

Addressing Gender Discrimination in the NBA with a “Hammon” Rule

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The purpose of this conceptual study was to examine how the National Basketball Association (NBA) should address gender discrimination in sports by implementing the “Hammon” Rule for head coaching and general manager hiring processes. Drawing from societal perceptions (Sagas & Cunningham, 2004; Schaeperkoetter et al., 2017), leadership (Burton, 2015), and the infusion of the Ecological-Intersectional Model (EIM; LaVoi, 2016) as conceptual focal points, this article asserts that the NBA has important opportunities to lead other professional sports leagues to aid in its recruitment and retention of women in front-facing leadership roles. Utilizing Lapchick’s (2020a) report on race and gender for the NBA, this study calls for progressive action. As the current literature documents, legal and cultural factors, as well as leadership and lack of advocacy, all play a crucial role in how women are perceived within sport. This study provides a multi-faceted approach to addressing gender discrimination at the coaching and general manager levels, including accountability measures necessary for structural and organizational change to address gender discrimination in the NBA and beyond.

Keywords: gender discrimination, NBA, homologous reproduction, EIM, role congruity

Introduction

Often referred to as a carousel, the coaching saga in the National Basketball Association (NBA) began with seven vacancies in the 2021 offseason (McGregor, 2021). While three of the four filled openings were men of color, a glaring issue remains: When will a woman be hired to lead an NBA roster as the head coach? For a league that is frequently touted for its diversity and inclusion efforts, the NBA has much more work to do in hiring women as coaches and general managers (Lapchick, 2020a). During the 2019-2020 basketball season, only nine women held assistant coaching roles, while no woman has served as an NBA

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general manager (Lapchick, 2020a). One of the women in an assistant role is Becky Hammon of the San Antonio Spurs, a position she has held since the 2014 season. On March 3, 2020, the league took a further step backwards when the head coach of the San Antonio Spurs, Gregg Popovich, was sidelined for a personal matter (Baker, 2020). Instead of designating Hammon to lead the team as the acting head coach, thereby becoming the first woman to serve as a head coach within a regular season contest, the Spurs opted for team legend and first-year assistant Tim Duncan to serve in such capacity.

This was not the first time Hammon was denied the opportunity of being a head coach in the NBA. A finalist for the coaching vacancy in 2018 for the Milwaukee Bucks, and in the most recent hiring cycle for the Portland Trailblazers, Hammon was not selected and remains as an assistant with the Spurs (McGregor, 2021; Velzaquez, 2018). Hammon, a 16-season veteran in the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), two-time Olympian, and NBA summer league head coach, has the accolades and experience to be an effective leader in basketball and all of sport (Schaeperkoetter, Mays, & Bass, 2017; Velzaquez, 2018).

It is well documented that competent, skilled, and qualified women like Hammon have experienced discrimination in the workplace on a consistent basis (Fink, 2016). Specifically within sport, women have been discriminated against, especially within the game of basketball, as rules and spaces varied for women in the foundations of the sport (Cain, 2001; Fields, 2004; Sanderson & Gramlich, 2016).

As professional sport leagues attempt to be more inclusive in their hiring and retention practices, the purpose of this review is to develop a series of recommendations to be implemented by the NBA to address gender discrimination by developing intentional practices within existing organizational structures. The NBA is spotlighted due to its relative racial and gender progressiveness (Lapchick, 2020a, 2020b) compared to other professional leagues in the United States, with the exception of the WNBA.

While much of the existing literature focuses on elements of law, leadership, culture, and advocacy of others within sport, the need for policy change is dire. The creation of a "Hammon Rule" would encourage the NBA to take a stand and require each team to strongly consider women for all head coach and general manager vacancies. To support the existing literature, the suggested Hammon Rule is modeled after elements of the National Football League's (NFL) Rooney Rule—a policy that requires teams to consider one or more diverse candidates for head coach and general manager vacancies (National Football League, 2018). Additionally, this article looks to explore the systemic issues in place that prevent women from securing leadership roles within the NBA. Through the assessment of current initiatives by the NBA to be more gender inclusive, the current study will provide recommendations on how to advance existing structures to create actual policy changes.



Though continued hiring practices often remain rooted in discrimination, decision makers cite women's deficiency in skill, knowledge, and professional and personal choices (LaVoi, 2016) for their lack of opportunity. The forthcoming literature review, with the highlighted conceptual frameworks, explains the various discriminatory efforts at the individual, interpersonal, organizational, and societal levels. Building on the foundation set by Kanter (1977), LaVoi's (2016) conceptual framework discusses the intersection of power and identity within the work setting.

Literature Review

Women have been underrepresented in men's sports throughout the history of competitive contests. Even when progress seems to have been made, the numbers continue to pale in comparison with the numbers of men serving in leadership roles for women's teams (Blom et al., 2011). For instance, of the 12 head coaches in the WNBA, only four of the coaches are women, resulting in 75% of the posts being held by men (WNBA, 2020). In addition to the statistics regarding who is allowed to serve in coaching and managerial roles within a given organization or league, elements of discrimination law provide a foundation to explore the historical effects on women's involvement in sports. Drawing on conceptual frameworks provided by the Ecological-Intersectional Model (EIM; LaVoi, 2016), women in leadership (Burton, 2015; Stangl & Kane, 1991), and societal expectations (Sagas & Cunningham, 2004; Schaeperkoetter et al., 2017), the literature review reviews the impact of legal, leadership, cultural, and advocacy concepts to support the need for such policy change.

Applicable Conceptual Framework

Schaeperkoetter and colleagues (2017) discussed the influences of cultural capital (Saga & Cunningham, 2004), role congruity (Eagly & Karau, 2002), and homologous reproduction (Stangl & Kane, 1991) when examining gender differences in sport. Beyond the influences reviewed by Schaeperkoetter and colleagues (2017), LaVoi (2016) presented the EIM, which depicts the impact of individual, interpersonal, organizational structure and sociocultural practices. In explaining the impacts of the individual and environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) and how power is distributed, LaVoi's (2015) model navigated the multi-factorial distribution of power among the individual, interpersonal, organizational, and societal. In considering the individual level, EIM takes account of the intersection of identities rather than handling them in isolation (LaVoi, 2016). When managers and others in sport operate from an angle in which aspects of identity are separated out, the acts of discrimination, sexism, racism, and other moments of bias are woven into the fabric of the organization (LaVoi, 2016).



Furthermore, Burton (2015) emphasized the restriction of women's access in sport and the effects of institutionalized practices creating varying levels of expectations based on gender.

Additionally, within LaVoi's (2016) interpretation of EIM, the emphasis of interpersonal, organizational, and societal influences creates a two-way street of power dynamics. At the individual and interpersonal level, women are often blamed for disparities and lack of opportunity. This can break down the specified gender, resulting in limited opportunities to positively impact or change organizations and society (LaVoi, 2016). With such approach, organizations can remain traditionally masculine and hold all influential power, resulting in freedom of decisions among all aspects of EIM (LaVoi, 2016).

Cultural capital is defined as making employment decisions based on societal expectations (LaVoi, 2016; Sagas & Cunningham, 2004; Schaeperkoetter et al., 2017), while coinciding with how sport industries navigate culture within the work environment. Furthermore, cultural capital also cements the notion that hiring agents have varying expectations for women (Blom et al., 2011; Burton, 2015; Sagas & Cunningham, 2004; Schaeperkoetter et al., 2017). LaVoi (2016) described the intersection of power and environment that leads to cultural barriers in place for women in sport. Additionally, LaVoi (2016) highlighted that women are brought in but not developed to move up within the organization, thus having their power of influence stuck at the individual level. Burton (2015) emphasized the institutional level demonstrates the lack of power at the organizational or societal levels, which leads to women remaining stagnant within an organization and limiting their impact.

Role congruity is best described as societal perceptions regarding leadership (Schaeperkoetter et al., 2017). Through the limitation of access to resources and varying treatment, women are consistently placed at a disadvantage and not given the same power and influence as male counterparts within an organization (Burton, 2015; LaVoi, 2016). In addition, should a woman be in a leadership role and make a mistake with her responsibilities, the level of scrutiny and loss of credibility are amplified, in contrast to when a male peer were to make a similar misstep (Schaeperkoetter et al., 2017).

Lastly, homologous reproduction may be the most crucial of the discussed concepts. Homologous reproduction occurs, for example, when predominately White male hiring managers select candidates with whom they can identify and relate (Lapchick, 2020a; Stangl & Kane, 1991; Schaeperkoetter et al., 2017). The decisions made by hiring stakeholders affect and influence fans, boosters, sponsors, and other financial supporters (Schaeperkoetter et al., 2017). While management reiterates the value of inclusive practices, the failure to make significant changes related to policies and procedures further amplifies discriminatory practices (Burton, 2015; Stangl & Kane, 1991).



Throughout this literature review, the concepts presented by Burton (2015), LaVoi (2016), and Schaeperkoetter and colleagues (2017) are woven into legal cases, lack of advocacy from others, leadership perceptions, and organizations. These conceptual frameworks serve as the foundation in how women navigate and balance the level of influence all the way through society. Furthermore, they highlight the lack of power women are given and how the systems in place have continued to oppress women in sport.

Law

To assess the gender-based discrimination within sport and the legal cases that seek to address it, this section presents a variety of cases brought by women athletes and coaches against organizations. While the emphasis in the legal cases discussed is focused on athletes and coaches, the translation and infusion of discrimination against women is woven into the fabric of sport at all levels. Even prior to the inception of Title VII—the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, n.d), and Title IX, women have had to seek legal measures to carve out a space within sport. Specifically in basketball, women brought legal challenges seeking opportunities to play the sport according to the same rules and regulations that applied to men (Cain, 2001; Fields, 2004). In the early stages of women's basketball, prior to legal action, state associations frequently restricted the contests to half court or allowed each team to compete with six women on the court at a time (Cain, 2001; Fields, 2004).

One of the landmark cases, *Cape v Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association*, called for such basics as playing the game full court (Fields, 2004). While the defendant felt they and other women were within their rights to compete under similar conditions as men, the association's argument relied on perceptions of women's strength and stamina (Fields, 2004). The court ruled in favor of Cape, holding that the rationale of less physical strength was irrational and overbroad (Fields, 2004). The court in *Jones v Oklahoma Secondary School Athletics Association 1977* found no constitutional violation (Fields, 2004). The dissent noted, however, that the state of Oklahoma was not consistent with other states and would personally be in favor of a women's game that is consistent with that of the men (Fields, 2004). The case of *Dodson v Arkansas Activities Association 1979*, also addressed separate basketball rules (Cain, 2001; Fields, 2004). In sports generally and specifically in the game of basketball, women have had to overcome various discriminatory policies, and there is much more work to be done.

In addition to athletes, women coaches have faced discrimination in sport. In recent years, Burton and LaVoi (2019) highlighted the discrepancy in coaching dismissals among women and men, often leading to legal disputes. The University



of Iowa settled with a former field hockey coach due to the coach questioning her firing as being based on gender and sexual orientation (Burton & LaVoi, 2019; Emmert, 2017). Similarly, in 2014 another settlement occurred between the University of Minnesota-Duluth and former women's hockey coach Shannon Miller, as Miller sued for gender discrimination after being quite successful in her athletic program on and off the ice (Burton & LaVoi, 2019). More recently, two coaches at separate institutions in the state of South Carolina filed lawsuits against their institutions for wrongful termination. The first claimed the athletic director of Charleston Southern University wrongfully dismissed her after the athletic director claimed the coach was unable to balance pregnancy, childcare, and coaching (Martin, 2020). A lawsuit was also filed against the University of South Carolina Upstate as a long-time head coach's contract was allegedly not renewed because officials wanted to silence the coach from speaking out on gender equity and sexual harassment claims (Martin, 2020). The highlighted cases are simply a snapshot of the legal battles women have faced within sport, and do not encompass the vast array of instances and experiences that go unreported or are not given the same attention as other cases and circumstances.

Leadership

While women have continued to cement their identity as athletes within the sport of basketball through physical ability (Fields, 2004), there remains a need for societal growth around the notion of women's leadership ability in sports. As women athletes pressed for equality, the legal system continued to engage in a double standard (Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013). Women have and continue to be stereotyped for being less fit for leadership roles as compared to their male counterparts (Fink, 2016; Hindman & Walker, 2020; Sanderson & Gramlich, 2016; Schull & Kihl, 2019; Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013). Such limitations are founded on systems of oppression in which women at the individual level are not given opportunities for growth and development similar to their male colleagues (Burton, 2015; LaVoi, 2016). Furthermore, such lack of exposure at the individual level affects the view of women at the organizational and societal levels.

Women are qualified, experienced, and accomplished as former athletes, and can step into a coaching or managerial position, but are not selected for the top positions because of their gender (Schaeperkoetter et al., 2017). Furthermore, Schaeperkoetter and colleagues (2017) find successful instances in which women are selected to lead in various positions as publicity grabs by the organization or team. Further, women are being hired for specific positions but the nature of those positions further perpetuates the gender gap in the lead roles (Schaeperkoetter et al., 2017).



Women are often associated with gendered qualities, such as being nurturing, relational, and emotional, that have a negative effect on their ability to secure managerial roles (Forsyth, Jones, Duval, & Bambridge, 2019; Schull & Kihl, 2019). These negative generalizations often lead to further stereotyping and marginalization, often affecting perception and representation (Forsyth et al., 2019). Additionally, women may feel the need to take on other aspects of their identity to downplay these qualities, leading them to be viewed negatively. These biases by decision makers affects the perception of the woman candidates' commitment to coaching (Cunningham et al., 2019).

Culture

Because the culture of sport has long associated leadership with men, these gendered assumptions can negatively impact work culture for women within sport (Schull & Kihl, 2019). The organizational and societal cultures are not easily infiltrated due to the limitations put on women at the individual level (Burton, 2015; LaVoi, 2016). Discrimination against women in sport has been normalized and remains a barrier to women who seek their rightful place in the game (Forsyth et al., 2019; Hindman & Walker, 2020). Culture is infused into society and children at a young age. Fink (2016) described the discriminatory conditioning beginning at an early age when phrases such as “you play like a girl” are used as an insult. These learned behaviors translate into the workplace when discriminatory and sexist acts are often ignored, minimized, laughed about, or even accepted (Fink, 2016).

Additionally, gender discrimination, like other oppressive behaviors (e.g., racism, social class, sexual orientation) can present in various forms. In furthering Fink's (2016) view on gender discrimination as a learned behavior, Hindman and Walker (2020) emphasized the negative impact on organizational culture of systemic sexism. Discrimination toward women in sport can be overt or subtle (Fink, 2016; Forsyth et al., 2019; Hindman & Walker, 2020). An individual being given advice about their appearance may in some contexts be harmless, but a male superior who tells a female subordinate to “smile” to be more “approachable” is engaging in subtle discrimination (Hindman & Walker, 2020). When a woman challenges the norms set forth by society and the systems in place, they are often greeted with resistance, hostility, and sense of intrusion (Sanderson & Gramlich, 2016).

Lack of Advocacy by Others

At the societal and organizational levels (LaVoi, 2016), women are often dismissed within their roles of sport. Specifically, men have had their fair share



of negative impact on the progression and development of women in leadership or managerial roles within athletics. While men can be allies, many have created barriers to women's development in leadership and managerial roles—rooted in discrimination—that act as additional steps women must navigate when pursuing opportunities (Blom et al., 2011; Burton, 2015; LaVoi, 2016). In a large number of circumstances within professional sports, the decision makers are often men who are owners, presidents, and general managers making the hiring and firing conclusions (Forsyth et al., 2019; LaVoi, 2016).

Additionally, while Cunningham and colleagues (2019) call for role-modeling among women as an intentional offer of support, men are responsible for similar acts of providing a space for women to bring diverse perspectives, championing equality and professional behavior. Women in coaching and leadership positions often feel disrespected as disciplinarians and looked down upon for being emotional (LaVoi, 2016; Schull & Kihl, 2019). These moments of discomfort among a woman coach and male athlete lead to women feeling judged, labeled, and defeated (Forsyth et al., 2019; LaVoi, 2016).

Conversely, men have a sense of purpose and rejuvenation in seeking out coaching and managerial positions within sport (Blom et al., 2011; Schaeperkoetter et al., 2017). Men have generally navigated women's sports freely and without the burdens of sexism, while often women feel they must work twice as hard in order to even be in the conversation for a posting within a male sport (Forsyth et al., 2019). The increase in men's involvement over the years within the women's game is due to financial gain and an increased number of positions (Blom et al., 2011; Schaeperkoetter et al., 2017). For instance, in the collegiate sports environment, women represent fewer than half of the assistant positions on women's teams (Cunningham et al., 2019). Additionally, women are afforded fewer opportunities (Burton, 2015; Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013) in what can be known as the "old man's club"—where men are creating and upholding an unwelcoming environment for individuals who do not look or think similarly (Blom et al., 2011; Burton, 2015; Sanderson & Gramlich, 2016). This can be manifest by questions to assess women's competency, furthering the lack of support among men (Blom et al., 2011; Burton, 2015).

The aforementioned literature review shows that women historically have been limited in their ability to grow and develop within sport. Through the implementation of the conceptual framework presented by LaVoi (2016), women remain positioned at the individual and interpersonal levels, limiting their impact and power at the organizational and societal levels. Further, due to the inactions by counterparts and the prevailing perceptions in place, women are limited in overall access to opportunities and in how they are treated (Burton, 2015; Stangl & Kane, 1991). These limitations have existed and continue to persist at the legal,



leadership, and organizational levels. While women in sport continue to seek additional opportunities and responsibilities, the notion of role congruity and cultural capital (Sagas & Cunningham, 2004; Schaeperkoetter et al., 2017; Stangl & Kane, 1991) can box women out of their rightful and overdue positions.

Developing a Model for Gender Equality in the NBA

The National Football League (NFL) has a policy—the Rooney Rule—that explicitly attempts to address the lack of diversity in coaching and general manager positions. The NBA should follow this approach to address discrimination against women. Considering the existing literature coupled with the NFL’s Rooney Rule and Lapchick’s (2020a) NBA race and gender report, a “Hammon Rule” could be an important step in addressing gender equity in the NBA.

To best support the data gathered and the grading implemented per category, race and gender, among the various positions within the NBA, Lapchick (2020a; 2020b) works directly with the league office and compares the figures from the upcoming year to previous seasons. Furthermore, the letter grade is comprised of comparing the number of individuals within a specific role while using an already established metric of societal patterns (Lapchick, 2020a, 2020b).

According to Lapchick (2020a), the NBA compares well with professional leagues with an overall grade of an A-, with an A+ for racially diverse hiring. However, while there has been some success in the hiring and retention practices for women in the NBA, there remains work to be done. In areas that are not related to coaching and general manager roles, the NBA has a consistent area of improvement when hiring women in leadership level positions. When hiring women for team Vice Presidents and above, the NBA received a D+, though this area has improved from previous years (Lapchick, 2020a). Conversely, the NBA has seen a decrease in the hiring of women for presidents and chief executive officers (CEOs) postings from previous years but continues to receive a letter grade of an F (Lapchick, 2020a).

Focusing on managerial roles and coaching positions, as this research review emphasizes, the NBA has witnessed an increase in women securing NBA senior management positions from 2019 to the 2020 season with an overall letter grade of a C+ (Lapchick, 2020a). Furthermore, the Lapchick (2020a) report provides a letter grade and percentage related to the racial makeup of the head coaches, but fails to provide the equivalent for gender, due to the lack of any women securing a head coaching position. Thus, while women are represented within the league office and upper-level management, the gender gap at the coaching and general manager levels remains persistent (Lapchick, 2020a). During the 2019-2020 NBA season, there were only nine women in a coaching capacity, all in assistant roles, and similarly to head coaches, there has never been a female general manager



(Lapchick, 2020a). The presence of women in some assistant roles but not lead roles further stresses why the NBA is highlighted among other leagues that are predominately men. The NBA is well positioned to make systemic changes to its hiring practices due to its success in addressing racial and gender inequities in other areas (Lapchick, 2020a).

The Hammon Rule

The NBA can lead U.S. professional sports in addressing gender discrimination by adopting the proposed Hammon Rule (Lapchick, 2020a). The Hammon Rule will serve as a guide for the NBA to emphasize the recruitment, retention, and awareness of women in leadership roles (Lapchick, 2020a). This article will outline efforts to already existing practices and recommend new NBA initiatives that can assist in addressing the role of women in managerial and head coaching roles.

Leadership Development

Currently the WNBA engages girls ages 7 to 14 to promote participation in the game of basketball (Lapchick, 2020a). In being intentional about promoting the opportunity for women to land coaching positions, the NBA should expand the “Her Time to Play” initiative to include the foundational elements of coaching, strategy, and preparation. Additionally, the NBA has collaborated with Girls Who Code to engage female students as it relates to digital space partnerships and career opportunities (Lapchick, 2020a). This opportunity should be expanded beyond the digital space and more into the managerial forum, including current general managers, vice presidents, and other upper-level managers to serve and exhibit role-modelled behavior. In engaging in either or both recommendations, the NBA would help address cultural and structural issues within sport (Burton, 2015; LaVoi, 2016; Schaeperkoetter et al., 2017) that can perpetuate gender discrimination. By doing so, the NBA will create an environment that is intentionally addressing systemic perceptions of women in leadership roles. Furthermore, it would address sociocultural ideology around sport that represents a masculine hegemonic norm (Burton, 2015; LaVoi, 2016; Schaeperkoetter et al., 2017).

The NBA women’s network. To foster conversation and encourage professional development, this space is created for women to share their knowledge and experiences with opportunities to connect with women NBA senior leaders (Lapchick, 2020a). The recommendation is to redesign elements of this collaboration to serve as an advisory council that identifies qualified, experienced, and successful women who can transition into a coaching or managerial position. In partnership with an already existing collaboration with Women in Sports and Events (WISE), the NBA should implement strategic recruiting in which external stakeholders are identifying talented women among high school coaches, college coaches, and



athletic directors in the education sector. Implementing such strategy will further delve into the notion of power (LaVoi, 2016) among all stakeholders. More women will seize the opportunities of being at the table, which will translate through the transaction of power from the individual level through organizational and societal lenses (LaVoi, 2016). A goal would be to have continued efforts translate to more women in decision-making roles, which would result in shared power. Thus women just beginning in a leadership role or who have served for decades are supported and encouraged (LaVoi, 2016) to identify, call to action, and create change when women candidates are not selected for a vacancy. Similar to the accountability measure in place for NBA players to address league personnel violating safety and security measures (e.g., players leaving the COVID “bubble”), the formal creation and support of accountability measures related to gender discrimination should be welcomed and applauded. The establishment of a discrimination reporting line is also crucial to creating such disruptive change (LaVoi, 2016). Without creating meaningful and intentional practices in addressing discrimination, the change will be lackluster and not supported by all stakeholders. Additionally, in creating this space for women to further engage, the NBA will contribute to denouncing the ideas of role congruity in which perceptions of leadership are reserved for men (Schaeperkoetter et al., 2017).

Anti-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment

Within this initiative, the NBA makes recommendations to all teams regarding policies and trainings as it relates to anti-discrimination and anti-harassment, including a hotline in which stakeholders can report complaints (Lapchick, 2020a). What remains missing from the anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies are the training and accountability measures in place for all stakeholders. The NBA should require measurable outcomes specific to gender, with training and accountability methods at all levels. Furthermore, the development of concrete accountability measures should be widely publicized to further support women and minorities in the workplace.

The NBA needs to make clear the zero tolerance related to gender discrimination when recruiting, hiring, and retaining personnel. Diffusing power dynamics (LaVoi, 2016) and a culture in which individuals are supported when reporting an experience will lead to true policy and procedural changes (Burton, 2015). Similar to the actions instituted by the NBA’s Board of Governors regarding anti-drug programs, should a team or individual engage in discrimination or harassment, the violator would be held accountable through fines, suspensions, or dismissal (National Basketball Association, 2019). On any allegation of harassment or discrimination, the alleged should be subject to meet with the Board of Governors or its designee. Based on the outcome, the NBA should institute a progressive



model similar to other violations in which the league begins with a fine and moves toward dismissal. An example of this is the swift action the NBA has taken regarding fan engagement in which spectators are penalized, removed, and banned for their discriminatory behavior or words. At the point in which an individual is near dismissal, an external review board should be called upon to avoid conflicts of interests in the decision-making process. Should an individual be dismissed, a reinstatement would involve a two-year ban prior to review of the Board of Governors for reinstatement (National Basketball Association, 2019). Taking such action would significantly diminish the influence of power (Burton, 2015; LaVoi, 2016) and create an environment that practices what it outwardly preaches.

Hiring

Adopted in 2003, the Rooney Rule requires every team with a head coaching vacancy to interview at least one or more diverse candidates (National Football League, 2018). The Rooney Rule has expanded since the initial conception, as the policy began to incorporate general managers or equivalent front-office positions in 2009 (National Football League, 2018). The rule was put in place by administrators within the league office to address racial equity concerns and the lack of visual diversity among head coaches. The majority of NFL head coaches have traditionally been White; however, from 1990-2002, Black head coaches performed better than their White counterparts in terms of wins and losses (Fanning Madden & Ruther, 2011). After the culmination of the 2002 year, the policy went into effect to continue to broaden the pool of diverse coaches.

Currently, the Rooney Rule provides a guide to NFL teams with much gray area. The following are the amendments, pulled directly from the NFL (2018), which are intended to encourage and educate teams on being more diverse in their hiring practices:

1. Clubs must interview at least one diverse candidate from the Career Development Advisory Panel list or a diverse candidate not currently employed by the club;
2. Clubs must continue best practice recommendation of considering multiple diverse candidates;
3. Clubs must maintain complete records and furnish to the league upon Commissioner's request; and
4. If final decision-maker is involved in the beginning, he/she must be involved through the conclusion of the process.

While on the surface, the implementation of the Rooney Rule provides a blueprint to teams and executives on hiring coaches and general managers, some



have described it as a policy for publicity's sake (Schaeperkoetter et al. 2017). To further cement the critique of the NFL's Rooney Rule, in the 2020 Racial and Gender Report Card, Lapchick (2020b) reported that the NFL had only two general managers who are Black. As it relates to head coaches within the same league, Lapchick (2020b) gave the NFL a D+, citing only 12.5% in the hiring of head coaches of color.

Additionally, the Rooney Rule serves as a check-box for teams and ownership when considering hiring practices in order to gain an additional draft pick and to avoid accountability measures from league officials should an organization not follow the rule (Fanning Madden & Ruther, 2011). The implementation of solely the Rooney Rule and not the incorporation of diverse, equitable, and inclusive practices in all facets of policies, procedures, and practices within the NFL remain systemic issues. Additionally, by requiring team owners to consider at least one diverse individual with historically marginalized identities for coaching and general manager vacancies, the perception of being tokenized as the sole woman or individual of color presents its own challenges. Biases remain persistent as the overwhelming majority of the decision makers in the NFL remain White men, so that individuals from traditionally under-represented backgrounds will stand out among other candidates (Lapchick, 2020b).

Nevertheless, while the Rooney Rule has its shortcomings, like the NFL (Fanning Madden & Ruther, 2011; Lapchick, 2020b; NFL, 2018), the NBA should implement recruitment strategies in which WISE and the Women's Network (NBA, 2019) provide a list of qualified and experienced women coaches and managers to all teams when a vacancy occurs within its organization. And although the Rooney Rule has been criticized for a failure to produce actual diverse hires (Lapchick, 2020b), the NBA has had success generally in holding teams accountable (e.g., the Donald Sterling situation). Therefore, the NBA is well-positioned to mandate that teams with a vacancy in any leadership capacity—coaching or administrative role—identify at least two women from said database to be considered. In furthering their efforts related to recruitment and retention, the NBA would be addressing ongoing homologous practices put in place by decision makers (Schaeperkoetter et al., 2017) while addressing a shortcoming of the Rooney Rule regarding isolating one individual among a group of people with privileged identities. Furthermore, should a team consistently hire men over women or have a pattern of dismissing women employees, an external review would be required to assess the overall culture within the organization. Engaging in swift and meaningful action that denounces all hateful and harmful practices can lead to significant change within the organization (Burton, 2015; LaVoi, 2016). Only through such enforcement will there be a shift in ownership ideology.



Conclusion

Mandating the Hammon Rule in the NBA and beyond is not simply to check a box, but a way to continue to raise awareness among sport leagues to weave gender equity into the fabric of all policies, procedures, and initiatives. Having an isolated hiring initiative will only go so far, while making systemic changes to the way women are incorporated and given access to lead are critical to the success of gender equity in sport. Qualifications do not seem to be enough (Burton, 2015; LaVoi, 2016; Sanderson & Gramlich, 2016), so leagues such as the NBA, which prides itself on being socially aware, should set the tone and example for other leagues.

In order for the Hammon Rule to be successful, the systemic issues set by learned behavior and male peers needs to be discussed, trained, and implemented head-on. In recruiting and retaining women within sport, disciplinary measures should be used against those who create social and work environments that perpetuate discrimination (Blom et al., 2011, LaVoi, 2016; Schaeperkoetter et al., 2017). While leadership roles have been gendered with men in mind, women have exemplified their rightful place in sport through experience, skill, and knowledge (Blom et al., 2011; Burton, 2015; Cain, 2001; LaVoi, 2016; Sagas and Cunningham, 2004; Schaeperkoetter et al., 2017; Stangl & Kane, 1991).

In implementing the Hammon Rule, the NBA will foster and exemplify the importance of women role models who may contribute to assisting others (Forsyth et al., 2019; Sagas & Cunningham, 2004; Schaeperkoetter et al., 2017). The overwhelming lack of gender-relatable role models continues to magnify gender differences, further amplifying the discrimination (Forsyth et al., 2019). Additionally, Hammon herself is still dealing with challenges in breaking barriers, while others who are not as decorated or qualified for the role may feel a sense of defeat, leading them to not even consider applying (Sagas & Cunningham, 2004; Schaeperkoetter et al., 2017).

The aforementioned areas of culture and perception regarding women in head coaching and general manager roles are simply two prongs of the greater image of addressing gender discrimination. Instances in which the NBA can rewrite history, legally and/or anecdotally, in addition to marketing women in these elevated roles will revise how individuals in sport will define leadership and the intersection with gender. While the initial hiring of Becky Hammon as an NBA assistant coach was monumental (Sanderson & Gramlich, 2016), the NBA and specific organizations should not simply settle for status quo. This review of literature, coupled with the proposed implementation of the Hammon Rule, provide a blueprint for furthering the fight against gender discrimination in sport. From a male-dominated sport in the NBA, the league should embrace such changes to truly pave the way for other male-dominated leagues in addressing



gender discrimination throughout each sport organization, especially within coaching and managerial positions.

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