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## The Underrepresentation of women in interscholastic sport leadership: A qualitative study on the effects of role incongruity

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THE UNDERREPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN INTERSCHOLASTIC SPORT  
LEADERSHIP: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE EFFECTS OF ROLE  
INCONGRUITY

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the

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## ABSTRACT

### **The Underrepresentation of Women in Interscholastic Athletic Leadership: A Qualitative Study on the Effects of Role Incongruity**

by

Dana Massengale

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the underrepresentation of women in interscholastic sport leadership positions by analyzing perceptions of state association administrators and athletic directors of the function, if any, that role congruity theory plays in the underrepresentation women. Previous research has examined potential causes for this underrepresentation but no previous study had examined this phenomenon from a prejudice toward women in a leadership role perspective. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews involving nine women leaders in interscholastic athletics. The criteria for participation placed them into one of three categories: 1) participants who were currently working as state association athletic administrators as either an executive director or associate director; 2) participants who were currently working as a high school athletic director in addition to a leadership role in their state athletic directors association; 3) participants who were working in interscholastic athletic administration at the national level.

Using role congruity theory as a conceptual framework, the current study sought to give voice to a few select women who have broken the glass ceiling in the hegemonic masculine field of sport. The interview questions focused on the participants' career path, perceptions of the current representation of women in interscholastic athletics,

experiences inherent to role congruity, and their perceptions of the function of role congruity theory in the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in interscholastic sport. The data collected from the interviews were analyzed and five themes emerged: 1) formative career experiences; 2) perceived barriers for advancement; 3) perceptions of role congruity; 4) experiences associated with role congruity; and 5) strategies to overcome prejudice associated with role congruity.

All nine of the women interviewed perceived representation of women in interscholastic athletics as a problem that exists at the leadership position as well as other positions in interscholastic sport. The participants described barriers including work-life conflict, self efficacy, and effects of symbolic interactionism that they perceived as factors contributing to the current state of underrepresentation. Eight of the nine participants interviewed believed role congruity plays a part in the underrepresentation of women in interscholastic athletic administration. Based on the lived experiences of the participants the degree of impact varied. The results suggest despite the many advances that have taken place for women, there are still many limitations, based on role congruity theory, that exist in interscholastic sport leadership. Mentoring, networking, and avoiding professional limitations were consistent strategies the participants advised for women to progress into leadership positions. Future research is recommended to continue to study women in interscholastic leadership positions and develop an understanding of what influences women's decision making women pursuing leadership positions, as well as barriers that are impeding them.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Introduction

The representation of women has been increasing in many areas of the work force as well as higher education. However, the number of women in the highest leadership roles in almost all occupational areas is not increasing in proportion to their overall numbers in education or the work force (American Council on Education, 2007; Catalyst, 2006). This disproportion is seen in corporate business (Catalyst, 2006) politics (Center for American Women and Politics, 2008) and education (Giegerich, 2004).

Representation of women as leaders in the different areas of sport mirrors that in other facets of society. Women, as a whole, are under-represented in leadership positions, paid less for their work, and marginalized in the workplace (Acosta & Carpenter 2006; Whisenant, Miller, & Peterson, 2005).

Women are underrepresented in leadership areas in professional sport (Lapchick, 2007; Lapchick, 2006), intercollegiate sport (Acosta and Carpenter, 2006), and interscholastic sport (Whisenant, 2008). According to the 2007-2008 NCAA Division I-A Racial & Gender Demographics Study (TIDES), a report examining racial and gender representation in higher education leadership, 100% of the 11 Division IA conference commissioners were white men. Sixteen (13.3%) of the university presidents were women, yet of the 120 athletics directors in NCAA Division IA who oversee football, only six were women (5%). Additionally, in their twenty-nine-year longitudinal study, Acosta and Carpenter (2006) reported the lowest number ever of females as head coaches of women's teams. The details of the study indicated that only 42.2 percent of women's

teams were coached by a female coach, the lowest ever representation of females as head coaches of women's teams. This was in clear contrast to 1972 when over 90 percent of the head coaches for women's teams were females.

Despite improved athletic opportunities for girls and women since the passage of Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act of 1972, women's representation as athletic administrators has declined. Like women in coaching, in 1972 when Title IX was passed, over 90% of women's collegiate athletic programs were administered by female athletic directors. Acosta and Carpenter's (2006) update showed that while this year had the highest ever participation by female athletes, it also marked a continuing decreased representation of females as head administrators. In 2006, only 18.6% of athletic directors of women's programs were women (Carpenter & Acosta, 2006). In addition, the study showed that the most common administrative structure involved two to four administrators, with a male athletic director and one female assistant or associate administrator. However, 14.5% of athletic administrations lacked a female anywhere in the administrative structure (Carpenter & Acosta, 2006).

At the interscholastic level, the most recent study on the participation rates revealed that high school athletic participation continues to increase. According to the 2006-07 High School Athletics Participation Survey conducted by the National Federation of High School Sport (NFHS), there were 7.3 million participants in high school sport. In addition to the overall numbers, female participation rate set an all-time high of 3,057,266 girls (Gillis, 2007). Participation by female athletes in sport has greatly increased since the passage of Title IX. Even though there has been a significant increase in the number of females participating in high school athletics, the same cannot

be said for female interscholastic athletic administrators. No cumulative data was found that reported the representation of women as coaches, athletic directors, or state association governing executives. By examining the (NFHS) directory, state high school athletic associations were found to have only three of the top positions represented by women (6%) (Massengale, 2008). Despite the fact that data regarding the gender makeup of participants is readily available, there is a shortage of information concerning the number of women in athletic administrative positions. Pedersen and Whisenant (2005) found no state or national governmental agency that collects or stores specific demographic data related to the administrators of interscholastic athletics.

Of the criteria used by the Office of Civil Rights to enforce Title IX at the interscholastic level, none specifically applies to athletic administrators. Within the United States' Department of Education document, "Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Compliance Report," no data related to athletic administrators were requested or reported (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Moreover, Whisenant (2005) found the state coaching and athletic directors associations guarded the limited demographic data that did exist. Slack (1997) pointed out that despite the obvious lack of women in leadership positions in sport organizations there has been little attempt in this field to look at the gendered nature of leadership. Most of the investigations have been focused on barriers to obtaining leadership positions and demographic studies outlining the current status. To date, no study was found that examined the under- representation of women as leaders based on the gendered nature of leadership roles in sport and how the subsequent prejudice may lead to the underrepresentation of women leaders in interscholastic athletics.

No one theory has offered sufficient explanation regarding the low representation of women as sport leaders which has continually plagued sport as an institution. Thus, it appears to be important to evaluate whether an overt prejudice, as evident in role congruity theory, is one of the causes of women's shortage in leadership positions in sport. Role congruity theory (Eagly, 2004; Eagly & Diekmann, 2005; Eagly & Karau, 2002) states that prejudice arises from an incongruity between a group stereotype and social role characteristics (i.e., the attributes and behaviors prescribed by the social role), such that prejudice occurs when members of a group enter or attempt to enter into roles that are stereotypically mismatched for their group. Consistent with research about how people typically characterize gender roles and leadership roles, this theory proposes that prejudice toward female leaders takes two forms: (a) perceiving women as possessing less leadership ability than men and (b) evaluating behavior that fulfills the prescriptions of a leader role more negatively when it is enacted by a woman compared with a man. One consequence of these two forms of prejudice is that attitudes are more negative toward female leaders and potential leaders than male leaders or potential leaders. Other consequences are that it is more difficult for women to become leaders and to achieve success in leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Currently, there exists a lack of input from women leaders addressing the issue of role incongruity ingrained within athletic administration, which potentially prevents and/or limits women from achieving top leadership positions. The voices of women speaking about the problems encountered in athletic leadership will keep the issues of an underrepresented gender in the forefront of society (Inglis, Danylchuk, & Pastore, 2000). Therefore, there is a strong need for understanding how women, in athletic administration, experience role incongruity, role

expectations, and the reactions and consequences that have resulted in their professional careers. Understanding when and why prejudice occurs is the first step in reducing prejudice, and role congruity theory helps to answer these questions by highlighting the contextual nature of prejudice.

### Statement of the Problem

With the increased participation of female athletes and the escalation of girl's high school teams since the emancipation of Title IX, it would seem logical that growth would translate into an ostentatious opportunity for women to advance in athletic leadership roles. Yet, while the opportunity for such career advancement would seem available, women remain significantly underrepresented in these areas. One of the unanticipated outcomes of Title IX in sport was moving control of women's high school and college athletic departments out of the control of women and into athletic departments led by men. Consequently, this change resulted in male control of the hiring process, and thus prolonging male dominance as leaders. Research has shown that women want to advance into athletic leadership, nevertheless the number of leaders remains low (Acosta & Carpenter, 2006; Lough & Grappendorf, 2006; Whisenant et al., 2002; Whisenant & Pedersen, 2004). The literature on this inverse relationship between participation and leadership by women has purported several barriers and explanatory theories. However, the phenomena still exists. Cahn (1994) aptly characterizes this Title IX conundrum, writing that the "simultaneous increase in participation and decrease in leadership suggests that women have struck an unintended bargain, trading control over sport for greater access to sporting opportunities and resources" (p. 261).

Eagly (1998) stated that lack of leaders may be due to the different expectations that exist for men and women holding equal positions. Research points to an overt prejudice in role expectations that are incongruent with the general perceptions of leaders. There have been many theories suggested and barriers identified to explain this underrepresentation. However, a discrepancy between the leadership role and gender role as a source of prejudice has not been examined in any sport setting. This prejudice consequently contributes to the lower numbers of women obtaining leadership positions. In addition, evaluations of women in leadership roles have been found to be biased, making upward mobility more difficult (Eagly & Karau, 2002). To date, there have been no studies that examined this incongruence between leadership role and gender role as a possible explanation for the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles in sport. This qualitative study proposes to provide a greater understanding of the underrepresentation of women in athletic leadership from the perspective of the women in leadership positions in interscholastic sport.

#### Previous Research and Gaps in the Literature

Scholarly research devoted to the sparse representation of women in leadership roles has pointed to three key themes. “Pipeline problem” theory focuses on the concept that there are a low number of qualified women applying for these positions. Second, the shortage in these areas have been attributed to discrimination in the hiring process including: hegemonic masculinity (Whisenant, Pedersen, & Obenour, 2002); homologous reproduction (Lovett & Lowry, 1994; Stangl & Kane, 1991; Sagas, Cunningham & Teed, 2003); homophobia (Griffin, 1992) and occupational closure (Kanter, 1977; Witz 1991). The third theme involves social limitation theories that conclude with women opting out

or exhibiting self limiting behaviors and these include social cognitive theory and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986; Cunningham Sagas, & Ashley, 2003) symbolic interactionism (Satore & Cunningham, 2007) and work life balance (Inglis, Danylchuk & Pastore 2000; Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Bruening, & Dixon, 2008).

### *Pipeline Problem*

The career path of high level leaders in sport at both the interscholastic and intercollegiate levels typically includes coaching and lower level administrative roles. Currently, women have been found to have low representation in both of these areas (Grappendorf, Lough, & Griffin, 2004; Whisenant, 2003; Smith, 2005). With few women in coaching positions, a natural prerequisite for a career move into administration, the hiring of women athletic leaders becomes more difficult. With men in the dominant roles in sport, young girls do not perceive athletics as a possible career path and boys do not perceive that women belong as athletic leaders (Whisenant, Miller & Peterson, 2005). Gogol (2002) found coaches frequently discussed a lack of female mentors as a barrier for other women to get into the profession of coaching. Everhart & Chelladurai (1998) confirmed the relevance of this lack of female mentors as a barrier in their investigation of gender differences and their impact on the perception of the coaching occupation. Their findings indicated that female athletes with women coaches were more interested in the coaching field than those with male coaches.

### *Discrimination in the hiring process*

The shortage of women in leadership positions has been attributed to possible discrimination in the hiring process including: hegemonic masculinity (Whisenant, Pedersen, & Obenour, 2002); homologous reproduction (Lovett & Lowry, 1994; Stangl & Kane, 1991; Sagas, Cunningham & Teed, 2003) homophobia; (Griffin, 1992) and occupational closure (Kanter, 1977; Witz 1991). Hegemonic masculinity exists when the attributes of masculinity are viewed as superior to femininity and hold more power by reinforcing the dominant ideology. Sport affirms male dominance and supports this culture (Whisenant et al., 2005). Even with the passage of Title IX and the subsequent increases in women's participation in sport, Whisenant et al. (2005) argue there remains a strong presence of hegemonic masculinity. Furthermore, they assert, "Although Title IX and its enforcement chipped away at male hegemony on the playing field, hegemonic masculinity became even more entrenched in upper management" (p. 486). As Fink (2008) notes sport is still a powerful mechanism by which male hegemony is constructed and reconstructed.

Homologous reproduction was first conceptualized by Kanter (1977). As a theory it proposes that a dominant group within an organization will work to "carefully guard power and privilege" (p. 48) by systematically reproducing themselves in their own image. This systematic reproduction is accomplished by men in leadership roles hiring and promoting other men. The practice of homologous reproduction has been documented in the employment of coaches at both the interscholastic (Lovett & Lowry, 1994; Stangl & Kane, 1991) and intercollegiate levels (Stahura & Greenwood, 2001; Cunningham & Sagas, 2005). The evidence from these studies suggests that homologous



reproduction is at least one major underlying variable that contributes to the continued under-representation of female leaders in sport.

Homophobia, the irrational fear and/or intolerance of homosexuality (Rotella & Murray 1991) is another proposed discrimination that limits women in athletics. Griffin (1998) describes how this fear contributes to continuous institutionalization of sexism, blatant discrimination and prejudice against women. Teel (2005) listed lesbian fear as a significant factor contributing to women's difficulty in attaining leadership positions at NCAA Division I and II institutions. Additionally, the CAGE Report (2005) lists sexual orientation as a "salient" factor in the underrepresentation of women in coaching (p. 5). Finally, occupational closure refers to systems within society and work environments that perpetuate the underrepresentation of certain populations in various occupations.

#### *Social limitations*

Third, are social limitation theories that conclude with women opting out or exhibiting self limiting behaviors consequently contributing to the underrepresentation of women. These theories include social cognitive theory and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986; Cunningham Sagas, & Ashley, 2003); symbolic interactionism (Satore & Cunningham, 2007); and work life balance (Dixon & Bruenning, 2007). In seeking to understand why such a disparity of women leaders continue, researchers have pointed to differences between men and women in self-efficacy (Cunningham et al. 2007; Cunningham et al. 2003). In addition, symbolic interactionist researchers investigate how people create meaning during social interaction, how they present and construct the self, and how they define situations of co-presence with others. One of the theories central components is that people act as they do because of how they define situations. Satore & Cunningham

(2007) applied a symbolic interactionist perspective to the underrepresentation of women, proposing that gender roles and stereotypes connected to sport ideologies inhibit women in sport organizations. They argued that women might not view themselves as capable leaders because of the existing low levels of power and status of women in society. This results in self-imposed limits on their leadership aspirations.

A separate issue affecting the retention and advancement of women in athletic administration is the issue of family commitments and decisions and the resulting effects on their careers. Women have been found to perceive themselves as facing dual expectations of not only succeeding in their professional careers but also fulfilling their family responsibilities (Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Inglis, Danylchuk, & Pastore, 1996). Bruening, Dixon, Tiell, Osborne, Lough & Sweeney (2008) confirmed this perception in their study of NCAA athletic directors and senior woman administrators towards work-life conflict. The researchers concluded that contributing to a demanding work environment is the perceived role expectation of intercollegiate athletics employees. Personal sacrifices in time and energy for the sake of the program were equated with contributing to high levels of work-life conflict. Additionally, they found the culture of collegiate coaching and management is one that demands non-traditional work hours on nights and weekends thus further adding to work and life conflict. Additional research by Dixon & Bruening (2007) has focused on the organizational and cultural factors that affect work life balance perceptions for women in sport. In sport management, Dixon and Bruening (2005) introduced a multilevel model of work–family conflict that examined the interactions of three levels—sociocultural, organizational/structural, and individual.

They argued that higher level environments shape and constrain lower level behaviors, which ultimately influence the perception and consequences of work–family conflict.

In conclusion, women are underrepresented in leadership roles in all occupational areas; this underrepresentation of women is also evident in the area of sport. Sport has traditionally been a male domain, thus leadership roles within sport are primarily masculine in nature. There have been many theories suggested and barriers identified to explain this underrepresentation. However, a discrepancy between the leadership role and gender role as a source of prejudice has not been examined in any sport setting. This prejudice consequently is believed to contribute to the lower number of women obtaining leadership positions. In addition, evaluations of women in leadership roles have been found to be biased, making upward mobility more difficult. To date, there have been no studies that examined this incongruence between leadership role and gender role as a possible explanation for the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles in sport.

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the underrepresentation of women in interscholastic sport leadership positions by analyzing perceptions of state association administrators and athletic directors of the function, if any, that role congruity theory plays in the underrepresentation women. Previous research has examined potential causes for this underrepresentation but no previous study has examined this phenomenon from a prejudice toward women in leadership role perspective.

The specific research questions formed to guide this study were as follows:

1. How do women sport leaders perceive the current situation of women's underrepresentation in their field?

2. What function, if any, does role incongruity play in the underrepresentation of women leaders in interscholastic sport?
3. What evidence exists regarding the two types of prejudice inherent to role congruity theory? :
  - (a) Perceiving women as possessing less leadership ability than men
  - (b) Evaluating behavior that fulfills the prescriptions of a leader role more negatively when it is enacted by a woman compared with a man.
4. What specific strategies have women athletic leaders used to overcome role incongruity and/or perceived barriers associated with role incongruity?

#### Methodology

The purpose of this study was to investigate the underrepresentation of women in interscholastic sport leadership positions by examining state association administrators and athletic director's perceptions of the function, if any, that role congruity theory plays in the underrepresentation women. This information is best obtained through the use of qualitative research. In depth, elite interviews will be utilized in order to discover the perceptions and experiences of female athletic leaders. Purposeful sampling will be used to select participants that fit into the two following categories: female athletic administrators in state associations and high school athletic directors. Once the interviews are conducted, recorded and transcribed, a six step process will be used when analyzing the data by "preparing and organizing the data for analysis, exploring and coding the data, describing and developing themes from the data, representing and reporting the findings, interpreting the findings, and validating the accuracy and credibility of the

findings” (Creswell, 2002, p. 257). Finally, considering the small sample and nature of the study, ethical considerations such as Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, confidentiality, and anonymity will be intentionally considered throughout the research and publication processes.

#### Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

This study assumes that the underrepresentation of women as leaders in interscholastic sport is a problem that warrants study and advocacy to promote change. The sample was identified as the population most able to provide valuable insight on the topic. It is assumed that the sample will provide honest and open answers to the research questions.

This study is limited to the experiences, perceptions and opinions of the group of women leaders interviewed and cannot be used to deduce large scale generalizations. Further, interscholastic athletic administration is different in many ways than intercollegiate athletic administration therefore the results cannot be generalized to the intercollegiate level. As a final limitation, it should be noted the researcher as the instrument approaches the issue with bias based on her experience as a student-athlete, interscholastic and intercollegiate coach as well as an instructor of coaching classes. Additionally the researcher has strong interests in the promotion of equity and opportunity for women leaders in the realm of sport. The researcher’s experiences and interests may be of use understanding the issues surrounding this area of research, however, these same experiences and interests present the possibility of contributing to research bias.

## Definition of Key Terms

For the context of this study, definitions of relevant terms are provided below.

*Agency*: Relates to the motivation toward striving for power and control over others, emphasizing assertiveness, efficacy, and mastery (Bakan, 1966).

*Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW)*: The governing body for women's intercollegiate athletics until its demise in 1982.

*Athletic Director*: Person who has the responsibility to direct, coordinate and control athletic programs at a school. Typical duties include athletic staffing and evaluation, budgeting, and strategic planning.

*Communion*: Relates to the motive to form social relationships and get along with others, emphasizing harmony and affiliation (Bakan, 1966).

*Gender stereotypes*: The structured set of beliefs about personal attributes of men and women (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1979).

*Glass ceiling*: an unofficial policy that prevents women or minorities from advancing within a company or organization.

*Good old boys network*: A gender based network characterized by favoritism in hiring, exclusive support systems, gender constricted communication and cronyism (Acosta & Carpenter, 2002).

*Hegemonic masculinity*: A condition in which masculinity and its attributes are lauded, whereas femininity and its attributes are viewed as inferior (Whisenant, Miller, & Pedersen, 2005).

*Hegemony*: The dominance of one group over another by the imposing of one's ideological principles (Schell & Rodriguez, 2000).

*Homologous reproduction:* A process whereby dominants reproduce themselves based on social and/or physical characteristics (Stangl & Kane, 1991).

*Homophobia:* the irrational fear and/or intolerance of homosexuality (Rotella & Murray, 1991)

*Pipeline Theory:* Theory which holds that few women ever reach the upper levels of leadership because there have been few women at the lower levels (Turkel, 2004).

*Sex roles:* socially shared expectations about how men and women should behave (Eagly, 1987).

*Social ideology:* Clusters of attitudes and beliefs that are interdependent in the sense that they are organized around a dominant societal theme (Eagly & Chaiken, 1998).

*Social role theory:* Theory which suggests that women are expected to be communal while men are expected to be agentic (Eagly, 1987).

*Title IX:* “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” (Acosta & Carpenter, 2005).

*Title VII:* Federal law that bars employers from discriminating against any person with respect to their compensation or other terms and conditions of their employment on the basis of that person’s race, color, religion, sex or national origin (Whisenant, Miller & Peterson, 2005).

### Significance of the Study

A study on the low number of women in leadership positions in interscholastic sport is important for several reasons. First discriminatory practices need to be exposed

and changed. Although one would think that nondiscrimination laws such as the Civil Rights Act (1964), Title VII (1964) and Title IX (1972), would have eradicated many of the historical prejudices that exist, discriminatory practices against individuals within these protected groups continues to happen, particularly within organizational settings. Sport organizations provide one of the most notable examples of the persistent nature of discrimination (e.g., Cunningham & Sagas, 2005; Knoppers, Bedker Meyer, Ewing & Forrest, 1989; Stangle & Kane, 1991). Second, this study offers unique perspectives from a small group of women that have actually broken the “glass ceiling” and made it in a male dominated field. This information can be of great use to policy makers who are constructing strategic plans to increase gender representation including the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) as well as women’s advocacy groups; Women’s Sport Foundation (WSF), National Association for Girls & Women in Sport (NAGWS), National Association of Collegiate Women Athletic Administrators (NACWAA). Third, the results of this study will also be of use to women who wish to pursue leadership roles in the future by identifying strategies for success (coaches, administrators, graduate students). In conclusion, this important study could bring valuable information to future women leaders of sport, researchers, and policy makers by adding to the research available to promote advocacy, change, policy and practice.



## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

The literature review for the purpose of this study examines scholarly research crucial to an understanding of the background, nature, and extent of the problem of women's underrepresentation in interscholastic athletics leadership. It also draws from literature dealing with intercollegiate athletics, employment discrimination, social roles, and role congruency. From this review, several common themes emerge that provide an in depth review of the multiple facets that affect the underrepresentation of women as leaders in sport.

This chapter is divided into five main sections: (a) History of girls and women in sport; (b) Current participation and leadership levels of girls and women in athletics; (c) Leadership discrimination theories; (d) Social limitation theories; and (e) Role congruity theory.

According to Lopiano (2005) a major rationale for the decline in the number of women in coaching and athletic administration is the change in who has the leadership power in an athletic department. Programs that were managed by both genders before Title IX, because athletic departments were gender segregated, are now combined departments and therefore controlled and managed predominantly by men (Sagas & Cunningham, 2004). Section one outlines the history of women in leadership positions at both the intercollegiate and interscholastic levels as well as an overview of Title IX. Section two reveals what Cahn (1994) coined the Title IX conundrum; outlining the rapid growth in participation for girls and women in sport, but the decline in leadership since

the enactment of Title IX. Section three explains several discrimination theories that seek to elucidate why women remain underrepresented in sport leadership, including hegemonic masculinity (Whisenant, Pedersen, & Obenour, 2002); homologous reproduction (Lovett & Lowry, 1994; Stangl & Kane; Sagas, Cunningham & Teed, 2003); homophobia (Griffin, 1992); and occupational closure (Kanter, 1977; Witz 1991). Social theories that have been attributed to limiting females who aspire to become leaders in sport is the focus of the fourth section. Scholars project that women opt out or exhibit self-limiting behaviors because of low self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986; Cunningham Sagas, & Ashley, 2003), symbolic interactionism (Satore & Cunningham, 2007) and work- life conflict (Inglis, Danylchuk & Pastore 2000; Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Bruening, & Dixon, 2008). The last section highlights the literature on role congruity theory (Eagly, 2004; Eagly & Diekman, 2005; Eagly & Karau, 2002) given the application of this theory to the current study.

#### History of Girls and Women in Sport

Women received the right to vote in 1920 and yet their access to athletics outside of physical education classes was mainly as spectators (Hums, Bower, & Grappendorf, 2007). Historically, their access was limited by society's belief that participation in athletics was unladylike and even dangerous to their reproductive lives (Hums, Bower, & Grappendorf, 2007). Consequently, female physical education teachers and their students found less obvious ways to participate in sport, while at the same time they created organizational structures to direct the expansion of their future opportunities. Hums, Bower, & Grappendorf (2007) describe postal tournaments as one of the first ways women began competing. In postal tournaments, no physical contact was necessary

between opponents; each participant competed individually then mailed their results to a female leader at the opponent's school. Postal tournaments provided "at least a bit of access to competition for athletes while allowing their sport involvement to stay below society's radar" (Hums, Bower, & Grappendorf 2007, p. 46).

Eventually women wanted more opportunity to be physically active and compete; this need was met by the creation of play days. According to Hums, Bower, & Grappendorf (2007) play days were single day events where students met at one school for a day of sports. Students from one school did not play on a team; rather, everyone played together. However, in this model "students were not afforded the opportunity to train, practice, develop teamwork, have positive interactions with a coach, or develop their skill over time" (p. 47). Within a few years play days gave way to sport days. Sport days were also single day events, but unlike play days, students arrived and played as teams representing their schools. Acosta & Carpenter (2005) described the coaching of sport days as follows "Coaching, if any, was in the form of a dedicated volunteer female educator who gave up her day so that [the girls] could have a competitive and socializing experience" (p. 98). The philosophy for women's sport in the 1920's and 1930's was "play for play's sake" (Meier, 2003). Women's programs had no affiliation choosing activities that met the needs of females on their campus. According to Coakley (2001) women at this time were focusing on the socialization aspects while men were focusing on profits, competition, and winning.

"Sport days and play days were a step toward true interscholastic and intercollegiate athletics, but only a baby step" (Hums, Bower, & Grappendorf, 2007, p. 47). The next time period, 1950-1971, was the foundation of tremendous change in

women's sport for both participation and administration. A first step in formalizing the administration of sport for women was the development of the National Association of Girls and Women in Sport (NAGWS). Acosta and Carpenter (2005) explained that "NAGWS focused on the healthful, safe, a-girl-for-every-sport-and-a-sport-for every-girl (broad based participation) model" (p 98). Then in 1966 the NAGWS created the Committee of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (CIAW), which was assigned the task of looking into creating championships for women's college sports. An additional development that accompanied the transition to competitive sports at this time was the creation in 1971 of the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW), what Festle (1996) called "a uniquely woman-defined alternative to intercollegiate athletics" (p. 101). The voting power and representation of each of these associations remained predominantly in the hands of females (Hums, Bower, & Grappendorf, 2007; Festle, 1996, Acosta & Carpenter, 2005; Grant 1984).

The AIAW focused on the welfare of student-athletes. In fact, twenty percent of the AIAW's Executive Board and twenty percent of all of the sport committees were student-athletes (Grant 1984). The purpose of the AIAW, as Festle (1996) explained was "to help schools extend their sports programs for women" keeping women's sports programs "consistent with their member schools' educational aims." (p.110) In addition, according to Festle (1996) a significant goal of the AIAW was to "stimulate leadership among those (mainly women) who were responsible for women's programs" (p. 111). According to Grant (1984) the AIAW provided student-athletes leadership training, and encouraged them to caucus and speak up on the Assembly floor. "According to the AIAW, the real value of the sport experience lay with the student-athlete's ability to

extract from sport knowledge of self and values that pertained to self” (Grant 1984, p. 41). The relatively conservative agenda promoted by the women who controlled and governed women’s sports involved a concerted effort to distinguish women’s athletics from the elitism, commercialism, and corruption of men’s intercollegiate athletics (Festle, 1996).

In 1972 the enactment of Title IX was surrounded by controversy and debate (Birrell, 1984; Festle, 1996; Lovett and Lowry, 1989; Grant, 1984; Acosta and Carpenter, 2005; Henson and Cabaniss, 1994). The NCAA perceived Title IX as a threat to its control of athletics in the United States. Walter Byers, Executive Director of the NCAA, stated Title IX would be the “death to men’s athletics” (Hums, Bower, & Grappendorf, 2007 p.50). Therefore, the NCAA attempted to have intercollegiate athletics removed from the jurisdiction of Title IX through the courts as well as lobbying Congress (Acosta & Carpenter, 2005). During Congressional debates in 1973 on the Department of Education’s regulations for applying Title IX to intercollegiate athletics, some opposed the inclusion of athletics under Title IX, but not because they felt that athletics were free of discrimination. As Senator Birch Bayh, a Title IX proponent, said in these debates:

Oddly, no one making the argument that athletics should not be covered by Title IX does so on the premise that there is no discrimination. No one denies that there is something fundamentally wrong with a college or university that relegates its female athletes to second-rate facilities or second-rate equipment or second rate schedules solely because they are female (cited in Henson and Cabaniss, 1994 p. 514).

After congress rejected several attempts by the NCAA to ban Title IX in the mid 1970's, the NCAA determined it would be in the best interest of the organization to control women's athletics, and thus "seized universal control of women's athletics" (Carpenter and Acosta, 2005, p. 107). Lovett and Lowry (1989) argued that since the NCAA was unable to slow the growth of women's athletics by defeating Title IX, it chose to put women's sports under their governing structure in order to control their growth and possibly benefit from them.

The AIAW folded in 1982 after the NCAA began offering championships for women's sports in 1981 (Grant 1984). According to accounts by Festle (1996) and Lovett and Lowry (1998) it was difficult for the AIAW to compete with the NCAA's offers of television coverage and money for women's teams to travel to championship tournaments, and some of the women in the AIAW felt that joining the NCAA would be beneficial to women's intercollegiate athletics. The NCAA was viewed as a powerful sport organization with greater financial and media resources than the AIAW, so some women in the AIAW felt that women's athletics would be able to expand more quickly if they joined the NCAA (Festle, 1996; Lovett and Lowry, 1998).

With the demise of the AIAW came the end of women's control over women's college sports. As Zimbalist (1999) stated, "Title IX...had brought some status back to women's sports and now, it seemed, the women's programs were too worthy for women's work" (p. 60). Prior to Title IX, athletic departments separated by gender with each entity responsible for personnel, budget, and program requirements were then merged (Lopiano, 2005). Consequently, utilizing Title IX compliance as a reason, athletic departments merged. One person with seniority directed the newly formed departments, and the

directors were predominantly males in positions of athletic power (Lopiano, 2005; Whisenant, 2003). With the new organizational structure, “women administrators lost decision-making power, control of the employee acquisition and retention process and responsibility for the development of women’s programs” (Lopiano, 2005, p. 3). Lough (2004) echoed this perpetual and systemic practice of men in power positions at NCAA member institutions by stating, “In essence, the power and control of women’s sport has effectively been seized by men, many who have then limited the career progression of women” (p. 4).

### *Interscholastic Athletics*

According to Marilyn Mather as written in Hums, Bower, & Grappendorf, (2007) formal high school athletic administration structures developed gradually over the years. Originally students did their own planning and scheduling. However, as competitive interests increased, it became common for teams to recruit players from outside schools and sometimes there would be violence (Keller and Forsythe, 1984). To avoid being embarrassed, school administrators took over the administrative responsibilities from the students (Hums, Bower, & Grappendorf, 2007). Athletic administration duties were delegated and the number of people with the title of athletic director grew (Hums, Bower, & Grappendorf, 2007). By the 1960’s most high schools had created this position (Keller and Forsythe, 1984). In 1971 the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) began hosting conferences to provide professional educational support for athletic directors. The mission of the NFHS is to serve its members, related professional organizations, and students by providing leadership for the administration of education-based interscholastic sports and fine arts programs in speech, theatre and debate (NFHS,

2006). In 1977 the National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association (NIAAA) was established. The NIAAA is designed to support high school athletic administrators and offers professional development classes and certifications. High school athletic directors can earn certification as a Registered Athletic Administrator, Certified Athletic Administrator, and Certified Master Athletic Administrator (NIAAA, 2008; Whisenant, 2003).

Currently, each state and the District of Columbia have their own athletic/activity association that administers and governs education-based interscholastic sport and fine arts programs in their respective state. Each state athletic/activity association is an active member of the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), which has been the national governing body of interscholastic athletics since 1920. Each state activity association typically is responsible for, but not limited to, the following: sponsoring, directing, and developing athletics/activities; conducting post-season tournaments; regulation of athletic officials in their state; and service to the member schools in their state (NFHS, 2006).

Sparse information exists pertaining to women who have achieved leadership roles in interscholastic athletics (Hums, Bower, & Grappendorf, 2007; Whisenaunt, 2003). According to Hums, Bower, & Grappendorf, (2007) there are several reasons for the lack of information including poor record keeping, the differences in individual states, and the fact that history has not been compiled in one location. Lopiano (2005) hypothesized that “at the high school level the numbers are not that much better than college” (p. 1), however this leaves a large gap in the literature



### *Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act of 1972*

It would be remiss to discuss the history of girls sport without acknowledging the impact of Title IX. Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 to the 1964 Civil Rights Act states that, “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (Carpenter & Acosta, 2005). Title IX provided the civil rights that allowed women the opportunity to be educated and to achieve success without gender bias (Acosta & Carpenter, 2005). Title IX was the first federal law mandating equal opportunity for both men and women in educational institutions (National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education, 2002). De Varona & Foudy (2002) explained the sole purpose of Title IX was to create fairness among the sexes in educational programs and activities that receive federal funding. The goal of the legislation was to provide equal opportunities for men and women in all educational programs, both academic and athletic.

Although Title IX as it pertains to athletics has received the most publicity, there have been significant gains in other educational areas. It dramatically expanded women’s access to higher education. For example, prior to Title IX, women received nine percent of all medical degrees and seven percent of all law degrees compared with 38 percent and 43 percent respectively in 1994 (Gender Equity in Sports, 2004). *According to Title IX at 30: Report Card on Gender Equity* (2002), Title IX has made training for nontraditional careers possible for girls and women and paved the way for research regarding the classroom climate. Before 1972 math and science were viewed as male domains, while literature and the arts were considered female-friendly subjects.

“The application of Title IX to athletics has made a 1972 piece of federal statute a household word” (Acosta & Carpenter, 2005, p.65). It has commanded more judicial, legislative, and executive branch attention than any other undertaking within its jurisdiction. According to Acosta and Carpenter (2005) this is for two primary reasons. First athletics involves a mainly sex-segregated construct so discrimination is readily apparent. Second, athletics involves a historically male-centered domain, and women receiving more opportunity means having to share resources previously considered for males only.

### Participation and Leadership Levels of Girls and Women in Athletics

#### *Interscholastic Participation*

2008 marked the 36th year since the enactment of Title IX. This landmark gender equity legislation has led to a dramatic increase in girls’ interscholastic sports participation after its passage in 1972. Between the 1970-71 and 1977-78 academic years, the number of girls participating in high school sports increased over 600%, from 294,015 to 2,083,040 (National Federation of State High School Associations, 2008). This trend of increased participation rates has continued every consecutive year since the 1980’s. Based on data from the 50 state high school athletic associations, plus the District of Columbia, participation for the 2007-08 school year set an all-time high of 3,057,266 girls. In addition, participation for the 2007-08 school year set an all-time high of 7,429,381 boys and girls, according to the 2007-08 High School Athletics Participation Survey conducted by the NFHS (Gillis, 2008)

The Tucker Report (2007) cites three significant trends in participation patterns. First, girls are participating in sports in record numbers at all levels, from organized youth sports, to interscholastic sports and extreme sports like skateboarding, up through Olympic competition. Second, unfortunately, girls' participation in physical activity outside of organized sports is declining, especially as they matriculate from childhood into adolescence. Third, girls' participation rates in all types of physical activities are consistently lower than boys, and girls' sport dropout rates are higher.

#### *Interscholastic leadership*

“Within the context of girls’ participation, Title IX appears to be a success. Beyond the playing field, however, the effects of Title IX on the women who coached and managed girl’s interscholastic sports appears to have been unsettling” (Whisenant, 2003, p. 3). Girls who participate in high school sport are not afforded the opportunity to be athletic coaches or athletic administrators on the high school level (Whisenant, 2003). Despite the fact that data regarding the gender composition of participants is readily available, there is a deficiency of information concerning the number of women in athletic administrative positions. Whisenant (2005) found no state or national governmental agency that collects or stores specific demographic data related to the administrators of interscholastic athletics. Of the criteria used by the Office of Civil Rights to enforce Title IX at the interscholastic level, none specifically applies to athletic administrators. Within the United States' Department of Education document, "Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Compliance Report," no data related to administrators are requested and reported (U.S. Department of Education, 2000).

Moreover, Whisenant (2005) found the state coaching and athletic directors associations guarded the limited demographic data that did exist.

Representation of women in leadership roles in state associations is also difficult to obtain. By examining the (NFHS) directory, state high school athletic associations were found to have only three out of fifty of the top positions represented by women (6%). A woman is in the highest executive role in the states of New York California and Kentucky (Massengale, 2008).

Within academic scholarship, very few studies have examined athletic directors at the high school level (Stier & Schneider, 2001, Whisenant, 2003, Whisenant, 2005). Fewer still have noted the gender makeup of interscholastic athletic directors, and no literature regarding the gender make up of state association administrators was found. The longitudinal study of Acosta & Carpenter (2006) has been instrumental in tracking the representation of women nationally in intercollegiate athletics positions the past thirty years. Unfortunately, there has been no corresponding body of work examining women's representation in athletic leadership at the interscholastic level.

In the 1990's there were some individual state examinations, all of which revealed interscholastic athletic administration to be predominantly the domain of males. Oliphant (1995) noted that 98 percent of the Iowa athletic directors in their study were male. Moose's (1996) study added that males made up 96 percent of the North Carolina high school athletic directors. In addition, In Virginia high schools, females represented only 16 percent of the total population of athletic administrators (Heishman, Bunker, & Tutwiler, 1990).

In the 2000's most gender representation studies have been the work of Whisenant. Whisenant (2002) studied athletic directors from 423 high schools in two states. The results of the study confirmed that the governance of interscholastic athletics was dominated by men, as evident by the 90% of male athletic directors. Whisenant (2003) reported gender representation employment data provided by 22 of the 50 state high school associations. Of the 7,041 reported only 899, or 13%, were female. The data was further broken down into regions resulting in these representations: the West 17%, Northeast 16%, Southeast 12%, Great Lakes 12%, and Midwest 7%. Whisenant, Vincent, Pedersen, & Zapalac, (2005) illustrated the magnitude of the disproportionate growth between the number of men and women within athletic administration as evident by the demographic structure of public school district administrators and coaches. Men dominate the power positions within the public school system in Texas holding 82 percent of the superintendent positions, 75 percent of the principal positions, and 98 percent of the athletic director positions. Whisenant (2005), when examining success rates of athletic directors, found 90 percent to be male. Whisenant's latest study on the underrepresentation of women as high school athletic directors does not show much improvement. The gender of each school's principal, athletic director, and coaches were collected from The National Directory of High School Coaches. Men dominated both principal (76%) and athletic director (85%) (Whisenant, 2008).

### *Intercollegiate Leadership*

Undeniably, the access to college sport made possible by Title IX has amounted to an exponential increase in opportunity for female athletes. The number of young women participating in intercollegiate athletics has grown from 16,000 to around 180,000

(Acosta & Carpenter, 2006). Female athletic participation is the highest in 29 years from 2.5 teams per school in 1970 to 8.45 teams in 2006 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2006). The number of college women's teams has grown from 1,402 in 1977-1978 to 8,702 in 2006, with three hundred teams added in just the past two years (Acosta & Carpenter, 2006, p. 10). In 2006, the number of women coaching men's teams remained the same as in 1972, the year Title IX was enacted with just two percent of the coaches for men's teams being female (Acosta & Carpenter, 2006).

According to the 2007-2008 NCAA Division I-A Racial & Gender Demographics Study (TIDES), a report examining racial and gender representation in higher education leadership, the overwhelming majority of the most powerful people in college sport are white males, including 100% of the 11 Division IA conference commissioners. Sixteen (13.3 %) of the university presidents were women, yet of the 120 athletic directors in NCAA Division IA who oversee football, only six were women (5%).

Even though participation by women in intercollegiate athletics and number of women's athletic teams were both at an all time high, the representation of females in leadership positions in intercollegiate athletics was at an all time low (Acosta & Carpenter 2006).

Lopiano (2005) explained that as program numbers were rising and allowing women more opportunities to participate, there has been a decline in gender equity employment (Lopiano, 2005). Comparable to women in coaching, in 1972 when Title IX was passed, over 90% of women's collegiate athletic programs were administered by female athletic directors. Acosta and Carpenter's 2006 update shows that while this year had the highest ever participation by female athletes, it also marked a continuing decreased representation of females as head administrators. In 2006, only 18.6% of athletic

directors of women's programs were women (Carpenter & Acosta, 2006). In addition, the study showed that the most common administrative structure involved two to four administrators, with a male athletic director and one female assistant or associate administrator. However, 14.5% of athletic administrations lacked any female anywhere in the administrative structure (Carpenter & Acosta, 2006).

### Leadership Discrimination Theories

When examining the current organizational structures that are apt to place women at a disadvantage regarding career opportunities within interscholastic athletics, their underrepresentation can be framed within several theoretical constructs— pipeline theory, hegemonic masculinity, homologous reproduction, homophobia, and occupational closure.

#### *Pipeline Theory*

The career path of high level leaders in sport at both the interscholastic and intercollegiate levels typically includes coaching and lower level administrative roles. Currently, women have been found to have low representation in both of these areas (Grappendorf, Lough, & Griffin, 2004; Whisenant, 2003; Carpenter & Acosta, 2006). With few women in coaching positions, a natural prerequisite for a career move into administration, the hiring of women athletic leaders becomes more difficult.

A secondary result of the pipeline theory is women, because of their absence, cannot mentor or network with other women. When possible, women who network and form mentor groups create a forum for the exchange of knowledge and experiences as females in athletic leadership roles (Lough, 2001). Female role models in athletic coaching and athletic administration lend a voice to women in sport, show women in

decision-making positions, and realistically portray the possibility that women are qualified to be athletic leaders and possess the ability of leading from female to female (Coakley, 2001; Lough, 2001).

Gogol (2002) asserts when women coach female athletes, something qualitatively different is happening. By virtue of their gender, women coaches can provide direct life lessons about what it is possible for a woman to be and to do. Kane, also argued that the “gender of coaches matters because women athletes can more easily identify with women coaches and gain confidence about their own abilities as leaders by seeing women as coaches” ( as cited in Gogol 2002, p.49).

Same gender role modeling is important, as female athletic leaders can influence other females regarding career choices (Fazioli, 2004). According to Lough, (2001) leadership and visionary thinking is now needed to mentor the young women who will be the future of women’s sport. Fazoli (2004) calls the lack of women role models a deterrent for the younger generation to enter coaching. “With fewer female examples available to demonstrate for female athletes what is possible in regards to coaching, it is more likely that there will be fewer of these athletes making the transition into the coaching profession” (Fazioli, 2004, p. 20). Whisenant (2003) extends the role model importance to young men stating “women in the leadership roles will also be able to serve as role models for both boys and girls, thereby demonstrating that sex does not predetermine managerial success”(p. 182).

Everhart and Chelladuri (1998) confirmed the relevance of this lack of female mentors as a barrier in their investigation of gender differences in coaching. Their findings indicated that female athletes with women coaches were more interested in the



coaching field than those with male coaches. In addition Lirgg, DiBrezzo and Smith (1994) found that female high school players with a female coach desired to be a head coach while girls with a male coach were equally distributed between desiring to be head coach and an assistant coach. Furthermore players with women coaches believed that discrimination they might face in the coaching field would be less of a barrier than those coached by men. Socialization through mentoring provides women with the tools and a process to develop leadership skills. “Giving young women the voice they need to feel connected and mentoring their leadership skills will eventually create ‘wins’ for all women in sport” (Lough, 2001, p. 3).

### *Hegemonic Masculinity*

As a social theory, Hartley, (1982) describes hegemony as the condition in which certain social groups within a society obtain and keep authority through imposition, manipulation, and consent over other groups. It is not the maintenance of power by force. Rather, it is the maintenance of power by consent to what appears to be inevitable. Whisenant, Pedersen, & Obenour (2002) explain that hegemony can be defined as “the simple acceptance of the status quo in society” (p. 486). The modern concept of hegemony includes not only the expression of the interests of a ruling class, but also contains the idea of acceptance as commonsense by those in practice subordinated to it (McKay, 1997). Pedersen (2002) defined hegemonic masculinity as the “...acceptance of masculinity as the defining characteristic of western society that places women in the position they are. “In a society of hegemonic masculinity, women are considered off limits in certain areas, sport being one of the most obvious” (p. 305). The concept of

masculinity varies across cultures but remains evident in institutions where men hold power over women and strive to maintain that power (Connell, 1987; Pedersen, 2000).

Connell (1987, 1990, and 1995) has added a great deal of literature in the area of hegemonic masculinity. Connell's theory of gender power relations is based on the concept that there are numerous masculinities and femininities operating in a gendered hierarchy of structured power relations (Connell, 1995). The most preferred form in this gendered hierarchy is hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). It reinforces heterosexuality, aggression, and assertiveness (Connell, 1990, 1995). Connell (1995) concludes, hegemonic masculinity "...guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and subordination of women" (p. 77). Masculinity, therefore, becomes the standard by which everything is measured, since masculine traits are those most desired in society (Hargreaves, 1994).

Numerous scholars have contended sport serves as a hegemonic institution to preserve the power of men over women (Pedersen & Whisenant, 2005; Hardin et al., 2005; Hargreaves, 1994). Sport has long been associated with men and masculinity in nearly every society in the world (Coakley, 2004; Messner, 2003; Kane, 1989). Sage (1998) contended sport is one of the most prominent and hegemonic social institutions and cultural practices in society today. According to Kane & Disch, (1993) sport has been so tied with males that athletics and masculinity have almost become synonymous. Sabo and Jansen (1992) added that sport, as a hegemonic social institution, naturalizes men's power and privilege over women. This is evident not only on the playing field, but also in the coaching and administrative arenas of sport. This hegemony is then further produced, reproduced, and sustained in other cultural institutions and practices, such as the mass

media. Schell & Rodriguez (2000) also describe the hegemonic influence in sport as similar to other institutions within a patriarchal culture that works to belittle and hinder women's efforts to realize their full potential.

Whisenant et.al (2002) purported hegemonic masculinity depends on the privileging of men and the granting to them exclusive power and control. They focus specifically on sport as "the generic preserve of men" (p. 486), showing the history of male dominance in sport. Even with the passage of Title IX and the subsequent increases in women's participation in sport, Whisenant et al. (2002) argued "there remains a strong presence of hegemonic masculinity in intercollegiate sports." Furthermore, they assert, "Although Title IX and its enforcement chipped away at male hegemony on the playing field, hegemonic masculinity became even more entrenched in upper management" (p. 486).

Leadership in sport is not accessible to women because coaching and administration remain male domains (Whisenant et al., 2002). Men have historically controlled sport (Pedersen & Whisenant, 2005), they have kept their hold on leadership positions, and they do not intend to change that situation (Whisenant et al., 2002). Gender leadership dominance in sports has shown to women that coaching and administration are men's domains. According to Whisenant et al., (2002) "Until women are given an equal chance, hegemonic masculinity will continue to dominate and control athletic departments" (p. 6). Male hegemony is upheld through the limited positions that truly are open to women in athletic administration (Acosta & Carpenter, 2004; Schell & Rodriguez,

2000). Male hegemonic dominance has been perpetuated in the athletic leadership opportunities yielded to men over women (Acosta & Carpenter, 2004; Schell & Rodriguez, 2000). The cumulative effect of this hegemonic masculinity process is a gender gap perpetuated by homologous reproduction” (Whisenant, Miller, & Pedersen, 2005).

### *Homologous Reproduction*

Kanter (1977) suggested organizational structures were a potential cause or barrier to women as well as other minorities who sought leadership positions within organizations. Homologous reproduction, initially established by Kanter (1977), “is a process whereby dominants reproduce themselves based on social and/or physical characteristics” (Stangl & Kane, 1991, p. 47). This systematic reproduction is accomplished by the hiring and promoting of other men. Therefore, three important studies have examined the concept of homologous reproduction in interscholastic athletics. First, Stangl and Kane (1991) related the theory of homologous reproduction to the employment relationship between the gender of the athletic director and the gender of the various head coaches. The researchers examined 937 Ohio public high school athletic departments, focusing on three time periods surrounding Title IX (before, during, and after). Data gathered on the gender of the athletic director and the gender of the head coach for each of the women’s sports offered determined that the sex of the athletic director was related to the proportion of male and female head coaches under her or his administration. Results from the data supported the theory of homologous reproduction as the percentage of female head coaches was significantly greater under a female athletic director than under a male demonstrating a direct relationship between the gender of the

person doing the hiring and the gender of those being hired. Stangl and Kane (1991) concluded that homologous reproduction was evident in high school sport administration as athletic directors, depending on their sex, were more likely to hire a head coach of the same sex.

A second study conducted by Lovett and Lowry (1994) found similar results in their investigation of homologous reproduction in Texas interscholastic athletics. Lovett and Lowry (1994) focused on various administrative models within interscholastic athletics in the state of Texas. Their study used the underlying assumption that homologous reproduction was the base for the good old boys and good old girls clubs and expanded it to include the gender of the high school principal. These researchers concluded that the sex makeup of each level of the leadership team; administrators, principals, and athletic directors impacted the hiring decisions; men tended to hire men, women tended to hire women.

Third, the practice of homologous reproduction has been documented in the employment of coaches at the interscholastic level (Cunningham & Teed 2006). The results indicate that the gender of a head coach does impact the gender composition of the assistant coaches on a staff, irrespective of sport. In addition to interscholastic athletics, the subsistence of homologous reproduction has also been shown in intercollegiate athletic administration (Stahura & Greenwood, 2001). Stahura & Greenwood (2001) investigated the status of women in intercollegiate athletics. Specifically basketball, volleyball soccer and softball head coaches at the Division I and III levels. Their study revealed that the sex of the athletic director did influence hiring patterns.

Carpenter and Acosta's (2006) longitudinal update supports the theory of homologous reproduction and demonstrated its existence in intercollegiate athletics. In NCAA Division I, a higher percentage of the coaches for women's teams were female when the athletic director was also female (48.5%). When the athletic director was male only 43.3% of the coaches for women's teams were female. The percentage of coaches for women's teams that were female decreased to 38.5% when there was no female in the administrative structure. This pattern was found to exist in both Division II and Division III institutions as well (Acosta & Carpenter, 2006). These three studies show the direct relationship between the gender of the athletic director or other hiring personnel and the gender of the head coaches. The concept of hiring from a principle of similarity can be advanced to include issues and opportunity related to homophobia in sport.

### *Homophobia*

Homophobia, the irrational fear and/or intolerance of homosexuality (Rotella & Murray, 1991) is another proposed discrimination that limits women in athletics. Women who work in an occupation that is dominated by men are affected by the prevailing heterosexist atmosphere in which they are perceived as not really being a woman or as lesbian (Krane & Barber, 2005). Women in athletic coaching and athletic leadership roles have continuously fought issues of masculinity and sexual orientation (Drago et al., 2005).

According to Griffin (1998) the issue of sexual preference has turned from one of private behavior into one of competence, as the stereotypes in sport perpetuate a negative image. Social pressure to conform to established norms and also the use of fear of something different is exacerbated by assuming that sexual behavior is contagious or that

predator behavior is linked to sexuality (Griffin, 1998; Krane & Barber, 2005). Griffin (1998) indicated that this fear contributes to continuous institutionalization of sexism and blatant discrimination and prejudice against women. Teel (2005) listed lesbian fear as a significant factor contributing to women's difficulty in attaining leadership positions at NCAA Division I and II institutions.

### Social Limitation Theories

Self-efficacy refers to "people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). According to Bandura (1977) of all the thoughts that affect human functioning, and standing at the very core of social cognitive theory, are self-efficacy beliefs. Further, self-efficacy beliefs provide the foundation for human motivation, well-being, and personal accomplishment. This is because unless people believe that their actions can produce the outcomes they want, they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties (Bandura, 1986).

Such judgments of personal capabilities are important because they predict goal setting, perseverance, the outcomes people expect from behaviors, and performance (Bandura, 2000). Within the context of coaching, research has demonstrated that self-efficacy is significantly associated with several important outcomes. First, certain leadership styles (Sullivan & Kent, 2003), revealed that coaching efficacy accounting for up to 42 percent of the variance in leadership style. Second, self efficacy affected the intentions of women to become a head coach (Cunningham et al., 2003), Third, It effected women's turnover intentions (Cunningham et al., 2003). Thus, according to the framework, women in sport are more prone to be interested in, and pursue, leadership

positions if they believe that they have the ability to succeed in that role (Cunningham et al., 2003). Whisenant, Miller, & Pedersen (2005), concluded “girls may self-select out of these sports careers, more as a result of gender-related obstacles or diminished self-efficacy than a lack of skills and abilities” (p. 6).

### *Symbolic Interactionism*

Symbolic interactionist researchers investigate how people create meaning during social interaction, how they present and construct the self, and how they define situations of presence with others. One of the perspective's central ideas is that people act as they do because of how they define situations. Satore & Cunningham (2007) applied a symbolic interaction's perspective to the underrepresentation of women, proposing that gender roles and stereotypes connected to sport ideologies inhibit women in sport organizations, arguing that women might not perceive themselves as capable leaders because of the low levels of power and status of women that prevail in society. This results in self-imposed limits on their leadership behaviors. The model proposed by Satore and Cunningham (2007) suggests that an individual's self concept can function as a protective moderator. Thereby, the negative impacts of ideological meanings, identity formation, and self-limiting behaviors might be contradicted by one's self-concept.

### *Work-Life Conflict*

Netemeyer, McMurrian, and Boles (1996) describe work-family conflict as the discord that arises when the time devoted to or time spent fulfilling professional responsibilities interferes with or limits the amount of time available to perform family-related responsibilities. This phenomenon results when the expectations and time constraints associated with the professional and personal lives of an individual are not



compatible, making it difficult to manage both. (Netemeyer, McMurrian, and Boles, 1996) Ultimately, the demands and responsibilities of the professional life make it more difficult to accomplish or meet activities in the home and personal life or vice versa (Netemeyer, McMurrian, and Boles, 1996).

Research has indicated how multilevel factors; individual, organizational, and sociocultural, play a role in work–family conflict. Dixon and Bruening (2005) argued that higher level factors (sociocultural and organizational) shape and constrain lower level behaviors (organizational and individual), which ultimately influence the perception and consequences of work–family conflict. A demanding organizational culture, or what Dixon and Bruening (2007) termed the “greedy workplace” characterizes sport environments. Bruening and Dixon (2007) indicated there is a culture of demanding of long hours, excessive travel, and “face time;” in intercollegiate athletics. As a result, those who work long hours, particularly when those hours are visible to superiors and colleagues, and travel constantly for competition and recruiting have been viewed as model workers. These work patterns have come to be seen as standard and expected in order to be successful (Dixon & Bruening 2007). Bruening, Dixon, Tiell, Osborne, Lough & Sweeney (2008) confirmed this perception in their study of NCAA athletic directors and senior woman administrators towards work-life conflict. The researchers concluded that contributing to a demanding work environment is the perceived role expectation of intercollegiate athletics employees. Personal sacrifices in time and energy for the sake of the program were equated with contributing to high levels of work-life conflict. Additionally, they found the culture of collegiate coaching and management is one that

demands non-traditional work hours on nights and weekends thus further adding to work and life conflict (Bruening et al 2008).

The CAGE Report (2005) also examined the challenge of work-life balance. The report found that although the participants agreed that coaching and athletic administration posed significant work/life balance challenges regardless of sex, men were perceived as having greater latitude to meet work-life demands. In addition, they were often praised for attending to the needs of their family through the having “daddy privilege in the workplace” (p. 18). Therefore, the report shows the disproportionate consequences for women negotiating the competing demands of work and family. Further, the report also highlights the prevalence of discriminatory hiring practices and lack of institutional support for women balancing career and family, concluding that work-life balance issues create preemptive decisions about whom to hire for a job, such that mothers, particularly if they had young children, were less likely to be hired.

#### Role Congruity Theory

Role congruity theory advanced by Eagly & Karau (2002) is grounded in social role theory's treatment of the content of gender roles and their importance in promoting sex differences in behavior (Eagly et al., 2000). However, role congruity theory progresses beyond social role theory to consider the congruity between gender roles and other roles, specifically leadership roles. According to Eagly (1987) gender roles are consensual beliefs about the attributes of women and men. Further, these roles can be categorized into two kinds of exceptions or norms, including descriptive norms, which are consensual expectations about what members of a group actually do, and injunctive

norms, which are consensual expectations about what a group of people ought to do or ideally would do (Eagly, 2002).

A key proposition of social role theory is that the majority of these beliefs about the genders are related to communal and agentic attributes (Eagly, 1987). Communal characteristics, which are attributed more to women, describe primarily a concern with the welfare of other people. For example, affectionate, helpful, kind, sympathetic, sensitive, nurturing, and gentle are seen as communal characteristics. In contrast, agentic characteristics, which are ascribed more strongly to men, describe primarily assertive, controlling, and confident tendencies such as, aggressive, ambitious, dominant, forceful, independent, self-sufficient, self-confident, and prone to act as a leader (Eagly, 2002). Males are normally thought to occupy and possess the skills for leadership roles, consequently, prejudice toward female leaders follows from the incongruity that many people perceive between the characteristics of women and the necessities of leader roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

A second attribute of role congruity theory is the proposition that prejudice toward female leaders and potential leaders takes two forms. These two types of prejudice generally follow the two types of norms—descriptive and injunctive (Eagly, 2004; Eagly & Diekmann, 2005). Prejudice toward potential role occupants is founded mainly on descriptive stereotypes, where group members are presumed to possess the stereotypic characteristics of their group, which can prevent them from being considered suitable for a particular role. Prejudice toward current role occupants, is based mainly on prescriptive stereotypes, to the point that an individual has debased prescriptive stereotypes by fulfilling an incongruent role.

If there is not congruity between roles the effect is often found to lead to discriminatory consequences. One consequence of role incongruity is that attitudes are less positive toward female leaders than toward male leaders and potential leaders. A second consequence is that it is more difficult for women to become leaders and to achieve success in leadership roles. These consequences are most obvious in situations that increase perceptions of incongruity between the female gender role and leadership roles (Eagly, 2002).

Role incongruity has been identified consistently in areas outside of sport. In a study examining evaluations of leaders Eagly, et al (1992) found that female leaders who were perceived as having a stereotypically masculine style were less positively valued and seen as more threatening than male leaders. Consequently, female leaders face a paradox: If they adapt a masculine leadership style, their male subordinates will dislike them. If they adopt a stereotypically warm and nurturing feminine style, they will be liked, but not respected (Kawakami, White, & Langer, 2000). Heilman, et al (2004) supported the idea that a woman's success in areas traditionally reserved for men can give rise to social penalties, causing them to be disliked and negatively viewed. Heilman (2004) concluded that when women violate gender prescriptions by being successful in areas that are not traditionally part of their domain, they seem to be cast in a light that not only is negative but also is adversative to the traditional stereotype of women and perceptions of how they should be.

Additional research demonstrates that the dominant view of a leader is masculine in nature. Men and women display similar abilities and competencies in positions of authority, yet images of leadership remain primarily masculine (Eagly & Karau, 2002;

Schein, 2001). Specifically, executive leadership has been equated with masculinity (Collinson & Hearn, 2001), and has treated the male leader as the norm (Maier, 1999; Willemsen, 2002). Further, Berthoin, Antal, and Izraeli (1993) assert that stereotypes connecting leadership with masculinity, particularly within hierarchical organizations, advantage men due to inherent congruence between masculinity and leadership. Ridgeway (2001) further related differences between masculine and feminine gender norms to the social status differences favoring men in established institutional hierarchies.

Some leadership roles are more masculine than others. Not all careers foster images congruent with solely masculine gender norms. Women have succeeded in roles focused on managing people, specifically leadership in human resource departments and middle level management (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly, Karau & Makhijani, 1995).

In the case of sport, these masculine gender roles are well entrenched. Shaw & Hoerber (2003) examined organizational documents and transcripts from interviews with 35 employees from three national sport organizations in England. They was found that senior management roles were heavily dominated by discourses of masculinity that are linked to men and are highly valued in sport organizations. In contrast, women and discourses of femininity are associated with employment roles that are undervalued within organizations.

According to Eagly and Makhijani (1992) the issue of evaluation bias is particularly noticeable when female leaders exhibit an autocratic or directive style of leadership, as this style does not appear to complement the stereotype of female behavior. Further, Rutherford (2001) backed this conclusion; women were generally evaluated

negatively when they exhibited leadership characteristics that were seen to exemplify men, i.e. task oriented, directive or autocratic behaviors. These characteristics are not seen as appropriate for women. Furthermore, when women display similar traits to men, they are often criticized as being “masculine” (Rutherford, 2001). Therefore, when women do desire to progress into senior roles and leadership positions, they are more likely to be evaluated negatively based on “lack of person-job-fit” because senior roles and leadership positions have been seen as occupations that are a male domain (Lyness & Heilman, 2006). Consequently, when women are categorized as a lack of fit to perform careers which are seen as male dominated, it is more likely that the behavior of women will be under-evaluated (Lyness and Heilman, 2006).

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

Research has shown that women desire to not only participate in athletics, but also progress into leadership roles either in athletic coaching or athletic administration (Drago et al., 2005; Fazioli, 2004; Lopiano, 2005; Whisenant, 2003 & 2004; Whisenant et al., 2002). Unfortunately, few have been granted the responsibility to lead athletic programs at the high school or collegiate levels (Acosta & Carpenter, 2006; Lopiano, 2005; Whisenant, 2003). The research findings outlined in the literature review regarding the possible explanations for the struggle women have faced in acquiring top leadership positions suggest exploration of these issues from a new perspective. Appropriate in particular, is a qualitative study that examines the underrepresentation of women from a leadership perspective. To date, no previous study has sought the observations and perceptions of women athletic leaders regarding the impact of role congruity theory in the athletic environment. This theory may help explain the prejudice toward women leaders that prevents and limits women from attaining top leadership positions in athletic administration. Therefore, there is a need to develop an understanding of how women in athletic administration experience role congruity, role expectations, and the consequences that have resulted in their professional lives.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women in interscholastic sport leadership positions by examining state association administrators and athletic directors' perceptions of the function, if any, that role congruity theory plays in the underrepresentation of women. This information is

best obtained through the use of qualitative research. The methodological study that will be used is in-depth or long interviewing, specifically elite interviewing. Marshall and Rossman (1995) defined elite interviewing as a specialized case of interviewing that focuses on a particular type of interviewee. Purposeful sampling of women in high level executive roles at state associations throughout the U.S. and high school athletic directors will be the identified participants to be interviewed. In purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally select participants based on the notable fact that the individuals are information-rich with similarities in the defining characteristics of the central phenomena (Creswell, 2002).

Chapter three provides an in-depth discussion of the proposed research and includes the following sections: (a) research method and design appropriateness, (b) research questions, (c) participant selection, (d) interview strategy, (e) data collection, (f) instrumentation, (g) analysis, and (h) ethical considerations.

#### Research Method and Appropriateness

This study falls in the paradigm of qualitative research. Qualitative research is an inquiry-based methodology in which the researcher explores a phenomenon through questioning, and describes and analyzes emerging themes (Creswell, 2002). The qualitative method is an appropriate method for discovering meaning and understanding of phenomena under study (Creswell, 2002) and is appropriate for this study as the specific focus of the research is on the interpretation of the perceptions of women in athletic leadership.

A qualitative approach was chosen for this study for three primary reasons. First, the qualitative method is appropriate for this study because the research is not about



quantifying variable relationships (Creswell, 2002) or combining two methodological approaches (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) but rather, seeks a holistic and reflective view (Creswell, 2002; van Manen, 2002a) regarding the phenomenon of the underrepresentation of women as leaders in interscholastic athletic leadership.

Qualitative methods, which allow for a more in-depth and richly nuanced exploration of motives and experiences, provide the best fit for the research questions in this study. This study seeks to provide perspective as to why women remain under-represented in athletic leadership. Second, a qualitative approach is consistent with the purpose and nature of this study to provide in-depth understanding of women athletic administrators' perceptions as well as experiences. Third, a qualitative approach was chosen in order to fill a gap in the existing literature on this subject. Most of the previous research in this area has been quantitative, describing the status of women's underrepresentation and most studies have been limited to collegiate athletics administration and coaching. The issues facing female participants, coaches, and administrators at the high school level have not been researched to any degree comparable to that of the collegiate level. Thus, with the qualitative approach, interscholastic scope, and focus on leadership, this study was designed to complement other studies and provide a new way of looking at this pervasive issue.

### Research Questions

In order to ascertain the perceptions of state association administrators and athletic directors regarding the function that role congruity theory plays in the underrepresentation of women, the researcher utilized the following questions:

1. How do women sport leaders perceive the current situation of women's underrepresentation in their field?
2. What function, if any, does role congruity play in the underrepresentation of women leaders in interscholastic sport?
3. What evidence will be reported to support or refute the two types of prejudice inherent in role incongruity theory?
  - (a) less favorable evaluation of women's potential for leadership due to gender stereotyping
  - (b) less favorable evaluation of leadership behavior
4. What specific strategies have women athletic leaders used to overcome role incongruity and/or perceived barriers associated with role incongruity?

#### Participant Selection

A purposeful homogeneous sampling technique was used for the selection of participants for this study. Gilchrist and Williams (1999) refer to the selection of key informants as purposeful, strategic or information-rich sampling, as the selection attempts to yield a small number of informants who provide information-rich pictures or aspects of information or knowledge distributed within the study population. The homogeneous sampling technique identifies individuals based on their membership grouping characteristics (Creswell, 2002). Because the research is seeking to make meaning of interscholastic women athletic leaders' experiences, the participant selection is limited to a small group of women who have been identified as leaders in interscholastic athletics.

In-depth interviewing was the primary means of data gathering used in this research, specifically, the use of elite interviews. Marshall and Rossman (1995) defined elite

interviewing as a specialized case of interviewing that focuses on a particular type of interviewee. "Elite individuals are considered to be influential, the prominent, and the well-informed people in an organization or community and are selected for interviews on the basis of their expertise in areas relevant to the research" (p.83).

Further, Marshall and Rossman (1995) outlined the strengths of elites:"Elites can usually provide an overall view of an organization or its relationship to other organizations. They are more likely than other participants to be familiar with the legal and financial structures of the organization. According to Marshall and Rossman (1995) elites are also able to report on an organization's policies, past histories, and future plans, from a particular perspective. Accordingly, participants in this study will fall into one of two categories. First, a participant will be identified as female holding the position of executive director or an associate executive director at a state association for a minimum of five years and be a Certified Athletic Administrator (CAA) or Certified Master Athletic Administrator. (CMAA) Second, a participant will be as female holding the position of high school athletic director who is currently in or has held a leadership position within their state, or national association and is a Certified Athletic Administrator (CAA) or Certified Master Athletic Administrator (CMAA).Initial identification of participant will come through an examination of the National Federation of High Schools Handbook. The handbook is a public document and is used as a directory for state associations. It includes a picture and contact information of all Executive Directors. Executive Directors from any of the fifty states identified as female will be recruited as subjects for this study.

## Interview Strategy

Rubin and Rubin (1995) assert that qualitative interviewing is warranted whenever a depth of understanding is required. In this study, participants will be asked semi-structured, open-ended questions during one-on-one, face-to-face, and telephone interviews. “Conducting a qualitative interview is a process where researchers ask one or more participants in a study mostly general, open-ended question and record their answers. Information is then transcribed or typed into a data file for analysis” (Creswell, 2002, p. 203).

The technique of face-to-face or telephone interviewing was selected based on the diverse geographic locations of the participants and their schedules. The primary use of face-to-face interviewing with the option to use telephone interviewing for those who are unable to meet face-to-face, would produce comparable quality data (Carr & Worth, 2001). Additionally, according to Creswell (2002) telephone interviews may allow for more participants to respond, which is useful in collecting qualitative data quickly from a geographically dispersed group of people. An additional strength of this approach is during the individual interviews in this study, participants will be asked to share personal experiences, perceptions, thoughts and explain things that they might not feel comfortable sharing in a group or that could not be adequately explained in a questionnaire or survey.

In-depth or long interview methodology was chosen because currently very little is known about the function of role congruity theory as reflected in the perspectives and experiences of female leaders in interscholastic sport. In-depth interviews tend to concern personal information including but not limited to participants identity, lived experiences,

values, and perspective (Johnson, 2002). It is appropriate to use an in-depth interview method when the researcher is seeking to uncover information on a deeper level than would be revealed in surveys, informal interviewing or focus groups (Johnson, 2002).

### Data Collection

Creswell (2002, 2004) identified four data collection approaches in qualitative research: observations, interviews, documents, and audio-visual materials. Data for this study will be collected by interviewing women in athletic administrative roles in state associations and high schools throughout the United states. Prior to the interview, all participants will be sent an introductory e-mail (see appendix A). Each subject will consent to participate by replying to an introductory e-mail. The email explains the nature of the study, its purpose, interview procedure, and nature of the questions. The e-mail will be used as a consent letter. The informant consent letter ensures confidentiality and anonymity in the research and publication process. Neuman (2003) explained that participants can become aware of their rights and what they are getting involved in when they read and sign a statement giving informed consent. The introductory e-mail acts as a consent and each participant will only respond if they agree to participate in the study. On the day of the scheduled face-to-face or telephone interview, the letter will be reviewed with the participant before proceeding with the interview. Participants will be reminded prior to and during the interview that sessions will be recorded and transcribed. In addition, each participant will be informed that electronic and transcribed data will be archived by the primary researcher in a secure, locked file cabinet for three years, after which all electronic and transcribed documents will be destroyed. After reiterating the

consensual information in the introductory email, each participant will participate in a semi-structured face-to-face or telephone interview.

#### Instrumentation

The researcher will conduct in-depth interviews following a general interview guide. (See Appendix B for the interview questions.)The interview questions were derived with attentiveness to the literature review and research questions. The interview questions cover five main areas (a) career path; (b) perspective on reasons for underrepresentation of women in athletic leadership; (c) perspectives on how role incongruity may have contributed to underrepresentation;(d) prejudicial experiences they have encountered; strategies they have employed to overcome prejudices; and (e) advice they give other women who aspire to obtain leadership positions.

#### Analysis

Research data will be analyzed using the six-step process outlined by Creswell (2002). This six-step process provides a systematic, inductive method for examining and translating the large amounts of detailed, raw data gathered during the interview process into a clear set of emerging themes about the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2002), and the function of role incongruity theory in explaining the underrepresentation of women as leaders. The researcher will first prepare and organize the data, “a researcher organizes the raw data into conceptual categories and creates themes or concepts, which he or she then uses to analyze data” (Neuman, 2003, p. 441). To prepare and organize the data the researcher will record and transcribe each interview. Then, the text data will be manually analyzed by visually scanning the transcriptions to gain a general understanding of the information. Next, the data will be explored in detail by again reading all transcripts, and

then developing a list of emergent themes and coding to create preliminary groupings. “A good thematic code is one that captures the qualitative richness of the phenomenon. It is usable in the analysis, the interpretation, and the presentation of the research” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 31). Responses will be coded using Atlasti Software. After responses to interview questions are coded and preliminary groupings created, Atlasti will be used in the next step to build descriptions and themes. Preliminary groupings will be condensed to major themes by eliminating redundancies, and sub-theme groups. The coding process results in generating a description of the sample’s perception of the central phenomenon of the research, as well as themes for analysis (Creswell, 2002 & 2003) In order to validate accuracy and credibility of the data analysis, the researcher, first, will record all interviews and then transcribe the recordings for accurate records. Second, the researcher will validate her findings by providing the study’s participants with transcriptions, and again to her dissertation advisor as to the accuracy and validity of her interpretations.

#### Ethical Considerations

To account for ethical concerns, data collection approval will be obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the UNLV Office for the Protection of Human Subjects Rights. The purpose of the IRB is to evaluate the risk to the research participant, judging the risk to be minimal and either equal to or outweighed by the benefits.

A second ethical concern, confidentiality, will be assured. Upholding the confidentiality of the participants is the ethical responsibility of any researcher (Neuman, 2003). Participant confidentiality in this qualitative research denotes acquiring informed

consent from participants, the handling of any information learned about participants, the data collection process, and data storage. To ensure confidentiality each participant will receive a pseudonym or be assigned a case number. Confidentiality is especially important in this research because of the small number of eligible participants, and possible repercussions if their accounts were to be traced.

### Summary

The purpose of this study is to investigate the underrepresentation of women in interscholastic sport leadership positions by analyzing the perceptions of state association administrators and athletic directors of the role, if any, that role incongruity theory plays in the underrepresentation women in their field. This information is best obtained through the use of qualitative research. In depth, elite interviews will be utilized in order to discover the perceptions and experiences of female athletic leaders. Purposeful sampling will be used to select participants; female athletic administrators in state associations and high school athletic directors. Once the interviews are conducted, recorded and transcribed, a six step process will be used to analyze the data by “preparing and organizing the data for analysis, exploring and coding the data, describing and developing themes from the data, representing and reporting the findings, interpreting the findings, and validating the accuracy and credibility of the findings”(Creswell, 2002, p. 257). Finally, considering the small sample and nature of the study ethical considerations such as IRB, confidentiality, and anonymity will be intentionally considered throughout the research and publication process.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

#### Introduction

This qualitative study captured the unique perspectives and experiences of nine women who have broken the glass ceiling in interscholastic athletic administration. The investigation addressed the under-representation of women as leaders in interscholastic sport from a leadership perspective. Specifically, the incongruence between leadership roles and gender roles was examined as a possible explanation for the under-representation of women in leadership positions in sport. The purpose of the study was achieved by analyzing perceptions of state association administrators and athletic directors of the function, if any, that role congruity theory has played in the under-representation of women in leadership positions in sport. The following research questions were posed to achieve this purpose:

1. How do women sport leaders perceive the current state of women's under-representation in their field?
2. What function, if any, does role incongruity play in the under-representation of women leaders in interscholastic sport?
3. What evidence exists regarding the two types of prejudice inherent to role congruity theory?
  - (a) Perceiving women as possessing less leadership ability than men
  - (b) Evaluating behavior that fulfills the prescriptions of a leader role more negatively when it is enacted by a woman compared with a man.

4. What specific strategies have women athletic leaders used to overcome role incongruity and/or perceived barriers associated with role incongruity?

Chapter four is divided into four sections. The first section provides a synopsis of the participants in the study. The second section describes the major themes and sub-themes identified during data analysis from the interviews. The third section presents the findings of the study. The final section summarizes the findings based on the research questions.

### Participants

All nine participants were working in the field of interscholastic administration at the time of the interviews. The criteria for participation placed them into one of three categories: 1) participants who were currently working as state association athletic administrators as either an executive director or associate director; 2) participants who were currently working as a high school athletic director in addition to a leadership role in their state athletic directors association; 3) participants who were working in interscholastic athletic administration at the national level. Table 1 provides information about each participant. What follows is a brief portrait of each woman based on her perspective of her education and career path. Please note that each participant was given a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality.

Table 1

*Participants*

Pseudonym	Current Position	Section	Ethnicity
Julie	Executive or Associate Director	8	Caucasian
Diane	State AD's Association	2	Caucasian
Pat	State AD's Association	4	Caucasian
Doris	State AD's Association	4	Caucasian
Sam	Executive or Associate Director	7	Caucasian
Barbara	National Athletic Director		Caucasian
Nancy	Executive or Associate Director	1	Caucasian
Robin	Executive or Associate Director	6	Caucasian
Bonnie	Executive or Associate Director	2	Caucasian

*Julie*

Julie's career path was very atypical when compared to the other participants. Julie explained, "My career choice was an accident. It was not what I set out to do." Julie went to a University and majored in Medical Technology. She then began, "looking for something to pay the bills" while deciding what her next move would be. She applied for a secretarial job at her state high school association. The executive director at the time was aware of her academic preparation, but did not seem reluctant to hire her even though the job did not fit her skill set. It quickly became obvious that her responsibilities were not commensurate with her previous experience, as she had always been interested and involved in athletics. Consequently, she started taking on more responsibility. Julie described a conversation she had with a state association executive early in her career:

One day [an executive] asked me to do a certain task and I said are you sure? And he said he was. I said that's what you want me to do? And he said yes so I said okay. Then he stopped for a minute and said why? I

explained to him that what he was asking me to do for this particular track and field procedure was wrong; he was shocked and said we never hired a secretary before who had any real athletic knowledge.

She went on to say:

I was a softball player and a swimmer and those were the kind of things that interested me. Those things happen and the position was such that there was room for growth. As a result one of the board members got to know me a little bit and said this is a person we'd like to have on our staff for a long time and she's going to leave if we don't give her a salary and a job description that matches her abilities and then the next thing you know I was an assistant director and I've been here ever since.

Julie has been an executive/associate director at her state association for over twenty years.

*Diane*

Diane, at the time of the study, was an associate/executive director at a state association. She began her career path by obtaining a Bachelor's of Science in Health and Physical Education, and went on to get a Master's of Arts in Physical Education/Teacher Education and then obtained a Ph.D. in Physical Education Pedagogy. She began her career as a teacher and a coach at a high school where she taught physical education and health. In addition, she coached volleyball, gymnastics, track and field, and swimming and diving. She also taught and coached at the university level. She was hired as an administrator at a state association in Section Two and has been there twenty years.

She described the move from higher education to a state association as a serendipitous type of thing, explaining that she had absolutely no intention of pursuing any kind of interscholastic administrative career. She further explained:

My husband suggested that I might be good at this job. I thought that was kind of ridiculous because it was probably an inside job; they weren't looking for anyone outside of the mold of school administrator. But at his urging I applied for the job and was hired. But it was really not what I was looking for at all. But sometimes that's how it is in life.

*Pat*

Pat was serving as a state athletic director's association executive director in Section Four at the time of the interview. She has worked both in and out of education as an athletic administrator. Pat attended a university where she majored in Physical Education and minored in Psychology, and graduated with a Bachelor's of Science. She went on to receive her master's degree, and then received an Administration Degree for Secondary Education Administration. Pat worked in education for thirty-seven years. She was also an athlete throughout high school and college, participating in several sports and activities:

I played ASA softball. I started that when I was about fourteen. When I was thirty I played on a team that traveled extensively. We did not have any interscholastic competition when I was in high school. We had some intramural basketball and some things like that; we had an advanced physical education class. I had a physical education teacher who was very supportive and encouraged me to go on to school.

She described her career path as follows:

When I first started I was at rural schools where I was a GAA (which was the girl's athletic association which governed girl's sports). I coached track and basketball when I first started. Then I moved on to a large high school ... where I coached different sports. I started out with gymnastics, then coached track and basketball; then I coached primarily volleyball. I continued with volleyball the longest and had state championship teams. All that time I was also scheduling girls sports; I was the GA director but also the girls sports director so I'd been in some sort of athletic administration almost my entire career. So I wasn't just coaching I was scheduling for the other sports also.

*Doris*

When Doris went to college she; "purposely went to be a teacher and a coach." She began her career teaching and coaching, which she continued for ten years. She coached tennis, volleyball, and softball, the three sports she played in high school. She then pursued a Master's degree in administration. She said, "I got my Masters 10 or 11

years after I began teaching. In the school where I was the position opened up, the athletic director/assistant principal job.” She then moved to a position at a different school where she could be solely an athletic director. She described her reasoning at the time:

I got tired of being an assistant principal; I didn't like the negativity of the job versus the athletic director part of my job. The position opened (at her current school) where I didn't have to be an assistant principal. That doesn't happen a lot.

In addition to her duties as athletic director Doris has been serving as president of her state athletic directors association.

### *Sam*

Sam served as an athletic director in a state in Section Seven. At the time of the interview she was also the president of her state athletic directors association where she was one of the founding members. Sam's education included both a bachelors and masters degree in Physical Education and Recreation Administration

I was teaching Physical Education and one of the men that was in our league talked to me about starting up this organization. There was nothing for AD's...so the two of us got together and started up (the athletic directors association).

Sam has also had leadership positions in national governing associations and was serving as chair of a national committee.

### *Barbara*

At the time of the interview, Barbara was an athletic administrator for a national governing body. She initiated her career as a secondary school teacher. She taught physical education in a high school and coached three sports: volleyball, basketball, and track and field. From there she became an assistant principal and athletic director at a

large high school, where she remained for six years. Next, she became an administrator for the state high school activities association. She said of her responsibilities:

I was responsible for student eligibility, administration of all the high school championships, as well as cheerleading, and speech and debate. I worked there for twenty-four and half years.

Barbara then moved to a national association. She explained this career move:

Of course I was a member of the National Federation and I served on national federation committees. I was on the board of directors so I became very involved with the national federation and when a job position came open up here which also fit with my retirement plans it looked like a pretty good match. It was very similar work to what I had been doing. It would be at the national level. I would be involved in sports which I have a strong background and a strong interest in. So I kind of came up through those ranks.

*Nancy*

Nancy said she, “knew that I wanted to teach physical education when I was in fifth grade.” She received her bachelor’s degree in Physical Education and began her career as an elementary physical education teacher and coach. She then got her master’s degree in Health and an additional degree in Administration. In 1984, Nancy became an athletic administrator at only twenty-seven years old. She became involved with the high school athletic association where she served as a representative on the high school athletic association's governing board. She was then asked to become an officer in the association and was due to become president of the association when the presiding associate/executive director announced her retirement. She applied for the job and became the associate/executive director.

*Robin*

Robin has been an associate/executive director for thirteen years. She was the only minority participant in the study and she was the most accomplished athlete. She

began her education at a university on a full-ride scholarship for track and field. She also danced and was a Physical Education major. Robin was an NCAA champion, and earned an opportunity to train for the Olympic Games. After her athletic career she finished her degree and began coaching intercollegiate track and field. She then moved to a public school system, when the position of assistant commissioner at the state association became available. Robin described the move:

I think that things have to align. Some of my strengths may not have been the strengths they were looking for. I had a background in Title IX and equity and I had a background in cheerleading and dance. I think there were 107 applicants for two positions and I got one. I've been here thirteen years now.

Robin was enjoying her administrative position at the time of the interview and she expressed that she has continually grown and developed in her career.

#### *Bonnie*

Bonnie has been an associate/executive director for a state association in Section Two for seven years. In her leadership position the responsibilities include, athletic eligibility, spirit committee, state tournaments, competitive cheer, and Title IX education.

Bonnie described herself:

I was a little bit pre-Title IX so there were not as many college opportunities. I was a little ahead of that. In high school there was interscholastic sport but no state championships. I always had sport interest. I participated in diving and tennis. I was not what I considered a great athlete but I was always involved.

Bonnie began her teaching career as a physical education teacher. She went back to school to get a master's degree where she gained more sport experience. Bonnie described this time:

At the time women's sports were all club and part of the recreation program. I had a graduate assistantship and part of that was to coach a



sport. I had officiated and taught whatever the instructor told me to do. So I got a lot of experience that way.

Bonnie then coached on the collegiate level for three years before moving to a state association job:

And then I was sort of in the right place at the right time so to speak. A job opened up as an assistant commissioner at the state association. The two primary things they were looking for were track and field, and swimming and diving. In addition, girl's volleyball had just been sanctioned so it has been a lot of fun seeing the growth in this state and others. I have been in charge of volleyball, golf, swimming and diving, gymnastics, track and field, and tennis.

The women in this study had a number of common experiences in their education and career paths. These portrayals illustrated the commonalities as well as unique differences in their experiences that led them to their current roles as leaders in interscholastic athletic administration. The subsequent section highlights the themes and sub-themes that were identified through data analysis.

#### Theme Identification

A six step process was used when analyzing the data by “preparing and organizing the data for analysis, exploring and coding the data, describing and developing themes from the data, representing and reporting the findings, interpreting the findings, and validating the accuracy and credibility of the findings”(Creswell, 2002, p. 257). The participant's responses and researcher notes were organized in alignment with the interview questions. According to Creswell (2002) a researcher organizes the raw data into conceptual categories and creates themes or concepts, which he or she then uses to analyze data. The sequencing and organization of the data allowed for the identification of themes that emerged from the responses. These themes were used to convey and interpret the meanings the participants communicated about their lived experiences as

women leaders in interscholastic athletic administration. The major themes that emerged from the data were: 1) formative career experiences; 2) perceived barriers for advancement; 3) perceptions of role congruity; 4) experiences associated with role congruity; and 5) strategies to overcome prejudice associated with role congruity. Each theme was further coded into sub-themes when a separation in the primary theme was evident. The coding process resulted in the generation of a description of the sample's perceptions on the central phenomenon researched, as well as themes for analysis. (Creswell, 2002 & 2003)

The first theme labeled "formative career experiences" was broken down into four distinct sub-themes. First, "interest and participation in athletics" described the participant's relevant participation in a variety of sports when available to them. The second sub-theme, "physical education teaching experience", accounted for eight of the nine participants who began their career teaching physical education. "Coaching experience", the third sub-theme, was identified as a consistent antecedent to future athletic administration positions. Lastly, "mentors and role models" were stressed as an important part of their career path.

The second theme, "perceived barriers and advancement", was developed from interview questions in relation to the current under-representation of women as athletic directors and state association administrators. The women in this study described several barriers that were discussed in the literature review. The first sub-theme was the most commonly mentioned barrier: "work-life conflict". The second sub-theme, "hiring practices", identified athletic administration as hegemonic in nature. Social issues were the focus of the third sub-theme identified. In this sub-theme the theories of self-efficacy

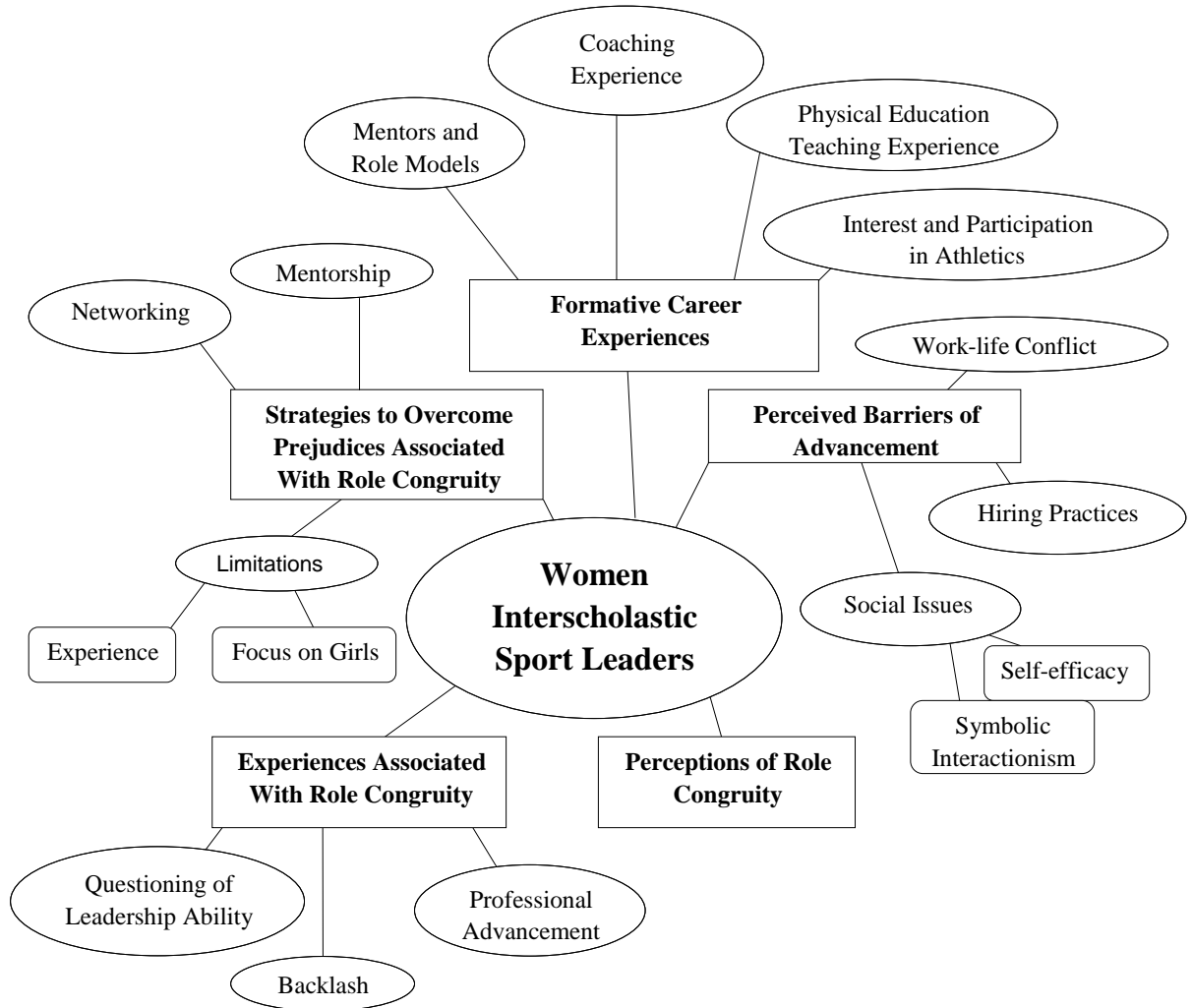
and symbolic interactionism were reinforced as barriers to women who strive to be leaders in interscholastic sport.

The third theme, “perceptions of role congruity”, described the impact the participant’s perceived role congruity has had on the under-representation of women in leadership positions. The fourth theme described actual experiences participants have encountered associated with role congruity in the work place. This theme was divided into three sub- themes: questioning of leadership ability, backlash, and professional advancement.

The last theme, strategies to overcome prejudice associated with role congruity, identified tactics the participants have used when dealing with prejudice as well as strategies for advancement in the male-dominated field of athletic administration. This theme was further coded into three sub-themes: mentorship, networking, and limitations.

On the following page, Figure 1 illustrates the interplay between strategies to overcome prejudice associated with role congruity, formative career experiences, perceived barriers to advancement, experiences associated with role congruity, and perceptions of role congruity. The constructed themes were based on this interplay, which was also reflected by the participant’s responses.

Figure 1 Code Tree of Themes and Sub-themes



### *Theme 1: Formative Career Experiences*

The women in this study shared stories about their career paths including experience, education, and professional positions held. The following section presents the sub-themes that emerged from their stories, including: 1) interest and participation in athletics; 2) physical education teaching experience; 3) coaching experience; and 4) mentors and role models.

*Sub-Theme 1: Interest and Participation in Athletics.* All of the participants competed as athletes at some point in their lives. The diversity in the types of sport and the length of participation of each sport varied. These experiences had an impact on the development of the participants and opened the door of opportunity to their positions as leaders in sport.

For example, Julie stated:

I've always followed a variety of sports. I was a huge wrestling fan, track and field fan. You know, I was myself a softball player and a swimmer and those were the kind of things that interested me.

Bonnie concurred with these sentiments when she told of her interscholastic athletic experience. She remembered, "I always had sport interest. I participated in diving and tennis and I was not what I considered a great athlete but I was always involved."

Pat further explained how sport participation has remained with her for a lifetime:

Yes, I played ASA softball. I started that when I was about 14. When I was 30 I traveled on a team that traveled extensively. We did not have any interscholastic competition when I was in high school. We had some intramural basketball and some things like that; we had an advanced physical education class. I had a physical education teacher who was very supportive and encouraged me to go on to school. Over the years I have still participated. I play golf. I played in a golf league and I attended a rec-center where I did water aerobics and the bicycle and things.

Like Pat, two other participants participated in either interscholastic or intercollegiate sport before the enactment of Title IX in 1973. Each commented on the dramatic difference in opportunity Title IX offered for girls and women. Bridgett remembered the differences as she matriculated through high school and college. She recalled:

I was a little bit pre-Title IX so there were not as many college opportunities. I was a little ahead of that. In high school there was some interscholastic sport but no state championships. It has been fun seeing the growth of girls' sports in our state and others.

Sam described how Title IX has worked to change the male-dominated culture as well:

I think Title IX changed everything in the whole entire planet. Not just in sports and athletics and all but the whole realm. I do think Title IX helped women who were good in the field like went from PE teachers to coaches to administrative positions; I think everybody realizes there has to be equity.

Pat added insight about the impact of Title IX on girls' career choices:

What I did notice was that before (Title IX) when the association had a banquet to recognize senior athletes... they would tell who the senior athletes were, where they are going to go and what they are going to major in. It used to be; well I'm going to be a nurse, going to be a teacher which was typical. Now out of the entire group that were being honored there was only one teacher and [the others] were going into things like nuclear physics and engineering that was really interesting to hear.

She went on to say, "...But what you're also seeing is you're seeing the top athletes are going into careers that have nothing to do with education or sport."

*Sub-theme 2: Physical Education Teaching Experience.* All but one of the participants earned a bachelor's degree in physical education. Four of the participants went on to receive a master's degree in physical education and three earned master's degrees in administration. One of the women also obtained a PhD. Seven of the nine

women began their professional careers as physical education teachers. For example, Pat described her career path:

I started out in physical education at ...the University I was a major in physical education and a minor in psychology and graduated with a B.S. I did my master's degree, then following that I received an administration degree...for secondary administration and then I was in education for thirty-seven years.

Diane had a similar career path, but taught physical education at both the secondary and university levels. She described her education and physical education experience:

Well let me just start with my education. I have a bachelor's of science from...University in health and physical education. I have a master's of arts in physical education teacher education...and I have a PhD. I started my career as a teacher and a coach at a high school ...I taught physical education and health. I coached volleyball, gymnastics, track and field, swimming and diving. I also taught at ...University as a graduate teaching assistant when I was doing my master's and Ph.D. Then I started to work at universities.

As they told their stories, there was an evident passion for physical education, exemplified by, for example, the decision for their career choice made at a very young age. Nancy recalled that she had chosen her career in the fifth grade.

I knew that I wanted to teach physical education when I was in fifth grade. I went on to be an elementary physical education teacher and coach. I got my master's degree in health... then I went on to get my degree in administration.

Doris also had made a career choice before beginning higher education:

When I went to college I went to ...University. I purposely went to be a teacher and a coach. I took psychology of coaching, coaching volleyball, coaching softball, athletic training, all those classes and that was 30 years ago.

*Sub-theme 3: Coaching Experience.* One of the themes revealed through the interview process was the significance of coaching experience. Eight of the nine

participants coached on their way to becoming athletic administrators. Seven had experience coaching three or more sports. Diane's experience was typical of the participants, stating, "I coached volleyball, gymnastics, track and field, swimming and diving." Doris had a similar path: "I coached tennis, volleyball, and softball; those were the three sports I played in high school." Pat differed slightly as she started out coaching several sports and then specialized:

Then I moved on to a large high school in ..... where I coached different sports. I started out with gymnastics, coached track, and coached basketball. I then coached primarily volleyball; I continued with it the longest and had state championship teams.

*Sub-theme 4: Mentors and Role Models.* All of the women acknowledged mentors and role models as having an influence on their career path and general self-efficacy. Several of the women pointed to an influential woman from their youth who inspired them. Bridgett shared how a family friend inspired her to excel.

...there were a couple of people who really made an impression upon me along the way. My mother and her best friend were Brownie leaders. Her best friend was very well read, magna cum laude, an attorney, a great tennis player, good golfer, and a master bridge player. And that was the time where that wasn't happening and I saw that and I was like WOW! She made a huge impression on me and I thought I can do it too.

Nancy also recounted a woman that influenced her early on, "I had a woman who was my basketball coach. She and her husband coached the team but *she* was the coach. I said well if she can do it anybody can."

Bonnie described a teacher that motivated her:

When I was in high school I went to an all girls private school and a physical education teacher allowed the girls who were interested in physical education to take college-level classes our senior year. So I went to the University for college-level physical education classes my senior year. Wasn't that great? Pretty cool.



As their careers progressed, the participants were more likely to credit a male as being a role- model. Pat, Sam, and Robin all pointed to males pushing them into leadership positions. Pat commented on how a male role-model helped propel her into leadership:

Well really early on there were coaching people that I looked up to. Athletic administration-wise the first guy was when I was girls' sports director. The guy that was athletic director was actually the person who got me involved in the state AD association early on. A lot of schools they didn't do that; they didn't encourage their girl sports director to become involved in the state Association. He was very instrumental in encouraging me to become involved and attend national conventions so I started doing that very early on. I consider myself fortunate to have had encouragement from that AD at that time.

Sam also credited a man with influencing her move into a leadership position.

Sam recounted this experience:

But he was the one that really inspired me to keep going. We started the (state association); he was kind of the Godfather and I was the Godmother. We started this whole thing. I mean I can take it right back to him.

I had a mentor who was an elderly gentleman who was president of the state association and he really took me under his wing. He was my biggest cheerleader and my biggest critic. And he came to me and in 2000 and said are you going to apply for this state association position and I thought I don't know but then I thought ... *he* thought I could do it.

Robin mentioned both men and women in her career development:

There were both women and men that helped me as I was getting started. I connected with women in other state associations. It was invaluable. I met them through our sectional meetings.

### *Theme 2: Perceived Barriers for Advancement*

This section examines the perceptions of the women leaders regarding why there are so few women reaching the top levels of leadership in interscholastic sport. The data was gleaned from interview questions in relation to the under-representation of women as athletic directors and state association administrators. In this section the participants

referred to women in general rather than pointing to barriers they had dealt with as individuals. The women in this study cited several barriers that have been previously identified in the literature. The first sub-theme, work-life conflict, was the most commonly mentioned barrier. It was based on the notion that athletic administration was a life-engulfing profession demanding a great deal of time and making it difficult to balance with having a family. The second sub-theme, hiring practices, supported the perception of the profession of athletic administration as being hegemonic in nature. Social issues were the focus of the third sub-theme identified. In this sub-theme the theories of self-efficacy and symbolic interactionism were reinforced as barriers to women who strive to be leaders in interscholastic sport. The participants also cited the concept of pipeline theory (Turkel, 2004), noting that the number of women “in the pipeline” has decreased at each of the levels along the typical career path to leadership in athletic administration. Consequences of pipeline theory were perceived to affect the number of women reaching the highest levels of leadership and were evident throughout the interviews. Becky explained this point at the state association level:

First off there's not as many females in state associations offices and many times the positions appear and many times they will come from staff members so the overall total of experiences is much more limited just by the fact that there are not as many females in state association offices so that reduces the number.

*Sub-theme 1: Work- life conflict.* All nine participants cited difficulties specific to women pertaining to work-life conflict as a reason why women have not achieved leadership positions in interscholastic sport. The time commitment of the position of high school athletic administrator was perceived as a barrier. Doris gave an explanation: “Why do I want to be an athletic administrator and work twelve or thirteen hours a day when I

can be a principal and go home in nine? So I think time commitment is a huge part of that.”

Julie expanded on this idea explaining that it isn't just the amount of time that athletic administrators work but the flux of hours, noting the difficulty if the AD is also a mother:

I am a working mother and I'm a single mother and I know there are things I have to sacrifice to put in the hours that I do at my job. I think what happens for a lot of women is that they don't have a support system behind them that is necessary for them to make those sacrifices. If you don't have a really strong network whether it's your friends or your family or whatever...it's harder to make those choices and put the number of hours in. Not just the number of hours but the flux of hours to be an AD. There are certain times of the year that you have no time to yourself, and other times where you get to sit back and spend some time on yourself or spend time with your family. With that kind of fluctuation there really needs to be a strong support system and I don't think that a lot of working mothers have that readily available to them.

Pat also alluded to the work-life conflict mothers in athletic administration face believing that the women who have been successful are more often single. Pat said:

I think because women traditionally, no matter what, have so many roles at home and if they're married and have children that combined with an athletic director job it's very, very difficult because of those responsibilities. You find some women who can do it but I find that most of the women, many of them usually are single. Not all of them, but many of them are single and put more time into it, or have the time. Maybe they want to put the time in, and they don't have so many things pulling them in different directions.

Because of the time demands and family commitments the participants believed women often opted out early in their career path, again affecting the future candidate pools. Sam believed that as women get married their priorities change, resulting in fewer women remaining in athletic administrator positions. “I see more... well it's about their families. Some of the best AD's you know they get married, they have families, and their

commitments are just different.” Doris gave a specific example that she experienced as an athletic administrator:

I know this with my coaching staff, when women start having families it’s the woman who quits coaching. Last year my head soccer coach—a female—and an assistant football coach—a male—had a baby; the woman quit coaching, the man stayed on. So it has to do a lot with the family situations too.

*Sub-theme 2: Hiring practices.* Data analysis of the interviews supported the perception that both the position of Athletic Director and state association administrator remain hegemonic. Participants described their belief that it was a “man’s world” and referred to “the good old boys.” Doris explained how males have traditionally held these positions and that most have long tenures once in the position. Doris stated, “I don’t know. How often does a position even come available? So if there’s been anybody in there for a number of years they’re probably a man. It was a man’s role back then.”

Barbara rejected the idea of tenure at the state association level:

... but again there are executive director positions that are opening up. We are seeing a lot of retirements and to be real honest when you look at it you would think there probably ought to be more than three females in those roles. That they don’t change over very fast though probably speaks to the fact that they’re good jobs. But there’s been enough turnover lately where the numbers would’ve gone up.

Diane stated that she believes the concept of leadership is traditionally perceived to be male, and therefore is a barrier to women in most areas of American society, especially sport; “Well I think that athletic administration like many other careers and businesses has been dominated by men, which makes it more difficult for qualified women to be successful at the higher levels of administration.”

Robin voiced the opinion that support from the current executive director (most often male) is important and not always available. Robin elaborated:

It also has to do with support of the outgoing director. Whether they would support a female in their position and they would start to build that trust within their schools and their boards so when that person stepped down it would be like an automatic oh yeah “*Dana*” is supposed to move into that spot and set you up to take that position. I think that would be critical for anybody.

Being female, many of the participants felt they had to go above and beyond to show they were competent. Julie expressed this sentiment:

...again trying to have boards feel comfortable with a female that is going to be able to step into that role; a woman who could take some of that controversy on and the other responsibilities which come along with it.

*Sub- theme 3: Social Issues.* Social limitations included low self-efficacy and symbolic interactionism as reasons for the low number of women reaching leadership positions in interscholastic sport. Self-efficacy refers to "beliefs in one's capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (Bandura, 1997, p. 2). According to Bandura (1986) such judgments of personal capabilities are important because they predict goal setting, perseverance, the outcomes people expect from behaviors, and performance. In seeking to understand why such a disparity of women leaders has continued, researchers have pointed to differences between men and women in self-efficacy (Cunningham et al. 2007; Cunningham et al. 2003). In addition, Satore & Cunningham (2007) proposed that gender roles and stereotypes connected to sport ideologies inhibit women in sport organizations, arguing that women might not view themselves as capable leaders because of the existing low levels of power and status of women in society. This results in self-imposed limits on their leadership behaviors (Satore & Cunningham, 2007). The participants perceived other women were opting out or exhibiting self-limiting behaviors based on the current social status of women in society and low levels of self- efficacy. Several participants

believed women were not trying to achieve leadership positions in interscholastic sport.

Nancy explained this position: “The reason they haven’t sought them out is they are afraid of ... I’ll call it rejection. I am just fortunate to never have had my gender be a discouraging factor in my professional career.”

Bonnie concurred:

High school athletics is so male-dominated even with the increased participation of female athletes at the high school level. I just don't think that women are willing to take the risk of seeking out the job and not getting it.

The participants suggested that women often had low levels of self- efficacy and were not willing to take the risk. Barbara said:

Then the other side is that females perhaps kind of backed off a little bit because we have a perception of... I don't know whether I want to take on all that. When in reality it's not as complicated as one might think it's going to be.

Also emerging from the data was the perception that because men have historically dominated sport, women do not believe they can achieve these positions.

Doris experienced this with a potential athletic director and shared:

I talked to a gal this morning who had taken over responsibilities while the AD was out and I told her she should apply for that job and she replied: not here that'll never happen it's a man's world here.

Only one participant, Robin, spoke about herself directly. She did not want to move beyond her current position:

I can only speak for myself but I don't want that position. I was the first minority female to ever be an administrative position...I don't mind being number two. I don't want to sit in that position I think it's because I'm not to that point yet. I think it's because it's whether or not the person wants to take on all those responsibilities of the Commissioner or the director; it's a lot of time and the buck stops there. For me I just don't want to sit in that position. I don't mind being number two.

The perceptions depicted by the participants reflected the belief that athletic administration continues to be dominated by men. In addition they perceived women to face unique barriers including work-life conflict, hiring practices, and social issues that may impede women's advancement into leadership positions. The next theme details their perception of role congruity theory and how it consequently effects the under-representation of women leaders in interscholastic sport.

### *Theme 3: Perceptions of Role Congruity*

Perceptions of role congruity describe the impact the participant's perceived role congruity has had on the under-representation of women in leadership positions. Role congruity theory (Eagly, 2004; Eagly & Diekmann, 2005; Eagly & Karau, 2002) proposes that prejudice arises from an incongruity between a group stereotype and social role characteristics when members of a group enter or attempt to enter into roles that are stereotypically mismatched for their group, in this case, women entering a leadership role in interscholastic athletic administration. Eight of the nine participants in this study believed that a prejudice was evident in response to the fact that they were women in leadership roles. Such perceptions ranged from a major factor to not a factor at all. Diane expressed her view that the perception of leadership has been labeled as male:

Girls and women have been very successful in sport for well over 35 - 40 years in our country, yet there is still this notion that the person in charge really ought to be a guy. I see it. You know you hear it. It is more under the radar now but it's still there.

Sam corroborated the perception that women are not viewed as leaders explaining "it's difficult; I don't think people think women can handle it. I believe women are perceived as different." A majority of the participants believed prejudices based on their role as a woman conflicting with their role as a leader was one of many factors that

contribute to the under- representation of women. Doris gave the explanation, “It very well could. It's a lot of functions I guess. In some places people are still close-minded and don't feel it's a woman's job.” Bonnie agreed with Doris saying, “I think that it is a combination of factors and plus you have a family issue.”

Nancy was the lone participant that did not believe that issues surrounding role congruity resulted in prejudice. She believed that social and work roles remained separate. According to Nancy, “I have never looked at my positions of being an athletic administrator or an executive/associate director in a social manner. I always looked at it as what are my capabilities as far as being a leader.”

Role congruity theory was perceived as playing a part in the under-representation of women in athletic leadership positions by eight of the nine participants. In the next section more specific experiences are presented. The women described encounters in which they experienced prejudice as a result of being a woman in a leadership position.

#### *Theme 4: Experiences Associated with Role Congruity*

Role congruity theory (Eagly, 2004; Eagly & Diekmann, 2005; Eagly & Karau, 2002) proposes that prejudice toward female leaders takes two forms: (a) perceiving women as possessing less leadership ability than men and (b) evaluating behavior that fulfills the prescriptions of a leader role more negatively when it is enacted by a woman compared with a man. This theme describes actual experiences participants have encountered associated with role congruity in the work place. The results were derived from the interview questions asking about personal experiences with the two types of prejudice proposed in role congruity theory. This theme is divided into three sub-themes: 1) questioning of leadership ability, 2) backlash, and 3) professional advancement.



*Sub-theme 1: Questioning of Leadership Ability.* Many of the participants cited a general resistance to a women being in a leadership role. Diane said:

I have been at this business twenty years. I have seen more women being hired in athletic administration at the interscholastic and the collegiate level. More women are at the age and have the experience that would allow them to be very successful at key and executive officer levels. But change is slow and there are still people that don't believe that women have what it takes to be in those positions in the athletic realm.

Julie expressed that there were even parts of her job that were considered more “male than others.” She explained:

It's funny we often will get phone calls, and the person calling wants to talk to one of the guys and sometimes I'm not offended by that but other times it's the way people think of the Association, especially when it comes to things like rules interpretation and who's going to give this a good strong answer... Often times they think it should go to one of the males in the Association even though I am the associate executive director.

Barbara had some of the same types of experiences when dealing with the public. She described reactions she received when making rulings on eligibility. She said:

...then it would be “I need to speak to your boss.” Well I'm it. You're at the top level. Or it would be “look lady.” You know it was just little things you would hear if they were talking to a man they might say Mr. Jones and then they're talking to me and they say “Barbara.”

According to Julie this perception came not only from the general public but also within her state association. Julie commented:

I have noticed a trend that when people talk about what has been achieved or changes that are made or maybe a project that went well—sometimes the assumption is that it was the male that was involved that did it. *He* did it.

Barbara moved beyond the general public when describing her experiences. She felt she had been treated differently in her leadership role by her state legislature. She said:

I've found that many times in working with the legislature. That was the group that tended to...if I had been a male and I had been assertive and strong, they may have disagreed because that's where they were. But with a female that kind of changed their tactics on how they might argue a point and go and become more personal and how they might present things.

*Sub-theme 2: Backlash.* Six of the participants told of experiences where they received some sort of backlash due to the fact that they were exhibiting leadership traits that were typically associated with a man. Robin humorously described this phenomenon: “To a certain extent if you take on a lot of male traits you get a different title and I don't want to say that word but...”

Sam described how she might even adjust her leadership style to be less aggressive, assuming that men responded to that better. She stated:

I would say... I mean I've seen it that people don't know how to deal with women when they become more aggressive or assertive...I usually don't use the word aggressive, I use the word assertive. Aggressive is the terminology or a term that men hate...you can't be out there being so aggressive that it turns them off because I think men are programmed to see women in a different light ...You just have to be able to handle that differently.

Julie gave an account of how she was perceived as threatening because she took action against her employers:

I think at some point you go through a little bit of that. At one point because I filed an OCR complaint with our school... people saw me as very threatening. They got over it and I just kept going. But that's not always the case; I know in many, many cases there have been repercussions for things like that. I was probably fortunate.

Diane also described a conversation with her boss:

There is just the prejudice that “God we are just not ready for a woman.” You know no one really articulates that but you get a sense. Actually my former boss did articulate that. I just needed to be not quite so “competent.” It's kind of humorous looking back at that.

*Sub-theme 3: Professional Advancement.* Diana believed that because she exhibited more agentic characteristics, she did not advance in her association. She asserted, “Oh sure I was a candidate for the chief executive position here and for the first time we went outside of the state association to hire someone.”

She went on to describe how she felt she was subjected to discrimination:

I felt that there were some discriminatory factors at work. I felt that because I had been more quote “aggressive” or “assertive” in fulfilling my obligation as an assistant that might have worked against me and that there may have been some prejudice against me.

In each of these examples, the participants revealed experiences where the received prejudicial treatment was stemming from the fact that they were female. In general the experiences came in the form of questioning of their leadership ability, backlash, and professional advancement. The following section illustrates the advice the participants gave to promote the representation of women in the area of leadership in interscholastic athletics.

#### *Theme 5: Strategies for Change*

The last theme, strategies for change, identifies tactics the participants have used when dealing with prejudice, as well as strategies for advancement in the male-dominated field of interscholastic athletic administration. This theme was further coded into three sub-themes: a) mentorship, b) networking, and c) limitations.

*Sub-theme 1: Mentorship.* All the participants in this study placed great emphasis on the value of mentoring both in crediting a mentor for their achievements, and in the belief that mentors were necessary for women who are pursuing careers in leadership in interscholastic athletics. In general, the women said there needs to be an increase of mentoring, and it should take place at every step of the career path to leadership in

interscholastic athletics. Diane, like all the participants, saw the value in having a mentor. She noted that although she had mentors in previous positions she did not have one in her current position and believed it to be a problem:

Women, I think will do well if they can find a mentor. I've had mentors in my past careers. I really didn't have one in this job and I think that's been a negative. I think if you can, find other women. Women are willing to do this; they are always willing to help other women as they explore their careers and look for promotions. I think that's really critical; somebody to kind of assist you, to show you the ropes and help you get acquainted and how to get around in this world of athletics.

Many of the women said their current position gave them the opportunity to mentor up-and-coming women in the field. They were helped by others during their climb, and wanted to, "give back." Sam, like Diane, expressed a desire to mentor. She added:

I think you need to talk to people who have walked the walk. So I think that one-on-one mentoring is really a big deal, even if it's just a little note here and there, calling them up and seeing how it's going, and if they feel free enough to call you to get advice.

Nancy concurred, saying "she would love to be able to work toward having some type of mentoring program and involve women in activities or jobs or professions that are related to interscholastic sport". Many of the participants gave examples of ways they were trying to mentor, while still pointing to mentoring as a void that needs to be filled in order for women to be successful. Nancy had made direct efforts to bring women into interscholastic sport in a variety of areas through a symposium. She described her efforts:

I put on a, young women in sport symposium where I invited journalists, nutritionists, chiropractors, doctors, sportswriters, college coaches, superintendents, and high school principals. All women and all of them had some background of the high school at the top, about taking your passion for high school sports and making a career of it. It might not be as a coach or an official but somewhere along the lines you still have your hand in interscholastic athletics.

*Sub-theme 2: Networking.* In addition to mentoring, developing relationships with other professionals in interscholastic sport was reported by the women as vital to career progression. The belief that strategic networking would increase opportunity for women entering the field was evident. However, there was also a perception that women in general do not do enough networking or self-promotion. Barbara expressed this opinion saying, “It doesn't serve you as well. So I really think that that's the biggest thing, we've got all the tools but we just need to use them a little differently.” According to Bonnie, “there is unofficial networking but there could be a whole lot more.” Julie expressed the attitude that although networking and self-promotion may not be natural, for her it was essential. She said, “I don't see myself as someone who needs a lot of attention but if you don't join in, if you don't make yourself seen, if you don't make yourself heard, there will be no movement.”

The idea that women needed to network differently than men, was also pervasive in the advice participants gave. Barbara explained that she did not try to be “one of the guys” but worked to find ways to be effective in public relations:

Everything I've done in the job world has been more males than females but what I have developed over a period of time is, I've tried to find the best way to communicate and I've learned when and where. I'm not one of the guys and I don't try to be one of the guys.

Bonnie also believed that women needed specific strategies in terms of networking, which allowed for social settings. In addition she emphasized networking outside of your current organization. Bonnie advised:

I think women network differently. I would advise all women to learn to play golf because a lot of networking is done on the golf course and if you're a decent golfer you will be in demand for scrambles and things like that. And people will have the chance to really get to know who you are. I could probably do a lot more of that myself and the other is to do alternative things like breakfast or getting involved with civic groups and

so you're interacting with people becoming more community-based or statewide-based in social projects that are more civic or altruistic...networking can take a lot of forums it's not just going out drinking with the guys.

Though not a golfer, Barbara also spoke to specific strategies she used when networking, working to put herself into situations that were more social in nature.

Barbara said:

Golf is the big one; I'm a lousy golfer. If I went to play golf with them they would probably throw things at me... I think there are different places. I'm not a good golfer but I know sometimes that's the place so what I'm saying is you have to find a way to create the in-between settings that are more informal and more social, get work done there but the more social setting it works and is comfortable.

Like Bonnie, several of the participants believed there was also a need to replace a social scene that involved going to the bars or drinking with business associates.

Barbara explained:

For example, I've found what I did best... I'm not going to go to bars with board members. I'm not going to go to bars or whatever with my staff. My staff is basically all male for a lot of different reasons. So I found that my best place to have a more social interaction I may go over for dinner or drinks or something social but then remove myself from that area. I have found that breakfast is a great place to do business with me; lunch is a very comfortable setting that can be informal but can still get business done and it works very well. So I tried to find ways I can work with different people in different settings that seem to work that can be informal yet get their business done and you can be yourself so to speak.

In addition to implementing diverse strategies, Barbara added the belief of women networking with other women is also essential.

That's one of the more difficult tasks, is how do you create or form social networking and be able to do what guys do to network. That's why I think women have to work with other women to pass on some of the tricks of the trade that we learn how to do and also make sure we network with other females. Sometimes we don't do that as much as men do.

*Sub-theme 3: Limitations.* The participants believed potential leaders needed to consciously work on not limiting themselves. These ideas were expressed in gaining necessary experience, professional development, and not limiting themselves in areas within athletic administration. The participants encouraged women to expose themselves to a range of experiences. Bridgett gave this advice, “Don't pigeon-hole and get the most broad-based experiences that you can because you never know who's going to have the next job and how your experience can help. In addition, the women believed one needs to be willing to accept positions that may not be in demand to show one's commitment and desire. Bridgett said, “Part of it has to do with taking the jobs and doing the things that no one else wants to do.” Volunteering to get your foot in the door was also suggested. She said:

Volunteer and be willing to be mentored by someone. At some point in time they might have a position open. These days everybody wants money but experience is very, very, valuable and internships are those types of things I think people really need to take advantage of.

Beyond gaining experience, the women interviewed felt strongly that professional development, participation in associations, and certifications were instrumental in increasing opportunities for women. Several participants pointed to the fact that these programs and opportunities were not available to them, and should be used to increase their “value” as a professional. Pat asserted:

That you really get out and get involved in your state Athletic Directors Association. If you're interested in athletic administration at the high school level you need to get out there and join your Associations and take the leadership courses that they offer. That wasn't available when I first started out. I mean there was nothing like that ...But for people who are starting out, they need to make themselves the most competent they can by whatever means they can, whether that is through collegiate preparation or through the national leadership courses. They have a whole series of those and you can get your certification; you know there's like three different

levels. I think they should aspire to the highest level they can get to and also just do the best job that they can in whatever it is they're doing.

Once in athletic administration positions, the participants strongly encouraged women not to work for or with girls' sport exclusively, as this would limit their future opportunity. Nancy voiced this opinion, "If you want to be in a leadership position as a female, it can't be your sole focus; you can't focus only on girls toward their opportunities." Julie added that not focusing on girl's sport adds to her credibility as an athletic administrator. She said:

That is one of the things that would lend itself to my credibility because yes I am about advocating equity and opportunities for women but if you want to talk about male sport I can do that too.

#### Summary

In this chapter, the research participants voiced their perceptions about how a prejudice such as that proposed in role congruity theory may contribute to the ongoing challenge of under-representation of women in interscholastic sport leadership. The women in the study expressed unique perspectives to help answer the study's research questions, but many of their perspectives had commonalties as well. The commonalties have been represented as themes and sub-themes. In this section the results will be structured around the proposed research questions.

RQ 1. How do women sport leaders perceive the current situation of women's under-representation in their field?

All nine participants perceived representation as a problem, not only at the leadership level but at the levels leading to leadership (coach, athletic director, school administrator). In addition they pointed to the public perception that sport was still perceived as a man's world or traditionally male. The women referred to several barriers



that they believed attributed to low representation, the most common of which was work-life conflict. All the participants mentioned this as a barrier in some form. Time commitments and parental roles were identified as impeding women seeking top levels of administration. The participants also mentioned that hiring practices were a barrier. They stressed the belief that athletic administration has been improving but signs of hegemonic masculinity were reported. Lastly, social issues were perceived as a barrier for young women coming into the field. The participants believed that young women professionals needed to have higher levels of self-efficacy and confidence. Further, the participants believed women were not seeking out leadership positions. As Nancy simply stated, “they are afraid of ... I’ll call it rejection.” In addition, the women also perceived potential female leaders as afraid to take the risk of trying in fear that they could not succeed in the male-dominated territory of athletics.

RQ2. What function, if any, does role congruity play in the under-representation of women leaders in interscholastic sport?

Eight of the nine participants interviewed believed role congruity plays a part in the under-representation of women in interscholastic athletic administration. However, the women varied regarding the impact role congruity had on women’s representation. The most common perception was that incongruence between leadership role and gender role was a possible explanation for the under-representation of women in leadership roles in sport. They agreed that women had a unique set of challenges as leaders because of their gender. The challenges were perceived as difficult to overcome resulting in fewer women reaching the highest levels of leadership. The participants perceived this incongruence was one of many factors that could be contributing to the ongoing dilemma

of low female leadership representation. However, role congruity was not labeled as the direct cause by the participants.

RQ 3. What evidence exists regarding the two types of prejudice inherent to role congruity theory?

All but one of the participants had experienced prejudice. Each woman believed the prejudice was based on the fact that she was a woman in a leadership role. They perceived their decision-making and leadership abilities were challenged more consistently than if they had been male. The participants gave examples of this questioning of ability from both the general public and within their organizations. Second, many women experienced what they had considered a backlash when they exhibited more agentic leadership traits. Lastly, one participant thought her career advancement had been slowed based on the fact that she had been a little too aggressive in her leadership pursuits. Though she was the only participant who alleged this consequence, several others assumed it was prevalent.

RQ 4. What specific strategies have women athletic leaders used to overcome role congruity prejudice and/or perceived barriers associated with role congruity?

Mentorship was emphasized as a specific strategy used by all of the participants. Many believed mentoring was the most important factor in their success. Furthermore, the women cited mentoring as a factor potentially affecting the success of other women entering the profession. There was a general acknowledgment that women needed to be open to both men and women as mentors. The participants also stressed that mentoring was a continual process that needed to occur at every level along the career path. Furthermore, all the participants believed that they were mentors and role models

themselves. Several women mentioned mentoring efforts that they or other women were engaged in. Still, they indicated that there needed to be more structured and continuous mentoring to result in significant change in the leadership composition of interscholastic athletic administration. In addition to mentoring, networking was advised as a means to increase the future representation of women in leadership roles. They stated that women were not engaging in networking as compared to men. The participants cited specific strategies they implemented to increase their presence in social situations. However, they advised against becoming “one of the guys,” as one participant put it. Lastly, they advised that women should not limit themselves. The women leaders recommended women get a broad base of experience. In addition, the participants warned of focusing only on girl’s sport as this could potentially limit their advancement into higher leadership positions. In the proceeding chapter, key findings, conclusions, implications, and suggestions for future research will be discussed.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### Introduction

Despite improved athletic opportunities for girls and women since the passage of Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act of 1972, women's representation in leadership positions remains low. At the interscholastic level, the most recent study on the participation rates revealed that high school athletic participation continues to increase. According to the 2006-07 High School Athletics Participation Survey conducted by the National Federation of High School Sport (NFHS), female participation rate set an all-time high of 3,057,266 girls (Gillis, 2007). Although data regarding the gender makeup of participants is readily available, there is a shortage of information concerning the number of women in athletic administrative positions. Research has estimated that women comprise 7-17 percent of high school athletic directors (Whisenant, 2003; Whisenant, 2008; Whisenant, Vincent, Pedersen, & Zapalac, 2005). Within state associations women make up six percent of the top leadership positions (executive directors) (Massengale, 2008).

Several barriers have been proposed that impede women's progress toward leadership roles. Scholarly research devoted to the sparse representation of women in leadership roles has pointed to three key themes. "Pipeline" theory focuses on the concept that only a low number of qualified women apply for leadership positions. Second, the shortage in the area of sport has been attributed to discrimination in the hiring process including: hegemonic masculinity (Whisenant, Pedersen, & Obenour, 2002); homologous reproduction (Lovett & Lowry, 1994; Stangl & Kane, 1991; Sagas, Cunningham & Teed,

2003); homophobia (Griffin, 1992) and occupational closure (Kanter, 1977; Witz 1991). The third theme involved social limitation theories that conclude with women opting out or exhibiting self limiting behaviors and these include social cognitive theory and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986; Cunningham, Sagas, & Ashley, 2003) symbolic interactionism (Satore & Cunningham, 2007) and work life balance (Inglis, Danylchuk & Pastore 2000; Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Bruening, & Dixon, 2008).

However, no one theory has offered sufficient explanation regarding the gendered nature of leadership which has continually plagued sport as an institution. This study examined incongruence between leadership role and gender role as a possible explanation for the underrepresentation of women in interscholastic sport leadership. The objective of this qualitative study was to provide a greater understanding of the underrepresentation of women in athletic leadership from the perspective of the women serving as leaders in interscholastic sport.

The presentation of the results in chapter four focused on several themes and subthemes that were derived through data analysis. This chapter will discuss these themes and subthemes to draw conclusions, answer the research questions and provide implications for future research. The chapter has been organized around the following sections: overview of the study, discussion of findings, implications of the findings for policy and practice, and conclusion.

#### Overview of the Study

Women remain underrepresented in leadership roles in all occupational areas. This underrepresentation of women has also been evident in the area of sport. Sport has traditionally been a male domain, thus leadership roles within sport are primarily

masculine in nature. There have been many theories suggested and barriers identified to explain this underrepresentation. However, a discrepancy between the leadership role and gender role as a source of prejudice had not been examined in any sport setting. The purpose of this study was to investigate the underrepresentation of women in interscholastic sport leadership positions by analyzing perceptions of state association administrators and athletic directors of the function, if any, that role congruity theory plays in the underrepresentation women.

To work toward this purpose, the researcher interviewed nine women who were serving in interscholastic athletic leadership roles. The interviews were conducted with the following research questions in mind:

1. How do women sport leaders perceive the current situation of women's underrepresentation in their field?
2. What function, if any, does role incongruity play in the underrepresentation of women leaders in interscholastic sport?
3. What evidence exists regarding the two types of prejudice inherent to role congruity theory? :
  - (a) Perceiving women as possessing less leadership ability than men
  - (b) Evaluating behavior that fulfills the prescriptions of a leader role more negatively when it is enacted by a woman compared with a man.
4. What specific strategies have women athletic leaders used to overcome role incongruity and/or perceived barriers associated with role incongruity?

A six step process was used when analyzing the data by “preparing and organizing the data for analysis, exploring and coding the data, describing and developing

themes from the data, representing and reporting the findings, interpreting the findings, and validating the accuracy and credibility of the findings”(Creswell, 2002, p. 257). The interviews were transcribed and checked with each participant for accuracy. According to Schaffir & Stebbins (1991) to ensure validity of interviews or observations, qualitative researchers should use the technique of “member validation,” in which the respondent is given a copy of the observations or interview to provide feedback. Next the data was organized by interview questions. From there the data was coded and a code tree was created for organizational purposes. Based on the codes, themes developed. The themes were then applied to the research questions, and overall purpose of the study.

#### Discussion of the Findings

Using role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) as a basis for examining perceptions regarding the underrepresentation of women, the findings in chapter four were grouped into the following five themes: 1) formative career experiences; 2) perceived barriers for advancement; 3) perceptions of role congruity; 4) experiences associated with role congruity; and 5) strategies to overcome prejudice associated with role congruity. These themes were then organized according to the research questions and then intentionally ordered based on the overall purpose of the study. The discussion follows the same organizational flow.

#### Perceptions of Role Congruity on the Underrepresentation of Women Leaders in Interscholastic Sport

Eagly and Karau (2002) revealed prejudice toward female leaders stems from the believed incongruity between the stereotypical communal attributes that have characterized women through time (e.g. nurturing, affectionate, sympathetic,) and the

agentic characteristics of successful leaders that are attributed more often to males (e.g., aggressive, ambitious, independent, self-confident). Furthermore, if women do exhibit stereotypically masculine or male-dominated behaviors such as those perceived as necessary in management and leadership positions, they are evaluated less favorably than men because they are not adhering to their stereotypical gender roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Role congruity theory was used as the theoretical framework for this study.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the underrepresentation of women in interscholastic sport leadership positions by analyzing perceptions of state association administrators and athletic directors of the function, if any, that role congruity theory plays in the underrepresentation of women. Eight of the nine participants interviewed believed role congruity plays a part in the underrepresentation of women in interscholastic athletic administration. Depending on the participants' lived athletic leadership experience, their responses varied regarding the impact role congruity had on women's representation. The women expressed the opinion that incongruence between leadership role and gender role was a possible explanation for the underrepresentation of women leaders in sport. In general, the participants perceived that prejudices proposed by role congruity theory were perceived to be one of many factors that could be contributing to the ongoing dilemma of low female leadership representation.

The findings in this study support the research on role congruity theory done outside the field of athletics. For example, in a survey of physicians, 14.6% of males were classified as leaders, as compared to only 5.1% of females (Kvaerner, Aasland & Botten, 1999). The largest percentages of females (32%) were employed in what have been considered female dominated occupations, such as gynecology or general medicine.



The lowest percentages were with the fields of neurology and surgery (2%), which are typically male dominated. Similarly, Fields, Davison & Burke (2000) found there was a clear tendency to prefer men over women for jobs rated as male sex-typed. Similarly, Garcia-Retamero & Lopez-Zafra (2006) found prejudice against female candidates when evaluating a male or a female candidate for a leadership position in an industry that was congruent or incongruent with the candidate's gender role. The findings of this study suggest despite the many advances that have taken place for women, there are still many limitations, based on role congruity theory, that exist in interscholastic sport leadership.

#### Evidence of Prejudice Inherent to Role Congruity

The theory of prejudice explored in this study proposes women do not reach top leadership positions due to two types of prejudice; perceiving women as possessing less leadership ability than men and evaluating behavior that fulfills the prescriptions of a leader role more negatively when it is enacted by a woman compared with a man. According to Eagly & Karau (2002) research has shown these prejudices exist, especially in more male dominated fields. Further, Lyness and Heilman (2006) demonstrated a perceived lack of fit between job characteristics and social role appears to be driven by a stricter standard for women.

As predicted by role congruity theory, all but one of the study participants had experienced prejudice each believed was based on the fact that she was a woman in a leadership role. The participants gave examples of this, describing questions regarding status and/or competency from both the general public and within the organization. Consistent with the research literature, the women perceived their decision-making and

leadership ability were challenged more consistently than if they had been male (Eagly and Karau, 2002).

Along with questioning of leadership ability, the findings in this study indicated the participants experienced what they had considered a backlash if they exhibited a more agentic style of leadership. Role congruity theory proposes that there is a perceived lack of fit between the agentic characteristics required of traditionally male leadership roles and women's (supposed) communal characteristics. This form of bias, labeled the "backlash effect" (Rudman, 1998), purports that women who exhibit agentic traits are evaluated negatively when they violate the cultural expectation that they be communal. Furthermore, the findings in this study added to previous research by Rudman and Glick (2001) who showed that implicit attitudes linking women and communal traits underlie this type of discrimination.

The research literature on role perceptions indicates that separate but equal is still a challenge for society when referring to feminine and masculine roles (Suggs, 2003). Women are viewed as incapable of handling the responsibility of power and leadership with their sensitivity traits of compassion, understanding, and warmth (Turkel, 2004). Men are considered to have the attributes of force, strength, and power to get the job done. When a woman acts decisively in a leadership role, her femininity is questioned, and she is labeled a "bitch" (Turkel, 2004). The findings in this study supplement previous research. Rhonda expressed this perception "To a certain extent if you take on a lot of male traits you get a different title and I don't want to say that the word but..."

One participant perceived her career advancement had been slowed based on the fact that she exhibited behavior perceived to be more agentic in nature. As a consequence

she felt she was subjected to prejudice as proposed in role congruity theory. Although she was the only participant who alleged this consequence, several others believed it to be affecting other women in sport organizations. According to Eagly and Karau's (2002) role congruity theory, prejudice against female leaders varies with the amount of incongruity between the leadership role and the feminine gender role.

These findings suggest that women in leadership positions have been experiencing prejudice in both forms Eagly and Karau (2002) identified, including perceiving women as possessing less leadership ability than men and evaluating behavior that fulfills the prescriptions of a leader role more negatively when it is enacted by a woman compared with a man. This finding is consistent with research on prejudice in professions outside of sport that are perceived as requiring more agentic forms of leadership. Eagly Makhijani and Kanski (1992) found in their meta-analysis of 61 studies in which leadership behavior was described and ascribed to a man or a woman, there was a general tendency to rate behavior less highly when performed by a woman. Importantly the tendency to devalue women's leadership behavior was much greater when the behavior was stereotypically masculine (e.g. directive or autocratic). Also, the devaluation of women was greater when leaders occupied male-dominated roles and when the evaluators were men.

This section provided support for role congruity theory as having an impact on the current state of underrepresentation of women in leadership positions through documentation of experiences of the study participants. In the next section the perceptions of the study participants regarding this underrepresentation including

perceived barriers women face as well as the impact these barriers potentially cause will be discussed.

### Perceptions of Women's Underrepresentation in Interscholastic Leadership Positions

The research literature on the representation of women as leaders in interscholastic sport shows inequality in the number of women reaching leadership positions. Although no specific data to account for the number of women athletic directors across the country exists, estimations range from 7-17 percent (Whisenant, 2003; Whisenant, 2008; Whisenant, Vincent, Pedersen, & Zapalac, 2005). Consistent with these estimations all nine of the women interviewed perceived representation of women in interscholastic leadership positions as a problem, voicing the opinion that the problem exists not only at the leadership level but at the levels leading to it (coach, athletic director, school administrator). Inequality was found to be a systemic leadership issue for women, through the findings in this research study on the interscholastic level. This is consistent with previous studies which investigated the representation on the collegiate level (Acosta & Carpenter, 2006; Schell & Rodriguez, 2000; Whisenant, 2003).

Adding to previous research (e.g., Whisenant et al., 2002; Pedersen & Whisenant, 2005) suggesting sport remains a male domain, and hegemonic in nature, the women interviewed for this study voiced the perception that sport is still considered a male domain. Numerous scholars have contended sport serves as a hegemonic institution to preserve the power of men over women (Pedersen & Whisenant, 2005; Hardin et al., 2005; Hargreaves, 1994). Sage (1998) asserted sport is one of the most prominent and

hegemonic social institutions and cultural practices in society today. Consistent with previous research, the participants in this study stressed the belief that female representation in athletic administration was improving but still shows signs of hegemonic masculinity. According to Whisenant et al., (2002) men have historically controlled sport, they have kept their hold on leadership positions, and they do not intend to change that situation.

Beyond sport leadership being hegemonic in nature, the women discussed several barriers that they perceived attribute to the low representation, the most common of which was work-life conflict. All the participants mentioned this as a barrier in some form. These accounts support the work by Bruening, Dixon, Tiell, Osborne, Lough & Sweeney (2008) in their study of NCAA athletic directors and senior woman administrators regarding work-life conflict. The researchers concluded that contributing to a demanding work environment is the perceived role expectation of intercollegiate athletics employees. Personal sacrifices in time and energy for the sake of the program were equated with contributing to high levels of work-life conflict. In addition, the findings in this study showed parental roles conflicting with job roles were perceived as impeding women seeking top levels of administration. As a result, women “drop out” along the sport career path because of this conflict. The findings from this study also add to the literature on working mothers in sport. Dixon and Bruening (2007) found that time demands increase strain for coaching mothers. However, the researchers found that when coaches were recognized as human beings first and given some autonomy on the running of their work lives, they in turn were more satisfied with their job as well as performed better. The accounts of this study and previous research on work life conflict raise

concerns regarding the future progression in sport leadership positions by women. Family supportive policies, programs, and institutional climate have been examined at the intercollegiate level. Dixon, Tiell, Lough, Sweeney, Osborne, Bruening (2008) established work-life issues most strongly impact the retention of females. Second, the authors found that benefits are widely available in intercollegiate athletic departments, but are often not being utilized. In addition Dixon, et al. (2008) purported more supportive climates would aid work-life balance and retention. The findings in this study regarding work life balance being perceived as a barrier to attainment of leadership positions in sport by women, also supports the findings from the CAGE Report (2005). CAGE (2005) examined the challenge of work-life balance, finding a lack of institutional support for women balancing career and family, and further concluding that work-life balance issues create preemptive decisions about whom to hire for a job, such that mothers, particularly if they had young children, were less likely to be hired. Similarly, Hart, Hasbrook, and Mathes (1986) found that women stopped coaching due to perceived time and role conflicts with their individual lives.

In addition to work-life conflict, social issues were perceived by the participants as a barrier for young women coming into the field. The participants held that young women professionals needed to have higher levels of self-efficacy and confidence. This perception is consistent with the work of Whisenant, Miller, & Pedersen (2005), who concluded that young women may self-select out of careers in sport, more as a result of gender-related obstacles or diminished self-efficacy than a lack of skills and abilities. Likewise, Cunningham et al. (2003) showed self efficacy affected the intentions of women to become a head coach and remain in the coaching profession. The participants

in this study perceived that other women would not take the risk of pursuing leadership roles in sport. This finding supports the theory of symbolic interactionism as a factor in the underrepresentation of women in interscholastic leadership positions. Satore & Cunningham (2007) applied a symbolic interactionist perspective to the underrepresentation of women, proposing that gender roles and stereotypes connected to sport ideologies inhibit women in sport organizations. They argued that women might not perceive themselves as capable leaders because of the low levels of power and status of women prevalent in society. This results in self-imposed limits on their leadership behaviors. Findings from the present study showed that the effects of symbolic interactionism were perceived to effect women's decision making on seeking out positions. As Nancy simply put it, "they are afraid of ... I'll call it rejection".

In addition, the women also perceived potential female leaders as afraid to take the risk of trying in fear that they could not succeed in the male-dominated territory of athletics. The overwhelming majority of men in leadership positions may lead aspiring female leaders to conclude that the abilities and contributions of men are more valued than those of women and therefore their chances of reaching high levels of leadership are slim. Nonetheless, research has shown that there is ample opportunity for both men and women interested in the professions of athletic director and state level administrator (Whisenant, 2003).

There is some evidence that supports the perception that women are less likely to succeed in athletic leadership positions. Whisenant, Pedersen, & Obenour (2002) rated the success ratio of intercollegiate athletic directors, with a primary focus on gender. The success ratio of male athletic directors significantly differed from that of female athletic

directors. The success ratio for men was higher than the ratio for women. However, when Pedersen & Whisenant (2005) assessed the success rate of the Athletic directors at the interscholastic level, the results revealed that females who had penetrated the glass-ceiling of athletic management were as successful as their male counterparts, when success was measured by their rate of advancement. Their findings indicated that when given the opportunity to serve in administrative positions, females find success in interscholastic athletics governance.

The women leaders in this study described different barriers they believe women are facing both as women and as leaders in interscholastic sport including work-life conflict, self efficacy, and effects of symbolic interactionism. According to the participants these barriers impact the number of women reaching higher leadership positions. In the following section, strategies they have used and advice for other women to counteract the barriers will be discussed.

#### Strategies to Overcome Role Congruity Prejudice

Mentorship was emphasized as a specific strategy used by all of the participants in the current study. Positive mentoring was identified as the most important factor relative to their successful attainment of a leadership position. Each participant named one or more individuals who had been mentors as they pursued careers in athletic leadership. These findings support past research on mentorship. The importance of mentorship in advancing women to leadership was noted by Lough (2001) who found women who network and form mentor groups create a forum for the exchange of knowledge and experiences as females in athletic leadership roles. Additionally, female role models in athletic leadership lend a necessary voice to women in sport, show women



in decision-making positions, and demonstrate that women have the qualifications to be athletic leaders. Moreover, the women studied cited mentoring as a factor potentially affecting the success of other women entering the profession. They explained that when women observed successful role models in leadership positions they were more likely to believe they could also be successful. As one participant (Bonnie) put it “Hopefully other women see me and think I can do that too”. This finding supports research on coaching mentors conducted by Fazioli (2004), who calls the lack of women role models a deterrent for the younger generation to enter coaching. Fazioli (2004) argued with few female examples available to demonstrate for female athletes what is possible in regards to coaching; it is more likely that there will be fewer of these athletes making the transition into the coaching profession. Consequently, due to the current low representation of women in interscholastic leadership positions, there was a general acknowledgment that women needed to be open to both men and women as mentors.

In addition to having used mentorship as a strategy to overcome barriers, the participants believed that they were mentors and role models themselves. The participants collectively perceived the opportunity to give back as integral to expanding opportunities for women in leadership positions. Fortunately, the study participants, though small in number, represent diversity in the pool of role models for future women athletic administrators. This was an advantage the participants themselves did not have. Several women mentioned mentoring efforts that they or other women were engaged in to expose women to opportunities in sport. Mentoring had a significant impact on the women studied, and as a result, they have become mentors. Thus it was not surprising they mentioned mentoring as a strategy to promote change. Still, the participants indicated that

there needed to be more structured and continuous mentoring to result in significant change in the leadership composition of interscholastic athletic administration.

In addition to mentoring, networking was advised as a means to increase the future representation of women in leadership roles. Like mentoring, the women had strong beliefs about the importance of developing relationships in interscholastic leadership. Networking, the women explained, was essential for movement up the career ladder. The significance of networking for advancement in athletic organizations has been addressed in the literature (Whisenant 2003; Whisenant & Pedersen, 2004; Whisenant et al. 2002). Each of these studies described networking as critical in order to advance to top administrative positions.

Findings from this study indicated that participants perceived young women were not engaging in networking as compared to men. This finding adds to previous research by Whisenant and Pederson (2004) in which the managerial activities of athletic directors were examined. They found that men engaged in networking more often than their women counterparts. Similarly, Whisenant et al. (2002) found men were better at networking and are more likely to engage in external networking.

Whisenant et al. (2002) also found that networking was the managerial activity most likely to lead to an athletic director position. The leaders in this study discussed how they have employed certain strategies for networking as women that were gender based. These strategies included increasing social activities that were perceived as “safe” (ie. golf), and replacing a social scene that involved drinking with a breakfast or lunch meeting. The participants acknowledged that networking was more difficult based on gender, and that male networking is done in venues where often women feel

uncomfortable. Additionally, some situations were perceived as potentially effecting them in a negative way, even compromising their professional status.

In general the participants strongly advised against becoming “one of the guys,” as one participant put it. The participants indicated there was a “fine line” in social situations that as women, they had to adhere to, that men did not. In addition the women perceived that men did not consider their plight when planning or attending social situations where networking often occurs. This key finding suggests that women have been forced to discover new and different ways to network, based on trial and error. This immediately puts women at a disadvantage based on gender.

Lastly, the study participants advised that women should not limit themselves. The women leaders recommended women get a broad base of experience. Beyond gaining experience, the women interviewed felt strongly that professional development, participation in associations, and certifications were instrumental in increasing opportunities for women. In addition, the participants warned of focusing only on girls sport as this could potentially limit their advancement into higher leadership positions. Nancy voiced this opinion, “If you want to be in a leadership position as a female, it can't be your sole focus; you can't focus only on girls toward their opportunities.” The participants revealed they worry about being perceived as only the designated “Title IX person”. The “Title IX person” tag is a formidable barrier given the prior advice of needing a broad base of experience. In addition, it can potentially hurt mobility into leadership positions, because these positions require a breadth and depth of skills.

Along with being labeled “Title IX person” the participants revealed they did not necessarily claim to be or want to be viewed as a feminist. Nancy proclaimed “I am not a

feminist”. More subtly, another participant (Barbara) stated “I don’t want to be known as a *woman* athletic administrator. I want to be known as a great athletic director who just happens to be a woman.” This creates a potential paradox for women aspiring to leadership positions in interscholastic athletics. Girl’s sport needs advocates in leadership positions but those who have reached high levels of leadership warn against gender advocacy. This creates a dilemma for young women who wish to be both leaders and advocates of girls sport.

## Implications

### *Implications for Research*

Little research exists on the experiences of women in leadership positions in interscholastic sport. This study has lead to several compelling questions for future research. First, a future quantitative study should specifically and accurately account for representation of women in interscholastic sport. At the intercollegiate level, Acosta and Carpenter (2009) have created a longitudinal study. With their documentation, other researchers have been provided an accurate depiction of the current representation of women in college sport, as well as trends and progress made. A similar study is needed at the interscholastic level to help remedy the problem of a lack of information and to acknowledge inequity in current state of ISA.

Second, future research should examine qualifications and experiences that are required for top leadership positions in state ISA associations. The participants in this study had a commonality in experiences. The majority had both an undergraduate and graduate degree in physical education. All but one participant had taught Physical Education and coached more than one sport. Previous studies (Grappendorf, Lough, &

Griffin, 2004; Smith, 2005) have analyzed the career paths and backgrounds of intercollegiate athletic administrators. However, a limited amount of research has been done on women in interscholastic sport. Further, there is evidence that intercollegiate athletic administration has been moving toward a more business oriented model (Sperber, 2001; Duderstadt, 2003). A future study should examine if this trend has also been happening in interscholastic sport.

Third, a future study should examine how athletic directors and executive directors at state associations form and maintain their networks. This type of study would expose the disparate impact that findings in this study indicated. In addition such a study could conceivably examine privilege in higher levels of athletic leadership and help us in understanding how this privilege is maintained.

Fourth, the participants advised against future leaders limiting themselves by focusing on girls sport. This limitation sets up a paradox for future women leaders who view themselves as girls' sport advocates. A future study should investigate how being tagged the "Title IX person" could potentially limit representation of a woman who aspires to a leadership position.

Fifth, along with the advice to not be solely involved with girls sport, there was a general undertone that the participants did not wish to be perceived as feminists. Although not a research question in this study, two participants specifically declared themselves as "not a feminist". This leads to future research on consequences of perceived feminism and gender equity advocacy for women in sport organizations.

Sixth, although the participants viewed themselves as competent, they perceived other women as having low self efficacy and fearful of taking risks. Future research

should examine application pools for the position of both athletic director and state association director to evaluate if women are indeed applying for these positions. In addition, potential female leaders in the field of interscholastic sport should be qualitatively studied to examine their intentions for pursuing a leadership position. This type of study should examine if and why women are truly self-selecting themselves out of positions. Lastly, future research should focus on the process for identifying qualified women leaders and explore in greater detail the selection process used when athletic director and state association hiring decisions are being made.

### *Implications for Policy*

This qualitative study has pointed to three considerations for policy-makers. First, the participants unanimously named work-life conflict as a barrier for women who seek advancement to leadership positions. More specifically, professional position time commitments and parental roles were perceived as barriers. Policies making the position more conducive to women with families are paramount to increasing representation in athletic leadership positions. According to Dixon, Tiell, Lough, Sweeney, Osborne, Bruening (2008) work-life issues most strongly impact the retention of females. These studies, as well as others have pointed to a needed change for family supportive policies in interscholastic sport.

Second, policies to gather information on the representation of women in ISA leadership are essential. When attempting to research this important area Pedersen and Whisenant (2005) found no state or national governmental agency that collects or stores specific demographic data related to the administrators of interscholastic athletics. Moreover, they found the state coaching and athletic directors associations guarded the

limited demographic data that did exist. Without accurate numbers, acknowledgement of the problem has been lacking. Previously, legislation was introduced that in practical application would extend to K-12 institutions the requirements of the *Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act* (EADA), which is mandatory in college athletics. The High School Accountability Act of 2007 (HSAA) and The High School Sports Information Collection Act of 2007 (HSSICA) were introduced to the US Congress and Senate respectively. Although needed, legislation such as this has not continued through the legislative process to become law. Accountability measures both at the federal and individual school level, are needed mechanisms to increase opportunities for women who aspire to leadership positions in interscholastic sport.

Third, current hiring policies, including job descriptions, need to be analyzed and revised. Examination is needed to determine if the job descriptions and policies for interscholastic athletic directors used by school districts contain a form of gender bias that might deny women the opportunity to compete for those positions. Such practices provide for a disparate-impact and discrimination against women. Whisenant (2005) found that nearly 75% of the announced AD vacancies in the state of Texas during the 2002–2003 academic school year required the applicant to also serve as the head football coach. Given that no woman has served as a head football coach within the state, the coaching requirement effectively discriminated against all women. Because of these findings, as well as the findings from this study, further examination of policy around the country is needed to explore other systemic barriers that may exist.

### *Implications for Practice*

Women in coaching and lower level athletic administration positions are often excluded from needed mentoring and networking opportunities. Due to their low representation, women's networks in interscholastic sport are often limited or nonexistent. Low representation also limits the opportunities to be mentored by a successful woman leader. The findings from this study suggest lack of networking and mentoring is impeding the progress of women into leadership positions. In order to eradicate this problem, two practical suggestions are recommended.

First, an interscholastic women's athletic administrators association is needed. Findings from this study as well as others (Whisenant 2003; Whisenant & Pedersen, 2004; Whisenant et al. 2002) suggest mentoring and networking are powerful tools in advancement of women into leadership positions. The participants studied advised women who aspire to become leaders in interscholastic sport to create a network and find a mentor. Although all of the participants described measures they were taking as individuals, an association would allow for more formal networking and leadership to occur. Another positive outcome of an association would be accessible female role models. Further, current female athletic leaders can influence potential female leaders regarding career choice. The participants studied voiced the perception that females were afraid of pursuing leadership positions based on interscholastic sport being hegemonic in nature. An association would draw attention to women who are already in decision-making positions, and realistically show that women can be athletic leaders. In turn young women would gain confidence about their own abilities as future leaders in interscholastic sport.



A women's association has been effective at the intercollegiate level. The National Association of Collegiate Women Athletic Administrators (NACWAA) provides educational programs, professional and personal development opportunities, information exchange, and support services to female athletics administrators. A corresponding association is needed at the interscholastic level to promote equity in leadership positions.

Second, current leadership needs to be more proactive in promoting change. Current leaders in interscholastic sport, males and females alike, must take initiative to serve as mentors and allow for networking opportunities. Current leaders need to appoint a mentor for women who are new hires or newly promoted; one who will give good advice both professionally and personally that might relate to the position. Professional development is also essential for career development. Offerings geared specifically toward women should be implemented by both the NFHS and NIAAA. Through these trainings young women will be able to build and expand their professional networks. In addition, principals and state school boards must look outside their own networks when hiring athletic directors and state association executives. Finally, men who in most cases hold the decision making power, must be held accountable so their schools and states maintain a selection process that embraces equity for all who choose a career in interscholastic sport.

### Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to investigate the underrepresentation of women in interscholastic sport leadership positions by analyzing perceptions of state association administrators and athletic directors of the function, if any, that role congruity theory

plays in the underrepresentation women. Eight of the nine participants interviewed believed role congruity plays a part in the underrepresentation of women in interscholastic athletic administration. Based on the lived experiences of the participant the degree of impact varied. The results imply despite the many advances that have taken place for women, there are still many limitations, based on role congruity theory, that exist in interscholastic sport leadership. For the second research question, eight of the nine participants recounted specific experiences where they have been subjected to prejudice based on predicted consequences of role congruity theory, in their professional environments. These prejudices took the form of questioning their leadership ability, backlash, and slowing professional advancement. Their unique experiences give further support to role congruity theory and the prejudices female leaders are facing due to incongruence between leadership and gender role.

All nine of the women interviewed perceived representation of women in interscholastic athletics as a problem that exists at the leadership position and as well as other positions in interscholastic sport. The participants described barriers including work-life conflict, self efficacy, and effects of symbolic interactionism that they perceived as factors in the current state of underrepresentation. More specifically, the women viewed themselves as capable; however they viewed other women as having low self efficacy when pursuing leadership positions. The women perceived this low self efficacy to be based on the hegemonic nature of athletic administration. The participants also perceived lack of role models and networking to consequently effect the representation of women. In general, the participants believed a combination of barriers has resulted in lower numbers of women reaching leadership positions.

Mentoring and networking were the two consistent strategies the participants advised for women to overcome barriers. However, due to women's current low representation, opportunity to take advantage of mentorship and networking is lacking. In addition, the participants explained that there were circumstances based on gender beyond representation that limited opportunity for networking. The participants believed networking was more difficult because they were female, and that male networking is often done in venues where they may feel uncomfortable. Further, participation in these networking opportunities may have negative professional consequences. As a result, women have been forced to create different ways of networking. The study participants also advised women to get a broad base of experience. They specifically warned against focusing solely on girls sport and being known as exclusively the "Title IX person". This leads to a paradox for young women who wish to be both a girls' sport advocate and reach top levels of leadership.

Through an understanding of the issues facing women leaders, comes the realization that to reverse the trend means to create strategic action plans. Current leaders, scholars, and policy makers must encourage, create and implement policies and practices that promote equity in interscholastic leadership positions. It is recommended that research continue on women in interscholastic leadership positions to understand what is influencing women's decision making on pursuing leadership positions, and barriers that are impeding them. The future promise of this line of research is to identify ways to close the gap of representation between participating in interscholastic athletics and being designated a leader. To the extent that interscholastic organizations are willing to shift away from a traditional view of leadership and women, women should experience

reduced prejudice and gain increased representation and acceptance in leadership roles in the future.

## APPENDIX A

### INTRODUCTORY E-MAIL

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

My name is Dana Massengale; I am currently a doctoral candidate in the Sports Education Leadership Department at UNLV. My dissertation is on the underrepresentation of women in interscholastic athletic leadership. Specifically, it is a qualitative study on the effects of role incongruity. As a woman in a leadership position in interscholastic athletics, I am respectfully asking you to participate in this study.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the underrepresentation of women in interscholastic sport leadership positions by analyzing perceptions of the impact, if any, that role congruity theory plays in the underrepresentation women. Previous research has examined potential causes for this underrepresentation but no study has examined this phenomenon from the perspective of prejudice towards women in leadership roles. There also exists a gap in research at the interscholastic level, as most research has examined intercollegiate athletics.

I am requesting your participation in this study because you fall within specific criteria that would enable you to speak at great depth about the challenges and perceptions of being:

Female, and either, An Interscholastic Athletic Director (for a minimum of five years),

and/or

An Executive director or an associate executive director at a state association, also a position held for a minimum of five years,

If you agree to participate in this study you will be interviewed either face to face or over the phone. The interview questions were derived from the study's research questions and a literature review on the topic of women in athletic leadership positions. Questions included are on: career path; perspectives on reasons for underrepresentation of women in athletic leadership; perspectives on how role incongruity may have contributed to underrepresentation; prejudicial experiences you may have encountered; strategies you may have employed to overcome prejudices; and advice you would give other women who aspire to obtain leadership positions. Participation in this interview is purely voluntary; you may refuse to participate in this study or any part of this study. In addition you may withdraw at anytime without prejudice to your relations with me or the university. Upon completion of the interview you will receive a written transcript for your approval.

All information gathered in this study will be kept confidential and your identity will be protected. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could possibly link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility for three years which upon completion of the study, all electronic files will be deleted and hard copies shredded. If you have any questions regarding the interview, study, or its future publication please contact my advisor and principal investigator Dr. Nancy Lough at 702-895-5392 or myself at 702-895-3395. If you wish to participate please respond to this e-mail and I will arrange an interview time at your convenience.

I do thank you in advance for your consideration and hope to include your unique perspective in the subsequent research. Your experience and perspective is invaluable toward our understanding of this ongoing challenge.

Respectfully,

Dana Massengale, M.S.

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please tell me about your career path to obtaining your current leadership position, including experiences, education, and professional positions.

2. (a) Currently there are only 3 female executive directors at state associations why do you believe this is the case?

(b) Currently it is estimated that only 10-15% of high school athletic directors are women why do you believe this is the case?

*Explain role congruity theory*

3. How do you perceive that role congruity or incongruity may have contributed to the underrepresentation of women as leaders in athletic administration?

*Explain the two resulting forms of prejudice.*

4. Tell me about a time that you experienced either of these forms of prejudice as a result of being a woman in a leadership position.

(Follow up if needed) Do you know of someone who has experienced either of these forms of prejudice during their career in interscholastic athletics?

5. What strategies have you employed to overcome either of these two forms of prejudice in your leadership position?

6. Describe a leadership challenge you experienced in your current position and how you handled it.

(Follow up if needed) In your current leadership position, what has been your biggest contribution?

(Follow up if needed) What do you perceive as a weakness of your leadership ?

7. What advice would you give other women who aspire to obtain leadership positions in interscholastic athletics?



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