"Off the court". Numeric gender representation in Italian women's basketball

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Abstract

The present study investigates gender dynamics in the Italian top women's basketball league, *Serie A1*, specifically numeric gender representation in off-the-court leadership positions and its potential influence on production relations and power relations, the first two dimensions of Connell's (2002) model. Italy is historically a country with a dominant patriarchal society and few women in leadership and decision-making positions. We performed frequency counts of gender by team and position and performed frequency distribution looking at 14 teams during the 2019-2020 season. A gender division emerged because men assumed the majority of off-the-court positions in the league. Men prevailed over women in power relations, occupying the most influential positions in the teams. There are very few women in leadership positions in the Italian teams. It is possible that the underrepresentation of women contributes to a lack of gendered emotional relations and the assumptions that male dominance is "natural."

Keywords: gender; sport; women's basketball; teams; Italy.

1. Introduction

Despite data showing that women now have greater opportunities to participate in sport at worldwide level (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Smith & Wrynn, 2013), there is still much work to be done in terms of leadership positions in sport. In the United States, for example, nearly 14,000 female professionals are employed within intercollegiate athletics, including coaches, assistant coaches, sports information directors, athletic trainers, athletics administrators and strength and conditioning coaches (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). The share of women in leadership positions, however, is still relatively small. In the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), only 22.3% women held a position as athletics director (AD) in all divisions combined, with Division I having the lowest number and Division III the highest number of female athletic directors (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). In addition, the majority of

women's teams are coached by men (57.1%), whereas almost all men's teams are coached by men (98%). It is important to note that having a female AD typically leads to a higher percentage of female coaches (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014), which suggests that having women in leadership positions is more likely to help other women to get more job opportunities in the sport industry. Similar trends can be observed at an international level. No woman has ever served as an International Olympic Committee (IOC) President and the 206 National Olympic Committees (NOCs) remain largely dominated by men. In fact, only 13 women occupied the role of NOC President, while 33 were Secretary General (IOC, 2018). Similar composition was found in the International Federations, where only four had a female President, and 18 had female Secretary Generals (IOC, 2018).

Under these circumstances, it is likely that search committees in the sport industry are seeking candidates that they believe are going to succeed in male-dominated organizations (Coakley, 2015), which in turn may have serious implications for women who want to have a career in this industry. It is important, however, for sport organizations to recognize that a combination of many human attributes enhance successful performance and the value of a diverse set of contributors within the organization is crucial in facing more complex tasks and challenges (Landy & Conte, 2013).

2. Purpose

This exploratory study seeks to contribute to the investigation on gender in sport organizations (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Adriaanse, 2015; Burton, 2015; Coakley, 2015; Henry & Robinson, 2010; Pfister & Radtke, 2009; Schull, Shaw & Kihl, 2013; Smith & Wrynn, 2013; Whisenant, Pedersen & Obenour, 2002; Wicker, Breuer & Von Hanau, 2012). It investigates gender dynamics in the Italian top women's basketball league, *Serie A1*, specifically numeric gender representation in off-the-court leadership positions and its potential influence on production relations and power relations (Connell, 2002). Established in 1930 (Mascolo, 2007), *Serie A1* is currently composed of 14 teams ("Legabasketfemminile", 2020). Studying gender dynamics in Italian sport is of particular interest, as Italy is historically a country with a dominant patriarchal society and few women in leadership and decision-making positions (Capranica et al., 2005). Consistent with male hegemony and patriarchal structures, the percentage of women participating in Italian sport has also been smaller compared to central and northern European countries (Capranica et al., 2005). Examining gender in Italian women's basketball is significant, as it is one of the oldest team sports available for women in Italy (Mascolo, 2007). Overall, Italian women participate in organized sport significantly less than men (CONI, 2017), though the gap has been shrinking in recent decades (Van Bottenburg, Rijnen & Van Sterkenburg, 2005). In addition, Capranica and Aversa (2002) found that men dominate Italy's sport industry.

Central to this exploratory study was the theoretical concept of a gender regime, a pattern of gender arrangements consisting of four dimensions: production relations, power relations, emotional relations, and symbolic relations (Connell, 2002). According to Adriaanse and Schofield (2014), this concept gives a theoretical foundation for "identifying and understanding

how gender works in organizational processes" (p. 486). For the purpose of this study, we define division of labor as different leadership positions held by women and men off-the-court and apply the concept to the specific setting of Italian women's basketball. Power relations relate to hierarchical power in the organizational structures of the teams in terms of women and men.

3. Gender in organizations

The experiences of women are often influenced by how well their gender is represented in their professional setting (Kanter, 1977). As Kanter found, women risk becoming tokens when they are few in number compared to their male counterparts:

> Sometimes they had the advantages of those who are "different" and thus were highly visible in a system where success is tied to becoming known. Sometimes they faced the loneliness of the outsider, of the stranger who intrudes upon an alien culture and may become self-estranged in the process of assimilation. (p. 207)

More recent studies found that having a critical mass of women in leadership positions is important for making a noticeable impact (Chesterman & Ross-Smith, 2006; Joecks, Pull & Vetter, 2013; Konrad, Kramer & Erkut, 2008). Having three or more women on corporate boards rather than having a single representative, for example, increases the likelihood of women to change the dynamics of corporate governance (Konrad, Kramer & Erkut, 2008). Organizations tend to reinforce patterns of difference between men and women, including divisions of labor (Acker, 1990). Division of labor was among the first structures of gender that social science discussed (Connell, 2002) and has long been recognized as the root of other gender-based inequalities (Kanter, 1977). A body of research based on gender inequalities produced through work relations subsequently emerged (Rothschild & Davies, 1994). Many studies in the corporate domain involved men's privileged in leadership roles (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Ibarra, Carter & Silva, 2010; Kanter, 1977; Oakley, 2000; Queneau, 2006), prejudice against female leadership (Bongiorno, Bain & David, 2014; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Garcia-Retamero & López-Zafra, 2006), men conforming to the ideal of the abstract worker (Acker, 2012), men as successful managers (Schein, 1973, 1975, 2001), female leadership traits as useful only in time of crisis (Ryan & Haslam, 2007), and women being paid less (Castilla & Benard, 2010; Evers & Sieverding, 2014).

4. Gender in sport organizations

In the realm of sports, a growing number of studies seek to understand the gendered nature of organizations. Several researchers found a male dominance in sport leadership roles globally (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Adriaanse, 2015; Burton, 2015; Coakley, 2015; Henry & Robinson, 2010; Pfister & Radtke, 2009; Schull, Shaw & Kihl, 2013; Smith & Wrynn, 2013; Whisenant,

Pedersen & Obenour, 2002; Wicker, Breuer & Von Hanau, 2012). Consequently, it seems that gender inequalities are maintained through work practices such as homologous reproduction, tokenism, and marginalization (Cahn, 1995; Hall, Cullen & Slack, 1989; Hoffman 2011; Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2008; Lovett & Lowry, 1994; Sagas, Cunningham & Teed, 2006; Stangl & Kane, 1991; Whisenant, 2008).

Masculinity is embedded within sport and also within sport management (Anderson, 2009) and it represents a major obstacle to men accepting women into their culture (Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013). Moreover, leadership in sport is very often portrayed in masculine terms (Knoppers, 2011). Being tough and having experience as a former athlete help some men to be perceived as competent and qualified to work in sport (Hovden 2000; Knoppers & Anthonissen 2008).

Thus, according to Burton (2015) any discussion of women's leadership experiences in sport must take into account gender as an organizational process. To date, there have been no studies examining the gender dynamics in Italian sport using Connell's (2002) gender model. Moreover, this exploratory study answers to a call for more in depth research regarding sport and gender in the Italian context (Tuselli & Vingelli, 2019).

5. Women in italian society

The construction of gender in Italian society has many implications on women's career. Women in Italy can pursue their career ambitions, as long as they are able to manage family and professional challenges (Turesky, Cloutier & Turesky, 2017). This may be one of the reasons for growth of female employment in Italy to be very slow, in addition to a lack of part-time opportunities, shorter and less well-paid parental leave (Del Boca & Giraldo, 2013). The share of women in decision-making bodies in Italy from 2013 to 2015 also is a portrait of inequality in work positions. As of 2016, only 13.3% of women were in charge of managerial positions (Statista, 2020). The numbers are not better in the realm of sport, where there has never been a woman president of national sport federations and women count only 11% in the boards (Piccardi, 2017).

Given Italy's prominent role in international sports, surprisingly little research exists on Italian sport in general, and women in particular (Martin, 2011). "Since the creation of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861", Martin (2011) noted, "the role of sport in the country's social, political, and economic development has been significant" (p. 199). Yet, scholarly analysis has typically been limited to the Liberal and Fascist periods (e.g., De Grazia, 1981; Gori, 2004; Teja, 1998). Previously confined to the upper middle-class and pockets of working-class communities in northern Italy, sport became a mass phenomenon in Italy during the Fascist era after World War I (Dogliani, 2000). At the time, Fascist leadership embraced sport to promote patriotism, enhance physical fitness, and advance military education (Dogliani, 2000). In 1920, the rising popularity of sport included a first championship for men's basketball in Italy, mostly contested by teams in the north. The following year saw the foundation of Italy's basketball federation. Italian women played for a first national championship in 1924 (Mascolo, 2007).

Although the vision to use sport to forge a new generation of Italians included women, the objectives were clearly gendered. According to Dogliani (2000), "the Fascist regime's interest in sport was largely confined to boys to strengthen physique, character and virility. For girls, sport was deemed a secondary occupation, advisable during adolescence to prepare them for their future role as strong, healthy mothers" (p. 330). Conservative views about women's role in society and the public sphere constrained girls' participation in Fascist youth organizations (Dogliani, 2000). Compared to boys, 20 to 30 percent fewer girls participated in general youth organizations, and the numbers were even lower in sports (Dogliani, 2000). By the 1930s, however, more urban middle and upper-class girls and women began to expand the boundaries of domesticity and patriarchal confines. As sport and physical activities increasingly served military purposes from the mid-1930s, programs for girls also took on more para-military forms including drill exercises and shooting (Dogliani, 2000).

In the 1920s and 1930s, Italian women increasingly represented their country in international competitions. In 1921, Italy was one of five founding members of the International Female Sport Federation, spearheaded by Alice Milliat of France. The federation successfully organized female Olympic Games in 1922 (Paris), 1926 (Sweden), 1930 (Prague), and 1934 (London). The success of those events encouraged the International Olympic Committee to add competitions for women to the Olympic program in Amsterdam in 1928 (Dechavanne & Hartmann-Tews, 2003). Coming on the heels of a similar facility for men in Rome in 1928, the opening of a sports training institute for women in Orvieto signaled a major boost in 1932, but it did not come in time to prepare women to participate in the 1932 Olympics (Dogliani, 2000). In time for the 1936 Games in Berlin, efforts to follow the Nazi model of showcasing the new woman bore fruit, as Italy's Ondina Valla and Claudia Testoni finished in first and fourth place in the 80 meter hurdles. Testoni went on to win the European title in the discipline in 1938. That same year, Italy's women's national team hosted and won the European Women Basketball Championship (Mascolo, 2007). Dogliani (2000) noted that these achievements demonstrated that "competitive sports were catching on among young [Italian] women where facilities, schools and youth organizations were available" (p. 337).

After World War II, female Italian athletes continued to make a splash on the international stage. Maria-Teresa de Filippis, for example, became the first woman to compete in a European Grand Prix auto race in 1958 (United Nations, 2007). Two years later, the Olympics in Rome showcased Italy's ambivalence toward women's sport. Women comprised 13 percent of Italy's team, which was in line with the overall representation of women at the 1960 Olympics, where women were able to compete in only six events (IOC, 2016; Zonis, 2006). In the count of total medals, Italy finished fourth behind the Soviet Union, the United States, and Team United Germany. Italy's success was mostly carried by men, with Italian women contributed bronze medals in the 100 meters and the foil team event. Though their success was limited, it could be argued that Italy's female athletes over-performed in 1960, as only 0.5 percent of Italian women engaged in sport and less than 10 percent of those participating in competitive sports were women in 1959 (Zonis, 2006). Women's participation in sport faced strong opposition by the conservative forces in Italy, including the Catholic Church and major political parties. Italian media contributed to the misrepresentation of women in sport. In the eyes of some press commentaries, the very qualities that were seen to make Italian women the most attractive in

the world, also made them less likely to succeed in athletics. Analyzing Italian media coverage surrounding the Games in Rome, Zonis (2006) concluded that

> Woman athletes were frequently portrayed as unnatural and unfeminine, a monstrous distortion of womanhood, successful as athletes only to the extent that they were not fully women, truly feminine only when they were not particularly effective competitors. In contrast to this assessment, however, female competitors were also shown as irresistibly attractive, sirens whose beauty and sexual allure men would be unable to resist. And the often imminent marriage, future motherhood, and consequent retirement of women athletes was an almost obsessive theme, perhaps because it offered a comforting solution to the problems of the un-womanly woman athlete and the woman athlete as a source of sexual provocation. (p. 84)

Research on women's sport in Italy during the feminist movement of the 1960s and beyond is scarce (Porro, 1995). There are some indications of progress. For example, the percentage of female athletes in Team Italy during Olympic Summer Games has increased from 16 percent in 1988 to 48% in 2016 (Statista, 2016). However, this increase in participation is not followed by an increasing number in leadership positions in the Italian sport establishment (Piccardi, 2017). The findings of the current study, however, suggest that the progress of women's representation in Italy's sport has been uneven at best. Since 1981, the Italian sports sector has been regulated by a particular Sports Act: law n.91. The purpose of this law is to give legal authorization to regulate the relationship between athletes, clubs and federations and focuses on the employment relationship (Foppen, 2010) and the benefits athletes are entitled to as recognized professional athletes by the law. This is why it is even more important to point out that basketball is one of the four sport disciplines in the country that are considered professional only for male athletes, leaving female athletes without retirement and maternity rights.

6. Theoretical Framework: Connell's Four-Dimensional Model

Connell's (2002, 2005, 2006) approach to gender is particularly helpful when studying professional organizations. According to Connell (2006),

> gender is, above all, a pattern of social relations in which the positions of women and men are defined, the cultural meanings of being a man and a woman are negotiated, and their trajectories through life are mapped out. Gender relations are found in all spheres of life, including organizations. (p. 839)

Connell identified four dimensions of gender: production relations, power relations, emotional relations, and symbolic relations. The combination of these dimensions creates a pattern in gender arrangements called "gender regime" (Connell, 2002, p. 53). The first dimension,

production relations, involves the division of labor based on gender; more specifically, which tasks are performed by men and which are performed by women. The second dimension, power relations, involves the ways in which authority is exercised along gender lines. This particularly relates to the ways subordinations and dominance are defined based on gender. The third dimension presented by Connell (2002) is emotional relations and involves how emotions are organized along gender lines. The last dimension is symbolic relations. This dimension focuses on interpretation and the meanings that society gives to gender.

Using the four-dimensional model on gender, Connell (2005) focused on the "Gender Equity in Public Institutions" (GEPI) program. The GEPI project was launched to understand why women's participation in public sector decision-making has not improved substantially despite the equal opportunity and anti-discrimination reform process initiated several years before in Australia. Consisting in a suite of studies, using a combination of research methods, examining a diversity of sites and events, and studying different aspects of organizational functioning, the aim of the program was to understand the complex character of the gender system. The fourfold model was used as a template for the analysis of gender regimes and understand the current state of play.

Schofield and Goodwin (2005) used Connell's (2002) model to examine gender politics in public policy making in the New South Wales public sector in Australia. More specifically, four public sector agencies participated in the study: a public utility, two human services organizations, and an economic services department. The study concluded that policy making is heavily male-dominated. Moreover, the authors found three different patterns of gender regimes: (a) masculine hegemony, (b) feminist presence and masculinist backlash, and (c) feminist gender mainstreaming. In the first gender regime, men held all the important positions and consequently had the all power and authority in the process. No relevant emotional relations were recalled in the policy making process by participants. Gender issues were never discussed in the policy-making process and women's limited presence in policy making was understood as something for which nobody was really responsible.

In the second gender regime, more balance of numbers between men and women emerged, but women were more in lower positions, whereas the majority of men held leadership positions. In terms of power and authority that was translated in men exercising power and authority and women being resentful for the exclusion. This situation affected the emotional relations in such ways that women sought out other women to be supported and deal with a very masculine environment. This gendered division ended up in different understandings of gender, which in turn was discriminatory against women. In the third and last gender regime identified by the authors, the numbers were balanced at all levels. This meant equal distribution of power and authority. In terms of emotional relations, the most prevalent was emotional solidarity. In terms of understanding gender and gender equity, all participants "agreed that gender involved unequal participation by men and women in social life that disadvantaged women" (Schofield & Goodwin, 2005, p. 15). The authors proposed that their approach and method can be adopted to analyze and identify gender dynamics in other organizations.

In the sport context, although a growing body of studies has emerged to examine gender dynamics using Connell's gender model (Adriaanse & Claringbould, 2016; Adriaanse & Schofield, 2014; Boyle & McKay, 1995; Mennesson, 2012), research into gender dynamics in

professional sport leagues is rare. Central to Adriaanse and Schofield's (2014) study was the theoretical concept of a gender regime to analyze the impact of gender quotas on gender equality in governance among boards of National Sport Organizations (NSOs) in Australia. The findings from the study showed three different gender regimes: (a) masculine hegemony, (b) masculine hegemony in transition, and (c) gender mainstreaming in progress. Consistent with Schofield & Goodwin (2005), the first gender regime was characterized by male dominance in production and power relations, no significant emotional relations, and a common idea that women's underrepresentation was a natural phenomenon beyond any political intent or action by those who are in dominant positions. In the second regime, masculine hegemony in transition, a woman holding the chair's position "was a major disruption to the 'natural order' of governance that had historically prevailed within the organization" (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2014, p. 493). However, results showed that a woman in this leadership role was enough to produce a strong change in the organization. The third regime, gender mainstreaming in progress, showed again male dominance in production and power relations, but the difference was in the women's influence based on their positions in the boards. Moreover, emotional relations demonstrated cohesion and support in addition to the willingness to include a gender perspective across all aspects of sport. The overall results of the study demonstrate that although quotas can be a first condition to advance gender equality, it is not sufficient (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2014). In fact, as Adriaanse and Schofield (2014) stated, gender quota is useful

> only if it is used in conjunction with other measures. They include directors' adoption of gender equality as an organizational value (symbolic relations), the allocation of women directors to influential board roles (production and power relations), and the promotion of a cohesive team environment on the board (emotional relations). (p. 495)

7. Methodology

The principal source of data for this study was the *Serie A1*'s official website, "Legabasketfemminile" (LBF), and teams' official websites during the season 2019-2020. For all 14 teams, we recorded job positions and the gender of staff members as perceived by the researchers based on first names and pictures. Since few teams had pictures of staff members online, we contacted teams directly and requested pictures. We performed frequency counts of gender by team and position and performed frequency distribution, a basic statistical technique that helps researchers in organizing, summarizing, and interpreting data (Kalaian, 2008).

8. Results

Applying Connell's (2002) model, a gender division emerged because men assumed the majority of off-the-court positions in *Serie A1*. Furthermore, men prevailed over women in power

relations, occupying the most influential positions in the teams. Both in terms of the total frequency and percentages, there are very few women in leadership positions in the Italian teams (for results related to all positions see Table 1 and Table 2).

Table 1. Front Office Job Positions in Serie A1

Job Position	Men	Women	Total
President	13	1	14
Vice President	13	1	14
Team Manager	10	4	14
Referee Liaison Officer	10	3	13
Press Officer	14	4	18
Marketing Manager	8	1	9
Logistics Manager	10	2	12
Administrator	6	1	7
Secretary	4	7	11
Executive Manager	11	0	11
Total	99	24	123

Table 2. Coaching and Medical Staff Job Positions in Serie A1

Job Position	Men	Women	Total
Head Coach	13	1	14
Assistant Coach	22	4	26
Athletic Trainer	11	3	14
Team Physiotherapist	14	7	21
Team Physician	13	2	15
Total	73	17	90

For example, men held all but one head coach positions of the 14 teams of the 2019-20 *Serie A1*. Despite being the premiere women's basketball league in the country, there was just one woman in head coach positions. Among assistant coaches, men held 22 of the 26 positions. Women held less than 16% of the assistant coach positions. Moreover, the four female assistant coaches in the LBF teams were on a staff with more than one assistant coach. Most of the athletic trainers in the league were men. More specifically, they were 11 men and only three women. The situation was different for physiotherapists: this is the only job position in which the percentages were slightly better. Indeed, 14 were men and seven women. Still men held the majority, but the percentage of women in this job position is bigger (33%) compared to the previous ones. Further, physicians were mostly men (13 of 15).

Men were not only dominant in athletic positions, but also in upper management positions. All teams but one had male presidents. In 2019, its first season in *Serie A1,* A.S.D. Basket Costa was the only team that had a woman as president. Same situation for female representation at the vice-president level with one out of 14 (12.5 %) positions held by women. Furthermore, men held all of the executive manager positions. The representation of women in marketing

manager and logistic manager job positions was equal to the vice-president level. Among all the teams in the Italian *Serie A1* league, there was only one woman holding a marketing manager position and only two women holding logistic manager positions. Among the positions discussed above, the findings support that male is the dominant gender in the division of labor and in terms of authority power based on the hierarchical structures of teams. The only exception was the secretary position, which was the only position in all the teams' job positions in which the findings are reversed. Women held seven out of 11positions (64%) while men held only four (36%). In summary, the findings of this exploratory study indicate that men overwhelmingly dominate in production and power relations at both the athletic staff and upper management levels in the women's *Serie A1* basketball league.

9. Discussion

Our analysis of gender dynamics in the Italian top women's basketball league, *Serie A1* was based on the first two dimensions of Connell's (2002) gender model: production relations and power relations. The underrepresentation of women in the sport industry in general has attracted much scholarly attention over the past decades and different approaches and explanations have been advanced regarding the gender gap (Burton, 2015; Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2008; Lovett & Lowry, 1994; Maass, D'Ettole & Cadinu, 2008; Sagas, Cunningham & Teed, 2006; Stangl & Kane, 1991; Whisenant, 2008). Our research expands existing knowledge by examining gender dynamics in the context of *Serie A1*, Italy's premiere women's basketball league. In general, results of the present study indicate that women are underrepresented in off-the-court positions in *Serie A1*. Based on the results of this exploratory study, a gender regime of masculine hegemony characterized by male dominance in production and power relations may be in place. In fact, consistent with previous studies that identified gender regimes of masculine hegemony in organizations (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2014; Schofield & Goodwin, 2005), we found a male dominance in all work performed off-the-court. Based on division of labor, on a total of 213 job positions, 172 positions were held by men (80.8%) and only 41 by women (19.2%). The findings show that all leadership roles, in upper management and athletic staff, are by far held by men. This is particularly evident in roles of president and head coach where men are extremely dominant with 93% respectively. Thus, these findings support previous studies about male dominance in sport leadership roles (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Burton, 2015; Coakley, 2015; Henry & Robinson, 2010; Pfister & Radtke, 2009; Schull, Shaw, & Kihl, 2013; Smith & Wrynn, 2013; Whisenant, Pedersen & Obenour, 2002; Wicker, Breuer & Von Hanau, 2012), but they also confirm the idea that sport is a masculine environment (Anderson, 2009). Burton (2015) describes this process as "an axis of power whereby men and masculinity are afforded power over and above women" (p. 157).

At the upper management level, a position that is performed more often by former basketball players is the team manager position. In fact, among the highest representation of women among *Serie A1* teams was the team manager position (28.5%). A possible reason leading to the hiring of female team managers could be attributed to what Sagas, Cunningham and Teed (2006) described as the importance of having female staff to "make them more effective in

relating to their players" (p. 508). The highest percentage of women was in the secretary position, the only job position in which women outnumbered their male counterpart: seven out of eleven. Looking at the specific tasks of both team manager and secretary job positions, this finding can also be consistent with a more stereotypical feminine approach toward work that relegate women always to tasks that focus on caring about someone else (Inglis, Danylchuk & Pastore, 2000) or working as a secretary (Pringle, 1988), which is also something that emerged from the findings of this study. In fact, team managers usually are the ones that spend longer time with the athletes to assist them in any kind of need they may have (e.g., housing, medical appointments, visas, anti-doping) and any kind of initiative the club wants the athletes to be involved (e.g., marketing campaigns, public relations). In practice, they act as a link between staff, club and athletes (R. Meneghel, personal communication, March 23, 2015).

The majority of women in the *Serie A1* teams hold job positions in middle management. This finding is consistent with previous research (Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2008). However, this lack of representation of women in executive roles in the Italian women's basketball teams, according to Whisenant (2008), may reinforce "negative perceptions towards women being leaders, feeding the status quo" (p. 774) and also sustain prejudice against female leadership (Bongiorno, Bain & David, 2014; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Garcia-Retamero & López-Zafra, 2006). Overall, the results of the current study are consistent with other studies confirming male dominance in Italian sport in general (Capranica & Aversa, 2002; Capranica et al., 2005; Van Bottenburg, Rijnen & Van Sterkenburg, 2005) and "strong male hegemony in sport-related careers in Italy" (Capranica & Aversa, 2002, p. 337), in particular. When comparing these findings with the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), the women's professional basketball league in the United States, it seems evident that there are many steps to take to change this trend and achieve more gender equality in the Italian sport context. Indeed, the WNBA is the leader among professional sports leagues for its racial and gender hiring practices (Lapchick, 2019). Evidence from the report published by The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES) suggests that in WNBA franchises and the WNBA League Office more than 40% of the employees are women (Lapchick, 2019).

Given the limitation of this exploratory study, we need to be cautious about firm conclusions. While this preliminary study provided a snapshot of division of labor and power relations through the existing organizational hierarchies of Italian women's basketball teams in *Serie A1*, it is important to note that the data collection method did not allow for in-depth assessment regarding "*relations* between categories and between groups – relations that are constantly being produced, renewed, and changed in organizational processes" (Connell, 2005, p. 6).

Finally, using researchers' perceptions of names and pictures to determine the gender of individuals could lead to false conclusions and reinforces gender binaries. Having individuals self-identify in terms of gender would lead to more accurate results. Thus, further research is needed in the case of *Serie A1* and other sports organizations. Future studies could employ a qualitative approach in order to investigate the other two dimensions of Connell's (2002) gender model, emotional and symbolic relations, to gain a deeper understanding of gender dynamics in the Italian women's basketball clubs and how gender effects are produced. In fact, a gender regime of an institution involves all the dimensions of gender relations, no matter what the institution is or does (Connell, 2005). From an organizational perspective, in

particular, understanding the influence of gender on human resources policies and procedures as well as leadership styles warrants further examination of the gender gap.

10. Conclusion

As our results point out, based on the configuration of the two dimensions of Connell's (2002) gender model we found through our analysis of the data, a gender regime seems to emerge in the Italian top women's basketball league, *Serie A1*. Moreover, the male dominance in production and power relations in the Italian clubs leads to a severe underrepresentation of women. We found that 80.8% of off-the-court positions in *Serie A1* were held by men, 19.2% by women. Men dominated all job categories, except the secretary position, where women had a two-thirds majority. Given that the secretary position is arguably subordinate to other positions, men and women in *Serie A1* not only perform different, but unequal roles and tasks off-the-court. This numeric gender representation indicates production relations based on gendered division of labor that renders women nearly invisible, voice-less, and in subordinate power relations (Connell, 2002). Based on previous studies (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2013, 2014; Schofield & Goodwin, 2005), the numeric gender representation in *Serie A* is consistent with a gender regime of male hegemony characterized by male dominated production and power relations. When men hold all important off-the-court positions it is likely that women struggle to gain power and authority.

While examining numeric gender representation alone does not provide insights into emotional and symbolic relations (Connell, 2002), it is possible that the underrepresentation of women in Serie A contributes to a lack of gendered emotional relations and the assumptions that male dominance is "natural". Thus, changing the status quo might be seen as beyond the responsibilities of current decision-makers, as was found by Adriaanse and Schofield (2013, 2014) as well as Schofield and Goodwin (2005). To examine the dimensions of emotional and symbolic relations in Italian women's basketball, semi-structured interviews with men and women from various organizational levels would be necessary (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2013; Schofield & Goodwin, 2005). Future research beyond this exploratory study should explore these dimensions, as they are essential to understanding gender dynamics in the league, which in turn has implications for recommendations to establish gender equality.

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