

## Are Head Coaches in Intercollegiate Athletics perceived as Masculine? An evaluation of Gender Stereotypes and the effect of Sexism on Intercollegiate Coaches

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Research suggests one's sexist beliefs indicate an individual's gender stereotypes about managers. For instance, Masser and Abrams (2004) found individuals who denoted high sexist levels ascribed more masculine than feminine traits to managers. Moreover, leadership traits are defined in instrumental and agentic qualities which are congruent with masculine traits (Eagly & Karau, 2002), engendering the notion "think manager, think male" (Schein, 1972). Further, research has demonstrated masculine traits are important successful leadership predictors, and are attributed to leaders in many contexts (Powell, Butterfield, & Parent, 2002).

Given coaches may be viewed as leaders in sport organizations, the traits ascribed to them may be similar to leadership traits. Thus, the notion of think coach, think male may exist. This study focused initially on determining the traits ascribed to successful coaches. The second portion of this study centered on determining if sexist beliefs engender the stereotypes surrounding coaches. In today's more "egalitarian" society, sexism presents itself in politically correct ways rather than with traditional prejudicial hostility (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005). Social pressures force individuals to suppress traditional sexist forms and gender stereotypes; however, these are only to be replaced with more subtle sexist forms (Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995). This contemporary form of sexism (modern sexism) has many negative consequences for women in the workplace, including negative employment recommendations for women in leadership roles (Masser & Abrams, 2004), toleration of sexual harassment (Russell & Trigg, 2004), and the employment and education curriculum decisions one makes (Fernandez et al., 2006). A supervisor's perceived sexist beliefs reduces a woman's performance (Dardene, Dumont, & Bollier, 2007) and can predict perceived treatment discrimination among coaches (Aicher & Sagas, 2008). Therefore, it is feasible gender stereotypes about college coaches may be housed in a sexist discourse. To address this issue, three hypotheses were advanced based on the sexism and sex roles literature.

H1: Respondent's, regardless of gender, and will ascribe masculine characteristics to successful head coaches.

H2: The ascription of masculine characteristics to a successful head coach will be positively affected by the respondent's sexism levels.

H3: Respondents who denoted higher sexism levels will prefer a man as a head coach compared to either having no preference or preferring a woman.

This study utilized a sample of undergraduate students at a major Southwestern United States university. In total, 116 students responded to the survey (male = 76, female = 40). The majority of the respondents indicated they participated in organized sports (yes = 97, no = 19). The participants in the study were mostly white (n = 94), followed by Hispanic (n = 14), Asian (n = 5), African American (n = 2) and Native American (n = 1).

With instructor's permission, students were approached during class time. The students voluntarily completed a questionnaire during physical activity classes. First, students completed Bem's sex role inventory (BSRI) (Bem, 1981). The BSRI contains 30 items, ten measure masculinity (e.g., aggressive, independent, assertive), ten measure femininity (e.g., affectionate, sympathetic, tender), and ten items were filler items (e.g., conceited, reliable, conventional). Students completed the BSRI twice to denote personal and perceived successful head coach's traits. Next, students completed the modern sexism scale (Swim et al., 1995). The scale consists of eight items (e.g., Women often miss out on good jobs due to sexual discrimination), and respondents indicate their agreement level on a seven point Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree).

In order to test the first hypothesis, a MANCOVA was employed to determine if gender differences existed in the ascription of gender characteristics to coaches. Results demonstrated no significant difference between the respondent's gender in terms of masculinity ( $F [1, 111] = .01, p > .05$ ) and femininity ( $F [1, 111] = .556, p > .05$ ) scores ascribed to head coaches. Paired sample t-test results illustrated perceived masculinity scores ascribed to head coaches were higher than femininity scores ( $t = 11.438, p < .01$ ). A regression analysis was calculated to test the second hypothesis. Modern sexism was regressed on the perceived masculine score, while controlling for gender, the number of women head coaches the respondent played for, and personal femininity and masculinity scores. Including modern sexism, the model explained 14% of the variance in the head coach's masculinity score, and the r square change was significant ( $r^2 = .08, p < .01$ ). Analysis of the  $\beta$  coefficients demonstrated a significant positive relationship between modern sexism and the head coach's masculinity score ( $\beta = .31, p < .01$ ); whereas the

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control variables did not indicate significant  $\beta$  coefficients. Thus, suggesting modern sexism is the best predictor for the ascription of masculine characteristics to head coaches. In order to test the third hypothesis a multinomial regression was calculated. The respondent's head coach preference (no preference, preference for a woman, and preference for a man) was loaded as the dependent variable with preference for a man as the reference category. The respondent's modern sexism was loaded as the independent variable. The analysis was appropriate given the categorical nature of the dependent variable.

Results indicated modern sexism was strongly predictive of head coaching preferences,  $X^2(2, N = 120) = 13.86, p < .01$ , Nagelkerke  $R^2 = .16$ . This study advanced the literature in three areas. First, competing evidence has suggested traits ascribed to leaders may be changing. For instance, Schein (2001) suggested female's perception towards leadership traits has shifted to an androgynous view; whereas, Powell et al. (2002) found no gender differences in the ascription of masculine traits to leadership positions. The current study's results bolsters Powell's findings in that, no gender differences existed in the ascription of masculine or feminine traits to head coaches. Next, this study suggests gender stereotypes may be enveloped within sexist beliefs, and thus expands the literature to show a link between successful head coaching traits and sexism. Finally, this research study expands the literature on the effects sexism has within intercollegiate athletics. For instance, if a similar relationship exists among administrators, then sexist beliefs may be a plausible explanation for the decline of women in coaching positions in intercollegiate athletics. This may occur because the stereotypes of successful head coaches are more congruent with masculine traits, and these traits are predicted through modern sexism. Additionally, the predictive ability of sexism on coaching preference may indicate hiring decisions as well; however, further analysis of athletic directors will need to be completed to fully support these assertions.