

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE EFFECT OF SELF-LIMITING BEHAVIORS AND  
SELF-CONFIDENCE ON MEN AND WOMEN'S ATHLETIC LEADERSHIP  
ASPIRATIONS

by

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An Investigation of the Effect of Self-Limiting Behaviors and Self-Confidence on Men  
and Women's Athletic Leadership Aspirations

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
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## **DEDICATION**

This is a dedication to my loving parents, my sister Catie, and all of my friends who have supported me, given me confidence, and been there for me every step of the way.

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I would like to thank my mom and dad for being the reason I have accomplished everything that I have to this day. They are the reason I was able to continue my education, be successful, and to do what makes me happy. To my sister, Catie, who has always been the person I go to for advice, no matter what the situation may be. To my boyfriend, Ben, who has been one of my biggest support systems. Lastly, to Dr. McDowell, my thesis chair, Dr. Rodgers, and Dr. Aylsworth, my thesis committee members, who have provided me with all the help and guidance a student could hope for throughout my thesis process and during my time at George Mason University.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women ..... | AIAW  |
| Atlantic Coast Conference .....                          | ACC   |
| Athletic Director .....                                  | AD    |
| Football Bowl Subdivision .....                          | FBS   |
| International Olympic Committee .....                    | IOC   |
| Major League Baseball .....                              | MLB   |
| National Collegiate Athletic Association.....            | NCAA  |
| National Basketball Association.....                     | NBA   |
| National Football League.....                            | NFL   |
| The Institution for Diversity and Ethics in Sport.....   | TIDES |
| Women’s National Basketball Association .....            | WNBA  |

## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE COMPARISON OF MALES AND FEMALES SELF-LIMITING BEHAVIORS AND SELF-CONFIDENCE OF PURSUING LEADERSHIP ASPIRATIONS IN SPORTS**

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The underrepresentation of women in athletic leadership positions has been researched extensively. The focus of these investigations, however, tends to be on external factors such as discrimination, stereotypes, and societal gender roles. This study expands knowledge of women in athletic leadership positions by exploring the effect of self-efficacy and self-confidence on their leadership aspirations. A mixed methods convergent parallel design was used to collect data from assistant and associate athletic directors of NCAA Division I schools in the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC). The survey consisted of items related to self-confidence, self-efficacy, and leadership perceptions. Results of this study will help contribute to knowledge about social psychological factors that result in an inequality of women in sport leadership positions.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In 1972, the year that Title IX of the Educational Amendments was enacted, women held 90 percent of the head coaching positions for women's intercollegiate athletic teams (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). In 2014, this number fell to 43.4 percent. Similar to head coaching positions, over 90 percent of women's intercollegiate athletic programs were led by a female prior to Title IX; but after the law was passed and many men and women's athletic programs integrated, women hold less than one-fourth of athletic director positions. Moreover, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) database reports a total of 1,583 assistant athletic directors, and only 496 of them are women in all divisions. There are also a total of 1,985 associate athletic directors, and women make up only 588 of that population (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2018). Kane and LaVoi (2018) assert that the main reasons for women being underrepresented are a "failure of females to apply for jobs" as well as there being a "lack of female role models" (p. 7).

The underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in sport is not limited to intercollegiate coaching and athletic director positions. Similar trends have been observed in head athletic training positions and sports information directors (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014), as well as in interscholastic and professional sport. In each of these positions, there have been barriers mentioned that women seem to face when trying to

attain these positions. It has been shown that "...experiences, challenges, expectations, and aspirations of girls and women in sport are not voiced, as women do not have a 'seat at the table' of leadership in sport organizations" (Burton & LaVoi, 2016, p. 50). There are also certain gendered expectations and stereotypes about leadership positions in sport organizations that result in men being viewed as a better fit for these positions (Burton & LaVoi, 2016). Burton and LaVoi (2016) noted that there are many leadership positions available in sport organizations, but, "gender stereotypes inhibit women's opportunities for advancement in coaching, as they fail to confront or challenge structural and societal barriers" (p. 54). Stereotypes and gender issues have been a problem for women before, and still are a barrier for women aspiring to obtain leadership positions today.

Some people believe males are more qualified to be in positions of leadership. Swaton (2010), however, highlights the presence of the "old boy network" (Swaton, 2010, p. 1). This network is known as "the tendency of powerful individuals to associate with those similarly situated; this reinforces and limits the traditional power structure to those fortunate enough to belong to that network" (Swaton, 2010, p. 3). This "old boy network" has kept on growing overtime which has been a possible reason as to why sports careers have continued to be seen as an area for men.

Title IX is a federal law to protect men and women from being discriminated against in athletics and other programs in educational institutions (Title IX of 20 U.S.C.A. Sec. 168). In relation to interscholastic and intercollegiate sport, Title IX has helped significantly increase the number of women who participate in sports, but as

aforementioned, leadership positions have had a negative trend (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014, National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2017).

Besides Title IX, the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) was founded in 1972. The AIAW is an organization that supported women's intercollegiate athletics in the United States from 1972-1982 (Plyley, 1997). The main functions of this organization were to develop and promote women's athletics through "the promulgation and enforcement of standard rules, the administration of championship programs, and the generation of commercial support and visibility" ("Pretrial Brief," 1982, as cited in Plyley, 1997, p. 6). After 1982, most women's intercollegiate athletics were placed under the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). After 75 years of being dedicated to men's intercollegiate athletics, they decided to offer a women's championship program for Divisions I, II, and III. This would make the NCAA officially a part of women's intercollegiate athletics (Plyley, 1997). The NCAA had been known to solely focus on men's intercollegiate athletics. So, after the NCAA offered 29 national championships in 12 women's sports, this meant "intercollegiate athletic championships for female athletes were sponsored and conducted by the AIAW, NAIA (National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics), and the NCAA" ("Pretrial Brief," 1982, as cited in Plyley, 1997, p. 10). These actions by the NCAA would be found within the regulations of Title IX, making all member institutions eligible to participate in NCAA women's championships. Their membership dues would not increase in amount, as incentives, and "additional costs would be subsidized by revision of the distribution of funds for men's championships" ("Pretrial Brief," 1982, as cited in Plyley, 1997, p. 10).

These were incentives that the AIAW was not able to duplicate. Because of the NCAA's newest actions, the AIAW saw a decline in membership from 961 members in 1981 to 759 in 1982 as well as a 32% drop in championship participation (The Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women, n.d.). Over the next year, the AIAW officially closed their doors as the NCAA had taken over. The AIAW was a huge part in women's athletics from 1972-1982, and after the NCAA began to take over women began to lose their voice in leadership. The NCAA made a five year plan that "assured women a maximum of 16% representation on the NCAA council, and from 18-24% membership on other important committees" (Hult, 1989, p. 256). Even though these women were made a promise to still have some sort of involvement in the NCAA committees and leadership roles, women were only involved in situations where only women were competing in sports, not men (Hult, 1989). According to Hult (1989), "Less than 350 women would be guaranteed leadership roles, and only one or two in a powerful decision-making position on the council" (Hult, 1989, p. 256). This plan was only guaranteed for five years and after these five years women would still not know if they would even be able to hold any leadership roles at all. Because the NCAA had been solely dedicated to men's intercollegiate athletics, it makes it difficult for women to move into leadership roles in this organization, especially since the NCAA had only men in leadership roles for over 75 years.

### **Problem Statement**

As previously mentioned, many factors have been identified that could be causing women to be less dominant in leadership positions in sports than men. The majority of

this research highlights external sources and men as the main cause for the underrepresentation of women in sport leadership positions. Limited research, however, has focused on the influential role that social-psychological factors have in impacting women's leadership obtainment and aspirations. This is an important area to investigate, as management research suggests social-psychological factors can have a profound effect on the representation of women in leadership positions. For example, Whitmarsh, Brown, Cooper, Hawkins-Rodgers, and Wentworth (2007) studied the self-confidence levels of males and females in various work environments. They found a positive correlation between gender representation and self-confidence in the workplace. Women who worked in gender-neutral careers had higher self-confidence than women who worked in a male dominate environment (Whitmarsh et al., 2007).

Hence, as suggested by this study, women's self-confidence may have a profound impact on their representation in sport leadership positions. Women who lack self-confidence may not want to worry about feeling uncomfortable in a male dominated work place. If these women's self-confidence decreased by being in this type of environment, then they may self-limit their own leadership aspirations. Research on how social-psychological factors affects women's leadership aspirations in sport has been theorized, but not empirically explored.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research was to explore the effect of social-psychological factors on men and women's pursuit of leadership positions. More specifically, this study explores the effect of self-efficacy, self-limiting behaviors and self-confidence on men

and women's pursuit of leadership positions in NCAA Division I athletics. Self-limiting behaviors "reduce the individual's influence on or contribution to performance of a task" (Veigal, 1991, p. 877). While self-confidence has been known to be "one's perceived capability to accomplish a certain level of performance" (Feltz, 1988, p. 278). There has been plenty of research on the dominance of men in the sports industry but comparing them to females to understand both of their true leadership aspirations is limited.

Accordingly, this study seeks to understand differences in males and females' leadership aspirations and the effect of self-limiting behaviors, self-efficacy and self-confidence on their aspirations. It is, therefore, hypothesized:

1. Male athletic administrators will report higher leadership aspirations than women.
2. Male athletic administrators will report higher self-confidence levels than female athletic administrators.
3. Female athletic administrators will report more self-limiting behaviors than men.
4. Differences in male and females' leadership aspirations can be explained by self-confidence and self-limiting behaviors.

### **Significance**

The significance of this research is to increase understanding as to why sports is a male-dominated industry. There are many reasons that have been researched as to why women may not be as plentiful in sport leadership, but one that has not been studied significantly is the self-limiting behavior theory and self-confidence. These behaviors



could help both men and women understand why the sports world is in fact “male dominant.” This research could also address social issues in sport organizations, and help others realize the significant difference of male to female ratio in leadership. To determine if women are limiting themselves in pursuit of leadership aspirations, comparing their self-limiting behaviors and self-confidence with men could be significant to other research looking at male dominant leadership in sport organizations.

The self-limiting theory and self-confidence of women pursuing a leadership position in sports is a topic that has been neglected in research. Many research topics have included studying only women and their barriers or struggles to climb the career ladder to leadership positions. There has not been a significant amount of research comparing men to women and certain psychological factors that have led them to or driven them away from leadership aspirations. The certain psychological factors compared are self-limiting behavior theory and self-confidence in men and women. This study could allow women increased awareness of their own self-confidence and self-limiting behaviors which could make a difference and affect their own social environment.

## **CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Sport is everywhere. Sport is available in the media, schools, and all over the world. There are millions of people that participate in sports in some way, whether it be for recreational purposes or as a career. Even though both males and females participate in sports, most decisions about what happens in sports, even things involving women and their access to sport, is decided by white males (Leberman & Burton, 2017). This indeed affects what or who people see in the media and who gets to be represented as a leader. In many sport organizations, “women continue to be underrepresented in the management and leadership ranks of sport” (Harris, Grappendorf, Aicher, & Veraldo, 2015, p. 12). The fact that women have actually been underrepresented could truly affect how the sports world is perceived (Harris et al., 2015).

The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact certain social-psychological factors may have in contributing to the underrepresentation of women in sports leadership positions. This chapter will first discuss the representation of men and women in collegiate athletic administration positions; followed by a review of theories used to explain why women are underrepresented in the leadership roles of sports. More specifically, this chapter will highlight how gender role and stereotype theory, status and power, homologous reproduction theory, intersectionality and discrimination, and hegemonic masculinity theory are used to explain the underrepresentation of women in sport leadership positions. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the theoretical framework and hypotheses that will guide this research.

## **Representation of Men and Women in Athletic Administration**

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) database keeps a record of the representation of men and women working in different athletic administration and coaching positions in NCAA member institutions. An analysis of assistant and associate athletic director positions in all conferences, for the 2017-2018 school year, revealed a total of 1,843 men who are assistant directors of athletics and only 960 women. At the associate athletic director level, there were 1,871 men and 1,033 women in that position. A comparison of these numbers to 1995-1996 data, the first-year data was reported by the NCAA, shows a similar trend, as there were 625 male assistant athletic directors and 289 females. There were also 399 male associate athletic directors and 230 females (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2018). A review of all school years in between, similarly reveals a low representation of females compared to men in these leadership positions. The low representation of women as assistant and associate athletic directors can also result in them obtaining fewer athletic director positions. For the 2017-2018 school year of the Division I Atlantic Coast Conference, there are 82 male assistant athletic directors and 42 female assistant athletic directors. There are also 122 male associate athletic directors and 44 female associate athletic directors (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2018).

Bower and Hums (2013) completed a study of women who were surveyed about their career as an athletic administrator. There were a few categories such as career advice, greatest challenges, and goals that were most common in their results (Bower & Hums, 2013). As mentioned before, women have had many barriers and challenges to

overcome in obtaining a leadership role in sports. These women, in Bower and Hums' (2013) study, talked about their greatest challenges of their job in the administrative field of athletics. There were three themes that came out of the survey that were the greatest challenges which included gender specific challenges such as gender equality and advocating for women, and also time commitment, and communication (Bower & Hums, 2013). Women mentioned that "the greatest challenges were very similar to the least enjoyable aspects of the job as women were not respected, had continuous pressure to prove themselves, and were not taken seriously" (Bower & Hums, 2013, p. 6). Seeing these results of this survey would definitely make women question entering the field of administrative athletics, or possibly any other related position in this career field. This could be related to self-confidence and self-limiting behaviors and could be why women decide not to go through with their true career dreams. These women who were a part of this study also gave some career advice: Be confident, develop a network, gain experience, and find a mentor. These were just a few pieces of advice that were themes in the surveys (Bower & Hums, 2013). In the Bower and Hums (2013) study, finding a mentor is an idea that stands out because if women see other women who have found their way down their career path successfully, then that will give them self-confidence to want to continue with a career in sports. Burton and LaVoi (2016) similarly demonstrated that support networks were a critical factor that was needed for coaching, especially in a higher level of sport. Showing women other females that had already been coaching at a higher level was very inspiring and "provided women with role models to aspire to and evidence that coaching is a worthwhile, accessible profession" (Burton & LaVoi, 2016, p.

56). A few short-term goals mentioned in the study were that women in the administrative field want to stay in their current position and advance within intercollegiate athletics (Bower & Hums, 2013). To compare the self-limiting behaviors of men and women, “This shows promise that as more women enter the field there may be more mentors to assist young women to advance through the ranks as well” (Bower & Hums, 2013, p. 7).

More women are needed in sports organizations. More mentors are needed to support aspiring athletic leaders of sport organizations to increase self-confidence in women. Women need the support of other women who have had the experience in a leadership type role in sports organizations, such as athletic directors, coaches, and presidents. More research is needed to find out the true reasons why women are underrepresented, and if the psychological factors on leadership, including self-limiting theory and self-confidence, have an impact on leadership aspirations.

### **Explanations for the Under Representation of Women in Sport Leadership**

#### *Influence of Gender Roles and Stereotypes*

Gender roles and stereotypes of women focus mainly on certain sex role beliefs and general stereotypes about women in society and how they could lead to biased opinions (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007). Research has stated that “Gender stereotypes are suggested to permeate and be reacted within organizational settings through everyday interactions” (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007, p. 247). Many people are aware of what the gender stereotypes of a female are, so if they are demonstrated every day in the workplace, then this is what will be reflected of the sports career. Some of these

stereotypical beliefs of women are that most females give off a warm, kind, and gentle vibe towards others (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007). However, the characteristics in a work environment “are suggested to undermine perceptions of competence and power” (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007, p. 248). Men seem to have stereotypes about them that fit the power role better than women. According to Sartore and Cunningham (2007), common stereotypes for men include being confident, assertive, strong, and independent. In other research, these specific stereotypical characteristics represent the way men and women do act, but also how they should act, which makes these stereotypes both descriptive and prescriptive in nature (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007). If research suggests that women do not act confident in themselves or are not assertive to their fellow colleagues, then women will always be stuck at the bottom of the power totem pole. In a study, Comeaux and Martin (2018) asked athletic administrators to assess pictures and qualifications of male and female fictitious athletic directors. The purpose of this study was to explore the understanding of the different meanings of both male and female athletic directors and their achievements. Comeaux and Martin (2018) wanted to construct this by using photo elicitation to connect anything from the photograph being used to identify different social cultures, meanings linked to society and even symbolism (Comeaux & Martin, 2018). The results showed that the female athletic director received much more support than the male athletic director. For example, one athletic administrator said, “It’s good to see women in lead administrative/leadership roles within athletics” (Comeaux & Martin, 2018, p. 135). Another mentioned, “Awesome! It’s great that a woman was able to move up the ranks to the top job at that school” (p. 135).

Seventy-six percent of females in this study had mentioned the constant gender inequalities with leadership roles in college athletics, while only 24% of males mentioned it (Comeaux & Martin, 2018). Swaton (2010) concluded that “Division I employs the fewest female athletic directors, while Division III employs the largest...more disappointing is that 11.6% of NCAA member institutions have no females in the administration” (Swaton, 2010, pp. 6-7). It seems that the more competitive the Division, the more men are involved, which could be keeping women out of a more intense and competitive environment. Some women may love that type of work environment, but “women who want to succeed in an environment that is dominated by discourses of masculinity must also embrace masculine work practices” (Shaw & Hoeber, 2003, p. 352). In that type of environment, women may be compared to men and how they complete tasks or solve problems. Shaw and Hoeber’s article on gender influence on employment roles in sport organizations is titled, “A strong man is direct and a direct woman is a bitch” (Shaw & Hoeber, 2003). Women who have achieved their leadership role in a sport organization may need to be direct to others at times, and it is looked at differently than if a man were to be direct. The fact that the sports industry is male dominated could truly discourage any female from wanting to go into this career, or even go to school to study subjects such as sport administration or sport management because of how male dominant the field truly is.

In sports administrative positions, men and women have different experiences and different barriers. As women and racial minorities have been compared to men, a study by McDowell and Carter-Francique (2017) compares African American women to men

in their athletic departments as athletic directors. African American women reported “their qualifications and abilities were questioned, having resentment expressed towards them holding key positions, and being perceived as incapable of successfully performing their jobs” (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017, p. 395). These types of research results go back at least 30 years and still are found to be a trend in present day. No matter which race, women have struggled for years to even be thought of as equal in a sport administrative leadership type position. Looking at Divisions I, II, and III of the NCAA, McDowell and Carter-Francique (2017) investigated the experiences of African American women as athletic directors. After interviewing these women, they found very similar themes from all of their experiences: career constraints and obstacles, genders stereotypes, criticism and scrutiny of qualifications, and negotiating identity conflicts in the workplace (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). These themes explain that these women have had barriers to overcome during their time as athletic directors. There is an athletic director prototype in which we “think athletic director, think masculine” (p. 403). Women in this study also mentioned how shocked some people or schools were when they knew an African American woman would be taking the position of athletic director (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017).

As of today, in the administrative field of sports, there has been one area that has been a little more successful for women. Women have been represented very well as conference commissioners within Division I of the NCAA, with currently 11 out of 32 being female (Taylor, Siegele, Smith, & Hardin, 2018). It is possible that “women have seen more success as conference officers, as opposed to on-campus administrative



positions because conference offices are further removed from donors and the college athletics spotlight” (Taylor, Siegele, Smith, & Hardin, 2018, p. 321). Donors of these different universities want a say in who they hire to be the lead of the athletic department, and since having a man in this position is the norm, makes it likely that a man will be chosen (Taylor et al., 2018). According to Southeastern Conference Bylaws, since conference offices operate more behind the scenes “this makes it easier for conference offices to hire with a disregard to gender and societal norms and place more emphasis on experience and fit” (Taylor et al., 2018, p. 321; Southeastern Conference Bylaws, 2016). This is how women are able to achieve a position such as conference commissioner, because it is behind the scenes and no one really sees who is completing the specific tasks of a conference commissioner.

Women have overcome so much over many decades and gained so much more confidence in being a female. So, why are these gender stereotypes still a first thought in many minds? Some studies suggest that there needs to be a balance of characteristics of men and women to balance out strengths and weaknesses of males and females (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007). In Glick, Zion, and Nelson’s 1988 study, they investigated sex-matching positions. As cited in Sartore and Cunningham’s (2007) study, sex-matching positions were explained, “The model demonstrated the ratio of men to women holding positions in a particular profession acted in such a way as to match men and women to specific domains” (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007, p. 249). So, they suggested that women would be a better match in an occupation with more women in that particular field, along with men being more successful in a male-dominated occupation (Sartore &

Cunningham, 2007). This almost contradicts the statement about how the male and female stereotypical characteristics needs to be balanced out. It seems that if men work with men it will be a power heavy environment; and if women work with women, there would be more of a peaceful and positive environment. If women try to come into a male dominant environment, it seems that it would be harder for women to take on those gender roles of a man to almost “fit in” with everyone in that career. But, if men were to come into a female dominated career, the gender role switch seems to be a lot easier.

Many of these gender roles are familiar in the American society, but what about other countries around the world? In 2003, a study was done examining the representation of girls and women in sport which also included positions of decision making (Adriaanse, 2016). This study analyzed data from 16 countries which included North America, South America, the Middle East, Asia, Oceania, Africa, and Europe (Adriaanse, 2016). In every single country there was a low representation of women in sport governance and management positions, which had researchers suggesting that this could be “gender suppression” (Adriaanse, 2016). Historical analysis was used during this study to show how gender roles were used in creating sport organizations or the boards of these organizations (Adriaanse, 2016). The analysis found that “The language, practices, and policy within the context of the sport organization construct gender relations that favor masculinities over femininities which explain women’s underrepresentation and men’s dominance in sport governance” (Adriaanse, 2016, p. 150). Because of the context of what each organization needed to conquer, it all seemed to be more of a masculine issue instead of feminine. This is another way to exclude

women in an obvious male dominated field. They had to maintain a status quo though, so to maintain this organizations say they practiced hiring the “best person for the job,” meaning the most qualified and have the best skill set (Adriaanse, 2016). CEOs claim that the most qualified person is more important than their gender and their organizations are gender neutral, yet the researchers still identified this as gender suppression (Adriaanse, 2016). Many studies back up this theory that gender stereotypes and the roles of women are a reason why women are much underrepresented in the field of sport.

### *Impact of Status and Power*

Status and power can both relate to each other when it comes to career. The more power a person has, the higher status they will achieve. There is belief that, “Status is associated with perceptions and expectations of ability and expertise” and along with power could be the capabilities that produce someone’s social standing and interactions (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007, p. 246). Depending on what level of power a persons’ status is, that could determine what level tasks or position that someone could hold. Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin (1999) state, “Societal status and power may be gendered as men occupy a disproportionately high number of powerful, high-status societal roles whereas women occupy nearly all of the lower-status and less powerful societal homemaker roles” (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007, p. 246; Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999). Kanter (1977) looked at gender differences in different organizational environments. She found that the lower levels of power in the organization, according to the women, were a part of the organizational ranks. Lower levels of power were associated with lower level positions including access to resources, which was all related

to an organizational hierarchy (Kanter, 1977). In a different example, male leaders of certain sport organizations were examined on how their policies and actions are taken place, and which members on the Board of Directors are in charge (Burton, 2015). The male leaders discussed how it in fact was important to include women as members of the Board, yet these leaders did not support any policy change which would increase the number of women that would appear on those Boards (Burton, 2015). These men went on to add what they believed to be adequate qualifications to be a part of this type of position. The women they ended up taking on for the jobs had experience and knowledge of sport, were not feminists, or open about it, and were committed to their sport (Burton, 2015). These specific findings of this examination determined that male dominated sport organizations create barriers or boundaries for women to try and “fit the model leader” which is defined by males (Burton, 2015). Discourse analysis was the focus of Claringbould and Knoppers’ (2012) study of “doing gender” This study looked into individuals who engage in the practice of “doing gender” without questioning underlying assumptions (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012). They looked into gender neutrality, gender normalcy, and passivity, and concluded that all of these categories underrepresented women in sport organizations (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012). There was an assumption that men should take on higher leadership roles in the organization when discussed with the Board, and women should take on issues that were more specific to them (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012). Gender passivity showed evidence that men in these sport organizations did have knowledge of the skewed ratios of males and females

in the organizational leadership roles, yet did nothing to try and change the ratios or bring it to anyone's attention (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012).

In conclusion, there was a difference in power in these organizations' environments. Because of this difference there was "a reflection of the high proportionality of women in lower level positions and men in high level positions" (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007, p. 246). These findings help see the barriers keeping women at a standstill from moving to upper level management, for example the "glass ceiling" approach (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007). The higher the power, the higher the status a person will receive. This gives people the opportunity to connect with others in the same power and status level. If most of these connections are men with other men, then most likely these male figures will hire people with their similar characteristics, which will continue this ongoing pattern. This pattern has continued and supported the stereotype of males being more powerful and having a higher status than women in multiple areas of different sport organizations around the world.

#### *Homologous Reproduction Theory*

The theory of homologous reproduction shows dominant groups of an organization that want to keep their power or benefits of the organization by reproducing their same self-image (Aicher & Sagas, 2009). To do this, the reproduction could occur in the hiring process. If someone seems to have similar power and characteristics as someone in an upper management position, then that is where they will be placed, and the same goes for if someone seems to fit in a lower management position (Kanter, 1977). This can be seen in athletic organizations or positions including athletic directors,

coaches, or any administrative position. Whisnant and Mullane (2007) have found that in an administrative position, men who are athletic directors hire men as sport information directors, and athletic directors who are women tend to hire women sport information directors (Whisnant & Mullane, 2007). Not only has homologous reproduction been a trend in sport administration, but it has been noticed in coaching positions as well (Aicher & Sagas, 2009). Since the law of Title IX was passed in 1972, women became more equal to men and were led into leadership positions that had been normalized by belief that men were supposed to occupy them (Walker, Schaeperkoetter, & Darvin, 2017). Because of the normality of men being in leadership positions already for such a long time, it has women behind on the track to equality in leadership of sport. This trend has been noticed internationally as well. In 2016, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) had 90 members, and of those 90 members only 22 (24.4%) were female (Walker et al., 2017). Also, in 2016, only 117 leadership roles were composed of women, out of the 805 leadership roles for the international federations of the Olympics which included 101 women for the summer sports and 16 for winter sports (Lapchick, Davidson, Grant, & Quirarte, 2016). This is an ongoing trend internationally because of the normality of men already leading in the sports industry.

### *Intersectionality and Discrimination*

Intersectionality theory focuses on the idea that people have multiple intersecting demographic categories (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation) that result in them having differential experiences from others (Bright, Malinsky, & Thompson, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989; Walker & Melton, 2015). Along with being a woman in a male dominated field,

women start to think about their race and ethnicity and if it will be a determining factor as to what position they will hold in their organization or how they will be treated.

Intersectionality provides an important lens to help explain why women may be underrepresented in sports organizations. Walker and Melton (2015) see this as an opportunity to examine how intersectionality can affect a person's experience within different sports organizations (Walker & Melton, 2015). Marginalized ethnicities or religious affiliations interact with gender and that women are affected in a totally different way than a male's experience with this affiliation (Crenshaw, 1989). Along with this study, in 2008, Black females were examined in sport involvement with related factors, in addition to race, there was a discovery that gender, geography, economics, school opportunities, and poor media coverage were all factors that affected black females in the sports industry (Bruening, Borland, & Burton, 2008). Research shows that, "Findings from these studies point to how having a combination of devalued identities or adverse life experiences can negatively impact one's life experiences" (Walker & Melton, 2015, p. 258). Not only have females been outnumbered by men in sports organizations, but they have most likely missed out on important experiences in one's life to gain the characteristics that are looked at to fit in to sports leadership roles.

### *Hegemonic Masculinity Theory*

The theory of hegemonic masculinity "serves as an operating principle within sport organizations that restricts women's access to leadership positions within sport" (Burton, 2015, p. 157). Upper level management is where this theory seems to hold the most attention. Athletic directors in sport organizations tend to mostly be males at the

intercollegiate level. Whisenant, Pedersen, and Obenour (2002) looked at the influence of this theory on the rate of women to men in a senior leadership position of intercollegiate athletics and found that men maintain control of positions, such as athletic directors, at the highest division of intercollegiate athletics. Men also had a higher success rate of career advancements at this level compared to women (Whisenant et al., 2002). The hegemonic masculinity theory can relate to the power and status theory mentioned earlier. Sports organizations have had the normality of men being in charge and having the higher level positions, which makes them more powerful and have a high status.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### *Effect of Self-Limiting Behaviors and Self-Confidence on Leadership Aspirations*

In sports, self-limiting behaviors could be a theme in a number of sport positions including coaching, participating as an athlete or in the administrative field. Sartore and Cunningham (2007) explain that self-limiting behaviors are present in women in leadership roles of sport organizations. What has not been addressed is “the emotional and cognitive processes of women as they encounter disparate acceptance and treatment within the male-dominated sport domain” (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007, p. 245). So, how do women act or react in these types of situations where they are put in a male dominated environment? It is described by Sartore and Cunningham (2007) that “ideological gender beliefs may serve to inhibit women within sport organizations through internal identity comparison processes that may subsequently result in the unconscious manifestation of self-limiting behaviors” (p. 259). If women are put into an environment where the dominant figure is a male, then they may believe that there is no



way to reach their level of leadership as a woman. Also, if a woman has never seen other women in dominant positions in their line of work, they may lose self-confidence that they will ever move up the ladder. One main area that self-limiting behavior has been examined is male and female coaches. Female assistant coaches have been compared to male assistant coaches and scholars have revealed that women in this role have had a decrease in interest in becoming the head coach (Burton, 2015). In another comparison, males as head coaches receive higher levels of self-efficacy, satisfaction, and reward from others, than females (Cunningham, Doherty, & Gregg, 2007). Other research supports that women have had lower aspirations and lower intentions to even look for a head coaching position because of the difference in attitude that female head coaches receive compared to male head coaches (Cunningham & Sagas, 2002). Walker and Bopp (2010) also showed that women, themselves believe that to be a coach of men, as a women, you need to come off as masculine and more fitting to the part than actually having the qualifications or experience of being a woman and a coach (Walker & Bopp, 2010). If a woman has perfect qualifications to coach a men's intercollegiate basketball team, she may not want the job at all because there is a requirement that does not show up on the application, which is to be like a male dominating figure.

A study by Wells and Kerwin (2017) showed how “women and racial minorities have to prove themselves in their field compared to their white male counterparts” (p. 128). Women and racial minorities, even after proving themselves, have been seen as being able to “work the ranch, but not run it” (Burdman, 2002, p. 24). According to Betz and Hackett (1981), women have shown a lack of self-confidence over time and have

seemed to avoid male-dominated careers. This trend has continued in today's sport careers, specifically in leadership roles such as assistant or lead athletic directors. In a more recent study, Cunningham, Doherty, and Gregg (2007) supported Betz and Hackett (1981) with similar findings when they researched women coaches compared to male coaches and found low self-efficacy. To hold any type of lead position, a person must be confident in themselves to know they will continue to do good work. Besides self-limiting behaviors, "low self-efficacy is an additional individual barrier, which can lead a coach to question her level of competence in coaching ability" (Burton & LaVoi, 2016, p. 58). With low self-efficacy of women, it may keep sports a male dominated career field. Since sport organizations are mostly males, females need the support of other females being successful in positions that they want to pursue, like a mentor.

Wells and Kerwin (2017) contacted 165 NCAA Division I athletic administrators to compare self-efficacy, outcome expectations, choice goals, barriers, and supports, and found there was no significant difference in self-efficacy, but "women and racial minority senior athletic administrators perceived lower outcome expectations and lower choice goals" (Wells & Kerwin, 2017, p. 133). This shows that being in a male dominated environment can make women and racial minorities feel that they can only reach a specific level of accomplishment. They may feel there is no chance for them to rise up to the top and climb the ladder to success in their specific career position.

Women and racial minorities' choice goals are related to their work experience in their career because "women and racial minority senior athletic administrators' work experience may lack the access or exposure (barriers) needed to make a career

progression, which influences their pursuit of an AD position” (Wells & Kerwin, 2017, p. 133). In Well and Kerwin’s (2017) study, it was shown that there has been improvement over time of women and racial minorities self-efficacy. Even though, over time, women and racial minorities’ beliefs that they can achieve goals has progressed, the actual choice goals have not. The confidence has risen that they can actually achieve goals in general, but the goals they choose to achieve are not goals to help them move into a higher leadership position. Women and racial minorities see the barriers and experience them first hand, making them believe there is no way to pass or defeat them, specifically in athletic administrative leadership positions. Even though over many years there has been an increase in self-efficacy of women and racial minorities in athletic administrative positions, “intercollegiate athletics perpetuates the social dominance and occupational segregation within the management of collegiate athletic administration” (Wells & Kerwin, 2017, p. 139).

Besides self-limiting theory, self-confidence is another factor that has not significantly been researched while comparing men and women leadership aspirations. Because women may lack experience in multiple areas of sport administration, when put in an area or given a task they are not familiar with, it could lower self-confidence. Grappendorf, Pent, Burton, and Henderson (2008) researched the Senior Woman Administrators (SWAs) and discussed their decision-making in the financial area of an athletic department. There was a lack of confidence noted and the feeling of not being prepared correctly for the job itself (Grappendorf, Pent, Burton, & Henderson, 2008). There are notes of lack of self-confidence in women of the sport administrative

workplace, but the comparison to men and women self-confidence levels in sports leadership positions should be researched.

Suggestions for future research have been mentioned in the articles of Sartore and Cunningham (2007) and Burton (2015) to examine self-limiting behavior in the leadership positions of sport organizations. Self-limiting behavior can lower aspirations or self-confidence to want to pursue a higher leadership position. At the macro and meso-level of research, “influences can impact women’s perceptions of their abilities and therefore their aspirations toward leadership positions within sport organizations. There is a noted absence of women’s aspirations for leadership positions within sport organizations” (Burton, 2015, p. 163). Because of the limited amount of research found in this area, there is a little knowledge of how these low aspirations form. There needs to be more research on the comparison of men and women and their self-limiting behavior and self-confidence when it comes to leadership aspirations in sport organizations and how it has led to inequality in this career field.

Accordingly, it is hypothesized:

Hypothesis 1. Male athletic administrators will report higher leadership aspirations than women.

Hypothesis 2. Male athletic administrators will report higher self-confidence levels than female athletic administrators.

Hypothesis 3. Female athletic administrators will report more self-efficacy than men.

Hypothesis 4. Differences in male and females’ leadership aspirations can be explained by self-confidence and self-efficacy.

## **Overview of the Representation of Men and Women in Athletic Administration**

Men and women have differed in dominance in athletic administrative leadership for decades. There have been laws created to try and equalize this, but to this day there is still an underrepresentation of women in sport leadership. Researchers have found many common themes as to why women have been underrepresented for so long in sport leadership, yet there is “still work to be done and the numbers aren’t where they should be, progress is being made” (Adelson, 2017, para. 18). Overtime, there has been progress, but this is still a conversation that is being talked about throughout athletics. There are many areas of leadership where there is an underrepresentation of women in athletics but one area that is researched the most often is women working in intercollegiate athletic administration (Bower & Hums, 2013). Intercollegiate athletics have many leadership roles that women can pursue and “an understanding of women who have succeeded in achieving a leadership position within intercollegiate athletic administration is warranted” (Bower & Hums, 2013, p. 2).

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

### Research Design

The purpose of this research was to investigate the effect of self-efficacy and self-confidence on men and women's aspirations to pursue athletic leadership positions. A mixed methods concurrent parallel research design was chosen to compare men and women's self-efficacy and self-confidence to pursue athletic leadership aspirations. In a convergent/concurrent parallel design "the qualitative and quantitative phases of the study occur at approximately the same point in time such that they are independent of one another..." (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007, p. 290). Likert-type questions were presented first, followed by open ended questions. Qualitative data was used to illustrate the results of the quantitative data. This method allows a better understanding of the data and results rather than using a single research method. This research has been approved by George Mason University's Internal Review Board (IRB). The approved recruitment email and consent form can be seen in Appendix A and Appendix B.

### Instrumentation

The type of instrument used in this study was a questionnaire with both open and closed ended questions. The questionnaire was designed to compare men and women's self-efficacy, self-confidence and leadership perceptions when pursuing leadership aspirations. Four questions were used to measure self-confidence. The self-confidence questions were adapted from the *Student Satisfaction and Self-Confidence and Learning Scale*, which was designed to test nursing students' self-confidence after being involved

in a stimulating learning experience (National League for Nursing, 2005). Reliability for the subscale was 0.888. Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). See questions 1 to 4 in appendix C. A composite self-confidence score was calculated for the analysis.

The self-efficacy subject questions came from Schwarzer and Jerusalem's General Perceived Self-Efficacy Scale (1995) and the General Self-Efficacy Subscale (Sherer, Maddux, Mercandante, Prentice-Dunn, Jacobs, & Rogers, 1982). This scale measures how much a person believes in their ability to complete their own personal goals (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995; Curtis, 2005). Self-efficacy was assessed by seven items on a 5-point Likert scale (see questions 5 to 11 in Appendix C). Responses ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Cronbach's alpha for scores on the self-efficacy scale was 0.832 indicating good reliability (George & Mallery, 2003). A composite self-efficacy score was calculated for the analysis.

The leadership questions were adapted from The Spiritual Leadership Survey and the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire from the International Institute for Spiritual Leadership (International Institute for Spiritual Leadership, 2010). These surveys are considered a valid means of identifying leaders who demonstrate authentic, transparent and socially responsible behaviors (Allen, 2012,; International Institute for Spiritual Leadership, 2010). Leadership behaviors were assessed by 14 items on a 5-point Likert scale; whereas 14 questions pertaining to leadership aspirations were adapted from O'Brien's (1996) Leadership Aspirations Subscale. Each questionnaire underwent slight revisions to fit the research topic of this study. Sample questions include: "I am confident

that I am developing skills that necessary for my current position,” “I can handle anything that comes my way,” and “I feel my organization demonstrates respect for me and my work.” See questions 12 to 25 in Appendix C.

Finally, participants were asked four open-ended questions about their age, gender, how long they have been in their current position, attributes of an effective leader, and if any previous experiences in their career made them more of an effective leader. See Appendix C for a list of all survey questions.

### **Population and Sample Size**

The population for this study includes male and female assistant and associate athletic directors of NCAA Division I schools in the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC). During the 2017-2018 academic year, there were a total of 124 assistant director of athletics (82 males and 42 females) and 166 associate directors of athletics (122 males and 44 females), making a grand total of 290 assistant and associate directors of athletics (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2018). To help increase the number of women in the sample, a disproportionate stratified sampling technique, in which women are oversampled, was used. A disproportioned stratified sampling technique is normally used if a subpopulation of research is smaller than normal, also, if the subpopulation is low in response ratings (Shafrin, 2006). Hence the entire female population of this study (n = 81) was sent a survey. Calculations based on a 95% confidence rate, 5% margin of error, and expected response rate of 30%, resulted in a sample of 133 men being sent the survey (Custom Insight, 2017). The total amount of surveys completed was 75 out of 214 (35%



response rate). The final number of completed surveys used in this study was 57-- 29 females and 28 males.

### **Research Setting and Data Collection**

The list of names and email addresses for the target population was obtained from each university's athletic department website. The survey was sent by email to each assistant or associate athletic directors selected for this research. The emails contained a link to the survey that took participants directly to the online survey. The email also had a brief description of what the research was and how it will be used. Contact information was given to the participants to use to contact the researcher if they had any questions or concerns about the survey. A follow-up email was sent out a week after the first email to all participants reminding them to please participate in the survey if they had not done so already. This email also thanked all of the participants who had already completed the survey.

### **Data Analysis**

*Qualitative data.* Inductive content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data. In the inductive approach categories or themes arise from the analysis of the data (Cavanagh, 1997). Each response to the qualitative questions was read and preliminary codes were determined. Next, through constant comparison, similar codes were placed into categories and then the data was organized into three main themes that stood out after asking participants about their previous experiences in their current role and if their experiences have made them more of an effective leader. There were three common categories found in this data. These three categories were role models and how it is

important to have them in this type of position, being in a supervisor role or leading a team, and the last category was experience.

*Quantitative data.* A one-way ANCOVA was conducted to compare differences in men and women's self-efficacy, self-confidence and leadership aspirations, while a t-test was conducted to compare leadership perceptions of male and female athletic administrators. After the qualitative and quantitative data had been analyzed separately, findings from both methods will be triangulated and used to illustrate data. This allows clarification of the results by using different techniques to overlap similar phenomenon (Research Designs, 2017).

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The comparison of male and female's self-confidence, self-efficacy, and leadership aspirations were conducted in this research. The male and females were all either assistant or associate athletic directors of multiple NCAA Division I Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) universities. The main psychological factors of self-confidence, self-efficacy, and leadership were the three main categories the participants were asked about in a survey.

### **Hypothesis Testing**

Hypothesis 1 perceived that male athletic administrators will report higher leadership aspirations than women. A one-way between-groups analysis of covariance was conducted to compare leadership aspiration scores for males and female athletic administrators. Participants' age and tenure were used as the covariates in this analysis. After adjusting for age and tenure, there was no significant difference between men and women athletic administrators' leadership aspirations,  $F(1, 53) = 0.595, p = 0.44$ , partial eta squared = 0.01.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that male athletic administrators will report higher self-confidence levels than female athletic administrators. A one-way between-groups analysis of covariance was conducted to compare male and female's self-confidence. The independent variable was the sex, and the dependent variable was self-confidence. Participants' age and tenure were used as the covariates in this analysis. Preliminary checks were conducted to ensure that there was no violation of the assumptions of

normality, linearity, homogeneity of variances, homogeneity of regression slopes, and reliable measurement of the covariate. There was no significant difference between self-confidence of males and females,  $F(1, 54) = 0.20, p = 0.65$ , partial eta squared = 0.004.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that female athletic administrators will report more self-efficacy than men. The same tests conducted for Hypothesis 3 were used to analyze self-efficacy differences. There was also no significant difference between self-efficacy of males and females,  $F(1, 54) = 0.70, p = 0.80$ , partial eta squared = 0.001. Therefore, Hypotheses 2 and 3 were not supported.

Hypothesis 4 further explored the role of self-confidence and self-efficacy on the male and females' leadership aspirations. A one-way between-groups analysis of covariance was conducted to compare the men and women's scores on the leadership aspiration scale, with self-confidence and self-efficacy as the covariates. After adjusting for self-efficacy and self-confidence, there was no significant difference between male and female athletic administrators' leadership aspirations,  $F(1, 53) = 2.040, p = .159$ , partial eta square = .037. There was, however, a strong relationship between administrators' self-efficacy and their leadership aspiration scores, as indicated by a partial eta squared value of .099. The above results show that there was no difference between men and women's leadership aspirations, when self-efficacy and self-confidence were controlled for. There was, however, a significant positive relationship between self-efficacy and leadership aspiration. The higher an administrators' self-efficacy score, the more likely they are to pursue a leadership position. This relationship was not found for self-confidence.

## Leadership Perceptions

In addition to leadership aspirations, this study additionally investigated participants' job satisfaction. No differences were found between men and women feeling respected and valued in their current position (see Table 1). Significant differences were found when participants were asked if they would be happy to spend the rest of their career with their specific organization. Specifically, results of an independent-samples *t*-test found a significant difference in scores for males ( $M = 4.04$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ) and for females ( $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ;  $t(55) = 2.11$ ,  $p = 0.04$ , two-tailed). This suggested, males would be happier than females to remain in their present position for the rest of their career. The magnitude of differences in the means (mean difference = 0.63, 63%, *CI*: 0.032 to 1.21) was moderate (eta squared = 0.075). Participants were also asked about perceptions of leadership effectiveness. More specifically, if effective leadership involves the use of both male and female leadership qualities and if they have been told they are not a good leader because of their gender. There was no significant difference in scores for males and females. See Table 1.

In addition to the Likert-type questions, participants were asked to discuss past experiences that have made them more of an effective leader. An analysis of the responses revealed three main themes: role models, supervisory experience, and diverse experiences. The first theme was role models and how it is important to have them in this type of position. One participant mentioned "Having the opportunity to work from the bottom up provided me the ability to be mentored by many different people." A second participant said "working with great managers, they model behavior that I can copy to be

my best self.” Another participant added, “Having mentors who gave me freedom and permission to lead and be authentically me and be trusted to do my job.” Lastly, a different participant mentioned “Observing and working under different leaders’ causes you to investigate your own style.” The second theme most identified was being in a supervisor role or leading a team. A participant said, “Experience as a supervisor, facilitation experience, experience working with coaches and student-athletes.” Another participant mentioned, “My first time leading a team, learned a lot just by trial and error and it made me more comfortable in my own leadership style.” One participant said “I have observed a number of effective and ineffective leaders in my career and I have learned from both instances.” Another mentioned “Doing the job for those who report to me is a high priority, so they know I will do what it takes, but also let them know that I know what it takes to get the job done.” The last common theme found in this research is experience. An administrator stated, “Both clinical and academic experiences have improved my effectiveness as a leader.” Another participant said “I’ve been in the business for 12 years. Every experience teaches you something different” while another participant also mentioned “Lots of varied experiences on committees throughout University and Athletic Department have provided opportunities.” Lastly, an administrator mentioned “The longer I am in the field and am able to approach challenging decisions, I have more experiences finding solutions and problem solving.”

**Table 1.***The Comparison of Male and Female Athletic Administrators  
Leadership Aspirations & Perceptions*

|  | <b>Gender</b>  |                | <i>t</i> | <i>p-value</i> | <i>df</i> |
|--|----------------|----------------|----------|----------------|-----------|
|  | <b>Males</b>   | <b>Females</b> |          |                |           |
| I feel my organization demonstrates respect for me and my work                     | 3.86<br>(0.85) | 4.00<br>(0.89) | -0.62    | 0.537          | 55        |
| I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization        | 4.04<br>(1.20) | 3.41<br>(1.02) | 2.11     | 0.039          | 55        |
| I feel I am valued as a person in my job   | 4.04<br>(0.79) | 3.69<br>(1.04) | 1.41     | 0.164          | 55        |
| Effective leadership involves the use of both male and female leadership qualities | 4.14<br>(1.15) | 4.17<br>(0.89) | -0.11    | 0.914          | 55        |
| I have been told I am not a good leader because of my gender                       | 1.43<br>(0.79) | 1.62<br>(1.05) | -0.78    | 0.439          | 55        |

*Note.* \* =  $p \leq .05$  \*\*\* =  $p \leq .001$ . Standard Deviation appear in the parentheses below means.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

Over many decades, men have been known to be the more powerful gender in the sports industry and organizations. Men seem to be more dominating over females when it comes to administrative positions in sport organizations as well. Even after Title IX had passed along with the formation of the AIAW, women have never seemed to be equal to men in these athletic administrative roles. The men and women who participated in this study were asked about their self-confidence, self-efficacy, leadership aspirations and perceptions in their role as an assistant or associate athletic director. The findings comparing men and women in these areas concluded there was no significant difference in any of these researched areas. This shows that self-confidence, self-efficacy, or leadership aspirations are not reasons that women hold fewer assistant or associate athletic director positions in Division I schools of the ACC. The only significant finding was that the administrators who had a higher self-efficacy score would go on to pursue a leadership position. This would make sense since efficacy is how well a person believes they can complete a task(s) given. So, if the administrators had high scores of self-efficacy, then high self-efficacy could be what these leadership roles require.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

A study done by Cunningham, Doherty, and Gregg (2007) compared male and female athletic coaches and found that women had lower self-efficacy than male coaches. Burton and LaVoi (2016) mentioned in their study that “low self-efficacy is an additional individual barrier, which can lead a coach to question her level of competence in



coaching ability” (Burton & LaVoi, 2016, p. 58). Compared to the results in this study, this was not the case as men and women did not have a significant difference in self-efficacy in their leadership role as an assistant or associate athletic director. If men had higher self-efficacy than women in a head coaching position, and the results of this study show there was no significant difference in male or female assistant or associate athletic directors, this may suggest the specific type of leadership position a person holds influences their self-efficacy. Cunningham, Doherty, and Gregg’s (2007) study had similar results as Cunningham and Sagas (2002) who found that women coaches also had lower aspirations and lower intentions of looking for head coaching positions. This was because of the different attitudes females received compared to male coaches (Cunningham & Sagas, 2002). These low aspirations may have caused low self-efficacy over time in this specific leadership position, as a coach. Wells and Kerwin (2017) conducted a study by contacting 165 NCAA Division I athletic administrators to compare self-efficacy, outcome expectations, choice goals, barriers, and supports, and found there was no significant difference in self-efficacy, but “women and racial minority senior athletic administrators’ perceived lower outcome expectations and lower choice goals” (Wells & Kerwin, 2017, p. 133). Even though there was no significant difference, women set lower goals for themselves compared to men, possibly not qualifying them for these leadership roles which may require a high goal-oriented mindset. This shows that being in a male dominant environment makes women and racial minorities feel that they can only reach a certain level of accomplishment. They may feel there is no chance to rise up

to the top and climb the ladder to success in their specific organization or to a leadership position.

Besides self-efficacy and leadership aspirations, self-confidence is a behavior that women have shown a lack of overtime and seem to have avoided male-dominant careers (Betz & Hackett, 1981). This is a trend that has continued today, but could be different throughout leadership roles and work environments. Glick, Zion, and Nelson (1988) studied sex matching positions which suggested that women would be a better match in an occupation with more women. This could in fact boost their self-confidence. In a different study, Whitmarsh, Brown, Cooper, Hawkins-Rodgers, and Wentworth (2007) also compared men and women in their different work environments and explored their self-confidence levels. They found a positive correlation between gender representation and self-confidence. Women who worked in a gender-neutral career had high self-confidence than women who worked in a male dominant environment. After analyzing these studies, it showed that most women who have careers in male dominant environments have lower self-confidence. What is interesting is that in this study of assistant and associate athletic directors, there was no significant difference in self-confidence levels.

Bower and Hums (2013) conducted a study in which women were surveyed about their career as an athletic administrator. The results showed three common themes that were their greatest challenges. These themes were gender specific challenges such as gender equality, advocating for women, and time commitment and communication. Some of the greatest challenges were “very similar to the least enjoyable aspects of the job as

women were not respected, had continuous pressure to prove themselves, and were not taken seriously” (Bower & Hums, 2013, p. 6). Besides these common themes that were found, the women of this study mentioned short term goals for their selves which included that they wanted to stay in their current position and advance in intercollegiate athletics. After analyzing these goals this “shows promise that as more women can enter the field there may be more mentors to assist young women to advance through the ranks as well” (Bower & Hums, 2013, p. 7). These women may not be happy in their current position at the moment and may move on to another role, but staying in this industry to support future women leaders of the sports industry is very powerful and promising in the field of sport leadership. More women in sport leadership will increase self-confidence and self-efficacy all around and the more likely they will pursue a leadership role.

The results of this study are slightly similar to Bower and Hums (2013) results as the women were not as happy as the men in their study if they were to stay in their current position with their current organization for the rest of their career. This may suggest that there could be other external factors causing women to not pursue leadership roles. Why are women less happy? What are these external factors causing women to be less happy than men? The results of this study also relates to the career advice given by the women who participated in the Bower and Hums (2013) study. Their advice was: Be confident, develop a network, gain experience, and find a mentor. This study found two of those four themes in the qualitative results, which were, gain experience, and find a mentor.

## **Leadership in Race and Gender**

The Institution for Diversity and Ethics in Sport, otherwise known as 'TIDES' has a Racial and Gender Report Card which is the "definitive assessment of hiring practices of women and people of color in most of the leading professional and amateur sports and sporting organizations in the United States" (Racial and Gender Report Card, n.d., para. 1). Looking at the NCAA Division I 2017-2018 leadership roles report, it showed that specifically in the athletic director role, the grade for race was a B- and the grade for gender was an F. The representation of women had decreased, but people of color showed a slight increase in representation in leadership. This specific study explored the race and gender of multiple leadership roles for 130 FBS (Football Bowl Subdivision) institutions (Lapchick, 2017). Today, there is still evidence of underrepresentation of women and minorities in leadership roles.

The Atlantic Coast Conference has actually been a leader in women's leadership. The ACC has had multiple women hold jobs as athletic directors and in leadership roles overseeing football as well (Adelson, 2017). This includes schools such as Virginia Tech who has a female director of football operations. John Swofford, the ACC commissioner said, "While there's still work to be done and the numbers aren't where they should be, progress is being made. More and more women are in leadership positions, and it's important that there continues to be more opportunities for female administrators to gain the experience that best positions them to be ADs and commissioners" (Adelson, 2017, para. 18). The goal is for more conferences and teams in the NCAA to encourage women and to accept and support them in leadership in athletic administration. The more women

in athletic administrative leadership roles, the more mentors and role models there will be for future women coming into sport leadership.

### **Differences of Men and Women Feeling Valued in Leadership**

When analyzing leadership perceptions, these specific survey questions were pertaining to job satisfaction. The findings showed that there was no significant difference between men and women feeling valued or respected in their current role. A significant difference was found between men and women when asked if they would be happy spending the rest of their career with their current organization in their current position. Males were found to be happier than females in their current role with their current organization for the rest of their career as an assistant or associate athletic director. This is interesting because there was no significant difference in men or women's self-confidence, self-efficacy, or leadership aspirations of these assistant or associate athletic directors, yet males are happier in their current role with their current organization.

There are more men than women as an assistant or associate athletic director in all ACC schools, making them male dominant. The more male dominated figures in an organization could be comforting and relatable for a male. Whereas if women come into a male dominated sports organization, which most of them are, they may not feel totally satisfied or comfortable with their current role and do not think about staying there for the rest of their career.

Sartore and Cunningham (2007) described that "ideological gender beliefs may serve to inhibit women within sport organizations through internal identity comparison

processes that may subsequently result in the unconscious manifestation of self-limiting behaviors” (p. 259). Women may not realize that they are setting low choice goals for themselves. As this study shows, they are just as confident, have just as much self-efficacy and similar leadership aspirations as men do in their current role as an associate or assistant athletic director, but women trying to get in this field may set the bar low for themselves, not realizing it.

Looking at the results in Table 1, women did not feel valued even though there was no significant difference in results comparing men and women. The comparison of men and women’s value and how they feel has been neglected in research. There is a study that was conducted by Allen and Shaw (2009) which explored women coaches and their perceptions of their sport organizations’ social context, specifically psychological need support (Allen & Shaw, 2009). They analyzed two different organizations. One of the organizations represented a popular sport played predominantly by women and had large numbers of women coaches, which was called Organization A. The second organization, Organization B, represented a popular sport played by both women and men and had a smaller number of women coaches. A section of the results that stood out was that in both organizations coaches “felt that they had more to offer their organizations but there was little or no avenue to present their ideas” (Allen & Shaw, 2009, p. 353). Another important result was connections with the organization, and “in addition to developing relationships with other coaches, the sense of connection with the organization was also important to these coaches” (Allen & Shaw, 2009, p. 359). The specific connection between the coach and organization was the feeling of being involved

with each other as well as the work of the coaches being recognized and valued (Allen and Shaw, 2009). To feel valued could factor into self-confidence, self-efficacy, and leadership aspirations. The environment people work in and the people working with them could affect each one of these factors and how it pertains to specific leadership roles.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research was to explore the effect of social-psychological factors on men and women's pursuit of leadership positions. More specifically, this study explored the effect of self-confidence, self-efficacy, and leadership aspirations and perceptions on men and women's pursuit of leadership positions in NCAA Division I athletics. This research looked into why women are underrepresented in leadership roles in sport organizations and why are these sport organizations male dominated. This research specifically looked into Division I schools of the Atlantic Coast Conference of the NCAA. The participants in this study were either assistant or associate athletic directors of these universities. This particular topic has been covered extensively throughout research. The most common explanations found in research for why women are underrepresented in sport leadership are gender roles and stereotypes, status and power, homologous reproduction theory, intersectionality and discrimination, and hegemonic masculinity theory. This study compared the self-confidence, self-efficacy, and leadership aspirations of men and women, which is something that has not been extensively researched.

There have been many studies researched on the different types of barriers and challenges that women have faced over many years that may describe the underrepresentation of women in athletic leadership roles. There were limited studies conducted that researched the self-confidence and self-limiting theories of both men and women and comparing them. This research sheds light on leadership roles, specifically



the assistant and associate athletic director position of Division I ACC schools. This research provides evidence that there is no significant difference in male or female's self-confidence, self-efficacy, or leadership aspirations in this role. The only significant finding comparing men to women was that men were happier than women in their current position with their current organization. Also, a person with a higher self-efficacy score will most likely possess a leadership position.

In this particular division and conference, men and women seem to have the same self-confidence, self-efficacy, and leadership aspirations and perceptions. This information is important to today's research because it can be concluded that, in this particular leadership role, men and women do not differ in their confidence or how well their ability to complete difficult tasks are for this role of assistant or associate athletic director. Being in this type of leadership role may boost these social-psychological factors knowing this role involves making tough decisions, leading a team, and creating strategies to fix problems.

This theoretical framework contributes to research by showing that men and women do compare in their self-confidence, self-efficacy, and leadership aspirations and perceptions. This shows that there could be another factor that determines why women are still underrepresented in sport leadership positions.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The limitations in this study may include that the survey used did not ask if the participants were college athletes. Further research could also be conducted for collegiate athletes who are now in a leadership role in a sports organization compared to non-

collegiate athletes in the same role. The results of this study may differ if the participants were asked if they were student athletes because they have already been exposed to the athletic department type of environment. This may boost their confidence going into a leadership role in a Division I athletic department since they are familiar with this work environment. They also have the experience of being a student athlete and can relate to what male and female student athletes go through on a daily basis and what they need. Also, this study may have resulted in higher leadership aspirations for women because being a student athlete, they see the underrepresentation of women first hand. The study could also compare the men and women in this role as a former college athlete or non-collegiate athlete and their specific choice goals.

Another limitation of this study was that the survey was only sent to NCAA Division I assistant and associate athletic directors of the ACC conference. These were the only people who had access to participate in this study. This limited other schools from participating in the research, making the data not reflective of the views of men and women throughout NCAA institutions. Further research could examine all leadership type roles in all divisions of the NCAA of their social-psychological factors including self-confidence, self-efficacy, and leadership aspirations. In this study, it was found that men are happier than women if they were to stay in their current position with their current organization for the rest of their career. Further research could examine the comparison of males and females' emotions about their current leadership role in athletics, how long they would plan or planned to stay in that position, and any additional factors including salary comparison of men and women.

## **Practical Implications**

In Bower and Hums (2013) study, the women who participated had their own career advice for other women who may come into their position in the future or in the sports industry. Their advice was: Be confident, develop a network, gain experience, and find a mentor. Two of these pieces of advice were found to be the same common themes in this study, which were being a mentor and experience. If similar results and advice are still showing up in studies dated years apart about women in sport leadership, then it seems to be a common result to help fix the issue of underrepresentation of women in sport leadership roles. Women who stick together in the sport industry will stay together and increase the number of women in this industry as well as confidence and self-efficacy. Women should stick together and show not only the sport industry, but show the world how powerful, confident, and ready they are to be equally recognized in leadership roles.

Moving into an athletic administrative leadership role that requires much confidence in a male dominated industry may be somewhat intimidating. Suggesting to any person moving towards this type of position or even interested in this industry should consider leadership or self-efficacy courses in the workplace. This will ensure the comfort of being in a leadership role and confidence may already start to grow. The results of this study will help women with their leadership aspirations because they can see these women in powerful roles who do not show intimidation.

## **Conclusion**

Across all NCAA Division I schools, the assistant or associate athletic directors who participated in this study showed that there was no difference in men or women's self-confidence, self-efficacy, or leadership aspirations. This shows that these factors are not reasons that women hold fewer assistant or associate athletic director positions in Division I schools of the ACC. Women have shown that they are not less confident than men, they feel that they have the ability to do what men can in athletic leadership roles, and they are attaining their leadership aspirations. There is hope and promise for women in the future of athletic administration and the sport industry and the results of this study shows that. Any woman who has an interest in joining the sport industry or moving into a leadership role in sport should do it with confidence, pride, and determination.

## APPENDIX A

### Recruitment Email

Dear: (Name of Assistant/Associate Athletic Director)

I would like to invite you to participate in my master's thesis research on men and women's leadership aspirations in sport organizations, that has been a board approved research project (IRB number: 1366245-1). The purpose of this research is to explore the effect of social-psychological factors on men and women's pursuit of leadership positions. More specifically, this study will explore the effect of self-efficacy, self-limiting behaviors and self-confidence on men and women's pursuit of leadership positions in NCAA Division I athletics.

I would like for you to participate in one survey. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. The survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes and will take place through an online survey tool through Qualtrics. The survey will look to analyze your self-confidence and self-efficacy while pursuing leadership aspirations.

I will carefully protect your privacy and I will take steps to ensure that the information collected will be kept strictly confidential. Names will not be recorded on research material.

If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Dr. Jacqueline McDowell ([jmcdowe7@gmu.edu](mailto:jmcdowe7@gmu.edu)) and/or Caroline Flowers ([cflower9@gmu.edu](mailto:cflower9@gmu.edu)) with any questions. The decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from participation will have no effect on your relations with George Mason University. We thank you very much in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Caroline Flowers  
Graduate Student, Sport and Recreation Studies  
George Mason University  
4400 University Dr.  
Fairfax, VA 22030  
IRB Number: 1366245-1

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Informed Consent Form**

#### **RESEARCH PROCEDURES**

This research is being conducted to investigate the self-limiting behaviors and self-confidence of men and women in their pursuit of leadership aspirations. If you agree to participate you will be asked to complete a survey designed to explore the confidence, leadership, and self-efficacy that are involved in pursuing leadership aspirations to determine if men or women have a difference in self-limiting behaviors or self-confidence. This survey should take no longer than 10-15 minutes.

#### **RISKS**

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

#### **BENEFITS**

There are no benefits to you as a participant other than to further research in collegiate athletics on ratios of male and female leadership positions.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The data in this study will be confidential. The survey and scale will both be anonymous. Identifiable information such as names will not be placed on surveys or other research data. The de-identified data could be used for future research without additional consent from participants. While it is understood that no computer transmission can be perfectly secure, reasonable efforts will be made to protect the confidentiality of your transmissions.

#### **PARTICIPATION**

You must be an assistant or associate athletic director of one of the institutions a part of the Atlantic Coast Conference of the National Collegiate Athletic Association. You must also be 18 years of age or older to be eligible to participate.

Your participation to complete the survey is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party.

#### **CONTACT**

This research is being conducted by Caroline Flowers a graduate student at George Mason University. She may be reached at 703-470-5676 for questions or to report a

research-related problem. You may also contact her faculty advisor, Dr. Jacqueline McDowell at (703) 993-7088 with any questions or concerns. You may also contact the George Mason University Institutional Review Board office at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

**CONSENT**

I have read this form, all of my questions have been answered by the research staff, and I agree to participate in this study.

Completion of this survey indicates my consent to participate.

## APPENDIX C

**Each question will be answered to your best ability. All questions are required.**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| What is your gender?   |  |
| What is your age?  |  |
| How long have you been in your current position as an assistant/associate athletic director? |  |

| <b>Strongly Disagree ↔ Strongly Agree</b>  |          |          |          |          |          |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. I am confident that I am developing skills that are necessary for my current position                             | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
| 2. I am confident that I am mastering the content that the head athletic director has provided or may provide for me | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
| 3. I am confident that the content I observe and learn is necessary for my position                                  | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
| 4. I know how to get help when I do not understand concepts in certain situations                                    | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
| 5. I am certain that I can accomplish my goals   | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
| 6. When I am confronted with a problem, I can find several solutions   | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
| 7. If someone opposes me, I can find the way and means to get what I want  | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
| 8. I can handle whatever comes my way  | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |



|  |          |          |          |          |          |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 9. In general, I think that I can obtain outcomes that are important to me             | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
| 10. I am confident that I can perform effectively on many different tasks              | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
| 11. Compared to other people, I can do most tasks very well                            | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
| 12. I feel my organization demonstrates respect for me and my work                     | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
| 13. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization        | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
| 14. I feel I am valued as a person in my job   | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
| 15. I am in this career field because I know I can make a difference                   | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
| 16. I am confident that my current career position will amount to all that I expect    | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
| 17. Men are just as essential as women in administrative leadership roles in sport     | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
| 18. Leadership qualities should be the same for men as they are for women              | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
| 19. It is possible for a woman to develop her own leadership style                     | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
| 20. Effective leadership involves the use of both male and female leadership qualities | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
| 21. I have been told I am not a good leader because of my gender                       | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
| 22. I have sometimes felt that I am not a good leader because of my gender             | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |

|  |          |          |          |          |          |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 23. I do not plan to devote energy to getting promoted in the organization I am working in             | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
| 24. I hope to move up through any organization I work in   | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
| 25. Attaining leadership status in my career is not that important to me                               | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> |
| 26. Have any previous experiences in your career made you more of an effective leader? Why or why not? |          |          |          |          |          |

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## **BIOGRAPHY**

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