

A slam dunk for women head coaches—so drop the bias

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Having a man in charge of a US female basketball league team does not necessarily translate into more on court success. This is the conclusion of Lindsey Darvin of the University of Florida, lead author of a study in Springer's journal *Sex Roles*. Its findings challenge the assumption that men are better leaders, and therefore as coaches will get better results from individual players.

Studies have found that female coaches face more biases than their male counterparts when applying for head coach positions. Women are disadvantaged in their salary negotiations and performance bonuses, as well as in their chances to secure promotions and multi-year contracts. Darvin's team examined the validity of such gender stereotyping in the sport industry by determining whether the gender of a head coach influences the performance and productivity of individual players.

The researchers analyzed data collected for 1,522 players during 19 US Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) seasons (between 1997 and 2015), and 4000 players in the US National Intercollegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) between 2013 to 2016. To be included in the analysis, players had to have participated in at least 250 minutes of play during two seasons.

Darvin and her colleagues found that men and women were equally successful as head coaches in developing their individual players within both the WNBA and NCAA women's basketball leagues. Individual players' performance was not linked to the gender of their head coach,

but rather to the number of games in which they were featured, whether they played under a new coach or not, and their class year.

"The results of this study challenge the [gender stereotypes](#) associated with leadership ability through an objective measure of followers' [individual players'] performance and suggest that both men and women are achieving similar levels of success as head coaches," says Darwin.

"These results may also contest the gendered nature of the industry because they suggest that men are not outperforming women in one of sport's more visible leadership positions - the head coach."

Darwin says it is important to change perceptions and to improve the working environment for women. The researchers therefore believe that hiring managers should consider employing more objective forms of critique when considering head [coach](#) candidates. It is important for organizations wishing to hire more women in leadership roles to evaluate the [gender](#) bias in their organization, with a first step being an audit of the compensation practices for women and men. This is necessary because recent research at the NCAA levels revealed that women coaches are more likely to perceive [gender bias](#) than their male counterparts.

"Organizations cannot assume that hiring managers are free of bias, and will need to consider educational programs to remedy the situation," Darwin recommends. "Organizations should also consider a more data-analytic approach to hiring that would include various measures of performance that are less prone to human bias in their interpretation."

More information: *Sex Roles* (2017). [DOI: 10.1007/s11199-017-0815-2](#)

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