

## The Underrepresentation of Black Females in NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Head Coaching Positions

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Although sport management researchers have produced findings with regard to diversity in the leadership positions of college athletics, much of this examination has focused on the differences in gender or the differences in race. Few studies have looked at the intersectionality of race and gender and thus, research on the sport experiences of Black women is largely invisible. To truly understand the experiences of Black women in sport, a theoretical framework that acknowledges this group suffers two types of discrimination - racism and sexism - simultaneously is crucial. It is important to conduct more relational analyses of women of color to understand how collective personal experiences and processes are informed by both race and gender (Smith, 1992).

Guttman (1993) and Weatherspoon (1988) noted that minority status has impeded the liberty of millions as the hegemonic construction of sport has kept out those with differences due to race, sex, age, sexual orientation, disability and religion (i.e. anyone who is not a heterosexual, white male). This impediment to advancement has been the experience of Blacks who have traditionally faced and continue to face truncated opportunities and hostile work environments (Abney & Richey, 1991). Research has been done recently on the experiences of Black males with regard to the lack of diversity in head-coach positions in Division I-A football and basketball (Cunningham, Bruening, & Straub, 2006), but sport management scholars have largely ignored the experiences of Black females in the head coach arena. Often, studies group all Blacks together, forgetting that the experiences of Black men and Black women could be different. Brooks and Althouse (2000) reported that the underrepresentation of Black men and women as head coaches could be blamed on overt discrimination by athletic directors, Blacks not having the same professional pathways available to them as those available to White coaches, and Black coaches not having access to existing head-coach recruiting networks. But the Brooks and Althouse research did not exclusively separate the experiences of Black males and Black females. Some research has been conducted that explains the underrepresentation of women in coaching and administrative positions within sport (e.g., Inglis, Danylchuk, & Pastore, 1996; Knoppers, Meyer, Ewing, & Forrest, 1991), but these studies have not specifically addressed the experiences of Black females. Much of the research has focused on the gendering of the work experiences of women as a whole. We cannot assume that the experiences of all women are the same. In summary, being both Black and female designates black women from other women and from other blacks (Collins, 1998).

Black women experience intersecting oppressions, or the "convergence" (Collins, 2000) of being both Black and female, and in some instances of a lower socioeconomic class than white women. Their position is one where the separation of race and gender oppression is impossible as these entities are simultaneously experienced; "racism multiplied by sexism" (King, 1990, p. 270). In Division I women's basketball and other workplaces, for example, Black female assistant coaches must compete against both white females and white males for head-coach jobs. Neither one of these groups faces the discrimination patterns that Black women face. It is the intersection of race, gender and sport that frames the socialization experience of Black females, whether they are athletes or aspiring coaches. As Black women go through the socialization process, they form ideas about what they can become. But as they experience two forms of discrimination, the line is blurred between what they can become and what is actually feasible.

As a result of discrimination, the lack of role models and mentors has been offered as a possible explanation for the difficulty of black females to move into coaching positions (Abney, 1988). "There are very few black women in higher education as athletic administrators and coaches. As a result, very few young black women perceive these positions as 'visible' goals as they plan and live their lives" (Abney, 1988, p. 1).

The purpose of the current study is to examine factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of Black women in head coaching jobs in Division I women's basketball and to supplement existing research on the underrepresentation of Black females in athletic administrative jobs (Abney, 1988). According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association's 2003-04 Race and Gender Demographics report, which contains the most recent data collected by the organization, 22.4 percent of the assistant coaches in women's Division I basketball were Black females. At the head coach level, using the same demographics, this percentage fell to 7.7 percent. With the percentage of the Black female population in the United States standing at about 13.5

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percent in 2000 (U.S. Census, 2000), the assistant coach percentage signals overrepresentation while the head coach percentage indicates underrepresentation. When compared with the percentage of Black females playing basketball in Division I (43.7), the decline in percentage from the assistant coach level to the head coach level is even more significant.

Data will be collected through in-depth, individual interviews with four Black female Division I assistant basketball coaches. The interview guide will revolve around their personal experiences as assistant coaches and aspirations to ascend to the head coach level, as well as questions about their socialization into sport, their job aspirations, and the double discrimination they face. The personal experiences tapped in the individual interview will lend themselves to an examination of the intersectionality of gender, race and sport, something lacking in the sport management literature. Giving voice to Black women in sport could have significant outcomes regarding equality in sport as a direct result of these women's position of double discrimination. Their perspective has been largely absent from sport management research. More data collected on this area of sport can inform those responsible for making decisions to provide opportunities for black women as athletes, coaches, and administrators.