



Where Have All the Post-Title IX Mothers Gone? Exploring the Scarcity of Female Coaches in Youth Sport

Nicole M. LaVoi, PhD & Erin Becker
Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sports
School of Kinesiology, University of Minnesota



ABSTRACT

A large majority of youth sport coaches are parent-volunteers with little-to-no coaching experience, and variant levels of playing experience. It is estimated that less than 10% of youth sport coaches are female, and this number over the last decade has counter intuitively *decreased* (Messner, 2006). The scarcity of female coaches within interscholastic and collegiate sport is well documented, but little research has examined this phenomena at the youth level. Given that female participation in sports across competitive levels has reached an all time high (Acosta & Carpenter, 2006; NFHS, 2006), it is disconcerting that more females are not entering the ranks of youth sport coaching. The lack of coaches includes former female collegiate athletes who clearly have vast experiences and expertise to offer youth athletes, but are failing to enter the coaching ranks in proportion to their sport participation. When females are involved in youth sport, it is in primarily gendered ways—with males predominately in coaching positions and females in “helping” positions such as ‘Team Mom’ (Chafetz & Kotarba, 1999; Messner, 2006; Thompson, 1999). While the gendered division of labor in youth sports is documented, rarely have mothers with collegiate athletic experience been asked directly about their choices and negotiations in arriving at the decision to coach or not to coach at the youth level.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the youth sport coaching experiences and perceptions of mothers with collegiate athletic experience. Specifically, this poster focuses on the perceived barriers, costs and solutions to overcoming barriers and reducing costs at the youth level.

METHODS

Participants: Participants were mothers who coached their own children in youth sports ($N=8$) and had collegiate athletic experience in tennis ($N=3$), soccer ($N=3$), basketball ($N=1$), cross country ($N=1$), softball ($N=1$), track and field ($N=1$), and volleyball ($N=1$). Mothers ranged in age from 35-47, with an average age of 41.4 ($SD=4.3$). All participants were White/Caucasian. All but one possessed a bachelor’s degree. Participants had coached between 3-22 years ($M=5.3$, $SD=1.5$) with all participants having coached at least two sports. Participants coached their own children between 2-18 years ($M=6.9$, $SD=5.7$), and half coached their own children/child in two different sports, but not necessarily in the sport they played in college.

Measures:

Demographic Questionnaire: Participants were asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire that asked questions pertaining to race, level of education, sport participation, significant other’s sport participation, and coaching background.

Interview Guide: The interview guide was developed specifically for mothers who have coached their children in youth sports and encompassed a variety of questions related to barriers to coaching, fears about coaching one’s own children, and negative aspects to coaching one’s own children, in addition to possible solutions that could be employed to help women overcome perceived barriers, fears and costs.

Procedure: After receiving authorization from the University Institutional Review Board a call for mothers with collegiate athletic experience and who coached their children in youth sport was placed on the Tucker Center Research on Girls & Women in Sports website, as well as the Minnesota Youth Soccer Association’s (MYSA) website. The MYSA also placed the recruitment announcement in their monthly “Soccer Blast” e-mail. Recruitment announcements stated that interested participants initiate contact through e-mail. Mothers were not included in Phase I of this study if they had no collegiate athletic experience and had never coached their own children in youth sports. After initial contact via e-mail, participants were contacted and the purpose of the study was explained. All participants contacted via telephone agreed to be in the study and a date and time was set up to conduct the interview. Seven out of the eight interviews were conducted over the phone, one interview was conducted in person. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim into a word document. The majority of the interviews were transcribed by a third researcher with no previous knowledge of the project.

Data Analysis:

A content analysis of all eight interview transcripts was conducted by grouping participant responses into lower and higher order themes (Patton, 1990). Two researchers independently examined the transcripts and identified themes specific to barriers, costs, and fears associated with youth sport coaching, as well as solutions to increase the likelihood of more mothers coaching at the youth level.

RESULTS

Table 1. Mothers’ Perceived Barriers to Coaching Youth Sport

Themes	Frequency Cited
TIME	7
FAMILY	7
Balance mom/work/coach	4
Time with children if not coaching own child	5
Gendered division of labor at home	3
SOCIETY	6
Gender stereotypes	4
Stigma of coaching (its easy, not respected career)	2
Men don’t think women can coach	1
More socially acceptable for men to coach	1
INDIVIDUAL SELF PERCEPTIONS	5
Competence	5
Confidence	5
“THE GAP” (between college graduation to having children who are in youth sports)	4
FEARS	4
Not doing a good job	3
Affect mother-child relationship	1
FINANCIAL (lack pay, pay for daycare)	2
STRUCTURE OF YOUTH SPORT	1
Inconvenient coaching time (3-9PM)	1
Easier for women to coach in summer	1



Table 2. Mothers’ Perceptions of Costs to Coaching

Themes	Frequency Cited
COSTS ON CHILD	8
Favoritism (playing time, attention)	5
Too hard/too easy on children	5
Embarrass them	4
Children need variety of coaches	4
Separation of mother and coach roles	2
Politics (when mother-coach is criticized)	1
Jealousy when other children give mother attention	1
COSTS TO FAMILY	2
Can’t watch other children’s games	2
Time away from family	1
PERSONAL	1
Men can be mean	1

“Then sometimes like, because I’ve wanted to coach like my second son in soccer. I would have like to coach him in soccer, but it’s, you know, I’m always worried about the other kids, who’s going to take care of them, or, you know, if my husband works, then how am I going to be coaching?” (Balance mom/work/coach)

“I think some of it has to do with family time. I think women, you know, were really career oriented for a while and now all that’s kind of got back where women are really finding their place more at home and coaching takes away from family time and it really puts stress on the family.” (Family time)

“I don’t understand, in some ways it seems more, even a little bit more socially acceptable for men to coach than women. The moms like to sit on a lawn chair on the side and watch the game and then they chit chat and drink their big Starbucks, I don’t know.” (More socially acceptable for men to coach)

“I think people my age, they are reluctant to coach because we’re from the sort of the beginning of Title IX where I didn’t have the same kind of coaching experiences that kids have today, so I don’t have the same kind of base of ideas and drills and sort of the confidence they get.” (Competence, confidence)

“It’s really hard to make the lineups. I really struggle with that part of it, because if he starts than it’s ‘oh, you’re only starting because your mom coaches’ kind of stuff.” (Favoritism)

“Coaching my own kids is just a challenge just trying to get them to remember that I am their mom and, but yet when I’m on the court, I am the coach, you know.” (Separation of mother and coach roles)

“I honestly think that the only downside is the time commitment, that’s just part of what you do. So downside could be if they hear kids complaining about me or parents complaining I think that would be hard.” (Politics)

Table 3. Mothers’ Solutions to Overcome Barriers and Decrease Costs

Themes	Frequency Cited
ASK THEM (ask for volunteers, specifically mothers)	5
PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES	5
Offer women’s coaching clinics	5
Offer class through community education	1
Encourage camps to young female coaches	1
APPEAL TO POSITIVE OUTCOMES (benefits to girls, giving back to community)	3
PROVIDING SUPPORT	2
Buddy system	2
Mentor	2
Provide coaching role model	2
FINANCIAL (increase pay, address childcare issue)	2

“You know I think they need to ask them. I think the youth sports, and this is probably true with any organization, but they wait for people to volunteer instead of asking them...I’ve found a lot of success with when I was President of our club is just reaching out to people and asking them and they feel flattered and they want to do it. And a lot of people are hesitant to volunteer because they’re not competent but if you asked, just asked them...And people do it and you know they’re happy to do it if you just give them a little bit of confidence that you think they can do it.” (Ask them, providing support)

“I think it would be beneficial if we had just mothers only coaching clinics. I think women are put off by men. I mean if a woman ran it, it would just be you teaching them that yes, you have the confidence or you should have the confidence in you, you can do this.” (Offer women’s coaching clinics)

DISCUSSION

• In this study mothers with collegiate athletic experience who are currently coaching their children identified similar barriers, fears and costs to coaching at the youth level, that have previously been identified at the interscholastic and intercollegiate levels (Demers, 2007; Pastore, 1991; Stangl & Kane, 1991; Theberge, 1993; Weiss & Stevens, 1993). However, mothers’ perceptions of costs to their children is a unique contribution of this study, in addition to the identification of “The Gap” barrier.

• Perceived coaching efficacy emerged as a salient barrier for these mothers, despite their high level of athletic achievement and participation. Coaching efficacy—the extent to which coaches believe they have the capacity to affect learning and performance of athletes (Feltz et al., 1999)—and its development is likely related to encouraging more mothers to enter youth sport coaching, especially mothers without previous athletic experience.

• Mother-coaches offered a variety of creative solutions and strategies on how to get more mothers involved in youth sport coaching including appealing to the social aspects and benefits for mothers and their children, mentoring, providing ‘women-only’ training opportunities, and simply asking.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS & APPLICATION

Phase II of the project is currently underway and involves interviewing mothers in three additional groups—mothers who were former collegiate athletes and have not coached, and mothers who do not have collegiate athletic experience, who are and are not coaching.

The goal of this research is to devise solutions and work with youth sport organizations to recruit mother-coaches, and thereby increase the number of women coaching in youth sports.

“It is coming really slow, but that’s the trend of us who are finding that the dad will go with the younger boy and the mom, the ones that are stepping forward, we’re getting a few, but not as many as we need and we’re just asking you know to pair up. We’re trying to get a head coach, a head volunteer coach, and have them pair up with those people that have kind of done it for a year to kind of get the feel.” (Buddy system)