

Women's Athletic Participation: Does it Make a Difference to Managers Hiring for Entry-Level Sport Management Positions?

Laura J. Burton, University of Connecticut
Heidi Grappendorf, North Carolina State University
Angela Henderson, Texas Tech University

**Session 25: Management/Leadership
Presentation (25-minute)**

Saturday, June 2, 2007

10:30 AM - 10:55 AM

Despite the gains women have made in the world of business, very little has changed in the overall perceptions about what makes a good manager. More than 25 years ago, Schein (1973, 1975) reported that managers perceived "successful middle managers" as those who held characteristics, attitudes, and temperaments most commonly associated with men. Schein's "think manager, think male" phenomenon has been consistently supported over the past quarter century in research that indicates that stereotypical male qualities are necessary to be a successful manager (Cejka & Eagly, 1999; Heilman, 2001; Heilman, Block, & Martell, 1995; Powell, Butterfield, & Parent, 2002; Schein, 2001). Powell et al. (2002) noted that considerable increases in the proportion of female managers (from 21% in 1976 to 46% in 1999) did not negate a "glass ceiling" effect. That is, even with the increase of women into managerial roles, these advances had not overcome the gender stereotypical perceptions of a successful manager (Heilman, 2001).

Within the field of sport management, women continue to be underrepresented at the highest levels of managerial positions (Acosta & Carpenter, 2006; Lapchick, 2005). Social role theory (Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000) and role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) have examined expectations about the roles that men and women occupy, in an attempt to explain why women continue to be underrepresented in major leadership positions. Each of these frameworks argues traditional gender expectations (i.e., being aggressive, agentic, dominant, self-confident and self-sufficient for men, and being affectionate, helpful, nurturing, and gentle for women) affect whether or not men and women fill those roles "successfully." In general, the stricter men and women adhere to their gender prescriptions, the higher they will be rated by society.

However, past research has shown that these traditional gender expectations can be violated - favorably - in certain situations. Females who have participated in sports have afforded greater respect than their non-athlete female peers. Harrison and Lynch (2005) found that female athletes were linked to more masculine or androgynous gender role orientations, and also to more agentic characteristics. Therefore, it is important to consider how those perceptions affect female athletes in the hiring, promoting, and evaluating procedures within management. These gender stereotypes may potentially affect how males and females perceive women in management (Whisenant, 2003), and could even impact how women are judged once they enter the workforce (Deal & Stevenson, 1998). Thus, the purpose of the present study was to examine whether or not perceptions of female job applicants differ for athletes versus non-athletes, and how athletic participation by females influences hiring recommendations to entry-level management positions.

Phase one of data collection used two existent sport management internship databases from two large universities containing the names and contact information of managers for organizations that have hired sport management interns over the past five years. Managers (n = 520) were sent a letter explaining the study, a résumé, from one (n = 130) of the four treatment conditions (female athlete, male athlete, female non-athlete, male non-athlete), a survey regarding hiring preferences, competence, and likeability, and a demographics questionnaire. To ensure random distribution of each treatment condition, résumés were randomly assigned to managers using a computer generated list of random numbers. Fifty-nine surveys were returned due to incorrect addresses. A total usable sample of (n = 461) surveys are available for analysis (female athlete n = 111, male athlete n = 116, female non-athlete n = 119, male non-athlete n = 115). Two weeks following the initial mailing, a follow-up letter was sent to all participants encouraging submission of the survey materials.

Phase two of data collection will use a random sample of sport organizations drawn from the 2004 Sports Market Place Directory. Using an online survey distribution method, managers (n = 400) from sport organizations will be randomly assigned to a treatment group, and will be sent a link to the online survey for that particular treatment group. The online survey will follow the same format as the paper and pencil survey. Managers will be provided the résumé, a survey regarding hiring preferences, competence, and likeability, and a demographics questionnaire.

Data collection has begun for phase one of the research project. To date sixty-five surveys have been collected with a usable sample of fifty-seven surveys (n = 57). Initial descriptive data indicate female athletes have higher means scores for all

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

dependent measures (i.e., hiring, competence and perceived liking) when compared to male athletes, female non-athletes, male non-athletes. Yet, at this early phase of data analysis, no significant differences were found among the four treatment conditions on the dependent measures, Wilk's $\eta^2 = .84$ $F(3, 57) = 1.05$, $p = .404$. However, analysis will continue as more data is submitted. Phase two data will also be added to the analysis. Results will be discussed using role congruity theory.