

# BEYOND X'S & O'S:

**Gender Bias and Coaches of Women's College Sports  
Executive Summary**

**June 2016**

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**A Women's Sports Foundation Report**

# LETTER FROM THE CEO

The Women's Sports Foundation was founded more than 40 years ago by Billie Jean King to serve as the collective voice for women's sports. Since our inception, we have been conducting evidenced-based research on a variety of subjects, recognizing that data drives public debate, action and policy, which can lead to greater access, opportunity, leadership and gender equity for women's sports.

Despite the dynamic growth of college sports and the expanding female participation, spurred in part by the passage and enforcement of Title IX, this growth is not replicated in the workplace. Females hold less than 23% of all coaching positions across all NCAA sports. In 1972, before the incorporation of women's sports into the NCAA, more than 90% of the coaches of women's teams were women. By 2014, only 43% of the coaches of women's teams and less than 3% of the coaches of men's teams were women. This not only represents a historic shift, but also is especially alarming as women's leadership in other sectors, such as business, law and medicine, is higher than 23% and growing.

- The intent of this study was to determine what has contributed to this downward shift. Do female coaches of college women's sports have a more difficult path to hiring, promotions, and pay increases than their male counterparts?

- Is there more of a reluctance on the part of female coaches to raise questions about discrimination or Title IX that has been described in lawsuits, discussed at conferences and portrayed in media coverage; and, if yes, is it because they fear they will lose their jobs?
- Is there a subtle, and/or not-so-subtle, gender bias around the intersection of sexual orientation and racial or ethnic backgrounds that contributes to the decline of women coaches?
- Are there double standards in the handling of athlete/parent complaints when the coach is female versus male?
- Is there an association with discussions around gender bias in academic institutions, especially in traditionally male-dominated disciplines like STEM, and those being raised around women's sports leadership?

With this study, we now have data-driven research that confirms there is gender bias in the intercollegiate women's sports coaching workplace. The bias exists and is specifically directed at coaches of women who are female, rather than all coaches of women's sports.

This study also revealed that both male and female coaches of women are more likely to discuss discrimination and Title IX issues with their departments but hesitate to speak

with campus leadership. A reversal of this could lead to more campus-wide, interdisciplinary solutions to gender bias rather than the current “siloeing” of sports from the larger campus.

This study answered many of the questions mentioned above, but a significant number remain:

- Is the growing popularity of women’s sports and the greater resources and higher salaries allocated to them why men now view coaching women’s sports as a viable profession?
- Was this shift facilitated because many more men are in hiring positions and can ease this career choice for men?
- Are there differences in gender bias by sport, level of experience, or NCAA division?

Our plan is to follow up with additional research to answer questions this study raised as well as to look at gender bias around other leadership positions. Importantly, there are systemic issues that this research uncovered that can lead to policy changes. We encourage policymakers and administrators to read the report and the detailed policy recommendations, which we believe will foster nondiscriminatory work environments for female and male coaches in intercollegiate athletics.

This report is the result of male and female coaches’ and administrators’ input, expertise and experience. These extraordinary leaders remain as passionate about women’s sports and women’s leadership today as they did when they were competing, coaching and in administration positions. Importantly, our personal and professional appreciation goes to Don Sabo, Ph.D.; Marjorie Snyder, Ph.D.; and Donna Lopiano, Ph.D., who have worked hours, days and months from conception to completion...and recognize that this is still a work in progress. The Women’s Sports Foundation has the privilege and responsibility to push for social change around gender equality in sports. We are honored to work in collaboration with so many talented women and men who share our vision of a culture that values all peoples’ talent, expertise and leadership potential.



Deborah Slaner Larkin  
CEO, Women’s Sports Foundation

## Authorship

This report was authored by Don Sabo, Ph.D., Philip Veliz, Ph.D., and Ellen J. Staurowsky, Ed.D.

## Women's Sports Foundation Acknowledgments

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The panel of coaches, athletic administrators, attorneys, scholars, and gender equity experts who reviewed the findings and the policy recommendations provided invaluable feedback that improved the final report immensely.

Val Ackerman, Commissioner, Big East Conference

Kathy DeBoer, Executive Director, American Volleyball Coaches Association

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Gina Krahulik, Director of Leadership and Education, National Association of Collegiate Women Athletic Administrators

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## About The Women's Sports Foundation

The Women's Sports Foundation — the leading authority on the participation of women and girls in sports — is dedicated to creating leaders by ensuring girls access to sports. Founded by Billie Jean King in 1974, our work shapes public attitude about women's sports and athletes, builds capacities for organizations that get girls active, ensures equal opportunities for girls and women, and supports physically and emotionally healthy lifestyles. The Women's Sports Foundation has relationships with more than 1,000 of the world's elite female athletes and is recognized globally for its leadership, vision, expertise and influence. For more information, visit [www.WomensSportsFoundation.org](http://www.WomensSportsFoundation.org). Follow us: [www.Facebook.com/WomensSportsFoundation](https://www.facebook.com/WomensSportsFoundation), on Twitter @WomensSportsFdn, or on Instagram @WomensSportsFoundation.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Today there are more women athletes and women working in college sport than ever before, a function of the overall growth and popularity of athletics within American culture and the economy of higher education. Ironically, despite the expansion of college sports, women are underrepresented in significant leadership roles (Ware, 2011). Women make up approximately 23% of all head coaches at the college and university level, and even among the ranks of head coaches of women's teams, they are a minority at 43% (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014).

To date there has been little systematic evaluation of gender relations and differential treatment of women in the coaching workplace. This nationwide online survey was designed to generate facts and analysis of the workplace experiences and views of both female and male coaches of intercollegiate women's sports. This research is unique in that nobody has heretofore assessed male coaches of women's teams and made comparisons with female coaches. Results reported here are based on the responses of a nationally representative sample of 2,219 current coaches of women's sports who work at schools across the spectrum of college sports. An additional nationwide sample of former coaches of women's sports (N=326) participated in the survey. This report includes descriptive statistics in order to illustrate basic findings and subgroup differences,

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## Gender was the most powerful factor that shaped the workplace experiences and attitudes of coaches of women's sports.

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and analytical statistics were used to test hypothesized differences between subgroups such as female and male coaches.

The key findings generated by this study appear below.

- 1. Men Said to Have More Professional Advantages than Women.** About two-thirds (65%) of current coaches felt that it was easier for men to get top-level coaching jobs, while three-quarters (75%) said men had an easier time negotiating salary increases. More than half (54%) believed that men are more likely to be promoted, to secure a multiyear contract upon hiring (52%), and to be rewarded with salary increases for successful performance (53%). See Table 1-ES on following page.

Table 1-ES: Perceptions of Professional Advantage: Percentages of Current Coaches Who Believe That “Men Have It Easier than Women,” by Gender

	Current Coaches				sig.
	Male (n=555)		Female (n=1,209)		
	Easier for Men	Easier for Women	Easier for Men	Easier for Women	
Easier to get a top-level coaching job	33%	30%	80%	4%	***
Easier to negotiate salary increases	34%	13%	91%	1%	***
Easier to receive fair professional evaluations	11%	7%	44%	1%	***
Easier to be promoted	19%	23%	70%	2%	***
Easier to negotiate clear contract conditions for performance evaluation	16%	6%	64%	1%	***
Easier to secure a multi-year contract upon hiring	21%	7%	67%	1%	***
Easier to secure clear conditions for termination of a contract upon hiring	9%	5%	46%	1%	***
Easier to influence decision-making in the department of athletics	30%	9%	68%	1%	***
Easier to allocate the fiscal resources in the department of athletics	25%	6%	65%	0%	***
Easier to participate in hiring practices in the department of athletics	12%	7%	33%	3%	***
Easier to receive fair administrative handling of complaints brought by students	7%	15%	36%	3%	***
Easier to be awarded salary increase for successful performance	19%	11%	68%	0%	***

\*,.05, \*\*<.01, \*\*\*<.001 Significance levels are based on Chi-square tests of independence (2x3)

Table 2-ES: Percentages of Current Coaches Who Agreed That They Had Professional Concerns About Gender Bias, by Gender

	Current Coaches		sig.
	Male (n=564)	Female (n=1,221)	
	Agree	Agree	
I am reluctant to ask for help with a gender bias situation because I fear possible retaliation.	19%	33%	***
I have been criticized for my coaching style.	25%	27%	
I have considered leaving coaching because of gender discrimination.	9%	20%	***
I am reluctant to ask for help with a gender bias situation for fear it would be seen as a weakness.	12%	27%	***

\*,.05, \*\*<.01, \*\*\*<.001 Significance levels are based on Chi-square tests of independence (2x2)

**2. Potential Retaliation and Less Pay.** Thirty-three percent of female coaches indicated that they were vulnerable to potential retaliation if they ask for help with a gender bias situation. More than 40% of female coaches said they were “discriminated against because of their gender,” compared to 28% of their male colleagues. Almost half (48%) of the female coaches and just over a quarter of the male coaches (27%) in the study reported “being paid less for doing the same job as other coaches.” Twice as many female coaches as male coaches felt their performance was evaluated differently because of gender (15% versus 6%). See Table 2-ES.

**3. Female Coaches Have Less of a Voice than Male Coaches.** While 65% of female coaches agreed that they could voice opinions openly in their department,

35% disagreed. Just 36% of female coaches indicated they were “fully involved with the decision-making process” within their athletic departments.

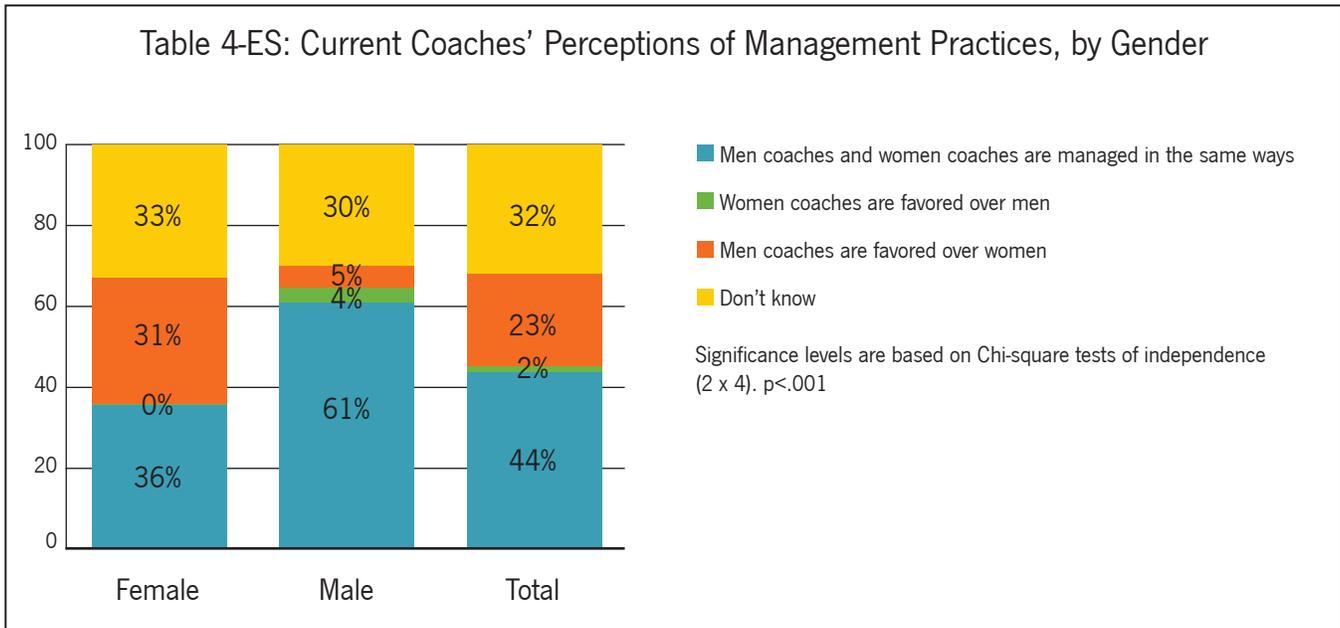
**4. Gender Differences in Job Security and Fair Treatment.** Thirty-six percent of female coaches and 27% of male coaches agreed that their job security was “tenuous.” More female coaches (46%) than male coaches (36%) reported being called upon to perform tasks that were not in their job descriptions. See Table 3-ES on following page. While 5% of male coaches believed that male coaches were “favored over female coaches” by management, 31% of female coaches believed so. Just 35% of female coaches felt men and women “are managed in similar ways,” compared to 61% of male coaches. See Table 4-ES on following page.

Table 3-ES: Job Security and Opportunity to Advance, Current Coaches

	Current Coaches		sig.
	Male (n=564)	Female (n=1,221)	
	Agree	Agree	
I feel my job security is tenuous.	27%	36%	***
Men coaches at my institution receive more support for professional development than women coaches.	9%	19%	***
I have been assigned tasks that were not part of my job description.	36%	46%	***
In my department, I am able to gain support for what I need to be successful.	75%	69%	*
I would apply to coach a men's team if I thought I had a realistic chance of being hired.	63%	44%	***
I did not get a coaching job due to my gender.	40%	12%	***
My direct supervisor typically does not conduct my annual performance evaluation.	17%	23%	**

\*,.05, \*\*<.01, \*\*\*<.001 Significance levels are based on Chi-square tests of independence (2x2)

Table 4-ES: Current Coaches' Perceptions of Management Practices, by Gender



**Table 5-ES: Current Coaches' Comfort Levels Around Expressing Gender Equity Concerns, by Gender**

	Current Coaches		sig.
	Male (n=564)	Female (n=1,221)	
	Agree	Agree	
I feel comfortable going to administrators in my department with concerns about gender equity and Title IX.	81%	66%	***
I feel comfortable going to administrators on my campus outside the athletic department with concerns about gender equity and Title IX.	74%	58%	***
I feel I would risk my job if I spoke up about Title IX and gender equity.	20%	31%	***
I am reluctant to ask for help with a gender bias situation for fear it would be seen as a weakness.	12%	27%	***

\*,.05, \*\*<.01, \*\*\*<.001 Significance levels are based on Chi-square tests of independence (2x2)

**5. Gender Bias and Title IX Still the “Third Rail.”**

While some female and male coaches were hesitant to speak up about gender bias and Title IX inside their athletic departments, even more expressed reservations about doing so with university officials outside of the athletic department. Overall, 31% of female coaches and 20% of male coaches in this study believed that they would “risk their job” if they spoke up about Title IX and gender equity. LGBTQ female coaches were the most apt to fear raising concerns about Title IX and gender equity, with 34% believing they would risk their jobs if they spoke up. See Table 5-ES.

**6. Unequal Resources Between Men’s and Women’s Teams.**

About one in three (32%) current female head coaches and 19% of current male head coaches believed that men’s sports received more resources than women’s sports. Less than half (46%) of female coaches and 58% of male coaches believed that men’s and women’s teams were treated equally.

**7. Some Racial Discomfort Expressed.** Eighty-two percent of white coaches felt comfortable expressing concerns about racial and ethnic discrimination, while 62% of black coaches shared that sentiment.

**8. Concerns About Homophobia Remain Visible.**

Among head coaches of women's teams, 15% of female coaches and 9% of male coaches reported that they found a "noticeable level of homophobia" among some of their colleagues. Similar numbers found it "difficult to speak up" about homophobia within their athletic departments. More LGBTQ coaches (29% male and 21% female) believed that their athletic department hampered them from speaking up about homophobia than heterosexual coaches (9% males and 14% females).

**9. Intersections Between Gender Differences and**

**Sexual Orientation.** While 78% of heterosexual female coaches and 84% of LGBTQ female coaches indicated it is "easier for men to get top-level coaching jobs," just 32% of the heterosexual male coaches and 57% of the LGBTQ male coaches did so. Among female coaches, 78% of heterosexual and 96% of LGBTQ minorities believed that men had an easier time negotiating salary raises. In contrast, just 33% of heterosexual male coaches and 57% of LGBTQ male coaches believed that.

**10. Claims of Reverse Discrimination Found Among**

**Male Coaches.** A larger percentage of male coaches (40%) than female coaches (12%) believed that they had not gotten a coaching job because of their gender. Moreover, an analysis of written comments provided by the survey respondents revealed that many male coaches believe that female candidates for coaching positions are being afforded preferential treatment in the hiring process and, whether they are qualified or not, being offered jobs over "better qualified" men.

The findings, when taken in their totality, suggest that while many women coaches perceive gender bias, fewer of their male counterparts (even ones who work in women's sports) recognize it. Workplace gender bias is also less pervasive among current coaches of women's sports than their former counterparts. We conclude that progress toward gender equity has been made, yet it remains more an objective than a reality.

# EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The survey results here provide an evidence-based framework critically assessing the “state of professional play” in the workplace of coaching women’s sports. The policy recommendations here aim to help coaches, athletic administrators and academic administrators to better utilize college sports as an institutional vehicle for equitable participation and opportunity. The policy recommendations are also aimed at college presidents and chancellors, without whose support and leadership, the creation of meaningful change in the women’s sports workplace is likely to be impeded. A longer list with much greater detail appears in the full report.

## Compensation

### Recommendation 1:

Institutions of higher education should require their respective offices of human resources to regularly audit compensation practices of their athletic programs, comparing the compensation of males versus females and racial/ethnic minorities versus white employees, and compensation for LGBTQ individuals as opposed to heterosexuals in identical or comparable positions to ensure that differences in compensation are due to legitimate

factors other than sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, race/ethnicity or disability.

### Recommendation 2:

Prior to the approval of compensation offers to new hires (including the provision of special benefits such as the use of courtesy cars, country club memberships, etc.) or increases in salary and benefits to current head or assistant coaches of athletic teams, the institutional Office of Human Resources should ensure that such offers meet standards established by the 1997 Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Enforcement Guidance on Sex Discrimination in the Compensation of Sports Coaches in Educational Institutions (retrieve at: <http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/coaches.html>).

## Hiring and Promotion Practices

### Recommendation 3:

Model hiring and promotion policies and processes should be adopted to offset the hiring and promotion favoritism toward males that currently exists in male-dominated occupational fields such as collegiate athletics. Such standardized HR policies and procedures will produce more

neutral outcomes with regard to sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, race/ethnicity and disability.

## Fair, Non-Discriminatory Treatment

### Recommendation 4:

Key to the perception and reality of fair treatment and rewarding work environment is the establishment of policies and processes governing orientation to workplace operation systems and policies, clear communication of performance expectations, regular and constructive performance evaluation and a standardized and sound approach to addressing performance concerns for all new employees. The athletic director and all athletic department employees with hiring and supervisory responsibilities should be required to participate in a training program conducted by the institution's office of human resources that specifically addresses these policies and processes as well as legal obligations related to prohibited discriminatory practices.

### Recommendation 5:

Model HR policies and systems applicable to all coaches and all employees should be adopted by athletic departments. This includes new employee orientation to operations and policy, annually updated job descriptions, annual appointment letter or multiyear contract, annual performance evaluations by supervisors and athletes. The absence of model HR policies or their selective and discriminatory application is the most common cause of perceptions and the actuality of unfair and

biased treatment. Detailed policies and practices protect supervisors from unfair allegations and employees from unfair treatment.

## Title IX Gender Equity Requirements

### Recommendation 6:

Institutional policies, complaint, and investigation procedures and remedies should be consistent with policies and processes required by the Office for Civil Rights. Institutions of higher education should ensure that their Title IX Compliance Officer (a position required by federal law) receives training in Title IX athletics, sexual harassment and sex discrimination (including pregnancy) requirements and is not an athletic department employee (in order to prevent any conflict of interest in the investigation of any Title IX complaint).

### Recommendation 7:

Institutions of higher education should adopt a confidentiality policy with regard to protection of the identity of employees reporting gender equity concerns and include an option for anonymous complaints. The Title IX Compliance Officer should be required to annually meet with all athletic department employees to review Title IX gender equity requirements, explain prohibitions related to retaliation, detail procedures to be used to express gender equity concerns and convey institutional policy related to confidentiality regarding the identity of those who express concerns.

## Recommendation 8

Institutions of higher education should require their Title IX Compliance Officer to conduct (or cause an independent, expert third party to conduct) a comprehensive Title IX athletics program assessment at least once every three years. A detailed written and timetabled plan to address correction of identified deficiencies in the equal treatment of male and female athletes should be required. Such Title IX total athletic program assessment should be publicly reported and distributed to all athletic department employees for review, with instructions on who to contact for further information or any gender equity concerns.

**Rationale:** Title IX athletics assessments require total program comparisons – the treatment of all female athletes compared to the treatment of all male athletes – related to participation, competition levels, the provision of financial aid based on athletic ability and numerous other treatment and benefits areas. In other words, a comparison of the men's and women's basketball programs is not a proper analysis. Further, with the exception of athletics-related financial aid, the analysis is qualitative rather than based on budgetary expenditures. In addition, the analysis may be complex if the athletic program places the same men's and women's sports in different financial tiers with regard to higher- and lower-priority sports. Coaches simply do not have access to total program information or knowledge of Title IX requirements to conduct such an analysis. That being said, a pattern of significantly different budgets (per capita expenditures) favoring men or women in the same

sports should be considered a “red flag” indicator of the need for a more careful total program equity analysis. The NCAA has created the Institutional Performance Program (IPP), which is a database that provides useful information needed for a diversity and gender equity review. Along with the EADA, the IPP is a tool that institutions should use for their reviews.

## Recommendation 9:

Title IX requires that male and female athletes be provided with the same quality coaches. Athletic departments should carefully examine current practices regarding provision of financial support for coaches to engage in professional development activities, such as attendance at clinics, coaches conferences, national sport governing body or coaching association licensing or certification programs, etc., to ensure the equal treatment of coaches of male and female teams and male and female coaches.

## Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Issues

### Recommendation 10:

Policies related to sexual orientation and gender identity should be adopted by athletic departments, consistent with general institutional policies that prohibit sexual harassment and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. These policies should apply to all employees and students. The Office of Civil Rights has ruled that Title IX

also includes sexual orientation and gender identity, thus there is a legal basis for the following recommendations.

## Involvement in the Workplace

### Recommendation 11:

Acknowledging that decision-making authority is vested in senior administrators rather than coaches, athletic directors should consider the adoption of staff meeting policies that enable all coaches to provide input and openly voice opinions about major athletic department decisions. The purposeful addition of such a regular staff meeting practice will do much to eliminate fears that some coaches have special access to decision-makers while others do not.

## Governance

### Recommendation 12:

National athletic governance associations should require member institutions to undertake a periodic certification program or other third-party peer review of the operation, processes and policies of its member institution athletic programs to ensure compliance with legal requirements and

best practices, including the employment and compensation of coaches. If deficiencies are identified, they should be remedied within a time certain or constitute cause for institutional penalties, including ineligibility for post-season championships or revocation of membership. Evaluation against specific standards, which describes the purpose of certification or accreditation program, requires significant retrieval and analysis of data in order to address trends and patterns over time. Such longer-term analysis is much better suited to address such issues as hiring practices, compensation practices and compliance with federal civil rights laws related to equal opportunity and treatment of underrepresented minorities. The recommendations offered in this section should be adopted as standards to be examined by such certification program.

### Recommendation 13:

National and conference athletic governance organizations should require that member institution athletic programs must establish policies that require a minimum number of qualified minority applicants to participate in the finalist in-person interview pool for all coaching positions.

# WOMEN'S SPORTS FOUNDATION

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