Advancing Women in Leadership

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Full Length Research Paper

Preparing Sport Leaders of the Future to Lead Equitable, Diverse, and Inclusive Sport Organizations: The Insights and Strategies of Their Professors

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Researchers have documented the tangible and significant benefits to organizations having more diverse senior leadership teams. However, not all industries have embraced this practice. While gains have been made for women securing senior positions in professional sport, the rate of change has been slow, despite the fact that men and women equally aspire to these roles, and women outnumber men in many sport management educational programs. Systemic and structural barriers exist for women seeking senior leadership levels in the industry, a fact that women students seem to recognize more than men students (Gray & Weese, 2021). This descriptive study extends this research by engaging nine sport management professors in a focus group to determine if they understand the issue and, if so, what they were doing to ensure that their students were equipped to advance women in the sport industry. The six-phase framework by Braun & Clarke (2006) was used to identify three overall themes (i.e., Awareness, Barriers to Advancement, and Purposeful) from the focus group. The professors appreciated the issue and recognized the gender differences that exist between their men and women students. Importantly, professors shared activities and strategies they use to help ensure that the next generation of sport leaders value and advocate for equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) leadership practices. The professors agreed that they needed to continue to heighten the awareness and sensitivities of their students on the topics of EDI, and they all believed that they could do more to incorporate EDI perspectives in their classes and mentorship sessions. Ten recommendations are provided to assist current and future sport management professors in addressing this critical issue.

Keywords: sport leadership, higher education, focus group, gender, equity, diversity, inclusion

Despite the compelling equity and fairness arguments, coupled with the compelling evidence that diversity is linked to heightened organizational performance, women remain vastly underrepresented at senior leadership levels in sport (Burton, 2015; Burton & Leberman, 2017; Hancock et al., 2018; Kane & LaVoi, 2018; Walker & Bopp, 2010). Researchers (e.g., Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Burton et al., 2011; Forsyth et al., 2019; Kane & LaVoi, 2018; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012) have concluded that women face structural and institutional barriers that impede women's career progress. Some examples of these barriers are: glass ceiling, glass cliff, glass wall, leaky pipeline, homologous reproduction, discrimination, sexual harassment, stereotypes, and lack of confidence. Other scholars (Betzer-Tayar et al., 2017; Burton et al., 2012; Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018; Sartore & Cunningham, 2007) suggest that women frequently impose limits on their advancement. For example, not applying for senior leadership roles because they believe that they lack the qualifications. This also helps to explain low representation of women in executive suites (Zenger, 2018). Burton (2015) noted that women often do not seek, and consequently do not secure, mid-level leadership roles in sport organizations that would build

their experience profile and qualify them for the candidate pools of senior-level leadership in the sport's industry. Women frequently underestimate their abilities, minimize their contributions, and believe that they are deficient in the requisite skills and ability to secure these roles, in direct contrast to the practices of their men counterparts (Kay & Shipman, 2014). In addition, women are often disadvantaged due to restrictive human resource policies and top management that don't support gender equity (Spoor & Hoye, 2014) and family responsibilities (Eason et al., 2014; Hideg & Shen, 2019; Mondal, 2020). Consequently, women leave middle management roles, despite these roles being fundamental skill and experience building prerequisites for senior leadership roles. As a result, this further limits women's chances of getting to these senior leadership roles. The "pipeline" transporting individuals into the candidate pools for senior-level positions is often devoid of women (Helfat et al., 2006; Johnson, 2016; Lyness & Grotto, 2018). A deeper analysis, especially in the sports industry, would conclude that the pipeline leaks (Hancock & Hums, 2016).

As a result of these facts, women often report that they lack the women role models, mentors, and sponsors that are critical to leader development and career accession (Burton & Leberman, 2017; Hancock et al., 2018; Hoyt, 2010; Jones & Palmer, 2011; Lough & Grappendorf, 2007; Pfister & Radtke, 2006). This reality is especially problematic when considered in the context that women are outnumbering men in our institutions of higher education, specifically in the undergraduate and graduate sport management programs housed in many universities (Darnell et al., 2012; Demers et al., 2019).

Gray and Weese (2021) uncovered the perceptions that undergraduate students studying sport management within Canadian universities had regarding the barriers that women might face in advancing to senior leadership roles in the industry. Gray and Weese (2021) adapted the methods from a similar study conducted by Hancock et al. (2018) set in the United States. Gray and Weese (2021) found that both men and women students equally aspired to senior leadership roles in their careers. However, contrary to the Hancock et al. (2018) study, Gray and Weese (2021) found significant differences between the men and women students relative to their perceptions of the glass ceiling barriers that women might face in reaching these career heights. The students who identified as men did not fully understand the fact that women often face barriers to senior leadership roles, despite feeling that their women colleagues could overcome any obstacles they encountered on their way to the executive suites (Gray & Weese, 2021). The women students understood this reality and were cognizant of the fact that the barriers could limit their opportunities (Gray & Weese, 2021). Perhaps the next generation of sport leaders holds the key to making a positive and lasting change towards key concepts like equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). Therefore, the purpose of the current study was to better understand what students' professors may or may not be doing to enhance their students' understanding of the barriers women face to advance to senior leadership roles. A conversation about advancement of all was had, specifically about the benefits and richness of EDI and the need to be advocates for the concept.

Implementing an authentic EDI program has proven benefits to organizations in several areas, including performance (Theard et al., 2020), enhanced decision making, and a better understanding of the market (Cunningham & Melton, 2011). Having women sit on corporate boards leads to more diverse perspectives being mined when discussing issues, more prudent decision making, a decrease in negative conflict, and heightened financial returns (Desvaux et al., 2007; Seierstad et al., 2017, Seo & Huang, 2017). Hoobler et al. (2018) and Torchia et al. (2018) conducted research that also confirmed these findings. Why would an organization or industry overlook 50% of the population, especially in light of these demonstrated benefits of EDI, and according to Zenger and Folman (2012) women generally outperform men in leadership roles. Unfortunately, this continues to be the case in most of the sports industry (Burton, 2019). Change is needed. Perhaps the best place to lead

significant and sustainable change rests with preparing the next generation of sport leaders. Holvino et al. (2004) believed that there is significant merit in embedding an understanding and appreciation for the concepts of EDI at this impressionable stage.

Defining Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

EDI are challenging topics to teach, given the sensitivities to a perception of perceived reverse discrimination that critics of EDI uphold. Equity ensures that there is parity and fairness in the processes and policies of a group or organization; equity programs are implemented to help ensure that no historically underrepresented group is disadvantaged (Fuentes et al., 2020; Theard et al., 2020). Equity is often used interchangeably with equality, which is different, therefore, it is important to note the difference. Equality is providing equal opportunities to all (Women and Gender Equality Canada, 2021). Sport management professors could introduce and discuss these concepts in their classes and demonstrate its utility and application through case study analyses where systemic policies exist and under-represented groups are subsequently disadvantaged. This could be of specific benefit given the impact using case studies has in sport management classrooms (Dixon, 2008). Diversity refers to the composition of a group or organization (Fuentes et al., 2020; Theard et al., 2020). Leaders must ensure that their human resource policies align with legislation and that they attract and support distinctly different groups of individuals (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation) who will bring richness and diverse perspectives to the group and its decision-making processes (Cunningham, 2011). Sport management professors could draw attention to the typical composition of leadership teams in sport and highlight the success stories of organizations and industries that have benefitted from greater diversity and formalized diversity programs. Inclusion refers to the culture of a group and the degree to which members of a group or organization feel included, engaged, and recognized (Fuentes et al., 2020; Theard et al., 2020). Professors could discuss the role that leaders play through their words and actions in shaping and embedding an inclusive culture for their group or organization (Schein, 1990). Inclusive case studies and confirmatory research studies could be discussed in class to help students understand the value and importance of inclusion in sport management.

A review of staff directories revealed that women in president and vice-president senior leadership roles in professional sport organizations/major league sport in Canada, were vastly under-represented (Gray and Weese, 2021). The field needs to reflect on human resources policies and make substantial changes that will take time and hard work to implement, given the historical resistance to change in this area (Bernstein et al., 2020). The past diversity training programs have not been effective in significantly changing the EDI channel (Bernstein et al., 2020). Fuentes et al. (2002) believed that the long-term, systemic change rested with the next generation of leaders, namely today's students. The researchers of this study concurred but felt that it would be necessary to initially understand the

activities and strategies that professors are using to heighten awareness in the classroom and help get students to understand the need for leading sustainable change. The research question that guided this study was: What are professors doing or could be doing to prepare their students to advance to a career in senior leadership within the sport industry? The focus of the conversation was on women students but turned into a conversation about heightening the awareness of EDI within all that professors do in their classrooms and within all courses that they teach for all students to advance. The results of this research could have implications on the approaches sport management professors employ to prepare their students to advance their careers in the industry. The results could also help professors implement strategies to educate their students to be inclusive, appreciative of gender equity, and eventually lead more diverse and equitable workplaces.

Method

Research Design and Study Population

The qualitative data for this descriptive study was generated through conducting an online focus group with sport management professors (N = 9) from the nine universities offering undergraduate sport management programs in Canada. The researchers sought to understand what these professors were doing to prepare their students to advance their careers and lead sport organizations.

Data Collection Procedures

Qualitative data were collected following the procedures outlined by Patton (2014). Focus groups typically consist of open-ended questions with approximately five to eight participants (Patton, 2014). Focus groups are a cost-effective method of gathering deep insights into a research question and aiding researchers to bring in large groups of participants to focus on a specific issue (Patton, 2014). Data quality and richness are enhanced when participants can interact and elaborate on their opinions, confirm, or challenge the views of others, and elaborate on a discussion issue (Patton, 2014).

The nine professors all agreed to participate in the focus group research, and each received a letter of information and consent form in their recruitment package. The session was recorded with the professors' permission, and the researcher took field notes to ensure that data were accurately captured (Patton, 2014). Three introductory questions were asked at the start of the session to get the participants freely interacting (Patton, 2014). These questions were followed by a series of open-ended questions designed to uncover their perspectives on the topic. Participants were asked about the barriers their students perceive that women may face in advancing to senior leadership roles in sport. They then discussed their strategies for creating awareness of their students' issues and helping their students understand the barriers that women face. From this discussion, equality, equity, diversity, and inclusion were discussed with respect to teaching the benefits of EDI in the workplace. They also discussed their pedagogical strategies and what they could do to help bring

awareness to and improve the situation. The professors determined which areas warranted more in-depth discussion and deeper reflection. The researchers followed the guidance of Patton (2014) to ensure that respondents were not influenced by each other or succumbed to "groupthink," which can be an issue in focus group research. This was done by creating a safe place where all opinions were welcomed and encouraged and by utilizing the chat function of Zoom to express different opinions that one may not have felt comfortable sharing out loud.

Data Analysis Procedures

The focus group meeting lasted 75 minutes and 14 seconds in duration, was recorded, and then transcribed verbatim. The final transcription data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework to identify themes. The six-phase framework has been widely used throughout the psychology discipline to analyze qualitative data (Forsyth et al., 2019).

In phase one of the data analysis procedure, the researchers transcribed the audio file to a text file. The researchers listened to the recording of the focus group three times to ensure that the transcription was accurate. The researchers then re-read the data and highlighted the initial themes or ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researchers reviewed the focus group data three times to identify keywords, preliminary themes, sub-themes and confirmatory quotes. Phase two of the data analysis process involved taking the highlighted words and generating initial ideas of potential themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Phase three involved searching for the themes in the transcribed data by matching the quotes from phase one to the mind map from phase two of the data analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researchers utilized NVivo Coding Software 12 to break the themes down into a smaller mind map and place relevant quotes underneath the listed themes. Similar themes were grouped under one central theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Phase four of the qualitative data analysis procedure reviewed and refined the identified themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After the pockets of data were examined in NVivo to fulfill phase four, phase five of the data analysis procedure was completed, by developing a mind map. The mind map helped the researchers summarize and categorize the data to identify the emerging themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Consistent with the advice of Forsyth et al. (2019), two secondary reviewers were secured to review the data following a training and testing program independently. This helped ensure inter-rater reliability between the reviewers (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Results

Strategies were identified to help increase students' understanding and awareness of the barriers women often face in advancing to senior leadership positions in the sport industry. By engaging in these conversations with students, professors felt that it would assist the advancement of all students, specifically women in their pursuit of senior leadership roles. The professors confirmed that this is an area of importance to them, and they

believe that students need to know the importance and benefits of fostering equality, equity, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace and the leadership practices of future leaders in the industry. The three main themes identified in the data were: (a) Awareness; (b) Barriers to Advancement, and; (c) Purposeful. Twelve sub-themes were identified from these analyses, and all were captured in the model illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1

Professor Themes and Sub-Themes
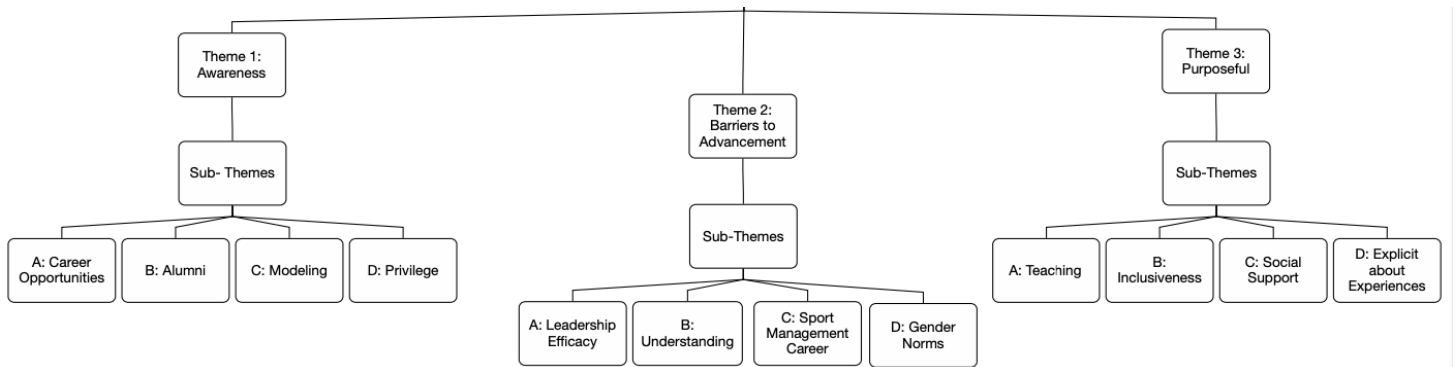
In this context, awareness is defined as a heightened understanding of the sport management profession, particularly the barriers women face when advancing in the profession. The professors identified a need for greater awareness of women's barriers to advancing in the sport industry. It was mentioned that this has been seen through The Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS, now known as Canadian Women & Sport) and the Sport Information Resource Centre (SIRC). These are advocacy groups that strive to increase awareness of gender equity and overall sport resources. Professor two highlighted this by saying, "[…] there is a lot going on […] right now with CAAWS leading the way and some of those other groups really pushing for equality and as a result there is a greater awareness […]". The professors highlighted this fact in the focus group session. Specifically, they discussed the advocacy programs available through these organizations and how they implemented this concept in their classes. They felt that these organizations and their coverage of the content were making a difference with their students.

However, while the professors confirmed that progress has been made, a discrepancy still remains. More work is needed, and the professors felt that the academy needs to double-down their efforts to heighten awareness and the need for change. They unanimously agreed that there is considerable work to be done in this area. This was specifically highlighted by professor one in the following quote:

> "…I think there is starting to be more awareness in general social inequities from students coming up generally about race and sexuality and gender this is still happening this is still a common situation of both men and women, and I would say not thinking that there are any gender inequities […]. When I push them to ask them for more significant examples give me more than one they can't and maybe that is when they kind of start to see that it is a bigger problem […]."

A deeper analysis of the data categorized under the Awareness theme was redefined as our sub-themes entitled: (a) career opportunities; (b) alumni; (c) modeling, and; (d) privilege. The "career opportunities" sub-theme captured a need for students to have a clearer understanding that there are jobs available in each sector and at multiple levels in the sport industry. Students need to be taught that there are opportunities at the non-profit level and in smaller communities, as opposed to solely working in professional sport, which is now dwindling due to fewer opportunities in this sector. Professor one stated:

> "[…] this industry is massive, and so maybe it is a rethinking of what actually is within the sport industry and helping students to understand the sort of number of opportunities that might come in front of them […] just the scope that possible careers are out there is maybe starting to become a greater understanding of what that might look like […] from students […]."

The professors spoke of widening the perspectives of students and exciting them to non-traditional and emerging career opportunity areas in sport management. They suggested that career opportunities for women and men could be increased through more work-integrated learning opportunities like internships and cooperative education programs. Experiential learning programs allow students to gain valuable experience in the field, better understand the rules of engagement in the workplace, increase the students' networks, and provide students with role models, mentors, and sponsors to advance their development. These can be especially beneficial to women, who tend to outnumber men in undergraduate and graduate sport management programs.

The next parts of the Awareness theme were the sub-themes: alumni, modelling, and privilege. Professors need to integrate case studies and examples of non-traditional and emerging sport management career options in sport management. Students need to learn about the success of women in sport management leadership roles. As Billy Jean King prophetically noted, "if I can see it, I can be it." On numerous occasions, the professors reaffirmed the need to profile women in senior leadership roles (e.g., as guest speakers, visuals, video presentations, case studies) in sport so both the men and women students can see women in these roles and better understand their career progression histories. The professors felt that having alumni fill these roles may be especially effective as current students might identify more closely with these individuals. The professors felt that these strategies would be impactful for students and establish a foundation for effectively engaging students in discussions on the importance and benefits of equitable, inclusive, and diverse workplaces. However, one example is not enough. One professor suggested that the same strategies must be employed for other equity-deserving groups (e.g., people of color, people with disability, and Indigenous populations). The professors discussed the need to challenge their students about the concept of privilege and help them recognize their privilege through critical thinking and reflection. This can be a challenging and oftentimes uncomfortable discussion, but one that is critical if we are going to make change and ensure more equitable, diverse, and inclusive sport leaders in the future.

The second overall theme from the focus group was labelled Barriers to Advancement. Four sub-themes were discovered from the Barriers to Advancement theme, and they were identified as: (a) leadership efficacy, (b) understanding, (c) sport management career, and, (d) gender norms.

"Leadership efficacy" and how it relates to the concept of self-efficacy was discussed at length in the focus group meeting. Colleagues felt that it was critical for the women and men sport management students to be confident in their abilities and their preparation for roles in the industry. Specifically professor six noted:

> "[…] how female young adults typically compared to their male counterparts feel as though with respect to self-efficacy and leadership efficacy that is lower than males so if they have a lower belief in themselves then compared to their male counterparts then how does that actually relate to how they feel as though they have advantages in actually attaining leadership roles regardless of actually advancing within those roles and then that leads me to the systemic barriers that females are up against […] I believe coming from a leadership self-efficacy standpoint that I am not sure that they feel that they have advantages and the literature also supports that once you get into the most senior it is less females for sure."

The professors suggested that this was especially true for their women students who, consistent with the research literature

(Sartore & Cunningham, 2007), placed self-imposed limits on themselves that impeded their career progression. One of the professors noted that their women students have lower levels of confidence than their male students, in spite of the fact that they have a higher ceiling for performance. They don't apply for roles that they don't feel 100% qualified for, a reality that they don't see in their male students. The professors spoke of the need to break this cycle. Bringing this to the attention of women students is important, as is the need to employ strategies to bolster the confidence levels of the women students. Having women role models, seeing more examples of women in these roles, and matching women students with mentors and sponsors might help address this problem.

Another sub-theme identified under the Barriers to Advancement theme was "understanding," Students need to understand gender norms and perceptual realities of men and women leadership. Professors drew on research (e.g., Shaw & Hoeber, 2003) that highlighted how men and women in leadership are perceived (e.g., men who are strong-willed are admired; women exhibiting the same qualities are labelled domineering). The professors felt that it was critically important to bring this research to the attention of students so these misperceptions can be addressed, deconstructed, and halted. In fact, women typically exhibit heightened levels of emotional intelligence and advanced communication skills which contemporary leadership researchers (Zenger & Folkman, 2012) believe are critical to effectiveness in the role.

The "sport management careers" sub-theme refers to the barriers that sport management students may face to gain and advance within careers in the sport management field. For example, long hours, low pay, and extensive travel become increasingly challenging for those with competing responsibilities. There are generally fewer work-to-life balance challenges in the early career years. Professor three speaks to this in the following quote:

> "[…] I think with entry level jobs they are typically getting those out of school when they are much younger with much less other work family conflict at that stage in life and so I think you know at that level hopefully we are seeing less disadvantage but I think then that shifts as women move on and have their other chapters of life whether it is child raising whether it is caregiving for parents or neighbor or others that is where we start to see some and I have heard from some of our Alumni certainly as they get into their late twenties early thirties and they are asked to move up into higher positions that is when they start to feel the intense pressure because a lot of those positions in the sport industry are not the typical nine to five jobs they […] involve a lot of travel they involve […] international calls at interesting hours and other constraints so I think that could be one of the reasons why we are not seeing entry level but then we are seeing some more challenge for women as they move through different management ranks."

However, researchers (Eason et al., 2014) suggest that things change for women as they enter the typical mid-career stage. While more couples engage in co-parenting, women still assume greater home responsibilities for child-rearing, and in some cases, parental support. They often feel greater pressure balancing career and family obligations (Eason et al., 2014; Hideg & Shen, 2019; Modal, 2020). Human resource policies are not often supportive of women. Sport management roles often require evening and weekend work. Women often feel intense pressure to balance their personal and professional lives. The professors felt that women often decide not to advance to mid-career or senior roles as a result. The professors felt that women and men students need to better understand this reality, and, when afforded the opportunity, influence human resource policies that are more equitable for both women and men. In addition to being more equitable, the host organizations can accrue the rich benefits that come with being a more equitable, diverse and inclusive unit (Cunningham & Melon, 2011; Theard et al., 2020). Overall, this observation is consistent with the literature that there are barriers in the sport management industry that usually transpire into mid and senior career levels (Burton, 2015; Burton & Leberman, 2017; Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; Hancock et al., 2018; Kane & LaVoi, 2018; Pfister & Radtke, 2009; Walker & Bopp, 2010).

The last sub-theme related to the Barriers to Advancement theme was identified as the sustained "gender norms" that continue to be prevalent in society. Professor four brought to the attention of the focus group that "[…] we live in a world with embedded gender norms in sport and within society as a whole and so I would hesitate to say that it is a fully equal landscape for graduates […]". This was also highlighted by several of the professors who participated in the focus group. The professors agreed that the barriers to entering the sport industry are not an issue for women. Men and women tend to enter the industry equally, which makes conceptual sense given the enrolments in college and university sport management programs. The issue emerges at the mid-career and senior leadership ranks in the industry. The professors agreed that as women progress to higher levels, there is more inequity due to embedded gender norms.

The final theme from the focus group session with the professors was identified as Purposeful. In the context of this study's analysis, the Purposeful theme refers to having mindfulness and meaning when educating students about the values of equity, equality, inclusion, and diversity. It is important that graduates understand these concepts and have the opportunity to learn and become aware of them as they navigate their careers in the field. They also need to understand the legal issues as well as the benefits to decision-making, organizational culture, and organizational effectiveness, when these values are upheld and practiced. Four sub-themes were identified under the Purposeful theme, and these sub-themes were: (a) teaching; (b) inclusiveness; (c) social support, and; (d) explicit about experiences.

The professors stated that increasing awareness through "teaching" the barriers that women face in career advancement is their responsibility. This was illustrated by professor seven who stated that "Obviously I think it is our responsibility to make them aware of those barriers and show them those inequalities […]". Students must be made aware of the barriers and their impact. Professor eight elaborated on this point by saying:

> "[…] has to be a part of everything we teach we can't have a section in our class on this because it then seems as though it is something that we have to address or deal with. It is similar to talking about indigeneity or any other kind of it just has to become part of what we do. If you are lecturing on organizational culture you have to talk about culture, the research that is done and shown that you have to have a diverse workforce that leads to increased performance, you know all of those kinds of things, but I think if you treat it as a section of a class it is not going to be successful."

They need to learn about barriers, stereotypes, gender inequities, inequalities, and issues regarding "inclusivity" and diversity in the classroom. They need to engage in reflection activities undertaken about experiences outside the classroom using real-world examples within and outside of the sports industry. Students can learn these concepts through a variety of pedagogical modalities, including, but not limited to, lectures, case study analyses, guest speakers, and guided reflection activities. The professors extended this point by stating that the concept of barriers needed to be integrated into everything that professors do in the classroom.

The sub-theme "social support" was evident when talking about how the barriers can continue to be minimized. Allyship between all colleagues and departments was discussed and deemed to be critical. Men and women must align to make significant and sustainable change. Colleagues across the academy must also be united in a quest to make this necessary change and aid women in overcoming barriers that impede their career progression. Students need to know how to build guiding coalitions to generate the momentum needed to make this necessary change (Kotter, 1996). Allyship needs to be taught to students to increase their understanding of the barriers to career advancement and allow both men and women students to recognize and appreciate how they can support others who encounter these barriers along their career paths. The professors also noted that their male students needed to understand the concept of allyship, and the professors agreed to do all they could to heighten student awareness and encourage them to also help lead change to reverse the historical patterns of stunted women advancement in sport leadership. Both men and women must be part of the solution and lead necessary change in this area (Kotter, 1996).

The final sub-theme in the Purposeful theme was identified as being "explicit about experiences." This theme represents continuing the discussion about barriers and stating that they still happen, and it is important to be honest about these experiences.

Honesty in accepting that women are still facing these barriers. The professors were aware of the barriers that women face to advance in the sport industry. Additionally, they discussed a strong commitment to lead change in the ways that they prepare their students. They pledged to heighten efforts to teach the concepts of EDI so their students and future leaders better understand the concept and the rich benefits of EDI programs. They reinforced the need to highlight the inequities that exist for their women students and offered hope that their students will help lead change in this area. However, it will take many who share this commitment to change. It was also clear to the professors that not only women face these barriers. They reinforced the point that awareness needs to be raised and strategies employed to level the playing field for other minority groups (e.g., people of color, indigenous groups, and people who experience a disability) as well as initiate discussion to stop other forms of discrimination (e.g., ageism, sexism, racism). As well, an allyship needs to be developed between individuals with gender-based privilege and those who do not, to continue the conversation and make greater necessary changes.

Discussion

The research question that guided this study aided the researchers in determining what professors are or could be doing to prepare their students to advance to a career in senior leadership within the sport industry. Multiple themes and sub-themes were identified, but four clear conclusions can be made from this data. Professors reported that they are: (a) educating their students about barriers faced to advancement in their classrooms by modelling them through imagery and examples, ultimately leading to a potential increase in students' understanding of the barriers; (b) helping students to gain different perspectives regarding careers to which they could potentially advance in the sport industry by bringing in alumni to explore barriers they have faced; (c) being purposeful in their teaching of the barriers where they emphasize meaningful discussions and keep students out of their comfort zone to increase learning, and; (d) learning more about the barriers women face and being honest and explicit about the experiences of women when advancing in the sport industry and academia which will help them better educate their students.

The results of this research offer significant implications for the preparation of students, and action today could help rectify systemic inequity for future generations of sport leaders. Researchers confirm that women are vastly underrepresented at senior leadership levels in sport management (Burton, 2015; Forsyth et al, 2019; Lough & Grappendorf, 2007; Sartore & Cunningham, 2007; Walker and Bopp). Advocacy literature that supports the fact that women do face barriers to advancement is prevalent in Canadian organizations such as Canadian Women and Sport (formerly CAAWS) and the Sport Information Resource Centre (SIRC). The programs and services that these organizations offer are bringing more awareness to gender equity in sport and it is possible that students are becoming even more aware as a result of these organizations' initiatives.

When it comes to career progression, professors stated that they are being honest about what a career in sport management entails. They are making students aware of the long hours, evening and weekend commitments, and employment realities (Harris et al., 2015). The professors in the current study recognized and stated many of the barriers that female students and alumni face to advancement (Forsythe et al., 2019), that appear to be causing the gender inequity that is present in senior leadership positions in the sport industry. Even when women reach senior leadership positions, they are often unfairly scrutinized and face unfair criticism for their decisions and actions (Ryan & Haslam; 2005; Shaw and Hoeber, 2003).

One of the main themes in the focus group was increasing the understanding of the barriers for students through examples, imagery, and alumni. To make any change, professors have to provide social support for each other and be explicit about their experiences towards the barriers to reduce them; a significantly important point that was mentioned in the focus group. Through continuing the conversation, barriers will be made evident to students, inside and outside of the classroom.

Students' understanding of barriers increases when they are pushed outside of their comfort zones, and thus, they become better prepared for their future. The professors who participated in this study encouraged discussions that promote gender equity in the university classrooms. Majority of the professors stated that they teach students about barriers and inequities. They also attempt to heighten awareness of diversity and inclusiveness through the examples of women in power in sport that they showcase in their class content and visual representations. A point that was discussed in the current study was that women alumni are being brought into classes to serve as role models. This has also proven to be an effective intervention within the field of sport management research (Hoobler et al., 2018). Perhaps more could be done to engage these professionals as mentors. The importance of mentorship is emphasized in the literature, especially for young women (Block & Tietjen-Smith, 2016; Bower & Hums, 2009; Clarke, 2011). An analysis of the literature base in this area highlights the difficulties women often experience in networking within the sports industry (Aman et al., 2018; Burton, 2015; Shaw & Frisby, 2006; Shaw & Hoeber, 2003). This is especially problematic if there are few women in the industry. Women do not have access to the same number of women peers, mentors, advocates, and sponsors (Darvin et al., 2019; Deane et al., 2015; Weiner & Burton, 2016). The field is imbalanced and offers fewer sustainable career options for women who seek greater balance in their lives (Harris et al., 2015; Savickas, 2005).

Forsyth et al. (2019) noted that the success of women achieving both sport and general business employment should be promoted and having an Alumni Day where women in sport come into a professor's classroom to inspire other young women would prove beneficial. Vianden and Greg (2017) specifically highlighted the impact on student's knowledge that incorporating diversity and inclusion materials into course content, fieldwork,

and internships had on students. Kay and Shipman (2014) commented on the lack of confidence that women hold for themselves compared to men. As Darvin et al. (2019) noted, securing a sponsor is an especially valuable strategy for women seeking to advance in senior leadership. Hopefully, the increased mentorship from alumni, peers, and professors, can potentially increase the confidence of women to continue to achieve their goal of senior leadership. It is evident from the results of Gray and Weese (2021), that women are striving to achieve senior leadership positions in the sport industry, as 57% of women participants stated they have career aspirations for a senior leadership role in sport. If more professors outside of those who participated in the focus group of this study continue this important discussion piece and create a safe space for allyship, mentorship, and networking to happen in their classroom, women may have more of the tools (i.e., confidence, networking, understanding of the barriers, allies, strategies for securing mentors, and sponsors) to achieve their goals of senior leadership and break through the glass ceiling to advancement (Zenger, 2018).

As per recent findings from Burton (2019), the metaphor glass ceiling implies to readers that women will not reach the top when they are aiming for a senior leadership position, that the barriers they face will be from a distance, and that the barriers are just something that can't be overcome. This is not true, given there are a number of women in top leadership positions currently and in sport specifically, who have spoken about the barriers they have faced and overcome (Burton, 2019). There are numerous barriers that women who are in senior leadership positions in sport have faced, which are extremely real, noticeable, and not at all indirect (Burton, 2019). Women are clearly getting to the top levels of the leadership hierarchy in sport (Burton, 2019), but not in proportions commensurate with the proportionate numbers seen in sport management educational programs (Simmons, 2011).

Implications for Sport Management

Reflecting on the results of this study, it is evident that equity, equality, diversity, and inclusion need to be a part of the discussion in all sport management classrooms. This was highlighted in the discussions of the current study. The underrepresentation of women will not change without the incorporation of EDI into classroom pedagogy and activity. However, teaching the concepts of equity, equality, diversity, and inclusion goes beyond a discussion and should become a part of pedagogy (e.g., diverse readings, guest speakers, and images), as found in DeLuca et al. (2021) and Vianden and Gregg (2017). These are simple practices that can be incorporated into the sport management classroom and, ultimately, make a difference at leadership levels when students graduate from higher education and take on organizational roles. DeLuca and colleagues (2021) conducted a study about students' perceptions of diversity and inclusion and state the same call to action regarding incorporating diversity and inclusion within course content to promote idea sharing, inclusive spaces, and display multiple

perspectives. They will know the importance of EDI from their classroom experiences, and they will employ the same tactics when hiring, leading, mentoring, sponsoring, and networking in their future endeavors.

The results of this investigation highlight the complexity of the situation, and men need to be included in the conversation and educated about the barriers to overcome their possible denial, and views on acceptance of the prevalence of barriers in organizational life (Gray & Weese, 2021). A number of undergraduate and graduate students studying sport management will advance into decision-making positions. Therefore, they need to clearly understand the need for equality, equity, inclusion, and diversity in the workplace. They need to be sure that they serve as mentors and sponsors of men and women colleagues. Women must also be strategic and employ strategies (i.e., preparation, securing a sponsor) that have been proven successful in advancing in the industry to avoid resignation (Darvin, et al., 2019). Women students need to remain resilient beyond their academic years. Although, resilience alone will not be the only answer to breaking down systemic issues and establishing change. The strategies and insights from the professors who participated in this study should be used to facilitate change at the undergraduate and graduate levels of higher education.

Based on the results of this study, the researchers recommend that sport management professors:

1. Introduce the concept of EDI and allyship into the early stages of the sport management students' program of study and integrate and apply the concept in senior-level courses.
2. Integrate the concepts of emotional intelligence and emotional literacy into the curriculum so men and women students better understand, appreciate, and commit to delivering more inclusive leadership practices after entering the workforce.
3. Expand work-integrated learning experiences (e.g., internships, co-operative education, practice) into the curriculum to provide students with the opportunity to hone and temper their skills, gain useful experiences that they can build upon, develop stronger networks, and evaluate the relative absence of women in the senior leadership ranks and the need for systemic change.
4. Work with students and campus placement offices to expand the career options for students in the sport management area (i.e., beyond traditional high-performance sport settings).
5. Ensure that visual representations, case studies, and guest speakers used in classes are purposely diverse on multiple axes (e.g., gender, race, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, experience, tenure).
6. Bring successful people of diverse genders who have a demonstrated record for promoting greater diversity in

their leadership teams to the classrooms to serve as role models and advocates.

7. Create a pool of diverse professional mentors and match them with sport management students from equity-deserving groups (on the condition that the students agree to "pay it forward" and serve in a similar capacity once they graduate).

8. Implement targeted strategies to help bolster the confidence of women students so they actively pursue opportunities that men counterparts actively pursue (sometimes with fewer qualifications and experience).

9. Include course content on leading change (e.g., Kotter, 1996) to help future sport leaders change the channel on the employment realities for women seeking senior leadership roles in the industry.

10. Unite as sport management academicians to better ensure that current and future sport management leaders eradicate discriminatory and limiting practices of the past and help ensure more inclusive and welcoming employment realities in the future.

Although professors in this study have indicated they are educating their students on the barriers women face, it may not be enough. The teaching of barriers that women face has highlighted the importance of promoting knowledge of EDI (Seirstad et al., 2017). Continuing the conversation regarding the benefits of a diverse leadership team in higher education will be vital to promote change for the next generation of sport leaders. Sport management professors have indicated in the focus group that this is something that they try to do in all of their courses, not just one. Increasing awareness, education on the barriers, and being purposeful in teaching will help move the needle forward and create change. An intersectional approach to teaching diversity will be evident as found by both DeLuca et al. (2021) and Viandaen and Gregg (2017). For example, guiding discussions that go beyond topics of gender equity and equality and speaking to various forms of diversity such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and age, are both warranted and necessary (Stowe & Lange, 2018).

The results can be helpful in informing both preparation and practice. Research often generates more questions than answers, and in that spirit, a number of areas for future research are highlighted. In the focus group session a statement that was brought up was that not only women experience these barriers. Thus, further research should be conducted on how other groups of people such as indigenous people, people who experience disabilities, people of color, and other visible minorities perceive and experience barriers to advancing in the sports industry.

A case study analysis could be an interesting methodological approach to see how equity, equality, diversity, and inclusion are being used in the classrooms to provide helpful resources for other professors who may not know where to start, or who may not be comfortable doing so. Some professors may feel they do not have the resources or knowledge to speak to topics that surround equity, equality, diversity, and inclusion and therefore,

they avoid it. It would be interesting to conduct an additional focus group with professors to determine the resources from which they would benefit to better include equality, equity, diversity, and inclusion in their teaching pedagogy. Providing professors with the tools and professional development courses to teach these topics would improve their success in classroom discussions (Brooks et al., 2013; DeLuca et al., 2021; Stowe & Lange, 2018).

In addition to exploring the barriers that other historically marginalized groups face, it is important to conduct research with groups of people who have been historically marginalized to determine how change can be made, and how they can be better supported both in higher education and leadership to have equitable tools and resources to achieve success. When researchers find the solutions, they need to then engage those who are in privileged positions to create and develop change. Overall, change will be a collective effort and assistance and commitment from all stakeholders will be required to make a significant and sustainable difference.

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