Factors Impacting Hiring Decisions in Intercollegiate Athletics: An Experimental Design Approach

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Introduction
Thousands of graduating students attempt to enter the sport industry job market annually; however, barriers to entry often prove difficult. For example, the National Basketball Association’s New Orleans Hornets recently had an opening for a low paying, entry-level community relations position that drew 1000 applications within one week of the job’s posting (Helyar, 2006; Masteralexis, Barr, & Hums, 2014). As a result, understanding the factors that impact hiring decision within the sports industry holds important, timely, and useful implications for sport management researchers, academic programmers, and students interested in sports industry careers. While previous research has explored these phenomena within a general workplace environment, little has been done to explore these issues within the sports industry.

Given this gap in the literature, the purpose of the present study is two-fold. First, we aim to examine various factors (e.g., gender, major, academic success, and professional work experience) that would potentially impact hiring decisions within intercollegiate athletics. Second, using homologous reproduction theory as a backdrop (Kanter, 1977; Sagas, Cunningham, & Teed, 2006; Stangl & Kane, 1991), we seek to explore the extent to which similarities (specifically with gender) between the hirer and job candidate might influence a job candidate’s potential for being hired.

Literature Review
Minimizing bias and maintaining consistency when making hiring decisions within a workplace setting is an important issue within the human resource management literature base. A number of previous researchers have explored the extent to which various factors impact personnel decisions and the labor market. Factors such as race (e.g., Bertrand & Mullainathan; Fryer & Levitt, 2004; Park et al., 2009), gender (e.g., Darity & Mason, 1998; Lahey, 2008), and age (e.g., Lahey, 2008) have been the primary foci of this area of research and the general findings have yielded generally consistent results. More specifically, males, white individuals, and younger job candidates having typically been labeled as the more desired candidate, relative to their minority counterparts.

Based on the seminal work of Kanter (1977) and her theory of homologous reproduction, researchers have also investigated how similarities between the hirer (i.e., the decision maker) and job candidate have impacted hiring decisions within the workplace. Empirical research examining the practice of homologous reproduction has been well-documented in the employment of coaches at both the interscholastic (e.g., Lovett & Lowry, 1994; Stangl & Kane, 1991) and intercollegiate levels (Aceosta & Carpenter, 2002) with the overarching findings from these studies supporting Kanter’s theory that both female and male administrators are more likely to “reproduce” their own gender when making hiring decisions. More recently, Sagas, Cunningham, and Teed (2006) found that “gender of a college head coach does impact the gender composition of the assistant coaches on a staff, irrespective of sport” (p. 503).

Methods
Participants for this two-part study (1 and 2) were recruited from a self-compiled email database obtained via publicly available Division I college athletics department staff directories. Participants for Study 1 included all individuals currently employed within an intercollegiate athletics marketing department (n = 728), while Study 2 was comprised of those currently employed within an athletics communications, media relations, or sports information department (n = 1,388). To be considered for this study, participants were required to be at the assistant director-
level or higher. For both Study 1 and 2, participants received an email from the investigators with a link to an online survey requesting they evaluate one single résumé with each of the independent variables of interest being manipulated between participants. Additionally, all other resume-related items were held constant in order to isolate the effects of the variables of interest. Respondents were then asked to evaluate the candidate (on a 7-point Likert scale) based on three criteria: (1) the likelihood that they would offer the candidate an interview (1 = not at all likely; 7 = extremely likely); (2) the quality of the candidate based on their education; and (3) the quality of the candidate based on their professional experiences (both on the scale of 1 = not at all qualified; 7 = extremely qualified). Once the respondent completed the candidate evaluation, they were then asked questions pertaining to their current place of employment (e.g., job title, current location, etc.), as well as specific demographic questions (e.g., gender, race, education, etc.).

The design for Study 1 was a 2 (gender of the applicant: female vs. male) x 4 (undergraduate major of the applicant: sport management vs. marketing vs. communications vs. biology) factorial design. Utilizing the self-compiled database of all individuals currently employed within a given athletics marketing department at the assistant director-level or higher, a total of 728 survey invitations were disseminated, yielding an initial response rate of 25.4% (n = 185). However, an additional 44 participants failed to complete the survey and were also omitted from the analysis; thus yielding a final response rate of 19.4% (n = 141). Based on the results from Study 1, the second phase of this analysis consisted of a 3 (undergraduate major of the applicant: sport management vs. communications vs. biology) x 3 (undergraduate academic success: high GPA [3.5/4.0] vs. low GPA [2.5/4.0] vs. no GPA listed) x 2 (sport-related professional experience: high vs. low) factorial design. Utilizing the self-compiled database of all individuals currently employed within a given athletics communications, media relations, or sports information department at the assistant director-level or higher, a total of 1388 survey invitations were disseminated, yielding an initial response rate of 42.8% (n = 594). However, an additional 185 participants failed to complete the survey and were also omitted from the analysis; thus yielding a final response rate of 29.5% (n = 409).

Results
Study 1. Results from the 2 x 4 ANOVA test yielded no significant differences for gender or major. Additionally, results indicated that no gender-based similarity bias (i.e., homologous reproduction) existed.

Study 2. Results from the 3 x 3 x 2 ANOVA test yielded no significant differences for undergraduate major or level of academic success (i.e., grade point average) of the applicant. However, a significant difference was seen in the level of experience for the job candidate \[F(1, 391) = 25.64, p < .001\]. A post-hoc, independent-samples t-test then was conducted to compare the likelihood of this candidate being offered an interview based on their previous professional experiences (i.e., low vs. high experience). There was a significant difference in the likelihood of being offered an interview for the high-experienced candidate (M = 6.02, SD = 0.99) and the low-experienced candidate (M = 5.45, SD = 1.23; t (407) = 5.158, p < .001). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = .57, 95% CI = .35 to .79) was moderately sized (eta squared = .06).

Discussion and Implications
Findings from the two studies suggest the primary determinant of evaluating a job candidate in intercollegiate athletics is previous work experience. Interestingly, differences in a student’s gender, major, and academic success (i.e., grade point average) did not significantly impact the likelihood of being offered an interview. Additionally, no similarity bias (i.e., homologous reproduction) existed based on the applicant’s gender. Complete descriptive statistics, results from statistical analyses conducted (i.e., t-test and ANOVA results), and implications for sport management faculty, researchers, and stakeholders will be discussed.