Managerial stereotypes may be women's largest barrier to attaining leadership positions in sport organizations. Consistently, researchers have found managerial stereotypes are associated with masculine characteristics (see Eagly & Karau, 2002), thereby limiting women's ability to break through the "glass ceiling." One area receiving little attention in the literature is the impact key organizational variables, such as diversity culture, potentially have on gendered leadership stereotypes. This study centered on examining the potential impact of an organization's culture on gendered leadership stereotypes. To do so, I drew from the social identity theory of leadership to examine the collective influence of leader sex, organizational culture, and the interaction between the two on two key outcomes: leadership prototypicality and leadership effectiveness.

The “central prediction from the social identity theory of leadership (SITL) is that as people identify more strongly with a group, the basis for leadership perceptions, evaluations, and endorsement becomes increasingly influenced by prototypicality” (Hogg, 2001, p. 191). Moreover, prototypical members are more likely to emerge as leaders, and these prototypical leaders will be evaluated more favorably (Hogg, 2001). Hogg and Reid (2006) suggested this occurred because followers adjust their behaviors to the leader’s behavior when the leader is perceived as prototypical. Moreover, followers prefer prototypical leaders because they (a) embody the group prototype, (b) behave in a group-serving manner, (c) possess more trust, and (d) define the group prototype.

SITL may explain the perceived "glass ceiling" considered to be present in most organizations for nontraditional leaders (e.g., women). SITL predicts that as group membership becomes more salient, the level of congruency between the leader's characteristics and the group's prototype will affect leadership endorsement and perceived leadership effectiveness (Hogg and van Knippenberg, 2003). Thus, a mismatch between the leader's demographic characteristics compared to the group prototype may impact her or his effectiveness and endorsement ratings (Hogg & van Knippenberg, 2003).

In addition to leader gender, the organization’s culture might also impact perceptions of the leader. Fink and Pastore (1999) developed a comprehensive diversity management model that suggested organizations adopt one of three approaches to managing diversity: compliance, reactive, or proactive. This study focused on compliant and proactive strategies because they are the most prominent in Division I and III institutions (Fink, Pastore, & Reimer, 2001, 2003). Compliant organizations view diversity as a liability, assimilate diverse individuals into the dominant culture, practice discrimination and homologous reproduction, and do not support diverse individuals. Alternatively, proactive organizations are people and future orientated, view diversity as an asset, and utilize resources to support diverse individuals.

Based on the literature, I advanced the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Men will be considered more prototypical leaders than will women.

Hypothesis 2: Culture will moderate the relationship between leader's sex and leadership prototypicality.

Hypothesis 3: Leadership prototypicality will positively affect leadership effectiveness ratings.

The sample included students (N = 278; 140 male, 102 female) enrolled in physical activity classes at a large public university in the Southwest United States. I employed a 2 (organizational culture: compliant, proactive) × 2 (leader’s sex: female, male) experimental design to test the hypotheses. First, participants read a vignette describing the organizational culture of an athletic department. Next, they read a short description of a randomly assigned female or male leader. Participants then completed a series of items designed to measure prototypicality (Platow & van Knippenberg, 2001) and leadership effectiveness (van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005).
Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations were calculated for culture, leader’s sex, prototypicality, leadership effectiveness, and agreement with culture, and were employed in the following analyses. I employed structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the hypothesized relationships. Culture and the leader’s sex were coded using 0 (compliant, female respectively) and 1 (proactive, male respectively), and an interaction term was calculated by multiplying culture and the leader’s sex together. A fully-mediated model and a partially-mediated were tested using these constructs.

The partially-mediated model was also a close fit to the data: $\chi^2 (df = 30, n = 247) = 68.80, p < .001$, RMSEA (90% CI = .05, .09) = .07, CFI = .98, PNFI = .52. The chi-square difference test indicates the models were significantly different, $\Delta \chi^2 (\Delta df = 3) = 17.52, p < .001$, and the partially-mediated model was the better fit ($AIC = 138.84$). Analyzing the partially-mediated model indicated leader’s sex ($\beta = -0.10, p > .05$), culture ($\beta = -0.08, p > .05$) and the interaction between culture and sex ($\beta = 0.28, p > .05$) were not significantly related to prototypicality; hypothesis 1 and 2 were not supported. Data supported the third hypothesis: prototypicality was related to leadership effectiveness ($\beta = 0.74, p < .001$). Furthermore, culture was significantly related to leadership effectiveness ($\beta = 0.59, p < .01$).

Although the first and second hypotheses were not supported, this study advanced the current literature in three facets. First, it determined leadership prototypicality may have a more direct relationship with the leadership effectiveness than has been supported in the literature. Previous research posited the relationship between prototypicality and effectiveness is moderated by other constructs (e.g., self-sacrificing behavior; van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005), whereas the current study demonstrated a direct correlation. Next, the results demonstrated a proactive culture positively impacts a leader’s effectiveness rating. This pattern may have occurred because participants may attribute positive characteristics of the organization to the leader, which has receive limited empirical support (e.g., Kwantes & Boglarsky, 2007) and should be further evaluated. Finally, it reinforces the notion that leaders are the greatest source of information about what is most prototypical about the group prototype. For instance, Reicher et al. (2005) found leaders are able to define, control, and inform others about what should be considered the group’s most important characteristics. With the limited knowledge about the group’s traits and the composition of the group, participants may attribute group characteristics to the leader, and therefore, establish the leader as the prototypical member.