

Breaking the Glass: The Perception of Gender Disparity from Future Sport Professionals

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The purpose of this study is to investigate gender disparities among students seeking entrance into the sports industry. With the growing trend of women facing differences in the sports industry, an exploration of the connection between professional challenges and the perception of future professions is necessary. A convenience sample of one hundred and fifty one (N=151) subjects who possessed sport related academic majors were selected to participate in the study. The subjects' ages, racial groups, classifications, and university or college of attendance varied. Two of the sites surveyed were classified as Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Subjects were asked to complete a questionnaire, which consisted of 15 question items. A modified version of the Career Pathway Survey (CPS) was used as the questionnaire for this research project. The questionnaire was distributed via email to the subjects using an anonymous Google Forms link. Descriptive statistics were used to assess if a significant relationship existed between the responses of the Career Pathway Survey and demographic variables. These variables included student major, gender, age, classification, and race.

Keywords: *Gender disparities in sports, sport management students, glass ceilings, career opportunities, career preparation*

Introduction

The male dominated industry of sports presents differences for women looking to sustain careers in various areas of sport management, media, and entertainment. In recent years the number of women hired in the industry has increased in jobs on the entry level. However, positions in leadership are far more often held by males. In recent years, women have found success in progressing from collegiate students to entry level and mid-level managers positions but often experience the glass ceiling effect when pursuing upper-level leadership positions. Previous works suggest that hiring disparities exist among men and women in sport industry jobs related to senior leadership and executive level positions. (Hindman & Walker, 2020; Lapchick, 2020; Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012). This notion supports the idea that challenges remain in recruiting, retaining, and promoting women to leadership roles in the sports industry. Thus, the importance of exploring the perception of women in the sports industry is necessary to improving diversity in the field of sports.

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This investigation aimed to examine the perception of challenges facing women careers in the sports industry through the views of future sport industry employees. To accomplish this task, the Career Pathways Survey (CPS) was modified to gauge perceptions of barriers facing women in the workplace (Smith, Crittenden, & Caputi, 2012). The CPS focuses on investigating the perception of the barriers in terms of acknowledging that opportunities for women to advance do exist rather than focusing more singularly on questioning if women can advance (Smith et al., 2012).

The original CPS instrument categorized the participant's attitudes towards challenges facing women in the workplace in four distinct categories. These categories included those with the attitude of denial, resignation, resilience, and acceptance (Smith et al., 2012). For this current study, the categories were applied to collegiate students seeking careers in the sports industry. The researchers hope to explore the role of career readiness and program inclusion as it pertains to the confidence of students transitioning into the sports industry. As well as better understand potential disparities faced by women in sport management programs. The purpose of this study is to investigate the perception of gender disparities for students seeking entrance into the sports industry. The following research questions guided the investigation of this study:

RQ1: Is there a difference between the level of assessed Career Pathway Survey Responses and student majors?

RQ 2: Is there a difference between the level of assessed Career Pathway Survey Responses and gender?

RQ 3: Is there a relationship between the level of assessed Career Pathway Survey Responses and age?

Literature Review

This literature review explores works related to this phenomenon and looks at the current status of how gender related obstacles such as the glass ceiling phenomenon are recognized in previous studies. Many studies today identify sport as a male dominated industry that possesses challenges for women who strive to make it to and maintain senior leadership positions in the field. Harris, Grappendorf, Aicher, and Veraldo (2015) argues that the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in the sports industry is mirrored by the disproportionate amount of female population in sport management degree programs across the United States. Moreover, 40% of sport management degree programs reported a female student population of 20% or less (Floyd Jones, Brooks, & Mak, 2008 and Hyre, Chen, & Larson, 2017). With the growing trend of women facing differences in the sports industry, an exploration of the connection between professional challenges and the perception of future professions is necessary.

The Glass Ceiling in the Sports Industry

The phenomenon of the glass ceiling is commonly used to explain existing barriers that stop women and minorities groups from moving up into top leadership positions in the professional realm (Roman, 2017 and Smith, Crittenden, and Caputi, 2012). The presence of various obstacles or barriers have been shown to hinder women in the field of sport management and can even turn them away from seeking careers in the industry. Previous research suggests that the presence of glass ceilings can directly impact career aspirations, career satisfaction, increase job dissatisfaction, and can result in women leaving the sports industry (Cunningham, 2003). This continues to be a problem in many different industries, one of these being in the realm of sports.

As participation rates for some minority groups have increased on the field, similar increases have not occurred in terms of women filling top administrative roles. With sports remaining a male dominated field in the areas of leadership and administration, research has investigated the challenges faced by women while employed in the industry. However, additional research must be done that focuses on the perception of women students prior to entering the profession. (Forsyth et al., 2019) Women can face challenges when moving up in the professional ranks. Current research suggests that women are underrepresented in leadership positions in the industry and statistically fill such jobs as Collegiate Athletic Directors, Professional Sport General Managers, and Coaches at a lower rate. Lapchick (2019) suggest that men coach more than 60% of all women collegiate sport teams.

Denial, Resignation, Resilience, & Acceptance

According to research the popularity of sport has reached monumental levels, as more athletic administration jobs exist than in previous decades (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Lapchick, 2019). Although strides have been made in improving the overall outlook in terms of opportunity for employment for women in sports management, the historical prevalence of the glass ceiling may still be perceived by students as a deterring factor of pursuing a career in the field. In addition, disparities are still found in leadership roles as men are employed at a higher rate and women are more likely to be hired in subordinate roles in sport management. Examples of employment trends that show disparity include only 22.3% of Collegiate Athletic Directors and women hold less than 23% of senior leadership positions respectively (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014).

Smith, Crittenden, and Caputi (2012) posit a four factor model to better understand the views of women as it pertains to the glass ceiling theory. The researchers suggest that the factors of denial, resignation, resilience, and acceptance are critical in determining women's perception of glass ceilings in the workplace.

This research study describes denial as the belief that women perceive glass ceilings do not currently exist or deem them to be a myth. Resignation describes women that quit or fail to pursue professional opportunities such as promotions due to social or organizational barriers in the workplace. Resilience is evident

through responses that indicate that women are willing to move forward in their careers despite obstacles related to a glass ceiling. Acceptance is shown when women do not seek high level positions and are content on not overcoming social or organizational barriers. Women who accept glass ceilings do not want to work in high level positions and may not want what men want in the workplace. Smith (2012) suggests that men seek power in the workplace and that some women do not want this responsibility. Acceptance can also indicate that women that exhibit this factor do not show a drive towards obtaining career development. Examples of how this perception can present itself include valuing a balanced life over a higher paying career or not seeking the need to work the longer hours that are required in a top executive position.

Sport Management Degree Programs Supporting Diversity

Floyd Jones et al. (2008) suggest that female and minority faculty members are underrepresented in sport management programs. Leaders of institutions play a major role in promoting inclusion and improving upon the lack of diversity in educational programs. Sport management degree programs must prioritize inclusion and implement strategies to incorporate all members of society. Being aware of and showing interest in differences such as gender is essential in the positive perception students possess of their respective degree programs. Literature indicates that students who favorably view their degree programs are more likely to view themselves as being ready to successfully enter careers in the sports industry (Perry, 2017). Sport management educators must develop programs that respond to gender issues and concerns in order to prepare women with the necessary skill set for the profession. Moore (2008) argues that the practice of inclusion and working through gender differences can help women maximize their potential as sport management students and as professionals in the field.

Administrators of sport management degree programs must effectively encourage all students to engage in the degree program to best prepare students for careers in the industry. This is especially true since sport management is an applied field that must be experienced by students in order to get a sense of the requirements that are needed to be successful in sport careers. Mentoring students can be used to promote inclusion within degree programs. Strategies such as promoting student engagement can help to connect students to the degree program and result in students forming a greater affinity for the industry. This is key as it can stimulate a love for the profession and motivate students to seek employment in the field. Techniques such as internship programs, encouraging campus involvement, and providing equitable supportive resources such as access to professional networks can help students successfully matriculate into the profession (Moore & Huberty, 2014). Degree program leaders and faculty members must provide guidance for students and acknowledge sociocultural factors (e.g., ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender) that are present in institutions of higher education.

The relationship between programs and career development and personal factors such as self-identity, affect, and motivation have also been linked to

determining the career path of students. An awareness of one's personal identity such as gender in the professional setting contributes to the presence of career development for all students in the field of sport management. Harrison and Lawrence (2003), Betts and Suárez (2011), and Brewer, Van Raalte, and Petitpas (2000) argue that specific groups such as women must be supported both professionally and personally to develop in their careers. Given the dynamic professional landscape of sports today, organizations that actively support all employees can benefit from inclusion.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore the perception of gender disparities in the sports industry from students seeking entrance into the sports industry. To accomplish this purpose, demographics data from a revised version of the CPS were analyzed by using descriptive statistics. The data was analyzed using .05 level of significance. The SPSS 25 program was used to perform the statistical analysis. This methodology section will provide an overview of the methods used in this study, subjects, the survey instrument, and the procedures used in the data analysis.

Participants and Procedures

A convenience sample of one hundred fifty-one subjects who identified themselves as current students majoring in a sports related discipline were selected to participate in the study. The subjects' ages, racial groups, classifications, and university or college of attendance varied. However, with the researchers being affiliated with institutions classified as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) the majority (83%) of subjects identified as black or African American. Further, 67.5% of the subjects were students on the graduate level. Each subject was asked to complete a questionnaire, which consisted of 15 question items. The questionnaire was distributed via email to the subjects using an anonymous Google Forms link. The initial launch of the survey consisted of the researchers sharing the survey with students in classes that they taught in the Spring 2022 academic semester. During the Fall 2022 academic semester the survey link was shared to the public through the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM) listserv. The sport management students surveyed represented classifications ranging from undergraduate freshman to senior, and ages varied.

Instrumentation

With the author's permission, the CPS (Smith, et al. 2012) was modified to address students majoring in sport related disciplines (e.g., sport management, human performance, sport administration, sport medicine). Additionally, researcher- designed questions were added to the survey to assist in gathering data related to the students' perceptions of gender-related sport industry disparities. Face validity was utilized to validate the questionnaire. There was a total of fifteen-question items, five of which were aimed at gathering demographic

information from sport management students, including their: gender, age, racial group, classification, and major of study.

The remaining 10 questions consisted of responses to 5-point Likert scale statements (strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, and strongly disagree), and pertained to the students' perception of the role of gender in the sport industry, discriminatory challenges that gender may incite, and barriers to success that may in the sport industry. Data was collected and analyzed using Google Forms and the SPSS 25 program.

Data Analysis

SPSS 25 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) program was used to analyze the data collected within the scope of the research. Frequency and percentage were used to determine the distribution of the sample. In order to determine the distribution of the scales, descriptive analysis results such as mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis are included. Independent sample t-test and one-way ANOVA to test the differences between groups for the cases where the scores of the scales are normally distributed; Kruskal Wallis test was used for cases where it did not show normal distribution. Levene's test was used to determine the homogeneity of the variances of the groups. In order to determine the direction of the difference between the groups, Scheffe post hoc tests were preferred when the variance was homogeneous.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics of Individuals Participating in the Research*

| Variables | | n | % |
|------------------|------------------------------------|----------|----------|
| Gender | Female | 90 | 59.6 |
| | Male | 61 | 40.4 |
| Major | Sport medicine | 10 | 6.6 |
| | Sport management | 23 | 15.2 |
| | Human performance | 10 | 6.6 |
| | Sports administration | 90 | 59.6 |
| | Others | 18 | 11.9 |
| Age | 18 – 21 | 45 | 29.8 |
| | 22 – 26 | 62 | 41.1 |
| | 27 – 35 | 21 | 13.9 |
| | 36 and over | 23 | 15.2 |
| Classification | Freshman | 9 | 6 |
| | Sophomore | 17 | 11.3 |
| | Junior | 13 | 8.6 |
| | Senior | 10 | 6.6 |
| | Graduate student | 102 | 67.5 |
| Race | Black or African American | 126 | 83.4 |
| | White or Caucasian | 17 | 11.3 |
| | Asian/Pacific Islander | 1 | 0.7 |
| | Hispanic or Latino | 4 | 2.6 |
| | Native American or American Indian | 1 | 0.7 |
| | Others | 2 | 1.3 |

Results

In this section, the results of the analysis methods used to test the hypotheses of the research are given. Descriptive statistics of 151 individuals participating in the study are given in the Table 1.

According to the results in Table 1, 59.6% of the participants are female, 40.4% are male. 6.6% of participants major is sports medicine, 15.2% of is sports management, 6.6% of is human performance, and 59.6% of is sports administration. 11.9% of participants have other type of majors (economics, biology, communication, etc.). 29.8% of participants are in 18 – 21, 41.1% of are in 22 – 26, 13.9% of are in 27 – 35, and, 15.2% of are aged 36 and over. 6% of participants are freshman, 11.3% of are sophomore, 6.6% of are junior, 6.6% of are senior, and, 67.5% of are graduate student. 83.4% of participants are black or African American, 11.3% of are white or Caucasian, 0.7% of are Asian/Pacific Islander, 2.6% of are Hispanic or Latino, and, 0.7% of are Native American or American Indian.

Table 2. Normality Analysis by Variables of the Career Pathway Survey Scores

| Variable | Groups | n | \bar{X} | sd | Skewness | | Kurtosis | |
|----------|-----------------------|----|-----------|------|-----------|------|-----------|------|
| | | | | | Statistic | SE | Statistic | SE |
| Gender | Female | 61 | 23.56 | 4.46 | -0.52 | 0.31 | 0.18 | 0.60 |
| | Male | 90 | 23.46 | 4.64 | -0.12 | 0.25 | 0.54 | 0.50 |
| Major | Sport medicine | 10 | 25.30 | 4.45 | -0.42 | 0.69 | -0.24 | 1.33 |
| | Sport management | 23 | 22.57 | 3.16 | 0.40 | 0.48 | -0.76 | 0.93 |
| | Human performance | 10 | 26.90 | 3.90 | -2.03 | 0.69 | 5.11 | 1.33 |
| | Sports administration | 90 | 23.29 | 4.31 | -0.44 | 0.25 | 0.36 | 0.50 |
| | Others | 18 | 22.83 | 6.58 | 0.12 | 0.54 | 0.20 | 1.04 |
| Age | 18 – 21 | 45 | 24.64 | 4.31 | 0.23 | 0.35 | 0.20 | 0.69 |
| | 22 – 26 | 62 | 23.82 | 4.49 | -0.31 | 0.30 | -0.05 | 0.60 |
| | 27 – 35 | 21 | 20.38 | 5.22 | -0.43 | 0.50 | -0.33 | 0.97 |
| | 36 and over | 23 | 23.22 | 3.32 | 0.07 | 0.48 | -0.96 | 0.93 |

sd: standard deviation, SE: Standard Error

One of the criteria that can be used to investigate the fit for the normal distribution is the kurtosis and skewness coefficients. If the kurtosis and skewness values are between +2.0 and -2.0 (George & Mallery, 2010), it can be said that the distribution is normal. In the Table 2, descriptive analyzes of the Career Pathway Survey scores in groups according to gender, major, and age are given. Accordingly, since the skewness and kurtosis values of the scores for gender and age remained between +2 and -2, they showed a normal distribution and parametric tests were applied. Since the major scores did not show normal distribution, non-parametric tests were preferred to investigate the difference between the groups.

Table 3. Independent Sample t-test Results of the Career Pathway Survey Scores by Gender

| Dependent Variable | Levene's Test | | t | df | p |
|-----------------------------|---------------|-----|------|-----|-----|
| | F | p | | | |
| Career Pathway Survey Score | 0.14 | .71 | 0.13 | 149 | .89 |

According to the results of the Levene's Test, which was performed to test the homogeneity of variances before the independent sample t-test in Table 3, the variances between the groups were homogeneous ($p > .05$). Accordingly, the results of the independent sample t-test where the variances were homogeneous were included. No statistically significant differences were found between the Career Pathway Survey responses of male and female students at the .05 level ($t = 0.134$, $df = 149$, $p > .05$). Therefore, it appears that male and female students had similar Career Pathway responses.

Table 4. Kruskal-Wallis Results of the Career Pathway Survey Scores by Major

| Dependent Variable | H | df | p |
|-----------------------------|-------|----|------|
| Career Pathway Survey Score | 10.78 | 4 | .03* |

* $p < .05$

According to Table 4, it is seen that the difference between the groups in the Career Pathway Survey scores according to the major is statistically significant ($H(4) = 10.78$, $p < .05$). The Kruskal Wallis test was applied in paired groups to determine between which groups the difference was.

Table 5. Group Comparative Kruskal-Wallis Results of the Career Pathway Survey Scores by Major

| Dependent Variable | Group 1 | Group 2 | H | SE | Standardized Test Statistic | p |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------|-------|-----------------------------|------|
| Career Pathway Survey Score | Sports Management | Human Performance | -48.50 | 16.53 | -2.94 | .03* |

* $p < .05$

According to the Kruskal Wallis, dual test results performed to determine the direction of the difference between the groups in Table 5, the difference between the sports management and human performance groups in the Career Pathway Survey score is statistically significant ($H(1) = -48.50$, $p < .05$). In the Career Pathway Survey score, the mean of sports management group ($\bar{X} = 22.57$) is significantly lower than the mean of human performance group ($\bar{X} = 26.90$).

Table 6. Homogeneity Test Results of the Variances of the Career Pathway Survey Scores by Age

| Dependent Variable | Levene's Test (F) | df1 | df2 | p |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----|-----|------|
| Career Pathway Survey Score | 0.95 | 3 | 147 | 0.42 |

In order to decide on the post hoc test, which determines the direction of the difference between groups in one-way ANOVA, it is necessary to test the homogeneity of variances first, and therefore Levene's Test was performed. Scheffe, one of the post hoc tests, was used in cases where the variances were homogeneous ($p > .05$) in Levene's test.

Table 7. One-Way ANOVA Results of the Career Pathway Survey Scores by Age

| Dependent Variable | | Sum of Squares | df | F | p |
|-----------------------------|----------------|----------------|-----|------|------|
| Career Pathway Survey Score | Between Groups | 271.52 | 3 | 4.69 | .00* |
| | Within Groups | 2834.23 | 147 | | |

* $p < .01$

According to Table 7 one-way analysis of variance results regarding the Career Pathway Survey responses of students with regard to their age. Statistically significant differences were found in the Career Pathway responses of the age of student ($F=4.69$, $df=3/147$, $p=.004$) at the .01 level. Due to homogeneity of variances as assessed by the Levene's test, $p > .05$, in further data analysis Scheffe test used as post hoc.

Table 8. Scheffe Test Results of the Career Pathway Survey Scores by Age

| Dependent Variable | Group (i) | Group (j) | i - j | p |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|-------|-------|
| Career Pathway Survey Score | 18 - 21 | 27 - 35 | 4.26 | .01** |
| Career Pathway Survey Score | 22 - 26 | 27 - 35 | 3.44 | .03* |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Considering the results, students in age 18-21 ($\bar{X}=26.64$) had significantly higher Career Pathway responses than students in age 27-35 ($\bar{X}=20.38$). Students in age 22-26 ($\bar{X}=23.82$) had significantly higher Career Pathway responses than students in age 27-35 ($\bar{X}=20.38$). No other mean differences were observed. Accordingly, it seemed that students in age 27-35 tended to have lower Career Pathway responses.

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perception of gender disparities of women in the sports industry from students seeking entrance into the sports

industry. Analysis of data from the present study represents results from a convenience sample of one hundred and fifty-one ($N=151$) subjects who possessed sport related academic majors data, using a modified version of the Career Pathway Survey (CPS). As reported in the results, 59.6% of the participants were female, 40.4% were male. The study employed an age range from eighteen and above with most of the participants being between the ages of 22-26. Another variable analyzed in the student was the major of participants. Results from the study yielded that the largest number of participants were sport administration students (67.5%). Race was the final variable analyzed in the study. Results indicated that 126 (83.4%) of all participants were African American. In addition, Mean scores yield normality analysis by variables of the CPS Scores between gender, major, and age.

Regarding gender, an independent sample t-test analyzed the results of the Career Pathway Survey Scores by gender. No statistically significant differences between the Career Pathway Survey responses of male and female students. Therefore, male, and female students had similar Career Pathway responses. Kruskal-Wallis results of the Career Pathway Survey Scores by major revealed a statistical difference ($H(4) = 10.78, p < .05$). In the Career Pathway Survey score, the mean of the sport management group ($=22.57$) was significantly lower than the mean of the human performance group ($=26.90$). Regarding age, a one-way ANOVA revealed statistically significant differences between Career Pathway responses and of the age of student ($F=4.69, df=3/147, p=.004$) at the .01 level. Scheffe Test Results post hoc results that student between the ages of 27–35 tended to have lower Career Pathway responses.

Limitations and Assumptions

The most notable limitations are that the instrument was researcher-constructed, was not pilot tested, and face validity was used to validate it. Also, considering the number of sport management students enrolled in institutions of higher education throughout the world, the study sample of 151 was small. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized for a broader population. Furthermore, since the survey was distributed via email, it is plausible that many faculty members could have inadvertently overlooked the questionnaire link or that it may have been deposited into their clutter or spam inbox. While email is seemingly a convenient way to garner a large response within a short time frame, Muñoz-leiva, et al. (2010), asserts that response rates for surveys administered online have decreased dramatically.

Conclusion

The first research question states: Is there a difference between the level of assessed Career Pathway Survey Responses and student majors? A statistical significance ($H(4)=10.78, p<.05$) was found in the Career Pathway Survey scores

among the majors of sport management and human performance. The mean of the sport management group ($\bar{X}=22.57$) is significantly lower than the mean of human performance group ($\bar{X}=26.90$). This indicates that the scores of sport management majors reported higher responses in the categories of denial and resignation. Thus supporting the idea that sport management majors believe in the presence of a glass ceiling which could lead to denial and resignation due to gender disparities. The responses of the human performance majors reported higher responses in the categories of resilience and acceptance. Indicating that human performance majors acknowledged the presence of gender disparity and sought to work through career related challenges.

The second research question states: Is there a difference between the level of assessed Career Pathway Survey Responses and gender? The results of the independent sample t-test where the variances were homogeneous were used to answer this question. The t-test indicated that no statistically significant differences were found between the Career Pathway Survey responses of male and female students at the .05 level ($t=0.134$, $df=149$, $p>.05$). Therefore, it appears that male and female students had similar responses to the Career Pathway Survey questions. Thus, leading the researchers to believe that both gender groups possessed similar perspectives of the challenges facing women that pursue careers in the sports industry.

The third research question states: Is there a relationship between the level of assessed Career Pathway Survey Responses and age? The study concluded that students between the age 18–21 ($\bar{X}=26.64$) had significantly higher Career Pathway responses when compared to students in age 27–35 ($\bar{X}=20.38$) Thus indicating that the age range of 27-35 reported a higher rate of denial of the presence of gender disparity when compared to the age range of 18-21.

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