

# Why 'Coach' is usually a bloke

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New research shows women defer to men when it comes to coaching youth sport and have little confidence in their own ability.

Dr Sarah Leberman, Senior Lecturer in Sport Management at Massey University has just returned from four months in the United States on a Fulbright Scholarship with fresh insights into why so few women, particularly mothers, become sports coaches. Dr Leberman (pictured) did her research at the Tucker Centre for Research on Girls and Women in Sport at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis-St Paul, the only research centre of its kind in the world.

She says it has been established that there are few women coaching at the top and elite levels. “So we decided to track through from the beginning by going back to entry-level to look at why women were not taking on coaching positions in youth sport.”

It is estimated that only 15 per cent of youth sport coaches in the United States are women. Dr Leberman says although there is only limited data available in New Zealand, the percentage is also likely to be low.

Her Fulbright research focused on soccer, the fastest growing women’s sport in the United States. “It showed that the main reason women don’t take part is a lack of confidence in their own abilities, the cost to their children in terms of perceived favouritism, and the challenge of separating the mother/coach roles. There is also a perception that sport is male-dominated and that most coaching clinics are run by men, with little consideration given to the needs of women.”

Dr Leberman says the research suggests there is a need to provide women-only courses, run by women, as well as mentoring and highlighting of the benefits of mothers being a coach, such as being a role model. She and a research colleague also explored the idea of transferring mothering skills to the coaching context. “Many women we interviewed had never considered that their skills as mothers could be relevant to coaching.”

She plans to continue her research in New Zealand and says it will be interesting to compare the results. “The research participants in the United States were predominantly middle class white women. We now want to look at the issues in a context that includes Maori and Pacific Island women.”

Source: Massey University

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