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THE GLASS CEILING: EXAMINING THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN IN THE DOMAIN OF ATHLETIC ADMINISTRATION

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ABSTRACT

The "glass ceiling" is a metaphor for examining gender disparities between men and women within the workplace. Such disparities are particularly visible in athletic administration. This literature review evaluates specific leadership characteristics and their relationship to gender stereotyping in Sport Management. Because athletic administration is a male dominated domain, there appears to be discrimination against women, creating a gender gap that prevents the advancement of women into top-level managerial positions.

INTRODUCTION

The underrepresentation of women in administrative positions in sport is commonly seen as example of the "glass ceiling" (Stockdale & Crosby, 2004). The lack of women holding leadership positions within the domain of athletic administration is not new to the global business world. The "glass ceiling" describes the invisible, but very prevalent, roadblocks that limit the progression of women within the workplace. The "glass ceiling" describes how discrimination increases as people ascend in the administrative hierarchy (Wright, Baxter and Bunglund, 1995). Women's presence in top-level managerial positions within organizations today is far from where it needs to be. According to Heller and Stepp (2001), given the greater number of women receiving degrees and representing the majority of graduates in the

major countries in the world, women still represent only 6% of executives in the largest companies.

The underrepresentation of women in top-level manageri-al positions in corporate America has been examined from the per-spective of the *gender role theory*. This includes the examination of managerial roles being gendered as "masculine," and women in managerial positions being seen as negative, due to gender ste-reotyping (Atwater, Brett, Waldman, DiMare, & Hayden, 2004; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Powell, Butterfield, & Parent, 2002). Per-ceptions and stereotypes, true or false, perpetuate the reality of the glass ceiling as a distinct barrier. According to the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1995), perceptions are what people believe, and people translate their beliefs into behaviors, attitudes and biases. Perceptions affect how subordinates view leaders and managers. Leadership characteristics are not always explained by past qualifications or experience, but often by stereotypes about gender. Such stereotypes become more pervasive and ubiquitous within male-dominated fields such as athletic administration.

This literature review will examine the glass ceiling in relation to leadership characteristics. The concept of gender dis-parities in athletic administration and the negative effects that ste-reotypes have on a woman's advancement to top-level managerial positions will also be explored.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of the "glass ceiling" was brought to the forefront and recognized as an American social issue in 1986. *The Wall Street Journal* published an article describing the impercep-tible barriers that women confront as they approach the top of the corporate ladder (*Federal Glass Ceiling Commission*, 1995). The "glass ceiling" also implies that gender disparities are more prevalent at the top of hierarchies than at lower levels, and that the disadvantages become more challenging as a person's career ad-vances (Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vanneman, 2001). The Fed-eral Glass Ceiling Commission (1995) described the idea of the glass ceiling as a significant barrier to the progression of women and minorities.

This barrier reflects discrimination and the unequal and differential treatment of a group of individuals—in this case, discrimination specifically directed against women and minorities. Lapchick (2011) reported that Amy Trask, the President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Oakland Raiders, remains the only female President and CEO of a team in the National Football League (NFL), a position she has held since making history in 2005. No person of color has ever served as President or CEO of a team in the history of the National Football League (NFL).

According to Cotter et al. (2001), the glass ceiling creates job inequality unexplained by a person's past 'qualifications or achievements.' The authors also note that such disparities are not explained by job-related characteristics of the employee, but by gender differences. Past experience and knowledge are seen as invalid when it comes to the glass ceiling. It is a reality for women, indicating no matter how much education or experience a woman receives, there is a real chance she will never achieve her highest professional aspirations. "The glass ceiling contradicts the nation's ethic of individual worth and accountability, the belief that education, training, dedication and hard work will lead to a better life," (*Federal Glass Ceiling Commission*, 1995, p 17).

Many share a cultural belief that women are not "supposed" to be in top-level power positions. At the uppermost level of business, a barrier exists that is seldom penetrated by women (*Federal Glass Ceiling Commission*, 1995). As men advance into top-level administrative positions in athletics, obstacles do increase, but men are not hindered by gender-based discrimination and stereotyping. "Despite identical education attainment, ambition, and commitment to a career, men still progress faster than women" (*Federal Glass Ceiling Commission*, 1995, p.23). Burton and Parker (2010) have noted that it is more problematic for women than for men to be promoted to levels of authority in workplaces. Women face more adversity, compared to men, as they progress up the corporate ladder.

Research has found that "over the last decade 95-97 percent of senior managers, vice presidents and above were men" (*Federal Glass Ceiling Commission*, 1995, p.22). Gender discrim-

ination is rampant in the workplace. "Corporate leaders surveyed and women and minorities participated in focus groups, researchers, and government officials, all agree that a glass ceiling exist and that it operates substantially to exclude minorities and women from top levels of management" (*Federal Glass Ceiling Commission*, 1995, p.217). Top-level officials, researchers and subordinates acknowledge the existence of the glass ceiling.

Leadership

Sound leadership is an intrinsic to the success of an organization. "Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northouse, 2012, p.5). According to Northouse (2012), there are several necessary aspects to successful leadership: influence, attention to common goals, and the ability to work well in groups. Leadership and management have similar components; both involve working with individuals or groups of people and accomplishing sought-out goals. Leadership and management complement one another. For example, leaders may articulate a vision and clarify long-term goals, influencing and empowering subordinates to work toward those goals. Management may be more detail and position oriented. Management plans and allocates monetary resources for the leader's vision, and also establishes rules, while creating incentives for subordinates.

If a person, male or female, possesses both leadership and managerial qualities, and effectively executes both skills, that person should have the opportunity to rise within an organization. Leadership is not defined by a person's gender, but rather by their ability to influence subordinates, direct attention to common goals, and to promote success with groups.

Women in Leadership

Women within leadership roles face many more barriers than men. Societal norms expect women to "take care" and men to "take charge." Women comprise only a small portion of management populations and are often viewed as representative of all women; they experience extreme pressure as their highly visible

performance is examined. They are often perceived through a gendered-stereotyped lens (Northouse, 2012).

Women in managerial positions often also experience the "glass wall" and the "glass cliff." The "glass wall" refers to a lateral move within an organization, or to another organization, undertaken as a catalyst to further promotion for males success within the domain of business (Davis, & Woodward, 1995). "The metaphor of a glass wall relates to the concept of occupational segregation. The metaphor also refers to lateral barriers that prevent employees from seeking the kinds of jobs that lead to promotions" (Browne & Giampetro-Meyer, 2003, p. 13). The "glass wall" typically sees women placed into positions considered "female appropriate." When employers or managers refuse to extend job opportunities and promotions to women, these employees are experiencing the "glass wall." They can see the thousands of jobs on the other side, within reach, but women simply cannot access them.

The "glass cliff" occurs when women are promoted to high positions, but these positions involve greater risk and a greater chance of failure. For example, Laurel Richie was named the President of the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) just as the WNBA's television ratings dropped. The monetary value of the league steadily declined, and the lack of a large and consistent fan base put Richie at a higher risk of failure than if she had been hired as the President of the financially-sound National Football League (NFL).

Stereotypes are unsupported beliefs people use to categorize other people. Stereotyping blocks women's advancement to top levels of athletic administration by generating erroneous generalizations about women and people of color, as well. If top-level management bases its views about employees on stereotypical or discriminatory beliefs, dangerous biases are formed. These biases exclude and disregard certain groups or individuals from advancement into future top-level managerial positions. "This group level of biases can be found to negatively impact women, much more than men. If a woman is also a person of color, she faces not just one level of inequality, but two" (Garica, 2009, p.7). Women of

color encounter a "concrete ceiling," resulting from inequality and stereotypical beliefs (Catalyst, 1999). Discrimination in male-dominated settings occurs through blatant and subtle stereotyping, questioning of women's competence, sexual harassment, and social isolation (Eagly & Carli, 2003).

Effective leadership rewards assertiveness, aggressiveness and independence, which are typically recognized as "masculine" characteristics. Women are expected to be light-hearted, dependent and nurturing. Researchers have noted that people associate masculine characteristics with successful managers (Burton & Parker, 2010; Frey, James, & Eitzen, 1991). Women who behave in a confident, aggressive, independent manner are seen as behaving outside of societal norms (Burton & Parker, 2010). Men who are seen as strong leaders in their organizations are often seen as being "direct," but women who possess the same communication style are seen as "punitive." In a meta-analysis comparing female and male leaders' effectiveness, men and women were found to be equally effective leaders, yet many felt that they were more effective in leadership roles that were congruent with their gender (Eagerly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995). Women are not expected to excel, nor to be successful in male-dominated domains such as athletic administration. Because of discrimination and stereotypical perceptions, women are often overlooked for opportunities of advancement to top-level management.

Eagly and Carli (2003) suggest that easing this quandary of role congruity requires female leaders to be tremendously competent, while reassuring others that they are conforming to expectations of "appropriate" female behavior. The double standard of requiring women to display extra competence, while remaining "feminine," makes it especially difficult for women to gain recognition for their abilities and outstanding achievements. Many of the hardships that women encounter derive from the incongruity of socially-expected norms, and stereotypes against women in leadership.

Figure 1. lists some of the characteristics typically attributed to women and men in leadership positions. Note that the masculine characteristics are viewed as the most positive and effective aspects of leadership.

Managerial Subroles Feminine	Managerial Subroles Masculine
Developing and mentoring	Problem Solving
Recognizing and rewarding	Disciplining
Communicating and informing	Delegating
Motivating and inspiring	Strategic decision making
Planning and organizing	Allocating resources
Supporting	Punishing
Providing corrective feedback	

Figure 1. Managerial Characteristics, Based on Gender (Atwater et al., 2004)

Northouse has written that:

Another oft-cited barrier to women's advancement is the presumed gender difference in commitment to employment and motivation to lead. However, research indicates that women show the same level of identification with commitment to paid employment roles as men do, and both women and men view their roles to be secondary to their roles as parents and partners" (2012, pp. 356-357).

Researchers and managers have proposed that women mangers may contribute, particularly in the following important aspects: communication and cooperation, affiliation and attachment, power, intimacy and nurturing. According to Grant (1988), women often have a different attitude toward power, compared to men. "For example, women are more likely to take an informal, as opposed to an official leadership role in organizations, and use terms such as 'facilitator' or 'organizer,' instead of 'leader'" (Northouse, 2012, p. 357). Effective leadership is not noted by gender, but by an androgynous mixture of traits including intelligence, social skills, initiative, and the ability to persuade (Northouse, 2012).

Women in Sports Administration

One of the objectives of the Feminist Movement was for women to attain equal levels of participation in historically male

dominated realm of social life (Hanis-Martin, 2006). Athletic administration embraces an eclectic skill set associated with leading, directing, finance budgeting, and evaluating within the context of an organization whose primary product or service is related to sport. Top-level managerial and leadership positions include: Executive Chief Officer, Owner, General Manager, Executive Director, Vice President, President and Athletic Director.

According to Burton and Parker (2010), despite the large increase of women participating in sports since the passage of Title IX, there is continued evidence of a decline in women's roles in athletic administration programs. This causes a gender gap that supports notions of gender disparity. On a professional level, women have remained factually underrepresented in these administrative management and leadership positions within sport (Lapchick, 2009).

The domain of athletics in the United States of America remains troublesome and static for women seeking to advance up the corporate ladder seeking managerial positions (Moore, Parkhose, & Konrad, 2001). Lapchick (2009) reports that the number of women CEOs and presidents of national sports organizations as the following: zero-percent (0%) in the National Basketball Association (NBA); one-percent (1%) in the National Football Association (NFL), and one-percent (1%) in Major League Baseball (MLB). Acosta and Carpenter (1996) specified that only 18% of female sports programs at the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) Division I institutions were led by women. Although one may think this is only an issue in the United States, the discrimination and plight of women in the top-level athletic directorial positions is a worldwide trend. Women represent only 36% of the commissioners for the Australian Sports Commission and less than a third of the council members in Sport England (Cunningham, 2007). The glass ceiling is a global pheonomenon.

Through time, research and awareness, the glass ceiling is becoming less of a burden for women. According to Lapchick's report in 2011, women are holding more leadership and top-level managerial positions, including vice presidents, executive directors and presidents. Women make up only 27% of managerial

positions in National Basketball Association (NBA), 21% in the National Football Association (NFL) and 18% in Major League Baseball (MLB). Pam Gardner, currently the President of Business Operations for the Houston Astros, is the only female CEO and President in Major League Baseball (MLB). There is no person of color as either CEO or team President of an MLB team (Lapchick, 2011).

Traditional gender roles for woman are gradually fading. While women held only 18% of managerial and administrative positions in the United States in 1972 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1982), by 2002 that percentage had increased to 46% (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Despite the increase, men, far more than women, occupy positions that have the authority to make decisions and the capacity to impact subordinates' salary and advancement (Smith, 2002). Although there have been improvements, there is still a lot of research—and work—to be done on gender disparities.

Gender-based discrimination against women in leadership positions in athletic administration is highly prevalent and wide spread. "Think manager, think male" is still often the mindset of both women and men, when referring to male-dominated work environments (Schein, 2001). Burton and Parker (2010) add that women may experience discrimination in sport organizations at the very onset of their careers as a result of gender stereotyping. The pro-male mentality in sport exists throughout the domain. Its ability to keep women within the margins of sports has been well established (Coakley, 2009). The practice of keeping men in top level managerial positions is part of an "old boys' network" that women have been prohibited from joining (Burton, & Parker, 2010). The lack of networking, resources and proper guidance have hindered women and their advancement in sport administration.

Women are viewed as less reliable leaders within athletic administration because of stereotypical perceptions and judgments concerning their abilities and experience. The misperceptions of women's capabilities have stunted their professional and career advancement into top-level managerial positions.

When asked about the most significant barriers to their advancement in athletic administration, women reported that as

athletic administrators they have experienced negative percep-
tions about their knowledge of intercollegiate athletics, questions
regarding their ability to be effective leaders and a lack of respect
(Burton & Parker, 2010, p. 4) Top-level managerial positions con-
tinue to be held by men who have encountered few, if any gender
roadblocks, while advancing within the domain of athletic admin-
istration. Researchers have identified and proven that gender is a
barricade preventing women from advancing vertically through
administrative hierarchies, into top-level leadership positions in
professional athletic administrations (Burton & Parker, 2010).

CONCLUSION

The invisible barrier known as the "glass ceiling" is in-
creasingly being examined, identified, challenged, and tested by
researchers. It is prevalent in athletic administration because of
gender-biases, gender discrimination, and stereotypes. Women are
often devalued as leaders, particularly in the field of athletics.

Researchers have suggested new leadership paradigms
that challenge the traditional societal norms. The paradigms have
become common in corporate America and athletic administra-
tion. For example, "transformational" and "charismatic" leader-
ship are newly established complimentary approaches to effective
leadership. Research has proven that "charismatic leaders differ
from other leaders by their ability to formulate and articulate an
inspirational vision. Their behaviors and actions foster an im-
pression that they, and their mission, are extraordinary" (Conger,
Kanungo, & Menon, 2000, p.747). Transformational leaders en-
gage with subordinates to create a rapport that raises the level of
motivation and value, both in the leader and the follower (Nort-
house, 2012).

If practitioners apply gender roles to these pervasive lead-
ership approaches, female leadership characteristics will be more
in concert with effective leadership styles than males.' This indi-
cates that women are just as capable as men to be leaders in ath-
letic administration. There is a need for more research to examine
the perceptions that reinforce the glass ceiling in athletic adminis-
tration. We must factually illustrate the relationship between gen-

der stereotyping and the gender gap in leadership positions. Furthermore, researchers must bring an awareness of the inequalities that women of color endure. The inequality is even more troublesome and static than the glass ceiling. Future research will help us identify barriers to advancement and advocate for change. We should all be mindful of the existence of such invisible, yet prevalent barriers, and be willing to overcome them. Results of this research could lead to the eventual removal of the glass ceiling for all qualified women in leadership positions.

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