What's Diversity Got to Do With Me?

Jörg Vianden, University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse
Elizabeth Gregg, University of North Florida

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Sport is a male-dominated, multi-billion dollar industry historically marked by a lack of racial and gender diversity in leadership positions (Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; Bower & Hums, 2013). Investigating how affiliates of privileged groups perceive the role of diversity in sport, and their responsibility in enhancing diversity in sport is crucial in advancing the field in a dynamic global society. The purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions regarding diversity in sport management programs and the sport industry in general among White heterosexual undergraduate sport management students. Participants shared their views regarding diversity in sport management and the sport industry, women in the field, meritocratic hiring policies, and about their responsibility to affect change.

Literature Review

Within sport and society in general, White men are the predominate leaders in public and private organizations. In the sport industry, this privilege is evident in statistics characterizing National Football League front offices. Of leadership within the NFL, 95% are men and 86% are White, while players in there are 70% non-White (Lapchick, Costa, Sherrod, & Anjorin, 2012). Within the ranks of intercollegiate athletics, women hold less than half of all head coaching positions, and about one fifth of athletic director jobs (Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; Acosta & Carpenter, 2012).

The homogenous nature of professional and amateur sport organizations is perpetuated by a lack of diversity in sport management programs. King (2009) found about 24,000 undergraduate students pick sport management as their major program of study in the U.S. annually, equating to about 400 graduates from roughly 300 sport management programs (NASSM, 2015). Of undergraduate sport management majors in America, women comprise 20 to 30%, and African American men and women encompass 11% and 3% of sport management majors respectively (Hancock & Hums, 2011). At the research site of the current study, the sport management program student body consists of 204 men and 42 women. Of those, 167 students are White, and 57 students of color (including students who identify as African American, Latino/Latina, Asian, and as bi- or multiracial).

Two theoretical frames informed the current study, homologous reproduction and hegemonic masculinity. Because sport has historically been a site for the development and maintenance of traditional gender norms, girls and women have been marginalized. This phenomenon of hegemonic masculinity, described by Donaldson (1993) as the process of dominant social groups holding power over others in a given organization, is well documented in sport management literature (Cunningham & Sagas, 2005; Pedersen & Whisenant, 2005; Shell & Rodriguez, 2000; Anderson, 2009; Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013; Wright, Geurin-Eaglman, & Pedersen, 2011).

In addition to hegemonic masculinity, homologous reproduction, or the process in which organizational members hire individuals that think, look, and act like existing employees, was used as a frame for the current study. Frequently described as the “Good Old Boys Network” in popular culture and society, homologous reproduction includes structural determinants such as opportunity and power that interact to perpetuate the dominance of White men in leadership positions within sport (Kanter, 1977, Lovett & Lowry, 1994; Stagl & Kane, 1991).

Method

Grounded in constructivist epistemology that assumes that people seek to understand the work in which they live through life experiences, this qualitative study explored the experiences of 22 heterosexual White college men majoring in sport management at a Southern institution in the United States through the use of focus groups. A total of four in-person focus groups consisting of 4 to 7 participants each were conducted. Each focus group was digitally recorded, lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and all were transcribed verbatim. Particular emphasis was placed on the
participants experiences with the phenomenon of diversity on campus and in the classroom (Creswell, 2014; Charmaz, 2006). A purposeful sampling strategy was employed for the study. Two research questions were included.

RQ1: How, if you think it is necessary, could the sport industry be more diverse (e.g., include more women, persons of color, or LGBT individuals)?

RQ2: As heterosexual White men, what is your responsibility, if any, to make the sport industry more diverse?

Data Analysis
Following focus group transcription, the lead author utilized open coding (Creswell, 2014), which resulted in a list of 30 codes related to the research questions. From the first categories, four themes emerged including the culture of sport, roles of women managing sport, hiring policies in sport, and exploration of responsibility for change.

Findings & Discussion
Overall, participants expressed a sense of futility about the prospect of improving the rate of diversity in sport overall. While benefits of increased diversity were acknowledged, male focus group members expressed barriers such as hiring practices, organizational culture, and the overall perceived male dominance of sport hindered opportunities for change. Thus, homologous reproduction and hegemonic masculinity were identified as predominate forces precluding diverse groups from gaining equal footing in sport organizations. Recommendations for program and industry improvement are given based on research findings.