



Gender bias impacts the hiring of women in football coaching positions

Prior to 1972 women held 90% of the coaching jobs for women's teams, and now they only hold 40.8%. When the pay and the power associated with these jobs increased after Title IX, men were suddenly interested. But why were they hired? It's true that men tend to be bigger and stronger than women, but coaching sports is far different than playing sports. In fact, many of the skills associated with being a great coach—leadership, communication skills, motivation skills, understanding, the ability to get to know each player—could be deemed as stereotypically female. When we think of leaders, we tend to think of men. We want someone to lead our team, our company or our country, then our experience and unconscious bias makes us gravitate toward men.

There's plenty of scientific evidence that when women who are equally qualified present themselves, they seem deficient compared to the man. Prior to Title IX, women did not have to compete with men for these jobs. When the power, prestige and pay for these jobs increased, women were left behind.

One explanation for why so few women is hired to coach men's teams is that men's and women's sports are different. The argument states that men, many of whom played the sport they coach, just understand the game better. If this is indeed true, then women should at least dominate the coaching of women's sports. As a matter of fact, they don't.

In women's football leagues, men still hold 91% of all coaching jobs at all levels. Male dominance in football can be traced back to 1921, when the Football Association (FA) excluded women from participating in organised competitive football, after it had declared them "unsuitable" for the game.

When the FA rescinded the ban in 1971, women's football was seen as lesser than men's football. Female players repeatedly experienced gender discrimination and stereotyping. The president of FIFA was even accused of being sexist in 2004, after urging women to wear skimpier football kits to increase the popularity of women's football.

Perhaps it is no wonder there are so few qualified female coaches when there is resistance from the start. Chelsea Ladies coach Emma Hayes, the only female manager in England's top division of the Women's Super League (WSL), says that she encountered sexism while doing her Uefa B Licence aged 17:

"Women coaches are more likely to stay in the women's game so it's important we have role models. If there is no opportunity to coach and be involved in the game, you will find fewer taking up that challenge."

On the international scene, there are also signs that the issue is being tackled. Fifa has created a rule for women's Under-17s tournaments where teams must have female coaches in charge. Part of the problem is the existing "gendered sport coaching environment", which makes it difficult for women to come through. Sports coaching was generally male dominated, so it is less attractive for women to aspire to these roles and inspire other young females.

Benefits for having women in coaching positions included role modelling, challenging the stereotypes about women and leadership, and demonstrating coaching is an option for women.

It is also important for males, as a woman coach teaches boys to respect women in leadership positions. There are a vast number of challenges for women becoming coaches, these included gender stereotyping i.e., femininity and leadership versus heroic masculinity, complexities of women's lives when having a family, lack of support networks, female confidence levels and gender imbalance at governance level.

