

Women in College Coaching Report Card

ADDRESSING SYSTEMATIC CHANGE

However, simply “adding more women” is only part of the solution. The greatest target of opportunity to create positive and sustainable social change is to confront the systemic bias that permeates collegiate athletics. Women coaches—no matter the sport, institution or level of competition—face a complex and multi-level (individual, interpersonal, organizational, societal) set of barriers and bias (Hollomon, 2016; LaVoi, 2016; Sabo et al., 2016). Systemic inequalities and gender and racial bias within the context of sport are prevalent. Bias, whether it is conscious or unconscious/implicit, results in unequal treatment, evaluation, perception, and interpretation that can result in overt, gross, or micro-level aggressions due to attitudes based on the sex of an employee or group of employees—in the case of this report, women coaches. The social construction of what it means “to coach” and the stereotypical behaviors and ideologies linked with coaching, are associated with men and masculinity (assertive, tough, confident, powerful). When women coaches “coach” they are often unfairly and negatively evaluated, perceived, and interpreted compared to their male counterparts—by Athletic Directors, media, peers, parents, and athletes. One trend to watch is the increasing prevalence of student athletes alleging coach mistreatment or abuse, which may have a gender, race, and age biases that disadvantage women. Another example involving a high profile coach highlights gender bias. In a March 2019 ThinkProgress.org article, Notre Dame women’s basketball head coach Muffet McGraw stated she was “done hiring men” (Gibbs, 2019). Many harshly and swiftly criticized McGraw for being sexist and discriminatory toward men. McGraw was simply stating she will only hire female assistants moving forward because, as she pointed out, women deserve the opportunity to coach, and are not being afforded the opportunities to do so on the men’s side. In reality, McGraw was explicitly calling out a normalized hiring practice that male head coaches on the men’s side do without scrutiny, backlash, or punishment—hire assistants just like them—other men. Few, if any, would call Duke men’s basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski sexist or scrutinize him when he hires all male assistants. This double standard is an example of gender bias in action.

Based on the data, female coaches perceive gender bias very differently and feel it is more pervasive than do their male counterparts; foremost, women coaches perceive it exists, while a majority of their male colleagues do not (Sabo et al., 2016). The prevalent and systemic bias in college athletics creates an unpleasant workplace climate for many women and is one reason why women do not enter the coaching profession, are often silenced for speaking out against it, or are driven out by those in power when they call attention to injustice or discrimination. The failure to address bias, and structural and systemic inequalities are likely reasons that dramatic and statistically significant upward change in the percentage of women head coaches fails to occur. It is simply not possible that as each new generation of females becomes increasingly involved in and shaped by their sport experience, they simultaneously become less interested, less passionate, and less qualified to enter the coaching profession. *We can do better.*