

Shifting the Narrative about Women Sport Coaches

Women coaches exist within an occupational landscape that is dominated by men at every level, in every position, and in nearly every sport and institution around the globe. Women are often statistical tokens ($\leq 20\%$ of staff) which means they more frequently will experience negative workplace and psychosocial outcomes associated with being in the minority such as discrimination, scrutiny, wage inequality, stress, less job satisfaction, isolation, and pressure to perform. Within this system, many women coaches do not feel supported, valued, or connected to the athletics administration in ways that help them be successful. Often women are blamed for the lack, or stagnation, of women coaches. By blaming the people in the system with the least power and placing blame on the individual, those in positions of power erase the systemic discrimination women face. When women are blamed, the systemic changes that need to occur to create change and unstuck the stagnation fail to happen. Below are some 'blaming' narratives and counter narratives that help change the system.

WOMEN DON'T APPLY

Counter Narrative:

Women do apply, just not in the same numbers as men. Fewer applicants does not mean less interest.

Women will apply to positions where they recognize a positive workplace climate, see other women, and perceive they will be valued and supported, both personally and professionally. Women will not apply if they do not perceive a viable opportunity, legitimate career pathway, or chance at obtaining the position.

Not applying is the wrong framing. Very few coaching positions, especially at higher levels, are obtained by blindly applying. Obtaining a job is about who you know and who is in your network, not simply applying.

For individuals who hire coaches, leverage and expand your network to include women. Staying within your network reproduces gendered discrimination. People hire people like them, and hire people in their network.

Seek, find, encourage, invite, ask and actively recruit women to apply. Build an authentic relationship. Contact WeCOACH, national sport organizations, and colleagues who have recently hired in that sport for names of women to actively recruit.

WOMEN CHOOSE NOT TO COACH

Counter Narrative:

The choices of women are shaped by the environment and culture around them, specifically in sport, a system that privileges men and is dominated by men. Choices of women are not made in a vacuum.

THERE AREN'T ENOUGH COMPETENT WOMEN COACHES

Counter Narrative:

It is simply not possible that as girls and women participate in record numbers in sport and become more experienced, they simultaneously become less competent. The question should be, at what point are women not entering or leaking out of the coaching pipeline? Resources and efforts should be made to fill the pipeline and plug the leaks.

Societal definitions of competence, "the best" and what it means "to coach" effectively, are layered in bias and privilege men. How are you defining coaching competence?

Women coaches exist in a system where they are not given the best opportunities to develop competencies, network, status, resources, information, and access needed to seek, occupy and maintain leadership positions.



GAME ON: WOMEN CAN COACH



MORE MEN IN COACHING MEANS MEN ARE MORE INTERESTED IN COACHING

Counter Narrative: The lack of women does not mean they are less interested. It is a symptom and reflection of the problem, which is a system that doesn't provide opportunity or value and support women.

WOMEN ARE LESS INTERESTED IN COACHING

Counter Narrative: As is proven with participation, interest is driven by opportunity. Currently women are impeded from and denied opportunity to coach. Less than half (42%) of college female athletes and very few males (2-3%) are coached by women. Men have a legitimate dual career pathway to coach both males and females, women do not. It is simply not possible that as women participate in record numbers in sport and become more experienced, they simultaneously become less interested in coaching.

WOMEN DON'T WANT TO MOVE THEIR FAMILIES

Counter Narrative: There is **no** empirical data to support this assumption. Disrupting families for a new job is hard on ALL coaches, for women and men. The question should be, what does your institution have to offer that would make a female coach want to move? Will she be valued and supported?

WOMEN CAN'T (OR DON'T WANT TO) HAVE A FAMILY AND COACH

Counter Narrative: This simply is not true. Many women are mother-coaches and balance both roles effectively. In fact, women report this dual role enriches their lives. The real issue is, how can athletic departments' and sport organizations better value and support mother-coaches?...and ALL parent-coaches.
What is good for women is good for everyone.

WOMEN DON'T ACCEPT JOB OFFERS

Counter Narrative: The question should be: Why did she *not* accept the offer? Competent female coaches are in high demand and desire to feel supported and valued both personally and professionally. Goodness of fit is an important factor in accepting a job. Women will accept jobs in positive workplace climates where they are valued, supported and fairly compensated.



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