

*Full Length Research Paper*

## **“Discrimination? Low Pay? Long Hours? I am Still Excited:” Female Sport Management Students’ Perceptions of Barriers toward a Future Career in Sport**

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Accepted January 14, 2015

**Women continue to be underrepresented in the management and leadership ranks of sport. Researchers have worked towards understanding the various challenges and barriers women face in the sport industry. This study sought to expand that research taking a new angle to explore the underrepresentation of women in sport by examining female undergraduates’ perceptions of their future careers within the sport industry. Three focus groups with a total of 16 participants were utilized to gather data. Two investigators coded and searched for emerging themes from the focus group transcripts. The following themes emerged in this study: (a) perceptions regarding potential job discrimination (i.e., gender stereotypes, gender discrimination), (b) perceptions regarding industry-specific concerns (i.e., difficulty networking, job market constraints, long work hours, low salary range, multiple-role conflict, excitement regarding entrance into the field), and (c) overall excitement regarding future careers in sport.**

**Keywords:** women in sport, women and sport careers, job discrimination

### **Introduction**

Due to the passage of Title IX legislation, educational institutions receiving federal funding were prohibited from discriminating against students due to gender, thus opening up a world of educational opportunities for American women. In 1970 prior to the passage of Title IX legislation, 57% of the 8.5 million college students in the United States were male (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Furthermore, by 2007 the enrollment of females in postsecondary educational institutions increased 195% with females making up the majority or 57% of the college student population (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). King (2006) suggested this is not due to a decrease in the number of men enrolling in college, but rather the increase of men enrolling in college is outpaced by the increase in women enrolling. While females have experienced increased access to male-dominated academic fields such as medicine (51% female) and other health science programs (53%), female enrollment in sport management academia is not equivalent to their male peers.

Sport management is an academic degree that is noted as one that prepares students for the sport industry (Masteralexis, Barr,

& Hums, 2009) as it is a specific sport degree that gets students ready for the uniqueness or “intricacies peculiar to the sport industry” (p. 19). The sport-specific curriculum has evolved extensively due to the exponential growth of the industry and the need for a systematic academic program to educate future sport professionals. However, Hums (1994) found men comprised 75% of sport management students, while women comprised 25%. Moore, Parkhouse, and Conrad (2004) also reported an underrepresentation of female undergraduate students in sport management as nearly one-half of faculty respondents indicated less than 40% of their program undergraduates were women. Finally, Jones and Brooks (2008) found that 40% of sport management programs reported a female student population of 20% or less.

The underrepresentation of female students mirrors the professional sport industry, which has received considerable attention in the literature; particularly senior administration and athletic directors in intercollegiate athletics (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012; Cheslock, 2008; Drago, Hennighausen, Rogers, Vescio, & Stauffer, 2005; Lapchick, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2013; Whisenant, 2003). Acosta and Carpenter (2012)

reported the proportion of women head coaches had declined from 90% in 1972 to 42.9% in 2012, while the percentage of female athletic directors declined to 20.3% from an estimated 90% during the same period.

In the Race and Gender Report Card, researchers continued to demonstrate the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions within professional leagues. Lapchick (2013) noted that the NFL reported having only 28% of women in management, while in Major League Baseball (MLB) 38% of Major League Baseball's front office is comprised of women. Further, the National Basketball Association (NBA) and Major League Soccer (MLS) reported 42% of women hold positions in their management ranks (Lapchick, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2012d).

Considering the underrepresentation of women within sport management undergraduate programs and the sport industry, it is important to examine the perceptions of female undergraduate sport management students who are likely to become the future work force in the sport industry. Therefore, in this research, we focused on female sport administration students' perceptions towards their future careers in sport. Examining the perceptions of female students may provide some additional insight into the factors that influence the disproportion of women working in sport. Results may also provide valuable information to assist sport academic and industry leaders in achieving gender parity within sport organizations.

### **Framework**

Swanson, Daniels, and Tokar (1996) found certain perceived career barriers impact the vocational choices of college students. These barriers, whether the number perceived or the type, can influence the decisions students make about entering a particular field. This finding led to the creation of a standardized measurement referred to as the Career Barriers Inventory (CBI) (Swanson, et. al, 1996). The CBI was used to group applicable career-barrier literature for several disciplines, including psychology, counseling, business, and sport. The CBI's scale measures the following 13 barriers: sexual discrimination, lack of confidence, multiple-role conflict, conflict between children and career demands, racial discrimination, inadequate preparation, disapproval by significant others, decision-making difficulties, dissatisfaction with career, discouragement from choosing nontraditional careers, disability/health concerns, job market constraints, and difficulties with networking or socialization. In the following sections, twelve of the 13 barriers that were deemed the most applicable to the current investigation were included. The only barrier excluded was concern over disability or health reasons related to one's career due to the scope of this study including the nature of positions in management.

The CBI described sexual discrimination as "experiencing sexual discrimination in the hiring for a job" (Swanson et al., 1996, p. 225) and included items related to gender stereotypes

that hinder the entrance and advancement of women in the workplace. Steele, James, and Barnett (2002) found undergraduate students in male dominated fields perceived higher rates of discrimination than their female counterparts in other majors. Kirchmeyer (2002) found that sexual discrimination caused mid-career women to have fewer promotions and raises than their male counterparts. Quarterman, Dupress, and Willis (2006) found that most female managers in male-dominated occupations believed that success for women was attributable to the possession of certain masculine personality traits.

Discrimination in the workplace has also been found to discourage the entrance of women in male-dominated occupations such as sport. For instance, Grappendorf and Lough (2006) found that a majority of female athletic directors believed gender bias and discrimination contributed toward the underrepresentation of women pursuing a career such as collegiate athletic director. Grappendorf and Lough also reported that 77% of female athletic directors believed the perception that women cannot lead men was a barrier to their overall career success. These findings reiterate that sexual discrimination persists in the workplace.

Lastly, with regards to discrimination, there is a plethora of evidence that notes the under-representation of people of color within sport management. Lapchick (2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2013) has noted the lack of Latinos, Asian Americans, African Americans and those classified as 'other' in Major League Baseball, Major League Soccer, the National Football League, the National Basketball Association, and college sport. It is consistently noted that the higher up one goes in the league offices (e.g. the higher positions with power) the less likely it is to find a person of color.

Within the management of sport, women are often found in positions that are limited in power where they have less decision-making responsibilities (Whisenant, Pedersen, & Obenour, 2002). Grappendorf, Pent, Burton, and Henderson (2008) examined Senior Woman Administrator's (SWA's) perceptions regarding decision-making, and particular in the area of finances within an athletic department. Experiences with financial decisions and matters is particularly important to career advancement for women in intercollegiate athletic administration (Grappendorf, Lough, & Griffin, 2004). Therefore, women's roles may be limited in that they are not receiving experience with key decisions being made, ultimately limiting their abilities to move up.

Lack of confidence or feeling inadequately prepared were other barriers included in the CBI specific to educational and vocational choices and included statements similar to, "not feeling confident about my ability on the job" (Swanson et al., 1996, p. 225). Yang and Gybsers (2007) studied male and female college seniors and found that a lack of readiness and external support negatively influenced the self-confidence needed for the transition from student to working professional. Whitmarsh, Brown, Cooper, Hawkins-Rodgers, and Wentworth

(2007) found a positive correlation between gender representation and self-confidence among women in gender-neutral and male-dominated occupations. In other words, women in gender-neutral careers were found to possess higher career self-confidence than women working in male-dominated vocations.

Multiple-role conflict (e.g., traditional gender role responsibilities) was reflected in the CBI and included statements similar to “stress at work affecting my life at home” (Swanson et al., 1996, p. 225). Multiple-role conflict was found to impact the educational and vocational decision-making process, as well as influence the confidence and career motivation of working women. Almquist and Angrist, (1993) found that female postsecondary students had more difficulty making occupational plans than men which the researchers attributed to stronger desires by women to have a family. Further, Cinamon and Rich (2004) found female college students were more willing to change their educational and vocational interests and ambitions to avoid multiple-role conflict. Unlike men, women who did not alter career aspirations for family responsibilities were more likely to perceive the necessity to make compromises in other important life areas (Whitmarsh et al., 2007). This conflict can ultimately create a dissatisfaction with one’s career.

Conflicts between family and work responsibilities were found to negatively influence women’s career motivation (Gottfredson, 1996). Specific to sport, Grappendorf, et al. (2004) found that of the female collegiate athletic directors with children, nearly half (47%) believed that multiple-role conflict was a barrier facing women interested in head athletic director positions. Equally noteworthy, female athletic administrators believed that men received greater leeway in meeting work and life demands; whereas women with the same responsibilities were seen in a negative light (Drago et al., 2005).

The conflicts between having children and fulfilling career responsibilities encompassed comments comparable to “feeling guilty about working while my children are young” (Swanson et al., 1996, p. 226). Women were found to be more likely than men to disrupt or discontinue vocational careers to focus on the care of their children (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987). Although childrearing conflicts have been found to influence the career entrance and advancement of women, research has noted the impact is greater for women in male-dominated occupations. Quimby and O’Brien (2004) found college women were more likely than men to choose gender-neutral vocations, due to the perception that male-dominated occupations resulted in more work-family conflicts.

Discouragement in choosing a nontraditional career and disapproval from significant others was also included in the CBI (Swanson et al., 1996). Research suggests that the value an individual places on potential educational and occupational choices can be influenced by their socialization experiences (e.g., gender-role beliefs). Eccles (1987) speculated that

individuals categorically reject educational and vocational options that do not align with their gender-role schema. Further, a positive correlation was found between self-confidence and support from others. For example, Whitmarsh et al. (2007) suggested parental support has the greatest impact on an individual’s self-confidence as women in gender-neutral occupations recalled strong parental messaging about what were excellent careers for women. Additionally, parental discouragement in the pursuit of traditionally male-dominated occupations impacted their self-confidence negatively from these occupations (Whitmarsh et al., 2007). Perceptions of family members more generally (i.e., sibling, parents, etc.) were positively correlated with an individual’s confidence to pursue an occupation among high school and college-aged women (Caldera, Robitschek, Frame, & Pannel, 2003). Whitmarsh et al. (2007) found that women in traditionally male-dominated occupations reported being told by others that they would be unable to appropriately manage their work and family responsibilities. Specific to sport, Yiamouyiannis (2008) found that female head coaches of men’s sports cited feedback and support from family and peers as one of the top career motivators.

Job market constraints refer to the potential lack of demand in the workforce for one’s particular degree or area of study and/or specialty (Swanson et al., 1996). With the enormous growth of sport management programs being offered in the United States, it may be a concern that there are simply too many programs producing too many graduates for the available jobs in the industry. Sport management as an academic major did not exist until the late 1960’s (Masteralexis, et al., 2009) but the growth of programs, however has increased significantly. Further, in competing for jobs in sport, students in other related degrees and majors such as marketing, communications, etc., also compete with sport management majors for jobs in the field.

Finally, perceptions related to difficulty networking as a barrier in educational and vocational choices result in being “unsure of how to advance in my career” (Swanson et al., 1996, p. 228). Lent, Brown, and Talleyrand (2002) found that perceptions regarding the ability to network can affect the career choices of college seniors. Participants enrolled in technical colleges reported access to mentors as a factor influencing their pursuit of career goals. Specific to sport, 54% of NCAA Division II female athletic directors reported difficulties due to the “good ole boys’ network” (Quarterman et al., 2006). Lough and Grappendorf (2007) found that 19% of Senior Women Administrators (SWA) regarded the “old boys’ network” (p. 201) as a barrier to their career advancement.

## Method

The purpose of this study was to examine undergraduate female sport management students’ perceptions toward their future careers in sport. Examining the perceptions of female sport management students provided insight into a population that is

likely to become members of the future workforce in the sport industry.

Three focus groups comprised of undergraduate female sport management students at a large public institution in the Southeast United States were used to collect qualitative data. Focus groups are defined as a “carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment” (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 5). Krueger and Casey (2000) found the best use of focus group instrumentation was to determine the perceptions and feelings of people about certain issues. To allow participants to feel comfortable in disclosing personal information in a group setting, they were given aliases to use throughout focus group discussions. Additionally, focus group participants were asked to sign a statement of confidentiality. Krueger and Casey (2000) also recommended that a study employ several focus groups. Therefore, three different focus group discussions, with a total of 16 different participants were included in this study.

Each focus group was audio recorded and transcribed to ensure greater accuracy during the data collection and analysis process (Patton, 1987). Additionally, participants were asked to use their alias names prior to responding to a question to help with the accuracy of the transcription process. Notes were also taken to capture additional information on non-verbal participant behavior. At the conclusion of the interview, the notes were reviewed to assist in quality control and further guaranteeing the accuracy of the data obtained (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Patton, 1987).

### **Procedures**

Two sport management professors were contacted for permission to speak to their female sport management students prior to their classes. Once access was attained, the purpose of the focus groups was explained to each participant, and they were asked to sign a consent form if they were willing to voluntarily participate. At the onset of focus group interviews, participants were given a survey that asked for demographic information (e.g., age, race, marital status, number of dependents), educational background (e.g., grade level, grade point average, collegiate athletic participation), and future career expectations (e.g., entry-level salaries and work experiences). This instrument was utilized in addition to the focus groups to provide more specific information about the participants (Oblinger, 2003). Participants were then given aliases to protect their identity. Responses were later matched to participants’ aliases to provide additional insight into a given participant’s perceptions.

A questioning route was utilized to elicit the feelings and perceptions of participants, without biasing participants’ responses (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The expert-approved questioning route incorporated open-ended questions to encourage open dialogue among participants. The questioning route was designed as follows: (a) opening questions, (b)

introductory, (c) transition, (d) key questions, and (e) ending questions. The opening question was used to encourage everyone’s individual participation within the discussion. The introductory and transition questions were then used to initiate discussion about the topic under investigation. The ending questions were used to help enable participants to reflect on their comments, as well as add any additional last minute comments. Probing questions were also used to better understand and confirm participant responses (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

### **Participants**

A convenience sample of female undergraduate sport management students from a large NCAA Division I institution in the Southeast were asked to participate in the focus group. Randomization was not needed due to the purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of the group rather than generalize to a broader population (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Participants were grouped into three pre-determined focus group dates based on participants’ availability. The first focus group consisted of seven participants, the second consisted of three participants, and the final group was comprised of six participants. Focus group participants ( $N = 16$ ) were all in the age range of 20 to 22, were single, and had no children or dependents. The majority of focus group participants ( $n = 15$ ) were White/Caucasian with only one African-American student. Nearly half of focus group participants ( $n = 7$ ) expected a starting salary from \$35,000 to \$39,000, six more expected to earn less, and two participants expected to make \$40,000 or more. All focus group participants ( $N = 16$ ) reported having at least one year of relevant work experience, with half of them reporting they have four or more years overall work experience.

### **Data Analysis**

Two investigators coded and searched for emerging themes from the focus group transcripts. This was completed by identifying statements related to the perceptions of female sport management students in relation to their future careers in sport. Each statement was assigned a code (e.g., industry-specific concerns) that best summarized the quote. Then a label (e.g., difficulty networking, job-market constraints, long work hours, low salary range) was assigned to capture the essence of the quote. If any discrepancies in the codes were found, a third investigator would have been used until an agreement was reached (Krueger & Casey). However, there were no discrepancies, and thus a third member was not needed.

Credibility (i.e., internal validity), transferability (i.e., external validity), and dependability (i.e., reliability) were all addressed. Credibility was established through the authenticity of giving a “fair, honest, and balanced account of social life from the viewpoint of someone who lives it every day” (Neuman, 2000, p. 31). Further, to increase credibility two coders were utilized and interpretations were discussed by the researchers. Additionally, although the purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of a sample of undergraduate female sport

management students and not to generalize about an entire population (Merriam, 1998), necessary steps were taken to increase the external validity. To provide detailed information, respondents' quotes from the focus group transcriptions were used to help illustrate the coding and themes. "Thick description" (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993) was utilized to validate the meaning of participants' responses and the investigators' interpretations. Informal member checking, in which the investigator verbally summarized a participant's statement, was used throughout the focus group process to validate the accuracy of participants' responses (Erlandson et al., 1993).

## Results

The following themes emerged in this study: (a) perceptions regarding potential job discrimination (i.e., gender stereotypes, gender discrimination), (b) perceptions regarding industry-specific concerns (i.e., difficulty networking, job market constraints, long work hours, low salary range, multiple-role conflict, excitement regarding entrance into the field), and (c) overall excitement regarding future careers in sport. Qualitative results from focus group discussions are presented in subsections below.

### Potential Job Discrimination

A theme that arose from female sport management undergraduate students was a perception of potential job discrimination. The following sub-themes emerged regarding potential job discrimination: (a) gender stereotypes, (b) gender discrimination.

**Gender Stereotypes.** Participants indicated dealing with negative gender stereotypes associated with sport. In fact, statements indicate the participants were aware that sport is still a very traditionally male dominated domain and that they would have to work to break free from those stereotypes. Mary indicated, "[Because] you're a girl you're not going to be looked at as knowing enough about sports." She further explained, "Guys look down on girls in sport because they don't think they know as much." Mary reported having experienced this since "high school [guys] picked on you during P.E. because you're a girl." Pam agreed with these sentiments explaining that her female friends "who love exercising and sports and going to games" believe they must "enjoy it on a different level" because they view sports as "dominated by guys." Kris explained, "Growing up as a woman, you couldn't really like sports and really know a lot about it... the guys kind of look at me like I'm crazy."

Kristy indicated experiencing the same stereotype and offered suggestions on overcoming the stereotype saying, "Talk on their level [so] they will learn to respect you and know that you do know what you are talking about." Katie explained that women were placed in "front offices in either community relations or something to do with fundraising, positions where [they] have you out in public due to belief that [building relationships] is what women can do best." Katie was referring

to the stereotypical belief that women are better at nurturing and fostering relationships and would be expected to fill that role in sport. All five of these women display frustration with the stereotype of being female equating to lack of knowledge about sport. Their experiences show the added pressure to prove themselves in the field.

**Gender Discrimination.** Participants reported perceptions related to facing gender discrimination in their future careers in sport. Mary indicated she "worried that [she] might not get the higher job because [she's] looked down upon because [she is] a girl." She added:

If I decide I want to go into coaching, I know that the chances of me getting hired for a good DI [Division I] college team are very unlikely, that is frustrating... I also know because I'm a girl and I'm a coach... a lot of people don't really want a girl coach. I feel like that is discouraging... in the sense that realistically I know that I may or may not get the job just because I am a girl and girls aren't looked upon as qualified coaches.

Michelle explained that female coaches of women's teams "might [have it] a little harder getting a job, [because] men are taking more female jobs like women's basketball." Jane offered a recommendation for overcoming gender discrimination saying "The more you do, the earlier and the better it is [for yourself] because [females] are disadvantaged." The participants continued to reiterate that they felt they were going to have to work harder to prove themselves due to being a female in a traditionally male dominated area and that they might be discriminated against because they are female.

Mel described previous experiences with workplace hiring within sport, saying, "I've been in a handful of job interviews for potential openings but a guy will get it... [even though] I had the same qualifications... it's frustrating to see." Participants' frustrations were obvious when discussing this topic as they felt being a female hurt them in getting jobs within sport. Katie explained the negative effects that perceived gender discrimination has had on her career plans clarifying,

So many people I have met want [work in sports]... and they're all guys and it's just such a male-dominated area... I feel like it was going to take so much effort to breakthrough that and I thought 'well, I don't know if I want to do that.

Pam expressed that as women "we are disadvantaged [and] the more you do, the earlier, the better." Interestingly, Ellen, who participates in cheerleading and dance, expressed awareness that she has not yet had to deal with discrimination in a male dominated area of sport, but recognizes that when she applies for a job she will face some of the issues the other participants are discussing. She stated,

I know specifically what I'm doing and fortunately for me cheerleading and dance are predominantly female sports... I don't really feel like it's going to be a

problem for me to find a job and be discriminated towards at all... I definitely understand totally what [you girls] are saying though. I've looked into other things and I've thought, 'Wow, that's going to be scary because I'm not very... I don't really stand up for myself that often.' So that would be a hard thing for me to do, to get into a predominately male field.

Based on her comments, Ellen may completely avoid a more male-dominated area of sport as she works toward a future career because of her perceptions of gender discrimination.

### **Industry-Specific Concerns**

The following themes emerged regarding industry-specific, participant perceptions about their future careers in sport: (a) difficulty networking, (b) job-market constraints, (c) long work hours, and low salary range, and (d) multiple-role conflict.

**Difficulty Networking.** Participants expressed concern related to networking in sport. Jane indicated that she and other women have more difficulty networking because "historically, men have had more opportunities [to network] in sport, they have more connections... and they are more likely to get the jobs through networking than females." Pam indicated the desire to "talk to more professionals [in the field]." Kristy expressed her "concern about how few women are in the field of being a sport agent" resulting in difficulties networking or socializing.

Kris explained that increasing network opportunities for women in sport would be beneficial,

Would help increase the number of women who actually want to do sport management because... a lot of women that are interested in sports are afraid to take that extra step of doing it because of a lack of a support system... [for instance] networking, what to do with internships and experiences in the academic setting.

Kris added that she wished she "had been able to actually talk to women in positions within sport because I haven't met anyone like that so far." She continued "it can deter you a little bit, like 'there's no one like me' and it's kind of like being lost." Ellen specified the underrepresentation of women in sport is caused by the "lack of networking." Jennifer suggested bringing "professionals in the classroom," but understood the challenge associated with it in that "there's just not that many to go after and find."

These women clearly place a great deal of emphasis on networking with other women in the sport industry and because they are exposed to so few women they perceive this as a barrier to their advancement in the field.

**Job-Market Constraints.** Participants expressed perceived job market constraints in the pursuance of future careers in sport. It is reasonable to assume that students are aware of things like the economy and availability of jobs in their field. The participants in our study noted these constraints and indicated concern about them. This is a concern for female sport

management students, as they congruently noted they are aware that as a female, getting a job in sport is already going to be challenging and yet they are also quite aware of other factors regarding their professional entry into the field. Ann indicated concern with "the sport management programs being sold as a major for a lot of students, so they are getting a lot more students in, but not enough jobs to cover all the people in the programs right now." Michelle noted the state of the economy and "how it's not as big as it was" as the reason for experiencing discouragement from outsiders regarding the sport industry. Mel expressed, "It's going to be a reality check when [we] actually go out and try to find a job" due to the state of the economy. Emma attributed the job-market constraints to the popularity of the sport industry, saying:

Even though I'm a sport management major, and a lot of jobs I would want, do want me to be a sport management major, they also take a communications major, a marketing major, a business major. You're not just competing with sport management, you're competing with every other major. So if you like sport marketing, you're competing with all of the other people who are in normal business and marketing majors that also want that job too. So that's something that I always worry about. What if they like their experiences better than mine... so that's why it's important to find a specific thing that you want to focus on.

The participants perceive barriers such as the availability of jobs, competition for jobs, as well as the economy as job constraints which may influence their future careers in the sport industry.

**Long Work Hours and Low Salary Range.** Participants noted concern with the (a) long work hours, and (b) low salary ranges specific to the sport industry. Regarding the long work hours, Ann indicated "you may be working one day, nine to five or something and then one day you're working until midnight working a game or something... so that is definitely a concern." Mel suggested "If you're single your whole life [then] sports is the job for you" implying that a majority of time will be dedicated to your career in sport. Pam agreed saying "I'm almost more worried about how I'm going to feel later on when I've put in a lot more hours and probably not getting paid as much; I kind of worry about how that's going to make me feel?" Katie expressed that while she is young "the hours don't concern me," but looking toward the future when she "starts having a family" she will be more concerned. Jennifer agreed with the inconsistency of work schedules in sport saying "The lifestyle is different [because] it's not always a nine-to-five job."

A few participants communicated concern about the low salary ranges associated with sport. For example Mel said

With the pay, I think it will take a little bit more to advance up the ladder to get to a higher job than some other fields across the board. I think overall it takes

more time to get to the top... takes a little bit more time to make more money because as a whole it isn't a super-paying industry.

Kris agreed, saying, the "entry level [salary] for sport management is not that much." She further explained,

A lot of internships are unpaid... I'm going to have to work a part-time job so I can pay the bills or whatever... since you're either not bringing in any money or very little money, what back-up plan do I have to support me, pay is my concern, especially in this kind of economy with it being hard to get a job.

Likewise, Emma was concerned with unpaid internships upon graduation, saying:

With the NFL there is talk about there not being a season [in 2011]... they've cut a lot of positions and now there are unpaid internships. And they're realizing that they can do a lot of stuff that way, unpaid. That is a concern going into it. I feel like there have been less jobs and now they're being turned into unpaid internships and now sport is becoming more that way, because people are willing to bust their butt for nothing just to get in.

The participants shared the perception and concern about the long work hours and low or no pay jobs in the sport industry. They realize long work hours and low pay may be expected and they are willing to start in the field with these expectations; however, there is concern with career longevity in a field with long hours and low pay.

**Multiple-Role Conflict.** Participants perceived future conflicting work and family responsibilities. Ann indicated her professors "talked a lot about as a woman if you want to have children that could definitely put a strain on your career, especially in sports because there are a lot of men in sports, they don't really understand you." Mel believed once she "hit the age of wanting to have kids... [she] might want to move into an advanced administrative role where it's a little more toned down with your work hours." Jennifer said "if you ever want to start a family it's a little bit different because you might have to move a lot [because] it's totally different hours." Kris explained that while she desires to have a family, it has been forced onto the "backburner" because she,

Thought [she] was going to have settled down by 24 or 25 [but] looking at the job landscape and what I'm going to do in my career... I'm going to have to put that off in order to advance what I want to do in my career, eventually I want to have a family but not now.

The participants perceive the ability to balance family and work in the sport industry as a definite barrier in their future career and there is some uncertainty about how to navigate, both personally and professionally. They perceive a lack of

understanding from others about the demands of family and the need to alter or delay their plans in order to manage both.

### **Excitement Regarding Entrance into the Field**

Despite perceived barriers to their future careers, participants were still excited about their entrance into the sport industry and beginning their career in sport. Mary explained how her excitement is specific to the sport industry saying,

I'm excited because I don't want to have a job where you sit at a desk all day. Sports kind of gives you that freedom ... you can have a job where you're up on your feet all day and you're moving around and active instead of a job where you just have to sit at a desk...with sports...I'd much rather enjoy my job than not enjoy it...I think it'll be fun.

Pam also exhibited excitement, stating;

I'm looking forward to...when I'm done with college. I like using what I'm learning...and I'm also excited because I feel like I'm very much a relational person and I like to establish myself with people, so that is another thing that I'm really excited about.

Mel agreed saying "I'm really excited to put my ideas out there...I'm just looking forward to being a young professional...have something I can take the reins on and say this is mine...I'm just looking forward to real work." Jennifer described in detail what she looked forward to most about a future career in sport saying, "Opportunities...travel...I want to do things that require more traveling...it's cool that you get to meet a lot of famous people...people who have a lot of influence; there is a lot of glamour to the sport industry." Katie indicated that sport provides "opportunities...traveling and networking...as far as looking forward to it, being excited to get up and go to work in the morning, that's my biggest thing."

All of the participants perceived barriers to their future career in a male-dominated field; however, they continued to look forward to and be excited about working in the sport industry.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to examine undergraduate female sport management students' perceptions of barriers toward their future careers in sport. The following themes emerged: (a) perceptions regarding potential job discrimination (i.e., gender stereotypes and gender discrimination), (b) perceptions regarding industry-specific concerns (i.e., difficulty networking, job market constraints, long work hours, low salary range, multiple-role conflict, and (c) excitement regarding future careers in sport.

The concern over gender stereotypes was prevalent in the responses from participants. Stereotypes regarding women's abilities and fit in sport is well documented (Burton, Grappendorf, & Henderson, 2011; Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; Quarterman, et al., 2006). It was clear that participants in this study were quite aware that they would face stereotypes of a

woman in a traditionally male-dominated area and that they would have to work hard to prove they belonged. Gender stereotypes can be major constraints for women in traditionally male-dominated fields and sport does not appear to be an exception. These constraints can constrict the types of jobs within sport women get as well as their mobility. Further, it is a concern that if female students in sport management are aware they are going to face stereotypes and have to work twice as hard to prove themselves, some may opt out (i.e., not enter the field of sport management and choose a different career) if they feel they are going to have to fight an uphill battle. Educators and managers must continue to encourage discussion related to gender role stereotypes so they do not limit women's careers in sport management.

The concerns involving job discrimination in the hiring practices of sport organizations included facing gender stereotypes and gender discrimination. Kirchmeyer (2002) suggested discrimination in the workplace impacts the career progression and potential for raises of mid-career women more often than it does men. Furthermore, Grappendorf and Lough (2006) found that a majority of female athletic directors believed that gender bias and discrimination was a contributing factor to the underrepresentation of women in the sport industry. It is concerning that students perceive they are going to face gender discrimination before they enter the field because as Eccles (1987) noted, if undergraduate female students anticipate gender discrimination in their future careers, they lose confidence in their abilities in their field and choose to leave. This issue should be further investigated in the field of sport management. Further, we suggest that administrators and leaders in sport continue to strive to achieve equity so that a perception of inclusiveness and equality is a future perception of students. Due to the influence of gender discrimination on the number of women employed in sport (Kirchmeyer, 2002; Grappendorf & Lough, 2006), female sport management students' perception of potential gender discrimination in the workplace may impact women in making the education-to-career transition.

Participants in our study indicated concerns specifically related to the sport industry. These concerns included difficulty networking, job market constraints, long work hours with a low salary range, as well as multiple role conflict. It may not be unusual for students getting ready to graduate to have concerns over whether or not they can get a job and how much they will be paid. However, the concerns of the participants in our study seemed magnified due to their additional concerns regarding being a woman, developing networks, and having a family or children and a career. Participants indicated concern with multiple-role conflict due to the nontraditional nature of sport. This finding is consistent with Grappendorf et al., (2004) who found that nearly half of female athletic directors believed multiple-role conflict limited the entrance and advancement of women within sport. Quimby and O'Brien (2004) also found that college women are more likely to choose traditionally female vocations due to the perception that nontraditional

occupations result in more work-family conflicts. The field of sport in particular due to the nature of the job in that it involves non-traditional hours during nights and weekends when sporting events often take place warrants further research. Alternative strategies that allow women in the field of sport management greater flexibility to deal with work-family conflicts is needed as the perception of multiple-role conflict may be deterring women from entering or staying in the field.

Participants were quite aware of the gender make-up of their classes and of sport management as an academic field. In fact, they perceived sport management as male-dominated and expressed some discomfort with that fact. It is possible to suggest that this too may be discouraging women from staying or entering the field. In addition to exploring how multiple-role conflict impacts female students' career plans in sport management, faculty could create inclusive and encouraging academic environments for females, which could positively influence perception as well as retention of women in the field. Further, efforts to recruit and retain students and faculty that are female, and making a conscious effort to increase diversity should be made.

Participants indicated a concern related to difficulty networking in sport. Students expressed that they may be at a disadvantage because there are limited numbers of women working in sport, and their networking capabilities may be less. They indicated a concern over the lack of women to talk to and network with, as well as concern that they may lack the experiences practicing networks and working to develop those relationships. Previous research regarding college students' perceptions regarding networking/socialization may impact students' career choice (Lent et al., 2002). It is understandable that participants in this study felt they were the underrepresented population and may feel alone, isolated, or concerned that they will not have a network of other women available to them. Further, in sport the existence and influence of the 'ole boys club' has been documented. The 'ole boys club' has received considerable attention in the sport management literature particularly as it relates to hiring White males for positions, limiting women's involvement in decision making, and leaving women out of activities or meetings to preserve power (Lough & Grappendorf, 2007; Whisenant, 2003). Thus, forming student groups, encouraging conference attendance, develop women's groups within organizations, and asking female sport management professors to mentor such groups, could assist female sport management students. Furthermore, sport industry leaders should increase networking and social-support opportunities for women within the industry. Lastly, successful businesswomen within sport should be encouraged to give presentations, speak to, and mentor female sport management students.

Participants expressed concern related to job market constraints. Feelings that sport management majors are competing with other majors to get the coveted jobs in sport as well as concerns regarding the economy were present. Job market constraints that any graduate would face appear to be compounded by the

fact the participants are females trying to get jobs in a male-dominated industry. It will be interesting to see over time as sport management continues to grow as an academic field and the sport industry continues to grow if these perceptions persist as strongly. Hopefully more women enter the field.

A final theme that came from participants was that despite the perceived barriers, the participants still had feelings of excitement as they thought about starting their careers in sport. The optimism expressed by female undergraduate students is noteworthy and we can only hope they persist to enter and remain in the sport management field despite their concerns. Related to future research, it would be interesting to do a longitudinal study to see where the participants are in their careers in several years and if their perceptions became their realities.

### Limitations

This study only included undergraduate female students at one university. In the future, we would recommend expanding the participant number, considering including male students, as well as increasing the geographic diversity of where information is obtained. Further, considering only undergraduate students were studied, it would be interesting to include graduate level students. Lastly, only one African American female participated in this study. We recommend conducting this study with more racial or ethnic minority students because we cannot assume experiences are the same across the board. Due to these concerns, we caution against the generalization of our findings to all sport management students.

Bias is a concern in any study related to perceptions and opinions regarding future events. Though we took steps to address bias, we are inherently aware that the researchers of the study all work in the field and bring our own perceptions and biases to the study. We utilized transcription, direct quotes, thick description, member checking, and notes to ensure accuracy of participants response.

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