

2018

# The Harsh Reality: A Feminist Perspective on the Experiences of Women Coaching Male Athletes

Emilee Shearer

*Minnesota State University, Mankato*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/etds>

 Part of the [Gender and Sexuality Commons](#), [Social Psychology and Interaction Commons](#), and  
the [Sports Sciences Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Shearer, Emilee, "The Harsh Reality: A Feminist Perspective on the Experiences of Women Coaching Male Athletes" (2018). *All Theses, Dissertations, and Other Capstone Projects*. 797.  
<https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/etds/797>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, and Other Capstone Projects at Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses, Dissertations, and Other Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato.

The Harsh Reality: A Feminist Perspective on the Experiences of Women Coaching Male  
Athletes

By

Emilee T. Shearer

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

In

Department of Communication Studies

Minnesota State University

Mankato, Minnesota

July, 2017

8/5/17

The Harsh Reality: A Feminist Perspective on the Experiences of Women Coaching Male

Athletes

Emilee Shearer

This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student's committee.

Christopher Brown

Advisor

Kristen Treinen

Committee Member

Suzannah Armentrout

Committee Member

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Christopher Brown, for guiding me throughout this project and pushing me to become more of a critical scholar. I would also like to thank my other two committee members, Dr. Kristen Treinen and Dr. Suzannah Armentrout for inspiring me and being patient with me throughout this project.

Additionally, thank you to my participants for their willingness to be interviewed for this study. I appreciate your honesty to make this study possible.

Additionally, I would like to thank my friends and family for giving me the unconditional support and encouragement throughout my master's degree and thesis project. More specifically, thank you Cristy, Que, and Channing for helping me become a more critical scholar through our engaging conversations. I appreciate you all for showing me the love and support that I needed to be successful. Thank you to my sister, Laura Shearer, for being my role model, for inspiring me to pursue higher education and studying matters in the sport field. Furthermore, thank you to my parents, Cary and Holly Shearer, for believing in me and for always pushing me in my academic pursuits since middle school; but most importantly, thank you for your unconditional love. Finally, thank you to my grandparents, Kathleen and Richard Duis and Colleen Shearer, and all of my other friends and family members for helping me become who I am today and for always believing in me. I am forever grateful for each and every one of you.

## **Abstract**

Emilee Shearer, a student in the Department of Communication Studies at Minnesota State University, Mankato is the author of the study titled, *The Harsh Reality: A Feminist Perspective on the Experiences of Women Coaching Male Athletes* in July 2017.

This study, using a qualitative approach, examines the impact of patriarchy on females who coach a male-dominated sports team. The purpose of the study is to identify and examine the experiences of females who coach a male-dominated sports team in order to have a better understanding of the impact of the gender binary and patriarchy in the sport field. A qualitative approach was used in this study to gain an understanding of the individual and commonality of the experiences of women coaches. There were five female coaches interviewed; one was a high school basketball coach, two were high school football coaches, one was a coach at the collegiate level, and the last one was a coach at the professional level. The data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis to find patterns and themes across the interview responses to determine the results of the study. The study had four findings: (1) female coaches are often questioned of their qualifications through the public, (2) female coaches experience and hear derogatory comments such as sexual harassment remarks, (3) female coaches have limited problems with their male athletes and (4) female coaches have had a great experience overall coaching the male athletes. This study contributes to the limited research examining the experiences of females who coach male athletes and how they manage patriarchy while coaching. Therefore, an implication of this study is that it provides insights on how patriarchy impacts females who coach male-dominated sports.

## Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	7
Purpose of the Study .....	10
Objective of the Study .....	12
Precis of Chapter.....	14
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	15
Feminism and Sport .....	15
Masculinity in Sport.....	16
Gender Equality in Male-Dominate Fields and Leadership Roles .....	25
Existing Research on Female Coaches .....	27
Negative Experiences of Female Coaches.....	28
Athletes’ Perceptions on Female Coaches.....	32
Summary.....	34
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY .....	35
Participants.....	35
Data Collection .....	36
Interview Method.....	36
Data Analysis .....	37
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS .....	38
Challenges Experienced by Females Coaching Male Athletes.....	38
Questioning Female Coaches’ Qualifications.....	39
Derogatory Comments Experienced by Females Coaching Male Athletes.....	45

Female Coaches Experience No Challenges with Male Athletes .....	47
Coaching Male Athletes has been a Great Experience for Female Coaches .....	50
Summary .....	54
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION .....	56
Experiences of Females Coaching Male Athletes .....	57
The Impact of Patriarchy on Female Coaches .....	58
Implications of the Study .....	59
Limitations of the Study.....	61
Appendix.....	63
References.....	64

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

On January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016, the Buffalo Bills made history by hiring the National Football League's (NFL) first full-time female coach, Kathryn Smith. Smith was hired as the Bills' special teams quality control coach. She has a strong background in sports leading to this point in her career. Smith worked as a statistician for her high school football team at Christian Brothers Academy in Syracuse, New York. She earned a degree in Sport Management at St. John's University, where she was a team manager for their football team. She also held a game-day and special events internship with the New York Jets. Once Smith had graduated from college, she was officially hired as a player personnel assistant and then finally, an assistant to then-head coach of the Jets, Rex Ryan. When Ryan left for the Buffalo Bills, he hired Smith to the same position (Perez, 2016).

As Smith was the first woman to become a NFL football coach, she quickly gained attention from people across the nation. She stated that she was unsure of why she was getting so much attention, since there are women in higher positions within the sport industry like Christine Driessen, Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer of ESPN and Kim Ng, Executive and Senior Vice-President for Baseball Operations with Major League Baseball (Belzer, 2015). In an interview with *Sports Illustrated*, Smith stated the following quote after being asked if it is tough to work in a male-dominated sport like the NFL:

There are a lot of women who work in professional sports. There are a lot of women who work in higher positions, all across sports, and in football. One of our owners is a female [Kim Pegula]. And there are women who work in positions where they deal with players all the time: trainers, P.R. staff, football administration, doing contracts. That kind of stuff. So I think the perception that I'm the only woman interacting with these guys is

not accurate at all. The way I look at it is there are woman who hold much more prominent positions that deal with players on teams. More so than the quality control coach. So the guys are around women. There are woman doing great things in the league and in sports in general. That's why it goes back to it being odd that I'm getting the attention, because there are women that have been and continue to do great things in sports, for teams that have males playing. (Banks, 2016, para. 15)

Gibbs (2016) agreed with Smith and stated:

Women have been breaking barriers in the coaching ranks in other sports, as well – Becky Hammon became the first woman hired as a full-time assistant coach in the NBA when she joined the San Antonio Spurs in 2014, and Nancy Lieberman followed in her footsteps when she was hired by the Sacramento Kings last summer. (para. 9)

Gibbs goes on to state that Major League Baseball (MLB) has also hired its first female coach as Justine Siegal was hired by the Oakland Athletics for the two weeks of Instructional League camp. Also, Amanda Hopkins was hired by the Seattle Mariners as the first full-time female MLB scout in 60 years (para. 10). The reason behind Smith's added attention is due to the fact that football is viewed as the ideal '*mans*' sport, being that it encompasses what is known as masculine traits such as aggression, power, and strength. Therefore, it is significant that Smith became an NFL coach being a woman in an androcentric sport within a patriarchal field. Nelson (1994) discusses how women have become competitive with men in most cases like business, academia, and sports, except for football. She explains how football is one of the few areas left in which women cannot compete with men because "male muscle matters" (p. ix). When stating "male muscle matters", Nelson is metaphorically asserting that the patriarchy of football continues to play a role in the discrimination against women within the sport. Messner and Sabo

(1994) discuss this idea further by stating “Becoming a football player fosters conformity to male-chauvinistic values. It contributes to the legitimacy of a social structure based on patriarchal power” (p. 87). Women are not typically allowed to participate in the sport of football as players or coaches due to said patriarchal power, causing Smith’s new coaching position to be a point of interest. Furthermore, every sport that a male plays for a high school or college team, a female does too, except for football. If a girl wants to play basketball, hockey, or baseball (softball), she can do so on the girls’ team for her high school or college, but if she wants to play football, there is no girls’ team available for her to do so. This lack of availability is what causes society to believe that females do not belong in the sport of football. Additionally, due to the lack of opportunity to play football, females don’t learn the techniques and skills of the game like males do, which is an important skill of a coach. In most scenarios, if a person has never participated in a sport before, they will be deemed unfit to coach said sport due to a lack of knowledge of techniques and skills. Knowing that most females have never been a part of a football team, administrators and executives will choose to hire a male instead for the coaching position, as they have most likely competed in the sport at one point in their life. Overall, the patriarchy that comes with the sport of football is what keeps females out, causing Smith’s new NFL coaching position to be significant in the androcentric sport field.

Even though women like Smith, Driessen, Ng, and Hopkins have all made significant strides in the athletic field, there is still a substantial issue in regards to gender equality for female leaders, more specifically women coaches, in the male-dominated industry. Acosta and Carpenter (2010) reported that 42.6% of all collegiate female sports teams are coached by women and even more significantly, only about 2% of men’s collegiate sports teams are coached by a woman. In other words, less than half of collegiate female sports are coached by women and

almost no collegiate male sports are coached by women. These statistics prove that there is a significantly limited amount of women in collegiate coaching positions overall because of the patriarchy in sports. The idea of being successful in sports is commonly associated with masculine traits such as power, aggressiveness, and strength. Since these are not traits commonly associated with females, they are inadvertently limited to coaching not only males but females as well. The reportedly low numbers of female coaches due to patriarchy show the importance of addressing and researching ways in which women can continue to make gains in the sport industry.

### **Purpose of the Study**

It has been noted that the athletic field benefits men as it provides them with a better opportunity of power and authority than it does for women. This is because of the pre-developed beliefs from society regarding gender (masculinity and femininity) and sport (Kamphoff, Armentrout, & Driska, 2010). Women often have negative experiences while working in the male dominant athletic industry. A few examples include: (1) women only coach less prestigious men's sports like cross country, tennis, golf, and track; (2) they experience difficulties in recruiting male athletes; (3) they have experienced hostile interactions such as sexual harassment; and (4) they have to convince society of their worth to, and more specifically men (Kamphoff, et al, 2010; Norman, 2010; Walker, & Bopp, 2010; Young, 2005). In the following quote, Kamphoff, et al (2010) discuss in further detail the ways in which women coaches have to prove their credibility to society and men in order to be taken more seriously.

Difficulty establishing credibility and respect with athletes, parents, officials, and/or community members was mentioned by almost all of the women interviewed. When describing the difficulty women who coach a men's team experience when trying to

establish credibility, a golf coach said that people believe, “She’s a woman...she doesn’t belong here...what is she doing coaching men?” (pp. 301-302)

Norman (2010) identified the reason as to why women coaches need to prove their abilities to society and the men within the sport industry. The need for establishing their worth is associated with the idea that society has been trained to believe that people within leadership roles must be masculine and authoritarian. She states: “The requirement for women to prove they are effective coaches in terms of their sport knowledge and ability to lead a team goes much deeper and is rooted in the association between men with leadership” (p. 512). Norman (2010) extends on this idea by discussing how women experience barriers while pursuing coaching positions because of the masculinity hegemony within coaching. She claims women have difficulty gaining coaching positions because of enduring “masculine traits” in coaching such as power and competitiveness, while women are associated with “feminine traits” such as emotional, weak, and passiveness. Furthermore, as gender is continued to be assigned with specific traits of masculinity and femininity, an order of dominance will remain amongst men and women. Therefore, women will always be seen as lesser because of the cultural values assigned to gender within our patriarchal society.

As research on female coaches and their overall experiences have been noted by many authors such as Kamphoff, et al (2010) and Norman (2010), it is important to understand what women coaches experience specifically while coaching male-dominated sports within the athletic field. It is important to understand experiences of female coaches because of the impact of reified gender roles on them in an androcentric culture. Since gender is expected to be acted out in a specific way with feminine or masculine traits, women are anticipated to fail while coaching men as the expected gender roles do not relate to one another. While women do not automatically fail

at coaching male athletes because of their gender, the patriarchy of the sport field leads us to believe so, impacting women who wish to coach male athletes. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to identify and examine the experiences of women head coaches of an all-males sports team within this space in order to have a better understanding of the gender binary and patriarchal impact on women in the sport field.

In order to understand the importance of examining and identifying the experiences of women head coaches, I will seek to answer the following qualitative research questions:

RQ 1: What are the experiences of female coaches who coach a male-dominated sports team?

RQ 2: How has patriarchy in the sport field impacted female coaches who coach a male-dominated sports teams?

The importance of answering these questions stems from the social and political problems currently happening in society. While there are issues of patriarchy in the sport field, similar matters occur amongst other fields and society overall. Recently, over 5 million women gathered around the world to participate in the Woman's March on January 21, 2017. As events as such happen, the word 'feminism' and the ideologies of feminists are being discussed by people with varying political viewpoints. While women have been advocating for equality within all walks of life, the activism for women in the androcentric sport is important.

### **Objective of the Study**

Previous research suggests that women experience discrimination based on gender in several ways while coaching a male sports team (Blom, Abrell, Wilson, Lape, & Halbrook, 2011; Young, 2005). For example, Blom, et al (2011) found that women experience sexual harassment and hiring discrimination as most administrators would rather hire a man to coach

males. The hiring discrimination occurs because administrators think it will be easier to hire a man to coach males as issues like sexual harassment are less likely to happen. Young (2005) discovered women experience discrimination as others (i.e. spectators, parents, other coaches etc.) do not believe the women are competent enough to coach males. While previous studies have examined the experiences women face while coaching males, there is a lack of research regarding the experiences they specifically have with men while coaching an all-male sports team and the impact patriarchy has on them.

It is important to conduct a study that fills the gap in research as there is not only a lack of women who coach men, but women are a minority in the sport industry as well. More specifically, Acosta and Carpenter (2010) reported that only a small number of about 2% of men's sports teams are coached by a woman. It is critical to raise awareness for those who have a limited voice within a society in order to potentially reduce the problem that constricts them in the first place. This particular study will assist in understanding the experiences of women who coach males in sport. The goal is to help women who currently coach or plan to coach male athletes uncover and overcome common issues they might have in their career. In this research, a selection of female coaches who coach male-dominated sports at the high school, collegiate, and professional level will be interviewed through a semi-structured interview to delve into the personal experiences of the female coaches who coach male athletes. During the interview I will ask questions on their experiences coaching female athletes, differences in coaching men and women, and on some challenges of coaching male athletes. To analyze the data from the interviews, I will use thematic analysis to find patterns and themes across the interview responses to determine the results of the study.

### **Precis of Chapter**

In chapter two, a review of the literature regarding past and current studies related to female head coaches will be conducted. In chapter three, the methodology will be discussed. The results of the study will be identified in chapter four. Lastly, chapter five will include the discussion, conclusions, and recommendations of the study.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review discusses two main ideas: (1) feminism and sport and (2) existing research on female coaches. Within the feminism and sport section, I focus on the implications that masculinity has within the sport field and how women are gaining gender equality in organizations, male-dominated fields, and leadership roles. Additionally, the negative and positive experiences of female coaches and the athletes' perceptions of female coaches is reviewed within the existing research on female coaches.

### Feminism and Sport

As previously mentioned, research on feminism and sport focuses on masculinity in the sport field, and how women are gaining equality in organizations, male-dominated fields, and leadership roles in sport. Research on masculinity in the sport field specifically discusses the problems patriarchal norms creates for women within the sport field. Beyond that, research problematizes gender trait stereotypes and the coherent gender discrimination within the sport field. More specifically, in obtaining gender equality, women engage different strategies and techniques in sport organizations. Gender inequalities in male-dominated fields and leadership roles specifically underscores the lack of opportunities for women in the sport industry.

Therefore, feminism and sport as there is a clear need for activism in the sporting field in order to create a fair playing field for women.

It is therefore imperative to examine the issues associated with assigned gender traits to further understand why feminist perspectives are needed in the sport field. Feminists have been challenging the notions of male and female traits in relation to masculinity and femininity. For example, Anders (2015) demonstrates an issue with the two specific genders of *men* and *women* and their assigned traits of *masculinity* and *femininity*. Anders states:

Clearly, theories about orientations rooted in sex binaries are problematic in that they fail to address known “gaps” (i.e., real people’s lived experiences...The ways in which women and men are operationally defined are muddy...and fail to acknowledge that what even counts as sex is contingent. (p. 1181)

Anders discussed how individually, people fall somewhere on a gender-like spectrum, challenging the gender binary. This means that there is no consistency in defining what is a feminine trait or a masculine trait as both men and women practice a variety of bodily performances. Likewise, Lorber (1994) discusses how there is more than just masculine and feminine traits but once a gender is assigned at birth, society expects that individual to act in accordance to the specific traits assigned to that gender. Lorber states, “For human beings there is no essential femaleness or maleness, femininity or masculinity, womanhood or manhood, but once gender is ascribed, the social order constructs and holds individuals to strongly gendered norms and expectations” (p. 58). This notion demonstrates the problems of associating specific traits of masculinity and femininity to individuals in expecting them to act according to gender norms. This causes issues for women coaches as they will always be subjected to the negative connotation of ‘feminine traits’ and, if they act any differently, they will still be undermined. As notions of femininity and masculinity have been challenged by feminists for years, sport feminist scholars have been discussing the notions of femininity and masculinity issues in sport.

### **Masculinity in Sport**

Ideas regarding femininity, masculinity, and sport have been discussed for years amongst those who study feminism and sport. Scholars who study femininity and masculinity in sport define the assigned masculine traits as aggressiveness, strength, power, violence, toughness, and competitiveness (Bryson, 1987; LaFontaine & Kamphoff, 2016; Messner & Sabo, 1994) while

they define the assigned feminine traits as emotionally needy, weak, and passiveness (Bryson, 1987; Norman, 2010). When femininity and masculinity has been studied in sport, it is usually criticized for the negative implications the gendered stereotypes have on the sport field (Anderson, 2008; Bryson, 1987; Messner, 1992; Messner & Sabo, 1994). Furthermore, Messner and Sabo (1994) discuss how masculinity is problematic in the sport field for both men and women. More specifically, they discuss how the problem of masculinity is embedded in the sport field through learned experiences. These learned experiences are being passed down from coaches, family, friends, and community members to the youth. As the youth become adults, they pass down these learned experiences to the next generation of youth and so on and so forth, causing masculinity to be repeatedly embedded into sports. This results in the suppression of women and feminine-like traits within the field. Messner and Sabo stated:

Male supremacists are not born, they are made, and traditional athletic socialization is a fundamental contribution to this complex social-psychological and political process.

Through sports, many males, indeed, learn to “take it” – that is, to internalize patriarchal values, to incorporate these values in their gender identity and in their views of women and society.

As kids grow up playing sports, they are taught to encompass ‘masculine’ traits such as withstanding pain both mentally and physically, aggressiveness, and strength. Bryson (1987) supports this claim by discussing how sport commends and values stereotypical masculine traits like power and violence, resulting in the exclusion of some women and men who exhibit stereotypical feminine traits. They are taught these masculine traits through well-known sayings such as “no pain, no gain”, as well as through punishment from coaches, family, and friends when the youth are unsuccessful within the sport or if they are not demonstrating the ‘necessary’

masculine traits. Lastly, these ideas are reinforced when the youth is successful in the sport after demonstrating the masculine traits.

Moreover, the youth are taught to avoid feminine traits such as emotional needs and weakness. With that notion in mind, it's significant to note the problems associated with assigned gender traits. Feminists have been challenging the notions of male and female traits in relation to masculinity and femininity. For example, Butler (1999) challenges the perceptions of male and female traits by discussing how the term both men and women perform masculinity and femininity interchangeable. She states:

When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *women* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one (p. 10).

Through this, she is discussing how there is not simply two genders with one main trait, rather a range of gender identities with a range of characteristics. Similarly, Lorber (1994) furthers this idea by discussing how people essentially fall into a range on a gender-like spectrum that can vary throughout life. More specifically, she states "Individuals may vary on many of the components of gender and may shift genders temporarily or permanently" (p. 58), indicating that there is not one specific trait that can be absolutely correlated to a specific gender or sex. Therefore, the notions and connotations behind the concepts masculine and feminine are problematic to an androcentric culture such as the sport field.

In reference to sport, Messner and Sabo (1994) discuss how some coaches will use sexual and gender insecurities as motivational tactics to push the youth athletes to be more masculine. The youth are taught to avoid femininity and to be better/stronger than women through the

common taunting “you hit like a girl”. Sabo recounts a specific example with like motivational tactics from his youth where a coach taunted a high school sophomore who lacked aggressiveness at football practice. According to Sabo, the coach decided to teach the kid “how to block, once and for all” (p. 104) by taunting him during a blocking drill. The coach taunted him by stating

How many sisters you got at home, Brian? Is it six or seven? How long did it take your mother to find out you were a boy, Brian? When did you stop wearing dresses like your sisters, Brian? Maybe Brian would like to bake cookies for us tomorrow, boys. You’re soft, Brian, maybe too soft for this team. What do you think, boys, is Brian too soft for the team?

Through consistent taunting, the football coach was installing a fear of feminine and gay stereotypes. Since this is a relatively common situation occurring within sports, youth athletes become adults with such thoughts being fixed into their mind. For example, in 2002, former running back for the NFL, Garrison Hearst, gave his perspective on Esera Tuaolo coming out as gay. Hearst stated “Aww, hell no! I don’t want any faggots on my team. I know this might not be what people want to hear, but that’s a punk. I don’t want any faggots in this locker room” (Martinez and Ahmed, 2012). Additionally, former MLB shortstop and manager, Ozzie Guillen, and former National Basketball Association (NBA) player, Kobe Bryant, have both been quoted saying “fucking faggot” when referencing someone they do not like. In 2007, Guillen called a Chicago Sun-Times columnist a “fucking faggot” and in 2011, Bryant called a referee a “fucking faggot” during a game (Martinez and Ahmed, 2012). The installation of fear of feminine and gay stereotypes causes the problems of masculinity to be repeatedly embedded into sports, which

results in the suppression of women and boys with feminine-like traits within the field. Anderson (2008) supports this idea by stating:

Because of the sexist and (often) misogynistic ethos associated with the presence of orthodox masculinity among men in team sports, the performance of femininity by men, or transgression of masculinized boundaries, is deemed highly contentious and is severely penalized (p. 261).

Anderson demonstrates how fear of the performance of feminine or gay stereotypical traits results in punishment in a patriarchal society. Furthermore, Messner (1992) discusses a related notion by explaining how young boys who are not inherently good in sports or who do not enjoy sports are more likely to be negatively judged by their peers. This is due to the fact that “sport remains the single most important element of the peer-status system of U.S. adolescent males” (p. 24). The suppression of women in sport is especially apparent within quotes from men. In 1973, George Gilder, a writer, economist, and investor, wrote “Sports are possible the single most important male rite in modern society. The woman athlete reduces the game from a religious male rite to a mere physical exercise, with some treacherous danger of psychic effect” (p. 216-218). Even though this statement was made in 1973, these thoughts still occur in today’s time. In 2011, various men debated “why women are so bad at sports” in the blog “InsideHoops.com”. The following conversation occurred between these men:

Nick Young: Why are women so bad at sports? I understand they have physical disadvantages to men that they can’t help. What I don’t understand is the skill disadvantage, in sports like football and basketball. Surely skill is something that anyone can gain by working hard enough. Why are women goal keepers so bad and why do they

have such shit basketball skills, even the pro ones? Is it all down to spatial perception hormones that women lack?

Dresta: Because they're women.

Eliteballer: They're actually really good at sports that lend themselves to their physical strengths (flexibility, agility) like gymnastics, figure skating.

Nick Young: That's true, also sports that involve sexy dancing. But things like football and basketball, why are they so inferior skill wise compared to male athletes? I'm talking sports involving athleticism.

This conversation continues with no answer to the question that was proposed. The exchanged that occurred demonstrates the lack of respect men have for women in the sport field due to the socialized belief of superiority in the male gender/masculine traits and the inferiority of female gender/feminine traits. Lorber (1994) supports this claim by stating

As a social institution, gender is a process of creating distinguishable social statuses for the assignment of rights and responsibilities. As part of a stratification system that ranks these statuses unequally, gender is a major building block in the social structures built on these unequal statuses (p. 59).

Lorber discusses the notion that gender was created and maintained to keep an order of status between the two genders, causing women to be treated unequally, just as they were being described in the comments on the blog between the male correspondents. In another blog titled "why do women's sports suck so badly?" a man named Mr. Woodson left a comment stating "If someone's gonna suck, it's probably best that it's the women". While on these blogs don't contain commentary between scholars or well-known individuals, they still hold significance as they demonstrate the conversations that occur daily between average people who talk about

gender. Furthermore, in 2015, Andy Benoit, a *Sport Illustrated* contributor, took to Twitter to say “Women’s sports in general not worth watching”. These conversations are commonly discussed amongst men who have been socialized to believe in the superiority of masculine performances in the sport field. Similarly, Hunnicutt (2009) states “although women and men live intimately, gender is a principal division among members in society” (p. 555). Hunnicutt discusses how assigned gender is a cause for inequality amongst people with different traits; and as long as the inequality continues to exist in society overall, it will remain within the sport field. Therefore, the issues of masculinity and patriarchy will continue to occur in the field as the traditions of masculine praising and feminine degrading continue to be passed down from generation-to-generation. As this continues to occur, people will continue to believe female coaches are inferior to male coaches as people will associate the female gender and assigned feminine traits as subordinate to the male gender and assigned masculine traits within the androcentric culture.

### **Gaining Gender Equality**

While there are issues of patriarchy in the sport field, similar issues occur in leadership positions amongst every other fields. In the recent event of the Woman’s March of January 21, 2017, the word *feminism* is being discussed by people from various communities and with divergent political stances. Feminism can be broadly defined as the activism of women’s rights for equality. Over the years, feminism has changed from first wave feminism, to second wave feminism, and finally the third wave feminism or feminism of today. First wave feminism focused on the advancements in women’s suffrage and legal rights, the second wave feminism involved the experience of women with a career, family, and sexual oriented focus, and finally, third wave feminism involves various areas of activism (Aune & Redfern, 2013, p. xi). Aune and Redfern explain the idea of third wave feminism or feminism of today as “diverse and

vibrant...with something for everyone to get passionate about and a smorgasbord of opportunities for activism” (p. xi). In this context, the Aune and Redfern define feminism as a form of activism that everyone can become involved with to fight for an abundance of causes. As people of such have been advocating for various forms of equality, such activism is important for women in the androcentric sport field and in leadership positions.

Feminist research has examined the ways in which women could potentially gain gender equality in leadership roles. Having an understanding of how women are gaining equality in leadership roles across all organizations and fields is significant as women are a token in leadership roles within the sport field. For example, 42.6% of all collegiate female sports teams and only 2% of men’s collegiate sports teams are coached by a woman (Acosta and Carpenter, 2010). Therefore, women do not currently have equality in leadership positions within the sport industry. Taneja, Pryor, and Oyler (2012) discuss the how organizations should incorporate techniques of retention and promotion of women leaders in the workplace in order to gain gender equality. Taneja et al specifically state that organizations need to promote women to leadership positions in order to gain gender equality across all levels of the organization. They also believe that gaining gender equality by promoting retention rates through the technique of “work-life balance” (p. 48). Work-life balance policies involve the idea that work and life, such as family/children, should be balanced equally for employees, more specifically female employees. In reference to work-life balance, Taneja, et al (2012) specifically state:

Promoting a work-life balance initiative will empower and motivate women. Such empowerment and motivation are directly related to employee satisfaction, and employee satisfaction is related to the potential for organizational success. Organizations that

implement empowerment and gender equality initiative will be better positioned to compete in an increasingly competitive market. (p. 50)

Taneja et al mention that organizations do need to take into consideration what employees recognize as “life” priorities as each employee has a diverse background, which results in different views and priorities. While Taneja et al (2012) identifies techniques to gaining gender equality, Elkhof (2012) discusses the negative effects of believing that work-life balance policies will lead to gender equality. Elkhof specifically critique three techniques: knowledge work, information and communication technology (ICT), and work-life balance policies. Knowledge work is defined as “economic production in which immaterial resources such as talent, knowledge, creativity, communication and presentation skills are the key resource” (Elkhof, 2012, 9). Similarly, Elkhof defines ICT as “economic activity to be undertaken in relative independence from the traditional material infrastructure of production such as machines, factories or office buildings” (p. 11). Elkhof concludes that knowledge work, ICT, and work-life balance policies assist in the advancement of gaining gender equality for women by creating more flexibility within the work place. As flexibility in the workplace increases, women have more opportunities to participate in tasks, such as additional work projects, which can result in advancements within their career. However, each technique has negative effects that can hinder women from participating and advancing due to their gender. For example, there are weaknesses in knowledge work as the idea requires strong networks, which women lack in male-dominated fields such as the sport industry. ICT has weaknesses as it involves “extended geographical and temporal availability” (Elkhof, 2012, p. 15) that workers may struggle to have based on their life responsibilities. Lastly, work-life balance policies have negative effects as women are seen as uncommitted to their careers when they choose to use the policy. It’s critical to understand both

the positives and negatives of the techniques being used to increase gender equality in leadership positions and androcentric fields. The previously discussed feminist perspectives on gender equality in male-dominated fields and leadership roles assist in providing information on reasons why women are marginalized in sport and coaching positions, as well as techniques that may be used to promote gender equality in the sport field. Furthermore, my study will take the previous research into consideration while examining the experiences of female coaches.

### **Gender Equality in Male-Dominate Fields and Leadership Roles**

Women are essentially excluded from the sport field as coaches due to gender discrimination. Existing feminist research discusses the ways in which women are excluded from the “man’s world” or “androcentric cultures,” one of the original scholars discussing this particular concept is Charlotte Perkins Gilman. In 1911, Gilman wrote the book titled *The Man-Made World or our Androcentric Culture* discussing the ways in which men have dominated and masculinized cultural activities, including sport. She argues that the masculinization of the various cultural activities fosters exclusionary practices of women from such actions that results in a ‘disproportionately divided’ field (p. 108). Gilman explains that the monopolization of sport has occurred over the years as a result of: (1) the way society has socialized people to raise their children based on gender and (2) the idea that sport was established by and for men. Discussing how child-rearing influences the monopolization of sport, Gilman (1911) states:

Beyond the continuous dolls and their continuous dressing, we provide for our little girls tea sets and kitchen sets, doll's houses, little work-boxes—the imitation tools of their narrow trades. For the boy there is a larger choice. We make for them not only the essentially masculine toys of combat—all the enginery of mimic war; but also the models of human things, like boats, railroads, wagons. For them, too, are the comprehensive toys

of the centuries, the kite, the top, the ball. As the boy gets old enough to play the games that require skill, he enters the world-lists, and the little sister, left inside, with her everlasting dolls, learns that she is "only a girl," and "mustn't play with boys—boys are so rough!" She has her doll and her tea set. She "plays house." If very active she may jump rope, in solitary enthusiasm, or in combination of from two to four. Her brother is playing games. From this time on he plays the games of the world. (pp. 111-112)

Gilman comments that the "sporting page" in news print should be labeled "the Man's Page" in order to correctly reflect the monopolization and masculinization of the sport industry. Sport media reinforces that the idea success in sports depends on enacting masculinity because of the monopolization and masculinization of the sport industry (Hardin & Greer, 2009; Messner, 2002). Gilman (1911) attests to this idea that sport was established by and for men, and therefore, women are inherently excluded from the cultural activity. She states:

In games of skill we have a different showing. Most of these are developed by and for men; but when they are allowed, women take part in them with interest and success. In card games, in chess, checkers, and the like, in croquet and tennis, they play, and play well if well-trained. Where they fall short in so many games, and are so wholly excluded in others, is not for lack of human capacity, but for lack of masculinity. Most games are male. In their element of desire to win, to get the prize, they are male; and in their universal attitude of competition they are male, the basic spirit of desire and of combat working out through subtle modern forms. (pp. 113-114)

In other words, Gilman expresses that women have the knowledge and mental ability to be successful in activities like sports but remain unsuccessful in competition against men. This is because sport has been created by and for men and therefore, has been masculinized by society,

hindering women and boys with feminine-like traits. Similarly, de Vries (2015) conducted a study on gender equality in leadership positions using a feminist qualitative research perspective. de Vries' results corresponded with Gilman's ideas regarding the masculinization of activities. de Vries studied how the masculinization of activities translates to the masculinization of leadership positions in careers. de Vries' (2015) concluded that men are situated to be successful and powerful while women are debilitated because of the expectations society has applied to gender (p. 21). de Vries comments that "men undoubtedly appear well positioned to bring about change because of their positional power and the advantages conferred by their gender" (p. 33). She argues that men gain positions of leadership and authority because of their identified gender and the way society views men as more competent and powerful in leadership positions. Therefore, men are seen as more competent in coaching positions, causing challenges for female coaches who are always in direct competition with male coaches.

### **Existing Research on Female Coaches**

The following analyzes both the negative and positive experiences of female coaches, as well as athletes' perceptions on female coaches. There is a lack of common findings within the literature as there are differences in the experiences and perceptions of female coaches. The first two segments incorporate literature that validates how some women have negative experiences while other women have positive experiences. The last section contains research that have three separate findings: (1) athletes believe men are better coaches than women; (2) athletes believe women are better coaches than men; and (3) athletes have no preference between men and women coaches.

## **Negative Experiences of Female Coaches**

There have been numerous studies examining the experiences of female head coaches. Previous research examining female head coaches suggest that women experience discrimination based on gender in several ways while coaching a male sports team (Blom, Abrell, Wilson, Lape, & Halbrook, 2011; Walker, & Bopp, 2010; Young, 2005). For example, Blom, et al (2011) found that women experience sexual harassment and hiring discrimination. Additionally, it was concluded that female head coaches are more likely to coach sports like cross-country, track and field, golf, and tennis (Kamphoff, Armentrout, & Driska, 2010; Kane & Stangle, 1991; LaFontaine, & Kamphoff, 2016; Reade, Rodgers, & Norman, 2009) and are more likely to have lower salaries and issues recruiting male athletes (Kamphoff, et al, 2010; Young, 2005). It was also found that women find it difficult to obtain jobs coaching men because of a lack of established networks. Since male coaches are well established in the sport, there is a lack of female mentors and networks available for women seeking head coaching jobs. As Walker and Bopp (2010) state

There are simply not enough women coaching in men's college basketball to provide an old girls' club. Thus, there is still a dearth of women available to act as mentors and to open doors for other women in men's basketball. This lack of mentoring was found to be a critical issue in the view of many participants. (pp. 56-57)

This statement demonstrates one of the challenges women face as there are a lack of networks for women to be successful in the field. As the old saying goes "it's not what you know, but who you know", if there are a lack of networks for women, it will be more difficult for them to hire and maintain success over men with established networks. Lastly, female coaches experienced credibility and respect issues with athletes, parents, officials, colleagues, and/or community

members (Kamphoff, et al, 2010; LaFountaine, & Kamphoff, 2016; Walker, & Bopp, 2010). Female coaches described their credibility issues as athletes, and parents who raise concerns about their abilities to teach the male athletes. More specifically, Kamphoff, et al (2010) one participant mention the issue that she had during her first year coaching a men's tennis team with an athlete's father who questioned her credibility and capability to be a successful coach for a men's team. The father stated, "What is *she* going to teach my son? How is *she* going to make him a better tennis player?" (p. 302). Often times, people approach male assistant coaches or the male athletes because they don't believe a woman can be the head coach. Kamphoff, et al interviewed a coach representing her experience of credibility issues, who stated:

One time I was going to check into a hotel. I'm 38. You can tell I'm the oldest one in the crowd. I definitely look older than 18-22. I'm the one that has the jacket on that says 'Coach'. I've got the clipboard in my hand. I look like I'm the one in charge. And the guy behind the counter looked at me, looked at the 22-year-old athlete standing next to me, and then looking him in the eye said, "Can I help you?" (p. 302)

LaFountaine and Kamphoff (2016) believe that female head coaches experience less credibility issues when they portray more masculine qualities such as "toughness, aggressiveness, and competitiveness" (p. 35). Pawlak and Levy (2015) support this notion within their research as they found that the more a manager displays masculine-like traits, the more he or she is seen as credible (p. 8). A participant within LaFountaine and Kamphoff's study stated that women are more successful when they embody masculine traits such as power and aggression as they adhere to the organization's social norms (p. 35). This finding provides potential insight as to why more women do not apply for head coaching positions of male sports teams as some women may not want to change their personality or set values. Ashcraft and Pacanowsky (1996) found that

women adopt their behavior in the organizational setting to be deemed more masculine and to compete with the men within that space (p. 233). They believe that women avoid feminine-like traits and embody masculine traits in order to encompass the norms of the organization and be deemed competent. Mumby and Putnam (1992) expand on this idea by explaining why women may embody masculine-like traits to fit in and be taken seriously within a male dominated organization. Mumby and Putnam state:

Social actors construct their identities in organizations through discursive practices, specifically, through the rules, behaviors, and meaning systems that become everyday occurrences...Organizational practices construct the identities of men and women very differently, with women cast as marginalized actors who participate in only certain dimensions of organizational life... Thus, the traits associated with masculinity are treated as a “given”..., whereas the traits defined as feminine are constituted as “other”, or as supporting but not essential to organizational life.

Mumby and Punam demonstrate that women feel the necessity to incorporate the assigned masculine traits. The first reason being to fit in with norms (i.e. rules and behaviors) of the organization and the second reason is to be seen as more credible and be treated with the respect. This specifically relates to the female coaches in the sport world as they attempt to incorporate masculine traits to be seen as more credible and fit to the norm of the androcentric culture of the sport field. If women are discouraged from applying to coaching positions for male teams, then the sport industry denies opportunities to more knowledgeable and talented coaches. It was also reported that female coaches felt disrespected because colleagues and community members made sexist comments to them (Blom, Abrell, Wilson, Lape, & Halbrook, 2011). In particular, Blom et al. (2011) mentioned that one coach had overheard a comment regarding how she would “look

much better in a mini skirt” (p. 59). In another instance, a coach heard some of her athletes being asked inappropriate, sexist questions about her relationship with the athletes. The specific question the coach shared was “which one of your guys have done something with your coach” (Blom, et al, 2011, p. 59)? Statements as such results in work-related consequences like loss of credibility for the women who are being sexually harassed. Hewitt Loy and Stewart found that women who are sexually harassed receive poorer evaluations from employers and are more likely to be denied promotions; demonstrating how women who are sexually harassed experience credibility issues (p. 42). Therefore, women coaches who receive similar comments as previously discussed are going to be negatively affected through a loss of credibility from athletes, spectators, and other coaches. While numerous studies have found various negative experiences of female coaches who coach male athletes, other studies have found that women coaches have positive experiences.

### **Positive Experiences of Female Coaches**

When considering the positive experiences of female coaches while coaching men’s athletics, research showed that female coaches felt supported by administrators, family, and friends (Blom, et al, 2011; LaFontaine, & Kamphoff, 2016; Staurowsky, 1990; Young, 2005). The coaches also mentioned that their family and friends are typically excited for them to coach men and that they have complete confidence in their ability to coach men. Along with support from administrators, family, and friends, Young (2005) has an additional finding. Specifically, Young (2005) states

A few [participants] mentioned a supportive spouse, mentors, and family members, particularly fathers. However, the most significant sources of professional support

reported came from fellow coaches in their athletic department, athletic directors, and colleagues coaching their sport at another institution. (pp. 120-121)

Young (2005) continues that the female coaches experience mutual respect with the male athletes and that the female coaches have a positive impact on the male athletes and vice versa. LaFontaine and Kamphoff (2016) also discussed how female coaches believe they have a positive impact on male athletes. Overall, LaFontaine and Kamphoff found that women head coaches enjoy coaching male athletes due to the widely publicized positive feedback regarding their hard work and impact on the athletes. They state “The female coaches who were interviewed were very positive about their coaching experience with male athletes and would choose to coach male athletes” (p. 35). The results from the previous studies done on female coaches demonstrate the need to further understand the experiences of female coaches in order to understand how the patriarchy of the sport field affects women. It’s important to focus on the experiences of females who coach male athletes because there is a value to experiential knowledge. Storkerson (2009) demonstrates the significance of experiential knowledge by stating how it “provides judgments that are effective and actionable” (p. 5). By making that statement, Storkerson validates the experiential knowledge process as effective in understanding concepts and theories more in depth. Therefore, by gaining a deeper understanding of female coaches’ experiences, an understanding of how patriarchy of the sport field affects women. Following the previously discussed research on the experiences female coaches, other studies explain athlete’s perceptions of female coaches in hypothetical, proposed situations.

### **Athletes’ Perceptions on Female Coaches**

Studies by Frankl and Babbitt (1998), Habif, Van Raalte, and Cornelius (2001), and Leung (2002) have examined the perceptions of: (1) male athletes coached by female head

coaches and (2) female athletes coached by female head coaches. All three studies had extremely different findings regarding male and female athletes' perceptions of female coaches. Specifically, Frankl and Babbitt (1998) found that female athletes prefer male coaches over female coaches while male athletes have no preferences between male and female coaches. Essentially, they found this through the identification that female athletes would prefer to be yelled at by male coaches rather than female coaches, while male athletes have no preference. In another aspect, Habif, Van, Raalte, and Cornelius (2001a/2001b) conducted two studies within the same year and discovered both female and male athletes deem that gender matters less in overall coaching preferences. Habif et al discuss how their results are different compared to previous studies as the former studies found a bias towards female coaches. They showed differences in findings because they believe negative perceptions of female coaches may be changing as society is becoming more progressive. Lastly, Leung (2002) found that "Female athletes had significantly more positive attitudes towards female coaches than male athletes" (p. 110). Leung (2002) discusses how the results from the study may be altered because of the status of the athletes. In Hong Kong, there are a limited amount of female coaches so only 12% of the athletes surveyed had a women coach (p. 111). Therefore, Leung makes it apparent that the athletes' perceptions of female coaches may be affected based on the idea that many of the athletes have never had a female coach. The varying results from the three studies demonstrates that there are inconsistencies amongst the studies done on female coaches. Additional studies need to be done on female coaches, their experiences, and the perceptions the population has on them.

## Summary

In general, the review of literature discussed two main ideas: (1) feminism and sport and (2) existing research on female coaches. Within the feminism and sport section, there are implications that masculinity and patriarchy has within the sport field and leadership roles. Since there are clear hindrances in both the sport field and leadership roles because of the patriarchy, it's critical to understand how women coaches, who are leaders in the sport field, are specifically affected. Additionally, the negative and positive experiences of female coaches and the athletes' perceptions of female coaches is reviewed within the existing research on female coaches section. The results from studies specifically on female coaches demonstrate the need to further understand the experiences of female coaches in order to understand how the patriarchy of the sport field affects women. Overall, it is crucial to conduct research on females who coach male athletes because not only is there a lack of women coaching men, but women are a minority in the sport industry overall. Understanding the experiences women who coach male athletes can assist in the understanding of how patriarchy affects female coaches in the sport field. Therefore, this study highlights the experiences of the female coaches' experiences using the following discussed methods.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of the study is to identify and examine the experiences of women coaches of an all-males sports team in order to have a better understanding of the impact of the gender binary and patriarchy in the sport field. A qualitative approach was used in this study to gain an understanding of the individual and commonality of the experiences of women coaches. The following describes the participants of the study, qualitative research, the data collection of the interview method, and the data analysis.

### **Participants**

The participants for the current study were females who coach a male-dominated sports team at the high school, collegiate, or professional level. The participants consisted of one high school basketball coach, two high school football coaches, one collegiate-level coach, and one professional-level coach. The participants were recruited from male-dominated sport teams across the United States. The participants were selected as they all have experience coaching male athletes and therefore, can report on their positive and negative experiences while coaching. As the participants report on their experiences through the interview responses, an understanding was developed on the impact of patriarchy on females who coach male athletes.

The participants were recruited through the use of purposeful sampling. The reason to use purposeful sampling is because there is such a small population of females who coach male athletes. Therefore, it's best to contact as many coaches as possible. These participants were recruited through news articles and public data information. Following, the coaches were contacted through their own personal or school websites.

## **Data Collection**

### **Interview Method**

A selection of female coaches was interviewed through a semi-structured interview. The method of interviewing “can be seen as a conversation with a purpose, where the interview’s aim is to obtain knowledge about the respondent’s world” (Alvesson, & Svensson, 2008, p. 1343). The interview was beneficial to the current study as it “obtained descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena” (Kvale, 1996, p. 5-6 as cited in Warren, 2004, p. 522). Therefore, this current study benefitted through the use of interviews as they assisted in acquiring the lived experiences of the participants while interpreting the meaning behind those experiences. The interviews were done in a semi-structured manner as it allowed the conversations to flow more freely while still being able to answer a specific set number of questions. Cope (2006) emphasizes the importance of a semi-structured interview and being able to view the interview as a conversation with the participants “so that the richness of individuals’ experiences and thoughts can be explored” (Cope, 2006, p. 262). Prior to the interviews, a semi-structured interview guide was created containing a list of questions to help guide the interview. The main purpose for the interviews in the current study were to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences females have while coaching male athletes. The interviews also assisted in the understanding the impact of patriarchy on female coaches.

Due to the availability and geographical location of the participants, the interviews were conducted via Skype. Before the interviews were conducted, verbal and written consent were obtained from the participants. The interviews were approximately 45-70 minutes long and were audio recorded only via consent the participant. Once the interviews were completed, they were

transcribed verbatim. During the interviews, I asked the participants questions on their experiences coaching female athletes, differences in coaching men and women, and on some challenges of coaching male athletes.

### **Data Analysis**

Following the collection of data through the use of the interviews, the responses were analyzed in order to examine and understand experiences of the female coaches. The interviews were analyzed using the thematic analysis technique. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), “thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail” (p. 79). Overall, the thematic analysis technique involves six steps: 1) develop a familiarization with the collected data; 2) create preliminary codes; 3) find common themes; 4) review and refine the themes; 5) name the themes; and 6) generate the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once the interviews were complete, the responses provided a deeper understanding of the individual experiences females have while coaching men. The interview responses assisted in answering the second research question pertaining to how the patriarchy in the sport field affects women who coach male athletes.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

Within this section, I will discuss the findings of the study. Through thematic analysis, I was able to analyze the responses from the female coaches who were interviewed. Through this analysis, common themes were found and examined associated to the research questions. Following the analysis of common themes, the findings are further discussed to examine the two research questions presented earlier within this study. Within this section, the common themes from the thematic analysis are discussed. The main argument made is that female coaches experience external challenges with gender discrimination and credibility issues. Therefore, the first set of common themes found were that female coaches are often questioned of their qualifications through the public and that female coaches experience and hear derogatory comments such as sexual harassment remarks. Furthermore, female coaches have limited problems with the male athletes and therefore, have had a great experience overall coaching the male athletes.

### **Challenges Experienced by Females Coaching Male Athletes**

Throughout the interviews, the response that consistently occurred amongst the female coaches was that they experienced challenges due to external entities such as fans and parents. Some of the challenges experienced were questioning of qualifications from community members and receiving sexist comments from parents of athletes and coaches for other teams. These challenges most likely impacted the female coaches by causing them to have lower self-confidence and question their ability to coach the male athletes. From the consistent responses, two themes emerged: the first being that female coaches are often questioned of their qualifications through the public and the second being that female coaches experience and hear

derogatory comments such as sexual harassment remarks from men. The following sections provide detail of these common themes from the interview responses.

### **Questioning Female Coaches' Qualifications**

During the interviews, participants discussed the sort of challenges they had experienced and/or are still currently experiencing while coaching men. One of the main themes that emerged was that majority of the challenges that occurred was due to external pressure from as community members and the general public. The common challenges that occurred amongst the female coaches involved fans and parents questioning the female coach's qualifications to coach male athletes. The public questioned whether the women could gain the respect of the male athletes and whether they had the capabilities to properly teach the athletes. Furthermore, the female coaches experienced sexist and derogatory comments and were sexually harassed. For example, when questioned about whether Holly, a female coach for a professional male sports team, had experienced gender discrimination and credibility issues, she discussed how both the public and the media questioned her possible success as a coach of a men's team because of her gender. The public doubted her success because they disbelieved the athletes' ability to respect her as a female coach and her ability to coach male athletes. The concern of the public was more focused on whether the male athletes could handle having a female coach, rather than whether she had the skills and knowledge to properly coach. Holly states:

It was interesting because the debate was never as to whether I was qualified as an individual or not but as to whether the guys would listen to a woman or if a woman should be in that position at all. Because if you would have looked at my resume, blindly, there would have been absolutely no question that I was qualified. What would the media

lines be if it was not a woman? You're talking about a societal shift that people weren't ready for opposed to who could do the job.

Holly was not questioned on whether or not she was qualified to be a coach, but whether she was "qualified" to gain the respect of the male athletes. A man would never be questioned on whether or not they could gain the respect from the athletes, instead they would be questioned on what mattered – whether they had the experience and qualifications to be a coach. Therefore, women need to jump through an additional hoop to receive a job coaching male athletes. This idea is supported by Messner and Sabo (1994) in that men are taught to embrace patriarchal values and integrate those values into their views on women. Therefore, men are taught to give little respect to women in leadership roles above them. Missy and Nicole expand on Holly's thoughts of the public causing challenges by discussing how they experienced issues with administration due to the backlash they received from the community for considering a woman to coach male athletes. Missy, a high school football coach from the East coast, discussed how a job opening from a position coach of a baseball team opened up at a different school, but she was not offered the position even though she was clearly qualified. Later, she found out that the school extended the deadline until a man applied for the position so they could give it to him instead. Additionally, she found out the deadline was extended because she was deemed unqualified. Then again, the deadline was extended simply because she was a woman and they didn't want her coaching the male athletes. In response to this incident, Missy stated:

I couldn't pursue anything because I'm not tenured yet and trying to start a legal battle, no matter how right it is, doesn't mean that it's going to work out in the end. Still have a little bitter taste in my mouth over it. I would have felt better if somebody else had applied and I lost.

In addition, Nicole, a high school basketball coach from the Midwest, discussed how she had to jump through additional hoops just to receive a position coaching the male athletes, despite acting as interim coach for the boy basketball team the year previously. She mentions that “I think it would have become a discrimination thing if I wouldn’t have gotten it [the position]”. She also feels the pressure to succeed more from the community because she is a female.

I think if a male coach loses, it’s like “oh, they lost”. But I think there is more pressure for me to win because I am a female. Like in football, we’ve won about four games in the past two seasons. And there’s no talk about the football coaches. All of the talk is “how is [Nicole] going to win a championship game?” I just feel because I am a female, there is more pressure for me to win than if I were a male.

The three statements from Holly, Missy, and Nicole are all concerning the qualifications the female coaches have and whether those qualifications are enough to coach male athletes and gain respect from them. Additionally, the statements from Missy and Nicole regarding their experience applying for coaching positions shared a similar experiences regarding legal matters. Missy mentions how she could not begin a legal battle due to a lack of tenure while Nicole mentions how the hiring process could have become a gender discrimination lawsuit if she had not been given the position. The use of legal language demonstrates the idea that the women were frustrated with the experiences but feel the need to validate their frustrations through legal terminology in order to be taken seriously. Furthermore, Nicole’s comment regarding the pressure she feels to win demonstrates how the coaches feel the need to be successful to be respected by the public. By making this statement, Nicole is expressing the stress she experiences during a season to validate herself as a coach when men do not experience the same level of stress on the matter. This is due to the way patriarchal beliefs invalidate one’s

experiences and feelings over statistical facts and legal terminology. Bryson (1987) and Norman (2010) support this claim when they mention how femininity is viewed by patriarchal societies as weaker because of the feminine assigned trait 'emotionally needy'. Since being emotional is considered a weaker trait, one's thoughts and feelings are invalidated against facts in a patriarchal society. Lastly, Laura, a high school football coach from the East coast, agrees that the public causes challenges as she discusses how fans questioned her ability to coach the sport. She explained how the fans of the team would question her abilities by asking her to demonstrate specific techniques out in public. In one specific example, Laura explained how a coworker asked her to demonstrate a buttonhook, a particular play run by a wide receiver in football, in the office space to prove that she played and coached the sport. He also questioned whether she ever got hurt in the sport, inferring that she, as a woman, was too fragile to play the sport. More specifically, Laura provides the details of the conversation.

He was like, "you played football?" I said, "yeah" and he responded with, "no you didn't". I was like, "yes I did" and he asked, "what position did you play?" I told him, "wide receiver". He was like, "did you get hit?" and I said, "yes". He then asked, "Did it hurt?" and of course I responded with, "no, I did have pads on..."

Within this conversation, the coworker assumed that she got hurt while being tackled because she was a woman, even knowing that women play with pads. When she asked the coworker whether he would question a man as such to prove himself, he became upset and never questioned her abilities again. This exchange illustrates her coworkers need to be dominant in his relationship with a powerful woman who is in a "man's position" in a "man's field". The male coworker feels the need to be dominant in this relationship because he feels emasculated by a woman who is in a "man's position".

He asked me to show him a buttonhook. I was like “no, I’m not going to run of buttonhook in the office setting. And besides, you wouldn’t say that to a guy”. He was like “yes I would”. I responded with “if a man said he was a cheerleader, are you going to make him do a flip?” He was like “no” and then he got upset that I was questioning him. Additionally, Laura discussed how a vendor at a convention disregarded her as a coach because she was a woman. The vendor refused to acknowledge her and only talked to her male friend, even though they told the vendor that she was a coach. She goes on to recall a specific conversation that she had with the vendor when he questioned her skills.

The only thing he said to me was “how does a little lady like you learn how to play football?” There was no sense in arguing with this fool. What am I supposed to say? I’m not going to change his view. So I twirled my hair and told him I learned how to play football from watching a lot of TV.

She finished by stating “I mean, you get it a lot [the questioning of abilities and qualifications]. That’s part of everyday. I don’t even coach anymore and I still get it”. These challenges discussed by Laura represent the various challenges female coaches experience because of the impact patriarchy has on them. Laura’s experiences correspond to Holly, Missy, and Nicole’s experiences as she discusses the concerns others had regarding her qualifications and whether those qualifications are enough to coach football and gain respect from the male athletes. Furthermore, the use of the term ‘little lady’ being directed to Holly demonstrates the male’s need to express power and dominance over a female since she has gained a “man’s position” in a patriarchal field. This made the male co-worker feel emasculated due to her ability to have both femininity and power.

The examples and narratives given by the participants regarding the challenges show that society discriminates women by questioning their capabilities to coach male athletes, whether that is at the professional, collegiate, or high school level. Kamphoff, Armentrout, & Driska (2010) also found and stated female coaches who were questioned on their abilities to coach “felt that the questioning reflected the belief that a woman can’t teach a man to play [sports]” (p. 302). But at the same time, the athletes see no problem with a female coach, as long as they demonstrate the proper qualifications that are expected in a male coach. Young (2005) had the same finding in that female coaches felt high regards of respect from their male athletes. Additionally, Staurowsky found that the female coaches’ “male athletes displayed the most respect and the least amount of resistance compared to other coaches, parents, and opposing players” (as cited in Young, 2005). This indicates that female coaches will continue to experience external challenges until the media and more community members are able to see successful teams that are coached by women. This will be a difficult feat to reach as there are so few women coach male athletes because of the preexisting gender biases that exist in the sport field. This cycle will most likely continue until a generation can look past the predetermined stereotypes placed on women both in and out of the sport field.

In sum, the female coaches experienced challenges throughout their coaching experience. More specifically, the female coaches collectively experienced challenges caused by the public and community members questioning their qualifications to coach male athletes. The interview responses assist in the identification of the common experiences female coaches face because of their gender in an androcentric culture. Furthermore, the patriarchy in the sport field impacts females who coach male-dominated sports as they experience more challenges from the public than their male counterparts would experience. Kamphoff, Armentrout, & Driska (2010) also

found that women experience more challenges from the public than their male counterparts as they discuss how community members question the coach's ability – as a female – to coach the male athletes. This is a form of gender discrimination as male coaches do not receive the same form of questions of competence. Holly, Missy, Nicole, and Laura's experiences all provided different ways in showing how their gender influenced the mistrust they experienced from members of the community. Missy and Nicole both use legal terminology to validate their frustrations as the patriarchal field undermines the feminine-assigned trait of 'emotionally needy'. Furthermore, by avoiding their feelings and emotions, Missy and Nicole demonstrate the need to portray common traits associated with the patriarchal field in order to be respected by the men. Laura's use of the comment "so I twirled my hair and told him I learned how to play football from watching a lot of TV" when reflecting on her reactions to a male who questioned her qualifications, also demonstrates the need to portray common patriarchal traits to be respected by the men in the field. The questioning of qualifications by community members can be seen as a cause to why the female coaches feel the need to encompass traits commonly associated with an androcentric culture.

### **Derogatory Comments Experienced by Females Coaching Male Athletes**

The female coaches also showed how the patriarchy in the sport field has impacted them while coaching male athletes through gender discrimination of sexist, derogatory comments. The coaches discussed how they experienced sexual harassment or overheard derogatory comments from fans and coaches from other teams. When asked about the challenges the female coaches have faced from community members, Laura brought up the fact that she has been sexually harassed throughout her coaching career while coaching male athletes. She does not specify experiences of sexual harassment, but she explains how she handled the situations of sexual

harassment. She states that her only possible solution to the issue of sexual harassment was to sexually harass the men back.

People will ask “did you ever get sexually harassed?” and I’m like “of course.” So then they will ask “what did you do?” and I’m like “I sexually harassed them back.” What else can I do? You know, that’s part of it.

Laura provides additional evidence as to how the patriarchy impacts female coaches because it demonstrates the need to portray common traits as men in order to be respected. If Laura were to report the sexual harassment to a person of higher authority, she would be criticized by other men within the field. In order to fit in and be respected, she portrayed what she perceives as a norms of sexual harassment within the patriarchal playing field. Missy talked about similar experiences as Laura’s. I asked Missy about whether she believes females are taught to be feared in the sport field. She stated that women are taught to be feared because of the ‘good old boys club’. She states that the ‘good old boys club’ still exists in the sport field and therefore, femininity is invalidated. The ‘good old boys club’ is interpreted as men’s-only private network that purposefully neglects to include certain individuals, like women. I asked Missy about the good old boys’ club and she stated that she has heard the negative comments about women or feminine traits by the men within the field. More specifically, she stated “I’ve heard the comments. Not necessarily in my program but when you’re on the sideline, or you’re at another game, or at a coaches meeting, you just hear stuff on the side.” Missy finishes by saying how feminine traits in the sport field still, unfortunately, have that stigma and that’s why sayings like “you hit like a girl” still exist. Missy’s thoughts on the ‘good old boys club’ demonstrates how the patriarchy in sport impacts women and those who display feminine-like qualities by excluding them. Laura’s comment regarding sexual harassment and Missy’s comment pertaining

to the old boys' club demonstrate how the female coaches view gender inequalities on the sport field. The women use strategy to highlight and emphasize the patriarchy that occurs within sport. These strategies dictate the acceptance the females receive from the public as they play into what's expected from them. Therefore, it is concluded that patriarchy impacts females who coach male-dominated sports by forcing them to portray the negative actions to gain respect and by excluding them from the well-established networks within the male-dominated field. The derogatory comments about the female coaches consists of sexist language that degrades women and keeps them in a lower status than the men and enhances the patriarchy within the field. As discussed in this section, the female coaches experienced challenges while coaching male athletes because of their self-identified gender as a woman.

#### **Female Coaches Experience No Challenges with Male Athletes**

Despite challenges from the public, each interviewee discussed the very limited challenges they have experienced with male athletes. Every coach agreed that the athletes were the most accepting of their position as a coach and respected them more than anyone else. I asked Holly about the challenges she experienced as a female coaches for male athletes and part of her answer involved discussing how not only did the athletes not give her any issues, but they fully embraced her as a coach.

Those guys and what was potentially one of the toughest situations they have been in, never disrespected me as a woman or as a coach. And that is one of the greatest things that I've learned; it's that everyone said male athletes will never take coaching from a woman. And not only did they, but they embraced it.

While Holly discussed the some of the challenges that she experienced with questioning of her qualifications, she felt the need to express how the athletes caused no issues for her as that

impacted her overall experience as a coach. Laura shared a similar experiences with Holly by discussing how her athletes never disrespected her and that teaching male athletes were the easiest part in coaching a male-dominated sport. She states, “I mean everybody was usually always respectful and I never got disrespected really from the kids. My kids were always the easiest part of it all.” Missy’s comments correspond to Laura and Holly’s remarks as she immediately mentions how she received no challenges from the athletes when she was asked about the general challenges she had as a coach. As members of the community questioned her about whether she had any challenges while coaching the male athletes, she simply stated, “not with the kids, no”. This demonstrates that Missy wanted to make it clear that the athletes did not cause any challenges. Lastly, Kathy discussed how she had no issues with the athletes. She states, “I’m happy to report that there’s been no challenges. It’s been actually quite the opposite”. Overall, the female coaches agreed that the male athletes were very respectful to them. For example, Holly states that the athletes never disrespected her, even when the public assumed they would and Laura even mentions that the athletes were the easiest part in coaching male athletes. Holly’s comment regarding how the public assumed the male athletes would not “take coaching from a woman” demonstrates the beliefs held within the patriarchal field. The general public believes that male athletes would never respect female coaches as fear and invalidation of femininity has been continually instilled. Anderson (2008) supports this claim when stating:

Because of the sexist and (often) misogynistic ethos associated with the presence of orthodox masculinity among men in team sports, the performance of femininity by men, or transgression of masculinized boundaries, is deemed highly contentious and is severely penalized. (p. 261)

Therefore, as femininity is marginalized, then it is assumed the male athletes would reject female coaches. While the public assumes male athletes will not take to a female coach, it has been proven to be the opposite. Holly, Laura, Missy, and Kathy all mentioned that the athletes never disrespected from them. As the coaches discussed their positive experience with the athletes, they discussed how their gender and stereotypical gender-assigned traits did not change their coaching style. Rather, the coaches were respected by the athletes and used the coaching style and techniques they felt best to produce success. For example, when asked about whether the female coaches felt that they needed to embrace stereotypical male personality traits, like aggression, in order to be a successful coach, Kathy mentioned how she did not change her coaching style no matter what gender her athletes identified with. She states:

I said to myself, I can't be any different than the person that I've always been. I'm not going to pretend to be anybody that I'm not and I'm not going to change anything about how I coach or what I do...My coaching style is more educational and I'm generally calm, thoughtful, meticulous, and quite but the guys know when I'm pissed off as I can still raise my voice. And if you look at our results this year, they have improved.

Missy supports Kathy's comments about embracing the coaching styles that work, rather than by embracing particular gender norms, when she states, "I think just being able to do what the job requires is what is expected. I'm going to treat them the way they're supposed to be treated".

Holly share similar experiences with Missy and Kathy's comments about embracing the coaching style that works best when she states:

How you're competitive and how you treat your athletes it not mutually exclusive. I think there's some preconceived notion that any woman who got to the point where a man was coaching would have to be a man and I would argue that's fundamentally incorrect. On a

staff, you need those different dimensions because different players are going to fundamentally relate different.

Holly, Missy, and Kathy all believe that their positive experiences with the athletes does not come from their identified gender, rather that the athletes respect the coaches because they embrace the coaching style that works best for them.

This section discussed that the female coaches collectively did not experience challenges caused by their athletes. The athletes did not cause any issues with the female coaches as they personally interacted with the coaches and were able to witness the coach's abilities first-hand. As the athletes witness the female coach's skills, they are given proof that the females should be respected for their abilities. Plus, according to the coaches' statements about their coaching styles, it's apparent that the athletes respect the coaches for being true to their coaching style and not changing based on what's expected of them. This finding suggests the common experiences of female coaches in working with athletes because of their gender in an androcentric culture.

### **Coaching Male Athletes has been a Great Experience for Female Coaches**

Although majority of the female coaches experienced challenges in regards to their gender while coaching, there was still a consensus from every participant that coaching male athletes has been a great experience. When questioned about their experience coaching men as a whole, not one participant shared a negative experience. In accordance to the coaches' interview responses, the "great" experiences attributes to the relationships built between the male athletes and female coaches. Young (2005) supports this finding when discussing that female coaches experience mutual respect with the male athletes and that the female coaches have a positive impact on the male athletes and vice versa. When discussing her experience, Holly mentions how she could not have been happier while coaching men. More specifically, she states, "I couldn't

have been happier with my experience coaching men. I think that they responded very well". Nicole agrees with Holly by mentioning how if it wasn't such a great experience, she wouldn't have returned the following year. She states, "It's been great. I wouldn't have reapplied if it didn't go as well as it did and as well as it went. I said I'm going to go for the job again". Missy reiterates Holly and Nicole's comments by stating that she has been extremely fortunate for working with male athletes. More precisely, Missy states, "I have been fortunate. I haven't had many problems with the boys". Lastly, Laura perfectly sums up what all of the participants had to say about their experience coaching male athletes. She states "It was a great experience. I mean definitely hands down, it's great." Overall, the female coaches collectively agreed that they had great experience coaching male athletes. As the coaches previously agreed that the athletes caused no issues. Female coaches developed these unique relationships through the bonds and memories they made with the athletes.

When discussing their experience of coaching male athletes more specifically, Laura provides multiple narratives about some of the best situations she has had with the male athletes; majority of the stories involving humorous scenes. For example, she goes into detail about how the male athletes loved the song *Someone Like You* by Adele and they would sing it at any given opportunity. She explained that one day they printed off the lyrics and sang it in her office at the top of their lungs putting every emotion they had into it. Despite patriarchal norms, this experience develops a positive relationship with the athletes as it fosters an interpersonal relationship where the male athletes are able to express themselves without judgement. Holly agrees with Laura that the athletes were a major reason behind why coaching male athletes was such a great experience. She wrote her athletes notes and left them in their lockers because that's what she would have wanted as an athlete. The athletes took that to heart and even mentioned to

reporters that this was something special to them. Holly didn't expect the athletes to tell others, especially reporters, of this act of kindness; and the feedback from the players was one of the many things that made her experience coaching male athletes so great. These notes from Holly developed a positive relationship with the athletes as it creates an interpersonal relationship with the athletes and demonstrates her care and respect for them. Lastly, Missy agrees with Laura and Holly's comments that the athletes helped make the coaching experience great by talking about how grateful they were once they graduated. Missy states "One of the many great experiences was when I had my first four-year class graduate – they were so grateful. It's very flattering to get that kind of respect and to be able to keep it." These statements show that despite the negative experiences or challenges the female coaches faced, these women felt supported and respected by male athletes. To summarize the interview responses regarding the coaches' experiences, the participants stated that they had great experiences while coaching male athletes. In furthering the discussion, Laura, Holly, and Missy tell personal narratives regarding their relationships with the athletes and how they contributed to their experience. When the female coaches discussed their relationships with their male athletes, their language and vocal cues demonstrated that they care and respect their athletes. For example, Missy states that one of her greatest experiences as coach involves the respect and gratitude she received from the athletes. Furthermore, Laura's use of narratives involving the fun times she had with the athletes demonstrates how much she cared about those personal connections. She laughed and talked exuberantly about those memories, proving how great of an experience she really had with the athletes. Additionally, as the coaches' reflected on these great memories, their language became more conversational and less formal, demonstrating the easiness to open up about their

experiences. For example, Laura uses more of conversational language as she uses the words 'like' and 'and' repeatedly as she recalls the memories. She states:

They were just singing at the top of their lung like very emotional and using their hands and everything. And these football players are belting out Adele's *Someone Like You*. It was so funny and that was like our song.

In conjunction with Laura's feelings about regarding these football players, Missy reiterates how she was feeling in order to demonstrate how happy she was with her experiences of coaching male athletes and receiving respect from them. She states, "It's very flattering, it's just very flattering to get that kind of respect and to be able to keep it". The use of language in these narratives demonstrates the true happiness these women feel when reflecting back on their experiences and memories with the male athletes. Furthermore, from these narratives, it was found that the female coaches personally connect with the athletes and develop special bonds with them.

This section discussed that the female coaches collectively had an overall great experience coaching male athletes, even though challenges were experienced by the female coaches. The great experiences can be contributed to the relationships built between the male athletes and female coaches according to the coaches' responses. From the coaches' comments about their relationship with their athletes, it can be inferred that the athletes subvert patriarchy by respecting their coaches and by rejecting the stereotypical male behaviors when communicating with the female coaches. This could be due to the fact that the athletes have had time to build a relationship with these coaches and interact with them on a more personal basis. Therefore, the patriarchy isn't incorporated into the relationship between the female coaches and the male athletes, causing the coaches be at ease around the athletes and develop these bonds

further. Young (2005) supports this finding when discussing that female coaches experience mutual respect with the male athletes and that the female coaches have a positive impact on the male athletes and vice versa. This finding suggests that female coaches had an overall positive experience while coaching male athletes.

### **Summary**

The findings of the study were discussed throughout this section. Through thematic analysis, the responses from the female coaches were analyzed and common responses were found and examined through the research questions and themes were discussed throughout the chapter. The main argument made is that female coaches experience external challenges with gender discrimination and credibility issues. Therefore, the first set of themes discussed were that the female coaches were often questioned for their qualifications through the public and that female coaches experienced and heard derogatory comments such as sexual harassment remarks. Furthermore, the female coaches had limited problems with the male athletes and therefore, had a great experience overall while coaching the male athletes.

The first theme with regards to how the female coaches were often questioned about their qualifications as a coach. The participants all experienced the idea that the public questioned whether or not the female coaches were qualified to coach male athletes and gain the respect of them. This finding supports Messner and Sabo (1994) in that men are taught to embrace patriarchal values and integrate those values into their views on women, causing men to give little respect to them in the leadership roles. Furthermore, the finding regarding the questioning of qualifications supports Kamphoff, Armentrout, & Driska's (2010) finding regarding how female coaches who were questioned on their abilities to coach "felt that the questioning reflected the belief that a woman can't teach a man to play [sports]" (p. 302). The second theme

is that female coaches experienced and heard derogatory comments such as sexual harassment remarks. This finding supports Blom, Abrell, Wilson, Lape, & Halbrook (2011) as they found that female coaches felt disrespected by community members since they made sexist comments. Blom et al. (2011) reported that one female coach heard her athletes get asked “which one of your guys have done something with your coach” (p. 59) and another coach overheard a comment about how she would “look much better in a mini skirt (p. 59). The women in this study use strategies like “sexually harassing the men back” to highlight and emphasize the patriarchy that occurs within sport. Therefore, patriarchy impacts females who coach male-dominated sports by forcing them to portray the negative actions in order to be deemed respectable.

The third theme was that the female coaches, more specifically, Holly, Laura, Missy, and Kathy, experienced very little to no issues with the male athletes. This finding supports Young (2005) who found that female coaches felt high regards of respect from their male athletes. This finding also supports Staurowsky (as cited in Young, 2005), in that male athletes gave the most respect to their female coaches compared to community members. The coaches believe that their positive experiences with the athletes do not come from their identified gender, rather the athletes respect the coaches because they embrace the coaching style. The fourth theme was that the female coaches overall had a great experience coaching male athletes. The great experiences can be contributed to the relationships built between the male athletes and female coaches. Young (2005) supports this finding when discussing that female coaches experience mutual respect with the male athletes and that the female coaches have a positive impact on the male athletes and vice versa. Overall, although female coaches experienced challenges, they still had a great experience coaching male athletes.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

I chose to pursue this study as it holds a significance to me as a woman who worked within an androcentric culture known as the sport world. While working internships within the sport field, I personally experienced the patriarchy that continues to exist. For example, as a female intern for a sport statistician, I, along with another woman intern, did not receive a job taking statistics for the prestigious and male-dominated sports such as football and hockey. Those two spots were, specifically, given to the men while we were asked to take statistics for sports like volleyball and track and field. This is just an example of the way the patriarchy in the sport field impacts women as we were deemed less competent than the men to handle the more prestigious sports. While I have experienced few instances of discrimination, other women in the sport field have experienced much worse gender discrimination like the wage gap, feeling disrespected or mistrusted, the glass ceiling, and sexual harassment.

In this study, two research questions were proposed to better understand the discrimination women face when they coach a male-dominated sport. The first research question focuses on the experiences of female coaches who coach a male-dominated sports team. The most important insights that could be gathered from this research question is that understanding the successes and challenges helps in identifying how patriarchy impacts females who coach male athletes. The second research question focuses on the impact of patriarchy on female coaches who coach a male-dominated sports team. This research question stems from the social and political problems currently happening in society. While there are issues of patriarchy in the sport field, it was found that the female coaches still had positive experiences while coaching because of their relationships with their male athletes. Although, as there are issues of masculinity in the sport field, similar matters occur amongst other fields and society overall.

Then again, on January 21, 2017, over 5 million women gathered around the world to participate in the Woman's March to advocate for equality within all walks of life. The activism for women in the androcentric sport holds the same level of importance. Through the analysis of the interview responses, I found that female coaches experienced challenges and felt the pressures of patriarchy. These female coaches also felt that they were respected by their male athletes and had a great experience coaching them.

### **Experiences of Females Coaching Male Athletes**

The analysis of interview responses reveals that female coaches experienced challenges such as being questioned about their qualifications and hearing/experience sexist and derogatory comments throughout their coaching experience. The women in these interviews expressed that the public doubted their abilities to effectively coach male athletes. The participants all were questioned on whether or not they were qualified to coach gain the respect from male athletes. The public questioned whether Holly was qualified enough to gain respect from the male athletes while Missy and Nicole struggled to gain coaching positions with a male sports team. Lastly, Laura experienced a male co-worker question her abilities to actually play football, let alone actually coach it. These experiences of questioning demonstrate that patriarchy impacts the way society views a female's competence, as well as society's belief of the male's ability to accept them. Furthermore, the female coaches collectively did not experience challenges from male athletes. According to the female coaches in this study, the male athletes created very little to no problems as they personally interacted with the coaches and were able to witness their coaching abilities first-hand. As the male athletes were able to interact personally with the female coaches, bonds were form that created mutual respect. An example of the bonds and relationships formed is from a memory shared by Laura of having male athletes sing *Someone Like You* by Adele.

Another example is from Holly who shares that she wrote her athletes' notes and leave them in their lockers. Those two examples demonstrate the relationships and bonds formed during the time coaching and therefore, the coaches had no issues with their athletes because of these bonds. As demonstrated through these memories, the athletes were one of the main reasons as to why they enjoyed coaching. Another example demonstrating how the athletes were major contributors to the coaches' experiences was a comment from Missy. She discussed about how grateful the athletes were once they graduated. Missy states "One of the many great experiences was when I had my first four-year class graduate – they were so grateful. It's very flattering to get that kind of respect and to be able to keep it." These statements show that despite the negative experiences or challenges the female coaches, these women felt supported and respected by male athletes.

Within this study, we learn that female coaches experience challenges while coaching male athletes but they still view their overall coaching experience as great. More specifically, we learn that female coaches are consistently questioned for their qualifications to coach male athletes and to gain the athletes' respect. Additionally, the female coaches are further impacted by patriarchy through gender discrimination such as experiencing sexual harassment and sexist comments. Finally, we learn that even though the female coaches experience challenges, they still view their experience coaching male athletes as great and this can be attributed to the relationships the female coaches build with their male athletes.

### **The Impact of Patriarchy on Female Coaches**

Furthermore, the analysis of interview responses reveals that females who coach male-dominated sports experience more challenges from the public than their male counterparts. Challenges were experienced as the public does not believe that women are capable of coaching

male athletes. For example, fans assumed that the male athletes would not take to or respect Holly as a female coach. Furthermore, Missy and Nicole both struggled to receive a position coaching male athletes due to their gender and the communities' concerns that they were not qualified to do so. This is due to the idea that society has been lead to believe that women are not competent enough to coach a male-dominated sport. This idea is supported by Messner and Sabo (1994) as they discussed how men are taught to embrace patriarchal values and integrate those values into their views on women. Therefore, men are taught to give little respect to women in the leadership roles. Additionally, patriarchy impacts females who coach male-dominated sports by forcing them to employ negative strategies in a patriarchal field and by excluding them from the well-established networks within the male-dominated field. Women incorporate strategies in the field in order to subvert patriarchy and to be respected by the men they interact with. Furthermore, the 'old boys club' continues to exist and excludes women. The implications of the term 'old boys club' demonstrates how feminine traits in the sport field still, unfortunately, have a negative stigma and that's why sayings like "you hit like a girl" still exist. It demonstrates how the patriarchy in sport impacts women and those who display feminine-like qualities by excluding them from the androcentric field.

### **Implications of the Study**

This study contributes to the limited research examining the experiences of females who coach male athletes and how they manage patriarchy while coaching. This research confirms findings from previous research and presents new findings as well. For example, this study confirmed that females who coach male athletes do experience gender discrimination and credibility issues from the public (Kamphoff, et al, 2010; LaFontaine, & Kamhoff, 2016; Walker, & Bopp, 2010). The credibility issues were experienced by this study's participants as

their qualifications were questioned by community members. Moreover, the female coaches experienced gender discrimination through sexual harassment and sexist, degrading comments. This study also confirmed that female coaches experience mutual respect from their male athletes (Young, 2005). Beyond that, this research presents new ideas regarding women who coach predominantly male-dominated sport teams such as football, basketball, and soccer. Previous studies considered females who coach male athletes amongst all sports, including track and field, cross country, tennis, and swimming and diving. This study provides findings from a population of participants that is more likely to experience forms of gender discrimination and deeper levels of patriarchy as they are more immersed within the androcentric culture. This is due to the fact that the participants were female coaches of male-dominated sports like football, basketball, and soccer, which lack female coaches when compared to track and field, cross country, and swimming and diving. Lastly, this study presents findings on how patriarchy impacts females who coach male-dominated sports as there have been no studies that specifically examined such participants. An example of being forced to portray the negative patriarchal behaviors is the situation discussed by Laura. Laura mentions that when she was sexually harassed in the past and the 'only she could do in response is to sexually harass them back'. This demonstrates the need to portray negative behaviors associated to be respected by the men in the field. Therefore, this study provides insights on how patriarchy impacts females who coach male-dominated sports.

As research on female coaches and their overall experiences have been noted by many authors such as Kamphoff, et al (2010) and Norman (2010), this study provides new insight on the experiences females specifically have while coaching male-dominated sports within the athletic field. It is important to understand experiences of female coaches because of the impact

of reified gender roles on them in an androcentric culture. Lorber (1994) discusses how there is more than just masculine and feminine traits but once a gender is assigned at birth, society expects that individual to act in accordance to the specific traits assigned to that gender. Beyond that, Anders (2015) explains how there is no “female” or “male” and “feminine traits” or “masculine traits”, rather a spectrum that people fall on depending on their differing traits. The impact of reified gender roles on women boxes them into one “female” or “feminine trait” category and excludes them from the male-dominated field. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that female coaches are impacted by patriarchy and their voices and experiences should be heard. It’s critical for women’s voices to be heard as they are marginalized in an everyday basis. Having an understanding on the experiences women have creates a deeper understanding of how patriarchy impacts female coaches and why it continues to impact them.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are limitations within the study that need to be considered when conducting research in the future. The first limitation is that the study only included five participants due to the low number of available women who coach male-dominated sports. Additionally, there was a limited range in the sports and level of competition (i.e. high school, collegiate, and professional) amongst the participants. Majority of participants were at the high school level and coached football. Therefore, future studies should incorporate a broader range of male-dominated sports and competition levels amongst the participants in order to obtain a complete understanding of this phenomenon.

The other limitation of this study is that this research is more interpretive in that the analysis was not examined through a critical lens. An insight that could be gained from incorporating a critical approach is a deeper understanding of how patriarchy impacts female

coaches and why it continues to impact them. Therefore, future research should incorporate a critical approach to enhance the research and results. If future research takes these limitations into consideration, the study could provide more updated version of the female coaches' experiences at that moment in time.

In the future, I plan to pursue further research on this topic as future research needs to be done to gain further insight on female coaches' experiences and the way patriarchy impacts them. As I continue to study this topic, I will incorporate a quantitative approach to complete this project. Adding the quantitative approach to this study would provide a better understanding of how the patriarchy impacts the majority of females who coach male-dominated sports. Incorporating a critical approach and a survey for a quantitative method will provide the insights lacking in this research and complete this study.

**Appendix**  
Interview Questions

- 1) How long have you been coaching male athletes?
- 2) What sport do you coach? What got you into coaching that sport?
- 3) What made you interested in coaching male athletes?
- 4) Have you coached female athletes? What are the major differences between coaching female athletes and male athletes?
- 5) What do you enjoy about coaching male athletes?
- 6) What are some challenging aspects about coaching male athletes?
- 7) What advice do you have for female coaches coaching male athletes?
- 8) Is there anything else you want to add or say about this topic?

## References

- Acosta, V.R., & Carpenter, L.J. (2010). *Women in intercollegiate sport: A longitudinal, national study thirty-three year update 1977-2010*. Unpublished document. Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, NY, retrieved from <http://www.acostacarpenter.org/>.
- Alvesson, M., & Svensson, P. (2008). Qualitative interview. In S. R. Clegg & J. R. Bailey (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Organization Studies*, 4, p. 1343-1344. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Anders, S. (2015). Beyond sexual orientation: Integrating gender/sex and diverse sexualities via sexual configurations theory. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 44(5), 1177-1213.
- Anderson, E. (2008). "I used to think women were weak": Orthodox masculinity, gender segregation, and sport. *Sociological Forum*, 23(2), 257-280.
- Ashcraft, K. L., & Pacanowsky, M. E. (1996). "A woman's worst enemy": Reflections on a narrative of organizational life and female identity. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 24(3), 217-239.
- Aune, K., & Redfern, C. (2013). *Reclaiming the "F" word, or being and becoming postwestern*. New York, NY: Zed Books Ltd
- Banks, D. (2016, August). *Kathryn Smith, the NFL's first female full-time coach, is not thinking about history*. Retrieved from <http://www.si.com/nfl/2016/08/25/buffalo-bills-kathryn-smith-nfl-assistant-coach>
- Belzer, J. (2015, December). *The most powerful women in sports*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jasonbelzer/2015/12/02/the-most-powerful-women-in-sports/#7868068b3a5f>
- Blom, L. C., Abrell, L., Wilson, M. J., Lape, J., & Halbrook, M. (2011). Working with male

- athletes: The experiences of U.S. female head coaches. *Journal of Research in Health, Physical Education, Recreation, Sport & Dance*, 6(1), 54-61.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Bryson, L. (1987). Sport and the maintenance of masculine hegemony. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 10(4), 349-360.
- Butler, J. (1999). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Cope, M. (2006). Interviewing. In B. Warf (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, p. 262-262. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- de Vries, J. A. (2015). Champions of gender equality: Female and male executives as leaders of gender change. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 34(1), 21-36.
- Elkhof, D. R. (2012). A double-edged sword: Twenty-first century workplace trends and gender equality. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 27(1), 7-22.
- Frankl, D., & Babbitt, D. G. (1998). Gender bias: A study of high school track & field athletes' perceptions of hypothetical male and female head coaches. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 21(4), 396-407.
- Gibbs, L. (2016, January). *The first full-time female coach in NFL history was just hired*. Retrieved from <https://thinkprogress.org/the-first-full-time-female-coach-in-nfl-history-was-just-hired-2b27aa604843#.lfg5djuti>
- Gilder, G. (1973). *Sexual suicide*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.

- Gilman, C. P., 1860-1935. (1911). *The man-made world or our androcentric culture*. New York, NY: Charlton Co.
- Habif, S., Van Raalte J. L., & Cornelius, A. (2001). Athletes' attitudes toward and preferences for male and female coaches. *Women in Sport & Physical Activity Journal*, 10(1), 73-88.
- Hancho, M. (2013, May 4). Re: Why do women's sports suck so badly? [Online discussion group]. Retrieved from <http://247sports.com/Board/30/Contents/Why-do-womens-sports-suck-so-badly-19526199>.
- Hardin, M., & Greer, J. D. (2009). The influence of gender-role socialization, media use and sports participation on perceptions of gender-appropriate sports. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 32(2), 207-226.
- Hewitt Loy, P., & Stewart, L. P. (1984). The extent and effects of the sexual harassment of working women. *Sociological Focus*, 17(1), 31-43.
- Hunnicut, G. (2009). Varieties of patriarchy and violence against women: Resurrecting "patriarchy" as a theoretical tool. *Violence Against Women*, 15(5), 553-573.
- Kamphoff, C. S., Armentrout, S. M., & Driska, A. (2010). The token female: Women's experiences as Division I collegiate head coaches of men's teams. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*, 3, 297-315.
- Kane, M. J., & Stangl, J. M. (1991). Employment patterns of female coaches in men's athletics: tokenism and marginalization as reflections of occupational sex-segregation. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 15(1), 21-41.
- Kato, K. & Bark, W. (2008). Descriptive statistics. In N. J. Salkind (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Educational Psychology*, 2, p. 237-238. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.

- LaFountain, J., & Kamphoff, C. S. (2016). Coaching boys' high school teams: Female coaches' experiences and perceptions. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching* 11(1), 27-38.
- Leung, M. L. (2002). Attitudes of elite athletes toward female coaches in Hong Kong. *Women in Sport & Physical Activity Journal*, 11(2), 101-114.
- Lorber, J. (1994). Night to his day: The social construction of gender. *The paradoxes of gender*, 54-68. Yale University, New Haven, CT. Retrieved from:  
<https://jenseyatvajameh.files.wordpress.com/2008/07/sakhtareejtemaiejenseyat.pdf>
- Martinez, J., & Ahmed, E. (2012, June). *Hall of shame: A recent history of homophobia in sports*. Retrieved from <http://www.complex.com/sports/2012/06/recent-history-of-homophobia-in-sports/>
- Messner, M. A. (1992). *Power at play: Sports and the problem of masculinity*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Messner, M. A. (2002). *Taking the field: Women, men, and sports*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Messner, M. A., & Sabo, D. F. (1994). *Sex, violence, & power in sports: Rethinking masculinity*. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press.
- Mumby, D. K., & Putnam, L. L. (1992). The politics of emotion: A feminist reading of bounded rationality. *Academy of Management Review*, 17(3), 465-486.
- Norman, L. (2010). Bearing the burden of doubt: Female coaches' experiences of gender relations. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 81(4), 506-517.
- Ottaway, A. (2016, July). *Why don't people watch women's sports?* Retrieved from <https://www.thenation.com/article/why-dont-people-watch-womens-sports/>

- Pawlak, J. W., & Levy, P. E. (2015). Perceived masculinity/femininity of managers and the feedback environment. *Honors Research Projects*, 1-19.
- Perez, A. (2016, January). *Meet Kathryn Smith, the NFL's first female full-time assistant coach*. Retrieved from <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/bills/2016/01/21/kathryn-smith-first-female-full-time-coach/79142130/>
- Reade, I. Rodgers, W., & Norman, L. (2009). The under-representation of women in coaching: A comparison of male and female Canadian coaches at low and high levels of coaching. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 4(4), 505-567.
- Tafur Arciniegas, M. (2015). Understanding how adults approach technological challenges: A sequential mixed methods research. *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 1-186.
- Taneja, S. Pryor, M. G., & Oyler, J. (2012) Empowerment and gender equality: The retention and promotion of women in the workforce. *The Journal of Business Diversity*, 12(3), 43-53.
- Walker, N. A., & Bopp, T. (2010). The underrepresentation of women in the male-dominated sport workplace: Perspectives of female coaches. *Journal of Workplace Rights*, 15(1), 47-64.
- Warren, C. (2004). Interviewing in qualitative research. In Lewis-Beck, M. S., Bryman, A., & Liao T. F. (Eds.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods*, 3, p. 522-524. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Young, C. F. (2005). Female head coaches of men's collegiate teams: A critical feminist analysis. *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 1-195.
- Young, N. (2014, March 11). Re: Why are women so bad at sports? [Online discussion group]. Retrieved from <http://www.insidehoops.com/forum/showthread.php?t=328560>.