Women’s Experiences of Harassment in Sport Management Internships

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Research and employment statistics continue to show the sport industry is male-dominated. Fewer than 50% of coaches of women’s team and less than 12% of athletic directors at the NCAA Division I level are women (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). There is a similar demographic make-up in the big three (i.e., MLB, NFL, and NBA) of professional sports. Women comprise less than 30% of the workforce and hold a very small number of senior level positions (Lapchick 2014a, Lapchick 2014b, Lapchick 2015). The same is even true for Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) as only 37% of WNBA senior team administrators were women in 2014, an 11% decrease from 2013 (Lapchick, 2014c).

The sport management academic setting is extremely male-dominated as well. Research shows that female students often comprise less than 40% of students and faculty (Barnhill, Czekanski, & Pfleegor, 2017; Jones, Brooks, & Mac, 2008; Moore, Parkhouse, & Konrad, 2004). Women comprised approximately 37% of the membership in the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM), the professional organization for sport management faculty (North American Society for Sport Management, 2017).

There often is increased levels of sexual harassment, sexism, and incivility in male-dominated professions (Vogt, Bruce, Street, & Strafford, 2007). Female employees are perceived as organizational intruders who reduce the benefit of being part of the hegemonic group (i.e., men), which triggers higher rates of harassment type behaviors (Bergman & Henning, 2008). The presence of this harassment may be more pronounced in sport because of the gendered hierarchy that exists. Within sport, men are considered to be more educated, skilled, and competent which creates a hierarchy that places men above women. Women struggle to advance their careers because of cultural norms, gender normalcy, homologous reproduction, and lack of female mentors (Kamphoff, 2010; Kilty, 2006; Taylor & Hardin, 2016). Men are often thought of as the norm for positions within sport, so a woman may be scrutinized more severely, have her credentials questioned, and be held to a higher standard (Burton, Barr, Fink, & Bruening, 2009; Kamphoff, 2010; Kilty, 2006, Taylor & Hardin, 2016).

Practical professional experience, often achieved through part or full-time internships, is extremely important for students majoring in sport management who wish to enter the sport profession post-graduation (Cunningham, Sagas, Dixon, Kent, & Turner, 2005; Koo, Diacin, Khojasteh, & Dixon, 2016). Many sport management programs are evolving to include a semester or yearlong internship as part of their curriculum and graduation requirements (DeLuca & Braunstein-Minkove, 2016). These experiences offer hands-on training and exposure to the professional work environment students cannot obtain through their academic coursework. Additionally, they allow students to build a network of mentors and contacts who can help them secure a full time position. Networks and mentorship relationships have been found to be critical for success within the sport industry (Barnes, 2009; Brandon-Lai, Armstrong, Bunds, 2016; Odio & Kerwin, 2016). Students may begin to form opinions about whether or not they would like to secure full time positions within the industry during their practicum or internship. Experiences with sexual harassment, sexism, and incivility may decrease the want to pursue a full time career within the sport industry.

Purpose
The purpose of the current study was to investigate the prevalence and experience of harassment within the sport management internship setting. Female student interns may be an even bigger target, due to the limited power they hold within the organization. Experiencing harassment in the workplace can lead to lower level of self-confidence, burnout, or shifts in career goals (Kamphoff, 2010). The presence of these negative consequences could be particularly problematic for someone who has not yet entered into the profession full time.
Methods
Sport management, sport sociology, and sport communication list-servs were used to disseminate the survey information to sport management faculty. Faculty were asked to forward the survey description and link to their undergraduate and graduate students. The survey included questions about experiences of sexism and sexual harassment.

Findings/Discussion
Preliminary findings (n = 95) show experiences of sexual harassment and sexism to be common for female students working within sport management internships. More than 60% of the participants indicated they had been treated “differently” because of they were women, while more than 40% had a colleague or superior who made offensive sexist remarks. At least 20% of participants indicated a colleague or superior had made unwanted attempts to establish a romantic relationship with them or continued to ask them out for dates, drinks, dinner, etc., even though they had continually said no to the invitations. More 10% of participants stated they had been touched in a way that made them feel uncomfortable, had a colleague or superior who displayed, used, or distributed sexist/suggestive materials, or were whistled, called, or hooted at in a sexual way. More than 5% of participants indicated a colleague or superior had attempted to stroke, fondle, or kiss them or made them feel like they were being bribed with some sort of reward for special treatment to engage in sexual behavior. Just under 5% (4.3%) of participants had a colleague or superior attempt to have sex with them without their consent or against their will, but was unsuccessful, and one participant indicated they had a colleague or superior have sex with them without their consent or against their will. Additionally, 4.3% of the participants stated a colleague had made them afraid they would be treated poorly if they didn’t cooperate sexually or had implied faster promotion/better treatment if they were sexually cooperative.

The findings of this study demonstrate female students are facing a high-level of sexism and sexual harassment in the internship setting. This is quite alarming for sport management faculty and students. No one should be subjected to a hostile work environment and it appears most female students are encountering an inimical work environment. An emphasis needs to be placed in the curriculum to make clear students do not have to tolerate this type of work environment behavior and training on how to negotiate this type of behavior.