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## **Career Motivation, Career Path, and Gender: NCAA Division II Administrators' Motivation to Advance to Division I Athletics**

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*This study investigates whether the lack of growth in female leadership in college athletics is related to factors internal to the candidates. Specifically, it analyzes career motivation among NCAA Division II athletic administrators and their career path choices in advancement to Division I as a function of gender and position. The entire population of Division II athletic administrators at the assistant athletic director level or higher was surveyed generating 327 useable responses. Results indicate there are no significant differences in career motivation for male and female Division II athletic administrators. A main effect exists only for position, with athletic directors scoring higher than assistants and associates in career motivation. Vertical career path movement to Division I is not perceived as advancement by the majority of Division II athletic administrators because of different organizational structures and philosophies thus creating a self-imposed barrier between the two divisions.*

*Keywords: managerial aspiration, career development, gender, NCAA, value congruence, advancement*

In college athletics there is no question that women continue to be under-represented in management positions (e.g., Lapchick, 2019). Considerable research has focused on macro-level, structural factors that create and support systems that perpetuate this imbalance in the collegiate setting (e.g., Burton, 2015; Hartzell & Dixon, 2019). For example, in 2002, Whisenant, Pedersen, and Obenour found, “Women who are able to gain entry into the athletic director ranks are segregated into the lower, less esteemed, and less powerful athletic director positions at Division II and Division III institutions” (p. 489). While they took this as confirmation of institutionalized hegemonic masculinity, they also suggested that, “The seeding of women at the lower levels may enable more female administrators to fill the pipeline of qualified candidates for future consideration of positions at Division I institutions” (p. 489). Yet, since 2002, little has changed in the growth of women in senior administrator roles and this seeding of the pipeline appears to be an ineffective method for increasing gender balance in Division I. In fact, the pipeline solution makes two broad assumptions. First, it assumes there are no external constraints or structural impediments that would inhibit qualified and interested applicants from advancing to Division I from Division II. Second, it assumes that women administrators in Division II have the career motivation to follow a career path to Division I.

Many authors have addressed the first assumption and confirmed that external factors have limited the ability of women administrators to advance (Fink, 2008; Hancock & Hums, 2015; Katz, Walker, Hindman, 2018; Shaw and Frisby, 2006). As for the second assumption, as noted by Burton (2015), there is an “absence of research on women’s aspirations for leadership positions within sport organizations” (p. 163). Despite their exceptional depth and detail in reviewing the current research on women in athletic leadership, neither Burton (2015) nor Hartzell and Dixon (2019) mention individual motivation. To fill this gap on internal instead of external factors, we utilize career motivation theory to investigate whether men and women have different internal motivations to pursue these senior administrator roles and whether it depends on their current position. These results have important implications for those who believe the gender imbalance in Division I is due to an inherently lower level of career motivation in female leaders that manifests in reduced career advancement. Furthermore, the motivation to achieve a career goal is different from the path one takes to achieve it. Inkson (2004) explains that career path moves within and between organizations are driven by a subjective sense of growth. To this end, we utilize the concept of career path to investigate whether Division II administrators view Division I and Division II as a hierarchy of the same system or as separate entities. If they are not perceived as fungible, this could create a self-imposed barrier between the two divisions leading to the seeding of the pipeline as an ineffective tool to increase female administrator roles at the Division I level. Although there is qualitative evidence that female Division I administrators do not always seek promotion as part of their career path (Hancock & Hums, 2016), there is no quantitative analysis that compares the career motivations and career path choices of Division II administrators to potentially explain why one gender advances more often than the other.

Thus, the two objectives of this study are to investigate the role gender and current position play in a Division II athletic administrators’ career motivation, and whether advancement from Division II to Division I is viewed as part of a career path. To do so, we take what Correll (2004) refers to as a supply side approach to employee career motivation—how employees view themselves, opt for positions, and develop unique career aspirations—and rely on the literature regarding career path, career journeys, and career motivations.

## Literature Review

There is indisputable evidence that women are under-represented in leadership roles in college athletics. Data collected by The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport found 9.0% of Division I Athletic Director (AD) roles were held by females in the 1999-2000 academic year compared to 10.5% in the 2017-2018 academic year. Similarly, in the same time period female ADs in Division II shifted from 15.3% to 18.3% (Lapchick, 2019).

Burton (2015) identified and summarized the important research that has provided explanations for female under-representation in college athletics administration. Her work found significant research at the societal and organizational (macro) levels using theories like role congruity (Eagly & Karau, 2002), social roles (Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000), and homologous reproduction (Lovett & Lowry, 1994) to study concepts such as stereotypes, perceptions, gender role expectations, and hegemonic masculinity. There was clear evidence that societal and organizational structures impeded female success. Conversely, Burton (2015) identified very little research at the individual (micro) level with the bulk of the research related to college coaches using concepts such as turnover intentions, self-efficacy, and career intentions (e.g., Cunningham, Sagas, & Ashley, 2003). Furthermore, the research has been heavily qualitative. To build more knowledge at the individual level, we offer important quantitative and qualitative extensions in terms of four variables: current position, gender, division, and the concepts of career motivation and career path.

In terms of position, decades of research conducted on coaches (e.g., Cunningham et al., 2003; Cunningham, Doherty, & Gregg, 2007) has shifted, and more recent research has focused on front office administrative positions such as Assistant ADs, Associate ADs, and ADs. Similar to Hancock and Hums (2015), Wells and Kerwin (2017), and Katz et al. (2018), we move individual-level research beyond coaches and focus on two groups of athletic administrators: Assistant/Associate ADs, and ADs.

In terms of gender, Hancock and Hums (2015) state, "Until we explore the career experiences and perceptions of men ...it is difficult to adequately assess the role of gender in the career development of individuals pursuing careers in intercollegiate athletics" (p. 38). Accordingly, and similar to Wells and Kerwin (2017) and Katz et al. (2018), our sample extends to both genders in order to determine the differences and similarities in the internal motivations for both male and female athletic administrators to advance their careers.

In terms of division, we focus on Division II because "scholars have argued that research often overlooks athletics at the lower NCAA Division levels, especially Division II" (Baucom & Lantz, 2001). Moreover, at the heart of our study is whether Division II administrators see a move to Division I as part of their career path. To evaluate the Whisenant et al. (2002) suggestion of a pipeline to seed Division I, we must understand the organizational structure, unique features, and potential for a hierarchical and connected relationship between Division II and Division I.

Division I is composed of roughly 350 colleges and universities that offer multi-year, cost-of-attendance scholarships to athletes across an average of 18 sports. Division I includes the so-called "revenue generating" sports of football and basketball and collectively these schools earn over \$1 billion annually in broadcast rights alone (Sanderson & Siegfried, 2018). As a result, there are large profit generating pressures and Division I athletic departments are described as, "culturally distinguished by high incidences of work overload for coaches, administrators, and support staff" (Dixon et al., 2008, p. 137). Similarly, participants in Hancock

and Hums (2015, p. 32-33) describe the culture as “grinding and pounding,” and the industry as “a fast-paced, all in your face, all day long business” that is “out of control,” and “all about the money.” In 2017, Division I schools committed 15 major infractions compared to only 2 in Division II (NCAA, 2019a).

The roughly 300 colleges and universities in Division II offer primarily partial scholarships to athletes across an average of 15 sports. To illustrate the lower profit generating pressures, only four Division II football players were drafted to the NFL 2018 and none to the NBA (Oxley, 2018). Whereas Division I has no stated mission, Division II has a philosophical foundation of “Life in the Balance” reflecting “learning, service, passion, sportsmanship, resourcefulness, and balance” (NCAA, 2019b).

Finally, in terms of concepts, to investigate the career motivations of men and women in Division II athletic administrator roles, we follow Inkson (2004) who advocates for two simultaneous perspectives on this process—the micro-behavior of the employee and the macro form and structure of the career journey. As such, we focus on two concepts that have not yet been applied to the college athletic context: career motivation as the driver for the micro behavior of the employee and career path as the macro form of the career journey.

### *Career Motivation*

Career motivation theory (London, 1983; London & Noe, 1997) is a multidimensional construct (identity, insight, and resilience) designed to explain managerial career plans as well as the behaviors and decisions managers make to realize those plans. Noe, Noe, and Bachhuber (1990) describe it as, “internal to the individual, influenced by the situation, and manifested in career decision and behaviors” (p. 340). The first construct of career motivation, career identity, is the directional component that involves the centrality of work to one’s personal identity and is captured by two factors, need for recognition and career advancement. Need for recognition encompasses the extent of involvement at work including the pursuit of internal and external recognition, while career advancement is actions taken for career growth and time spent on any activities that will assist in career growth (Grzeda & Prince, 1997). Career insight is the arousal component of career motivation consisting of the factors of career awareness and self-awareness. It involves an introspective assessment of strengths and weaknesses which lead to realistic career goals and expectations (Noe et al., 1990). The third construct, career resilience, is the maintenance component and consists of a single factor that accounts for the ability to overcome setbacks related to the organization, people, or circumstances (Grzeda & Prince, 1997; Noe et al. 1990).

In the sport context, there has been no research on career motivations of athletic administrators. Instead, decades of research used similar concepts, such as self-efficacy, intentions to advance, and career intentions. Some studies focused on coaches found males had both higher self-efficacy and intentions to advance into head coaching roles than females (e.g., Cunningham et al., 2007; Machida-Kosuga, Schaubroeck, Gould, Ewing, & Feltz, 2017), while more recent research on coaches suggests this may be shifting among the millennial generation (Morris, Arthur-Banning, & McDowell, 2014). More specific to the context of administrators, white male Division I athletic administrators have stronger career intentions than females, although their self-efficacy scores are similar (Wells & Kerwin, 2017). While these studies and concepts are generally informative, they are not sufficient to address the research question in this paper. Specifically, because intentions are a manifestation of both internal drive and external

environment (e.g. Wells & Kerwin, 2017), and because extensive sport leadership research shows self-limiting behaviors derive from an environment filled with stereotype threats (Carlson, 2017; Correll, 2004), self-efficacy reflects more than internal motivation. To account for this conceptual limitation we use career motivation as a more specific measure of individual plans and decisions, in line with the objective of this project. Because career motivation is “manifested in career decisions and behaviors” (Noe et al., 1990, p. 340) there is a clear relationship between career motivation and career success (Day & Allen, 2004). For this reason, we focus on career motivation as it relates to the main effects of gender and current position, and the interaction of both.

*Gender.* In a sample of employees from multiple industries, Alnıaçık, Alnıaçık, Akçın, & Erat (2012) found females scored significantly higher than males on the overall measure of career motivation as well as the subscales for self-awareness and need for recognition. Conversely, Noe et al. (1990) found no differences between males and females on career motivation. Because the evidence for gender differences in career motivation is mixed, we rely on the more recent work of Wells and Kerwin (2017) on athletic administrators to predict male Division II athletic administrators will have higher career motivations than female Division II athletic administrators.

*Current position.* In terms of only position, research has found no difference between managerial and non-managerial employees in career motivation (e.g., Noe et al., 1990), although when investigating the differences within managerial ranks the distance between current position and career goal is important. While not every employee seeks the same peak position, career motivation includes the aspiration for upward mobility (London, 1983), and Noe (1996) explains that motivation for development activities increases when current position is closer to career goal. In the college athletics context this means we might see career motivation increase for Division II Assistant/Associate ADs because their position is nearer to positional pinnacle (the AD position) than other employees in the athletic department. Furthermore, because Division II ADs have already achieved the peak position in their department, we would expect their career motivation to be lower than Assistant/Associate ADs.

*Gender and current position.* To interact gender and position, we follow the logic from above: if we expect males to have higher career motivation than females and Assistant/Associate ADs to have greater career motivation than ADs, then collectively we would predict male Division II Assistant/Associate ADs to have higher career motivation than all other groups of Division II athletic administrators.

### *Career Path*

A career path is defined as a sequence of moves within or between organizations over time where each career move has unique motives bounded by different circumstances (Inkson, 2004). These progressive steps advance towards more favorable positions. A career path implies purposeful linkage between positions, where that purpose derives from an internal, subjective sense of logic to the path (c.f. Adamson, Doherty, & Viney, 1998; Cappellen & Janssens, 2005). This subjective nature of career path implies that a favorable advancement or favorable move to a different organization for one employee may not be perceived as equally favorable by another.

Not every person seeks the same positional title for their intended career goal. The business model of the NCAA adds a unique feature to the study of career path moves because although the divisions are hierarchically positioned in the overall organization, the divisions also have unique characteristics that can lead some to perceive them as not vertically integrated. Critical to this paper is determining whether Division I and Division II are perceived as successive steps in a career path and whether that perception differs based on gender, current position, or the interaction of both.

*Gender.* In terms of gender, men and women make different career choices and there is evidence that career path preferences are socially constructed (Hancock & Hums, 2015). Some research reports women have lower career path aspirations, but primarily in settings where gender differences are salient which leads to reduced self-assessment of task competence due to stereotype threat and status threat (e.g., Correll, 2004; Machida-Kosuga et al., 2017).

Career choices are also related to personal and organizational alignment whether this is conceptualized as organizational climate (Fritz & van Knippenberg, 2017), value congruence (Hancock & Hums, 2016), or person-culture fit (Ballout, 2007). Within the sport setting, a qualitative study by Hancock and Hums (2016) found 13 out of 20 of female, Division I Assistant/Associate ADs perceived the values of their athletic departments to be incongruent with their personal values. Access to students was a core value for working in athletics, but respondents found Division I was less focused on student athletes and more focused on commercialism which led them to select less dissonant job roles such as academic support or compliance instead of more dissonant roles focused on development or fund raising (Hancock & Hums, 2016). On the other hand, a survey of Division II ADs found these top level administrators already had access to students and the top three most rewarding aspects of their jobs were the success of students, teams, and coaches (40%), relationships with students or staff (13.6%), and witnessing personal development (16.7%) (Center, 2011). Outside of the sport setting, Fritz and van Knippenberg, (2017) found leadership aspiration was stronger for females than males in organizations with a cooperative interpersonal climate, as illustrated by the Division II mission (NCAA, 2019b). Taken in combination, this potential lack of fit for female administrators in Division I allows us to test if more male Division II athletic administrators would accept a similar or elevated position at the Division I level, relative to female Division II athletic administrators.

*Current position.* When considering only position, the path metaphor of a career indicates that within a career, there are a series of moves that link successive positions (Adamson et al., 1998). In the college athletic context, increasing position titles imply progression on a career path from Assistant to Associate to Athletic Director. While not every person seeks the same positional title, given the Wells and Kerwin (2017) description of Division I as the “crest of the hierarchy” (p. 136), we expect any Division II administrators who have not yet achieved their career goals to be willing to move to Division I to continue their paths. However, because Assistant /Associate ADs have not yet achieved a positional, title-based pinnacle (regardless of organizational achievement), career path theory suggests they will be more willing to move up to Division I. Therefore, we aim to determine whether more Division II Assistant/Associate ADs would accept a similar or elevated position in Division I, relative to Division II ADs.

*Gender and current position.* When interacting gender and position, consider that career progression for women has been described as more of a labyrinth (Eagly & Carli, 2007) than a linear career path. Regardless of whether the path includes movement between organizations, Hancock and Hums (2016) found Division I female Assistant/Associate ADs had different definitions of advancement with only a minority perceiving it as vertical mobility.

Although more recent studies find fewer gender differences in advancement preferences (e.g., Alnıaçık et al., 2012; Morris et al., 2014), meta analytic reviews find males have greater desire for power and leadership (Konrad, Ritchie, Lieb, & Corrigall, 2000) especially when they have not yet reached their most favored position (Noe, 1996). Thus, when interacting gender and position in the context of a career path move, we believe that relative to all other Division II athletic administrators, more male Assistant/Associate ADs would accept a similar or elevated position in Division I.

## Methods

### *Procedure and Measures*

Using a cross-sectional research design, an email invitation was sent to the entire population of Division II Assistant ADs, Associate ADs, and ADs requesting their participation in a survey. An embedded link took respondents to an online questionnaire created in Qualtrics. All respondents reviewed and accepted a consent statement before continuing to the survey. A follow-up email was sent two weeks after the initial communication.

Respondents were asked to report their gender identity and current position in Division II athletics. Participants were asked if they had already worked in Division I athletics and if they answered “yes” they were asked to report their role, as well as why they left their post at the Division I level, and the survey ended. If they answered “no,” the participants continued to the 5-point Likert, 15-item Career Motivation Scale from Alnıaçık et al. (2012). Respondents indicated the extent to which they aligned with work-related statements from 5 (to a great extent) to 1 (not at all). The five-factor scale captures the behavioral and attitudinal aspects of career motivation through Need for Recognition (three items), Career Advancement (four items), Self-Awareness (three factors), Career Awareness (two items), and Career Resilience (three items). The means of each factor and the overall career motivation mean were analyzed. A 2x2 factorial ANOVA was used to analyze both main effects and the interaction of gender and position in career motivation using SPSS 21.0.

A career path move was operationalized by asking if respondents would accept a role (similar or elevated) at the Division I level (yes or no). Chi-squared tests and t-tests were used to investigate statistical significance between group-level responses for gender, position, and the interaction of both. An open-ended question asked respondents to explain why they would or would not take the elevated position. Response codes were generated inductively from the data to understand why some athletic administrators were willing to move to Division I as part of their career path while others were not.

### *Participants*

Athletic administrators were defined as all 1,140 Assistant ADs, Associate ADs, and ADs in NCAA Division II as of January 2016 which was 33% female (n=379) and 66% male (n=761).

Email addresses were obtained for each through public webpages on institutional websites. Of the athletic administrators who received the email request to complete the survey, there were 356 responses, of which 327 were usable. Seventy respondents had previously worked in Division I athletics and were not included in the analysis. With a 95% confidence level and 50% degree of variability, our confidence interval is +/- 5.38%. The sample is similar to the entire Division II athletic administrator population, with 60.8% of the respondents male (n=157) and 39.2% female (n=100). Of the total sample, 73.2% were Assistant/Associate ADs and 26.8% were ADs.

## Results

The means and standard deviations for all five career motivation factors and overall career motivation are presented in Table 1. Because cross-sectional research by definition involves non-respondents, we compared early to late responders to look for differences in means to see if patterns of different responses would suggest non-response bias. We found no statistical difference between the two groups. ADs reported the highest overall career motivation scores ( $M=4.36$ ,  $SD=.53$ ) while Assistant/Associate ADs scored the lowest ( $M=4.25$ ,  $SD=.48$ ). Within individual factors, the lowest score was Assistant/Associate ADs in Career Advancement ( $M=4.14$ ,  $SD=.60$ ). The highest individual factor score was Self-Awareness ( $M=4.49$ ) for both females ( $SD=.60$ ) and ADs ( $SD=.71$ ). Females had an equal or higher mean than males in every factor of motivation except Career Awareness. Except for the factor Need for Recognition, ADs scored higher than Assistant/Associate ADs in every category.

Table 1

*Descriptives and Comparison of Means for Career Motivation by Gender and Current Position*

Factors	Male	Female	Assistant/ Associate AD	AD
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Total Career Motivation	4.26 (.51)	4.31 (.48)	4.25 (.48)	4.36 (.53)
Career Advancement	4.19 (.62)	4.19 (.59)	4.14 (.60)	4.35 (.59)
Need for Recognition	4.23 (.70)	4.33 (.66)	4.27 (.69)	4.25 (.69)
Self-Awareness	4.38 (.66)	4.49 (.60)	4.40 (.61)	4.49 (.71)
Career Resilience	4.29 (.73)	4.35 (.65)	4.28 (.67)	4.39 (.77)
Career Awareness	4.25 (.91)	4.23 (.78)	4.21 (.86)	4.33 (.88)
n	157	100	188	69

To determine if average career motivation scores were significantly different, inferential testing was conducted using ANOVA. Levene's test ( $p=.73$ ) indicated homogeneity of variance. Visual inspection of the standardized residuals plotted against the predicted values indicated homoscedasticity. Post hoc testing with Bonferroni adjustment indicated no main effect for gender ( $F(1,253)=2.22$ ,  $p=.14$ ) in career motivation allowing us to conclude that there is no difference in career motivation between males and females. A main effect existed only for position ( $F(1,253)=3.93$ ,  $p=.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .02$ ) although the direction is opposite to the expectation and indicates ADs had higher career motivation than Assistant/Associate ADs. The results also indicated no interaction effects of gender and position for overall career motivation ( $F(1,253)=.78$ ,  $p=.38$ ). Thus, we conclude that of the four groups of athletic administrators



(female Assistant/Associate ADs, female ADs, male Assistant/Associate ADs, and male ADs) there are no significant differences in career motivation.

Additional ANOVA analysis on each of the five career motivation subscales found no interaction effects of gender and position (see Table 2) and identified a main effect of position for only Factor 1, Career Advancement ( $F(1,253)=6.51, p=.01$ ).

Table 2

*Main Effects and Interaction Effect of Gender and Position for Career Motivation*

	Gender		Position		Gender x Position	
	F(1,253)	p	F(1,253)	p	F(1,253)	p
Total Career Motivation	2.22	.14	3.93	.05	.78	.38
Career Advancement	.68	.41	6.51	.01	.36	.55
Need for Recognition	.33	.57	.05	.82	.17	.69
Self-Awareness	2.48	.12	2.01	.16	.24	.63
Career Resilience	2.94	.09	3.61	.06	2.40	.12
Career Awareness	.37	.55	1.78	.18	.72	.40

To understand whether Division II and Division I are perceived as successive steps in a career path, we analyzed self-reported willingness to accept a similar or elevated role in Division I (Table 3). Significantly more males ( $p=.04, 57.5%$ ) than females (44.4%) reported a willingness to move to Division I. Similarly, significantly more Division II Assistant/Associate ADs ( $p=.01, 57.3%$ ) than ADs (38.8%) were willing to accept a role in Division I.

When gender and position were interacted, 65.0% of male Assistant/Associate ADs were willing to move to Division I which was significantly different ( $\chi^2=5.28, p=.02$ ) from female Assistant/Associate ADs. Only 21% of female ADs were willing to accept a role in Division I compared to 43.4% of male ADs. Female Assistant/Associate ADs were 125% more likely to accept a Division I role than female ADs and male Assistant/Associate ADs were 47% more likely to accept a Division I role than male ADs. Male Assistant/Associate ADs were the only group where over half of respondents answered affirmatively to moving to Division I and it was statistically different from the other groups ( $\chi^2=4.12, p=.04$ ).

Table 3

*Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Division II Athletic Administrators to Accept a Similar or Elevated Role in Division I*

	Male		Assistant/ Associate AD		Assistant/ Associate AD		AD	
	Male	Female	AD	AD	Male	Female	Male	Female
	Willing to Accept a DI Position: Yes	57.5%	44.4%	57.3%	38.8%	65.0%	48.2%	43.4%
Willing to Accept a DI Position: No	42.5%	55.6%	42.7%	61.2%	35%	51.8%	56.6%	78.6%
n	153	99	185	67	100	85	53	14
Chi-Square	4.12		6.74		5.28		2.25	
p	.04		.01		.02		.13	

After reporting their willingness to accept a similar or elevated role in Division I, respondents were provided an open-ended text box to report their reasoning. Due to the qualitative nature of the responses, they could be coded into several categories. For example, the remark from an Assistant AD that “they [Division I] typically have better pay scales and better potential for overall advancement” was coded as Advancement and Better Pay/Benefits. Table 4 indicates axial groupings and frequency of responses depending on willingness (yes or no) to move to a similar or elevated role in Division I. The table also notes whether the axial groupings are career-related (role or organizational career path components) or personal.

Table 4

*Frequency of Reasons for Division II Athletic Administrators to Accept or Not Accept a Similar or Elevated Role in Division I*

	Assistant/ Associate AD		AD		Career Path Component
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Willing to Accept a DI Position: Yes					
It Depends	39%	41%	48%	67%	n/a
Advancement	25%	24%	30%	0%	Role
Better Pay/Benefits	11%	10%	4%	33%	Organization
Prestige	11%	2%	0%	0%	Organization
Focused Job Tasks	6%	10%	0%	0%	Role
Quality/Size of Division I	3%	0%	0%	0%	Organization
Willing to Accept a DI Position: No					
Division II Philosophy	26%	36%	40%	82%	Organization
Work/Life Balance	23%	14%	10%	0%	Personal/Role/Organization
It Depends	20%	0%	0%	9%	n/a
Division I Workload/Stress Too High	14%	11%	0%	0%	Organization
Connection with Students	9%	5%	17%	9%	Role
Close to Retirement	6%	5%	10%	9%	Personal
Not Willing to Relocate	6%	2%	13%	0%	Personal

Note. The sum of columns for each Yes and No category can be greater than 100% because responses could be coded into multiple categories.

From the respondents who affirmed they would move to Division I, six themes were identified. The most frequent response for each of the four gender x position groups was It Depends. One respondent stated, “It would depend on location and job requirements,” while another responded, “It would have to be the right situation...I wouldn't jump at a job just because it was Division I, it would have to be a good move up.” For these respondents, a role in Division I was not a de facto promotion, providing evidence that Division I and Division II are not always perceived as part of the same hierarchy of career advancement.

The second most frequent response in three of the four groups was Advancement, which includes open coding such as increased responsibility, more accomplished, increased challenge, and fulfillment. A male Assistant AD said, “I would accept the position if the institution fit my career path and offered my career experiences that would improve my skills as an athletic administrator.” An Associate AD succinctly stated, “I am always looking for ways to advance

my career.” Of note, no female ADs indicated Advancement as a reason to accept a role in Division I.

Both Assistant/Associate ADs and ADs felt Division I offered Better Pay/Benefits including a larger budget and more resources. One-third of female ADs reported this as an important reason to move to Division I and was the second most frequent response for female ADs. Only Assistant/Associate ADs reported Prestige, Focused Job Tasks, and the Quality/Size of Division I as reasons to accept a new role in Division I. The Prestige associated with Division I included open codes such as a wider audience, bigger spotlight, better facilities, and a more exclusive atmosphere.

Six new themes emerged from the athletic administrators who indicated they would not accept a position in Division I. The only theme that occurred for both the yes and no respondents was It Depends. For those who would not move to Division I, the most frequent response in all four gender x position groups was a preference for the Division II Philosophy. A male Assistant AD responded, “I believe in and embrace the Division II platform of Life in the balance” while a female Assistant AD stated, “I stand firmly behind the DII philosophy and would not consider career opportunities in Division I for that reason.” In this case, a belief in the Division II Philosophy excludes Division I from their career path.

Work/Life Balance was the second most frequent response for both male and female Assistant/Associate ADs. A female AD explained, “I have been strongly encouraged to apply for DI positions, but I firmly believe that DII gets it right. We understand the importance of providing balance for both S/A’s and staff members.” Male and female Assistant/Associate ADs found Division I Workload/Stress to be reasons to turn down a Division I job though ADs did not.

Personal factors such as being Close to Retirement or Not Willing to Relocate were more commonly reported by ADs than Assistant/Associate ADs and were the third and fourth most common reasons reported by male ADs for their unwillingness to accept a role in Division I. The personal Connection with Students was the second most frequent factor for male ADs and tied for the second most frequent factor for female ADs.

For those unwilling to take a role in Division I, many of the comments indicated that vertical movement between divisions was not seen as part of a career path because of the different organizational structures and philosophies. A male AD summed this up while explaining, “I believe in the DII model and don't aspire to DI leadership.”

## Discussion

This research sought to utilize career motivation theory to investigate whether men and women have different motivations to pursue senior administrator roles and whether that motivation depends on their current position. The results indicated no main effect for gender; the career motivations of male and female Division II athletic administrators are not statistically different. These results are in alignment with more recent research that found an absence of gender differences in the internal desire for leadership positions (e.g., Walker, Bopp, & Sagas, 2011; Wells & Kerwin, 2017) despite females being stacked into peripheral decision-making positions (Wells & Kerwin, 2017). Similarly, there were no interaction effects between gender and position in career motivation. Differences in career motivation only appeared as main effects for position, with ADs scoring higher than Assistant/Associate ADs in both total career motivation and the factor of Career Advancement. Noe et al. (1990) suggest that employees who

are older, more mature, and in a maintenance career stage highlighted by a lower focus on career goals will score lower on career insight, identity, and resilience; yet, if we assume these characteristics apply more often to ADs, we find no evidence of such an association in this context.

The terms of the second objective of this research on career path moves, a majority of males and a majority of Assistant/Associate ADs of both genders would accept a role in Division I. A majority of Division II ADs of both genders would not. When gender and position were interacted, male Assistant/Associate ADs were the only group where more than half of respondents would accept a Division I role for reasons related to both role and organization. A majority of all of the other groups would not, suggesting that Division I is a career path move for only a small subset of Division II athletic administrators.

There are several interesting observations from these findings. First, in terms of career path, moving to Division I is not only out of the question for the majority of females, regardless of position; ADs of both genders also perceive Division I as a non-contiguous path to career growth. The top two qualitative responses for staying in Division II were the job culture that support Work/Life Balance and the Division II Philosophy. This finding relates to the theory of career construction as participants “impose meaning and direction on their vocational behavior” (Savickas, 2005, p. 3). The participants are content with their decision not to transition to the Division I level because of philosophical reasons. This alignment between organizational and personal values has been identified as an important factor in sport (Hancock & Hums, 2016) and non-sport contexts (Fritz & van Knippenberg, 2017). Specifically, we find that value incongruence can affect the choice of both role and organization in one’s career path moves.

Second, Hancock and Hums (2016) suggested that professional value incongruence affected women’s career choices and opportunities for advancement. In answering their question, “Are men also experiencing incongruent values based on the perceived direction of intercollegiate athletics?” (Hancock & Hums, 2016, p. 208) we found the same professional value incongruence also affects men’s career path choices. Specifically, male ADs in Division II did not see Division I as being congruent with their vocational values. Qualitative results indicate male ADs were rarely staying at Division II because of personal reasons (Close to Retirement and Not Willing to Relocate were less than 13% of the responses). Instead, male ADs preferred the Division II philosophy and the personal connections with students that was afforded by the structure of athletics at that level.

Third, contradictions emerge between career motivations and career path choices. ADs with significantly higher career motivations than Assistant/Associate ADs were less likely to move up to Division I, while Assistant/Associate ADs with significantly lower career motivation scores were more likely to accept a role in Division I. It appears higher career motivation had already successfully manifested in superior title-based roles for ADs whereas Assistant/Associate ADs had not yet achieved a positional pinnacle and were thus more willing to move up to Division I.

Finally, although they are part of the same NCAA system of governance, Division I and Division II were not perceived as successive steps in a career path for the majority of Division II athletic administrators. While this result may be obvious to someone working in Division II, those outside the NCAA perceive internal “pipeline” growth as a viable solution to the problem of gender imbalance in Division I (Whisenant et al., 2002). Differences in organizational structure and culture described by respondents allowed them to view the divisions as separate firms that are not hierarchically connected (though that perception differs based on gender,

current position, and the interaction of both). Even for those who affirmed they would accept a role in Division I, the most common response in all four groups was It Depends, indicating a role in Division I was not a clear promotion. Advancement was the second most common response for those who would move up to Division I, except for female ADs. No female ADs indicated Advancement as a reason to accept a role in Division I. Clearly, not every individual seeks vertical mobility or perceives the AD role to be a part of their career path. Past studies have explained these unequal career path preferences as being, in part, socially constructed by the influence of external forces (societal attitudes, institutionalized arrangements, biased hiring practices, etc.) (e.g., Hancock & Hums, 2016; Wells & Kerwin, 2017). But to advance our knowledge on this subject, the results of this study find that features inherent to the organization also play a role in the path of athletic administrators. No ADs (male or female) reported Prestige or Quality/Size of Division I as reasons to advance. These features of Division I were not attractive to them, and combined with our finding that less than 40% of ADs would accept a role in Division I, we can conclude that Division I has challenges in recruiting qualified ADs from Division II. Whether measured as choice goals or outcome expectations (Wells & Kerwin, 2017), value congruence (Hancock & Hums, 2016), or career path moves, athletic administrators are choosing careers that do not always involve Division I AD as the ultimate career achievement.

### *Implications, Limitations, and Future Research*

In an 18-year time span from 1999 to 2017, the NCAA has increased the percentage of Division I female ADs from 15.3% to only 18.3% (Lapchick, 2019). Our results confirm this is not because of a lack of career motivation among female candidates. There are two likely explanations. First is the overabundance of external constraints and barriers to executive positions (Burton, Barr, Fink, & Bruening, 2009; Burton, 2015) and second are the differences we find related to human agency and the choices made in developing career paths. Organizational culture, congruent workplace values, and organizational identification are paramount in the decision to move to Division I. Although Division II ADs had higher career motivation than Assistant/Associate ADs, the majority were unwilling to move to Division I and did not find Division I to be a realistic part of their career path. Thus, using the terminology of Whisenant et al. (2002), the NCAA does not have a leaky pipeline per se—they have a Division I organizational culture that is considerably different from that in Division II. At a practical level, the results in this study are helpful in finding a solution to the problem. As the NCAA increasingly (but reluctantly) embraces its role as the de facto minor league for men's professional basketball and men's football, its profit orientation runs counter to that of college athletics at the Division II and Division III levels. This shift in philosophy means the divisions in the NCAA are not universally perceived as a hierarchy of the same firm and the career paths of both male and female Division II athletic administrators do not automatically include promotions to Division I. Given this structural inability to promote from within, another solution is needed. If value congruent candidates rarely exist within Division II, then logic dictates Division I athletics must look outside of higher education (towards for-profit industries) to find qualified and value congruent female athletic administrators.

Our results have limitations. Research by Fritz and van Knippenberg (2017) indicates organizational identification strongly moderates the relationship between career aspirations and gender. This research did not measure organizational identification though we encourage future research to add this important covariate. A more in-depth analysis could use the framework of

Ballout (2007) to assess the fits between person-environment, person-job, person-organization, and person-culture. In addition, there are other important covariates that we did not take into consideration such as number of years until retirement and number of years in their current role. Our cross-sectional sample captures a moment in time but Hartzell and Dixon (2019) suggest career paths can change, thus, future studies could use a different research design to capture this temporal variation. An additional recommendation for future research would be to compare the level of career motivation between Division II and Division III administrators. Both of these divisions have a similar philosophy which may eliminate responses related to increased attention, maximized resources, and any opinions that referred to the overall student-athlete experience. The jump from Division III to Division II would seem a more natural intra-organizational career path move that could be compared to the stronger divide between Division II and Division I.

## Conclusion

These results fill a gap identified by Burton (2015) in our understanding of the role individual motivation plays in aspirations for leadership roles in college athletics. The results also clearly address calls by Hancock and Hums (2015) to understand the career experiences of men and by Hancock and Hums (2016) to determine whether men also perceive value incongruence in college athletics. Using concepts not yet applied to the sport context, this study adds to the growing body of literature (e.g., Wells & Kerwin, 2017) suggesting that the forces constraining women athletic administrators are not based on internal motivations or imperfections; female senior administrators do not have statistically different levels of career motivations than their male counterparts. Instead, the lack of growth in female administrators is more likely a function of external constraints (institutionalization, stacking, occupational segregation, etc.) and career path choices.

From a practical angle, these results offer important evidence to find solutions to the lack of progress in finding female administrators. Most Division II ADs do not perceive Division I roles as a natural sequence in their work experience due to the different Division I philosophy. Male Assistant/Associate ADs were the only group where the majority would accept a Division I role. This suggests that Division I will continue to perpetuate the stark gender imbalance in leadership roles if they only hire from within because there are simply not enough women in Division II who are willing job candidates. If equalizing gender balance is an important human resource objective to maximize firm performance (Dwyer, Richard, & Chadwick, 2003), then one solution to the problem of a lack of qualified candidates is for Division I leaders to look beyond the NCAA toward for-profit industries to find female leaders who have sufficient value congruence.

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