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Discrimination Against Women in the Sport Industry

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Running head: DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

Discrimination Against Women in the Sport Industry

Honors Thesis

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

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By

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Abstract

Discrimination Against Women in the Sport Industry

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Discrimination against women in the workplace has been a widespread topic throughout society for quite a few years. According to the National Partnership for Woman and Families (2017), women make 80 cents for every dollar paid to men. While this number statistically represents the wage discrimination women face throughout all industries, it is also important to look at other discriminatory factors women face as well. More specifically in the male-dominated sport industry, we see women represented in extremely low numbers. While women may lack the interest to occupy jobs in this profession, this does not entirely explain the underrepresentation. In 1972, Title IX was passed which set out to promote equality in federally funded educational institutions and was later applied to athletics. Before this law was enacted, females coached 90+% of women's teams. By 2014, that number has dropped to 43.4% (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). There are several factors that contribute to this steep decline, most result from the stereotypes society instills in males and females from a young age. The way men and women are raised influences interests, careers, socialization, and views of the opposite gender. Due to these societal factors, stereotypes are made and sexism becomes evident. This leads to the low representation and ultimately alienation of women in the good ole' boys club, referred to as the sports industry.

Key Words: Honors Thesis, Undergraduate Research, Discrimination, Gender, Sport Industry

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According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, discrimination is defined as “the act of making or perceiving a difference” (Discrimination, 2017). The phrase, “perceiving a difference” is the challenging part of this definition because it is rather arbitrary. Another difficult part of this concept of discrimination is where is the line drawn? What is considered discrimination and do intentions matter? It is quite easy to see the difference between a male and a female. Because it is easy to see this difference, men and women are often raised differently, causing them to associate differently, and are ultimately treated differently. So is it considered discrimination if men make a difference because a woman is present, even when they are trying to avoid being inappropriate? The concept of discrimination is not a black or white, or a yes or no matter, it seems quite subjective the more you look into it. Which is why it is such a controversial subject across all industries in the workplace. Looking into a male-dominated industry such as the sports industry makes it even more complicated. In the sports industry, there is this good ole’ boys club and many Human Resource rules are thrown out the window.

Although men dominate the sport industry, the few women in the industry tend to heavily occupy jobs in a limited number of fields, which is referred to as

gender clustering. Gender clustering into particular fields in the sports industry is evident as well; “significantly more males are responsible for facility and event management, media relations, and marketing across all NCAA divisions, while females were disproportionately found in academics and compliance” (Lumpkin, Dodd, Mcpherson, 2014, Abstract). Careers in academics and compliance seem to be stable, with less travelling and more typical eight to five schedule; which is great for women who are held to their family obligations. Not surprisingly, women are far underrepresented in the athletic directors’ position, which happens to be one of the most powerful positions in intercollegiate sports (Quarterman, Dupree, & Willis, 2006). In 2014, only 22.3% of athletic directors were women.

Furthermore, in Division I universities, only 10.6% of females held the position of an athletic director (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). According to the Federal Affirmative Action standards, the workplace should reflect the population. Obviously in the case of the athletic director position, this standard does not hold (Lapchick & Baker, 2015).

In many other positions throughout the sports industry such as coaches, assistant coaches, and sports information directors, women are still far underrepresented (Lapchick & Baker, 2016). According to research conducted by Jerome Quarterman, Aimee Dupree, and Kimberly Pettaway Willis (2006), the number of women in the workplace has increased, however the number of women in management positions has not maintained the same pace. These authors also cited a study done by Rosenfield (1988), who found four consistent challenges women faced when seeking to achieve top-level management

positions. The challenges were: competition, family obligations, being a woman, and the stereotype that women were not willing to give enough time and effort needed to be in management positions. (Rosenfield, 1988). These challenges make it quite difficult for women to occupy a position in this industry, especially a higher management position. Based on the underrepresentation of women and the association of masculinity and sports, I hypothesize that discrimination plays a key role in women's ability to achieve and maintain a career in the sport industry. While women as a whole may lack interest in this area, the barriers that women face when pursuing these types of careers keep women from moving up into higher level positions.

Literature Review

Childhood and Social Development

From the time a baby is born, gender is distinguished and it oftentimes determines a lot about how the baby is raised. If the baby is a boy, normally one of his first toys is some type of ball or something sports related. If the baby is a girl that normally is not the case. A girl normally receives dolls, Barbie's, or something of that nature. Childhood activities contribute to the child's development of different skills, preferences, and abilities, which in turn can eventually influence their career choice (Giuliano, Knight, & Popp, 2000). There is evidence that supports that these activities prepare children for different roles in their adulthood. While male activities tend to be more competitive, aggressive, and often in large-groups, female activities tend to be in smaller-groups and focus more on cooperation and nurture (Lever, 1976). Lever (1976) found these

types of activities for males promote business or professional careers, whereas the female activities promote family careers. So it is no surprise there may not be as much female interest in a business revolving around sports.

Another study conducted by Toyama (1977), found that the most successful female administrators were more likely to have played American football in their youth than their less successful counterparts (Giuliano, Knight, & Popp, 2000). From this it can be concluded that activities and games children do at a young age help develop social skills that stay with them as adults. So when females engage more in noncompetitive, smaller group activities it is not developing social skills that tend to favor a sport's business career. Female vs. male socialization is quite different as well. According to the authors of the book *Women and Men in Organizations*, females often have their attention on one another whereas men often have it on a third party. "Women are more likely to study together and talk about friends, family, and personal problems, whereas men are more likely to watch movies or play sports together" (Cleveland, Stockdale, Murphy, 2000, p. 79). It is therefore not surprising that men pursue a career in something they spend a lot of time discussing and bonding with each other over, proving that social development and socialization is a huge factor contributing to the lower numbers of women who are interested in and pursue careers in sports.

Networking

While social development may account for the low level of interest, it is important to look at the women who do apply to, or maintain a career in this

industry. One major barrier that affects women's ability to get a career or move her way up in the sport industry is networking. Networking is a major contributor to both learning of a particular position and actually landing that position. Hardin and Whiteside (2012) state "women simply do not have the resources in terms of support, opportunity, and networking options to compete on equal footing with their male counterparts" (p. 62). While this author is referring to women in the sports information position it stands true with women pursuing careers throughout the entire industry since men heavily dominate this profession.

In research regarding women in sports, Hardin and Whiteside (2012) found that because men occupy higher status positions, they are able to receive more help from their peers and are better able to create more networks than women. Networking is key to moving up the career ladder, so being able to hold conversations with the men is crucial for women. The "in-speak" of these male networks makes it difficult for women to become part of these networks as well. "In-speak" refers to locker-room humor and discriminatory banter. In a survey conducted by Hardin and Whiteside, 200 women were recruited from the College Sports Information Directors of America. Of the 200 women recruited, 187 women responded. The findings of this survey revealed that 51% of the respondents felt that "knowing sports trivia and recent statistics is important in order to better participate in conversations with my male colleagues" (p. 60). If women cannot contribute to these types of discussions, they are often alienated from networking with males. However, this type of behavior by men may not be intentionally meant to exclude women; "phenomena such as men dominating

relationships, helping each other in informal networks, and outwardly expressing their knowledge and accomplishments is a way of 'doing' masculinity that is often unconscious to the actor" (p. 54). Men oftentimes try to avoid certain conversations and/or jokes in front of women out of respect. They do not want to say something they feel could be offensive to women. However, in reality this is benevolent sexism, which ultimately excludes women, casting them as the weaker sex and shuts them out of upper management opportunities (Whiteside and Hardin, 2012).

Family and Work Obligations

The unique and busy schedule in sports is another barrier preventing women from occupying higher-level jobs. In a study led by Hardin and Whiteside (2012), of the 187 women who responded to their survey, 69% agreed with the statement "the untraditional schedule makes it difficult for women to succeed" (p. 60). In the majority of sport careers, many weekends are devoted to work, which can often involve travelling. A normal nine to five job is rare in this industry. Even on days or nights off, there may still be phone calls or other work to be done at home. In the off-season, work hours may lessen, but during the season coaches and support staff may find themselves working 80+ hours a week, which explains why it is difficult to balance family and a career in this field. Women may work all day then go home and be expected to do household chores. "Women in the United States still do four fifths of the childcare and two thirds of the housework" (p. 54). In the Bureau of Labor Statistics Annual Time Survey (2015), 50% of women spent time doing housework on the average day compared to just 22% of

men. When comparing men and women who do perform housework and childcare, women are also putting more time into performing these chores. This may be expected since men tend to work longer hours and are less likely to be unemployed; however, even when women are the breadwinners they are still expected to do the majority of housework and childcare. A study that examined Americans' attitudes on the division of housework between spouses, concluded that even when a woman had higher earnings she was still expected to come home and do the majority of the housework and childcare (American Sociological Association, 2016). This attitude held by the majority of American adults, it makes it extremely challenging for a woman working the unusual hours the sports industry demands to also perform the majority of cleaning and childcare. This American attitude also can affect the hiring of women. The so-called "ideal" worker is commonly thought to be one who is not burdened with outside obligations and distractions (Whiteside & Hardin, 2012). If most Americans expect females to do the majority of the housework, she will not meet the qualifications of the ideal worker. It should also not come as a surprise when women tend to favor careers in compliance and academics that have more regular work schedules allowing them to also meet household obligations. In order to help women move up in higher management positions, we must look to change the stigma of "womanly duties" in the home.

The Glass Ceiling

The term glass ceiling has been defined by the U.S. Department of Labor as, "those artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that

prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization into management-level positions.” (Department of Labor, 1991, Abstract). With the challenges women face and the negative stigma associated with women in this industry, it is evident a glass ceiling is present. While some women have been able to break the glass ceiling and move into upper management positions, this tends to be rare. In the book, *Gender, Journalism, and Equity*, Robinson (2005) discusses the definition of the term ‘glass ceiling’ the Department of Labor uses. Robinson argues this definition does not recognize the social expectations for women. She states men developed the concept of a “working day” and women have to accept it despite the “higher social costs” (Robinson, 2005). Whiteside and Hardin (2012) in reference to Robinson’s work state, “until women reach one third of the leadership in any given organization, they lack the power to eradicate the glass ceiling because they cannot make ‘strategic deals with the majority’” (p. 54). This supports how extremely difficult it is for women to ever eliminate the glass ceiling because so many women have to overcome these barriers to pursue leadership positions. A survey of corporate executives concluded that, “women identified the top issue facing them as gender stereotyping in regard to leadership; men identified the top barrier for women as being lack of professional experience” (Whiteside & Hardin, 2012, p. 54). These findings support the fact that many men may be unaware of the circumstances women encounter in their career.

Since it is quite difficult to overcome the glass ceiling, many women tend to rationalize working under it. In a study done by Wrigley (2002) there are five

themes describing how women rationalize working under a glass ceiling. These themes are denial, gender-role socialization, historical precedent, women turning against other women, and corporate culture. Whiteside and Hardin (2012) expand on these five themes. Denial is denying that the glass ceiling and discrimination exists. Gender-role socialization means women come to understand they are better at some things while men are better at others. Historical precedent is the idea that men have always held these leadership roles. The theme of women turning against other women is when women will not serve as mentor for other women or look down on women who have achieved success. Lastly, corporate culture is the culture of the office and the idea that women may threaten men by changing the status quo of this culture. The idea that women feel they have to rationalize working under a glass ceiling instead of trying to overcome it is quite frustrating. By rationalizing this ceiling, the barriers will remain and women will continue to work in a challenging climate. The women who do not rationalize their situations are the ones who normally leave their position, which further contributes to the dominance of men in the industry.

Title IX

In an effort to promote equality for females in educational institutions, Title IX¹ was created. While it originally just applied to educational programs it later was applied to athletics within educational institutions as well. (Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013). While Title IX certainly gave female athletes more opportunities

¹ “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972

in sport, it did not serve to help women in athletic leadership roles. In 1972, the year Title IX was enacted, females coached 90+% of women's sports teams. By 1978, the deadline for high schools and colleges to comply with Title IX, that number had significantly dropped to 58.2% (History of Title IX, 2017). This number has continued to drop at a much slower rate, and has seen little increase throughout the years. In 2014, the percentage of female coaches coaching women's teams was at 43.4%, which shows the negative impact Title IX has had on female athletic leadership positions (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014).

The long hours and hectic schedule filled with travel may turn many women away from coaching; however, it did not seem to turn many women away in 1972. Women had families and children in 1972 just as they do today, the stigma that women should do the majority of "housewife duties" could be argued to have been even stronger back then. Therefore, the major decrease in female coaching positions cannot only be attributed to women juggling the hours and schedule with their family obligations. The difference can be partly attributed to Title IX making coaching women's sports a more desirable position. Before Title IX, there were not many women's sports, which was part of the purpose for the legislation. There was little to no funding for female sports, many of the coaching positions were voluntary, so men who were expected to provide for a family did not want these positions. The NCAA did not even offer female sports at this time, they were offered only by the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW). As the effects of Title IX went into place, the NCAA began governing women's sports. There were more coaching positions available, more funding for

women's sports, and more pressure to win now that national championships for women's teams had begun (Hunsinger Benbow, 2015). Naturally men began flocking to these positions. Even though women were clearly interested in coaching women's sports since they held a high majority of these positions, it still is argued women lack interest in coaching today. Title IX also added pressure to these head coaching positions, requiring an increase in coaching hours and more travel is why the job requires the schedule it does. Coaching became a job women could no longer continue performing because of their preexisting family obligations; the pressure and schedule was now far too great for them to balance. This argument is not the only explanation for this decline of women's coaches because while it may have alienated some women, it made these positions more enticing not only for men but other women (Hunsinger Benbow, 2015).

Women in Collegiate Sports

The internationally recognized Racial and Gender Report for 2015, which looks at the hiring practices of sport management professions in collegiate and professional sports, revealed the numbers of women holding positions in collegiate sports. The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES), issues grades for gender when looking at professional leagues and college sports. Grades are based on the overall patterns in society. TIDES uses the Federal affirmative action policy that states, "The workplace should reflect the percentage of the people in the racial [minority] group in the population" (Lapchick & Baker,

2015, p. 30). The table below shows how grades are administered based on gender in the Racial and Gender Report Card for College Sport:

Table 1.

Grades Administered Based on Gender

| Grade | Percentage of Female Employees |
|-------|--------------------------------|
| A | >40% |
| B | 32% |
| C | 27% |
| D | 22% |
| F | <22% |

Note. Retrieved from The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport. Copyright 2016 by Richard Lapchick and DaWon Baker.

There is an exception for female head and assistant coaches for women's teams, where it is expected that women hold at least half of the positions.

Therefore in this category grades are administered a little differently, the table below shows this change:

Table 2.

Coaching Grades Administered Based on Gender

| Grade | Percentage of Female Coaches |
|-------|------------------------------|
| A | >60% |
| B | 52% |
| C | 44% |
| D | 40% |
| F | <40% |

Note. Retrieved from The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport. Copyright 2016 by Richard Lapchick and DaWon Baker.

Based on this system, the table below shows the grades and percentages TIDES has given for each of the given positions:

Table 3.

Representation of Women in Collegiate Sport Positions

| The 2015 Racial and Gender Report Card: College Sport | | |
|--|------------|-------|
| Position | Percentage | Grade |
| Head Coaches for all Division I Men's teams | 3.4% | F |
| Head Coaches for all Division I Women's teams | 38.9% | F |
| Head Coaches for all Division I Men's basketball teams | 0% | F |
| Head Coaches for all Division I Women's basketball teams | 58.3% | A- |
| Assistant Coaches on Division I Men's teams | 9.5% | F |
| Assistant Coaches on Division I women's teams | 48% | C/C+ |
| Division I Athletic Directors | 8.9% | F |
| Division I Associate Athletic Directors | 28.3% | C |
| Faculty Athletics Representatives | 33.3% | B |
| Sports Information Directors | 11.6% | F |
| Professional Administrators | 34.9% | B+ |

Note. Retrieved from The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport. Copyright 2016 by Richard Lapchick with Dawon Baker.

Based on Lapchick and Baker (2016), it is obvious women are well underrepresented throughout leadership and administrative positions in college sports. Walker & Sartore-Baldwin found in the NCAA Student-Athlete Ethnicity Report 2010, "female student athletes account for 42.8% of all NCAA student athletes" (2013, p. 303). When comparing the student athlete population to coaching, the numbers should be similarly represented, but this is not the case. When looking at all teams, both men's and women's, women only hold 23% of

these coaching positions (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Because of this huge disparity between female athletes and coaches, many of the women who participated in sports are turned away from the pursuit of coaching. Walker & Sartore-Baldwin (2013) acknowledge this idea by stating, “despite investing substantial time and dedicating profound segments of their lives to sports, female athletes who want a career in the sport context perceive several barriers to entry and are therefore unsure of what to do with the social capital that they have accumulated while playing” (p. 304). Former athletes are often the key candidates to advance in the sport industry due to their experience and the knowledge they have acquired throughout their career. If these perceived barriers are turning away many of the key candidates for these positions, it is no surprise there is a lack of female applicants and representatives throughout the field. There should be more support for female athletes pursuing coaching careers. With the playing experience and high sport IQ, former female athletes already possess much of the knowledge required for the job. Barriers and lack of support should not stand in the way of these women pursuing careers as coaches.

The percentage of women coaching men’s sport, 3.4%, is an extremely low percentage and obviously very rare to see. While it is uncommon to see women coaching men, it is the opposite for men. Men hold a high percentage of coaching positions for women’s teams. As of 2014, “4 out of 10 coaches for women’s teams are female” (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014, p. E). This data shows over half of the coaching positions for women’s teams are occupied by men.

According to Jimmy Sanderson and Kelly Gramlich (2016), “one of the major reasons that women are underrepresented in coaching is that leadership positions within sport are closely tied to masculine traits, creating the perception that women are not viable coaching candidates for male athletes” (p. 115). The stigma of a position is also brought down when women occupy it; the perception often is “if a woman can do the job, the status of the job becomes devalued. If a woman can do it, it must not be manly” (Salter, 1996, p. 12). Not only do women not seem like viable candidates, there is this concern that femininity threatens the masculinity of a position.

There is also the argument that women could not coach a sport such as football due to the locker room, which is perceived as a sacred place. This myth can almost instantly be debunked due to the high percentage of male coaches of female sports. Male coaches of female teams make the opposite sex locker room situation work so it should not be a problem with women coaches. There is also this idea that women are not looked at as an authority figure to men. “Male coaches also are mythicized as moral authority figure who push players beyond their physical and emotional capacities to achieve results” (Sanderson & Grimlich, 2016, p. 115). Females are not believed to be capable of pushing male athletes as hard, solely because of their gender. In a study conducted by Walker and Bopp (2010), 10 female coaches who have been associated with women or men’s collegiate basketball were interviewed. Ultimately the findings showed female coaches felt their presence was not welcomed in men’s basketball. The women felt a lack of respect, which they felt was due to their gender; one

participant stated, “I think a woman would get looked over for a head coach (in men’s basketball) like she’s a joke” (Walker & Bopp, 2010, p. 58; Sanderson & Grimlich, 2016, p. 115). This quote shows the sexism that is present in the industry. Even if the statement is not true, many women still accept this idea, which keeps them away from pursuing careers coaching men.

While few women coach men’s teams, there have been steps made in a positive direction. Becky Hammon is one woman who has overcome this barrier and is now the first full-time, paid female assistant coach in the NBA. Hammon commented on her historical hiring, “when it comes to things of the mind, things like coaching, game-planning, coming up with offensive and defensive schemes, there’s no reason why a woman couldn’t be in the mix and shouldn’t be in the mix” (“Becky Hammon hired to Spurs’ staff”, 2014). Coach Popovich of the San Antonio Spurs made history with this decision to hire Hammon. While this is not college sport, this hiring choice may influence coaches of other teams and levels to consider adding females to their staff.

Representation by Geographical Region

When looking at the representation of females in leadership roles and administrative positions, the geographic region reveals where women have a greater voice in the sport industry. The Northeast region has the highest number of athletic directors, athletic trainers, strength and conditioning coaches, and sports information directors in comparison to the South, Midwest, and West regions. The South region has the highest percentage of schools with no female administrator on staff (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). It is important to look at these

numbers because it shows where collegiate sport struggles to maintain diversity in their administrative staffs. Some of the most successful college sport programs are located in the south. Giving women a voice in these schools is important in creating a more diverse environment. Furthermore, the difference in representation of Red and Blue states² also show a disparity in women's representation in sports. Blue states have a higher number, on average, of female athletic directors, athletic trainers, strength and conditioning coaches, and sports information directors. Blue states also have a higher average number of female administrators; however Red states have, on average, a larger administration staff (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). While there could be explanations to describe this trend, it may be interesting to see that while Red states have larger staffs they still employ fewer women than the Blue states (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). The ideology of the residents in these states may help explain the number of women in a male dominated industry. Conservatives, who tend to vote Republican, are often more traditional in their beliefs, suggesting more conservative women may go into more family-oriented careers and are not as business driven. Liberals, who tend to vote Democrat, are ideologically more progressive, focusing on social issues such as the gender gap. More liberal women may be provoked to work in business careers or in an athletic industry. The sports industry seems to have more progressive views as well. The NCAA has urged its member institutions to put an emphasis on creating

² "Red states are states that vote predominately Republican during an election while blue states are states that vote predominately Democratic during an election"

a more diverse staff that reflects the nation through hiring practices. The NCAA states in their Presidential Pledge, “we will strive to identify, recruit, and interview individuals from diverse backgrounds in an effort to increase their representation and retention as commissioners, athletic directors, coaches, and other leaders in athletics” (2016). Not only is this encouraging for minority groups, such as women, it shows the inclusive and more progressive nature of collegiate sport.

Advantages for Women

While the disadvantages and barriers are often pointed out throughout literature, advantages of being a woman in this industry are present and worth noting. An advantage credited to women working in the public relations field is perceived to be specifically a female’s “‘natural’ sense of ethics and empathic communication” (Hardin & Whiteside, 2012, p. 311). Women’s natural communication skills are recognized as making them better at public relations work. However, while this advantage helps woman get entry-level jobs it makes it difficult for them to access upper-management. Viewing these communication skills as naturally feminine, reinforces the myth that “women cannot be both a good listener (feminine) and assertive (masculine) at the same time and, thus, the same skills that give women access at the entry level are the ones that ultimately rationalize the view of women as unqualified for leadership positions” (p. 312). This idea is labeled as a “friendliness trap” for women because they are praised for certain advantageous skills without considering these same skills are disadvantageous later on in their career (Fröhlich, 2004). While the idea of women’s natural communication skills may at points of a woman’s career be

looked at as a positive aspect, it in turn can be the reason she does not move up the ladder. The gender identity of women can in part both help and hurt them. “The view of women as empathetic, nurturing and accommodating—of mothering—is the standard by which women are judged both as competent and as incompetent” (Hardin & Whiteside, 2012, p. 312). This unique characteristic in a largely male field can help cultivate a special relationship with college athletes. When these athletes are constantly pushed by male coaches it is comforting for them to have a “motherly” figure who can be more understanding and offer a different perspective than a male. In professional terms, when women are compared to this standard it can be favorable or unfavorable. If women do not fit this standard they may be more qualified for leadership positions but potentially can be resented for not being feminine enough. If they do fit the standard, they can be seen favorably for meeting the female expectations (female advantage), then later experience the disadvantages due to this behavior not fitting leadership qualities.

Methodology

The question of whether gender discrimination is present in the sports industry is rather easy to answer: yes, there most definitely is. Whether it is a widespread problem whose source can be pinpointed is more difficult to answer. To find evidence to prove or disprove the idea that gender discrimination is the major contributor to the underrepresentation of women in the sports industry, I received Institutional Review Board approval to conduct interviews with women who work in this industry. The participants were chosen based upon on a non-

randomized, convenience sample. The women who were interviewed all work at a rural, southern NCAA Division I FCS³ university. I reached out to 13 different women who worked in athletics. Of the 13 women I emailed, four did not reply, one felt she did not hold a position that met the requirements of my study, one did not feel comfortable the information she would supply would be kept confidential with the position she held, two were hesitant to interview but did commit, and five committed without showing any hesitation. Overall, I met with seven women working in athletics. The positions of these women all vary, but they all work in athletics or with college athletes. The names of these women are being withheld for confidentiality. The interviewees were asked anywhere from seven to twelve questions, depending on the position they held. The questions were composed based on the literature review. My hope was to gain insight into their experiences to see if they support my findings. Responses from the women were all opinions they have formed throughout their career in the industry. The women who were interviewed worked in the following areas: development coordinating, academics, assistant coaching for women's teams, compliance, and marketing. The questions the women were asked related to the pursuit of their career, their networking experience, if they have noticed "in-speak"/felt excluded in conversation, if they believe there is gender discrimination present in the industry, and challenges they have faced throughout their career.

³ FCS: Football Championship Subdivision participates in NCAA championship run, not bowl games.

Results

Development Coordinator

First, I interviewed a woman working as a development coordinator. This woman works with a men's sport, which means she's around men all of the time and rarely with any other women. After talking with this woman, the information gathered from my literature review was supported. When asked if women in this industry face discrimination based on gender, she replied, "Yes, 100%, women face discrimination in this industry." However, the discrimination I found from this woman's experiences did not seem intentional and did not necessarily look directly like discrimination. It seemed to come from this societal mindset instilled in boys from a young age. It also stems from men trying to be respectful around a lady and also from the stereotype that women do not have the high sports IQ that men seem to have.

This term mentioned by Whiteside and Hardin (2012) of "in-speak" seemed extremely prevalent in her experience working in a men's sport. She explained that the coaches have a group text that includes the whole staff, but excludes her. She did not know if she was left out because she was a female. While the group chat mainly consists of jokes and non-work conversations, the frustrating part is that she sometimes gets left out of important information such as meeting times. She also noted there were jokes throughout the day that the men would avoid around her or ask her to "close your ears". She explained how

none of the jokes or conversations ever felt degrading but they are constantly pointing out that she is a female.

Networking never seemed to be much of a challenge for this development coordinator. The difficult part was getting the men in this industry to take her seriously. She mentioned the conversation is never really the hard part but the recommendation is. There seems to be a bit of trust issues with women working in sports, which very well could come back to the traditional stereotyping of women with athletics and the lack of women in this industry. I asked about any advantages she may have felt being a female in this male dominated industry. While there were not many she did list two, and one was rather unique. Working in sports, there are not as many traditional HR rules that have to be followed. There is a lot of yelling; however, being a woman she felt the male coaches would be more calm when pointing out a mistake she may have made. The more rewarding advantage she listed was the unique relationship she can form with the male college athletes she works with. Being a woman, she can have a more traditional motherly or sisterly relationship with them. This can be especially important for the young men who come from broken homes who need a stable motherly figure in their life. With this relationship, she can sense when something may be going on in their life and help address it. This is one of the best parts of her job, one that she said is extremely rewarding for her.

One of the final questions I asked was where she sees herself in ten years. The issue of the schedule came up in the conversation. She mentioned that having a family is nearly impossible with the hours she works. In ten years,

she definitely would want to move to a more stable administrative position such as academics or compliance. Being involved in a coaching staff means that her job greatly relies on how well the other coaches do their jobs and how the team performs. If the team has a losing season, often the entire coaching staff can lose their jobs. She also cited that even though pregnancy is not on her near future radar, she wants more time to herself and away from her career.

Academics (1)

The first woman I interviewed who maintains a leadership role in student-athlete academics did not actually pursue a career in sports. She works directly with football and men's basketball, which is not common at many universities. In the office she works at there is a very diverse staff, which allows them to really assess the needs of all the students. At times she said there is this misconception of women working with power sports such as men's basketball or football that leads to some questioning how well women are able to fully help the students. However, she did mention that at her office there are a high majority of females and only one male. There have actually been more female directors than males at her university.

The schedule is still challenging, she said, "if you want to have an 8-5 type of job, I think athletics is just not the type of field in general." Recruits, games, and events are on the weekends and evenings, so as she puts it, "it's a lifestyle not a job". Even if you do not necessarily have to attend the games, you want to be there. She states, "you get to know them [student athletes] on a one-on-one, face to face basis. So they are no longer just a student, they have a name and a

history, you grow attached to them and you want to see them succeed and you want to be there for them.” I think this perfectly describes why women may cluster into academics, because they are able to form this relationship with the athletes. Women, often due to social development, crave this nurturing or family-like environment (Lever, 1976).

Academics (2)

The second woman I interviewed in academics confirmed the low number of women working with power sports, such as men’s basketball and football. Many times she mentioned there might be two to three advisors working with each of these sports but it is common that only one may be a woman. She noted there is a perception that women may not be able to relate to the athletes, handle the coaches or atmosphere as well as a male. As a female, she felt she had to work twice as hard to gain respect. Bringing out the masculinity was also something she believed women sometimes feel is necessary to be involved in this industry; however, while they may bring out the masculinity they have to balance it with remaining very feminine as well. The National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics (N4A) hosts a large conference that helps advisors to network. This conference allowed her to see that there is not a majority of men in this particular field; it is about half and half. When networking, she said once the connection is made the male-female dynamic goes away and groups become mixed. The conference also makes obvious which gender more often works with certain sports. She could look at a group and predict that the bigger guy at the big time SEC school is most likely working with football.

As a woman, you have to pick between having a family or a career in this industry because of the schedule. Women do not face as much discrimination working in academics as she thinks one would in compliance, the business office, or in coaching since it is academically driven.

Assistant Coach (1)

The next woman I spoke with was an assistant coach for a women's team. Being a younger coach, this is her first experience working as an assistant coach for a Division I university. While she has not experienced any trouble networking, she has noticed the "boys' club" in sports. Most notably when she is out on the road recruiting she sees how the men tend to stick together, which in turn leaves the women out and allows the men to make more connections. Being the only woman working with a male assistant coach and a male head coach, she feels she is treated the same as if she were a male. The men she works with are open and very respectful to her, which may be due to them coaching a women's team. They may be more accustomed to working with women.

While she did not note any discrimination thus far in her career, she did feel like it was present in this industry. In the future as she progresses in her career, she feels she is more likely to face barriers because she is a woman. She noted the high number of men holding higher-level positions who tend to hire men. Getting equality in coaching is becoming more important, she said. It is mandated (for the most part) that there be at least one woman on staff. Also, the sport she coaches for has programs to help keep women coaching due to the high turnover for female coaches. She feels discrimination plays a role in getting

equal support as men. One female head coach at the university she works at has to fight a lot harder than she feels her male head coach has to, to get the same things. This assistant coach feels the women on the staff do not get the same kind of backing as men get from the administration, which she said was frustrating. She also stated it is difficult to judge when to speak up and when to keep moving forward, "As a woman, you either say something and you complain and then you get blacklisted or do you not say something and go forward? So it's about picking the times and places to be like, is this fair?" Her advise to women pursuing careers in sports is to try and figure out this balance. While women have been blacklisted in more male-dominated, power five sports, it is becoming more common to see women fill roles on these staffs.

Assistant Coach (2)

The way this woman landed the position as an assistant coach was quite interesting. Before her, there was no full time assistant coach position for this women's sport and the head coach had been asking for one for a while. The school hired a new coach for the men's team, whose contract required he have an assistant coach. Due to Title IX, it was required that the women's team would get one as well, which is how this woman was able to become the assistant coach.

When asked the big question, whether or not she thought discrimination took place in the sport industry she replied, "I'm sure it happens all the time." However, she herself has never felt discriminated against. She acknowledged that there is more opportunity for men because there are more positions

available to them that are not jobs women typically do. The major barrier she has noticed is head coaches or administrators encouraging some of her friends in the business to avoid another pregnancy. She had to plan her own pregnancy to fit with the off-season so it did not interfere with her job.

Working with two other female coaches and also coaching females, she is not around men very much to really experience any locker-room talk, but she did say women have locker-room talk as well. She said it probably is a little different than the men's but her players know when to tone it down. The hardest part of the job is balancing all the hats she wears as a mom, wife, and coach. In the future she could see herself coaching down a division, so she can spend more time with her family and see her children grow up.

Compliance

The woman I interviewed working in compliance was very positive about the experiences she's had. She has never experienced discrimination or any demeaning talk. The only thing she mentioned was a comment a male had made that she felt "[he] wouldn't have said that if I were a dude." The good ole' boys club was acknowledged and she said it does still exist, but diversity is more important now and it is a lot better than it was. She even mentioned that it was a good time to be entering this industry as a woman.

The key question, "does discrimination still exist in this industry" was then asked and she was hesitant to answer. Although she had never experienced any discrimination she did comment, "It's not like this at every place, I would assume, but the places that I have been, I've been very fortunate that we don't work with a

lot of disrespectful males.” The Senior Woman Administrator (SWA) position was also discussed. Although this position is given so women have a voice in the governance structure, she said they have little to no voice over the important matters such as men’s basketball or football. A lot of times the women are dealing with minor issues such as uniforms. When they are given more important issues, they are never the deciding vote.

One challenge she noted was that it is difficult to assert yourself as a woman sometimes. She said you have to balance being too assertive or not contributing to the meetings, you also really have to know what you are talking about. While she said networking is easier with the same gender, she has found she has networked mainly with men because she’s around more men.

Marketing

The woman I interviewed who worked in marketing also said she had not experienced any discrimination or any demeaning talk at her current or previous university. She said yes, there are jokes that are made in the workplace but she has never felt personally discriminated against. Something she mentioned a few times is the confidence she has built throughout her career in sports. She said you have to be tough to be in this business as a female. She told a story of when she had just begun her career and her boss at the time came up to her and said, “do you know how to talk? ‘Cause if you do, I want you to start ... I don’t want you to exist in those meetings, I want you to speak up if you need to and assert yourself.” This was a moment she said she would never forget because that was the push she needed, especially being a female.

I asked her even though she had not experienced any discrimination in this industry, if she thought it did exist. She quickly addressed the student-athlete side of the industry. She said it absolutely happens on that side of it, but she said she cannot speak on anything but the environment she's been in. "Jokes are made in the workplace, but I have never been personally discriminated against" she replied.

Conclusion

It is quite clear there are many factors influencing women's ability to pursue and maintain a career in the sports field. While discrimination is present, outright hostile sexism⁴ is not as evident as one may have thought based on the results from my interviews. Much of the discrimination that seems to be present based on my data is benevolent sexism⁵, which is difficult to overcome or remedy because men are often trying to avoid being inappropriate or are trying to act out of perceived respect for women. The problem is, while it is appreciated that they avoid disrespecting those of the opposite gender, the jokes or the discussion that may offend women should not take place with or without them in the room. If it is a discussion that is acceptable to take place in the workplace then all coworkers, male or female, should not be offended and should be included.

Even with the mostly positive remarks from the women I interviewed, there is still a societal factor that limits women in the sports industry. The women I

⁴ "Hostile sexism is an antagonistic attitude toward women, who are often viewed as trying to control men through feminist ideology or sexual seduction"

⁵ "Benevolent sexism is a chivalrous attitude toward women that feels favorable but is actually sexist because it casts women as weak creatures in need of men's protection"

talked to did not feel obligated to take care of their children or future children, but they said it is something they want to do. The question I quickly have to ask in response is why do men not want to spend more time with their children or why do they not have this obligation? The answer, it seems may be the way society shapes men and women. Men have felt a more traditional pressure to be the breadwinner, even when that means sacrificing time with their family. I believe these societal influences are also to blame for the lack of women interested in sports and the stereotype held that women are not as knowledgeable in this area. While society is becoming more progressive, there is still work to be done. Requiring one woman on staff, having a senior level position designated for a female, and the hiring of a female in a professional men's sport create more opportunity for women. This has been a slow process. Once more women are involved in this area and gain a bigger spotlight, the roles of men and women will change. Until this changes, I think women will still have a more difficult time getting a sports career or moving up in the sports industry.

It is also important to look at the limits of the research I conducted. These results were a small convenience sample from seven women, so this data may not represent all women working in athletics. The responses from the emails, and lack of response, I believe is crucial to consider as well. Two women I interviewed were concerned about the confidentiality of my study, resulting in some hesitance to participate. One woman declined the interview because she felt she would not be able to supply confidential information. Four women did not respond. The lack of response could mean these women are busy, they may not

check their emails, or perhaps did not feel comfortable discussing this issue.

Discrimination is a sensitive subject in many cases, and as one of the assistant coaches said, if you say something as a woman, there is the risk of getting blacklisted. It is natural that some of these women may have been a little fearful talking about this issue, but I also think the fact that there was hesitation or refusal shows discrimination is an issue that may be present.

In order to get a better representation of the women in this industry, I would be interested in researching this topic further. I would want to include more women in this study. In expanding my research pool, conducting an anonymous survey would definitely be a better option than interviews. Surveys would most likely give me more responses from women since it would ensure their experiences would remain confidential. Comparing the difference between women working in athletics in the south to those working in the north would also be something I would like to research further. It would also be interesting to see how women's experiences are different at power five schools and in professional sports. As the results from my interviews showed, every woman has a different experience. Younger women are often not far enough along into their careers and do not have the family obligations that they will in the future. Extending this research into a longitudinal study could potentially reveal how discrimination can affect career commitment long-term. Drop-off is often pointed out to be an issue with women in this industry, so it would be interesting to see if further research would support this claim.

To overcome discrimination and create change, it is important to recognize the barriers women face and the experiences they have in comparison to their male counterparts. While discrimination may be present for many more years, change is taking place and the more media attention and fight that women bring to these issues, the faster this evolution will happen.

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