

Power and Politics: Women's Intercollegiate Athletics

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Early in the 1960's a new generation of liberal proponents of competitive athletics emerged from the female leaders of the NAGWS. These women had a vision of a new model of educational athletics. Out of this dream came a membership organization within the NAGWS/AAHPER structure: The Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW). This investigation used a voluntary organization power model¹ to examine the internal and external influences upon the rise and fall of the AIAW.

The survival of any voluntary organization is based on its capacity to withstand environmental transactions and influences. The AIAW's life span encompassed a series of environmental threats to its existence and its student-centered, educational-oriented athletic model. Early in its life cycle four major external factors influenced the internal tensions and directional pathways of the association. These four External Events included: (1) a lawsuit to permit collegiate tennis athletes on scholarships to compete in the AIAW tennis championship; (2) Title IX; (3) a strong feminist movement pressuring for exact equality for female athletes; and (4) the watershed influence —a life threatening struggle with NCAA. Moreover, these four external factors served to reorder the power actors and control of the AIAW.

The external influences interacted with the internal ones to determine the power configuration of AIAW. The central *Internal influences* I described below. (1) After a strong internal coalition with links to the feminist movement led to the success of Title IX. the actions of the coalition forced the dichotomy between the traditionalist and the modernist within the association in the chartering of new directions and remodeling the women's athletic model; (2) With the triumph of the feminist consciousness and values heralded by the younger breed of athletic personnel, the power actors were reordered to create a political anomaly for voluntary associations typically guided by an executive director: The legal counsel, who had energized the modernist, emerged as the central power figure in the inner circle of AIAW; (3) The disaffiliation of AIAW from AAHPER occurred as well as the departure of the "Old Guard" traditionalist who saw their ardent amateurism positions being replaced by acceptance of quasi-professionalism. These changes help the new breed of feminist to be able to demand more visibility, and a larger piece of the available athletic resources; (4) The twilight years of the association saw the erosion of the original educational oriented model, which changed through regulatory actions and ultimately forced near duplication of the male model.

The final stage of interaction which led to the demise of AIAW were: (1) the controlling modernists within the AIAW power structure fragmented into at least two major factions. (a) the established inner circle led by the legal counsel and (b) the California coalition led by

a past president. The California coalition, a self-defined faction, who espoused geographical separation and philosophical differences described the presence of an Eastern Clique, and initiated a move from AIAW into the NCAA in 1981; (2) once the victory of Title IX was a reality, NCAA had little incentive to be seriously interested in making substantive accommodations that might lead to a merger between semi-equals. Similarly, entrenched AIAW power actors, while willing to negotiate, had an even stronger commitment to a separate governance. Consequently, any efforts to reach an agreement between the two organizations was dysfunctional; and (3) after considerable legislative maneuvering, NCAA voted to offer championships for women. After a year of parallel championships, the rate of major institution defection, the greater resources of the NCAA, plus the fact that at most institutions males basically made the choice of affiliation. would cause the NCAA ultimately to win. Seeing this, the AIAW suspended operations and concentrated its remaining resources in an anti-trust lawsuit won by NCAA.

In summary, the turbulence of the time, fractional structures, destructive consequences of cleavages being acted out, and the fatal note of NCAA to offer championships for women were all contributors to the final demise of AIAW. Ironically, AIAW's successful support of Title IX and its success as a governing body for women's intercollegiate athletics was central to its demise.

¹ A combination of Alan Metcalfe's sociological model and Jeffrey Pfeffer's political science model is used in this study.