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A 40-year Examination of the Experiences of Women in Coaching

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ABSTRACT

Since the passage of Title IX in 1972, the number of female coaches in the United States has grown due to an increased number of female sports offered at the collegiate level. However, the percent of female collegiate sports teams coached by women has dropped from 90% to 42.9% (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012) suggesting that female coaches are not benefiting from the growth in women's athletic opportunities. The purpose of this project was to examine research articles published within the past 40 years that focused on female coaches to understand the female coaches' experiences.

The project collected research articles about the female coaches' experiences published between 1972 and 2012 using search terms such as women, coaching, athletics, sports, and experience in multiple databases. A total of 38, peer reviewed articles focused on the female coaches' experiences were identified. All articles were read, and categorized according to year published, level and location of sport, publisher source, research methodology, demographic information and the type of coaching experiences documented (positive, negative, both or neutral).

Between 1972 and 1982, no research about the female coach experience was found in the literature. The earliest research matching the search criteria found was published in 1988, 16 years after the passage of Title IX. Between the years of 1983 and 1992, 13% of the identified articles were published and 15.7 % were published between 1993 and 2002. The largest percent of the articles identified, was published between 2003 and 2012 at 71%.

Of the 38 articles, only eight percent of the articles focused exclusively on positive coaching experiences such as mentorships, shared experiences, and workshops (Bruening & Dixon, 2008; Cormier, 2011; Croxon, 2009). Thirty-seven percent documented coaching negative experiences such as sexism, homophobia, marginalization, difficulty recruiting, and work and family conflict (e.g., Kamphoff, 2010; Kerr, 2009; Kilty, 2006; Norman, 2010b; Theberge, 1998). The majority, 47.3% discussed both positive and negative coaching experiences (e.g., Demers & Aduet, 2007; Durand-Bush, Collin, & McNeil; 2012; Norman, 2010a). Experiences that were not specifically negative or positive were categorized as neutral. Neutral experiences made up the remaining eight percent of the articles and documented experiences on gender differences, work experiences, commitment, and family influences (Callary & Werthner, 2011; Cunningham & Sagas, 2003; Doherty & Casey, 1996).

After examining the research articles, the majority of the research found focused on the experiences of female head coaches working with collegiate and elite athletes. While this information is important and valuable, it is imperative that all the female coaches are represented proportionally in the research as their experiences could shed light on valuable information regarding the decline of female coaches.



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Based on the results of the project, the number of research articles published about the female coaches' experiences has slowly increased since 1988. While there has been growth in the area of female coaches' experiences, there are gaps present in the research. In order to help fill these gaps, future research should examine the experiences of lower level coaches (including volunteer coaches) and minority coaches.



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Author's note

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