

***Research presentation:
“An exploratory study on the role of
gender in the experiences of senior
level executives within the sport
industry”***

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Relevant Research

The degree of underrepresentation of women within leadership positions has received considerable theoretical, empirical, and anecdotal attention in:

- Intercollegiate athletics (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010; Inglis, Danylchuk, & Pastore, 2000), interscholastic athletics (Whisenant 2003; 2004), business (Lough, 2007), and diverse populations (Lapchick, 2012).

Women's present conditions within the sport industry

Women presently are disproportionately represented, paid less, and marginalized in the workplace.

- **College athletics:** 20.3% of collegiate athletics directors are females. Only 3% in Division I.
- **NFL:** 16% (21) of team NFL vice presidents are women, yet there is only 1 CEO/president.
- **NBA:** 2 Women presidents in the NBA, 33 women vice presidents.
- **MLB:** 1 CEO/president; Women held 18% of senior level positions.
- **AP Sports Editors:** 6% of women were sport editors; Women accounted for 11.4% of total staff.
- **WNBA:** Only female of color to lead a professional league; Only 2 CEO/presidents of the teams were female.

PURPOSE

- ***The purpose of this study was to examine the working conditions of senior-level executives within the sport industry across a broad range of spectrums.***
 - Explore gender differences stemming from socio-cultural, organizational and individual factors, and how these pieces impact many areas including job satisfaction, turnover, family friendly culture, policies, and gender composition.
 - Sectors represented: marketing, communications, business operations, media, legal, professional coaching, sport agency, and governance.

Research Questions & Objectives of Grant

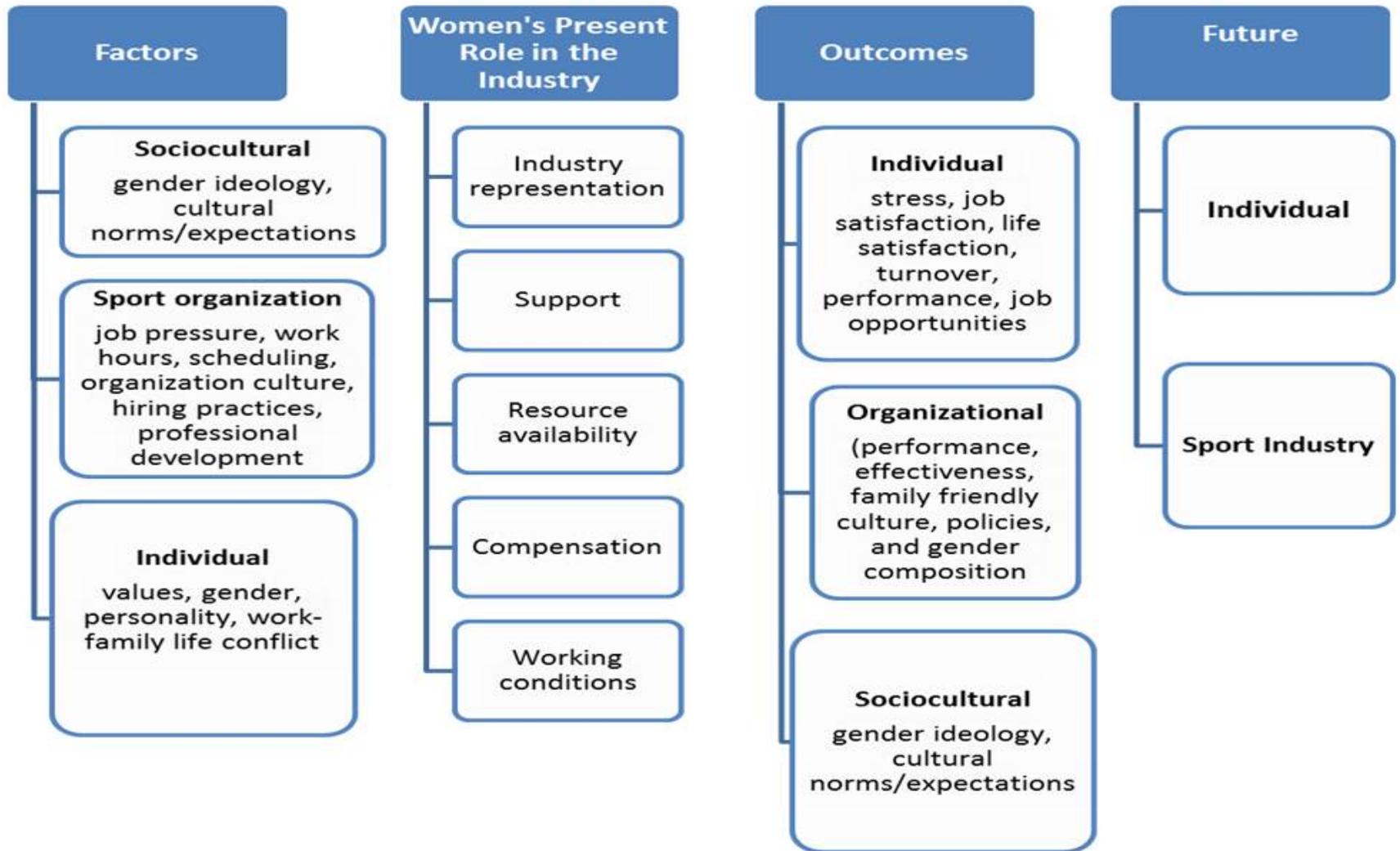
- (1) What factors impact the experience and consequences of women within professional sport organizations at the individual, organizational/structural and socio-cultural levels?
- (2) How do such factors shape and constrain employment opportunities in the industry?
- (3) How do employees cope with these factors?
- (4) What is necessary to change the present working environment for the individual and organizations?

Tasks to accomplish

The tasks to accomplish for this research, particularly during the funding period included:

- (1) Formulate a faculty committee and an industry committee to assist with formulating the research design, industry connections, and instrument design.
- (2) Design and implement the research instrument. (WISE Industry Pulse)
- (3) Publish the research findings in a sport management academic journal.
- (4) Garner the national attention of the media for this landmark work.

Conceptual model



Methodology

Participants

Men and women senior level executives (15+ years experience)
Across the various sectors of the sport industry

Data Collection

In depth interviews with pre-constructed questions were conducted over the phone with each participant, which lasted an average of 45 minute-60 minutes per participant.

Instrument

- (1) Career path
- (2) Challenges in the hiring process
- (3) Barriers for advancement
- (4) Role of mentorship
- (5) Perceptions of the skill set needs for a career in the business of sport
- (6) Characteristics of a leader in the business of sport
- (7) Professional organizations and publications.
- (8) Perceptions of what is necessary to change the landscape of the sport industry

Methodology

Data analysis

- Grounded theory approach was utilized.
- Interviews were transcribed by a third party.
- Data was coded and analyzed by two researchers to determine the emergent themes.
- The data was validated by checking with participants for accuracy of the interview responses and interpretation of the findings.

FINDINGS - Demographics

- Participants ranged in age from 41 to 65 years old.
- Divided with regards to marital status and children.
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- All of the participants participated in sport in high school.
- At the collegiate level, 75% of the participants played a sport.
- 2 of the women played professionally and competed in the Olympics, which was the sport they presently held a position within.

Theme: Career path and movement

The majority of participants made multiple horizontal and vertical moves to different organizations to attain their current position.

- Men had a faster and more vertical path to senior level positions and experienced greater longevity in their positions.
- Women took longer and had more horizontal moves than men.

“Men take care of one another, it’s a fraternity thing. For some reason women don’t relate to this.”

Theme: Challenges in the workplace

The demanding nature of working in the sport industry such as long hours, travel, work/family balance and technology changes were noted across gender.

Specific obstacles for women:

- Underrepresentation
- Behavioral expectations
- Implications of being a women in a male-dominated industry

Theme: Challenges in the workplace

1. Underrepresentation

“I would say the glass is both half empty and half full, as it relates to the movement of women in the sport careers and upward as they progress. The ‘half full’ is that there are more women working in sports than ever before. But at the top, is still underrepresentation.”

2. Behavioral expectations

“I think it’s okay for a man to be assertive, whether it be his personal confrontation or style, or managing the boardroom. I found that when I do it, it’s too aggressive.”

Theme: Challenges in the workplace for women

3. Implications of being a woman in a male dominated industry

“I find men feel more comfortable with men. It’s not a criticism. Its just the country club thing. You like working with people you like to hang out with. So, it’s not just a gender issue, but also diversity in terms of culture and in terms of ethnicity.”

“I have found being a woman, I have to work harder and deliver more.”

Theme: Strategies to overcome the existing challenges

In an effort to overcome the existing gender barriers for women, the following strategies were noted:

1. Network

“You have to be cautious of how you use your network and how that information gets back to others because really, everybody knows everybody. So that’s an interesting thing to navigate...I went from one point when having the broadest network possible to offer and then to a little bit further down my career path where that starts to be something you really have to **navigate carefully.**”

Theme: Strategies to overcome the existing challenges

2. Demonstrate your worth and value

“Once you prove that you’re capable, and once that they get used to something different (hearing a women’s voice), once you get used to that, I don’t think that it’s much of a big deal. It’s just a matter of proving you’re good enough to do it... and you’re doing your homework... and you’re capable of doing the job.”

Theme: Mentorship

Mentorship plays an important role in the development of senior level executives.

“He [mentor] looks at everybody in terms of their potential to add value and it doesn’t matter whether you’re an owner,... a manager, a woman, a man...I have found that leaders who have really impressed me [have an] ability to extract value and have meaningful relationships with everybody regardless of their background and title.”

The “**giving back**” aspect was very important to women as mentors. Each felt they wanted to help the next generation of industry leaders by providing them with the necessary insight into the realities of the sport industry.

Theme: Critical skills for sport industry employment

The following skills were noted as important to the sport industry:

- Marketing skills
- Communication skills
- Sales skills
- Technology skills
- Business and managerial skills
- Understanding sport and the language of sport

Theme: Characteristics identified as necessary to work in the sport industry

1. Strong work ethic

“I believe a person has to be willing to do everything and anything presented, and truly be willing to start at the bottom... whether it’s the mailroom or production assistant slot or an executive assistant, whatever it may be...start at the bottom and work their way up.”

2. Build relationships

“I think women need to hear about women more than they know. I think it (the sport industry) is a ... country club- that men tend to take care of. It’s a fraternity thing ... As a rule, women don’t. There’s a big difference.”

Theme: Critical skills for sport industry employment

3. Be yourself

“When women have asked me for advice, young women particularly, my advice is that you’re a woman and remember you’re a woman. Don’t try to be one of the boys. Be yourself. I think that for some women, they have fallen into a trap of trying to be one of the guys – talking like the guys, acting like the guys – and our society doesn’t permit that so the sports world wouldn’t. Really be yourself...”

Theme: Critical skills for sport industry employment

4. Leadership skills/Having a vision

“A great leader... always thinks team first, always thinks - how we can make this organization better? And rewards people – pats them on the back when there’s a job well done – and teaches and coaches them when mistakes are made in order to not make those mistakes again...”

“Well, it’s kind of like being a captain of a team, right? You have to be able to inspire those around you, and towards the common goal, you have to inspire the people to believe in that goal...So it’s probably vision as well as the ability to have people believe in that vision and believe that they can accomplish it, so that when they wake up every day and run towards it, that they do so with a purpose.”

Conclusions

- Supports the existing literature and based on the results of the study, career challenges and barriers remain for senior level executives in the sport industry.
- Participants recognized the differences in the challenges they faced as well as the industry culture that continues to favor a male dominated network.
 - Networking, organizational practices, behavioral norms
- Women in senior level positions represent a very small group and often operate in isolation for this reason.

Next steps....

- Annual quantitative study that examines the role of women, at various levels, within the business of sport by exploring the different sectors of the sport industry, which was the initial plan of this seed grant.
- Continue to investigate these issues in a way that brings light to the barriers women are facing to reach senior level executives.
- To examine the personal characteristics necessary for women to break through the barriers compared to those that decided to exit the sport industry.
- Become a landmark study and capture the attention of the sport industry and national media.

QUESTIONS????

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