



***INCONGRUENCE OF GENDER, LEADERSHIP ROLES AND
UNDERREPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN SPORT
LEADERSHIP POSITIONS***

AMAN, MIRIAN PABATAO

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By

AMAN, MIRIAN PABATAO

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

May 2019

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to all women who have broken
the glass ceiling of sport and leadership.



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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2019

Chairman : Professor Aminuddin Bin Yusof, PhD
Faculty : Educational Studies

The overall purpose of the study was to investigate the underrepresentation of women in top leadership positions of sport organizations through the perspectives and experiences of women leaders who have broken the barriers in sport leadership. To attain this purpose, the study employed five research questions purposely designed to answer the perceived barriers women leaders faced; their experiences related to the discriminatory practices in the organizations; influences of those prejudice; strategies they employed to overcome those barriers; and the support they provided to aspiring women leaders. The study employed phenomenological qualitative design where data were collected through face-to-face, semi structured interviews, observations and document analysis involving women leaders currently occupying top leadership positions in the national sport organizations. Framed by three theoretical perspectives of role congruity, homologous reproduction and pipeline problem, the current study sought to give voices to seven purposely selected women leaders who have navigated the male dominated environment of sport. The perspectives and experiences of the participants provided greater understanding of the underrepresentation of women in top positions of sport leadership. The data collected from three data sources elucidated five emerging themes: perceived barriers, experiences, influences of prejudice, strategies to overcome barriers and support. The participants perceived that the underrepresentation of women in top leadership positions is attributed to the perceived barriers women faced which include personal limitations where self-limiting behaviors and work-life conflict prompted it; sociocultural factors consist of traditional and cultural practices and society's perceptions; and organizational factors consist of all-men's network, gender discrimination and conflict among women. The participants also talked about their experiences related to the discrepancy of gender and leadership roles, organizational discrimination and pipeline problem. The participants revealed that gender stereotyping is evident through designation of leadership positions and gender role expectation; organizational prejudice is also occurring attributed to treatment and access

discrimination manipulated by the majority in the organization; and candidate pool problem is apparent in the organization attributed to the lack of programs provided for the aspiring and potential women leaders, and low self-efficacy of women to come forward in the sport leadership pipeline. The participants also discussed the influences of prejudice in the organization, whereby the lack of leadership role models, lack of support and gender role conflict were identified. However, all the participants were hopeful of a better change and greater opportunities for women in sport leadership. They recommended strategies to overcome those barriers included networking, mentoring and developing self-efficacy. The participants also offered support which they believed will alleviate women's underrepresentation in sport leadership, such as the needs for leadership role model and mentors, developmental programs and to work toward amending the selection process of selecting women leaders. All throughout this study, the findings showed that women were underrepresented in top leadership positions. The study revealed that there are many gendered barriers and prejudices that have discouraged women from pursuing leadership positions particularly at the top level. Significant findings of the study showed that the three theoretical perspectives employed are intertwining and collectively explained the underrepresentation of women in sport leadership.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**KETIDAKSESUAIAN JANTINA, PERANAN KEPIMPINAN DAN
KEKURANGAN WANITA DALAM JAWATAN KEPIMPINAN SUKAN**

Oleh

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Secara keseluruhan, tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji kekurangan wanita dalam jawatan kepimpinan tertinggi pertubuhan sukan melalui perspektif dan pengalaman pemimpin wanita yang telah mengatasi halangan dalam kepimpinan sukan. Untuk tujuan ini, kajian ini menggunakan lima soalan kajian yang direka bentuk untuk menjawab halangan yang dihadapi oleh pemimpin wanita; pengalaman mereka mengenai amalan diskriminasi dalam organisasi sukan; pengaruh prejudis; strategi yang digunakan-dalam menangani cabaran; dan sokongan yang diberikan kepada pemimpin wanita yang beraspirasi. Kajian ini menggunakan rekabentuk kualitatif fenomenologi di mana data kajian dikumpulkan melalui temuduga separa berstruktur, pemerhatian dan analisis dokumen yang melibatkan pemimpin wanita yang ketika ini sedang menduduki jawatan kepimpinan tinggi dalam pertubuhan sukan kebangsaan. Merangkumi tiga perspektif teoretikal *role congruity theory*, *homologous reproduction* dan masalah saluran, kajian ini cuba untuk memberi suara kepada tujuh pemimpin wanita terpilih yang telah mengemudi persekitaran sukan yang dikuasai lelaki. Perspektif dan pengalaman peserta telah memberi lebih fahaman tentang kekurangan wanita dalam jawatan tertinggi kepimpinan atasan sukan. Data yang telah dikumpul dari tiga sumber data menghasilkan lima tema: persepsi halangan, pengalaman, pengaruh prejudis, strategi mengatasi halangan dan sokongan. Peserta mempunyai persepsi bahawa kekurangan wanita dalam jawatan tinggi dikaitkan dengan halangan persepsi wanita yang dialami termasuk batasan peribadi yang berpunca dari kelakuan membatasi diri konflik kehidupan kerja; faktor sosiobudaya yang terdiri daripada amalan tradisi dan budaya dan persepsi masyarakat; dan faktor organisasi yang terdiri daripada jaringan lelaki, diskriminasi jantina dan konflik dalam kalangan kaum wanita. Peserta juga menyuarkan pengalaman mereka yang berkaitan dengan percanggahan dari segi jantina dan peranan kepimpinan, diskriminasi organisasi dan masalah saluran organisasi. Peserta juga mendedahkan bahawa terdapat stereotaip jantina yang jelas melalui peruntukan jawatan kepimpinan dan jangkaan peranan jantina di kalangan wanita; prejudis organisasi juga dikaitkan dengan layanan dan diskriminasi akses yang dimanipulasi oleh majoriti dalam

organisasi, masalah kekurangan calon memang jelas dalam organisasi yang dikaitkan dengan kekurangan program yang bertujuan untuk membantu meningkatkan kemahiran kepimpinan di kalangan pemimpin wanita berpotensi dan efikasi sendiri rendah wanita untuk tampil ke hadapan dalam saluran kepimpinan sukan. Peserta juga membincangkan tentang pengaruh prejudis dalam organisasi bahawa terdapat kekurangan contoh kepimpinan, kurang sokongan dan konflik peranan jantina telah dikenalpasti. Namun demikian, semua peserta berharap akan ada perubahan dan peluang yang lebih baik kepada wanita dalam kepimpinan sukan. Mereka mencadangkan strategi bagi mengatasi halangan yang merangkumi jaringan, pementoran dan pembinaan efikasi sendiri. Peserta wanita juga menyokong kepercayaan bahawa kekurangan wanita dalam kepimpinan sukan dapat diatasi, seperti keperluan menjadi contoh kepimpinan dan mentor, program pembangunan dan berusaha untuk mengubah proses pemilihan pemimpin wanita. Sepanjang kajian ini, dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa terdapat kekukangan wanita dalam jawatan pemimpin tinggi. Kajian ini juga mendedahkan bahawa ada halangan jantina dan prejudis yang tidak menggalakkan wanita untuk mengejar jawatan kepimpinan terutamanya diperingkat atasan. Penemuan penting dalam kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa ketiga-tiga perspektif teori yang digunakan adalah berkaitan dan memberi jawapan secara kolektif terhadap kekurangan pemimpin wanita dalam bidang sukan.

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 8 May 2019 to conduct the final examination of Aman, Mirian Pabatao on her thesis entitled "Incongruence of Gender, Leadership Roles and Underrepresentation of Women in Sport Leadership Positions" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AD	Athletic Director
AGM	Annual General Meeting
CDM	Chef De Mission
IOC	International Olympic Committee
ISLP	Institute of Sport and Leisure Policy
MSC	Malaysia Sports Commission
MYS	Ministry of Youth and Sports
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association
NDYS	National Department of Youth and Sports
NOC	National Olympic Committee
NSA	National Sports Associations
NSC	National Sports Council
NSI	National Sports Institute
OCA	Olympic Council of Asia
OCM	Olympic Council of Malaysia
PA	Personal Assistant
RMC	Research Management Center
SCUAA	State Colleges and Universities Athletic Association
SEA	South East Asia
SWA	Senior Women Administrator
UPM	Universiti Putra Malaysia
WSFF	Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The first chapter illustrates the general concept of the current study. It describes the issues that the study investigated and provides an in-depth representation of the phenomenon. In particular, in this chapter the researcher discussed the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, significance, limitations, delimitations, and assumptions of the study. For a clearer representation of the terms used, in this chapter the researcher also presented the conceptual and operational definitions of the key terms or phrases in the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Leadership is the process of influencing an organized group toward accomplishing common set goals (Silva, 2016; Roach & Behling, 1984). It is also defined as the ability of an individual to establish direction for a working group of individuals who gain commitment from this group of members to this direction and who then motivate these members to achieve the direction's outcomes (Conger, 1992; Callahan & Grunberg, 2016). Similarly, House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, and Gupta (2004) describe leadership as the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members. Leadership, however, requires neither gender qualifications nor someone with communal or agentic characteristics but one with instinct potential to fulfil responsibilities.

Apparently, in the social context, leadership has been predominantly a male prerogative, such as, corporate, political, military, and other sectors of society (Eagly & Karau, 2002), and this does not exclude the realm of sport, where in women are less likely than men to be associated with leadership (Latu, Mast, Lammers, & Bombari, 2013). Women in leadership face a disproportionate number of life challenges that reduces their ability to achieve their full potential (Women Win Journal, 2009). Although women have gained increased access to supervisory and middle management positions, they remain quite rare as elite leaders and top executives (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Although there is an increased opportunities for girls and women to participate in sport, but they remain underrepresented within all areas of leadership at all levels of sport (M'mbaha & Chepyator-Thomson, 2018; Burton, 2015; Fasting, Sand, Pike, & Matthews, 2014). In many studies, despite formal guarantees of equality, the overall rate of progress for women particularly those from the poorest and marginalized regions of the world have been slow (Women Win Journal, 2009).

Many barriers and challenges to equitable employment opportunities remain, including stereotypical attitudes towards women and sport. The study of Sartore and Cunningham (2007) proposes that gender-role meanings and stereotypes associated with social and sport ideology may limit the capacity of women within the sport context. In addition, *Women 2000 and Beyond Journal* (2007) affirmed that given sport as traditionally a male domain, the involvement of women in sport challenges a multitude of gender stereotypes. Specifically, the globalization of women's movement of equity which started in developed and western countries have reached many parts of the world, including the South East Asia of which Malaysia is no exception. Megat Daud, Radzi, Abdullah, and Johari (2013) exemplified that women in top-level positions in sport is still lacking in numbers in contrast to the population and lower than their male counterparts.

The issue of the underrepresentation of women in sport leadership is a phenomenon that every sport woman advocate wanted to put forward in breaking the barriers in achieving better opportunities and full potentials. The voices of women speaking about problems encountered in sport leadership will keep the issues of an underrepresented gender in the forefront of the society (Inglis, Danylchuk, & Pastore, 2000). There have been improvements in the number of women in sports as participants, officials and leaders. Such advancements include the increase of women athletes by 44% and women's participation in all sports for the first time in 2012 London Olympic (International Olympic Committee, 2013). Another significant advancement for women in sport is the positive deliberation in the policy reform of the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) for women's inclusion as decision makers in the executive committee (FIFA, 2015). Recently, the 2016 Rio Olympic Games mark the second straight Summer Olympics to make it women to all sports. Nonetheless, there is still a significant amount of work that needs to be done in order to create equity (Parnter, Deranek, & Michel, 2014) in women's representation in top leadership positions of sports organizations.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The extant literature of the underrepresentation of women in sport leadership is a phenomenon that continuously receives attention in international and local platforms (Goslin & Kluka, 2014) which help paved the way of increase participation and involvement of women in sport at all levels. The participation of women in all sports in 2012 London Olympic with 44% mark the greatest achievement of women in Olympic participation followed by its increased in 2016 Rio Olympics setting a new record of 45.2 % or a total of 5,176 women out of 11,444 athletes (Women in Sports, 2018) and the FIFA reform for the inclusion of women as decision makers in the executive committee (FIFA, 2015) were examples of the logical manifestations for requisite career advancement in women's sport leadership. Nevertheless, even with these established opportunities, laws and policies, women remain significantly underrepresented in top leadership (Burton, 2015). Women in sport leadership positions like administrators and decision-makers still faced obvious challenges that significantly limit the advancement for greater opportunities. Despite of the advances in women's equity and empowerment in leadership positions, women are still underrepresented (Huggins & Randell, 2007).

Sport management researchers have produced findings with regard to diversity in leadership positions among women (Fink & Pastore, 1999; Sartore & Cunningham 2007), but most of these studies focused on western women in different levels of sport leadership positions (e.g., Massengale: 2009, Hancock & Hums, 2014: Sagas, Cunningham, & Teed, 2006: Norman, 2010: Lovelin & Hanold, 2014: Hederson, Grappendorf, & Burton, 2011). Few studies were conducted in Malaysia on the underrepresentation of women in managerial or leadership positions; however, these studies focused more on business sectors, (e.g., Jogulu & Wood, 2008; Osi, Ilac, & Amante, 2012; & Subramaniam & Arumugam, 2013), economics (e.g., Mansor, 1994 & Saadin, Ramli, Johari, & Harin, 2016), as well as politics (e.g., Sobritchea, 2000). However, studies on the topic of underrepresentation of women in managerial or leadership positions are very rare in the case of sport as an institution (Massengale, 2009). One study conducted by Megat Daud et al., (2013) looked at the challenges and reality faced by women managers but focused on sport industry. Thus, research on sport leadership experiences of Malaysian women in sport organizations receives very little attention among sport management researchers. In the Malaysian context of sport, women in leadership position continue to juggle their personality and manage many things in order to be relevant and need to carry out greater effort not to be discriminated. Although, Malaysian women have enjoyed opportunities to participate in the workforce in the country with a relative increased of 43.05% in 2008 to 50.79% in 2017 (Malaysia female labor force participation, n.d.) and there have been women's policy that emphasized on women's equity of 30% in managerial and leadership position in public sector yet, women's representation in sport associations are still low than their male counterparts (Megat Daud et al., 2013). In fact, women's occupancy in the higher level of sport leadership position indicated only 14.2%, while men comprise the 85.8%.

There have been theories that explained the underrepresentation of women in leadership. The role congruity theory initiated by Eagly and Diekman (2005) which hypothesized that women's underrepresentation in leadership is due to the incongruence of gender and leadership roles that contributed to prejudices towards women's aspiration for leadership positions. Moreover, homologous reproduction (Sagas, Cunningham & Teed, 2006; Lovett & Lowry, 1994), is an organizational barrier, believed that dominant group are likely to hire subordinates of the same gender. While pipeline problem (Turkel, 2004; Whisenant, Miller, & Peterson, 2005; Massengale, 2009; Monroe & Chiu, 2010) are social and personal limitations which are believed to impede women's representation in leadership. Pipeline problem is a notion that due to the sparse representation of women in the lower level of administrative roles (Turkel, 2004; Grappendorf, Lough, & Griffin, 2004), thus for a career move into administration and hiring of women in top leadership is even more difficult.

However, neither of the theories mentioned above (role congruity theory, homologous reproduction and pipeline problem) was employed in the local setting of the current study. To date, there have been no studies conducted that examined the incongruence between gender and leadership roles, homologous reproduction and pipeline problem as a possible explanation of the underrepresentation of women in sport leadership in sport organizations. The validation of such claim was done through an extensive searching and browsing on the search engine or database such as, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost,

Scopus, Eric, even Goggle Scholar and simple Goggle search of articles. The thorough exploration also includes searching on the key terms used in the study such as underrepresentation of women, women in sport leadership, organizational discrimination, and gender discrimination, as well as the theories employed in the study such as role congruity, homologous reproduction, and pipeline problem theory. However, no research has been found that particularly discussed the said topic. Consequently, previous research mostly focused identifying barriers and challenges of women in sport leadership, rather than investigating the impact of those barriers to the underrepresentation of women. Meanwhile, others evaluate the effectiveness of leadership roles when it is enacted by different gender. The descriptive and quantitative nature of the previous studies help the current study, but somehow, failed to uncover some issue in-depth thus, fall short to provide deeper explanation on how the issue of underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in sport organizations affected the group under study.

Therefore, this study attempted to further the extant literature. Considering that most of the studies on women's underrepresentation in sport leadership is widely studied in the West and among low to middle positions, this study employed in the Asian context of sport leadership and among top women leaders, specifically in Malaysia thus, adding to the local literature on women leaders and sport leadership studies, which rarely been studied in the local setting. Also, the three theoretical perspectives of role congruity theory, homologous reproduction and pipeline problem were used to inform the study as collectively explore the social, organizational and personal aspects of barriers that impacted women's ascend in leadership positions of sport organizations. Furthermore, the issue on women's underrepresentation in sport leadership were vastly studied quantitatively were results could only tell quantifying variables. Hence, this study employed phenomenological qualitative research as it goes beyond statistics and demographic description, rather focused more in providing rich descriptions and analyses of the phenomenon under study through the stories of the lived experiences of the participants involved. Through phenomenological qualitative design the study dug greater investigation and unearthed in-depth explanations and defined the underrepresentation of women in sport leadership positions rather than just simply quantifying them.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The overall purpose of the current study was to provide an in-depth understanding on the underrepresentation of women in sport leadership positions of sport organizations. This is where, in-depth understanding was investigated through the lived experiences of women leaders purposively selected from the national sport organizations and among the top executive leaders of the organization, who were directly involved in decision making and administration. Specifically, this study investigated the current status of women in sport leadership in Malaysia. This study also investigated women top leaders' experiences related to the prejudices brought about by perceived incongruity of gender and leadership roles, organizational discrimination and pipeline problem and how these perceived sociocultural and organizational barriers impede their ability to ascend in

leadership positions. Moreover, the study also examined the strategies women leaders employed to overcome the perceived barriers in the underrepresentation of Malaysian women in sport leadership positions. Furthermore, the study also investigated the support women leaders provided to other women aspiring for leadership positions in sport organizations.

1.4 Research Questions

In investigating the underrepresentation of women in sport leadership through the lived experiences of women top leaders, the current study sought to answer the research questions listed below. Research questions evolved from the literature and were refined after pilot study was conducted (Appendix B). The following are the research questions that guided the investigation of the phenomenon.

1. How do women leaders perceive the underrepresentation of women sport leaders in top leadership positions of sport organizations?
2. What experiences do women leaders encounter that are associated with the discrepancy of gender and leadership roles, organizational discrimination, and pipeline problem in sport organizations?
3. How does discrepancy of gender and leadership roles, organizational discrimination, and pipeline problem influence women in sport leadership positions of sport organizations?
4. How do women leaders overcome the barriers associated to the discrepancy of gender and leadership roles, organizational discrimination, and pipeline problem in ascending to top leadership positions of sport organizations?
5. What support do women leaders provide to other women aspiring for leadership positions in sport organization?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The continuous issue of the underrepresentation of women in the male dominated sport leadership position warranted a need for a more in-depth investigation for the issue to be better understood and addressed. By giving voices to the marginalized group in the realm of sport paved the platforms for more discussion and discourse which eventually open better opportunities and equity in rights and status for women in sport leadership. Not only because gender diversity in the leadership of sport organizations balance the demographic and opportunities, but diverse representation of individual in the organization has the potential to drive superior organizational effectiveness. In their study Doherty and Chelladurai (1999) noted that diverse representation in an organization contributed to significant changes in legislative, economic and society. Further, organizations with a diverse workforce attracted the best and brightest employees (Robinson & Denchat 1997). Therefore, gender-diverse organizations perform better than the lesser ones. Thus, women can be equally significant as men in an organization not to mention that women possess different informational resources

than men and interact in ways that enhance group members' creativity and cooperative relationship (Eagly, 2013).

With the pursuit of contributing to the foregoing phenomenon this study is significant in several grounds. Firstly, although the phenomenological nature of the current study could not generalize the whole context of sport leadership – (and in fact, generalization is not the main objective of this study) – however, in-depth and rich data gathered from this study will provide useful information in understanding the underrepresentation of women in sport leadership particularly at the top positions. Thus, taking into account the lived experiences of women top leaders, discriminatory practices and prejudices in sport organization will be addressed. Considering further that sport is a non-traditional career field for women (Senne, 2016; Women in Sport-IOC, 2018) there is an obvious persistent discrimination (Stangle & Kane, 1991; Cunningham & Sagas, 2005), the in-depth nature of this study was necessary to put forward the issue.

Secondly, the information from the current study is hoped to provide insightful and in-depth understanding that may inform and influence policy makers to develop policies and laws that could strengthen the sporting culture of Malaysia as well as initiatives towards achieving 30% representation of women in managerial and leadership positions. Whereby, women are supported with better opportunities, access, and support in all levels and in all capacities. That is, as decision-makers, administrators, managers, coaches, officials and participants. Wherein, sport culture in the country could provide an environment where the marginalized group are supported, empowered, and thus feel comfortable and confident being members of the organization.

Thirdly, the current study will also contribute to the extant literature on the underrepresentation of women in leadership of sport organization taking into account the perspectives of Malaysian women top leaders. Whereby, this study will help bridge the knowledge gap in the sparse literature in women and leadership in sport organization in the local setting of the research. The current study will serve as baseline information for future sport researchers interested in similar topic. Considering further that the current study is pioneering in its nature; the issue, setting, and participants in particular. In addition, the issue of women's underrepresentation in sport leadership has not been examined through the three theoretical perspectives used in this study. Hence, the results of the current study will fill this theoretical gap and will contribute to the body of knowledge concerning leadership discrepancy, organizational discrimination, and pipeline problem in sport leadership from a gender perspective.

In conclusion, this study will provide greater understanding and insightful information to future women leaders in sport, sport management researchers, and policy makers in promoting advocacy and change for better organizational and sociocultural practices; and creating women supportive policies in sport.

1.6 Limitations

Limitations are potential weaknesses in a study that are mostly out of the researcher's control. It is also a restriction that cannot be dismissed and might affect the design and results of the study. But limitations were being acknowledged and were properly addressed and handled throughout the research process. As such, the current study was limited to the experiences, perceptions and views of the purposely selected seven women participants who were among the top leaders in national sport organizations of Malaysia. Whereby, the data gathered could not be used to assume large scope of generalizations. Further, sport management is just one of the venues for women to portray leadership abilities and it is not assumed to be the only institution for women's leadership and not only women top leaders faced the same issue of underrepresentation in sport. Thus, it cannot generalize the whole context of women in leadership positions, either in Malaysia or within the larger contexts.

Another limitation of the study being addressed was the researcher's experiences, perspectives and personal connection to the subject matter (Patton, 2002). In qualitative research, as this study as well worked upon, the researcher is herself the research instrument, her experiences as student-athlete, head-coach in women's basketball team, physical education lecturer and sport director were factors for biases in the interpretation of the results. However, these limitations were carefully noted through bracketing in order to maintain the purest pursuit of the study. As a researcher, it is imperative to acquire enough background of the literature and possess effective interview skills and techniques that would encouraged research participants to actively construct knowledge on the questions and responses (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Through reflexive journal bracketing, mental preparation was also considered. The researcher confirmed of putting aside her own knowledge of the phenomenon and adopted this attitude throughout the research process and maintained curiosity about the research questions. The researcher also committed to surface her own preconceptions both before and during the research process, and maintained bracketing as a priority which, is fundamental to effective and meaningful qualitative research.

The time constraints of the research participants were also among the factors that limited the study because it limits prolonged engagement in the field. The researcher conducted three session interviews with each participant, although these enabled her to gather rich data, but more time spent talking with the participants without minding their other appointment would have given the researcher more information than what has been collected. The researcher acknowledged the difficulty of availing the time of the participants during the KL 2017 - Southeast Asian Games were time constraints of the participants were high due to their organizational commitments and the initial plan of meeting them every other week for the interview sessions were not as well realized which caused long interview intervals. In order not to loss connection with the participants, the researcher took the opportunity to be part of the volunteers for the 2017 SEA Games to keep sights with the participants since all of them were involved into it. Through this the researcher gets the chance to casually talk to some of the participants during the event.

Additionally, the researcher continued the unstructured, non-participatory observation whenever the participants were available.

Another limitation encountered in the study was the venues where interviews took place. Some interviews were done in their different offices and some were in their houses. Interviews conducted in their offices were sometimes affected by other office concerns. Staffs sometimes interfered or unexpected visitors came, which forced us to pause for a while. Interviews at home as well were sometimes affected by some family members which interviews were stop because the participant needed to attend to them. The different location could have had affected their comfort level and perhaps loss their focus of the topic. However, as a researcher it is her responsibility to bring back to consciousness the topic to the participants. In such cases, the researcher briefly reviewed the participant of the topic that was leave-off. The researcher asked the question again and reminded them of the responses they made earlier.

1.7 Delimitations

Delimitations are the definitions set as boundaries of the study that can be within the researchers' control. It is a detailed description of the scope of interest of the study as it relates to the research design. Delimitations are set so that the goals of the study would not become impossibly large to complete.

The current study was delimited to the purposively selected women leaders whose leadership positions are among the executive management of sport organizations. Executive management in sport organizations includes positional titles such as Chief Executive Officer, President, Vice President, Chairman, Director, Secretary, Athletic Director and General Manager (Lapchick, 2013). Other global sport entities included numerous other designations (Hancock and Hums, 2016), therefore, with cultural distinction, this study included the positional titles stipulated in the structure of the organizations in the local setting of the research. This includes the positions such as President, Vice President, Deputy President, Executive Board Member, Director and General Secretary and General Manager.

They are significantly considered as research participants of the study because they are directly involved in the decision making and legislative procedures of the organizations. They are believed to be the most credible individuals who have the most experiences with the subject matter and have the paramount source of information.

Moreover, this study was also delimited to the theoretical stance (discussed in the succeeding chapter) established that provided a greater understanding of the underrepresentation of women in top leadership positions of sport organizations. Theoretical perspectives such as role congruity, homologous reproduction and pipeline problem theories are believed to explain women's underrepresentation in sport

leadership in this study. However, it is not assumed that these are the only theories that could explain the phenomenon. Other sport management scholars also attempted to employ other gender and leadership theories to explain women's underrepresentation in sport leadership.

In investigating the incongruence of gender, leadership roles and underrepresentation of women in sport leadership position of sport organization, this study was delimited to a phenomenological approach which included face-to-face, in-depth semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, unstructured, non-participatory observations and document analysis (Langdridge, 2007; Harding, 2013). This approaches allowed open-ended responses that unearthed diverse information that facilitated deeper discussion and greater understanding of the phenomenon under study.

1.8 Assumptions

This study assumed that the underrepresentation of women top leaders particularly in sport leadership positions was a problem that needs to be addressed with utmost necessity to promote advocacy for change and development. Since women are as well an essential group component of the society, hence needs to be treated equally as how society treated the majority and deserve to benefit the same professional protection and tenure like everyone else. Empowering women is the key to undermining male control towards a more humane society (Ariffin, 1999). If women are not empowered, discriminatory practices and gender role stereotyping shall continue to threaten, and oppression against women shall become a norm among the majority. It was also assumed that the participants of the research were the most competent and precise people who can provide reliable information and insights on the topic. The fact that the research was conducted qualitatively thus, the researcher purposely selected the participants that best qualified to provide the most relevant lived experiences and perceptions on the research topic. As such, the research would be mutually beneficial to both the researcher and the participants. Furthermore, this study also assumed that the participants provided responses to the research questions honestly. It is the responsibility of the researcher, as the research tool, to make sure that the data gathered from the participants are in fact true, not only to the participants' experiences and perceptions, but also to the historical and factual information.

1.9 Definition of Terms

For a clear representation and to provide better understanding of the meaning of the key terms or phrases to be used in the study, definitions are provided conceptually and operationally.

Access discrimination. Access or hiring discrimination is a situation when a person from a particular subgroup is being denied of the opportunity to access to a position, job, or profession (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990). In this study, this particular term is used to refer to the organizational prejudice that hinder women leaders' entry to leadership position and denial to organizational governance.

Gender discrimination. Is the systematic, unfavourable treatment of individuals on the basis of their gender, which denies them the rights, opportunities or resources (Reeves & Baden, 2000). In this study, the term is referred to the discriminatory practices in the organization which brought unfair and bias treatment among women being the recipient of the weaker sex. In such prejudice, women were discriminated in terms of opportunities, access to privileges and support. It is also one of the organizational perceived barriers that hinder women leaders to ascend to higher leadership position.

Homologous reproduction. In the context of social organization, the term is referred to hierarchical practices of the dominant group within an organization to systematically reproduce like images based on social and/or physical characteristics (Sagas, Cunningham, & Teed, 2006). In this study, the term is used to refer to the organizational practices manipulated by the dominant group (i.e., men) which resulted to treatment and access discrimination against women.

Leadership. The ability of an individual to influence, motivates, and enables others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta 2004). In sport management, Yusof and Shah (2008) implied that it is a characteristic (specifying transformational leadership) that makes a significant difference in terms of the organization's performance and effectiveness.

Organizational discrimination. In general context, the term is defined as treating an individual or group less well in recruiting, hiring, or any other terms and conditions of employment due to the person's or group's race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, or veteran's status. (Kleiman, n.d.). In sport leadership, organizational discrimination threatens women's access in career advancement due to bias treatment of the dominant group within the organization. Specifically, this term is used in this study to describe the unfair and bias practices manipulated by the dominant group (i.e., men) in order to deny women in the position and governance in the organization.

Pipeline problem. A concept that posits the idea of women's underrepresentation in the higher level of organization is because of the lack of women leaders in the lower level (Turkel, 2004). In this study, the term is used to indicate the organizational and personal limitations which contributed to the lack of potential women leaders to be selected in the higher position of leadership pipeline in the sport organizations.

Role congruity. A concept hypothesizing the incongruity of gender and leadership roles that produce negative evaluation toward women occupying leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). In this study, the term is referred to the discrepancy of gender and leadership roles, specifically implying the incapability of women to hold leadership roles because it conflicts to the preconceived social roles for women. As such, women experience gender stereotyping, being labelled to positions designated for women and expected to perform roles specific for women.

Sport organization. A social entity operating in the various continuums of sport activities with a wide variety of goals and means (Gomez, Opazo, & Marti, 2008). In this study it is referred to the sport body taking charge in creating and developing programs and implement policies in different sporting activities both local and international involvement. Specifically includes national sport associations, sport councils, sport institutes and sport schools.

Top leadership position. The positions held by an individual in the organization specifically among the executive management. Sport management scholars identify executive management in sport organizations which includes positional titles such as chief executive officer, president, general manager, vice president, and athletic director (Lapchick, 2013), while other global sport entities include numerous other designations (Hancock & Hums, 2016). In this study and with cultural distinction, top leadership positions included the positional titles stipulated in the structure of the organizations. This includes the positions such as President, Vice President, Deputy President, Executive Board Member, Head of Department, and General Secretary.

Underrepresentation. The lack of particular social group in a certain area of an institution or society (Borland, 2008). In this study, the term is used to refer to the sparse representation of women leaders in top leadership positions of sport organizations in Malaysia.

Woman Leader. A person particularly woman (of gender) holding sport leadership position and purposively identified as participant of this study with their designated positional title in the organization.

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