The "Token" Woman? Assessing the Relationships Between Stigma, Workplace Incivility, and Organizational Outcomes Among Senior Woman Administrators

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Across all three divisions, Senior Woman Administrators (SWA) serve as “the highest ranking female involved with the management of an institution’s intercollegiate athletic program” (NCAA 2012-2013 Division I manual, p. 18). SWA’s differ greatly from the prototypical athletic department employee (i.e., White, Protestant, able-bodied, heterosexual male; see Fink & Pastore, 1999; Fink et al., 2001), which may relegate them to the periphery. The duties assigned to the SWA may also contribute to their marginalization. The predominant view is that it is the responsibility of the SWA to represent the interests of women and women’s sports (e.g., Clausen & Lehr, 2002; Tiell et al., 2012). As such, the duties of representing a marginalized population fall on the often lone or “token” woman in the athletic department (i.e., SWA) who herself is relatively powerless as both the numerical and social minority (Hoffman, 2010). Many SWAs fail to advance any further than the SWA position; it is argued here that their labeled differentness and separation is a function of gender stereotypes and may result in prejudice and discrimination in the organizational ranks. Simply put, SWAs are stigmatized. The purpose of this investigation is to assess the extent to which SWAs perceive this stigma in their current positions and if this stigma impacts these women’s work-related experiences and outcomes.

Within the sport context, women have long been subjected to two profound (and interrelated) stigmas: gender stigma and sexual stigma (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007, 2009). Formed on the basis of norms of heterosexism and heteronormativity, these stigmas serve to label, stereotype, and separate women from the majority male within sport. As a result, women fail to gain power and status and continue to elicit prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory actions (Cunningham, 2008; Link & Phelan, 2001). Simply put, stigmas function to marginalize women at every level within the sport context. At the institutional level, stigmas can inform structural arrangements like glass ceilings, glass walls, and good ol’ boy networks. Likewise, stigmas can inform organizational practices such that hierarchical arrangements are generally accepted as ‘how things are done’ (i.e., institutionalization; Cunningham, 2008; Sidanius et al., 2001). At an interpersonal level, stigmas reinforce in-group/out-group distinctions through the processes of labeling, stereotypes, separation, status loss, prejudice and discrimination (Link & Phelan, 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). At the individual level, the extent to which one is aware of a stigma attached to a group to which he or she belongs can result in negative personal and professional consequences (Pinel, 1999; Sartore & Cunningham, 2009). It is this individual level response to stigma, one’s stigma consciousness, that is of particular interest to this inquiry.

Stigma consciousness is the response to a salient identity and its domain-relevant stereotypes being made salient (Pinel, 1999). More specifically, it is the degree to which persons focus on their stereotyped status within given contexts. Within sport, it has been argued that gender stereotypes are permanently salient thereby increasing the potential for women to not only be aware of them but to also be impacted by them in some way (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007, 2009). This is particularly the case within sport organizations where men overwhelmingly outnumber women in leadership positions and masculinity remains synonymous with management (Burton et al., 2009). While levels of stigma consciousness vary by individual, research suggests that the consequences of stigma can be detrimental to one’s overall health and well-being and influential in impacting one’s personal and professional life (Pinel & Bosson, 2013; Sartore & Cunningham, 2009). Such consequences may be the result of expectations of prejudice and discrimination held by members of stigmatized groups in a context where social stereotypes are highly salient (Crocker et al., 1998; Lewis et al., 2006). Indeed, Pinel’s (2002) examination of stigma consciousness amongst female study participants identified that women possessing high levels of stigma consciousness were more likely to make attributions of discrimination than those possessing low levels (Pinel, 2002). Pinel and Brown (2003) identified similar patterns in their examination of women’s stigma consciousness within the workplace.
Overt displays of discrimination on the basis of one’s gender were once socially acceptable and quite common in the workplace. No longer the case, researchers have turned their attention to more subtle forms of discrimination such as workplace incivility. Workplace incivility is defined as, “low intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect. Uncivil behaviors are characteristically rude and discourteous, displaying a lack of regard for others” (Andersson & Pearson, 1999, p. 457). Recent research has demonstrated that these uncivil behaviors can have a negative impact on both the organization as a whole and the employees within it (see Cortina, 2008). To the extent that uncivil behaviors are selective and targeted at members of one social group (see Cortina, 2008), incivility is a potential mechanism by which certain groups remain underrepresented and/or are treated differently within an organization. The effects of such uncivil behaviors include lower job satisfaction and commitment (Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2004), decrease creativity, cooperation and citizenship (Pearson & Porath, 2004, 2009), diminished institutional satisfaction and intentions to leave the organization (Caza & Cortina, 2008).

To date, there exists very little, if any, data on the effects of stigma within sport organizations. To fill this void, this study seeks to examine stigmas as they relate to SWAs. Specifically, the intent of this study is to examine whether stigma consciousness is present amongst SWAs and, if so, to what extent it impacts work outcomes. It is hypothesized that a positive relationship exists between stigma consciousness and perceptions of workplace incivility (H1). It is also hypothesized that perceptions of workplace incivility will be negatively associated with job satisfaction (H2), and opportunities for advancement (H3). Lastly, it is hypothesized that stigma consciousness will moderate the relationship between perceived incivility and work outcomes (H4). Data is currently being collected from Division I, II, and III SWAs (N = 845). The online questionnaire assesses demographic information (e.g., age, sexual orientation, tenure, pay, etc.), stigma consciousness (Pinel, 1999), perceived incivility (Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2007), job satisfaction (Camman et al., 1979), and organizational opportunity (Bergman et al., 2012). Data will be analyzed and hypotheses tested using SPSS 21. The implications for the anticipated results of this study are threefold. First, it will extend the literature to include the concepts of stigma and stigma consciousness within sport organizations. Subsequently, it will better inform researchers and managers about the effects that stigma may have within sport organizations. Finally, by identifying stigma and stigma consciousness as potential contributing factors in SWAs perceptions of incivility, sport organizations will be able to be better informed to create workplace environments that counteract these factors and may therefore be more conducive to the advancement of women.