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A gap in the sport management curriculum: An analysis of sexual harassment and sexual assault education in the United States



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ABSTRACT

Sport is a space possessing a permissive rape culture due to its masculine culture, and male-dominated professions have higher levels of sexual harassment and incivility compared to those industries that are gender equal or female-dominated. This research examined sport management students' education and training on sexual harassment and sexual assault. Findings demonstrate that less than 50% of students are exposed to education on sexual harassment (46.1%) or sexual assault (35.9%) in the classroom, and less than 40% are exposed to training on sexual harassment (39.6%) or sexual assault (28.4%) in the internship setting. Students may be entering the professional workforce without the proper knowledge and training in regards to these issues.

Throughout the past year there has been increased media attention and legal action surrounding issues of sexual harassment and sexual assault on college campuses around the United States. Campus sexual assault was ranked third on the American Association of State Colleges and Universities Top 10 Higher Education State Policy Issues for 2015 (Hurley, Harnisch, & Parker, 2015). Between 20% and 25% of women attending higher education institutions will be the victim of completed or attempted sexual assault during their college careers (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Sinozich & Langton, 2014). The 2008 National Crime Victimization Survey (2009) found more than 75% of women who report being sexually assaulted nationwide were under the age of 25 at the time of the assault.

Further, there are alarming rates of sexual harassment on college campuses as well. More than 60% of female college students report experiencing sexual harassment at their university, and 80% of those indicate that the harassment was peer-to-peer (Hill & Silva, 2005). Additionally, 51% of male college students admit to participating in sexual harassment behaviors, and 22% of those men report harassing someone often or occasionally illustrating a willingness to admit to engaging in these destructive behaviors on anonymous surveys (Hill & Silva, 2005). Women and men are almost equally likely to experience sexual harassment on a college campus, but they are harassed in different manners and have different responses. Female students are more likely to be the object of sexual jokes, remarks, or gestures, while men are likely to be called a homophobic name such as gay (Hill & Silva, 2005). Additionally, women are more likely to be upset, feel embarrassed, angry, less confident, afraid, or worried by sexual assault (Hill & Silva, 2005). Similar to sexual assault, more than one-third of sexual harassment victims do not tell anyone of their experiences, and less than 10% of all students report incidents of sexual assault (Hill & Silva, 2005).

1. Women in Sports Leadership

There has been a steady increase in female athlete participation in sports at all levels of competition during the past 40 years, but there has not been growth in the percentage of female coaches and athletic administrators. In fact, the percentage has actually

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declined during that same time span (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; National Federation of High School Associations, 2014). Only 43.4% of women's teams at the NCAA level were coached by women in 2014 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Bass, Hardin, & Taylor, 2015). Additionally, less than 25% of athletic directors across all three divisions of the NCAA are women, and that percentage drops to less than 10% at the Division I level. Eleven percent of athletic departments do not have a woman in their administrative structure (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014).

Similar to the NCAA, there is a limited number of women in administrative roles within professional sport. Women make up only 29.4% of the entire workforce, and 22.6% of senior executive level positions in Major League Baseball (Lapchick, 2015). Similarly, in the National Football League (NFL) only 29.6% of management positions are held by women, but that is the highest percentage in history (Lapchick, 2014a). The National Basketball Association (NBA) is no different. In 2014, women held only 16.6% of vice president positions and only 21.9% of team senior administration positions, both down from the 2012–2013 season (Lapchick, 2014b). Only 37% of the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) senior team administrators were women in 2014, which was an 11% decrease from 2013 (Lapchick, 2014). These results show that men continue to dominate key positions in organizations that govern and represent sports, and the higher the organizational level, the fewer number of women (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012).

Although generally few or no differences have been identified between the traits, abilities, education, motivation, and ambition of men and women professionals or managers (Powell, 2011), women have been stereotyped as not being as capable as leaders as men (Embry, Padgett, & Caldwell, 2008), and sport is one of the most accepted domains for male leadership and decision-making (Whisenant, Pedersen, & Obenour, 2002). Men have historically been perceived as the norm in coaching and athletic leadership positions in sport organizations with the perception women are not viable candidates for leadership positions (Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013).

Women often experience barriers to entrance when trying to break into the industry as well as when trying to secure more senior, decision making positions (Sibson, 2010). These barriers include unequal assumption of competence, hiring from a principle of similarity, homophobia, and lack of female mentors (Kamphoff, 2010; Kilty, 2006). Women working in athletics often describe experiencing difficulty working in a hostile, male-dominated environment (Norman, 2010). These challenges are similar to those faced by women working in other male-dominated industries. It is not uncommon for women working in male-dominated industries to attract increased attention, be evaluated more critically, and experience less support, especially when they are new to their organization (Embry et al., 2008; Kanter, 1977; Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013).

University classrooms in sport management programs are similar. Jones, Brooks, and Mak (2008) reported 66% of sport management programs had fewer than 40% female faculty members, and 81.39% of sport management programs had fewer than 40% female students. Women comprised 32.8% of the membership in the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM), the professional organization for sport management faculty (R. Ammon, personal communication, June 9, 2015). From academia to intercollegiate athletics to professional sports, women are in the minority. Males dominate the sport management classroom, teaching profession, and coaching and administrative positions across all levels of sport.

2. Organizational culture in male-dominated organizations

Organizations and industries that are male-dominated may experience a greater number of issues with unethical or unprofessional conduct due to the high value that is placed on masculine characteristics such as power, dominance, competitiveness, aggressiveness, and toughness (Vogt, Bruce, Street, & Stafford, 2007). In order for women to see success in male-dominated organizations, they must form high-quality relationships with their male colleagues, which can be difficult because these colleagues see them as invaders (Bagilhole, 2014). Men in these organizations and industries feel the need to display these masculine characteristics, and female employees (or male employees who display less masculine, more feminine characteristics) often fall victim to their bullying and harassment. Men may be threatened by women who are successful in male-dominated industries because these women may blur the lines between masculinity and femininity (Bagilhole, 2014). Studies consistently show women in male-dominated industries experience higher rates of sexual harassment than women in gender balanced or female-dominated industries (McCabe & Hardman, 2005; Norman, 2010; Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007). In these male-dominated organizations and industries, women and racial minorities are perceived as organizational intruders, potentially reducing the benefit of being part of the hegemonic group (i.e., white men), which triggers higher rates of harassment type behaviors (Bergman & Henning, 2008). Women working in these male-dominated industries often times become expecting of this type of behavior. McLaughlin, Uggan, and Blackstone (2013) found women working in these male-dominated industries reported they believed this harassment came with the territory. Some women working in male-dominated industries describe their experience as a "constant battle" because male colleagues cannot accept the idea of a female co-worker (Bagilhole, 2014). In some male dominated industries such as sport, men have been the dominant sex for decades so deviating from the norm can create hostility in employees.

Research on workplace bullying and sexual assault has been increasingly prevalent. Studies report that as many as 88% of white and blue collar employees experience some form of workplace bullying within a six month time frame (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2006). Workplace bullying encompasses a large range of negative behaviors including, but not limited to: verbally offensive remarks, ridicule, social exclusion, and slander (Einarsen, 2000). Sexual harassment can also be found under the workplace bullying umbrella although research is also conducted solely about sexual harassment. In the United States, research indicates that 40–75% of women and 1–31% of men across all industries have experienced sexual harassment at some point during their career (Aggarwal & Gupta, 2000). Additionally, claims of sexual harassment filed with federal and state agencies in the United States rose 19% between 1992 and 2005 (Elkins, Phillips, & Ward, 2008).

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