

Are sport management faculty biased?

An examination of faculty perceptions of male and female students' applications for a job in sport

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Abstract

Despite an increase in female enrollment in traditionally male dominated areas, the enrollment of women in sport management academic programs is not near equal that of men's programs. Further, women are underrepresented in the management ranks of professional sport and many areas of collegiate sport. To examine if biases exist regarding perceptions of appropriate jobs for sport management students, faculty (n = 136) were asked to evaluate a fictional student for a job based upon a description working in the WNBA or NFL. Results indicated participants perceived differences in male and female students, as the female student was viewed as more competent for the job in the WNBA and was encouraged to apply for the WNBA job when compared to the male student. Utilizing the frameworks of social role theory and implicit bias results are discussed.

Introduction

Over the past 40 years there has been a 195% increase in female student enrollment in United States colleges and universities (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Women encompass more than half (57%) of postsecondary students (King, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2009) and in traditional male dominated fields like medicine, the number of women enrolled has increased by 51% (King, 2006). Although women have experienced enrollment gains into male-dominated academic fields, their advancement has not translated to undergraduate sport management programs (King, 2006; Jones & Brooks, 2008), or to the management ranks of professional sport and some areas of collegiate sport where women are underrepresented (Lapchick, 2014).

Women comprise between 30-40% of the undergraduate student population in sport management programs and 37% of the masters' program enrollment (Hancock & Hums, 2011). Further, 40% of sport management programs reported having a female student population of 20% or less (Jones & Brooks, 2008). The most recent numbers available indicated that 34% of sport management students are female, and 66% are male (R. Ammon, personal communication, August 25, 2016). Considering positions in sport management, women hold approximately 36% of intercollegiate athletic administration positions, but only 22.3% of athletic director positions (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). In professional sports organizations, women are underrepresented in the senior management positions in professional sport organizations (e.g., presidents, vice-president) (Lapchick, 2014). Within the National Basketball Association, women constitute only 17% of team vice president positions and 21% of team senior administration positions. In the National Football League, women constitute only 15% of team vice president

positions and only 19% of team senior administration positions (2014). However, in the Women's National Basketball Association, women comprise 40% of team general manager positions and 37% of senior team administration positions (Lapchick, 2014).

It is possible to suggest that the percentage of women enrolled in sport management programs may be a contributing factor in the under-representation of women in sport management positions within professional sport organizations. However, considering a disparity exists within the leagues in which women hold positions, (i.e., well represented in administration positions for teams playing in the WNBA, and underrepresented in administration positions for teams playing in the NFL and NBA), it is important to examine additional factors that may be contributing to the under-representation of women in sport management positions. One potential mechanism that may influence sport management students' aspirations for and application to particular positions in sport organizations is the influence of sport management faculty. Drawing upon previous work by Moss-Racusin, Dovidio, Brescoll, Graham, and Handelsman (2012), if faculty teaching in sport management hold biases with regard to positions that are more appropriate for male students, compared to female students, this could potentially influence faculty members' perceptions of female students competence and fit, in certain positions within the field of sport management. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to examine whether sport management faculty demonstrate a bias against female students when evaluating them for positions in professional sport organizations.

Theoretical Framework

Social role theory

Social role theory (Wood & Eagly, 2012) suggests gender differences in behavior derive from the differential prescribed social roles of men and women. Social role theory proposes there are expectations regarding the roles men and women fill in society and that there are qualities and behavioral tendencies demonstrated by each gender (i.e., descriptive roles), in addition to expectations regarding the roles men and women should occupy (i.e., prescriptive roles) (Wood & Eagly, 2012). Communal characteristics such as being affectionate, helpful, kind, sympathetic, interpersonally sensitive, nurturing, and gentle are often used to describe women and are perceived as most appropriate for women to demonstrate (Wood & Eagly, 2012; Heilman, 2001). Conversely, agentic characteristics include being aggressive, dominant, forceful, self-confident and self-sufficient, and are typically used to describe men. Agentic characteristics are perceived as most appropriate for men to demonstrate (Wood & Eagly, 2012; Heilman, 2001). Descriptive stereotypes denote that women are more communal and men are more agentic. Prescriptive gender role stereotypes then indicate women should behave in more communal roles and not in agentic roles, and men should behave in more agentic roles and not communal roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001). Within the domain of sport management, gender role expectations for men and women have been noted as limiting factors for both men and women seeking careers in the field (Burton et al., 2009; Burton, Grappendorf, & Henderson, 2011).

Expectations and assumptions (e.g. stereotypes) are often accepted based upon societal beliefs or one's own beliefs about women and women's role in the workforce. Gender role stereotyping is forming specific expectations and assumptions regarding an individual's abilities and behavior on the basis of their gender roles (Hughes & Serta, 2003). Thus, specific to sport, stereotypes can be formed on observations about social roles and also through occupational roles, such as woman as team mom and man as coach (Koenig & Eagly, 2014).

Lack of fit and implicit bias

Gender stereotypes are beliefs related to the traits and characteristics ascribed to individuals based upon their gender (Cleveland, Stockdale, & Murphy, 2000). A high potential for bias and prejudice exists when perceivers hold a stereotype about a particular group (e.g., women) that is incongruent with the attributes that are thought to be required for success in certain positions (e.g., management) (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Some jobs and positions most likely become gender-typed as male or female based on job responsibilities or the usual job holder (Lyness & Heilman, 2006). Further, group role stereotypes for men and women are thought to be formed based on typical roles enacted within specific occupations (e.g., women as elementary school teacher) (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). Management and leadership positions have been consistently identified as masculine (or agentic) and requiring responsibility, authority and status, have typically been associated with men (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011). Further, Heilman (2012) describes a lack of fit model that can negatively impact women as a result of a perceived incongruence regarding female stereotypic attributes and male gender-typed job requirements. Therefore, the lack of fit model explains that due to expectations regarding fit (or lack of) between gender stereotypes and occupations, individuals will hold a positive or negative evaluation of that person based on the fit. As previously stated, there are a larger percentage of men than women holding management positions in professional sport organizations, specifically in men's professional sports leagues (Lapchick, 2014). Burton and colleagues (2011) found that of equally qualified male and female candidates that male candidates were more likely to be selected for the position of athletic director. This may indicate that women in sport management are being impacted by the lack of fit model as described by Heilman (2012).

This perceived lack of fit may contribute to an implicit bias held by faculty preparing students for careers in sport management, including positions in professional sport. According to Rudman (2004) and Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan and Nauts (2012) implicit bias is unconscious; as individuals may not be aware they are harboring biased or prejudiced feelings toward a particular group. This bias occurs automatically or unconsciously and has formed over years of environmental influences (Kawakami & Dovidio, 2001). In other work regarding implicit bias, Hoyt and Burnette (2013) evaluated the impact of gender bias on evaluations of women in leadership. Findings of their study indicated that those holding more traditional attitudes toward women in authority held more biased evaluations of women in leadership positions (2013). Further, Devine (1989) suggests unintended bias may stem from cultural stereotypes, particularly for women where they are portrayed as less competent but simultaneously accentuate their kind and likeable sides as compared to men.

Research that has examined factors contributing to the under-representation of women in the sciences has noted that faculty rated male applicants for a laboratory manager position as significantly more competent and more likely to be hired when compared to equally qualified female candidates. Faculty also offered a higher initial salary and more career mentoring to male students than they did to equally qualified female students (Moss-Racusin, Dovidio, Brescoll, Graham, & Handelsman, 2012). An additional noteworthy finding is that both male and female faculty rated female students lower and offered them less salary and fewer mentoring opportunities. The theoretical underpinnings regarding the aforementioned study included that of gender bias towards female students, and stereotypes held that might undermine attempts for women to work in the field.

An understanding of how gender stereotypes operate within organizations and can impede women's experience is important. Second generation bias stems from both implicit bias and

perceptions of lack of fit based on gender roles, which negatively impacts women in the workplace. Second generation bias is defined as, “powerful but subtle and often invisible barriers for women that arise from cultural assumptions, organizational structures, practices, and patterns of interaction that inadvertently benefit men while putting women at a disadvantage” (Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013, p. 60). Second generation bias is difficult to recognize and more difficult to counteract (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011) and may impact the experiences of female sport management students as they consider careers in the field. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore whether sport management faculty demonstrated bias against female students which potentially could be contributing to the under- representation of women in sport management positions within professional sport organizations.

H1: Sport management faculty will provide higher ratings of competence to a male graduate of a sport management program when compared to a female graduate of a sport management program.

H2: Sport management faculty will provide more support in applying for a position to a male graduate of a sport management programs when compared to a female graduate of a sport management program.

Further, based on the lack of fit model, faculty will also be more likely to hold an implicit bias toward women applying for positions in more male dominated organizations or those more typically associated with men (Gaucher, Friesen, & Kay, 2011; Hoyt & Burnette, 2013). Therefore:

H3a: Sport management faculty will provide higher ratings of competence, and support for hiring to a male graduate of a sport management program when compared to a female graduate of a sport management program when evaluating students for a position within the National Football League.

H3b: Sport management faculty will provide higher ratings of competence, and support for hiring to a female graduate of a sport management program when compared to a male graduate of a sport management program when evaluating students for a position in the Women’s National Basketball Association.

Method

Participants

Participants (n = 136) were faculty recruited from sport management programs from geographically diverse universities in the United States. A list of sport management programs was utilized to obtain faculty names from the North American Society of Sport Management’s (NASSM) website. A total of 510 faculty were contacted by email invitation to participate in the study. Of those contacted, 136 responded to the survey for a response rate of 26%. A majority of participants were female (n = 76, 56%) and the majority (55%) was between 27-44 years of age.

Participants identified as assistant professor (39%), followed by associate professor (28%), full professor (18%), with lecturer (5%) and adjunct (1%) as having lowest representation.

Data collection

We utilized a simulated employment context as has been used in previous studies examining faculty bias (Moss-Rascusin et al., 2012). Participants were sent an email invitation to participate in this study. A link to one of the following online conditions (male student for NFL position, female student for NFL position, male student for WNBA position, and female student for WNBA position) was included in the email invitation. Each condition contained a job description and resume. The resumes for the male and female candidates were identical, but for name on the resume and membership in either a fraternity (male candidate) or sorority (female candidate) to reinforce the candidate's gender. Participants were asked to rate the fictional student for the job description based on the following measures: competence and support for applying for the position stated in the job description. Ratings of competence refer to how skilled and capable an individual may be, and ratings of support refers to the encouragement and backing one was given. Follow-up emails were sent two weeks after the initial email invitation in an effort to maximize response rate.

Measures

Perceived competence was measured using two items utilizing a Likert scale 1-7 with 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much) scale. Competence ratings by the faculty were measured using two items (How likely is it that this student has the necessary skills for the job? Did the candidate strike you as competent for the job?) ($\alpha = .88$) were asked. Support by the faculty member to the student in applying for the position was measured using two items (How likely would you encourage the student to apply for this position? How likely would you be to encourage the student to continue applying for similar positions) ($\alpha = .95$).

Data analysis

To evaluate the proposed hypotheses, data were analyzed using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) (SPSS 21). A 2 (type of job) X 2 (candidate gender) design was employed. Perceived competence and support for applying were the dependent measures. Type of position (NFL or WNBA) and candidate gender served as independent variables.

Results

The means, standard deviations, and correlations are provided in Table 1. In evaluation of hypotheses 1 and 2, the overall MANOVA was not significant. Hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 were not supported as the MANOVA was not significant ($\lambda = .980$, $F = 1.35(2, 131)$, $p = .26$). The female graduate ($M = 4.60$) of a sport management program was perceived to be similarly competent when compared to the male graduate ($M = 4.67$). The female graduate ($M = 5.30$) was also similarly encouraged to apply for positions to professional sport organizations when compared to the male graduate ($M = 5.09$).

Post-hoc analyses were conducted to examine Hypotheses 3a and 3b. Hypotheses 3a stated that sport management faculty will provide higher ratings of competence and support for hiring a *male* graduate of a sport management program when compared to a female when evaluating students for a position within the *NFL*, while hypotheses 3b indicate there would be higher ratings of competence and support for hiring a *female* as compared to a male graduate when evaluating for a position with the *WNBA*. Results demonstrated that there was partial support for both H3a and H3b. Findings indicated significant differences with regard to competence ($F =$

5.04, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$) and support for applying to different positions ($F = 5.50$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$). Related to hypotheses 3a, the male graduate of a sport management program was perceived to be slightly more competent for the NFL position ($M = 4.56$), but not significantly more so when compared to the female candidate ($M = 4.15$). Related to support, the male applicant was provided less support to apply for the NFL job ($M = 4.87$) compared to the female graduate of a sport management program ($M = 4.94$). Related to hypotheses 3b, the female graduate of a sport management program was perceived to be more competent for the WNBA position ($M = 5.13$), than the male graduate ($M = 4.79$). Related to support for the WNBA position, the female candidate was provided more support ($M = 5.75$) than the male graduate ($M = 5.31$).

Although not a part of the hypotheses, it is interesting to note the male graduate of a sport management program also encouraged to apply to WNBA position ($M = 5.31$) over the NFL position ($M = 4.87$). Additionally, the female graduate was supported for applying to the WNBA position ($M = 5.75$) over the NFL position ($M = 4.94$). Further, the female graduate was rated higher in competence for the WNBA position ($M = 5.13$) compared to the evaluation of competence for the NFL position ($M = 4.15$) while the male graduate was rated higher ($M = 4.79$) in competence for the WNBA position than the NFL position ($M = 4.56$).

Table 1. Mean (SD) Dependent Variables by Job Application and Gender of Applicant

	Job Application	Gender of Applicant	Mean	SD
Apply	WNBA	Female	5.75	1.20
		Male	5.31	1.40
	NFL	Female	4.94	1.75
		Male	4.87	1.96
Competence	WNBA	Female	5.13	1.33
		Male	4.79	1.33
	NFL	Female	4.15	1.69
		Male	4.56	1.59

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to examine whether sport management faculty demonstrated a bias against female students when evaluating their competency as well as their willingness to support them in applying for positions in professional sport organizations. Science faculty in the male-dominant STEM fields rated female students to be less competent and less worthy of being hired than identical male students (Moss-Racusin, et al., 2012). Exploring this in sport management, which has also been traditionally male dominated, could provide additional

insights into potential biases that exist amongst faculty members, and start a discussion on whether these biases may be preventing females from obtaining certain jobs in sport.

Findings from this study do not indicate that a female sport management student received lower ratings of competence from sport management faculty. This finding was not expected based upon the literature review. It is noteworthy that sport management faculty did not rate the female student as less competent and indicated the female student was as capable and competent as the male counterpart. When considering the lower percentage of women employed in sport organizations, our findings indicate that we cannot attribute faculty bias toward male sport management students as a contributing factor.

Related to hypothesis 2, results did not indicate that the female student would receive lower levels of support when applying for positions compared to the male student. It was notable that our findings indicated that sport management faculty participating in our study provided the same level of encouragement and support to female students applying for jobs as compared to male students. Support by faculty is important for students as they progress in their academic careers and can contribute to whether or not they stay in their original choice of a major. Support is also an important variable as students often rely on faculty input, encouragement, and support as they look to take the next step into employment (Gasiewski, 2012; Lent, 2001). Thus, faculty can have the potential to play a major role in the process in students' career endeavors. As Moss-Racusin and her colleagues (2012) suggested, cultural messages about women's lack of competence in science could cause faculty to hold gender-biased attitudes that could affect their support for female (but not male) science students. However, we did not find any indication that faculty member's support of a sport management graduate is solely based upon being male or female. Ultimately, our findings suggest that faculty support is not a factor contributing to the lower percentages of female sport management students.

However, related to hypotheses 3a, the male graduate of a sport management program was perceived to be somewhat more competent for the NFL position, but not statistically significantly more so when compared to the female candidate. This follows work that would support male candidates to be more competent for positions in more male dominated organizations (Gaucher, Friesen, & Kay, 2011). However, these results must be interpreted with caution as the differences in perceived competence between the male and female student graduate was not statistically significantly different. Further, the male student graduate was provided less support than the female graduate in applying for the NFL job than the female student. This finding is counter to what was hypothesized and worthy of more investigation, though again should be interpreted with caution as this difference was not statistically significant. It may be that the NFL, though male dominated, may not be perceived by sport management faculty as only appropriate for male candidates and therefore support female candidates applications to such positions, yet the WNBA may be perceived to be more stereotypically appropriate for female candidates and therefore a more congruent positions for women when compared to men.

As noted above, findings from this study indicate that the female graduate of a sport management program was rated as more competent for the WNBA position than the male graduate. Related to support for the WNBA position, the female candidate was provided more support than the male graduate. These findings indicate that faculty may view their female graduates of sport management programs as a better fit, and thus view them as more competent and are more willing to support them in applying for a position with the WNBA – a *womens'* sport league. From one perspective, group role stereotyping (Koenig & Eagly, 2014) may have worked as an advantage for the females in our study. In other words, faculty appear

to have viewed women as more capable and competent for a job in women's sports over men's capabilities and competencies in women's sports.

However, from another perspective, the lack of fit model (Heilman, 2012) may have disadvantaged the male students. Faculty may have not seen a congruent fit between men working in women's sports. Regardless, there is clearly some stereotyping at play in this scenario. Traditionally in the sporting realm women have been under-represented within organizations, and often disadvantaged to men in the hiring process (Burton et.al, 2009; Burton et.al, 2011). However, in our study that specifically uses a women's professional sporting league, the opposite appears to be true. Whereas gender role stereotyping has typically impacted women in sport management, it is evident from our study that men can too be affected.

Additional findings indicated that when being evaluated for a position within the National Football League, compared to a position in the Women's National Basketball Association the female student was perceived to be more competent for the WNBA job compared to the NFL job. Thus, participants indicated a female student would be more competent for and do better work in a women's sport organization (i.e., WNBA), as opposed to the men's sport organization (i.e., NFL). These findings lend support to gender role stereotyping and social role theory. Further, it is possible to suggest that implicit bias and potential lack of fit was operating to influence participants' evaluation of the female student. Participants may have biased their evaluation of the female student based upon the gender roles regarding what is perceived as appropriate or congruent for both the male and female students. Participants in this study perceived a better fit for the female student and the WNBA and that perception led to a much higher rating of competence and support for the female student applying to that position. This finding is troubling because if faculty perceive women to be better suited for positions in women's professional sport organizations, the opportunities for female graduates of sport management programs are limited. To date, the WNBA is the only women's professional sport organization that has had any long term, sustainable success as a professional organization. Encouraging women to apply to positions that are perceived as a better fit can also signal to female sport management graduates that men's sport organizations are not a 'good' fit for them. This perception contributes to the underrepresentation of women in all aspects of sport organizations and can lead to the 'vicious cycle' of gender typing of occupational positions as described by Ely and colleagues (2011). This 'vicious cycle' leaves unchecked gendered assumptions regarding appropriate roles and positions for men and women in organizations.

Our findings indicate that sport management faculty may be contributing to second generation bias toward female students (Ibarra et al., 2013). Because second generation is embedded in organizations, it is difficult to recognize and address. It is worth noting that 55% of our participants were between the ages of 27-44. Thus, it may be that being early in one's career, the intricacies of second generation bias are not yet fully comprehended. Though our participants may have been advantaging the female student by providing better support for the WNBA position, this support reinforces assumptions regarding appropriate positions for women in sport organizations (Burton et al., 2009).

Limitations

As with all research, our study was not without limitations. Established procedures for maximizing response rates to online surveys were used in this study, however, we did not provide an incentive (e.g., opportunity to win a small prize) to participants in return for

completing the survey (Sauermann & Roach, 2013). The lack of an economic incentive may have suppressed our overall response rate. Further, this study followed similar research protocols examining hiring and mentoring perceptions (e.g., Moss-Racusin et al., 2012) of student applicants, yet participants in this study may have required more information in order to best evaluate the student applicant.

Conclusion

Our study provides additional contributions to the body of literature exploring the underrepresentation of women working in sport management. Evidence that some bias on the part of faculty does exist related to the type of job they recommend should be examined as this finding could be contributing to the under-representation of women in male sports leagues. If women are viewed by faculty as only competent for positions in women's sport organizations, they may be steered towards only those jobs, limiting not only opportunities, but also continuing the lack of women within the management structures in men's sport organizations. It is crucial that sport management faculty consider their own biases and how these biases may be impacting female students.

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