Perceptions of Division III Female Student-Athletes Self-Efficacy to Pursue Collegiate Coaching

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The enactment of Title IX led to increased participation rates and funding opportunities for female student-athletes, yet the number of women ascending to leadership positions in college athletics has decreased (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Presently, males hold the majority of athletic director positions and serve as head coaches for over half of all female varsity sport teams in college athletics (LaVoi & Silva-Breen, 2018). For example, in 2018, women held 31.1 percent of athletic director and 44.3 percent of head coaching positions at the Division III level (TIDES, 2019). Those percentages were the highest among all three NCAA Divisions. While female student-athletes in Division III have the largest pool of same-gender head coaches and athletic directors, limited research has been conducted to understand how the presence/absence of women in leadership positions impacts their desire and self-efficacy to pursue coaching.

The lack of same-gender administrative and coaching role models for women could create entry barriers and hinder the career development of women currently employed in those positions (Massengale & Lough, 2010). Acosta and Carpenter (2014) acknowledged, “most female coaches come from the ranks of past athletes” (p. 27), thus, perspective from this population toward entering coaching is vital to understand when discussing the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions (Schull, 2017). Subsequently, the purposes of this study were to examine the relationship between head coach gender and coaching self-efficacy of Division III female student-athletes, and to investigate the impact of perceived barriers (e.g., discrimination and working hours) on their desire to enter the field.

Qualtrics online surveys were distributed to Division III female student-athletes in the New England region. Surveys included demographic information, coaching self-efficacy (Everhart & Chelladurai, 1998), desire to coach (Moran-Miller & Flores, 2011), and perceived barriers (Everhart & Chelladurai, 1998). Respondents included 192 (n = 192) Division III female student-athletes across 10 sports and all grade levels. The results indicated a higher number of female head coaches (n=131) compared to male head coaches (n=61).

Coaching self-efficacy results indicated a statically significant relationship with gender (p = 0.4), as student-athletes coached by women reported higher scores (M = 7.56) on the coaching self-efficacy scale than their counterparts coached by men (M = 7.10). Additionally, female student-athletes coached by men were more likely to perceive discrimination (p = 0.007) and working hours (p < .001) as future coaching barriers. There was also a statistically significant relationship (p < .001) between coaching self-efficacy and participants’ desire to coach, reporting higher desire to coach scores for lower levels (e.g., high school and Division III) compared to the upper levels (e.g., Division I and Division II).

This study has implications for athletic administrators and coaches in terms of understanding the perceptions of Division III female student-athletes toward coaching. Female student-athletes coached by men reported lower coaching self-efficacy scores and perceived more barriers to entering the profession than student-athletes coached by women. To that end, efforts should be made to provide same-gender role models and properly equip male coaches to handle cross-gender mentoring relationships.