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Moving the Chains on Men's Sports: An Analysis of Successful Female Coaches

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Moving the Chains on Men’s Sports:

An Analysis of Successful Female Coaches

Kira Widran
Oberlin College
Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies
Honors Thesis

Spring 2022
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Chapter One: Introduction

In 1972, Title IX was passed as a federal law prohibiting gender discrimination in an educational setting. This law was most impactful for women’s sports, and the United States saw a dramatic increase in women’s participation in sports at all levels, but most specifically in collegiate athletics.\(^1\) Despite this increase in female athletes, fifty years after Title IX there continues to be a glaring lack of women in positions of power in sports, especially in men’s sports.\(^2\) This problem led me to this research project, in which I examine women who have had success as coaches of men’s sports and to what they attribute their successes. Essentially, my research question is: How have women who coach mens’ sports at the college and professional levels, or the highest levels in U.S. athletics, been successful? So many women are discouraged from reaching for the highest level of coaching in men’s sports, or eventually hit a ceiling in their careers that prevents them from reaching that level,\(^3\) and I pursued this project in order to understand the success stories of those who were able to make it as coaches of men’s sports. Because there are so few women who coach at this level, the scope for this project includes female coaches of men’s basketball, football, and baseball teams in the United States at the college NCAA Division III level all the way up (including the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics, or NAIA) to professional leagues. Moreover, these coaches can hold any coaching position, including but not limited to head coach, assistant coach, position coach, player development coach, etc.

This research is incredibly important because of the jarring lack of progress towards equality in the athletics world, especially in terms of gender. My interest was piqued in this


\(^2\) Blom, Lindsey C, et al. Working with Male Athletes: The Experiences of U.S. Female Head Coaches.

subject approaching the 2021 Super Bowl, where it was announced that it would include the first ever female referee in Super Bowl history. After 52 total Super Bowls in the NFL, Sarah Thomas was the first woman ever allowed to referee the game. Even then, she is a white woman with familial connections to football, giving her a huge advantage over women with compounding marginalized identities in the athletics world. For reference, Maia Chaka was just hired in 2021 as the first black female referee ever in the NFL. This gendered gap in leadership exists in all men’s sports, including NCAA Division I men’s basketball where 0% of head coaches are women and 0.1% of assistant coaches are women, including 3 women total.4

This situation frustrated me and led me to look for answers as to why there are so few women holding positions of power in men’s sports, especially within coaching positions. I originally wanted to research the cultural and environmental factors within athletics that led to so few women making it to these positions of power in men’s sports, but the sources already existing on this topic are all in basic consensus in terms of the reasons women are so underrepresented as coaches of men’s sports.5 I decided to turn instead to investigating how the women who do make it as coaches of men’s sports are able to succeed, and to what they attribute their success. If the research community can understand why some women have been successful, since we already know why so many have not been, we can gain tools to be able to promote the success of more women in positions of power in men’s sports, which could help close the gendered gap between representation in athletics. If I can understand why my participants have had success as coaches, this can contribute to the success of many others and change the world of


5 These reasons include the lack of athletic career opportunities for women, the wage gap, gender roles and differences in gendered socialization, and more.
athletics in terms of equality, and can make a difference in other aspects of the community that negatively affect the women who participate in it.

**A Note On Language and Gender Identity**

I would like to make a note that although I am not specifically using language inclusive of any non-men in these coaching positions, I was not opposed to using them as subjects in this project. I am specifically using the words “female coach” and “women” because I found that the number of non-binary and gender-nonconforming coaches that existed within my scope of research was incredibly small if not non-existant. However, I would not have excluded any non-men from being subjects in my research, and in fact would have greatly appreciated their contribution to this project if I had found anyone interested and willing. Since I did not, and since all of my respondents are cis women, the language of “female” and “women” captures one hundred percent of my participants.

I also want to recognize that by using terms such as “men’s and women’s sports” and “female and male coach,” I am continuing to normalize a gender binary within athletics. Ideally, I would prefer to discuss athletics simply in terms of sports without such a clear distinction between gender, which is a social construct and does not inherently affect one’s ability to play or coach a sport. However, I am choosing to differentiate between men’s and women’s sports and the gender of coaches in this project because it is important to recognize the ways in which this institutionalized binary has led to the issues we now see in terms of gender equality within athletics. The point of this research is to discover how women who coach men’s sports have been able to achieve these positions despite social barriers working against them, and gender is the main unifying identity between all of my participants. It is important to acknowledge the way that sports have become heavily separated in terms of gender, and how this has led to the
exclusion of women from men’s athletics. In order to properly accomplish what I set out to with this project, I need to write and speak about athletics in terms of the gendered ideas deeply ingrained in this social sphere, especially since the passage of Title IX.

**Methods and Methodologies**

To answer my research question, I chose to interview subjects in order to gain a first-hand understanding of how female coaches have been able to succeed while working in male athletic environments. Due to the small population of women who coach men’s sports, I recruited participants from all over the United States for this project. I used multiple strategies to find and reach out to coaches all over the country. The first step involved identifying women who were working as coaches of men’s sports in colleges. I went through each U.S. state alphabetically and found lists of every college and university in each state. From there, I searched the athletics websites of each school and looked at the staff directories for the men’s baseball, basketball, and football teams to find women working as coaches. This was a grueling process, mostly attributed to the fact that I so rarely found women on these coaching rosters. Looking back now at the spreadsheet I made to log the coaches I found, I was lucky to find even one or two women coaching the sports in the scope of this research in every state. Some states such as California stood out as having more than two, but many like Georgia and Arizona stood out as having none. This was not surprising to me, however, and only fueled my excitement to do this research because I came into this knowing how few women work in these positions.

I chose to examine athletics websites because I knew this would give me access to contact information, and I reached out by email to every female coach that I found. I told them about my project and what I was hoping to accomplish with this research, and I received around seven responses. However, a major barrier I ran into with college coaches was scheduling, which
is very difficult within the athletics profession. Many coaches, especially those whose sports were currently in season, were not able to find a time to do the interview, or simply did not respond to my subsequent email about scheduling. People who work in athletics have long hours and non-traditional schedules, and this wound up making it difficult to find coaches who were able to make time for the interview. Despite this, I was able to find two college coaches in the end who were interested in participating and had the time to do so.

When searching for participants within *professional* leagues, I knew I would have a lot more trouble finding information about them, and an even harder time getting into contact with them. To start this process, I initially attempted to search for lists of women coaching in professional baseball, basketball, and football organizations, but all I could find were sports news articles about the most prominent and recognized female coaches. I would not have been able to find some of the coaches I reached out to through a simple google search, which is a major problem in itself. I was then informed by a professional contact about the TIDES (The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport) Racial and Gendered Report Cards for the MLB (Major League Baseball), NBA (National Basketball Association), and NFL (National Football League) for 2021. In these report cards, TIDES gave letter grades to each institution based on their racial and gendered hiring practices, treatment of employees, and more. This source was incredibly useful because the sections about gendered hiring practices actually included lists of all of the women currently coaching in the organizations. These women are in some of the most highly coveted positions within athletics, and yet receive no easily-found recognition for their work. The TIDES report cards were the only comprehensive lists I was able to find that included every woman coaching in each league.
After finding every woman coaching in professional leagues, I knew I needed to use a different approach to contact them since most of their emails were not publicly listed like college coaches’ were. I decided to reach out to them through social media, and sent direct messages explaining my project and asking for participation. I got about six responses through Instagram, but again ran into the same scheduling barrier that I did with college coaches. Professional athletics tend to take up even more of coaches’ time than college sports because of travel and offseason training, and I found many coaches who were interested but simply did not have the time to meet with me. Despite this, I got some good referrals from coaches who did not have time to interview, made important connections, and was able to eventually get interviews with two professional coaches. Recruiting was an interesting process because it showed me exactly what I expected, which was just how few women coach men’s sports at college and professional levels. This made me even more eager to interview these coaches and find out how they got to these positions despite every social barrier working against them.

After I recruited my participants, I moved on to the interview process. I originally wanted to specifically choose subjects from many different backgrounds, and I wanted to diversify as much as possible in terms of race, sexual orientation, age, and geographical location. Unfortunately, since I only found four coaches able to make time for the interview, this greatly diminished my ability to consciously diversify my pool of participants. I knew that this would not necessarily be easy, especially with the abysmally low numbers of female coaches at these levels within these sports and the even lower levels of diversity among these coaches, but it is vital to recognize and strive for diversity of identity and experience within participants in order for this to be a feminist research project. Within the interviews I conducted, I asked questions regarding their experiences as an athlete, their career trajectory, experiences at work, and their
thoughts on the state of women in coaching. See Appendix A for a full list of the interview questions.

I formulated these questions in order to uncover an in depth roadmap that would show these coaches’ backgrounds as athletes, the choices and paths that led them to their current job positions, the people who helped them along the way, and finally what it has been like to coach men’s sports. I specifically chose to ask possibly sensitive questions surrounding identity and treatment in the workplace because in order to create a feminist project, the compounding effects of other identities along with gender can greatly change one coach’s experience from another’s. However, I told my participants ahead of time that I would be asking such questions, and reserved these questions until towards the end of the interviews to confirm that I first established a rapport with my participants. I wanted to ensure they were as comfortable as possible before asking the more sensitive questions, and reminded them again that they could skip any question or end the interview if they were in fact uncomfortable.

It is incredibly important to look at this issue intersectionally, because identity impacts the way these coaches move through these spaces, and one person’s ability to succeed does not necessarily indicate the ability for another to do the same. If a Black queer woman has to navigate coaching a male sports team, her path to get to this position of power will be compounded by treatment based on her race and sexuality as well as her gender, which is crucial to understand. The fact that women already hold these positions at much lower rates than men shows how gender impacts this research, but people such as Women of Color and queer women will also hold these positions at lower rates than straight white women because of specific oppressive systems that work against people with compounding marginalized identities. The impact that other aspects of identity will have when looked at in combination with gender will
help expose the social barriers faced by women who hold multiple oppressed identities and want to coach men’s sports. I believed these questions would help give me insight into the specific ways in which these coaches were able to succeed despite all of the social barriers working against them in addition to gender.

Finally, I asked these coaches their own opinions about how change can be made in this aspect of athletics, which was interesting to hear because not every participant answered in a way I would have expected them to. These differences in opinion are incredibly helpful to my research because they helped me think about ways to create change that I never would have thought about since I don’t actually have experience as a coach. I will discuss these responses further in Chapter 5.

I specifically chose interviews in order to give my subjects their own voices throughout the process, and to make sure that their stories and experiences are being shared in their own words. Linda Alcoff offers that when speaking for other groups of marginalized people, it furthers the oppression of that group because it decentralizes their voices, and without interviewing my subjects I would become that oppressor. As a queer cisgender white woman, I understand that I come from a place of immense privilege, and that my experiences within athletics are far different from others who have additional historically oppressed identities. I therefore have no basis from which to speak on many issues that female coaches face in the athletics world through first-hand experience, especially in terms of race, and I want my participants who do have those identities to be able to share their stories on their terms. I do not want to speak for anyone working as a coach in male athletics because I do not have these experiences, and by interviewing these subjects I am able to give them their own voices

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throughout the process. As such, this research project follows Alcoff’s\textsuperscript{7} assertion that there is merit in researching groups of people with identities that the researcher does not share, which include centralizing the voices of these identities. In order for this to be a feminist research project, I give that voice to my subjects, especially since they historically have not had a voice when it comes to this field. I also asked my interview subjects to read the transcripts of their interviews before I moved forward with my research so that I could be sure to capture them as they want to be captured.

I also want to recognize that my feelings on the subject and assumptions about success and identity based on personal experiences within athletics and research done for this project have the possibility of influencing my interviews and my overall research. I actively worked to try to not influence my research with my personally held beliefs in any way, but I want to acknowledge that possibility in order to hold myself and my research accountable. This specific idea is referred to as reflexivity\textsuperscript{8} within qualitative research, and is important to recognize that my identities combined with my experiences in athletics do have the possibility to influence my choices in this research, such as the questions I asked in the interviews. However, I have worked as hard as possible to make sure that this project is not based off of any influences from my personal beliefs and expectations.

In terms of my positionality and recognition of my social privilege, I want to be able to use the results of this project to encourage more women to pursue coaching positions in male sports by offering clarity on how some women have been able to be successful in these roles, as well as attempting to change current conversations surrounding women pursuing coaching jobs. In order to do this, I will give my research to the Syracuse Qualitative Data Repository (SQDR)

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.

for use by future researchers. I chose this repository specifically because it is a large database that allows future researchers access to previously found data in a manner that ensures confidentiality for my interview participants. I will be submitting my de-identified transcripts to the SQDR so that those who are interested in doing further research on this subject will have the ability to build off of the work I have already done. I will grant conditional online access of the transcripts to researchers studying women in athletics, which will require IRB approval of their projects as well as terms of access requiring maintenance of confidentiality, prohibiting attempts to identify participants or their organizations, and limiting use to academic researchers. By granting this access on these conditions, I can maintain the safety of my participants while at the same time ensuring that this information is accessible to those interested in furthering the work to promote the success of more women as coaches in men’s sports.

A Note About Intersectionality

When beginning this research, I planned to place a heavy focus on intersectionality within my participants, and the ways that other identities they hold aside from gender impact their experiences while coaching men’s sports. However, within the interviews, participants tended to discuss experiences specifically related to their gender, rather than other identities that they held. Three of my four participants identified as Women of Color, but when I asked them questions about experiences related to racial identity in athletics, they could not think of times where they have been excluded or discriminated against specifically because of their race. One coach also identifies as queer, but gave a similar response to coaches with marginalized racial identities in terms of the impact of her sexuality on her career opportunities and development in men’s sports. These identities are incredibly important to consider because they have most likely played into these coaches’ experiences, but a common theme from all of these interviews showed
gender as the most polarizing identity in terms of their treatment within athletics, and within men’s sports specifically. I considered intersectional identities throughout this entire project, but do not have a chapter dedicated to this because of the responses from the coaches I interviewed.

**Timeline and Narrative of Research**

I started this project in October 2021 when I began crafting my IRB (Institutional Review Board) ethics proposal. I went through one round of reviews after my initial submission, and was granted IRB approval to begin my data collection in December 2021. During this time, I also completed the Human Subjects Research certification program (CITI) which is a requirement before doing research with human subjects. Since I had never written interview questions before, I spent time researching how to craft this aspect of the project in a way that centralizes the respondent and makes the questions clear so that I get the category of answers that I am looking for. After receiving IRB approval, I began researching and recruiting participants. In January 2022, I started the interview process while still attempting to recruit more participants, and wound up completing four successful interviews by March 2022. After completing and transcribing the interviews, I began the analysis and writing process.

In this project, I will proceed in a feminist way and through a feminist lens by centralizing the voices of those who have been successful as female coaches in male sports in order to pinpoint reasons for their success as well as barriers they have faced to use as a way to advance the progress of gender equality within athletics. For too long, women have been left out of leadership roles and positions of power in sports, which can change through a cultural shift. This project is just one step in that direction. Although the ultimate goal would be to rid athletics of the hegemonic masculinity it has been centered around since its inception, and to destroy the gender roles that exist within that social sphere, as a society we have not yet reached that point of
progress. That is why the intent of this project is to give women a foot in the door by creating a blueprint to success that can be universalized, and to change perceptions and conversations around women in coaching positions in men’s sports. However, I do recognize that every experience is going to be different and is going to be heavily impacted by identity, especially in terms of race and sexuality. I am hoping that by diversifying my subject pool as much as possible, and by going in with this understanding, that this research will be instrumental in the gendered progress of the athletics world, and will help more women gain these positions of power.

Outline of Chapters

Throughout this research, I found commonalities between the success stories of the subjects I interview, including connections in the athletics world, mentorships by respected leaders in coaching, and strong support systems inside and outside of the workplace. Some barriers I found to these coaches’ success include a lack of opportunities for female coaches to break into coaching men’s sports, problems within the inherent structures that exist in gendered sports, and negative cultural attitudes surrounding the inclusion of women as coaches of men’s sports.

The subsequent chapters in this thesis will focus on several crucial topics that came up during interviews with all participants. First I will discuss the literature that exists surrounding research and scholarly articles on women in positions of power, and specifically in men’s sports. Chapter 3 will concentrate on the mentors and support systems that participants mentioned during the interviews, and how these have been influential in their success in coaching men’s sports. I will then go on to explore environments that exist within athletics that are both physically built and culturally built, and how these environments have affected both the coaches
I interviewed as well as how they exclude more women from entering this career. Finally, Chapter 5 will look at how to move forward to include more women in coaching positions in men’s sports, as well as the programs and initiatives that currently exist in professional men’s sports leagues that aim to bring more women into these positions.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

There is a wealth of research surrounding women in positions of power within the workforce, as well as women specifically working in power positions in men’s sports. In this literature review, I will focus on previous research that examines the history of Title IX, as well as women playing and working in sports, and working in positions of power in other career fields such as business. I will also look at research on the views and perspectives of men surrounding this subject, as well as cultural factors that contribute to the lack of women working in men’s sports. Previous research indicates that familiarity with the history of women participating in sports is essential to understanding the role of women as coaches.\(^9\) There are also important sources that discuss the reasons for the striking lack of female coaches in male sports, both in the US and internationally,\(^10\) as well as research on women who have been successful as coaches.\(^11\) Other crucial research focuses on the perspective of male athletes,\(^12\) and explores the inherent biases and stereotypes held by male athletes about female coaches. I have also found that the historical lack of women as coaches as evidenced by research in that field is not unique to the athletics world, and that in fact women from all professions face a similar difficulty in reaching leadership positions within their fields.\(^13\) Finally, I will examine the TIDES Racial and Gender Report Cards,\(^14\) which expose gendered hiring disparities that exist in the MLB, NBA, and NFL.

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Understanding the history of the role of women as athletes and coaches is necessary to unpack their roles as leaders within male sports. Title IX, a federal civil rights law passed in 1972, has been incredibly influential in this history since it was originally meant to make educational institutions equal in terms of gender, and specifically has made improvements to women’s sports in these institutions. The law specifically states that “no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance,”15 which requires equal funding for women’s sports at educational institutions. The scope of Title IX covers any educational institutions that receive federal funding, which includes schools and colleges/universities, as well as libraries and museums. The passage of Title IX has fundamentally shifted the experiences of women in sports because it changed the opportunities available to women through sports. Women became eligible for college sports scholarships, women’s teams could afford uniforms and equipment, and they could afford to travel for games and play a wider array of teams.16 The differences made by Title IX for female athletes are abundant, as evidenced by the fact that in 1971, less than 295,000 women played high school varsity sports nationwide, and by 2001, over 2.8 million women were participating in high school varsity sports.17 Similarly, in 1966, only 16,000 women participated in college athletics, and by 2001 over 150,000 women participated in intercollegiate sports.18

17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
Title IX has been one of the most influential laws to support women in athletics, and has helped create equal opportunities in sports regardless of gender.

LeBlanc and Swanson\(^{19}\) examine female trailblazers in the early years of Title IX, and show the importance of women in the athletics world and what their role was during this critical time for women’s sports. They give readers a multitude of examples of women who made organized women’s sports leagues possible, and show the earlier history of women within sports. The book profiles eight women\(^{20}\) who worked as physical educators and leaders in women’s sports, and were extremely influential in the advancement of sports for women both before and after the passage of Title IX in the early 1970s. These women worked to create organized programs in order to generate opportunities for women through sports, and their contributions helped to produce long-lasting athletic opportunities that changed the lives of many young women. For example, LeBlanc and Swanson share the history of Dorothy McIntyre, a physical educator from Minnesota who assisted in providing sustainable competitive opportunities for girls in high school sports.\(^{21}\)

Belanger’s\(^{22}\) book is very similar in terms of style and message, as she highlights the tremendous work done by female coaches and administration at MSU in terms of the women’s basketball program there, and how the grassroots work done by women involved in this team (players, coaches, administration) fought to build up the program with no help. Women were advocating and fighting for their ability to play basketball in the time soon after Title IX was


\(^{20}\) Catherine Allen, Ruth Schellberg, Celeste Ulrich, Fay Biles, Dorothy McIntyre, Willye White, Doris Corbett, and Anita DeFrantz


passed, but not necessarily followed by all educational institutions. The men’s basketball program received far more funding and recognition from MSU, and female athletes, coaches, and employees fought to bring a lawsuit against the school in order to force them to adhere to the new Title IX laws. Written in 2017, this book shows how far from over the struggle for equality between women’s and men’s sports is despite the federal law meant to help with this, and the barriers that still exist for women within sports.

The most striking aspect of these two books is the way that their subjects were so influential in the creation of women’s sports leagues, and yet the lack of women in coaching positions is visible today in both men’s and women’s sports. Although Title IX created monumental opportunities for women as athletes, it also attracted more men to coaching careers in women’s sports.23 Due to legally required equal funding to men’s and women’s sports programs post-1972, the pay and exposure for coaching positions in women’s sports became more appealing to everyone working in athletics. Because of this, more men began applying to coaching positions in women’s sports, and unsurprisingly were hired at a much higher rate than women applying to these positions.24 As critical and necessary as Title IX is to reducing gendered barriers of athletes, the unintended consequences for female coaches continue to exist to this day. Not only is there a major lack of women coaching men’s sports, but a lack of women coaching women’s sports as well.

Some earlier studies examine the aftermath of the passage of Title IX on the number of female coaches for male sports, and offer reasons for these low numbers that are logical for the

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24 Ibid.
time period. In the 1990s, Pastor\textsuperscript{25} and Kosovsky\textsuperscript{26} both found traditional gender roles to be a serious barrier in involving more female coaches in male sports. In her research, Kosofsky makes seven total arguments as to the lack of women in sports (either playing or working) and attributes these factors to sexism and misogyny as they operated at the time. She discusses the lack of career opportunities for women, the wage gap, physical differences that have been used to keep women out of sports, and more. She rightly argues that inequalities within men’s and women’s sports are human made, because popular sports were created geared towards men’s physical abilities. Moreover, Kosofsky examines the ways in which, from childhood, women are socialized to avoid sports. Kosovsky helps set up a generational background for why women are less likely to choose a career in coaching male sports, which is heavily reliant on gender roles and differences in gendered socialization, which Pastor speaks to specifically in terms of the role of women in the home. Pastor’s research showed that most coaches who left the career did so in order to have more time to spend with their families and friends. Through this research, Pastor is able to show the extent to which coaching positions are gendered, mainly because women are expected to stay in the home and be the primary caretakers for their families. Coaching careers, especially at the highest levels, have grueling schedules that do not leave a lot of room for carrying out domestic responsibilities. In essence, the schedule required to be a coach directly contradicts societal expectations of a woman’s ability to perform her duty in the home. These gendered expectations for women lead to a pressure to abandon their careers in order to take care of their domestic responsibilities. Women are often forced to choose between pursuing their

\textsuperscript{25} Pastore, Donna L. "Male and female coaches of women’s athletic teams: Reasons for entering and leaving the profession." \textit{Journal of Sport Management} 5.2 (1991): 128-143

careers or creating and maintaining a family, which is one major reason for the lack of representation of women coaching men’s sports.

Different studies have investigated the specific attitudes and perceptions of male athletes who have female coaches, and the results are important to this study overall. Weinberg et al.\textsuperscript{27} used hypotheticals to measure attitudes, and split male and female athletes up into two groups, one assigned to evaluate a female coach and one to evaluate a male coach. The coaches’ profiles and backgrounds were exactly the same, the only difference being gender. The authors found that men held more negative attitudes to the female coach and more positive attitudes to the male coach, while the women in the experiment showed positive attitudes towards both. This study helped show the inherent biases that male athletes hold against female coaches.

However, more recently, Siegele et al.\textsuperscript{28} studied male athletes who actually had female coaches, instead of having to hypothetically think about having a female coach, and they found much more positive attitudes toward female coaches within this group. Despite these positive attitudes, researchers still found that these male athletes held heavily gendered ideas of their female coaches, consistent with other research in the field. Siegele et al. concluded that having women break into coaching positions on mixed-gendered sports teams, such as track and field or swimming, could help women break into more leadership positions in male only sports.

As gender equality has become a more important political issue in the eyes of the American public, recent research has begun to investigate the more subtle ways in which sexism and misogyny work to keep women from becoming coaches for men’s sports. Hindman and

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Walker examine women who manage minor league hockey teams, and in their discussion of the culture of athletics, note that “(a) diminishment of intellectual contributions and capabilities and (b) objectification of physical appearance” in athletic environments work effectively to keep women out of this professional sphere. Walker and Bopp also found that in college and professional men’s basketball, head coaches tend to maintain a similar coaching staff to themselves in terms of race and gender. The authors conclude that with an abysmally low percentage of female coaches for men’s Division 1 college basketball, there are far less opportunities for hire since head coaches tend to maintain their identities throughout their coaching staff. This leads to very few opportunities for women, and especially Women of Color, to enter this career field. Walker and Bopp also discuss the dominance that men have over athletics in general, and especially within men’s sports, which works as a constant barrier to women trying to enter as well. This manifests in ways such as the overwhelming popularity of men’s sports in comparison to women’s sports, as well as the idea that only men can be interested in sports and therefore are better athletics employees than women.

Similar research on the lack of women in leadership positions (including coaches, managers, referees, etc.) in sports helps give further insight as to why this disparity exists. The Michigan Task Force on Women in Sports found the same factors as other researchers as to why women are not hired to leadership positions in sports, including a difficult work-life balance.

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30 Ibid.
and a lack of institutional support. Kamphoff’s study points to similar reasons as other researchers have found, including gender discrimination and the centrality of male coaches, but they also found homophobic attitudes in the workplace as a discouraging factor for female coaches. Since athletics are seen as a “masculine” area, there is a certain level of queer stereotyping that happens to women who are interested in working in sports. Kamphoff discusses the notion that single women working in athletics face the high possibility of being labeled as a lesbian since they are working in a traditionally masculine role, which therefore causes women to leave this field to avoid such stereotyping. There is a cultural stereotype that all women involved in athletics, especially within men’s sports, are queer, which presents a barrier to women wanting to work in this field. This is not examined by the other research I discuss here, highlighting the intersectional and feminist lens of Kamphoff’s research. There is a fairly clear consensus between most sources discussing barriers for women gaining coaching positions, especially in men’s sports, which acknowledges the ways societal attitudes on gender have permeated the athletics world. Sexist and misogynistic attitudes bar women from gaining coaching positions, and conscious or subconscious hegemonic hiring practices continue to keep women out of these jobs.

International studies have also been conducted on the lack of female coaches in all sports, indicating that this is a global problem that needs to be addressed. Greenhill et al. investigate the lack of female coaches in Australia, and found the barriers to success for them to be almost identical to barriers for women in the United States. These included hegemonic masculinity and systemic barriers, which maintained an environment suitable for male coaches while directly

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marginalizing female coaches. Similarly, Kubayi et al.’s\textsuperscript{35} research in South Africa found that female coaches are hindered by lack of support from superiors, lack of support systems in general, and low pay, consistent with research examining female coaches in the United States. International research gives evidence that the lack of female coaches in athletics is a global issue, and that the reasons for this disparity are consistent within other countries. By finding ways to help promote the success of female coaches in the U.S., we can also help to create change in athletics on a global scale.

In research similar to my own, Blom et al. considered women who have been successful as coaches for male athletes.\textsuperscript{36} The authors examined 6 female head coaches of male teams who worked on different levels including high school, college, and minor league professionals. This study was looking for reasons these women had made it to coaching at these levels since the rate of female head coaches on any level has been on a decline since the birth of Title IX, and found 5 unifying categories of these female coaches. All of the coaches interviewed had diverse athletic backgrounds, positive influences from their own male coaches, strict and disciplined coaching styles, support from their families and administrations, and viewed coaching roles as masculine positions. The findings from this article are helpful to the larger conversation surrounding this topic, but the way they ascribed gender roles to coaching positions feels reductivist and against progress. They argued that since these female coaches had bad experiences with their own female coaches as athletes, that they have turned toward a masculine coaching style to achieve success, but to imply this is to assume that there are gendered styles of coaching, which is regressive and untrue. Although this research was done only 30 years ago, none of my


\textsuperscript{36}Blom, Lindsey C, et al. \textit{Working with Male Athletes: The Experiences of U.S. Female Head Coaches}. 
participants fit the unifying categories found by Blom et al.\textsuperscript{37} aside from having support from family and administration. This shows the importance of my current research, because this is the only similar resource about women coaching men’s sports and is already outdated in terms of the findings.

Other sources necessary to look at are those that study women in managerial positions in realms outside sports all around the world. Chugh and Sahgal\textsuperscript{38} investigated women in positions of management in business, and wanted to explain the lack of women in senior level positions at these types of companies. Their findings, similar to findings of research rooted in athletics, were that there are 3 recurring barriers, including sex-role orientation, gender stereotyping, and the glass ceiling, that explain why women are less likely to be hired for high level management positions. They also found that women who are in leadership and managerial positions are more likely to develop their managerial style around stereotypical male behavioral characteristics, which turns out to be detrimental to them because stereotypical feminine managerial styles are actually found to be more productive and to foster a better work environment. By acting under male characteristics, female managers are seen as worse at their jobs because of the compounding effects of gender biases and their ineffective male-centered leadership styles, and are therefore less likely to be hired in these positions. Oakley’s\textsuperscript{39} similar article found even more barriers to high level opportunities such as CEO for women in business, which included lack of experience and inadequate career opportunities, leading many women to avoid even applying for these leadership positions in the first place. By considering the obstacles women face in achieving leadership positions in fields outside of athletics, we can see how gender-based

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Oakley, Judith G. "Gender-based barriers to senior management positions: Understanding the scarcity of female CEOs." \textit{Journal of Business Ethics} 27.4 (2000): 321-334.
\end{itemize}
discrimination is rampant in most institutions within the U.S. and all over the world. Changing hiring practices and working to diminish sexist attitudes within athletics can help translate to easier accessibility of leadership positions and better treatment for women working in all different career fields.

A final group of crucial sources important for this research were The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport’s (TIDES) Racial and Gender Report Cards for the MLB,\textsuperscript{40} NBA\textsuperscript{41}, and NFL.\textsuperscript{42} These professional league report cards gave overall grades to each organization based on their racial and gendered hiring practices, and rated them in several individual job positions including head and assistant coaches, team front offices, and team owners and managers. These report cards expose the need for this research due to the lower grades for all organizations’ gendered hiring practices. For example, the NFL received an overall grade of C+ for gender hiring,\textsuperscript{43} which means only 32-34.5\% of all NFL employees are women. In this same category, the NBA received a B,\textsuperscript{44} which signifies that 37.6-38.9\% of NBA employees are women, and the MLB received the lowest score of the three with a C,\textsuperscript{45} showing that only 30.6-31.9\% of their employees are women. However, the most striking part of these report cards were the fact that they do not include a gendered hiring grade for any coaching positions specifically, which is likely due to the fact that these numbers are so low that each league would receive an F, signaling that less than 24\% of employees in this category are women. The gendered hiring

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
grades for every other section depend on the percentage of women who work in those roles for each organization. Instead, the coaching section of each report card only lists a racial hiring grade for the three leagues. This background information on the three most famous professional leagues for the sports in the scope of this research is crucial to have in order to realize the current lack of women in coaching positions in men’s sports, and therefore the necessity of this research.
Chapter Three: Mentorships and Support Systems

When conducting interviews with coaches, a major theme that came up in every conversation was mentorship and support systems. Every coach mentioned having at least one mentor as an athlete and eventually as a coach that was influential to their success, and was important in getting to their current job position. Previous literature\textsuperscript{46} has cited a lack of support as a reason many women are not able to be successful in coaching men’s sports, so finding that every coach I talked to distinctly mentioned people who have supported and helped them reach this position was unsurprising. However, the lengths that some of the people in their lives must go to support these coaches far surpasses the assistance that their male counterparts require, which helps expose major issues in the hiring and wage practices that exist for women in these positions. In this chapter, I will first discuss the ways in which mentorships have been vitally important for my interview subjects, and have even been the reason some of these coaches decided to coach men’s sports in the first place. These mentors provided a fundamental “foot in the door” for all of my research participants. After this, I will turn to the support systems these coaches described once hired, and how they are indeed crucial to get more women into these positions and keep them there long-term. However, while I focus on mentorship and the importance of social capital in this chapter, I by no means wish to imply that the coaches I interviewed are not talented or qualified enough to gain these positions on their own. Instead, they are successful in their positions today because they have these qualifications \textit{and} mentors and social networks that have helped them tap into career opportunities that they may not have been considered for otherwise due to the gendered barriers that work against women who want to coach men’s sports.

Mentorship

Every coach that I interviewed mentioned having at least one mentor within the athletics world that was crucial to them in pursuing a coaching position. These mentors tended to be coaches of my participants when they themselves were athletes, which speaks to the importance of coaches fostering a love of sports and coaching among their female athletes. While men receive constant messages from society that if they want to play sports or work in sports they can, women do not receive these same messages. Having strong connections with mentors before they even enter their coaching careers can give women more of an equal opportunity to even be interested in coaching, especially coaching men’s teams.

This idea can be clearly seen within Olivia Marrant’s\textsuperscript{47} path to coaching, where she cited her college basketball coach as being the reason she is coaching men’s basketball today. Olivia played basketball her entire life, and went on to play in college for her school’s women’s basketball team. She helped the team win multiple championships as a player, and once she graduated her head coach asked her to stay at the school another year to help him coach the women’s basketball team. Olivia mentioned her college coach many times as an extremely influential person in her coaching career, and as the person who gave her the initial opportunity to coach in the first place. After coaching the women’s team for one year, Olivia went on to play professional basketball overseas for a few years. Once she came back to the U.S., she was no longer playing basketball and was instead interested in becoming a coach. She reached out to her college coach again to see if he had a job available, and it turned out he had moved over to become the head coach of the men’s basketball team at the same college. He asked Olivia to work with the men’s team with him, and offered her a position as assistant coach. This was the

\textsuperscript{47} All names of research participants, their mentors, and others names from interviews used throughout this thesis are pseudonyms.
first time Olivia had thought about coaching a men’s basketball team, and it was a life-changing opportunity for her. When talking to Olivia about her college coach and mentor, she said that “he gave [her] that opportunity and [she] ended up loving it,” which might not have happened if she did not have a mentor willing to give her a chance as a coach. She did not go into the day-to-day details of her relationship with her mentor, but more discussed the impact he had on her decision to coach overall. Olivia’s mentor was able to give her a foot in the door into the world of coaching men’s college basketball, which is rare for women interested in coaching men’s sports.

Francesca Raleigh, a minor league coach in the MLB, had a similar story about the importance of having the help of a men’s sports coach by her side in the process of becoming a coach. Francesca grew up playing baseball and softball, and eventually played softball in college and professionally. After her playing experience, she decided to work as a private coach48 for softball players, where she gave lessons and coached players individually. Francesca loved this work, and one day received a social media message from someone at a company that offered private lessons for baseball players. He informed Francesca that the company was attempting to expand into the world of softball, and thought she would be the perfect person to help them do that. Francesca accepted the position, and while working there, formed a close relationship with the president of the company, Steven Jacobs. She had run into issues of equal access to resources between softball and baseball players in the past, and brought this concern up to Steven. He assured her that she would have full access to everything that baseball coaches had access to, which Francesca had never experienced before. From that point on, she eagerly dove into her work with softball players, but her career path shifted when she asked Steven if she could also work with baseball players. Francesca’s story is a bit different from Olivia’s in this way, since

48 Francesca did not specify what level of players she was coaching, but private coaches tend to train athletes in high school and college.
she sought out the opportunity to coach men’s sports while Olivia came to it by chance. Steven agreed to have Francesca coach baseball as well as softball, and according to Francesca, “the more time [they] spent together… [they] built this relationship,” which eventually helped her reach her current position in the MLB. Steven was already working as a consultant for an MLB team, and eventually got hired to a full time position. As he made this transition to his new job, he asked Francesca if she would be interested in working with the organization as well. He set her up for an interview soon after, and she was offered a job.

When talking about her path from private coaching to becoming a professional coach, Francesca reflected on the process of being hired by the MLB and how seamless her experience was with the hiring process. She attributes this to having a person with connections in the industry who was able and willing to help her. Francesca did not ever specifically refer to Steven as a mentor at any point during the interview, but in my own understanding and analysis, the support and opportunities he was able to provide her with are very similar to the support and opportunities that others noted receiving from mentor figures. Steven’s position of power in the MLB and his ability to offer Francesca a job was crucial in her path towards coaching professional baseball. Francesca described her MLB hiring process as “organic,” in contrast to the grueling application process of women who have come before her as coaches in the league. She made a point to pay respect to these women who precede her, and to recognize that they have done the “heavy lifting” in terms of expanding opportunities for women to coach in the MLB. However, Francesca also does recognize that athletics organizations “want to hire people that they're familiar with, that they know are qualified for the position,” which is where the importance of her working relationship with Steven Jacobs came in as well. Steven was able to bring Francesca up with him, akin to Olivia Marrant’s experience with her college basketball
coach and mentor. Had it not been for Francesca’s connection to someone in the organization, becoming a coach in the MLB may have been a much more challenging process, and may have been more similar to the experiences of other female coaches who have had to “scrape and claw” their ways into the industry.

Sarah Russel, a college football coach, highlighted multiple mentors in her interview who were influential in reaching her current position. The first entered her life during her senior year of high school, when she decided to join her school’s football team. Sarah had been debating the decision to join the football team due to the stigma surrounding women playing football at the time, but Frank Parsons, the head football coach at her high school, changed her perspective. Sarah expected Coach Parsons to react negatively to the idea of a woman joining his football team, but instead he did not react at all. He told Sarah when and where to join the team’s next weightlifting session, and the rest was history. After this, Sarah went on to play professional football in the U.S., making her one of an estimated 4,000 women playing tackle football in organized leagues, and became a member of the Women’s National Olympic Football Team. Without the nonchalant attitude Coach Parsons held about having a woman on his team, Sarah may have not felt comfortable pursuing a stereotypically “masculine” sport, and might not be coaching football today. She was initially worried about the social stigma she would face from peers and others in athletics when she began playing football, but Coach Parsons’ instant acceptance gave her the confidence she needed to pursue her love of the sport.

Towards the end of her career as an athlete, Sarah met another important mentor who helped direct her onto the coaching path. She describes this relationship beginning through a

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50 Sarah did not mention how her teammates reacted to having a woman on the team.
“chance meeting,” without which she may not currently be a football coach. When she met Wesley Cordon, Sarah had not thought about pursuing a coaching career at any point. However, Wesley was impressed with her background as a football player and invited her to help him coach his high school football team. This was the beginning of Sarah’s experience coaching football, and from here Wesley helped her get coaching jobs at three different high schools. At this point, Sarah was coaching high school football part-time while also working a full-time job in a different sports industry. She received a promotion at her full-time job and decided to take a few years off of coaching. This changed when she ran into Coach Cordon at an event, and he asked her why she had stopped coaching. Sarah was reminded of how much she loved being a coach, and Wesley helped her get a job at a high school that eventually helped lead her to her current college coaching position.

Without the relationship and support she received from Coach Cordon, Sarah does not know if she would have even pursued coaching. It was not something she had thought about as a career option, and in her eyes she “sort of fell into the position” of being a coach. It was crucial for Sarah to have a mentor who fostered and helped grow her interest in coaching football, especially once she took time off to focus on her full-time job. By consistently encouraging Sarah to pursue opportunities within coaching football, Wesley provided the motivation and guidance necessary to help her get where she is today. Sarah is obviously talented and knowledgeable enough to have gained these positions on her own, but mentors are incredibly important for women pursuing coaching in men’s sports because they can provide opportunities that may be much more difficult to access due to social stigma and barriers. For example, a high school may be less likely to hire a woman to coach the football team without someone to vouch for her because of gender stereotypes that exist around women in sports. Football is also a unique
sport in the sense that it does not have widely recognized leagues and institutions for women who play in the same way that women’s basketball and softball are recognized as gender-balanced counterparts for the other sports in the scope of this project. In terms of football, it can be harder for women to find coaching jobs because the sport has been historically heavily gendered towards men with less opportunity for women to learn and gain experience with the game. Professional women’s football leagues exist throughout the U.S. as well as internationally, but they are far less visible to the public eye because of social gendering of football as a sport. I personally did not know that there were professional women’s football leagues in the U.S. such as the WFA (Women’s Football Alliance) until I began doing this research. Because of this, Sarah’s mentorship from Coach Cordon was vital in encouraging her to pursue a coaching career because he was able to offer her opportunities she may not have been offered on her own due to social stigma surrounding women engaging in football, despite the fact that she had years of experience playing the sport.

The final mentor that Sarah Russel mentioned was Martin Cranter, who she worked with at the first high school she coached football for. According to Sarah, if Wesley Cordon “opened the door” for her as a coach, Martin Cranter was the one who “helped [her] walk through it.” Coach Cranter helped Sarah learn everything she would need to be successful as a coach, especially in terms of behind-the-scenes work. Some of the instrumental advice he gave her included “how to grade film, how to teach the best… and even how to raise money for the team,” which are all skills that Sarah needed in order to become an efficacious coach. Martin also helped Sarah make essential connections in the coaching world, which helped her land her current position as a college football coach. Martin would introduce Sarah to the people he knew at every conference and work event, thus providing crucial networking opportunities and helping

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51 https://wfaprofootball.com/
her break into a sphere where she was often the only woman in the room. One such introduction eventually helped Sarah get a recommendation for a coaching position in college. Without someone to help her learn the business and build a professional network, Sarah may not have had the opportunity to reach a college coaching position.

An important thing to note in this section is that all of the mentors mentioned by my participants were men. I expected to find this due to the findings of previous literature, but I was still surprised when I heard it for myself because the previous research is quite a bit dated and I had hoped things would have changed. This occurs because of a wide-scale lack of visibility of women who coach men’s sports, meaning that since there is little publicity and recognition of women coaching at a college or professional level, younger generations of women usually only have men to look up to for inspiration and mentorship. Based on this evidence, we can deduce the necessity of having a member of the ingroup in an institution as a mentor in order to help pull outsiders in and create more inclusive spaces. Athletics have historically created spaces that exclude women from positions of power, especially within men’s sports, and therefore these spaces are not conducive to women entering them and being successful. This is not at all to say that a woman must be connected to a man in order to achieve coaching positions in men’s sports, but these testimonies show the real importance of having someone who is already welcomed and integrated into men’s athletics who can create opportunities for those who are not systematically included.

Mentors have been important to help these coaches avoid some barriers that exist in the hiring process, such as introducing them to networks of other coaches and offering more access to prospective job interviews. The coaches I interviewed could absolutely have gained these positions on their own; they are all more than qualified and are great at their jobs. However, 52 Blom, Lindsey C, et al. Working with Male Athletes: The Experiences of U.S. Female Head Coaches.
because of the social barriers that often make it so difficult for women to gain these positions, such as the “boys’ club”\textsuperscript{53} that exists in athletics making it harder for women to build a professional network, mentorship is a major advantage that can help more women break into coaching men’s sports.

**Support Systems**

The mentors described by the coaches I interviewed were crucial to their current success, but the support necessary in order for women to maintain coaching roles in men’s sports works twofold. First, support systems outside of the workplace help ensure these coaches remain in their positions for the long run. This happens in several ways, including emotional support and financial support, which is necessary because some women do decide to quit coaching because it does not always offer financial security.\textsuperscript{54} Next, support systems inside of the workplace play a central role in these coaches’ successes and the achievements they have earned while in their coaching positions. This encompasses support from coworkers and administration, and is important because coaches need to know that the institutions they work for want to include them in that space, which allows them to be able to effectively do their jobs without worrying about discrimination in the workplace. This section examines these support systems in more detail.

Perhaps the most notable story highlighting the importance of continuous support systems from my interviews came from Samantha Bellinger. Samantha is currently a development coach in the MLB, but followed a long and grueling path to get there which would not have been possible without the support of her family. Samantha began her path to becoming a baseball coach in graduate school, where she did the work of a graduate assistant for the

\textsuperscript{53} The idea that an organization is dominated by cisgender men and either directly or indirectly excludes women and feminine-presenting people from that space.

school’s baseball team. She also did office work for the team, which she was compensated for, but Samantha was never paid for her on-field coaching duties because the graduate assistant position did not technically exist at her college. After finishing graduate school, Samantha was offered an internship working in baseball operations for an MLB team. Since this was an internship, she was again not compensated for her time and her work. Samantha missed being on the field and working directly with players, so she left the internship and moved home with her parents to take a volunteer coaching position at a local university. During this period, Samantha worked seven part time jobs in order to have an income since she had not received any compensation from any of her coaching jobs. Eventually, she received another internship from a different MLB team where she was able to work in both the front office and on the field, but again she was not being paid for this work. She left this internship for a paid position as an assistant athletic director at a college, where she was allowed to act as the hitting coach for the school’s baseball team. Eventually, Samantha was contacted by a third MLB team, and was hired for a paid coaching position.

This entire process took seven years of Samantha’s time and effort, and the most grotesque aspect of her story is the fact that until a year ago, she was not being paid for any of her work as a coach. She has held different paid jobs that have allowed her to spend her own time gaining experience and voluntarily coaching baseball, but spent six years without being directly compensated as a coach. Samantha’s story is unfortunately similar to other women coaching baseball at the same level, where they are forced to spend years volunteering their time in order to “gain enough experience” to be hired for a paid position. Samantha and women on a similar path can sometimes spend years applying to coaching jobs without receiving as much as an interview, which is a major barrier to keeping women interested in being a coach because this
time does not offer financial security. Statistically, women only make up 30% of MLB front office and on-field employees,\(^5\)\(^5\) signifying much lower hiring rates for women in this institution. This indicates that the hiring process that women go through in baseball could take significantly longer on average than it would for a man of similar (or even less) experience. The fact that women who are interested in coaching baseball must work in volunteer positions to gain experience while applying for paid coaching positions, which may not lead to a job for several years, is a major barrier for women interested in coaching baseball, especially at the highest level. Due to this, women who want to coach in the MLB must have a support system with financial means ready to help them throughout this sometimes fruitless process, which Samantha Bellinger has been fortunate enough to have in her life.

When sharing who had been most influential in her success, Samantha’s first and only answer was her family, especially her parents. Since she had spent seven years volunteering a lot of her time to coaching while also working several part-time jobs to supplement her income, it was crucial for Samantha to have financial support during this period. When recounting the years of uncertainty in her career, Samantha mentioned having to move for work nine times. In order to chase success she needed to be able to move where she was needed, and without the support of her family she would not have been able to. According to Samantha, in those nine moves, she only paid for one of them. Her parents supported her financially for several years so that she was able to pursue success through unpaid positions, including moving and housing costs as well as having Samantha live at home during baseball’s off-season so that she did not need to worry about paying rent. Not only did they provide financial support, but also emotional support and

encouragement as well. Samantha mentioned that she almost gave up pursuing coaching multiple times because she was exhausted by the effort that it took (while also working seven part-time jobs), but her parents never allowed her to do so. They encouraged her to continue working towards her dreams, and without them she would not be coaching in the MLB today. As examined in multiple literary sources, it is crucial that women coaching men’s sports have support systems in order to be successful in their roles and to maintain that success over time.56

Something I would like to note about Samantha’s experience is that she has been fortunate enough to have people in her life that can offer financial support. This is a privilege that not everybody has access to, which can present another intersectional barrier to women who are economically disadvantaged and want to coach a men’s sport like baseball that often requires volunteering time. Samantha’s story illustrates that although it is already incredibly difficult for middle and upper class women to break into coaching men’s sports, this added economic layer can make it nearly impossible for working class women to do so.

Olivia Marrant shared the importance of having support from the institution she works for as well as from her exclusively male coworkers. Olivia was brought into coaching men’s basketball by her former coach, which she does not believe could have happened at a different college because that practice is “really not heard of,” especially for women. Olivia did not even need to go through a job application or interview process, which could have delayed her coaching career by months or even years. Olivia might not be working as a men’s basketball coach in general today, because the support from her mentor and former coach is how she decided to begin coaching in the first place. If the college she works for had not been open to hiring Olivia through the unique process she experienced, there would be one less woman coaching men’s sports.

Olivia also stressed the importance of another crucial area of support in her career, which comes from her coworkers. When asked about experiences with her coworkers, Olivia had nothing but praise and respect for them. She said that “the other assistant coaches are super great,” and that they treat her “as a person and not just a woman.” She also acknowledged that “other women obviously have different experiences” with their coworkers, and that she is fortunate to have only had positive engagement with her fellow coaches. Due to her good experiences with her coworkers, Olivia feels supported in her position and like she has a group of people who are there for her in the workplace. This is incredibly important to ensure her success as a coach, because she has a positive environment with people who are there to provide support if she needs anything. As Blom et. al highlight in their article, women who coach men’s sports need a strong and steady support system from both administration and coworkers in order to maintain their roles and be successful, which is clear in Olivia’s personal story.

I was struck by Olivia’s sentiment here, because in her eyes she is lucky to be treated as an equal in her workplace despite her gender, which is a view also held by other coaches that I interviewed. Samantha Bellinger, for example, considered herself “really lucky with the organizations [she’s] worked for,” because she had never been discriminated against by her coworkers. This sentiment can be incredibly dangerous, because normalizing the fear of facing gender-based discrimination in the workplace for women who coach men’s sports can be a huge reason women do not enter this career path. If women expect to face discrimination in the workplace, they might steer clear of jobs where that is stereotypically more likely, such as in athletics, and could be a major reason that there are so few women in these roles. In this section, I am focusing on coaches’ responses to the cultural environments within athletics, and in the next chapter I will discuss how this culture is built. This idea also puts institutions like the ones Olivia

57 Ibid.
and Samantha work at on a pedestal for having the basic decency to not discriminate against their employees, which allows them to avoid looking deeper into organizational flaws that subtly oppress the women who work there.

While my participants were extremely grateful to have their mentors and support systems, there are other aspects of being a woman coaching a men's sports team that are not as positive. In the next chapter, I delve deeper into these organizational flaws in the context of the facilities and locker rooms available to women who coach men’s sports, as well as the negative social environments that exist within public views of women who are involved in athletics in general.
Chapter Four: Built and Cultural Environments

Despite the fact that the coaches I interviewed are so successful, it is necessary to recognize that barriers do still exist within their work environments that can foster feelings of exclusion and hinder their ability to do their jobs. A major theme that came up in almost every interview was the ways built and cultural environments in athletics are designed to keep women out. This is not necessarily always intentional, but more related to the idea that the world of men’s sports was not created to include women in the first place. This appeared in two distinct ways within the interviews, and in this chapter I will examine both the physically built environments, including athletics facilities and locker rooms, as well as cultural environments that effectively work to dissuade women from working in men’s athletics. Importantly, all of the coaches I interviewed had great relationships with their coworkers and did not specifically point out discrimination in any of their workplaces, yet they all recounted incidents that revealed issues that implicate the athletics community and the way sports are organized in general.

Physically Built Environments

Due to the passage of Title IX, U.S. law states that all educational institutions must provide equal locker room facilities for men and women, but there is little knowledge or understanding of how to navigate single-gendered facilities when a coach or player does not identify with the gender of the locker room they need access to. This problem was consistent between college coaches, whose institutions must abide by Title IX, as well as with professional coaches who work for organizations without regulations on facilities for women. Within high-level athletics, coaches often need to enter the locker room with the players, whether to

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coach during halftime or timeouts or even to shower after a game. This presents a sizable barrier to women who coach men’s sports, because several of the coaches I interviewed brought up incidents that have occurred related to locker room interactions and other situations related to changing their clothes.

Olivia Marrant was the first one to bring this problem up with a story about an issue she had in a locker room situation. She is the only woman on her college’s men’s basketball staff, and had a major problem after one game in particular. She was in the men’s locker room at an away game with her players after the contest when a male referee from the game walked out of the shower area without a towel on. This was an innocent mistake by all means, but the biggest problem was that the referee was not expecting a woman to be in the men’s locker room. Olivia was unphased by the situation, but recognized it as a barrier to having women coach men’s teams. One of the most fundamental aspects of sports is the locker room and the important coaching that happens within it, but this is generally inaccessible to women who would not be comfortable with a situation like what Olivia experienced. Since locker rooms are meant to be single-gendered spaces, it makes it very difficult for women who coach men’s sports to take part in these fundamental coaching conversations. They must either deal with the discomfort of being in a men’s locker room with the possibility of situations like Olivia’s, or they have to refrain from entering the men’s locker room in general and therefore miss out on important coaching and team bonding moments.

This is a problem that is incredibly difficult to find a solution to because it is understandable why locker rooms are single-gendered spaces, but this also leads to the discomfort and/or exclusion of coaches on teams associated with a gender they do not identify with. The way sports are intrinsically set up, especially the sports within my scope, has
normalized practices like going to the locker room during halftime. This is not a problem within itself, but the barriers do come in when there is no alternative for men’s teams that have a female coach, or the ostracization of teams that must find alternatives to the locker room experience because of this. A possible solution could be if teams were to meet in private all-gender spaces, such as film rooms or classrooms within the athletic facilities during halftime and after the game, instead of locker rooms. Then, after the meeting at the end of the game, players and coaches could go to their respective locker rooms to shower. This could help avoid incidents like what Olivia experienced, and could make gendered sports more inclusive of the people who coach them. Solutions such as these may seem like they are changing fundamental aspects of sports, but all this would do is bring more inclusivity to the athletics world, and set up facilities that are conducive to more women coaching men’s sports.

Another crucial story was shared by Samantha Bellinger, who highlighted an issue specifically relating to baseball coaches. In the sport of baseball, coaches wear the same uniforms as the players during games, which requires the coaches to have a safe and comfortable place to change their clothes as well. As Samantha recounted, the college teams she coached for would sometimes have their players change on the bus, which was a problem because that meant Samantha would need to change on the bus as well. According to Samantha, she needed to figure out how to “not only change on the bus in front of a bunch of guys but change in the dugout [as well],” and was forced to “plan ahead” if she knew the team would not have access to a locker room at an away game. Again, this is an issue that happens because athletics have been set up in a way that intrinsically excludes any sort of gender integration within gendered sports. Thought has gone into the creation of locker rooms and single gendered spaces, but not into how a woman might have to navigate these gendered spaces when coaching a men’s team. Samantha has not
always had access to facilities to change her clothes in, and has often needed to change secretly or in a hidden space away from her team, whereas her male counterparts can feel comfortable changing on the bus in front of the rest of the team. One way to solve this dilemma could include having at least one gender neutral restroom/changing area near every school’s baseball field.

A final issue that was brought up related to unique problems faced by women who coach professional men’s sports, since these professional institutions are not bound by the same Title IX laws that colleges are. Francesca Raleigh, who coaches in the MLB, brought up a disadvantage for women that coach in professional organizations that exists because of lack of government regulation. She noted that “there are things that… people didn't plan for when they built stadiums or when they built spring training complexes, for example, they didn't really anticipate having a bunch of women in the game,” pointing out how professional leagues did not account for the inclusion of women from their inception. Since professional men’s sports leagues were only created with men in mind, they lack the provisions within their facilities necessary for the integration of women into these organizations. Francesca specifically mentioned the locker room and shower area that has been haphazardly thrown together for the female staff, which is “basically a very large bathroom with three lockers” for all of the women who work on the field with the team. This is a major inequality in comparison to the facilities available to the men in the organization, which Francesca described as “big” and “super nice.” Similar facilities could easily be created for the women in the organization as well with the tens of millions of dollars the team earns every year.59

Institutions like the MLB have enough money to build equal facilities for their female employees, but choose not to because they do not have laws and regulations that require these

accommodations. Granted, with the small number of women that do exist in these professional coaching positions, it can be easy to argue against the necessity of building equal facilities for women within men’s professional sports. However, the creation of these spaces for women within predominantly male organizations can have a drastic impact on the inclusion of women in men’s sports in general. According to the UK Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, “decisions about the design, planning and management of places can enhance or restrict a sense of belonging,” and “can remove real and imagined barriers between communities.”\textsuperscript{60} Essentially, by designing physical spaces such as baseball stadiums in a way that promotes inclusion, institutions like the MLB can reduce gendered barriers that exist within the sport. This requires having equal facilities for the women who coach in these organizations, which can help create a sense of belonging in a historically male-centered work environment. If professional sports institutions were to create facilities for women with the anticipation of more women entering the field of coaching men’s sports, this could create major progress in the way of gender inclusion within athletics. This could also help create a cultural shift in the gendered views people have of organizations like the MLB, because if the general public sees these changes being made, it may lead to a more culturally inclusive view of sports as well.

This progress towards equal facilities that fit the needs of all people in a space is in fact already happening in the MLB. Recently, an all-women group of Washington Nationals fans sent complaints to the team’s stadium committee\textsuperscript{61} asking for pads and tampons to be available in the bathrooms at the park. The Nationals recently implemented a clear-bag policy for the stadium, which made fans who experience menstruation uncomfortable since they would be forced to carry their sanitary products out in the open. Washington’s organization responded promptly to


\textsuperscript{61} https://twitter.com/LONTDC1/status/1512564148504350724
the fans’ concerns, and within two weeks were able to add free sanitary product dispensers to
every women’s restroom in the park. This simple act of providing necessary products is also
promoting inclusivity within baseball, and showing women that they belong in this space through
physical implementations. This is obviously not on the same scale as providing equal locker
rooms for women who coach in these professional institutions, but it is definitely a start towards
inclusion through the design of athletic facilities.

Despite the unfortunate stories recounted by the coaches I interviewed about their
experiences with navigating the facilities of men’s athletics, all of them made sure to note that
their institutions have been nothing but supportive with finding “creative work-arounds” for
anything they might need. Francesca mentioned that she and others are allowed to use the Major
League coaches’ locker room when the team is away for periods of time, and that the
organization “has been really good at making accommodations for [them] when they can.”
Ultimately, the supportive institutions these coaches work for and the supportive staff they work
with are again clear reasons why my participants have been able to maintain success. If their
experiences with their workplaces had been more negative, they may not have stayed in their
positions. It is crucial that athletic institutions are focusing on improving and creating positive
and equal environments for all employees in order for women who coach men’s sports to be
successful. However, while it is great that the institutions my participants work for have been
supportive in finding alternative solutions for accommodations, these are individual fixes that do
not work to address the structural level issues in athletics, such as the lack of equal facilities in
professional leagues.
Cultural Factors

Cultural environments in the U.S., especially surrounding men’s sports, can be extremely misogynistic, presenting several more insidious barriers to female coaches. This stems from broader cultural expectations regarding women’s roles in society, which came up in two specific ways during the interviews. The first is the idea of the “second shift,” coined by Arlie Hochschild, which refers to the expectation that working mothers complete a “second shift” when they come home from work to perform domestic duties. I will discuss this idea in relation to women who coach men’s sports, and how this “second shift” affects women’s abilities to coach and simultaneously have a family. Next, my participants brought up cultural discrimination of women in athletics, and how negative social perceptions of women who coach men’s sports can present a barrier to bringing more women into this field. I will delve into general cultural norms and public conversations surrounding how women are viewed in sports, including how media plays into public opinion.

A cultural theme that several coaches pointed out as providing a barrier to more women becoming coaches is the expectation on women regarding domestic labor in the United States. Despite progress that has been made towards gender equality in our society, including far more opportunities for women to work, there is still an inherent belief in many people that women also must handle most if not all duties in the home. These duties include childcare, cooking, cleaning, and other necessities in the domestic space. Due to these beliefs, many women may feel pressure to abandon careers that require them to work untraditional hours and travel often. Samantha Bellinger in particular discussed these expectations in relation to the strenuous

schedules of coaches, especially including travel. She brought this up when we talked about her years of volunteer coaching when she also held several part time jobs, which can often be inaccessible to women who have families and other domestic responsibilities imposed on them by a cultural zeitgeist. Samantha pointed out that “men with families can come in and do these volunteer positions because they've got a wife at home to take care of the kids,” giving them the freedom to seek out careers regardless of the time and travel commitments. In contrast, she asked “how is a woman supposed to have a volunteer coach position where she's also doing another part time job to actually pay for the rent and bills, AND she's got family that she's got to take care of?” This career path and the dedication it requires can be completely inaccessible for women who already have families and expectations in the home when trying to advance their careers in athletics, whereas men do not have these additional familial expectations. This is a major roadblock that helps illustrate why so few women are able to be successful within men’s sports.

Samantha has been able to be successful in her coaching career because she is not married and does not have children, alleviating the possible domestic expectations she may face. However, it is unfair that women who do happen to have families will face these pressures, and female coaches who wind up getting married and having children often do take a leave of absence from their coaching duties. Samantha mentioned this in her interview as well, stating that “[women] end up taking a step back so they can take care of the family and then they try to get back into coaching and now they've got this gap [in their resume], which men don't usually have.”

Even if women do not enter careers in coaching with domestic responsibilities, they may end up with them at some point during their career, which forces women who have already been

65 Ibid.
66 This phenomenon occurs throughout a vast majority of careers, and is commonly referred to as the “baby penalty” or “mommy penalty”
successful in coaching to jeopardize the opportunity of continuing their jobs in order to fulfill
gendered expectations of labor within the home. If our culture were to have a more equal view
on the division of responsibility in the home regardless of gender, this barrier could be done
away with and more women would be able to pursue careers in coaching men’s sports without
facing societal pressure to stay home.

Another cultural environment within athletics that can pose limitations to women in
men’s sports is the public’s views and opinions on athletics in general. As mentioned before,
sports have been set up as a heavily gendered institution, and men’s sports have historically
existed to only include men in leadership positions. Based on the interviews I did with these
coaches, it is clear that athletics organizations like the ones they work for are open to hiring more
women as coaches on men’s teams. However, the general public, who despite having little to no
connection and experience with college and professional sports, have opinions rooted in cultural
misogyny that work to dissuade women from these career choices. Samantha Bellinger
specifically pointed out that “it's usually not the players that are the ones who have a problem
with having a woman as a coach, it's usually people who don't even play the sport, or aren’t even
part of the athletics world that are having issues with [hiring women as coaches].” In her own
experience, especially within the public eye of professional baseball, she has received all
negative backlash from people who are not involved with athletics in general. This idea has been
confirmed through previous research, notably by Siegle et al.,67 where male athletes who had
female coaches were interviewed about their experiences. Responses by men who have actually
been coached by a woman were overwhelmingly positive, whereas people who have never been

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67 Siegele, Jessica L., Allison B. Smith, and Robin Hardin. "Male collegiate student-athletes’ experiences
and perceptions of female head coaches." *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education* 13.1
coached by a woman hold more inherent biases against gendered inclusion within coaches.\textsuperscript{68} This indicates that there is a normalized misogynistic view of women in positions of power in men’s sports within U.S. culture, and that many people have the automatic assumption that a woman can not be successful as a coach, especially in men’s sports. These studies prove the importance of increasing gender diversity within positions of power in athletics, because the people who actually have a woman as a coach must reckon with their biases firsthand and realize that gender does not have any indication on the quality of a coach. If more women were included as coaches of men’s sports, and more athletes were exposed to women in these positions, it would decrease this inherent bias that many people currently hold.

Sarah Russell has also faced a similar barrier in her football recruiting process. Part of her coaching duties at the college she works for require her to scout and recruit high school players, which can prove difficult at times because players seem to be often uninterested in being recruited by a woman. Sarah recounted that “there are people that don't call [her] back or email [her] back,” which she believes is “probably because they look at [her] and [her] name and email address or hear [her] voice on voicemails” and decide they aren’t interested in a team with a woman on the coaching staff. Negative cultural attitudes held by people who have never had a female coach are extremely detrimental to the success of women who coach men’s sports because they are based on misogynist stereotypes of women rather than their actual ability to coach, which is in no way a gendered characteristic.

Misogynistic cultural attitudes permeate every public aspect of sports, which is especially visible through television and social media. Popular sports media organization ESPN is arguably one of the most influential media outlets for sports in the United States, as well as its flagship

sports news show *SportsCenter*. As Fraidenburg and Backstrom⁶⁹ explain in their research, despite the fact that ESPN “claims to cover ‘all sports, all the time,’” *SportsCenter* only allots 3.2% of its total coverage to women’s sports, and 76% of all ESPN viewers are men. This connects to previous discussion in Chapter 3 about the lack of public visibility of professional women’s sports leagues in the United States, despite the fact that they exist in abundance. This highly gendered gap in both coverage and viewership points to a deeper cultural attitude that sports are a masculine space that women do not belong in, which hinders women’s ability to enter coaching positions in men’s sports. If media sources were to give women in athletics the same coverage and attention as they do to men, this could reduce the hegemonic masculinity that dominates athletics, and would allow for a shift in U.S. cultural mindsets that would make the general public more accepting of women in sports. This would in turn create inclusive spaces and mindsets that would foster the ability for more women to coach men’s sports.

Social media is also another sphere where cultural attitudes towards women in sports are influenced, and where companies such as ESPN continue to cultivate environments that exclude women from athletics. Through social media such as Instagram and Twitter, ESPN could provide the equal coverage of women in sports that they lack through their television shows. However, the company instead chose to create a new digital product for women in 2009, which they dubbed espnW.⁷⁰ This new facet of ESPN is marketed towards women between 18-34 years old, and claims to “provide a unique point of view on the sports stories that matter most to women and highlights the crossroads of sports and culture.”⁷¹ By creating a completely different brand for women, which exists purely on social media sites as well as on a subset of the main ESPN

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⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.
website, the company is communicating that they mainly cater to a male audience. This reinforces stereotypes that sports are made for men and should therefore be dominated by men, which is a very harmful view that supports the exclusion of women from sports in general, and most specifically from men’s sports.

The problem with ESPN’s social media coverage does not end with the creation of espnW, but is actually furthered through the content and coverage on espnW accounts. In their research, Fraidenburg and Backstrom found that “both ESPN and espnW uphold hegemonic masculinity in sport, but they do so in different ways.” Since ESPN is mainly catering towards a male audience, the company’s social media accounts seldom post about women in sports, rely on gendered stereotypes, and reinforce traditional gender roles through their content. This maintains the cultural view that women do not belong in sports, and that there are very few opportunities for women to be successful in any athletics-related career. However, espnW’s coverage also implicates a hegemonic masculine view of sports through its inherent separation from ESPN, lower frequency and volume of posts and content related to women in sports in comparison to ESPN’s coverage of men in sports, and the “less engaging coverage of sportswomen” through their media accounts. This is referred to as “bland coverage” of women in sports, which “normalizes the gender hierarchy in sports,” and reinforces the idea that men’s sports are more engaging. The most popular and prevalent sports media company has the power to influence how the general public views women in sports, and their focus on separating men and women in sports through social media conveys the message that sports are for men and that

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72 https://www.espn.com/espnw/
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
women do not belong in these spaces. The cultural environments of sports television and social media uphold the exclusion of women from athletics, which contributes to social barriers for women who coach men’s sports. By doing away with the distinct separation between ESPN and espnW, and by giving equal engaging coverage of both women and men in sports, this could help alleviate the social and cultural backlash that women in sports receive, and therefore foster inclusive ideas and environments within athletics.

Overall, it is clear that cultural attitudes and public opinions about athletics have the power to influence the success of women in these spaces. Through widely-held misogynistic attitudes about women in positions of power in sports, which reinforce gender roles and stereotypes, public opinion has the ability to maintain the exclusion of women from sports and to create cultural environments that are not conducive to the success of women in these spaces. These social ideas are fed by media companies such as ESPN, which maintain hegemonic masculinity within athletics. If these companies were to provide positive equal coverage of women in sports, this could change cultural conversations around athletics in general, and could work towards creating equal and inclusive opportunities for women to gain positions of power within men’s sports.
Chapter Five: Moving Forward

Although the coaches I interviewed have been quite successful in their careers, it is clear that many barriers still exist that effectively keep women out of positions of power within men’s sports, especially at the college level and above. Knowing this, it is crucial to focus on what changes need to be made within athletics moving forward in order to create a more inclusive environment with increased accessibility and mobility for the women working in these spaces, especially as coaches. This chapter will discuss my participants’ ideas about what must happen in athletics to create this progress, as well as some programs and initiatives that already exist in professional men’s sports leagues meant to encourage more women to become coaches.

What Must Be Done?

When interviewing each coach, the final question I asked was about what changes need to be made within athletics in order to see more women succeed as coaches of men’s sports. My participants all had different answers that spoke to specific aspects of their own experiences in becoming coaches, which included opportunities, advocacy, diversified hiring practices, and a change in social perceptions of sports in the United States. It is especially important to consider the opinions of women currently coaching men’s sports at college levels and above because they are intimately familiar with the problems existing within athletics that effectively keep women out of positions of power in men’s sports. Linda Alcoff’s ideas about speaking for other groups are again vital when discussing how to move forward, since centralizing the voices and ideas of my participants is one of the main goals of this project. This section will focus on how the coaches I interviewed would like to see the athletics world move forward.

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The first idea about progress came from Olivia Marrant, who believes opportunity above all else can help create change. Within her own experience, she does not think she would currently be a men’s college basketball coach without the chance she was given by her former coach, who brought Olivia into coaching the men’s team at her former college. “Opportunity. I think that's the main thing,” she said when asked how we can get more women working in these positions of power in sports. Olivia also gave the example of Becky Hammon, who was up until recently an assistant coach in the NBA for the San Antonio Spurs.\textsuperscript{77} In 2017, Becky was the second woman to ever be hired as an assistant coach in the NBA, and was able to earn this position when her hard work and dedication as a coaching intern was noticed and appreciated by Greg Popavich, the Spurs’ head coach.\textsuperscript{78} Olivia mentioned Becky Hammon as a model of how successful women can be coaching mens’ sports if given the opportunity, and specifically mentioned the importance of Greg Popavich’s willingness to endorse a woman for the job as a major stepping stone towards more women gaining these job positions. Olivia specifically noted the significance of these opportunities in institutions like the NBA since they are influential in the public eye, and if people see women given the opportunity to coach on these stages, it will encourage lower athletic institutions to do the same. Olivia described this as a “trickle-down effect” of sorts, and believes that offering more opportunities in mainstream professional leagues can help all athletic institutions become more accepting of women coaching men’s sports at any level.

\textsuperscript{77} She is now the head coach for the Las Vegas Aces, a WNBA team.
Another crucial idea came from Samantha Bellinger, and was born from her personal experiences during her years in volunteer coaching positions. As discussed in Chapter 3, Samantha spent years coaching baseball without earning compensation for that time, and the only reasons this was accessible to her were obviously her hard work and dedication, but also the financial support of her parents. She was fortunate that her family had the ability to help support her, but the unfortunate reality is that most women would not have this kind of financial support available. Because of this, Samantha believes that scholarships must be created that specifically offer stipends to women working in volunteer coaching positions in baseball. A fund such as this could help equalize the field for women trying to break into paid coaching positions, since as Samantha said in our interview, volunteer positions are “generally how you get in” to paid coaching positions. As explored in Chapter 3, women who want to coach baseball at a college or professional level will often spend years working in volunteer positions, while men may have to volunteer for much shorter periods of time before being hired in paid positions.

Now granted, Samantha did discuss the fact that there are some “full time coaches who actually put together clinics where they raise money for volunteer coaches.” However, these funds are not being specifically directed to women, and therefore “nearly all of [the coaches receiving these existing stipends], like 98%, are men.” With Samantha’s proposal to create scholarships that offer financial support specifically to women working as volunteer coaches in baseball, she hopes that less women will be discouraged from pursuing this career due to financial need and inequalities. She wishes that a fund like this would have existed during her 7 years of volunteer work, where she instead was forced to work 7 different part time jobs and receive assistance from her parents. Scholarships and funds that explicitly work to supplement the income of women in volunteer coaching positions are “where the difference needs to be
made,” and can create networks of support for any women in the U.S. who want to coach baseball but cannot afford to spend years in volunteer and uncompensated positions.

Another sentiment Samantha expressed in terms of social progress in sports is the necessity of men, especially white men, using their social power and privilege to advocate for women in the industry. From Chapter 3, it can be argued that the coaches that participated in this research have been able to access success and opportunities through the connections they have made in the athletics world with people in positions of social power. The mentors that helped these coaches break into coaching men’s sports were able to do so because they hold power through their identities as men, and used their positions as members of the in-group of athletics in order to create room and opportunity for women. In order to continue moving forward, and to facilitate more equal and inclusive athletic spaces, people in positions of power, in this case men, must use their social privilege to bring more women into these environments. As Samantha put it, “if you look at the people who are in power and who have the ability to change things, you're not seeing a lot of women,” essentially saying that it is crucial that the men in these positions of power step up and advocate for the inclusion of women in men’s sports.

This can look like many different things, but boils down to a radical belief in inclusion. It can mean “stepping up and being willing to hire women,” as Samantha said in our interview, or it can mean introducing a woman interested in coaching men’s sports to any industry connections they may have. However men, or any people with social capital within athletics, are able to use this privilege to bring historically excluded groups into these spaces is necessary in order to move forward. These actions will reduce social stigmas that exist in every aspect of sports, the origins of which were explored in Chapter 4, and could create drastic changes not just within athletics, but in other settings where women have been historically excluded as well. Sports are a
People all around the United States look up to athletes, coaches, and other people involved in high level sports, and the status that these people have give them the ability to define social values and influence the views of generations. For example, by signing Jackie Robinson to the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1945, Branch Rickey opened up the floor for a national conversation about racial inclusion within athletics. Although this is quite a dated example, it is one known by just about every person in the U.S., and shows how important identity-based conversations can begin in athletics and can have major impacts on social acceptance of these groups. By using this power and influence to promote and advocate for the inclusion of women in positions of power in men’s sports, men can help create positive change in these environments that women do not currently have the social power to do on their own.

Francesca Raleigh also brought up an interesting point about the need for change in conversations surrounding women coaching men’s sports, and a change in perspective that is necessary to achieve this. Francesca reflected on the fact that she expected to have a very difficult time becoming a successful coach in men’s baseball, and how many women with similar interests have these expectations as well. She explained that because of the social stigma women face in men’s sports on a national scale, women may enter this career path thinking “it's going to be really really hard,” which is a discouraging sentiment to have from the outset. If we simply accept the fact that women will have a harder time breaking into coaching men’s sports, this can discourage women from attempting to do so in the first place.

Francesca also discussed this in connection with work performance once in this career, and how these intrinsic fears of discrimination and harassment in the workplace can affect women’s abilities to do their job. Francesca said:

If I walk into every room and go, ‘Oh my god. Is everyone going to treat me different because I’m a woman?’ then now I’m not focusing on doing my job. I’m focusing on how everyone’s going to treat me. If I just normalize it and I say ‘Hey listen like we’re all in this together, I’m just here to just be a part of this wonderful organization or in this wonderful sport,’ I feel like people will treat me with the energy I put out, like this is the energy I’m going to get back.

Francesca’s emphasis on the inherent inclusion available in athletics is very interesting, given that sports can genuinely create spaces where people can drop everything else going on in their lives and just focus on the game. Unfortunately, for those with historically oppressed identities in spaces where they have historically been excluded, it can be hard to forget the differences between themselves and the people they work with, and to not expect social backlash from merely existing in these spaces. However, I think Francesca is correct in that these expectations can present barriers to women entering careers in men’s sports in that they may avoid pursuing them altogether for fear of exclusion and discrimination, or might have a difficult time doing their jobs with the weight of this fear on their shoulders.

These expectations are obviously valid and are supported by decades of women being excluded from working in men’s sports, but this also shows the necessity of this change in conversation and perspective on women coaching men’s sports in the 21st century. This change will require a difference to be made in the perspectives and attitudes of a majority of people working in and playing men’s sports, but is absolutely possible given the trajectory of progress that has already been made in the past few years.81 Women are being hired in professional

coaching positions at record rates, considering the fact that in 2012 there were zero women working as coaches in the MLB, NBA, and NFL, but there is still much more work to be done. If more women are brought into coaching men’s sports through the advocacy of those in positions of social power, this can change conversations and social stigmas surrounding other women following this path. This will help reduce messages of discouragement that women currently receive from the athletics world, and can therefore help to reduce internal feelings of hopelessness or fear that women entering and working in this profession may have. By changing the sentiment of conversations surrounding women coaching men’s sports that currently tells women they have a low chance of success, and instead encouraging them to pursue these positions without the expectation that it will be a difficult process, this can reduce several social barriers that women face within this career path. This could also help the athletics world progress towards gendered equality by viewing people through their merit and ability to do a job regardless of their gender.

A final suggestion made for how to move forward comes from Sarah Russel, and focuses on recognizing the values of different experiences within sports. Sarah’s idea is influenced by her own experience as a football player on both men’s and women’s teams, and is crucial especially within the sport of football due to its historically masculine focus. Women’s football leagues have existed intermittently in the United States since the 1930s,82 yet have never received the same recognition or popularity in viewership as men’s football leagues. As Sarah explained in our interview, the experience that women have playing in women’s football leagues is “not viewed the same way” as a man’s experience playing in men’s leagues due to culturally misogynistic views of women in football. This poses a major barrier to women who have played

football and want to coach men’s football, because playing experience is one of the most important factors that teams look at when hiring a coach. As previously discussed in Chapter 3, this issue is less prevalent in the other sports within the scope of this research because women’s basketball and softball leagues are seen as gender-balanced counterparts for men’s leagues in terms of player experience. Therefore, this problem presents more often within football than within baseball or basketball.

Women are also discouraged more heavily from playing a contact sport like football in their youth than these other sports, meaning that player experience may begin much later in life for women who want to play football. This is true for those like Sarah Russel, who did not start playing football until her senior year of high school, which can also put them at a disadvantage when competing for coaching jobs against men who have been encouraged to play the sport since childhood. In an article from Indeed, a job searching website, they define important experience for one looking to become a football coach as someone who has “personally played the game of football, preferably at a high level,” which is far less accessible to women who have fewer opportunities to play the sport.83 This creates a much smaller pool of seemingly qualified women because playing experience is seen as one of the most important hiring factors, meaning that it is necessary to increase the scope of what should be considered relevant experience when deciding which coach to hire. As Sarah put it, “we need to see the value in different people with different kinds of experience, versus just like, just checking the box that they played,” explaining that there are other factors in one’s football background that can be just as valuable as playing experience.

Many other aspects of coaching candidates should hold just as much weight as player experience because they are necessary attributes for someone to become a successful coach. Some of these factors should include experience and ability in leadership, teamwork and team building, empathy, communication, and organization.\textsuperscript{84} If these attributes were viewed as equally important to playing experience, many more women would be seen as highly qualified candidates for coaching jobs. The fact that women’s access to football experience is so limited has been extremely detrimental to their ability to get coaching jobs. If most employers are searching for someone with playing experience above all else as a coach, many women will be left off of that list due to either lack of experience or lack of recognition of their experience. By focusing more on other necessary qualities of a coach such as those listed above, women will have more equal opportunities to attain coaching jobs in football.

All of the suggestions made by the coaches I interviewed are necessary changes that need to be made within athletics in order to progress towards gendered equality. Increasing opportunities for women coaching men’s sports in professional leagues, as Olivia proposed, will help change social perceptions of women in these positions, and will encourage colleges and high schools as well as other lower level leagues to do the same. Samantha’s idea about scholarships and funds specifically for women in volunteer baseball positions is crucial to creating financial accessibility for women who want to enter this career field, especially because women will on average spend a longer time in these unpaid positions in order to gain job experience before being hired for a paid position. This idea was developed in Chapter 3, in reference to statistics of how many women work in the MLB.\textsuperscript{85} Her other point about the

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.
necessity of men and people in positions of social power to advocate for the inclusion of women in men’s sports is also critical for social progress within athletics. The final two points about changes that must be made focus on social conversations and perceptions about women in coaching, and what makes a coach qualified. Francesca and Sarah both speak to differences that can be made on individual and communal levels, that if successful, could change the way people perceive gender within sports and work to remove gendered barriers within athletics altogether. Every one of these ideas came from these coaches’ personal experiences throughout their careers, and it is necessary to listen to the women currently working as coaches in men’s sports in order to reduce the barriers that keep so many women out of these positions.

**What Is Being Done?**

Despite the fact that there are many changes that still need to be made in athletics in order to bring more women into coaching men’s sports, professional men’s leagues have taken several steps to lead sports in that direction. Initiatives and programs have been put in place in the MLB, NBA, and NFL to promote diversity and inclusion within the leagues, which encompass opportunities for women in coaching. Historic progress has been made in the last decade in these institutions, and systems are beginning to be put in place to advance the inclusion and success of women in positions of power in these spaces.

The MLB has several diversity programs that aim to provide women and People of Color with career development opportunities. The first is a collection of employee resource groups, which aim to provide employees of different identities with networking and upward mobility in the organization. The resource group for female MLB employees works to encourage women in

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the organization to pursue future careers in baseball leadership, and attempts to “inspire women to succeed and excel both professionally and personally.” The MLB also has a diversity fellowship program in order to connect young women and People of Color to career opportunities in the organization. This program offers entry-level jobs to candidates in front office or baseball operations roles, and will help diversify the newer generations of employees in the MLB. Although this fellowship is open to both men and women, it is helping to raise the numbers of women working in the organization. Through this program, the MLB has seen large increases in female employees, and in 2018 “the MLB had 32 women holding on-field operations roles – an 88% increase” from the year before. Even though they are not in coaching roles, it is still important to increase the numbers of women working in baseball in general, because this will help reduce social stigma against all women working in men’s sports.

A final program offered by Major League Baseball is the diversity pipeline, where the organization “seeks to identify, develop and grow the pool of qualified minority and female candidates for on-field and baseball operations positions throughout the industry.” This program puts together events such as scouting conferences, which teaches women and People of Color interested in working in baseball how to scout players effectively. Conferences like these are necessary because the program “wanted to put a comprehensive scout development program in place that would give women and Persons of Color an opportunity to learn the nuances of scouting, and then put them in a position to make this a career pathway for them.” Scouting is a

88 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
skill that coaches need to have to put together effective teams, and is also a skill generally not taught to women. By creating the pipeline program, the MLB is giving women the opportunity to build expertise necessary for coaching baseball at the highest level.

The NBA has initiatives in place to promote the success of women in leadership as well, although at a much smaller rate. This is understandable due to the fact that the WNBA is seen as a professional counterpart to the NBA that offers women opportunities in professional basketball, whereas women’s football and softball leagues do not receive nearly as much visibility or recognition as the NFL and MLB. However, it is still important that the NBA creates opportunities for and sponsors the growth of women in the organization, which they currently do through one specific program. The NBA Women’s Network is a resource group for women who work in the offices and operations of the NBA. This group aims to promote the professional growth of women in the organization through “sharing collective knowledge, experience, and success strategies; connecting successful professionals through networking opportunities; providing visibility to NBA’s senior leadership; and leveraging women’s talents and expertise to drive the NBA’s global growth.”93 This program is important because it supports the inclusion of women within the NBA, and gives them career opportunities to gain power in the organization. Similar to the MLB’s fellowship program, the women in the NBA Women’s Network are not specifically in coaching roles, but the benefits of both programs are the same. This is the only diversity and inclusion initiative that the NBA has in place to specifically promote women in this space, but it is an important group for the inclusion of women in leadership roles in the organization. However, from what I could find in my research, the NBA does not have any initiatives in place for women who coach.

The final organization I will discuss is the NFL, which has recently created pivotal changes that will positively impact women who want to coach professional football. The first came with an expansion in the language of a hiring rule in the league that outlines diverse hiring practices within coaching staff. Established in 2003, the Rooney Rule sought to increase diversity in coaching staff by stipulating that each team must interview at least two People of Color when seeking to fill prominent coaching positions. However, in March 2022, the NFL expanded the wording of the Rooney Rule to include women, now requiring teams to interview at least two People of Color and/or women for open coaching positions. The NFL believes that the update of this rule will “encourage the further identification and development of women candidates and the ability to provide them additional opportunity to interview for open positions,” which is a major step towards bringing more women into coaching positions in the NFL. Another new mandate that came out around the same time as the updated Rooney Rule will also now require every NFL team to hire a woman or Person of Color as an offensive assistant coach, which leads us to believe that many more women will soon be hired as coaches in the NFL. The organization specified this coaching position because most head coaches in the league were promoted from offensive coaching positions, showing where this updated language will eventually lead: employing a woman as a team’s head coach. This is unprecedented in the league’s 122 years, and would be a significant mark of progress towards gendered equality in leadership in the NFL.

In terms of diversifying the NFL, there are some rightful concerns around the organization that teams will elect to hire white women instead of People of Color under the new

95 Ibid.
96 Ibid.
Rooney Rule, thereby decreasing diversity in other areas in order to bring more women into the league. This rule is necessary to give women more opportunities to coach in the league, but it is important that managers of teams recognize the value and significance of including all identities within their coaching staff. Art Rooney II, an NFL manager and son of the namesake of the Rooney Rule, has taken these points into consideration, and has given an explanation for the specific new language. According to Rooney,

> The truth of the matter is that as of today, at least, there aren't many women in the pool in terms of head coach. We hope that is going to change over the years, but for that reason we didn't see it as inhibiting the number of interviews for racial minorities at this point in time. Obviously, we can address that as time goes on, but for now we didn't see that as an issue. Really, we are looking at probably the early stages of women entering the coaching ranks, so we may be a little ways away before that becomes a problem.98

It is extremely heartening to hear that the NFL has taken issues that may arise from this rule update into account, and that they are prepared to continue making changes that promote diversity in the league.

Another influential change in the NFL that has worked to promote women as coaches is the creation of the Women’s Careers in Football Forum, or WCFF.99 This two-day annual event was started in 2017 under the leadership of Sam Rapoport,100 the NFL’s senior director of equity, diversity, and inclusion, and aims to link women with high level NFL employees in order to create more equal access to job opportunities in the organization. The forum includes “presentations, breakout sessions and panel discussions with league coaches, general managers

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98 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
and executives,” in order to connect women with the people and resources they need to get jobs in all aspects of the NFL, including coaching jobs. The WCFF has been influential since its inception, and there are already “44 women who’ve previously participated in the WCFF program [that] have landed a football operations role at the professional or collegiate level,” with 83% being Women of Color. The WCFF is making its mark on the inclusion of women in the NFL, and gives women a space for professional development and growth within the league. Through the inclusive work being done by the NFL, NBA, and MLB, women are earning positions of power in men’s professional sports at unprecedented rates, which inspires hope in current and future generations of women who want to coach men’s sports. However, the fight for gendered equality within positions of power in men’s sports is far from over. These powerful institutions must continue to create opportunities for women, and ensure that they are inclusive spaces that foster opportunity and growth for all female employees. As discussed in Chapter 2 with the TIDES Gender and Racial Report Cards, there is a very small percentage of women in each of these organizations that work in coaching roles. There are many suggestions that can be taken from my participants to help lead these institutions towards including more women as coaches of men’s sports.

101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
Conclusion

In this research, I set out to examine the success of women who coach men’s baseball, basketball, and football at college and professional levels in order to understand how they have been able to achieve these positions despite the social barriers that work to keep women out of positions of power in athletics. I conducted in-depth interviews with 4 coaches, where I found several similarities to both their success as well as hindrances to this throughout their experiences as coaches. All of my participants spoke about mentors they have had along the way, which were all men who had more access to community and opportunity in the athletics world. These mentors helped them tap into career opportunities that they may not have been considered for otherwise due to the gendered barriers that work against women who want to coach men’s sports, showing the necessity of men using their privilege as members of the in-group in sports to create spaces and opportunities for women in positions of power. The coaches I interviewed also discussed the importance of having support systems both inside and outside of the workplace in order to help them maintain their success over time. We also talked about barriers they have faced in their careers, which related to both built and cultural environments within athletics. It is necessary for athletic institutions to include women through the design of facilities, which I offer some suggestions for in Chapter 4. Previous research in this field has mainly focused on why women are not included in positions of power in men’s sports, but there is still little information on the women who have been successful in these positions, and how they have been able to do so. This research is necessary in order to understand the specific ways that women are entering this industry despite the social and cultural attitudes that work against them, which can help others to do the same. Eventually, if more women have the tools to be successful, and if progress

continues to be made by athletic institutions around the country, this could reduce the hegemonic masculinity that currently dominates sports, and could bring gendered equality to many more aspects of athletics. Many positive initiatives and programs currently exist in professional leagues that aim to promote the success of women in positions of power, which are discussed in Chapter 5, but there is still more to be done. A majority of this work will involve a cultural shift in perspectives on sports, and the role of women within them. By studying the women who currently coach men’s sports, I hope to educate people on the realities of women in positions of power in athletics, and contribute to this cultural shift of moving the chains towards a more equitable future.
Appendix A

Interview Questions:

1. Tell me about your experience as an athlete.
2. What influenced your goal of coaching men’s sports?
3. How did you begin coaching?
   ○ How did you end up coaching men’s sports?
4. Who has been influential in your path to becoming a coach?
5. What has been your experience with your players?
6. How would you describe your social engagement with your coworkers?
7. Have you experienced gender-based discrimination in the workplace?
8. Have you ever faced harassment (sexual or other) in the workplace?
9. Have you been discriminated against based on other facets of your identity (race/sexuality) in the workplace?
10. Why are there so many fewer women coaching men’s sports than men coaching women’s sports?
11. What changes need to be made for more women to succeed in coaching men’s sports?
Works Cited


