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Investigating into the barriers militating against women taking up coaching roles in Ghana

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Abstract

Less women in the coaching fraternity in the world has been a subject for thought throughout the 21st century. This trend is seen all over the globe including Ghana. Some countries in Europe and Asia have taken a giant step in supporting women to coach some of their national teams and athletes but this seems not to be so in Ghana where female coaches are scarce. This study therefore investigated the barriers militating against female taken up coaching roles in Ghana. Interviews were used in collecting data and the barriers that militate against women were highlighted. Recommendations based on the barriers were made in order to promote the involvement of females in the coaching job.

Keywords: homophobia, role model, sexism, women sports, title ix.

1. Introduction

Historically, it has been understood that the natural order of the universe consists of man as master of all and a rational thinker whilst women are seen as the custodian of moral. This order had been accepted by generations through the ages and is still embedded in the minds of both men and women in our Ghanaian society today. Career choices in sports are no exception when it comes to areas of specialization where women find themselves relegated to the background, aside from already feeling inferior themselves. This raises a lot of concern with the general public as to why less or no female coaches are seen rising up in Ghana.

Studies have shown that women are underrepresented in all fields of sports as managers, administrators, officials in sports organisations, coaches and athletes (Njororai, Achola and Mwisukha, 2003) ^[1]; Mwisukha, 2005) ^[2]. This may be the case because sports was traditionally seen as a male preserve and it was considered inappropriate for women to get involved (Beashel & Tailor, 1996) ^[3]. Njororai *et al*, (2003) ^[1] noted that women underrepresentation in sports is not only reflected in their low participation as players, but also in sports leadership and as spectators.

Research has also shown that there are fewer number of female coaches worldwide and this has not been encouraging considering the number of sports that women engage in nationally and internationally. Acosta and Carpenter (1992) ^[4] in their Women in Intercollegiate Sport study in the USA reported that since the inception of Title IX, the percentage of female coaches currently at the college level has dropped precipitously. Forty –three years ago, 90 percent of all women teams were coached by women. Today, that number is 40 percent, according to NCAA research. Also Acosta and Carpenter, (2012) ^[6] opined that four out of five of all teams (Male and Female) are coached by males and less than half of female teams are coached by females that is 57.1% of female teams are coached by males whilst 97 to 98% of men teams are coached by males.

Mazrui (1986) ^[8] pointed out that African women both in pre-colonial and post-colonial periods have had fewer opportunities to participate as both athletes and coaches because the warrior culture of pre-colonial society linked sports to physical combat and militarization of sports. In addition, it is believed that the kind of sports ushered into Africa by our colonial masters were male specific. However, some efforts have been made in the post-colonial period to correct these biases in sports but there is one aspect that still remains under represented by women which is coaching. It is in light of this that it became imperative for the researcher to objectively look at and identify the main reasons that prevent women from taking up coaching roles in Ghana.

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It is very pathetic to survey Ghana looking for female coaches and find just a handful. A survey conducted in University of Education Winneba (UEW) Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Sports (HPERS) Department indicated that only two women are currently pursuing a coaching programme in the University, one in level 200 and the other one in level 300 respectively as at August 2015.

Another survey was conducted during the Annual Inter-Regional Basic School Sports Festival held at Ho within the period of 5th-12th August 2014, to find out the number of women who accompanied their regional teams as coaches rather than chaperons. The outcome of the survey is presented in the table 1 below.

Table 1: Number of female who represented their region as coaches rather than chaperons

DISCIPLINE	GA/R	UW/R	UE/R	N/R	ASH	B/A	E/R	C/R	W/R	V/R	TOTAL
Volleyball	1	1	1	-	-	-	1	1	-	1	6
Netball	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	1	2	5
Handball	1	-	1	-	-	1	-	1	1	1	6
Table Tennis	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	4
Soccer	1	1	-	2	-	1	-	-	-	-	5
ATHLETICS											
Sprints	-	-	-	1	-	1	1	-	-	-	3
Middle. Dist.	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Long Dist.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
Jumps	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
Throws	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Total	5	3	2	3	1	4	3	3	3	4	31

From table 1, 31 female coaches were captured in the survey. Games recorded the highest number of female coaches 26 out of 31 as compared to athletics which recorded only 5 coaches. Six were found to be coaching volleyball from six regions namely Northern Region (NR), Western Region (WR), Ashanti (ASH) and Brong Ahafo (BA) whilst netball had 5 coaches coming from Ashanti, Eastern Region (ER), WR, and Volta Region (VR) recording the highest number of coaches in netball. Handball also recorded the highest number of coaches (6) one from each of the following regions Greater Accra Region (GAR), Upper East Region (UER), BA, Central Region (CR), WR and VR respectively. The table also indicated that table tennis had 4 female coaches, 2 representing GAR and one each from CR and WR. Soccer had 5 female coaches from the ten regions, one from GAR, Upper West Region (UWR) BA and two from NR respectively. With regards to athletics, the table also showed that sprints recorded the highest number of female coaches with no representatives for long distance and jumps. For sprints, NR, BA and ER had one female coach each whilst middle distance had only one coach from BA. Throws also had only one coach from UWR. This survey results leave a lot of questions to be asked. Through unstructured interview with the female coaches surveyed above and the UEW female coaching students, a lot of factors ranging from psychological to cultural were identified as the major barriers to women taking up careers in sports coaching.

2. Barriers identified from participants through the survey

2.1 Psycho-Social and Cultural Barriers

Psycho-social and cultural factors exert pressure on most women and their immediate families, community, religion, media and peer groups. Also, sources of socialization to reinforce expected behaviour stands very tall in our Ghanaian society. In this light, sports is viewed by the society as an exemplary activity which focuses attention on gender influence by allowing for the comparison of innate against learned factors. Thus our society and the way they perceive sports coaching discourages women from taking up coaching as a career.

Also, society believes that a woman is supposed to give birth and cater for the family and so a woman with a new born baby will find it difficult to coach any given team making the

coaching job unattractive to married women as even some husbands instead of encouraging them may rather not allow their wives to go into coaching. In our Ghanaian context, excellence in any aspect of sports is an attribute cherished for men whilst it is seen as a distraction for women rather than it being an element for healthy living or a career.

2.2 Low Self-Confidence

Many women right from infancy underestimate and devalue their capabilities, potential and talents that they are endowed with in performing activities that are tagged as masculine, among which coaching is no exception. Sports in Ghana is mainly male dominated and it is often argued that women who want to take up coaching roles must possess and exhibit certain male characteristics such as assertiveness, aggression and authority. Furthermore, players who are coached by a woman especially female athletes undermine female coaches since many women grow with these qualities of devaluing themselves, their capabilities and potentials.

2.3 Sexism and Homophobia

Homophobia in women's sports drives parents, athletes and administrators to prefer male coaches more to females in order to dispel the stigma of lesbianism from women sports in their clubs and institutions. Interacting with some of the female coaches made it known that their parents never allowed them to go to camp with the reason being that their female coaches and other female athletes who are lesbians will lure them into the act. Most women therefore cite this homophobic climate in sports as one of the major constraints for not entering the coaching profession. Buzuvis, director of the Center for Gender & Sexuality Studies at Western New England University School of Law in Massachusetts, and many others said, in many instances that, it's a prominent reason women don't get coaching jobs.

2.4 Low Wages and Salaries

Ghanaian women are discouraged from taking up careers in sports coaching because of low salaries and wages as compared to their male counterparts. An interview with one of the assistant female coaches for one of the female national teams revealed that the salary and remuneration she takes as an assistant coach is not near what other male assistant coaches of

the national teams receive as salary although they are all having the same job title and doing the same job. Research has shown that women easily give up in the coaching job earlier than men against the backdrop that some occupations render quick acquisition of money than coaching will do. Seventy five percent of female collegiate athletes in an NCAA survey on their job preference as presented in Title IX, said they are interested in a career that offers a higher average salary than coaching. Women therefore don't want to take up jobs in which they could be fired anytime and yet will not be paid as they are worth in terms of the licence they have to operate as a coach.

The most recent example came in December, 2014 when Minnesota-Duluth said it wouldn't renew the contract of women's hockey coach Shannon Miller because of "financial considerations." "When is the last time you heard of a men's collegiate coach being fired after winning five NCAA championships, developing 28 current and former Olympians and running up a .713 winning percentage?" asked by Bob Collins in the blog he writes for Minnesota Public Radio. Miller was the highest-paid Division I women's hockey coach, making a base salary of \$207,000. But she has repeatedly told the media she would have taken a pay cut to keep her job. "This move was incredibly disrespectful to all women, not just to coaches and to female athletes," Miller told the Boston Globe. "It is a slap in the face to our gender. I will not tolerate it and I will continue to speak out and fight it."

2.5 Politics and Power use in the Sports Fraternity

Politics of favouritism in our Ghanaian society never allows a woman to be appointed as the head coach of any national team even though she may have all the qualifications. This constitutes a significant constraint to women taking up roles as coaches. Men are seen to wield a great deal of power over the development and management of women sports and therefore the input by women in formulation of policies for the development of female sports is insignificant.

2.6 Lack of Role Models

There are less female coaches in Ghana who serve as role models or mentors to the young females in the coaching arena. For instance, there has not been a senior Ghanaian female coach to any of the national teams let alone a female being appointed as a head coach in any of our abled-bodied national teams since the inception of sports in the country. This makes it difficult for young up and coming athletes to find any woman as their role model. This means that they do not get to be motivated into entering into coaching and therefore opt for other careers.

3. Recommendations

1. Women should be encouraged and be motivated by their male counterparts to take up coaching roles in sports.
2. Special attention and strong orientation in the area of professional coaching training should be given to women who show interest in sports coaching.
3. Adequate information should be provided to females who show interest in coaching prior to starting any coaching programme. This information should include programme qualification, scope of the programme, facilitators for the programme and the expectation at the end of the programme.
4. Equal opportunity and treatment should be provided for females in terms of salary and remuneration as well as job intake.

5. Coaching should be actively promoted as a career option to all female athletes and female sports participants.
6. Governing bodies of sport and national agencies should work collectively to raise the profile of female coaches and their successes. Female coaches also need to recognise that they can inspire other females to follow in their footsteps.
7. There should be creation of networks that allow women to learn and support each other as a way of encouraging more women to progress in sports coaching. (Sports Coach UK and the Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation, 2012) ^[10].

4. Conclusions

Ghanaian Culture and other factors has put a dark crowd on women taking up roles in sports coaching. It therefore behoves on women to empower and surcharge themselves that they have a very important and critical role to play in the development and management of sports in Ghana and the entire world as a whole. As inspired by Bowmaker of England who vowed not to let the barriers get to her and strictly came out to say that "I want to inspire other women that is why I stayed in the sports". It is time women arise and build credibility in the sports fraternity so that they can manned the affairs of female sports in Ghana.

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