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**Contesting the Marginalization of Female Leadership in Sports:  
The Struggle for Equal Opportunities in Men's Collegiate and  
Professional Basketball**

**By**

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## **Contesting the Marginalization of Female Leadership in Sports: The Struggle for Equal Opportunities in Men's Collegiate and Professional Basketball**

**Caitlain Tinker**

### **Abstract**

*This feminist critique interrogates the discourses and practices of gender discrimination in men's professional and collegiate sporting institutions in the United States. This study focuses on delineating and 'naming' the discriminatory ideologies that are (re)produced by dominant social and cultural institutions, revealing in the process how these practices (over)determine gender equality in the professional and collegiate sporting field. To this end, I perform a post-structuralist discourse analysis of what Louis Althusser calls the dominant 'ideological state apparatuses,' namely schools, the media and sporting institutions. I argue that these institutions coalesce to form a network of power that produces, reproduces, and reinforces patriarchal discourses and practices that are not only problematic and contradictory, but also act as social barriers that restrict women from obtaining leadership positions in sports. Based on the literature and data collected on men's basketball in the United States, this study focuses on the category and experience of the 'head-coach' as revelatory of contradictory forms of gender discrimination, marginalization and misrepresentation that exist in men's sporting institutions, especially the National Basketball Association (NBA) and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). This study, drawing as it does on critical post-structuralist feminist frameworks, also seeks to contest and subvert the deeper social forces and cultural discourses that promote the phenomenon of institutionalized gender discrimination in sports.*

*Keywords: Sports, ideology, head coach, coach, basketball, NBA, NCAA, gender discrimination, female leadership, feminism, post-structuralism, gender equality*

### **Introduction**

Throughout history, the sphere of collegiate and professional sports in the United States has typically been a male-dominated environment for both athletes and professionals. Women have faced and continue to face, many obstacles in regards to gaining autonomy and representation in sports. When the time came for women to be recognized as athletes within official sporting institutions, they still faced significant amounts of discrimination, not just in sports, but in other institutional structures, which led to the implementation of Title IX. For organized sports, this legislation was aimed at the elimination and prevention of discrimination based on sex in schooling institutions that receive federal funding. This appeared to make a massive impact on female participation in sports, where the number of female athletes in college increased from around 16,000 in 1970 to over 180,000 in 2005 (Rhode & Walker 2008).

While female athletes still face different types of institutionalized discrimination, the surge in female athleticism over the last 40 years has been impressive and appears to have made a positive impact on the lives of girls and women across the country. On the contrary, however, this surge has not made a significant impact on the number of female coaches leading women's teams and virtually no impact on the number of female coaches leading men's teams. Today, women continue to face discrimination that keeps them from breaching the barriers that protect the coaching position and other positions of leadership within men's sports. Despite the fact that male coaches have been and continue to be accepted into the realm of women's sports, female coaches are rarely accepted into positions coaching men's teams, particularly at the collegiate and professional levels.

Although women's sporting organizations obviously do exist at the professional and collegiate levels, there are many problematic differences between the two organizations that present an entirely separate discussion of inquiry that I cannot cover in this analysis. However, when it comes to women crossing-over into men's sports, some argue that women have their own organizations to participate in, and therefore equality has been established. Others argue that women can't be as successful at coaching as their male counterparts, when in reality these arguments can be countered by simply looking at some of the facts. For example, a fact sheet compiled by the Women's Sports Foundation (2009) reveals that during the 2005-06 season in the NCAA, the average salary for the head coach of men's Division I basketball was \$409,600, while the average salary of the women's basketball coach was \$187,300. While the WNBA head coach salaries are not released to the public, a comparison can be drawn between WNBA and NBA players, where the *average* player salary in the NBA is 59 times higher than the *maximum* salary for players in the WNBA (Women's Sports Foundation 2009). Additionally, for college athletics, based on a study published by the Women's Sport Foundation, "Coaches of men's basketball programs were more than three times as likely to have personal appearance contracts and more than two times as likely to receive country club or apparel contracts as coaches of women's basketball teams" (2009). These are just a few of the many examples demonstrating that the NBA is significantly more popularized and lucrative for careers than the WNBA. Yet assumptions that women would only want to seek leadership opportunities within a women's organization often deter them from thinking that high-level opportunities in men's sports are actually available to them.

In terms of knowledge and success, women head coaches have proven to be just as, if not more, successful than male counterparts. Nancy Lieberman, the only female to ever coach men's

basketball at the professional developmental level in the United States, led her team to the playoffs during her first and only year as a coach (NancyLieberman.com). Additionally, the legendary Pat Summit, championship head coach of the University of Tennessee Lady Volunteers Basketball team and, in my personal opinion, a true inspiration for female coaches everywhere, currently holds the record for highest number of basketball wins in the NCAA over the duration of her career as head coach for Tennessee. She holds an overall record of 1,098 wins and eight NCAA championships (Gardiner 2012). While some of these arguments appear to defend and naturalize the segregation of men and women in sports, it makes me wonder if the establishment of the WNBA solidifies the fact that a woman will never play in the NBA, and if it does, does this also ring true for female coaches?

This paper aims to reveal the underlying structures, within mainstream American institutions, that contribute to the continued underrepresentation of female coaches in men's professional and collegiate sports. With a focus on basketball, this study examines the primary schooling institution, mainstream sports media institutions and the professional and collegiate sporting institutions in the United States. Through a Foucauldian discourse analysis with influence from Althusser, I argue that these institutions, together, produce and reinforce patriarchal standards that are problematic because they reveal underlying patterns of discrimination against women and act as restricting social barriers, preventing women from obtaining certain positions of leadership, predominately in men's sports. Using existing literature and data about female leadership in sports, I focus on the position of head coach in professional and collegiate basketball. Through an examination of contemporary examples within sports culture, I aim to reveal the different forms of gender discrimination, marginalization and misrepresentation that exist within official sporting institutions like the National Basketball

Association (NBA) and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). This study will use post-structuralist and feminist frameworks to identify, contest and offer ways for reforming the existing discourse surrounding the practices that promote the social phenomenon of institutionalized gender discrimination in sports.

### **The History of Women in Sports**

Upon examining the historical and social conditions that initially formed notions of gender inequality within sporting institutions, it is important to identify the role of sports in the lives of women during the late nineteenth century and entering into the twentieth-century, as organized sport became an increasingly popular socio-cultural practice. This brief historical examination reveals some of the marginalizing and oppressive obstacles that women faced in the sporting environment before gender equality became a predominantly recognizable issue. Prior to the enactment of the Title IX legislation, Bell (2007) explains that women were discouraged from physically exerting themselves in social environments. Female sport participation was seen as more of an informal practice of physical exercise, rather than something of a competitive nature. As more women began participating in sports during the late nineteenth-century, the desire for competitiveness grew, yet college sports organizations still prohibited women from participating in extramural sports that would play competitively against other colleges.

The transition into the twentieth-century brought significant changes and new freedoms for women that came from the women's suffrage movement. The incentive for women to participate in sport was abruptly halted by the Great Depression in the 1930s, but picked back up again in the late 1950s and 1960s with the push for Civil Rights. In the 1970s, female participants in intercollegiate athletics called for an organization similar to the NCAA, where women could participate in organized sport on a competitive level with the backing of a major

institution. This led to the establishment of the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) in 1971 (Bell 2007). Like many female athletes in the United States, female coaches also faced several difficult and discriminatory obstacles that they were forced to overcome in order to gain respect and autonomy within the sporting culture. One example of these problems can be seen in the early treatment of female coaches where, prior to the enactment of Title IX legislation, sporting organizations found it unnecessary to pay females for their coaching services and many coaches were expected to use their own funds and resources to manage travel and play for their teams (Richman 377).

Those behind the establishment of professional female basketball organizations faced similar hardships in developing an organization that would last. While the NBA was established in 1949, Rosenberg (2011) explains that women were not given the opportunity to play in a professional league until 1967 with the short-lived establishment of the Women's Professional Basketball League (WPBL). The WPBL closed its doors after three years and it wasn't until three decades later, in 1991, that the Liberty Basketball Association was established. This organization only lasted a year. With an increasing demand for women's professional basketball, the NBA established the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) in 1996. Today the WNBA is still operating with a total of twelve teams from across the nation. Although the implementation of Title IX and the establishment of a professional women's basketball organization can be considered by some to be a step forward for women in sports, there are several problematic issues that female coaches continue to face today. I argue that these problems operate on complex, underlying levels which reveal the construction and reproduction of sexist ideologies circulating within certain mainstream institutions. This study will attempt to



examine some of the larger social conditions that enable discriminatory practices against the inclusion of female coaches in men's sports.

**Title IX: A Failure for Female Coaches?**

As I had previously mentioned, the implementation of Title IX brought many significant changes for females over the last 40 years. While many people generally associate this legislation with sports, it was actually intended to serve all aspects of state-funded academia. Title IX states that, "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. After the enactment of Title IX, the increased participation in women's sports led to a higher demand for coaches of women's sports. Although Title IX appears as though it was intended to open the door of leadership positions for women, like that of the head coach, statistics reveal that the number of female head coaches for women's teams in the United States has actually decreased significantly since the 1970s. Based on a study conducted by Walker and Bopp (2010), the number of female head coaches in women's sports went from 90% to 42% since the enactment of this legislation in 1972 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010 via Walker & Bopp 50). There are several different factors that contribute to these statistics, one of which being the crossing over of male coaches into female sports, which I cover in more detail later on.

Following the enactment of Title IX in 1972, secondary and post-secondary institutions were given a six-year grace period to meet compliance with this enactment (Bell 2007). As time has progressed, it appears that these institutions *still* seem to be struggling with actually implementing policies from this legislation. In fact, under Title IX, the formation of women's sports leagues, such as the AIAW, became problematic and allegedly posed a threat to the

NCAA's control over college athletics, leading into a wave of open patriarchal opposition to the impact of Title IX on sports. In 1973, several school district representatives, including high ranking officials in the NCAA forcefully opposed the guidelines of Title IX, referring to athletics as, "a builder of men and a source of civic pride" (Hanson, Guilfooy & Pillai 2009). As Bell explains,

The NCAA became concerned by what it perceived to be the potential weakening of its position as the dominant and controlling body of intercollegiate athletics. If Title IX was to apply to intercollegiate sports at all levels and women were to be elevated to a status equal to the men, its financial assets and political power were threatened. The first approach of the NCAA, when faced with the threat of equality in intercollegiate athletics, was to attempt to limit Title IX's application (2007).

The limitations that were imposed on the application of Title IX were demonstrated by the struggles women faced in establishing successful athletic organizations for female sports, organizations that would be formally recognized by men's sporting institutions. This demonstrates that the NCAA played a role in creating and reproducing the ideological assumption that women's sports had no place in organized intercollegiate athletics. In fact, it wasn't until the NCAA discovered that women's college sports could be profitable that the organization decided to open doors to a select few female sports. By 1981, the NCAA had apparently reversed its original position on women in organized sport and absorbed the AIAW to create the women's division of NCAA athletics.

The discriminatory actions taken by the NCAA in the past reveal that without the capitalistic motivation behind the merge of the AIAW and the NCAA, the struggle for gender equality, through the establishment of a credible institution for female sports with equivalence to the NCAA, would have carried on along with the marginalization of female sports as a whole. By conducting an in-depth examination of the different institutions that play a role the formation and reproduction of gender differentiation, I will move on to explore patterns of discriminatory

practices and ideological standards that exist within these institutions. I argue that the ideological misrepresentation of the female's relationship to sports ultimately prevents women from being able to receive coaching opportunities within men's professional and collegiate sporting organizations in the United States.

### **The Schooling Institution**

In order to analyze the gendered power relations of sports in our society, it is important to understand and identify the larger social context by identifying some of the institutions that play a role in making certain things the way they are within our culture. As Foucault (1982) describes in his analysis on the relationship between the 'subject' and power, it is important to examine the institutions from the standpoint of power relations because even while these relationships are fundamentally imbedded within an institution, they are to be found outside the institution as well (791). While discriminatory practices of gender inequality have historically existed within the sporting institution, there are other institutions that play a significant role in constructing underlying ideologies and practices of gender discrimination that support the marginalization and exclusion of women from high-ranking positions, one of which, being the schooling institution.

There is little doubt contesting the identification of the school as what Louis Althusser (1970) describes as an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA). As an ISA, the schooling institution acts as a dominant structure that contributes to the creation and reproduction of dominant ideas and ideologies. Althusser describes the school as a place where children, in addition to learning academic skills, learn the 'rules' of acceptable and good behavior. He writes:

...children at school also learn the 'rules' of good behaviour, i.e. the attitude that should be observed by every agent in the division of labour, according to the job he is 'destined' for: rules of morality, civic and professional conscience, which actually means rules of respect for the socio-technical division of labour and ultimately the rules of the order established by class domination. (Althusser 132)

This indicates that, within this structure, children learn at a young age what is considered to be acceptable behavior and what is not. In this same respect, children are exposed to the divisions of labor and who comprises what positions of authority, in regards to gender composition. The schooling institution can also be identified as an active agent in the shaping of masculinities and perceptions of female autonomy among boys and men. This is accomplished through the implementation of dominant ideologies of male superiority reproduced within this cultural ISA. As R.W. Connell (1996) identifies in his analysis, there are four types of relationships that, together, create what Connell refers to as a *gender regime*. Although gender regimes can differ from school to school, this term refers to how “gender is imbedded in the institutional arrangements through which a school functions” (213). These arrangements being identified as: power relations, division of labor, patterns of emotion and symbolization. Here, in relation to sports and the school, I interrogate the patterns and similarities that exist between the mainstream sporting institutions and the schooling institutions in regards to power relations and the division of labor. An identification of the way gender relations are reproduced within the schooling institution is extremely important because, not only does the school act as one of the main producers in the formation of dominant ideologies, but these ideological standards are exposed to children at an early age and impact how they perceive gender relations later on in life.

In the schooling institution, it becomes a normal and socially accepted practice to typify certain employment positions based on gender. Ultimately, over time, through the reproduction of certain practices, gendered ideological signifiers and meanings are attached to these positions. As a result, certain jobs within school administration are perceived as masculine, while others as feminine. These gendered ideological formations can be seen through an examination of the statistics surrounding the gender composition of schooling administration. According to Miki

Litmanovitz (2011) in her study compiled at Harvard Law School, women make up 76% of all teaching positions and hold 50% of all principal positions. However, when it comes to the higher-level leadership positions, such as the superintendent, state-superintendent/commissioner of education and U.S. secretaries of education, women find themselves underrepresented. This demonstrates a systematic institutional hierarchy based on gender that children within the institution are ultimately exposed to during their time in school. As of 2011, only twelve of the fifty largest school districts have female superintendents; there are only seventeen state-superintendents/commissioners of education and there have only been two U.S. secretaries of education (2011).

The power relations within both institutions rely on the identification of *who* is put in positions of authority and leadership. In the school, power is typically exercised over the pupil; however, upon closer examination, it is revealed that there are different levels of power relations that exist among positions in school administration, allowing for an internal exercise of hegemony, where gendered hierarchies become acceptable in this environment because it is being exercised through a process of forced consent. Hegemony, first introduced by Antonio Gramsci (1971), describes a situation between a dominant and a subordinate group where the dominant group is able to exercise power over the exploited subordinate group (i.e. the masses). Power is exercised through the process of forced consent, so that the ideas and practices reproduced by the dominant class become naturalized and accepted as common sense by the subordinate group.

The reproduction of masculine hegemonic ideologies among school administrators is also correlated with the divisions of labor within the schooling institution. As Connell (1996) describes, a familiar pattern that exists within schooling institutions is the association of

masculinity with authority where, in some cases, a concentration of men hold positions of authority and superiority. In the case of the schooling and sporting institutions, the ideological meanings and practices created by power relations have a direct effect on the divisions of labor within these institutions. In this instance, women appear to face the same kind of underrepresentation in senior and executive level administrative positions in the school as women who are underrepresented in coaching and management positions in organized sports. The divisions of labor can also be described by the way certain positions are specialized or typified with an underlying correlation with gender. Additionally, it is important to mention that divisions of labor are practiced informally among pupils in the schooling institution where the teacher may, for example, choose to ask the help of a young boy over in girl in doing something physical like moving desks or heavy furniture. These kinds of normalized practices associated with revealing the underlying power relations and divisions of labor allow children attending these institutions to be directly exposed to the workings of hegemonic masculinity. This indicates that, based on the gender composition of certain positions, children are taught at a young age what is considered to be “normal” in regards to gender roles and who fulfills positions of authority.

The formation of meanings behind masculinity and femininity is significant in this instance because it introduces children to the seemingly normal existence of gender hierarchies within the schooling institution, and because primary schooling is mandatory for children in the United States, a majority of pupils are exposed to this over the period of time the child is attending school. Therefore, certain ideologies and practices of masculine dominance are maintained by schooling institutions and allow for the pupil to view these ideologies as social facts. When it comes to sports, boys involved in sports within these institutions are taught at a

young age that normal practices of gender involve segregating the sexes during sporting activities. In most public schooling institutions, sports play a huge role in the school's cultural and social life and in most institutions, higher levels of importance are placed high-profile boys sports. This indicates that even the school itself makes a direct impact on how girls' sports are perceived in comparison to boys. And because the institution is upholding these discriminatory standards, how is the student expected to perceive this as anything other than what is considered to be 'right?' The schooling institution's influence on the formation of masculinity in young boys at an early age impacts not only their relationship to females, but their perceptions of masculinity as a dominant force, particularly in sports. Much like the professional and collegiate sporting institutions that I will discuss later on, there are many similarities that can be drawn between the school and sporting institutions that seem to reveal a kind of starting point for the creation and reproduction of masculine ideologies that circulate within these institutions. By confronting these gender-based discriminatory practices and ideologies that exist within the schooling institution, it becomes apparent that schools need to make significant structural changes within its administrative and executive composition in order to actually demonstrate the notion of equality and equal opportunities to its pupils. This could impact the way children perceive gender roles later on in life, particularly when it comes to involvement in sports. Additionally, the social agents within the schooling institution need to consider redefining the ways that boys and girls sports are celebrated, ideally in ways that don't express favoritism or importance of one over the other.

### **Sports Media Institutions**

Considering that sports culture in the United States is so highly popularized, there is no doubt that mass media institutions play a primary role in the creation, transmission and reproduction of

dominant cultural values within our society. Media institutions generally have a particular way of reproducing and constructing ideological representations through the use of stereotypes that exist within American culture. In the media, these stereotypical ideological representations exist through the transmission of information through signs, symbols and language. How certain messages are communicated to mass audiences, particularly in relation to sports and gender, allow for the reproduction of institutionalized relations of power to emerge. As Buysse and Herbert (2004) demonstrate in their examination of NCAA media guide cover photographs (from the six most prestigious athletic associations in the United States), mainstream sporting institutions rely heavily on sports media to market athletic teams and it is up to the institution to be responsible for their own public perception. Sports media and marketing is an industry that can be considered especially lucrative, particularly for a popular sport like basketball. The NCAA media guide acts as a representation of how the organization wants to present itself to audience members that support the schools' athletic programs. Additionally, these cover photographs act as ideological representations of the NCAA's perception on masculinity and femininity in sports (Buysse, Herbert 2004). This study reveals that women were often marginalized and subjected to portrayals which fit into certain feminine stereotypes that correlate with the perceived characteristics of their gender. While the numerical representation of women on these covers seems to be fairly equal to men, it is other aspects of these covers that allow this institution to encode its underlying perception of women into mainstream media. When the encoded message is transmitted to the masses, underlying ideological representations of women are decoded by the audience, allowing for the reproduction of essentialist views of gender in sports. For example, in comparison to male athletes, female athletes featured on the cover of the NCAA media guide appeared to be placed into the appropriate gender role stereotype that



represents femininity by placing the athlete in a photo with a background that isn't on a court or field or by photographing her out of uniform (Buysse & Hubert 2004). Although the focus here was on female athletes, this study is a representation of how ideologies and perceptions of gender in mass sports media typically tend to reproduce marginalizing stereotypes of females in athletics. To provide contemporary examples of how female professionals tend to be represented in sports media, in the next section, I discuss how the gendered and sometimes stereotypical portrayal of females in sports is replicated throughout sports media, creating misrepresentations as well as the accepted normalization of marginalizing women, particularly in men's sports.

There have been numerous studies, such as that of Burton, Grappendorf and Henderson (2011) that focus on identifying the ways that certain sporting positions are classified as masculine and feminine and how it negatively impacts women, particularly in sports. This study reveals that the lack of women in high-level sports management, impacts people's perception of women's abilities to be leaders within a historically masculine domain (35). While many masculinized sports, such as basketball, have historically marginalized the inclusion of women by placing female athletics into virtually invisible social spaces of oppression, other sports for women, like cheerleading, emerged. As Messner (2011) discusses in his analysis on soft-essentialism in youth sports, the cheerleader became the symbol for white femininity in America, something that he considers to show qualities of "hard essentialism." Hard essentialism in gender relations describes the post-WWII era in the United States, where hegemonic ideological beliefs of the naturalized roles that men and women are expected to take on, classifying the men as family breadwinners while women serve within the domestic sphere (Messner 155).

Cheerleading is a sport that still demonstrates qualities of hard essentialism because of its hyper-sexualized portrayal within mass media, often being seen as a position where it is normal

for women to be sexualized. This overly-sexualized perception of the cheerleader is not only problematic, but it demonstrates an intervention of hegemonic masculinity. As Laura Mulvey (1975) explains in her psychoanalytic examination of film as a contributing force to controlling the female body through visual representation and erotic spectacle; when unchallenged, mainstream film encodes the erotic image, along with the establishment of sexual difference into the dominant patriarchal structure (Mulvey 1975). Through this encoding process, the dominating male force is able to control the female subject through what Mulvey refers to as the “male gaze.” This gaze allows for the male force to project its erotic fantasy onto the female subject who is displayed accordingly, demonstrating notions of hegemonic forced consent. As Mulvey explains, the female subject becomes the subordinate subject within patriarchal culture,

Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning (Mulvey 7).

In this case, the cheerleader becomes representative of the erotic spectacle in sports. The cheerleading position, particularly in professional sports, has become an overly sexualized as it appears to serve the purpose of providing entertainment for male audience members, making the cheerleaders (or ‘dancers’ in the NBA) the bearer of meaning by becoming the controlled erotic spectacle.

The sideline sports reporter position has recently opened its doors to hiring more female representatives to interview athletes and report on camera. Much like the cheerleader, the discourse surrounding this particular position, provides an indication that many female sideline sports reporters face discrimination at an institutional level by being subjected to the controlling male gaze and becoming an eroticized and fetishized spectacle for the male audience members. A significant comparison can be drawn between the media perception of cheerleaders and the

position of the female sideline sports reporter, which demonstrates that the inclusion of so-called “eye-candy” in sports is something that has managed to include women into a male-dominated environment, but still continues to oppress them through the encoded perception that these women aren’t here for their credibility, but for their looks and visual appeal to viewers. Placing women into sideline sports reporting positions can also be seen as a way for certain organizations to achieve the bare minimum of equal employment regulations for women in sports. This section focuses on critically analyzing the role of women as sexualized objects in professional and collegiate sports. Using a critical feminist framework, I provide an in-depth analysis of the position of the sideline sports reporter in order to expose the hypocrisies and injustices that occur when institutions like the NBA and NCAA assign women to certain employment positions that reinforce negative and marginalizing gender stereotypes.

For this analysis, it is necessary to identify the discourse behind practices of gender stereotyping employment positions in sports. I argue that assigning stereotypical gender signifiers to certain positions plays a direct role in the exclusion of women from leadership positions that are typically classified as masculine because it goes against what our society considers acceptable. In their study on the perceptions of masculinity and femininity of female athletes in mass media, Jones and Greer (2011) use gender schema theory to evaluate the way women are perceived by media audiences in relation to their respective sport. They reveal that gender schema theory, “suggests that individuals learn the differences between the classifications of male and female from society and then adjust their behaviors to meet these expectations (McVee, Dunsmore, & Gavelek, 2005 via Jones & Greer, 2011).” By applying this theory to contemporary circumstances surrounding women in sports, it can be argued that the media plays

a significant role in producing ideologies that define what is considered masculine and what is considered to be feminine.

Through this, the media is enabling the sporting institution to exercise a form of masculine hegemony over the females within these institutions by creating the perception that going beyond these gender norms is socially abnormal or exceptional. The classification of what is considered masculine and what is considered feminine also directly affects *how* the media covers certain athletes, sports and coaches based on their perceived levels of femininity and masculinity. Jones and Greer demonstrate an example of this; they reveal that male participants were more favorable towards female athletes that conformed to the gender-role stereotypes of their respective sport, i.e. volleyball players to fit the stereotype of feminine, unlike female basketball players because this sport is considered to be more masculine (2011). While this study focuses on the socially constructed media representation of female athletes, the results of this study are parallel with how certain positions within sporting institutions are portrayed by the mass media, which I argue, ultimately affects the gender composition of these positions. I would like to move forward by identifying and analyzing another highly-publicized leadership position that has been historically dominated by males, but as of recently has seen a surge in the number of females receiving opportunities in this position. I am referring to the position of the sideline sports reporter, which has been routinely objectified and overly-sexualized by the mainstream sports media institutions.

### **The Objectification of Women in Sports**

Although the position of the sideline sports reporter used to be primarily male-dominated, recently there has been a significant increase in the amount of female sports broadcasters emerging on the sidelines. With this surge in female acceptance into male-dominated sports

culture, comes the notion that the sports broadcasting role can be both feminine and masculine. However, my analysis indicates that the research done on gender roles in sports, by Jones and Greer (2011), is congruent with the fact that female sports reporters are expected to fit into a feminine stereotype. As Fink and Kensicki indicate via Jones and Greer, “when female athletes do receive media attention, their femininity receives more attention than their athletic ability (360).” This same notion can be applied to the position of the female sideline sports reporter who is typically portrayed as a sexual being within sports media. One example of this is demonstrated by a website known as the BleacherReport.com that offers a list of “The 40 Most Popular Female Sports Reporters.” This compilation provides a brief background of the reporter accompanied by a photo and editor commentary on the woman’s physical attractiveness. By navigating this particular slideshow of female sports reporters, one can easily identify the types of women that are employed into this position. This list showcases a series of reporters that consist mainly of attractive, white women with backgrounds predominantly that range from former pageant winners and models to ex-cheerleaders. While this list only contains a select number of women with backgrounds in journalism, the hyper-sexualized gender stereotype associated with this position begins to emerge, thus revealing the impact of the “male gaze” on women who occupy these positions. Here, the importance placed on pleasing the male gaze acts as the controlling force in marginalizing this position where women are perceived to only be relevant because of their external features and/or level of attractiveness rather than knowledge and experience in sports.

In this sense, female sideline reporters are given the opportunity to enter into a male dominated environment, yet part of this responsibility includes subjecting one’s self to being controlled as a sexualized object. Upon examination of the credibility of female sports

broadcasters, Gunther, Kautz and Roth identify that since the 1970's, women who have entered this field have merely played the role of the "hostess" in sports broadcasting. This study identifies Phyllis George who despite being a hard worker, was only seen as a former Miss America sex symbol, receiving the position because of her ability to "add femininity" to the world of male-dominated sports broadcasting (Gunther, Kautz & Roth 73). In addition to the sexualized nature of this particular job, it is also important to identify that while these women have managed to break through the glass ceiling by entering a male dominated environment, they continue to face certain stipulations that are upheld by the patriarchal forces that lie within these institutions.

In a 2013 Huffington Post interview that focuses on analyzing the role of women on the sidelines of sport, Ross Greenburg, the former President of HBO Sports was quoted saying that female sports reporting is like "taking the easy way out" (Women on the Sidelines 2013). Greenburg explains that while women are qualified to hold certain positions in sport, they are simply not provided with the same opportunities as their male counterparts. Additionally, Gunther, Kautz and Roth (2011) state that by examining the qualitative data from their study on the credibility of female sports broadcasters, their hypothesis can be supported that a bias in the *credibility* of female sports broadcasters does in fact exist. This data surrounding the practice of gender-role positioning of certain employment opportunities reveals that placing women into the position of the sideline sports reporter is merely a way to continue practices of male domination over females in sport. Not only are women in this particular position sexually objectified by the governing institutions, but they continue to be marginalized and oppressed by a process that seems to be sugar-coating blatant gender discrimination against females.

**The NBA Race and Gender Report Card**

In this section, I critically analyze the information on gender diversity that is found in the 2011 Racial and Gender Report Card for the National Basketball Association. Created by Richard Lapchick for The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES), and meant to be a true representation of gender and racial diversity within this organization, this study uses a grading scale where institutions, and employment categories within these institutions, receive a grade of A through F. By focusing on specifically gender, I argue that not only is this study inconsistent and selective, but the media alerts and articles written about this report card are creating false representations of gender equality in the NBA.

This study was done on several different professional sporting organizations in the United States, including the National Football League (NFL), the National Hockey League (NHL) and Major League Baseball (MLB). Each organization receives its own grade based on the gender and racial composition of those employed by the organization, including high-level executives, all the way down to players. In comparison to other organizations like the NFL, the NHL and the MLB, the NBA actually did receive a better grade than all other professional sporting organizations with an overall A minus for gender diversity, however, when examined more closely, the data found in this study reveals that the NBA actually doesn't have as much gender diversity as this report card, and many other mass media outlets claim it to be. This report card is structured in a way that provides readers with the overall grade and significant highlights first, it then moves into a detailed description and break-down of grades by employment category. As I explain shortly, this grade categorization, in addition to the methods used by Lapchick to determine these grades, are extremely problematic and require deeper investigation. The last thirteen pages of this study provide a series of tables and statistics of the gender and racial composition for each position mentioned. The report concludes with an explanation of how

grades were calculated, the methodology used to put this report together, information describing the background of the racial and gender report card and an identification of what TIDES is and does.

The main thing about this report card that I consider to be problematic is the way that grades were assigned to each employment category that was analyzed. The categories each contain a brief description of the job and the job titles included within, along with a comparison of the statistics from previous years. At the end of each description, a grade was assigned under the categories of race and gender. The problem here is that this study chose to include race and gender grades for positions included under the categories of league central office (A at 42%), senior administration (C at 27%), professional administration (A- at 39%), and team vice president (F at 15%). At the same time, grades for gender were completely excluded from the categories of head coach, assistant coach, CEO/president, and general manager. Interestingly enough, all of these positions *were* assigned grades for the gender category in the 2012 Racial and Gender Report Card for the WNBA. Upon further investigation into the statistics provided at the end of the NBA study, there are zero female head athletic trainers, zero female head coaches, zero female assistant coaches, two female CEO/presidents, and zero female general managers. According to the grading scale guidelines provided by the report itself, for gender, an A was assigned if more than 40% of employees were women, a B for 32%, C for 27%, D for 22% and F for anything lower than 22%.

Based on the numbers and the grading scale provided by this study, I question why grades for gender were not assigned to certain positions, positions that coincidentally have almost no female representation. Although there are no details that reveal the math needing to be done to calculate the overall percentage (reaching at least 40% to receive an A) how can the only



two categories given A grades for gender diversity in the NBA qualify this organization to receive an overall grade of A minus when the only other two categories that were included under gender received a C and an F? Additionally if this study actually included the five zero-percentages coming from the positions that weren't assigned gender grades, wouldn't the overall percentage and grade be significantly lower than the 40% required to receive an A? Has the underrepresentation of women holding these exclusively male positions become so naturalized that it becomes acceptable to completely avoid the identification and interrogation of this problem? More importantly, does this organization even recognize this as a problem? Through an examination of the news articles published about this report card, it becomes clear that TIDES is not the only organization that disregards identifying the lack of female representation in coaching positions.

Upon examining two news articles, one from *ESPN* and one from *USA Today*, reporting on the NBA's "leadership" in diversifying professional American sports, the importance placed on gender diversity seems to be significantly downplayed in comparison to the examination of racial composition. Based on the report card, there is significant representation of racial diversity in NBA basketball. However, discussions on gender diversity for high-ranking positions, like head coach or general manager, (which are discussed in-depth in the racial category) are avoided by the authors. In the Associated Press article published by *ESPN*, Lapchick indicates that there are places where the NBA *does* need to improve for gender diversity, such as the positions of vice president and senior administration, yet this article fails to mention anything about the lack of female representation in the positions of head coach, assistant coach, and general manager. In this article, Lapchick also states, "The increasing presence of women and minorities of color in ownership roles would surely lead to improvement because 'they bring their life experiences and

knowledge of qualified people' to their jobs" (*ESPN* 2012). If he is able to identify the underrepresentation of women in these leadership positions, why are the other, heavily male dominated positions, made out to be the exceptions? This article reveals the naturalization that occurs in the exclusion of women from positions like NBA head coach. And even though a woman has never been given the opportunity to coach men's basketball, the concept appears to be swept under the rug and diverted to discussing positions that are considered to be acceptable for a woman to hold in the NBA, like in the League Office category, for example.

The article published by *USA Today* about the 2010-11 Racial and Gender Diversity Report Card (which contains numbers that are almost identical to the 2011-2012 report card) focuses most of its discussion on racial diversity. While the author briefly identifies some of the positions women occupy (specifically in the league office) through statistics, they expand on the racial composition of the head coaching and general manager position, yet at the same time, they completely avoid mentioning the total exclusion of women from these positions. Much like the other article, and the report card itself, the idea of women coaching men appears to be so socially unacceptable that it isn't even worthy of mention when discussing diversity in the NBA. These types of practices within sports media create problematic ideological representations of where women are perceived to belong in professional sports. These representations marginalize the importance of female leaders in men's sports, and reinforce subjectivities that misrepresent the things that women are able to achieve career-wise in professional basketball. It is also problematic that the concepts of race and gender are simply lumped together as a singular representation of diversity, when both of these concepts are obviously very different, particularly in American sports.

### **The Sporting Institution**

By concluding with an examination of the sporting institution as one of the main contributors to gender discrimination in professional sports employment, I aim to critically analyze and deconstruct some of the prominent ideologies within this particular institution, especially as these relate to the constitution of female subjectivity and hegemonic masculinity. This section also looks into some of the hiring practices that have taken place within the NBA and the NCAA and how the presence of gender role assignment and Kanter's theory of homologous reproduction continue to be a prominent factors in the formation of ideological standards that portray men as superior and better fit for certain positions because of their gender.

For decades, the organized sporting institution has played a significant role in the construction of hegemonic ideologies about masculinity. This has also been accompanied by the formation of female subjectivities that render the female as inferior within this cultural institution. In this instance, the existing ideological discourse reinforced by this cultural ISA obliges female subjects to take up the role of inferiority to their male counterparts. Since Althusser identifies subjects to be the effect of discourse, the female subject seeking a coaching position in men's sport, if given the opportunity, is required to adopt the institution's ideological standards for fulfilling the masculine image of head coach. Since the sporting institution typically upholds ideological standards of the head coach as a masculine figure, female subjectivity is greatly marginalized. This is demonstrated in a study by Blom et al. (2012) that examines the perceptions of female coaches that used to or are currently working with male athletes through a series of in-depth interviews. This study indicates that a prominent theme amongst these female coaches was that many felt as if they needed to adopt traditionally masculine characteristics as a part of their coaching style in order to be successful with the male athletes (Blom et. al 60). This reveals that, in many cases, in order to successfully maintain an

authoritative position coaching male athletes, the female subject is required to go through a hegemonic process of forced consent that exists because of the dominant masculine ideologies upheld within the institution.

In this case, the masculine ideologies created and upheld within the sporting institution are very prominent and can be dispersed through several different practices within this institution. It is argued by Messner (1988) that in many ways, organized sports have come to serve as the primary institutional means for sustaining the faltering ideology of male superiority in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (197). Messner's article provides an analysis of female athletic body to explore the historical and ideological politics of gender relations in organized sports. This faltering ideology of male superiority can clearly be seen in the NBA and NCAA by examining the gender composition of both organizations, which I discuss shortly. I argue that through active practices of hegemonic masculinity, these organizations are allowed to uphold these faltering ideologies that impact the sports work environment through certain hiring practices that are congruent with the theory of homologous reproduction.

Kanter first conceptualized the theory of homologous reproduction in 1977. It predicts, "that a dominant group will strive to 'carefully guard power and privilege' (p.48) by systematically reproducing themselves in their own image (Sagas, Cunningham & Teed 503). In this case, men typically hire other men to serve in coaching positions within these organizations because their conception of their gender role is congruent to those doing the hiring. Based on the evidence collected by Sagas, Cunningham and Teed (2006), in their examination of homologous reproduction and the hiring of assistant coaches for women's teams, homologous reproduction is one significant underlying factor that contributes to the under representation of females as coaches. One limitation to this study is that it fails to address the vast differences in how this

theory impacts both the men's and women's sports organizations. The overall results of this study reveal that the gender of the head coach does impact the gender composition of the assistant coach on staff (Sagas, Cunningham & Teed 508). This theory is undeniably represented within men's basketball, both on the professional and the collegiate levels. In the NBA, women represent 0% of both head coaches and assistant coaches, while in NCAA men's basketball 0% of head coaches were female and 0.1% of assistant coaches were female. On the contrary, statistics on women's NCAA basketball for the 2007-2008 show that 42.6 % of head coaches 34.2% of assistant coaches were male. Current statistics show that as of 2012, males make up 48% of head coaches in the WNBA and 36% of the assistant coaching positions (Lapchick 18-19).

This data indicates that while men have adequate representation in both men and women's collegiate basketball and women have adequate representation as coaches for women's NCAA basketball; women have virtually no representation in men's basketball whatsoever. This also reveals that in relation to the theory of homologous reproduction, in this particular circumstance, the theory can be applied to both organizations, but I argue that it is implemented on a stricter, more exclusive level in the men's basketball division. This exemplifies problems surrounding the fact that men continue to cross-over and get offered positions coaching both men and women, while women are marginalized from receiving such positions and their authority continues to be minimalized in sports as a whole (Bopp & Walker 50).

Based on several different studies on the experiences of women coaching men, such as Norman (2010) and Blom et. al (2011), there are also several other practices that take place within the sporting institution that reproduce political and social ideologies of female oppression. While the former uses participatory narratives from female coaches in the UK, the latter uses

interviews with female head coaches in the U.S. to determine reoccurring themes and patterns among the interviewee's responses. Despite the fact that Norman's study focuses on women in the UK, this study indicates that this is a problem women face in other Western sporting cultures as well. Based on the results of these studies, both reveal that there are several other obstacles women face even if they do receive the position as head coach for a men's team. In the UK, Norman (2010) indicates that several of the women experienced heightened pressure to perform in their position in order to prove to the other male coaches and players that they are competent enough to hold that position (94). Additionally, one participant indicated that she felt as though there was an additional burden she must carry to symbolize the capabilities of the entire minority group (95). This reveals that certain stereotypical ideologies exist within sporting institutions that render women as less-knowledgeable and credible about sports, forcing them to work extra hard in attempts to prove their worthiness.

This can be seen in the case of Natalie Nakase, a prospective female leader in men's basketball. In an interview with *ESPN*, Nakase expressed her desire to become the first female NBA coach after serving as the first female head coach for a men's professional basketball team in Japan (Fagan 2013). Although Nakase has taken a progressive step forward within men's basketball on an international level, there are still gendered barriers that exist within this foreign basketball institution that marginalize her as a leader. The *ESPN* article profiling Nakase indicates that her gender was perceived as a nonissue among the male athletes. Jayme Miller, who played under Nakase in Japan, claims that he had never been coached by a woman, but Nakase was able to "prove herself" (Fagan 2013). This problematic statement within the article exposes the existing ideological representations of the female naturalized as the inferior subject. Like some of the other female coaches in Norman's study indicated, Nakase was also faced

expectations from male players to prove herself in order to gain respect. Another interesting aspect to Nakase's story is that even though she obtained the head coaching position in Japan, after returning to the United States, she hasn't been able to breach the gendered barriers that exist for that position in the NBA. The study by Blom et. al (2011) indicates the existence of male-oriented coaching networks that play a significant role in inhibiting the opportunities given to females interested in coaching men. It has been suggested that when it comes to men's sports, many women feel as though certain coaching positions are not open to them. Additionally, Fagan writes, "The league loves to recycle, with teams routinely installing coaches and general managers who've been hired and fired multiple times" (2013). Blom et. al argue that the limited opportunities women receive to join these coaching networks, in addition to the exclusion from informal male coaching networks, act as deterrents for women seeking to penetrate the male-dominated work environment.

To demonstrate a brief example of this internal network of male coaches within the NBA that I discovered over the course of my research, I would like to list just a few examples that expose the interconnectivity of men among the position of head coach. Lawrence Frank, who never played past high school and was rather inexperienced as a coach, became the head coach of the New Jersey Nets in 2004 after Byron Scott was fired. Scott left the team and was hired to the New Orleans Hornets in 2004. After Frank left the Nets, and became assistant coach of the Boston Celtics, he replaced Tom Thibodeau, who is currently the head coach of the Chicago Bulls. After leaving the Celtics, Frank was hired as the head coach of the Detroit Pistons, replacing John Kuester who was fired from the Pistons and hired as assistant coach for the Los Angeles Lakers in 2011. This reveals the internal network of male coaches that circulates throughout the organization, allowing coaches to pick up vacant spots even if their previous

coaching position had been terminated. Additionally, this demonstrates that relatively inexperienced men can be offered coaching positions without having to have played in college or professionally, and while experienced and highly-acclaimed female coaches do exist, they are not being given the same coaching opportunities as men.

### **Conclusion**

When it comes to finding equal opportunity for females leading men's sports teams, there is still a very long way to go in breaching and eventually eliminating the social barriers that restrict women from certain positions. As I demonstrated in this analysis, it is not the sole responsibility of a single institution, but of multiple institutions, all of which play a significant role in the formation and reproduction of discriminatory ideologies and practices that limit female leadership in men's sports and create patterns of gender discrimination. Female coaches looking for better opportunities in men's professional and collegiate sports face multiple barriers that prevent them from being able to obtain positions coaching men. This not only impacts female coaches on an individual level, but it also affects the institutions by revealing the inconsistencies of perceived gender diversity and the problematic differences in what these organizations *say* and actually *do*. If changes are to take place, they must be evaluated through a larger context on an institutional level. I suggest, based on information I have gathered during my research process, that institutions and their social agents must first be able to recognize that there are many underlying discriminatory practices that take place within. The institutions must stop hiding behind the false pretenses of gender diversity within their organization and address the problematic underlying practices that go on within them. Additionally, legislative acts need to be enforced on a stricter level, particularly for organizations that receive federal funding, something that can be covered on a deeper level in future studies.



Despite the fact that basketball is a popular sport among boys and girls, seeking out a professional career in basketball appears to only become a reality for boys who grow up into men. Throughout my research, I found myself drawing personal connections with the issues being presented and discussed, as I have been a girls' youth basketball coach for nearly five years. Over the course of this project, I often wondered that if I wanted to eventually coach at a higher level, would I ever be able to coach a men's team? Or is that concept just another far-reaching fantasy of equality blocked by gender barriers within our society? I have found that although women have come close, they just are not given the same kinds of opportunities coaching men in sports, as men have been given coaching women's sports. Gender segregation, learned by children at an early age, is something that stays rooted into our ideological understanding of gender roles and the subjectivity of females as leaders. Ideological representations of where women belong in the sporting realm contribute to the creation and reproduction of dominant masculine ideologies that circulate on a mass level. While working with the school and media institutions, the sporting institution acts as the agent in enforcing this institutionalized discrimination through practices of gender-based exclusion and oppression. The head coaching position in basketball is something that women have proven they are more than capable of excelling at, but there needs to be significant institutionalized changes on multiple different levels in order to make a far reaching fantasy of coaching at the highest-level, into a reality for female basketball coaches.

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