Gendered Hiring Networks And Access Discrimination: A Social Network Analysis of Leadership Positions in NCAA Sports

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While Title IX has resulted in record numbers of female sport participants, an unintended consequence has been a decline and current stagnation of women coaching women. In 1972, the year Title IX was passed, over 90% of women coached women in collegiate athletics (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012), currently that number is approximately 42% and been stagnant for the last decade (LaVoi, 2018). This study builds on previous gendered network research (Katz, Walker, & Hindman, 2018) by examining the influence of gendered affiliation networks on gendered hiring practices. Specifically, the aim of this study is to examine whether gendered administrative leadership networks influence the lack of women coaches in women’s intercollegiate sports, an area where the highest concentration of female coaches is evidenced.

Leadership in network theory, is a well-suited framework to study this phenomenon in that it suggests that social network structures influence various outcomes associated with leadership. Specifically, affiliation networks allows us to examine an observable proxy for a specific relationship, without needing access to the individual being examined (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011) and access discrimination, allows us to examine exclusive networks or excessive barriers that exclude certain people from certain positions. This framework is fruitful for examining whether gender exclusive networks at the administrative hiring level (i.e. ADs and SWAs) influence who gets hired (i.e. access) at the coaching level.

We collected data and created affiliation networks for newly hired women’s team head coaches within seven select NCAA D-I conferences. The dataset included 236 newly hired head coaches, in addition to the actors most involved in hiring new coaches: ADs and SWAs. Altogether, our dataset includes 459 unique actors. In terms of job categories, 459 includes 218 coaches, 130 ADs, and 111 SWAs. For each actor, we searched for all previous organizational affiliations. This includes undergraduate and graduate schools, plus every organization where the actor worked in their professional career. This resulted in a total of 790 unique organizations. Using the 459 unique actors and the 790 organizations, we created a two-mode network. Results are as follows. Across all variables that signal influence, prestige, popularity, and access to resources and power – the average female coach is better connected than the average male coach in the network. Whether we look at ego network size, ego density, ties to ADs, centrality in the new coaches’ network, or centrality in the whole network – the average female coach is better connected than the average male coach. Women on average are much better brokers than men, meaning they are positioned in the network to have better outcomes in the job market, yet they do not. We assumed network variables would explain the dearth of women coaches. But the results suggest the opposite—women are well-positioned in the network. Data suggests that gendered leadership networks lead to gendered hiring practices, which lead to gender biased hiring in sport. Thereby producing institutionalized access discrimination.