Hegemonic Masculinity and the Institutionalized Bias of Women in Men’s College Basketball: What do Men Think?

Nefertiti Walker, University of Massachusetts
Melanie Sartore-Baldwin, East Carolina University

Organizational theory/culture  Friday, May 25, 2012  10:25 AM

Abstract 2012-184 20-minute oral presentation (including questions) (East)

Sport is the most widely accepted preserve for male domination and masculinity (Whisenant, Pedersen, & Obenour, 2002). Although, in most cases representation of women as participants in sport at the collegiate level hovers somewhere around 50%, women as employees at the same level are a meager 27-28% (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010). Research has suggested that the pool of candidates for sport related positions should likely be those who have accumulated capital in sports such as former athletes (Everhart & Chelladurai, 1998). Taken together, there appear to be inconsistencies. Thus, this research sought to investigate whether the social capital, knowledge, and experiences of women were being marginalized as less worthy than their male counterparts. Specifically, the purpose of this study was two-fold. First, through in-depth, semi-structured interviews the perceptions of men’s college basketball coaches toward women coaching in men’s college basketball were explored. Second, the characteristics of men’s college basketball, which serve as evidence of hegemonic masculinity as a cultural norm and the institutionalized (i.e., established practices and norms deeply rooted in the way the organization functions) bias toward women, were examined.

As it stands, women serve as the head coach for 58.3% of women’s college basketball teams, while only serving as the head coach for 0.01% of men’s college basketball teams (Zgonc, 2010). Likewise, women occupy a mere 3.5% of assistant coach positions within men’s college basketball programs. On the contrary, men’s representation in women’s college basketball is significantly higher at 41.7% and 33% for head and assistant coaches, respectively (Zgonc, 2010). These descriptive statistics identify vast discrepancies between men and women coaching within college basketball. Considering the vast similarities in men’s and women’s basketball and the ease at which men acquire coaching positions within women’s college basketball, this study examines the role of hegemonic masculinity and institutionalized bias against women working as coaches in men’s college basketball.

Hegemonic masculinity proposes that society consents to masculinity as dominant and superior to femininity, suggesting that men have rights to certain positions and roles in society, which inherently disadvantages women (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, Norman, 2010). Previous works by Walker and colleagues have examined the linkage between hegemonic masculinity and societal perceptions of women in men’s collegiate basketball. For instance, Walker, Bopp, & Sagas, 2011 assessed how traditional gender role attitudes and a lack of congruence between being female and working in men’s sports contributed to the lack of public encouragement in the hiring of women as men’s college basketball coaches. Overall the findings of this study suggested that although society as a whole is accepting and content with the non-existent role of women in men’s sport, which has hegemonic tenets, there was still underlying feelings of inequality and unfairness. Likewise, Walker and Bopp (2011) provided evidence suggesting that despite having barriers to entry when seeking coaching positions in men’s college basketball, once in the system, their experiences were very positive and similar to their experiences in women’s college basketball. Thus, it is suggested that the primary hindrance to women in men’s college basketball is the institutionalized hegemonic masculine culture of men’s college basketball that serves as a barrier to access.

Similar to hegemonic masculinity, system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994) and social dominance theory (Sidanius, Levin, Frederico, & Pratto, 2001) both suggest that ideologies and stereotypes form the way institutions and individuals organize themselves and others. Specifically, these theoretical perspectives put forth that inequalities are perpetuated over time and materialize into accepted norms such that there exists an established hierarchy between a disenfranchised group (e.g., female coaches) and the dominant group (e.g., male coaches). Within sport, this hierarchy is evident in the mutual understanding that both men and women acknowledge that the dominant group has more power, control, and access, but neither group is willing to suffer the negative consequences of speaking out against the status quo. It was through these theoretical lenses/perspectives that the following method was implemented.
As suggested by Donaldson (1993), "coaches and sportsmen are the most influential agents" of hegemonic masculinity and the non-inclusive workplace dynamics, which result from a hegemonic culture (p. 646). Thus the sample of participants for this study was formed from a sample of both men who have coached men's college basketball as well as men who have coached both men's and women's college basketball. These participants ranged in age from 25 to 61 years old. Their experience spanned from as few as 2 years to as many as 35 years coaching college basketball. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data from 11 NCAA Division I men's basketball coaches. The data was then analyzed using NVIVO 8 and Moustakas (1994) methods for analyzing phenomenological data (Creswell, 1998; Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007; Walker & Bopp, 2011) which is a modification of the methods of analysis suggested by Stevick (1971), Colaizzi (1973), and Keen (1975). Moustakas (1994) methods are eight specific steps in which data are first transcribed and then rigorously reduced, clustered, and assembled into themes based on invariant constituents.

Results suggest that there is a masculine culture present in men's college basketball, which was acknowledged by most participants as being hyper masculine, gender exclusive, and resistant to change. Emergent themes were as follows: masculinity and culture, in which participants proclaimed, "men's college basketball is a masculine culture"; access and opportunity, in which a future hall of fame Division I men's basketball coach suggested, "the biggest challenge [for women] would be just getting in the door"; Societal norms; and the fact that this issue is a phenomenon in that women are non-existent in men's college basketball. This system, in which the institutional norms of NCAA college basketball is that women coach women's basketball and men coach basketball in general both men's and women's, continues to disadvantage women. Women continue to be bound to only women's sport and gain little social and work capital in men's college basketball. Meanwhile men such as Geno Auriema, continue to be an example that men are welcomed and can succeed in basketball as a whole, regardless of the gender of the sport. Overall the results of this study suggest that institutional and systems justification beliefs (e.g., norms), form system justification systems, which perpetuate the current state of women in college basketball.