definition of the SWA was seen as a huge problem. The biggest problem with it was that some women in the role did not know the true definition. While the women in the role were not clear on the definition of the position, they also felt they bosses and counterparts were also unclear and at time did not know what to do with the SWAs. The definition was very general and did not explain the specific responsibilities of the SWA. Her tasks must have included being in any department and included on senior management team (NCAA, 2017). As this was usually true, the SWAs did not always have a voice at the table. SWAs are supposed to act as a key-decision maker in their departments, however not all SWAs are provided that opportunity. The definition is very vague and it needs to be updated as many of the participants were confused by roles and obligations that needed to fulfilled within the department.

When asking participants to define SWA it was very perplexing because the SWAs were unsure of the definition themselves. There were also a couple different definitions floating around which made it difficult. With the uncertainty of the definition it seems people are confused on what exactly their responsibilities should be. At most universities that were interviewed, the SWA was in charge of Title IX, had sport oversight, and was in charge of equity for women's sports. Although these were all common themes, none of these were actually listed in the definition of the SWA. Some SWAs were also in charge of the Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act. The SWAs that were not in charge of the EADA report was because a male in the athletics department was in charge of it; however, SWAs believed they should be the ones in charge of that report.

As part of the SWA definition, she was to enhance representation of female experience and perspective at the institutional, conference and national levels and support women's interests (NCAA, 2017). A way of doing this was attending professional development opportunities to educate herself and to figure out how to get more women in athletics. However, not all SWAs were able to attend professional development opportunities. At least half of the SWAs were not encouraged to go to professional development opportunities or could only go if they were approved. Since SWAs were not always given the opportunities to go to professional development, it can make it harder to promote the involvement of other women.

When the designation of the SWA role was first made, it was definitely needed and it was important for women to be at the table. Almost four decades later, the specified definition is outdated and is a huge problem. The definition looks nice on paper

but is not functional within athletics departments. The SWA participants in this study felt as if they were sometimes not respected and were underappreciated. There must be a clear definition that is functional for all SWAs. Also, all SWAs must be aware of the definition and the responsibilities that fall within the definition. Along with this, the NCAA needs to make sure each SWA is given the opportunities they are mandated by this definition. It may look great on paper, but when an SWA has an unsupportive athletic director, she is not given any of the rights the NCAA was intending. When she has an unsupportive athletic director she is just sitting at the senior management table instead of having senior management responsibilities and a voice on the senior management team. The definition must be clear and everyone needs to be informed of the overall purpose.

**Role with Conference**

There were some things SWAs that report to their conference, but overall they were confused about their role within conference. As all SWAs met with their conference at least once a year and had conference calls, they were still very confused on what their role with the conference was supposed to be. When working with the conference office, the SWAs are expected to know everything, even if they did not directly oversee all areas, which a lot of times they do not. Other conversation that goes on while meeting with the conference office was staying in the loop of what other schools were doing on their campus. There needs to be a clear description of what SWAs are supposed to report and work with the conference on since they are confused about what they do with the conference. If SWAs just gather to stay in the loop, it would be more beneficial to just do that on another conference call.

**Satisfaction in the Role**

There were some SWAs that were not satisfied because they were not involved or utilized enough. With these schools, the SWAs felt as if they were not able to exercise their power. In the schools that SWAs felt that they were not involved it was because they were not considered upper administration. There were also many of SWAs that thought their role was considered negative. They felt like they were only in the role because the NCAA mandated it, which could be considered is true. If this position was not mandated for specifically women, there was a very good possibility this position would have been filled with men. As SWA's seemed to be very unsure by their responsibilities, the felt their athletic directors were too. Some SWAs believe it was just a title. Some SWAs believed they could have been in charge of more things such as more sport oversight or more upper administrative issues, but the athletic director would not give her more things to be in charge of or did not want her in charge of those things.

There were quite a few SWAs that thought the role was positive because it gave women a chance to be represented. Due to the advancements of Title IX opportunities for women in sport, women in leadership positions should not be subjected to one spot at the table. However, the main purpose of this position was to give women a seat at the table. Overall, this position was very empowering for women. With this position, it helped promote other women and try to get more women in the field. This designation was imperative as women were not automatically at the table.

**Challenges**

Each SWA faced many challenges while in the designation. Since college athletics had been a good ole' boys club (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2008; Kamphoff,

2010; Stangl & Kane, 1991), it made it very hard for SWAs to have their voices heard. Athletics departments were often ran by white males and only listen to those who looked like themselves (Baer, 2014). A lot of campuses struggled with departmental culture even though each university must have had a SWA on the senior management staff. Even though athletic departments had a SWA in some of those departments she was the only female at the table. When there was a lack of diversity in athletics departments, the only woman in there felt like she was usually seen and not heard. Also, when there were other women, she was forced to prove herself more than others. When she was forced to prove herself more it was hard because she kept doing things in the department that were not always seen or wanted to be seen.

Each SWA had a very different background, which made it hard to recognize the requirements to become a SWA. During this study, some SWAs were qualified individuals and with others it appeared as it the SWA designation was just a title. The women that were qualified were extremely experienced. However, there were some that had no administration experience at all. There are some SWAs that were coaching or were the only female in the department when the designation was mandated and they essentially received it by default.

**Duties and Responsibilities**

The duties and responsibilities of the SWA were very unclear as the definition only said her responsibilities included any department task (NCAA, 2017). Therefore, when you asked SWAs what their duties and responsibilities were they were confused because they relate to what their full time title was. For example, when asking a Deputy AD/SWA what her responsibilities were, she referred to her Deputy AD role when she

explained her responsibilities since that was what her job description entailed. An employer could not advertise a position opening as the SWA, because they cannot discriminate and say this position would only hire a female. Since this cannot be advertised, it seemed like the duties were all part of the full time role rather than the SWA role.

**Influence**

Participants in this study reported having two types of athletics directors, supportive and unsupportive. When a department had a supportive athletic director the SWAs had the opportunity to express their power and different opinions. However, when females in the department expressed their opinions too much they were often seen as too pushy or people only wanted selective opinions that came from them. When the department had an unsupportive athletic director this usually correlated to no diversity and did not want different opinions. When a SWA had an unsupportive athletic director, she did not have power and felt she could not express her opinions. Also in this atmosphere, participants felt others did not respect her position since the athletic director their selves did not respect her position. When the SWA did not have power or opinions the athletic director seemed to not care about the title SWA or what her responsibilities were.

**Limitations**

A limitation of this study was that all but one interview was completed over the phone. Since interviews were conducted on the phone, it was hard to read the body language of the SWAs. Along with body language, another limitation is participants

being open and willing to talk about sensitive issues in their place of work with a complete stranger.

**Future Research and Implications**

Future research is imperative for a better understanding of SWAs perceptions of their roles, responsibilities, and influence. A follow up to this thesis would be asking SWAs if they could write the SWA definition what would it say. It is important to get their feedback on the definition because they are the ones in the role. Some athletic directors and people at the NCAA are not aware of what SWAs are doing on their campus and how they feel about the role. Therefore, it is substantial to see what the SWAs think of the definition and if there should be a title change. As the NCAA should still mandate at least one woman in athletics, there is a possibility of a title change and a definite definition modification. This focus would help to figure out what the new definition and new title of the SWA should be by giving SWAs the power to write the title and definition. Although the results of this study may not be representative of all SWAs, the population explored did have a diverse background and path to becoming a SWA that did produce some pertinent findings.

Based on the results of this research suggestions for future research include focusing on supportive and unsupportive athletics directors as it relates to power and opportunities. This focus would dig deeper into the future opportunities SWAs have or do not have. In addition, future studies may have a specific focus on supportive athletic directors and the influence they may have in providing opportunities for growth and retention for women in leadership positions.

The last focus would be to study leadership styles within an athletics department and how that affects the SWA's duties. Leadership styles can affect an athletic department by how it is run. It is important to learn the leadership styles of others in the department to figure out how to better work together.

**Conclusion**

With college athletic administration continually changing it may be time that not only is an updated definition of the SWA specifically defined, but includes detailed duties and responsibilities to make it clear of the expectations of the role. There were various perceptions of SWAs and several recommendations to fix the current designation. There were major themes that arose that would help fix the designation as the designation is still very important to have. Women were not automatically at the table, and this designation still provides women with a chance to be at the table.

As the designation PWA was made thirty- six years ago, it is out dated. The inclusion of women in meaningful, decision-making positions within their respective athletic departments was the intended outcome of the legislation established by the SWA designation (Claussen & Lehr, 2002; Sweet et al., 2006). However, this is not what is happening on all campuses.

It may also be beneficial to run a campaign that informs people of exactly what a SWA does. People should know that it is not just a title and should be more than just a seat at the table. We should not only update the job description but leaders in the field such as athletic directors should ensure that this role is respected, taken seriously, and not just given to the first women they see or the only women in the department. Rather this role should be valued and respected enough that a qualified experienced employee is in

the role and is being fairly compensated. That should set the tone in the athletic

department and let everyone know the individual in their role should be valued and taken

seriously and has more than just a seat at the table but needs to be listened to, is valued,

and heard.

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**Appendices**

**A LEADING AMERICAN UNIVERSITY WITH
INTERNATIONAL REACH
SCHOOL OF KINESIOLOGY, RECREATION & SPORT**

**INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT**

Project Title: <u>Roles, Responsibilities, and Perspectives of Senior Women Administrators</u>
Investigators:
<u>Dr. Evie Oregon - School of Kinesiology, Recreation, and Sport, (270) 745 - 2080</u>
<u>Jacqueline McGill - School of Kinesiology, Recreation, and Sport, (618) 838 - 9581</u>

Dear Participant:
You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky
University. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in
this project.

The investigators will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures
to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask
any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the
project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any
questions you may have.

If you then decide to participate in the project, please sign this form .You should be given
a copy of this form to keep.

**Nature and Purpose of the Project:**
This research project will break down the roles, responsibilities and perspectives of
senior women administrators in athletics. This project will analyze the responsibilities
and the job description of SWA's to see if they are able to practice the responsibilities
they are supposed to be practicing. We will also explore if senior women administrators
feel they have a voice at the highest level within the department.

**Explanation of Procedures:**
The study will involve an interview where we will ask you to answer a few questions. We
will ask you participate in an individual interview, where you will be asked to answer a
few questions about your Roles, Responsibilities, and Perspectives of Senior Women
Administrators. The interview should take approximately 30-60 minutes. Please note that
the sessions will be audio taped.

**Expected risks and benefits:**

Participating in this project involves minimal risk, although it is possible that we may ask a question or two that makes you feel uncomfortable.  If that is the case, you will not have to answer it. Results will benefit other senior women administrators, and young women aspiring to work in intercollegiate athletics. However, there will be no specific benefits to you as a result of answering the questions.

**Confidentiality:**
All information collected during this study will be strictly confidential. We will not share any information about you with anyone outside the study. Interviews will be audio recorded and then transcribed. We will not include names of the subjects in transcriptions, just what is said as part of the discussion. We will do everything possible to protect your privacy and will not include your name in any of the publications resulting from this study. Your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. All of the data will be stored in locked file cabinets or password-protected computer files at Western Kentucky University. Only the project investigators will have access to your data. Only the project investigators will be able to access and receive the results of the study.

**Refusal/Withdrawal:**
Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the project at any time without penalty. You may refuse to participate in certain procedures or answer certain questions or discontinue your participation at any time without consequence. Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.


*You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.*


_____          _____
Signature of Participant                                                        Date


_____          _____
Witness                                                                             Date

THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT
THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY
THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Paul Mooney, Human Protections Administrator
TELEPHONE:  (270) 745-2129

- Introduce yourself
    - Student – Education
    - Interested and passionate about minorities in sport administration
    - Share how I became interested
- ***Remind them everything discussed will be kept confidential and anonymous

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
    a. How did you get into college athletics and the position you're in now?
    b. What are some of your past experiences that have led you to this job?

2. Perspective/perception of role
    a. What does being/the title a SWA mean to you?
    b. The definition of a Senior Woman Administrator is as follows: she is to be the highest-ranking woman in the athletics department. The designation is intended to encourage and promoted the involvement of female administrators in meaningful ways in the decision-making process. Her responsibilities must include participates on senior management team, acts as a key decision-maker in athletics, advocates issues important to female and male student-athletes, coaches and staff, educates individuals on issues concerning both men and women, serves as a resource for all individuals in athletics and is an active member of key professional organization. Based on this definition, do you feel you are provided with opportunities the NCAA is intending by the SWA designation?

3. Administrative responsibilities: What type of administrative responsibilities is part of your SWA title?
    a. Compensation: Do you receive a stipend or professional development funds- conference funds?

4. Role with conference: What is your role with your conference office and what are some things you must report to it or work with them on?

5. Professional Development: Are you able to attend any NCAA meetings, conference or institutional engagements, and/or be part of any NCAA committees? If so, is the institution paying for your participation?

6. Satisfaction in role: With your responsibilities, culture and environment at your institution, how satisfied are you with your SWA role?

7. Are you able to exercise power: Are you part of senior administration meetings? If so, are you comfortable exercising your power and opinions in these meetings?

    a. Do you feel like you are a part of the decision making process?

8. Working relationships/work environment/culture: Do you feel that your athletics department values and promotes diversity, different opinions, and feedback?

9. SWA Title Change: Do you feel there is still a need for the SWA role/designation? Do you feel the title is still appropriate or should there be a change?