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Women's Leadership in Paralympic Sports

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Statistics show consistent inequality between the numbers of men and women holding major leadership roles in business settings. Women held 14.4% of Executive Officer positions at Fortune 500 companies and 7.6% of top earner positions, while 27.4% of these companies have no female executive officers (Catalyst, 2010). The sport industry is traditionally considered a male dominated industry (Bower & Hums, 2009; Burton, Barr, Fink, & Bruening 2009; Burton, Borland, & Mazerolle, 2012; Burton, Grappendorf, & Henderson, 2011). The under-representation of women within sports organizations has received considerable attention (Inglis, Danylchuk, & Pastore, 1996, 2000; Sartore & Cunningham, 2007). The literature indicates that women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions in intercollegiate athletics (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012, Hancock. 2012; Lapchick, 2010), interscholastic sport (Ladda, 2007; Mather, 2007; Whisenant, Pedersen, & Obenour, 2002), campus recreation (Bower, 2004), health and fitness (Bower & Coffee, 2007), professional sports (Hums & Sutton, 1998; McDonogh, 2007) and international sports (Hums, Barr, & Döll-Tepper, 1998; Hums, Moorman, & Nakazawa, 1998; IOC, 2012). According to Strawbridge (2000), national and international sports organizations made slow progress incorporating women into leadership positions. The first two female members of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) were not elected until 1981 (IOC, 2012), and for 87 years the IOC was exclusively male (Davenport, 1996). Henry and White (2006) conducted research to provide information and evaluate progress on the implementation of the IOC policy in relationship to women's leadership in the Olympic Movement. However, there is limited research of women's leadership in Paralympic movement (Döll-Tepper, 2005; Hums, 2010; Hums & Moorman, 2001), and it is important to understand the limitations and barriers women face in leadership positions in Paralympic sport.

The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) (2012) announced that a record number of women took part in the London 2012 Paralympic Games. While strides have been made for female athletes, work remains to be done on the leadership side despite IPC efforts to increase the number of women in leadership positions over a decade ago. In 2002, the IPC formed its Women in Sport Committee in response to the issue of gender equity within the Paralympic Movement. The Committee was established to address the low number of female athletes and events in the Paralympic Games as well as the lack of women in coaching, officiating, and leadership positions. The role of the Women in Sport Committee is "to advocate for the full inclusion of girls and women at all levels of Paralympic sport, to identify barriers that restrict participation, to recommend policies and initiatives that address these barriers, and to oversee the implementation of initiatives to increase participation" (IPC, 2010, p. 4). The language "at all levels" applies not only to athletes, but leaders as well. Although achieving equality on the field of play is a main priority, there is a low representation of females in leadership positions in Paralympic sport (IPC, 2010).

It is important to address the lack of representation of women in leadership positions in the Paralympic Movement. In 2003, the IPC General Assembly adopted a policy stating that the IPC, National Paralympic Committees, International Organizations of Sport for the Disabled, and sport entities belonging to the Paralympic Movement should immediately establish a goal that women hold 30% of all offices in their decision-making structures by 2009 (IPC, 2009). Though many member organizations have missed the target deadline, the number of female representatives has increased. According to IPC Women in Sport Committee (2008), the percentage of women in leadership positions is as follows: 19% of positions within all IPC decision making, 29% of IPC Standing Committees and Councils, 10% of the leaderships positions within the IPC Governing Board and National Paralympic Committees' leadership structures. Also only 19% of countries have women as Presidents or Secretaries General. In 2008, 17% of NPC staff was women, and that number rose to 23% in 2010 (IPC, 2012). As of 2012, three women are on the IPC governing board - Ann Cody of the United States, Rita van Driel of Netherlands, and Hyang-Sook Jang of South Korea (IPC, 2012).

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Women in the Paralympic Movement likely face barriers similar to women in other segments of the sport industry such as women's underrepresentation in higher levels in sport organization (Knoppers, Bedker Meyer, Ewing, & Forrest, 1990; Sartore, & Cunningham, 2007), in athletic administration (Burton, Grappendorf, & Henderson, 2011), and face the so-called old boys network (Bower & Hums, 2009; Hancock, 2012, Schein, 2001, Shaw, 2006). It is important to acknowledge these barriers and consider recommendations to overcome them.

Formal scholarly studies of careers of women working in the management of Paralympic Sport have been undertaken (Döll-Tepper, 2005; Hess, n.d., Hums, 2010; Hums & Moorman, 2001). Given the dearth of information about women in the management of Paralympic sport, this study attempts to establish basic information about women working in leadership positions in Paralympic sport. This questions for this study have been utilized in previous studies examining women's careers in other segments of the sport industry including campus recreation (Bower, Hums, & Keedy, 2006), professional baseball and professional basketball (Hums & Sutton, 1999), sport for people with disabilities (Hums & Moorman, 2001), and international physical educators (Bower, 2009).

The purpose of this qualitative study is to identify and understand the career factors considered important for women working in leadership positions in the Paralympic Movement. This study will rely on in-depth interviews and demographic information as the primary means of collecting data. Formal semi-structured interviews will be conducted until saturation of the data is reached or up to 10 participants. A total of 6-10 women working in leadership positions in Paralympic sport will be interviewed. The women will have worked in leadership positions in the Paralympic Movement for a minimum of 5 years. The methodology for this study will use a modified three-interview series technique (Bower & Hums, 2009; Siedman, 1981). The interviews will take place in one designated time period, with breaks between question sets. The three parts of the interview will be (a) personal life history including demographics and career path, (b) career experiences including the most/ least enjoyable and greatest challenges as a women working in the Paralympic Movement, and (c) career aspirations and career advice. Each interview should last approximately 60 minutes. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed verbatim. The researchers will code the data using constant comparative method of analysis to generate themes (Ross & Rallis, 2003).

The results will provide insight into the career challenges and work climate for women working in Paralympic sport. This information can prove to be useful to officials in the Paralympic Movement, and in particular to the Women in Sport Committee in meeting the IPC's goal of increasing women's participation in leadership positions. It also will provide researchers an insight into the status of the careers of women in leadership in a segment of the sport industry which has not yet been explored.