

**Gender diversity and service quality in NCAA Division I women's teams**

*Jinho Choi, Texas A&M University*

*Michael Sagas, Texas A&M University*

*Se-Hyuk Park, Seoul National University of Technology*

*Dean Kwak, Texas A&M University*

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Abstract 166**

As organizations in the sports business industry have continued to grow and develop, the characteristics of the members in these organizations have become diversified. Social science researchers have been concerned with understanding the effects of race, gender, age, and other demographic differences within organizations (e.g., Dwyer, Richard, & Chadwick, 2003; Leonard & Levine, 2006; Pelled, 1996). Considerable research has evolved with respect to diversity in sport organizations in particular, as can be seen in Cunningham's (2007) recent text devoted to the topic. The practical importance of understanding the effects of demographic similarity or dissimilarity among group members is that a number of studies have suggested that these differences can affect team performance and group functioning (Cunningham, 2007). For example, top management team members' diversity has been shown to hold a negative association with firm performance (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992; Murray, 1989). Interestingly, there is also literature to suggest that demographic diversity, when managed appropriately and in particular contexts, can be beneficial to group functioning and decision making (Jackson, Joshi, & Erhardt, 2003; Williams & O'Reilly's, 1998).

The effects of gender diversity in sports (and in particular women's collegiate sports) have received considerable scholarly attention of late. However, few studies have examined how gender diversity practically impacts potential variables at the group level, and have only sought to understand the categorical and relational effects of gender (Cunningham, 2007). That is, few studies have assessed the impact that the gender diversity of a staff might have on the effective functioning and satisfaction of the group functioning under the staff. In the present study, we sought to extend the previous gender diversity research in collegiate athletics to examine the effects of gender diversity of a coaching staff, and the subsequent perceived service quality of student-athletes. Furthermore, we aimed to analyze the relationship between the proportion of women on a coaching staff and the subsequent impact on service quality as perceived by women student-athletes.

In collegiate athletics, it has been argued that in-group members are people who have similar characteristics with the majority members of the organization, and out-group members are regarded as people who are dissimilar to majority members (Cunningham & Sagas, 2005). According to Tajfel (1972), self-categorization is defined as "the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership" (p. 292). While social identity (or self-categorization theory) has been directly tested and supported through theoretical and practical literature in the sport literature and the organizational sciences, Gaertner and Dovidio (2000) proposed a common in-group identity model that is contrary to the perspectives suggested above. This perspective follows that people who are different from their majority members may recategorize themselves as in-group members belonging to a common group (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). Thus, the recategorization process might make a group consisting of diverse members become a more cohesive entity. Research based on Gaertner and Dovidio's common ingroup identity model has indicated the positive effects of recategorization, such as positive attitudes toward group members, high organizational citizenship behaviors, and positive organizational commitment (Cunningham & Sagas, 2004). Therefore, recategorization is potentially effective at reducing the negative effects of diversity (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). In the current study, we draw from self-categorization theory and common in-group identity model to examine the effects of coaching staff-student-athletes gender dissimilarity on subsequent service quality. Bitner and Hubbert (1994) defined service quality as "the consumer's overall impression of the relative inferiority/superiority of the organization and its services" (p. 77). However, the concept of service quality can be perceived differently at the individual level, as people recognize the quality of service provided, and because services are often multidimensional and elusive (Chelladurai & Chang, 2000; Crompton & Mackay, 1989; Jabnoun & Rasasi, 2005). In this study, we aimed to assess the effects of gender diversity (of the coach and coaching staff) on the outcomes of a group (service quality perceived by the student-athletes). While traditional diversity literature and theory (i.e., social categorization) would predict a potentially negative relationship between diversity and service quality delivered, it is also possible that the common in-group identity model might be more explanatory in the intercollegiate athletics context.

Data were collected through a web based questionnaire. Usable data was returned from 192 female student-athletes who participated in a variety of National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I sports (11 women's sports were represented) at 32 different colleges and universities. The majority of the student-athletes were Caucasian (n = 159, 82.8%) and the most frequently reported age of respondents was 21 years old (n=64, 33.3%). A version of the SERVQUAL instrument, modified by Harris

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(2002), was used to measure the service quality perceptions of the student-athletes. The questionnaire included 14 items to measure four major indicators of service quality: Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy. A 7 point Likert-type scale, with responses ranging from 1(Strongly Disagree) to 7(Strongly Agree) was used to measure the service quality. The reliability (Cronbach's alpha) estimates for each dimension of the service quality ranged from .88 to .91. With respect to demographic information, the participants provided their age, ethnicity, head coach's gender and head coach's ethnicity. Each participant's team operating budget and the gender make up of their respective coaching staffs (i.e., head and assistant coaches) were obtained from public Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act reports.

A multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was performed to assess two research questions. In each case, the overall budget from each institution was used as a covariate to control for this potential confounding effect on service quality. Research question one asked if gender of a head coach impacted the perceived service quality of women student-athletes. The results indicated that significant differences were not found with regard to the gender of the head coach on the service quality outcomes, Wilks's  $E = .97$ ,  $F(4, 168) = 1.21$ ,  $p = .31$ ,  $\eta^2 = .03$ . Research question two asked if the gender composition of female coaching staffs influenced service quality, as perceived by women student-athletes. We classified the gender composition of the coaching staffs into three distinct categories to analyze the second research question: all male staffs, mixed staffs, and all female staffs. Results also revealed a nonsignificant multivariate effect for the proportion of female coaches on a staff, Wilks's  $E = .92$ ,  $F(8, 336) = 1.73$ ,  $p = .09$ ,  $\eta^2 = .04$ . Furthermore, the ANOVA results for each of the service quality outcomes of reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy on the proportion of female coaching staffs were not significant.

The results of this study suggest that gender diversity of a leader (e.g., male head coach for a women's team) does not impact the service quality perceived by women student-athletes (in isolation). Further, we found no evidence to suggest that the compositional diversity of the top management team leading the group (i.e., the coaching staff) impacted the perceived service quality of women student-athletes. The common in-group identity model supports these findings in that it is likely that women student-athletes considered (or recategorized) their head coaches as in-group constituents, irrespective of their gender. Furthermore, the common fate, common goals, and frequent interaction cited in the study of Cunningham and Sagas (2004) might also be allowing the female athletes to oversee any categorical differences with male head and assistant coaches.