



Behind the Stripes: An Exploration of Female High School Football Officials

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Credit: (istockphoto)

Abstract

This qualitative study focused on the personal and professional experiences of female high school football officials that are employed in the male-dominated career of officiating. There has been research conducted on officiating, but very little that has focused on female officials that work exclusively in male sports.

The methodology of a case study was used to explore the careers of female football officials. This was used to create an in-depth description and analysis of the bounded system of female officials (Merriam, 2009).

The two participants that took part in interviews were both female high school football officials. The findings revealed the following common themes: having positive experiences while being involved in officiating, feeling they had to prove themselves while being in the male-dominated career, and having support systems set-up in order to succeed in officiating.

The results of this study will be used to fill the gap in the literature by allowing these women to tell their story of what it is like to be a female football official in the male-dominated career of officiating.

Research Questions

Grand Tour Question:

What are the experiences of female high school football officials?

Sub-Questions:

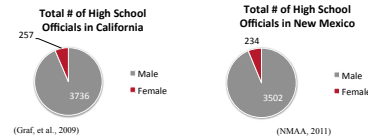
- Why did the participants enter into the career of officiating?
- How do participants characterize success and challenges in officiating?
- What have careers in officiating meant for the participants' personal lives?



(Credit: (CBS/AP)istockphoto)

Literature Review

There is extensive research related to issues of gender and sport, but few have addressed the subject of gender and officiating. Perhaps one reason for this is before Title IX was passed in 1972, a female official in a sport was nearly non-existent (Casey, 1992). Even with the passing of this gender discrimination law, there still appears to be a very low percentage of females in the career of officiating (Graf, Yabko, & Christensen, 2009).



“This underrepresentation of female officials may be because of the perceptions of women’s abilities in the historically masculine domain of sport, and the congruity of their abilities when compared with stereotypical gender roles” (Burton, Grappendorf, Henderson, 2011, p. 36). The role of a sports official is associated with authority, control of others, and power, which are characteristics that are inconsistent with the stereotypical feminine role. There are cultural and social expectations of how females and males should act and what careers they should choose (Bem, 1981). In our society, people are expected to act in their gender roles and when people step outside of these boundaries, it can cause chaos and confusion. Because of these common beliefs about gender norms, females and males sort themselves into occupations related to their gender roles (Kidder & McLean Parks, 2001).

A societal shift is occurring where these views are not as strong as in the past, but change still needs to happen to rid our culture of these gender job-role stereotypes (Kidder & McLean Parks, 2001). Despite the number of local, state, and national officiating programs, there are still very few female officials in the United States (Graf, et al., 2009). By seeing more females officiate significant games such as high school state tournaments or conference championships, it may encourage more females to become an official.

Methodology

The methodology of a case study was used to explore the career of a female football official. A case study is a good approach when the research has “clearly identifiable cases with boundaries and seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the cases or a comparison of several cases” (Creswell, 2007, p. 74). The phenomenon in this study consisted of female high school football officials in the southwest United States.

Data were collected using various sources including:

- interviews
- direct observations of participants
- documents related to officiating (i.e. newspaper, magazine articles)

Data were analyzed by:

- open coding by reviewing interview transcripts and observation notes to find common words or phrases that related to the research questions
- axial coding was used to develop categories and themes from the data
- conceptual schema was formed from the data and from theories in the gender and sports field

Participant Profiles

Mary:

A 60 year old female official from the Southwest United States. She retired from officiating in 1999 after 30 years of officiating a variety of sports including softball, baseball, basketball, and youth, high school, and college football.

Laura:

A 51 year old female high school football official from the Southwest United States. She has been officiating football for 13 years including youth and high school.

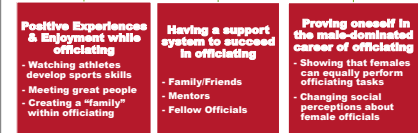


Credit: (Albuquerque Football Officials Assoc.)

Findings

Below are the common themes found between the participants in the study:

Female High School Football Officials



Future Research

Future research on this topic should include a larger sample size of female officials in various male-dominated sports and participants that have worked in different levels of sport including youth, high school, college, and professional.

References

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