

What Are They Thinking? Sport Management Students' Attitudes Toward Women

Sally R. Ross, Bowling Green State University
Janet B. Parks, Bowling Green State University

**Session 11: Professional Preparation
Poster**

Thursday, May 31, 2007

4:00 PM - 4:55 PM

Research has shown that men hold the vast majority of positions in sport organizations and that women who are employed in these organizations typically are not in senior management positions (Acosta & Carpenter, 2006; Lapchick, 2004, 2005, 2006; Schoenfeld, 1999; Whisenant, Miller, & Pedersen, 2005). Given that most undergraduate sport management students are male (Cawley, 1999; Moore, Parkhouse, & Konrad, 2004), gender imbalance and inequity of opportunity in sport organizations will likely continue into the foreseeable future. While the low number of undergraduate women in sport management programs is certainly concerning, even more alarming is the prospect of perpetuating "taken-for-granted" attitudes that permeate sport and impact women's opportunity in the sport context (Shaw & Frisby, 2006). As Connell (1995) noted, dominant ruling groups within the institution of organized sports are largely responsible for defining and reinforcing a masculine ideology. When masculinity is embraced and reinforced in the administrative structures of the sport context, power differentials favor men (Whisenant et al., 2005). As a result, these systems of inequality tend to exclude and/or limit women who aspire to leadership positions in sport.

The transformation of sport organizations into entities that appreciate and reward the contributions of women will require the leadership of sport managers who value organizational diversity and understand how to manage it. As noted by Shaw (2006) and Shaw and Frisby (2006), sport management professional preparation programs have an important role to play in helping sport managers of the future learn to recognize gender inequity. These managers, who have been educated about the value of diversity, will be more likely to implement proactive strategies that will result in a welcoming and equitable work environment for female employees (Thibault & Quarterman, 2007).

Merely recognizing inequity and exclusion in sport, however, is not enough. As educators, we need to devise a plan to disrupt the "taken-for-granted" notion that men, not women, are the natural leaders in the sport context. An important early step in this process is the discovery of current students' attitudes toward women and the factors that contribute to those attitudes. The purposes of this study, therefore, were (a) to examine the attitudes toward women held by a convenience sample of undergraduate sport management students, and (b) to explore three variables for their explanatory power relative to those attitudes.

From the universe of factors that could affect people's attitudes toward women, we selected three that some scholars have suggested could be associated with treatment of women in the workplace: (a) perspective taking (Shaw & Hoerber, 2003), (b) gender social identity (Burn, 1996; Burn, Aboud, & Moyles, 2000), and (c) attitudes toward sexist language (Parks & Robertson, 2004, 2005; Shaw & Frisby, 2006; Shaw & Hoerber, 2003). Our research questions were: (a) What are undergraduate students' attitudes toward women? and (b) To what extent are perspective taking, gender social identity, and attitudes toward sexist language associated with undergraduate sport management students' attitudes toward women?

The participants were 115 undergraduate sport management students in a medium-sized university in the Midwestern United States. Eighty-eight (76.5%) of the participants were men, 100 (87%) were of white, Western European heritage, 78 (67.8%) were 18-20 years old, and 37 (32.2%) were 21-22 years old. We measured attitude toward women with the Neosexism Scale (NS; Tougas, Brown, Beaton, & Joly, 1995). We employed three scales to measure the remaining factors: the Perspective Taking Scale (PT; Davis, 1983, 1996), the Gender Self-Esteem Scale (GSE; Burn et al., 2000), and the Inventory of Attitudes toward Sexist/Nonsexist Language-General (IASNL-G; Parks & Robertson, 2000, 2001). Higher scores on each of these scales indicate a more positive attitude toward the variable being measured.

The NS (attitude toward women) item mean for the sample was 4.83, only slightly above the midpoint ("neutral") of the 7-point scale. For women, the item mean on the NS was 5.36, and for men it was 4.66. An independent samples t test revealed a significant and meaningful gender difference on the NS [$t(113) = 4.87, p < .0001$; Cohen's $d = 1.07$]. Given this large gender difference on the primary variable of interest, we analyzed the data separately by gender. For the female participants, correlation coefficients between attitudes toward women and perspective taking ($r = .13$), gender self-esteem ($r = -.11$), and attitudes toward sexist language ($r = -.049$) were non-significant. For the male participants, however, both perspective taking ($r = .31$) and attitudes toward sexist language ($r = .38$) were significantly associated with attitudes toward women ($p < .01$). Gender self-esteem was not significantly related to men's attitudes toward women.

2007 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2007)

The results of this study offer insights into factors that should be examined in larger samples of sport management students. First, and perhaps most importantly, the men's attitudes toward women were far less positive than would be desired in the 21st century. Indeed, the location of their mean at only slightly above the midpoint of the 7-point scale is disturbing. Although the women's mean was significantly higher than the men's, there is ample room for improvement in their attitudes as well. If similar attitudes are found in additional samples of students, sport management educators should make a concerted effort to adopt instructional approaches that would enhance students' opinions of women. Second, the finding that men's perspective taking and attitudes toward sexist language were moderately correlated with their attitudes toward women provides a clue as to instructional approaches that might be effective with men. Third, future studies should attempt to identify factors that explain female students' attitudes toward women so that effective approaches might also be developed for them. As scholars continue to discover factors that explain sport management students' attitudes toward women, educators will be more likely to devise strategies that would give these future practitioners the tools necessary to identify, critique, disrupt, and dismantle the discourses and assumptions that perpetuate gender inequity in sport organizations (Shaw & Frisby, 2006).