

Digital Media Frames of Stereotypes Pertaining to Women Coaches: A Textual Analysis  
of Sport Blog Post Comments

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## Abstract

Today, there a record number of girls and women participating in sport (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). However, the number of women in sport leadership, particularly in coaching, has drastically decreased over the past 45 years (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; LaVoi, 2016). Women also receive very little sport media coverage (2-4%) and often times are trivialized, if and when, they are in the media (Cooky et al., 2013; Kane et al., 2013). With the growing popularity of digital media, this study used framing theory to examine how women coaches are portrayed in digital sport media comments. It examined the comments made in response to three sport blogs posted on the online swim news medium *SwimSwam* to better understand how women coaches are framed. The sample included 229 comments with 302 total units of analysis. Comments were aligned with LaVoi's (2016) Ecological-Intersectional Model of Supports and Barriers for Women Coaches to better understand if comments were reproducing or challenging common gender ideologies pertaining to women coaches. The top five themes were *women blame the women* (22.5%), *"blaming" men* (19.5%), *the unique nature of swimming* (10.6%), *women can/want to coach* (8.3%), and *the "best" bias* (7.2%). Most comments reproduced common gender ideologies pertaining to women coaches as most aligned with the individual level of the model (57.6%). Findings indicate that digital media continues to marginalize women, creating an environment that does not value or support women coaches.

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## Digital Media Frames of Stereotypes Pertaining to Women Coaches: A Textual Analysis of Sport Blog Post Comments

Since the passage of Title IX in 1972 the number of opportunities for girls and women in and out of sport have drastically increased (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; United States Department of Labor, 2016). Today, women comprise 51% of the workforce and are afforded many more opportunities as compared to 45 years ago, when Title IX was passed (United States Department of Labor, 2016; US Department of Labor, 2010). With women in the workplace, occupational landscapes are more diverse ultimately improving production, problem solving, and communication among companies (Cox, 2001; Herring, 2009). Work environments are more inclusive, potentially creating a culture where everyone's, especially women's, opinions are valued (Herring, 2009). Girls and women have also made massive strides in sport within the past 45 years (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Today, girls and women have access to many more opportunities as there are a record number of girls and women participating in sport (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Therefore, women are far more visible today in both the workplace and sport than they were pre-Title IX (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; United States Department of Labor, 2016; US Department of Labor, 2010).

With a record number of women in both the occupational landscape and sport, it would be logical to assume women are afforded the same opportunities in regards to leadership positions. However, women are still underrepresented in terms of leadership both in the occupational and sport landscapes (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009; LaVoi, 2016). Men dominate positions of power, leaving women on the outside, not visible, and many

times not valued (LaVoi, 2016). Therefore, it appears women continue to face a glass ceiling, which ultimately inhibits some women from reaching their full potential (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009).

Sport is one discipline where the disparity between men and women in power is exacerbated (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; LaVoi, 2016). With sport being a powerful institution, it has the power to send the message of “who and what is relevant and valued (and who is not)” (LaVoi, 2016, p.3). By examining the occupational landscape within sport, particularly positions of power such as coaching and administration, it appears women continue to face many barriers (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009; LaVoi, 2016). In terms of coaching, only 41% of females participating in intercollegiate sport have the opportunity to be coached by a woman (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; “Head coaches: 2017-2018 overall figures”, 2018). This is in comparison to pre-Title IX where nearly 90% of females participating in sport were coached by a woman (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Not only are women underrepresented in coaching, they are also underrepresented in athletic administration (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Once again, pre-Title IX approximately 90% of women’s intercollegiate athletics were administered by a woman (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). That number has dropped to 22.3% of athletic departments being administered by a woman today (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Therefore, women are still vastly outnumbered by men in sport, leaving men as the ones who are valued (LaVoi, 2016).

LaVoi and Dutove (2012) created a model of supports and barriers women coaches encounter throughout their career, which was then updated and enhanced when LaVoi (2016) added intersectionality and power to the model. The model consists of different

levels of a coach's ecological system including the individual, interpersonal, organizational, and socio-cultural levels (LaVoi, 2016; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). Women coaches face a multitude of barriers and supports at different levels of their ecological system, which ultimately impact their experience as a coach (LaVoi, 2016; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). For instance, at the individual level, women believing they do not possess a high degree of coaching competency; at the interpersonal level, an unsupportive partner impacting woman coaches experience; at the organizational level, athletic departments that have a lack of family friendly policies for coaches; and at the socio-cultural level, gender stereotypes affecting how women coaches are viewed (LaVoi, 2016; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). Every level of a coach's ecological system affects their experience and the high number of barriers women coaches encounter, may be the reason there are so few women in the profession (LaVoi, 2016; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012).

Not only are women underrepresented in terms of sport leadership, sport media scholars have long documented the limited amount media coverage dedicated to women's sports, once again sending the message women's sports are not valued (Cooky Mesner, & Musto, 2015, Cooky, Messner & Hextrum, 2013; Lisec & McDonald, 2012). Women's sports tend to receive only 2-4% of the total sport media coverage and are often times covered at insignificant times (Cooky et al., 2015; Cooky et al., 2013). Within the 2-4% of media coverage devoted to women's sports, often times female athletes are portrayed in a manner which emphasizes their femininity as opposed to their athletic competence, ultimately trivializing their worth in sport (Cooky & LaVoi, 2012; Kane, LaVoi & Fink, 2013).

While many sport media scholars have documented the portrayal of female athletes in sport media (Cooky et al., 2015; Cooky et al., 2013; Cooky & LaVoi, 2012; Kane et al., 2013), very little research exists examining the portrayal of women coaches (LaVoi & Calhoun, 2016). Therefore, this study extends on previous research regarding both women in coaching and women in sport media to better understand how women coaches are portrayed in the new popular sports information medium that is digital media. Based on previous findings, the following research questions guide this study (1) How do digital sport media comments made about women coaches in response to a blog about women coaches, align with levels of LaVoi's (2016) Ecological-Intersectional Model of Supports and Barriers for Women Coaches?; and (2) Do comments made in response to a blog post about women coaches challenge or reproduce dominant gender ideologies and narratives pertaining to women coaches?

While there are a record number of girls and women participating in sport, there appears to be a disparity to the way in which men and women are viewed and valued in sport. Women coaches matter (LaVoi, 2016). Not only are women coaches role models, they add diversity to the workforce, and they create a strong support system for other women coaches (LaVoi, 2016). Therefore, it is important to understand how a powerful news medium, such as digital media, is constructing and reproducing or perhaps challenging common stereotypes about women coaches. Gaining a better understanding of the portrayals and narratives and how of women coaches are framed in digital media, equips scholars with tools to combat the many damaging stereotypes which currently dominate the landscape and ultimately helps them to change the narrative, and therefore

perhaps the occupational landscape to one that better values and supports women.

### **Literature Review**

This section begins by summarizing the statistics and research on females in the occupational landscape as it pertains to where women have been and where women are currently in terms of inclusion in work places outside and within sport. This will provide insights as to how sport, and in particular women in sport, is situated within broader occupational contexts. It provides an overview of the numerous barriers a female coach may encounter during her career. It then focuses on the existing literature on the impact of the media and the growing popularity of digital media, specifically looking at the media representation of women in sports both as athletes and coaches. Finally, the theoretical framework- framing theory- is summarized as it pertains to the media's influence on schemas as well as the audiences influence on schemas. Throughout the literature review, potential influences of the media on the representation of women and girls in sport, particularly women coaches, will be highlighted using theory and practical support.

### **Women in the Occupational Landscape**

Over the past five decades, women's opportunities in the occupational landscape have drastically increased (United States Department of Labor, 2016). At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women were afforded limited career opportunities such as teaching, domestic services, and scarce factory work (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). Today, women are afforded many more opportunities to participate in the US workforce (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). In 2016, women accounted

for 47% of the total workforce in the United States with a projection of women comprising 51% by 2018 (United States Department of Labor, 2016; US Department of Labor, 2010). In fact, the number of women in almost all professions is on the rise (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). Since 1964, the number of women in nontraditional jobs such as trade, transportation, and utilities has steadily increased (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). However, disparity between men and women in certain occupations remain, which influences limited upward mobility for some women (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). While there is still a difference between opportunities for men and women in certain professions, it appears there is more access to opportunity for women today as opposed to 50 years ago (United States Department of Labor, 2016).

Diversity in the workplace is beneficial for numerous reasons (Herring, 2009). Not only does diversity improve production, but employees' perspectives are also broadened resulting in better problem solving and communication among team members (Cox, 2001; Herring, 2009). Diversity can create a more inclusive work environment and potentially lead to a culture that values others' opinions (Herring, 2009). Therefore, when women are in the workplace, the message is they are valued, respected, and heard (Herring, 2009). Simply by having women present allows women the opportunity to voice opinions and offer alternative viewpoints, a reality less likely in a workplace dominated by men (Herring, 2009; LaVoi, 2016). Diversity in the workplace is imperative because having different communities and groups represented is beneficial for everyone ultimately leading to a more productive work environment (Herring, 2009).

While women are making strides forward in regards to opportunities in the occupational landscape, a glass ceiling remains, inhibiting some women from reaching their full potential (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009). The glass ceiling refers to women reaching a certain point in their career where upward mobility is no longer possible (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009). There are very few women in powerful positions in society, leaving them underrepresented in leadership (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009). Women are underrepresented in positions of power, meaning those who have the power and are in control are men (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009; LaVoi, 2016).

Gender stereotypes affect the way society views men and women, which potentially contributes to the dominance of men in leadership positions (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009). One of the first characteristics society notices about a person is their sex, and based off their sex, assumptions are made (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009). Most stereotypes associated with men are related to assertiveness, aggression, and dominance while stereotypes associated with women are usually related to sensitivity, gentleness, and that they are soft-spoken (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009). These stereotypes ultimately end up inhibiting women in the workplace because most stereotypes related to leaders are similar to stereotypes of men, sending the message that men are the ones who belong and are supposed to be in powerful positions in society (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009). Having men dominate the occupational leadership positions warrants caution and further examination. Examining dominant gender ideologies is needed to better understand gender stereotypes, gender roles, and power which all may be contributing to the lack of women with power in today's society (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009).

## Essentialism and Gender Roles

One possible explanation for the scarcity of women in powerful positions is essentialism and the idea men and women naturally have different interests (Bohan, 1993; Messner, 1988). Early in the twentieth century, women were the ones who were at home and taking care of the family, while men were the ones working and supporting their loved ones (Messner, 2011). Many believed the difference in occupations was due to biological predispositions of men and women (Messner, 1988). That is, women and girls are biologically, and therefore naturally and inherently, programmed to be interested in different activities than men and boys (Messner, 2011). Therefore, it follows that women and girls were to work domestically, in the private sphere of the home and men and boys work in public workplaces (Messner, 1988). Essentialism revolves around the assumption there are natural (or biological) differences between groups of people (Messner, 2011). Differences between men and women were perceived as internal, persistent and not associated with the daily lived experiences of one's life (Bohan, 1993). Essentialism refers to the personality, cognitive process, and moral judgement of an individual, meaning since naturally and inherently women think and act differently than men, women will have different interests as well (Bohan, 1993; Messner, 2011). Essentialism is rooted in universal assumptions and therefore, when men and women do *not* act in a way which fits with gender norms they are scrutinized (Bohan, 1993).

The workplace is associated with masculinity and power, and since power is associated with testosterone, these associations privilege the expectations that men should be, and are, dominantly present in the workplace. This is thought to be natural due to

biology (Messner, 1988). While women's ability to bear a child and raise a family, disadvantages women, leaving them excluded out of the workplace and saddled with expectations to remain at home (Messner, 1988). Due to essentialistic beliefs and the biological differences between men and women, many believed men dominated the occupational landscape simply because women are biologically programmed to *choose* different interests (Messner, 1988). Presuming and pressuring men and women to act a certain way based on gendered belief systems rooted in biology, which is thought to be deterministic, ultimately frames their behavior (Bohan, 1993). Labeling men and women's behaviors and choices, that for some becomes internalized, perpetuates a dangerous cycle of conformity to gender norms, which inhibits many from reaching their full potential, following their passion, and doing what they are capable of (Bohan, 1993).

While many believe societal beliefs have shifted from the essentialist viewpoint and think women are widely accepted in the workplace today, there is still a lack of women in leadership positions which warrants caution and theoretical explanation (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009; LaVoi, 2016). Given the scarcity of women in leadership, essentialism, or the idea women are biologically different than men and therefore have different interests than men, may very well still be the dominant ideology operating and influencing gendered beliefs about the workplace in society (Bohan, 1993; Messner, 2011).

### **Essentialism and Sport**

Sport is one context where essentialism and the biological differences between men and women is exacerbated (Messer, 2011); Messner & Bozada-Deas, 2009; Love &

Kelly, 2011). Pre-Title IX, very few women and girls were afforded opportunities in sport (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Many believed women and girls were absent from sport because they simply were not interested or chose not to play due to biological predispositions (Messner, 2011). Essentialistic-based ideology constructs a false reality that men and boys value sport more than women and girls and contributes to and reinforces the idea that women and girls are more interested in and/or choose other activities (Messner, 2011).

Another way in which gender roles in sport and essentialistic differences between men and women in sport are exacerbated pertains to youth sport parents and who is seen in what role (Messner & Bozada-Deas, 2009). Fathers of young children usually become the volunteer coach whereas mothers usually become the “team mom” (Messner & Bozada-Deas, 2009, p. 50). Fathers are typically in the visible, powerful action roles of administering, coaching and developing young sport participants whereas mothers are behind the scenes in less visible and powerful positions organizing snack schedules, team parties, making phone calls, and collecting money for gifts (Messner & Bozada-Deas, 2009). These stark difference between the role of men and women in sport involvement continue to uphold the dominant essentialist ideology of men belong in public-facing powerful sport roles and women belong in less visible, private roles or should be in the home taking care of the family (Messner, 2011; Messner & Bozada-Deas, 2009; Love & Kelly, 2011)

While today there are more women and girls participating in sport, men dominate and hold the majority of powerful roles (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014 & Messner, 2011).

Given this paradox, it leaves one to wonder if women and girls are truly valued in sport and if essentialism is still alive and well in shaping dominant gender ideologies. Further investigation about the intersection of essentialism, sport, and gender roles is needed to better understand if, and how, women and girls are valued in sport and if not, what contributes to this paradox and what strategies might help change the landscape of sport to make women feel valued. Having women in the workplace and in leadership positions provides women visibility, but also gives them a voice (Herring, 2009; LaVoi, 2016). Women are still the minority in the workplace, especially in regards to leadership positions, but are making strides in regards to the number of opportunities they are afforded (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Eagly & Sczesny, 2009; United States Department of Labor, 2016; United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017), yet sport is one exception.

### **Opportunities in Sport**

Sport, in particular, is one area where women are being afforded drastically more participation opportunities than they did 45 years ago (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Since the passage of Title IX in 1972, the participation opportunities for women and girls in sport has dramatically increased (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Acosta and Carpenter (2014) conducted a thirty-seven-year update on the state of women in intercollegiate athletics, reporting the opportunities for women to participate in intercollegiate sport was at an all-time high with over 200,000 females participating in sport. However, looking at women in the occupational landscape in sport, particularly in positions of power such as coaching and sport administration, those positions are still dominated by men indicating

women continue to face a glass ceiling in sport (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009; LaVoi, 2016). Stereotypes associated with positions of power usually overlap with stereotypes pertaining to men, making it hard for women to get their foot in the door (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009). Those women who wish to move up in the occupational landscape are faced with different and more barriers than men. Better understanding of the dominant narratives and gender ideologies pertaining to and which inhibit women from fully participating and reaching their full potential in the 21<sup>st</sup> century occupational landscape is needed.

### **Women in Sport Leadership**

As the number of females participating in both the workforce and sport continue to increase, it would be logical to assume the opportunities for women in sport leadership would follow a similar trend. That in fact is true, there are more occupational opportunities in sport currently than in the past. However, the percentage of women occupying coaching and sport leadership positions, has drastically *decreased* over the past 45 years (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Before Title IX in 1972, approximately 90% of females participating in sport were coached by a woman, as compared to 2017-2018 where only 41% of females participating in intercollegiate sport were coached by a woman (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; “Head coaches: 2017-2018 overall figures”, 2018). In Division-I, only 41.7% of female athletes had a female head coach and in Division-III, only 45.7% of female athletes were coached by a woman (LaVoi & Silva-Breen, 2018; LaVoi & Silva-Breen, 2017). At the high school level in 2013-2014, 42.1% of female athletes had the opportunity to be coached by a female coach (LaVoi, 2013). This is in

comparison to nearly every (~96-98%) male collegiate athlete being afforded the opportunity to be coached by a male at some point during their career (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Therefore, not only do male coaches dominate male athletics, but female athletics as well, leaving women coaches facing a glass ceiling because they remain locked out of many of the opportunities to coach, and when they do receive an opportunity it is generally an opportunity to coach a certain gender, women (LaVoi, 2016).

Male leadership in female sports along with the lack of a women leadership in men's sports creates a lack of females in positions of power and ultimately lead females to lose their voice (Walker & Bopp, 2011). Since men are represented in both men's and women's sports, they have double the amount coaching opportunities (Stangl & Kane, 1991). That is, when a woman is searching for a coaching job, she is limited to women's sports whereas a man can search both men's and women's sports. This ultimately leaves very few male and female athletes the opportunity to see a female coach and/or to be coached by a woman (LaVoi, 2016). Female role models are important as they allow both girls and boys the opportunity to see a strong female in a position of power (LaVoi, 2016). If young girls can see strong female coaches, they can ultimately be a strong female coach in the future (LaVoi, 2016). On the other hand, if young boys see a strong female coach, they learn to respect and value women and see them as equals (LaVoi, 2016).

Women are not only underrepresented in coaching, but are underrepresented in other sport leadership positions, such as athletic directors, as well (Acosta & Carpenter,

2014). Once again, pre-Title IX over 90% of women's intercollegiate athletics were administered by a woman as compared to only 22.3% of athletic departments being administered by a woman in 2014 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). This lack of females in administrator positions takes away women's voices in reference to decision making (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Stangl and Kane (1991) attributed the lack of women in leadership positions to homologous reproduction. That is, those in charge, in this case men, are more likely to hire those who are like them (Stangl & Kane, 1991). Therefore, the majority of athletic directors, who are male, are more often than not going to hire men (Stangl & Kane, 1991). This leads to a cyclical cycle of men hiring men, leaving women on the outside not able to get their foot in the door. The lack of female representation in athletic administration continues to perpetuate the narrative of sport being dominated by males (Stangl & Kane, 1991). This cycle is still prevalent today as Kane and LaVoi (2018) found that male and female athletic directors tend to attribute the lack of women in coaching to lack of female applicants. The unconscious bias of both male and female athletic directors to hire men for coaching positions continues to reproduce and send the message that men are the ones who are meant for coaching (Kane & LaVoi, 2018).

Another area where women are underrepresented is in National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) governance (Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012). The higher the level of governance at the NCAA level, the fewer number of females there are represented (Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012). Only three women (15.8%) serve on the executive committee of the NCAA, which is the most powerful governing body of the NCAA (Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012). Therefore, women are not only

underrepresented at the highest level of collegiate sport, but also have very little voice and power to make change for gender equity at the highest level of governance in collegiate sport (Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012). These committees are in charge of determining how sport is played and who plays them, and by having a lack of female representation in the committees once again perpetuates the dominant ideology that sport is dominated for and by men (Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012). Having women represented at the highest level of sport allows women to have a voice as well as allow young girls and women to see strong female role-models, sending a message that girls and women can and should be in sport (LaVoi, 2016; Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012).

Given the fact women traditionally took care of the family and naturally had different interests than men, essentialism potentially impacts dominant narratives pertaining to female coaches (Messner, 2001; LaVoi, 2016). A common narrative is women cannot coach because it is not possible to coach and take care of a family (LaVoi, 2016). This narrative aligns with essentialism and women not being interested in coaching because they want to be at home with their families, sending a message women choose to pursue other careers than coaching (Messner, 2011; LaVoi, 2016). This narrative is not only common with the public, athletic administrators and those doing the hiring attribute family obligations to the lack of females in coaching as well (Kane & LaVoi, 2018). Both male and female athletic directors accredited females' obligations to families one of the main reasons why there is a lack of women in coaching. This is troublesome because those who have the power and ability to hire female coaches are subject to conform to dominant gender ideologies, therefore contributing to the lack of

women coaches (Kane & LaVoi, 2018; LaVoi, 2016). Furthermore, many believe women and girls, because of their biology, are not interested in sports (Messner, 2011). Due to their biology they simply choose other activities to participate in (Messner, 2011). This idea perpetuates dominant narratives ultimately allowing more men and boys opportunities in sport leadership simply due to biology, choices and inherent interest (Messner, 2011; LaVoi, 2016).

Hiring women coaches not only increases diversity in the workplace, it offers many other benefits to athletes, coaches, and administrators (Herring, 2009; LaVoi, 2016). Women coaches are role models (LaVoi, 2016). Role models in which both girls and boys need allowing those young athletes to see strong female leaders who are competent in sport (LaVoi, 2016). When young girls see women coaches, they see a role model who was once in their shoes ultimately leading some of those young girls to pursue coaching in the future (LaVoi, 2016). When young boys see women coaches, they see women strong women in leadership positions which allows those young boys to grow up learning to respect and value women (LaVoi, 2016). Having women in coaching challenges typical gender stereotypes about women in power or leadership positions (LaVoi, 2016).

Women coaches also matter to other women coaches as they create a strong support system for each other (LaVoi, 2016). Women coaches can relate to one another and create an environment where friendships can be developed, networking is established, support is created, and advice is given on how to navigate the male dominated landscape of sport (LaVoi, 2016). Women coaches offer different perspectives

which adds value and productivity to the workplace (Herring, 2009; LaVoi, 2016).

Creating a workplace where women are present allows women to advocate for diversity and equity in sport as well as other contexts (LaVoi, 2016). A diverse workplace offers numerous benefits to employees and consumers alike, ultimately creating an inclusive space where everyone feels heard and valued (Herring, 2009; LaVoi, 2016).

With sport being such a powerful institution in the United States culture, women being underrepresented at every level in sport sends a message that men are the ones who hold the power and are the ones making the decisions (LaVoi, 2016). This then communicates to the public “who and what is relevant and valued (and who is not)” (LaVoi, 2016, p.3). In turn, men are valued and expected to be the decision makers not only in sport but society as well (LaVoi, 2016). In the sporting world, women coaches are the statistical minority (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; LaVoi, 2016). Women coaches are underrepresented in sport which has created multiple and complex barriers for them to enter and sustain their careers (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012; LaVoi, 2016). These barriers impact a female coach’s experience during their career and potentially impact future women from going in to the profession. There has been a plethora of research on the scarcity of women coaches, however, more is needed to better understand how dominant narratives pertaining to women coaches are produced or (re)produced as society changes and evolves.

### **The Ecological-Intersectional Model of Supports and Barriers for Women Coaches**

Due to the underrepresentation of women coaches at every level, LaVoi and Dutove (2012) created a model which depicts multiple and complex barriers female

coaches encounter throughout their career. The backbone of this model is based on Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1993) ecological systems theory (EST) which states human beings have multiple and complex environmental systems including the individual, interpersonal, organizational and socio-cultural system, which influence their development and experience. In 2016, the model was modified and enhanced to include intersectionality and power (LaVoi, 2016). This model serves to better understand how the system of relationships and structures a coach has, and how those relationships and structures affect and influence their experience both personally and professionally (LaVoi, 2016; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). Each different level offers certain barriers and supports for female coaches and are ever-changing over their lifetime as seen in Figure 1 (LaVoi, 2016; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012).

There are four levels in the EST model which influence human behavior and experience (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The first, and most proximal, level in which LaVoi and Dutove's (2012) conceptualized their model is the individual level. Different personal, biological, and psychological factors of the individual are included in this level such as cognition, emotion, values, expertise, beliefs, and personality (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). For example, a female coach not applying for a certain job because she believes she is not qualified even though she possesses a high degree of athletic and coaching competency would be a barrier at this level (Greenhill, Auld, Cuskelly & Hooper, 2009; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). An example of support includes a female coach having a successful athlete or team, which in turn raises a coach's confidence in her ability to

coach (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012; Robertson, 2007; West, Green, Brackenridge & Woodward, 2001).

The next level in the model is the interpersonal level, which includes the social-relational influences a coach has (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). These social-relational influences may include friends, colleagues, parents, or a significant other (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). A support in this level would be parents supporting a female coach believing she is pursuing a 'normal' career (Dixon et al., 2008; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). On the other hand, a spouse being unsupportive and providing a lack of encouragement would be considered a barrier at the interpersonal level (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012; Thorngren, 1990). The common narrative pertaining to women choosing to raise a family instead of coach falls at the interpersonal level (LaVoi, 2016). Many believe since women are the ones who predominately take care of the family, the demands of being a mother and a coach are too much for many women to handle, which creates another barrier for female coaches (Messner, 2009; LaVoi, 2016).

The organizational/structural level includes organizational practices and professional practices, job descriptions, use of space, and opportunities (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). Organizations or institutions which specifically recruit and retain women coaches are considered a support at this level (Demers, 2009; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012), while institutions which have limited family-friendly policies are an organizational barrier (Kerr & Marshall, 2007; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012; Robertson, 2007). Finally, the social-cultural level includes norms and cultural systems in which a female coach encounter (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). For example, different gender stereotypes and gender

norms may affect a female's experience in coaching creating certain barriers and/or supports at this level (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012).

Examining the complex interaction of the four different levels helps better understand both the supports (or lack of) and barriers a female coach may encounter throughout their career (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). This model provides examples of how a woman's experience in coaching may differ from a male's simply because he may not experience many of the barriers a woman encounters during her career (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). Though there is very little research on women coaches' portrayal in digital media, most of the common narratives found in LaVoi and Dutove's model can be found in popular press and are perpetuated by the media (Hardin & LaVoi, 2013; LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014). The media has the power to communicate who is important, and more importantly, who is not (LaVoi, 2016). There are a handful of studies that have examined the portrayal of women coaches in the media. Therefore, more research is needed to better understand how women coaches are being portrayed through the powerful medium that is the media, and if those portrayals and narratives are (re)producing dominant gender ideologies pertaining to women coaches.

### **Media Representation of Females in Sport**

While the number of female participants sport and physical activity has increased since the passage of Title IX in 1972, the amount of media coverage for female athletes has remained stagnant (Cooky, Messner & Hextrum, 2013). Only 2-4% of all media coverage is devoted to women's sports (Cooky et al., 2013). In addition, men's sports are predominately given primetime coverage meaning women's sports are covered during

unimportant and insignificant times (Cooky, Messner & Musto, 2015). In fact, most of the lead stories during the sports section of the news are related to men's sports (Cooky et al., 2015). Therefore, women are nearly non-existent in sport media, leaving those who are interested in women's sports unable to access them (Cooky et al., 2015).

Not only do female athletes receive limited media coverage, when they are portrayed in the media female athletes are more often than not portrayed in a sexual manner being off the court, out of uniform, and highly sexualized (Kane, 1988). Instead of being portrayed as competent and competitive athletes, females are portrayed in a way that focuses on their looks (Kane, LaVoi & Fink, 2013). Therefore, female athletes have to balance being seen as a female and an athlete instead of being seen simply as an athlete (Kane et al., 2013). Female athletes are left trying to coincide with the views that privilege men and the masculine ideals associate with sport (Cooky & LaVoi, 2012). That is, women are supposed to be feminine first and foremost instead of a strong competent athletes (Cooky & Lavoii, 2012). While the media portrays these women in a sexualized manner, many female athletes and fans do not want to see women portrayed in that manner (Kane et al., 2013). Female athletes desire to viewed as strong competent athletes like their male counterparts, but the media continues to perpetuate the dominant narratives associated with female athletes and portray women as objects as opposed to athletes (Kane et al., 2013).

According to Messner, Duncan, and Cooky (2003) women are still "missing in action" in regards to media coverage (p.39). Women's sports are hardly covered during the weekdays, and when they are in the media, they are represented in a humorous and

sexual manner (Messner et al., 2003). The few articles pertaining to women's sports hardly quote or mention players and/or the coaches, which silences these women's voices and perspectives (Cooky, Wachs, Messner, & Dworkin, 2010). Leaders of women's groups (i.e. the National Organization for Women) are also nearly nonexistent in media frames (Cooky et al., 2012). Therefore, women who are involved in sport and have power in society are hardly seen in the media making them invisible and sends the message they are not valued (Cook et al., 2010). One explanation as to why people believe female athletes are not represented in the media is because of the myth no one is interested (Kane, 2013). Therefore, the media focuses on the "big three", men's football, basketball, and baseball, in regards to their coverage (Kane, 2013, p. 234). These three sports are viewed as the important sports or the sports most fans are interested in, leading the media to dedicate most of their coverage to them (Kane, 2013). The difference between the type and amount of media coverage devoted to men's and women's sports continue to uphold the male dominated culture and ideologies of sports (Cooky & LaVoi, 2012).

Many noteworthy milestones in which both female athletes and coaches achieve are covered similarly to male accomplishments (Kane, 2013). However, male athletes overall receive far more media coverage about their accomplishments as well as unimportant details pertaining to their personal lives while women tend to only receive little coverage about their accomplishments (Cooky et al, 2015). The media tends to play it safe and not cover women's sports because they believe that people are not interested in women's sports (Kane, 2013). This begs the question how does one know there is not an audience for women's sports if we do not give people the chance to watch and

consume them? The media contributes to and constructs the narrative that women are not interested in sport or coaching sports and therefore not worthy of coverage (Cooky et al., 2015).

Dominant gender ideologies are not only perpetuated in traditional media sources, digital media also trivialize and marginalize women in sport (Lisec & McDonald, 2012). An examination of blog post entries and discussion boards indicate digital media is not immune to perpetuating dominant gender ideologies (Lisec & McDonald, 2012). Female athletes are viewed as inferior to male athletes as female athletes are usually sexualized, heterosexualized, and feminized in blog posts and discussion boards (Lisec & McDonald, 2012). If and when women's sports are discussed in digital media, female athletes are mocked and viewed as inferior to male athletes (Lisec & McDonald, 2012). In addition, the authors of blog posts tend to spin stories in order to justify negative perceptions of women's sports (Lisec & McDonald, 2012). That is, including statements which question the existence and vitality of women's sports are common sending the message to readers once again that women's sports are inferior to men's (Lisec & McDonald, 2012).

While there is a plethora of research on the lack of female athletes in the sport media (Cooky et al., 2003; Cooky et al., 2010; Kane, 1988; Kane, 2003; Lisec & McDonald, 2012; Messner et al., 2003), very little research exists on media portrayals or narratives about female coaches in sport, and even less on digital media portrayals and narratives about women coaches. Research on women in leadership indicates women leaders need to juggle being seen as feminine but not too feminine otherwise they will not be taken seriously (LaVoi & Calhoun, 2016). On the other hand, if they appear to

aggressive and masculine, they are called crazy or hysterical (LaVoi, & Calhoun, 2016), and women coaches are no exception. Highlighting the marital status or maternal status of women leaders is far more prevalent than highlighting their achievement, academic background, or experience (Bystrom, Robertson & Bryant, 2001; LaVoi & Calhoun, 2016) which reinforces and constructs essentialistic gendered beliefs. The few studies in which the portrayal of female coaches is examined, indicated the narratives surrounding women coaches are similar to those pertaining to female athletes (LaVoi & Calhoun, 2016). There is very little media coverage of female coaches, and when female coaches are in the media their image is featured as opposed to their accomplishments and competence as a coach (LaVoi & Calhoun, 2016). It is important to research how women coaches, not only female athletes, are portrayed in the media since sports have a way of communicating who is important and who is not. There needs to be an understanding of how the institution of sport and dominant narratives about women in sport leadership is affecting and influencing current and future women coaches, and perhaps contributing to the current stagnation of women in sport coaching (LaVoi, 2016). This study fills that gap and forwards understanding of which dominant narratives about women coaches in sport media sources are constructed and perpetuated, particularly within digital media.

### **The Influence of Digital Media in Sport**

Digital media is far more popular than traditional media (Rosen, 2006). News mediums such as blog posts, Twitter, and Facebook pages are overtaking traditional sources of media such as TV, print newspaper, and radio (Hutchins & Rowe, 2009; Vann, 2014). Most sports professional and collegiate sports teams have websites which include

news blogs, Facebook pages, Instagram, and Twitter accounts (LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014). This new form of media is highly interactive allowing consumers to comment and voice their opinion about the information, where as in traditional media, that is not possible (Hutchins & Rowe, 2009; Vann, 2014). Digital media equips the audience with many tools to both consume the content and interact with each other via comments, network, and participate in open sources (Deuze, Bruns & Neuberrger, 2007; LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014). Digital media is a type of civic journalism where consumers can interact with the content, voice their opinion, and influence how others consume content and as a result, consumers can challenge and/or reinforce dominant gender ideologies that may or not be scientifically grounded (LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014).

The popularity of digital media as a new source of sport information creates a space where writers and consumers can contest or reinforce dominant gender ideologies pertaining to women in sports, which are often unmediated, like comments (Rosen, 2006). An interesting aspect of digital media is it allows readers to participate in the conversation by commenting on the content of the author or commenting on the comments of other consumers (Vann, 2014). As a result, digital media is often created for and by the audience (Rosen, 2006). With the shift in sport media from traditional sources such as the radio and print newspaper to digital media sources such as blogs and Twitter, it is important to understand what opportunities and challenges are presented in this new form, especially as it pertains to sportswomen (Hutchins & Rowe, 2009), including coaches. While the use of digital media is growing, there is little research examining the gender-sport-digital media triad (LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014). To our knowledge, there is

very little research, if any, on the women coaches-sport media triad. The scarce amount of existing research indicates that dominant gender ideologies in sport are present in digital media (Lisec & McDonald, 2012; Hardin, 2011) and more research is needed, to ascertain if and how digital media may hold transformative potential for narratives pertaining to women in sport (LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014).

Research on the impact of digital media on sport and gender allows feminist scholars an unique opportunity to engage in the dialogue with authors or consumers who are not familiar with the representation of women in sport (LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014), and may perpetuate false and damaging narratives. Many times, dialogue about female athletes in digital media is shifted from talking about a woman's ability and athleticism to dialogue referencing their physical appearance reinforcing dominant oppressive ideologies pertaining to women in sport (Lisec & McDonald, 2012). Female athletes are often discussed in terms of dominant gender roles and expectations, such as appearing feminine and obligations to their families, as opposed to competent athletes (Lisec & McDonald, 2012). While traditional gender ideologies are predominant in digital media, difference of opinions can emerge in digital media, which allow audiences to voice their opinions and understanding of those dominant ideologies (LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014). Anti-feminist perspectives create a possibility of oppressive ideologies and existing power structures to remain intact and strengthened (LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014). However, digital media has the power to produce transformative narratives pertaining to girls and women in sport which ultimately increase interest in and respect for those women and girls who participate in sport (LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014).

Digital media platforms allow space for scholars to educate and challenge individuals who contribute to the annihilistic narratives which commonly surround women's sports ultimately shifting the narratives towards respect and interest (LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014). Common and false narratives that limit, inhibit and discourage women from getting into and staying in coaching, can be identified through examination of digital media sources, but current research on this topic is limited in scope. Given the power of digital media on dominant ideologies in sport, this study will help better understand how digital media (re)constructs or challenges gender ideologies in sport as they pertain to woman coaches by examining blog posts and subsequent consumer comments written about woman in coaching. One framework that is particularly useful in analyzing narrative content is framing theory.

### **Framing Theory**

The theoretical framework for this study is framing theory (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974). Framing theory or frame analysis was first brought forth by Goffman (1974) where he described a frame as a "principle of organization which govern events, at least social ones, and our subjective involvement in them" (p. 10-11). Put simply a frame of reference allows readers and consumers to better understand the meaning of content and make sense of societal values (Goffman, 1974). According to Entman (1993), to frame is to "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text" (p. 52). Therefore, frames do not influence attitude changes, they simply reinforce common ideologies and existing attitudes of society (Klapper, 1960). The way in which information is presented, the frame, influences how individuals process

that information (Goffman, 1974). This processing and interpretation of information is influenced by preexisting meanings of structures and schemas ultimately affecting how audiences and recipients come to understand meaning and values (Price, Tewksbury, & Powers, 1997; Scheufele, 1999). Using aspects of the text, looking for repetition, and associating them with culturally familiar values and ideals, one can better understand what message the text is sending (Entman, 1993). As it pertains to this study, analyzing frames of women coaches will help better understand society views women coaches. Analyzing emergent themes gathered from digital media comments will give understanding to narratives surrounding women coaches. Therefore, framing theory will be the primary framework guiding this study due to the power of the framing of words to understand underlying meanings of text (Entman, 1993).

Goffman (1974) makes the distinction between two different types of frameworks involved in frame analysis, natural and social. Natural frameworks refer to occurrences which are undirected and unguided (Goffman, 1974). These frameworks are formed “naturally” as there is no motive or intent guided by individuals (Goffman, 1974, p.22). Social frameworks on the other hand refer to events which involve aim and a controlled effort by individuals to deliver a certain message (Goffman, 1974). These frameworks guide individuals to think, act, and behave in a certain way (Goffman, 1974). Social frameworks will guide this study as there is motive and intent behind blog post comments and media frames. Digital media uses social frameworks as a way to coerce and influence ideologies, and in this case, dominant gender ideologies as they pertain to women

coaches, therefore making these frameworks the primary focus of this study (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974).

Frame analysis and framing theory involves using spheres of experiences and turning them in to realities (Goffman, 1974). Reality is mediated through the way in which our experiences are framed (Goffman, 1974). Therefore, it is important to understand the way in which words are framed because frames contain their own logic, motives, and meanings which help better understand big picture societal values (Goffman, 1974), and for this study as it pertains to the perception and valuation (or not) of women sport coaches. Using digital media comment frames as they pertain to women coaches will give insight about dominant gender narratives and ideologies. Due to the gap in the literature regarding women coaches portrayal in digital media, this study will fill that gap and make sense about the impact of digital media on women coaches.

Research suggests women coaches are constructed in a way that reproduces dominant gender ideologies about women in sport (Hardin & LaVoi, 2013). Analyzing text and frames helps to better understand themes and ideologies which influence how society views a certain group of individuals (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974; LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014). Using the repetition of words, ideas and phrases to develop higher order themes as they pertain to women coaches in digital media allows researchers to analyze common narratives and ideologies, in this case narratives pertaining to women coaches (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974; Hardin & LaVoi, 2013).

While examining what is present in the text, analyzing what is not in the text is equally important (Entman, 1993; Hardin & LaVoi, 2013). When women are

symbolically annihilated in the sport media, meaning coverage or narratives are absent, implicit messages are sent to society about the value of women and girls in sport (LaVoi & Calhoun, 2016; Tuchman, 1975). Therefore, when women and girls are not in the media or oppressive and damaging narratives are written about women and girls in sport, it sends the message they are not valued (Hardin & LaVoi, 2013; LaVoi, 2016). The media has the power to normalize who is valued, visible, and important in sport and more importantly who is not (LaVoi & Calhoun, 2016). That is why it is important to understand the way in which women coaches are framed in the media, which will give insight on how women are viewed and if they are valued in society or not. While a great deal of literature uses framing theory in a variety of contexts to call attention to dominant ideologies, only a handful of scholars have applied it to examining women coaches.

### **Common Frames About Women Sport Coaches**

Previous research has identified some of the common stereotypes pertaining to women coaches (Acosta & Carpenter, 1985; Hasbrook, Hart, Mathes, & True, 1990). For years, women coaches have been portrayed as not being interested in coaching, lacking experience, and unable to coach due to time constraints with their families (Hasbrook et al., 1990). Many argued that women are not interested in coaching and if an organization is required to hire a woman coach, many underqualified women will be granted coaching positions over qualified men (Acosta & Carpenter, 1985; Hasbrook et al., 1990). Therefore, women coaches historically have been marginalized due to the many different narratives which align with essentialistic beliefs that women are not interested in coaching and choose other careers (Bohan, 1993; Hasbrook, 1990; Messner, 2011).

LaVoi (2016) has identified and argued that many of the common narratives, most of which have not changed over time, pertaining to women coaches place the blame on women for the lack of women in coaching, the very population that are marginalized and have the least power in the system. LaVoi (2016) was the first to document and create a comprehensive list of the wide range of frames as they pertain to women coaches. Table 1 illustrates the numerous blame the women narratives dominant in today's society. The current study uses the dominant narratives as illustrated in Table 1 to see if new narratives emerge and if digital media continues reproducing some of those narratives. Being that digital media is publicly accessible, commonly used, a place where people who care about their sport go for information, and usually is free, it is important to understand the way women coaches are framed (Hardin & LaVoi, 2013; LaVoi, 2016; Rosen, 2006).

### **Significance of Study**

While there is a plethora of research related to women in sport leadership and female athletes in sport media, there is a scarcity of research pertaining to women coaches in sport media. Sport leadership scholars have focused their attention on the supports and barriers women coaches encounter in the coaching profession. While on the other hand, sport media scholars have focused their attention on the portrayals of female athletes in sport media. These two prevalent research topics for sport scholars have yet to be combined to examine the portrayals of and narratives about women coaches in sport media. Researchers have yet to examine how a powerful entity, such as sport media, may impact women coaches in sport as they are already marginalized by the lack of women

coaches in the profession and how those narratives influence popular opinions about women coaches, including the people that hire them (Kane & LaVoi, 2018). This study will fill this gap.

The narratives that surround women coaches construct and reproduce damaging gender narratives which marginalize women (LaVoi, 2016). This is a potential reason as to why the current percentage of women coaches is stagnant because those in power, such as athletic directors doing the hiring, buy in, whether consciously or unconsciously, to damaging narratives leading them to hire men when they have the chance (Kane & LaVoi, 2018). Most importantly Kane and LaVoi (2018) found these common damaging narratives which blame women coaches for the lack of women coaches have not changed in 25 years. It is important to control and change the narratives because they have the ability to influence who society deems important and valued (LaVoi, 2016). The lack of research on the portrayal of women coaches in sport media is a glaring and important gap, and therefore it is imperative to examine and document existing narratives, so that efforts can be developed to bring awareness, counter and combat them in an effort to recruit, hire and retain women in coaching so that the current stagnation is reversed.

This groundbreaking study will examine the digital media narratives, in particular blog posts, pertaining to women coaches. This study will identify what common narratives are prominent in digital media, document them, and ultimately provide a starting point for refuting them and changing dominant ideologies in society. It will use three blog posts written on the online news medium *Swim Swam*. The blogs were written specifically about the lack of women coaches in collegiate swimming. The sport of

swimming was chosen because there is consistently a low percentage of female head coaches in this sport (LaVoi & Silva-Breen, 2018; LaVoi & Silva-Breen 2017). The *Women College Coaches Report Card* is an annual report put out by the Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport which documents the percentage of female head coaches of women's collegiate teams (LaVoi & Silva-Breen, 2018; LaVoi & Silva-Breen 2017). The data are broken down by sport, conference, and institution and each of the following receive a grade A-F based on the percentage of female head coaches. For example, each sport, conference, and institution receive a grade based on how many head female coaches they have. Overall, only 42% of female collegiate athletes at the Division I level and only 46% of female athletes at the Division III level are coached by a woman (LaVoi & Silva-Breen, 2018; LaVoi & Silva-Breen 2017). Swimming is a sport consistently receives a D or an F. In swimming, the percentage of women coaches is extremely low with only 17.9% and 26.1% of Division I and III female swimmers being coached by a woman respectively (LaVoi & Silva-Breen, 2018; LaVoi & Silva-Breen 2017).

Blog post comments provide a way to examine the culture current female swimming coaches live in as the comments help better understand the occupational landscape for female coaches. By examining the comments, one can better understand the narratives and potentially can change the narratives, or the culture, to be more favorable towards women. This study aims to fill the gap in the literature pertaining to women coaches portrayal in digital media and help gain a better understanding of what narratives are being produced and reproduced in this prominent and popular news medium.

## **Research Questions**

Based on the findings of LaVoi and Dutove (2012), LaVoi (2016), LaVoi and Calhoun (2013), Kane and LaVoi (2018), and Goffman (1974), the following research questions guide this study:

**Research Question 1:** How do digital sport media comments made about women coaches in response to a blog about women coaches, align with levels of LaVoi's (2016) Ecological-Intersectional Model of Supports and Barriers for Women Coaches?

**Hypothesis:** Based on the findings of LaVoi and Dutove (2012) and LaVoi (2016), and Kane and LaVoi (2018) most of the comments are expected to be align with the individual level. Due to the common blame the women narratives from LaVoi (2016), the fact that most athletic directors are male and those men blame women coaches themselves for not applying to coach (Kane & LaVoi, 2018), and that most sport media and blog commenters are male (Kian, 2007), most of the comments will blame women coaches for their inability to apply and be interested in coaching. Blaming individuals who are marginalized, in this case women, does not require those who do the hiring as well as the structure of sport to reevaluate who is included and valued in sport, ultimately allowing systems and structures to remain intact (LaVoi, 2016). The comments written blog posts are made in a sociocultural climate where a return to essentialism and conservatism is prevalent, therefore the idea that women inherently have different interests than men continues to put the blame on those very people who are marginalized in sport, women.

**Research Question 2:** Do comments made in response to a blog post about women coaches challenge or reproduce dominant gender ideologies and narratives pertaining to women coaches?

**Hypothesis:** Based on the findings of LaVoi and Calhoun (2013), the comments will reproduce dominant gender ideologies pertaining to women coaches. The majority of frames are predicted to align with the individual level of the model, which continue to reproduce dominant gender ideologies in sport (Goffman, 1974; LaVoi, 2016; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012) The way in which women coaches are framed tend reproduce dominant gender ideologies in sport. Therefore, perpetuating the male dominance of sport and the scarcity of female coaches.

## Methods

### Study Design

This qualitative textual analysis examined comments of three different blog posts on the online swimming news outlet *SwimSwam* between posted August 2018 and September 2018. Textual analysis was chosen because it is a type of content analysis research method media scholars use to locate meanings in text, as content analysis often involves using texts, images, or other symbolic matter to systematically analyze content (Cooky, Wachs, Messner, & Dwrkin, 2010; Krippendorff, 2004). Content analysis interprets and quantifies texts and images and allocates them to pre-determined categories, ultimately allowing researchers to determine meanings and relationships of certain words and concepts within those texts and images (Cooky et al., 2010; Payne &

Payne, 2004). Therefore, a textual analysis of the blog post comments was compiled to create a sample of texts surrounding narratives about women coaches.

Texts, such as blog posts, are written to be persuasive and influence the readers to think a certain way (Gill & Gill, 2007) and analyzing such texts can help forward understanding of dominant societal ideologies (Fürsich, 2009; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Textual analysis provides a way to understand and analyze those messages to better understand societal ideologies, in this case messages in regards to the gender ideologies about women coaches in digital media (Lombard, Snyder-Duch & Bracken, 2002). This method has been used in prior research on mainstream print news media coverage of the 2007 NCAA women's basketball championship game (Cooky et al., 2010), media coverage of two high-profile NCAA women's basketball coaches (Hardin & LaVoi, 2013), and the media's representation of WNBA players (Lisec & McDonald, 2012) in sport, but this study is the first to apply it to textual analysis of sport blogs specifically written about women coaches. The blogosphere is a place where sports-minded people can create their own thoughts, content, and discussions about sport (MacKay & Dallaire, 2013). It provides a unique opportunity for users to expand on discourse related to sport allowing users to potentially challenge normative definitions of gender (Lisec & McDonald, 2012; MacKay & Dallaire, 2013), which is why it is important to the understand narratives in sports blogs as they pertain to women coaches.

### **Source of Data**

*SwimSwam* is an online swim news organization which covers competitive swimming, diving, water polo and synchronized swimming at the high school, club and

collegiate levels. It is a popular medium for the latest swimming news as it has international and national coverage. The sport of swimming was chosen due to the consistent low percentage of female head coaches in this sport (LaVoi & Silva-Breen, 2018; LaVoi & Silva-Breen 2017). From year to year, swimming receives an 'F' grade on the Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport's annual *Women College Coaches Report Card (WCCRC)*. *SwimSwam* was chosen as the news medium due to the high level of circulation the website receives. As a website, *SwimSwam* (<https://swimswam.com>) receives nearly 12,000,000 views per month and publishes nearly 2,500 articles per month. The specific blog posts were selected because they pertain to the sport of swimming's low grade on the *WCCRC* and the lack of female head coaches in collegiate swimming. Due to the low number of female coaches in collegiate swimming, examining blog posts directly related to the topic provides insight into the culture of the sport, what challenges women coaches encounter, creates a better understanding of why there is a lack of women coaches, and sparks conversation about how to recruit and retain women in the profession.

This investigation will look at three specific blog posts written on *SwimSwam* which related directly to women coaches. Comments posted on all three blogs were examined to determine higher order themes and narratives. Three different blog posts published on *Swim Swam* were purposely selected. The three particular blogs were selected because they were written specifically about or in response to the *WCCRC*. The initial blog post entitled *NCAA Swimming Lands 'F' Grade for Lack of Women Coaching Female Teams* encompassed information from the *WCCRC*. This blog comprised of

statistics and data as it pertains to the gender of head collegiate women's swimming coaches. The purpose of the blog post was to educate readers on the lack of women coaches in collegiate swimming. The post created a host of ensuing backlash and negative comments related to and about women coaches, which in turn possibly reinforced negative and false narratives about women coaches.

Due to the backlash pertaining to her work Dr. Nicole M. LaVoi, the director of the Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport and author of the *WCCRC*, wrote two separate responses. These responses were entitled *8 Reasons Why Women Coaches Matter* and *Shouts From the Stands: Barriers Facing Women Coaches*. The purpose of LaVoi's responses was to educate and stimulate dialogue about the topic, as well as provide more enlightened and educated narratives to readers. As a result of LaVoi's responses, many comments were generated online and discussion did ensue pertaining to the lack of women coaches in sport. The dialogue and online discussion in response to all three blog posts were a catalyst for this study. Since there is little research pertaining to the portrayal of or narratives about women coaches in digital media, the comments made in response to blog posts specifically written about women coaches provided an opportunity to examine the narratives about women coaches in this new form of media. Table 2 shows the descriptive breakdown of the total number of themes coded in each blog post. In total, 229 comments were made across the three blogs. Of the 229 comments, 302 units of analysis (frames) emerged. All three of the blog posts were published between August and September 2018.

Table 2  
*Percentage of themes coded in blog post comments across three different SwimSwam blog posts pertaining to the lack of women coaches in collegiate swimming*

Blog Post	Percent (# of frames) n=302
NCAA Swimming Lands 'F'	55.6 (168)
Shouts from the Stands	19.2 (58)
8 Reasons Why Women Coaches Matter	25.2 (76)

### **Data Collection**

Data was gathered between October 2018 and March 2019. Blog posts and resulting comments are public domain; therefore, IRB approval was not required. No identifying information was collected from blogger usernames or comments.

### **Data Analysis**

A qualitative textual analysis of the comments made in response to the all three blog posts was used to uncover frames and narratives as they pertain to women coaches. Textual analysis was chosen as it provides researchers the opportunity to make observations, view patterns, and establish higher order themes and narratives (Bernard & Ryan, 2009; Cooky et al., 2010; Gill & Gill, 2007; Hardin & LaVoi, 2013). Frames and narratives allow researchers to analyze what messages are being expressed in the text and helps makes sense of them (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In order to answer both research questions, a deductive approach was used. A deductive approach was chosen because it is useful when mapping data onto existing themes or ideologies (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) for the purpose of this study, the Ecological-Intersectional Model of Barriers and Supports

for Women Coaches (LaVoi, 2-16; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). Mapping the frames and narratives on to LaVoi and Dutove's (2012) model allows one to gain a better understanding of what types of barriers and supports a coach receives at each level of their ecological system. This in turn creates an awareness of certain relationships and structure affecting and influencing women coaches' experiences throughout their career which potentially impacts the low percentage of females in the coaching profession (LaVoi 2016; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012).

To answer research question one, researchers first read through all three blog posts coding different frames and narratives within the comments. Themes were coded as they appeared and therefore, some comments had multiple units of analysis. Repetition of key ideas, common phrases, and words were coded which allowed researchers to identify frames and narratives as they pertain to supports and barriers women coaches encounter at different levels of their ecological system using the Ecological-Intersectional Model of Barriers and Supports for Women Coaches model (Bernard & Ryan, 2009; Hardin & LaVoi, 2013; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). Frames and narratives were placed in to one of four higher order themes previously mentioned in the model pertaining to a coach's ecological system including the individual, interpersonal, organizational, and structural levels (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). Frames and narratives related to personal, biological, and psychological factors of female coaches were placed in the individual level. Those frames and narratives with content about the settings and personal interaction a female coach encounters were placed in the interpersonal level. Content related to hiring practices, evaluations of coaches, and retention of coaches were placed in the organizational level.

Lastly, frames and narratives related to sexism, homophobia, and gender norms were placed in the societal level. All coding was done by hand.

The themes and narratives produced by research question one were then used to answer research question two. Using previous knowledge about narratives and gender ideologies pertaining to women coaches (Haridn & LaVoi, 3013; LaVoi, 2016; LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012), the frames and narratives produced from the blog comments were used to determine if they reproduce current dominant gender ideologies or if they challenge many current damaging narratives about women coaches. The purpose of this was to better understand how digital media comments either produce new narratives about women coaches or reproduce existing narratives. Analyzing narratives about women coaches and how they are framed in digital media, helps to forward understanding about whether or not this popular source of media is reproducing common gender ideologies or if it is challenging and changing the landscape of how society views women coaches, or both.

Trustworthiness of coding was established by triangulation of data meaning gathering data from multiple blog posts and multiple coders (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). The role of the primary researcher in this study was to better understand the narratives about women coaches as she was a woman coach herself. Being that researcher is a woman coach herself, she was aware of the many different types of narratives which currently surround women coaches. Multiple coders were used to establish credibility and intercoder reliability (MacPhail, Khoza, Abler & Ranganathan, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Having multiple coders determines the agreeableness

between coders and confirms which themes are valid are which themes may be due to personal bias (Lombard et al., 2002). After the trained primary researcher read the blog post comments and developed a coding key based on deductive analysis, an expert who is knowledgeable in the field analyzed the coding key. During this review process comments, codes, and emergent themes until the final lower order themes and coding key were refined and finalized to ensure the information was credible, dependable, and transferable (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Following the refining of the coding key, an additional trained researcher used the coding key to code 10% of the data. Inter-rater reliability was 83%, which is an acceptable level that ensures trustworthiness (McHugh, 2012).

## **Results**

### **Research Question 1: How do digital sport media comments made about women coaches in response to a blog about women coaches, align with levels of LaVoi's (2016) Ecological-Intersectional Model of Supports and Barriers for Women Coaches?**

The four levels of LaVoi's (2016) Ecological-Intersectional Model of Supports and Barriers for Women Coaches were used as higher order themes. There was a total of 302 units of analysis (frames) coded, which created the 18 total lower order themes, and the number of frames per comment ranged from one to nine ( $M = 2.1$ ). The 18 emergent lower order themes which are arranged from most commonly cited (%) to least common within the appropriate level of the model in Table 3. Descriptions of the themes as well as exemplar quotes are also shown in Table 3. A descriptive breakdown of the total number

of lower order themes per level can be found in Table 4 and seen in Figure 2. The individual level accounted for 57.6 % of lower order themes, the interpersonal level accounted for 7.6% of lower order themes, 24.8% of lower order themes were placed in the organizational level and finally 10% of lower order themes were placed at the socio-cultural level. The majority of themes aligned with the individual level (57.6%), indicating the narratives at that level were the dominant narratives as they pertain to women coaches portrayal in the digital media, therefore the hypothesis for research question one was supported.

Among the 302 frames coded, each level of the model was represented. The most prevalent lower-order themes at the individual level were *blame the women* (22.5%), *women “blaming” men* (19.5%), and *women can/want to coach* (8.3%), and *the “best” bias* (7.2%). Comments included *support system* (3.0%) and *unfriendly work environment* (2.6%) as the most prevalent lower order themes at the interpersonal level. Common lower order themes at the organizational level were *the unique nature of swimming* (10.6%), *call for policy/action* (4.3%), and *limited opportunity* (4.0%). Finally, the most prevalent lower order theme at the socio-cultural level was *gender discrimination* (5.0%).

**Research Question 2: Do comments made in response to a blog post about women coaches challenge or reproduce dominant gender ideologies and narratives pertaining to women coaches?**

Descriptive analyses of lower order themes cited in the blog post comments are arranged from most commonly cited to least commonly cited in Table 5. The top five lower order themes included *blame the women* (22.5%), *women “blaming” men* (19.5%),

*the unique nature of swimming* (10.6%), *women can/want to coach* (8.3%), and *the “best” bias* (7.2%). Most narratives framed women as blaming men for their own shortcomings and that women are simply not interested in coaching such as the exemplar quotes below:

*“I see it as women whining and putting men down. Just because women don’t fill as many roles as men DOES NOT equal bias or sexism”*

*“Women are more likely to make other choices rather than going in to coaching”*

Goffman’s (1974) framing theory states the most common frames give a better understanding of the meaning of the content which aids in making sense of larger societal values. Due to the fact that four of the top five most prevalent frames were placed in the individual level (57.6%), these frames are the dominant narratives pertaining to women coaches in digital media. In particular, the two most prevalent themes, *blame the women* (22.5%) and *women “blaming” men* (19.5%), far outweighed the other themes in terms of prevalence. These themes align with LaVoi’s (2016) common blaming narratives pertaining to women coaches. Therefore, this indicates most comments reproduced common gender ideologies as they pertain to women coaches as most aligned with the individual level of the Ecological-Intersectional Model of Supports and Barriers for Women Coaches which continue to place the blame on women for the lack of women in the profession, which supports the hypothesis for research question two (Goffman, 1974; LaVoi, 2016). However, one of the top five themes challenged dominant gender ideologies. *Women can/want to coach* (8.3%) offered support for women coaches. This theme challenged the common blame the women narratives (LaVoi, 2016), as comments

mentioned women are interested and make great coaches such as the exemplar quote below:

*“Competency and excellence in coaching are not limited or restricted to any gender”*

## **Discussion**

### **Main Findings**

This study explored digital media narratives as they pertain to women coaches. Women face multiple barriers within the occupational landscape, and those barriers are especially prevalent in sport leadership as men dominate leadership positions, leaving women coaches marginalized (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Eagly & Sczesny, 2009; LaVoi, 2016). Therefore, it is important to understand what type of messages popular news mediums, such as digital media, are creating and reproducing in regards to the portrayal of women coaches. Digital narratives in swimming are also important due to the fact that swimming and diving and women coaches are rarely covered in the mainstream media. Therefore, consumers, fans, athletes, coaches and swimming and diving stakeholders likely turn to digital media for news, stories and commentary about their sport, including *SwimSwam.com* the most popular source of swim news in the US. *SwimSwam.com* is a dominant source of news where ideologies about swimming and issues related to swimming, like coaches, gets produced and reproduced. A textual analysis of blog post comments on *SwimSwam.com* indicated that women sport coaches continue to be viewed and constructed in ways which marginalize them.

Previous research indicates that most barriers and supports align with the individual level of the Ecological-Intersectional Model of Supports and Barriers (LaVoi, 2016;

LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). The majority of the comments made in the *SwimSwam.com* blogs in this study also aligned with this level. The most prevalent theme in this study was *blame the women*, where many commenters attributed a lack of interest, lack of female applicants, and inexperience as to why there are so few women in the profession. This is important because blaming the women narratives place blame and fault on the women for the lack of women in coaching, thereby erasing systemic factors that impede, limit and drive women from coaching (LaVoi, 2016). These narratives align with essentialistic beliefs that women naturally choose other careers besides coaching (Messner, 2011). This belief creates the assumption that women think and act differently than men and therefore have different interest, which ultimately is the reason why there are so few women coaches (Bohan, 1993; Messner, 2011). Essentialistic viewpoints send the message that women inherently do not want to coach, which in turn, reinforces the false reality that men are the ones who belong in sport (Messner, 2011).

Given the historical relevance of women coaches being portrayed as not interested in coaching (Acosta & Carpenter, 1985; Hasbrook et al., 1990), it is clear from the data in this study that those types of narratives continue to persist and women coaches continue to be marginalized and are still portrayed as not being interested in coaching. One possible explanation for the continuation of the damaging narratives about women coaches is that most of the people in sport leadership position are men (Acotsa & Carpenter, 2014). Since these men are most likely going to hire people like themselves, men, it continues to inhibit those women who are interested in coaching to get their foot in the door (Stangl & Kane, 1991). This in turn allows these types of narratives about

women coaches to persist because many people do not see women visible in sport.

If dominant framing narratives lie at the individual level, like the data in this study, it illuminates the fact that most people are unaware of systemic barriers women face which makes changing the system even harder. If blame lies with women at the individual level, the institution of sport itself and the individuals in power, do not have to reexamine who and what is valued, and who and what is not (LaVoi, 2016). When women get blamed for the lack of women in coaching, it is also damaging because some women take up these narratives as truth and it influences their career trajectory in sometimes damaging ways (LaVoi, 2016). The production and reproduction of blaming women continues to shape societal views of women coaches, fans the flame of bias and sexism, and also keeps the current gender hierarchy alive that privileges male coaches. For example, if women begin to believe that women “choose” not to coach, then others might also choose not to coach and believe that coaching is not for women. Many women are aware gender discrimination exists in the work place, especially in sport, which potentially cause some to hesitate entering the profession (Forsyth, Jones, Duval & Bambridge, 2019). Therefore, there is a lack of female role models for those women interested in coaching, which leaves young women without the support and guidance they need when entering a profession where so few women persist (Forsyth et al., 2019). This leads to women coaches feeling unsupported or under-valued due to the common damaging narratives and essentialistic beliefs that women cannot and should not coach (LaVoi, 2016; Messner, 2011).

Given most narratives in this study align with the individual level, it is clear

dominant gender ideologies in sport continue to be reproduced by digital media.

According to framing theory, the most common frames are important to analyze because they give insight on larger society values (Goffman, 1974). Frames reinforce common ideologies and attitudes in society (Goffman, 1974; Klapper, 1960). Previous research indicates both female coaches and female athletes are portrayed in ways which sexualize, trivialize, and diminish women (Cooky et al., 2015; Cooky & LaVoi, 2012; Hardin & LaVoi, 2013; Kane et al., 2013; LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014). The data in this study adds to that body of literature. Results complemented and extended existing research examining the impact of media on women in sport as most themes continue to blame women for the lack of women in the profession with the top two emergent themes were *blame the women* and *women “blaming” men*. Women in sport, both athletes and coaches, are viewed as inferior to men (de Haan & Knoppers, 2019; LaVoi, 2016). Women are often framed as lesser athletes or coaches than men and therefore, are not taken seriously (de Haan & Knoppers, 2019). Men on the other hand, are framed as the norm or the ones who are expected to be strong, competent, and in context of sport (de Haan & Knoppers, 2019). Therefore, the dominant narrative in sport, and was supported in this study, is that men are the ones who belong and who are valued while women are the ones who are weaker and have issues (de Haan & Knoppers, 2019), and who do not want to take responsibility for the lack of women in coaching.

The findings of this study indicate the common frames in digital media as they pertain to women coaches, most of which continue to marginalize and silence women. It extends off of previous research about the damaging and disruptive ability of digital

media to undermine women in sport (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2019; Hardin & LaVoi, 2013; LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014). Often times, if and when women in sport are in the media, they are portrayed in much different ways than their male counterparts (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2019; Kane, 1988; Kane et al., 2013). Women are often talked about in ways which are sexist and which belittle their athletic competence (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2019; Kane, 1988; Kane et al., 2013). Men on the other hand, are usually praised for their athletic prowess and only criticized on digital media if they cheat or use drugs (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2019). This stark difference leaves women left trying to coincide with the dominant ideals which privilege men (Cooky & LaVoi, 2012).

This study extends on previous sport media research as most narratives continue to silence and marginalize women, in particular women coaches. With the powerful potential of digital media to change the landscape of how society view women coaches (Hutchins & Rowe, 2009; Vann, 2014), it appears this news medium is only continuing to perpetuate the many common damaging narratives. Therefore, future research should continue to examine the landscape of digital media to better understand how this news medium can and should be used as a way to support and value women coaches.

The data yielded five themes which were most commonly cited, many of which align with the individual level of the Ecological-Intersectional Model of Supports and Barriers (LaVoi, 2016; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012) and reproduced the dominant narratives pertaining to women coaches (Goffman, 1974; LaVoi, 2016). Only one of the five themes challenged dominant narratives and offered insight on how digital media can be used to

support women. These five most prevalent themes are summarized and discussed in the following subsections.

**Blame the women.**

The most prevalent theme, *blame the women*, placed the blame on women for the lack of women represented in the profession. Quotes such as “*women are more likely to make other choices rather than going in to coaching*” indicate the perception that women are choosing to pursue other careers outside of coaching. Previous research indicates that difference of interest is a commonly cited reasons as to why there are so few women coaches (LaVoi, 2016). It implies that women are naturally and inherently interested in other professions, which reinforces the essentialist idea that boys and men are the ones who are interested and supposed to be in sport (Messner, 2011). Saying women simply are not interested in coaching does not require the institution of sport to change, leaving the current structure and hiring practices in place (LaVoi, 2016). Interest is shaped by the culture one lives in, and in women coaches are continually blamed for the lack of women in coaching, the culture of devaluation will continue to persist (LaVoi, 2016).

**Women “blaming” men.**

The second most prominent theme was that women are whining and blaming men. Previous research indicates this narrative is not emergent (Sabo, Veliz & Staurowsky, 2016). Many male coaches believe reverse discrimination is happening to them by females candidates being favored for jobs simply because they are female (Sabo et al., 2016). Therefore, men may believe that females who are not qualified are being offered jobs over more qualified men (Sabo et al., 2016). This study extends on that finding and

indicates the narrative about reverse discrimination is common on digital media. With quotes such as *“I see it as women whining and putting men down. Just because women don’t fill has many roles as men DOES NOT equal bias or sexism”*, it is apparent many believe hiring processes are now discriminatory towards men.

Previous research debunks this popular notion as the majority of coaches in both men’s and women’s sports are still men (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; LaVoi & Silva-Breen, 201; LaVoi & Silva-Breen, 2018). Only 42% of women’s collegiate athletes are afforded the opportunity to be coached by a female head coach (LaVoi & Silva-Breen, 2018). This is in comparison to nearly 100% of men’s collegiate athletes having a male head coach at some point in their career (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Women are the minority in others sport leadership positions, such as athletic directors and NCAA governance, which indicates men have the power (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012), and many of those men continue to hire people like themselves, men (Stangl & Kane, 1991). Therefore, it is clear that men are still afforded many more opportunities in sport and that reverse discrimination is simply not happening.

### **Unique nature of swimming.**

Many commenters attributed the structure of swimming as a reason why so few female coaches exist in the sport of swimming. Since swimming is a sport where most men’s and women’s teams are combined, many attributed the limited coaching in swimming a reason why there are so few women coaches in collegiate swimming. However, previous research indicates the composition of coaching staffs for combined

team sports consists of mostly, if not all, male coaches (LaVoi, 2019). There are very few women who are afforded the opportunity to coach combined team sports (LaVoi, 2018 & Silva-Breen, 2017; LaVoi & Silva-Breen, 2018). Only 17.9% and 26.1% of women's swimming teams had a head female coach at the Division I and Division III levels respectively (LaVoi, 2018 & Silva-Breen, 2017; LaVoi & Silva-Breen, 2018), indicating there is a limited career pathway for women who are interested in coaching swimming. Track and field is a sport similar to swimming where coaching staffs are the same for both the men's and women's teams. Previous research suggests the percent of women coaching track and field is similar to swimming with only 17.7% of Division-I and 17.8% of Division-III women's teams having a female coach (LaVoi & Silva-Breen, 2017; LaVoi & Silva-Breen, 2018). If and when coaching staffs in these sports have women on staff, it is usually in the form of one token female who is often times an assistant coach (LaVoi, 2019). Therefore, women are the minority in combined team sport coaching staffs and once again are left surrendering to the masculine ideals associated with sport (Cooky & LaVoi, 2012).

While many collegiate swimming coaching staffs are the same for both men and women, it is clear many women are not afforded to opportunity to get their foot in the door. When men are in charge, in this case as head coaches, it reinforces that men should be in charge and that they are the most competent (LaVoi, 2016). Since women typically are only afforded the opportunity to coach one gender, women, combined team sports make it even more difficult for women coaches to get opportunities (LaVoi, 2016). If 50% of swimmers are women, there needs to be a more viable path for those women who

are interested in swimming to join the coaching ranks. Since both men and women can benefit from visible female role models, combined team sports should be a place where women coaches are present and valued, a reality that is currently not likely (LaVoi & Silva-Breen, 2018; LaVoi, 2016).

### **Women can/want to coach.**

While many comments blamed women, one theme offered support for women coaches. The theme *women can/want to coach*, was the fourth most commonly cited theme in this study. Quotes such as “*competency and excellence in coaching are not limited or restricted to any gender*” indicate women can and should be in sport leadership positions. This comment challenges dominant gender ideologies in sport. Most common narratives about women coaches marginalize and portray women as inferior to men (Hardin & LaVoi, 2013; LaVoi, 2016; LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014). While previous research indicates that digital media continues to marginalize and silence both female athletes and women coaches (Cooky et al., 2015; Cooky & LaVoi, 2012; Hardin & LaVoi, 2013; Kane et al., 2013; LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014) this finding indicates digital media can be a place where women coaches are supported and valued. This finding challenges the idea that women are inherently interested in other professions (Messner, 2011), and offers support for past, present, and future coaches. Future research should continue to examine digital media sources to better understand if more narratives such as this are present.

### **The “best” bias.**

Hiring the best candidate or the best person for the job was another theme which was cited often. Comments such as “*Collegiate athletics is about competition and*

*performance – the best athletes and best coaches win*” indicate that athletic departments should simply hire the best person for the job when hiring a coach. While this was cited often by multiple users, previous research indicates that hiring the best often privileges male candidates due to the high number of male coaches who already hold coaching positions (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; LaVoi & Wasend, 2018). Athletic departments want to be competitive and ultimately want to hire the best coaches (LaVoi & Wasend, 2018). The “best” narrative privileges men because of current stereotypes and gender bias which inherently affect women (LaVoi & Wasend, 2018). In order to “coach”, a person needs to be assertive, in control, confident, dominant, forceful, and aggressive which are all characteristic which are usually associated with men (LaVoi & Wasend, 2018). Therefore, whether intended or not, the framing narrative about hiring the best coach is coded through gender bias mean hire a man (LaVoi & Wasend, 2018).

Previous research also indicates the majority of athletic directors are men (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014) and that male athletic directors are more likely to hire people like themselves (Kane, 1988). Ultimately hiring the best means more often than not a man will be hired for a coaching opportunity. Therefore, saying athletic departments should hire the best person from the job is once again damaging for women, because many times society views the best as being a male. This narrative continues the cyclical nature of men holding the power in sport and once again does not require the institution of sport to reevaluate who it values (LaVoi, 2016). In turn, the structure of sport remains intact, females continue to coincide with views which privilege men, and men continue to dominate the coaching landscape with very few women afforded the opportunity to

persist in the profession (Cooky & LaVoi, 2012; LaVoi, 2016).

### **Limitations**

This study has several methodological limitations. First and foremost, with any qualitative research study, validity of data collection is warranted. It is possible not all aspects of comments were coded as it is up to the coder's discretion. Although there was a rigorous coding procedure, it is possible some aspects of the comments were missed. However, creating a coding sheet and having multiple coders establishes intercoder reliability which in turns improves trustworthiness (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Moreover, obtaining a baseline of digital media narratives as they pertain to women coaches allows researchers to gain an understanding of how women coaches are viewed and if they are valued. Future research should continue to evaluate narratives as they pertain to women coaches in blog posts as well as other digital media sources.

There are several other limitations in regards to the design of the study. A larger sample of comments would allow for greater generalizations to be made. Future research should also examine other forms of digital media. Since there were a limited number of comments made across all three blogs, there is limited data about the portrayal of women coaches. Another limitation is that only one source of digital media was used for this study. There are many different sources of digital media such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram which should be analyzed to determine narratives as they pertain to women coaches as well. Other sites may offer more insight on the perpetuating stereotypes of women coaches and help researchers gain a deeper understanding of how digital media is impacting the women, and in particular women coaches. This study also only examines

one sport, swimming. Therefore, more research is needed to understand the impact of multiple digital media sources on the portrayal of women coaches. Examining other sports blogs websites, and content related to other sports will offer support and will help make results more generalizable to athletics as a whole.

### **Future Research**

Digital media is a popular news medium which needs to continue to be examined, as most people obtain their sport information from sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and blog posts (LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014; Rosen, 2006). It has the transformative power to change narratives about women and girls in sport, and change the landscape to be a place where women feel supported and valued (LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014). Therefore, it is important to examine what messages these sites are sending (LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014). With the scarcity of research examining the effect of digital media on the framing of women coaches (Lisec & McDonald, 2012; Hardin, 2011) this study identifies that digital media narratives pertaining to women coaches continue to reinforce the current damaging and silencing narratives, but more research is needed.

Despite the potential of digital media to challenge gender ideologies of women coaches in sport, it appears digital media continues to perpetuate the dominant damaging narratives pertaining to women coaches. Do date, there is very little research examining the portrayal of women coaches in digital media. This novel study creates room for future research to further examine the gender-sport-digital media triad as it pertains to women coaches.

With this is one of the first studies of its kind to examine the portrayal of women

coaches in digital media, future studies should continue to examine what narratives and ideologies are being produced. First and foremost, future research should examine other forms of digital media. Given the fact this study only looked at one form of digital media, blog posts, future research should examine how other forms of digital media are framing women coaches. Additionally, only three blog posts were examined with a limited number of comments to each post. Future research could examine other digital media sources such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to better understand how women coaches are being portrayed and the narratives produced by the content. Given the findings of Lisec and McDonald (2012), different media sources can have different mission statements and values for their content, making it important to examine a wide range of digital media sources to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of this news medium.

Future research should also examine digital media sources related to other sports as this study solely focuses on blog posts related to the sport of swimming. In particular, finding that sport type and swimming being a combined sport as opposed to a single gender sport should be examined further. Previous findings indicate that sports such as basketball produce similar narratives pertaining to women coaches (Cooky et al., 2010; Cooky et al., 2013; Cooky et al., 2015; Hardin & LaVoi, 2013; LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014), but more research is needed to better understand if digital media related to other sports continue to reproduce dominant gender ideologies. This potential relationship between narratives of women coaches and all sports in digital media needs further examination to understand if this study is only generalizable to swimming or if it has the potential to

apply to other sports as well.

Research comparing the frames and narratives of male and female coaches in digital media does not yet exist. Most research has been dedicated to the portrayal of female athletes in digital media (Cooky et al., 2003; Cooky et al., 2010; Kane, 1988; Kane, 2003; Lisec & McDonald, 2012; Messner et al., 2003), yet there is very little research examining women coaches as well as the comparison of male and female coaches. Future research should examine portrayals of both men and women coaches to better understand the disparity of how these two groups of people are viewed.

### **Conclusion**

While women and girls have made many strides forward in regards to opportunity and in participation in both the workplace and sport (Acosta & Carpenter, United States Department of Labor, 2016), they continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions allowing dominant gender ideologies pertaining to women in sport to persist (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; LaVoi, 2016). Sport media also continue to perpetuate the dominant narratives about women in sport as women tend to only receive 2-4 % of total media coverage (Cooky et al., 2013), and when they are in the media, the focus is usually on their femininity and heterosexuality as opposed to their athleticism (Cooky et al., 2015; Kane et al., 2013). With the growing popularity of digital media in society, there is a plethora of research in regards to the portrayal of female athletes in the media (Cooky et al., 2003; Cooky et al., 2010; Kane, 1988; Kane, 2003; Lisec & McDonald, 2012; Messner et al., 2003), but very little research in regards to women coaches portrayal in digital media. This study builds on limited existing research to examine digital media

narratives as they pertain to women coaches. While results indicate there were few themes which challenge dominant narratives, it concludes that digital media is serving as yet another vehicle for the common narratives, many of which blame women for the scarcity of women in coaching, to be reproduced. Ultimately making men to be the ones who are valued in sport and structure of sport to remain the same (LaVoi, 2016).

This is one of the first studies of its kind to examine the effect of digital media narratives on women coaches. It takes a new popular news medium, digital media, and examined the frames and narratives surrounding women coaches. This method could be used in other forms of digital media to gain a broader understanding of the impact of digital media as a whole as opposed to only blog posts, which would help understanding the impact of digital media as a whole. Do other forms of digital media create the same narratives? Are there other news mediums which produces narratives which challenge the dominant gender ideologies pertaining to women coaches? How can digital media be used to created narratives which support and value women coaches? These questions can be answered using textual analysis of other digital media sources to create a clearer picture of the frames and narratives of women coaches, which allows for a better understanding if women coaches are valued in sport, or not.

While this study indicates many of the damaging narratives pertaining to women coaches continue to persist, it does create room for different strategies to combat these narratives. Since digital media is interactive, scholars and supporters should use it as a way to state the facts and refute these narratives. First, supporters should present data and research about the scarce number of female coaches within these digital media platforms.

Often times, these sites are a place where many people voice their opinions versus using data and research to refute the false narratives. Therefore, scholars and supporters can combat the many false narratives simply by commenting and using the data. Another strategy to refute these narratives is for women coaches and supporters of women coaches to use their own digital media sources as a place to promote and support each other. Since digital media is a popular form of sport information, individuals can use their own digital media platforms to post pictures, articles, and texts about women coaches to create a space where women coaches are visible and valued.

Digital media is a powerful news outlet (Hutchins & Rowe, 2009; LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014; Rosen, 2006). It has the power to send the message of who is valued, and more importantly, who is not (LaVoi, 2016; LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014). This study indicates that women coaches continue to be marginalized in sport partly due to the damaging narratives perpetuated in digital media sources. While there were few comments which challenge dominant gender ideologies in sport and support women, many continue to marginalize women coaches. Research must continue to examine the new popular form of media that is digital media to better understand how this powerful news medium can be used to support and value those very individuals who are marginalized in sport, women.

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## Tables

Table 1

*Blame-the-women narratives: common casual perceptions for the lack of women coaches*

Narrative
Women do not apply for open positions
The quality of women in the labor pool is thin and weak
Women choose other careers
Women are not as interested in coaching than men
Women do not want to or less willing than men to move/uproot their families for a job
Women with children are less committed
Women “opt out” of coaching to start families
Women with children have less time to devote to coaching, due to time demands of the profession
Women lack the knowledge or expertise
Women are not confident and assertive enough
Women do not “lean in” and take responsibility for their own careers
Women will not apply unless they feel they are 100% qualified
Women lack the experience
Women are too “whiny” and demand resources
Women do not support each other and “eat their own”
Women do not have a strong network or an “old girls club”
Women burnout and leave coaching sooner than males
Women think they need to be overqualified to apply
Women do not perceive coaching as a viable career pathway
Women coaches are too “relational” (i.e., qualities that are devalued and naturalized as feminine)
Women do no have thick skin and cannot take the pressure

*Reproduced from LaVoi, N. M. (2016). Women in Sports Coaching. New York: Routledge.*

Table 3  
*Higher and Lower Order Themes, Descriptions, and Exemplar Quotes from Blog Post Comments*

Higher Order Theme	Lower Order Theme	Definition/Description of Lower order theme	Example of Lower Order Theme
<b>Individual Level</b>			
<i>personal, biological, and psychological factors of the individual such as cognition, emotion, values, expertise, beliefs, and personality</i>			
	<b>Blame the Women</b>	Lack of interest, lack of applicants, lack of experience, women want to have children instead of coaching, temperamental differences, biological differences, women choose other career	“Women are more likely to make other choices rather than going in to coaching”
	<b>Women “Blaming” Men</b>	Reverse discrimination, women whining about the amount of men in coaching, women are inferring men do not work as hard as women, women asking for special treatment	“I see it as women whining and putting men down. Just because women don’t fill has many roles as men DOES NOT equal bias or sexism”
	<b>Women Can/Want to Coach</b>	Women make excellent coaches, women love to coach, lack of applicants does not equal a lack of interest	“Competency and excellence in coaching are not limited or restricted to any gender”
	<b>The “Best” Bias</b>	Hiring the best person for the job, hire someone to fit in the athletics culture, hire the most qualified person, coaches who are not performing should be fired	“Collegiate athletics is about competition and performance – the best athletes and best coaches win”

**Interpersonal Level**

*social-relational influences a coach has such as friends, colleagues, parents, or a significant other*

<b>Supportive System</b>	Female athletes need female role models, women coaches are role models, recruit female athletes to become coaches, women coaches recruiting female athletes to become coaches	“Current coaches can be a part of the solution by putting the thought in the mind of a female athlete that they can make a good coach”
<b>Unfavorable Work Environment</b>	Difficulty networking with other women, few women to network with, women do not support other women, sexual harassment, condescending male colleagues	“Sometimes women can be our own worst enemies”
<b>Good Ole Boys Club</b>	Men talk to and respect other men, male “pig” coaches, women are chased out of coaching by men, men get their foot in the door more often than women, women succumbing to a male dominated culture	“Women coaches are being driven out of Division I by the Good Ole Boys Club and men acting like pigs”
<b>Athlete Preference</b>	Athletes prefer male coaches	“The actual women on the team themselves treated me with disdain, they all sat there with their arms crossed and said they “didn’t want to swim for a woman”

<b>Organizational Level</b> <i>organizational practices and professional practices, job descriptions, use of space, and opportunities</i>		
<b>Unique Nature of Swimming</b>	Swimming is a sport with combined men's and women's teams, more women swim than men, many men's swimming teams have been cut, more scholarship money for women, swimming is different than single gender sports	"Given the fact that almost all, if not all, DIII programs are combined, that doesn't seem fair that an A is a 70+"
<b>Call for Policy and Programming Changes</b>	Create a no contracted/dead period, require institutions to interview at least one woman when hiring, develop programs which encourage more women to apply, create policy to support parent coaches, more time off for coaches	"The NCAA or USA Swimming needs to develop a program to support female coaching positions"
<b>Limited Opportunity</b>	Female coaches as assistants, more men have opportunities in coaching, most women are coaching youth and lower levels, part-time female coaches, females given less responsibility than male counterparts	"Very few women are able to get out of the age group coaching ranks"
<b>Organizational Culture</b>	Most cultures shaped by men, most women work for men who control their schedules, culture of devaluation, women need a supportive culture	"More than 80% of team's cultures have been shaped by a male head coach"

<b>Homologous Reproduction</b>	Most athletic directors are male, men consciously or unconsciously hiring other men, males being replaced by a male	“The reality of the matter is that Athletics Directors, as with most people in the world, are horrendous at hiring the best candidate for a job, it’s”
<b>Tokenism</b>	A woman coaching a men’s team, one female who is coaching both men’s and women’s teams	“When I was at Georgetown in the early 00’s, we had something even more rare...a female head coach of a men’s DI team”
<b>Sociocultural Level</b> <i>norms and cultural systems influencing a woman coach’s career</i>		
<b>Gender Discrimination</b>	Power imbalance, women not being given a chance, women getting overlooked, women being passed over for jobs by men, women do not start at an equal playing field	“Women who are as qualified for jobs are usually passed over by men”
<b>Gender Bias</b>	Women are treated differently in the occupational landscape, women have to overcome extra hurdles, assuming women are assistants, telling young women they cannot be in power	“We tell females at a young age that they simply can’t be in a position of power because they don’t have the mental toughness or what it will take to become a good head coach”

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<b>Mommy Bias</b>	Treating mother coaches differently because they are mothers	“You can’t expect to be treated like normal coaches; most of you are mothers”
<b>Gender Roles and Stereotypes</b>	Women are caretakers, women commit less crime, more men are incarcerated, women are smarter than men	“Women are smarter than men on average, and also more conscientious”

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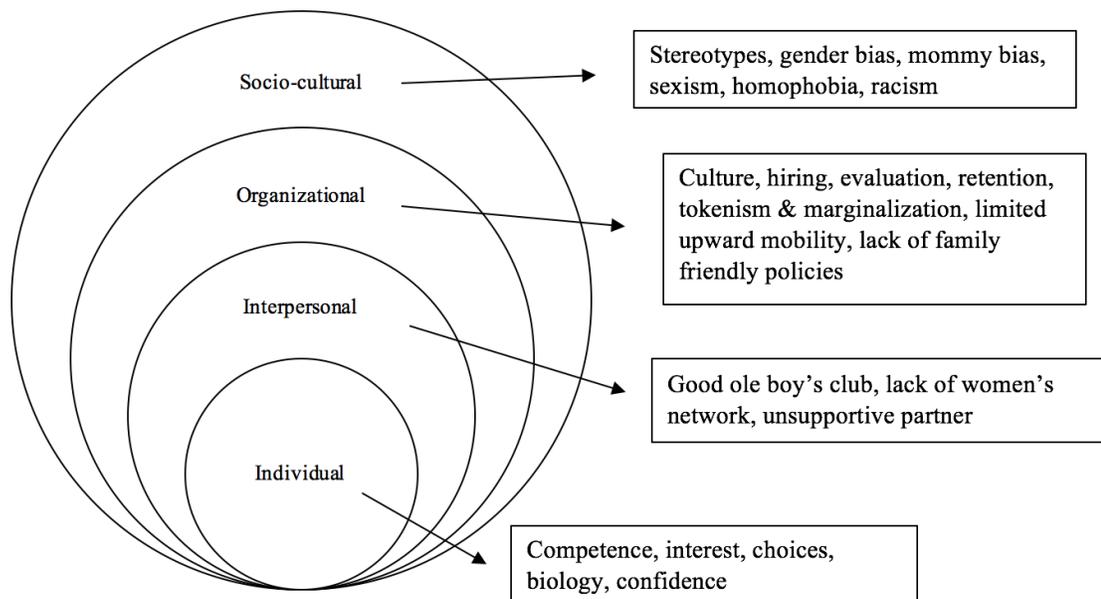
Table 4  
*Percent of lower order themes per level of the Ecological-Intersectional Model of Supports and Barriers for Women Coaches*

Level	Percent (total # of frames)
<i>Sample size (n)</i>	100 (302)
Individual Level	57.6 (174)
Interpersonal Level	7.6 (23)
Organizational Level	24.8 (75)
Socio-cultural Level	10.0 (30)

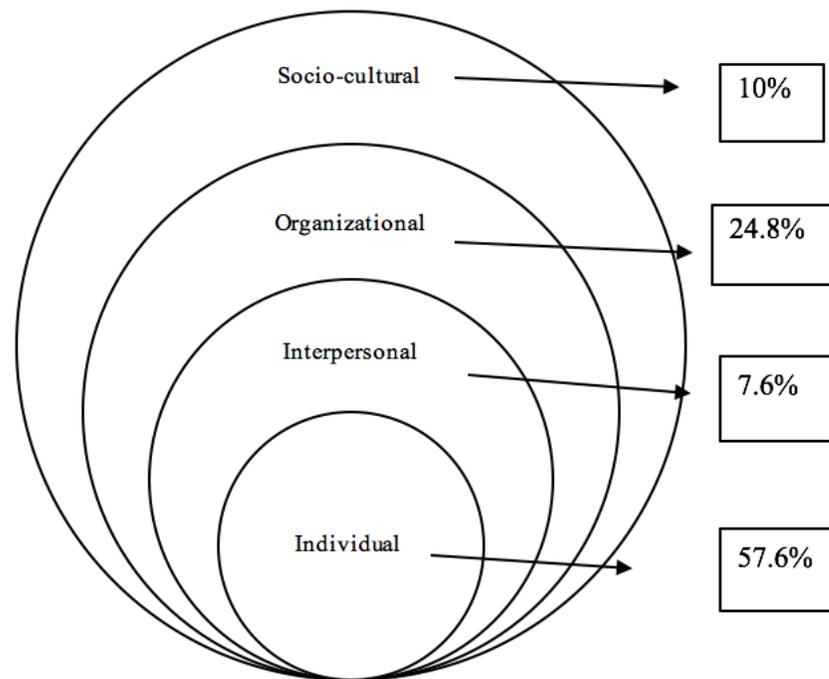
Table 5  
*Percentage of lower order themes cited in blog post comments*

Lower Order Theme	Percent (# of frames)
<i>Sample size (n)</i>	100 (302)
Blame the Women	22.5 (68)
Women “Blaming” Men	19.5 (59)
Unique Nature of Swimming	10.6 (32)
Women Can/Want to Coach	8.3 (25)
The “Best” Bias	7.2 (22)
Gender Discrimination	5.0 (15)
Call for Policy/Programming	4.3 (13)
Limited Opportunity	4.0 (12)
Support System	3.0 (9)
Gender Bias	3.0 (9)
Unfavorable Work Environment	2.6 (8)
Organizational Culture	2.3 (7)
Homologous Reproduction	2.0 (6)
Good Ole Boys Club	1.7 (5)
Tokenism	1.7 (5)
Gender Roles/Stereotypes	1.0 (3)
Mommy Bias	1.0 (3)
Athlete Preference	0.3 (1)

## Figures



*Figure 1.* The Ecological-Intersectional Model of Supports and Barriers for Women Coaches. Reproduced from LaVoi, N. M. (2016). *Women in Sports Coaching*. New York: Routledge.



*Figure 2.* Percent of lower order themes per level of the Ecological-Intersectional Model of Supports and Barriers for Women Coaches.

## Appendix

### Coding Sheet

#### *Higher and Lower Order Themes, Descriptions, and Exemplar Quotes for Blog Post Comments*

Higher order theme	Lower order theme	Description of lower order theme	Example of lower order theme	Total number themes coded
<b>Individual Level</b>				
<i>personal, biological, and psychological factors of the individual such as cognition, emotion, values, expertise, beliefs, and personality</i>				
1	Blame the Women	Lack of interest, lack of applicants, lack of experience, women want to have children instead of coaching, temperamental differences, biological differences, women do not want to coach high level sport, women choose other career	“Women are more likely to make other choices rather than going in to coaching”	68
2	Women “blaming” men	Sexism towards men, women whining about the amount of men in coaching, women are inferring men do not work as hard as women, women asking for special treatment	“I see it as women whining and putting men down. Just because women don’t fill has many roles as men DOES NOT equal bias or sexism”	59
3	Women CAN love/want to coach/are great coaches	Women make excellent coaches, women love to coach, lack of applicants does not equal a lack of interest	“Competency and excellence in coaching are not limited or restricted to any gender”	25

4	The “best” bias	Hiring the best person for the job, hire someone to fit in the athletics culture, hire the most qualified person, coaches who are not performing should be fired	“Collegiate athletics is about competition and performance – the best athletes and best coaches win”	22
<p><b>Interpersonal Level</b>  <i>social-relational influences a coach has such as friends, colleagues, parents, or a significant other</i></p>				
5	Good ole boys club	Men talk to and respect other men, male “pig” coaches, women are chased out of coaching by men, men get their foot in the door more often than women, women succumbing to a male dominated culture	“Women coaches are being driven out of Division I by the Good Ole Boys Club and men acting like pigs”	5
6	Unfavorable work environment	Difficulty networking with other women, few women to network with, women do not support other women, sexual harassment, condescending male colleagues	“Some times women can be our own worst enemies”	8

7	Support System	Female athletes need female role models, women coaches are role models, recruit female athletes to become coaches, women coaches recruiting female athletes to become coaches	“Current coaches can be a part of the solution by putting the thought in the mind of a female athlete that they can make a good coach”	9
8	Athlete preference	Athletes prefer male coaches	“The actual women on the team themselves treated me with disdain, they all sat there with their arms crossed and said they “didn’t want to swim for a woman”	1
<b>Organizational Level</b> <i>organizational practices and professional practices, job descriptions, use of space, and opportunities</i>				
9	Unique nature of swimming	Swimming is a sport with combined men’s and women’s teams, more women swim than men, many men’s swimming teams have been cut, more scholarship money for women, swimming is different than single gender sports	“Given the fact that almost all, if not all, DIII programs are combined, that doesn’t seem fair that an A is a 70+”	32

10	Limited opportunity	Female coaches as assistants, more men have opportunities in coaching, most women are coaching youth and lower levels, part-time female coaches, females given less responsibility than male counterparts	“Very few women are able to get out of the age group coaching ranks”	12
11	Organizational Culture	Most cultures shaped by men, most women work for men who control their schedules, culture of devaluation, women need a support	“More than 80% of team’s cultures have been shaped by a male head coach”	7
12	Tokenism	A woman coaching a men’s team, pointing out the one female coaching both men’s and women’s teams	“When I was at Georgetown in the early 00’s, we had something even more rare...a female head coach of a men’s DI team”	5
13	Call for Policy/Action	Create a no contracted/dead period for coaches, require institutions to interview at least one woman for a coaching job, need to develop programs which encourage more women to apply, create policy to support parent coaches, more time off for coaches	“The NCAA or USA Swimming needs to develop a program to support female coaching positions”	13

14	Homologous reproduction	Most athletic directors are male, men consciously or unconsciously hiring other men, men being replaced by a man	“The reality of the matter is that Athletics Directors, as with most people in the world, are horrendous at hiring the best candidate for a job”	6
<b>Sociocultural Level</b> <i>norms and cultural systems influencing a woman coach's career</i>				
15	Gender roles/ stereotypes	Women as caretakers, women commit less crime, more men are incarcerated than women, women are smarter than men	“Women are smarter than men on average, and also more conscientious”	3
16	Gender bias	Women are treated differently in the occupational landscape, women have to overcome extra hurdles, assuming women are assistants, telling young women they cannot be in power	<p>“Coaches who are viewed as not strong/too compassionate are not taken seriously and canned whole women who are strong leaders get called bullies and are canned”</p> <p>“We tell females at a young age that they simply can't be in a position of power because they don't have the mental toughness or what it will take to become a good head coach”</p>	9

17	Mommy bias	Treating mother coaches differently because they are mothers	“You can’t expect to be treated like normal coaches; most of you are mothers”	3
18	Gender discrimination	Power imbalance, women not being given a chance, women getting overlooked, women being passed over for jobs by men, women do not start at an equal playing field	“Women who are as qualified for jobs are usually passed over by men”	15