

Chapter 2

The Sport Intersectional Model of Power (SIMP) as a tool for understanding

Intersectionality in Sport Governance and Leadership

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Abstract

The recent UK *Diversity in Sport Governance* report (UK Sport, 2019) highlighted that two thirds of boards have no Black, Asian and minority ethnic members and that board diversity is an ongoing problem. In the report, UK Sport (2019, p. 5) acknowledged that ‘the sports sector is falling behind other sectors in terms of minority ethnic members’. While this is an important acknowledgement, it reflects trends in both research and policy on diversity in UK sport governance that continue to focus on single forms of discrimination (e.g., gender, ethnicity, age or sexuality). In this chapter we move beyond this approach to consider how Black women experience sport leadership and governance through an intersectional lens. The key findings in this paper outline Black women’s positionality at the intersections of race and gender and how these influence their sport leadership opportunities and experiences based on: (a) their outsider within status, (b) inequities in their salaries, marginalizing promotions, and occupational stereotyping, (c) their tactics identity negotiation, and (d) their experiences with womanism. We conclude by arguing that we need more research exploring the intersection of race and gender within UK sport leadership and governance which should be positioned within the context of long-standing and deep-rooted racialised and gendered ideology and beliefs within UK society.

Keywords

Intersectionality, Governance, Sport Intersectional Model of Power (SIMP), Discrimination, Inequality Regimes, Ideology

Introduction

This chapter is written from the perspective of the first author, a Black queer woman who experiences sport leadership and governance through an intersectional lens. We apply this lens to

understanding intersectionality in sport leadership/governance in the UK and beyond. This positionality as a Black woman was central to the thoughts and values underpinning the research and influenced the interactions with the women who were a part of this study. The research is significant because there is a dearth of empirical research on sport leadership and governance that has adopted an intersectional lens, despite a growing body of literature acknowledging this absence (Abney & Richey, 1991; Armstrong, 2007; Armstrong & O'Bryant, 2007; Bruening, 2005; McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017; Simpkins, 2019). Within the UK, the recent *Diversity in Sport Governance* report (UK Sport, 2019) highlights the lack of diversity in sport governance, including that two thirds of boards had no BAME members. UK Sport (2019, p. 5) go on to acknowledge that 'the sports sector is falling behind other sectors in terms of minority ethnic members'. While this is an important acknowledgement, it reflects trends in both research and policy on diversity in UK sport governance that continue to focus on single forms of discrimination (e.g., gender, ethnicity, age or sexuality). For example, whilst there is an ever-growing body of research exploring issues related to gender equity in UK sport governance, there is a distinct lack of empirical research exploring issues related to the inclusion and experiences of minority women (e.g., BAME women, LGBTQ women, disabled women). This is despite a growing body of research on minority women in other sporting roles, such as coaching (e.g., Norman, 2011, Rankin-Wright & Norman, 2017).

Within this chapter we discuss how forms of inequality produce unique injustices for different women working in the sector and highlight that this needs much further consideration in policy and practice. The chapter starts by providing an overview of the importance and ideology of intersectionality as a framework for analysis. This includes a discussion of how intersectional

forms of oppression can contribute to what Acker (2006) identifies as inequality regimes within sport organisations: interlinked processes that produce patterns of complex inequities that reinforce power structures. We then draw on data from research in American sport organisations that focused on the underrepresentation of Black women in sport leadership to outline a model for intersectional power that can be applied to understanding intersectionality in sport governance and leadership in the UK.

Leadership and Ideological Implications

Leadership is a concept that can have different meanings for different people across different situations and contexts. Within this chapter, we define leadership as ‘the ability to influence a group toward the achievement of goals’ (Robbin, 2003, p. 314). Most leadership positions come with a certain degree of formally designated authority, as a person typically assumes a level of authority because of the position they hold within an organisation (Robbin, 2003). To be able to influence and guide a diversity of individuals and groups in organisations within a multicultural country like the UK, multicultural competency is a key component of effective leadership. Despite this, certain characteristics continue to be expected, required, and/or accepted in sport leadership roles that align with the experiences and competencies of dominant white men (Shaw & Frisby, 2006; Shaw & Hoeber, 2003; Simpkins, 2019).

Gendered and racialised ideologies that are embedded in sport organisations can create organisational cultures that adversely impact upon Black and ethnic minority women’s leadership opportunities and experiences. Gender ideology refers to ideas and beliefs about masculinity and femininity and gendered relationships in the organisation of social worlds (Coakley, 2009,

Lenskyi, 2013). Sport governance continues to be thought of as a male domain, where competencies associated with men and masculinity are celebrated. This includes traits related to assertiveness, physical dominance, and charisma (Kraft et al, 2021, Hoyt, 2005, Parker, 2005). Discussions on the impact of gender ideology on the opportunities and experiences of current or prospective women sport leaders (i.e., the positioning of women as possessing traits that oppose desired leadership competencies associated with men and masculinity) have been framed around the experiences of white women. For example, certain framings of femininity have traditionally portrayed women as docile, communal, and supportive, which may leave women overlooked for leadership positions (Collins, 2000, Sotiriadou & de Haan, 2019). This framing of femininity often ignores the ways in which race is socially constructed (Lenskyj, 2013) and the stereotypes that Black women experience due to also being defined by elements of their race (i.e., racial ideology) (Melton and Bryan, 2017).

Racial Ideology and Leadership

Racial ideology refers to the ideas and beliefs people use to give meaning to skin colour and evaluate people based on this. Racial ideologies are used to place individuals in racial categories that are tied to assumptions about character traits and abilities (Coakley, 2009). While race is often defined as biological, referring to skin colour or other physical markers, ethnicity explains cultural characteristics such as dress, norms and values (Farrington et al, 2012). Despite accepted definitional differences, van Sterkenburg et al. (2019) argue that, when people discuss race, a range of markers refer simultaneously to biology and cultural difference, suggesting that both race and ethnicity should be considered as social constructs (van Sterkenburg et al, 2019). This is because traditional racisms may be circumvented through drawing reference to nationhood or religion to

mark difference and highlight racial and ethnic hierarchies (Morning, 2009). Race has long served as a basis for inequity, disparate treatment, and associated perceptions of inferiority. For example, a prevalent belief was that Black people lacked the ‘necessities’ (i.e., skills, readiness, abilities, etc.) to be leaders (Hoose, 1989). Assumptions such as these are rooted in racial ideology and are powerful ideologies which can serve as the foundation for social practices and policies that lead to the marginalization of Black people and other ethnic minority groups (Coakley, 2009). In leadership, whiteness became the norm and the standard by which leadership was determined, defined, and celebrated.

The privileges afforded to whiteness through racial ideologies often signifies that whiteness is equated to normalcy (Bonnett, 1998; Frankenberg, 1993; Long & Hylton, 2002; Wong, 1994). This normalcy is complex, often contradictory, and privileged (King, 2005; Long & Hylton, 2002). Whiteness is simultaneously a practice, a social space, a subjectivity, a spectacle, an erasure, an epistemology, a strategy, an historical formation, a technology, and a tactic. Of course, it is not monolithic, but it is unified through privilege and the power to create opportunity and deny access (King, 2005, p. 399; King & Springwood, 2001, p. 160). Additionally, this normalcy allows “whiteness to be viewed as the ‘inside’, the ‘included’, the ‘powerful’, the ‘we’, the ‘us’” (Long & Hylton, 2002, p. 89) that have helped to create the standard of leadership.

In previous research on gender and power in sport organisations the focus has been on gender and has ignored the intersectional experiences of women leaders, including Black women. For example, the frames presented by Shaw and Frisby (2006) offer a critical and in-depth explanation about how gendered beliefs are present and reinforced within an organisation. However, their

presentation of gender stems from gendered beliefs about white women, despite suggesting these experiences are applicable to all women. For instance, some discussions about women being docile, nurturing, and lacking assertiveness as prevalent ideologies and perceptions about gender do not consider that not all women are perceived this way. Such depictions of gender are often typically reserved for white women (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991; Parker, 2005). Many gendered beliefs about Black women are that they are loud, aggressive, and independent (Collins, 2000).

If organisations are using the frames offered by Shaw and Frisby as a reference for gender, then it is arguable that gendered and racialised beliefs about Black women may not be addressed. Perceptions and beliefs about a person's race can deny, constrict, or filter the access they have to leadership roles (power) in society at large and within organisations. In organisations, racialised beliefs often reinforce disparities seen in American society. These include examples of persistent beliefs about race that have stereotyped Black people as less competent, lazy, and unprofessional (Collins, 2000). Historically, Black people were excluded from organisational spaces and leadership positions that in turn were held by rich white men who at times perpetuated racist beliefs (Acker, 2006). This includes sport organisations that have historically been white owned and/or operated and situated within capitalist economic models that tend to privilege those in power (i.e., whites) and subjugate others (i.e., racial minorities; Cunningham, 2021).

Positionality and Intersectionality: Intersections of Race and Gender

The concept of positionality is derived from Collins' (2000) standpoint theory, which argues that group locations are nestled within hierarchical power relations that produce collective knowledge

and similar challenges for the individuals in those groups. Collins (1998) defined group standpoints as ‘situated in unjust power relations, reflecting those power relations, and helping to shape them’ (p. 201). In the context of sport, positionality speaks to the distinct social location of an individual in the organisational power structure based on their social identities and the extent to which their identities are included or excluded (valued or diminished) in the organisation’s culture.

Based on the nature and structure of the inequality regime in sport, the intersectionality of race and gender may create unique life experiences for Black women sport leaders, and their specific positionality may adversely impact their experiences and hinder their ability to progress. This is because race as an aspect of positionality often relegates Black people to a position of subordination, and gender as another aspect of positionality often relegates women to a position of subordination. Too often the narrative focuses on being either a women or issues of race (Melton and Bryant, 2017). For Black women, this phenomenon typically happens simultaneously because of both their race and gender.

Intersectionality has been long discussed by Black women (Beale, 1969; Combahee River Collective, 1977; Cooper, 1995; Collins, 2000, 2016; Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 2015), but it was Crenshaw’s (1991) article that specifically coined the term intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991). Crenshaw (1991) outlined how the concept can highlight the inequities Black women experience which uncover multiple forms of prejudice. Examining intersectionality (the many dimensions and identities that influence an individuals’ opportunities and experiences) in the context of organisational power is a better way to understand, analyse, and interpret the world via human

experience (Collins, 1991). In other words, the simultaneous oppression a person feels based on multiple identities such as their race, gender, and class are best understood using the multiple (or intersecting) lenses in/by which they experience the world. The intersections of identities often determine an individual's position in life and plays a significant role in the access they have to constitutions of power and privilege. An intersectional framework is premised on the understanding that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type because various identities work together to produce the injustices that individuals experience (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins & Bilge, 2016). As Crenshaw has argued, 'intersectionality is not just about identities but about the institutions that use identities to exclude and privilege'.

Intersectionality offers a critical framework for understanding gender and white privilege in sport leadership. It can aid an understanding of the racialised and gendered factors and elements of power that may be embedded in sport organisational cultures. This knowledge can then be applied to rectifying underrepresentation and creating sport organisational spaces in which Black women may thrive. We acknowledge that factors such as social class, ability, and sexual orientation may further intersect with race and gender to influence Black women's opportunities and experiences, however the focus of this chapter is primarily on the intersection of race and gender.

Inequality regimes as a conceptual framework for understanding sport organisations

Intersectionality is an important concept in understanding how sport organisational cultures impact upon historically excluded groups to create and sustain inequality regimes (Acker, 2006). Inequality regimes produce patterns of complex inequities that reinforce power structures and disparities in organisations are often related to the political, historical, and cultural inequities of

the surrounding society. Inequality regimes (as defined by Acker, 2006) may generate different experiences, based on a person's positionality—their distinct social location. Moreover, shared experiences can 'foster similar angles of vision leading to group knowledge or standpoint deemed essential for informed political action' (Collins, 2000, p. 321). Therefore, one's positionality and standpoint in an organisation may impact an individual's trajectory and experiences.

Figure 2 shows Simpkins' (2019) adapted figure that expands on Acker's concept of inequality regimes to show how a person's positionality, based on intersections of race, gender, class, ability, sexuality, etc., may play a critical role in the type of access that an individual has to power and privilege (Collins, 2000; Harding, 2007).

Insert figure 2

Figure 2 demonstrates how, based on one's positionality in an 'inequality regime', access to certain opportunities may be either denied, constricted, or filtered. In the context of sport, positionality speaks to the distinct location of an individual in the organisational power structure based on their social identities and the extent to which their identities are included or excluded (valued or diminished) in the organisation's culture. Based on the structure of the inequality regime in sport, Black women's positionality may either assist or hinder their ability to progress. This may take the form of denial, being prevented from accessing roles by not hiring or promoting Black women. Black women may also be constricted to a certain amount of limited power within the organisation. Lastly, Black women may be filtered by only being hired to perform certain tasks, and then have difficulty accessing other projects or opportunities that may help them develop additional skill sets.

Sport organisations may be classified as an inequality regime as they often reflect a culture of androcentricity and whiteness that marginalises others, notably Black women. For example, within American culture, there are certain racialised, gendered, and classist beliefs in society that may be further upheld within American sport organisations. These systemic beliefs may lead to policies, practices, procedures, and organisational cultures that may further maintain racialised, gendered, and classist disparities seen throughout American society, fortifying power dynamics. Inequality regimes have the ‘power’ to perpetuate discrimination and disparities, whether consciously or subconsciously. These regimes stipulate behaviours and actions that oftentimes dictate the treatment of groups.

Black Women and Experiences of Inequality Regimes

The research discussed in this chapter specifically examined how sport organisational cultures impacted Black women. These discussions are informed by the findings of a wider study by Simpkins (2019) on the experiences of Black women in sport leadership positions in the US. This included interviews with 10 women in mid/high-ranking positions in intercollegiate athletics. In the United States intercollegiate athletics refers primarily to sports/athletic competition that are organised and funded by universities and colleges. The 10 women were identified using a purposive snowball sampling method and were employed at 10 different universities across the continental United States. The women were chosen for this study because they: (a) identified as Black or African American, (b) identified as a woman, (c) worked in intercollegiate athletics at the Division I, II, or III level, and (d) were employed at predominately white institutions. **Table 2** below provides a summary of the participants and their experiences.

Insert Table 2

Data collection consisted of primary and secondary sources. The primary source consisted of structured in-depth interviews, and the secondary sources included organisational audits and document analyses. The data from these sources were analysed via reflexive journaling and various levels of coding. In qualitative research a code is “most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language based or visual data” (Saldana, 2016, p. 4). The first level of coding allowed for the development of codes from the words or short phrases found in the actual language within the interview transcripts. This was done by highlighting and underlining words and/or phrases that: (a) featured participant’s voices and (b) were repeated or heavily emphasized. Using the actual words from the participants allowed for the prioritization of the voices of the women which is an important concept of Black feminist thought. Since In Vivo coding provided an overwhelming amount of data, transitional coding was adopted to support smaller codes generated from the line-by-line coding process to larger units of data. Lastly, pattern coding was used as “a way of grouping summaries into a smaller number of categories, themes, or concepts” (Saldana, 2016, p. 236).

This research specifically sought to utilise the preliminary Sport Intersectional Model of Power (SIMP) to explore Black women’s experiences of sport leadership. This qualitative study highlighted Black women’s sport leadership opportunities and experiences while aiming to address organisational elements which may serve as barriers for Black women. The study focused on how Black women’s intersections of race and gender interact with sport organisational cultures, and how despite policies on inclusion and equity, Black women’s experiences were shaped by

inequality regimes in their everyday experiences of the workplace. While the research focused on the underrepresentation that Black women face in sport governance, this analysis can also create space for other Women of Colour, such as Latine, Asian/South Asian/Pacific Islander, Native/Indigenous, and Mixed-Race women who are also severely underrepresented in sport governance. As stakeholders of sport organisations become increasingly diversified, it is imperative that sport leadership and governance reflects that (Simpkins, 2019).

In the research several themes emerged relating to how sport organisational cultures impact Black women. We now discuss some of those themes individually.

Outsider Within Status

Adapted from Collins' (2000) definition of outsider within status – a concept that explained how Black women enjoy partial but never complete membership in either gender or racial groups, allowing them to maintain a unique set of experiences relative to their race and gender – Simpkins (2019) found that Black women often experience both an insider and outsider status. Their *insider* status was due to their leadership roles, but their *outsider* experiences were based on their social location and positionality at the intersections of race and gender. As Susanna (Division I – FCS Senior Athletics Director/Chief of Staff) explained, “I don’t think that I would ever consider a situation as a reminder that I’m a Black woman, ‘cause society allows me to have this [experience] in which I’m not allowed to forget.” As Susanna highlighted, Black women may often encounter athletic departments where they are the only Black women present. Serving as a constant reminder that they are Black women.

Black women's outsider within status is also emphasized because they are underrepresented in leadership roles. Gabrielle (Division II Associate Director of Athletics/SWA/Compliance Coordinator) explained, "When you're a Black female, people don't see you. They haven't seen you in that point of authority." Even though Gabrielle had attained the status of associate athletics director in her department, she still struggled with being fully accepted as a leader. She was still unable to gain full insider status in her leadership role. Additionally, not being expected to be in leadership roles affected how some of the women performed their jobs and interacted with their co-workers. Heather (Division III Director of Athletics) recounted, "...it affects the way I speak to people, the way that I explain things to people, the way that I dress, and the way that I have to dismiss people from conversations." Heather understood that she was not granted full insider status and that fact impacted how she showed up and performed at work.

Inequities in their salaries, marginalizing promotions, and occupational stereotyping

It became apparent through this research that there were several ways that inequality regimes were significantly impacting upon Black women in sport leadership positions, such as salaries and the promotion process. Additionally, Black women experience occupational stereotyping –the belief that Black women are more appropriate for certain roles (Simpkins, 2019).

When salaries were discussed with Sienna (Division I – FBS Senior Associate Athletic Director) she explained, "I was a part of the senior staff but I was the lowest paid person...like the next person above me was paid \$20,000 more than I was, and I worked the most." Sienna's experience emphasized the inequities Black women may encounter in compensation. Even though she put in the most hours, she was not paid proportionally to her colleagues. Black women also encountered

this when it came to promotions. As Susanna (Division I – FCS Senior associate Athletics Director/Chief of Staff) highlighted when she recalled an experience after she was promoted to assistant athletics director at her previous job, “I basically wrote my job duties as I was doing them, compared to the job that I was hired to do and said [to the AD], ‘yeah I should make this much.’ AD was like sure, brought it to a senior team and they were like, ‘well what about so-and-so?’ So, when I got promoted, four White men also got promoted.” Sienna and Susanna both recalled experiences where even though they were qualified and deserving of fair promotions and raises, they were not treated as such.

Even though all the women in the study held mid/high-ranking positions within their departments, they encountered experiences where other people assumed that they were not the leader in charge. For example, Brianna (Division I – FBS Director External Affairs) discussed, “...if you walk into the office of the external suite, and the first person you see is a Black girl sitting at the desk then it’s the assistant and you’re telling her who you’re here to see.” This assumption is often because Black women are often thought to be better suited for ‘assistant’ or ‘help-mate’ positions and not authoritative leadership positions. This perception of Black women often adds to pushback that Black women encounter when they are in leadership roles.

Identity negotiation: Personal and Professional Identities

Another critical way in which Black women’s positionality at the intersection of race and gender influenced their sport leadership opportunities and experiences was the necessity for them to engage in identity negotiation. Identity negotiation is the process that people undertake to establish, maintain, and/or change their identity based on interactions for a concern that they are not able to

share all parts of themselves in certain spaces (McDowell and Cunningham, 2009). While Black women are often proud of their Blackness as an element of their identity, and comfort in expressing their Blackness at work may be true for some Black women, others may not feel comfortable or feel the need to do so (Simpkins, 2019). The nature of Black women's negotiation may be present in the intentional action regarding where, when, and with whom they share elements of their Blackness (Simpkins, 2019).

Heather was an example of a Black woman who did not feel comfortable expressing her Blackness at work, "Because if I come out and I show my Blackness, the first thing that they'll feel like is that I'm racist." Heather did not feel that her Blackness was welcomed at work. Additionally, other Black women made intentional decisions about what they did and did not share with their co-workers. Brianna shared that she made a delineation about what she shared and with whom, "When I'm at work, you get the work Brianna. There's sometimes a little bit of outside of work, hood Brianna that might slip out a bit. With a few of the Black guys in the office, we'll joke, and you can definitely tell it's a Black thing." Brianna has made a clear distinction about how comfortable she allows herself to get at work and with whom she feels comfortable sharing aspects of her Blackness with.

Experiences with sport organisational cultures

Given that the inequality regime of sport celebrates whiteness and maleness, leadership opportunities for Black women are limited. The cultures of sport organisations often have a line of entitlement and privilege running through them such that whiteness and maleness are celebrated in leadership positions. Such entitlement and privilege may negatively impact Black women, who

have neither entitlement nor privilege based on their race and gender. Heather summarized this when she explained. “I do think that these sport organisational cultures are set up, has a line of privilege and entitlement that rings all through it, and I think that is some of the reasons it becomes harder and harder for Women of Colour to break through because we’re not privileged, and we’re not entitled.” Entitlement and privilege may create environments that are not welcoming towards Black women and may aid in Black women’s lack of representation within intercollegiate athletic leadership (Simpkins, 2019).

Although the organisational audits provided insight that the universities and athletic departments held positive positions towards diversity and inclusion, the Black women’s experiences were not congruent with those positions (Simpkins, 2019). For example, the composition of Black women (or other Women of Colour) in the athletic departments did not reflect the nature of the diversity espoused by the organisations (Simpkins, 2019). This was emphasized by the fact that nine of the 10 women were the only Black women in their departments.

In summarising this research, the key findings include that Black women’s positionality at the intersections of race and gender influenced their sport leadership opportunities and experiences based on: (a) their outsider within status, (b) inequities in their salaries, marginalizing promotions, and occupational stereotyping, (c) their tactics identity negotiation, and (d) to a lesser extent, their experiences with womanism.

Intersectionality, Inequality Regimes and UK Sport Governance

In the research discussed above it highlights how power intersects and affects groups and individuals in sport leadership contexts and this impacts on their experience and opportunities. Currently in the UK there is a poor representation of women from ethnic minorities in leadership and governance positions. The Sport Intersectional Model of Power could be applied to exploring inequality regimes in UK sport leadership and governance. The use of this model could highlight how racialised and gendered beliefs become inequality regimes to generate, sustain, and perpetuate certain preconceived notions that can impact Black women's leadership opportunities and experiences. Thus, there is a need to acknowledge Black women's positionality within organisational cultures that form the UK sport sector. This should include how Black women perceive themselves, how they are perceived by others as 'racially-gendered,' and the ways in which Black women's positionality may be influenced by access, power, and privilege within UK sport organisations that are reflective of the inequality regimes that Acker (2006) described, and this study sought to explore. As outlined within this chapter, racialised, gendered and classist cultures and practices within sport organisations are influenced by the beliefs and culture of the society in which the organisation is positioned. Therefore, future studies exploring the intersection of race and gender within UK sport leadership and governance should be positioned within the context of long-standing and deep-rooted racialised and gendered ideology and beliefs within UK society. Such context-specific research can help to uncover the intersections of power that exist within the UK sport sector and how inequality regimes continue to impact on women's leadership and a broader and ongoing lack of diversity in UK sport administration, leadership, and governance.

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