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**NCAA Division I Senior Woman Administrators' Perceptions
of Barriers to Career Mobility**

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There has been an increase in collegiate sport participation for women, but that has not led to women obtaining more leadership positions in collegiate sport. Several barriers (e.g., lack of mentorship, gender norms, homologous reproduction, and work-life conflict) have been identified as influencers to career mobility of women in college athletics and their accession to leadership positions. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of career mobility from NCAA Division I Senior Woman Administrators (SWAs) through a multi-level approach. Interviews with 14 NCAA Division I SWAs found an overarching theme of Restricted Career Mobility. Themes that emerged to support this were Macro-Level Barriers to Career Mobility, Meso-Level Barriers to Career Mobility, and Micro-Level Barriers to Career Mobility detailing experiences with institutionalized gender norms, bullying, familial and partner obligations, loyalty towards their current institution, and the external requirements of the athletic director position. These findings have organizational culture implications for athletic departments and the NCAA as a whole, as career mobility should be examined from a holistic approach.

The designation of Primary Woman Administrator (PWA) was established in 1981 by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) as a way to assist in the merger of men and women's athletic departments that was occurring due to the dissolution of the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW; Hult, 1994). This designation eventually evolved into its current title of Senior Woman Administrator (SWA) in 1989. The NCAA Division I Manual defines the SWA designation as,

An institutional senior woman administrator is the highest ranking female involved with the management of the institution's intercollegiate athletics program. An institution with a female director of athletics may designate a different female involved with the management of the intercollegiate program as a fifth representative to the NCAA governance system (NCAA Academic and Members Affairs Staff, 2018, p. 18).

The designation was created as a means for women to be more involved in the overall management of collegiate athletics, but this has created a situation where there is often only one woman in a senior-level administration position at NCAA member institutions (Hoffman, 2010; Hult, 1994). Additionally, as recently as 2015-16, 25% of DI and more than 70% of DII and DIII institutions reported having zero or one female administrator (NCAA Inclusion, 2018). Furthermore, Division I, II, & III SWAs (85%), athletic directors (ADs; 56%), and conference commissioners (61%) believe that without the SWA designation some institutions would not have a woman involved in the senior level management of athletics (NCAA Inclusion, 2018).

The involvement of SWAs in the actual decision-making process (i.e., financial and budgeting decisions or revenue sport oversight) in athletic departments also varies across institutions (Grappendorf, Pent, Burton, & Henderson, 2008; Hoffman, 2010; Tiell & Dixon, 2008; Tiell, Dixon, & Lin, 2012). The NCAA Inclusion Report (2018) found that among Division I, II, and III SWAs 75%, reported being actively engaged in the hiring process for senior-level positions, but only 46% involvement in major financial decisions. Additionally, 66% of SWAs have sport oversight responsibilities, but only 13% oversee revenue generating sports (i.e., football and men's basketball).

SWAs are often tracked into overseeing women's programs and funneled into the soft areas of athletic department management such as marketing, academics, and student-life (Grappendorf et al., 2008). Despite this funneling, many SWAs do have a desire to achieve leadership positions beyond the SWA designation (Lough & Grappendorf, 2007; NCAA Inclusion, 2018; Tiell et al., 2012). However, despite this desire for senior level positions, women have been stereotyped as lacking the leadership skills needed in sport organizations in comparison to their male peers (Embry, Padgett, & Caldwell, 2008; Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013; Whisenant, Pedersen, & Obenour, 2002). Women are underrepresented in leadership positions throughout college athletics administration and coaching (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Lapchick, 2017). Therefore, it is important to understand the challenges and experiences of women in leadership positions so that guidance and encouragement can be provided to those aspiring to similar positions. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of career mobility of NCAA Division I Senior Woman Administrators through a multi-level approach.

Career Mobility Barriers for Women

Career mobility refers to the potential career opportunities available to an individual, including those within a firm (i.e., *intrafirm* career mobility) or across firms (i.e., *interfirm* career mobility), and associated attitudes and behaviors toward these potential positions (Sicherman & Galor, 1990; Vardi, 1980). *Intrafirm* and *interfirm* career mobility opportunities allow employees to pursue positions that may better align with their professional goals or skillsets, move into positions of leadership, and allow for opportunities to receive increased compensation (Jovanovic, 1979; Parsons, 1973). However, achieving professional advancement is only possible when a person has the option to secure alternative employment opportunities within their chosen profession.

Although career mobility is typically influenced by employment history, differences in a person's career mobility can be impacted by education, skills, ability, and afforded opportunities or experiences. For instance, gender has been shown to play a role in decision-making regarding potential (and improbable) career paths as men and women approach this decision-making differently (Jacobs, 1999; Smith, 2002; Trentham & Larwood, 1998). Societal views on traditional gender roles and homologous reproduction can impact the careers women (and men) elect to pursue and in which they are able to achieve success. Homologous reproduction refers to hiring practices that create similarity in the demographic characteristics of employees within the organization because individuals in charge of hiring hire those who look like them and/ or have similar experiences or backgrounds as them (Hultin, 2003). Both of these factors have been found to impact vertical and lateral career mobility, and may create barriers to entry into a particular profession (Hultin, 2003, Taylor & Hardin, 2016; Taylor, Siegele, Smith, & Hardin, 2018).

These barriers to entry and ascension have led to a skewed gender composition of leadership positions in collegiate athletics (i.e., Division I has less than 12% of female athletic directors and 11.3% of athletic departments do not have a woman in the administration in any capacity (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Lapchick, 2017). Within sport, masculinity has been shown to be privileged over femininity and therefore masculine characteristics are often linked to superior leadership (Anderson, 2008). Subsequently, those tasked with hiring within collegiate athletic departments may perceive women as lacking the skills required to assume leadership positions (Burton, Barr, Fink, & Bruening, 2009). Thus, a skewed gender make-up within collegiate athletic departments is occurring due to perception of women's leadership skills and homologous reproduction, which makes it difficult for women to obtain decision-making positions and limits their career mobility.

The work-life interface is another factor that has been found to impact career mobility for women working in the sport industry (Dixon & Bruening, 2005; Kamphoff, 2010). The work-family interface refers to both work-family and family-work conflict and has been defined as the inter-role conflict experienced by an employee when components of their work and family responsibilities are not compatible, which creates consequential effects in both spheres (Boles, Howard, & Donofrio, 2001; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The interaction between work-family and family-work operates in a bi-directional manner where work affects family and family affects work and employees are often forced to prioritize one and sacrifice the other (Boles et al., 2001; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus, Collins, Singh & Parasuraman, 1997). This challenge is encountered by employees in all professions, but with the increased job demands placed on collegiate athletic employees, (e.g., heavy travel schedules, long, nontraditional hours,

and exceptional pressure to perform) levels of work-family and family-work conflict are likely to increase (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Schenewark & Dixon, 2012).

Research on the work-family interface within sport has become increasingly popular as scholars have been able to identify critical career outcomes that are impacted by work-family and family-work conflict (Dixon, Tiell, Lough, Sweeney, Osborne, & Bruening, 2008). Individuals with children or those who have responsibility to care for elderly dependents experience higher levels of work-family and family-work conflict (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Men and women have been found to have similar levels of work-family commitment, but women are more (negatively) impacted by work-family conflict than their male counterparts (Hollenshead, Sullivan, Smith, August, & Hamilton, 2005; Kaufman-Rosen & Kalb, 1995; Williams, 2004). Research has found women in collegiate athletics experience feelings of guilt, anxiety, and stress surrounding time away from their children or consider exiting collegiate athletic administration all together to pursue family life (Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Palmer & Leberman, 2009; Taylor, Smith, & Hardin, 2017). Research on the work-family interface has found individuals with high levels of work-family and family-work conflict often report feelings of distress, dissatisfaction, and burnout (Frone, Yardley, & Markel, 1997; Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996). These challenges associated with the work-life interface may be causing women to leave the coaching or athletic administration profession (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Kamphoff, 2010).

Conceptual Framework

A multi-level approach was used as the guiding framework for this study. Within the multi-level approach, three levels influence one another: macro (structural and institutionalized elements), meso (organization), and micro (individual) (Chelladurai, 2009; Cunningham, 2010; Cunningham & Sagas, 2008; Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). Fink (2008) noted this approach uncovers the “subtle and usually taken-for-granted structures, policies, and behaviors in sport organizations” (p. 147), as sport organizations are multi-level and shaped and re-shaped by a variety of factors (Cunningham, 2010; Burton, 2015).

Macro-Level

At the macro-level institutionalized practices and norms, political climates, and stakeholder expectations are evaluated and explored (Cunningham, 2010). These institutionalized practices, norms, climates, and expectations are results of long habit, history, and tradition that become solidified and accepted as practice (Cunningham, 2010; Scott, 2001). Specifically, research on women in collegiate athletics has found systematic and institutionalized gender norms to be present and hegemonic masculinity to be normalized, reinforced, and privileged (Burton et al., 2009; Shaw & Frisby, 2006). As such, hegemonic masculine qualities are associated with appropriate sport leadership (e.g., Burton et al., 2009; Shaw & Frisby, 2006) leading to men maintaining control of the most senior level position (i.e., AD) within collegiate athletics and being afforded more career mobility than female peers (Whisenant, Pedersen, & Obenour, 2002). This power afforded to those who demonstrate hegemonic masculinity then leads to gender inequality and a lack of women in collegiate administration and coaching roles due to constrained access (Burton, 2015; Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; Whisenant, Pedersen, & Obenour, 2002).

Further demonstrating the effects of macro-level institutionalized practices and norms, Walker & Satore-Baldwin (2013) argued these practices are accepted and deeply embedded within organizations and “change cannot be fathomed” (p. 306). Thus, exploring macro-level factors with regard to the underrepresentation of women in collegiate coaching and administration has led many scholars to believe in the presence of institutionalized discrimination (Walker & Satore-Baldwin, 2013). For example, Walker and Satore-Baldwin (2013) explored the perceptions of male head coaches to understand the lack of women coaching male sports teams. Male coaches could not fathom how women would be accepted into coaching positions of men leading to the institutionalized practice of excluding women from male sports and viewing them as outsiders in this domain. Again, these institutionalized and socially accepted ideologies in sport embrace the White male as a leader or coach and posit women and minorities as unqualified or incapable of taking leadership positions.

Meso-Level

At the meso-level, research is focused on how the organization operates and makes decisions (Cunningham, 2010). Macro-level institutionalized beliefs are reinforced through an organization’s structures, policies, procedures, and cultures (Cunningham, 2010). Research has found that macro-level gender norms are reinforced at the meso-level, where women are seen in more entry-level positions or positions considered “soft” or “nurturing roles” that more closely align with societal gender norms (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Claussen & Lehr, 2002; Pent, Grappendorf, & Henderson, 2007; Raphaely, 2003). Furthermore, women encounter sport organizations that lack administrative support, the inability to bring children to work, possess inflexibility with travel and work schedules, and maintain expectations for being present in the office (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; 2008; Dixon et al., 2008; Dixon & Bruening, 2005; 2007; Dixon & Sagas, 2007; Kamphoff, 2010). This can lead some women to exit the profession.

Research has also found women who encounter sports organizations that promote and maintain a culture of similarity are faced with unstructured or unfair hiring and promotional practices, homologous leadership teams, and closed memberships (Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999; Fink & Pastore, 1999). These types of organizational cultures can lead to women enduring access and or treatment discrimination where they are excluded from entrance into the organization or denied access to crucial resources (Cunningham, 2010; Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990).

Micro-Level

Finally, at a micro or individual level, research focuses on how the individual interacts within the organizational structure (Burton, 2015). Specifically, how individuals construct meaning of their own experiences while also understanding the power, policies, and politics of the organization (Burton, 2015). Researchers have found that at the micro-level women in sport leadership may exhibit self-limiting behaviors, encounter more work-life conflict, and lack the social capital of their male peers (Dixon & Bruening, 2005; Kamphoff, 2010; Sagas & Cunningham, 2004; Satore & Cunningham, 2007; Walker & Bopp, 2010).

Specifically, scholars have found self-limiting behaviors from women in coaching. Cunningham, Doherty, and Gregg (2007) found that men associated with being a head coach and had higher intention and desire to become a head coach in comparison to women, who have

lower aspirations for head coaching positions (Cunningham & Sagas, 2002; Cunningham, Sagas, & Ashley, 2003; Sagas, Cunningham, & Ashley, 2003; Sagas, Cunningham, & Pastore, 2006). Macro and meso-level factors such as social norms, institutionalized discrimination, and poor organizational culture could be limiting women, but micro-level factors such as self-perception and efficacy are also influential factors (Satore & Cunningham, 2007; Taylor & Wells, 2017). Women may be more concerned with fitting in or portraying an image that will be accepted as a coach or struggle with the lack of respect they receive in the coaching domain all together (Norman, 2010; Walker & Bopp, 2010).

Furthermore, the micro-level explores how human and social capital differ among men and women. As Sagas and Cunningham (2004) explain human capital is obtained through training, education, or specific job experiences, whereas, social capital is obtained through networking with peers and supervisors. Research has found that women have underdeveloped stores of social capital and this has an adverse effect on their career aspirations within collegiate athletics (Cunningham & Sagas, 2002) as they lack mentors and networks to advance (Katz et al., 2018; Walker & Bopp, 2010). All three levels of the multi-level model approach can be used to explain the presence of limited career mobility in women working within collegiate athletics.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of career mobility of NCAA Division I Senior Woman Administrators utilizing a multi-level framework. This research sought to understand the factors contributing to limited career ascension among women in collegiate athletic departments from a multi-level perspective. Research has explored the role of SWAs, particularly in relation to whether the role leads to leadership opportunities for women in collegiate athletics (Clausen & Lehr, 2002; Grappendorf et al., 2008; Inglis, Danylchuk, & Pastore, 2000; Pent et al., 2007; Raphaely, 2003; Tiell & Dixon, 2008; Tiell, et al., 2012). A qualitative study was used to examine this topic from the voices of those in the role. The findings in this study can add to the body of literature by demonstrating a more detailed approach to the barriers that influence career ascension for women in collegiate athletics, especially in the SWA designation, a designation created with the intent to provide opportunities for women in collegiate athletics to ascend to leadership positions.

Method

A qualitative, descriptive approach using semi-structured interviews was implemented to understand the perceptions of the NCAA Division I SWAs, as the researchers were “seeking to describe an experience or event” (Sandelowski, 2000, p.335). In a male-dominated industry such as sport, it is important to understand the thoughts and experiences of those within the minority, such as women within leadership positions, in order to grow, diversify, and change potentially discriminatory cultures (Cunningham, 2008; Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001). Thus, this study seeks to “place women at the center of the research process” to understand the participants’ experiences authentically” (Brooks, 2007, p.57) and access these concrete experiences. Additionally, applying a qualitative approach to explore an area where women are currently widely underrepresented, allows researchers to discover the positions of women and create social change (Brooks, 2007) through the collective stories of the participants (Chase, 2013).

Participants

The recruitment of the SWAs was purposive in nature, using the criteria of employment at a NCAA Division I institution with the designation of SWA as inclusion criteria. Researchers sought to interview Division I SWAs as they may have more time to devote to administrative duties and position-specific responsibilities. SWAs at Division II and III institutions were excluded from the study because any SWAs at these levels have other duties, such as coaching. Individuals were identified via their athletic department websites and e-mails were sent to 121 NCAA Division I SWAs inviting them to participate in interviews. Sixteen SWAs responded to the interview request. Individuals who agreed to participate were emailed a demographics questionnaire and an interview time was arranged. The sample reached saturation as similar concepts and ideas became repetitive between the 14 participant SWAs who were interviewed (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The participants in the study represented a wide range in ages, time spent in collegiate athletic administration, time in their current position, and diverse backgrounds in athletic administration or coaching (See Table 1). Eleven of the participants self-identified as White, which is representative of the SWA population within NCAA Division I, as 18% of current SWAs identify as women of color (NCAA Inclusion, 2018). Six participants were former coaches at the collegiate level, eight were former NCAA student-athletes, and two were former ADs. All but one of the participants held a master's degree and three had earned doctoral degrees.

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Participant	Age	Length of Time in Field	Length of Time in Position	Previous Area of College Athletics	Relationship Status	Children
Afton	49	27 years	5.5 years	Athletic Training	Married	Yes; 2
Beth	62	35 years	13 years	Coach; WBB	Single	No
Cathy	62	40 years	17 years	Development	Single	No
Donna	56	30 years	19 years	Coaching	Single	No
Edith	51	30 years	19 years	Athletic Training	Married	Yes; 2
Faith	44	21 years	17 years	Compliance	Single	No
Gretchen	53	20 years	2.5 years	Athletic Director	Married	Yes; 2
Hallie	55	29 years	12 years	Athletic Training	Married	Yes; 1
Irene	43	21.5 years	1.5 years	Coaching	Single	No
Jacky	66	45 years	6 years	Athletic Director	Single	No
Kim	53	30 years	10.5 years	Coaching; WVB	Married	Yes; 1
Lauren	47	19 years	10 years	Life Skills	Single	No
Monica	44	20 years	2 years	Athletic Relations	Married	Yes; 1
Nora	32	10 years	One month	Internal Operations	Single	No

Table 2
Interview Guide

Questions

1. Tell me how you got where you are? Was working in collegiate athletics administration always your aspirations?
 2. Did/Do you see the role of SWA as a stepping-stone to move up in collegiate athletics administration?
 3. Was mentorship influential in your progression? Why or why not? If so, can you describe those relationships?
 4. Describe the job/role of the SWA in your department.
 5. Describe a typical workday as SWA.
 6. What is the perception of the SWA position in your department? Conference? In athletics in general?
 7. Do you think women are more inclined to enter into the soft areas (academic advising, life skills, etc.) of sport? Why or why not?
 8. Describe the process or how you manage your personal, professional, and work life.
 9. How do you think we can attract and keep more women in collegiate athletics administration?
 10. What are the best parts of your job as SWA? What are the worst?
 11. What are your future career goals? Where do you see yourself in 5-10 years?
 12. Is there anything else you think I missed or want to tell me about being an SWA or woman in collegiate athletics administration?
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Data Collection

An interview guide was developed based on research conducted with female athletic administrators (see Table 2; i.e., Clausen & Lehr, 2002; Grappendorf et al., 2008; Pent et al., 2007; Inglis et al., 2000; Raphaely 2003; Taylor et al., 2018; Tiell & Dixon, 2008; Tiell et al., 2012). The interview guide covered career experience, the perception of the SWA designation, and navigation of the career path. All interviews followed the same interview guide, however there may have been some variation in the use of probes and follow-up questions by the interviewer (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). All interviews were conducted via phone. The interviews ranged in length from 26 to 58 minutes and averaged 42 minutes in length. The interviews were transcribed verbatim by a third party and the transcriptions were compared to the original audio file to ensure accuracy. Identifying information such as names, employers, conferences, or

colleagues were omitted from the transcriptions and participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect anonymity. Interview transcriptions were sent to the participants for member-checking (Creswell, 2014).

Data Analysis

The researchers read and coded the transcriptions individually. All of the codes were then organized into a master code sheet where they were evaluated across each case for evidence of patterns (Patton, 2002). The codes were then organized into the multi-model categories of micro-, meso-, and macro-factors contributing to restricted career mobility. The categories were further grouped into themes that reflected the multi-level model approach (Lindloff & Taylor, 2011). Consensus of the themes was reached amongst the researchers through regular discussion and debate. The themes were derived both inductively and deductively, as the researchers were open to emergent themes, but also were identifying multi-level model factors or influences (Lindloff & Taylor, 2011). Lastly, quotes were selected that presented the themes and overall challenges of the SWAs and institutional structures hindering the SWAs advancement.

Findings and Discussion

An overarching theme of *Restricted Career Mobility* emerged from the interviews and can be explained using the three levels of the multi-level framework: *Macro-Level Barriers to Career Mobility*, *Meso-Level Barriers to Career Mobility*, and *Micro-Level Barriers to Career Mobility*. The women in this study explained they faced macro-level barriers due to institutionalized discrimination from male peers and micro-level barriers due to sacrificing career moves and ascension for relationships and family. Particular to this study and unique findings to add to the literature is the meso-level barriers of the perception of the sole responsibility of the SWA to oversee Title IX, fairness, and equity which aids in limiting career ascension and mobility. Additionally, adding to the literature at the micro-level women in this study explained their devotion to their athletic departments and institutions, desire to work closely with student-athletes, and a lack of desire for the AD position as reasons for self-regulated restricted career mobility.

Macro-Level Barriers to Career Mobility

All of the participants discussed how they experienced institutionalized gender norms or discrimination (macro-level barriers) as they moved throughout their career in collegiate athletics. The women specifically discussed how the designation of SWA is accompanied by the expectation of sole responsibility for gender equity and Title IX issues paired with a lack of emphasis and contribution in these areas from their male peers or superiors. Although this seems like a meso-level problem, the perception that SWAs are solely responsible for Title IX and gender equity issues is another example of institutionalized and accepted practices of limited power or barriers for women (Ely & Padavic, 2007). As Taylor & Wells (2017) detail, the practices of limited power for women at the macro-level is deeply engrained with “history and habits that become institutionalized” (p.166) or normalized and gender inequity develops into an institutionalized practice such as segmenting women into the designation of SWA or giving them Title IX and gender equity responsibilities. Furthermore, the institutionalized practice of women

taking sole responsibility of Title IX and gender equity issues has been found to be an issue across NCAA divisions, as 76% of Division I SWAs and 65% of SWAs overall are tasked with these duties, suggesting an institutionalized issue at the NCAA level rather than an organizational culture issue within singular athletic departments (NCAA Inclusion, 2018). Additionally, even when male colleagues believe it is not the sole duty of SWAs to be the voice of gender issues and Title IX, they do not listen or offer support, as again they are in a system that perpetuates male privilege and power. As Cunningham (2008) described come to see these behaviors or responsibilities over Title IX and gender issues as “the obvious ways to do things” (p. 137) and these behaviors only become more deeply embedded and perpetuated.

Research can confirm these experiences and has found the SWA designation is accompanied with confusion at the macro-level (NCAA Inclusion, 2018). The NCAA Inclusion SWA report (2018) found Division I SWAs felt only 6% of their student-athletes, 26% of coaches, and 33% of athletic administrators understood their designation within the athletic department and institution as a whole. Furthermore, the report detailed the common misperceptions accompanied with the designation are oversight of women’s sports and gender equity compliance, similar to the experiences expressed by the women in this study (NCAA Inclusion, 2018). The participants detailed this deeply engrained misnomer of the designation of the SWA happened at the meso-level within their athletic departments, however, through our understanding of institutional practices, norms and political climate, we recognize that Title IX and gender equity issues extends further than the organizational level and are macro-level barriers within collegiate athletics. Afton detailed the misnomer that in her designation she is solely responsible for equity issues stating,

I don't think I should be the only one saying it. I think you, as an athletic director, or a male senior associate AD, should look at that and say, “This is what we are going to do ...” When you look at something, you're going to do something for men's basketball, you need to think, okay, what are we going to do now for the women's basketball team? You've got to think about that. I shouldn't have to bring that up in this day and age. That's frustrating...

Monica reiterated the frustration of being designated and isolated as the one person responsible for equity issues. She said,

That is one thing that I have been frustrated by here, is that sense “oh gender equity that’s Monica’s issue.” No it’s not. It really is everyone that should think about it when we are looking at making decisions, it’s not just me.

Speaking about SWAs across the NCAA as a collective, Monica further explained that the macro-level tasks associated with gender equity and Title IX added further strain to her workload and left her without time to be as effective in her position. She said,

There are a lot of us that don’t quite know how to be as effective as we can be in our positions. The tasks (Title IX/gender equity) are still our jobs, but my job description is already a very large workload and you add on top of that I am involved in almost every decision about this facility or a new salary to weigh in on from a gender equity standpoint when it shouldn’t have to be always me.

Beth explained that in addition to being one of the only ones discussing gender equity issues, she had altered her approach with male colleagues and omits the mention of Title IX completely. She said,

Don't force Title IX down their throats. Don't be ... it's like you can't just wave the Title IX flag on every issue. I think you have to talk about fairness. They do want to hear, is it the right thing to do? And they'll jump on board if it's the right thing to do. But they're not going to do it because some female started waving the rule book at them. They're not cut out that way. They don't like to be told that.

Again, although these women are specifically speaking to their personal experiences or their specific athletic departments, it is clear the issue is more far reaching than individual organizations and is therefore operating at the macro-level. As explained by Burton (2015) taking “a macro-level approach to examining the lack of women in leadership positions in sport recognizes that sport is a gendered institution and that all processes in sport operate within a hegemonic masculine norm” (p. 156). Thus, the gendering of sport entities operates to where men and masculinity are afforded power, leadership opportunities, and this results in further marginalization of women (Shaw & Frisby, 2006) and this can clearly be seen through Beth’s discussion of Title IX and the way she approaches it with her male colleagues. Beth makes a conscious decision to alter the way she speaks to her male colleagues about Title IX issues in order to create needed “buy-in” for change. This small adjustment speaks to the macro-level norms women are encountered with in sport institutions. Beth must conform her conversation and approach to operate within institutionalized hegemonic masculinity and the power that is afforded to men in the sport domain. Furthermore, as Cunningham (2010) explained the ways of operating within a sport entity can become institutionalized and accepted. As such, within sport entities masculinity has been institutionalized, which influences operating principles and practices including priority of tasks (e.g., Title IX and gender equity issues) and communication styles (Burton, 2015; Cunningham, 2010).

This institutionalized power afforded to men in sport organizations is not an uncommon finding in sport research. Claringbould and Knoppers (2012) found in their study of sport journalists and sport organization board members that gender normalcy (i.e., the belief that men should obtain leadership roles and women should fill roles specific to women’s issues) was ever present. Additionally, their study revealed acceptance of this gender normalcy as sport organizations lacked women or lacked an even distribution of work, but when attempting to bring change to these organizations, resistance was found (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012). Based on our participants the designation of SWA is not being utilized to its full potential. As it is known that there is a lack of women in leadership roles within collegiate athletics the position is still very much needed, but the way in which athletic departments seem to be utilizing the SWA designation is not effective in creating upward mobility for these women. Since women are being recognized only for the SWA designation - and not their actual jobs - they are not receiving the necessary training to climb the ladder. While the position was created with good intentions, it seems to be falling short of its purpose.

For the women in this study, the association solely with Title IX and gender equity issues not only perpetuates gender normalcy, but also negates the women’s other athletic administration responsibilities that directly align with leadership qualifications and ascension to

(more) senior level positions. For example, Edith stated, “I would say a lot of executive women who manage teams don't get that opportunity (decision-making outside Title IX), the AD does it. They may be the day to day person, but they're not that negotiator, decision-maker.” Thus, they may have decision-making power in associate and assistant AD positions, but the SWA designation may not provide them with decision-making power. When asked about decision-making power, women in this study referred to conference level autonomy where the SWA group voted on current issues, trends, and NCAA rules, but ultimately the recommendations of the SWAs were communicated to the ADs group, who had the final vote on all emerging matters. This lack of power could be one of the factors that leads to the cyclical perpetuation of the lack of women in leadership roles.

The NCAA, conferences, and athletic departments could increase the decision-making power of the SWA designation by advocating that the women in these designations vote as part of the conference level ADs group on new legislation. Many of the women detailed that they were part of an SWA group that weighed in on issues, but this vote or changes being made was ultimately determined by the AD group, reinforcing the hegemonic masculine power dynamic. Faith discussed the current structure of voting as “All the sport committees come through the SWA group first, and then we give recommendations out to the athletic directors who vote on the issue.” Edith also explained that this format was the current model, “In our conference if it comes from a sport, the coaches present it to us, they bring it to our group, and then we send it to the ADs.” The NCAA and athletic departments could also increase SWAs decision-making power by working to create a more holistic approach to tackling Title IX and equity issues that includes male administrators and administrators from other areas within athletics. These entities could also consider eliminating the designation completely, which perhaps would result in more men taking on Title IX and gender equity issue responsibilities. Gretchen explained this process of allowing women more time away from the traditional and institutionalized duties of the SWA simply stating,

They need to minimize the additional tasks that their SWAs are saddled with on a day-to-day basis, so they're freed up to handle whatever challenges arise in that day. And to be able to back off and strategically think about what that step needs to be as far as the department and the development of the department and of the staff members in that department, the managing of the staff.

If this holistic approach to Title IX and equity issues is taken, SWAs would have more time to devote to learning and conducting decision-making tasks in areas like fundraising, marketing, and budgeting, which are necessary skills to move into the next level of leadership in collegiate athletics.

Additionally, at the macro-level, the women detailed feeling marginalized and, in some cases, even bullied based on their gender and being viewed as outsiders in their own athletic departments. This is not an uncommon practice in sport institutions where hegemonic masculinity is reinforced and institutionalized to uphold masculine dominance (Anderson, 2009; Cunningham, 2008). In these hegemonic masculine cultures, values and norms privilege heterosexual, white men and situate women and other minority groups as “other” (Dixon et al., 2008). Furthermore, Burton (2015) utilizes the work from Ely and Padavic (2007) to highlight the role organizational demography plays in creating power and influence for men and macro-level barriers for women in collegiate athletics. Organizational demography is explained as

“perpetuating notions of who is appropriate for particular positions, and therefore appropriate to perform particular work, within an organization. If organizational demography is such that women generally perform some jobs and men others, for example, the stage is set for communicating that women have aptitude and preferences for some kinds of work and men for other kinds” (Burton, 2015, p. 156; Ely & Padavic, 2007, p. 1136). Cathy explained this otherness or organizational demography in collegiate sport simply stating women were not given opportunities due to their gender. She said,

I think sometimes women are segmented by others. Like you're not going to get the track of being an athletic director because you're not male. So you might as well find something that you're going to find satisfaction in and not beat your head against the wall.

Beth explained being marginalized and even stereotyped by her gender when starting her position as Associate AD and SWA stating, “They (men) would look at me as the secretary or whatever.” Gretchen explained this feeling of otherness through gender-based questioning of her qualifications and worth. She said,

People don't question male senior associates and their senior level members, but they certainly do question senior associates that happen to be female and why they're there, definitely whether they're SWA or not. We still have that element of having to prove ourselves.

Monica detailed a vivid experience of men in her department using their power or influence to bully and intimidate women and that it is accepted practice or gender normalcy. She explained,

There is a sense, the male staff would essentially bully you into deciding something or changing your policy. I've seen where a male staff person influences a female staff person enough to where it changes the policy. Most women have been able to stand strong and say, “No, this is my decision and it is what it is.” But it does damage that relationship because they treated them without respect. I have seen that happen to myself here as well as other women on staff. Bullying is the only way I can portray it, but when a male says, “I am the football coach or I am the whatever, I am used to getting my way, so I am going to try my hardest to make you feel the way I want and I am going to make you feel as uncomfortable as I can in this position.” They try to embarrass you. It's a tactic of political gain on some things, but it's still disrespectful. It's a calculated to try to catch you in a difficult spot, to make you look bad, and that's not really a professional way to act. I think it become accepted as, “Oh that's college athletics. You just deal with it. It's part of the culture.” But it doesn't have to be.

The experiences detailed by Gretchen and Monica demonstrate the need for sport institutions to create policies and cultures embedded in diversity and inclusion, as these practices have been shown to have positive benefits (Cunningham, 2008). Research has found that valuing gender equity support had more positive outcomes for not only women, but also men within the industry (Spoor & Hoye, 2013). Thus, institutions need to work to create inclusive practices (e.g., mission and vision statements that reflect diversity, equal distribution of work despite the

issue or gender of the team, creating hiring and cultural practices more inclusive to women and minorities) and to treat everyone with respect in order to combat the gendered experiences and low number of women in collegiate athletics administration.

Meso-Level Barriers to Career Mobility

All of the women in this study acknowledged that work-life interface was a barrier to career mobility for women in collegiate athletics. Specifically, participants discussed the organizational cultures (meso-level) they worked in as being incompatible with having a family and moving into the AD role. Research focusing on the work-life interface has found that sport organizational level constraints particularly affect female coaches and administrators (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; 2008; Dixon & Bruening, 2005; 2007; Dixon & Sagas, 2007). Particularly, expectations of demanding hours, job pressure, and job stress accompanied with lack of administrative support cause women to exit the fields of coaching and administration prematurely (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; 2008; Dixon & Bruening, 2005; 2007; Dixon & Sagas, 2007; Kamphoff, 2010).

Dixon et al. (2008) found in their comparison of SWAs and male ADs that work-life benefits were readily available at most institutions, but male ADs reported higher levels of usage for supportive work-life benefits than their female SWA peers who had low levels of usage or none at all. Specifically, it was found that the SWAs in their study did not use the benefits of compressed work weeks, telecommuting, or childcare referrals at all (Dixon et al., 2008). Similarly, ADs reported a general agreement to statements about work-life support in their departments, while SWAs reported much lower values to the work-life supportive climate statements (Dixon et al., 2008). This may indicate that men receive this information and support whereas, women lack the dissemination of available resources and support; in turn, this could be causing lower levels of perceived support and a negative work-life climate.

Taylor, Smith, and Hardin (2017) found that women at the entry or mid-level positions were already making concessions for career aspirations and some were planning to exit the collegiate athletic profession all together due to a desire for a family. Furthermore, senior-level women discussed sacrificing areas of their personal life including marriage and family for their job. Overall, the study found a lack of organizational support and resources for work-life integration. Similar to the findings from Taylor et al. (2017), the women in this study discussed a lack of pursuit for AD positions due to the meso-level barriers (i.e., time and travel demands while having a family).

Edith described one of the reasons she had not pursued an AD position was due to juggling young children and the extensive time and travel demands that are a core component of working in collegiate athletics and were expected of by her organization. She explained,

As they (children) get older it's easier to manage, because they're a little more self-sufficient. But as toddlers it's tougher to manage, or say mom has to travel. For example, I'm on the national softball committee. Last summer I was gone over 35 days between my commitments with our team who made a run to the super regionals. That's hard.

Hallie reiterated the strain working in athletics can have on time with family. Particularly, as someone who had previously worked in athletic training, she felt further sacrifice as an AD would cause more work-life conflict. She stated,

A big part of it, especially at the Division I level, is that the quality of life for having a family is just not there. You sacrifice a lot to be even an administrator or a coach at the Division I level. I sacrificed a lot. I missed a lot of my son's growing up for my profession and my career.

She further exemplified the expectation and sacrifice required by her organization when she discussed working holidays and how it causes conflict with her family. She said,

I don't mind that occasionally I have to work on Thanksgiving. It bothers my family more than it bothers me. It's just ... I know it's part of the expectation. There's many, many holidays where I have to work. That's just part of the job.

Similarly, Afton expressed the job of AD is accompanied with even more sacrifice, commitment, and long hours than her current position of senior associate AD and SWA which caused her to question whether it would be a good role for her. She said,

People have asked me, "Why wouldn't you want to go be an athletic director?" I would not. I would not want to do that. Part of it is because of the way it's structured. If I think I don't have the life, the balance and all that, now, I can't even imagine if I was an AD. As a mother, I don't want to do that.

Furthermore, Afton discussed the work-family pull she already experienced in her current position between her family and her expectations for game day facilitation stating, "I struggle sometimes with, 'Oh, well, my kid has something versus I have to go to this game.'" Additionally, she felt that these expectations and pressures of managing work and family were not equally burdensome on the men she worked with and felt the responsibility to create more equality between gender on this issue fell on the organization. She said, "I feel like men don't think about the hours we have to work, the events you have to go to, they just go and do it. It's like it's not a big deal. I don't think that is right. We should try to structure things and give women more time off.

Although Faith and Jacky did not have children, they detailed conflict with dual responsibilities at home and work that may have caused women to not be able to ascend to AD or leadership positions. Faith stated,

Because of the hours and the commitment, I think women in general, for right or for wrong, whatever, are more family-oriented, that's sometimes a hard pull on females. When they've got children at home, especially young children. They're trying to navigate what that looks like. Trying to put in the hours. Trying to navigate what's going to the event, working at night, working on the weekends, and raise a family at the same time. Although, I think that's getting a lot better. I think that's one area at an earlier state, it separates males and females, not pursuing becoming an AD.

Jacky reiterated Faith's discussion saying,

It certainly is a challenge for those that have families. That they try to find a way to balance that. Do they have a partner that is over a situation that allows them to manage those things? Do they have an institution that makes an effort to allow them to continue to do the things they need to do if they are a parent? And, how they can juggle both of those extremely important responsibilities? I think that that's always an issue.

Overall, the women in study confirmed how work-family conflict is an organizational or meso-level barrier contributing to the lack of women in AD or senior-level administrator positions. This could be due to purposeful decisions by women so that family does not interfere with work (e.g., not applying for/taking an AD job because of family). Sport organizations need to provide support to help manage work and family obligations (Bruening & Dixon, 2008). This support can be facilitated through managerial practices and procedures such as: allowing travel for children, spouses, and partners to away competitions, attendance and participation at home athletic events, flexible work hours, and working from home (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; 2008; Dixon & Bruening, 2005; 2007; Taylor et al., 2017).

Micro-Level Barriers to Career Mobility

The majority (10 out of 14) of the participants in this study did not desire to move into the AD position and imposed self-restricted career mobility due to a commitment to their current institution, yearning for interaction with student-athletes, and lack of desire for additional responsibilities. Four women expressed the desire to become an AD, but also noted the macro and meso-level barriers they could foresee deterring them from their pursuit, such as: (a) competitive nature of AD job hunting, (b) gender norms where they would be perceived to lack experience or competency in comparison to their male peers, and (c) work-life interface. Two women had previously been ADs, but were terminated from those positions and discussed macro-level barriers or institutionalized discrimination as the cause for dismissal. One of the two women who had previously been an AD expressed a desire to return to that position, but felt she would never be afforded another opportunity since she was fired from her previous AD position.

Research has found women in collegiate athletics can exhibit self-limiting behaviors in relation to career mobility and ascension. Satore and Cunningham (2007) described how "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). Self-limiting behavior has primarily been explored in coaching where female assistant coaches have been found to have lower aspirations for head coaching positions compared to their male peers (Cunningham & Sagas, 2002; Cunningham et al., 2003; Sagas et al., 2003; Sagas et al., 2006). These lower aspirations could be due to overt and subtle gender discrimination experienced (Satore & Cunningham, 2007).

In relation to self-limiting mobility, six of the women felt they had opportunities to leave their institutions and the SWA position, but stayed due to a commitment to their AD, department, and university as a whole, or the mission of caring for the student-athletes. This is not an uncommon finding for women in relation to their organizational commitment. Blackhurst, Brandt, and Kalinowski (1998) examined the relationship between career development and the organizational commitment of female student affairs administrators and found that organizational

commitment was higher for women with five or more years on the job than for women with fewer than five years on the job. Thus, concluding that the lowest levels of organizational commitment were observed by women in assistant or associate director positions. Andrews-Little (2007) found in a study of 66 NCAA Division I SWAs that salary, age, and alumni status were significant factors contributing to affective (emotional attachment) and continuance organizational commitment that lead to these SWAs remaining in their organizations (Meyers & Allen, 1997). Cathy explains this combination between affective and continuance organizational commitment stating,

If I had it to do over again, I probably should've left and gone someplace else to get a better opportunity to be an AD, but honestly, when I had opportunities at smaller schools I didn't want to give up 30 years of relationships with donors to go start all over again. I still believed in the vision of our athletic director and wanted to be part of his team, so it was easy to just stay here and continue to plug away at his vision.

Similarly, Lauren described feeling a tie to her university's mission as the reason she never left to pursue an AD role. She said,

In all honesty, if my department would have me, I would stay here and retire from here in another 10 years, because I like what I do. I love my university and what it stands for. I could see myself staying here as long as I was still given that same level of authority and autonomy to develop things for our student-athletes.

In addition to enjoying her job, Donna detailed how location and timing were not ideal for her to leave her current institution for another opportunity. She said,

When I first came here, I mean, that was ultimately my goal, was to lead a program. It's not to say that that couldn't still happen at some point in my life. I don't know. But when some of the opportunities came up, it just either wasn't the right time, or fit, or the right geographical location. Plus, when you feel like you're making a difference and you're enjoying what you're doing ... I've always been one that does my job versus looking for my next one. You know, I hope I haven't missed out on anything super special that maybe I turned down or didn't pursue. But you know, I've enjoyed what I've done here, certainly.

Cathy, Lauren, and Donna all explain the unconscious manifestation of self-limiting behaviors here that may have lead to them not pursuing opportunities to leave their current institutions or move into an AD role. This is not an uncommon finding in the sport management literature, as Taylor and Wells (2017) found in their study of 10 female Division I ADs that micro-level barriers of self-limitation and gendered socialization influenced the women's career path choices and belief in their ability to become ADs. Research has shown that gender plays a role in these career path decisions for women and many times these choices are made based on perceived ideologies and prestige through a gendered lens (Gottfredson, 1981; Jacobs, 1999; Smith, 2002).

Furthermore, this unconscious self-limiting behavior may be present since collegiate athletics lacks visible female leaders at the top (i.e., Division I has less than 12% of female

athletic directors; Lapchick, 2017). Currently, a slight increase of women in athletic department administration in the past decade has occurred (36.2%), but 11.3% of athletic departments do not have a woman in the administration in any capacity (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Visibility, role models, and mentors are crucial to career mobility and leadership development as they provide professional development and psychosocial support (Chester & Mondello, 2012; Smith, Taylor, & Hardin, 2016). Thus, although the women in this study discussed their commitment and love of their current institutions, the lack of women in leadership positions could also be causing women to unconsciously impose self-limiting behavior in regard to leadership opportunities and career mobility. It is also important to note, the agency of women who make a choice not to become ADs, as some women simply make a conscious choice not to pursue AD positions for non-self-limiting reasons.

All of the participants in the study discussed motivation and continued enjoyment in the job came from their involvement and interactions with the student-athletes. This desire to work with student-athletes is not uncommon as working with student-athletes can allow women to feel direct worth and gratification for their work (Smith, Taylor, & Hardin, 2017). However, research has found that working with student-athletes outside of a coaching role is part of the deeply embedded cultural norms of women's work. Grappendorf et al. (2008) found women are funneled into the "soft" areas of collegiate sport such as academic advising or life skills. This funneling can be problematic as it limits women's ability to gain leadership skills needed to ascend to the role of AD (Grappendorf et al., 2008). Furthermore, the women in this study discussed enjoyment in their current jobs and a lack of desire to leave their institutions to pursue other AD opportunities; this could be alluding to a self-limiting behaviors or a phenomenon that has not been yet explored in the literature this far.

Five of the 10 women who expressed a lack of desire to leave their current job also discussed how working directly with student-athletes and coaches kept them from pursuit of AD positions; describing a personal choice, not systematic funneling. For example, Jacky expressed concern for managing AD responsibilities and being able to contribute to work with student-athletes. Thus, for her, staying in her current position allowed her to continue to work on projects surrounding the student-athlete experience, "I think my goal is to continue to find ways where I can help bring value and contribute to the overall experience of student-athletes." Kim, a former AD at a Division II institution discussed turning down an AD job due her desire to mentor coaches and student-athletes. She said,

Very honestly when interviewed and asked over and over again, do I want to be an AD again, I said no. This has changed so markedly in the time that I've been involved and I'm doing what I like to do, which is to supervise coaches and mentor coaches and kids and help them achieve their goals without having to be in the forefront.

Furthermore, Lauren felt her role as SWA allowed her to influence change in prominent issues related to student-athlete development that an AD role might not be afforded time to pursue. She explained,

For me in my role at as the senior woman administrator, it's dealing with the student-athletes. It's those relationships, because I do get to work with student-athletes one-on-one. I do get to help them from a career mentoring standpoint. I do get to help them from a mental health standpoint. Sometimes individually and sometimes just from a

programming standpoint. Developing the events that make the impact. That's my favorite part.

Finally, four of the women detailed that their lack of desire to become an AD was due to the role and responsibilities that the AD has. Particularly, all four women pointed to speaking to the public and fundraising or interacting with donors as deterrents to the AD position. Hallie explained this simply saying, "I don't think I ever want to be an AD. I don't like to get up and talk in front of people. That's not in my wheelhouse. That pushes me outside of my comfort zone." Faith reiterated the lack of desire to be the external voice of the athletic department and expressed her desire to continue making an impact internally with coaches and teams. She said,

I honestly have no desire to be an athletic director. That would not be an option for me. I think that position would need a very well-rounded person. An external person. I think that I do a very good job from an internal stand point. Again, it might go back to standing up there in the conference dome. I don't necessarily know if I would fare very well in the external side.

Although the women discussed the external responsibilities of an AD as barriers to pursuit of the role, the reality is women many times are not mentored or prepared for the job duties of being an AD. Research on SWAs has found the designation is accompanied with a lack of opportunity to build skill sets in fundraising, budgeting, and oversight of male sports, which are all skills associated with success as an AD and necessary to secure an AD position (Grappendorf et al., 2008; Hoffman, 2010; Pent et al., 2007; Tiell et al., 2012). Furthermore, women have less access to social capital (e.g., networking relationships with peers, supervisors, and subordinates) and human capital (e.g., job training and education) than their male peers (Katz et al., 2018; Sagas & Cunningham, 2004). Social capital has also been found to be more influential for men in comparison to women in terms of advancement in sport organizations causing negative career intention and aspiration for women in sport (Cunningham & Sagas, 2002; 2004). At a micro-level, women should consider becoming involved in organizations that encourage interconnectivity, education and networking such as: Women Sport Leaders, N4A, and Alliance of Women Coaches.

Conclusion

There many obstacles to career mobility and career accession for women in collegiate athletics, and sport in general. These issues have been examined from a variety of perspectives among different positions within collegiate athletics (Burton, 2015; Cunningham, 2008; 2010; Cunningham & Sagas, 2006; Dixon & Cunningham, 2006; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). The current study examined the perceptions of career mobility of NCAA Division I SWAs through a multi-level approach. As previously discussed, the use of the multi-level approach is a contribution to the body of literature as it explores the SWA designation holistically through macro-, meso-, and micro-levels expanding the research on women in collegiate athletics. The barriers present needed to be examined at all levels to fully understand the complexity of the issue. The challenges of macro-, meso-, and micro-level barriers exist simultaneously and must be navigated simultaneously for women to obtain AD and senior level administrator positions.

This sample (SWAs) provides unique insight into the meso- and micro-level barriers experienced working in collegiate athletics in comparison to previous research which explored barriers primarily from a macro-level. Thus, from this study's findings and previous research in career mobility, what must be fully understood, is these barriers are all intertwined and are effectively serving to limit or even prohibit career accession for women in collegiate athletics. It is also important to realize women may not be being put in the position to become an ADs or senior-level administrators. Furthermore, the SWA designation specifically may not be aiding in development to the AD position.

There is confusion surrounding the responsibilities of the position, and the position itself does not necessarily lead to developing the required skills to become an AD. In order to negate this confusion, guidance and clarity of the SWA designation from the NCAA to the member institutions is required. The SWA designation was created to enhance leadership opportunities for women, but the involvement of SWAs in the decision-making process varies across institutions (Grappendorf et al., 2008; Hoffman, 2010; NCAA Inclusion, 2018; Tiell & Dixon, 2008; Tiell, Dixon, & Lin, 2012). SWAs are often charged with oversight of women's sports and hold administrative roles that align with societal gender norms (Claussen & Lehr, 2002; Katz et al., 2018; Pent et al., 2007; Raphaely, 2003; Taylor & Hardin, 2016).

Limitations of this study include the qualitative nature of the study as there is an inability to generalize this study and its findings. Another limitation is the study's sole focus on the perspective of women and women from the highest division. Future research should include SWAs from Division II and III and their perceptions on career mobility. Additionally, future research should include male administrators, especially ADs who are in positions of power to make hiring decisions and create organizational or meso-level change. Furthermore, future research should explore resources and support from a multi-level model to understand if increased encouragement and acceptance of women within collegiate athletics is occurring and what strategies are effective in creating this social change.

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