Conceptualizing the Lack of Women in Men’s College Basketball: A Multilevel Model Approach

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Thus far, the underrepresentation of women in men’s sports has been examined by focusing on how a single level (e.g., discrimination) effects the representation of women in sports. In the early 1990s, the most significant, surge of research describing the role of women as coaches in men’s sports began to surface (Kane & Stangl, 1991; Lovett & Lowry, 1994; Stangl & Kane, 1991; Staurovsksy, 1990). Much of this research was at the high school level and used homologous reproduction, hegemony, and hegemonic masculinity as theoretical frameworks to explain the lack of women as coaches in men’s sports. Although each theory has merit, none are all encompassing. Thus, inevitably, each study left a conceptual void in explaining the underrepresentation of women in men’s sports, specifically men’s college sports. Also, research pertaining to women’s role in men’s college basketball specifically has been sparse. Although there has been research using multilevel models to explain the gender related issues in society and sport (Cunningham & Sagas, 2008; Dixon & Cunningham, 2006; Kozlowski & Klein, 2000), very few have been specific to women in men’s sports. It would be irresponsible to believe that one study could explain this phenomenon. Therefore, by no means does this research suggest that a multilevel framework is all encompassing. However, a multilevel perspective does attempt to leave very little residual reasoning for the phenomenon. In viewing sports from a sociological lens, race and gender issues have paralleling similarities. By this we mean, the underrepresentation of racial minorities and the underrepresentation of women in sports can be explained using very similar frameworks, theoretical perspectives, and ideologies. Thus, the theoretical framework used in this study is modeled after multilevel frameworks used to describe the role of racial inequities in sport (Cunningham, 2010), the multilevel, multi-model framework described by Chafetz (1990, 1999) to describe coercive structures of gender inequities, and previous studies relating gender and sports in a multilevel framework (Cunningham & Sagas, 2008; Dixon & Cunningham, 2006; Kozlowski & Klein, 2000).

Cunningham (2010) provides a multilevel framework for understanding the underrepresentation of African Americans as head coaches of college athletics. Through in-dept explanation of which factors are influential at each level, Cunningham (2010) identified how factors interact within and between the macro, meso, and micro levels of the multilevel model. Overall, Cunningham (2010) conceptualizes how the underrepresentation of African American coaches influence and is influenced by the multilevel organizational structure of college sports. Chafetz (1990, 1999) multilevel perspective suggests that there are four coercive structural levels of gender inequity in the workplace (i.e., macro, meso, micro, and personal). These four levels are sometimes imbedded within each other. Nonetheless, they all work in contributing to men’s dominant role in the workplace. Similar to both Chafetz (1990, 1999) and Cunningham (2010) multilevel models, this research aims to conceptualize the underrepresentation of women in men’s sport, by means of the multilevel model perspective. Thereby, the purpose of this research is to propose a multilevel model perspective which models an inclusive and interacting understanding of factors influencing the underrepresentation of women in men’s sports, specifically men’s college basketball.

Macro-level concepts that influence the underrepresentation of women in the male dominated sport workplace of men’s college basketball are, but not limited to, hegemonic masculinity, institutionalized practices, and gender ideology. Macro-level influences can be defined as the level at which perceptions and ideologies of a socio-cultural group influence the behaviors of an organization operating within that group (Heilman, 2001; Sartore & Cunningham, 2007). In the organization of men’s college basketball macro-level factors are broad ideologies that influence the biases, norms, and organization of men’s college basketball. These factors can be identified in other areas of American politics and culture, however, have very specific consequences in the realm of sport. Macro-level factors influence expectations and perceptions of what coaches should embody (Coakley, 2010). Meso-level concepts that influence the underrepresentation of women in men’s college basketball are stereotypes, gender roles, discrimination and homologous reproduction. Unlike macro-level factors, meso-level factors are very specific to the particular organization of sports. For instance, although stereotypes exist in just about every part of societal perceptions, stereotypes for women in sport, specifically men’s college basketball are very distinct and applicable to the organization of sport (McCabe, 2007). Findings at the meso-level are expected to be specific to women coaching in men’s college basketball, as oppose to macro-level factors, in which findings tend to mirror gender dynamics within American culture and society as a whole (Coakley, 2010).

Lastly, micro-level factors that influence the underrepresentation of women in men’s college basketball are intention related variables. Micro-level factors are very different from macro-level and meso-level factors in that they directly influence the individual, (Cunningham & Sagas, 2008) as oppose to the organization or society as a whole. Intention related variables explain factors which influence the intentions of women pursuing coaching careers in men’s college basketball, the intentions of
administrators to hire women to coach men’s college basketball and the intentions of athletes to pursue careers as coaches in men’s college basketball.

The multilevel model perspective is an inclusive model for depicting the multiple entities, which are embedded within sport organization, (i.e., men’s college basketball) and how these multiple entities interact amongst three levels of conceptualization. Overall the purpose of applying the multilevel model perspective to the underrepresentation of women in men’s college basketball is to add an inclusive and holistic approach to understanding this phenomenon. Although literature exists using a singular approach to studying the underrepresentation of women in men’s sport, this study aims at providing a more complete understanding of the lack of women coaching in men’s college sports, through a multilevel model perspective of women coaching in men’s college basketball.