Assessing the Impact of Stereotype Threat on Leadership and Career Aspirations for Students in Sport Management

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Women continue to be underrepresented in sport leadership, which is mirrored in undergraduate sport management programs as women make up approximately 36% of students (Barnhill et al., 2017) compared to the overall female undergraduate population of 55.8% (Snyder & Dillow, 2015). As more girls and women participate in sport (NCAA, 2016), it would seem plausible that women would be interested in pursuing careers in sport, including sport management. The concept of stereotype threat may offer insight into this issue. As women consider future careers in sport management, gender-based stereotypes may negatively impact their career development (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). In an effort to understand the underrepresentation of women in sport management programs and how this impacts their career development in sport management, we will examine if stereotype threat impacts undergraduate students' career aspirations in sport management, how stereotype threat may be heightened in certain sport management programs and what factors may mitigate this threat.

The concept of stereotype threat, first explored by Steele and Aronson (1995) in the context of racial stereotypes, is also applicable to gender stereotypes in sport management and leadership. Stereotype threat is “the concrete, real-time threat of being judged and treated poorly in settings where a negative stereotype about one’s group applies” (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002, p. 385). Stereotype threat is a complex process in which the type of threat experienced by the individual depends on the source of the threat (who judges the action – self, in-group, out-group) and on the target of the threat (who one’s actions reflect upon) (Shapiro & Neuberg, 2007).

The impacts or outcomes associated with stereotype threat are equally complex, including declining performance and avoidance of situations in which these stereotypes may manifest. Within the context of sport management, the outcome of stereotype threat for women may include a decreased motivation to take on leadership roles and/or decreased engagement in leadership positions. Sport management programs may contribute to female students experiencing stereotype threat, as those threats are increased in “organizations where women are scarce, in contexts where gender stereotypes are made salient through the media or physical environments, or in organizational cultures extolling the virtues of competition or innate brilliance for success” (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016, p. 390).

The following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Sport management programs perceived as more stereotypically masculine (heightened stereotype cue threat) will negatively impact career aspirations and career self-efficacy for female sport management students (stereotype vulnerability).
H2: Leadership self-efficacy will have an indirect influence on the relationship between perceptions of more stereotypically masculine SM programs and career aspirations and career self-efficacy for female sport management students.
RQ1: Experience working in sport (e.g., internships) will moderate the relationship between leadership self-efficacy and both career aspirations and career self-efficacy.

A sample of 200 undergraduate sport management students (n = 200) representing geographically diverse universities will participate in this study. Findings of this work will provide insights into the factors influencing female undergraduate students as they develop leadership skills in undergraduate sport management programs.