



# Gender openness in managerial education: a sport management focus

Gender openness  
in managerial  
education

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this research paper is to examine the effect of gender openness on female student representation within sport management preparation programs.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A questionnaire was sent to 172 undergraduate and graduate sport management preparation programs within North America and 72 completed surveys were returned. These data were used to test confirmatory factor and structural equation models at the undergraduate ( $n = 47$ ) and graduate levels ( $n = 47$ ).

**Findings** – Results show that gender openness progresses sequentially and is an effect of programmatic size.

**Research limitations/implications** – The primary limitation of this research investigation was the utilization of a cross-sectional design given the topic sensitivity. Despite its cross-sectional focus, the study offers important insight about gender openness and inclusion for female students within sport management education.

**Originality/value** – This study utilized a non-standard approach by examining programs relative to gender openness in sequence as they relate to women in management education. This refreshed approach should be valued by scholars and practitioners alike.

**Keywords** Gender, Women, Students, Sports, United States of America

**Paper type** Research paper

Within sport organizations, there is an increasing need for effective management of diversity to maintain their competitive edge in this initial segment of the twenty-first century. Cox and Blake (1991) claim that diversity, when managed properly in the workforce, can provide numerous benefits to organizations, including improvements in resource allocation, marketing, problem solving and employee cooperation and interaction. Despite the positives that can occur from its presence, diversity has been shown to be lacking within the leadership structure of contemporary organizations, especially with respect to the representation of women.

Duehr and Bono (2006) stated that the mobility of women into managerial positions is still slow. This is particularly true within the sport industry. Acosta and Carpenter (2006) revealed that only 18.6 percent of female athletic programs at National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I member institutions within the USA were headed by women. In comparison, the authors stated that women directed 90 percent of female sport programs at NCAA Division I member institutions in 1972, at the time of the enactment of the Title IX provision to the Educational Amendment to the Civil Right Act of 1964 for the purpose of prohibiting gender related discrimination within the USA.



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Lapchick (2006) formulated assessments of employment diversity of professional sport within the USA relating to Major League Baseball (MLB), the National Football League (NFL) and the National Basketball Association (NBA). Studies show that 18, 16 and 23 percent of senior administrators within the MLB, NFL and NBA, respectively, were women. Although the Acosta and Carpenter and the Lapchick studies offer the most current longitudinal examples indicating that the representation of female managers has consistently remained low within the sport industry, there are no known statistics relating to the percentage of women who actually applied for those positions.

One explanation for the lack of mobility of women into management is that women are commonly perceived as not having the skill set needed to perform in an executive capacity. Levsen *et al.* (2001) stated that women and other protected groups are not encouraged to pursue post-secondary educational training in business and related disciplines. Therefore, they tend not to be in the position to compete realistically with qualified male candidates who typically possess the conceptual and analytical proficiencies required to perform competently in positions of leadership. Consequently, preparation programs within the higher educational sector have the opportunity to end the gender divide.

Management education continues to evolve to meet the needs of an ever-changing job market. Particularly, due to an increasing demand from the industry for competent managerial personnel, sport management educational programs are expanding within higher education. Parkhouse and Pitts (2005) indicated that there are over 200 managerial education programs oriented toward sport within the USA and their development has accelerated globally as well. Despite its growth, there is evidence to suggest that sport management education has not been very effective in assisting efforts to expand managerial opportunities for women within the sports industry. Hums (1994) indicated 25 percent of the undergraduate students in sport management professional preparation programs were women, and female students comprised 37 percent of the masters' program enrolment in sport management. This is the only known enrolment-based study on female students within sport management professional preparation programs. Through a comparison of Hums' data with other enrolment data sets, women were discovered to be better represented in business administration and parks, recreation, and leisure studies disciplines than sport management education. According to enrolment statistics for the US higher educational institutions compiled during the same time frame as the Hum's investigation (National Centre for Educational Statistics, 1997), 43 percent of the students in bachelors business administration programs were women, and 37 percent of master of business administration (MBA) students were women. Additionally, female students comprised 48 and 49 percent of the aggregate undergraduate and graduate enrolment, respectively, in the area of parks, recreation and leisure studies.

To provide the required skill sets for female students, sport management education must develop programs that respond to women's issues and concerns. Thus, the focus of this study will be on gender openness within sport management education.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is two-fold. The first objective is to investigate whether environmental influences significantly manipulate the degree of gender openness within the climates of sport management educational programs. The second aim of the

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investigation is to determine whether the degree of gender openness within the programmatic climate leads to an increased representation of female students.

### **Theoretical framework**

The degree of diversity openness tends to vary across the cultures of today's organizations. Härtel (2004) defined diversity openness as the degree of receptiveness to perceived dissimilarity from the characteristics of the majority group. According to this explanation, when an organization is open to diversity, it is not prejudiced in any manner to specific groups with discernable differences; thus it does not expect minority groups to forego their respective identities for the purpose of assimilating with the existing culture. Instead its workers are amenable to new ideas, divergent viewpoints and to satisfying needs that have traditionally not been fulfilled. Härtel further explains that an organization lacking diversity openness is more concerned with adapting minorities to the present culture than valuing their particular beliefs and cultural norms. Hence, the divergent perspectives and values that are generally required for diversity to be an effective strategy for an organization cannot be adapted properly to this type of work environment. Consequently, it is important that organizational leadership understands that diversity results in an array of attributes that impacts life experiences. According to Cox (2001), these include gender, race, national origin, religion, age and work specialization.

Based on Härtel's (2004) conceptualization of diversity openness, gender openness relates in this paper to the receptiveness toward female students in managerial education. According to the literature, gender openness is a variable of significance in the professional education of women. Tidball (1973) and Tidball and Kistiakowsky (1976) indicated that traditional women's colleges and universities are highly receptive to having female students train for professional careers and this openness is emphasized through the development of climates that foster the learning and professional development of their student populations. In contrast to these friendly settings, the literature also stated that within law schools and other professional education programs women and minorities frequently encounter hostile climates that prevent them from reaching their full academic potential (Tidball, 1973; Tidball and Kistiakowsky, 1976; Duehr and Bono, 2006).

Richardson and Skinner (1991) defined student diversity as a dynamic rather than static concept that flows from a reactionary environment to a climate of adaptation that leads to full inclusion within an academic program. According to these theorists, educational programs will initially attempt to increase diversity through recruitment activities that are generally intended to comply with governmental and legal pressures. Richardson and Skinner posit that the second stage of diversity is strategic in nature and is designed to retain students in an academic program. The final stage of Richardson and Skinner's student diversity model is the adaptive stage which emphasizes cooperative and active learning to strengthen the professional development of all students.

This investigator believes Richardson and Skinner's (2001) theoretical framework has relevance to the study of gender openness, its basis offered direction in formulation of hypotheses for testing postulations among recruitment, retention and professional development openness and female student representation in this study. Initially, the premise is made that environmental forces influence the degree of gender openness within an academic program. Research shows that organizational size and institutional type were

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two environmental influences that can have significant effects on the degree of openness toward protected groups (Moore *et al.*, 2001, 2004; Konrad and Linnehan, 1995). Consequently, the forthcoming section theorizes about the consequence of environmental influence on gender openness within academic programs of management.

### **Environmental influences and gender openness**

Program size is conjectured to have an effect on the degree of gender openness within an organization. First, large organizations are more visible to various constituencies. Those constituencies interested in increasing opportunities for female students in sport management are more likely to focus on large entities because larger programs touch more individuals and are often role models for smaller organizations. As such, large organizations comprise more efficient targets for advocating change. The third reason that organization size is perceived as a variable having an effect on gender openness is the formalization inherent in most large organizations. Studies indicate that larger organizations are more likely to develop formalized diversity initiatives to hire and promote women due to economies of scale (Kim, 2004; Moore *et al.*, 2004). Even if large organizations have the same level of unutilized resources as small organizations in percentage terms, the difference in actual budgetary allocations make large programs more capable of starting new initiatives.

According to the literature (Richardson and Skinner, 1991; Pless and Maak, 2004), gender openness first appears in a limited and reactionary state and ultimately broadens to a stage of full receptiveness in an academic organization. With respect to student diversity, Richardson and Skinner imply that educational programs typically establish recruitment related openness first as a response to environmental pressure:

*H1.* Program size is a positive predictor of recruitment openness toward female students.

The literature suggests that organizational type impacts the degree of gender openness within an academic program. The culture of public sector organizations is primarily designed to represent a model of a good society; thus gender equality is an important goal for the public enterprise (Connell, 2006). In contrast, there are indications that women encounter more stringent barriers in the private sector. Women often experience a lack of clarity about their role and overall lack of support for gaining success in organizations of a private nature (Wilson-Kovacs *et al.*, 2006). Finally, it is perceived as less normative for public institutions than for private institutions to restrict openness to any particular group. In the Western nations, particularly the USA and England, public institutions are expected to be more open to the participation of each citizen; whereas some private sector organizations have been able to formulate a rationale that restricted access is justified based on an organizational mission of selectivity:

*H2.* Broader public access within the programmatic climate increases recruitment openness toward female students.

### **Gender openness and representation of female students**

If sport management educational programs are to be more attentive in meeting the needs of female students, their cultures must become multicultural formations (DeSensi, 1995). This transformation would assist women and other unrepresentative

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groups to reach their full potential first as students and, ultimately, as members of the workforce. Pless and Maak (2004) argue that diversity cannot be realized without full inclusion of protected groups. Within this line of reasoning, Richardson and Skinner (1991), in their examination of student diversity, suggest that student diversity cannot be realized until full inclusion is achieved; and they assert that this degree of inclusion is not achieved until the adaptive stage is reached. However, their theoretical framework emphasizes that in order to move to a stage of adaptation, an academic program or institution must progress through stages of reactive and strategic periods of diversity. Richardson and Skinner suggest that the reactive stage emphasizes the recruitment of the protected groups to increase enrolment diversity. Once this stage has been successfully initiated, the Richardson and Skinner's paradigm indicates that the academic program enters the strategic stage. Within this phase of the model, attention is focused toward student retention:

*H3.* Broader recruitment diversity openness leads to increased openness toward efforts to retaining female students.

Carter (2007) indicated that one of the significant reasons for college students not to remain within a specific academic major or program of study is that they become disinterested in the subject matter. Further, the literature reports that retention programs assist students and their respective programmatic staff to become more engaged in the professional development process (Leverett *et al.*, 2007). Finally, the Richardson and Skinner (1991) model posits that once the strategic stage has been mobilized successfully, full inclusion begins to emerge as the adaptive stage evolves. In this stage, priority is given to structuring learning experiences that encourage the professional development of all students. Since sport management is an applied discipline, cooperative education experiences provide an indication of whether the program is meeting the professional development needs of its students:

*H4.* Openness toward student retention efforts leads to broader openness toward professional development activities for female students.

Student diversity practices for advancing the professional preparation of women have been shown to be effective. Previous authors have argued that academic climates possessing broader professional development openness have a higher representation of students from protected groups (Richardson and Skinner, 1991). Such climates are often structured to enable female students to take full advantage of professional development opportunities, thus encouraging their representation within sport management education (Cushner *et al.*, 2003; Moore *et al.*, 2004).

*H5.* A high level of professional development openness within the programmatic climate leads to greater representation of female students in sport management professional preparation programs.

## Methods

### *Survey instrument*

A review of the literature and discussions with sport management professionals were utilized to identify potential items for the survey instrument. The content validity of the instrument was assessed by a nine member expert panel, consisting of nine

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professors from sport management education and allied disciplines. These experts approved the use of a survey instrument (see Appendix) to examine:

- student diversity practices designed to promote openness toward educating women in sport management professional preparation programs;
- levels of social desirability bias through applying a measure created by Crowne and Marlowe (1964); and
- demographic characteristics.

A total of 20 sport management educational programs within the USA were asked to participate in pilot testing, and 13 administrators of these organizations completed and returned questionnaires. Through conducting a Cronbach  $\alpha$  assessment on the pilot test data, the investigator found  $\alpha$ s of 0.95 and 0.81, respectively, for the student diversity practices and social desirability bias constructs. Based on the  $\alpha$ s, the investigator deemed the survey instrument to be reliable.

#### *Data collection procedures*

A database of 172 sport management educational programs within the USA was created for data collection purposes. Introductory letters were mailed to one administrator (e.g., program coordinator or department head) for each of 172 programs to request their participation in the study. Approximately one week after the introductory mailing, survey materials were sent to the identified administrators for each selected program, followed by a reminder mailing three weeks later. These survey administration procedures resulted in 72 completed questionnaires being returned, a response rate of 42 percent.

#### *Measures*

The term “size” reflects the number of faculty members and the number of students in a sport management professional preparation program. This measure was assessed by asking the respondent to provide the number of undergraduate and graduate students and the number of full-time faculty members in their respective programs through open-ended response type questions.

“Program access” refers to the respective sport management professional preparation program being housed within an institution with restricted, moderate or public access (coded: 1 – restricted access, 2 – moderate access, 3 – public access).

The term “recruitment openness” refers to the degree of openness toward a marketing approach to recruiting female students. A summated two-item index was used to assess recruitment openness in sport management professional programs. Respondents were specifically asked of their respective programs:

Is the program open to formulating a marketing plan to recruit female students?

Is the program open to placing advertisements in publications targeting prospective female students?

Responses were as follows: 1 – strongly disagree; 2 – slightly disagree; 3 – neither agree nor disagree; 4 – slightly agree; 5 – strongly agree ( $\alpha = 0.79$ ).

Retention openness focuses on the extent of receptiveness of a program toward initiatives to retain female students. A Likert scale (coded: 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – slightly disagree; 3 – neither agree nor disagree, 4 – slightly agree, 5 – strongly

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agree;  $\alpha = 0.77$ ) was used to evaluate the three questions pertaining to retention openness:

Is the program open to appointing a departmental liaison to facilitate equality for female students?

Is the program open to establishing support groups for female students?

Is the program open to facilitating mentorship arrangements between practitioners and female students?

The term “professional development openness” refers to the degree of receptiveness toward practices designed to prepare female students for the working world through utilization of active learning techniques. To measure this construct, the following questions were asked:

Is the program open to organizing internships/cooperative employment for female students?

Is the program open to establishing programs to link female students to prospective employers?

Is the program open to the participation of female students at professional conferences?

Respondents assessed each of the three questions on a Likert scale (coded: 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – slightly disagree, 3 – neither agree nor disagree, 4 – slightly agree, 5 – strongly agree) ( $\alpha = 0.74$ ).

The final measure “representation of female students” refers to the percentage of women comprising the full-time student populations of the respective undergraduate and graduate programs. Subjects were asked to indicate the level of representation by selecting one of six responses. Responses were coded as follows: 1 = 5 percent, 2 = 10 percent, 3 = 25 percent, 4 = 35 percent, 5 = 45 percent, 6 = 50 percent.

#### *Data reliability and validity*

A cross-section study was designed to solicit responses from a single informant per organization. While a survey design of this nature can heighten apprehension over biased estimations due to the method of self-reporting, the investigator believes percept-percept inflation of results was of a nominal concern for the following reasons. First, questions were not presented in a pattern where respondents would expect to be consistent in their responses. In fact, conveying attitudes on a wide range of student-diversity issues suggests the possibility that consistency in their assessments would be unlikely to occur. Second, the structure of the survey instrument into separate categorizations of gender openness and the wording of questionnaire items was designed to reduce uniform responses. Third, forced attitudinal rating scales possessing clearly stated items were designed to generate unbiased responses. Finally, the topic and questions were viewed from a programmatic perspective; thus respondents were unlikely to state strongly subjective views instead of providing their objective assessments of gender openness measures within their respective program. According to Crampton and Wagner (1994), if the aforesaid conditions are satisfied, the likelihood of results being biased by percept-percept inflation is minimal.

Furthermore, anonymity increases the response rate and reduces social desirability bias in survey responses (Innes and Ahrens, 1990; Makki and McAllister, 1992). Survey responses appeared to be an accurate reflection of administrators’ efforts to achieve equality for women in contemporary organizations. For example, nearly one-half of the respondents in both the undergraduate and graduate samples indicated that fewer than

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40 percent of the students were women. In comparison, enrolment statistics indicate that 49 and 51 percent of students within recreation and leisure studies programs in the USA at the undergraduate and graduate levels, respectively, are women (National Centre for Educational Statistics, 2007). Additionally, an assessment of female students within US Colleges of Business revealed that women accounted for 50 and 42 percent of the respective enrolment at the baccalaureate and master's levels (National Centre for Educational Statistics). From these accounts, it would seem that respondents to this study did not provide their answers with a desire to project a socially desirable image of their programs since their evaluations were not given in glowing terms.

In addition, the validity of the survey data was enhanced by conducting preliminary testing for social desirability bias. There was no indication the results were significantly affected by social desirability bias. Preliminary statistical analysis also controlled for the influence of the gender (Kern, 1994; Tougas and Beaton, 1993) and race (Bobo and Kluegel, 1993; Smith and Witt, 1990) of the survey respondents.

Additionally, a confirmatory factor analysis was performed on the constructs of gender openness. The model of fit measures indicated the establishment of strong divergent and convergent validity relating to recruitment diversity openness, retention diversity openness, and professional development diversity openness variables. A  $\chi^2$  value of 21.75 ( $df = 17$ ,  $p = 0.19$ ) was reported for the confirmatory model. Further, the analysis also showed a goodness of fit index of 0.92 and incremental fit index of 0.92, offering additional evidence of a validated model. The outcomes of the divergent and convergent tests are supported by literature (Richardson and Skinner, 1991) suggesting that student diversity efforts are developed through a sequential approach that begins with a recruitment orientation and transforms through a student retention orientation to an adaptive orientation that emphasizes active learning.

#### *Data analysis*

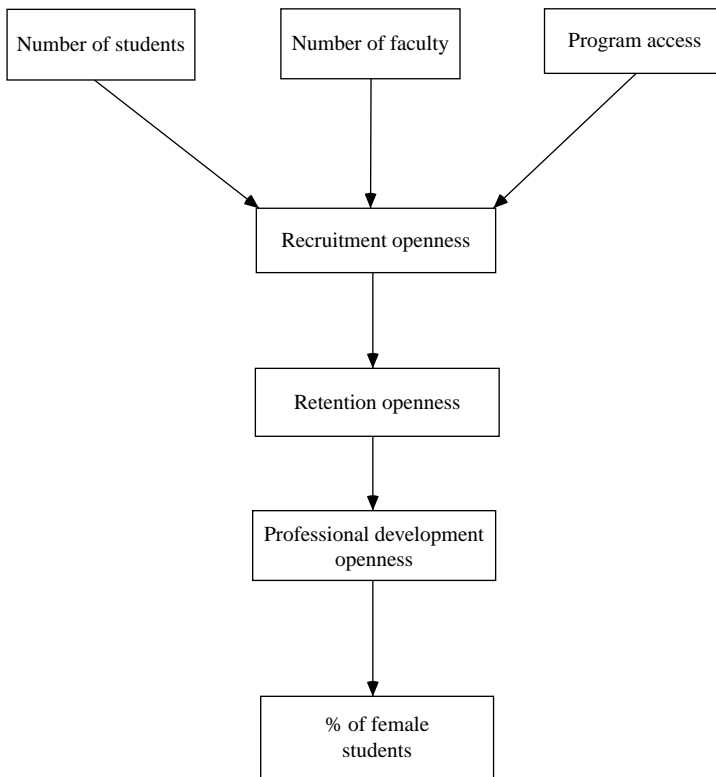
To assess the hypotheses formulated in this study, a structural equation model (SEM) was created and tested. Structural equation modelling was used because of its capability to assess simultaneously interrelationships among program factors, student diversity openness constructs and the representation of female students.

The proposed theoretical model shown in Figure 1 posits that recruitment diversity openness is influenced by program access, number of students and number of full-time faculty members. In addition, the model posits that professional development openness is influenced by retention openness; and hypothesizes that retention openness is influenced by openness toward recruitment initiatives. Finally, the model implies that the representation of female students is impacted by the degree of openness toward professional development programs.

#### **Results**

Preliminary statistical analysis indicated that the control variables showed no significant effects. Descriptive analysis revealed that 82 percent of the samples were Caucasian. Given its lack of variance, controlling for ethnicity was not important for protecting the internal validity of the study's findings. Additionally, descriptive analysis showed that 68 percent of the sample was male. Since 32 percent of those replying were female respondents, an independent *t*-test two-sample was performed to determine if gender status influences recruitment openness denoted theoretically in the





**Figure 1.**  
Environmental influences,  
gender openness  
constructs and percentage  
of female students

literature to be the first indicator of gender openness within an academic program. The test was not significant,  $t(70 \text{ df}) = -0.714, p = 0.479$ . The mean for male respondents ( $M = 9.33, SD = 3.75$ ) was not different from the mean for female respondent ( $M = 10.00, SD = 3.58$ ) on the recruitment openness variable. Hence, controlling for the gender of the respondents was not necessary for protecting the internal validity of the study's findings.

Since professional preparation programs in sport management are offered at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, two separate SEMs were developed and tested for the undergraduate and graduate sample, respectively. The undergraduate model was tested with a sample size of 47 responding institutions that indicated offering professional preparation in sport management at the undergraduate level. Forty-seven of the replying institutions also indicated offering professional preparation in sport management as a graduate program. Data from those institutions were utilized to test the graduate model. The statistics indicated that 12 of the institutions participating in this study offered professional preparation in the management of sport as both an undergraduate and graduate concentration. According to Chin (1998), the minimum sample size for an SEM analysis is determined by the dependent variable which has the largest number of independent variables. Chin recommends using a regression heuristic of 10 cases per independent variable. In the SEM specified for testing in this study, the dependent variable that has the largest number of independent variables is

recruitment openness, which is influenced by three independent variables. Based on the heuristic rule, the minimum sample size requirement is 30. Thus, both the undergraduate ( $n = 47$ ) and graduate ( $n = 47$ ) samples are sufficient for SEM testing.

Tables I and II show descriptive statistics for the undergraduate and graduate programs are shown. Tables III and IV reveal the coefficients for each causal path within the samples of the undergraduate and graduate programs.

For the undergraduate programs, the  $\chi^2$  fit statistic was non-significant ( $\chi^2 = 13.72$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p = ns$ ), indicating that the data did not depart significantly from the model. The goodness of fit index of 0.92 and incremental fit index of 1.00 also indicated a good fitting model. Additionally, for the graduate programs an acceptable level of fit to the data was revealed. The non-significant  $\chi^2$  value of 6.78 ( $df = 12$ ,  $p = ns$ ), the goodness of fit index of 0.96, and incremental fit index of 1.00 indicated that the data did not depart significantly from the model (Hair *et al.*, 2006).

*H1* stated that program size is a positive predictor of recruitment openness toward female students. There was a significant path found between the number of students and the degree of recruitment openness within the undergraduate sample; hence *H1* was partially supported.

*H2's* prediction that broader public access within the programmatic climate leads to increased recruitment openness toward female students was partially supported. There was a significant positive path between program access and recruitment openness within the undergraduate sample.

**Table I.**  
Correlations, standard deviations, and means (undergraduate sample)

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Number of students	1.00						
2. Number of faculty	-0.03	1.00					
3. Program access	-0.08	0.18	1.00				
4. Recruitment openness	0.36	0.01	0.12	1.00			
5. Retention openness	0.15	-0.08	0.17	0.52	1.00		
6. Professional development openness	0.04	0.07	-0.13	0.41	0.43	1.00	
7. Percentage of female students	-0.26	0.24	0.12	-0.16	-0.04	0.12	1.00
<i>M</i>	129	3.94	2.23	7.55	9.23	10.40	3.68
<i>SD</i>	322	3.29	0.98	2.54	3.66	3.17	1.50

**Table II.**  
Correlations, standard deviations, and means (graduate sample)

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Number of students	1.00						
2. Number of faculty	0.14	1.00					
3. Program access	-0.07	-0.14	1.00				
4. Recruitment openness	-0.03	-0.07	-0.11	1.00			
5. Retention openness	0.16	-0.17	-0.00	0.36	1.00		
6. Professional development openness	0.14	0.00	-0.11	0.25	0.63	1.00	
7. Percentage of female students	0.10	0.09	0.18	-0.08	-0.15	-0.13	1.00
<i>M</i>	35	3.56	2.66	7.83	9.85	10.89	4.00
<i>SD</i>	20	2.16	0.76	2.21	3.68	3.56	1.35

Path	Unstandardized coefficient (SE)	Standardized coefficient	<i>t</i> -value
Program access > recruitment openness	1.61 (0.77)	0.31	2.09*
Number of students > recruitment openness	0.00 (0.00)	0.31	2.09*
Number of faculty > recruitment openness	-0.02 (0.12)	-0.02	-0.14*
Recruitment openness > retention openness	0.84 (0.20)	0.55	4.14*
Retention openness > professional development openness	0.40 (0.11)	0.50	3.48*
Professional development openness > percentage of female students	0.09 (0.08)	0.19	1.14

**Note:** *n* = 47, 0.05

**Table III.**  
Path coefficients  
(undergraduate sample)

Path	Unstandardized coefficient (SE)	Standardized coefficient	<i>t</i> -value
Program access > recruitment openness	-0.67 (0.94)	-0.11	-0.71
Number of students > recruitment openness	0.00 (0.02)	0.02	0.14
Number of faculty > recruitment openness	-0.10 (0.16)	-0.10	-0.62
Recruitment openness > retention openness	0.60 (0.23)	0.38	2.63*
Retention openness > professional development openness	0.64 (0.12)	0.65	5.44*
Professional development openness > percentage of female students	-0.05 (-0.06)	-0.14	-0.88

**Note:** *n* = 47, 0.05

**Table IV.**  
Path coefficients  
(graduate sample)

There was a significant path between recruitment openness and retention openness within the sample of undergraduate students and the sample of graduate students. These findings provided support for *H3*'s prediction that broader recruitment diversity openness leads to increased openness toward efforts to retaining female students. At both undergraduate and graduate levels, there were significant paths between retention openness and professional development openness. Thus, *H4*'s prediction that openness toward student retention efforts leads to broader openness toward professional development activities for female students was supported.

Finally, *H5* predicting that a high-level of professional development openness within the programmatic climate leads to a great representation of female students in sport management professional preparation programs was not supported since there was no significant path shown between those variables within either the undergraduate or graduate samples.

## Discussion

The literature (Acosta and Carpenter, 2006; Lapchick, 2006) indicates that women encounter barriers in their pursuit of careers in the management of sport. As more attention is given to breaking the "glass ceiling," management education can have an important role in this process. However, there are limited data on how educators perceive gender openness as it relates to their respective programs. Härtel (2004) suggests that a climate of openness is needed to increase the representation of

protected groups in contemporary organizations. Consequently, this study sought to examine the effects of the dimensions of openness on the representation of female students within sport management education. First, this investigation suggests that faculty members' degree of openness toward recruiting female students has causality with their level of openness for establishing intervention to retain women as members of the student body. Second, the study found that openness toward intervention to retain female students has a significant effect on the level of receptiveness toward structuring professional development opportunities for female students. Professional development activities can engage students and help them adapt fully to their respective academic environments.

Based on the outcomes of this examination, a logical inference can be made that the pathway to full openness is achieved through a step-wise process. This supports the literature (Richardson and Skinner, 1991; DeSensi, 1995) stating that educational programs must be transformed from monoculture to multicultural entities before full receptiveness toward women and other protected classes can be achieved. Hence, this suggests that to understand and manage diversity effectively, educators should not perceive gender openness holistically. To do so could result in inaccurate interpretations of the concept. Instead, educators should adopt a sequential approach when assessing the degree of openness within their respective academic programs and when taking actions to broaden it.

Further examination of the results of this study showed that openness toward professional development intervention does not impact the level of representation of female students significantly. This suggests that enrolment in the short term may be primarily impacted by receptiveness toward recruitment activities. Furthermore, this study indicated that nearly 50 percent of responding undergraduate and graduate programs, respectively, reported that women accounted for less than 40 percent of their enrolment. Not only do these findings support the belief of Levsen *et al.* (2001) who suggested that women face challenges in obtaining the educational requirements to compete equally in the job market of the twenty-first century, they also imply that gender openness should be broadened if the representation of the women in sport management education is to be increased. Consequently, educators need to increase their understanding of gender openness since this knowledge can assist them in creating, implementing and managing programs to recruit, retain and professionally develop women for managerial careers. To increase awareness of gender openness, educators should continuously assess viewpoints of their respective faculties regarding the perceived similarities and dissimilarities between female and male students. Without measuring such attitudes, gender diversity within management education will likely remain at sub-par levels. Furthermore, to facilitate a state of broadened openness toward female students among the faculty members, academic programs should adopt knowledge-based tactics. These could include workshops and training sessions.

In conclusion, this study revealed that gender openness is established in sequence supporting the work of Richardson and Skinner (1991) and Pless and Maak (2004) that considers making an organization more diversified as a process. Additionally, this course of action was shown to be initiated by environmental influences. Thus, educators should consider these influences when implementing diversity programs and assessing their impact on the participation of female students.

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*Limitations and future research*

Although this study provided important insight into the professional preparation of female students within sport management education, it is not without limitations. One such limitation was the failure to use a longitudinal design. However, it is often beneficial to implement an investigation of a sensitive area that is cross-sectional in nature. The topic of student diversity can often evoke a myriad of perspectives, especially when respondents have limited awareness of the particular concerns of female students. Consequently, the researcher felt it was more important to protect the anonymity of the respondents to encourage them to provide unbiased information. A longitudinal design would have required that organizational respondents be identifiable to the researcher so that data collected at different points in time from the same program could be matched. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, such a design would likely have reduced the survey response considerably. Another limitation pertains to the geographical focus in the USA. Future replications of this study should have a global thrust. A good starting point could be to expand this study by assessing gender openness and its effect on the representation of women within sport management professional preparation programs across England, Canada and other Western nations.

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### Appendix. Survey items

#### *Recruitment openness*

(Response code: 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – slightly disagree, 3 – neither agree nor disagree, 4 – slightly agree, 5 – Strongly agree).

- Is the program open to formulating a marketing plan to recruit female students?
- Is the program open to placing advertisements in publications targeting prospective female students?

#### *Retention openness*

(Response code: 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – slightly disagree, 3 – neither agree nor disagree, 4 – slightly agree, 5 – strongly agree).

- Is the program open to appointing a departmental liaison to facilitate equality for female students?
- Is the program open to establishing support groups for female student?
- Is the program open to facilitating mentorship arrangements between practitioners and female students?

#### *Professional development openness*

(Response code: 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – slightly disagree, 3 – neither agree nor disagree, 4 – slightly agree, 5 – strongly agree).

- Is the program open to organizing internships/cooperative employment for female students?
- Is the program open to establishing programs to link female students to prospective employers?
- Is the program open to the participation of female students at professional conferences?

#### *Other variables of importance*

What is your gender? (Response code: 0 – female 1 – male).

What is your ethnicity? (0 – White/Caucasian, 1 – African American/Black, 2 – Latino, 3 – Asian; 4 – Native American, 5 – Other \_\_\_\_\_ (please specify)).

What is the total number of full-time students comprising your: undergraduate program \_\_\_\_\_ graduate program \_\_\_\_\_?

What is the total number of full-time sport management faculty members \_\_\_\_\_?

Please describe the institutional type in which the sport management educational program is housed? (Response code 1 – private access, 2 – uncertain, and 3 – public access).

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What percentage of the total undergraduate sport management population is comprised of women? (Response code: 1 = 5 percent, 2 = 10 percent, 3 = 25 percent, 4 = 5 percent, 5 = 45 percent, 6 = 50 percent).

What percentage of the total graduate sport management population is comprised of women? (Response code: 1 = 5 percent, 2 = 10 percent, 3 = 25 percent, 4 = 35 percent, 5 = 45 percent, 6 = 50 percent).

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#### **About the author**

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