Obstacles and Opportunities for Female Sport Management Students

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Historical practices that perpetuate forms of discrimination based on gender, and promote a culture of male dominance, can be observed in nearly all industries of work. These systemic inequities do not exclude sport and can be witnessed in all facets of the sport industry. Such boundaries withhold equality from being an honest possibility despite earlier advances like the 1848 Declaration of Sentiments and the Nineteenth Amendment that was ratified in 1920. Even later, the creation of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, and Title IX of the Education Amendments Act continued the progression of equity for women in many different aspects of American life.

The sport environment, regardless of the facet, has been institutionalized to favor male dominance in the entire industry (Perez-Rivases, Torregrosa, Vildrich, & Pallares, 2017). Such forms of oppression, although subtler over the last couple of decades, remain a destructive force for women’s equality in the industry “by which male hegemony is constructed and reconstructed” (Fink, 2008, p. 146). There are aspects of the workplace, in addition to historical boundaries, which serve as obstacles to female leadership in the labor force and in the sport industry. Despite boundaries, women are described to have more leadership focused qualities and skill sets (Lammers & Gast, 2017, p. 11). However, due to these traits, “exercising leadership in postindustrial society can undermine support for affirmative action” (Lammers & Gast, 2017, p. 11).

This research seeks to examine the interests, objectives, and barriers faced of female students currently enrolled in the Sport Management academic discipline. For this research, qualitative data was collected in an initial pilot study from a convenience sample of female Sport Management students at a large, public university in the southern United States. The group was given a series of open-ended survey questions related to their own personal experiences, and academic and career choices. The purpose of this initial study was to gain the insight of individuals actively pursuing a career in the sport industry, and help formulate a more quantitative-focused questionnaire, which could provide broader insight into the experiences and choices of female sport management students.

The goal of this study is to strengthen a sport management program’s ability to prepare, and develop, female leaders for the sport industry. Not only can this be used for institutions to efficiently produce leaders, but the long-term significance could very well point to a growing interest among women for a career within sports.