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How Are Student Athletes Perceiving Female Coaches

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St. John Fisher College

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Abstract

This study was designed to assess the perceptions that student athletes have of female coaches and relate these perceptions to the establish factors within the literature review. Research has suggested possible explanations for the decline of females coaching female sports, however, the focus has not been on the extreme low number of women coaching male sports. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to gain an understanding as to why females are not coaching male sports. A cross sectional survey will be designed and sent out to Male and female student athletes within the NCAA Division III Empire 8 conference. The survey contained open and closed questions, and data was evaluated through the use of the role congruity theory. Descriptive and a chi square analysis was ran to determine if two or more independent variables are related to the dependent variable. A total of 314 participants were used for the completion of this study. The results of this study display that athletes may not perceive female coaches in a negative manor. The findings both prove and disprove previous research.
Within the United States sport is more than just a leisurely activity, it is a popular cultural practice and historically a “mans sport.” For decades, and even centuries, sport has been directly associated with males, essentially establishing a synonymous relationship between athletics and masculinity (Whisenant, Pedersen, & Obenour, 2002). Even though there have been wide changes in gender roles, women continue to have less power than men, more noticeably within sport (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007; Whisenant, Pedersen, & Obenour, 2002). According to Lapchick (2009) in 2008 of the 120 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Football Bowl Subdivision programs only five women were the head of athletics departments, which past research has shown that this can have a correlation with the number of female coaches. Although the opportunities for females to participate in athletics have increased, the same positive response cannot be seen in the number of females occupying head coaching positions (Blom et al., 2011).

The percentage of women in athletic leadership positions (i.e. head coach, athletic director) has decreased since the passage of Title IX. Since 1972 the number of women coaching female intercollegiate sport has decreased by 48% and has continued to steadily decrease (Blom et al., 2011). Some research has been done to examine this occurrence, and many have found variables that seem to be contributing to the lack of women at head coaching positions (Cornelius, Habif, & Van Raalte, 2001; Cunningham & Sagas, 2008; Sartore & Cunningham, 2007). Besides Blom et al., there has been little to none research done on the absence of female head coaches of male sports. According to the 2008 Racial and Gender Report Card within Division I of the NCAA only 2.8% of men’s sports had a female head coach (Lapchick, 2009). Additionally, according to Acosta &
Carpenter (2012) report, 2012 represents the highest number ever of women’s teams per school. However, males coach 57.1% of these women’s teams and 97-98% of male teams. Even though the low levels of females at leadership positions within sport organizations has received an increasing amount of attention, research on why women are not coaching male sports has been neglected.

It is evident that gender discrimination and inequality is still prevalent within U.S. society, more specifically, within sports. Even though some research has been done to explore why males appear to dominate the coaching profession (Cornelius, Habif, & Van Raalte, 2001; Cunningham & Sagas, 2008; Sartore & Cunningham, 2007), there has been very little research done on attempting to understand why women coaching male athletics is limited. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to find how student athletes perceive female coaches and how these perceptions relate to the established factors in the literature review.

**Literature Review**

**Women in the Workplace**

Women are stereotypically viewed as less dominant than men in the work place, more specifically in upper level managerial positions. Men are also more likely to occupy the top positions within a hierarchy (Bauer & Baltes, 2002; Heilman, 2001; Mast, 2005; Ridgeway, 2001; Welch & Sigelman, 2007). Additionally, men tend to assume leadership positions more easily than women do. Mast ‘s (2005) reasoning for this is since women are underrepresented in top managerial positions and other positions that involve hiring new people into leadership positions, this process will only continue. Meaning, since men are in these positions they are more likely to see women as less
capable for these positions and therefore not hire them (Heilman, 2001; Mast, 2005). Furthermore, when there is a pro-male bias, meaning men are rated more favorably than women given comparable performance, then women will be at a disadvantage in obtaining employment (Bauer & Baltes, 2002; Ridgeway, 2001).

Even when women are beginning to enter into roles previously dominated by males, the gender hierarchy is still fixed within the perceivers mind (Diekman, Goodfriend & Goodwin, 2004). Ridgeway (2001) found that within hierarchies’ gender stereotypes contain status beliefs (shared cultural conceptions about the status position in society of groups such as those based on gender) that connect greater status and competence with men instead of women. This hierarchical concept as a barrier for women in the workplace is further displayed in Conrad, Carr, Knight, Renfrew, Dunn, and Pololi (2010) research on barriers to professional advancement for women in academic medicine. Like sport, males have traditionally occupied academic medicine. Within academic medicine women experience inequalities in rank and leadership, they are also paid less than their male counterparts at the same rank, and move through the ranks at a slower rate (Conrad et al., 2010). In their literature review Claringbould and Knoppers (2008) found that women working in male dominated jobs (i.e. police) encountered more discrimination than men working in jobs that were dominated by women (i.e. nursing). Another profession that women are noticeably outnumbered in is among correctional officers (Matthews, Monk-Turner & Sumter, 2010). Matthews, Monk-Turner & Sumter (2010) found that female correctional workers are generally perceived negatively by their male counterparts, and many believe that they cannot perform the job as well as a man. Male correctional officers viewed females as more of a
nurture or caregiver, and that they “tend to perceive females officers as a calming, moderating, and normalizing force” (p. 54) which are all considered as ‘feminine’ traits.

Prohibiting women from being granted access into certain “masculine” professions, or the denial of their advancement within these professions reveals evidence of a glass ceiling (Goodman, Fields, & Blum, 2003; Welch & Sigelman, 2007). According to Goodman, Fields, and Blum (2003) the glass ceiling is “a barrier that appears invisible but is strong enough to hold women back from top-level jobs merely because they are women rather than because they lack job-relevant skills, education, or experience” (p. 476). The glass ceiling is viewed as result of gender stereotypes, and the expectations they create about a woman’s character and how women should behave (Heilman, 2001). Descriptive gender-role stereotypes describe how women are, and prescriptive gender-role stereotypes state how women should be have (Burton et. al., 2010). This unconsciously shapes peoples expectations of both men and women within a given context (Ridgeway, 2001). When expectations and views are shaped by gender it allows employers to view men as an “image” or “reference point” of what a typical employee should be for a specific profession (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2008). Therefore this use of a man as a reference point “excludes and marginalizes women who cannot, almost by definition, achieve the qualities of a real worker because to do so is to become like a man” (Claringbould, & Knoppers, 2008, p. 91). Role congruity theory states that there are qualities and behavioral tendencies that are believed to be mandatory for each sex as well as expectations about the roles that women and men should occupy. Females are stereotypically associated with communal traits and men are more agentic. Communal traits are; compassionate, helpful, kind, sympathetic, sensitive, nurturing.
Agentic traits that are typically associated with men are aggressive, forceful, self-confident and self-sufficient (Burton et. al., 2010).

**Women in Sport**

Women in general are under-represented in leadership positions, paid less for their work, and marginalized in the workplace especially within the context of sport (Cunningham & Sagas, 2008; Welch, & Sigelman, 2007). When examining the salaries of male and female coaches of university athletics, women coaches of women’s basketball teams are paid more than men who coach those teams. However, when looking at the salaries of men who coach male basketball teams it is almost double of what the coaches of women teams earn. This in effect lowers the earning potential for women considerably since head coaching positions of men’s teams are almost guaranteed for men due to hiring practices along with disproportionate ratio’s shown by National Collegiate Athletic Association 2012 gender report (Cunningham & Sagas, 2008). According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association 2012 gender equity report within NCAA Division I institutes the average number of full time male coaches for men’s teams is 119, and the average number of full time female coaches for men’s teams is 14. NCAA Division II Institutes show that in 2012 there were 278 male head coaches of men’s teams, 29 female head coaches of men’s teams (Bracken & Irick, 2012). Meanwhile there were 265 male head coaches of women’s teams and 252 female head coaches of women’s teams. Similar ratios appear for NCAA Division III institutes as well (Bracken & Irick, 2012). Most of the female head coaches of men’s teams come from sports that are viewed as “gender neutral” sports such as Cross Country/ Track and Field or Volleyball (Manley, Greenless, Thelwell & Smith, 2010). Within Cornelius,
Habif and Van Raalte’s (2001) discussion of their study they found that a possible explanation for the lack of bias among volleyball players head coach preference may be that in gender-neutral sports athletes have had more chances to work with female coaches. When looking at NCAA 2012 gender equity report a majority of the female coaches of men’s teams come from cross country/track and field, golf, and tennis (Bracken & Irick, 2012). Two concepts have been developed to better explain the inequality that women experience in their pursuit of leadership positions within sport. Whisenant, Pedersen and Obenour, (2002) define hegemony as “a social theory, the condition in which certain social groups within a society wield authority through imposition, manipulation, and consent over other groups” (p. 485). An institution is considered hegemonic when a dominant belief is adopted and then reinforced over time within a society. Therefore, sport is one of the most hegemonic institutions due to the dominance that men have had over it (Whisenant, Miller & Pederson, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity is when masculinity is accepted as the “defining characteristic” of western society and anything that is thought of as feminine is deemed inferior (Whisenant, Pedersen & Obenour, 2002). Women are associated with femininity and they are often denied opportunities to achieve a higher status within sport. This is due to the establishment of men’s power and control through the continual acceptance of male dominance as the ‘status quo’ (Norman, 2010a; Whisenant, Miller & Pedersen, 2005). Thus, sport is seen as “off-limits” to women and can inhibit their advancement.

The overall affect of the process known as hegemonic masculinity is a gender gap that is maintained by homologous reproduction. Whisenant, Miller and Pedersen, (2005) define homologous reproduction as “the phenomenon where the group in power
(i.e., men) works systematically to reproduce itself” (p. 912) simply put, homologous reproduction is hiring from a principle of similarity (Kilty, 2006; Norman, 2010b). When the dominant group (men) only allows people who hold characteristics similar to them into their circle of influence it produces a closed network to women (Whisenant 2007, Whisenant, Miller & Pedersen, 2005). This closed network creates a barrier for women known as “good old boys” club, where men continue to hire and promote males over females (Blom et al., 2011; Norman, 2010b). In Acosta and Carpenter’s (2012) longitudinal study found that the gender of an institutions athletic director seems to make a difference in the percentage of female coaches. For example, they found that 1 of 5 head coaches of all NCAA men’s and women’s teams is a female, and 1 of 5 athletic directors across NCAA division institutes is a female. Additionally Cunningham and Sagas (2005) found that male athletic directors were more likely to employ more men than women.

**Female Coaches Experiences**

Coaches perform various duties to help athletes develop and succeed; some of these duties are guiding the practice of skills, providing instruction and feedback, and monitoring learning and performance. Therefore, coaches must fulfill multiple roles such as teacher, strategist, motivator, and character builder (Carter & Bloom, 2009). Additionally, coaches need to have proficient communication skills in order for their teams to succeed (Johnson, Wojnar, Price, Foley, Moon, Esposito & Cromartie, 2011). Furthermore, coaching is a high investment that involves a great deal of commitment, which has both positive and negative aspects (Raedeke, 2004).
Even though the opportunity to coach both male and female teams has increased, more men have “crossed-over” to coach female teams, and women have not “crossed-over” to coach male teams (Blom et al., 2011). Historically, the number of women coaching male sports within the NCAA has remained between 2-3% (Blom et al., 2011). However, most of the females that are coaching men at the collegiate level are coaching combined men and women’s teams such as cross-country, track, or swimming, as opposed to exclusively coaching males (Bracken & Irick, 2012). Women that have coached men reported barriers to coaching male sports such as; job access, discrimination, and athlete’s perceptions. Blom et al., 2011. Norman (2010) performed a study on senior national coaches of both men and women major sport teams (soccer, field hockey, rugby, basketball, volleyball, etc.) and their experiences of day to day relations with men in their profession, to better understand if the meanings and values of sport culture are embedded and maintained in male and female coaches relations. Results of this study showed that female coaches felt they constantly had to prove themselves as effective as the male coaches around them. Even though these female coaches faced opposition and resentment from their male counterparts (i.e. not wanting to take advice from a women) they became head coaches within their respective sports. However, Norman felt that this was because female coaches integrated themselves in the preexisting culture of coaching rather than challenge it. This acceptance of sport as a man’s field is also highlighted in Hardin, Shain, and Shultz-Poniatowski’s (2008) study of women in sports journalism. Participants within the study reported that they do not challenge it (all-male environment) rather they “accept the field as men’s turf and their own status as one of an outsider” (p. 74).
Coaching Turnover

There have been higher turnover rates of female coaches as compared to male coaches. Kamphoff (2010) reported that the gendered and patriarchal nature of U.S. collegiate coaching presents challenges and influences women to leave the profession. She further found that women receive few resources, older facilities, lower salaries, more responsibilities, and less administrative support than males do. This trend can also be seen in Kamphoff and Gill’s (2008) study of athletes interest and perceptions of the coaching profession. Sagas, Cunningham and Pastore (2006) also found that female assistant coaches have higher dropout levels, and anticipate leaving the coaching profession sooner than their male counterparts. This is important because assistant coaches comprise the largest potential pool for head coaching positions in the future (Sagas, Cunningham, & Pastore, 2006). In Sagas, Cunningham and Pastore’s (2006) study, they found that female coaches’ head coaching intentions were not strong, and women posses less intent than men to pursue head coaching positions. Work-family conflict was seen as a barrier and prevented most women from wanting to become head coach (Sagas, Cunningham & Pastore, 2006). Additionally, the think coach, think male stereotype negatively affected females from pursuing coaching positions due to the possibility of being labeled as a lesbian due to the professions masculine nature (Aicher & Sagas, 2010; Kilty, 2006). Smucker & Whisenant (2005) noted that male coaches were significantly more satisfied than female coaches. In Cunningham and Sagas (2002) study on the differential effects of human capital acknowledged that although other factors affect the experiences of intercollegiate coaches the different levels of human capital for male and female coaches might lower female coaches aspirations. Female
assistant coaches continue to leave the profession sooner than male assistant coaches the
gender gap between the number of men and women as head coaches will continue to widen (Turner, 2008).

**Athlete Perceptions**

The stereotypical belief that women should not participate in sport due to its masculine nature may attribute to perceptions that players have of male and female coaches. Manley, Greenless, Thelwell and Smith (2010) stated that previous research showed both male and female athletes prefer to be coached by men. The authors also found that when a specific sport is considered “masculine” the shaped the player’s expectancy of a coach to be a male due to the stereotypical belief that it is not appropriate to have a female coach (Manley, Greenless, Thelwell & Smith, 2010). Expectancies signify the process of using observable cues, past experience and knowledge in order to project certain outcomes and establish a “set of rules” about the world (Manley, Greenless, Thelwell & Smith, 2010). Hartmann, Nelson, and Sullivan (2011) found in their study on female and male sport participants and non-sport participants that both male participants from both groups showed more adherence to traditional roles and sex based discrimination than females. In Frey, Czech, Kent and Johnson’s (2006) exploration of female athletes perceptions of being coached by men and women they found nine of the females participants displayed a preference for male coaches. Similar to this, Cornelius, Habif and Van Raalte, (2001) found that NCAA Division III basketball players preferred male coaches because they believed male coaches are more qualified than female coaches even when both coaches were presented as having identical skills and experiences. However, they found that volleyball players (both male and female)
reported no significant preference for a male or female coach. Cornelius, et al. (2001) explained that volleyball is seen as a “gender-neutral” sport while basketball is seen as masculine. The authors acknowledged that volleyball players had higher exposures to female coaches, which may lead to more favorable attitudes toward female coaches. Thus, male athletes will continue to have a preference for male coaches over female coaches because they have had little to no experience with a coach of the opposite sex (Cornelius, Habif & Van Raalte, 2001). This point is further illustrated in Kavassanu, Broadley, Jutkiewicz, Vincent and Ring’s (2008) study of male and female student athletes. They found athletes will evaluate a coach’s effectiveness and form expectations based off their past experience with male and female coaches. Furthermore Bauer and Baltes (2002) found that raters may rate ratee’s less favorable because they have had less experience or exposure to them.

Another factor contributing to an athlete’s perception of a coach is the fixed concept of ability. Sex-typed activities (activities that are seen masculine i.e. football, soccer, basketball) can mediate gender differences in ability perceptions resulting in a fixed concept of ability forms, which is the conception that “an ability cannot be changed with effort or practice and performance depends on innate capabilities” (p. 184). Therefore, if there were a fixed concept that a woman does not have the ability to coach a masculine sport than athletes would not perceive that she could perform as a coach within this context. As opposed to having an acquired concept of ability where ability can be improved through more practice and effort (Belcher, Lee, Solmon & Harrison, 2003).

Summary
Based on the literature reviewed above the current study utilized a quantitative approach to explore athletes perceptions of male and female coaches. The goal of the research conducted is to draw conclusions from data and find relatable themes between the results and literature review previously presented. The data collected will be interpreted through the use of the role congruity theory formerly addressed in the literature review to essentially assess what student athletes perceptions are in regards to qualifications for coaching.

Methodology

Participants

Participants within this study are from a sample representing NCAA Division III student athletes. The sample was taken from student athletes that comprise the NCAA Division III Empire 8 conference. Student athletes participating in football, basketball, soccer, lacrosse, baseball, softball, volleyball, tennis, golf, swimming/diving, cross country, and track emails were retrieved by viewing each schools athletic roster and then collecting them through each schools directory. Emails were collected from these schools within the Empire 8 conference; St. John Fisher College, Ithaca College, Hartwick College, Utica College, Elmira, and Nazareth College. Due to time constraint emails were not collected from Alfred University, and Stevens Institute of Technology. These emails were then put into an excel file for organizational purposes. Houghton College was also excluded from the list of institutions being used because they are not a full member of NCAA Division III yet. The student athletes were selected for this study because they are purposeful due to
the convenience of the conference they are in and their potential to provide an accurate sample representing Division III athletes.

**Procedure**

Before data collection has begun this study received institutional review board approval for its research. The type of research conducted was exploratory with the goal of gaining a better understanding if what females have faced at upper managerial positions within the work force can be applied to female coaches. Due to this I took an interpretivist approach to my research to determine if the findings are consistent with the role congruity theory or not. The role congruity theory was used because the theory suggests that a prejudice may exist against impending female leaders because the leadership ability is more stereotypically linked to men. Essentially, the theory shows that gender roles are related to men and women and that certain jobs are viewed more as appropriate depending on the sex resulting in a male bias within male dominated fields (Burton et. al., 2010). Coming from the interpretivist tradition I was able to explore and find out explanations through qualitative data as well as quantitative data. I interpreted the data myself to understand why the certain occurrences are happening. Unlike positivism and post-positivism, taking an interpretivist approach allowed me to study multiple realities through the participants (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Lastly, my findings are less likely to be applied to other settings of generalized for a greater population. Meaning, just because the answers I receive are happening in the empire 8 conference the same may not be true throughout Division I, II, and III.

**Framework**
Perceptions were defined as a way in which something is regarded, or understood. Gender-neutral sports were defined as a sport that has traditionally received equal participation from males and females swimming, volleyball, track/cross country, and tennis (White & Kay, 2006). Masculine sports were defined as a sport that has traditionally been perceived as male-oriented, or male dominant such as football, soccer, and basketball (Blom et al., 2011). Exposure was defined as how many male and female coaches have the athletes come in direct contact with. The sports that were not examined in this study were cheerleading, equestrian, rowing, and wrestling. Gender will be evaluated as male or female.

**Materials**

A cross sectional survey was sent out electronically to the participants. The survey assessed their perceptions of male and female coaches. The independent variables within the research are factors that are affecting athlete’s perceptions; prior literature has suggested that more exposure to female coaches, and gender-neutral sports may attribute to a positive perception of female coaches. The dependent variable that I assessed is the student athlete’s impressions/perceptions of coaching characteristic. The survey was comprised of closed and open questions. The open ended question asked participants to describe their ideal coach in 3-4 words. The answers were coded on masculine and feminine characteristics such as those found in the literature review. Descriptive statistics were collected and a chi square analysis was ran. The collection of data will be completed through the use of Qualtrics online survey software.
Results

A total of 1,498 surveys were sent out electronically through Qualtrics. From this 364 total surveys were collected and then downloaded into SPSS. After reviewing the results of the survey, responses that were not usable were deleted. If the respondent answered fewer than 20 questions they were taken out of the data analysis. Therefore, a total of 314 participants were used for the completion of this study.

The following two tables display participant’s level of exposure to male and female coaches.

Table 1. With respect to your primary sport how many male coaches have you had throughout your history of playing?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-6</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-9</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 or more</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. With respect to your primary sport how many female coaches have you had throughout your history of playing?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 or more</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Table 3.**
Mean scores and of student athletes are displayed ($f =$ frequency).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Male f</th>
<th>Female f</th>
<th>Either f</th>
<th>%Male</th>
<th>%Female</th>
<th>% Either</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>66.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement Oriented</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>60.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>56.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>61.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertive</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>53.2</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>59.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please select which gender (or either) you feel would be the best head coach for each team.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sports</th>
<th>Male f</th>
<th>Female f</th>
<th>Either f</th>
<th>%Male</th>
<th>%Female</th>
<th>% Either</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men's Basketball</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>93.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Basketball</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>38.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men's Soccer</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>82.5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Soccer</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>43.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men's Volleyball</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>61.1</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Volleyball</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>45.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross Country</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>74.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>97.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please choose which gender you feel would have the most adequate knowledge about each sport listed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sports</th>
<th>Male f</th>
<th>Female f</th>
<th>Either f</th>
<th>% Male</th>
<th>% Female</th>
<th>% Either</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>57.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>90.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>75.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>63.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming/Diving</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>81.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>80.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golf</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>52.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The below charts display the percentages of athletes that participate in each sport and their gender within the NCAA Division III as of 2010 based off of the National Collegiate Athletic Association gender equity report and participants within this study. Sports that are bolded in the table were not seen as representative.

Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>NCAA (Division III overall %)</th>
<th>Survey Participants %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>58.80</td>
<td>49.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>41.20</td>
<td>50.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sport</th>
<th>NCAA (Division III overall %)</th>
<th>Survey Participants %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Football</td>
<td>13.80</td>
<td>13.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basketball</strong></td>
<td><strong>7.80</strong></td>
<td><strong>14.88</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>12.10</td>
<td>14.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacrosse</td>
<td>5.70</td>
<td>8.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseball</td>
<td>6.80</td>
<td>3.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Softball</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>7.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>5.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>7.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming/Diving</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>6.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross Country</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>5.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Track &amp; Field</strong></td>
<td><strong>18.00</strong></td>
<td><strong>9.82</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golf</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>1.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football</td>
<td>13.80</td>
<td>13.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A chi square analysis was used to evaluate if gender was associated with any of the questions pertaining to athletes’ perceptions. The results are represented in the table below.

Table 5.

Pearson Chi-Square

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please choose which gender (or either) that you associate with these characteristics</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement Oriented</td>
<td>0.113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertive</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please select which gender (or either) you feel would be the best head coach for each team.</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men's Basketball</td>
<td>0.557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Basketball</td>
<td>0.558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men's Soccer</td>
<td>0.219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Soccer</td>
<td>0.086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men's Volleyball</td>
<td>0.534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Volleyball</td>
<td>0.651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross Country</td>
<td>0.141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football</td>
<td>0.107</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please choose which gender you feel would have the most adequate knowledge about each sport listed</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football</td>
<td>0.303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>0.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td>0.228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming/Diving</td>
<td>0.196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td>0.066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golf</td>
<td>0.464</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significance level
(x²): *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001
Content analysis was conducted on the qualitative data. Participants within the sample were asked to describe their ideal coach in three to four words. The most frequently repeated characteristics used were: knowledgeable, confident, understanding, assertive, strong, motivating, competitive, smart, caring, compassionate, driven, helpful, and fair. Out of all the surveys completed (N=314), 294 written responses were recorded and of these 294 responses 288 were valid. Each written response was read through multiple times to evaluate whether the characteristics were to be coded as communal or agentic from what the role congruity theory establishes. Based upon previous research the follow attributes were coded as communal due to their association with feminine traits supportive, encouraging, understanding, personable, approachable, and believing. Previous research classified the following attributes as masculine traits; organized, intense, and competitive, therefore they were coded as agentic, along with any text entry specifically stating male. Any other responses that could not be coded were only used in the portion analyzing the frequency of characteristics used. After separating responses into categories of communal and agentic traits 167 responses were classified as feminine and 316 as masculine.

Discussion

In recent years, researchers have looked into possible reasons for the declining number of women coaching female sports, however, the focus has not been on the extreme low number of women coaching male sports. Fink (2008) concluded that although sport is a multi-level structure we need to continue to investigate and study the
issues of gender and sex diversity in sport in order to make sport beneficial to both men and women. This study helped to give better insight on athletes’ perceptions of female coaches.

A majority of the participants were found to be a representative sample of the NCAA Division III population. Basketball and track and field were the only sports that were not found to be a representative sample of their sport within the overall Division III population. Even though participant’s gender within this study did not emulate the percentage of males and females participating within NCAA Division III athletics it was still significant.

The results of the question evaluating participants’ exposure displayed that athletes had a higher rate of male coaches. Only 6 participants stated that they have not had a male coach compared to the 141 participants who have not had a female coach. This could explain why the question evaluating who would be the best head coach for each team supports similar findings in the literature review. When a task is perceived as masculine it is believed that males are more qualified for the job than females. This can clearly be seen as a majority of the participants chose male for sports that are typically classified as masculine. Table 3 also shows that more participants chose “female”, or “either” for sports that are seen as “gender-neutral”. Similarly, when a task is perceived as masculine it is believed that males are more knowledgeable in that area, this idea is also suggested in table 3. This proposes that cultures of different sports may contribute to athlete’s perceptions. Additionally, culture may vary among different levels of the NCAA, or other conferences. As previously mentioned in the literature review the perception of gender related tasks can be seen throughout the workforce. Females that work in fields
that are predominately male dominated (i.e. police) experience more discrimination compared to males that work in jobs labeled as feminine (i.e. nursing). This provides a possible explanation as to why people perceive females negatively when they enter into the coaching field in general, and even more so when they attempt to coach males. Therefore, the results display that females may be limited to working within job fields that are deemed gender appropriate.

Looking at the significant difference in the amount of athletes that have not had female coaches supports previous findings in the literature review. Cornelius, Habif & Van Raalte (2001) discuss their findings as an indication that male basketball players do prefer to have male coaches. They went on to explain that this may be occurring because a majority of males (96%) have been coached by only males. By examining the results of which gender participants believe would be the best head coach for each team there is a significant spike in the selection of “female” or “either” for sports seen as gender neutral. This could also be related to Kavussanu, Boardley, Jutkiewicz, Vincent, & Ring (2008) study examining athletes’ reports of coaching efficacy. Findings within their study suggested that athletes and the compatibility between the gender of the coach and athlete may affect how they evaluate a coach’s effectiveness.

The most important findings of this study show that athletes do not technically perceive female coaches in a negative way. This can be seen in the high response rate of participants selecting “either” or “doesn’t matter” when asked questions pertaining to their perceptions of gender and coaching characteristics. These results are interesting in that they offset what the role congruity suggests; a prejudice may exist against impending female leaders because the leadership ability is more stereotypically linked to men.
Leadership characteristics were defined as competence, achievement oriented, confident, strong, assertive, and independent. Therefore, by looking at the high response rate of “either” there are implications that males and females possess equal amounts of leadership abilities that are seen as necessary to be a coach. This suggests that athlete’s perceptions of female coaches may be changing. This is contradictory to the findings of athlete perceptions in the literature review. Additionally, the results from Hartmann, Nelson, and Sullivan (2011) study on female and male sport participants and non-sport participants displayed that both male participants from both groups endorsed traditional roles and sex based discrimination compared to females.

The results of the chi square analysis are displayed in table 5. The first table shows that there is significance in how males and females are selecting competence, strong, assertive, and confident. Independent was found to be moderately significant and achievement oriented had no significance. This shows that gender and strength/confidence/competence/analytic/independence are somehow related. Due to limitations discussed in the following section this study was not able to assess exactly how they were related. The next table displays that there was no significance between gender and how participants’ selected which gender they felt would be the best head coach. The final table of the chi square analysis shows there was significance for basketball and a moderate significance for soccer only.

The data analysis of the open ended response question showed that there was a significance difference in the number of argentic traits versus communal traits. This displays that the results of this study are consistent with the role congruity theory. This could suggest that athletes see these characteristics (confident, assertive, knowledgeable,
strong, etc.) being continuously attributed to male coaches therefore possibly leading more favorable perceptions of them. Masculine attributes seem to be considered more consistent with what student athletes perceive as their ideal coach. However, attributes such as understanding were defined within the literature review as a feminine trait. This characteristic was repeated frequently when participants were asked to describe their ideal coach. Additionally the trait “relatable” appeared multiple times. This is significant because in Burton et. al., (2010) findings the sex of a coach compared to the sex of participants showed that male football players had a preference of female trainers to treat psychological conditions. This could possibly connect to the findings within this study which displayed that the trait understanding was one term that numerous participants used to describe their ideal coach. This provides evidence that student athletes prefer to have an understanding, relatable coach, and both these traits are qualified as feminine. Burton et. al., (2010) displayed that football players felt comfortable with female trainers on an emotional level. This could imply that female coaches have the ability to relate to male athletes which may create more opportunities for them.

Limitations

The main limitation of the study was the questions that were asked in the survey did not give me the ability to run any correlations. This occurred because that data that I collected was categorical versus parametric or continuous. A de-limitation with this study was decided to leave out Alfred University and Stevens institute of Technology from the student athlete population used, thus not all athletes emails from the Empire 8 conference were collected. This was due to time restraints as well as accessibility to student athlete
emails. The population size for this study serves as a limitation because a larger population size would give the research conducted more strength. Another de-limitation to this study was the answers provided to the questions relating to athletes' exposure to male and female coaches was formatted. The choices that the participants were given overlapped which possibly skewed the results of the study. An additional limitation of this study was that it did not allow me to definitively determine the causality of the chi square analysis that was ran.

Future Recommendations

Unfortunately not much can be done to completely negate negative stereotypes that are held toward female coaches which is limiting to their capacity within sport. Potential researchers should find ways to run correlations with data that is similar to this study. Correlations should be ran to compare if athletes’ exposure to female coaches has any significance in how they are perceiving them and if the number of opportunities to work with female coaches has any association with bias that athletes may hold. Additionally, correlations should be ran to determine the effect of gender on athletes’ perceptions in sport. Future research should consider using other qualitative methods such as interviews to help explain how and why there is significance between participant’s gender and the way they are selecting masculine and feminine traits. For example, research like this may explain how athletes are defining certain characteristics such as strong, i.e. are they defining the trait as a physical trait or emotional. Further research should focus on trying to categorize traits that are not specified in previous research as feminine or masculine to gain a better understanding of the traits that athletes’
desire in a head coach. As previously stated a limitation to this study was the size of the sample used, therefore, upcoming studies should try to expand their sample size across all divisions (I, II, III). There may be a difference in the culture of each division or conference; therefore, looking at each division and various conferences will allow for comparisons to be drawn.

Future research should extend and build off what the findings of this study show by evaluating if males have had a female coach. If they have research should find out what was there experience and if this affects their perceptions and attitudes toward other female coaches. This should be compared to athletes who have not had any female coaches. Although it may be hard to find males that have had female coaches this is critical in creating change among how female coaches are being perceived. Belcher et. al., (2003) findings displayed that when females saw an activity that was traditionally defined as masculine to be gender neutral then they had higher levels of proficiency in learning that activity. This can be connected to Sartore & Cunningham (2007) explanation of self-limiting behaviors, females may not be seeking advancement or trying to push boundaries because they feel that they lack necessary qualifications. By helping women see and change the fixed concept of ability they may gain confidence which in return would hopefully push them to make attempts to coach male sports. Support groups, mentoring, and changing institutional practices that promote equal ideologies can help eliminate the “think coach, think male” stereotype. Until people start challenging what is considered the norms in sport then we will not see much advancement of females in this field.

Conclusion
Female coaches still have a ways to go in terms of breaking into “masculine” sports, or teams that are classified as all male teams. However, it seems that they are advancing in gender neutral sports and may be being perceived by athletes in a more positive manor then previous literature suggests. However, within the work force and sport how females are being perceived will reflect on a woman’s ability capability to confront particular tasks deemed as masculine (Belcher, Lee, Solmon & Harrison, 2003). The results of this study examining athletes’ perceptions of female coaches both challenges and confirms previous literature review about them. However, as long as people hold beliefs that associates overall competence with men than women, specifically in sex particular skills, then it will continue to preserve stereotypes that women cannot coach males thus limiting their advancement in this field of work.
How Are Student Athletes Perceiving Female Coaches

References


