

Career decision-making process of Japanese Paralympians: factors influencing female paralympians to be coaches

Authors: Maki Itoh (1), Akiko Arai (2), Etsuko Ogasawara (1), Mary. A. Hums (3)

Institutions:

1. Juntendo University, Japan
2. Tokyo University of Science, Japan
3. University of Louisville, US

E-mail: m-ito@juntendo.ac.jp

Purpose of the study

Tokyo will be the proud the host city of 2020 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games, and from the viewpoint of female athlete support, strategies are needed to cultivate women leaders in sports. "The Sport Basic Plan", a law defining the basic matters of policy relating to sport in Japan, outlines suggestions for achieving this. Despite the fact that Japan produces many talented female athletes, few become top-level coaches after their retirement (JOC, 2015). Immediate efforts are necessary to establish a stable competition environment for female athletes. This study targeted female Paralympic athletes who need support to improve their level of international competitiveness.

This particular investigation aimed to (a) determine the structural barriers that must be overcome to cultivate female leaders and coaches and (b) study the development of a support system for female leaders and coaches. Marks and MacDermid (1996) suggest it is especially difficult for women, who are required to do numerous social roles (coach, mother, wife, etc) at the same time, to continue coaching careers where they face irregular working hours (Bruening & Dixon, 2008). This study clarified factors influencing work-life balance of female coaches and their career decisions to eventually pursue leadership positions in the future. Furthermore, this study researched the support system required in future Japanese sports organizations to increase the number of female coaches and create an environment which could promote the career development of female coaches

Theoretical background

Formal scholarly studies of careers of women working in the management of Paralympic Sport have been undertaken (Döll-Tepper, 2005; Hums, 2010; Hums & Moorman, 2001). Given the dearth of information about women in Paralympic sport, this study attempted to establish basic information about careers of former and currently active female Paralympians. The questions for this study have been utilized in previous studies examining women's careers in sport industry segments including the Paralympic Movement (Itoh, Hums, & Bower, 2016), sport for people with disabilities (Hums, Moorman, & Wolff, 2003), and the career decision-making process of Japanese Olympians (Arai, Ogasawara, Itoh & Watanabe, 2015). The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify and understand the career factors considered important for former or active female Paralympians wishing to become coaches.

Methodology

This study relied on in-depth interviews as the primary means of collecting data. A phenomenological design utilizes in-depth, exploratory interviews as its primary means of collecting data

(Rossman & Rallis, 2003). This type of interviewing allows researchers to examine meaningful relationships in an exploratory nature, providing a greater understanding of women's career experiences (Patton, 2002). Formal semi-structured interviews were conducted until saturation of the data was reached. A total of seven former or currently active female Paralympians were interviewed. The methodology for this study used a modified three-interview series technique (Bower & Hums, 2009; Siedman, 2006). The interviews took place in one designated time period, with breaks between question sets. The three parts of the interview were (a) personal life history including demographics and career experiences, (b) career perceptions of coaches including the coaching experience and coaching skills, and (c) career aspirations and career advice for women interesting in coaching. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The researchers coded the data using the constant comparative method of analysis to generate themes (Ross & Rallis, 2003).

Results and discussion

After analyzing the participants' responses to the researchers' questions, five distinct themes emerged: (a) underrepresentation of women as Paralympic coaches, (b) social identity, (c) challenges of "double minority status" as women and persons with a disability, (d) athletes wanting to be coaches indicating they needed formal training, and (e) current coaches felt overwhelmed by task requirements not related directly to working with athletes. Detailed results and further discussion will be provided in the presentation. The results offer insight into the career challenges and career perceptions of coaches and also former or currently active female Paralympians. This information can prove to be useful to officials in the Paralympic Movement, particularly to the International Paralympic Committee's Women in Sport Committee which works to increase women's participation in leadership positions in the Paralympic Movement. The results also will provide researchers with an insight into the status of the careers of women in a segment of the sport industry, the Paralympic Movement, which has not yet been thoroughly explored.

References

- Bower, G.G., & Hums, M.A. (2009). Mentoring women to advance within leadership positions as international physical educators. *Women's Sport and Physical Activity Journal*, 29, No. 3
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2011). *The Sport Basic Plan*. Tokyo.
- Marks, S. R., & MacDermid, S. M. (1996). Multiple roles and the self: A theory of role balance. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 58(2), 417-432.
- Hums, M.A., Moorman, A.M., & Wolff, E. (2003). The inclusion of the Paralympics in the Olympic and Amateur Sports Act: Legal and policy implications for integration of athletes with disabilities into the United States Olympic Committee. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 27, 261- 275.
- Itoh, M., Hums, M. A., Bower, G.G., & Moorman, M. A. (in review). Career experiences of women working in Paralympic sport organizations. *Advancing Women In Leadership*.