

High School Girls' Sport Coaches: Characteristics and Persistence

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Socio-cultural

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Relevance/Significance of the Topic to Sport Management

Equal opportunity in all educational programs led to a dramatic increase in the number of high school girls' sport teams with over 3 million girls participating in 2011-2012, thus increasing opportunities for women to enter the coaching profession. Yet some prior research suggests that in many states the percentage of female high school coaches has declined while the percentage of males coaching girls' teams has increased. Current research investigating who is coaching girls' teams and why coaches might drop out of coaching may help sport managers develop strategies to increase the number of females pursuing a coaching career and retain a higher percentage of female coaches who enter the profession.

Review of Relevant Literature

True (1986) examined a national sampling of state directories of coaches and found dramatic declines in the percentages of high school girls' sport teams coached by females between 1971-1972 and 1984-1985. Potential reasons for this decline include role conflict between coaching, teaching, and family duties, incomplete occupational socialization through the acquisition of the knowledge, skills, and values associated with being a coach, discriminatory treatment such as pay inequities and less administrative support (Hart, Hasbrook, & Mathes, 1986), the success of the "old boys' network," failure of the "old girls' network," and discrimination (Delano, 1990; Lovett & Lowry, 1994; True, 1986; Wilkinson & Schneider, 1991). Knoppers (1987) conjectured that coaching could be perceived as a dead-end career for females given males' overall domination of sports and suggested that opportunities for females in sports have been thwarted by sexual harassment, homophobia, occupational stereotyping, and lack of feedback that adversely affected self-esteem, limited career aspirations, and threatened survival in the coaching ranks. Lovett and Lowry (1994) argued persuasively that males had much greater opportunities to engage in homologous reproduction because they held more power (hiring and decision-making) positions than did females. More recently, authors of research at the Tucker Center for Research on Girls and Women in Sport (2009) posited that a lack of female role models in the power position of head coach was perpetuating a relative scarcity of female coaches for many high school girls' sport teams.

Clarity of Purpose/Objectives of the Study/Timeliness

This study sought to answer the following research questions: (1) Are fewer females than males coaching high school girls' sport teams? (2) Are there differences in why males and females coach high school girls' sport teams? (3) Are there differences in the selection process for coaches? (4) What factors might influence coaches to leave coaching and do these differ by sex? Answering these questions is especially timely given the absence of a recent investigation of the characteristics and persistence of coaches of high school girls' sport teams in multiple states.

Appropriate Methodology and Data Analysis

Fifty Executive Directors of state high school athletic associations were contacted and asked to assist in this study by providing a list of high school coaches in their states or forwarding an email message that included a link to a 15-item online survey to athletic directors in their states for distribution to each coach of a high school girls' team. Ten Executive Directors agreed to forward the email and survey link to athletic directors, and six provided a list of coaches. Using the six state lists provided, each head coach of a high school girls' team received an individual email message from the authors that included the survey link. Data from 3910 coaches in 16 states were analyzed to establish the percentages of females and males in each category. Additionally, a chi square analysis was conducted to

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identify whether there were significant differences between the number of females and males in the different age categories.

Discussion/Implications/Applications

At least three results of this study are particularly noteworthy. First, while the overall percentages of male (52%) and female (48%) head coaches in this study are similar, only 36% of the coaches of the top 10 most popular sports for girls are females if volleyball and competitive spirit squads are eliminated. This suggests that many more males than females are being selected as head coaches of female teams in the most popular high school girls' sports. Second, the predominance of males serving as athletic directors, principals, and superintendents is clearly apparent. In fact, only 15% of those responsible for hiring coaches of high school girls' sport teams in this study are females. Thus, homologous reproduction could be one plausible reason for the differences in percentages of female and male coaches in the most popular high school girls' sports. However, an examination of the sex of coaches and male and female selectors reveals few differences. With the exception of track and field and tennis, both male and female selectors tend to select similar or higher percentages of male coaches among the most popular sports. Thus, there appears to be other reasons for the decline in female coaches at the high school level. One possibility is that females may be leaving the coaching profession earlier than male coaches. In this study, 27% percent of females had 2 or fewer total years of head coaching experience compared with 16% of males. Similarly, over twice as many males (17%) as females (8%) had 20 or more total years of head coaching experience. Data suggest that female coaches may be exiting around the 12-15 year mark. While concrete reasons for this apparent departure are not identified, contributing factors may include a lack of veteran female coach role models, family responsibilities, and inadequate support for less popular sports for girls, which are coached by a higher percentage of females. A third noteworthy finding was the reasons both male and female coaches might leave coaching. While family responsibilities have often been a reason given for why female coaches might drop out of coaching, it has seldom been associated with male coaches. However, both female and male coaches in this study cite family responsibilities as the number one reason they might resign from coaching. This surprising finding may reflect changing sex roles in American society, especially among younger generations of coaches, or it may indicate that male coaches today may be less likely than their predecessors to commit such a large percentage of their lives to work. A large number of both male and female coaches also agree that being tired of dealing with parents might lead to resigning from coaching. Coaches of both genders identify inadequate financial compensation and taking time away from personal activities as common factors that might influence them to resign. Player issues, retirement, lack of administrative support, and age or health-related issues are other common themes. Career-related factors, such as current job responsibilities of coaches who are not teachers, seeking a new job, and other coaching duties, also are noted as factors that might influence them to resign from high school coaching. If high school and athletic administrators believe that adolescent girls want and need female role models in their sports, they might more actively encourage females to pursue coaching careers. Greater administrative support for high school girls' sport teams also might lead to females continuing to coach.

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