

Women's Leadership in the Sports Industry

Caroline Task

A Thesis

in

the John Molson School of Business

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Science (Management) at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

April 2022

© Caroline Task, 2022

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Caroline Task

Entitled: Women's Leadership in the Sports Industry

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science (Management)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final Examining Committee:

_____ Examiner

Dr. Ingrid Chadwick

_____ Examiner

Dr. Stéphane Brutus

_____ Supervisor

Dr. Kathleen Boies

Approved by _____

Linda Dyer – Chair of Department/Graduate Program Director

_____ 2022

Anne-Marie Croteau – Dean of Faculty

ABSTRACT

Women's Leadership in the Sports Industry

Caroline Task

Sports have proven to have multiple benefits for the development of both girls and boys. Accessibility and the resources available to young girls and women to participate in sports is often inadequate in comparison to that available for their male counterparts. Female leadership within the workforce is increasing yet the male dominated sports industry seems to be stagnant in following this societal trend. The purpose of this exploratory study was to highlight and examine the barriers faced by men compared to women in achieving leadership positions in sports management and coaching. Using an interview method, the experiences of eleven participants within the sports industry were explored. Participants were comprised of U SPORTS and RSEQ (Réseau du sport étudiant du Québec) leaders and included six head coaches, two young assistant coaches and three athletic directors (totaling five men and six women). It is evident that women in the industry experience more barriers to achieving leadership positions. Six themes emerged, with additional sub-themes exposed. The six main themes uncovered were mentorship, role models, experience in sports, staying true to oneself, barriers and solutions. The results highlight the need and importance to invest time and money in women's sports and the need to educate various stakeholders on the value and benefits that come with sports participation. In addition, it is crucial that those holding top rank positions (majority men) provide opportunities for women and allow these appointees to truly be their authentic selves while functioning in leadership positions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was made possible with the support of multiple individuals. I would like to thank Dr. Kathleen Boies who provided me with constant support throughout this research process. Her guidance was there to the very end. She provided me with the opportunity to research a topic about which I am truly passionate and made my research experience extremely enjoyable.

Not only am I grateful for my supervisor, I was also privileged to have an outstanding thesis committee. Dr. Ingrid Chadwick and Dr. Stéphane Brutus, thank you for your honest feedback and for being a part of such a meaningful project.

A huge thanks to my extraordinary family for their unconditional love and support. Thank you to my mother and father for instilling in me a great work ethic. You taught me what it takes to be successful and that nothing meaningful is accomplished without hard work and determination.

Thank you to my friends and teammates who kept me motivated throughout my academic career.

In addition, thank you to all the coaches I have had throughout my athletic career. Thank you to my university basketball coach for promoting the importance of being a strong independent woman. The character traits developed through sports will remain with me forever.

Lastly, a big thank you to the John Molson School of Business and the Department of Management for giving me the opportunity to continue my studies at the Graduate level.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
LITERATURE REVIEW	2
Women in Leadership	2
Women in Sports.....	5
Leadership of Women in Sports	8
Role Congruity Theory	11
Research Question	12
METHODS	13
Participants and Data Collection.....	13
Data Analysis	15
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	16
Mentors: Gender, Support System and Providing Opportunities	17
Role Models	21
Experience in Sports	24
Staying True to Oneself: Moving Away From True Self and Growing as a Person	28
Barriers: Representation, Investment in Women’s Sports, Gender, Having a Family and Minority Status.....	33
<i>Representation</i>	33
<i>Investment in Women’s Sports</i>	36
<i>Gender</i>	37
<i>Family</i>	42
<i>Minority Status</i>	44
Solutions	48
OVERALL CONCLUSION FROM ANALYSIS	50
STUDY LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDY	51
PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS	53
REFERENCES	55
APPENDIX A.....	59

INTRODUCTION

The last few years have been filled with social change. It has been a period of acknowledging systemic problems in society and attempting to begin the process of re-education, advancement and influencing the evolution of change. The emphasis on creating equality for racial minorities and women has not diminished even though certain objectives have been met. With a rich and diverse population, it is important that a workforce seek accurate representation.

The sports industry struggles to achieve a gender balanced workforce. Women experience barriers within the industry that include branding restrictions, minimum media coverage and difficulty in achieving positions of authority (Lobpries, Bennett & Brison, 2018; Walker & Bopp, 2010). The present research aims to investigate some of the reasons that may contribute to the absence of women in leadership (i.e., management and coaching) positions within the sports industry.

A significant number of influential and powerful women have come from a sporting background (EY & espnW, 2015). Michelle Bachelet, who broke down barriers and became Chile's first female president, was a star volleyball player in high school. Ana Guevara, a Mexican Senator, previously represented her country at the 2000 and 2004 Olympic games, winning a silver medal in track and field. Hilary Clinton, at one time US Secretary of State, was a multi-sport athlete competing in team sports (including softball and basketball). From the corporate world, there is Christine Lagarde, a trailblazer becoming the first woman to hold the position of chairperson at a large international law firm and also serving as the managing director of the International Monetary Fund. She represented France on the national synchronized swimming team. Women who hold executive positions within organizations have stated that sports had a substantial impact on their success as leaders in their field and influenced their

performance level. They emphasize the importance of hiring other women who have participated in sports themselves (EY & espnW, 2015).

The aforementioned leaders represent only a handful of the many powerful women in politics and the corporate world who have excelled in their career, using their experience in sports to shape themselves as leaders (EY & espnW, 2015). Although the representation of female leaders in the corporate and political world is slowly increasing, female leaders in the male-dominated sport industry remains limited and, in fact, a rare occurrence (EY & espnW, 2015). Not only do men hold the majority of positions in sport management, but men also hold the majority of the head coaching positions in men's sports and more than half of the head coaching positions in women's sports (Walker & Bopp, 2010). With the current imbalance in gender representation in leadership positions within the sport industry, there is significant relevance to understanding the barriers limiting the access of women to leadership positions in the sports industry. Highlighting these barriers and disclosing them to the appropriate stakeholders has the potential to influence the key decision makers to take the appropriate initiatives to find solutions to resolve the imbalance of male and female representation in leadership positions within sports.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women in Leadership

The sports industry is not the only domain where issues with homogeneity exist among leadership positions/teams. A pertinent example of gender imbalance in leadership positions is the general lack of gender diversity on boards of directors occurring today across all business segments (Catalyst, 2020). To overcome this imbalance, Catalyst, a global non-profit organization founded in 1962 is "...working with some of the world's most powerful CEOs and

leading companies to help build workplaces that work for women” (Catalyst, 2020, p. 7). The goal of Catalyst is to promote the advancement of women being selected into leadership positions, “...because progress for women is progress for everyone” (Catalyst, 2020, p. 7). This organization has also been collaborating with the 30% Club Canada. This Club aims to influence and help businesses achieve a 30% representation of women on boards of directors and C-Suite positions by the year 2022 (Catalyst, 2020). The intense struggle to get a mere 30% representation of women on boards of directors indicates and confirms the substantial gender imbalance on boards of directors (Catalyst, 2020).

The struggle and obstacles for women to reach higher ranks within organizations is often due to the fact that women fall victim to the “glass ceiling” effect. The glass ceiling is “the unseen yet unbreachable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications and achievements” (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995, p. 4). This prejudicial treatment never completely vanished even with the recent progress that society has made regarding systemic injustice towards women (Krishnan & Park, 2005). Women have been establishing themselves differently within organizations in comparison to previous years. Women are now taking on roles within organizations that were previously dominated by men. Although the “glass ceiling” effect still maintains a strong presence, academia is realizing that “the conditions of the modern corporation may require taking a wider perspective of strategic leadership and a much more inclusive definition of who the leaders are” (Donald, Cannella & Pettigrew 2001, p. 43-44). Although there has been improvement in the proportion of women entering the workforce and correspondingly their ability to break down gender barriers (including the glass ceiling), there is still inequality regarding their ability (or lack thereof) to move up the organizational hierarchy

(Catalyst, 2020). This illustrates that there is a substantial need to take the necessary steps forward to promote opportunistic equality between men and women in the workforce.

There are multiple benefits beyond the apparent value of equal representation that result from diversity on boards. Catalyst emphasises that as more women participate in the labor force and develop into organizational leaders, this not only helps the next generation of women, but it also increases the performance of a given business and has become crucial to the economy (Catalyst, 2020). Increasing the representation of women on boards also allows new perspectives to be heard, "...adding some modern-day reality to the deliberation process" (Carter et al., 2003, p. 34). Women on boards of directors have the ability to provide different opinions and suggestions that have yet to be presented, studied or considered in the organization (Campbell, 1996). Campbell (1996) discusses how these perspectives maintain important value and are often absent during an all-white male gathering. It is also suggested that these perspectives can be inspirational for a company's diverse workforce (Campbell, 1996).

Prior to the publishing of the Fields and Blum (1997) article, there had been a significant increase in the number of jobs in the workforce being filled by women. Occupations that formerly had been largely dominated by men now have a significant number of positions occupied by women (Fields & Blum, 1997). This increase in the representation of women in the workforce was due to the availability of qualified and high-performing female candidates. Organizations were beginning to accept that hiring female employees provided the firm with a competitive advantage in the marketplace.

Fields and Blum (1997) based their research on the theory that an employee's level of job satisfaction is likely to be related to the gender makeup of his or her work community. Employees' impressions of contextual variables, such as boss and co-worker characteristics,

influence their attitudes about their employment/position. The findings confirmed the relationship between an employee's job satisfaction and the gender makeup of their work group. Job satisfaction was higher for men and for women who worked in gender-balanced groups than for those working in more homogeneous groups. It is interesting to note that men had the lowest level of satisfaction when they were a member of a work group that contained a majority of men.

These results reflect Blau's theory of social structure that creating heterogeneous work groups is the preferential way to attain a high level of employee satisfaction. Overall, Fields and Blum (1997) show that a heterogeneous workforce is ideal in order to maximize employee satisfaction. These findings also demonstrate the advantages to having adequate representation of women go beyond solely the effects of those on boards of directors. A simple increase in women within the composition of a work group has been shown to have significant advantages (Fields & Blum, 1997). The aforementioned results can be applied in the context of sports. Perhaps if more gender diversity was evident in coaching positions, the incumbents in the coaching positions may perform better and demonstrate an increase in job satisfaction.

If the gender imbalance decreases, and women are as equally active in the labor force as their male counterparts, there is a significant financial benefit to annual global GDP (EY & espnW, 2015). McKinsey Global Institute have shared their research which claims that annual global GDP by the year 2025 would increase by \$28 trillion dollars if women had equal representation in the labor force (EY & espnW, 2015).

Women in Sports

Not only does the presence of women within work groups improve overall employee satisfaction, but when more women are present in the workforce and within higher ranks of a given organization, they enable a cycle of role model and mentorship. Li and Chen (2018)

discuss how a larger representation of women on boards of directors may lead to the attraction and retention of talented women in the workforce. Li and Chen (2018) also claim that there is potential for female representation in higher positions to have a positive role model effect on female employees in lower ranks. It follows that in the context of sports, if young women have the opportunity to witness professional female athletes in the media (i.e., female Olympians), young girls are provided with role models to emulate (EY & espnW, 2015). Inspirational professional female athletes have the ability to enable increased participation of young girls in sports, creating a positive cycle (i.e., positive health effects and the continuation in sports to an elite level) (EY & espnW, 2015). Walker and Bopp (2010) provide evidence that the gender and race of the head coach for a women's team has great influence on the individuals that compose the remainder of the coaching staff. More women hired as head coaches would result in the creation of an "old girls' club" (i.e., women hire other women).

The gender parity in society and in the corporate world is so prevalent that researchers have established that in order for women "...to achieve political, social and economic equality with men" (EY & espnW, 2015, p. 3) and have equal representation in leadership positions (i.e., senior management) within the corporate world, it would take 80 and 25 years respectively. Important to note is the substantial platform that sports provide to empower and inspire women of all ages (EY & espnW, 2015). It has been stated that the knowledge, ability and skills developed by women through the participation in sports prepares them to hold and succeed in leadership positions within the corporate world.

Doty (2006) presents the argument that participation in sports is an important component in the teaching and development of character throughout an individual's developmental years (i.e., ranging from youth to the collegiate level). The author mentions that coaches must be aware

and make it a conscious goal to develop the character of their athletes (Doty, 2006). Participation in sports not only enables health benefits but also elicits important psychological processes and societal values (Doty, 2006). The author defines character as follows: “Some refer to character as an internal state that is manifested in behavior. This internal state guides decisions and actions while defining the qualities that make up a person’s nature” (Doty, 2006, p. 3). An individual’s character and personality determine not only how the person acts in various situations but also defines who they are. Whether in the workforce or in personal relationships, individuals are constantly exposed to and involved in human interactions on a regular basis (Doty, 2006). Personality traits and character play a significant role in the type and quality of human interactions in our everyday lives, making an individual’s character a determinant of whether the interaction is positive or negative (Doty, 2006). Participation in sports has a lasting influence on an individual’s future actions and activities.

Early research regarding the influence that participation in sports has on a young athlete has determined the development of personality traits such as leadership, self-confidence, human relations and initiative are more favourably nurtured through the participation in activities outside the classroom (i.e., through athletics) (Carter & Shannon, 1940). Extra-curricular activities practiced on a daily basis are shown to be more effective and influential at guiding kids and teenagers in the development of self-expression, mental hygiene (actions and activities that encourage, support and sustain mental health) and on the advancement and sustainability of an individual’s growth and emotional balance (Carter & Shannon, 1940).

Carter and Shannon (1940) conducted research by questionnaires contrasting social adjustment and personality features of high school athletes and non-athletes. The authors studied six personality traits, “...co-operation, self-control, leadership, reliability, agreeability, and

sociability” (Carter & Shannon, 1940, p. 128). Important to highlight are two meaningful trait differences, leadership and sociability, statistically significant in favouring the athletes (Carter & Shannon, 1940).

The Ryba et al. (2015) article speaks to the “...life-designing processes in and through sports” (Ryba et al., 2015, p. 47). The authors interviewed elite athletes addressing their successful athletic careers while analyzing their experiences in sports and most importantly how sports influenced their career behaviors (Ryba et al., 2015). The athletes studied expressed a connection between their career as athletes and their life projects (their future careers in the workforce) indicating that there was a definite connection between their careers after sports and their previous athletic experience. Self-development, improvement and feedback were useful not only in sports but also in their professional careers (Ryba et al., 2015).

Youth participating in high level competitive sports are exposed to multiple coaches (i.e., leaders) that enact a leadership style that promotes team work in achieving goals that go beyond the coaches’ self-interests and instead focuses on the team’s (i.e., organizational) goals (Dirks, 2000). Exposure to problem-solving skills, team-related experiences (EY & espnW, 2015) and the development through sport of the aforementioned character traits provides women with the ability to make well thought out decisions and work in a cohesive atmosphere within a team. If young women are able to gain greater access and exposure to sports, they will be able to move forward, gaining momentum to reduce the gender imbalance in politics, society, economy and the corporate world.

Leadership of Women in Sports

There are multiple segments and positions within the sports industry that have been shown to be difficult for women to aspire to and attain. A prominent position that lacks female

incumbents in head coaching positions in both women's and men's sports (Walker & Bopp, 2010). Throughout the years, women's sports have become more competitive, popular and visible with the result that men are attracted to a career in coaching women's sports. Men now not only monopolize the head coaching positions in men's sports but also in women's sports (Walker & Bopp, 2010). As men hold over 50% of head coaching positions in women's sports and 97% of head coaching positions in men's sports, the result is "...decreased opportunities for women overall and the loss of a female voice in sports as a whole." (Walker & Bopp, 2010, p. 50-51). A similar imbalance was found in a 2011 study which determined that within men's sports only 2.8% of head coaches in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) were women (Blom et al., 2011)

A recurring argument used by many in the attempt to justify the imbalance of female representation in head coaching positions is the idea that "...women should not coach men's college basketball because they have not themselves played..." (Walker & Bopp, 2010, p. 48). This argument is invalid considering the significant representation of men coaching women's sports that they have clearly not played themselves. Similarly, many male head coaches who are coaching at the collegiate and professional level have themselves never played at that caliber (Walker & Bopp, 2010). In addition to these weak arguments, researchers have shown that there are certain factors that may prevent women from rising within the sports industry hierarchy. These factors include attributing certain characteristics to women solely based on their gender, oversexualization and minimal coverage of women in the media (Walker & Bopp, 2010).

The "old boys' club" is another factor that hinders the ability for women to gain representation as head coaches and athletic directors (Walker & Bopp, 2010). This "club" encourages existing male athletic directors and head coaches to recruit their successors on the

basis of self-resemblance. Men holding leadership positions in sports tend to search and hire men, limiting the availability of positions for women. As women are under-represented in the sports industry, there are limits to their ability to create their own “old girls’ club”. This “club” could potentially increase the percentage of female incumbents in leadership positions (EY & espnW, 2015). The shortage of role models for women is another significant barrier limiting the opportunity for women to obtain leadership positions in the sports industry. Not only is there a lack of female representation in coaching and athletic director positions, but at the international level, less than 30% of Olympic committee/board positions are held by women (EY & espnW, 2015). How are women and young girls to develop relationships with sponsors, mentors and role models in this industry if female representation in leadership positions is so limited? Just like men, women require the opportunity to be taught and the opportunity to hold leadership positions in sports in order for them to continue their development, whether it be as a coach or an athletic director (Walker & Bopp, 2010).

Women not only struggle to attain leadership positions in sports, but female athletes experience similar difficulties in obtaining equal representation (in comparison to male athletes) in the media regarding the creation of their personal brand (Lobpries, Bennett & Brison, 2018). Often, when female athletes are used in the media for promotion and marketing, the emphasis on appearance, attractiveness and sexualisation is overwhelming (Lobpries et al., 2018). The lack of acknowledgement of the talent and athletic ability of female athletes is an injustice (Lobpries et al., 2018). The traditional gender norms that have been established within society are contributors to the tendency toward the minimal branding of elite female athletes. As children, women are discouraged from promoting themselves and encouraged to promote others. At a young age, girls are told not to be too bold and to especially avoid being “bossy”. The perception

is that a woman asserting herself is labelled with the term “bossy”. Male counterparts expressing the same assertive behavior find acceptance and they are rewarded and labelled as a “leader”. This is a double standard that weighs heavily on women. Terms such as “bossy” tend to hinder the willingness for women to express themselves and speak up freely (Lobpries et al., 2018). In order for women to create a stronger personal brand identity, they must be encouraged to speak freely, to be assertive, bold, competitive and aggressive, whether it be during competition, during post-game press conferences or simply while celebrating a victory (Lobpries et al., 2018).

Role Congruity Theory

A relevant theory for this research paper is role congruity. A closer look at Eagly and Karau’s (2002) role congruity theory allows us to identify two possible ways that female leaders can be victim of prejudicial behaviours. Often we see incongruity between the “traditional” leadership role and the expected female gender role (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This incongruity can cause individuals to perceive men as candidates for leadership positions more favorably and to view similar leadership characteristics (exhibited by men) when exhibited by women less favorably (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This particular role incongruity stems from the idea that female characteristics, such as various communal traits, are not reflective of what the traditional leadership role requires (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Communal traits (i.e., affectionate, sympathetic, sensitive and kind) are predominantly attributed to women while agentic characteristics (i.e., assertive, confident, aggressive and ambitious) are most often attributed to men (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001).

As “traditional” leadership roles are expected to reflect agentic characteristics, most commonly attributed to men (due to the prevalence of male incumbents), it is common for individuals to view women as unfit to hold leadership roles (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt,

2001). If women act in a manner that reflects the necessary agentic characteristics attributed to men and leaders, they may be seen as lacking the communal characteristics that society ascribes to women (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001).

The theory of role congruity is particularly applicable in the sports industry as this industry has long been associated with male competitiveness and aggressive behavior. This creates a difficult situation for women trying to climb up the hierarchy in the extremely male-dominated sports industry. Female leaders in the sports industry may display a leadership style that reflects control and dominance, which is likely to result in a direct backlash as they are not fulfilling the “traditional” female communal characteristics (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Societal expectations and “norms” create extremely challenging obstacles for women to overcome in order to gain the leadership representation they deserve.

Research Question

It is important to recognize the difference between the theme of women in sports versus leadership of women in sports and how these two themes inform each other. When addressing the theme of women in sports, we are highlighting the barriers that female athletes face commencing at a young age. The lack of opportunity to compete on competitive teams and the lack of encouragement to participate present barriers to their ability to succeed as athletes and diminish their facility to develop character traits necessary to provide women with the momentum to reduce gender imbalance in politics, society, economy, the corporate world and the sports industry. These character traits that aid in the development of young female leaders include but are not limited to leadership skills, self-confidence, personality development and decisiveness.

When addressing the leadership of women in sports, we are acknowledging the barriers present that hinder the ability for women to achieve leadership positions in the sports industry. The two themes go hand in hand. Young girls and women, discouraged from participating in sports as they encounter a significant number of barriers, will abandon their participation in sports and not benefit from the associated important character development. In addition, once they have left their sport behind, they are unlikely to return to the sports industry seeing no future opportunity for leadership positions. It is therefore imperative to acknowledge both themes and understand how they are interrelated.

Women continue to be victims of the gender imbalance in society, politics, the workforce and the male-dominated sports industry. Women's sports are increasing in popularity in both audience and participant numbers resulting in a corresponding increase in the availability of qualified and talented potential female leaders. This underlines the importance of focusing on the sports industry to try and understand why the lack of female representation in leadership positions remains, even as interest in these positions within this group continues to grow. There is a need to determine the cause for the lack of female leadership in the sports industry in order not to extinguish the growing interest of women in sports. I conducted an exploratory study that aims to answer the following research question: *What are the barriers faced by men in comparison to women to achieving leadership positions in sports management and coaching?*

METHODS

Participants and Data Collection

To accomplish this exploratory research, eleven individuals (six women and five men) were interviewed between November 2021 and January 2022. The group was comprised of U SPORTS and RSEQ (Réseau du sport étudiant du Québec) leaders, which included six head

coaches (three men and three women), two young assistant coaches in the early stages of their coaching careers (one man and one woman) and three athletic directors (one man and two women). U SPORTS is the organization that governs all university sports across Canada and the RSEQ governs all levels in Quebec including, primary, secondary, collegiate and university sports.

In order to obtain interviews with the aforementioned, I relied on my network of contacts holding leadership positions in the sports industry with the emphasis placed on those involved in university sport. Upon receipt of approval from the research ethics board (see ethics certificate in Appendix A), the eligible participants were contacted in person or via email and were provided with information outlining the study's goals, the method of data collection in addition to consent forms to be signed and returned to the researcher. Each participant was interviewed individually for durations that ranged from eleven to fifty minutes. The interviews were carried out either in person (at an agreed upon location) or via video call (in order to respect the participants' level of COVID comfort). All interviews were recorded on an iPhone 10 and then transcribed using the website Happy Scribe. The transcriptions generated through Happy Scribe were then manually reviewed in order to correct for any discrepancies and to ensure verbatim.

The approach of interviewing women and men holding positions at the same level in the sports hierarchy is significant. This allowed the researcher to identify differences, similarities and barriers that men and women encounter and to compare their individual backgrounds, training and experiences that helped them attain their respective leadership positions in the sports industry. What follows are the questions that were used to frame the interview process:

1. Can you describe your current position and the path taken to achieve it?
2. Where do you see yourself as your career continues to unfold?

3. Did you feel the need to move away from your true self to succeed as a female/male coach/athletic director?
4. Did you or do you have any role models?
5. Did you or do you have a mentor while striving to reach your current position?
 - a) Please describe your relationship with this mentor, their position and their gender.
6. Did you or do you receive specific encouragement/support during the progression of your career?
 - a) Who did the support come from?
 - b) At what point in your career did you receive support?
7. Did you play sports as a child/young adult? If so, were you ever appointed captain/leader of your team?
 - a) What sport(s) did you play?
8. As a female athlete, did you experience any barriers to your athletic development? If yes, what were they?
 - a) During the history of your career progression at what levels were these barriers encountered?
9. As a male athlete, did you experience any barriers to your athletic development? If yes, what were they?
 - a) During the history of your career progression at what levels were these barriers encountered?

Data Analysis

Upon completion of the data collection and the transcription of the interview recordings, the analysis aimed at finding patterns in the participants' responses. The transcripts were initially

open-coded in order to identify recurring themes related to the participants' experiences in reaching their current positions (c.f. Fiset & Boies, 2018). As numerous themes began to emerge, a further analysis of the transcripts was required in order to identify the most recurring themes. Commencing with their youth, the researcher looked for similarities in the path to their career achievements. It was anticipated that certain common barriers making job progression for women in the sports industry more difficult would be uncovered. The discovery of barriers leads to the end goal – their correction for the benefit of future generations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of each individual transcript identified multiple recurring themes. All the men and women interviewed have worked extremely hard to achieve their current leadership positions and they have demonstrated a high level of success within their respective roles. It is evident from the results that the women interviewed encountered more barriers than the men while rising through the hierarchy to obtain their current positions. Identified were a total of six significant themes to be detailed in greater depth in the following sections. Within each theme additional sub-themes were exposed. The six main themes are: mentorship, role models, experience in sports, staying true to oneself, barriers and solutions.

Important to clarify is how certain themes were included in the main theme “barriers” and others were instead categorized into other themes, despite the fact that they can also represent barriers. This differentiation was based on the impact each theme has on the difficulty for women to attain leadership positions in the sports industry. This does not imply that barriers such as the lack of female mentors, the lack of female role models and being asked to move away from your true self are not inhibitors to success and progression. It is simply the degree of difficulty that certain barriers impose that was the determining factor. The impact of barriers such as the lack of

investment in women's sports, gender, having a family and being an individual of minority status carry a more significant weight for women trying to achieve leadership positions in the industry. The classification of these themes provides an indication as to which barriers need to be prioritized and addressed in order to correct the situation.

Mentors: Gender, Support System and Providing Opportunities

Five of the six women interviewed expressed that they either have or have had a mentor while working towards reaching their current positions. Worth noting is that only two of the five women have a female mentor. On the men's side four of the five interviewees expressed that they either have or have had a mentor helping them reach their current positions and in all cases the mentors were men. Nine of the eleven participants stated having a mentor experience with the majority of mentors being men (seven out of nine are men). A possible explanation for the low number of female mentors can be a question of supply and demand. There is simply a lack of female leadership in the sports industry. The female coaches interviewed referenced the scarcity of female coaches available to organically serve as mentors stating that there are very few female coaches in their immediate environment.

"I never ever dreamt of coaching or thought of coaching as a profession. And mainly because you just didn't see a lot of female women coaches at a high level." –U SPORTS female head coach

Another possible explanation for the lack of female mentors is that women, as potential mentors, may be perceived as less effective. Additionally, a female mentor may not be considered because that is not "the look" of the traditional mentor (a stereotype). This explanation is supported by the role congruity theory previously examined in the literature review section (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Being a mentor is considered a leadership role and often there is an apparent incongruity

between the “traditional” leadership role and the expected female gender role (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Unfortunately, this incongruity may cause individuals to have a more favourable perception of men as mentors.

With the growing awareness of the lack of female leadership in the sports industry as well as the limited availability for female mentors, there are initiatives and programs being created to help support and promote women in sport leadership roles. It is imperative to continue to develop and support programs that are pushing toward greater representation of women in sports, in leadership positions in particular.

“She has conferences. She has clinics. She has presentations at the sports RSEQ. You got Égale Action. They're doing a good job and they're promoting women in sports. Now, Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women in Sports produce grants to try and promote mentorship. So there are a lot more things happening and more things have to happen and not just give me the \$1,000 extra grant to encourage me in my coaching. I'm sorry, it's not enough.” –Retired U SPORTS female head coach

An organization that uses their platform to promote female leadership in the sports industry is the *Canadian Women & Sport* initiative that partnered with the *Coaching Association of Canada* to create the Female Coach Mentorship Model. The goal of this initiative is to guide both the mentor and the mentee through the mentorship process with the goal to aid women in leadership (i.e., coaching) positions (Canadian Women & Sport, 2020). The end goal for the Female Coach Mentorship Model is to encourage more women to enter and remain in the coaching profession (Canadian Women & Sport, 2020). This is an example of the initiatives required to promote and support Canadian women as they strive to attain their desired leadership position.

Of interest is the common view expressed by those with and those without a concrete

mentor relationship. Both groups emphasized the importance of having a support system composed of individuals who they trust and who will provide them with an honest opinion of their performance.

“Again, is it more mentor or is it more at this point just somebody who I trust that they’ll give me an honest opinion because I think that’s really what I try to do to people who ask me questions like that, because I think people are often afraid to kind of tell you if you did something that they don’t agree with or in this sense, more of a basketball strategy.” –U SPORTS male head coach

A female athletic director described this informal relationship as having a “confidante”. She emphasized the importance of there being someone to discuss and review your ideas prior to implementation. It is essential that the individual chosen as the confidant must truly value confidentiality when granted personal and professional information disclosed in trust. Although different from the traditional form of mentorship relationship, participants expressed the value attached to this type of relationship.

“So truly, I would not say a mentor, but I have confidantes. There’s certain things that I truly value, and one is confidentiality. And so quite often my confidante can change. So therefore, maybe my mentoring person could change just based on the fact that I trust that they will keep things in confidence because you have to share some things sometimes, sometimes it’s personal, sometimes it is professional nature. And so I don’t have mentors. I have confidantes, and they have changed over the years.” – Female athletic director

As the sports industry is male dominated, it was revealed by the female participants interviewed that women rely heavily on men opening doors on their behalf and providing them

with opportunities to commence their career in the sports industry. The ability for a majority of women to progress in the sports industry is then in the hands of men who may not necessarily have the promotion of female leadership in the industry as a top priority. However, among the participants interviewed many women expressed that they were fortunate in the sense that they had male friends/acquaintances in the sports industry give them chances, jobs and opportunities to get their foot in the door and to prove themselves.

“As an apprentice coach with the National Team Program, the late [coach name] gave me the opportunity of a lifetime. As an apprentice, he integrated me into the coaching staff where I led all the defensive drills. My confidence level and my teaching abilities were boosted.” –Retired U SPORTS female head coach

This retired U SPORTS female head coach had the opportunity to be involved with a senior National men’s team at a young age. The opportunity granted to her by an established male coach propelled her career and eventually enabled her to become a trailblazer in her chosen sport.

“I thank him profusely. Unfortunately, he passed away, but I still thank him because he took a chance on me.” –Retired U SPORTS female head coach

A female athletic director who started at the CEGEP level and progressed to the university level also praised the men along her career path. She was recruited into a not so glorious position that jump started her career in the sports industry. She expressed that the accommodation that these men gave allowed her to both coach at the CEGEP level and work in the athletics department.

*“And that’s the great support that you have when people do that for you, they’re allowing you to switch roles in order to accommodate something that you’re passionate about.” –
Female athletic director*

“Contacts was basically what got me going all through the food chain.” –Female athletic director

These testimonials demonstrate the importance of mentorship and in particular the necessity of increasing the representation of female leaders in the sports industry. There will then be a corresponding significant increase in the availability pool of potential female mentors. Increasing the number of female leaders in the sports industry allow women to identify with their female mentors and likely will benefit their career development and progression. It is also evident that for women to reach these leadership objectives, men will need to help with direction by offering women positions and opportunities so that the cycle of limited female leaders is rectified. The goal is that there will be in time a sufficient number of female leaders in the sports industry so that women will no longer be reliant on men to provide them with the opportunities needed to start their careers.

Role Models

Ten of the eleven participants responded positively when asked if they did or presently have role models. All the women reported having a role model, but only two of the six women stated that their role model is a woman. For the men, four of five responded yes to having a role model and all were men. In total, only two of the ten role models were identified as women.

During the interview process, participants had the tendency to interchangeably use the terms role model and mentor. A thorough analysis of the transcripts uncovered an important differentiation between who the participants identify as a mentor and who they identify as a role model. A mentorship is based on a professional relationship, where guidance is provided in order to help an individual succeed in their respective workplace (for this study, in the sports industry). A role model is someone to whom they look up, who demonstrates a good example, someone

who represents an inspirational ideal, someone who may inspire all generations. Often role models inspire others to imitate their good behavior and strive to be the best version of themselves.

The participants select role models who are either close to them (i.e., successful family members) or those observed in the various media who resemble them or to whom they aspire to resemble (i.e., successful athletes).

“I think for me it was always my close family, people I can see every day, I thought that was really important to me, those in my life that I could actually see what they’re doing and how they’re doing and how they’re living and being true to themselves and true to the values that are important.” – U SPORTS female head coach

All participants grew up as athletes and attempted to identify with successful athletes or coaches they respected in the media. The coaches and players identified as role models were at the professional or university level (i.e., National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)). As outlined in the Lobpries et al. (2018) article, women have the tendency to be underrepresented in the media and have difficulties in obtaining equal representation (in comparison to male athletes) in the creation of their personal brand. Due to this reality, it becomes very difficult for women to seek out sport role models whether it be at the professional or university level. As male athletes and coaches are heavily covered in the media and broadcasting it was easier for the men to establish a role model relationship.

“There are a lot of College coaches that I follow and I really like their philosophy about the game. Like Jay Wright from Villanova. I really love what he does with his players. Obviously, Tony Bennett from Virginia, I absolutely love what he does, the program and the culture that he’s built.” –High school male head coach

The lack of representation of female athletes in the media (Lobpries et al., 2018) and the limited number of female coaches combine to make it difficult for women to identify with a female role model, a factor in limiting their development and growth in the sports industry.

“I just think it’s on the responsibility of the people that market the game to really do a better job of putting the women’s game out there at a time where people are going to watch and just really promote that because there are high level players and I think the more high-level players little girls see that resemble them, the more they’re going to want to emulate that. And as more young girls want to emulate these professional athletes, the women’s game is also going to grow” –High school male head coach

The absence of representation and limited ability for the female interview participants and in general young girls to identify a female role model results in a negative cycle. As young female athletes see few women from the sports industry represented in the media (Lobpries et al., 2018) and available in their immediate environment, they have limited role models to emulate which may lead to a loss of interest in sports participation. Interest is lost in that they do not see individuals with whom they identify in leadership positions within the sports industry. This loss of interest in turn reinforces the cycle limiting female representation in the industry.

“But maybe at the time too there were no females. And I just didn’t realize there are no females in the business to encourage me and to be my role models.”—Female athletic director

You cannot underestimate the power that role models have to enable kids (particularly young girls) to strengthen and envision themselves at the higher levels in the sports hierarchy (EY & espnW, 2015). Role models provide kids, teenagers and adults with the opportunity to cherry pick the information and lessons they adopt and integrate them into their activities. Girls,

boys, women and men grow becoming better citizens and potential leaders.

Experience in Sports

The literature review mentions that participating in sports from a young age has proven to be beneficial (Carter & Shannon, 1940; Dirks, 2000; Ryba et al., 2015). Traits that are known to be developed through sports include leadership skills, self-confidence, improved human relations and increased initiative (Carter & Shannon, 1940). All eleven participants played sports at a young age and ten of the eleven participants were captains of their respective teams. As all participants are now leaders and all participated in sports growing up, there is support for Dirks (2000) – that participating in high level competitive sports at a young age exposes you to multiple leadership styles and promotes the development of leadership skills. All participants highlighted important character traits and lessons they learned through the participation in team sports particularly when they were young.

“I think it’s important for the development of their personality. I think it helps shape your personality and helps to put you through those unfortunate, sometimes disappointing times. Oh, I didn’t win, how do I learn? How do I deal with “I’m not the best on the team?” And I think all those things are important to be learned when they’re young so that they don’t have that disappointment when they are older... You can still be discouraged when you’re older if you don’t get what you want. But I think it’s important to go through it. I think sports are a huge factor for the development of young people, boys or girls.”—U SPORTS male head coach

It is important to highlight the traits developed through the appointment of captaincy that have significantly aided the participants to achieve success within their current leadership positions. One female head coach emphasized certain traits that she feels were developed

through her previous role as a captain of her sports team. To her these traits included self-awareness, confidence, being trustworthy, selflessness, having integrity and being decisive. She continued by expressing the importance the aforementioned traits had in the making of a good leader/head coach.

“Being a captain allowed me to communicate, not to be shy. Not being an introvert allowed me to speak up, speak out loud and being part of a team allowed me to work well within a team atmosphere” –Female athletic director

Participants further expressed that there is a significant difference that can be observed when they work with individuals that have never been a member of a sports team. Multiple participants divulged the importance of understanding when it is time to allow others to take the lead and for you to follow. This personal development was considered essential to their day-to-day work-life.

“And it’s funny because you meet people who’ve never been part of a team, and they just don’t understand that we’re compromised or understanding how to give a little take a little bit. Or sometimes it’s okay to follow, like, there are days that if they want to take the lead, I’ll be more than happy to follow them because you’re only as good of a leader if someone is willing to follow you and you are willing to follow others.”—Female athletic director

“I think that’s good for them (athletes) to translate their leadership skills into whatever job they get, because you don’t want to be known as that person who at work is only about yourself in front of the team.”—U SPORTS male head coach

All participants confirmed the benefits and importance that sport provides for the development of youth and young adults. There is no debate regarding the traits developed as an appointed team captain and the fact that these traits translate into someone’s future career and

success as a leader. A difficult aspect to accept is that sports for young girls in comparison to boys is not easily accessible. Even more restrictive is that parents and caregivers at times can be reluctant to encourage young girls participation in team sports. Several participants shared experiences related to girl's access to team sports and the limited parental encouragement they received.

“He (my grandfather) got me into soccer. And so when I first started, however, there was no women's soccer available. So I had to practice with my brother's team. And there was a coach on my brother's team who allowed me to practice. I couldn't play a game, but he allowed me to practice.”—Female athletic director

This athletic director was privileged in that her grandfather encouraged her to play soccer. As much as she was encouraged, there was clearly a lack of available resources and infrastructure for her to truly participate and compete in the sport that she loved.

“A lot of the barriers come from parents just not wanting to...oh no she's a girl, she's gonna get hurt. She can't play hockey. And I also see it in the way it's set up. I mean, I saw it with my own daughter playing hockey. She loved it. She was great. But when you're playing with five, six, seven-year-old boys who are a lot more aggressive, she was a little reticent, and it took away from her experience.”—Male athletic director

One female head coach expressed her gratitude toward her parents for allowing her to play the sport that she so badly wanted to experience. The support of her parents allowed her to have a successful career as an athlete, competing in the Olympics and eventually becoming a university head coach.

“I kept looking where the hockey boys were, and I was like, I want to play hockey, and my parents are like, okay, so now you have your Asian daughter wanting to play hockey

with the boys, and they're like, sure. And I think about that moment where I don't remember the conversation, obviously I'm pretty young at this point, but if they would have said no, I think my path and my life would be really different. And they didn't even say yes because they thought it would lead to my future job or the Olympics. They said yes, because I wanted to be active and try something. And I think that's really cool.”—U SPORTS female head coach

All participants agreed with the importance of increasing the availability for young girls to participate in sport at an early age and to continue participation throughout young adulthood.

“I’m hoping we all can help encourage and give back to make sure there’s enough young girls getting involved in sports.”—U SPORTS male head coach

“I think sports for females is extremely undervalued and I find young girls they lose out a lot, especially in the team sport aspect.”—Male athletic director

“So in the community leagues, we’re not putting enough of an emphasis on having girl only leagues where they can continue to flourish and not be intimidated by the aggression of the young boys.”—Male athletic director

A Quebec organization with the aim to encourage and support equal opportunity for young girls in sports is *Égale Action*. Their ultimate goal is to make the Quebec sports system more equitable for young girls and women in order to allow them to reach their full potential (Égale Action, 2022). *Égale Action* is a significant organization that is taking necessary action to mitigate the gap between the opportunities offered to girls/women versus boys/men in sports. Their objectives include training the right stakeholders to ensure the continuation of recruitment, the retention and advancement of girls and women in leadership within the sports industry and raising the awareness of the inequality that women face in sports (Égale Action, 2022).

Increasing the investment in programs and leagues that support and encourage young girls to play and remain in sport benefits society by providing a platform for the development of leadership traits. This potential can be carried over into a sport career allowing them to succeed and grow into leadership positions in the industry. Investment is necessary in order to generate greater representation of female leaders in sports. Doing so strengthens the cycle of young girls being able to emulate their role models (leaders in the industry) and achieve their career goals. Also to be considered is the advantage of the lessons learned through participation in sport when applied to non-sport related careers. Given the limited number of top positions available for both men and women in the sport industry, these learned attributes can be applied to any chosen career path.

Staying True to Oneself: Moving Away From True Self and Growing as a Person

When the participants were asked if they ever felt the need to move away from their true self to succeed as a female/male head coach/athletic director one of the five men and four of the six women responded yes. Five of the eleven participants felt the need to move away from their true self to succeed in an athletic position. However, all the women disclosed anecdotes that reflected being told by men to “scale back” and show less emotion.

“I remember the feedback at the end from one of the directors (male), well, we haven’t chosen you as an assistant, (which I wasn’t actually surprised because we had a lot of really veteran people going), but it was just more so that sometimes maybe it’s better to just sit and listen and not be as vocal.”—U SPORTS female head coach

The quote is a great example of a woman who never felt the need to move away from her true self to succeed, although often told to change her behavior in order to be less “intense”.

Important to note is the self-reflection this woman conducted following this comment. She felt as

if she pulled back during that experience, and only spoke up twice in this large group setting. What does this expose about men's tolerance to hearing women express themselves in a sports setting?

“If I was a man I would probably be praised instead of told that I’m doing too much or being aggressive instead of assertive and passionate. An absolute double standard. Men don’t like to be challenged in this profession whatsoever. So they’ll make you out to be “too much” to appease their fragile male egos...And it’s worse when you’re a black female.”—U SPORTS Female head coach

Cognitive dissonance theory (CDT) helps to explain the response of women who have never felt the need to move away from their true self to succeed while actually being told to “scale back” and experiencing first hand barriers (Festinger, 1957). The “...theory (CDT) suggests that when individuals hold two or more cognitions that are contradictory, they will feel an unpleasant state—dissonance—until they are able to resolve this state by altering their cognitions” (Hinojosa, Gardner, Cogliser, Gullifor & Walker, 2016, p.171). The Hinojosa et al. (2016) article discloses a study that showed evidence that when an employee experiences extreme socialization, such as hazing, it results in the employee compensating with amplified organizational commitment to justify the hazing and hostile behavior (Aronson & Mills, 1959). If women participants in the sports industry were told to deviate from their true self and were met with barriers and challenges (likely unpleasant) at the beginning or throughout their career, once they have achieved success in the sports industry they may have changed their cognitions. As they are now in a good place in their career they may choose to ignore previous negative experiences, discomfort, obstacles and injustices faced while they strived for their leadership position in the industry.

The one male head coach who responded yes to having to move away from his true self to succeed as a male head coach expressed that he did not have to “scale back”, it was the contrary, he had to become less patient, stricter and more outspoken with his players.

“I’m usually very patient. And I think as you get older groups, you kind of have to have a certain breaking point where you feel like, you know what? I’m not going to allow this and that...you have to put some limits. So I have to become a little less patient and a little more intense in things I do.” –High school male head coach

Men are expected, encouraged and praised to be more outspoken and more intense in comparison to women who are often expected to be quiet and observe. This double standard can be explained by the parallel-constraint-satisfaction theory “...which posits that stereotypes affect the interpretation of behavior...” (Evans, Slaughter, Ellis, & Rivin, 2019, p. 1077). An interesting study by Evans et al. (2019) states that “...women’s use of humor will trigger lower ratings of status compared with nonhumorous women, while men’s use of humor will trigger higher ratings of status compared with nonhumorous men” (p. 1077). This study was conducted using employees in the United States collected through MTurk. In the sports industry, women who are outspoken, confident and more intense, receive “lower ratings” of status compared to women who do not exhibit these traits. The reverse applies to men who receive “higher ratings” when outspoken, confident and intense. The idea that women are “better” when they display communal traits (i.e., affectionate, sympathetic, sensitive and kind), is another behavioural stereotype that society would like women to follow (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Women who reflect agentic character traits (i.e., assertive, confident, aggressive and ambitious), are told to “scale back” (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

A female athletic director, asked if she felt the need to move away from her true self to succeed, responded not only with a yes due to her gender, but that other individual characteristics make it difficult for her to be herself.

“I would tell you two things. Number one, I am female and I’m also of color. So for us at the RSEQ, there are about 65 colleges and there are only three people of color (as athletic directors), which is not a lot.”—Female athletic director

The lack of ethnic diversity in leadership positions poses an additional barrier preventing individuals from being themselves. An individual’s ethnicity/race has been a recurring barrier disclosed throughout this research and will be thoroughly discussed when addressing the issue of barriers.

The phenomenon of women told to “scale back” and be calm and men expected, encouraged and praised for being intense and assertive can be explained by the role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002). As detailed in the literature review, the incongruity we see in this case is between the “traditional” leadership role and the expected female gender role causing society/individuals to perceive more favourably men as candidates for leadership positions (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Previously outlined in the literature review, agentic character traits are predominantly attributed to men and the “traditional” leadership role, while communal traits are predominantly attributed to women and not to the “traditional” leadership role (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Female characteristics (communal traits) are not reflective of what the “traditional” leadership role “requires”. As a result, women are often seen as unfit to hold leadership positions. In the case of the sports industry, when the female participant exhibits agentic behavior (i.e., control and dominance) the result is a backlash (i.e., being asked to “scale back”) as they are not fulfilling the “traditional” female characteristics

(Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). These societal “norms” and expectations present challenging obstacles for women to overcome in order to obtain leadership representation in a male-dominated industry.

Worth noting is the participants’ realization of self-growth throughout their careers. Women in the sports industry who are told to alter their leadership style and character traits that do not match the communal traits that society has attributed to women find it difficult and requiring great emotional intelligence.

“But I think I’ve gotten better at just kind of dealing with people and still being me, but helping people understand. Okay. This is how I am...But I’ve never, shrunk myself for anybody and I never will.”—U SPORTS female head coach

Another participant shared her experiences dealing with men trying to keep their workspace an “old boys’ club” by holding meetings when not all staff members (i.e., women) are present to hear and participate in the conversations and provide their own input.

“And then there were some major adjustments that I had to go through when business was still happening in the locker room, up at staff hockey or business was still happening in the locker room after a squash game. Well, I’m not in that locker room. And at the time, I think there was only three women on staff when I came here in leadership roles.”—Female athletic director

The female athletic director expressed that she had to learn how to impose herself in a professional manner in order to get the ear of the people who matter. No women member of the team should be excluded from pertinent applicable meetings. The aforementioned male behavior makes it impossible for women to be in those “off hour meetings” making it difficult for women to have access to the important information needed to succeed in a leadership role. Men need to

refrain from such behavior in order to ensure that women have an equal chance for success in leadership positions.

Barriers: Representation, Investment in Women's Sports, Gender, Having a Family and Minority Status

Representation

Research participants expressed that they have encountered themselves, or have been witness to, barriers to career progression. The lack of representation, exposure and visibility (the “three factors”) that female athletes and female leaders receive in the media is a key concern that results in the perception that there is a lack of excellent, competent female coaches in the development chain. This supports Lobpries et al. (2018) regarding barriers faced by women in relation to the media’s promotion of women in sports. The participants were in disagreement with this biased perception.

“Nowadays (2021), one can find a list of great sport leaders. It’s just that they are not in the public view as much as our male counterparts.”—Retired U SPORTS female head coach

With the “three factors” in play it is not surprising that a woman holding a head coaching position is often not recognized by outside individuals as the leader of the team (i.e., the head coach). For those not in the know the assumption is that when there are both men and women on the coaching staff, the head coach is definitely male. This perception is, once again, supported by the role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

“When we go out of province and they don’t know from my coaching staff, who’s the head coach and who’s not, they’ll go to my assistant coach all the time. They’ll shake hands typically and go to him first thinking, he’s the head coach.”—U SPORTS female head coach

“They would walk past me sitting in the number one chair and go say, hi coach to him because he was the male, right. And so that happened on a regular basis.”—Female athletic director

Again the “three factors” result in individuals often being taken by surprise when they hear a woman’s voice speak up in the sports industry.

“I was there for the camp and the head coach at one point skates by and goes, it’s weird to hear a female voice on the ice...And that just made me realize they haven’t heard it. They haven’t heard a female coach take the lead.”—U SPORTS female head coach

Although there is still a significant lack of female coaches in the sports industry, there are strides being taken to rectify the situation. In 2014, Becky Hammon became the first woman to be hired as a full-time assistant coach in the National Basketball Association (NBA) (Greenspan, 2021). She went on to make trailblazing history by becoming the first woman ever to coach an NBA team as a consequence of a head coach game ejection (Greenspan, 2021). In the 2021-2022 season of the National Football League (NFL), history was made with a record-breaking twelve female coaches participating in the league (Williams, 2021). These record breaking events are not insignificant as they reflect the beginning of more breakthroughs to come.

It is imperative to make sure that there is support and exposure for women coaches who have succeeded in the sports industry. Insufficient recognition of successful female coaches reinforces the false belief that there is a lack of excellent and competent female candidates for sport industry management and coaching positions. This is one of many reasons for the scarcity of female leadership in the industry.

Important to remember is that in order to showcase successful female coaches, most of whom are coaching women, the women’s game (in all sports) must receive more representation,

exposure and visibility in the media. A successful application of media attention in women's sports is evident in the growth of women's soccer. Women's soccer in Canada has now become extremely successful as a result of this exposure.

“The more young girls want to emulate these professional athletes...The women's game is also going to grow (women's basketball). It's kind of the same thing as, say in soccer. Canadian soccer is really good for the women and in the US as well. Well, it's because they (young girls) always saw those women perform at a high level, and it's shown on TV and it's in prime time hours. It's in the Olympics, it's in the World Cup. So girls want to emulate those great soccer players. And so they're going to want to play that sport and they're going to want to play at a high level.”—High school male head coach

In 2019, the USA women's national soccer team disproved the predisposed stigma that the general population is not interested in watching women's sport. The live viewership of the FIFA Women's World Cup final was 82.18 million viewers, a significant increase from the 52.56 million viewers for the 2015 Women's World Cup finals (Canavan, 2020). It is evident that interest in women's sport has the potential to grow.

Representation in the media is a critical step in enabling the growth of women's sports. Representation results in young girls emulating their favorite female athletes which increases the probability of remaining and growing within their respective sport. Continuation in sports throughout their teenage years and into early adulthood increases the likelihood of women remaining in the sports industry upon completion of their athletic career. This would lead in the long run to greater representation of female leadership in the sports industry.

Investment in Women's Sports

Without investment in women's sports, we hinder the ability for Canadian women's sports to grow and limit the growth and development of female athletes and coaches.

“It's not an accident that basketball in Canada has grown so much for men that we've had the second most NBA players in the world outside of the United States. It's simply because there was a huge investment in the sport. A lot of private investors and global brands such as Nike, Adidas put a lot of money into the game for kids and etc. And that's why the game has grown so much. So if you do one thing on the male side, well, do the same thing on the female side, and you're going to be able to have a game that's growing on both parts. And it's going to be much better support for everyone.”—High school male head coach

The hindrance is that publicity requires money. Without a major investment in women's sports and leagues, the major networks will not increase the current minimal airtime dedicated to women's sports. One participant expressed that even when women's sports are shown, they are broadcasted on a day and at a time that guarantees low viewership ratings (i.e., Tuesday at 5:00 p.m.).

“Except in Olympic games, like, we're (women) really the best kept secret to sports. And why? Because money, it comes down to money and sponsorship and publicity and the men attract that and the women don't or don't necessarily.”—U SPORTS retired female head coach

There is a need for those working in sport marketing and communications to advocate and promote women's sports. Providing the opportunity to attract increased viewership (i.e., displaying games at prime time) increases the opportunity for women's sports to receive more

significant investment, enabling the game to grow to another level. Growing the game will encourage female athletes to remain in their sport due to the possibility of a future career that allows financial stability. There is one caveat to this ideal solution. The difficulty is an obvious “catch 22”. Which comes first, increased interest or increased investment in media coverage?

One participant described how a financial investment in women’s sports at the university level gave her school the opportunity to offer more women full-time coaching positions.

“So we’re very lucky, a couple of years ago we had a great donation for women in sport, right. We got over a \$3 million gift that allowed us to create full time assistant coaching positions into some key sports. And although we’ve not filled one sport, we’ve filled the women’s hockey position. We’ve filled the women’s basketball position.”—Female athletic director

The referenced generous donation had a positive impact on more than just the hiring of female coaches. The fact that the initiative was led by a female administrator is a statement in itself, as it demonstrates women empowering and advocating for women. An important piece of this initiative is the expansion of the development program for the student athletes and coaches to raise awareness, highlighting the need to promote, support and invest in women in the industry.

Gender

A female athlete, coach or athletic director faces challenges. The female participants expressed that throughout their professional careers they have felt the need to prove themselves significantly more than their male counterparts.

“So at the beginning of my career, there was an awful lot of having to prove yourself and maybe not getting the immediate support.”—Female athletic director

This female athletic director expressed that it took a lot more time for her to be granted the trust and respect as an athletic director in comparison to her male colleagues. At the beginning of her career, her decisions were continuously challenged by men. This push back from her male colleagues made it apparent that as a woman, you must prove yourself to a higher degree than your male counterparts in order to gain the respect of colleagues and superiors. Women in the sports industry need to work harder than men in order to gain trust and support but hard work in the current atmosphere does not guarantee achieving equal success equivalent to male colleagues.

“I believe that women coaches are held to higher standards but we shouldn't be.”—

Retired U SPORTS female head coach

One female athletic director mentioned that she only started to feel valued in her position once she started receiving acknowledgement from her superiors and colleagues and upon the deserved receipt of financial merit.

The female participants also expressed that they were not being heard in meetings composed of mainly men. This stems from their participation and speaking up during meetings (big or small) and their ideas and thoughts not being acknowledged. One participant even disclosed that she was often the victim of male colleagues repeating the same ideas and suggestions she raised and the male colleague receiving the credit and validation for the idea.

“I've had moments when you sit there and go, I just said that (as she points next to her)

I'm sitting there going, hold on, folks, I just said that, he said it, but I just said that, that's the exact same thing.”—Female athletic director

“There are times at a meeting table where I feel that sometimes our male colleagues will talk over a female administrator.”—Female athletic director

This form of male behavior makes it difficult for women to have a voice in the sports industry. If women continue to be ignored when they participate, it becomes demotivating to continue to make an effort to be heard. The continuation of the practice of ignoring women when they speak up reinforces the negative cycle that results in the loss of female leadership in the sports industry and the loss of both the positive contributions of women and their ability to rise in the sport hierarchy.

As women attempt to push for equality and fight for their rightful place in the sports industry there are often consequences. One female head coach expressed that women who speak out are often not liked.

“She (female head coach) was also very different because she was a coach that actually wasn't very well liked because she was one that was a great example of someone that always pushed the envelope. So she was the one that wouldn't let things slide. And she'd call people out. And because of that...she wasn't really liked.”—U SPORTS female head coach

The female head coach referenced in the above quote was “penalized” for fighting for things that she considered important. One scenario disclosed by this female interviewee was that the aforementioned head coach did not receive the recognition she deserved following an exemplary coaching season.

“And she didn't get coach of the year, and we didn't lose many games. And meanwhile, they gave it to one of those other two coaches that didn't have as good of a season and didn't have nearly as much success. And I think that they didn't do it (give her coach of the year) because they didn't like her, versus being able to step back. And I feel like if it

was a guy, that person still would have been honored even if they didn't like that man, I do still see that.”—U SPORTS female head coach

When women display assertiveness, confidence and stand up for equality, women are often the victim being labeled with the word “bossy” instead of confident. When men stand up for themselves and push for something they want they are not labeled but instead they are praised for their ability to be a strong and assertive leader. This is supported by the parallel-constraint satisfaction theory, where the same behavior is valued when displayed by a man (i.e., confident and assertive), yet, unappreciated when exhibited by a woman (Evans et al., 2019).

*“I think sometimes the hard thing is to speak out, because the more you speak out, then oh she's a troublemaker or she's so "bossy", oh, she's so "bitchy". And it's like, no, she's standing up for herself and it's okay for her to do that. He's standing up for himself, it's okay for him to do that. But the people in power, they don't see it like that. So you got to word things very carefully and understand the landscape before you say anything.”—
CEGEP male head coach*

It is imperative that the sports industry learns to respect strong independent women to the same degree that they respect strong independent men. Women must advocate for each other, yet most importantly, as men are in the majority at the top of the sports industry hierarchy, men must be willing to advocate for women. They have the most influence when it comes to advocating for equality.

Women are often not respected in the sports industry. Many female coaches experience name calling and a lack of camaraderie with their male colleagues.

“But when I was coaching at the CEGEP level, we represent Quebec at the National Championships. And there are always two teams from Quebec, and for three years in a

row, we went out to BC to Kamloops, and it was noticeable (the lack of inclusion). But we would be watching the games from a booth above. And of course, the guys would all congregate by themselves, and it's like they tolerated me. But it was never camaraderie, which it was among the men. Like they'd have their beers and stuff. Like I even went out of my way in the local restaurant. I ordered beers for the guys to see if I can "hangout".”—Retired U SPORTS female head coach

The above anecdote indicates that in many cases women were merely tolerated in the sports industry, rather than accepted as equals. The lack of inclusion does not place the sports industry in a good light or encourage any woman desiring to have a career within the industry.

“Some opposing coaches haven’t shaken my hand” —Retired U SPORTS female head coach

“So we were in France and the referees would come over to my assistant coach and say, will you please get her to sit down?”—Retired U SPORTS female head coach

“After beating a team in the States, the opposing coach was walking back to the locker room, muttering “How the hell can we lose to a “blanket-blank” woman?”—Retired U SPORTS female head coach

The above is further evidence of the intimidating and harsh environment that women in the industry experience. These derogatory actions and comments cause women in the sports industry to question whether they are simply being hired as an affirmative action or for the publicity. They receive negative comments and are treated as if they are intruders within the industry. It is imperative to create an environment where women feel accepted and are treated with respect in order to continue the growth of female involvement.

Family

Two of the six female participants expressed that they have a family and children and four of the five male participants disclosed the same status. Society puts an extreme amount of additional pressure on women combining managing the household and caring for children. Even though men are currently participating more in the caregiving and nurturing of their children, women still bear the majority of the responsibility. In the majority of households they are the ones taking maternity leaves, exiting the workforce for an extended period of time. A female coach or athletic director who exits the industry to take advantage of entitled maternity leave faces the basic difficulty of finding a temporary replacement. In many situations the employer is forced to hire a replacement at an additional cost.

“If I were to leave here for a year, it would be difficult for them to replace me for a year. Things wouldn't be rolling as much. Five weeks. I think they could do it, but a year they would have to find someone else to replace me with. And I think that would be the issue.”—Female athletic director

The position of athletic director and/or coach involves a time commitment beyond the standard nine to five work day. Games, practices and events require availability on week nights and weekends. These commitments, which come with the position, become more challenging to fulfill when a woman has a family.

“I think, to be honest with you, an athletic director at the College level is like a coach, you're there every Friday, every weekend, every game. And it takes a big toll on you and your family life. And that's what I believe is the issue with coaching for females is that society allows males to step away from the home. But it's not seen very positively when a female leaves home to do something that they love... Right. So it's not as positive. And so

that's why I think not as many people will focus on that. Once you have a family, it's very difficult.”—Female athletic director

One female athletic director disclosed that her colleagues support her enormously and have trust in her as she is always present or reachable not having to run home to take care of kids. This allows her to deal with developing situations that demand immediate attention.

“I think the fact that I don't have children allows me to work harder. So I'm able to be here all the time and when a COVID case happens or whatever. And my day finishes at five, I don't have a kid at daycare. So I just call my partner and say, I'm coming home later and I'm able to deal with that situation. So I think she's (her colleague) able to see that and appreciates it.”—Female athletic director

A female athletic director expressed concern for the lack of support she would receive if she were to have an obligation to pick up her children at school/daycare or be required to take a maternity leave. It is extremely important that employers in the sports industry show support toward their female employees required to balance their career path and their family life and responsibilities.

“How can we make sure that the women who choose a coaching profession or a sport administration profession can still have an opportunity to have the family life that all the men have.”—Female athletic director

Some employers unfortunately see maternity leaves and child care responsibilities as a burden to their organization. Employers must avoid negative comments and actions that may result in a woman second guessing the risk to her career should she choose to have children. One participant disclosed a rather disturbing “joke” regarding having children that their previous employer would express.

“I used to go to work, and my boss used to tell me because people used to go on maternity leave [sic]. He's tired of it. And he'd say, okay, as a joke. But he was half serious. Every day you walk in a vodka shot and a punch in the gut. I'm like are you for real. And so because he was tired of having to replace and the cost of training staff too. Right. It's expensive to train. Half of me believes that the higher positions, it's easier to just get a male because five weeks again is easy.”—Female athletic director

Comments of this type make it evident that society and employers need to adopt a more positive perspective on women balancing a career and a family life. Women are capable of having a successful career while caring for children. Participants disclosed that it was imperative to encourage women to accept the maternal instinct of wanting to stay home with their baby by opting for their maternity leave entitlement. Ideally a career development plan should be in place in order to demonstrate to women that they will indeed be able to remain on track for advancement regardless of their family situation. There are definitely ways to balance family and career in the sports industry. Although not a coach or athletic director, in 2019, a pregnant Serena Williams won her 23rd Grand Slam victory at the Australian Open (Canavan, 2020). This 23rd Grand Slam victory represented the greatest number of Grand Slam titles held by an individual (Canavan, 2020). Williams returned to the tennis court 10 months following a traumatic delivery of her daughter (Siddique, 2018). Women do have the power to achieve the unthinkable (Canavan, 2020).

Minority Status

Generally, there is an imbalance in the representation of minority incumbents for positions in the sports industry. There is no exception in the sports industry for individuals of minority status experiencing additional barriers. Important to highlight is the additional challenge

one experiences when they are a woman with minority status. One female head coach expressed a common stereotype, the “angry black woman”, with which she has had to deal in the workplace while coaching.

“It (the angry black woman) roots are from slavery. The black enslaved woman that refuses to conform and be submissive. We are deemed defiant, disobedient, hard to work with. When in actuality our anger especially back then was justified. Fast forward to today if we don’t conform if we won’t sit and be submissive, we are problematic. A problem because we can’t be controlled”—U SPORTS Female head coach

Participants discussed the important role the media plays in perpetuating the stereotype of the black woman who refuses to sit and be quiet. One female head coach emphasized that media portrays black women who refuse to be controlled as loud, scary and angry which does not help their opportunities for advancement.

A consequence of the stereotype that the media and society attribute to black women is that black female coaches are faced with extreme obstacles when pursuing their profession and are challenged when they coach the way they want to truly coach.

“In my profession my passion, my not confirming to the “norm”, me challenging anyone is viewed as me having “attitude” and or being “sassy” and or “emasculating” the male [sic]. Our league is predominantly officiated by white men. And they can’t control me. And I don’t conform. I challenge the patriarchy. And they hate it. So the refs who are the majority, tab me as the aggressor, the one with attitude, the one that’s too loud. Because that’s what they’ve always known black women to be because that’s all they’ve been shown and taught in media and literature (the history written by white people that we are blindly forced to learn). So they will magnify the negative stereotype to soothe themselves

and in a twisted way take control and paint themselves as the soft, gentle, “human” stable ones. Smoke screens.”—U SPORTS female head coach

With black female head coaches continuously told to “tone it down”, it becomes impossible for these individuals to truly be themselves. One female head coach expressed that being told to “tone it down” only means that she has to change how she speaks, celebrates, encourages and coaches in order to be successful. This comment reflects the fact that individuals want a strong and assertive black female head coach to move away from her true self simply because they cannot handle a strong independent black woman. The aspect of race becomes an added factor to the previously reviewed theme of women in general being told to shy away from being strong and assertive (i.e., moving away from their true self). It is treated separately as it is important to understand that this further increases the difficulty for this subgroup to achieve leadership positions within the sports industry.

“I was told last week that the RSEQ referees don’t like me (shocker I know). Because I challenge them too much. That just proves what I already knew, that they want me to sit and be docile. And it shows in how they officiate my team, that’s why they got to be sharp. Which is unfair to my players as well. And they know how to do it subtly so that it isn’t blatantly obvious that they don’t like me. They have no idea who I am and have a limited interaction with me twice a week at best but yet they make assumptions about me based on my gender and skin tone. It’s unfair but unfortunately expected.”—U SPORTS female head coach

A male head coach expressed that as a minority it is often difficult to try to speak up against injustice in the workplace as they are often labelled when they do so as troublemakers, emotional or unable to get along with others.

“It's funny because I just feel like a lot of black coaches are labeled as like, oh, you're emotional. It's not emotion. Why say emotion? Why don't you say passion? You're passionate. It's almost the same word. But emotional means, like, you're almost unstable. Like, oh, my God, you're going to cry or be upset, but you're passionate about it. It's like, yeah, you love the game, you want the guys to do well. You want your team to do well. You want the program to do well, but you never hear it said like that. It's more, oh, you know, he or she is so emotional. And it's like, no, that has nothing to do with it.”—

CEGEP male head coach

These labels are damaging to individuals of minority status and expecting them to “tone it down” or “deviate from their true self” can lead to their own doubt reducing their performance solely because others do not have the capacity to understand and accept them for who they genuinely are. It is therefore imperative that all individuals regardless of sex and/or minority status are respected and given the freedom to act in the way that best reflects their true self. People need to be who they want to be.

The *Black Canadian Coaches Association (BCCA)* is an initiative created by the head coach of the St. Francis Xavier University women’s basketball team (Steiner, 2021). She created this initiative as a means of “seeking to connect, empower and advance racialized minorities in the Canadian sport sector” (Steiner, 2021, para. 2). This Association is a first step in attempting to rectify the minimal number of coaches and athletic directors of minority status represented in Canadian universities. An audit during the summer of 2020 discovered that of the 400 top leadership positions in Canadian universities (i.e., athletic directors and head coaches) only 10% had incumbents who were of visible minority status (Steiner, 2021). We must continue to create

and promote these forms of initiatives and associations in order to eliminate the bias toward both athletes and coaches of minority status.

Solutions

From this research it is clear that the sports industry is a long way from achieving gender equality within the leadership ranks. Women and individuals of minority status hold few leadership positions. Although this issue is not something that can be rectified in the short term, the participants put forward some tentative solutions that may help to regulate the imbalance.

Investing in women and in programs that promote women will enable initiatives that develop female coaches and athletic directors and provides the potential to enhance the sports experience for women.

“But I think you break down those barriers by giving opportunities to make sure that we're thoughtful in it, too, and opening those and allowing the same growth pattern that we would a man. So if you're hiring a man that might not be ready, but there can be investment, wanting to do the same thing for a female coach.”—U SPORTS female head coach

These initiatives can include conferences and clinics that promote the status of women in sports. Through the hire and increased promotion you allow these women to break down barriers for young girls aspiring to have a career in the industry.

“But the whole point of having positions that you do have is so that either somebody can have the experience, same experience as you, which is no barriers. And you could shed a light on the fact that there are some for other people and which by doing so, then slowly, we chip away at that barrier, right.”—U SPORTS female head coach

“My one experience in (an American city), now hopefully there's another female that goes down. Now, their (the players) next experience isn't like, oh, this is the first female coach we've ever had on the ice, right?”—U SPORTS female head coach

There is a necessity to hire women and individuals of minority status in the sports industry. Their hiring provides for the creation of role models of similar backgrounds.

“But if you're going to coach black kids, then you should have somebody that they can connect to and understand them a little bit more because I don't care what they say. You're going to understand who you look like a lot more or naturally navigate towards that person, right?”—U SPORTS female head coach

Having women occupy the top ranks in the sports industry ensures that young girls are able to visualize reaching toward and achieving their chosen end goal. In order for women to be represented in the top ranks, those at the top (the majority being men) must provide opportunities to women to prove that they have the ability to take on a leadership role. If women are not given the opportunity to show their competence, the imbalance in female leadership will not be corrected.

“But again, it has to start from the top. There's very little we can do as minority coaches or females to force them to open it.”—CEGEP male head coach

“Hopefully more people of the minority groups get in position of power and they start changing things.”—CEGEP male head coach

Hiring in leadership roles must be combined with providing a work environment that makes women feel welcomed and ensures that they are not viewed as being hired simply as the result of affirmative action.

“So I think that also is a factor as well, in regard to hiring and developing your minorities or women in the program and making them feel accepted because right now, I don't know if women feel accepted. I don't know if minorities feel accepted. It's tough because sometimes you want to know you got hired because you're good, but then it's like, are they hiring you based on affirmative action?”—CEGEP male head coach

The suggested solutions and initiatives are but a mere start toward the goal of attaining gender equality in sport leadership positions. Education is required not only directed toward young girls, but to the parents emphasizing the value of participating in sports programs. This needs to go beyond simply outlining the health benefits of playing sports and needs to demonstrate the opportunity for psychological development, skill development, improved confidence and strength that are the key attributes to have during their progression to becoming young women. Encouraging young girls to remain in sports encourages more women to aspire to a career in the sports industry.

OVERALL CONCLUSION FROM ANALYSIS

It is evident from the research and interview discussion that women face additional barriers to progression in the sports industry that men have been able to circumvent. From the participants' experiences and anecdotes, disclosed during the interviews, it is clear that barriers are present that continue to contribute to the lack of female leadership in the industry.

First, there is minimal investment in women's sports. This limited financial and time contribution makes it difficult for women to have equal experiences and opportunities compared to their male counterparts. Second, it is clear that there is a lack of programs, initiatives and clinics that promote and empower women in sports. This is a product of the minimal investment (time and money) directed to women's sports.

Third, women who manage to obtain leadership positions within the sports industry are told to move away from their true self. Women are asked to “scale back”, be less “intense”, less outspoken and less assertive, they are told to reflect the communal traits that society has attributed to women. The role congruity theory and the parallel-constraint theory (discussed throughout this thesis) play significant roles in explaining why women are victims of backlash when displaying “traditional” leadership traits (i.e., agentic traits that society has attributed to men). This is a double standard engrained in society (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Evans et al., 2019).

Fourth, as men hold the majority of the higher ranked positions in the sports industry, women have no choice but to rely on men to open doors and provide them with opportunities. This is a restrictive position for women, as the ability for their advancement in the industry to a high degree rests in the hands of men. Yes, this points to interesting avenues for solutions.

STUDY LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDY

This exploratory study is not without limitations. First, the interviews focused solely on the perspectives and experiences of Canadian coaches and athletic directors. The findings may only be applicable to coaches and athletic directors working at Canadian high schools, CEGEPS and universities. It would be interesting in a future study to investigate the perspectives and experiences of Americans in these sport positions. Comparison of the results between American and Canadian participants would highlight certain similarities and differences in individual perspectives and experiences and could influence any corrective actions that need to be implemented.

Second, it may be judicious to increase the sample size, in collaboration with a sport organization or governing body (i.e., Coaching Association of Canada). Although the sample may be a limitation, several arguments support this sample size as being adequate for the purpose

of this thesis. First, this is an exploratory study aimed at identifying barriers for a very specific group of individuals, with the intent that it will encourage future study with broader exploration. Second, it is a purposive sample, with individuals at specific coaching levels and expressly with an equivalent representation of men and women. Third, other related studies have a similar sample size including Caron, Bloom, Johnston and Sabiston (2013), Vallée and Bloom (2005) and Lobpries et al. (2018). The Caron et al. (2013) article consists of interviews with five retired National Hockey League players who discuss their physical and psychological symptoms resulting from suffering multiple concussions throughout their hockey careers and how these symptoms affected various aspects of their life. In the Vallée and Bloom (2005) article, the authors interview a sample of five Canadian female university coaches with the goal of determining how these coaches built successful team sports programs. The Lobpries et al. (2018) article explores branding barriers experienced by elite female athletes through interviews with eleven elite female athletes and three agents (a sample size of fourteen). These studies all center on topics related to the sports industry using a sample size and interview method similar to this study. Finally, for this study there was a saturation point reached as the latter interviews did not uncover significant new information and/or experiences that were not already aired by the previous interviewees.

Third, the interviews focused solely on coaches and athletic directors' perceptions of the barriers experienced in achieving leadership positions. It would be interesting in a further study to explore young athletes' perceptions in this area. Of interest would be exploring the differences of young boys' and girls' visualization and perception of the barriers they may face while striving to reach the top ranks of the sports industry.

Last, this study focused mainly on the lack of female leadership in the sports industry. It would be beneficial for a future study to focus on the lack of leadership positions held by individuals of minority status, currently underrepresented in leadership positions within the sports industry. This issue deserves attention solely on its own merits as it is crucial to uncover the barriers these individuals face in order to take corrective action.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings from this exploratory research offer several practical implications that will help promote gender equality in leadership positions and reduce the barriers experienced by women in the industry. First, it is important to invest (time and money) in women's sports. By investing in women's sport, we allow women to have the same experiences and opportunities as their male counterparts to succeed and to visualize a future career in sports, particularly in leadership positions and in women sports. Second, it is imperative to educate various stakeholders (i.e., parents and young girls) to the value and benefits of playing sports (i.e., health benefits, psychological development, strength and confidence) that will carry over throughout their development process. Third, there must be an increase in initiatives, programs and clinics that promote and empower women in sports. Increasing these programs are an investment in the development of women for leadership positions. Fourth, individuals holding the top ranks in the industry (the majority being men), must provide opportunities and open doors for women in order for women to continue their career path. Without an opportunity to prove themselves, it becomes difficult if not impossible for women to excel and reach the higher levels of the sports industry hierarchy. Last, as women are still the primary caregivers in households, the sports industry needs to create sustainable plans that allow a woman to choose freely to take maternity

leave, providing temporary replacement without the concerns of loss of trust of their superiors, colleagues or players.

The current study is a first step to understanding the extent of the barriers women face in achieving leadership positions in sports management and coaching. The barriers uncovered are numerous and certainly more barriers remain for women and for individuals of minority status. It is imperative for women to keep pushing and challenging barriers so that the gaps in equality can be minimized or eliminated.

REFERENCES

- Aronson, E., & Mills, J. (1959). The effect of severity of initiation on liking for a group. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 59*, 177-181.
- Blom, L. C., Abrell, L., Wilson, M. J., Lape, J., Halbrosk, M., & Judge, L. W. (2011). Working with male athletes: the experiences of u.s. female head coaches. *Journal of Research, 6*(1), 54–61.
- Campbell, R.H., 1996. Letters to the editor: CEO vs. nun: It's a draw, *Wall Street Journal*, August 12, Section A.
- Canadian Women & Sports. (2020). *Female Coach Mentorship Model*.
<https://womenandsport.ca/resources/tools/female-coach-mentorship-model/>.
- Canavan, C. (2020, March 8). *International Women's Day 2020: 9 Record-Breakers Who have Achieved the Unthinkable*. Women's Health.
<https://www.womenshealthmag.com/uk/health/g31257104/international-womens-day-records/>
- Caron, J. G., Bloom, G. A., Johnston, K. M., & Sabiston, C. M. (2013). Effects of multiple concussions on retired national hockey league players. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology, 35*(2), 168–79.
- Carter, G. C., & Shannon, J. R. (1940). Adjustment and personality traits of athletes and non-athletes. *The School Review, 48*(2), 127–130.
- Carter, D. A., Simkins, B. J., & Simpson, W. G. (2003). Corporate governance, board diversity, and firm value. *Financial Review -Buffalo Then Tallahassee-*, 38, 33–53.
- Catalyst (2020). Women CEOs of the S&P 500. *Workplaces That Work For Women*.
<https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-ceos-of-the-sp-500/>

Catalyst (2020). Women in leadership at S&P/TSX companies. Retrieved from

https://www.catalyst.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Women-in-Leadership_SP_TSXCompanies_report_English-Final-1.pdf

Dirks, K. T. (2000). Trust in leadership and team performance: Evidence from NCAA basketball. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 85*, 1004-1012.

Donald, H., Cannella, A. A., & Pettigrew, A. (2001). Upper echelons: donald hambrick on executives and strategy [and commentary]. *The Academy of Management Executive (1993-2005), 15*(3), 36–44.

Doty, J. (2006). Sports build character?! *Journal of College and Character, 7*(3).

<https://doi.org/10.2202/1940-1639.1529>

Eagly, A. H., & Johannesen-Schmidt, M. C. (2001). The leadership styles of women and men. *Journal of Social Issues, 57*(4), 781–797.

Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review, 109*(3), 573-598.

Égale Action. (2022). *Qui sommes-nous? Égale action: Égalité par l'activité sportive.*

<https://www.egaleaction.com/mission/>.

Evans, J. B., Slaughter, J. E., Ellis, A. P. J., & Rivin, J. M. (2019). Gender and the evaluation of humor at work. *The Journal of Applied Psychology, 104*(8), 1077–1087.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000395>.

EY & espnW. (2015). Where will you find your next leader? EY and espnW explore how sport advances women at every level. *EY*. Retrieved June 29, 2020, from

https://www.ey.com/en_ca/athlete-programs/why-female-athletes-should-be-your-next-leader

- Federal Glass Ceiling Commission. 1995. *Goodfor Business: Making Full Use of the Nation's Human Capital*. U.S. Department of Labor.
- Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Fields, D. L., & Blum, T. C. (1997). Employee satisfaction in work groups with different gender composition. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *18*(2), 181–196.
- Fiset, J., & Boies, K. (2018). Seeing the unseen: ostracism interventionary behaviour and its impact on employees. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, *27*(4), 403–417. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2018.1462159>.
- Greenspan, J. (2021, June 21). *Becky Hammon makes history in Trail Blazer's coaching search*. New York Post. <https://nypost.com/2021/06/21/becky-hammon-makes-history-in-trail-blazers-coaching-search/>
- Hinojosa, A. S., Gardner, W. L., Coglisier, C., Gullifor, D., & Walker, H. J. (2016). A review of cognitive dissonance theory in management research: opportunities for further development. *Journal of Management*, *43*(1), 170–199. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206316668236>.
- Krishnan, H. A., & Park, D. (2005). A few good women—on top management teams. *Journal of Business Research*, *58*(12), 1712–1720. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2004.09.003>.
- Li, H., & Chen, P. (2018). Board gender diversity and firm performance: the moderating role of firm size. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, *27*(4), 294–308. <https://doi.org/10.1111/beer.12188>
- Lobpries, J., Bennett, G., & Brison, N. (2018). How I perform is not enough: exploring branding barriers faced by elite female athletes. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, *27*(1), 5–17.

Ryba, T. V., Ronkainen, N. J., & Selänne Harri. (2015). Elite athletic career as a context for life design. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 88, 47–55.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2015.02.002>

Siddique, H. (2018, July 13). *Williams rewriting tennis history with return to dominance after difficult childbirth*. The Guardian.

<https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2018/jul/13/williams-rewriting-tennis-history-with-return-to-dominance-after-difficult-childbirth>.

Steiner, B. (2021, February 25). 49 Sports. <https://49-sport.com/2021/02/25/bipoc/>

Vallée, C., Bloom, G. (2005). Building a successful university program: key and common elements of expert coaches. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 17(3), 179–196.

Walker, N. A., & Bopp, T. (2010). The underrepresentation of women in the male-dominated sport workplace: Perspectives of female coaches. *Journal of workplace rights*, 15(1), 47-64.

Williams, M. (2021, December 15). *Female coaches in the NFL: Meet two of the record-setting 12 women leading teams in 2021*. The Sporting News.

<https://www.sportingnews.com/ca/nfl/news/female-nfl-coaches-women-record/1qx7043dny5qq1xu5o2ukxlo5t>

APPENDIX A

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Name of Applicant: Caroline Task
Department: John Molson School of Business\Management
Agency: N/A
Title of Project: Women's Leadership in the Sports Industry
Certification Number: 30015718

Valid From: November 02, 2021 To: November 01, 2022

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard DeMont".

Dr. Richard DeMont, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee