

## **ABSTRACT**

WICKER, INGRID. African American Women Athletic Administrators: Pathway to Leadership Positions in the NCAA A Qualitative Analysis. (Under the direction of Dr. Carol Kasworm.)

The success of African American women as athletic administrators in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is a story of irony and persistent determinism. The irony is that while statistics show African American women as well represented in the NCAA as student-athletes, a disproportionate absence of African American women in the hierarchies of athletic administration and decision-making persists. The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of ten African American women who have succeeded as leaders in athletic administration in the NCAA using basic qualitative analysis. The research questions which guided this study were:

1. What formative experiences influence the career development of African American women athletic administrators in the NCAA?
2. How do African American women athletic administrators obtain entry and advance professionally in the NCAA?
3. What coping mechanisms do African American women athletic administrators employ that counteract perceived barriers to their NCAA careers?

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) provided the conceptual framework for exploring both internal and external contextual factors such as self-efficacy, personal goals, and outcome expectations on career development for the women in this qualitative investigation.

Data was collected using open-ended, semi-structured questions during tape-recorded interviews of ten African American women athletic administrators in the NCAA. The lived experiences of African American women participating in the present study reflected a myriad of skills and abilities. The findings revealed that these women acquired life lessons through both

formal and informal education which ultimately impacted their career paths. All of these women excelled as student-athletes and entered the profession as coaches and teachers. These opportunities served as entry points to athletic administration.

Three major conclusions were derived from the findings. First, formative experiences such as family's educational expectations influenced their career development. Second, their career pathways to athletic administration were enhanced through mentoring and formal professional development training. Third, the good old boy network and race and gender discrimination were identified as perceived barriers to career development.

African American Women Athletics Administrators: Pathway to Leadership  
Positions in the NCAA A Qualitative Analysis

by  
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## **DEDICATION**

This research and the process for obtaining my doctoral degree is dedicated to first and foremost to God for all of His grace and blessings He has bestowed upon me. Second, I dedicate this research to the most influential and magnificent role models in my life, my father, Floyd Sr., my mother, Evelyn, and my brother Floyd, Jr. Their support, guidance, and wisdom enabled me to accomplish personal and professional success. Last, this research is dedicated to my loving husband, Geno, and my three children, Alexia, Quinton, Sydney, and my family.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Ingrid Wicker, after a successful coaching career of the women's volleyball program at North Carolina Central University, began her journey through the ranks of athletic administration in 1998. Her training and experiences as a compliance officer, academic advisor, instructor, oversight of the athletic budget, and Senior Woman Administrator, has prepared her for a new role. She was named Director of Athletics at NCCU in April 2008.

Wicker began her collegiate athletic career during her undergraduate years at The George Washington University as a member of the women's volleyball team. Also during her tenure at The George Washington University, she was a member of the facility management team of the Smith Center. This early experience introduced her to athletic administration. After graduation, she entered North Carolina State University as a graduate assistant volleyball coach, where she earned a Master's in Recreation Resource Administration. During her graduate studies, Wicker also played professionally in Puerto Rico for the San Juan Las Chicas women's volleyball team. In 1992, she was named Head Women's Volleyball Coach/Academic Counselor at North Carolina A&T State University. Her experiences in building a women's volleyball program and oversight for student-athletes' academic progress led her to opportunities in her hometown at North Carolina Central University.

In addition to her volleyball coaching duties at North Carolina Central University, Wicker served as an adjunct instructor in the Physical Education Recreation Department for 14 years, women's head softball coach, and Compliance Director.

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I am indebted to Dr. Leroy T. Walker, Judy Martino, and Mrs. Sandra Shuler. Dr. Walker recommended that I pursue a graduate degree in recreation and sports management due to the dearth of African American women in athletic administration. Ms. Judy Martino provided me the opportunity to pursue a career in coaching and Mrs. Sandra Shuler opened the door for my career into athletic administration. I also would like to thank Coach William “Bill” Hayes for trusting and pushing me to greater heights as an athletic administrator and allowing me the time from work to complete my studies. These individuals opened the door for my professional career in athletic administration.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In the last thirty years, equality of opportunities for women in education and athletics has been significantly influenced by Title IX legislation. This landmark legislation has had significant impact on the number of women earning college, graduate and professional degrees. In 1971, women only earned 18 percent of all college degrees. However by 1994, women earned 27 percent of all bachelor degrees and recent data concluded that women earned over 57 percent of all degrees in 2004-2005 (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Notwithstanding the impact of Title IX on the advances for women in the academic arena, Title IX has also greatly enhanced opportunities for women to participate as collegiate student-athletes and provided more career options for women to pursue careers as coaches and administrators.

While statistics show women are well-represented as student-athletes in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), disproportionate absences of women within the hierarchies of NCAA athletic management and decision-making continue to persist. Specifically, African American women's participation in the NCAA also continues to increase, yet career opportunities for African American women athletic administrators in the NCAA have expanded at much slower rates.

### *History of Women in Athletics*

One significant impact of Title IX legislation on women's athletics has been the increase in participation opportunities in college athletics. In 1971-1972, only 15 percent of college teams were comprised of female student-athletes. Recent data revealed a noticeable increase to over 42 percent in 2000-2001 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2002; Butler & Lopiano,

2003). Athletic scholarships for women were virtually non-existent prior to Title IX, but by 2003, there was more than one million dollars in scholarships for women at NCAA Division I schools. Additionally, funding has increased through various diversity programs sponsored by the NCAA to increase the number of women pursuing graduate degrees in hopes of increasing the pool of available applicants to become future coaches and administrators in the NCAA.

Although there has been significant growth of women students in higher education and specifically in college athletics, there has not been a similar growth of opportunities and subsequent participation in leadership and administrative roles in college athletics. In fact, prior to Title IX, women held over 90% of women's athletic programs administrative positions in 1972. However, in 2005-2006, women now only hold only 40 percent of coaching positions and 43.3 percent of administrative positions in the NCAA. Due to legal issues regarding power and ultimate control of women's athletics by the NCAA, Title IX's influence on women's participation in athletic careers resulted in plummeting numbers of women available to advance as athletic administrators (Carpenter, 2004).

The number of women serving as the Director of Athletics (AD), the top athletic administrative position on any member campus, is even more problematic with women representing only 19.5 percent in 2005-2006 (NCAA, 2006). The majority of these women serve as AD at the lower division of the organization, not at the top powerhouse institutions where mega-million dollar budgets are managed. Specifically, in 2005-2006 women only represented 7.9 percent of athletic directors in Division I, 16.7 percent in Division II, and 27

percent in Division III. (Acosta & Carpenter, 1985, 1988, 2004; Butler & Lopiano, 2003; NCAA, 2006).

### *Career Pathways to Athletic Administration*

Beyond these problematic percentage of women in athletic administration, the career development of women into positions of athletic administration has somewhat limited research understandings. Women's entry into athletic administration is an increasing topic for discussion and academic inquiry. Past research has identified teaching and coaching as key entry points for career in athletic administration (Abney, 1988; Grappendorf et al, 2004; Lough, 2004; Teel, 2005). Tiell (2004) studied the career paths, roles, and tasks of Senior Woman Administrators (SWA). This position is the highest-ranking position held by a woman in every member institution in the NCAA. She found that over 58 percent of the SWAs had prior head coaching experience before advancing to administration. Teel (2005) interviewed 48 current female athletic directors at NCAA Division I and II institutions and found similar results and additionally concluded that the majority of the respondents were once high school and collegiate student-athletes. These studies suggested that the experiences gained specifically, from coaching and teaching on the college level were integral to the ascension to leadership positions within college athletics. Thus, throughout the years, the transition of women from coaching to administration was advanced by the leadership of the NCAA. Legislation such as Title IX, mandated a more equitable society in the classroom and in the field of play for women in sports, and individual women continued to advance.

### *Barriers to Career Advancement in Athletic Administration*

The majority of the top leveled-NCAA institutions (Division I) are led predominantly by male athletic administrators and coaches. Men have continued to dominate the more highly esteemed positions in athletics: Athletics Director, Associate Athletic Director, Assistant Athletic Director, Fund-Raiser/Development Officer, Sports Information Director, or Facilities Manager. These positions have offered vast opportunities to network with other high-profile individuals in the industry, as well as put them in the spotlight. Women have been given roles similar to caregiver roles in the fields of nursing, in which the day to day type of responsibilities are reminiscent of mothers or big sisters instead of those roles of power brokers or decision-makers within the organization. Women athletic administrators have often been life skills coordinators, academic advisors, or administrative assistants. These position offer limited opportunity for advancement due to the placement in the hierarchy of athletic administration (Acosta & Carpenter, 1988; Deller, 1993; Delpy, 1998; Gappendorf & Lough, 2006; Knoppers, 1994). Lough (2004) echoed this perpetual and systemic practice of men in power positions at NCAA member institutions, “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).

Pedersen, Whisenant & Schneider (2003) suggested that when women were limited in their pursuit of leadership positions in sports, the result was the promotion of power positions in favor of men. This subordination of women results in the systematic deprivation of opportunities to compete for leadership positions in collegiate athletics. There have been other key reasons for the lack of women pursuing and advancing in collegiate athletic

careers. For some women, personal goals and perceived outcome expectations of a career in athletics may have been diminished by the preponderance of factors such as limited financial benefits, lack of support, family/work roles, and a lack of visible role models. The NCAA conducted a study of women college student-athletes regarding their career interests in athletics. Overwhelmingly, 75 percent stated they were interested in a career that offered higher average salaries than did athletic administration or coaching (NCAA, 1995). These findings were also consistent with Teel (2005) who revealed that the lack of monetary incentives for women to enter the athletics field was a compelling reason. She stated,

There is also a lack of incentive for coaches of women's sports to stay in coaching due to pay and benefit inequities, all factors which contribute to the fact that women and minorities are not viable and visible leaders in the world of intercollegiate sports. (p. 22)

Another key aspect of career pathway research in athletic administration has focused on the perceived barriers which serve as obstacles to advancing in the field. While the women in this study have been successful at climbing the ladder to administrative positions in the NCAA, their journeys have been hindered by a variety of factors. Literature focused on barriers to career advancement in athletics have found the perceptions of the good old boys' club, failure of the old girls' club network, lack of support systems for women, and the lack of network building opportunities have limited their advancement in the field (Butler & Lopiano, 2003; Deller, 1993; Rosas, 1998; Teel, 2005; Whisenant et al, 2003).

Beyond the lack of network building opportunities for women, the literature has shown additional reasons for declines in the number of women coaches and administrators.

First, barriers such as discrimination in hiring practices of women have resulted in decreased women's opportunities to entry-level positions, such as coaching (Acosta & Carpenter, 2002; 2006). For example, research has shown a link between the gender of the administrator who controlled the hiring selection and the gender of the coach selected (Lough, 2004; Tiell, 2005). Second, advancing in the field has been equally challenging as women were often placed in positions which do not afford them the opportunity to develop the skills to make the necessary contacts to become an athletic director (Grappendorf & Lough, 2004).

Although the door to athletic administration opportunities for women overall has been slow to open for African American women, opportunities on all athletic administration levels has been more limited. Many African American women are finding other entry points to careers in athletics administration. Research shows that while the number of African American women serving as head coaches has been dismal, positions such as Compliance Coordinator/Director, Academic Advisor, Life Skills Coordinator, and Ticket Manager are being filled at a higher rate than head coaches and athletic directors (NCAA, 2006). Thus, the traditional career pathway from coaching and teaching to administration may not be the conventional path for African American women.

In spite of these new opportunities for African American women, research has shown that there has only been a slight increase in the total number of African American women serving in leadership positions in the NCAA. In 1995-1996, African American women represented 2.5% of all head coach positions of women's teams compared to 3.2% in 2005-2006. The trend was similar for athletic directors as African American women represented .6% of all Athletic Directors in the NCAA compared to 1.2% in 2005-2006. If Historically

Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) were excluded from these figures, only .3% of athletic directors in predominantly white institutions (PWI) in 2005-2006 were African American women (NCAA, 2006). For HBCUs, these institutions continue to lead the way in providing athletic career opportunities for African American women as athletic directors.

### Statement of the Purpose

While African American women are often well represented in the NCAA as student-athletes, there is an absence in the hierarchy in management and decision-making positions. The NCAA provides a quantitative snapshot of the diversity in the organization. However, this picture does not reflect the lived experiences of African American women who have achieved success in obtaining and advancing in athletic administration. The stories of successful African American women in athletic administration will help inform the future direction of the NCAA as well as aspiring African American women athletic administrators.

Recent literature on women in athletic administration has focused on both positive and negative influences on career pathways and advancement in athletic administration (Acosta & Carpenter, 2004; Grappendorf & Lough, 2004; Teel, 2004; Tiell, 2005). On the other hand, there have been few studies which have attempted to address these issues to determine what factors have contributed to the disproportionate numbers of African American women in athletic administration in the NCAA. However, there is a need to explore the factors found in previous studies and the impact they may have had on the career pathways of African American women athletic administrators. More important, there is a need to discover those prevailing factors which have served as vehicles for entry and advancement for African American women in NCAA athletics administration.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand what factors influenced the career paths of African American women athletic administrators in the NCAA. Moreover, the shared experiences of the women in this study revealed which factors not only influenced, but may have hindered their careers at certain points during their pathways to leadership positions. Those factors which may have limited the participants' career advancement were explored specifically to reveal strategies for overcoming or reducing negative influences on their careers. The research questions that served as a guide for this study were:

1. What formative experiences influence the career development of African American women athletic administrators in the NCAA?
2. How do African American women athletic administrators obtain entry and advance professionally in the NCAA?
3. What coping mechanisms do African American women athletic administrators employ that counteract perceived barriers to their NCAA careers?

This qualitative study utilized an interpretive approach to understand the career paths of African American women athletic administrators at NCAA member institutions. Qualitative research methods allowed the researcher to explore the lives of African American women in athletic administration. Merriam (2001), states, "A central characteristic of qualitative research is that individuals construct reality in interaction with their social worlds" (p. 37). This study focused on understanding the participant's perception of how they advanced to leadership positions in a setting and climate of a male-dominated field of intercollegiate athletics (Whisenant, Pedersen, & Obenour, 2002). The career pathways of

women, and more specifically, African American women in athletic administration, needed to be examined to determine what personal, social and environmental factors influenced their careers and what strategies were employed to limit the negative impact of perceived barriers on their career advancement.

### *Conceptual Framework*

This study, situated in Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), served as the framework to interpret the women's stories. SCCT facilitated an exploration of key factors such as personal, social and environmental influences on their careers. Some of these influences, according to SCCT, could be perceived as barriers or negative impacts on the women's career decisions and professional advancement. In addition to analyses of factors impacting their occupational choices, SCCT research also provided a framework in which to examine coping mechanisms, or the strategies individuals employed to overcome perceived barriers or obstacles (Hackett & Byars, 1996). In sum, SCCT permitted an examination of how the intersections of particular influences signified precursors of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals, i.e., variables which may have influenced career choices and behaviors.

One key component of SCCT, self-efficacy, is the belief that an individual can influence one's own thoughts and behaviors (Bandura, 1986). The participants in this study exemplified the four key factors of exhibiting high self-efficacy, which include: performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, physiological and affective states, and verbal persuasion. Outcome expectations are the perceived consequences of behaviors, whether positive or negative which will impact an individual's decision to pursue a career, and in

some cases, how they sustain or advance in that particular field. Lastly, SCCT espouses that one's ability to set personal goals and implement strategies to attain these goals are essential to the development of their professional lives (p. 22). Social Cognitive Career Theory integrates the four factors to explain how careers are chosen, what individuals expect from their choices, and how they cope with barriers to achieve and attain their career goals (Stitt-Ghodes, 1997).

Another key factor of SCCT examines the ability of an individual to learn how to plan effective strategies to manage negative factors which can impede the progression from entry point to leadership positions in women's careers. Coping efficacy is the ability to possess confidence in one's ability to manage complex and difficult situations one may encounter in their career paths (Bandura, 1997). Luzzo and McWhiter (2001) reveal evidence that coping-efficacy in women and minorities can counteract the negative effect of perceived barriers or obstacles on career development, success, and achievement. These career obstacles can include sex and race discrimination. Women of color may encounter gender and racial barriers at different times in their careers, as well as simultaneously. African American women have often been referred to as living a doubly oppressed existence. Allen (1995) explains, "Gender and race-ethnicity are socially-constructed aspects of identity which influence ways that human beings interact with each other" (p. 7). Thus, the intersection of gender and race are significant in the everyday professional lives of African American women.

Traditional theories of career development provided a workable foundation for exploring career development (Holland, 1959; Parsons, 1909; Super, 1953). However, these

theories mainly addressed the career pathways of a mostly White, male-dominated work force (Luzzo, 1996). Women, minorities, and the economically disadvantaged have been methodically omitted from career development research due in part to the exceptionality of their status and roles in U.S. society (Leong, 1995; Parham & Austin, 1984; Sue & Sue, 1990). Specifically, traditional career development theories do not adequately address the particular influential factors on African American women's careers such as their multiple roles. For example, the present study is unique in its examination of professional experiences among African American women who are NCAA athletic administrators, i.e., career experiences investigated through the lens of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT).

Particularly, SCCT incorporated intersecting factors such as background factors, including educational and familial backgrounds; significant responsibilities like role models and mentors; support systems; and barriers or obstacles and coping strategies. Other influences such as gender, race, socioeconomic status, family, and community memberships also play important roles in the selection and development of an individual's career (Brown, 1995; Cheatham, 1990; Kerka, 1998; Stitt-Ghodes, 1997). For women and minorities in non-traditional careers, the influences of role models and mentors have been researched and found to greatly influence their professional development (Abney, 1988; Deller, 1993; Lough, 2001). Understanding the problematic low percentages of women in athletic administration, the career development of women into positions of athletic administration has somewhat limited research understandings. Social Cognitive Career Theory provides a lens to explore the career pathways of women in athletic administration incorporating the social, personal, and environmental influences on career development.

## Definitions of Terms

The following terms will be used in this study:

### *Historically Black College and Universities (HBCU)*

The Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended defines Historically Black College and Universities Institutions of higher education whose population is made up of mostly African American students and whose principal mission is the education of African Americans (P.L. 89-329, 79 STAT 1219).

### *Intercollegiate Athletics*

Sports for students enrolled in post-secondary institutions such as colleges and universities. For the purposes of this study, *intercollegiate athletics* will refer to member institutions of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA).

### *Predominantly White Institution (PWI)*

Institution of higher education whose population is made up of mostly Caucasian students.

## Significance of the Study

As more women enter in college athletics, career opportunities in athletics needs to be examined more closely in order to identify factors which influence as well as deter women from pursuing athletics careers. Research exists on variables that influence career pathways for women athletic administrators (Acosta & Carpenter, 1990, 2000; Deller, 1993; Pleban, 1998). However limited research has described the lived experiences of African American women as leaders in athletic administration in the NCAA. There is a paucity of information that addresses the career pathways of African American women in athletic administration.

The findings of the study have several implications for practice. First, the study describes how the participants have made meaning of their career pathway experiences. These descriptions provide a more in-depth understanding of the important factors that influenced their career decisions and pathways. The few African American women employed as athletic administrators in this study will offer evidence and insight into the development of career pathways in college athletics for African American women. Second, key higher education leaders and athletic administrators at National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) institutions may develop a better understanding of the need to continue diversifying the leadership positions within their institutions and the NCAA. This study will capture and tell success stories of the lives of accomplished African American women in athletic administration. Their lived experiences will illustrate their pathways into the field, strategies used to succeed and advance in the field will provide rich and descriptive information for future aspiring African American athletic coaches and administrators

The study's findings may also have implications for research. First, researchers who study women and minority career pathways have emphasized the need for a comprehensive theory on women and minority career development. As African Americans face various forms of discrimination, opportunities for career advancement are even more limited compared to White men and women. Concepts such as racism, ethnicity, and class have been excluded from most career development theories. Brooks (1990) indicated that little is known about the career behavior of African Americans. Thus, the need for more meaningful and descriptive research this area is essential to the career development of African American

women. Thus, this study will contribute needed research through the SCCT framework towards a theory of career development reflecting minority women.

Additionally, this study offers the opportunity for discourse on the career paths of African American women who have lived experiences as athletic administrators at both HBCUs and Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). In fact, the stories of successful African American women in athletic administration could help inform the future directions of both the NCAA and other African American women who aspire to positions as athletic administrators. Specifically, this study allows for open dialogue to glean valuable information and insights into these women's career paths and help close the gap in the literature on the career pathways of African American women in intercollegiate athletics.

## **CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

The purpose of this study was to understand what factors influenced the career path development of African American women athletic administrators NCAA. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What formative experiences influence the career development of African American women athletic administrators in the NCAA?
2. How do African American women athletic administrators obtain entry and advance professionally in the NCAA?
3. What coping mechanisms do African American women athletic administrators employ that counteract perceived barriers to their NCAA careers?

Since the late 1970s, women's career development theories have provided frameworks for exploring individual career choice, career satisfaction, paths and achievement (Brown, 1995; Cheatham, 1990; Farmer, 1977; Hackett & Betz, 1981). However, there has been a need for more descriptive and explanatory research concerning factors that directly affect opportunities for African Americans. As noted by many authors, there was a need to change the work environment to support access and success of African American women as they became more integrated in the labor force, particularly in nontraditional fields, such as science, engineering, and athletics (Albert & Luzzo, 1999; Coyle, 2001; Lough, 2004; Whisenant, 2003).

This chapter reviews the key literature of women's career development relative to this research study. The review of key research will be presented in five sections. The first section synthesizes the literature on career development theories, tracing classical career

development to a focus on women's career development. The second section reviews the key literature on Social Cognitive Career Theory as a means for identifying and understanding the cognitive, behavioral and environmental issues related to women's career development. The third section examines research on athletic administrator's career pathways. The fourth section reviews the key literature on barriers to career choice and advancement in athletic administration, and the fifth section reviews the current status of women and African American women athletic administrators in the NCAA.

### Career Development Theories

#### *Classical Career Development Theories*

Early career development theories, often defined as classical theories, have been derived from models of personality development. The belief that one's personality and behavior were related to work and careers (Kerka, 1998) was the foundation for those theories. Career development theory emerged in 1909, with Parson's proposition that if people actively engage in career choice, they will be more satisfied with their careers (Brown & Brooks, 1996). The factors essential to Parson's theory included the components of (1) self-knowledge of abilities, interests, and resources; (2) an understanding the requirements, advantages and disadvantages of different occupations; and (3) the ability to understand how individual aptitudes and abilities relate to job requirements. Researchers, during these early times, developed tests to measure interests, aptitudes, and personalities to match those traits to job factors (Morrisey, 2003).

In the early 1950s, a significant shift in career theory occurred as Ginzberg, Axelrad, and Herma (1951) proposed that career choice was a developmental process, starting in the

preteen years and ending in young adulthood. Super (1953) expanded this concept to view career behavior as a developmental process. This theory combined Parson's theory with theory grounded in developmental psychology and sociology (Stitt-Ghodes, 1997). Super's Life-Span Life Space theory attempted to match the individual's abilities and traits throughout their life stages with career interests.

According to Super's Life Span Life Space Theory, an individual will experience different life stages: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline or disengagement. These stages when applied to careers represent individual stages of career choice and development (Super, 1980; Super et al., 1996). As reflected by Stitt-Ghodes (1997), Super's Life-Span Life Space theory combines the psychology of occupations with the psychology of careers, which provides a strong foundation for one of the most widely respected career development theories.

From another perspective, Holland (1959) expanded on Parson's trait theory by developing a typology of personality types. Similar to trait-factor theory, Holland posited that personalities can be categorized into six types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional. These personality or interest types were designed to explain the interactions of personality with specific occupational environments to predict behavior that would occur in those particular environments (Holland, 1985). Holland's typology for matching the six personality types to careers was widely used for several decades (Brown & Brooks, 1996). This model assumed that individuals move in and out of work environments when there was no longer a perceived fit.

Classical theories of career development (Ginzburg et al., 1951; Holland, 1959; Parson, 1909; Super, 1953, 1980) established the premise that career choice is a developmental process that involves matching aptitudes, abilities, and personality type with occupation choice. While these theories proved to be highly regarded as the foundation of today's field of career development, the diversity and complex nature of today's society and work force do not adequately fit into these traditional theories (Brown & Brooks, 1996; Stitt-Ghodes, 1997). Fitzgerald and Betz (1994) and Leong, (1995), critics of the major classical career development theories, charged that these theories are based on white, middle-class values. The classical theories of career development are based on assumptions about people's access and opportunity to careers and success (access to education and occupational information, free and open labor market), and fail to include important structural and cultural variables. Fitzgerald et al. (1995) state:

From the earliest discussions of matching men and jobs up through Crites' (1969) landmark volume summarizing the field of vocational psychology, researchers and theorists in the area universally and unselfconsciously investigated men's vocational interests, described their career patterns, and sought to explain their vocational behavior – with women representing (sometimes literally) only a footnote to their work. (p. 67)

Thus, classical theories do not directly explain and illuminate the career development patterns of women, minorities, and other diverse demographical groups. For example, Parson's (1909) theory focusing on individual psychological or personality characteristics does not take into full account the wider environmental context in which individuals make

career decisions, thereby failing to recognize the constraints faced by some groups. Super's life-span theory suggests that careers develop through stages of life based on the individual's vocational development. However, Sharf (1997) points out that not all of the life stages are applicable to women, especially as their roles have changed over the decades. Super (1990) later considered self-concept and career maturity to be important determinants in occupational choices. However, the self-concept of minorities is linked to some degree to the formation of ethnic identity, which is not acknowledged in life-span theory (Leong, 1995). Stitt-Ghodes (1997) also concluded that classical career development theories "reflect the dominant makeup of the professional work force of 20 or 30 year ago: white, middle-class males. Indeed, women, people of color, and the poor have been methodically omitted from career development research" (p. 13).

Critics of developmental theories discuss the lack of attention focusing on the impact of gender roles and the socialization of men and women in relation to their work lives. Fitzgerald et al. (1995) observe women's career development as uniquely different from men's career development because of influences, such as family roles in their lives. Brown and Brooks (1996) also remark on the lack of diversity in research studies to explore the careers of women. They state, "Traditionally, [career development] theories have been developed by white males of European descent, and, not surprisingly, the theories have been most useful as a basis for understanding the behavior of white males of European descent" (p. 7). Women's socialization processes limit their opportunities for developing interests thus sometimes limiting their career choices and career patterns. Women's roles as primary

caregiver in their families also have had implications for them seeking careers outside of the home, thus limiting their opportunities sometimes for advancing in their selected careers.

Overall, developmental career theories made several assumptions about career development. These theories claimed that career patterns were linear, planned, predictable, and go through uninterrupted movement from one stage to the next (Schreiber, 1998). Thus, Morrisey (2003), stated, “This description, however, is inconsistent with women’s experiences. The career pattern for women is more interrupted, nonlinear, and unplanned” (p. 22). Researchers agreed that a comprehensive theory would be one that acknowledged and integrated multiple role responsibilities, sex role socialization, race, class, career choice, and learning to describe women’s career behavior. Further this theory would represent positive and negative factors which have affected their careers (Bierema, 1998; Lent & Brown, 1996; Stitt-Ghodes, 1997).

#### *Women’s Career Development Theories*

During the 1970s and 1980s, a major shift occurred in the theoretical understandings of career development. In particular, social learning theory by Bandura (1971) was applied to career counseling resulting in a number of new theoretical perspectives. These perspectives included Gottfredson’s (1981, 1986) theory of circumscription and compromise, Hackett and Betz’s (1981) self-efficacy approach, and Farmer’s (1985) model of career and achievement motivation. These theories marked the shift from focusing research primarily on European American males, to including a focus on women’s career development (Astin, 1984; Hackett & Betz, 1981).

Fitzgerald, Fassinger, and Betz (1995) provided an overview of women's career development covering the literature which spanned 25 years. The literature moved from the pretheoretical stage, which focused on concepts which described and classified women's careers, towards the formation of theories which explained how women related to the work world. A brief discussion of the evolution of the study of women's career development will be presented in the following section.

During the pretheoretical stage, the literature focused on identifying and examining variables, such as career orientation, career salience, traditional versus nontraditional career choice, and were viewed as integral to the enhancement of theory and research on women's careers (Fitzgerald et al, 1995). During this stage, the body of research focused on why some women chose careers outside of the home versus being homemakers. Later, these studies were replicated using additional variables such as ability, achievement orientation, background factors, and personality characteristics (Gysbers, Johnston, & Gust, 1968; Oliver, 1974; Rand, 1968).

As women's participation in the workforce increased, the importance of their dual role as homemaker and employee became more important to research exploring women's career choices and behaviors. Super's (1957) text, *The Psychology of Careers*, highlighted the central role that homemaking played in defining women's activities in relationship to their participation in the labor force. He identified seven mutually exclusive categories for describing women's life and career patterns: (1) stable homemaker; (2) conventional career pattern of women who entered the workforce after college until marriage; (3) the stable working pattern, women who did not marry but worked throughout their life span; (4) the

double-track career pattern, which described women who combined work and family roles; (5) the interrupted career pattern, describing women who returned to work after raising their children; (6) the unstable career pattern of women who constantly moved in and out of the workforce; and (7) the multiple-trial career pattern of women who had an unstable job history (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). Super's seven categories of women's life and career development was used by other researchers for decades and was considered one of the first documented theory to devote attention to women's vocational behavior (p. 74).

Later, researchers focused on women's desire and motivation to work. These factors included career salience, (Almquist and Angrist, 1971), gender roles, attitudes (Sobol, 1963), and the importance of family in their career decisions and development (Eccles, 1994). Further, Sobol (1963) concluded that the decision of married women with children to work outside of the home was based on family characteristics, educational level, previous work experience, and individual characteristics such as self-concept (Fitzgerald et al, 1995).

Additionally, during this stage, research focused on identifying barriers to women's career development. Farmer (1976) revealed several internal and environmental barriers to women's careers. Barriers cited from this study included fear of success, gender role orientation, risk-taking behavior, low academic self-esteem, discrimination, family socialization, and availability of resources.

Theories which examined gender differences in women's career development appeared in the 1980s. These theories addressed unique issues to women and work and were grounded in social learning and cognitive theories. Four of these theories, Astin's (1984) sociopsychological model of career choice and work behavior; Gottfredson's (1981) theory

of circumscription and compromise; Farmer's (1985) model of career motivation, and Hackett and Betz's (1981) self-efficacy theory of women's career development are reviewed in the following discussion.

Astin's sociopsychological model of career choice and work behavior was grounded in Bandura's social learning theory (Bandura, 1978). This theory claimed that there were four influences on career decisions: genetic endowment and abilities; environmental events and conditions; learning experiences; and the development of task-approach skills. Based on this set of understandings, Astin's (1984) model of career choice and work behavior attempted to incorporate personal characteristics and social forces into career theory. Astin focused on the differential effects of socialization experiences that shaped women and men's career aspirations based on four major constructs: motivation, expectations, gender role socialization, and the structure of opportunity. Career choices were grounded in expectations which were based on early socialization experiences and opportunities. She speculated that when women are exposed to a variety of career choices and internalize the achievement possibility, career choices, both traditional and nontraditional would be available to them.

Astin's model has been tested only once during the mid-1990s because researchers have claimed that the constructs are too broad and general, which further complicates testing procedures. Fitzgerald et al. (1995) concluded, "In general, it has not proven heuristic, perhaps because the broad generality of its constructs do not lend themselves easily to operationalization, a problem underscored by the one empirical study that attempted to examine it" (p. 85).

Bandura's (1978) social learning theory applied to career development influenced Gottfredson's (1981) theory of circumscription and compromise. This theory proposed that individuals go through a process of circumscription, which involved eliminating unacceptable occupational choices based primarily on gender and prestige during early socialization. The original model espoused that society placed certain limitations, based on the gender socialization process, which served to limit an individual's perceived options to a smaller range of career options. This range of career choices was generally set between the ages of six and eight. A later modification of this theory by Gottfredson (1996) examined the reality of gender, social class, and other internal and external forces and the effect these factors have on career choice and goals.

Gottfredson's most important contribution to current career development theory has often been identified as the consequences of the socialization of children based on traditional concepts of gender roles (1996). One significant limitation to Gottfredson's theory however, is its failure to address the issues in adult career development such as family and career, career changes, and retirement (1996).

Farmer's (1985) model of career and achievement motivation postulated the importance of background factors, personal characteristics and environmental variables for predicting career choices and development. She found that these factors were the strongest predictors of career and educational aspirations. Her model, grounded in Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, emphasized learning as an interactive process resulting from behavioral, cognitive, and environmental influences (Morrisey, 2003). Farmer's conceptual model for examining career choice behavior has been replicated over the past 20 years. In

1997, Farmer published the results of a 10 year longitudinal study of high school students who were followed into adulthood. This study included a diverse group of participants (men and women of various racial backgrounds), and utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods. Results, specifically regarding women's career development, concluded that career salience, aspiration, and mastery motivation are related clearly and strongly to environmental support for working women (Fassinger, 2005).

In a fourth major area of career development theory, emphasis was placed on Bandura's (1977) concept of self-efficacy beliefs. Hackett and Betz (1981) were the first to hypothesize that self-efficacy theory might be useful in understanding women's career behavior. Their model focused on self-efficacy expectations based on one's own ability to successfully perform work related behaviors. Bandura defined self-efficacy beliefs as the individual's "...ability to judge their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (p. 391). Self-efficacy was derived from four principal sources of information: performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and physiological arousal. These sources of information served to create a dynamic set of self-beliefs that were specific to particular performance domains which interact with people, behavior, environment, and contextual factors. Self-efficacy expectations were based on how difficult the task, how the individual preserves and sustains the behavior through unfavorable experiences, and finally, how the individual applies their learning experiences through different behavioral domains (Bandura, 1977).

Through their research, Hackett and Betz (1981) measured the differences between men and women's self-efficacy expectations regarding careers traditionally held by men and

women. They found differences in self-efficacy expectations resulted from the socialization of women and men. These differences have also influenced men's and women's career self-efficacy, which impacted career choice and development. Although Hackett and Betz's (1981) self-efficacy theory stimulated an insurgence of research on self-efficacy and career behavior (Betz & Hackett, 1983; Lent, Brown, & Larkin, 1984, 1986), there has been reported a number of limitations to the theory. These limitations included the relationship between self-efficacy and outcome expectations, reasons why women exit and reenter the workforce, and barriers to exclude women from career choice and advancement. (Fassinger, 2005; Hackett & Lent, 1992).

### Social Cognitive Career Theory

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) was developed from research conducted by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1996). They applied Bandura's (1977, 1986) concept of self-efficacy and Krumboltz et al (1976) social learning theory of career decision making. SCCT emphasized three social cognitive constructs relevant to career development: self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1996). Specifically, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) maintained that people not only respond to environmental and personal influences, they actively shaped their own behavior through activities such as goal-setting. It was the importance placed on self-efficacy and goal-setting which set apart SCCT from the social learning career theory of Krumboltz and colleagues (1976). SCCT examined the processes individuals develop as they choose careers: (1) how academic and career interests developed, (2) how these interests promoted career choices, and (3) how people attained varying levels of performance and persistence in

their career pursuits (Hackett & Byars, 1996). Lent and Brown (1996) stated, “This model holds that personal attributes, external environmental factors, and overt behavior each operate in interactive sets of variables that mutually influence one another” (p. 312). Additionally, SCCT took into account perceived barriers to career choice and development and explored how individuals used certain coping mechanism, or coping efficacy, to deal with adversities they may have faced in choosing a career and their experiences as they moved through their chosen career paths.

As a key component of SCCT, self-efficacy is derived from four principal sources of information: performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and physiological arousal. These sources of information create a dynamic set of self-beliefs that are specific to particular performance domains that interact with people, behavior, environment, and contextual factors. Academic and employment learning experiences; realistic and appropriate models; arousal levels, such as stress and anxiety; and various types of communication (both positive and negative) can enhance or diminish career self-efficacy (Harrington, 1998).

Another key component of SCCT is outcome expectations. Outcome expectations are determined by what a person believes will be the effects of certain behaviors (Stitt-Ghodes, 1997). Bandura (1986) distinguishes several classes of outcome expectations, such as the anticipation that certain financial, social (approval of significant others), or self-evaluative (e.g., self-satisfaction) consequences would follow particular actions. Expected positive outcomes operate as potent motivators which, along with other variables, help to determine whether people will undertake certain actions. Conversely, perceived negative outcomes

operate to limit or deter individuals from undertaking certain actions or behaviors (Lent and Brown, 1996).

Establishing personal goals is the third component of SCCT. Goals may be defined as the determination to engage in a particular behavior or activity or to predict a particular future outcome (Albert & Luzzo, 1999). By setting goals, individuals help to organize and guide their behavior. These goals are interrelated and influenced by self-efficacy and outcome expectations. This process of developing interest and expertise in a particular endeavor and experiencing positive outcomes will result in the development of goals to improve or continue their participation. As Lent and Brown (1996) state, "...if the opportunities to which one is exposed are narrow or if individuals feel they have little probability of success in that endeavor, the result is an inaccurate occupational self-efficacy or outcome expectations" (p. 314).

SCCT suggests a complex interplay among self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goal setting in the development of career choice and behavior. These factors together help individuals exercise personal agency and become self-directed. However, these components do not occur inside a vacuum. The exploration of issues such as gender, external and internal factors, and barriers on career choice have also been an integral part of SCCT. The external and internal factors are considered by SCCT as objective and perceived influences (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000). Objective factors such as exposure to quality of the educational experiences and the financial support available to pursue training options can potentially effect one's career development. How the individual chooses to appraise and respond to

these environmental factors, positively or negatively, can affect their construction of the environment and themselves.

The subjective or perceived opportunity construct emphasizes that opportunities, resources, barriers presented by a particular environmental variable may be subject to individual interpretation (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000). This aspect of SCCT presents theoretical and practical challenges, as the same environmental variable may or may not yield the same interpretation or response from different individuals. Lent et al (2000) state:

For instance, on the one hand, such a focus seems necessary to account for individual differences in response to similar environmental conditions. Yet, on the other hand, if taken too far, assumptions about contextual effects existing (only) in people's minds can lead to attributions that blame the victim (or conversely, credit the beneficiary) of received environmental conditions. (p. 38). Thus, career development theorists need to continue considering multiple aspects of the objective environment, such as economic conditions as well as how individuals interpret and respond to what their environment provides (Albert & Luzzo, 1999; Stitt-Ghodes, 1997).

Lastly, SCCT explores the sequence of how particular environmental or contextual influences occur in relation to career choice. Environmental variables were divided into two basic categories according to their relative proximity to the career decision-making process; these are labeled distal and proximal environmental factors. Distal factors affected the learning experiences through which career-relevant self-efficacy and outcome expectations develop. Distal factors included types of career role models that individuals had during their career development; opportunities presented to individuals in which interests and skills were

developed; gender-role socialization processes, one's academic potential, and the type of support or lack of support one receives for engaging in specific academic or extracurricular activities. Proximal influences are especially important during the active phase of career decision making. Examples of proximal influences include the individual's informal career contacts, financial support, job availability, and exposure to discriminatory hiring practices.

These variables, distal and proximal, contribute to the development of research on perceived barriers to career development and the use of coping mechanisms as strategies for overcoming barriers (Brown & Lent, 1996). Women and African American women as evidenced in the literature, experience various types of discrimination throughout their careers. SCCT addresses how perceived barriers affect their careers and studies how women and other minority groups cope with these factors throughout their career paths.

Research into the role of perceived barriers and impact of these barriers on career decision-making have made an impact on SCCT (Albert & Luzzo, 1999; Swanson et al., 1996; Swanson & Woitke, 1997). Swanson and Woitke (1997) defined barriers as "events or conditions either within the person or in his environment, that make career progress difficult" (p. 434). These barriers may include economic needs, educational limitations, lack of familial support, lack of role models or mentors, and gender or ethnic discrimination and have been identified as environmental factors which may have negatively affected an individual's career self-efficacy. They may also have inhibited the pursuit of primary interests or preferred career goals. Albert & Luzzo stated:

For example, someone from an ethnic minority group may realize that there are few representatives in a certain career field from their ethnic group. Perceived barriers or

impediments may arise in this individual due to their conceptual processes of differential opportunities for skill development, self-beliefs, standards, and outcome expectations that may become internalized (1999, p. 432).

Perceived barriers may have caused the individual to exclude potentially rewarding career choices, because their environment has not provided them with enough positive efficacy building opportunities.

Negative or marred beliefs and expectations could have made any given career option seem out of reach. Coping mechanisms served as strategies for individuals to counter these negative beliefs based on the individual's coping abilities. The individual's ability to possess confidence in one's ability to cope with or manage complex and difficult situations was called coping efficacy (Bandura, 1997). If an individual possessed high levels of coping efficacy, perceived barriers or obstacles that might have prevented certain accomplishments related to a certain task may not have seemed as harmful. Luzzo and McWhirter (2001) believed that individuals who displayed high levels of coping efficacy would manage perceived barriers better. Further, in their studies, these individuals were more likely than those with low levels of coping efficacy to engage in efforts to overcome these perceived barriers associated with a particular goal or objective.

#### *SCCT Research in Women's Career Development*

Research exploring the SCCT model to explain women's career development have examined several components of the theory: career self-efficacy, outcome expectations, career aspirations or goals, and perceived barriers and coping mechanisms (Bierema, 1999; Coyle, 2001; Flores & O'Brien, 2002; Gates, 2002; Luzzo & McWhirter, 2001; Nauta,

Epperson, & Kahn, 1998; Schere, et al., 1991; Scott, 1997). These studies have been instrumental in developing SCCT theory by providing a better understanding of career choice, patterns, and development of individuals in today's diverse labor force.

Self-efficacy research emphasized the influences of mentors and role models in men's and women's career development and on barriers which served to impede one's career development. Many of the studies on self-efficacy focused attention on the concept of vicarious learning experiences or the importance of role models in career choice and behavior. Scherer, Brodzinski, and Wiebe (1991) found that women students who had observed a successful role model in a specific occupation were more likely to believe that they themselves would be successful in that field. Nauta et al. (1998) found that positive role models influenced higher levels of career aspirations among women students in mathematics, physical science, engineering, and biological science majors.

Gates (2002) explored the types of role models who influenced career choice in young women planning traditional careers such as education and nontraditional careers in math and science-related fields. Results of this study found that women following a traditional career path identified teachers and professors as most influential. Both traditional and nontraditional women cited their mothers as having influenced their career of choice. However, nontraditional women were more likely to mention their fathers as most influential. Gates concluded, women were less likely to consider alternative careers and had fewer role models for success in nontraditional occupations (Gates, 2002). Bierema (1999) further elaborated on the need for women role models and mentors, especially in corporate environments. She stated, "Although men helping women is a positive development in a

diverse workplace, the lack of diverse mentors poses the risk of replication of a male-dominated culture” (p. 118).

Coyle (2001) attempted to determine the role of self-efficacy on women’s selection of math-related careers. In particular, this study included African American women and examined the four components of self-efficacy (learning experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasions, and physical and emotional states). This study used personal narratives of women in the math career field and concluded that vicarious experiences and verbal persuasions were most instrumental sources for the development and maintenance of self-efficacy beliefs for women in math careers. Participants indicated that they relied on people with whom they had positive relationships as being more influential than the skills they acquired while pursuing math-related careers.

Additional research utilizing SCCT focused on perceived barriers to women’s career development and the impact on career decision-making and advancement (Albert & Luzzo, 2001; Fassinger, 2005; Kerka, 1998; Leong, 1995; Scott, 1997). These studies honed in on how race and gender affected career choice, salary, and promotion and tenure of women and minorities. These studies cited as perceived barriers to career development women’s family roles versus career choice, lack of mentors or role models for women in the workplace, wage and salary inequities, and promotion and tenure inequities (Coleman, 1998; Kramer & Lambert, (2001); Nelson & Rogers, Elliott and Smith, 2004; Scott, 1997).

Scott (1997) surveyed 200 men and women administrators in the National Association for Independent Schools (NAIS) and explored reasons for the scarcity of women heads of independent schools. The study identified the barriers perceived by both men and

women and offered advice from women heads of schools for overcoming those barriers. The barriers identified by respondents as major hindrances to achieving leadership positions in these schools included the choice of choosing family over career, the influence of existing social biases against women leaders, personal sacrifices, and the fear of the consequences for choosing nontraditional gender roles.

One key study was Coleman's (1998) examination of women's perceptions of race and gender discrimination of women administrators in education, business, and government in Minnesota. In this study, barriers for women were categorized as individual factors, group factors, and organizational factors. These individual barriers included lack of motivation, isolation, high stress, and tokenism. Group barriers were identified as a collection of interdependent relations with differentiated roles, functions, and expectations. Examples of group barriers included stereotyping, lack of social support, and exclusion from informal or formal networks. Organizational barriers were identified as policies and systems (formal and informal) within the organization, which facilitated or deterred advancement. Examples of organizational barriers were access to mentoring, functional segregation, or limited opportunities for advancement. The most frequently cited barriers in Coleman's study were racial discrimination, no opportunity for upward mobility, exclusion from the old boys' network, and negative attitudes toward women in administration.

Nelson and Rogers (2003) attempted to show the disparity between male and women faculty members in science and engineering. They reported astonishing data revealing the disproportionate numbers of women faculty to student ratio. They researched tenured and tenure track faculty in the top 50 departments of science and engineering disciplines and

found that women and minorities were significantly underrepresented. Each department chair was asked to provide the gender, race/ethnicity, and rank of each tenured or tenure track faculty member. They found that women represented a high number of recent PhD recipients; however there was a gap between those receiving degrees and the percentage of them hired as assistant professors. This study also found that there were very few tenured and tenure-track women faculty in those departments, women were more likely than men to hold lower academic ranks, and that underrepresented minority women faculty were less likely than either white women or men of any racial group to be full professors and to be awarded tenure.

It has been suggested that Social Cognitive Career Theory has been one of the most widely studied career theories in recent years (Swanson and Gore, 2000). The constructs of SCCT, to include self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goal setting have been instrumental in building theories and models that explained the relationship between career interests, career choice, and behaviors. SCCT has provided a framework from which to examine math, science, and other nontraditional career field options for women and minorities (Lent et. al., 1984; Nauta, Epperson, & Kahn, 1998). Additionally, SCCT identified factors such as the structure of opportunity, environmental constraints, and perceived barriers that have been useful in examining the career development of women (Coleman, 1998; Coyle, 2001; Gates, 2002; Nauta, Epperson, & Kahn, 1998). ). SCCT proposed that a person's abilities and values were integral to the formation of career interests. These abilities and values, however, could be overshadowed by perceived barriers to career choice and development. For women and minorities, they often confronted barriers in the

workplace such as lack of access to professional development programs, lack of role models or mentors, and other forms of discrimination, which could produce stress, increase anxiety levels, thus causing a negative effect on career self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986).

The application of SCCT to women's careers sustains the idea that the career development process is complex and takes into account the interactive influences of behavior, environment and cognition to explain career choice and behavior. On the other hand, Fitzgerald et al (1995) and Brown & Brooks (1996), note that SCCT theory, being relatively new to career development research, fails to address fully all the variables of gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status associated with career development and the career choice-making process.

As career development theories are tested with research on women and minority populations, a very complex picture emerges. This picture illustrates the multiple factors and constructs that influence career choice and development, for example personality, self-concept, racial/cultural identity, socialization, availability of resources, experiences of sexism, racism and classism, and the salience of life roles and identity. These variables must be considered as newer and more comprehensive theories of career development surface.

#### Career Pathways and Barriers to Athletics Administrative Positions in the NCAA

Another key aspect of this literature review examines current knowledge of career pathways and job antecedents to leadership positions in athletic administration (Goodloe, 1998; Hartfield et al., 1987; Landry, 1983; Quarterman, 1994; Youngberg, 1971). As the number and diversity of women participating in collegiate athletics and the number of job opportunities in athletic administration increase, there is a need for research into the career

paths of women athletic administrators (Fitzgerald & Sagaria, 1994). This review will reveal the limited literature, particularly concerning women and African American women's career paths in college athletics. This section will explore research on preparation patterns, as well as career barriers and current status of women and African American women in athletic administration in the NCAA.

#### *Athletic Administrators' Career Pathways*

Past research of the careers of athletic administrators has provided descriptive data on the demographics of individuals in athletics leadership positions, their educational background, prior experiences as student-athletes, and career experiences. Goodloe (1978) and Youngberg (1971) found that experiences as a college athlete, as a high school and/or college coach, and in previous administrative experiences were important qualifications in the career pathway to the director of athletics position. Herron (1969), in one of the earliest studies of directors of athletics at predominantly white institutions, found that secondary teaching and coaching experiences were significant factors in the selection process for becoming a college director of athletics. Also, Landry (1983) surveyed over 50 athletic directors from major schools. Over 65 percent participated in college football, 44 percent held master's degrees, 47 percent taught in high school or college, and 63 percent held a college coaching job prior to becoming an athletic director.

Expanding on previous studies, Quarterman (1992) attempted to identify demographics and career paths of Athletic directors at Historically Black College and Universities (HBCUs). He surveyed 55 athletic directors of HBCUs to explore the background variables important to their careers. Similar to other studies conducted on

athletic directors (Williams and Miller, 1983; Hartfield et al., 1987; Landry, 1983), 76 percent of athletic directors at HBCUs were college student-athletes, particularly in the sports of football, basketball and baseball; 84 percent of athletic directors had teaching experience at the high school and college levels; and 89 percent had coaching experience at high school or college levels, mostly in revenue-producing sports of football, basketball and baseball.

Williams and Miller's (1983) study of career preparation patterns of intercollegiate athletic directors provided empirical data on the important factors in career patterns of male and women athletic directors. They surveyed 320 male and women athletics directors using a questionnaire to collect demographic background, job responsibilities, and background experiences which led them to their leadership positions in athletic administration.

Highlights from their results suggested that women had a greater percentage of higher education degrees and had heavier teaching loads than men. Women ranked coaching women athletes and having been an assistant or associate director of a women's athletic program as more beneficial factors for their career paths than the male respondents in the study. The male respondents ranked coaching male athletes and coaching a revenue-producing sport as more important factors in their career pathways to athletic administration. This study supported previous writings and studies which purported that the general progression for athletic directors began at the coaching and teaching levels and progressed to administrative positions. These findings continued to be corroborated in later studies (McGee, 1984; Zimmer, 1984).

In an attempt to better understand the career patterns or career trajectory of athletic directors, Fitzgerald et al. (1994) incorporated the notion of a normative career trajectory

(Spillerman, 1977). This career trajectory was developed by establishing sequentially ordered and a presumably central position that begins with a single or fixed-entry position and culminates in a single, fixed top position (Moore et al., 1983). For intercollegiate athletic administration, a number of studies have attempted to establish a normative career pattern or trajectory, which consists of five steps: college athlete, high school coach, college coach, assistant or associate athletic director, and college athletic director (Goodloe, 1978; Hatfield et al., 1987; Herron, 1969; Landry, 1983; McGee, 1984; Quarterman, 1992; Williams & Miller, 1983; Youngberg, 1971; Zimmer, 1984).

#### *Women Athletic Administrator Career Pathways*

As noted by Tiell (2003), the career pathway for women in athletics has been a complex journey since the early 1970s. Past research suggested prior sports participation as student-athletes, coaching, and teaching were early steps in the career pathway to athletic job opportunities (Holl, 1996; Lapchick, 2001; Lough, 2004). Lapchick (2001) established that high school women participation was directly related to the opportunities for careers in college athletics later in life. The more significant numbers of young women who participated in athletics, the greater likelihood that these individuals would remain in school and further their education beyond high school. Specifically, for women of color, Lapchick (2001) found a relationship between sports participation and career opportunity. He contended,

To increase the chances that women of color will participate as professional athletes and sports team executives in the future, more of them must compete on the playing field as youngsters. Without athletic opportunity as children, it is unlikely that they

will be part of the sports world as adults. Right now those chances are severely limited by lack of opportunities for girls in urban areas to take advantage of youth sport programs. (p. 248)

Abney (1988) corroborated this assertion in her qualitative study of African American women serving in athletic leadership positions. Her participants' career decision processes began during their participation as high school and undergraduate athletes. She suggested that this prior participation may have helped form a positive view about women in athletics. Teel (2005) interviewed 48 current women athletic directors at NCAA Division I and II institutions. This study was designed to identify the characteristics and critical factors that contributed to the career pathway to athletic leadership. She also found that an overwhelming majority of the women in the study participated in both high school and college athletics.

Another proven career pattern for women in athletic administration has been through teaching and coaching on both high school and college levels. In Tiell's (2004) study of career paths, roles, and tasks of Senior Woman Administrators (SWA), she found that over 58 percent of the SWAs had prior head coaching experience before advancing to administration. In addition to participation in high school and college athletics, Teel's (2005) study participants also had prior coaching experience on the college level. Abney (1988) also found that the first coaching assignment was a part of the career paths of African American women leading to athletic administration leadership positions.

The literature has shown the commonalities of certain experiences that influenced the career path towards athletic administration positions in athletics for women. Many women

athletic administrators participated as college student-athletes, held teaching positions in high school and/or college, and served as high school or college coaches in their pathways towards athletic administration. The literature has also shown the commonality of certain barriers that have influenced careers and advancement in athletic administration.

### *Barriers To Career Advancement in Athletic Administration*

Past research has suggested that there are gender, racial, and organizational barriers in hiring and promotion practices of women for senior-level positions in college athletic administration (Abney, 1988; Acosta & Carpenter, 1985; Benton, 1999; NCAA, 1995; Nelson, 1999; Sagas & Cunningham, 2004; Tiell, 2004). These factors have been cited to explain the decreasing percentage of women in the coaching and athletic administrative career field. Acosta and Carpenter (1985) surveyed men and women involved in intercollegiate athletics and asked them to rank the causes for the diminishing role of women in intercollegiate athletics. They found the following suggested barriers: 1) The success of the “good old boy’s network” kept women from getting “their foot in the door”; 2) The lack of a qualified pool of women applicants for coaching and administrative jobs; 3) Weakness of the “old girls’ club” in which women fail to develop the networking system to keep each other abreast of opportunities and strategies for succeeding in intercollegiate athletics; and 4) Unconscious discrimination by those individuals with authority and power to hire women coaches and administrators. Tiell’s (2004) study of senior woman administrators found similar results to Acosta and Carpenter’s (1985) study. Additional barriers in the Tiell study included a lack of role definition, time/role conflict, and lack of decision-making authority.

Abney's (1988) qualitative investigation also identified barriers to advancement. She reported the five highest-ranking obstacles reported by women employed at historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) were inadequate salary, lack of support groups, being a woman, employer discrimination (sexism), and low expectations by administrators and others. The five highest-ranking obstacles for African American women at predominantly white institutions (PWI) were inadequate salary, lack of support groups, being black, being a woman, and lack of cultural and social outlets in the community. In a further examination of the effects of racial and gender discrimination, Benson (1999) and Nelson (1999) researched the careers of select African American women coaches and administrators. The data from these studies supported the argument that race, gender, and organizational barriers have served to limit career opportunities and advancement in athletic administration for women and African American women. Statistics also revealed the effect of these barriers in diminishing the presence of the women voice in college athletic administration (Acosta & Carpenter, 1985). Only 18.6% of athletic directors of women's programs are women, yet women hold over 35% of all administrative jobs. Further, 14.5% of women's athletic programs totally lacked any women administrator at any level. (Acosta & Carpenter, 2006). Thus, decisions which affected both male and women student-athletes often had only one perspective, that of a man. The current status and the disparity between women and men as participants, coaches, and administrators in the NCAA will be discussed in the next section.

#### Current Status of Women and African American Women in Athletic Administration

Before Title IX in 1972, most universities offered more sports opportunities for men. After the passage of Title IX, the door was open for thousands of women to participate.

Prior to Title IX, most institutions offered an average of two sports programs for women. In 2004, the number of sports programs increased to 8.32 sports programs for women (Acosta and Carpenter, 2004). While women represented only 15 percent of student-athletes in 1971-1972, in 2000-2002 42.1 percent of all student-athletes were women. In addition African American women's participation as college student-athletes had risen by 955 percent from 1971 to 2000 (Butler & Lopiano, 2003). As indicated in previous discussion in the literature review on career paths of women athletic administrators, participation as a high school or college student-athlete was integral in the career decision-making process.

Compliance with Title IX regulations forced many institutions to merge their once separate men's and women's programs. Consequently, the very premises that Title IX established, inclusion and equality of all persons in higher education and employment, resulted in an unequal playing field in careers in athletics leadership in college athletics (Whisenant, 2003). Tiell (2003) states:

For decades, intercollegiate athletics was segregated by gender with men directing men's programs and women directing women's program. In the early eighties when most men and women's intercollegiate athletic programs merged, the male predominately retained the highest leadership position as Director of Athletics and the top women were assigned subordinate positions as assistant directors or they dropped out of the governance structure completely. (p.1)

As institutions expanded their women's programs, coaching opportunities on the collegiate level increased and were filled by men more often than women. In 1972 women coached

more than 90% of the women's collegiate teams, but by 1992, their representation had dropped to 48.3% (Lovett and Lowry, 1994). During that time more men were in better position to secure these newly formed coaching jobs, thus making it more difficult for women to gain employment in these entry-level positions in college athletics (p. 222).

This disparity in the number of women athletic administrators has denied women student-athletes and coaches the opportunity to see positive women role models in positions of decision-making authority. Acosta and Carpenter's (1996) study reported that in 1972, women were more than 90% of head athletic administrators in four-year intercollegiate programs overseeing women's athletics programs. By 1988 the number of women head athletic administrators had dropped to 16.05%. According to the most recent NCAA's report of race and gender demographics of its member institutions (2004), women represented a small number of all head athletic administrative positions as athletics director, at approximately 18%. Acosta and Carpenter (2004) suggest this decrease in the number of women in athletic administration diminishes the presence of a women voice in the highest position held on NCAA member campuses, the Director of Athletics.

In 1990, the NCAA changed the position of Primary Woman Administrator title to Senior Woman Administrator (SWA), the highest-ranking women administrator in the department of athletics. In 1998, the NCAA legislated that every member institution appoints a SWA (NCAA, 2006). Recent research on the SWA position concluded that there should be a natural transition for women from the SWA position to the Director of Athletics (Lough, 2004; Tiell, 2005). However, while women represented 82.5 percent of all SWA positions, these women were not securing the highest athletics position at NCAA member

institutions (NCAA, 2004). Lough (2004) found that these women were at a disadvantage for leadership positions. They were not appointed to decision-making positions such as the SWA during their careers. When examining current placement, African American women were employed as academic counselors, compliance officers, life skills coordinators at a higher rate than any administrative position. Additionally, African American women only represent 5.6 % of SWAs in the NCAA (Lough, 2004; NCAA, 2004) in contrast to the high percentage of all women holding this same position in the NCAA.

Because of the limited number of women in the highest athletic administrative position on campus, the director of athletics, Acosta and Carpenter (1990) suggested:

No woman's voice is heard in the administration of almost one of our every five women's athletics program...The total of 176 women Directors of Athletics in 2002 is four women more than in 2000 and yet it is smaller than in 1998...Division I has the lowest percentage of women Athletic Directors at 8.4 percent or 27. There are more women college presidents of Division I schools than there are women athletic directors in Division I programs. (p. 25)

When focusing on African American women, many athletic administrators at HBCUs have led the way in hiring and promoting African American women in athletic leadership positions (NCAA, 2004; Quarterman, 1992). In 1995-1996, there were a total of six African American women serving as athletic directors in the NCAA, of which four were employed at HBCUs. In 2003-2004, there were nine African American women serving in the same positions, of which seven were employed at HBCUs (NCAA, 2004). Since the enactment of Title IX, there has been an increase in the number of women, and specifically, African

American women college student-athletes. Thus, there is a potential future pool of African American women for coaching and administrative positions in the NCAA.

### Summary

This chapter provided a review of the literature related to the conceptual framework for this study. The five major areas of research identified for the literature were (1) career development theory and its application to women's career choices and development, (2) Social Cognitive Career Theory as related to women's career development, (3) career paths of women in athletic administration, (4) barriers to career choice and development, and (5) review of the current status of women and African American women in the NCAA. The research questions for this study were based in Social Cognitive Career Theory and in previous research on African American women athletic administrators.

Key research findings showed that women's career development was different from men's career development. These differences existed because of variables such as the complexities of multiple role responsibilities, gender-role socialization, race, and class. Researchers found Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) to be a useful career model, which explained women's career development experiences. SCCT examined influences such as self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals as predictors of career choice and behavior (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996). These influences were found, at times, to be hindered by perceived barriers in their career development. However, SCCT further examined the impact of these barriers to career development and explored how individuals use various coping mechanisms to effectively manage and advance their careers (Lent & Brown, 1996).

Studies of athletic administrators' career pathways revealed that men and women have followed similar pathways. Early participation in high school and college athletics as student-athletes, teachers and coaches served as springboards to careers as athletic administrators in the NCAA. Even though there has been a significant increase in women's athletic participation, consequently, the percentage of women athletic administrators and specifically, African American women, has remained low in leadership positions in the NCAA. This low number has been attributed to barriers such as the good old boy's network; lack of support; lack of role models and mentors; and gender, race, and class discriminatory practices (Abney, 1988; Acosta & Carpenter, 2004; Lopiano, 1991; NCAA, 2004). The next chapter presented key research questions, design and methodology used to examine African American women athletic administrator's career pathways in the NCAA.

### CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand what factors influenced the career path development of African American women athletic administrators. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What formative experiences influence the career development of African American women athletic administrators in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)?
2. How do African American women athletic administrators obtain entry and advance professionally in the NCAA?
3. What coping mechanisms do African American women athletic administrators employ that counteract perceived barriers to their NCAA careers?

This chapter described the qualitative methodology used to investigate these research questions above and was organized by the following sections: research design, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness and credibility and reliability, researcher stance and summary.

#### Research Design

Basic interpretive qualitative research served as the methodological approach for conducting this study. Merriam (2002) explained that basic interpretive qualitative research is interested in, "...understanding the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved" (p. 37). All forms of qualitative research have the basic premises of understanding the meaning individuals have about their worlds. The researcher was the key instrument in qualitative research for data collection and analysis. Qualitative data collected for this study offered

thick, rich descriptions about the phenomenon being studied. According to Merriam for a basic interpretive qualitative study, "...the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon, this meaning is mediated through the researcher as instrument, the strategy is inductive, and the outcome is descriptive" (2000, p. 6).

A basic interpretive qualitative design was best suited for this study. First, this design enabled the researcher to conduct an in-depth exploration of a phenomenon that has received little scholarly attention, understanding the career development of African American women athletic administrators in the NCAA. Second, a qualitative design was more beneficial in exposing the complexities of African American women's career advancement in relation to how gender and race have been perceived to influence their career paths to athletic administration. Third, in qualitative research, the researcher is used as the primary data collection instrument. As such, I had the flexibility in collecting information about the research context and study participants by communicating with them face-to-face. These interviews resulted in vivid and colorful illustrations of their lived experiences in intercollegiate athletic administration.

#### Sample Selection

In selecting the sample for study, the goal was to specifically identify participants within the population that were able to contribute the most insight about careers in athletic administration. In order to provide results which would be steeped in rich thick description, purposeful sampling was used to select the participants in this study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 1998).

Purposeful sampling is based on selecting information-rich subjects for in depth study. According to Merriam (1998) purposeful sampling furthers the “assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 61). Patton (2002) further concludes purposeful sampling and the use of “information-rich cases yield insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations” (p. 230).

Purposeful sampling technique was employed to select ten African American female athletic administrators in the NCAA. The first stage of the interviewees was based on the following criteria: (1) employment in a member institution of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), (2) female, (3) African American, and (4) a minimal of 5 years work experience as a senior-level athletic administrator. A list of African American female athletic administrators was generated from the annual *NCAA Committee Membership Handbook* (2004). This handbook listed all committee members on Division I, II, and III committees by institution and position. Also, the database maintained by the Executive Director of the National Association of College Women Athletic Administrators (NACWAA) served as a reference to solicit participation.

In order to capture the lived experiences of women who had experience as a senior-level athletic administrator, this study used a second stage of criteria for selection to those women serving as Director of Athletics, Associate Athletic Directors, Senior Women Administrators, and Assistant Athletic Directors. These women were selected from various levels of the NCAA organizational structure, Divisions I, II, and member Conference offices.

There were ten participants selected for this study. African American female athletic administrators ranging in age from 32 to 55 years of age were interviewed. These ten women represented a diverse geographical background which included the Eastern, Mid-western, and Western part of the United States. This purposeful sample represented women from HBCUs and PWIs. The number working in HBCUs was seven and three at PWIs. Six of the ten women worked at some point in their athletic careers at both types of institutions. Eight of the women held Masters or professional degrees, while five served in dual roles as Senior Woman Administrators (SWA) and Associate Athletic Directors. As a group, the average number of years worked in athletic administration was 12.3 years; and eight of the ten participants had advanced degrees beyond the Bachelor's level. (see Table 1.1).

Request for participation in the study (see Appendix A) were sent to potential participants via e-mail. Participants responded via e-mail and telephone confirming their intent to participate in the study. Upon this initial contact, additional information regarding the nature of the study was provided. Any questions they may have had about the study or process were answered. Next, the following materials were sent via e-mail and/or fax: Interview Consent Form (see Appendix B); Professional Demographic Information form (see Appendix C); and an Interview Guide (see Appendix D). The participants and researcher agreed upon the time, date, and location of the face-to-face interview.

**Table 1.1*****Participant Characteristics***

Characteristics	Number of Participants
Current Position at:	
Historically Black College and University	7
Predominantly White Institution	3
Previous Work Experiences at Both	6
Previous Work Experience at Only One Type of Institution	4
Master's Degree or Professional Degree	8
Bachelor's Degree	2
Athletic Director	1
Senior Woman Administrator	1
SWA/Associate Athletic Director	5
Assistant Athletic Director	3
Years of Experience	
1 – 5 years	1
6 – 10 years	2
11 – 15 years	4
16 – 20 years	2
20 + years	1

**Data Collection**

The primary method of collecting data for this study was through qualitative semi-structured interviewing. Other key data included field notes and artifacts such as organizational charts, newspaper articles, personal resumes, and vitae of participants. The interview questions developed for this study were derived from the review of the literature and from field notes from the pilot study. The pilot study was conducted to refine research

questions, interview style, and determined additional probing questions. I also used observation notes of both participant's the environment and the nuances of the participant during the interviews. Resumes, newspaper articles, and Internet articles were additional artifacts collected and reviewed at the interview sites.

During the interview process, all of the responses were recorded via audiotape (both digital and cassette). A vital component of the data collection process was an accurately transcribed transcript. For this study, a transcription machine was used to transfer spoken words to transcripts of each audio taped interview. Each interview transcription contained the interview questions and responses. Each interview was transcribed as soon as possible to identify any needed improvements and additional questions to be explored or clarified.

Additionally, field notes were taken during the interviews and throughout the research process. These field notes captured the thoughts, feelings, and demeanor of the participants. This active participation was vital to the processes of observing, reflecting and writing. Janesick (2004) observed that "... the role of the researcher as one characterized by discipline, persistence, and desire to communicate the findings so as to reflect the social setting and its members" (p. 8).

### *Pilot Study*

Between February 2005 and June 2005, I conducted a small pilot study which investigated the factors that influenced the career development patterns of four African American women athletic administrators. Specifically, these four women had work experiences at both HBCUs and PWIs. A basic qualitative research design was used and a

purpose sampling technique was used to select participants in this pilot study. A pseudonym was assigned to each respondent to preserve confidentiality for identification purposes.

The data collection for the pilot study was achieved using taped recorded face-to-face interviews. The interviewing time for each participant averaged an hour and a half. The researcher had the tapes transcribed and conducted data analysis. The data analysis resulted in the construction of categories from open coding. The results of the data analysis were included into the entire dataset for this research project. Results from the pilot study helped the researcher in several ways. First, the range and depth of the experiences of the more mature participants provided deeper insight into their lives and career patterns. This led the researcher to seek out additional participants with career experiences at HBCUs. Second, the pilot study allowed the researcher to refine the research questions and helped the researcher add additional probing questions to capture more rich descriptive data.

### *Interview Process*

Patton (2002) asserted that capturing the actual words of the person being interviewed is vital to qualitative research. Six additional interviews were conducted with African American women athletic administrators from February, 2006 and June, 2006. The interviews ranged from one hour to two and a half hours in length. The interviews were conducted at the location of each participant's selection and were free of distractions and interruptions. Before each interview started, each participant signed two copies of the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix B).

During each interview, a series of questions facilitated by an interview guide was used in order to get each participant to tell her story of how she developed and advanced in

athletic administration. The use of in-depth probing interviewing techniques were used to seek out additional information from the interviews. The expressions “tell me more” and “please elaborate” were used to incite each participant to add as much detail and description to their responses.

After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher read each interview several times. This process was used to ensure accuracy. Each transcript was sent to the participant for review of accuracy and clarity. If there was any discrepancy between what was transcribed and the participant’s responses, a follow-up call and e-mail was sent to the interviewee, with a request to correct, add to, or make adjustments to the data. All tapes and transcripts were stored in a secure setting.

#### *Field Notes*

The field notes recorded by the interviewer were used as another source of data. Key areas that needed further discussion, observations of the environment, body language, facial expressions and voice tones were recorded and helped facilitate the data analysis process.

#### *Document Analysis*

Document analysis was another data collection method employed in this study. Each participant was asked to submit a resume and bring any newspaper or Internet articles written about them during their careers. I also conducted a media search on each participant. These data served as supplements to the interviews.

### Data Analysis

For this study, the transcribed recordings of the interviews, detailed and reflective field notes of the researcher’s observations, and other documents collected from participants

were used for data analysis using the constant comparative method. Constant comparative analysis was used to analyze the data. According to Goetz and LeCompte (1981) this method "combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all social incidents observed (p. 58). As social phenomena were recorded and classified, they were also compared across categories, which began with the analysis of the interviews. They further stated, "As events are constantly compared with previous events, new topological dimension, as well as new relationships, maybe discovered" (p. 58).

Each participant's responses and researcher notes were organized according to the interview questions. This sequencing and organization of the data allowed me to record themes which emerged from the responses. For example, when all participants repeatedly mentioned the importance of education to their careers, "education" emerged as a theme. This process was utilized throughout the data analysis process. The second step involved coding by segmenting the themes into larger clusters of categories. Preliminary codes were assigned to these themes and categories. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), "Coding is analysis. To review a set of field notes, transcribed or synthesized, and to dissect them meaningfully, while keeping the relations between the parts intact, is the stuff of analysis" (p. 56). Initial coding revealed general categories such as: formative experiences, career pathways, and perceived barriers. These categories expanded to themes to convey and interpret the meanings the participants communicated about their lived experiences as intercollegiate athletic administrators

## Ensuring Trustworthiness and Credibility

Evaluating and critiquing qualitative research are based on the paradigm from which qualitative methods have been developed. Qualitative concepts of validity and reliability, or trustworthiness and credibility, are strategies to describe specific criteria used to evaluate qualitative research studies (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; LeCompte & Goetz, 1992; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Credibility is ensuring that the findings generated are understood and based on the data from the study. Trustworthiness is the extent to which one can believe in the research findings.

Several strategies were used to ensure credibility and trustworthiness such as triangulation (multiple methods of data collection were used), thick description (reflected complexities in the data), member checks (going back to the informants to see if the analysis made sense to them and reflected their experiences), and maintained a researcher journal which enhanced self-reflection.

The interview questions used in this study ensured that all participants had the opportunity to respond to the same questions. Verbatim transcriptions provided rich and thick descriptions of their career experiences. In addition, field notes, demographic questionnaires, resumes, vitae, and archival documentation such as organizational charts were also analyzed for triangulation. Additionally, measures were taken to clarify and validate my interpretation of the data. First, I acknowledged and disclosed my subjectivities, assumptions, biases and conceptual framework of the study. I frequently reviewed field notes from the actual interviews and listened to tape recorded reflections of personal thoughts and feelings which came about by the interview process. Second, member checks were used

to verify accuracy and engaged the participants in the construction of meaning. Last, I consulted with my advisor to review the coding process and preliminary themes for accuracy in the coding and analysis process. These processes contributed to the trustworthiness of this study.

An audit trail which described the data collection and analysis processes was maintained. This aided in the decision-making process which helped enhance credibility of the study (Merriam, 1998). A description of the design and methods of the study were clearly detailed describing how data were collected, coded, and filed in order to maintain a careful audit trail (Merriam, 2001). The careful organization of data collection, the use of field notes contributed to the credibility of this study.

#### Researcher Stance

Lincoln and Guba (2003) conclude that qualitative researchers often have a deeply invested interest in the topic that they are studying and therefore it is important that the researcher is conscious of the bias and assumptions he/she brings to the study. As the primary instrument of data collection, I come to this research with a personal and professional interest in college athletics and the advancement of African American women in this profession. It is my intention to discuss my personal background as it relates to African American women and African American women in sports to increase the awareness of the biases which may affect the interpretation of the words and meanings of the participants in this study.

I am an African American women intercollegiate athletic administrator and instructor at an HBCU public institution whose career as a head coach which progressed to an athletic

administrator spanned a 12 year period. The words of wisdom which have been passed down and instilled in me have been shaped and molded by the kaleidoscope of people in my life, my educational background, and my life opportunities.

This dissertation truly represents the passion I have for understanding how people can reach their potential through their personal and work lives, regardless of the number and kinds of obstacles they may confront. I believe that people, education, life experiences, opportunities and appreciation for diversity are essential to one's success in life. Now, as a parent, I will instill all of these things in my children in hopes that they too will learn to understand and accept people for who they are. It is important that they learn to develop their lives through personal interaction, education and opportunities.

Thus, the goal for this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the participant's world without allowing the experiences and bias of the researcher to affect the responses of the participants and the findings of the study. My goal, as researcher, was to remain aware of the biases which may have influenced the interpretation of the data. I understood that my passion for promoting not only women in athletic administration, but more specifically, African American women in the field, was important to this research. However, I also understood that my passion should not be a barrier to my recognition of other's positions and perspectives.

Information from participants in this study would build upon the knowledge base and overall understanding of the influences on the career advancement of African American women athletic administrators. The participants must feel comfortable and possess a certain amount of trust toward the researcher. It is not unusual for the participant to be hesitant

when an outsider is trying to get “into” their world. However, because of my broad knowledge and understanding of the politics of job opportunities in athletic administration as an African American woman, the participants may be more comfortable with their role in the research.

### Summary

Basic interpretive qualitative research guided the design of this study. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants for this study. Participants engaged in face-to face interviews and submitted resumes or vitae to reveal the thoughts and meanings of their experiences as athletic administrators. The data was coded to identify various themes using the research questions as a guide. Triangulation, member checks and a documented detail audit of the research design, helped to insure credibility and trustworthiness of this study. The role of the researcher was discussed to bring to light any bias from the experiences as an African American woman. The next chapter discusses the findings that emerged from the study.

## CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

This qualitative study captured the stories of ten African American women's career pathways. This investigation redressed a dearth of research which explored the careers of African American women athletic administrators, as well as factors which have influenced or hindered their professional and personal development. The purpose of this study was to understand what factors influenced the career pathways of African American women athletic administrators. Hence, the following questions were examined to achieve this purpose.

1. What formative experiences influence the career development of African American women athletic administrators in the NCAA?
2. How do African American women athletic administrators obtain entry and advance professionally in the NCAA?
3. What coping mechanisms do African American women athletic administrators employ that counteract perceived barriers or obstacles to their NCAA careers?

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section provides an overview of the participants in this study. The second section shares the findings of this study by presenting the major themes and categories identified during data analysis of the interviews.

### Participants

All ten participants currently work in the field of intercollegiate athletic administration at NCAA member institutions. To understand the uniqueness of each participant, a brief portrait of each African American woman is presented below. Please note that each participant was given a pseudonym.

*Brenda.* Brenda has been serving as the Director of Compliance for three years. Her involvement with sports began at the age of five and was influenced by a family jam-packed with athletes. Her siblings participated in sports, as well as her parents. She won numerous sports awards as a young woman, which eventually led to a full athletics scholarship to college. Brenda participated in basketball, volleyball and softball during her undergraduate years. Consequently, her athletic prowess was noticed by several coaches, and she became one of her university's most talented, multi-sports student-athletes.

Brenda's college softball and basketball coach was one of the most influential individuals in her professional life. He insisted that she pursue opportunities in athletics, and as a result, she secured an internship in a major NCAA Division II conference office. Since that time, she has worked in various intercollegiate settings that range from the sports conference level to college campuses. Brenda's five to ten year career plan included serving as a Director of Athletics at a mid-level NCAA institution and also gaining greater experiences at other types of NCAA member institutions to include Division I, Division III, and Predominantly White Institutions.

*Danielle.* Danielle was recently promoted to a full-time administrative role at her present institution. For many years, she mentored and coached young women on and off the court. Danielle's dedication to education and sports was heavily influenced by her mother, who raised 12 children during her lifetime. Her mother's compelling desires for her children to be successful on and off the court led Danielle to successfully pursue a full athletic scholarship. As a student-athlete, Danielle lettered in both volleyball and softball at an NCAA Division I, public HBCU in Florida.

Her undergraduate degree in Criminal Justice helped her obtain a full-time job as a police officer, after college graduation. During that time, she also volunteered at the institution where she had attended college. This role fueled her passion for sports and she eventually decided to make a career change. This decision led her to begin a successful career as a coach and an administrator. Danielle's future plans focus on becoming a Director of Athletics at the intercollegiate level.

*Toni.* Toni's career development began at home with her parents. Heavily influenced by her father who was a high school basketball coach, Toni participated in several sports when she started middle school; however, she quit competitive athletics and decided to be a cheerleader after entering high school. Nonetheless, Toni's interest in competitive athletics persisted as she was a sports enthusiasts whether on the court or from the sidelines.

Unlike some of the other participants, Toni did not participate in college sports as a student-athlete. However, she did start her writing career as a sports reporter at the campus newspaper. Her passion for writing and sports evolved into a strong interest in sports journalism and marketing. Since her graduation, she has worked in marketing, sports information and fundraising in college as well as for professional sports organizations. Her long-term career desires include continuing to work in a senior-level administrative capacity at a major NCAA Division I institution or in professional sports.

*Davita.* Davita had one of the most diverse careers in athletic administration among the participants. At an early age she knew that sports would be a part of her career. Davita was raised by older parents. Both of her parents grew up in the 1920s, which meant for her, a constant reminder of the struggles they endured as African Americans during the depression

and civil rights eras. They stressed to her the importance of not only obtaining a college degree, but completing some type of graduate or professional degree to get ahead as a young African American woman.

Davita started her career as a sports journalist during high school which led her to become the sports editor for the campus newspaper during her undergraduate and graduate years. Her expert writing skills landed the prestigious position of President of the Student Law Review while pursuing her law degree. Davita broke early barriers as she was the first African American Director of Marketing at NCAA headquarters. She had extensive experiences at the Conference, NCAA Division I and II levels and professional sports. Her future five to ten year career goals include becoming a Director of Athletics at an NCAA Division I or II institution.

*Ayanna.* Ayanna was the youngest participant at age 33. Since the age of three, when she began her formal education, her parents instilled the importance of education. By the time she was five, she was fluent in Spanish. Most of her early sports experiences focused on participating in soccer with her brother. Similar to the other participants, she tried several sports before deciding that the sideline (or off the court/field) was where she was best suited. During her college years, she majored in political science, but was told by a friend that the football team did not have enough athletic trainers and she should try her hand at becoming an athletic trainer. Thus, she started her focus on athletics as a career at this point.

After graduating from college, she attended a Midwestern institution for further studies in law. While there she was afforded the opportunity to volunteer with a highly

esteemed woman pioneer in college athletics, which greatly influenced her desire to continue a career in college athletic administration. Since graduation from Law School, Ayanna has served in almost every capacity in athletic administration. Her long term goal is to become a Director of Athletics.

*Cherie.* Cherie grew up in a small mid-western town. She excelled as an athlete from middle school to college, where she was a recipient of an athletic scholarship. Cherie knew early on that she wanted to coach. Her undergraduate major in college was Physical Education and she continued on to obtain her Master's degree in Education. Cherie has climbed the ladder quickly in athletic administration. She has served as Senior Woman Administrator (SWA) before being promoted to her current position of Athletic Director for an NCAA Division II HBCU.

Cherie has strong family values. She and her husband have been together since middle school and work diligently to keep family roles intact, which according to Cherie, is part of her duty as a wife and mother. Cherie epitomizes the concept of "superwoman" where the work-life balance is truly accomplished as she believes that her roles as wife, mother, and career woman are all essential elements in her everyday life. Her future goals include continuing her work as a Director of Athletics at a University closer to home.

*Latoya.* Latoya grew up in a very diverse northeast city with integrated schools. At an early age, she was provided with opportunities as an athlete, to participate in a variety of sports spanning from basketball to field hockey. She obtained her undergraduate degree in Physical Education and her graduate degree in Counseling. Latoya's career began in what is considered a more traditional career field for women during the late 1950s - education. Her

husband's job required her family to move quite often during their marriage, thus making it difficult to focus on her career. She began her career as a teacher, then gradually moved into administration as a counselor. Even though she is one of the more mature participants, her career as an athletic administrator was the shortest.

She is the only full-time Senior Woman Administrators (SWA) among all ten participants. Latoya wishes to retire soon, however she plans to continue to stay involved as a volunteer in college athletics.

*Schannon.* Schannon had over 15 years of experience as a coach and administrator. She has excelled as a student-athlete, coach, and administrator. Her career in athletics began during her graduate studies at a mid-western Predominantly White Institution (PWI), where she served as an intern for the Women's Athletic Department. After graduate school she utilized her undergraduate and graduate degrees in public administration and worked as an accountant for a company which serviced the US Armed Forces. In addition, she taught public administration courses at an HBCU. However, her deep desire and connection to college athletics never wavered. Her family encouraged her to leave her career in public administration to seek out her true passion, college athletics.

Schannon has devoted her career to working at an HBCU institution. In addition, she has served on several NCAA committees which have helped to enhance her career and establish a diverse network of constituents. Her family has always been a major part of her personal and career life. Schannon's husband and children travel with her teams and continue to travel with her as an administrator. She has managed to merge work and family in a very unique manner in order to maintain balance in her life. She commented on how she

has incorporated her work travel into her family vacation plans. Every opportunity she had to intertwine work and family (attending sporting events together for example), she has taken advantage of the opportunity. Her future plans included becoming a Director of Athletics of an NCAA member institution.

*Ariel.* Ariel had some of the most diverse experiences in intercollegiate and professional athletics throughout her career. Ariel was exposed early during her childhood to college life and athletics. Her father was an athletic administrator at a local HBCU in her hometown. She remembered attending games, seminars, plays, and other extracurricular activities with her brothers and sisters. After graduating from college, she served in many capacities at this same institution. In her first full-time job, she served as the Sports Information Director and Cheerleading Advisor/Coach. These experiences opened the door, as she became the Public Relations Director for an NCAA Conference office.

Ariel became the first woman Director of Athletics at a southern HBCU institution. During this time period, she restructured this athletics program by implementing policies and procedure guidelines, hired additional administrative staff, and helped this University rise to the top in athletic competition in their conference.

Her present position allows her to continue working hands-on with student-athletes. She values these experiences because she misses the advantages of working closely with student-athletes, the experience administrators at member institutions and conferences have each day. Her future plans include retiring from administration and pursuing teaching of Sports Management or Athletic administration at an institution near her hometown.

*Rena.* Rena was also exposed to college life and athletics at a very early age because both of her parents were completing their undergraduate degrees during her childhood years. She remembered, especially, attending basketball games to watch her father compete. She grew up in a Midwestern state and shared, “If you didn’t play basketball in [Midwestern state], you were not normal.” Thus, she participated in basketball and volleyball throughout middle school and high school.

Rena continued on to earn a scholarship to play volleyball at a prestigious All-Women’s school. Even though she received her degree in economics, she was fascinated by college athletics and thus chose to serve as an intern at NCAA headquarters. This internship experience led to many future full-time work opportunities working for both HBCUs and PWIs, private and public, and Divisions I, II and III institutions. Her future plans included becoming a Director of Athletics.

The women in this study had a number of common experiences, however, the stories illustrated these similarities and differences in their career pathways that led them to their roles as college athletic administrators. The next section illustrates the major findings derived from this study.

### Findings

The findings presented in the three sections represented the most noteworthy themes identified during data analysis using the constant comparative process and developed into major categories. These categories were further developed into themes. The categories were: 1) formative experiences influencing careers;

2) career pathways to athletic administration; and, 3) perceived barriers to career advancement and coping strategies. These key findings are enumerated in Table 2.1, Data Display Summary of Findings.

**Table 2.1**

*Data Display Summary of Findings*

Sections	Categories & Themes
I. Formative Experiences Influencing Careers	A. Family's Educational Expectations B. Athletics Participation as Students C. Career Dreams
II. Career Pathways to Athletic Administration	A. Women Promoting Women B. Professional Development C. Paving the Way
III. Perceived Barriers to Career Advancement	A. Good Old Boy Network B. Limited Access to Opportunities C. Race and Gender Discrimination D. Coping Mechanisms

*Formative Experiences Influencing Careers*

The women in this study shared stories about their family backgrounds, childhood sports participation, and work experiences. Their experiences illustrated their families' influence on education and sports, and their childhood career dreams. This section presented the themes that emerged from their stories: (1) educational expectations; (2) athletic participation; and, (3) career dreams.

*Family's influence and expectations of education.* The lives of all ten participants were significantly influenced by strong family values focused on education and

extracurricular activities. As the stories of their career pathways unfolded, it was evident for these women that their families affected their pathways to success in athletic administration. For example, they credited their parent's influence for their pursuits of undergraduate and graduate studies and subsequent impacts of their formal education on their career successes. For example, Davita noted,

Our parents stressed that a bachelor's degree was fine for them, but me and my brother needed graduate degrees. My parents' degrees were hung in front of the television, since that's what we did as a family, watch TV, so it sort of sent subliminal messages to us regarding the importance of education.

Cherie remembered as a young girl the exact words from her mother regarding to obtaining a college degree. She recalled,

My mother always said to us as we were growing up, 'Once you get a degree, nobody can take it away from you.' The other thing she always said, 'Once you get your degree, you decide what you want to do in life and where you want to live because they're no restrictions placed on you except for those that you place upon yourself.'

Because their childhoods span the early 1950s to the late 1970s, several participants could recount social and political events that impacted their families and themselves. The Jim Crow era, the ascensions and assassinations of Malcolm X and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., as well as other watershed moments during the modern Civil Rights Movement, and the passing of Title IX legislation were significant life experiences for the ten participants. These social and political events which occurred during the participants' formative years prompted their parents to emphasize the importance of college degrees and

advanced education. Further, their status as women and African Americans meant that they would be in a position of double jeopardy. Thus, being a woman and African American would necessitate extra effort for them to be successful. Ayana, a 31 year-old Director of Compliance at a PWI institution, shared that she was held to a higher standard because she was a girl. She explained,

My parents' expectation of education for me was different than for my brother. I was expected to finish school and go to college. There's education all throughout my family, more so with the women than men. They realized that girls needed more education to make sure they were qualified for more opportunities.

Most of the participants came from families where their parents, aunts, uncles, and in some cases, grandparents completed some type of formal education beyond the secondary level. Rena added,

We didn't even talk about it. It was understood that I had to get good grades and that I was going to college. I know that was the expectation. I grew up on a college campus because my parents were still in college, so I spent a lot of time in the college environment.

Toni, gave an account of her family's rich heritage "steeped" in the tradition of education. She proudly remembered that even though her father's parents only obtained an eighth grade education, all seven of his children attended college. She recounted,

My family's background is steeped in the tradition of education. Education was seen as a way to move up and to advance. Seventy percent of my family went into

education as a field from prison education to higher education. It was never an option, I was programmed, it wasn't an option.

Not only was the formal educational experiences important, but the informal educational experiences were also valued. Latoya, eloquently shared how her father inspired her to understand the importance of education to advancing in life.

My father went to New York every day. So, we always knew what Malcolm was doing. And when we began to be introduced to the ideals of Martin Luther King, Jr., -- nonviolence and education, education was so important. This is what people were being denied in so many places. And so then I realized this is the only way we're going to make it. This is the only way our people are ever going to get anything, go anywhere, do anything. We have got to be educated.

The emphasis on family values of education heard through their responses highlighted the importance of education, as the vehicle by which opportunities for advancement would occur as they transitioned from college into their careers. In addition, their career pathways were influenced by societal and personal of experiences the participants and their families. Pursuing a college and professional/graduate degree appeared to be paramount for eventual enjoyment and success as athletic administrators. Their Sports participation during their youth and adult lives was an influential factor in their career choice and pathways.

#### *Athletic Participation*

There was richness in each of the participants' stories concerning the impact of education and sports participation on their career choices and advancement. All of the

participants competed as athletes at some point in their lives. Six of the women competed during college as student-athletes, while three worked as undergraduate interns and student assistants in the athletic departments at the schools they attended. These experiences opened the doors of opportunity to their present careers.

The childhood experience of sports had profound impact on the growth and development of all ten participants. Most participants suggested that sports instilled discipline and taught them the importance of team work. In their quest to become “lifelong” athletes, many of them recalled playing sports at very early ages. The diversity in the types of sports and the length of participation of each sport varied. Later, some of the participants revealed that over time, the life of a student-athlete became something less desired. Toni recalled participating in a variety of sports but vividly remembered each reason why she moved on to another sport and eventually settled into writing for her school’s newspaper. She shared,

I remember playing softball in the fifth grade, but later became the scorekeeper because I didn’t like the sun....In middle school, I played basketball, volleyball and was sports editor of the newspaper. However, after quitting the basketball team because of the demands and expectations of my father, who was a high school coach, I decided on cheerleading because that way, I could still get in the games for free and was still connected to athletics.

Danielle’s mother stressed the importance of athletics as a way to instill values which helped the personal and social development of her children. She explained,

My mother got us involved in athletics to keep us busy and out of trouble. She wanted us to learn to interact and build our social skills through sports. She believed that this could prepare us for a college athletics scholarship as an avenue to pay for college.

Rena vividly remembered going to basketball games with her mother to watch her father who was also a college student-athlete. These frequent visits to the gym resulted in her becoming an athlete. She recalled, “I felt like I grew up in the gym. I think that’s how it got started.” Many of the participants described how their participation in sports had spanned throughout their lives. Recounting her youth, Brenda shared,

I’ve participated in athletics since I was five years old. So, I’ve lived; I’ve breathed sports. I started out playing tee-ball when I was five. I went all the way through college on athletics scholarships...I went on a basketball scholarship. So, I’ve been an athlete all my life.

### *Career Dreams*

Many of the participants’ childhood career dreams were considered “nontraditional” (math, science, and law) during their formative school years. Several of the participants stated their childhood career dreams were to become lawyers, doctors, or accountants. Thus, their undergraduate degree majors reflected this array of careers. It was not until many of them reached graduate school, did their focus become more closely situated in the field of athletics. However, Ariel recalled early on wanting to go into a nontraditional career field for women. She recalled, “My earliest recollection of any kind of career was wanting to go

into television and do what Jane Goodman Hall was doing. I wanted to do the sports reports, sideline reports... I wanted to do television journalism...sports journalism.”

Davita remembered her parents, especially her father, wondering why she was transitioning her career focus to athletics after earning a degree in journalism. She recalled, I remember when I was talking about working in athletic administration—we’re talking about ’79-’80—there weren’t even black men working in athletic administration, much less black women. There were no black assistant coaches in the ACC—none. There were no administrators, male nor women. It just seemed, to me, for my father and my brother, it just seemed like something that was impossible. But I was like, there’s something I can do in this field.

As she continued to pursue a career in athletics and advanced in her career she expressed how her parents shifted their perception of women in sports careers. She suggested,

My mother’s thing was whatever I wanted to do, she was going to support it. She didn’t understand why I wanted to do that but since I wanted to do that she was going to support it. When I did get the job at the NCAA, my father was completely flabbergasted, because he couldn’t believe these were full time jobs. He was like, “It’s just little sports stuff. How you going to get a job doing that all year round?” My first job at the NCAA was only \$18,000 a year... My father was like, “I can’t believe these people are paying you full time and they’re giving you benefits.”

The participants also discussed how their families were apprehensive with regards to their career choice early on, but did not falter in their support for them to succeed. The

resounding echo from all of the participants revealed the true spirit of their families enduring support of their daughters' goals and dreams. Brenda commented, "My family always embraced anything that I wanted to do. As long as I was putting forth effort in whatever direction that I wanted to pursue, they were always there to support me."

Ayana told a humorous story about how her father joked with her about getting college athletics scholarship at the school where she oversaw eligibility. She jovially commented,

Well, my dad has this running joke that eventually he's going to be able to get a scholarship wherever I'm working to play a sport—even though his eligibility has exhausted. It's become something that my parents like to talk about.

Although family joked about her career, she expressed how exciting it has been to have her parents proud of what she's doing. She vibrantly shared, "It's been really exciting to have them follow my career and they're aware of everything that goes on in my career and they can tell everybody where I've been."

Only one of the participants admitted that their childhood career dream was to actually become a coach. Cherie recalled,

My childhood career dream was to be a basketball coach. Beginning in middle school after watching my middle school basketball coach, I was just so intrigued and so impressed with her, her work ethics and the profession. And so much to the point as, "Oh, she gets to come to work in shorts and all relaxed and everything." So, immediately, I decided in middle school that I wanted to be a basketball coach.

Overall, it was evident that family influence on education played a dynamic role in shaping their development as African American women. The first set of findings of the study was that the women's career pathways had a formative component that included three influences. First, their strict adherence to families' values and expectations of education were influential in the participant's undergraduate and professional/graduate work. Second, their early experiences as athletes had an impact on their continued participation on the college level, thus, introduced them to career opportunities in athletics. Third, each woman described her early career aspirations. They did not all choose careers in athletic administration initially, but their desire and love for athletics led them to athletics. In the next segment, the factors which helped to advance their careers in athletic administration will be explored.

#### Career Pathways to Athletic Administration

Career pathways to athletic administration described how these women developed relationships, participated in professional development programs, and suggested the impact of Title IX legislation on their career pathways. The participants also focused on the importance of formal knowledge and job skills to become successful in the field. Thus, the themes illustrated in this section were: (1) women promoting women, (2) professional development, and (3) paving the way.

##### *Women Promoting Women*

One of the overarching themes revealed in the interviews was the significance of influential people in their lives, specifically women who were considered pioneers in the field of intercollegiate athletics. Schannon, Brenda, and Cherie all mentioned women who

were working at HBCUs as some of the most influential women in their careers. All of the women mentioned were former coaches who, similar to many of the participants in this study, endured through the early Title IX years and fought for young girls and women's rights for equality in college athletics. Many of these pioneering women had either a direct or indirect impact on their careers.

One of the most important factors in their career advancement was the belief that women reaching back to help another would further enhance their career pathways. Danielle discussed the impact of her boss along with other women in her department on her career. Her current boss, the Director of Athletics, was once the Associate Athletic Director and Senior Woman Administrator (SWA). She stated,

She was the only means I had at the time. And, she has done an excellent job of preparing me and kind of molding me and mentoring me for a move into administration. She was there a lot longer than I was in the battle alone.... So, when we weren't able to go out where she was, she would come back, she always fed us the knowledge that we needed.

Davita also shared how she did not have many opportunities to work with other African American women in the field, but utilized resources shared with them by white men to further enhance their careers. She reflected,

It would have been helpful to have been able to see somebody that looked like me doing something that I wanted to do. It was very frustrating to me early in my career that the only people that I could look to that had actually extended a hand, who had given me a chance, who had given me an opportunity were white men.

Thus, as reflected by the participants, the opportunity to now share with younger aspiring African American women athletic administrators was part of their responsibility. Brenda shared the following:

Being around some of my older mentors... to see where they came from and now what we are afforded because they were pioneers. So, I work hard to try to always reach back to those who are up and coming who are fresh in the profession and expose them to opportunities that I didn't know about when I was where they are now. And I think that as women we owe that to those that are coming up behind us.

Danielle further supported the notion of sharing with future women administrators, she exclaimed,

...we were never in this alone...And that was the attitude we took. And that we knew that we had to act sort of in a pioneer role because we knew that there were others coming behind us so what we did determined the paths of others.

The impact of women mentors and role models contributed greatly to the direction in which the women journeyed to become administrators in intercollegiate athletics. Yet, this was only a piece of a larger puzzle, which helped piece together their careers. External influences such as professional development and training programs also contributed greatly to their success.

### *Professional Development*

The success of a woman athletic administrator and her organization began with the vision and values of its leadership. For many of these participants, they were influenced by

individuals in key leadership positions in their institution, conference office, the NCAA and other organizations which support women's athletics.

It was very evident for most of the participants that their success was in part due to opportunities for professional development and the support and guidance from key individuals in decision-making positions at their institutions. One key factor was the NCAA's emphases on diversity and inclusion by implementing professional development programs for women and minorities. Highlighting the NCAA's influence on diversity and inclusion, Latoya, who had recently moved into an athletic administration position talked about how the NCAA and her employer has supported opportunities for professional development in her role as SWA, the highest-ranking women position on an NCAA campus in athletics. She exclaimed,

I may not know everything that is supposed to be done but I have lots of support and I have lots of resources to go to for help...People in this organization want this position [SWA] to be successful. And they seem to be willing to do anything and everything to help." So, that's where I felt lots of support from my conference level, from the national level, and from my college administration team.

Other organizations such as the Women's Sports Foundation (WSF) and the National Association of College Women Athletic Administrators (NACWAA) also played an integral role in the training and enhancement of women in sports. Both of these organizations offered extensive training workshops and seminars for women's careers in athletics. Seven of the ten participants completed seminars and workshops offered by all three organizations. Specifically, the week-long intensive institute sponsored by NACWAA brought together

renowned women and men in college athletics and future women athletic administrators. This week of mentoring opportunities and training sessions offered workshops in managing intercollegiate athletics programs. Four of the ten participants participated in NCAA sponsored programs, and all ten participants have attended NCAA seminars on Title IX and Diversity.

Brenda echoed Latoya's admiration of programs such as the NACWAA institute for women. She indicated that NACWAA, as well as the conference office, helped to enhance her career by offering programs to strengthen women athletic administrators. Latoya shared,

Well first I'd have to start with our conference-the CIAA because my hat goes off to [Patricia] at the conference office for really steering the direction of SWAs and getting us to be recognized as senior woman administrators on each of our campuses and to be respected by our colleagues within the conference. And that has been very key. The second one would be NACWAA and that's the National Association for Women Athletic Administrators. Going through much of their programming and their sessions, workshops, etc., you are exposed to so many people and able to expand your network base. The NCAA as well has embraced the position of the SWA and has been strategic in enhancing opportunities for women and minorities. So, that's it.

Ayana, Brenda, and Rena had the opportunity to participate in one of the most prominent leadership programs in the NCAA, the NCAA Fellows Program. Only 18 participants are selected for this 18-month program. Ayana applauded the program and felt very strongly that this opened her eyes to more aspects of intercollegiate athletics. She exclaimed,

The Fellows Program has probably been the culmination of it at this point. Getting into the Fellows Program and being assigned to a mentor has really been a great opportunity to learn from someone who has been a woman, who has made it through the ranks, has been an outspoken woman, and is still getting it done. I spent three days with her about two weeks ago in Texas. She treated me just like I was one of her employees...she gave me carte blanche access to everything. It was just a great opportunity.

These programs served as prominent steps along their career paths. The data revealed that once the participants knew what they wanted to do, a more deliberate approach to ensuring that they succeeded was taken. The women expressed the importance of participating in NCAA and NACWAA professional development programs.

### *Paving the Way*

Historically, Title IX and Affirmative Action both helped provide access and opportunities to college and professional degrees for all of the participants. Although all of the participants seemed to recognize the affects of Title IX, most felt that Affirmative Action was truly the vehicle that provided more access for African American women.

Enacted in 1972, Title IX legislation served as a major impetus for women to gain access to higher education. This access also granted more opportunities for women to engage in extracurricular activities, including college athletics (Acosta & Carpenter, 2005).

This piece of legislation, according to Latoya, was a necessity. She proclaimed,

It's a must. It is an absolute must. As much as you want to think that we have progressed in our thinking in terms of fairness – that is so not true. And, and I see – I

see regularly that given an opportunity to not be fair...given an opportunity to not be equal still seems to be in the human spirit. Because people still will try to do that if they can do it and get away with it.

Schannon echoed Latoya's statement, "Title IX was the key to open doors for women in sports and put back integrity in athletics and education." Rena agreed that Title IX has been a great benefit to women in sports. She expressed, "It's just been so positive and so important for women who participate and for their health and for their mental well-being. It's just so much that women gain from it."

Brenda also commented on the importance of how Title IX has provided her with the opportunity to as she stated, "Get in the door, to break down the barricades along the pathway. As far as Title IX, I realized that without Title IX, I probably wouldn't be sitting here with you today. The opportunity to first participate as a women is key...it's allowed us to be able to embrace sports...." This legislation continued to be an impetus in Ayana's fight for equality for women in sports. She remarked,

As I became an adult, learning more about Title IX and how it affected women with access to education and jobs, as well as access to sports and activities, that was something that continued to push me forward in pursuing being an athletic administrator. There are some women that took the opportunity – a lot of white women – to make opportunities for young women coming behind them. I think Title IX definitely has been something big. The rights they're waging against women and girls in sports (they're really aiming at the wrong people) continue to push me to fight again.

Even though Ayana's suggested approval of Title IX and its effects on women sports she, like a few other participants, also had some reservations about the effectiveness and intent of Title IX. For example, Toni certainly endorsed the intent of Title IX, however she shared some skepticism regarding how it's been used. She stated,

Personally, I think Title IX is a very important piece of legislation. I think it's valid but in terms of the NCAA I think its rhetoric. That's my honest opinion. I think they talk a good game, make it sound real good, but we're not there. I don't know when we're going to get there. I think we are making strides, don't get me wrong; but I don't know if the strides are in the actual Title IX legislation or just the evolution of society...I believe in Title IX but I don't know if the people who put it out there believe in it.

Davita believed that Title IX has addressed the issues of women in education and athletics, and that Title IX has provided opportunity for women. But Title IX has had limited impact on the careers of women of color. She asserted,

Title IX has provided an excellent opportunity for white women to be able to excel in athletic administration. Title IX has provided great access opportunity in terms of athletics participation for women, black and white, but in terms of administration, Title IX has done nothing to help women of color.

Although the women felt strongly that Title IX served as a major impetus in their careers, there was a more pervasive suggestion that Affirmative Action policies had an equal if not more influence on the opportunities gained in athletic administration. Ayana was passionate about the value of Affirmative Action on her career. She asserted,

I believe that affirmative action creates opportunity. It means that my resume will get looked at – not that someone will give me a position because they’re not going to hire me if I’m not qualified. At least they won’t throw my resume away because I’m not in the “good ole boys club” or because I’m not an alum, because my grandparents didn’t have an opportunity to go to school there. Affirmative action affords me the opportunity as well as that of my student-athletes. I can guarantee that at least one of them will be in a pool. And affirmative action doesn’t say that you have to hire this person, but it says you have to consider them because I’m just as good as the person sitting next to me, maybe better.

Davita’s position on Affirmative Action revealed her steadfast belief that this policy is necessary, not only for women in athletics but for society as a whole. She stated,

Affirmative action is close to my personal heart. I don’t think affirmative action is about rhetoric, I think it’s misunderstood. The thing that hurts me about affirmative action is it’s on its demise and it’s barely 40 years old. My thing is, I use to try not to get on any socio-political soap box at all. Now, I stand on one most of the time. It’s that, how do you think in even 40 years, even in a perfect world, you could fix the damage that occurred over 400. Affirmative action is needed, it’s necessary.

She further discussed how there have been strides made by society to diversify the work force, but that athletics was slowly creeping along in its hiring and promotion practices in leadership positions in both college and professional sports:

The problem that I have is that it’s going under because of misunderstanding.

Affirmative action was supposed to give opportunities to minorities - - be they

women, be they black, be they Hispanic, so on and so forth, that were qualified. That all other things considered if everything was parallel, this is a way to promote diversity. But what has happened is people have used it in the pursuit of diversity in filling quotas. We desperately, desperately need it. I don't think people realize it. We're just 30 years out of civil rights – but at the same time it's just very frightening to me that sports has predominately black, not even just minorities but predominately black athletes but you almost have to take a magnifying glass to find black administrators, it's like that's just retarded. Affirmative action was created so that I with my masters and law degree can be considered along with other people and their masters and law degree for the same position.

The markers along the career path such as mentors, opportunities for professional development, and significant legislation such as Title IX and Affirmative Action have enhanced the participants' careers in athletic administration. However, the journey has not been free from road blocks. These barriers for some, have delayed and sidetracked some of the participant's career development and advancement.

#### Barriers to Career Advancement

For African American women, the pathway towards athletic leadership positions does not come without stumbling blocks. As these participants spoke about their career paths, they also noted the impact of barriers to career advancement and the coping mechanisms to persevere through the discriminatory obstacles in their career. Key factors which made their career paths more challenging included: (1) the good old boy network, (2) limited access to opportunities for African American women, and (3) race and gender discrimination.

*The Good Old Boy Network.*

The decision-making authority in most athletic departments usually rested in the hands of a male, which diminished the voice and authority of women's holding athletics positions (Acosta & Carpenter, 1996). One key concern was that the Good Old Boy Network, as defined by Acosta and Carpenter (1992), a gender-based network characterized by favoritism in hiring, gender-restricted communication, and cronyism, has affected their career pathway tremendously. This reality was identified as a key obstacle by most participants. Participants made very clear that this network, which entailed men taking purposeful measures to hire other white males in decision-making position, stunted the growth of women and, in particular, women of color in athletic administration. Latoya shared,

Well, I think before this position [SWA] really became mandatory, that in many instances it was a male...very, very male-dominated...It wasn't until women sports and finally women being hired to coach did women begin to get in. The Good ole boy system around doesn't support women's ability to make sound decisions regarding an athletics program that is male-dominated. The role of the SWA has helped.

Brenda further concluded that not only has the good old boy network impeded the career advancement of women, but stated that often times male athletic leaders were not bold enough to acknowledge the contributions women administrators brought to athletics. She concluded,

I don't think that there are enough males that are willing to reach back and groom and shape and mentor women administrators and what we bring to the table and being strategic enough to put that women at the table.

Ayana was very passionate in her response to this question, as she boldly expanded the conception of the good old boy network to not only include white but black men as well. She noted, "Black men were not willing to help worth a darn and there weren't any black women who were in a position to help." Schannon also concluded that the good old boy network, not only was present in mainstream athletics, but also at HBCUs.

Ariel further commented on the power of the good old boy system which sustained their support system thus lengthening their careers in athletics. She noted,

The lack of people encouraging women to go into athletics and the early experiences tend to be distasteful. And then they want to get out of it. They don't want to do it anymore. In women's sports, we've got more male coaches in the sports of women's basketball than women coaches. And all the data that I've seen suggests that women get in and some kind of experience turns them off, where men continue to fight through it, women are like,...psshht, this ain't for me. And consequently, you end up with fewer administrators.

It was evident that the participants heralded the good old boy network as a definite barrier in their career paths. This network, according to the participants, served to limit their ability to make those needed connections and associations which would have helped propel their careers.

*Limited Access to Opportunities for African American Women*

Not only was there a good old boys' network, but also a good old girls' network, which presented barriers to the career pathways of these participants. Their career paths have been different from their White counterparts. They suggested that the good old girls' network served to limit the opportunities for training and development of African American women careers as athletic administrators. Specifically, they suggested there has been lack of access to opportunities for African American women when compared to White women in athletic administration. Ariel commented,

My career development path has been somewhat unique among my white and black counterparts, primarily in the variety and depth of the positions/opportunities that I've had. My white [women] counterparts tend to have had more access to training and development opportunities and are compensated at a higher rate of pay.

Schannon further commented on the differences between her career path and that of white women athletic administrators she stated, "Our counterparts are allowed to attend professional development workshops/seminars at the expense of the institution and we often have to afford these opportunities ourselves."

Davita discussed how she had to be more deliberate in her strategies to enhance her career development. She explained,

I had to do more planning compared to my White counterparts. I had to have more structure to not only my search but my work. I have to always be accurate. I have to always pay attention to detail. I am not allowed to make some of the same mistakes they would be allowed to make...They go from secretary to associate AD and then

end up on the NCAA Management council. They go from secretary to assistant commissioner with no steps in between. With no steps in between at all...Access is still a barrier.

### *Race and Gender Discrimination*

Race and gender discrimination played an important role in shaping the patterns for opportunities in higher education and sports (Butler & Lopiano, 2003). The participants in this study echoed this claim as they expressed their discontentment with being subjected to limited career opportunities in college athletics due to their race and gender

Ariel shared how relocating to a Midwestern state impacted her perception of being an African American woman in athletic administration. She recalled, "...It's just that...I've never thought of myself as being a woman in athletics. I never, ever thought of my sex. And I've had people remind me along the way you know..." . She admitted that moving from a predominantly Black environment to a predominantly White work environment revealed the true nature of racism.

Toni directly addressed the burdens of being members of a dual system of discrimination as she discussed how African American women were often overlooked in athletic administration. She stated,

We are faced with the burden of being double-minorities in a system which is not very open to gender or ethnic minorities in general. We are the exact opposite reflection of the powers that be (aka white males) and they do not actively seek us nor understand how to work with us. I don't think it's entirely purposeful discrimination. I think a great deal of the cyclical behavior stems from ignorance and indifference.

Furthermore, Schannon discussed the challenges of being an African American woman in a field of other minorities experiencing similar obstacles in advancing in college athletics. She commented,

Women of color have the challenge of being seen as the individual who will strive to replace the men of color in this field. Therefore, we are not exposed to all the areas of athletic administration which limits our ability to become athletic directors or becoming a member of the athletic senior management team.

Rena, has not had difficulty sustaining her career in athletic administration. However, her role as an African American and woman has obscured their perception of her abilities to perform duties outside of the traditional women athletic administrator's role. She commented,

I don't know that I felt like there's been big barriers in terms of me getting hired in different positions. I never felt like that's been a problem or that's how I got in the door. After I got a few years of experience under my belt it seems like I've been able to move around pretty much as I would like to. The difficult thing I think of more is dealing with being a woman and being a minority. It's definitely a male dominated field. It's frustrating because men don't realize how important it is to include women in the structure and not feeling threatened about women being involved in the structure of athletics. And really not understanding the benefit of a woman being involved. The only asset that they see is that a woman can attend to women's issues. I guess that's been the hardest thing. To find someone to work with who really and truly embraces you in the athletic department. My current athletic director, and I

have really worked in that direction and I feel good about my role and how my role has changed over the years that I've been here. But it's really hard to find that. It's hard to find that position where you feel like your athletic director takes you seriously and listens to you and involves you in making decisions.

Many of the respondents at HBCU institutions cited more examples of gender discrimination, whereas the participants with work experiences at PWI cited both gender and race discrimination barriers. What evolved from their responses regarding career barriers was a discussion of coping mechanisms or strategies which they employed to counter the negative effects of barriers on their career lives.

### *Coping Mechanisms*

Coping mechanisms are strategies used to manage barriers or stress. The participants in this study alluded to several coping mechanisms they use to limit the impact of these barriers on their careers. These coping mechanisms included their own personal belief systems, which included having a positive attitude, being optimistic, being able to set a goal and reach goals, and maintaining a passion for their work. Further, all of the participants strongly felt that the ability to build relationships with well-established individuals in the field of athletic administration was also another way to limit the pressures from barriers such as race or gender discrimination.

Cherie and Ayana discussed how maintaining the right attitude and being able to persevere through turmoil enhanced their ability to deal with barriers. Cherie, specifically credited her "don't take it personal" attitude as one of her coping mechanisms. She expressed,

You've gotta develop duck feathers. A duck's back is oily and so when you watch them on the pond the water just beads off. It doesn't just sit there of course they'd drown. Well, you've gotta let it roll off you've gotta take that hit because it's coming. You just let it roll off and then you do on and they look at you and say, "How'd she bounce back so quick? How come she ain't fussing and cussing about that?" You don't have to. But the person that tried to take you down, they're the ones stressing because you're not responding the way they wanted you to respond. So you have to develop duck feathers.

Ayana further discussed the importance of perseverance and being passionate about one's career aspirations in athletics. She exclaimed,

You've got to love it because of the demands it puts on your personal life, your time, your family. "You gotta love it because it's not a nice business, it's brutal. It's very, very brutal and discouraging. So, I would say passion, perseverance, you gotta be able to fight through and recognize that you are going to sacrifice things – whether it's your personal life, whether it's money, your friends down the street. So there are literal sacrifices that you're making so you gotta be able to persevere and be patient

Another coping mechanism mentioned by the participants throughout the study focused on the importance of networking and building relationships during their career paths. Building relationships with esteemed professionals in the field, unlocked the doors to career opportunities in their lives. Toni stated, "It's all about networking. "You build your network and people come looking for you." Ayana also commented on the importance of networking

early on in one's career as a great strategy to potentially reduce the barriers or obstacles later in their career paths. She explained,

It's all about networking. I had a professor when I was working on my Master's degree (that I didn't want), to tell me that when he gets a resume he looks at the bottom and see what affiliations you have and if there's nothing down there he tosses the resume. He said because you can't develop professionally in athletics if don't know anybody. You just can't. Sitting in the office all day you can't learn anything. If you can get those memberships and registrations and get to conferences then you need to it. That is what you do. You build your network and people come looking for you. Meet as many people in the profession as you can.

Davita also shared the importance of aligning oneself with individuals who would be able to help in the future, which she stated, would also assist in assessing career goals. She commented,

One of the things I did, that I strongly encourage people to do, is to find people who have jobs that you think you want and ask them to let you see copies of their resume. What that allowed me to do was to gauge my resume and my experiences against somebody who was where I was trying to go. It let me see where the gaps were. Where there were gaps, those were things I knew I had to go and get more experience in to complete those gaps so that I could be considered a competitive candidate. I never thought that I was going to be considered equal but I knew that if I got in and I worked with you, I could prove to you that I was equal.

Toni spoke passionately about her graduate program. She recalled how the program was designed to introduce students to major sports organizations and individuals in the field of collegiate and professional sports. She explained,

My graduate program was in teaching and career development. They built into the program field experience and practitioner experience. So as part of the degree you actually had to work somewhere, whether it was volunteer or paid, in athletics or recreational sports. The department brought in speakers from the industry for us to meet, they would write letters, my professors were just awesome about that. About not just being about academics but connecting the academic into the profession and kind of merging the two both experience and the classroom as well as getting you out there in the field with other people. I really think they did an awesome job and I just owe everything to them. Even to this day I can call any of those people and I'm almost 10 years removed, and they will write a letter or make a phone call. That was just a really valuable experience.

These women had their own unique way of coping with barriers. The networking opportunities mentioned and their personal values and beliefs helped these women overcome race and gender barriers and provided more access to career opportunities through relationship building with mentors and other individuals who have been influential in their careers.

### Summary

The study provided insight into factors which have influenced the career development of ten African American women athletic administrators in the NCAA. Some of

these women did not begin their professional careers with athletic positions. Regardless, involvement with college sports as student-athletes as well as volunteer work, graduate assistantships, and internships, introduced all of them to career opportunities in athletic administration. These experiences, as well as later professional development opportunities, helped cultivate their career goals. For many of the participants, this study provided them opportunities to reflect on what specific events, people, and life situations nurtured them throughout the process of becoming athletic administrators.

The first subsection of this chapter reviewed the formative experiences such as family background, education and sports participation, which influenced their career choices. The most consistent data revealed in this section was the overwhelming support and emphasis by their families on education. All of the participants exclaimed that education was “not an option”, but a necessity. Education was definitely an integral part of their lives as 80% of the participants hold graduate or professional degrees.

The fact that previous athletics participation further afforded many of these women opportunities to continue their education either for free or with significant assistance from an athletic scholarship, provided additional evidence that early athletics participation was a key factor in their career pathways. Their participation at the college level exposed them to significant people outside of their families, who helped influence their careers.

The second subsection addressed, more specifically, the factors which assisted their career pathways into athletic administration. For many of the participants, their roles as intercollegiate student-athletes, spurred interests into athletics as a potential career choice. Moreover, these women continued to build their network and pursue opportunities to hone

their skills and ensured that their resumes reflected expert knowledge and experiences. These opportunities included seeking out mentors, both men and women, pursuing professional degrees in sports-related curricula, serving as interns for college athletics departments, beginning their careers as coaches, attending professional development seminars and workshops to enhance their careers.

The last subsection described the barriers experienced along their career paths and the coping mechanisms used to overcome or limit possible barriers. These women were committed to their education and made the necessary sacrifices to achieve their goals in a profession dominated by men. The good old boy network, limited access to opportunities, and race and gender discrimination served as stumbling blocks in their paths. The coping mechanisms utilized to endure and persevere, oftentimes provided alternate routes, to get to the next milestone in their careers.

The chapter concludes with a summary discussion of the data findings in relationship to the research questions that guided the investigation. The next chapter will include a discussion on several issues relevant to this study: summary, discussion of findings, implications, and recommendations for future study.

## **CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study sought to understand factors which influenced the careers of African American women athletic administrators in the NCAA. In particular, the study examined certain aspects of these women's professional achievements in athletic administration. The study of these women's successes included three, specific aspects: their formative experiences, individual career pathways, and strategic navigations through and around perceived barriers. Three research questions guided the exploration into those three aspects of the women's career development:

1. What formative experiences influence the career development of African American women athletic administrators in the NCAA?
2. How do African American women athletic administrators obtain entry and advance professionally in the NCAA?
3. What coping mechanisms do African American women athletic administrators employ that counteract perceived barriers or obstacles to their NCAA careers?

Finally, this chapter provides a summary of the study; a discussion of the conclusions; implications for practice; and, recommendations for further research related to African American women athletic administrators.

### Summary of the Study

Through purposeful sampling methods, ten African American women athletic administrators shared personal and professional stories about their career pathways to leadership positions within the field of intercollegiate, athletic administration. These women

from NCAA member colleges and universities located across the United States, worked at both predominantly White and historically Black institutions. The research design utilized basic qualitative research methods. To capture their stories, semi-structured participant interviews, reflective field notes, and the collection of other documents such as resumes or vitae constituted sources for data analyses. The process for data analyses included using the constant comparative method to facilitate comparisons of social phenomena across categories extracted from participant interviews. Results of the study revealed three conclusions regarding the career pathways of African American women athletic administrators in the NCAA.

### Conclusions and Discussion

The first conclusion of the study shed light on the important intersections of familial and educational experiences on the women's career successes. The second conclusion revealed access points to career opportunities in the field of intercollegiate, athletic administration as well as the most often traveled pathways for advancement in athletic administration. The third conclusion explained the challenges, frustrations, and strategies for overcoming these occurrences emerged from the participants' career stories regarding their acquisitions of NCAA administrative positions.

#### *Conclusion One: Participant integration of family and education expectations*

The first conclusion of this study describes the importance of familial support in the participants' desires to pursue college and graduate/professional degrees as well as to participate in extracurricular activities. All study participants grew up in families with strong emphases on education. Several of the participants' siblings, parents, and other family

members obtained college degrees; thus, all of the women grew up with intentions of going to college. Their families stressed achievement and socialized the women to believe that these experiences would be valuable to career success.

Children's early educational experiences, in particular, have broad consequences for their future educational attainment and employment (Brown & Butty, 1999). Thus, education can influence an individual's perceived self-efficacy, which could broaden career options. Each of the women obtained bachelor's degrees and eight went on to earn professional or graduate degrees. These advanced degrees proved to be effective in their pursuits of athletic administration careers as many administrative positions in athletics require masters or professional degrees.

The participants' educational experiences helped shape career opportunities for their entrance into the field of intercollegiate athletics. Within the framework of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), there are external or objective factors which include educational experiences. Further, the degree to which an individual is exposed to quality educational experiences can influence career development positively (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000). For example, people eliminate from consideration careers they believe are beyond their capabilities; consequently, pursuing a vast array of educational opportunities (formal and informal), could help increase self-efficacy and their ability to succeed (Bandura et al., 2001).

The internal or perceived factors in the SCCT framework emphasize how an individual interprets their opportunities, resources and barriers in relation to career development (Lent et al. 2000). The influence of their parents in going to college and

pursuing bachelor's and advanced degrees helped these participants internalize and interpret possibilities of selecting nontraditional careers for women. Specifically, many of the participants stated that their childhood career dreams did not include traditional women fields such as teaching, nursing or clerical work. Thus, only two of the participants started their careers in teaching, while the remaining participants initially worked in more male-dominated fields of law, medicine, and business. One of the two teachers actually had a childhood career dream of becoming a coach; thus, teaching actually served as an entry point to coaching careers.

The participants' families also encouraged them to participate in extracurricular and community service activities during their secondary school years. Yet, the women identified their participation in sports and other extracurricular activities as another formative factor in their career development and pathways to athletic administration. They all participated in sports in middle and high school, while six participants continued their sports careers as college student-athletes. All of the women mentioned how their lives were daily impacted by sports and how their early experiences later served as impetus to refocus their career aspirations towards intercollegiate sports. According to the Women's Sports Foundation (2000), girls' participation in extracurricular activities like sports played significant roles in the development of skills for success in the workplace.

Sport is where boys have traditionally learned about teamwork, goal-setting, the pursuit of excellence in performance and other achievement-oriented behaviors – critical skills necessary for success in the workplace. In an economic environment where the quality of our children's lives will be dependent on two-income families

our daughters cannot be less prepared for the highly competitive workplace than our sons. It is no accident that 80% of the women executives at Fortune 500 companies identified themselves as former “tomboys” – having played sports. (¶ 7)

Several women in this study identified themselves as tomboys. Further, they concluded that their participation in youth sports provided an edge in blending into male-dominated, athletic sports as both participants and employees. For example, they discussed the development of their comfort levels in coping with disappointments that came with trying to establish careers in college sports. Particularly, for the six participants who had previous coaching experiences, their abilities to persevere despite being denied opportunities given to male counterparts were attributable to lessons they had learned from previous sports participation.

Personal goals, one of the three key components in SCCT, help individuals organize and guide career focused behaviors (Albert & Luzzo, 1999). As young women, the participants had learned to set goals as one result of their participation in extracurricular activities. The ability to set goals and learn how to develop strategies for obtaining their goals had developed early in their lives and directly aided in the participants’ increased self-esteem. In particular, the women developed confidence in their abilities to succeed in any career from their education, familial support and sports participation. This confidence, according to the study’s findings, helped propel participants’ careers in athletic administration. SCCT also espoused career self-efficacy, i.e. the confidence to perform career specific tasks, as a major impetus in the success of an individual’s career (Lent & Brown, 1996). Specifically, study participants felt positive about their abilities to succeed in athletic administration; and, therefore, they established personal goals which would yield

positive outcomes such as becoming an athletic director or other leadership role in college athletics. Participant experiences as athletes early in life as well as during their college years along with their desires to enter nontraditional career fields for women all significantly influenced their career pathways later in life. In sum, SCCT supported the idea that there were connections between participants' career development and their formative experiences, including familial support and the importance of education as well as extracurricular activities in women's professional lives

*Conclusion Two: Entry into the field; a paradigm shift*

Athletics has become big business and has opened opportunities for individuals with diverse backgrounds to become employed in the field. For example, athletics personnel have backgrounds across multiple academic and professional fields such as accounting, marketing, hospitality, counseling, and psychology. For many young women still aspiring to careers in male-dominated fields, professional development and other career enhancing opportunities are making those career pathways somewhat less linear. Conversely, the women in this study revealed linear pathways which included early work experiences as coaches and teachers as key entry points for a career in athletic administration.

For instance, similar to other studies (Fitzgerald et al., 1994; Tiell, 2004), the majority of the women in this study had prior coaching and teaching experiences. Tiell (2004) found that 58% of the women in her study had prior teaching and coaching experiences which led to leadership positions at their respective institutions. Specifically, six of the participants in this study began their college athletic careers as coaches. Coaching and teaching, specifically on the college level, allowed the participants to continue developing interests and

skills needed to advance to leadership positions in athletic administration. Thus, if these work experiences served as entry points to the field of intercollegiate, athletic administration, women interested in athletic administration may need to consider acquiring teaching and coaching experience at the collegiate level.

Even though the majority of the participants' career pathways reflected standard linear paths, four of the participants utilized alternative entry options. One of the alternative entry options included participation in professional development, internships, and training programs. Specifically, the participants mentioned programs geared towards developing women and minorities as leaders in college athletics. Additionally, four of the women credited the diversity of their academic backgrounds as integral to their success in athletic administration. For example, one of the participants whose degree and work experiences in counseling stated that she was able to volunteer in academic services that eventually opened a door to a leadership position. Another participant worked as an intern in marketing and utilized her degree in communications and journalism to land a management position as Athletics Marketing Director for a major university. Thus, these types of learning experiences enhanced participants' abilities to obtain positions for advancement (Lent & Brown, 1996). Further, Hackett and Byars (1996) concluded SCCT theory examined how people attained varying levels of performance and persistence in their career development. Their participation in these programs not only advanced their opportunities to enhance their skills and abilities as athletic administrators, but continued to provide opportunities to meet new mentors and role models.

The study participants cited role models and mentors as key factors in their career success. Each participant named several individuals who had been positive role models or mentors as they pursued careers in athletics. SCCT theory emphasized the importance of mentors and role models in career advancement. Research revealed that when women observed successful role models in specific occupations, they were more likely to believe that they also could be successful in those fields; in other words, role models indirectly influenced women's personal goals and outcome expectations regarding the observed career fields (Scherer, Brodzinski, & Wiebe, 1991). For instance, the women who participated in the current study referenced pioneering women and men from their career experiences who were either coaches or athletic administrators in the NCAA. Further, as their careers progressed, the participants became role models and mentors to younger, aspiring, women athletic administrators. The opportunity for them to give back became integral to the continued development of opportunities for women in athletic administration.

*Conclusion Three: Strategies to overcome barriers and challenges are integral to career success*

Barriers to career opportunities and advancement, the third finding, often limited career advancement of the participants. Similar to other studies which examined barriers that women experience in their progression to athletic administrative positions (Acosta & Carpenter, 1985; Sagas & Cunningham, 2004), my study corroborates previous findings. Specifically, key factors which obstructed career development among study participants included: (1) the "good old boy network;" (2) limited access to opportunities for jobs and training; (3) race and gender discrimination; and, (4) the lack of exposure to women mentors

and role models in the field of intercollegiate, athletic administration. According to the participants, these barriers contributed to the decreased number of women in coaching and athletic administration.

Study participants identified the “good old boy network” as the primary obstacle in their career development. The lack of women in leadership positions in athletics further diminished the opportunity for women to be hired in senior-level positions. Tiell’s (2004) research on Senior Woman Administrators exposed the importance of having women in position to hire other women. Subsequently in these situations more athletic administrative and coaching positions were offered to women. Study participants further declared that for them, opportunities were even bleaker because of the lack of African American women with hiring authority. In addition, they cited that the lack of support from African American men further negatively impacted their advancement into leadership positions. The “good old boy network” explained not only the attitudes and behaviors of White men in athletics, but their male African American counterparts as well.

In addition to the above mentioned barriers, further research has concluded that a lack of women’s role definitions in athletic administration, multiple role challenges, and women not being in decision-making positions have limited the opportunities and decreased the desires of women who may pursue athletic administration careers (Acosta & Carpenter, 1985; Tiell, 2004). Particularly for African American women, the perception of barriers specific to their career pathways supports the research of Abney (1988) as she identified barriers to career advancement of African American women in athletic careers. In addition

to Abney (1988), other scholars also found similar results; however, those studies specifically identified race and gender as obstacles to career advancement (Benson, 1999; Nelson, 1999).

The participants shared their experiences in relation to their roles as both African American career professionals and women in the field of intercollegiate athletic administration. Six participants had work experiences in both predominantly White and African American settings. Dependent on their settings, race or gender discrimination often was more prevalent in their career development. When these participants were working on predominantly White campuses, they experienced more significant discrimination by race. Whereas, when they worked at HBCUs, study participants reported more prevalent occurrences of gender discrimination. The experiences of these participants mirrored the findings of Abney's (1988) study. She found that among the five, highest-ranking obstacles for African American women at predominantly, White institutions, being Black ranked higher on the list than being a woman.

The women in this study cited the lack of women mentors and role models as another barrier to career advancement. They expressed their frustrations with the trials of identifying women mentors in athletics, a particular challenge for study participants who worked at HBCUs. Bierema (1999) concluded that the lack of a diverse pool of mentors for women in corporate environments continues to contribute to the replication of a male-dominated work cultures. Fortunately, the study participants currently diversify the pool of role models and mentors for young African American women athletic administrators to help enhance their career development.

The participants' intense desire to succeed in athletic administration served as the driving force to overcome these challenges and barriers. SCCT examined individual's ability to strategically cope with these barriers to career advancement (Luzzo and McWhirter, 2001). In particular, most of the study participants discussed their intrinsic motivation factors such as having a positive attitude, being confident and passionate about their careers, and developing strong networks as coping strategies.

The findings of the study demonstrated the intersections of family and education expectations, entry points for opportunities in athletic administration, and the challenges or barriers to career advancement on the career pathways for African American women athletic administrators. The study concludes that these African American women athletic administrators had solid foundations grounded in high expectations as formative preparations for academic success. These expectations, whether derived from the support of immediate or extended family members, mentors and role models, proved essential in developing career interests and the development of their professional lives.

The study supports the idea that African American women athletic administrators must carefully plan their career pathways. Whether these pathways are linear or circuitous, they must be prepared to seize career opportunities for entry and advancement. Challenges and barriers may cross the career pathway at different times, but developing strategies and coping mechanisms to counter the potential negative effects on their careers are paramount to career success.

## Implications for Practice

The findings of this study have implications for educators, athletic administrators, and African American women who aspire to become leaders in college athletics. The participants' experiences suggest that education is important in women's development of leadership skills, personal awareness and self-confidence. Graduate programs should provide a variety of course offerings and internship opportunities in sports management and athletic administration which will provide a diverse introduction to the field of intercollegiate, athletic administration.

Leadership and professional development training are essential to career advancement. All of the women in this study had participated in leadership institutes or seminars, wherein they gained insight into athletic administration, resources for career advancement and developed professional networks. The NCAA should continue the thrust towards diversifying its membership. NCAA institutions and conference offices should continue to sponsor leadership training initiatives, especially those that target women and minorities. Each of the women in this study mentioned networking as a key factor in establishing relationships with individuals who could help enhance their careers. Through these training programs participants will be able to identify and expand their professional athletic networks.

Each of the women in this study named either another significant woman athletic administrator as one of her mentors or role models in college athletics. These significant individuals had assisted study participants with their career development via work, professional development, and other learning opportunities. African American women

athletic administrators should assume responsibility for mentoring young, aspiring African American women interested in athletic administrators.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

Many of the women in this study discussed the impact of various roles outside of their careers on their professional development and opportunities to advance. However, the study did not address how these roles affected their abilities to succeed in athletic administration. Further research could explore, in detail, the influences of African American women athletic administrators' multiple roles on their career development. In fact, other researchers already have identified the need for more research in order to fully understand and describe the effects of women's multiple roles on their career development (Brown & Brooks, 1996; Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). Further research could be conducted to explore key variables such as degree attainment, intercollegiate sports participation, type of institution, etc. and their affects on career progression.

The study revealed that there were individuals in the participants' lives who had been significant in their career development. The women reported that as they were advancing through their career pathways, they had both significant male and women mentors. Future research on the influence of mentors on the career development of African American athletic administrators could focus on several issues. First, whether or not the gender of the mentor had differential impacts on their careers and second, if the actual career fields of the mentor has important relevance to career development.

Participants in the study identified professional development programs as important to their career development. They mentioned campus support, conference support, and

national organizations such as the NCAA and NACWAA as key components in their progression in athletic administration. Another area for future study might examine the influence of these organizations and association, or their professional development activities on African American athletic administrators' career development.

### Chapter Summary

SCCT illustrated that women's career development is influenced by multiple factors. The participants in this study described multiple factors which influenced their career choices and progression such as family support, education, sports participation, role models and mentors and professional development opportunities. Even though all of these factors can positively enhance the likelihood of advancing in the field of intercollegiate, athletic administration, challenges and barriers can serve to negatively impact career paths. These challenges and barriers inevitably will surface, but how an individual chooses to cope with such obstacles will influence their abilities to achieve success.

In particular, career pathways to professional success in athletic administration continue to shift from the traditional or linear entry points of coaching and teaching to more creative and innovative blueprints. For aspiring woman athletic administrators, those new blueprints must be shared with not only African American women, but all women who intend to succeed in the male-dominated field of NCAA athletic administration.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A. Request for Participation

Dear Colleague:

My name is Ingrid Wicker. I am a doctoral student in Higher Education Administration in the Department of Adult and Community College Education at North Carolina State University. I have completed the course work and am now beginning to conduct research for my dissertation. The topic of my dissertation is: African American Female Athletic Administrators: Pathway to Leadership Positions in the NCAA A Qualitative Analysis

The purpose of this study is to clearly describe the experiences of four African American women athletic administrators who have had past work experiences at HBCUs and PWIs. Specifically, this research will attempt to describe the differences and similarities in the work experiences and how they have helped or hindered career advancement in athletic administration. Finally, this study will identify career progressions that athletic administrators have followed throughout their athletic administrative careers.

This research will help understand better through the voices of women like you who have helped to set high standards for other aspiring African American women athletic administrators in NCAA member institutions. My hope is that this research will provide not only women such as yourself, but to those in position to hire more African American women, a glance at what has helped and hindered their career advancement in athletic administration.

If you have had past or present experiences in both PWIs and HBCUs as an athletics administrator and would like to participate, please complete the attached form and e-mail back your response. I will select four to ten participants to conduct face-to-face or telephone interviews, which will take approximately 1 to 1 ½ hours and possible follow-up interviews. I will send you a consent form and questionnaire for you to complete. I would appreciate your response by March 25, 2005.

Please be assured that your responses on the questionnaire and interviews will be held in the strictest confidence and anonymity. The questionnaires and interview transcripts will be stored and locked when not in use. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact the Office of Sponsored Programs and Regulatory Compliance (919-515-4514).

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact the person(s) below:

Ingrid Wicker

(919) 730-3524

iwicker@ncsu.edu

Dr. Carol Kasworm

(919) 515-6295

carol\_kasworm@ncsu.edu

Thank you for your time and I hope that you decide to contribute your story to this study.

Yours In Sports,

Ingrid Wicker

## Appendix B. Informed Consent Form for Research

North Carolina State University  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study *African American Female Athletics Administrators: Pathways to Success*

Principal Investigator  
Ingrid Wicker-McCree

Faculty Sponsor  
Dr. Carol Kasworm

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You are invited to participate in a research study designed to describe the experiences of African American female athletic administrators who have had present and past work experiences at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). This research is significant because there is little qualitative research on the experiences of African American women who have excelled in intercollegiate athletics administration.

### INFORMATION

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to provide me with a copy of your resume and/or vita. You will also be asked to participate in an in-depth, face to face interview. If more information is needed after the interviews, I may ask you for a follow-up interview. After the interviews have been transcribed, I will ask you to review the transcripts for accuracy.

The interview will be conducted during the Spring 2006 semester. The interview should last between one and two hours.

### RISKS

I anticipate no potential risks for you as a participant in this study. All descriptive identifiers will be avoided. Your name and any other identifiers associated with you personally will not be used. I am aware that during the interview, some sensitive information may be revealed. I will remind you before we begin the interview that you can stop at any time. As stated before you will have the opportunity to review the transcripts to ensure your thoughts and words express your intent.

### BENEFITS

**This study will document your experiences of how you have made strides in your career. These experiences will provide**

*Documentation of these experiences may highlight the barriers that both types of institutions present for African American women athletic administrators and how they learn to confront or overcome these barriers in their career paths. It may also serve as a reference for those individuals in leadership positions seeking to help increase the number of African American women in the field of athletic administration. The participants in this study will have the opportunity to tell their "life" story as it relates to their career in athletics. This could prove beneficial to the participant because the reflection and acknowledgement of the hard work and dedication to their careers will*

**Appendix B. Continued**

*be revealed in their own way. Leaders in athletic administration may also benefit from understanding the career path development of African American women who aspire to have careers in intercollegiate athletics*

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

**COMPENSATION**

You will not receive any compensation for your participation in this study.

**CONTACT**

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Ingrid Wicker-McCree, at 623 Orindo Drive, Durham, NC 27713 or (919) 361-5823. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Matthew Zingraff, Chair of the NCSU IRB for the Use of Human Subjects in Research Committee, Box 7514, NCSU Camps (919)/513-1834) or Mr. Matthew Ronning, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Research Administration, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/513-2148).

**PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

**CONSENT**

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Subject's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix C. Professional Biographical Information**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: (home) \_\_\_\_\_ (work/cell) \_\_\_\_\_

Athletic Administrative Positions at Historically Black College and Universities: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Athletic Administrative Positions at Predominantly White Institutions: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Career Achievements in areas of athletics and/or athletics administration: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Willing to participate: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank You.

## Appendix D. Interview Guide

1. Tell me about your career.
  - a. Responsibilities
  - b. Job titles
2. Describe any early experiences with sports.
3. How was your family influential in your career?
4. How has Title IX affected your career?
5. What have been some of the influential factors that have helped shape your career?
  - a. Role models/mentors
  - b. Educational
  - c. Athletic
6. What barriers, if any, sidetracked or delayed you from your career goals?
  - a. Personal
  - b. Race
  - c. Sex
  - d. Economic
  - e. NCAA/institutional
7. Describe your work experiences at each college athletic department.
  - a. Compare/contrast
  - b. Advantages/disadvantages
8. Where do you see yourself in five-10 years?
9. If you had to repeat your career to this point, what would be different?
10. What advice would you offer today to a young woman about a career in athletics administration?
11. Are there other comments or issues important to your career development that you would like to share?

## Appendix E. Demographics of African American Women Athletic Administrators

	Age	Marital Status	# Children	Degree	Yrs. Athletic Administration	College Coach?	Present Position	BA Major	Master's Degree
<b>Brenda</b>	35	Yes	2	Masters	13	Yes	Assoc/SWA	Speech Pathology	Sports Admin.
<b>Danielle</b>	40	No	0	Bachelors	5	Yes	Asst. AD	Criminal Justice	
<b>Toni</b>	33	No	0	Masters	11	No	Asst. AD	English	Sports Mgmt.
<b>Davita</b>	42	no	0	Law Degree	19	No	Assoc/SWA	Journalism	Sports Journalism
<b>Ayanna</b>	31	Yes	0	Law Degree	10	Yes	Asst. AD	Political Science	Physical Education
<b>Cherie</b>	45	Yes	2	Masters	11	Yes	A.D.	Physical Education	Education
<b>Latoya</b>	57	No	3	Masters	4	No	SWA	Physical Education	Counseling
<b>Schannon</b>	46	Yes	3	Masters	16	Yes	Assoc/SWA	Business	Public Affairs
<b>Ariel</b>	46	No	0	Bachelors	21	Yes	Assoc. Dir.	English	
<b>Rena</b>	34	No	0	Masters	12	no	Assoc/SWA	Economics	Human Resources

Assoc/SWA – Associate Athletic Director and Senior Woman Administrator

Asst. AD – Assistant Athletic Director

A.D. – Director of Athletics

Assoc. Dir. – Associate Director of Education Services, NCAA