The Glass Cliff as an Explanation for the Under-Representation of Women in Coaching

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Introduction
Women have been historically excluded from leadership positions in sport, and that pattern largely continues today (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Burton (2015) outlined a number of reasons for this trend, including explanations at the individual, group, organizational, and societal levels (see also Burton & Leberman, 2017).

Theory and Hypotheses
In seeking to extend this scholarship, the purpose of the current study was to examine factors associated with women obtaining a leadership position in sport. To do so, we draw from glass cliff theory (Ryan & Haslam, 2007), which holds that women are most likely to be placed in a leadership role when the unit or organization has had a history of poor performance. In this case, the organizational decision makers seek dramatic change and are thus most likely to employ someone who has historically differed from the norm—in this case, women. Experimental research from outside sport has largely supported this rationale, such that raters believe women are best suited for a position when the unit they will be leading has a history of poor performance (Ryan et al., 2007). The theory also holds that because women are placed in units with a history of poor performance, the performance while they are leading might be poor, too, thereby reinforcing negative stereotypes.

In the current study, we examine these possibilities in the context of intercollegiate women’s soccer. We hypothesized that women would be most likely to be selected as a new coach following poor performance by the team (H1). We further suspected that this relationship would be moderated by former coach sex, such that the aforementioned relationship would be stronger when the new female coach was replacing a man (H2).

Method
Using archival data sources, we collected 10 years of data for all women’s soccer teams in five conferences: Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Big Ten, Big 12, Pac 12, and Southeastern Conference (SEC). School websites provided coach information, including sex, race, experience, and record; team performance, including win-loss record, post-season tournament appearances, and strength of schedule; and other relevant team information, such as stadium capacity and attendance. In all, we collected 640 seasons of data.

Anticipated Results
Analyses are on-going. We will use probit regression analysis to examine the influence of previous team performance and previous head coach demographics on the sex of the coach selected. Because women might be placed in a particularly precarious leadership position, we will also examine coach performance, relative to previous performance, while taking into consideration the demographics of the previous and current head coach.

Discussion and Implications
Results will have implications for the hiring of new athletic coaches and the gender diversity of athletic departments. If the findings are consistent with the hypotheses, results will show that when women are hired as coaches, they are placed in precarious roles, making their jobs doubly challenging. Sport managers can use the results to combat stereotypes and have more inclusive hiring practices.