

Are Head Coaches in Intercollegiate Athletics Perceived as Masculine? An Evaluation of Gender Stereotypes and the Effect of Sexism on Intercollegiate Coaches

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Abstract This study focused on determining if gender stereotypes existed in intercollegiate athletics in relation to coaches, and if the discourse was enveloped within sexist beliefs. Specifically, we tested the relationship modern sexism had with traits ascribed to successful head coaches. Results indicated no gender differences in the traits ascribed to head coaches. Further, modern sexism did not moderate the relationship between gender and masculinity scores for the head coach. This research study bolsters previous research in that we found no gender differences in ascribed leadership traits, and expands the literature about sexism in sport.

Keywords Sexism · Coaches · Gender roles · Leadership stereotypes

Introduction

Could an individual's sexist beliefs affect her/his judgment towards who (s)he feels would be a successful head coach? Research suggests one's sexist beliefs indicated an individual's gender stereotypes about managers (see [17]). This association between leadership traits and sexism has found support in numerous contexts—especially in masculine organizations (e.g., sport entities)—engendering the “think manager, think male” stereotype (for a review see [11] or [18]). Given coaches may be viewed as a leadership role in sport organizations, the attributes ascribed to them may be similar to leadership attributes suggesting the “think coach, think male”

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stereotype is plausible. Therefore, this study focused on determining the traits attributed to coaches, and next, if one's sexist beliefs determine their agreement with gender stereotypes about intercollegiate coaches.

Evidence in intercollegiate athletics may support the “think coach, think male” stereotype. Similar to management positions, the majority of top positions in intercollegiate athletics are occupied by men; manifesting a masculine gender norm for the position [11]. Women have been limited to just 21.3% athletic director positions, and 42.4% of women's teams have a woman as head coach [1], which has received voluminous attention in the literature (see [8] for a review). Additionally, Kennedy's [16] gender report card for intercollegiate athletics has further outlined women's underrepresentation in coaching positions. Women's struggle to attain leadership positions in intercollegiate athletics may facilitate gender stereotypes development, and generate gender expectations of coaches and administrators alike; preventing future women from attaining head coaching or administrative positions.

Researchers have bolstered the notion that gender stereotypes may impact an individual's perceptions of coaches. For instance, Shaw and Hoerber [26] outlined the numerous stereotypes towards women in the coaching profession (e.g., expected work-family conflict), and that men are perceived to possess a “naturalness” to leadership positions. In their study, they concluded masculinity was associated with influential coaching and senior management roles; whereas, femininity was associated with teaching and regional development roles. Thus, we hypothesized masculine traits would be congruent with traits ascribed to successful head coaches.

Hypothesis 1 Traits ascribed to successful head coaches will be more consistent with masculine traits as compared to feminine traits.

The second portion of this study centers on determining if the gender discourse is encompassed in sexist beliefs. Sexism has traditionally been defined as a unitary hostility towards women (e.g., [27]), which used to be expressed overtly in the past, but now, social and political changes forces individuals to express them in covert ways [30]. Modern sexism represents unequal and unfair treatment of women that is not recognized by people because it is perceived to be normative, and does not appear unusual [29]. This contemporary form of sexism (i.e., modern sexism) has many negative consequences for women in the workplace, including lower employment recommendation and evaluations of women for leadership positions [17]. Furthermore, researchers have found sexism predicts the ascription of negative feminine traits, positive masculine traits, but not positive feminine traits to different targets, and endorses women placed in traditional gender roles (e.g., homemaker; [15]. Similarly, an individual's modern sexism level predicts her/his use of gender-biased nouns [7].

Researchers have found sexist beliefs have negative consequences for women in the workplace. Sexism predicts the toleration of sexual harassment [19], and the employment and education curriculum decisions one makes [12]. Perceived sexist beliefs in a supervisor reduces a woman's performance [9], and predicts perceived treatment discrimination among coaches [3]. This relationship is mediated by increased self-doubt, increased preoccupations, and a decrease in self-esteem [9]. Finally, individuals high in sexism believed biological differences between men and

women were the cause of sex segregation as opposed to discrimination, socialization, and prejudice against women [Swim et al. 28].

This line of inquiry may suggest managerial stereotypes may be moderated by an individual's sexism level. For instance, men who possess less traditional stereotypes about women may not be as likely to view leadership as a masculine role. Similarly, women who subscribe to modern sexism may perceive leadership as a masculine role.

Hypothesis 2 The relationship between gender and masculine stereotypes will be moderated by the individuals denoted sexism level.

The literature on managerial selection and sexism demonstrates a preference for a male leader. Masser and Abrams [17] research study bolsters this assertion. In their research study, they found individuals who denoted higher sexism levels were more likely to endorse a man for employment in a masculine occupation, whereas, women received lower employment recommendations. Therefore, we expected individuals who indicated higher levels of sexism to prefer a man as a coach compared to preferring a woman or having no preference.

Hypothesis 3 Respondents who denoted higher sexism levels will prefer a man as a head coach compared to either having no preference or preferring a woman.

Research Method

Participants

This study utilized a sample of undergraduate students at a major university in the Southwestern United States who were participating in physical activity classes. This sample selection method allowed for a representative sample of the entire university population. Moreover, we wanted to ensure the sample had previous competitive sport experience, and this sampling method allowed us to target individuals who were active in sports and feasibly developed stereotypes about successful coaches. Each student was allowed to voluntarily complete the survey during class time, and we offered no reward for completing the questionnaire. In total, 116 responded to the survey (male = 76, female = 40); no participants declined the opportunity to complete the questionnaire. The majority of the respondents indicated they participated in organized sports (yes = 97, no = 19) suggesting they may have established stereotypes about coaches through their experiences. The respondents represented 57 majors offered at the university and all ten academic colleges were represented. In terms of race, the participants in the study were mostly white ($n = 94$), followed by Hispanic ($n = 14$), Asian ($n = 5$), African American ($n = 2$) and Native American ($n = 1$).

Procedures

Participants were approached during class time with the instructor's permission. They were handed a paper survey and asked to complete the questionnaire

voluntarily. There were no incentives used to elicit responses. The questionnaire contained the modern sexism scale, the Bem's sex roles inventory, and demographic questions. Participants were first asked to respond to the Bem's sex role inventory as they would respond about themselves. Next, utilizing Bem's sex role inventory, they were asked to indicate their judgments of a successful head coach. Finally, participants were asked to denote their sexism levels by responding to the modern sexism scale, and then complete the demographics portion.

Instrument

To measure the respondent's masculinity and femininity, and the gender attributes they ascribe to successful head coaches, the Bem's short sex role inventory [5] was utilized. This scale consisted of 30 items. Ten items measured masculinity (e.g., aggressive, independent, assertive), ten items measured femininity (e.g., affectionate, sympathetic, tender), and ten items were filler items (e.g., conceited, reliable, conventional). The respondents were asked to indicate on a seven-point scale the level they felt each item is true about themselves (1 = Never or almost never true to 7 = Always or almost always true), and then, denote how they felt the characteristics described a successful head coach. Research utilized the Bem's short sex role inventory that indicated the reliability of the masculinity ($\alpha = .74$) and femininity items ($\alpha = .86$).

The modern sexism scale was utilized to measure the respondents' sexism level. Swim et al. [28] developed the modern sexism scale to measure the perceptions of sexism and equality in the wider society. The scale consists of eight items, and asks respondents to indicate their agreement level on a seven point (1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree) Likert-type scale. Five of the eight items are reversed coded (e.g., Discrimination against women is no longer a problem in the United States), and the remainder measured modern sexism directly (e.g., Women often miss out on good jobs due to sexual discrimination). Previous research indicated the modern sexism scale was reliable ($\alpha = .84$). Alternative measures for sexism may add to the validity of this study's findings, however, issues of respondent fatigue prevented the use of more than one measure. Additionally, using more than one scale may enhance issues of collinearity (see, [14]). Finally, a single item was used to determine the respondent's coaching preference ("What gender head coach would you prefer to play for?").

Data Analysis

Once reliability was determined for each scale, mean scores and correlations were calculated using the different scales: personal Bem's scores, successful head coach Bem's scores, respondent's gender, and sexism level. The respondent's mean score for modern sexism and BEM's sex role inventory were utilized in the data analysis.

To test the first hypothesis—traits ascribed to successful head coaches will be more consistent with masculine traits as compared to feminine traits—a paired sample *t* test was employed. The mean Bem's scores for successful head coaches were compared to determine if the masculine scores were significantly higher than the femininity scores.

Hypothesis 2 stated traits ascribed to successful head coaches will be more consistent with masculine traits as compared to feminine traits. To test this hypothesis, we followed Barron and Kenny's [4] steps for moderated regression. First, we calculated an interaction term for the two main effect variables: modern sexism and gender. We then loaded the head coach's masculine mean score as the dependent variable. The number of women head coaches who the participant played for, and the personal femininity and masculinity means scores were loaded as controls to account for any gender identity effects. The respondent's gender and sexism score were loaded into the second step. Finally, the interaction term was loaded in the final step, and was evaluated to indicate if moderation was present.

The final hypothesis put forward that the respondent who denoted higher sexism levels would prefer a man as a head coach compared to either having no preference or preferring a woman. In order to test this hypothesis, a multinomial regression was calculated. The head coach preference (no preference, preference for a woman, and preference for a man) denoted by the respondents was loaded as the dependent variable. The respondent's modern sexism was loaded as an independent variable. The analysis was appropriate given the categorical nature of the dependent variable.

Results

Cronbach's alphas were calculated, and determine the personal masculinity score ($\alpha = .86$) and femininity scores ($\alpha = .89$), head coach's masculinity ($\alpha = .75$) and femininity scores ($\alpha = .86$), and the modern sexism scores ($\alpha = .72$) were reliable. Next, mean scores were calculated for each scale and a correlations table was calculated and is presented in Table 1. Results indicated (a) gender was correlated with the individual's personal femininity ($r^2 = -.25, p < .01$) and modern sexism scores ($r^2 = -.24, p < .01$), (b) personal femininity scores were related to the head coach's masculinity ($r^2 = .19, p < .05$) and femininity scores ($r^2 = .48, p < .01$), and the individual's modern sexism score ($r^2 = .27, p < .01$), (c) the head coach's masculinity score was correlated with the individual's modern sexism score

Table 1 Means and correlations

	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender ^a	.66 (.48)	–	0.11	–0.25**	–0.02	–0.06	–0.24**
2. Personal masculinity	4.90 (.98)		–	–.02	0.16	0.01	–0.08
3. Personal femininity	5.13 (.91)			–	0.19*	0.48**	0.27**
4. Head coach masculinity	5.74 (.73)				–	0.11	0.25**
5. Head coach femininity	4.54 (.96)					–	0.22*
6. Personal modern sexism	4.42 (.77)						–

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

^a Coded as 0 = Female, 1 = Male

Table 2 Moderated regression analysis to determine if modern sexism moderates the relationship between gender and perceived head coach's masculinity

Variables	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	β
Step 1			
Personal masculinity	0.01	0.07	0.14
Personal femininity	0.16	0.08	0.20
# of Women head coaches	-0.03	0.05	0.05
Step 2			
Personal masculinity	0.12	0.07	0.17
Personal femininity	0.12	0.08	0.14
# of Women head coaches	-.03	0.06	-0.05
Gender	0.12	0.20	0.08
Modern sexism	0.32	0.11	0.31
Step 3			
Personal masculinity	0.12	0.07	0.17
Personal femininity	0.12	0.09	0.15
# of Women head coaches	-.03	0.07	-.05
Gender	0.13	0.20	0.08
Modern Sexism	0.30	0.13	0.29
Gender by Sexism	-0.02	0.08	-0.03

$R^2 = .06$ for Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .08$ for Step 2 ($p < .05$), $\Delta R^2 = .00$ for Step 3 ($p > .05$)

($r^2 = .25$, $p < .01$), and (d) the head coaches femininity score was related to the individual's modern sexism score ($r^2 = .22$, $p < .05$).

Results of the paired sample *t* test demonstrated support for the first hypothesis. The paired sample *t* test indicated the mean scores are significantly different ($t = 11.44$, $p < .001$). Evaluating the mean scores determined the head coach's masculinity score ($M = 5.74$, $SD = .73$) was higher than the head coach's femininity score ($M = 4.54$, $SD = .96$).

The moderated regression analysis did not support the second hypothesis. The control variables (personal femininity and masculinity scores, and the number of women head coaches) explained 5.0% of the variance. Once gender and modern sexism were loaded, the model explained 13.7% of the variance, and the change in *R*-square was significant ($\Delta R^2 = .08$, $p < .05$); however, the change in *R*-square was not significant once the interaction term was loaded into the model ($\Delta R^2 = .00$, $p > .05$). Although the change in the model was not significant, modern sexism remained as a significant predictor ($\beta = .29$, $p < .05$) of the head coach's masculinity score. The results illustrated the remaining variables in the model did not significantly predict the head coach's masculinity score. Full results are depicted in Table 2.

Multinomial logistic regression results supported the third hypothesis. Results indicated modern sexism was strongly predictive of head coaching preferences, $\chi^2 = 13.86$, $p < .01$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .16$. A full display of the results are presented in Table 3, with preference for a man head coach as the reference category. Results indicated respondents who denoted higher levels of sexism were more likely to prefer a man head coach compared to either no preference, or preference for a woman head coach.

Table 3 The influence of modern sexism on the respondent's gender preference for a head coach

Preference	<i>B</i>	SE	Wald	Exp(<i>B</i>)
No preference	1.10	1.66	8.47	2.99
Prefer a woman	1.77	0.64	7.77	5.87

All values significant at the $p < .01$ level. Reference category is preference for a man as head coach

Discussion

Given the study's exploratory nature, this study developed the foundation for future research in two areas. First, in terms of leadership attributes, there has been competing evidence in the literature evaluating leadership stereotypes. For instance, Schein [20] suggested females' perception towards the leadership position has shifted to an androgynous view; whereas, Powell et al. [18] found no gender differences in the ascription of masculine traits to leadership positions. The results supported the first hypothesis and bolsters Powell's findings in that no gender differences existed in the ascription of masculine or feminine traits to head coaches. The results do, however, suggest masculine attributes were considered more consistent with head coaching positions: the second area in which this study moves the literature forward.

Thus far, literature on leadership stereotypes has shown the "think manager, think male" phenomenon exists cross culturally [24]. Research has demonstrated the phenomenon's presence in Germany, the UK [21], China and Japan [23]. Further, the literature has found evidence among middle managers [6], management students [22], and different managerial contexts [10]. This study begins to illustrate masculine traits are more congruent with leadership positions (e.g., head coach) in intercollegiate athletics than feminine traits.

The intercollegiate sports context is similar to previous research because sport organizations are perceived as masculine [25]. However, it differs theoretically because it shows women are not expected to be successful coaches. Although the findings challenge Eagly and Karau's [11] assertion that women may be expected to be better coaches, feminine stereotypes may be more congruent with coaching traits (e.g., supportive) in other contexts. Intercollegiate athletics is a male dominated profession [26], and therefore, gender stereotypes may be ingrained into the social fabric surrounding athletics. Other environments with less emphasis on gender stereotypes may allow for feminine traits to be associated with good coaching, or even, good leadership.

Although the second hypothesis was not supported, the results illustrated sexism plays a role in gender stereotypes. Sexism did not moderate the relationship between gender and leadership stereotypes; however, sexism was the only significant relationship in the model. This suggests sexism predicts masculine leadership stereotypes. Previous research has concluded sexism predicts the negative evaluation of women as managers and lower employment recommendations of women for managerial positions [17]. The current research study demonstrates the same effect for women in the coaching profession. This may be a plausible explanation for the continuing

decline of women in head coaching positions in intercollegiate athletics [1], and a potential reason for the increase in hiring men to coach women's teams [2]; however, further research should be conducted using alternative samples for generalizability.

This finding also continues the work of Fielding-Lloyd and Mean [13]. In their qualitative study, they evaluated gendered discourse in English Soccer. They found parallels between the discourses presented by their respondents and modern sexist ideals. For instance, 15 of the 27 respondents viewed affirmative action (e.g., promotion of women coaches in soccer) as favoritism and unfair opportunities for women because they would lead to a woman's promotion over a more qualified man [13]. This notion was bolstered with one respondent's discussion who indicated affirmative action practices were unfair because it did not guarantee the best person for the position. Moreover, another respondent possessed similar distaste for the program, but avoided being overtly sexist by softening his language into modern sexist discourse. Similar to the Fielding-Lloyd and Mean's [13] study, the current study demonstrates the power modern sexist beliefs have in the realm of sports.

The third hypothesis in this study was supported. Results indicated higher levels of sexism predicted the respondent's preference for a man as head coach. This finding is important for two reasons. Thus far limited research has demonstrated the implications sexism has in sport organizations. The current study shows sexist beliefs affects gender preferences for head coaches. Individuals who possessed high sexist beliefs preferred to play for a man, which may lead individuals to be inclined to hire a man when making hiring decisions for coaching. Coupled with the prediction of gender stereotypes, sexism may be a plausible explanation for the hiring practices of women as head coaches.

In summary, this research study sought to determine if gender stereotypes surround college coaches, and if this discourse is enveloped within sexist beliefs. The study's results indicated coaches were ascribed higher levels of masculine characteristics compared to feminine characteristics. Additionally, this study displayed evidence to suggest sexism does not moderate the relationship between gender and coaching stereotypes. However, sexism scores were positively and significantly related to masculine scores; suggesting modern sexism levels are a good predictor of gender stereotypes toward coaches.

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