

Gender Role Expectations and the Prevalence of Women as Assistant Coaches

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Management/leadership

Thursday, May 30, 2013

**20-minute oral presentation
(including questions)**

Abstract 2013-064

3:50 PM

(Room 404)

In 2012 the number of female assistant coaches of collegiate teams rose to an all-time high of 8,036 which accounts for 57% of the assistant coaches for women's teams. When compared to the statistics for head coaches however, 3,974 are female which only accounts for 43% of the women's team head coaches (Acosta & Carpenter, 20012). This head coaching percentage is even more troubling when we consider that it has risen very little from the all-time low of 42.4% which was recently seen in 2006 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2007). At first glance, the percentage of female assistant collegiate coaches (57%) appears quite positive, as head coaches most often come from the assistant ranks. However, it is troubling that these assistant coaches are not transitioning into head coaching positions at a higher rate. In fact, while the percentage of female assistants has risen from 55% to 57% since 2001, the percentage of female head coaches has gone in the opposite direction from almost 45% in 2001 to 43% (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to better understand if gender role stereotyping can help to explain the overrepresentation of women in assistant coaching positions in women's intercollegiate athletics, and the underrepresentation of women as collegiate head coaches.

Previous research examining the lack of women as head coaches has identified several contributing factors, such as work-life balance issues (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Bruening & Dixon, 2008), lack of same sex mentoring (Fazioli, 2004; Gogol, 2002; James, 2000; Massengale, 2009; "Wanted!" 2009; Young 1990), lack of interest in coaching by female athletes (Madsen, 2010), lowered self-efficacy among female assistant coaches (Cunningham, Sagas, & Ashley, 2003), and perceptions of gendered opportunities (Kamphoff, Armentrout, & Driska, 2010; Walker & Bopp, 2010-2011; Walker, Bopp, & Sagas, 2011). However, if these factors are constraining women from becoming head coaches, the question becomes: why are these factors not equally constraining women from attaining assistant coaching positions?

There has been limited consideration as to why the number of female assistant coaches is rising within intercollegiate athletics, but those women are not transitioning into head coaching roles in greater numbers (Cunningham et al., 2003). In considering possible reasons for this discrepancy, differing gender role expectations between head coach and assistant coach positions must be compared. Previous research has indicated that there are masculine gender role expectations associated with leadership positions, including head coaching positions (Aicher & Sagas, 2010; Aicher & Samariniotis, 2012; Burton, Barr, Fink, & Bruening, 2009; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Schein & Davidson, 1993; Schein, Mueller, Tituchy, & Liu, 1996; Schein 1973; Shaw & Hoeber, 2003). In addition, leadership positions within athletics that place a greater emphasis on tasks such as delegating, managing conflict, and strategic decision making are perceived as masculine positions (Burton et al., 2009; Burton, Grappendorf, & Henderson, 2011). Leadership researchers have found that when positions are aligned with masculine gender role expectations it can make male candidates seem like a natural fit (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Shaw & Hoeber, 2003) and can lead to women being relegated to more subordinate roles (Masser & Abrams, 2004).

Women in head coaching positions therefore navigate a double bind (LaVoie, Buysse, Maxwell, & Kane, 2007), as they must display the stereotypical masculine characteristics necessary to demonstrate effective coaching behaviors, while also conforming to prescribed feminine societal expectations (LaVoie & Dutove, 2011). However, what is unknown is whether perceptions of effective assistant coaching behaviors also require a display of stereotypical masculine characteristics similar to effective head coaches. Perhaps the behaviors perceived to be required of assistant coaches are based on more stereotypical feminine characteristics, and therefore women in those roles do not have to navigate the double bind of female head coaches. This may be one contributing factor for the greater number of women holding assistant coaching positions, in comparison to the number of women holding head coaching positions. Therefore, based on previous work within sport management regarding gender role expectations of male and female leaders, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1a Perceptions of characteristics associated with an ideal head coach of a women's intercollegiate team will be

2013 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2013)

more closely aligned with stereotypical masculine characteristics.

H1b Perceptions of characteristics associated with an ideal assistant coach of a women's intercollegiate team will be more closely aligned with stereotypical feminine characteristics.

The proposed study will include 600 female student-athletes from 3 different Division I universities in the northeast United States. Participants will be randomly assigned to either the head coach or assistant coach group. Participants will then be asked to consider the attributes of an ideal head coach or an ideal assistant coach and choose corresponding characteristics from the short version of the Bem Sex-Role Inventory Scale (BSRI, Bem, 1981). The BSRI assesses masculine sex roles (e.g., assertive, forceful), feminine sex roles (e.g., affectionate, understanding), and includes ten neutral items not used in scoring. Additional demographic data will be collected from participants including age, sport played, sex of head coach, sex of assistant coaches, and number of years playing for a male and a female head collegiate coach. A masculine score and feminine score will be calculated for the head coach and assistant coach positions. Analysis of variance will be used to compare differences on the masculine and feminine scores for each coaching position.

Results of this research will be discussed within the context of role congruity theory. Role congruity theory indicates that, based on prescriptive gender role stereotyping, individuals are punished if they fail to display appropriate gender role expectations and are more severely punished if they display qualities expected from the other gender (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly & Diekmann, 2005; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Women who exhibit the masculine characteristics of arrogance and controlling behaviors are especially punished socially (Prentice & Carranza, 2002; Rudman & Glick, 1999). Further, role congruity theory indicates that prejudice toward female leaders stems from the perceived incongruity between the prescribed gender role expectations for women (e.g. nurturing, passive, sympathetic) and the masculine characteristics that are associated with successful leaders (e.g., aggressive, ambitious, dominant). Additionally, if women do engage in stereotypically masculine or male-dominated behaviors such as those perceived as necessary in management and leadership positions, they are evaluated less favorably than men exhibiting the same behaviors because the women are violating their societal gender role expectations (Eagly & Karau, 2002). If participants in this study rate the characteristics associated with an ideal head coach as more closely aligned to masculine characteristics, and rate the ideal assistant coach as more closely aligned to feminine characteristics, role congruity theory may provide one explanatory mechanism as to why there has been a steady increase in the number of women as assistant coaches and not among women as head coaches. The underrepresentation of women as head coaches is a complex and important issue that deserves attention. While there certainly are a great number of issues contributing to this situation, this study may provide additional understanding as to why women coaches are facing difficulty advancing in college athletics.