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"She is the Best *Female* Coach": NCAA Division I Swimming Coaches' Experiences of Sexism

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Sport participation for women and girls is at an all-time high in the United States, but women are still widely underrepresented in leadership positions and coaching (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Women hold approximately 50% of head coaching positions of women's teams in the National Collegiate Athletic Association, and only 18% of the head coaching positions of women's swimming and diving teams (LaVoi & Silva-Breen, 2018). Numerous barriers have been identified on the factors that inhibit upward career mobility for female coaches including sexism. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to examine the career experiences of 21 current or former female swimming coaches at the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I level. The theme of sexism in coaching was pervasive and identified in five different categories: (a) misidentification, (b) differential treatment, (c) isolation, (d) tokenism, and (e) motherhood. The sexism that female coaches experience hinders upward career mobility which can lead to career dissatisfaction and early exits from the field, contributing to the underrepresentation of women in the profession.

Keywords: sexism, female coaches, NCAA, swimming, college sports

"She is the best *female* coach": Female Swimming Coaches Experiences of Sexism

The number of women participating in collegiate sport has dramatically increased since the passage of Title IX in 1972 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; "Sport Sponsorship, Participation, and Demographics," 2017). However, the percentage of women in leadership and coaching positions has decreased or stagnated (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). The sport of swimming has one of the lowest percentages of female coaches coaching women's teams of all NCAA sports (LaVoi & Silva-Breen 2018). The purpose of this study was to examine the career experiences of NCAA Division I female swimming coaches in order to better understand the lack of female representation in the college coaching profession.

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USA Swimming, the national governing body for swimming in the United States, reports that nearly half (9,430) of the 19,000 registered coaches are women (USA Swimming, 2016). This percentage is relatively high compared to other youth sports where women only coach 27% of youth teams (Farrey & Solomon, 2017; LaVoi, 2009). The percentages drop significantly in collegiate swimming as only 18% of NCAA Division I head women's swimming coaches are women ("Sport Sponsorship, Participation, and Demographics," 2017). Women in collegiate swimming have far better representation as assistant coaches as nearly 41% of assistant coaches for women's teams are women ("Sport Sponsorship, Participation, and Demographics," 2017). This phenomenon of women attaining assistant coaching positions but not moving into head coaching positions is part of the rationale for the present study.

These statistics are sobering for women pursuing a career in college swimming coaching or considering this career. Retiring athletes looking for a healthy transition out of competing and into coaching may be discouraged to pursue it as a career. Additionally, gender stereotypes of what a leader looks and acts like are only further engrained in sport culture, which perpetuates the inequity (see Burton, 2015). Creating a more equitable environment and culture is necessary to begin to dismantle the entrenched gender hierarchy in sport.

Barriers to Women in Coaching

Women have struggled to reach the same levels of success as men in the coaching profession due in part to the barriers they encounter. The Ecological-Intersectional Model, created by LaVoi (2016), provides a framework into which career barriers and facilitators can be organized. Based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model (1977), the Ecological-Intersectional Model contains four levels, in which the individual level is at the center, followed by interpersonal, organizational, and societal levels (LaVoi, 2016; LaVoi, 2018). This model assists in understanding the relationships between person and environment, and how that affects human behavior. Integral to the Ecological-Intersectional Model is the acknowledgment of intersecting identities at the individual level, such as gender, age, race, and sexual orientation. The inclusion of intersectionality allows the model to illuminate the variations within the broad category of "women" (LaVoi, 2016). Barriers for women in coaching include but are not limited to gender normalcy, homologous reproduction, tokenism, an unequal assumption of competence, work-life conflict, and lack of mentors and professional networks. (Derks, Ellemers, Van Laar, & De Groot, 2011; Kamphoff, 2010; Kilty, 2006; Messner, 2009). These barriers are examined next within the framework of the Ecological-Intersectional Model.

Societal Level

Stereotypes of gender roles can be included at the societal level of the Ecological-Intersectional Model. Gender stereotypes permeate sports culture and the professional duties therein, in the form of gender normalcy. Gender normalcy occurs in two facets: normalizing the skewed ratio of women to men and normalizing the assigned

duties based on gender (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012; Laabs, 1993). An example of the former facet would be a woman who is the assistant swim coach, but her duties primarily lie with coordinating team travel and meals, ordering equipment, and managing the facility. She is spending limited time coaching even though she is an assistant coach. The types of administrative and organizational tasks she has been given are considered "woman's work," and this becomes a regular part of assigned duties rather than coaching. In this example of gender normalcy, the coach is exhibiting or portraying behavior that is considered "natural" for her gender, and thus it is accepted by the community of athletes and coaches, and perhaps by the coach herself (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012).

Society may also perceive women's accomplishments as lesser than their male peers. Historically women have largely been perceived as "invaders" in the male-dominated sport spaces (Coakley, 2017), and therefore female coaches face an unequal assumption of competence as compared to their male counterparts (Kilty, 2006). Research consistently illustrates the presence of unequal assumption of competence between male and female coaches. Studies have found that female coaches who coach male athletes had to be highly decorated athletes or coaches to establish credibility from the athletes and administrators (Kamphoff, Armentrout & Driska, 2010; Siegele, Smith, & Hardin, 2019). Women are unable to achieve high-ranking positions without having the highest levels of credentials, while men can attain these levels with much greater diversity in their previous accomplishments (Cunningham & Sagas, 2002; Kilty, 2006). These results indicate that for women, personal athletic achievement may be more valued than diversified coaching experience, while the opposite may be true for men.

Organizational Level

The organizational level of the multi-level model for the current study is the environment of the collegiate athletic department, which is largely male-dominated (Taylor & Hardin, 2016). Therefore, it is not uncommon for the behaviors of homologous representation and tokenism to present themselves within individual institutions (Taylor & Hardin, 2016). Homologous reproduction is the process by which dominant groups or individuals reproduce themselves through hiring similar individuals based on social and physical characteristics, (e.g., a white male would be more likely to hire another white male; Stangl & Kane, 1991). Homologous reproduction happens across gender and race as people are more likely to hire those that look like them. This practice is problematic for everyone in the organization, especially women as collegiate athletics preserves heteronormative gender roles and marginalizes, excludes, and devalues women (Hardin, Whiteside, & Ash, 2014; Whisenant & Mullane, 2007).

Tokenism also occurs at the organizational level. Men attribute the lack of women in sport organizations to a lack of aspiration, not opportunity (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012). This perception may be based on the token status that many women occupy in their organization, where they are viewed as symbols of their category, rather than individuals (Kanter, 1977). The token individual may have trouble be-

having naturally, fitting in, and gaining peer acceptance (Kanter, 1993). These effects may influence a woman's intention of staying within the organization and her overall satisfaction in the position.

Interpersonal Level

At the interpersonal level, relationships between female coaches and their colleagues, both male and female, predictably affect their experiences. Mentoring and networking may be less available to women as it is to men. Female coaches struggle to build networks and obtain mentors (Greenhill, Auld, Cuskelly, & Hooper, 2009; Walker & Bopp, 2010) due to the male-dominated nature of the environment. Strong evidence of an "good ole boys" club and the absence of a similar network for women has been identified as well (Katz, Walker, & Hindman, 2018; Taylor & Hardin, 2016). In non-sport environments, mentorship has shown to improve job satisfaction, career mobility, and career commitment (Chao, Walz, Gardner, 1992; Høigaard & Mathisen, 2009). Female coaches could struggle to find satisfaction within their career without the availability of networking and mentorship.

Female coaches also may experience sexism in interpersonal relationships among both male and female colleagues. Particularly in male-dominated contexts, male colleagues can be the offenders of sexist behaviors towards women (Clarkson, Cox, & Thelwell, 2019). However, research has also shown that women in male-dominated fields can play a negative role in the advancement of other women (Ellemers, Van den Heuvel, De Gilder, Maass, & Bonvini, 2004). This phenomenon, termed the Queen Bee Syndrome, may be present in the coaching profession, as female superiors legitimize the disadvantaged position of other women (Derks et al., 2011; Dobson & Iredale, 2006; Taylor, Hardin, Welch, & Smith, 2018). Academic research has indicated that Queen Bee Syndrome may be a product of the environment when working in a sexist organization (Derks et al., 2011; Dobson & Iredale, 2006).

Individual Level

At the individual level is where intersecting identities influence human experiences. Gender identity may intersect with age, class, race, sexual orientation, and other identities. Homophobia has been a barrier for women in the coaching field because of inaccurate and detrimental associations that come with being a lesbian and a coach. Often, rival coaches will use the accusation of the other coach being a lesbian as a negative recruiting tool (Krane & Barber, 2005). Coaches, therefore, have felt the need to hide their sexual orientation from the public to protect their coaching position. Lesbian coaches may "pass" as heterosexual by dressing more feminine or wearing make-up to hide their sexual orientation (Krane & Barber, 2005; Norman, 2016). Inevitably, this conflict between private and public identity will have a detrimental effect on these coaches and may lead to their exit from the coaching profession.

Racial identities are especially relevant in the context of the sport of swimming. Swimming has a long history of excluding African Americans (Wiltse, 2007), and that history leads to fewer African Americans choosing to participate in swimming

as a leisure activity (Shinew, Floyd, McGuire, & Noe, 1996). Undoubtedly, the eventual result is an underrepresentation of black women in the swimming coaching profession.

Parental status as it intersects with gender affects male and female coaches differently as well. NCAA Division I coaches who were also mothers reported a sense of fulfillment from their role as a coach, but they dealt with feelings of guilt and anxiety stemming from being away from their children (Dixon & Bruening, 2007). The accepted norms and policies of an organization may influence these feelings of guilt or anxiety based on constraints such as work schedule, job pressure, and stress (Burton, 2015; Dixon & Bruening, 2007). Women face the added barrier of work/life conflict, where involvement in one role makes it difficult to participate in the other (e.g., work responsibilities interfere with wife/mothering responsibilities and vice-versa; Linehan & Scullion, 2008). Traditionally, men and fathers are asked to provide financially for their family and to provide the discipline for children (Graham & Dixon, 2014), whereas women are expected to provide extensive childcare as well as completion of most household duties (e.g., cooking, cleaning; Goldberg, Tan, & Thorson, 2009).

Gender inequity among collegiate coaches is a result of the aforementioned barriers in addition to some others. These barriers, which are all related to the coach's gender result in limited upward career mobility. Career mobility is influenced by both personal characteristics and social structures (Allmendinger, 1989). The Ecological-Intersectional model is an appropriate model to evaluate career mobility because it addresses the personal characteristics and the social structures in which the individual works. In college coaching, interfirm career mobility is of specific importance because it refers to an individual's ability to advance their career through moving between organizations (Sicherman & Galor, 1990). Collegiate coaching is a unique field where positions for promotion rarely come available within the employee's current athletic department and to move up in the field coaches often must move to another institution. Thus, examining the personal characteristics of coaches and the social environment in which they work can provide insight into the underrepresentation issue.

Focusing on a single sport such as swimming may provide some nuance or differentiation into the phenomenon of underrepresentation of women in college coaching. With a relatively equal representation of male and female athletes in collegiate swimming, as well as the training environment often being a shared gender space, the environment is contextually different from other collegiate sports. Therefore, the sexism experienced by female coaches in swimming may be more or less pronounced or demonstrated differently than other sports.

Methodology

A qualitative research design was used as it is one of the best when attempting to gain understandings that are best communicated through examples and narratives (Yates, 2003). Moreover, the purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of

the participants; it is not an attempt to predict or find causation (Van Manen, 1990). Therefore, a phenomenological methodology guided this research to understand how female swim coaches make meaning around their career experiences. Methods were chosen that would allow the participants to describe their perceptions about their experiences (Patton, 2002).

Participants

Purposeful criterion sampling was used for participant selection (Patton, 2002; Seidman 2013). The inclusion criteria for the sample were swimming coaches who identify as female and have coached at the NCAA Division I level. Participants were limited to NCAA Division I because it is the division with the greatest disparity in the ratio between male and female coaches. Coaches at this level rarely have other responsibilities other than coaching as their primary focus. There are limited if any other administrative duties outside of their sport. The participants included both head coaches, associate head coaches, and assistant coaches. Potential participants were identified through their university's athletic department website, and 35 potential participants were contacted via email. These individuals were selected based on the diversity of conference (e.g., Autonomous, Non-Autonomous, other Division I) and position (e.g., head coach, associate head coach, or assistant coach) they represented, in order to have a diverse sample to represent swimming coaches across all of NCAA Division 1. Twenty-five female coaches responded to the inquiry and fit the inclusion criteria. Interviews were conducted with 21 participants.

Due to the small population of female swimming coaches, providing detailed individual demographic information (e.g., conference affiliation, age, etc.) in a traditional table format could compromise the confidentiality of the participants. Therefore, the participants were assigned pseudonyms based on years of experience in NCAA Division I coaching to provide context for the reader. Four coaches with less than five years of experience in Division I were assigned pseudonyms with surnames beginning A through D. There are seven coaches with five to 10 years of Division I experience and are represented with surnames E through K. The 11 coaches, with pseudonym surnames L through U, have more than 10 years of Division I experience. The mean age of the participants was 42.7 years old, ranging in age from 28 to 63 years. The participants all racially identified as Caucasian/white. Nineteen of the participants identified as heterosexual, with three identifying as not heterosexual. The average time spent in coaching, across all divisional levels, ranged from two to 41 years, with a mean of 18 years.

The participants were assigned pseudonyms with the title of Coach and a surname. The practice of using first names for pseudonyms did not lend the amount of respect the participants deserved. Additionally, using surnames may help the reader to bracket any bias they may have toward women. For example, reading quotations from "Coach Adams" versus "Amy" may invoke different responses from the reader (Enfield, 2007).

Data Collection

The primary researcher conducted semi-structured interviews for the targeted purposes of uncovering meaning in the experiences of the participants and to understand the topic from the participants' perspective (Perakyla & Ruusuvuori, 2013; Yates, 2003). Phone interviews were selected in order to reach individuals in varying geographic locations (Harvey, 2011). Although in-person interviews may be preferred, studies have found that comparable findings can be yielded from phone interviews (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). The questions in the interview guide related to (a) the participants' personal coaching history, (b) training and education as a coach, and (c) perceptions regarding the gender imbalance in the profession. The interview guide was constructed based on research conducted with women in sport leadership positions (e.g., Massengale, 2009; Norman, 2010; Taylor, Siegele, Smith, & Hardin, 2018). After conducting one pilot interview with a colleague who had retired from coaching, the interview guide was determined to reflect the intention of the study accurately. Interviews were conducted via telephone by the primary researcher with the average length of the interviews being slightly more than 44 minutes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Saturation was reached after 21 interviews at the point where similar data was being repeated through the interviews (Seidman, 2013).

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the study was enhanced through member-checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the use of open-ended interview questions, and the primary researcher's ability to build rapport and understand the culture and the context of the participants' experiences due to her time spent in the profession (Morrow, 2005). The primary researcher also regularly journaled her own preconceptions and perceptions throughout the research process to understand her personal biases as it related to the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member-checking allowed the participants to review the transcription and change, delete, or amend any data they wished. Only one participant elected to change any of her data. She retracted two pages of her transcription in which she told a story that did not involve her personally.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data were analyzed using constant comparative analysis, beginning with in-vivo coding (Saldaña, 2015). The primary researcher chose to use in-vivo coding to keep the analysis in the words of the participants as much as possible. From the 215 pages of transcriptions, 819 initial codes were developed. Codes were compared to previous codes in the same transcription and then across transcriptions. These codes were then grouped into categories by "connecting threads and patterns" among the data (Seidman, 2013, p.127). A co-researcher reviewed the codes and categories for confirmation. Although some disagreement occurred between researchers, the researchers were able to agree on themes through discussion, debate and continual review and examination of the initial codes and categories. Nine categories were condensed into three mutually agreed-upon themes by the primary researcher and

one co-researcher. The themes were then presented to the other two co-researchers for verification. The theme of sexism is presented here independently due to the robust nature of the findings.

Findings and Discussion

The experiences of the participants in this study revealed a pervasiveness of gender bias in the swim coaching profession. These biases in several instances resulted in incidents of discrimination. The gender bias and discrimination experienced by the coaches in the present study could broadly be explained as subtle sexism or the "unequal and unfair treatment of women" that is "perceived to be normative, and therefore does not appear unusual" (Swim, Mallett, & Stangor, 2004, p. 117). The term sexism is used to generally identify both the prejudice and the discrimination the participants experienced (Cudd & Jones, 2005). Sexism was manifested in five general categories: (a) misidentification (b) differential treatment, (c) tokenism, (d) isolation, and (e) motherhood (see Table 1). Using the Ecological-Intersectional model, at the societal level, female coaches experience misidentification and differential treatment. At the organizational level, the female coaches experience tokenism. Isolation is representative of the coaches' experiences at the interpersonal level. Lastly, female coaches' intersectional identity regarding their parental status is represented by the motherhood category.

Table 1
Categories of Sexism within the Ecological-Intersectional Model

Ecological-Intersectional model level	Category of sexism	Example of category
Societal	Misidentification	Lack of external identification as coaches or leaders
	Differential treatment	Experience of treatment dissimilar from male colleagues
Organizational	Tokenism	Receiving additional attention for being a female coach
Interpersonal	Isolation	Separation from dominant group creating networking barriers
Individual/Intersectional	Motherhood	Experience of discrimination based on parental status

Misidentification

The female coaches in this study experienced sexism through a lack of external identification as coaches or the leaders of their teams. This sexism is not uncommon; research has found that many times women in coaching are questioned on their status or must hold high credentials (e..g., former All-American or Olympian) in order to be respected in their environment (Cunningham & Sagas, 2002; Kamphoff et al., 2010; Siegele et al., 2019). The participants commented on how they are sometimes mistaken for one of the student-athletes or an athletic trainer, and not as a part of the coaching staff. The less experienced, younger coaches often assume that it is because of their age and not because of their sex, although this misidentification happens to even the most experienced coaches. Coach Evans described a situation where she was not assumed to be a coach. She said,

> I was standing with another female coach at our conference meet and [a member of the meet staff] walks up and is like, "Where are your coaches at?" And it's two female coaches, one is the interim head coach and me. And I'm like, "We are the coaches. What are you thinking?" Sometimes as a female, you're either someone on the team or you're the trainer. Nobody knows you are the coach. If you are the head coach, they are still going to go to your male assistant, treating him like he's the head coach.

Coach Isaac had similar experiences of being mistaken for an athlete. She said,

> I feel like sometimes I am not taken seriously. And there are times when officials are like, "What are you swimming?" I'm like, "No I'm the coach. Do you not see the stopwatch? I'm like one of the only people dressed in clothing." … But they never say that to my guy friends. They never say that to the other male coaches, they only ever say that to younger females.

The assumption of the female coach, being a student-athlete or staff member and not a coach extends beyond the younger coaches. This would suggest that the misidentification is more a product of sexism than ageism. Coach Ullman recalled a story of her male assistant and male director of operations being mistaken for the coaches. She said a younger male on the meet staff walked right past her and handed the meet line-up to her male assistant and male director of operations as he says, "Here you go, Coach." She reacted by informing this individual of his subconscious biases. She said to him, "Do you realize that you just assumed that the men were the head coaches and that I wasn't the coach? You just probably want to check in with that."

Coach Ullman also retold the story of her encounter with a female meet referee at a top-level national meet. Coach Ullman's institution has separate women's and men's swimming programs. There was an issue with one of the female swimmers, and the meet referee came to Coach Ullman and asked to speak with the head coach of the men's team. Coach Ullman said to the referee, "That's bullshit. This is a female, and this is a women's issue. Why are you going to him? You're a woman; you

should know how hard this has been." Coach Ullman said she "was dumbfounded" at the encounter. Lastly, in her many years of coaching, Coach Ullman said she has regularly been misidentified by swim meet security as a parent. She says she has been directed towards spectator seating by meet security. She says she does not see her male counterparts misidentified in this way.

This misidentification of female coaches as athletic trainers, athletes, or parents shows the deep-rooted bias individuals may hold, in which the assumption that a woman is not the leader is demonstrated. The pervasiveness of gender stereotypes, and who is perceived as leaders, is engrained throughout sport culture and therefore this category fell into the societal level of the Ecological-Intersectional model. The younger female coaches attributed this misidentification to their age; however, as this still happens to older women who are well established in their careers, it is likely to be more a product of sexism. In addition, younger men associated with the program, such as assistants or directors of operations, are assumed to be the coaches. It is naturally assumed a younger man with a team is a coach but that is not always the case for younger women or women of any age for that matter. It is also notable that it is not only men who misidentify the female coaches, as women do this as well. This finding aligns with research in collegiate athletics that found men are assumed to hold the leadership positions within college athletics (Burton, Grappendorf, & Henderson, 2011; Taylor & Hardin, 2016).

The stereotypes surrounding gender and leadership create biases that lead to misidentifications. Gender stereotyping influences who is perceived as a competent leader. Women are stereotyped as kind, warm, and gentle. Although these are positive traits, when it comes to leadership this can have negative consequences because the stereotypical masculine characteristics of confidence, assertiveness, and independence are perceived as the preferred leadership qualities (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Differential Treatment

Participants not only identified misidentification as a form of sexism used to discredit their role as head coaches but also discussed the differential treatment they experienced in comparison to their male peers. Sexism in the form of differential treatment occurred from a variety of sources within and tangential to the swimming program, be it other coaches, athletes, parents, and athletic administrators. This sexism is deeply embedded culturally in sport which limits or devalues women in leadership roles (Kamphoff et al., 2010; Kilty, 2006). These coaches regularly encounter stereotypes and discrimination as women in a male-dominated field.

Coach Davis witnessed varying levels of respect for the coaches on the pool deck based on their gender. There were both male and female head coaches in her conference. She said,

> I think they [female head coaches] had to work a lot harder to get respect on the pool deck than the men did. Men just kind of had it when they walked on the pool deck, or had it for each other by default, whereas the women didn't get the benefit of just being respected for their position.

The swimmers on the team may also have a sexist view of who should be coaching them. Coach Evans tells a story of a female coach who had an athlete leave her program when she was promoted from the assistant coach to the head coach. The female swimmer said she did not want to swim for a female head coach and questioned what would happen to the team if that coach got pregnant. This female coach had been the group coach for this swimmer before her promotion and had been quite successful in developing this swimmer. It could, therefore, be inferred that the swimmer recognized the coach for her coaching acumen but could not accept her as the leader.

Coach Owens said she had personally faced sexist attitudes from female athletes. She said,

> Some females don't want to be coached by females, they do better with males, and they have told me that, which I am like, "Gender has nothing to with it. It's personality; it has nothing to do with gender." But I can't educate the world on that.

Coach Foster said that when she first started coaching, she perceived sexist attitudes from the men's team she coached. She again thought their disrespect might be attributed to her age rather than her gender. She "thought that the men's team didn't respect me as much as the women's team, or listened to me on coaching… I was a lot younger, too." However, her words suggest that the treatment she was receiving from her athletes was intersectional. She said,

> I don't think it was my gender, definitely my age, but it definitely was hard for me to garner respect of the athletes. I think I really had to work hard to get the men's respect. The other three swimming coaches were male, (and) it was sometimes difficult for them to take me seriously.

Gender may also be used as a negative recruiting tool against female coaches. A prospective student-athlete eventually told Coach Knight that she thought she needed a male coach after several months of Coach Knight recruiting her. The athlete told Coach Knight that a male coach who had been recruiting her to another institution suggested this. This particular student-athlete wanted to study engineering, and Coach Knight eventually won her over, by explaining that she had "some perspective on being a female in a male-dominated industry." She explained that this negative recruiting against female coaches "is out there, it gets used against you."

Female coaches also face gender biases when they act in stereotypically masculine ways. Coach Evans said that when a female coach enforces the rules, she is a "bitch." She said that the expectation is that the "female is supposed to be the complete nurturer." Female coaches are also disparaged by their male colleagues according to Coach Lewis when they do not act in stereotypically feminine ways. She said that she has heard, on several occasions, male coaches on the pool deck talking negatively about a highly successful female coach. She said, "People talk about how she's a bitch, and she's crazy. And it's like, what about these other guys? They're

crazy too!" She said this "is not very encouraging to women, especially if you are younger. You are hearing these people that you trust and see as a role model or idol, and they are talking that way."

Coach Ullman said she regularly faces this double standard of being a female coach who is tough. She says,

> If you are a female coach and you are direct, and you have expectations and you make people work hard, I'm a bitch. But if I'm a guy and I do that, I'm a good coach. I'm a bitch because I might yell or say that needs to be better, or that's not okay here, but if I do that as a male coach that is a positive quality.

She added that she tried to help her female athletes understand this double standard. She tells them, "So bitch means you know what you want and you're going to be passionate about getting it and you're willing to speak up for yourself, and yes, I'm a bitch, so I hope you'll be a bitch too."

This differential treatment is at the center of the sexism experienced by female coaches as it perpetuates hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is the system in which men's dominant role in society is legitimized, which in turns makes women the subordinate gender (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), and thus why this category falls at the societal level of the Ecological-Intersectional model. The participants' examples of differential treatment continually reinforce the notion that men are presumed to be the natural leaders. This is especially true in a male-dominated sporting context where stereotypical masculine behaviors are rewarded. When athletes say "they prefer a male coach" or administrators think they need to hire a male coach for male athletes, they are constructing or reconstructing the gender hierarchy and perpetuating hegemonic masculinity. Women continue to experience underrepresentation in leadership roles because of this view (Walker & Bopp, 2010).

Women are supposed to be sensitive, gentle, and nurturing, which are not considered leadership traits. Women are perceived to be a "bitch" when they exhibit stereotypical masculine traits of leadership. Women who express femininity have little chance to move into leadership roles within their sport organization because they are not taken seriously by their male colleagues. However, women who express masculinity are also excluded from leadership positions because they were perceived to be "bitchy" (Shaw & Hoebner, 2003). Of interest in the current study, was how Coach Ullman embraced her "bitch" status and has turned what is typically seen as a negative into a positive. She wears her "bitch" status proudly, recognizing what it really stands for and celebrating it almost as a status symbol.

Tokenism

Several of the coaches provided examples of times they have felt like a token in their careers. Tokenism is when an organization makes a symbolic effort to include minority groups in order to be perceived as more inclusive (Kanter, 1993). The effect of tokenism is that individuals may perceive that the only reason a woman has a specific position is because of her gender, not her expertise (Kanter, 1993). The women

in this study discussed feelings of tokenism in their interactions with other coaches. Coach Morris said she feels like "the reality is that you have to be better than the men coaches to be perceived as good." She said she still hears comments like, "She is the best *female* [emphasis added] coach I know," and that she is "still trying to get that clarification [female] out of the sentence." Being one of few female coaches inevitably brings more attention to her as a coach, but at the same time highlights her gender as different from the majority, just as Kanter (1977) asserted that token women feel highly visible, yet isolated from their peers.

Participants in this study acknowledged that their gender might have assisted them in obtaining their first positions in college coaching. However, the benefit of gender ended there, as many women then struggled to ascend the coaching ranks. Coach Smith summarized this perception saying, "So I feel like it [being female] does open doors, but I feel like there will be a time when it hinders me from obtaining opportunities. I have this perception that administrations would rather have a male in a head coaching role."

Coach Smith discussed how entry-level positions might be easier to obtain as a woman, but it is necessary to overcome the token status which keeps female coaches in those positions. She said,

> I do think that sometimes it's easier for a woman to get a job because a lot of programs always want that token female… but if you think that you are that token and all you are going to do is organize travel and get food at meets, if that's what you think your role is, then that's what your role is going to be.

Coach Davis explained the attitude these male coaches may have in hiring a female assistant. She said male head coaches "feel like they need a female on a staff" and are "setting up her position to be at the bottom of the totem pole." She furthered her point saying, "they [male coaches] don't really care about who she is and aren't interested in her contribution" and "creating a space for her to actually want to be there." She says this is an "exceptionally huge hurdle in a coaching career." She continued addressing the impact that tokenism may have on female assistants. She said, "I guess I don't really think that head coaches these days have a ton of respect for young women coaches."

Coach Isaac summarized several of the themes in her discussion about assistant coach job openings in the Power Five Conferences (e.g., SEC, ACC, Pac-12, Big Ten, Big 12). She said when there is an assistant coach opening,

> They're really just looking to hire that token female position. And apparently, that's a thing, where it's like a token female that will do all the admin work and just recruit the women. If a position opens, I don't want to be stuck in that position my entire career.

The token female role on a coaching staff does not work in favor of female coaches. Coach Smith explained how head coaches are resistant to hire more than

the one female coach they deem necessary to have on their staff. She said that she wanted to apply at a program that had multiple assistant openings when they hired a new head coach. Her mentor called the newly hired head coach to put in a good word for her and the "coach of the college told him, 'No, I'm going to retain the girl that was on staff, so we don't need any more women coaches.'"

This token status that female assistant coaches appear to occupy in the minds of their male head coaches or administrators may result in fewer opportunities for on-the-job training in the technical areas of coaching that will most likely lead to head coaching opportunities. The coaches in the current study used terms such as "secretary-coach," "admin-coach," and "operations-coach" to describe the token role that these female coaches occupy; demonstrating the gender norms of "men and women's work" (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012). Coaches receive most of their coaching education through their closest coaching contacts, for assistant coaches, this is their head coach. Therefore, the assistant coaches are highly dependent on the ability of their head coach to educate and train them to learn the necessary skills that will be required at the level of head coach. Unfortunately, in the current study, both head coaches and assistant coaches discuss the lack of training female assistant coaches receive from their head coach as a result of their token status. Coach Nelson explained the attitude that head coaches have in not training their assistant coaches to become head coaches. She said that they want someone who is "not going to overstep her boundaries," that the head coach will "still get to do all the coaching," and that the female assistant will "almost be like the secretary coach, do all the travel, do all the paperwork, do the expense reports, do all that stuff, instead of actual coaching."

Tokenism, while opening the door for some of the women in the current study, eventually has adverse outcomes. The token role assigned to many female coaches is a product of the culture of the organization, and thus has been situated within the organizational level of the Ecological-Intersectional model. An individual who is in a token role may have trouble behaving naturally, fitting in, and gaining peer acceptance (Kanter, 1993). The coaches in the current study reported some degree of all three of these negative outcomes. Kanter (1977) also suggests that tokenism can lead to role entrapment which is exactly what the women are experiencing as the "admin-coach." Evidence of women being stereotyped into certain career functions or "role entrapment" has been shown in college athletic departments (Taylor & Hardin, 2016). Women tend to be funneled into careers that do not lead to the highest leadership positions. Gender-role entrapment means the minority gender is pushed further into the stereotypical roles and behaviors of their gender (Johnson & Schulman, 1989). There is evidence of this in the current study as women are pushed into the "secretarial" or "administrative" duties that are stereotypically associated with women.

Women are not being prepared to move onto higher positions of leadership because of the token status of their position. They are experiencing "the sticky floor" phenomena where the entry-level position becomes a "trap" rather than a "stepping stone." A sticky floor does not allow a woman to advance high enough to even encounter the glass ceiling (Reskin & Pavadic, 2006). The other effect that tokenism

has on individuals in the minority group is diminished self-esteem (Kanter, 1977). This sentiment was echoed nearly verbatim by one of the participants when she questioned whether she was deserving of her position or whether she got her job "just because she was a female."

Isolation

Both more experienced and less experienced coaches discussed the isolation that occurs due to working in a male-dominated profession such as swimming. This lack of representation can lead to women lacking mentorship, role models, and allies within their industry causing feelings of isolation. Isolation can occur in two different ways: within a coaching staff and in the swimming community at large. In the current study, the assistant coaches discussed being the only woman on the coaching staff while the head coaches discussed isolation in the larger swimming community. The coaches were often one of the very few women on pool decks, at professional meetings, or in other potential networking situations. Isolation seemed to be present at every stage of these women's careers. The women were usually the only female coach on a five-person staff early in their careers. They were met with a "good 'ole boys" club that was unwelcoming, and they found it challenging to connect with other women when they pursued networking at professional development events. Once the women had a well-established career in their 30s and 40s, they found that many of the female coaches who were once their peers had left the profession. Lastly, if the female coach reached the highest coaching levels, they were now one of the very few head coaches.

Coach Nelson expressed how she experienced isolation in the college coaching environment. She said, "In my life, I always felt like a freak. I was this female balancing being a DI coach, being married, recruiting, going away. My community, they just hadn't seen anything like that." She went on to say, "When I became the head coach, I thought, 'I'm 26-years old, I'm pregnant, and I am a head coach, and I don't know who to turn to.'" She also discussed the isolation that occurred in professional situations that were intended for networking and career development. She said that there was a time at College Swim Coaches Association of America (CSCAA) conferences when "basically the men would all go out and play golf, and some of the women were there and we would sit out by the pool and talk or go to dinner." The isolation that Coach Nelson was experiencing was two-fold. She was coaching and raising a family, which was unique in her community, and she was also not part of a larger female coaching community professionally.

The isolation that Coach Nelson was experiencing at a professional development convention may be considered sexism, as the male coaches, either intentionally or unintentionally, did not include women. Although this is a subtle form of sexism, it is still prevalent and impactful on a woman's career. This may suggest that male coaches do not see the female coaches as their peers, coworkers, or friends, and the female coaches are fundamentally different from them. Women are excluded from the normal dialogue and social interaction that develops between the male coaches. Ultimately, this exclusion from the networks and social interactions could negatively

affect the upward career mobility of women. Career mobility is enhanced by having a vast, sparse network of informal ties for acquiring information and resources (Podolny, & Baron, 1997). Female coaches struggle to advance their careers without the opportunity to build a network due to the isolation that occurs.

Other coaches discussed the isolation they experienced as a coach with a family. Coach Lewis explained how being a female coach with a family was isolating. She said, "I think I felt isolated for a long time as a mother trying to coach." In addition, she said that she lacked peers. She could name only two other female coaches in her age range with children. She said, "So there's not very many of us. I don't think I felt like I had any peers that I could talk to." She said there is a specific age group of unrepresented female coaches. She said there are some established older female coaches and quite a few young female assistants, but there are very few women in the mid-30s to mid-40s age range. She said, "Women look around, and sure it's great when you are young, but they look around and like, 'What do you do when you're in your mid-30s?' There's not very many women left, so they see it."

The observation of a missing demographic of female coaches may be evidence of limited upward career mobility. Individuals with fewer opportunities for career advancement will lower their career expectations, experience greater dissatisfaction, and eventually leave a given profession or organization (Kanter, 1977). This phenomenon may be precisely what women in coaching are experiencing, as women are represented in greater percentages at the assistant coach level than the head coach level. The missing demographic may be the result of women reaching a point in their coaching career where they are frustrated with limited opportunities for advancement and leave the profession altogether (Hardin, Taylor, Smith, & Siegele, 2017,, 2018; Taylor, Smith, & Hardin, 2017).

Isolation can occur even when there is an opportunity to connect with other female coaches. Coach Harris said she experienced isolation from female coaches as well and her attempts to connect with other female coaches have not been successful. She recounted a time at a coaching conference where there was a women's cocktail hour. She said she "was introduced to some of these women, but that was it. I just didn't feel, as women in the industry, we weren't doing a great job of helping each other out because we were all just trying to stay afloat."

Coach Harris' perception that women are not helping other women because they are all just trying to "stay afloat" is the result of working in a male-dominated environment. "Queen Bee" behavior may emerge among some women in a male-dominated environment (Taylor et al., 2018). Some women will choose to distance themselves from other women because of the negative stereotypes associated with women and align themselves with their male colleagues (Derks et al., 2011). This may mean that female coaches will not build networks with other female coaches, and instead build a stronger network with male colleagues. As this experience limits relationship building, it has been categorized in the Ecological-Intersectional model as interpersonal.

The isolation these women are experiencing can have other effects, as well. The women expressed difficulty in identifying female role models and mentors. Research

has shown the importance of female role models for women. A female career-role model proves to be more inspiring for women than does a male role model for a man (Lockwood, 2006). Additionally, positive female role models influence women's perceptions of coaching as a potential career path. Current female coaches have limited numbers of high-achieving female coaches to emulate. Young coaches or prospective coaches may lose interest in the career field without this source of inspiration, and current female swimmers may not consider coaching as a possible career path.

Motherhood

Sexist attitudes towards female coaches can also come from pregnancy or parental status which can create further conflict for women regarding a work/life balance (Burton, 2015; Dixon & Bruening, 2007). Coach Evans described a conversation she overheard between two male head coaches as one was considering hiring a specific female coach for an open assistant position. The other male coach had previously worked with this female coach. The first male coach asked the other if he would ever hire the female assistant again. His response was, "I would if she didn't have kids."

Coach Adams expressed concern regarding getting pregnant as she thought her administrators might express some reservations. She did not have children, but she imagined telling her administrators she was pregnant and the reaction she might get. She said, "they would be like, 'Oh my gosh, now is she going out on maternity leave? Is she going to come back, or should we just try to replace her right now?'" Coach Isaac echoed a similar sentiment about the impact having children might have on her career. She wondered "if they [her administration] would be supportive? Or would they just push me out? I don't know." This concern over discrimination regarding having children or pregnancy extends to women who have no intention of having children. Coach Davis said,

> I fall into the category of women who don't have any interest in having children. Because you are female people think you're going to be having babies someday, and that probably means you're not going to be interested in doing this (coaching)forever.

Coach Nelson told a story of interviewing for a head coach position at another institution when she was visibly pregnant. She said she saw reactions from the hiring committee when she came to the interview "showing quite a bit." This job ended up going to a male coach. She did not say that her pregnancy was the reason she did not get the job, but she was aware of the hiring committee's reaction.

In other male-dominated professions, women who did not have children were perceived as competent as men in the field, but once women had children or became pregnant, they were now regarded as mothers rather than professionals (Ranson, 2005). Female coaches working in a male-dominated environment may be more accepted before they become mothers, but once pregnancy or motherhood occurs, the two identities of coach and mother may be incongruous. Arguably, the impact

of pregnancy or parental status discrimination may contribute to the struggle for women to advance in coaching. This is not uncommon for women to consider the repercussions of having a family. Taylor et al, (2017) found that early career women in collegiate administration had already decided to exit the profession or forego having children even when a partner and serious relationship was not present in their life.

Women who pursue coaching as a career may leave the profession when they have children or may decide that having children is not compatible with their career goals. Coach Smith, retired from coaching after having her second child. She said that she wants to "be all-in" in everything that she does. She did not feel like she could give coaching the proper attention necessary when distracted by the needs of motherhood. Coaching is a uniquely demanding profession, perhaps more so for women than men, add to that the expectations and responsibilities of motherhood, it may be an unmanageable lifestyle for some (Bruening & Dixon, 2008). Male coaches do face work-life challenges as well but are contextually different from women (Graham & Dixon, 2014). These intersecting identities of gender and parental status that uniquely effect women, situate this category of sexism at the individual/intersectional level of the Ecological-Intersectional model.

Conclusion

Examining the career experiences of NCAA Division I female swimming coaches in order to better understand the lack of female representation in the profession was the purpose of this research. Female leaders in sport experiencing sexism is not a new concept; however, understanding how and in what contexts that sexism occurs for swimming coaches is distinct. The women in the current study experienced sexism from a variety of sources and in a variety of contexts. The Ecological-Intersectional Model of barriers and supports for women coaches developed by Lavoi (2016) provides organization to the variety of barriers encountered by female coaches in this study. At the societal level, cultural norms and gender normalcy may limit women from obtaining leadership positions (e.g. head coach; Kamphoff, 2010; Taylor & Hardin, 2016; Taylor et al., 2018) represented in this study in the Misidentification and Differential Treatment categories. At the organizational level, homologous reproduction and organizational culture within sport organizations limit women's ability to gain initial employment and subsequently climb the career ladder. The Tokenism category in this study is an example of such an organizational culture. At the interpersonal level, female coaches may struggle with sexism from colleagues and administrators, which results in a lack of mentorship and role models, represented by the Isolation category. At the individual level, female coaches intersecting identities create further challenges. As it relates to the current study, the intersection of gender and parental status, the Motherhood category, was identified as a barrier for female coaches.

The sexism female coaches experienced by those associated with their program can create a hostile working environment. As Coach Davis said, if "I felt like this

was going to be a very miserable existence, I would leave." She said that she thinks it is "a choice a lot of women, unfortunately, have been making across all types of sports, dealing with their various male-dominated cultures." When women regularly experience sexism, it may eventually lead to their decision to leave the career field. Moreover, a female athlete considering the coaching career path may choose not to enter the field initially if she is witness to the sexism experienced by female coaches. These sources of sexism encountered by female coaches, whether from athletes, other coaches, parents, or administrators, can create an environment that is less than hospitable for female coaches. Every coach may not have experienced sexism from every source, but most have experienced sexism to some degree from at least one of the sources. It could impact their career experiences to the point where they consider leaving the field when these coaches feel disrespected from a variety of sources.

Having opportunities for women in the coaching profession is important. Coaches are role models for children and adolescents. Athletes are overwhelmingly coached by men, which only serves to reinforce gender stereotypes which exist in sport and leadership (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Furthermore, women have largely been excluded from coaching men which limits career options for women, prevents boys/men from the benefits of female leadership, and further engrains the gender hierarchy. For example, in research conducted with men's college basketball coaches the environment is both gender exclusive and resistant to change which perpetuates the limited of opportunities for women to coach the sport (Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013). Additionally, coaching can be a viable career option for former athletes. Athletes often struggle with identity issues and lack of career opportunities after their competitive career ends and coaching is a potential outlet for them (Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996; Saxe, Hardin, Taylor, & Pate, 2017; Smith & Hardin, 2018; Smith, Taylor, & Hardin, 2018). Lastly, having female coaches as role models also affects perceptions of leadership characteristics. Girls and women may falsely come to believe that they must adopt a stereotypically masculine leadership style, whether in coaching or other leadership positions if they are only exposed to male leadership styles as coaches, and thus not pursue coaching as a career.

Women must be in an environment that facilitates upward career mobility to maintain a coaching career or climb the coaching career ladder. The current college swim coaching environment does the opposite. Many of these women are not able to ascend to higher ranks due to a variety of barriers perpetuated by sexism and hegemony. Additionally, the roles that they do occupy on their coaching staffs may be unfulfilling and not offer growth opportunities. Women who have achieved the highest levels of success and are widely considered experts in this field are still regularly confronting the hegemonic masculinity entrenched in sport and coaching.

From these findings, athletic administrators can recognize the challenges their female coaches face and consider strategies to support them better. Likewise, the perception of what a swimming coach looks, sounds, and acts like needs to evolve in order to challenge the belief that sport leadership positions are inherently masculine. It has long been recognized that there is a gender representation problem in collegiate swim coaching, but the narrative often shifted the blame to the coach herself,

with observations of women not wanting to coach. However, from these findings, it is undeniable that it is the environment that needs to change to make coaching more attractive for women in terms of career advancement and overall job satisfaction.

Limitations

This study is limited in a few ways. Foremost, the primary researcher is a former college swim coach herself. She spent six years coaching college swimming, and her positionality should be recognized. In addition, the instrument of interviews for data collection, although providing a narrative, does not provide scale. It cannot be determined if the experiences of the participants were isolated incidents or examples of regularly occurring events. Also, with self-reported data, the participants' memory may be selective or even exaggerated. The sample of participants was also a limitation to the study, as it did not represent women who left the career field early. Future research should examine women who have left the profession in order to understand their reasoning for opting out of this career path.

Implications for Practice

Due to the continued male-domination of leadership positions in sport, women cannot simply wait for a change in culture to advance their careers. Therefore, female swimming coaches must act to enhance their career mobility. Misidentification and differential treatment due to societal stereotypes will undoubtedly continue. However, the response of the coach can change perceptions. When asked how the coaches handled these situations, some coaches laughed off the misidentification or sexist behaviors while others corrected the behavior. Only through confronting the stereotypes will the offenders become aware of their biases (Czopp, Monteith, & Mark, 2006). To combat the token role that assistant coaches often occupy, assistant coaches need to discuss their career goals with their head coach to avoid the "sticky floor" (Laabs, 1993). The head coach then needs to train and develop his/her assistant coaches in tangible skills that will be marketable for head coaching positions. This means assistant coaches need to assert themselves in asking for duties other than administration. Assistant coaches need to be given the autonomy to develop season plans, write workouts, recruit, and fundraise, among numerous other coaching skills. These are the skills that will help them climb the ladder to their next career move (Machida & Feltz, 2013; Smith, Taylor, Siegele, & Hardin, 2019; Taylor & Hardin, 2016). Although working in an inhospitable environment may make mentorship and networking more challenging, the most successful, longest tenured coaches in this study participated extensively in these activities. If a coach desires a long and more satisfying career experience networking and mentoring services are available through a variety of coaching organizations as well as through institutional athletic departments. Lastly, a coach's parental-status, whether a mom or dad, should not have a negative impact on the career of a coach. It should be under the purview of the athletic department to ensure that hiring practices are non-discriminatory based on parental status. The athletic department should also provide proper supports and

resources for coaches with children such as on-campus child-care options, flexible work schedules, and ability to travel with the team. Head coaches need to be aware of the demands of the job on parents and consider ways in which they can support assistant coaches with children. These recommendations for practice cannot summarily fix the problem of institutional and pervasive sexism in a male-dominated community, however they may provide some pathways towards equity between male and female coaches.

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