

Journal of Issues in **Intercollegiate Athletics**

Get in the Game through a Sponsor: Initial Career Ambitions of Former Women Assistant Coaches

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Research on women coaches within the field of intercollegiate athletics suggests numerous barriers to entry with additional obstacles that may influence prolonged involvement. Although research has explored these challenges, as well as intentions to leave the field prematurely, there is very little work on those individuals who voluntarily leave the profession. The purpose of the current project was to explore the initial career aspirations of women assistant coaches who voluntarily left the profession. Utilizing career construction theory as a guiding framework for the analysis and interpretation procedures three themes emerged: (a) educational advancement (b) limited coaching aspirations, and (c) sponsorship to enter the coaching profession. Practical and theoretical implications are discussed in relation to the career construction process for women assistant coaches and their eventual departure from the profession.

Keywords: sport, career aspirations, career construction, sponsorship, women coaches

In sport, not only are women underrepresented in leadership roles, they subsequently maintain fewer lower-level positions (Hoerber, 2007), and experience greater barriers to both entry and ascension to senior-level occupations (Taylor & Hardin, 2016). Barriers for women leaders in sport include unequal assumption of competence, homologous reproduction, a lack of female mentors and networking opportunities, and homophobia (Darvin & Sagas, 2017; Kamphoff, 2010; Kilty, 2006). These barriers may limit women's career mobility both laterally and vertically within the industry. More specifically, power structures found in male-dominated fields may create what women have described as a "difficulty" working in a hostile environment (Norman, 2010). Within these male-dominated industries women may also attract increased negative attention (e.g., forms of harassment), receive less organizational support, and be evaluated more critically, especially when new to the organization (Berrey, 2014; Kanter, 1977). The barriers experienced by women in head coaching positions may also influence the entry experiences of women into the assistant coach role and there has been a decline in the overall proportion of women assistant coaches. Specifically, the sport industry has seen a decline in the proportion of paid women assistant coaches coaching women within the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) level of competition from 62% in 1994 to 54% in 2014 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Most recently, Lapchick (2018) has noted the continuous decline in the proportion of women assistant coaches for NCAA women's programs from 51% during the 2016-2017 athletic season to 49% during the 2017-2018 athletic season.

The underrepresentation of women assistant coaches transcends each level of competition, from youth to the professional ranks (Wells, 2016). At the youth sport level, women assistant coaches are often highly underrepresented. For example, findings within a Midwestern youth organization indicated women represented a mere 18.9% of all assistant coaches for both boys and girls teams (LaVoi, 2009). Within the NCAA, the proportion of women assistant coaches has declined since the enactment of Title IX in 1972 (a U.S. policy requiring equal opportunity to activities in federally funding educational settings), is almost nonexistent in men's sports (< 2%), and maintains only a slight edge in women's programs (51.1%; Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Darvin & Sagas, 2017; NCAA, 2017). At the North American professional league level, men represent 99% of the assistant coaches for male professional leagues within the United States (i.e., National Basketball Association (NBA), Major League Baseball (MLB), National Hockey League (NHL), National Football League (NFL)) and for the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) women represent 68% of the assistant coach population (Lapchick, 2016). Globally, Lapchick (2016) boldly stated that "leadership in international sport is an exclusive club of men" (p. 1).

Despite the low and disproportionate representation of women assistant coaches in the profession, minimal research exists and has been limited to largely descriptive analyses, often concerned with the proportion of men and women occupants, work-related intentions to advance within the field or leave the occupation, or from the experience of current women assistant coaches (e.g., Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Darvin & Sagas, 2017; Dixon & Sagas, 2007; Hancock, Cintron, & Darvin, 2018; Lapchick, 2016; Sagas & Cunningham, 2005; Sagas, Cunningham, & Pastore, 2006; Sagas, Paetzold, & Cunningham, 2006). The lack of research centered on better understanding the lived experiences within the occupation of assistant coach for women, combined with the knowledge that women are an integral part of the head coaching pipeline suggests an emerging need for additional inquiry (Wells, 2016). To our knowledge, only

one previous investigation (e.g. Darvin, 2019) has focused on those women who have voluntarily departed from the career of assistant coach. Instead, much of the previous investigations have focused on occupational turnover intentions, rather than the process of leaving an entire professional segment (Blau, 2007). Therefore, it would be insightful to hear the lived experiences of this particular population without the impression management concern that influences employees to bias, distort, or even hide their true work experience and reasoning for voluntarily exiting an organization or occupation (Giacalone, Knouse, & Montagliani, 1997; Kulik, Treuren, & Bordia, 2012). Beyond that, while previous research has examined the work experiences of current women sport employees (e.g. Dixon & Sagas, 2007; Hancock & Hums, 2016; Sagas, Cunningham, & Pastore, 2006; Taylor & Harding, 2016), an examination of this specific population of former employees permits an expansion of that literature and an avenue for comparison.

Based on these gaps in the literature, the current investigation focused on the initial career ambitions of former women NCAA assistant coaches who engaged in voluntary occupational turnover. The overarching research question that guided our study: What were the initial career aspirations of former NCAA women assistant coaches who have engaged in voluntary occupational turnover?

Review of Literature

Previous researchers have established that even within entry-level roles, such as the assistant coach position, the opportunities for men and women are often enabled, shaped, and constrained by social contexts (Messener, 2009). These social institutions throughout sport continuously create, maintain, and subsequently recreate homogeneous hierarchies and as a result, women often have difficulty initially entering the coaching profession as an assistant, or continuing along the coaching pipeline (Darvin & Sagas, 2017; Wells, 2016). Many of these social contexts are applicable within a variety of sport sectors, as women are often discouraged from coaching roles at the lowest levels of sport competition. According to Messener (2009), gendered assignments may subsequently set the stage of stereotypical hiring practices at higher levels of sport competition, as youth athletes are socialized to believe early on that men coach and women manage. Messener (2009) explicitly noted:

The head coach, nearly always a man, is the leader and public face of the team; the team parent, nearly always a women, is working less visibly behind the scenes, doing the 'housekeeping'; support work; assistant coaches, mostly men, but including the occasional woman, help the coach on the field during practices and games (p. 29).

The preferences placed on maintaining men assistant coaches in sport competition as early as the youth level, often serves to reinforce the gendered nature of sport along with the gender-based stereotyping that occurs within hiring practices, whether formal or informal, throughout the industry (Darvin & Sagas, 2017; LaVoi, 2013). Additionally, findings have illustrated the distinction in athletic experience that men assistant coaches maintain. While women assistant coaches transition into the position following an elite-level playing career, men assistant coaches do not come equipped to the position with the same elite-level playing experiences (Wells, 2016). Further, researchers have also indicated women student-athletes do not differ in their coaching self-efficacy when compared to their men counterparts (Everhart &

Chelladurai, 1998). Additionally, women student-athletes who played under a woman head coach often express less concern with perceived discrimination in hiring or otherwise (Everhart & Chelladurai, 1998), yet women are still underrepresented within the assistant coach position.

Specific to the current investigation, Sagas, Cunningham and Pastore's (2006) findings indicated women assistant coaches maintain higher intentions to leave the coaching profession compared to their men assistant coach counterparts. These gender differentials in occupational turnover can have serious consequences including a supply shortage of women to fill sport leadership positions (e.g., head coach; Cunningham, 2015; Thorpe & Chawansky, 2017). Recognizing previous researchers have determined leaving one's organization is an easier process than leaving one's occupation due to the increased costs, such as training, human capital investments, disrupted work relationships, abandoned networks, lost time, and lost income (Blau, 2007), it is important to hear from those who have exited the occupation. According to Bolles (2006), employees have a higher chance of changing their organization than they do changing their occupation. As such, the average employee under the age of 35 will search for a similar job within a different organization roughly every one to three years and an employee over the age of 35 will seek out this change every five to eight years (Bolles, 2006). In contrast, a complete change in an individual's occupation will only occur for most individuals three times over the course of a lifetime (Bolles, 2006). Previous research conducted by Darvin (2019) indicates that there are a variety of reasons that lead to women voluntarily exiting the assistant coach occupation including, (1) destructive leadership practices, (2) recruiting toxicity, and (3) non-nuclear family balance. It was also determined that the process of leaving the occupation of assistant coach was a dramatic one for women, a process that took several years to come to fruition (Darvin, 2019). Thus, the process of leaving one's occupation voluntarily is quite extreme, yet investigations specific to those who have exited the profession of coaching voluntarily is rare in sport and additional inquiry is necessary.

Conceptual Considerations

Career Construction Theory

Career construction theory (CCT) assisted in the analysis and interpretation procedures for the current study as it is useful in "exploring how social contexts, identities, and behavior impact career decisions and trajectories" (Hancock & Hums, 2016, p. 199; Savickas, 2005). CCT explores how individuals construct, process, and negotiate meaning as it relates to their career choices by answering two questions: "What do people do?" and "Why do they do it?" (Savickas, 2005). More specifically, CCT focuses on the occupational personality and behavior of an individual and how these personalities and behaviors allow them to adapt to vocational changes during the course of a person's career (Savickas, 2005). For the purposes of the current investigation, CCT assisted in the interpretation of the participants experiences as this framework does not attempt to predict career paths, but rather aids in understanding the choices and decisions an individual makes.

With limited insight regarding the lived experiences of assistant coaches at any level, this exploration is critical to help understand why and how assistant coaches conceptualize their entrance into the coaching profession as well as their experiences during their tenure. Further, sport has been identified as a gendered domain with power structures in place that may hinder women's ability to find success in the industry (see Burton, Barr, Fink, & Bruening, 2009;

Burton, Grappendorf, & Henderson, 2011; Taylor & Hardin, 2016), thus it is important to highlight the unique, and understudied experiences of women assistant coaches. Because an individual's career path can be molded by personal meaning, past memories, present experiences, and future aspirations, CCT includes the following themes: vocational personality, career adaptability, and life themes (Hancock & Hums, 2016). CCT has assisted researchers in discovering participants' personal and professional identities by exploring the motives behind career decisions and personal values as they are situated in socially constructed realities (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Savickas, 2005).

Vocational personality refers to an individual's "career-related abilities, needs, values, and interests" (Savickas, 2005, p. 47). A person's abilities, needs, values, and interests can be reinforced by individual factors such as gender, self-efficacy, personality, and human capital acquired (Burke, 2007; Wentling, 2003). Previous research on gender and sport, specifically examining women NCAA Division I athletic directors, found gender impacted participants' self-efficacy (negatively) and human capital (positively; Taylor & Wells, 2017) suggesting further inquiry into the career experiences of women in intercollegiate athletic departments is necessary. Cultural norms and gender roles may be particularly influential toward the job aspirations and expectations of women in society, especially within the male-dominated industry of sport. For example, choices regarding career path (e.g., selecting a vocation, valuing a job, deciding to change jobs/careers) are made in combination with and influenced by other life decision (e.g., the work-family interface; Eccles, 1994). Further, if industries have power structures in place that work to discriminate against women, it may eliminate careers within the industry as potential options due to limited interest of alignment of values.

A person's life themes help give the individual purpose and allow them to make meaningful decisions surrounding their work (Savickas, 2005). Examining the life themes of an individual is an important element in understanding their career choices as decisions regarding potential occupations "are not made in isolation of other life choices (Eccles, 1994, p. 605). For example, an individual's decision to marry or engage in a long-term relationship, have children, return to school, or desire to balance their work with their outside life (e.g., hobbies, family) may impact the career they decide to pursue. Understanding the life themes of an individual may help uncover why he/she made a specific decision regarding their career (Savickas, 2005).

Career adaptability refers to an individual's ability to cope with developmental tasks such as learning new skills or adjusting to new environments (Savickas, 2005). Contextual factors, such as discriminatory hiring practices, organizational policies that hinder work-life balance, gender role stereotyping, and networking and mentorship opportunities may impact an individual's career adaptability. Career adaptability recognizes the relationship between a person's skills and abilities, social expectations and occupational interests, perceived and real opportunities, as well as the acceptance of an occupation by peers (Hancock & Hums, 2016). "The manner in which personal and contextual factors influence an individual's career experiences rests in how a person perceives and responds to such factors (Hancock & Hums, 2016, p. 200).

Much of the previous literature on women working within the sport industry has focused on women who have achieved success within the field (Grappendorf, Lough, & Griffin, 2004; Hancock & Hums, 2016; Taylor, Siegele, Smith, & Hardin, 2018), therefore it is important to understand the experience of those who have yet to achieve such success or who have voluntarily left the profession. Utilizing CCT, is it possible to better understand how a woman's career interests, development, and choices are impacted by personal experiences and contextual factors

(Hancock & Hums, 2016; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). Previous research on the experiences of women in intercollegiate athletics has used CCT to help explain the career development and choices of participants (Hancock & Hums, 2016; Hartzell & Dixon, 2019; Taylor et al., 2018). In addition to being utilized in similar, previous research, CCT was selected for use in the current study as it provided the ability to critically assess the decisions made by participants regarding their vocational personality (e.g., desired career, education), life themes (e.g., personal experiences that influence career choice), and career adaptability (e.g., career opportunities).

Method

Research Design

A hermeneutic phenomenological approach was utilized within this investigation, as this study was particularly concerned with the lived experiences of the participants and focusing on interpreting the “texts” of their lives (Creswell, 2013). Specifically, this theoretical concept suggests interpretations are all that we have, and the description of life experiences is in itself an interpretative process (Kafle, 2011). The interpretative element of the hermeneutics philosophy lends itself to an interpretive phenomenological analysis structure (IPA), one that strives to transform the collected data into a textual product that provides each reader with contextually rich perspectives about the phenomenon of career aspirations of former NCAA female assistant coaches who have chosen to leave the occupation.

Researcher Background

Under the guidance of hermeneutics and phenomenology the current research design called for a self-reflection done by the researchers, or the individuals with the most interaction with participants. Creswell (2013) acknowledged that the role of the qualitative researcher is to interact with each participant in order to obtain a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. As such, the interactions require an acknowledgement and management of all personal views of the researcher throughout the data collection, analysis, and interpretation process (Creswell, 2013). The research team identifies as female and all of the researchers engaged in this study have previous experience as NCAA student-athletes in a variety of sports. Additionally, all of the researchers have previous work experiences as NCAA assistant coaches, with one researcher currently serving as an assistant coach at the intercollegiate level. Beyond that, several members of the research team have spent time employed as intercollegiate administrators. The experiences each of the researchers have maintained within the sport industry provided an avenue for them to relate with the participants and enabled the interviewer to build a rapport with each participant. According to Creswell (2013), this is an important aspect of the phenomenological qualitative approach. These previous experiences also contributed to the development of the current investigation and the networks each developed while working within the intercollegiate sport industry assisted with the recruitment of participants for this investigation.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, semi-structured interviews were scheduled to take place either in person or by phone. Semi-structured interviews ranged in total time from 65 minutes to 140 minutes in length. An interview guide was first designed through a pilot test with a participant similar to those within the sample. This pilot test enabled adjustments to the wording of the question(s), the order in which the questions were asked, as well as the clarity of the questions. Thus, this assisted with the flow of the interview and enabled a more naturalistic approach to the data collection. The overarching research question, concerned with the initial career aspirations of former NCAA women assistant coaches who have engaged in voluntary occupational turnover, was answered using the following interview questions:

1. Please describe/elaborate on your initial aspirations to become an assistant coach.
2. Why did you enter the coaching profession and when did you decide to embark within this profession?

Participants

The population for this study included women assistant coaches who had served within the NCAA Division I, Division II, or Division III and voluntarily left the occupation over the past four years. Participants (N = 12) were recruited via criterion, purposeful, and snowball sampling techniques. The sampling frame included former women assistant coaches, who voluntarily left the occupation between the years of 2013-2017 within the sports of NCAA women's basketball, women's soccer, women's swimming, and women's lacrosse (see Table 1). These sports were selected for two reasons: (1) both men and women maintain assistant coach and head coach positions of women's programs for these sports which provides an ability to interpret experiences depending on staff composition, and (2) it permits an interpretation of lived and career experiences within sports with opposing gender disparities at the level of head coach. The timeframe of voluntary departure from the occupation was selected in order to ensure the participants had a relatively recent experience and could recall the phenomenon more clearly. Specific to the sport coached, Table 2 provides an overview for each participant and details the sport(s) in which they had served as an assistant coach along with the NCAA divisions in which they had served as an assistant coach.

Table 1.

Participant Aggregated Demographics

Age	28 to 41 years (Avg. 33 years)
Race	9 White, 3 Black
Education	8 Graduate Degrees or Higher
Sexual Orientation	6 Straight, 5 Gay, 1 Bi-Sexual
Relationship Status	4 married, 8 not married
Children	2 have children, 10 do not have children
Final Coaching Salary	\$20,000 to \$74,000 (Avg. \$42,000)
Previous Playing Experience	9 Division I, 2 Division II, 1 Division III
Years in Coaching	2 to 14 years (Avg. 6.5 years)

Table 2.
Individual Participant Demographics

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>	<u>Educational Background</u>	<u>Sport(s) Coached</u>	<u>NCAA Division(s)</u>	<u>Years as NCAA Coach</u>	<u>HC Gender</u>	<u>Sponsor Gender</u>	<u>Final Salary</u>
1	Caucasian	Bachelors	Swimming	1	10	Man	Man	\$46,000
2	Caucasian	Masters	Swimming	1	15	Man	Man	\$42,000
3	Caucasian	Masters	Swimming	1, 2, 3	6	Man	Man	\$20,000
4	Caucasian	Masters	Soccer	1	4	Woman	Man	\$30,000
5	Caucasian	Masters	Soccer & Lacrosse	1, 2, 3	7	Woman	Woman	\$50,000
6	Black	Bachelors	Basketball	1	4	Man	Woman	\$42,000
7	Caucasian	Masters	Basketball	1	5	Man	Man	\$57,000
8	Caucasian	Masters	Basketball	3	2	Woman	Woman	\$20,000
9	Black	Bachelors	Basketball	1	8	Man	Man	\$72,000
10	Black	Masters	Basketball	1, 2	9	Man	Man	\$37,000
11	Caucasian	Masters	Lacrosse	1, 3	14	Woman	Woman	\$54,000
12	Caucasian	Bachelors	Lacrosse	1, 2, 3	6	Woman	Man	\$38,000

Note. All participants are former NCAA student-athletes.

*HC = Head Coach

Data Analysis

At the conclusion of the interview cycle, data was transcribed through a third-party transcription service. The transcripts were then reviewed for accuracy. The analysis was conducted through an application of a phenomenological and hermeneutic theoretical underpinning. In order to accomplish this task, the analysis required a deep immersion with the material. The IPA strives to accomplish this by providing evidence of the participants' sense making of the phenomenon under examination, while simultaneously documenting the sense making of the researcher (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Under this approach, Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) recommend a three-step process of analysis that was utilized for this study including: (1) multiple reading and making notes, (2) transforming notes into emergent themes, and (3) seeking relationships and clustering themes. Finally, it was critical to consider the aforementioned previous research related to women and the coaching profession, as well as the conceptual consideration of CCT throughout the process of developing the final themes. Therefore, the tenants of CCT and previous findings have been weaved throughout the results and discussion section to elaborate on the interpretation procedures.

Findings and Discussion

The following will detail the manner in which the participants entered the coaching profession and focuses largely on their initial aspirations of becoming assistant coaches. This section is broken down into three main themes, each of which contributed in some manner to their process of entering the coaching profession including: (1) educational advancement, which maintained the sub-themes of (1a) educational endeavors and (1b) passion for teaching, (2) limited coaching aspirations, and (3) sponsorship to enter the coaching profession.

Educational Advancement

Several factors associated with the field of education emerged as components of the career aspirations of the participants. Specifically, each of these women had a passion for education and this was displayed in two distinct ways. First, their own ambitions to continue with their educational endeavors were evident as many of these women pursued advanced degrees. This finding relates to the vocational personality pillar of CCT and previous research that indicated women who strive to receive additional education are often higher in self-efficacy and more likely to be confident in their ability to coach (Burke, 2007; Sagas, Cunningham, & Teed, 2006; Wentling, 2003). Second, their passion for educating others was apparent, as several of the women either majored in education or taught prior to beginning their coaching career. According to Millslagle and Morley (2004) it is not uncommon within interscholastic sport to encounter educators, specifically physical education teachers, who are involved in coaching. However, previous research has not yet pointed to a distinct connection between educator career goals, specifically ambitions to one day become a teacher or educator and entering the intercollegiate coaching profession.

Educational endeavors. To begin, a few of the participants recognized graduate school was an important component to their individual development and initial career ambitions. This theme illustrates the importance of the vocational personality component of CCT specific to an individual's career-related abilities (Savickas, 2005). P1, a former NCAA DI women's swim coach of 10 years, was particularly blunt in her analysis of her educational endeavors stating, "I knew I needed a graduate degree." Similarly, P6, a former NCAA DI assistant women's basketball coach for four years, described how the opportunity to attend college under a scholarship as a student-athlete was an important piece of her career goals. She described the manner in which she approached her undergraduate education with that professional objective in mind when she stated "I wanted to go to pharmacy school. So my thought process was, okay, I'm going to get to take the classes I need, I'm going to apply for pharmacy school, that was what I was thinking."

Likewise, P3, a former swimming coach with experience in all three NCAA divisions, understood because she was not entirely certain about a future vocation, a graduate degree would provide her with additional opportunities. Stating, "So I went to grad school. So at [redacted] they have the MBA, Master's of sport business, double Master's degree, so I thought, OK, I can still pursue the business route, but maybe there's something in sport management that will appeal to me." Comments from P3 illustrate the vocational personality component of CCT. Advanced education degrees, or additional human capital, can assist individuals in furthering their career opportunities. Although these women may not have necessarily known what career they wanted

to pursue, they understood attaining advanced degrees could assist them in further understanding their interests, values, and abilities (Savickas, 2005).

While gaining additional education and pursuing a post-secondary degree can provide a boost in self-efficacy for women coaches, several of the participants noted how their passion for education went beyond their own desire for advanced degrees. Some of the women described their initial career goals within secondary and higher education, as teachers and professors, while others did work within education during their time as coaches. The skills and knowledge acquired as an athlete through educational endeavors has been found to translate to increased confidence for women within coaching roles (Demers, 2009; Reade, Rodgers, & Norman, 2009). P11, a former women's lacrosse coach for 14 years at both NCAA D1 and D3 levels, stated while she did gain some early experiences coaching clinics and camps, and she did enjoy her time, she still assumed she would enter higher education in a capacity outside of sport, "I always thought I was going to go back to school and become an English professor." These women spoke to the importance of having a passion for higher education in their journey to become an assistant coach and recognized the synergy between a career in teaching and one in coaching. Desire to continue within higher education and the pursuit of additional degrees relates to CCT's career adaptability and vocational personality, particularly increasing one's value and human capital. Through continued education, the participants were able to enhance both their career adaptability and vocational personality by learning new skills and career related abilities as well as functioning in different contextual environments.

Passion for teaching. While previous research has indicated a connection between teaching and coaching is not uncommon throughout secondary education (Millsagle & Morley, 2004), research to this point has not examined the higher education landscape. It was apparent these women understood they had a desire to teach and believed they were destined to become educators in some capacity, but had not yet realized the vocational choice or value of teaching through a coaching profession. P5, a former NCAA coach of both women's lacrosse and soccer, knew she wanted to combine her love of teaching with her passion for sport, "I majored in human development I always knew that I wanted to go into some sort of teaching of some nature. I've never really looked at coaching as that."

P12, a former NCAA DI, III, and III assistant coach, echoed similar sentiments as she discussed her undergraduate educational pursuits prior to entering her career in coaching, "I knew I wanted to teach, I knew I wanted to be involved in the sport industry. I was going through the whole physical education undergrad and getting my teaching certificate, I liked it, [but] there was definitely something missing." P5 and P12's comments illustrate the life themes pillar of CCT. Although during their time as students both P5 and P12 were unaware of how they would merge their two passions - teaching and sport - by examining how they create meaning from their experiences we can better understand the decisions they made that led them to becoming a coach. Further, as noted by Eccles (1994), decisions regarding potential occupations "are not made in isolation of other life choices" (p. 605), therefore it is important to understand the experiences of these women across all facets of their lives

P8, a former NCAA women's basketball coach at the DIII level, had similar experiences with her passion for the field of education and the desire spring boarded her into a coaching career. She had initial aspirations of working at the high school level as an educator and coach. P8 explained, "my initial goal was to be a high school history teacher and coach. So I went to go get my Master's degree in education." P2, a former NCAA DI swimming coach of 15 years,

brought this synergy into full light as she expanded upon her own experiences as an elementary school teacher “I actually have a degree in elementary education, so I’ve taught for about a total of five years, off and on throughout life. Post-graduate and my post college career, I’ve been in the classroom for about a total of five and a half years.” For a few years there was crossover for P2 as she both taught and worked as an assistant coach noting her identity as an educator was certainly not hidden from her identity as a coach, and how she incorporated her experiences as a teacher within her coaching style.

Overall, the educational backgrounds of these participants appeared to greatly influence not only their entry into the coaching profession, but even the manner in which they approached their coaching style. A majority of the women within this study had advanced degrees, and several had ambitions to pursue post-graduate education prior to landing their first assistant coach position. These experiences are typically associated with higher levels of confidence and higher levels of self-efficacy for women coaches as they consider entering the field (Reade et al., 2009; Sagas et al., 2006). For example, women coaches are often more likely to have earned an undergraduate degree or higher when compared with their male counterparts (Reade et al., 2009). Additionally, a few of the participants had distinct passions for education and teaching. These women held a degree in education, and some taught prior to or during their tenure as an assistant coach. These women recognized the importance of human capital, particularly their background within the field of education throughout their time as sport coaches.

Beyond that, the participants alluded to the idea that training opportunities are less substantial for the sport coaching occupation than they are for the teaching occupation. In professional segments outside of sport coaching, such as within education, certifications and training requirements are more robust (Anderson, 2015). These certifications have also been found to positively impact student achievement. For example, previous research has determined that professional certifications for teachers often correlate to higher achievement levels and higher test scores for their students (Anderson, 2015; Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000). Specifically, students instructed by teachers who have accomplished standard certification levels were more successful than students instructed by educators without these trainings (Anderson, 2015). For sport coaching, the training and certification procedures, if they exist at all, are far less substantial than those found within education. While programming has been developed in a more substantial manner at the international level, domestic coaching education programming is lacking (Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2003; Lemyre, Trudel, & Durand-Bush, 2007). The participants within this study indicated that they had to rely largely on their educational training and noted the positive influence those experiences had on their coaching ability.

Limited Coaching Aspirations

During these assistant coaches’ youth and throughout most of their intercollegiate playing careers, all 12 of the women identified they had minimal aspirations to enter the intercollegiate sport coaching profession. Previous research has revealed individuals may not always recognize the full range of vocational options afforded to them especially if gender-role schema exists in the profession (Eccles, 1987). Additionally, barriers or the perception of barriers may influence an individual’s decision to pursue a career in intercollegiate athletics (Cunningham et al., 2005). Many of the women did recognize their love of sport and desire to remain within sport in some capacity at an early age, but had not considered coaching as a viable profession for themselves. P11, a former lacrosse assistant coach stated, “As a student-athlete and a younger person, I don’t

think I saw it as a profession, as what some student-athletes may see now as an opportunity.” Similarly, P4, a former NCAA Division I soccer assistant coach, explained she had career goals outside of the sport context, although she did understand the benefit of her sporting experiences at an earlier age, “When I was a kid I didn’t want to be a coach until I got immersed in the environment in soccer.” The limited aspirations theme parallels the vocational personality and life themes components of CCT. Although the participants had no intentions to enter the profession (limited vocational personality) their life experiences (themes) eventually pushed them in the direction of coaching. This theme illustrates how it is not simply one event or experience that determines the selected career choice of an individual and the pillars of CCT often get intertwined.

Self-perceptions of women coaches can serve as a barrier to considering the profession a viable option, as women generally believe they are not qualified for a position, even when they possess a high degree of athletic capital (LaVoi & Becker, 2007). That being said, previous findings have also indicated a desire to remain involved in athletics can be a contributing factor in a woman’s decision to enter the coaching profession (Bower, 2010). Further, former players, who tend to make up a large portion of the pool for future sport coaches, are often more likely to believe they can enter the coaching profession (Morris, Arthur-Banning, & McDowell, 2014). However, while each of the 12 women within this study had previously competed as NCAA student-athletes across all three NCAA Divisions, they did not initially consider coaching as a viable career path. Instead, many of these women faced events or outside influences within their own lives that shifted their focus to the direction of coaching. For example, although P6, a former NCAA Division I assistant women’s basketball coach, had not considered becoming a coach until her senior year of college when she recognized how her career-ending injury enabled her to experience the sport in a different and enjoyable light:

So, I didn’t really want to coach until my senior year of college. I went down with a career ending injury as for my ACL. And so, about half of my senior season, the girls would come and talk to me. They’d say, ‘hey, what are you seeing’ and I kind of saw some things that I didn’t see when I played.

P6’s career ending injury worked as a life theme to influence the decisions she made regarding her career choices. Although she did not have any specific vocational personalities or career opportunities (i.e., career adaptability) she utilized her experience to start investigating the potential career path of coaching.

Similarly, although not due to injury, P9 a former NCAA Division I women’s basketball assistant coach and student-athlete, indicated she had not considered coaching throughout her playing career, quickly saw it as an opportunity to remain involved with the sport she loved, “but I just didn’t see it as a career. I mean, to be honest, I didn’t know that coaches made money. Or, I won’t say made money. Made as much money as they do.” The shift in P9’s perspective, echoes Eccles (1987) revelation that individuals do not always recognize the full range of vocational options available and are easily influenced by the value they place on an employment option. Similarly, P7’s vocational options shifted when she stated she was passionate about remaining within the sport industry, but did not know precisely what these feelings meant for her, reiterating the fact she did not consider a profession in sport coaching as an option, “I knew that I could play overseas for a couple of years and make some money and just kind of go about it that way, but I never had professional aspirations other than that, but I did know that I wanted to be

around sports.” P5 asserted she majored in human development and knew that she was hoping to remain within the field of sport in some manner, but had not considered coaching as a method to do so, “I didn’t really think of coaching as a career or a profession, by any means.” The limited aspirations of many of the participants, despite prolonged and high level participation, illustrates how every individual makes meaning of their experiences differently.

Although all 12 of the participants had life experiences (themes) involving sport, they did not all take the same path to finding and securing coaching positions. Additionally, the lack of career aspirations of the participants suggests life experiences (themes) in a specific industry or field may not be enough to spark career interest, there must also be a value proposition for the vocational choice (Eccles, 1987). If governing organizations and athletic departments are interested in increasing the representation of women in coaching and administration positions they may need to be purposeful in creating meaningful experiences for women student-athletes of all levels.

Similarly, P12 indicated she wanted to combine several of her passions into a long-term career, but had not initially considered coaching as a method by which to accomplish the goal, “I wasn’t really sure what I wanted to do, I knew I wanted to do something that was hands on with athletes and also hands on with either high school students or college athletes and kind of go around that route.” P3 had similar feelings towards the profession of sport coaching, indicating she had not considered the occupation as a viable career path, “I didn’t think coaching was like a real career. I had this really, I don’t think negative opinion of coaching because I had great coaches growing up, I had great role models, but I just didn’t think it was a long-term real career.” P1, indicated she too had not considered working within the coaching profession most notably because she needed a break from the intense commitment within the sport she competed in as a student-athlete, “I had spent five years swimming at the collegiate level. It was pretty intense. You know, I had no aspirations to continue with swimming at the coaching level or at the playing level.” These experiences demonstrate how negative life experiences (themes) can influence an individual’s vocational personality (e.g., career-related interests). Although these women were able to recognize their love for sport, they also questioned their ability and interest in continued involvement in an industry that is so intense and requires such a high level of commitment. The high level of commitment necessary for success in collegiate coaching can be illustrated through a prolonged and unusual work schedule (e.g., long hours, weekend requirements), frequent travel, constant pressure to perform at a high level (Hall, Bowers, & Martin, 2010), which has been cited in previous literature to discuss barriers to continued employment in the industry. These factors may also impact the vocational personality pillar of CCT. Individuals who are interested in working or currently working within the sport industry may be dissuaded from entering or continuing employment if they are unable to achieve personal goals (e.g., maintain hobbies or personal relationships, start a family) due to professional time commitments.

P10 felt as though she had simply ‘fallen into’ the profession, indicating prior to being offered a position or prior to someone reaching out to her and suggesting she consider this career, she had not thoroughly considered this path. A few of the women had aspirations outside of sport coaching, such as P10, who reflected on her goals of playing basketball professionally until an injury kept her from pursuing that initial goal, “Yeah I kind of just fell into coaching, I don’t know if I had aspirations to become an assistant coach, I wanted to play professional basketball.” Similarly, P7 explained, “I loved just every team I was ever on and the situations I was in and yeah coaching, I kind of just stumbled into it.” Previous research on women in the

collegiate sport setting reported similar findings (e.g., female athletic directors; Taylor & Hardin, 2016) suggesting many women may not be utilizing the vocational personality or career adaptability pillars of CCT to purposefully enter the sport industry. Rather, these women may be relying on their life themes to push them in this direction.

Several participants indicated the coaching profession was initially a means to an end as they had not considered coaching a true career or career option prior to the opportunity to use the profession to pay for graduate school became available to them. For example, P1 indicated she became an assistant coach strictly to pay for her graduate studies as she pursued a career outside of the sport industry, “and so, I applied there, I got in, started that program, went through it for a year, but I was also paying for my graduate programs through coaching. And that was strictly for financial reasons.” P12 had a similar experience and knew coaching would assist her financially as she completed a graduate degree, “initially, my aspirations to become an assistant coach was to go to grad school and to get it paid for as best as possible.” Similarly, P11 described her desire to complete her graduate degree and was given an opportunity to combine this opportunity with a job in coaching and have the tuition paid for by the institution, “I knew that I wanted to get my Master’s...so I came back stateside and got a grad assistantship at [redacted] to study sports psychology and coach. So that's how I started in, in collegiate coaching.”

The experiences of the participants illustrate how the components of CCT work together to help individuals construct, process, and negotiate meaning as it relates to their career choices. Women within the current study had positive, influential experiences related to sport causing them to desire continued involvement in sport. However, lack of exposure to coaching as a full-time, long-term, valued career limited their initial interest and ability to pursue coaching as a profession. This lack of exposure may be gendered in nature, as children are socialized to believe certain careers are gender appropriate (Gottfredson, 1981), coupled with the fact that 98% of commercialized sports are men’s sports (Lapchick, 2016), meaning men coaches are the ones represented on the sidelines. Interestingly and contradictory to the findings of student-athletes’ vocational intentions, previous research (Everhart & Chelladurai, 1998) suggests women student-athletes may be more likely to enter the profession and consider the career a viable option. Within the current sample of former women student-athletes it was their love of the sports they had participated in and their positive life experiences (themes) as an intercollegiate student-athletes that eventually drove them back onto the courts, fields, or into the pools. For others, it was a desire to utilize their skill set as a former student-athlete as a method by which to receive a master’s degree in their desired field outside of sport. While previous scholars have noted women coaches have cited an interest in the career or stimulation of the job as supports for entering the profession (e.g., Demers, 2009), these women relied more heavily on their personal goal of continued involvement with their sport once their athletic career came to a close as a motivating factor (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012).

Sponsorship to Enter the Coaching Profession

Each of the 12 women spoke to the importance of the coaching network, noting the vital role of sponsors as they gained entry into the profession. As the women elaborated on their lived experiences, it became clear these relationships went beyond traditional mentoring and instead shifted into the space of sponsorship. Sponsorship differs from mentorship in that the sponsor leverages relationships and influence to advocate for the protégé, as they are often referred to within the sponsorship realm, in a manner meant to lead directly to career advancement instead

of simply providing career feedback and advice (Helms, Arfken, & Bellar, 2016; Wells & Hancock, 2017). Sponsorship relationships are more risk to the sponsor, as their reputation is at risk if the protégé does not live up to expectations (Scheepers, Douman, & Moodley, 2018).

Historically, any work examining relationships within sport have been concerned with and from the viewpoint of the head coach, however participants in the current study (i.e., assistant coaches) clearly demonstrated understanding the importance of sponsorship to enter the profession. P6 illustrated the value of sponsorship to enter the coaching profession, when she recalled the coach she played for as a student-athlete assisted her greatly in obtaining her assistant coaching position:

So, I actually didn't apply. My coach, my college coach knew the guy who was the head coach at [redacted]. So, that is how I got the job. When I went for an interview before I even left the campus, he offered me the job. It was literally that simple, which was crazy because, you know, college coaching is such a hard profession to get into, but I was lucky enough to have that – process.

Additionally, P7 described the importance influence her coach had over her career:

I got my GA from the guy that I played for and got the job that I took because that head coach had called my head coach that I was working for at the time for a reference for another person and as he was talking he said “actually I have a better candidate for you if you're interested”, and so 20 minutes after that phone conversation that guy called me and then I got an interview, and then I got the job pretty quickly thereafter.

Similarly, P8 detailed the manner in which her head coach was a critical aspect of her job search when she stated, “My college coach helped me reach out to other coaches and I was able to use my coach's name as a reference as I applied for jobs.” P6 also recalled a coach who invested a good deal of time in her and brought a coaching position to her attention at a time when she had not considered becoming an assistant coach.

Although previous research suggests sponsors are important and beneficial to one's career advancement, there has been limited research to suggest women working in intercollegiate athletics are engaging in or benefiting from sponsorship relationships, which is what we discovered in the current study. The limited work on sponsoring, networking, and mentoring within sport suggests women employees often struggle to find these developmental relationships due to the limited number of women working in decision-making leadership positions (Wells & Hancock, 2017). While the importance of networks for women coaches has been previously established within the literature (Avery, Tonidandel, & Phillips, 2008; Wells & Hancock, 2017), our study extended the LaVoi and Dutove (2012) revelation of informal networks progressing one's career, by revealing how imperative a sponsor operating through his or her network was to a women's *entry* into the career of coaching.

Previous work on the topics of mentorship and sponsorship suggests (White) men benefit most from these relationships as they have more access to and are more likely to create developmental relationships with individuals who are similar to them (i.e., those in power positions) and will be more integrated into networks of decision makers (Dreher & Cox, 1996). Our research highlights progress within the sport industry, as the women assistant coaches in the sample greatly benefited from the sponsorship relationships. Further, the support of a sponsor

within the field is a part of an individual's vocational personality pillar of CCT as a sponsor can enhance a person's career-related abilities and needs by plugging them into the right networks and job openings. This can be heard in P9's detailed occurrences of hiring practices she either witnessed first-hand, or had heard about through fellow coaches. All in all, it appeared P9 felt very strongly about the significant role sponsors play when she detailed the ways in which head coaches will often sponsor their friends and may hire individuals based on personal recommendations, "Most of the time it's not even what they know about the coach. I knew a head coach...who literally hired them just because their friend said, "Hey, I got this person, you should hire him."

Many of the participants mentioned specific sponsors within their coaching networks who greatly influenced their career path. These sponsors took a special interest in the participant, sought them out, and provided information on open assistant coaching positions or assisted them greatly with their job search by providing unsolicited recommendations for positions. These recommendations sometimes occurred when the participant had not even applied for the position as previously described by P6. Previous research has indicated special interest relationships are often critical components of success for girls and women with a passion for or hoping to become more involved in athletics (Darvin, Cintron, & Hancock, 2017). For example, P10 described a past memory of how the relationship with a former coach had significantly impacted her entry into the coaching profession:

My community college coach actually reached out to me...my community college coach knew I had come back home in the area, and he just kind of reached out to me and said, 'hey, I have this friend, have you thought about this?' He thought it would be a good opportunity.

Within the current sample, sponsors went so far as to help the participants understand coaching was a viable career option for them. Using CCT to deconstruct, the sponsor created a value to the vocational choice of coaching. This mechanism was relatively evident for P6, as she explained she had not considered the coaching profession as an option, yet her coach took an interest in her and felt she would be a good fit and motivated her to pursue this career path:

My own coach didn't know...if I wanted to go into college coaching or not. But then once the idea presented itself and she said "hey, there is this opening, I'm pretty sure you can have it if you want it," I really thought about it and I thought, okay, well, you know, I love basketball, I loved college, why not give it a go and try something new and stay in it?

Additionally, P12 recalled a special relationship with a sponsor, her head coach, and one administrator in particular who took a great interest in her and her career success stating, "he and I actually had a really good relationship; he wrote my first two recommendation letters to my first two jobs before he passed away. He personally called the athletic directors." P12's experience exemplified sponsors who are being purposeful in creating the next generation of coaches by opening a barrier to entry.

Our study is the first to note the necessity of the role of a sponsor to enter the coaching profession, and arguably this type of sponsorship is what women have been lacking within the field of sport. Given that these women voluntarily left the occupation without advancing to the

role of head coach, it would also indicate that women require consistent sponsorship throughout their sport careers, not just at the entry point. Recognizing that sponsorship has been found to directly influence the advancement of women in a given organization, a discrepancy of sponsorship opportunities for women candidates has been previously realized in fields outside of the sport industry (Foust-Cummings, Dinolfo, & Kohler, 2011; Ibarra, Carter, & Silva, 2010; Doty, & Helitzer, 2013). While men and women are both likely to note receiving valuable career advice from mentors, men are more likely to describe acts that are deemed sponsorship (Foust-Cummings et al, 2011; Ibarra et al, 2010). According to Ibarra and colleagues (2010), sponsors often go well beyond simply giving feedback and advice as they advocate for their protégés to assist them in gaining visibility in the company and fight to get their protégés to the next level. These sponsors are enhancing the participant's vocational personality by exposing them to careers (i.e., interests) they never knew were options to pursue (Wentling, 2003). Additionally, sponsors also work to enhance a protégé's self-efficacy and break down gender stereotypes associated with certain positions (Ibarra et al, 2010). The importance of a sponsor for women entering the coaching profession may subsequently relate to the vocational personality pillar of CCT (Burke, 2007; Savickas, 2005; Wentling, 2003). This finding suggests the sponsorship relationship may be altering cultural norms and gender roles within sport by creating a purposeful pipeline for women to enter the coaching profession, which has not been present in the past. This finding may also expand our knowledge of the career adaptability pillar of CCT as contextual factors, such as discriminatory hiring practices, organizational policies that hinder work-life balance, gender role stereotyping, and networking and mentorship opportunities may impact an individual's career adaptability (Burke, 2007; Wentling, 2003). Our results illustrate sponsorship relationships may be dissuading discriminatory hiring practices and gender role stereotyping while positively impacting women through these sponsorship opportunities.

Implications

By gaining insight from the perspective of women assistant coaches who have voluntarily engaged in occupational turnover, our results extend the literature in two main areas of contribution. First, these women's pursuit for educational advancement opened the doors to other vocational opportunities such as coaching. Second, a sponsor is advantageous to entering the field of coaching.

Through the utilization of CCT, there are theoretical implications related to the participant's initial aspirations towards entering the profession, including their educational advancement pursuits and engagement with sponsors. First and foremost, individuals cannot pursue careers they are unaware of or have limited knowledge of. If we are not educating women student-athletes on their ability to pursue a full-time career in coaching, they will not have ambitions for that career choice (Savickas, 2005). Without ambitions, these women student-athletes will not develop the necessary skills to be successful in the coaching profession. Further, if professors and practitioners are not educating women student-athletes on the intricacies of a career in coaching, they will similarly lack an ambition to pursue head coaching roles and will likely exit the profession prematurely. The participants indicated they did not consider the role of coach as a viable and full-time profession. This clearly indicates a disconnect between ambitions to play a sport and knowledge of leadership and career paths within that same industry segment. Additionally, while life themes (e.g., love of sport, passion for education) may have influenced these participants interests in remaining involved within the sport industry, without developing

the career adaptability and vocational personality for coaching they will not be able to be successful.

One specific finding within this investigation pointed to the importance of sponsorship to enter the coaching space for female coaches. While mentoring relationships are important to the professional development of individuals, sponsorship allows those supporters to play an integral role in the career attainment of their protégée by enhancing their career adaptability and vocational personality. Although sponsorship cannot alter the tangible qualifications of the protégée, such as their educational background, it can assist them in securing new projects, positions, or promotions thus influencing their career aspirations and expectations.

Additionally, our research advances what is known about those who engage in occupational turnover within the sport industry from the perspective of female coaches. While occupational turnover is reportedly higher for women in sport organizations, sport industry research has yet to analyze a sample who has actually engaged with this process rather than merely indicating an intention to do so. It is evident from the findings regardless of previous playing experiences, the limited aspirations these women initially had to enter the profession likely contributed to their occupational turnover engagement. By gaining insight from the perspective of those who have voluntarily engaged in occupational turnover, we can better understand the dynamics that may influence this outcome. While this particular investigation did not focus solely on the process of occupational turnover, providing these participants with a safe and anonymous space to discuss their experiences within the occupation that they exited is critically important. This study provided an underrepresented group a safe environment within which to share their stories.

Practical Implications

The current investigation delivered a wide range of experiences and therefore provided a very informative review of the initial career ambitions of former women assistant coaches. This review is suitable for a variety of sport industry stakeholders including administrators, coaches, and sport management faculty across industry segments. Sport industry leaders and stakeholders may be able to utilize these themes as they consider the structure and framework of entry into a coaching role for women participants. Outside of the sport industry, organizations have noted the importance of sponsorship to advance women candidates. Deutsche Bank, Unilever, Sodexo, and IBM Europe have each established sponsorship programming in order to facilitate the promotion of high-potential women (Ibarra et al, 2010). Specifically, Deutsche Bank created a sponsorship program aimed at assigning more women to critical posts, pairing entry level employees with executive committee members to increase their exposure to committees, and worked to ensure the women had influential advocates for promotion (Ibarra et al, 2010). As a result of these sponsorship initiatives, one-third of the women participants were in higher level roles than they had held during a previous year, another third were deemed ready for higher level positions by senior management and HR, and the final third were deemed ready to take on broader responsibilities (Ibarra et al, 2010). The women within the current study each voluntarily exited the profession of coaching prior to reaching a leadership position. Based on the sponsorship theme, women in sport may require consistent sponsorship throughout their careers in order to enter, advance, and remain within the profession.

Sport organizations that seek to promote women, such as Women Leaders in College Sports (WLCS), the Women's Sport Foundation, and WeCOACH may need to fine-tune their

advancement strategies towards distinct sponsorship programming based on the themes derived from these former assistant coaches and the instances of successful sponsorship programming found outside of sport. The importance of such an initiative is supported by previous research which indicates women may maintain higher levels of the successful leadership competencies as reported on by their subordinates (e.g., empathy, ethical values, team building; Sherwin, 2014). However, before these qualities can help shift the leadership culture within sport, women need to be given access to the entry-level roles that are suitable for leadership training. In order to accomplish this task, the results suggest women student and student-athletes need to be provided with additional insight into the coaching profession. Without proper knowledge of the role and the expectations of the occupation, women may continue to overlook the possibility of becoming a sport coach and will likely not pursue head coaching roles. Perhaps educational programs and athletic departments need to approach the process of sponsorship more holistically, as women student-athletes should be approached at younger ages to develop an interest in coaching.

Further, while the theme of sponsorship revealed itself as significant, it would also appear the manner by which this is accomplished for women needs to emerge as well. According to Wells and Hancock (2017), if fewer women exit the profession, there will be increased opportunities for role models, mentors, and sponsors for women candidates. The findings of this study extend this notion as they suggest women may require additional role models and advocates who are more in touch with the challenges associated with entry into the coaching profession. Men have been engaging in sponsorship for years, which is part of the reason why they are getting jobs over women candidates (Ibarra et al, 2010). The industry, and society in general, needs to evolve the narrative of mere mentoring and reframe it to include tactics aligned with the sponsoring of women. Based on the experiences of the participants, it would appear these women received distinct forms of sponsorship that greatly assisted with their initial career aspirations. Athletic departments will likely benefit from more robust recruiting, hiring, and search committee practices to ensure women candidates apply for their open positions if these forms of sponsorship do not develop for women in sport. For example, it may be beneficial for NCAA athletic departments to consider programming and protocol similar to the NFL's "Rooney Rule." Deliberate attempts on the part of athletic departments to attract women candidates for assistant coach roles would likely increase the proportion of women found in those positions.

These findings also indicate a greater synergy should be developed between education and coach training. Organizations that work with women coaches (e.g., WeCOACH, Women's Basketball Coaches Association (WBCA)) along with academic programs (e.g., sport management departments), should consider a more substantial investment in developing coaching education courses. Coaching education and training, along with continuous coach development is essential to improving upon the quality of sport coaching (Mallet, Trudel, Lyle, & Rynne, 2009). While coach education programming and certification requirements are relatively substantial at the international level, domestically coaching education programs are lacking (Cushion et al., 2003; Lemyre et al., 2007).

Many of the participants within the current investigation indicated they had a passion for education and the structure of education leading them to believe coaching would adhere to similar processes and principles. These findings suggest that the skills obtained within education courses and teacher training may be highly beneficial to coaches, and current curriculum stakeholders should recognize the connection between teaching skill sets and coaching effectiveness. This would also undoubtedly assist with earlier recruitment of women coach candidates. To that end, institutions of higher education should investigate the opportunity to

develop sport coaching majors for their students similar to those currently in existence. For example, the State University of New York at Cortland hosts a coaching major that contains a unique sequence of subjects focusing on the theory and practice of coaching and provides students with an experiential-learning component through a coaching internship. Additional coaching majors at the undergraduate and graduate levels should be developed in the future to expose women to the career path and provide resources and concrete training opportunities.

Limitations and Future Research

This investigation was not free from limitations and thus provides an opportunity for future research endeavors. First, the focus of the current study was on former assistant women coaches recalling their initial career ambitions. Recall bias occurs when there is an error in the recollection of information from the timeline to the actual event (Hassan, 2006), so future research should include journaling of the participants focused on their career experiences within the profession or rationale for exiting the profession. Recognizing the decision to leave an organization or occupation is complex and multifaceted (Morrell & Arnold, 2007), future research should evaluate coach's unfolding model of voluntary turnover (e.g., shocks, scripts, image violation, dissatisfaction, and alternative job opportunities; Lee & Mitchell, 1994). Additionally, former women assistant coaches were selected from four distinct intercollegiate sports and thus this is not representative of the entire intercollegiate space and therefore may not be generalizable. Future research should aim to examine initial career ambitions for additional sports, positioned at different levels within the sport industry, and governed differently. Additionally, longitudinal research on those coaches staying in the game, possibly collaborating with developmental coaches' academies such as WeCOACH, should occur. Finally, only former women assistant coaches were selected as participants, so future studies should aim to investigate the initial career ambitions of men assistant coaches as well.

Conclusion

Generating higher proportions of women sport leaders begins with generating higher proportions of women within entry-level roles. The findings of this study advance our knowledge of not only the career aspirations of women assistant coaches, but also the leaking pipeline. These women voluntarily engaged in occupational turnover and subsequently contributed to the leaky pipeline of potential leadership candidates. Their limited aspirations and requirement of a sponsor to enter the field of coaching is significant in that it becomes evident women often require very distinct and at times intense forms of support. Industry stakeholders across a wide spectrum will likely be able to utilize these findings in order to assist in their own hiring practices as well as the recruiting methods by which they reach out to potential prospective women candidates.

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