JOURNAL OF INTERCOLLEGIATE SPORT

Football and Financial (In)equality: Comparing Salaries of Men's and Women's Teams' Coaches and Severance Pay within Division I-FBS

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This study investigates the relationship between women's and men's team coaches' salaries and severance pay at 104 public NCAA Division I-FBS institutions. Using data from the Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Data project from 2014 to 2021, the research reveals that the salaries of men's teams' coaches grew significantly more than those of women's teams' coaches, especially among the most competitive schools in FBS (Power conferences). At Power conference schools, the increase in the severance pay for men's teams' coaches was 5.3 times larger than the growth in women's teams' coaching salaries. The study confirms that the higher the level of competition, there is a growing disproportion of compensation in favor of men's teams' coaches over women's teams' coaches. FBS institutions' chase for prestige means paying coaches of men's teams increasingly more than they pay to the coaches of women's teams, despite espoused values of gender equity, the intent of Title IX, and economic conditions.

Keywords: coaches' salaries, Power conference, masculine leadership, revenue allocation theory, severance pay

There is a long-standing tradition in the United States for men to be paid more than women, despite the type of work or effort. Indeed, the Equal Pay Act of 1963 (US EEOC, n.d.), the Equal Rights Amendment (1972), part of the rationale behind Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Suggs, 2005), the Fair Pay Act of 2009 (US EEOC, n.d.), outspoken national icons such as Gloria Steinem (1970), author Margaret Atwood (Field, 2018), actress Jane Fonda (Flamisch, 2018), the U.S. Women's National Soccer Team (Peterson, 2022), and U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg (Massey Law Group, 2022) – all argued against women wage discrimination in the United States. Wage discrimination has also been a focus in big-time intercollegiate athletics, in which women in coaching roles have a history

Journal of Intercollegiate Sport, 2025, 18.1

of unequal compensation to men (Grant & Judge, n.d.; Lattinville & Denny, n.d.). Yet, despite the social, cultural, and athletic history of discrimination against women in pay, little empirical research has been conducted to compare the growth rates of men's teams' coaches' salaries with the salaries of other college sports coaches, especially the coaches of women's teams' coaches. Furthermore, while severance pay of football coaches has recently garnered attention (Clarke, 2022; Knight Commission, 2023a; Levine & Schlabach, 2021; Riepenhoff et al., 2024; Syrluga, 2022), no research to date has compared how this practice may impact the overall pay equity for women's coaches. This study seeks to address this gap in research by examining the growth rates of salaries and severance pay for men's and women's teams' coaches.

Despite gender discrimination in sport for equal pay, the interesting phenomenon today is women's sports are experiencing a surge in popularity (Darvin, 2024; Smith, 2024). By 2024, women's sports were encountering a period of significant increase in publicity on television with record media ratings for women's college basketball and its March Madness Tournament, the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), and the women's soccer World Cup, (Darvin, 2023, 2024; Nielsen, 2023; Smith 2024). This increased popularity could allow for increased revenue from future media contracts. Considering the new wealthier environment for women's sports in mind, this study aims to determine whether the salaries of the coaches for women's college teams are approaching parity with the salaries of men's teams' coaches of the same sports.

Literature Review

This study examined the outcomes of personnel decisions by leaders of higher education institutions or their athletics department, specifically how those in a position of authority can leverage their organization's financial capacity to maximize prestige. There have been many questions about severance pay (also known as "dead money") to failing coaches: more specifically, firing a coach and paying the remainder of their million-dollar salary for them not to coach (Clarke, 2022; Fuller et al., 2022; Hirko, 2022; Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2023b). This prestige-maximization philosophy to make financial decisions in favor of *football first* may or may not be aligned with decisions based on an institution's academic values and values of gender equity. Below is a literature review to discuss the gender pay gap in America and college sports considering Title IX with a specific focus on gender pay equity in intercollegiate athletics, and the impact of "dead money" on coaches' compensation.

Legal Foundations

The gender pay gap between women and men in higher education has been a constant drumbeat over the years that has improved for women in aggregate but still lags far behind the pay of men (Grabham, 2023; Miller & Vagins, 2018). Arguments in favor of providing women equal pay for equal work in America can be traced to 1869 (Alter, 2015). By the time President Kennedy signed into law the Equal Pay Act of 1963, women were making 59 cents on the dollar compared to men (The

White House, 2023). In 2023, Hegwesch and Mefferd (2022) analyzed the greater pay equity concern in America and found regardless of the 1963 Equal Pay Act, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Fair Pay Act of 2009, there remained "occupational and sector segregation" against women's pay for equal work. Gender discrimination in pay still exists, although Aragão (2023) found women have closed the gender gap in pay in America by earning, on average, 82% of the wage earned of men.

In college athletics, the gender pay gap has been a significant discussion among scholars, and the public since the passage of Title IX in 1972 (Rhode & Walker, 2008; Steidinger, 2000; Von Allmen, 2013). Before 1972, most coaching positions in women's teams were voluntary, while coaches of men's teams received a salary (Female Coaching Network, 2019). In 1972, Cathy Rush earned $450 as the head coach of the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) national champion women's basketball team of Immaculata College (Bowen, 2019). The first year after Title IX was adopted, women received 2.1% of the average proportion of AIAW and NCAA institutional athletics budgets compared to 97.9% for men (AIAW, 1978). By 1978-79, the AIAW found that the spending for women's sports increased 4.3% compared to 85.7% for men's sports. When considering coaching salaries by gender, a 1981 study of 106 NCAA Division I basketball coaches (Mottinger, 1981) demonstrated that the mean salary for 53 male coaches was $29,841.74 compared to a mean salary of $17,570.79 for 53 female coaches. In 1989, although athletic administrative staff salaries (including coaches) by gender were roughly the same size of overall expenses (23% for men, 24% for women), the pay gap between the two was significant: $1,804,000 for men's salaries compared to $441,000 for women's salaries, four times greater for men than women (Raiborn, 1989).

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits discrimination based on sex by any educational program or activity receiving federal assistance, including college sports. The research on Title IX and equitable participation for women athletes as men athletes in college is well documented, and participation has improved tremendously since its adoption as law in 1972. However, equitable pay among coaches remains elusive in its interpretation under the law (Lattinville & Denny, n.d.; Women's Sports Foundation, 2016). Valencia & Birren (2019) raised Title IX as a context of concern in the salary culture in Minnesota as an example of a significant disparity between women and men in intercollegiate athletic coaching compensation. The lack of equitable compensation is explained by a variety of reasons, including (but not limited to) experience, duties, working conditions, fan interest, ticket cost and media coverage (Mota, 2006; Rhode & Walker, 2007; Suggs, 2005; Women's Sports Foundation, 2016). While Title IX may not specifically refer to the compensation of employees, the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Fair Pay Act of 2009 make it illegal to discriminate against equal pay for equal work (US EEOC, 2009). To fight the injustice of the gap for equal pay in college sports, head women's basketball coach Marianne Stanley of the University of Southern California sued her employer in 1999 based on gender discrimination (Stanley v. USC, 1994*)*. However, her fight for equal pay was defeated as the court rejected her claim because men's basketball revenues were 90 times greater than those of women's (Stanley v USC, 1994).

Today, the highest national and international television ratings in women's sports history provide increasing revenues from media contracts (Smith, 2024). Some women college coaches of women's teams are financially benefitting from the limelight with their teams on television and winning championships (Gaines, 2024). Both Kim Mulkey of Louisiana State University and Dawn Staley of the University of South Carolina earned more than $3 million annually for women's basketball in 2023 (Alexander, 2021; Kesin, 2025), Patty Gasso of the University of Oklahoma softball team averaged $2 million per year (Sulley, 2024), and Mary Wise of the University of Florida women's volleyball team earned nearly $500,000 in 2022 (University of Florida, 2024). But are these coaches the exception to the rule? Most women's team coaches trailed their male counterparts in the same sport despite the significant salary increase for the most successful women's teams coaches (Gaines, 2024).

Regardless of the national wage gap, some progress is being made in professional sports compensation between men and women athletes: The US Women's National Soccer Team made history in 2022 by negotiating with USA Soccer on equal pay to the men's national team, eventually guaranteed by it being codified into federal law as The Equal Pay for Team USA Act (The Equal Pay for Team USA Act, 2022). Thus, this study was created to learn if equal pay enjoyed by the national soccer teams is being realized by coaches of women's teams at the collegiate level, especially when considering the impact of men's football.

A manual produced by the Women's Sports Foundation (2016) to assist with gender-neutral coaches' employment compensation acknowledged: "a key to gender equity considerations is the implementation of a system that is evenly applied to all employees regardless of their sex" (p. 40) and responded to the discussion of educational values by stating "remedying compensation discrimination becomes a part of the larger goal of achieving gender equity in every aspect of the athletic program" (p. 41). While the courts debate institutionalized equitable compensation when considering the letter of the law and the intent of Title IX, gender pay equity in college sports remains a controversy grounded in a discriminative history that remains today.

Dead Money Compensation

Part of the concern of women's equitable compensation to men in big-time college sports is how it is distorted by massive severance contracts to men's football and basketball coaches. In the past decade, criticism has mounted against the massive amount of severance pay delivered to fired football and men's basketball coaches since the advent of the Bowl Championship Series in the 1990s (Clarke, 2022; Fuller et al., 2022; Hirko, 2022; Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2023b). Severance pay (also known as "dead money") is provided by institutions to coaches in their initial contract negotiations as an incentive to coach athletes at their institution with the hope of success. Yet, sports is a zero-sum game, so success is not guaranteed. According to the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, in NCAA Division I-FBS, more than $623 million was paid from 2015 through 2022 to terminate football coaches at public institutions before the end of their contract, in effect paying football coaches millions not to coach (Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2023b; NCAA, 2024). NCAA Financial Report Forms provided for this research from Syracuse University's Newhouse School of Public Communications found over the same time that 81% of the total men's team severance pay was attributed to football coaches. The same NCAA Financial Report Forms provided by the Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Data Project showed less than 5% of the total amount of NCAA Division-I coaches' severance pay was provided to women's coaches (Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Data Project, 2023; NCAA, 2024).

Conceptual Framework

To better understand the phenomenon in this study, four concepts were used to frame how different factors affect the compensation of women's teams' coaches compared to coaches of men's athletics teams: (1) rational choice theory, (2) the concept of the "coaching carousel," (3) the concept of masculinity leadership, and (4) sexism.

Rational choice theory is useful to consider how individuals review choices and make decisions based on their preferences because it can be used as a policy concept in the investigation of college sports finances. The policy of having sports at America's universities is to use competition in sports, particularly football, for institutional prestige (Bok, 2003; Duderstadt, 2003; Toma, 2003). Prestige from sports is expected and used as the "front porch" of America's major universities. An American example of the "front porch" is at the University of Alabama, where the Crimson Tide football team comes to mind before its academic programs. When the university considers its financial decisions each year, a rational decision by leaders is to fund sports. Sports provide academic opportunities, but sports moreover create prestige. Pope and Pope (2014) found successful sports on a college campus improved an institution's application rates. Leaders at institutions make a rational choice to invest financial resources into having a successful sports program by raising prestige through prominent winning athletic teams.

The movement of coaches from school to school, known as the "coaching carousel," is best discussed by reviewing football success because of the stress to win expected with investments of millions of dollars into the sport. Investing in football at the highest competitive level also means the decision to pay high salaries for coaches to compete with the best. High salaries include potentially significant severance pay in a coach's contract to attract the coach to their institution. Rational choice theory then contends that leaders at institutions make a rational choice to invest financial resources into having a successful sports program by raising prestige through prominent winning athletic teams. Since a coach's success/failure is evaluated primarily based on the team's results, if those results are not satisfactory and the coach is fired, he or she may not be able to get a new job with a top program (or, at least, not right away; Thomas & Van Horn, 2016). Previous literature suggests that, commonly, Division I universities sign a five-year contract with a head coach; however, on average, coaches spend only about 4.6 years with one program (Thomas & Van Horn, 2016). Such circulation of football coaches (the "coaching carousel") is one of the reasons driving coaches' salaries up (Brook, 2023; Hoffman, 2015, Lacoste, 2024; Lens, 2024). An example of these golden parachutes for football coaches is Jimbo Fischer, the football coach at Texas A&M University from 2018-2023, who was paid $75 million to terminate his contract early due to lack of team success (Khan, 2023). This exemplifies a significant risk for coaches. Since severance pay is often calculated along with negotiating ever-growing coaches' salaries, severance payments grow as well. Notably, very few women's team's coaches receive any type of severance pay in their contracts (Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Data Project, 2023; NCAA, 2024).

The concept of masculine leadership is useful to determine how and why leaders make certain decisions on compensation affecting women. Leadership in higher education is often associated with a masculine lens (Burkinshaw, 2015), and the male perspective is more prominent because of the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles (Gaines, 2024; LaVoi & Wasend, 2018; Women's Sports Foundation, 2016). This is particularly acute in college sports, in which the masculine role is historically dominant in positions of leadership (such as program management and coaching; Estler & Nelson, 2005; Staurowksy, 1990) and dominant in those who participate in sports (Burton & Leberman, 2017; Kraft et al., 2021; Messner, 1988). Women are and have been historically minimized in college sports leadership. Lapchick (2024) found women held 41.3% of Division I head coaching positions for women's sports and only held 4.5% of the head coaching positions for men's sports. Despite the increasing popularity and media contracts across women's sports, the employment gap mirrors the pay gap for women coaches compared to men coaches. As such, a look at women's teams can help provide some degree of the level of support or discrimination in compensation for women coaches as compared to men.

Sexism is another viewpoint to understand gender discrimination in equal pay. Sexism against women is considered as any prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination of women. In the context of intercollegiate athletics coaching, women often face sexism in various forms, including misidentification as non-coaches, differential treatment compared to their male counterparts, feelings of isolation, tokenism in hiring practices, and discrimination based on motherhood. The extensive literature on sexism in sports demonstrates its historical and current nature as it impacts women (Carson et al., 2018; Kokkonen, 2019; Musto et al., 2017; Sabo et al., 2016; Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013). For instance, a 2020 qualitative investigation of college women swimming coaches found sexism played a primary role in unequal pay to women's teams' coaches compared to men's teams' coaches (Siegele et al., 2020). Sexist actions against women across all areas sport (leadership roles, administrators, coaches, college athletes, media, alumni and fans) included not receiving equal pay for equal work (Cooper et. al, 2020). Exposure to sexism and unequal pay leads to career dissatisfaction, resulting in less women attaining leadership roles than men (Cooper et al., 2020; Sabo et al., 2016). This circular reality means women are less likely to be involved in coaching, and fewer women are encouraged for leadership roles, resulting in male perceptions that women's abilities are not equal to men, resulting in lower pay for women.

To review, higher education leaders make rational choices to invest in high-profile programs like football to improve their prestige. At the most competitive level of the NCAA, Division I-FBS, success in football helps to build institutional prestige, and that success is dependent on hiring good and expensive coaches. Often, institutional leaders include multi-million-dollar severance packages to lure football coaches to their campuses. With football success and prestige comes massive amounts of revenue that are used to help pay both men's teams' coaches and women's teams' coaches in non-revenue sports. Women's sports are becoming increasingly popular and more financially lucrative, but not enough yet to slow the pay gap between women and men. This may partly be due to college sports leaders of male hegemony making sexist decisions to improve prestige through football success at the cost of women's sports. This study is one way to help quantify the outcome of sexist actions treating women's team coaches differently by investigating how women's teams' coaches are paid compared to men's teams' coaches. This framework will also help understand how decisions at different levels of competition impact differences in pay (and pay growth) between coaches of men's teams and women's teams, and identify how much men's teams' severance pay impacts women's teams' coaching salaries. Taking male-centric football out of the equation will further help us quantify football's impact on women's teams' coaching salaries.

Based on the direction proposed for this study, the following research questions were used to collect and analyze data:

> RQ_1: What is the difference between the growth rate of salaries for men's teams' coaches compared to women's teams' coaches from 2014 to 2021 for the institutions in FBS?
>
> RQ_2: What is the difference between the growth rate of men's teams' coaches compared to women's teams' coaches' salaries from 2014 to 2021 for the institutions in FBS?
>
> RQ_3: To what extent does the level of competition in FBS impact the pay of women's teams' coaches, men's teams' coaches, and severance pay of men's teams' coaches?
>
> RQ_4: Without football, what is the level of pay equity between men's teams' coaches and women's teams' coaches in FBS college sports?

Method

To answer the research questions, the research team analyzed data from 104 public institutions of the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS). The data was collected from universities' NCAA Financial Report forms through the Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Data Project (Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Data Project, 2023; NCAA, 2024). NCAA-member public higher education institutions are required to make the NCAA forms available to the public except in states with explicit exemptions. The data used for this study include annual compensation for men's and women's teams' coaches and annual men's teams' coaches' severance pay as reported on individual line items in NCAA Financial Report forms. For this study, researchers collected data over several months from NCAA financial reports through public record requests directed by the Knight-Newhouse Data Project. There were no complications with access to the data because the authors are intricately involved with the administration and research agenda of the Knight-Newhouse Data Project and helped to create and administer the Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Database. The research team's roles in directing and managing both the Knight-Newhouse Data Project and the Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Database include the specific use of NCAA Financial Reports as the primary data component necessary to collect for the projects. To be clear about how the data is organized, there is a difference between using the Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Database and accessing data from the NCAA Financial Reports. The Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Database (2023). The analyzed data exclude third-party compensation, such as golf club memberships, cars, and coverage of moving expenses that universities provide their coaches. Third-party data was excluded because it is reported inconsistently and is notoriously challenging to identify based on the nature of the contractual relationship.

All ten conferences of NCAA Division I-FBS (American Athletic Conference, Atlantic Coast Conference, Big Ten Conference, Big XII Conference, Conference USA, Mid-American Conference, Mountain West Conference, Pacific-12 Conference, Southeastern Conference, Sun Belt Conference) were selected to collect data from the academic years 2013-2014 to 2020-2021. Eleven schools that had missing data on the salaries for the men's or women's teams' coaches at any given year were excluded from the sample. The schools without data on severance pay did not include any spending on severance in the official reports because they did not pay any severance that given year. For those cases, a "0" was assigned to missing severance data. Therefore, the analytical sample includes data on 93 public schools (45 colleges from the Power conferences and 48 from others in FBS) for the years 2014 through 2021.

As is well articulated in the national discussion by the news media and scholars, the billions of dollars in revenue attributed to football in the FBS Power conferences are not available to institutions in the other FBS conferences (Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2021), leading to significant differences in revenue and institutional prestige. Therefore, data were separated into Power and Non-Power groups.

The time period was chosen purposefully to inspect how compensation changed over eight years and to test whether those changes were equal for the salaries for men's teams' coaches versus the compensation for the coaches of women's teams. In addition, particular attention was paid to the shifts that happened during 2014 – 2016 and 2019 – 2021. The years 2014 – 2016 are of particular interest for this study because of the establishment of the College Football Playoff to determine a national football champion. It was hoped data from 2019 – 2021 would provide insights into the impact of COVID-19 on coaches' salaries and severance payments. Of note, 2021 data was not used for the longitudinal comparison because of COVID-19; rather, 2021 data was only used for the latter purpose of identifying its specific impact on salaries from 2019-2021.

SPSS Statistical software was used to capture the results for all analyses. Growth rates were gathered from 2014 to 2021 using salary data of all men's and women's teams' coaches (head and assistant coaches) and severance data of all men's teams' coaches (head and assistant coaches) from the Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Data Project based on NCAA Financial Reports (2024). Data were subsequently loaded to SPSS and t-test results were calculated by year and separated by Power and Non-Power affiliation based on the conference affiliation in each year. The research team applied descriptive statistics to analyze the data and show the changes in the salaries of men's and women's teams' coaches' and severance pay of men's teams' coaches over the course of eight years. To conclude the data analysis, t-tests were used to compare and determine whether the differences were statistically significant. Initial data and results were reviewed by each researcher and subsequently discussed to identify potential anomalies or data entry errors: no anomalies were found.

Results

A look at averages from public institutions in NCAA Division I-FBS from 2014-2021 proved useful in trying to determine the relationships between men's and women's teams' coaching salaries and men's teams' coaching severance pay (see Table 1). From 2014 to 2021, the average Power conference women's teams' coaching pay increased 33%, while the average men's teams' coaching pay increased 55% (see Table 2 and Figure 1). During the same period, the average Non-Power conference women's teams' coaching compensation rose 25% while the average men's teams' coaching compensation rose 37%. Interestingly, the average men's teams' coaching severance pay for Power conference schools increased by 208%, while the average men's team severance pay for Non-Power conference schools rose by 64%.

Fever graphs of the average women's and men's teams' coaching salaries (see Figure 2), the mean for women's teams' and men's teams' coaching salaries of all teams except football (see Figure 3), and average men's teams' coaching severance pay (see Figure 4) for both the Power conferences and Non-Power conferences from 2014-2021 were created as a visual attempt to identify growth rates and peaks and valleys in the data. Notably, football is considered the "front porch" of our nation's universities due to the popularity of the sport, the significant financial commitment, and its impact on the perceived prestige associated with our largest and most iconic institutions of higher education (Bok, 2003; Duderstadt, 2003; Toma, 2003). Thus, another understanding of the level of pay equity between coaches of men's and women's teams in college sports would include the removal of football from this discussion. In other words, without football, what is the level of pay equity among coaches in big-time, Division I-FBS college sports?

Table 1

Average salaries for coaches of men's team and women's team, men's team coaches' severance pay, NCAA Division I-FBS, Power and Non-Power conferences, 2014-2021

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Power conferences								
Men's Team Coaches' Salaries	$12,197,658	$13,425,069	$14,358,744	$15,338,136	$16,792,117	$17,834,901	$18,601,140	$18,876,721
Women's TeamCoaches' Salaries	$3,865,851	$4,097,267	$4,348,369	$4,626,662	$4,965,929	$5,246,055	$5,307,881	$5,125,611
Men's Team Coaches' Severance	$574,188	$834,550	$826,173	$982,476	$2,423,519	$1,566,716	$1,257,374	$1,767,469
Non-Power conferences								
Men's Team Coaches' Salaries	$4,049,146	$4,247,669	$4,464,369	$4,597,992	$4,931,981	$5,389,592	$5,505,723	$5,528,091
Women's TeamCoaches' Salaries	$1,638,279	$1,741,662	$1,773,607	$1,866,061	$1,976,256	$2,044,562	$2,112,488	$2,047,391
Men's Team Coaches' Severance	$107,855	$79,572	$134,977	$227,092	$156,299	$161,943	$197,152	$177,207

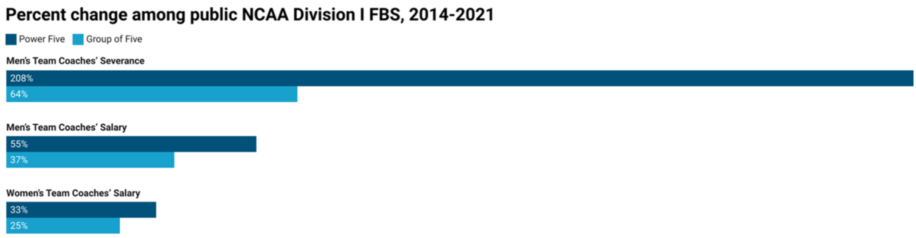
Table 2

Growth rates in men's team coaches, women's team coaches, and men's team coaches' severance pay, NCAA Division I-FBS, Power and Non-Power conferences, 2014-2021

	Power	Non-Power
Men's Team Coaches' Salary	55%	37%
Women's Team Coaches' Salary	33%	25%
Men's Team Coaches' Severance	208%	64%

Figure 1

Growth rates in men's and women's team coaches' salaries, men's team coaches' severance pay, NCAA Division I-FBS, Power and Non-Power conferences, 2014-2021



Two-tailed t-tests (see Table 3) conducted using SPSS demonstrated that the annual salaries for the coaches of men's teams at Power conference schools (M = 15,928,061, SD = 4,686,929) were significantly different from the salaries for the coaches of men's teams at Non-Power conference schools (M = 4,839,320, SD = 1,896,432), $t\ (742) = 42.78,\ p < .001$; the salaries for the coaches of women's teams at Power conference schools (M = 4,697,953, SD = 1,251,584) were significantly different from the salaries for the coaches of women's teams at Non-Power conference schools (M = 1,900,038, SD = 601,287), $t\ (742) = 39.24,\ p < .001$). Severance payments for the coaches of men's teams at Power conference schools (M = 1,279,058, SD = 2,622,788) were significantly different from the severance payments for the coaches of men's teams at Non-Power conference schools (M = 154,749, SD = 347,396), $t\ (742) = 8.32,\ p <.001$).

Discussion

The results of the study demonstrated a large gap between the average salaries for the coaches for women's and men's college teams, and this difference was exacerbated as competition increased from Non-Power to Power conference institutions. Football is often referred to as a reason for a disparity between the average pay for the coaches of men's and women's teams. There is an anecdotal argument that if a football team cannot pay for itself, then it cannot pay for

Figure 2

Average salaries for men's and women's team coaches, NCAA Division I-FBS, Non-Power and Power conferences, 2014-2021

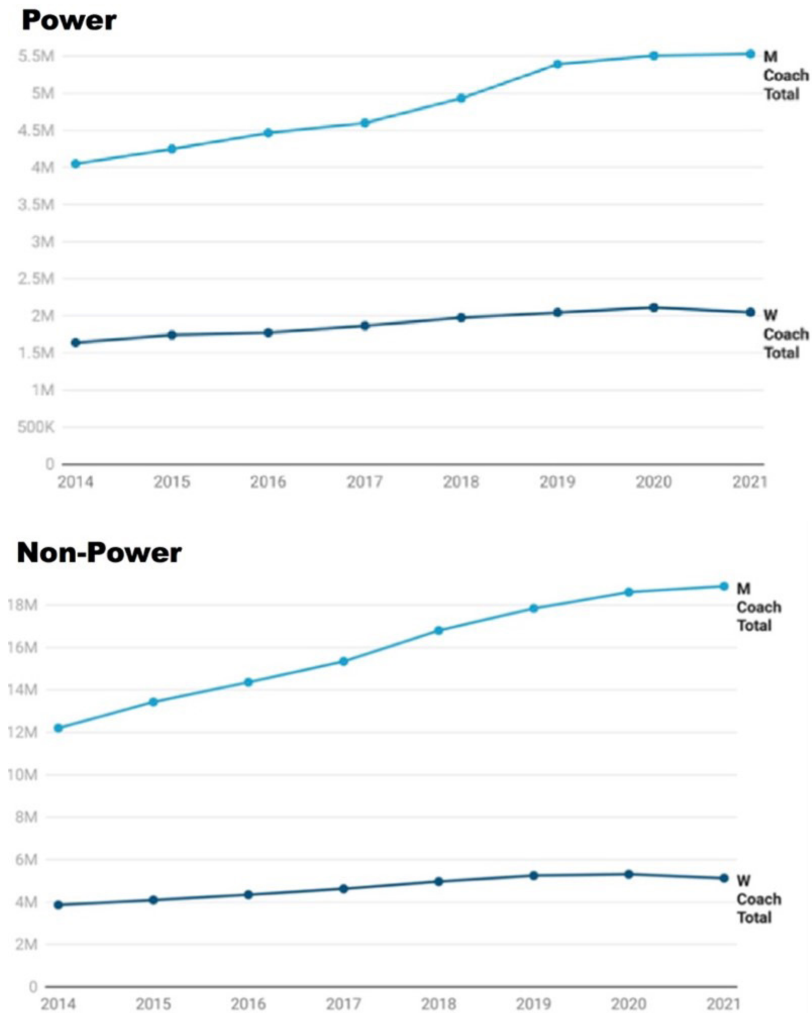


Figure 3
Average salaries for men's and women's team coaches (excluding football), NCAA Division I-FBS, Non-Power and Power conferences, 2014 - 2021

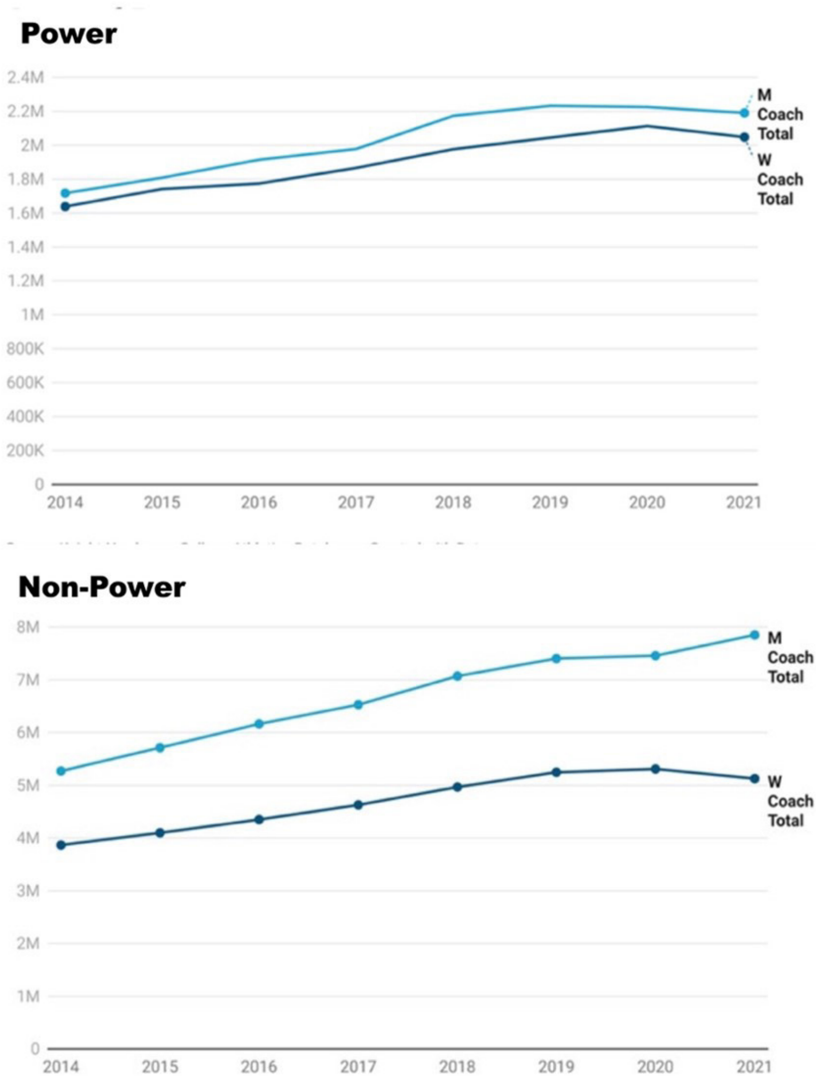


Figure 4
Average men's team coaches' severance payments, NCAA Division I-FBS, Non-Power and Power conferences, 2014-2021

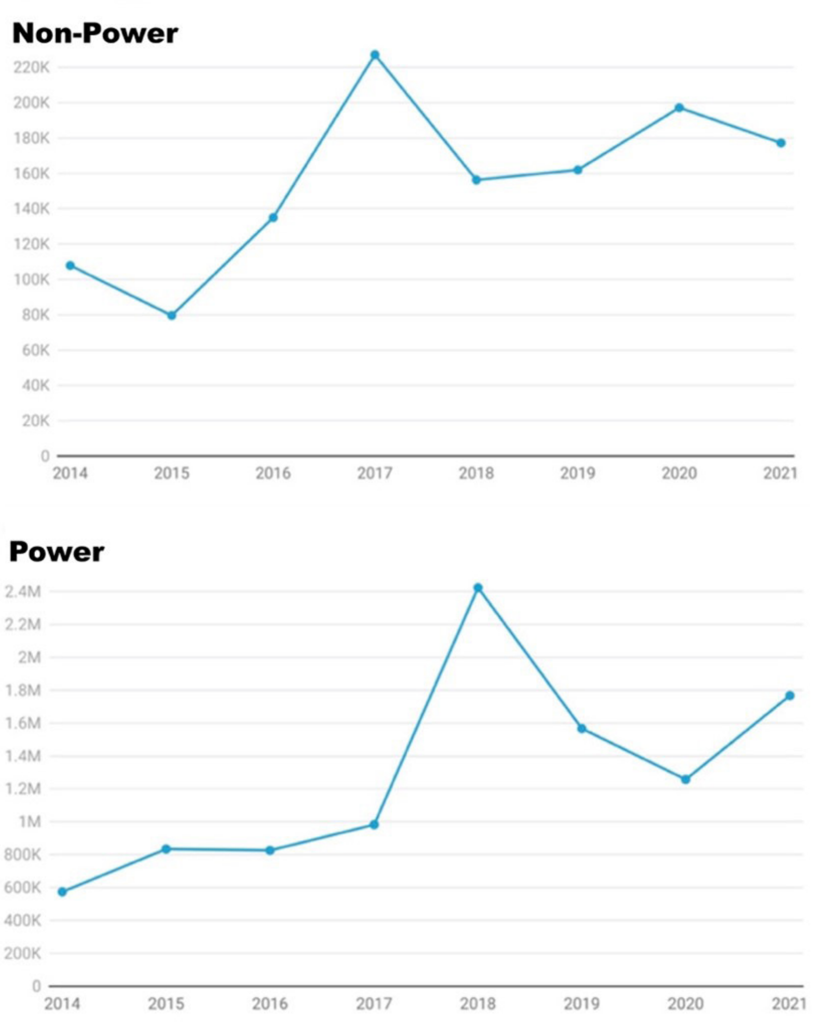


Table 3

Results of two-tailed t-tests for men's team and women's team coaching salaries, men's team coaches' severance payments, NCAA Division I-FBS, Power and Non-Power conferences, 2014-2021

	Power		Non-Power		
	M	SD	M	SD	t-test
Men's Team Coaches' Salaries	$15,928,061	$4,686,929	$4,839,320	$1,896,432	42.778**
Women's Team Coaches' Salaries	$4,697,953	$1,251,584	$1,900,038	$601,287	39.243**
Severance Payments for Men's Team Coaches	$1,279,058	$2,622,788	$154,749	$347,396	8.323**

**p<.01

non-revenue sports, including women's team sports. But, this study found the level of competition made it more viable to pay for women's teams. Data reported by 101 public Division I-FBS institutions to the NCAA (2024) from the Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Data Project and Database (2023) demonstrated in 2020, over 50 football programs in the Power conferences made more money from football than they spent, while only one Power conference football program spent more money than the football team made. In other words, in 2020, more football programs in Division I-FBS (59) made money from football than lost money (42). The primary reason for football's financial success in the Power conferences are primarily due to football receiving massive conference media contracts, ticket sales at large stadiums, and large alumni donations compared to the lack thereof in the Non-Power conferences (Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2021; Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Data Project, 2023; NCAA, 2024). Since football programs provide its institutions with prestige, leaders make the rational choice to invest more resources in football. When football coaches' salaries were removed from our analysis, the gap between the average pay for the coaches of men's and women's teams became smaller; however, the gap remained. The coaches' compensations were greater for Power conference schools than for Non-Power conference schools because football revenue was nearly five times greater for the Power conferences. These sports-rich schools used their football revenue to help pay much larger salaries for both men's teams' and women's teams' coaches; but in the Non-Power conferences, big revenue from football was not available, and thus all coaches' salaries were smaller.

It is important to understand this happens in most colleges because leaders choose the rational financial choice to spend more money on men's sports for prestige despite increasing revenue and popularity in women's sports, and inequality in pay for women's teams' coaches. Notably, there is a popular belief that college athletics programs are moving towards equality because of increased popularity and information that the salaries of coaches of women's teams are increasing every year (Schnell, 2024). Although the results of our study found coaches of women's teams on average were paid more every year from 2014-2021 (with the exception of the COVID year of 2020-2021), the findings also demonstrated that salaries of the women's teams' coaches grew at a slower rate than the salaries of men's teams' coaches and severance payments.

The huge increase in men's severance payments means male college coaches in football and basketball are receiving large payments for being fired. Data show for the Non-Power conferences, the average growth rate of "golden parachutes" for men's teams' coaches was 64% since 2014. For institutions in the Power conferences, the average growth rate of the severance pay for men's teams' coaches' was 208%. In other words, men's team coaches' severance pay was 5.3 times larger than the growth rate of women's coaching salaries of 33% over the same period. The data were not controlled for extraneous factors such as turnover of coaches, athletics directors, administrators, community sentiment, media perception, or changes in financial climate. Men's teams coaching severance pay is dominated by football coaches, as 81% of all men's team coaches' severance pay from 2014-2021 can be attributed to football.

It is important to acknowledge that many of the coaches receiving severance pay in our analysis signed contracts before their performance was known, thus binding athletic departments into long-term contractual obligations with uncertain outcomes. This underscores a critical issue: there is no guarantee for success, and athletics leaders should reconsider investing significant amounts of potential "dead money" without knowing possible outcomes. Instead of focusing on extravagant salaries and severance offers to lure football coaches, athletic departments could redirect those funds towards increasing salaries for women's teams' coaches. This would foster gender equity within coaching and create a more attractive career path for more women in college coaching. The cost to athletics departments to better improve or equate women's coaches' salaries to men's coaches is one of the financial choices that may require administrators to find new ways to raise more money. Potential solutions could include reallocation of resources. Additionally, refocusing athletic department hiring priorities to align with academic missions emphasizing gender equity can create a more equitable environment. Another interesting finding was the significant increase in men's teams' coaching severance pay in 2017, 2018, and 2021. Major revenues from the College Football Playoff, which began in 2014-2015, are likely a factor in golden parachute payments increases (particularly for football coaches) by the time of the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 academic years. In addition, despite significant revenue problems during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021, both men's teams' coaching salaries and severance payments were insulated from any reduction. Rational choice theory would posit that leaders of higher education institutions view investments in sports, particularly football, to elevate their prestige and financial standing. Coaches are paid well because of the prestige and revenues that men's sports (especially football) create. This finding is even greater by Power/Non-Power level of competition where greater success provides greater revenue to reinvest into the football enterprise instead of into women's coaches' salaries. The growing pay gap favoring men's teams' coaches over women's teams' coaches is concerning, especially with increased popularity and revenues from women's sports. These findings support the premise of a male-dominated American sports culture built on sexism, where men make decisions to pay men more than women and the decisions exacerbate the pay gap.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations to this study should be taken into consideration, including for future research. First, only public institutions in Division I-FBS were used for this study. It may be worthwhile to learn about the difference between public and private institutions and severance pay; however, a Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics (2015) analysis of aggregate data from the NCAA in 2015 showed that private institutions typically spent their money in a similar way as public institutions. It is also worthwhile for future research to consider Division I-FCS or No-Football to learn if the same trends of men's dominance in coaching and severance pay are as significant as in Division I-FBS.

To further explore the issue, future research could combine the quantitative findings with qualitative interviews of athletics and university leaders and ask about their perceptions of decisions affecting compensation in athletics. This would reveal whether there is an alignment between the actual outcomes and desired goals. Such data would provide insights as to why decisions are made and suggest how best to guard against societal or cultural bias in favor of big-time men's revenue sports.

Future research should expand beyond the coaching ranks to investigate whether the same gender pay disparities exist within athletic administration. Given that staff compensation has risen in parallel with coaching salaries (Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Database, 2023; NCAA, 2024), analyzing hiring and compensation practices for administrative staff could reveal if Title IX compliance is being upheld consistently across all athletic department roles. This broader examination would offer a more comprehensive understanding of gender equity in college athletics.

Conclusion

Because of its social attraction, media attention, and significant financial impact, intercollegiate athletics today is in the crosshairs of Congress, federal courts, state legislatures, sports media, and even the public. This study is significant because it demonstrates that athletics and education leaders at the most competitive level in the NCAA (Division I-FBS) are failing to follow higher education's values and investment of gender equity in compensation. Instead, masculine hegemony and sexism remain alive and well in college sports. Despite Title IX providing the legal requirement as well as its intent for gender equity in education and college sports, this investigation found a significantly larger growth in men's teams' coaches' salaries and men's teams' coaches' severance pay compared to women's teams' coaches' salaries – both for those with larger revenue due to football (Power conferences) and those without access to major football revenue (Non-Power conferences).

Women's sports are experiencing significant growth in popularity and revenue generation that can impact institutional prestige, but the compensation of women's teams' coaches is not being realized for most. While the commercialized market powers surrounding football and men's basketball may impact media attention and prestige for an institution's entire athletics program, there is no excuse under the intent of Title IX not to compensate women's teams' coaches at the same level as men's teams' coaches of similar sports. College leaders agree to pay millions of dollars to male coaches to lead high-profile athletics teams as a common way of seeking institutional prestige. As revenues soar, increasingly larger sums of money are reportedly spent on keeping or luring coaches to win games, particularly male coaches in high-profile sports of football and basketball. When high-profile male coaches are fired for losing, they receive million-dollar paydays from severance pay, a form of compensation rarely provided to women's teams' coaches. And, even when economic pressures (such as COVID-19) seemingly would reduce spending more on coaching salaries, men's teams' coaches' salaries severance pay increased at a rate that significantly surpassed any increase in women's teams' coaching salaries.

Leaders of higher education and intercollegiate athletics would be well served to identify their need to lead by their stated values in support of gender equity by paying women's team coaches the same as men's team coaches for the same sport. Instead, college and athletics leaders lead with their actions which ignore sexism and financially support the hegemony of masculinity in college sports.

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