Are Sport Management Faculty Biased? An Examination of Faculty Perceptions of Male and Female Students’ Applications for a Job in Sport

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Over the past 40 years there has been a 195% increase in female student enrollment in United States colleges and universities (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). In traditional male dominated fields like medicine, the number of women enrolled has increased by 51% (King, 2006). Within sport management programs, women's enrollment is not equal to men's. Hancock and Hums (2011) reported 30-40% of the undergraduate students in sport management programs were women, while women comprised 37% of the masters' program enrollment. In addition, within professional sports organizations, women are underrepresented in management positions in the National Football League (29%), Major League Baseball (30%), and in the National Basketball Association (35%). However, women held 79% of the professional administration positions in the Women's National Basketball Association (Lapchick, 2013). As noted by Shaw and Hoeber (2003) reasons attributed to the lack of women in management positions in sport is “overwhelming” (p.348). Despite extensive research on the under-representation of women in sport management, there is limited research regarding potential bias on the part of faculty teaching in sport management programs. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to examine whether sport management faculty demonstrate a bias against female students when evaluating their potential to succeed in positions in professional sport organizations.

A high potential for bias and prejudice exists when perceivers hold a stereotype about a particular group (e.g., women) that is incongruent with the attributes that are thought to be required for success in certain positions (e.g., management) (Eagly & Karau, 2002). When compared to women, men are perceived to have the stereotypical characteristics required of successful managers (Schein, 2001). Further, Heilman (2012) describes a lack of fit model that can negatively impact women as a result of a perceived incongruence regarding female stereotypic attributes and male gender-typed job requirements. However, as Devine (1989) notes, often individual behavior is the result of an unintended or implicit bias held against a certain group. According to Rudman (2004) implicit bias is unconscious, as individuals may not be aware they are harboring biased or prejudiced feelings toward a particular group.

As previously noted, there are a larger percentage of men than women holding management positions in professional sport organizations, specifically in men's professional sports leagues. This disparity may indicate that female sport management students are being impacted by the lack of fit model as described by Heilman (2012). This perceived lack of fit may contribute to an implicit bias held by faculty preparing students for careers in sport management, including positions in professional sport.

Research that has examined factors contributing to the under-representation of women in the sciences has noted that faculty rated male applicants for a laboratory manager position as significantly more competent and hireable than comparably equal female candidates. Faculty also offered a higher initial salary and more career mentoring to male students than they did female students (Moss-Racusin, Dovidio, Brescoll, Graham, & Handelsman, 2012). An additional noteworthy finding is that both male and female faculty rated female students lower and offered them less salary and fewer mentoring opportunities. It is possible to suggest that the percentage of women enrolled in sport management programs may be a contributing factor in the under-representation of women in sport management positions. However, considering a disparity already exists between the numbers of male and female students enrolled in programs, it is important to examine other factors that may be contributing to the under-representation of women, including potential implicit bias on the part of faculty members regarding the potential for female students to be successful in sport management positions. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Sport management faculty will provide higher ratings of competence, leadership ability, salary recommendations, and perceived student aspirations for leadership to a male graduate of a sport management program when compared to a female graduate of a sport management program.
H2: Sport management faculty will provide more career mentoring support to a male graduate of a sport management programs when compared to a female graduate of a sport management programs.

Further, based on the lack of fit model, faculty will also be more likely to hold an implicit bias toward women applying for positions in more male dominated organizations or those more typically associated with men (Gaucher Friesen, & Kay, 2011; Pazy & Oron, 2001). Therefore, we propose that:

H3: Sport management faculty will provide higher ratings of competence, leadership ability, salary recommendations, and perceived student aspirations for leadership to a male graduate of a sport management program when compared to a female graduate of a sport management program when evaluating students for a position within the National Football League, compared to a position in the Women’s National Basketball Association.

Method

Participants will be faculty recruited from sport management programs from geographically diverse universities in the United States. Participants will provided a link to one of the following online conditions (male student for NFL position, female student for NFL position, male student for WNBA position, and female student for WNBA position). The condition will contain a job description and resume. Faculty will be asked to rate the fictional student for the job description based on the following measures: competence, leadership potential, perceived leadership aspirations, salary recommendation, and level of career mentoring. Following evaluation of the candidates, participants will complete the Modern Sexism scale. To evaluate the proposed hypotheses, data will be analyzed using multivariate analysis of variance. Competence, leadership potential, perceived leadership aspirations, salary recommendation, and level of career mentoring will serve as dependent variables. Sex of student and type of position (NFL or WNBA) will serve as independent variables. Participant ratings on the Modern Sexism scale will serve as a covariate.

The findings of this study could provide insight and a new angle to examine the under-representation of women in sport management positions. It is possible that female students are experiencing bias in their academic careers before their professional careers even begin. The lack of fit model may help explain an implicit bias on the part of sport management faculty, which may be contributing to the underrepresentation of women in management positions of professional sport organizations, and particularly men’s professional sports organizations.