

## **Always the Bridesmaid and Never the Bride: Women's and Minorities Coaching Opportunities in Intercollegiate Sports**

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*Abstract:* It has been well documented that Title IX opened doors of opportunity for women to participate in sports at all levels. Similarly, players including Jackie Robinson and Sam “Bam” Cunningham paved the way for Black athletes to compete at all levels of sports. It is equally well documented that the world of college sports leadership is almost entirely populated by white men. This paper examines the status of two underrepresented groups in college coaching and administration: women and Black men. Using Virginia as a case study, our analysis reveals that despite increased participation for both women and Blacks in intercollegiate sports, and the overall dominance of Black athletes in some sports, including basketball and track and field, there are few professional opportunities for women or Blacks. When they do have opportunities, Black men and women are stalled at the ranks of assistant coach, never able to lead a team on their own, and never commanding the kinds of salaries associated with head coaches. Finally, the data in our case study demonstrate that football impacts opportunities for white women and Black men inversely; specifically, football increases some opportunities for Black men and suppresses some opportunities for white women. This study has ramifications for athletic directors, college presidents, and others with the power to diversify intercollegiate athletics.

*Keywords:* American higher education, inequality, gender, race, sport, intercollegiate athletics

The term SportsWorld, which was first coined by Earl Smith in his 2007 book, *Race, Sport and the American Dream*, refers to the fact that the world of sports is far more than the games we play. SportsWorld can be characterized as a system that is deeply embedded in both structures and American ideology, and this is especially true for the Black community. Parents encourage their children to take up sports at an early age as a way to pass the time and build strong bodies, but also as a part of a plan for accessing an opportunity structure through the garner of college scholarships and even full-time employment for those lucky and talented enough. Scan any social media feed of middle class parents and accounts of sports successes, Little League trophies, or even announcements of college scholarships will undoubtedly appear. In some communities, sports are thought to be the only attainable avenue for success. Sports is big business precisely because it has

the capacity to deliver on the American Dream, or in sociological terms, access to an opportunity structure. SportsWorld is perhaps the greatest site for manufacturing the Horatio Alger Myth, the belief that anybody, if given a chance, can work hard and pull themselves up by their bootstraps and enter into the middle class or even into the upper echelons of American society (Smith, 2014).

SportsWorld, as Smith (2014) documents, is also a set of structures imbedded into the social political economy. At the level of intercollegiate athletics, SportsWorld inhabits a space Smith (2014) refers to as the Athletic Industrial Complex (AIC). The AIC includes everything from the contracts associated with stadium building and renovations, to air travel hotel accommodations, to lucrative broadcast rights on major television networks and streaming sites like CBS, NBC, and ESPN.

### **Literature Review**

Among the most well documented phenomenon in SportsWorld is the limited impact of Title IX (Messner & Solomon, 2007). Despite all of the gains made by women and minorities, especially Black participants, the pathways to professional success are limited to the role of athlete. It is well documented that the ranks of coaching and administration, in both college and professional sports, remains the world of white men (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Harrison, Bukstein, & McArdle, forthcoming; Hattery, 2012; Hattery, Staurowsky, & Smith 2007; Lapchick, 2015).

As our previous research has well documented (Hattery, 2012; Hattery, Staurowsky, & Smith, 2007), it is commonly believed that one of the negative and perhaps unintended consequences of Title IX was the decimating of some men's sports. Title IX is frequently blamed for draining resources from the coffers of men's sports in order to support opportunities for women. And yet, as we document (Hattery, 2012; Hattery, Staurowsky, & Smith 2007), in fact, women's athletics remains extremely under-funded, as do the Olympic men's sports, while the bulk of funding in college athletics is concentrated in two men's sports: basketball and football. Despite data that reveal a different story, many in the general reading public as well as many athletes participating in intercollegiate athletics believe, wrongly, that football is the provider for all other sports on college campuses, especially those played by women. And yet, as Smith (2014) has documented, only a small number of very successful football programs with long legacies and big donor checkbooks make more money than they spend.

The driving question for the current research investigation is: Besides money, what is the impact of football, one of the "Blackest" sports on college campuses, on the coaching and athletic administrative opportunities for women and Black men?

### **Theoretical Framework**

We employ intersectional theory as the frame for examining the complex interconnections of race, gender, and position in intercollegiate athletics. This approach, as outlined and applied to the realm of sport by Collins and Bilge (2016), allows for a deeper and more nuanced analysis of most social phenomenon, including intercollegiate athletics. In short, an intersectional approach interrogates the role that power and relationality play in structuring opportunity. When it comes to

this study, an intersectional framework posits that we focus our attention on the opportunities that exist not just by gender or race, but by gender *and* race. An intersectional framework also opens the inquiry to focus on the structures of an organization. In this case we interrogate the structure of intercollegiate athletics in order to expose the nuances of particular structural arrangements. Such nuances are the presence or absence of coaching opportunities for minority members in sports like football. These nuances will be observed at all levels of sport, inclusive of the participation, coaching, and administration stages.

### **Virginia As A Case Study**

For this research, we take as our case study, the Virginia publics. This collection is defined as the 12 public universities in the Commonwealth of Virginia. We chose Virginia as our case for the following reasons: (a) Virginia has a fairly large number of public universities; (b) these public universities are diverse in terms of the athletic conferences in which they participate, from the very highly ranked Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) to mid-major conferences like the Atlantic 10; (c) within Virginia publics a wide range of sports are offered for both men and women; and (d) this case includes institutions that field Division I football as well as institutions that do not. Prior research on the role that college football plays on both participation opportunities for men and women as well as the overall financial picture of an athletic department (Smith, 2014) makes including institutions both with and without football a critical methodological choice.

While research is limited with regard to the Virginia publics, there is evidence that the status of the conference impacts the types of opportunities available to women. For example, research identifies more gender equality among athletic directors (Wong & Matt, 2014) and female head coaches on women's teams, specifically Haverford Group Institutions (LaVoi & Wasend, 2017), within Division III conferences compared to the Power Five Division I conference. Additionally, because the Virginia publics are all part of the same higher education administration, the State Council of Higher Education in Virginia (SCHEV), any variations in Commonwealth policy or practice are eliminated as sources of difference among the institutions analyzed. Finally, by including the aggregate data from the NCAA data sources, we were able to compare and contrast the data from the Virginia publics to assess their representativeness of colleges and universities nationwide.

### **Data and Methods**

We created a unique data set using information obtained from publicly available sources, such as university websites and U.S. News and World Report for Best Colleges and Universities. Using these various sources, we constructed a database for more than 6,000 divisional (non-club) men's and women's team sports athletes, coaches, and athletic administrators from the 12 public universities in Virginia. Utilizing team rosters, athlete's name, year at school, sport, gender, race, hometown, and school previously attended, data were collected and coded. Team rosters and "Staff Directory" pages were utilized to collect and code the name, title, race, and gender for coaches, athletic directors, and athletic administrators. Additionally, the NCAA Sport Sponsorship, Participation, and Demographics Database for Student Athletes and Institutional Data for all conferences within Division I schools for the 2016-2017 academic school year (NCAA, 2017) provided comparison and contextual data for the Virginia case.

**Independent Variables**

Race and gender were the independent variables utilized to examine our research question. With regard to Virginia public universities, gender was coded as male or female (we acknowledge there may be many gender queer or gender non-binary athletes, coaches and administrators, but unfortunately we are limited to binary variable attributes by the way the data were originally collected) and race was coded as white or non-white. Racial coding was determined by triangulation, including photographs contained in team rosters or websites, data on last name, hometown or country, and other race-relevant information, such as awards listed. Race information is missing for 33 athletes, 22 athletic administrators, eight other coaching and team personnel, and three assistant coaches. Though we recognize that this method for coding race has limitations, it is not an uncommon strategy when building this kind of data set (Loy & McElvogue, 1970; Smith & Leonard, 1997). When the triangulated method of coding race yielded conflicting or inconclusive results, race was coded as missing. Similarly, when coding for gender and race using the NCAA Division I data, gender was coded as male or female. In order to deal with issues of low variability, athletes, coaches, and athletic administrators who identified as American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, Black, Hispanic/Latino, or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander were recoded as white or non-white. For people who reported two or more races, and those who reported their race as “other” were recoded as “non-white.” “Nonresident alien” was excluded from the analysis for athletes, coaches, and athletic administrators due to the fact that race is not collected and therefore data is missing. The sample size for student athletes decreases from 172,874 to 162,558 after the removal of athletes designated as “nonresident alien” and the sample size for head coaches decreases from 6,408 to 6,308 after the removal of head coaches designated as “nonresident alien.” Similar reductions in sample size are reported for assistant coaches and athletic administrators.

Table 1

*Independent Variables*

Virginia	NCAA
Race: White/Non-white	Race American Indian/Alaskan Native Asian, Black Hispanic/Latino Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
Gender: Male and Female	Gender: Male and Female

*Note.* Because this paper is a brief research note, other detailed graphs and tables are not included but can be obtained from the lead authors.

**Dependent Variables**

The dependent variables examined here include the sport participated in or professional position held. Virginia public universities reported fielding 14 men’s sports teams and 16 women’s sports teams (note cross country was combined with indoor and outdoor track and field). Additionally, NCAA Division I data denoted 21 men’s sports teams and 23 women’s sports teams (again, cross country was combined with indoor and outdoor track and field, as well as the triathlon) offered at the more than 300 member institutions. For the purpose of this analysis, we limited our sample to the sports teams that are fielded by Virginia public universities and within the data reported by the NCAA Division I member institutions. Lastly, position was coded as athlete, head coach, assistant coach, athletic director, or athletic administrative staff.

**Findings**

Similar to previous research findings since the passage of Title IX, women, and minority women in particular, are less likely to be head coaches on women’s intercollegiate athletic teams across Virginia public universities and NCAA Division I conferences than are white men. Specifically, across all teams for Virginia public universities and NCAA Division I conferences for the 2016-2017 school year, not only are three-fourths of head coaches male and majority white (91.6 percent and 86.9 percent, respectively), but more than half of the head coaching positions on women’s teams across Virginia public universities and NCAA Division I conferences are occupied by white men.

Table 2

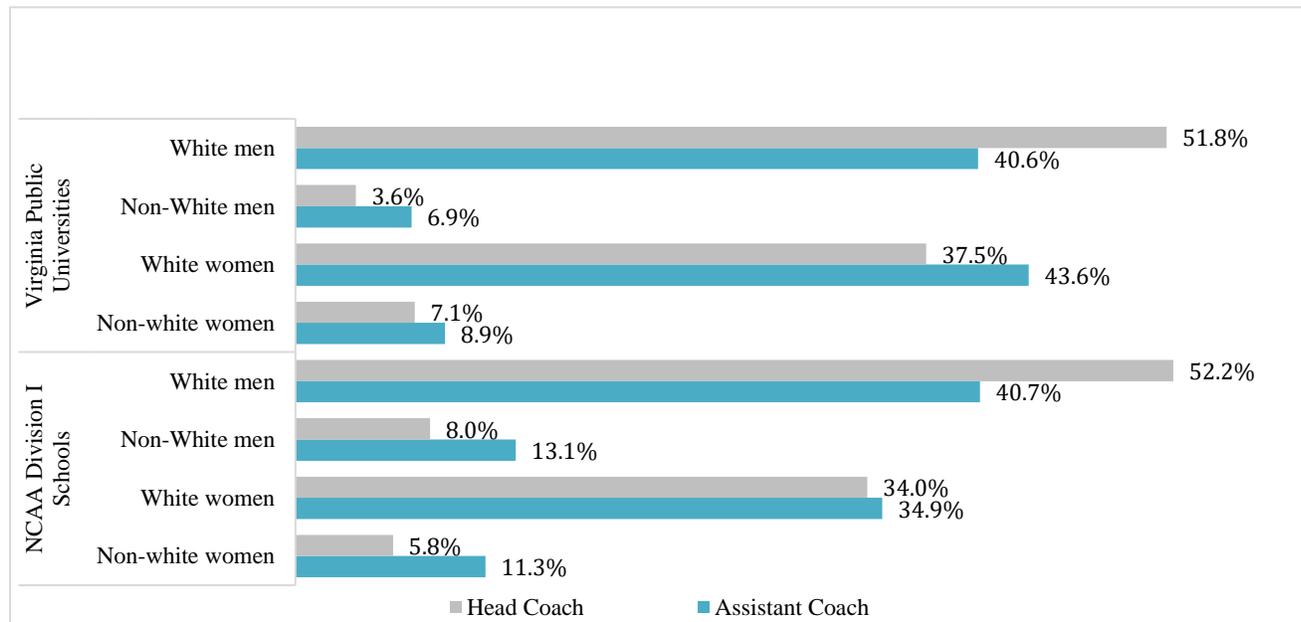
*Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Athletes, Head Coaches, Assistant Coaches, & Athletic Administrative Staff within Virginia Public Universities, 2016-2017*

	Gender			Race			Race and Gender				
	Male (%)	Female (%)	p value	White (%)	Non-white (%)	p value	White Male (%)	Non-White Male (%)	White Female (%)	Non-White Female (%)	p value
<b>Athlete</b>	54.8	45.2		74.8	25.2		37.8	17.0	37.1	8.1	
<i>Football program</i>	58.6	41.4	<b>0.000</b>	75.0	25.0	0.671	40.0	18.5	35.1	6.5	<b>0.000</b>
<i>No football program</i>	46.5	53.5		74.4	25.6		32.8	13.8	41.6	11.8	
<b>Head Coach</b>	75.2	24.8		91.6	8.4		70.6	4.7	21.0	3.7	
<i>Men's Teams</i>	97.1	2.9	<b>0.000</b>	94.1	5.9	0.203	91.2	5.9	2.9	0.0	<b>0.000</b>
<i>Women's Teams</i>	55.4	44.6		89.3	10.7		51.8	3.6	37.5	7.1	
<i>Football program</i>	79.3	20.7	<b>0.075</b>	96.3	3.7	<b>0.001</b>	77.0	2.2	19.3	1.5	<b>0.006</b>
<i>No football program</i>	68.4	31.6		83.5	16.5		59.5	8.9	24.1	7.6	

<b>Assistant Coach</b>	73.5	26.5		79.8	20.2		57.8	15.6	22.0	4.6	
<i>Men's Teams</i>	96.1	3.9	<b>0.000</b>	76.0	24.0	<b>0.035</b>	72.9	23.1	3.1	0.9	<b>0.000</b>
<i>Women's Teams</i>	48.0	52.0		84.2	15.8		40.6	6.9	43.6	8.9	
<i>Football program</i>	77.0	23.0	<b>0.012</b>	79.2	20.8	0.593	59.3	17.5	19.9	3.3	<b>0.029</b>
<i>No football program</i>	65.4	34.6		81.4	18.6		54.3	10.9	27.1	7.8	
<b>Athletic Director</b>	100.0	0.0		83.3	16.7		83.3	16.7	0.0	0.0	
<i>Football program</i>	100.0	0.0	--	85.7	14.3	0.793	85.7	14.3	0.0	0.0	0.793
<i>No football program</i>	100.0	0.0		80.0	20.0		80.0	20.0	0.0	0.0	
<b>All Other Athletic Administrators</b>	60.8	39.2		85.4	14.6		51.7	10.0	33.7	4.6	
<i>Football program</i>	60.7	39.3	0.955	87.8	12.2	0.135	52.3	8.1	35.5	4.1	0.479
<i>No football program</i>	61.0	39.0		80.9	19.1		50.6	13.5	30.3	5.6	

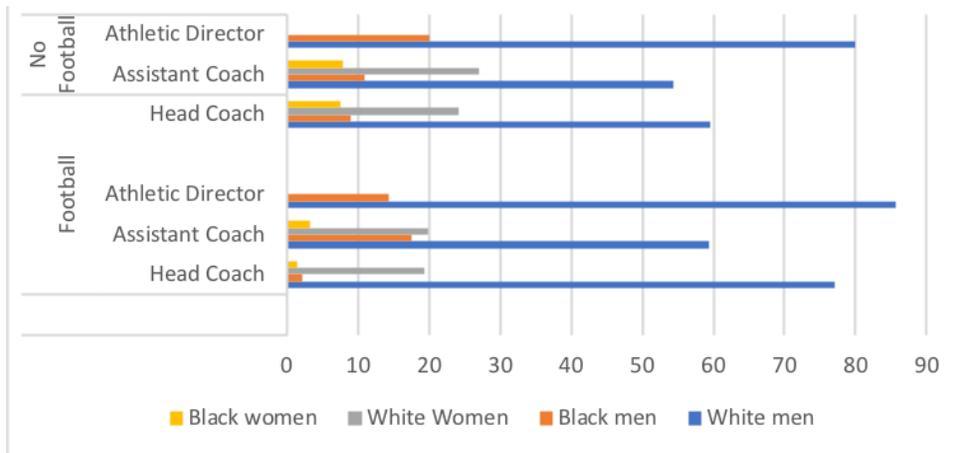
When we apply an intersectional lens and examine coaching positions by race and gender, we see that overall, *race is a greater predictor of coaching women's intercollegiate teams than is gender*. This confirms the findings of previous research (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Hattery, 2012; Hattery, Staurowsky, & Smith 2007).

**Figure 1.** Head and Assistant Coaches of Women's Sports by Race and Gender Across Virginia Public Universities and NCAA Division I Schools, 2016-2017



The advantage of using the Virginia publics as a case study is that we were able to examine institutions in the same state and compare those institutions that host football teams with those that do not. When we looked specifically at the impact of football on opportunities for women and minorities at all professional levels, including as head coaches, assistant coaches, and athletic administrators, the main story that emerged is also one best understood through an intersectional framework.

**Figure 2.** The Impact of Football on Professional Opportunities in Sports by Race and Gender, Virginia Public Universities 2016-2017

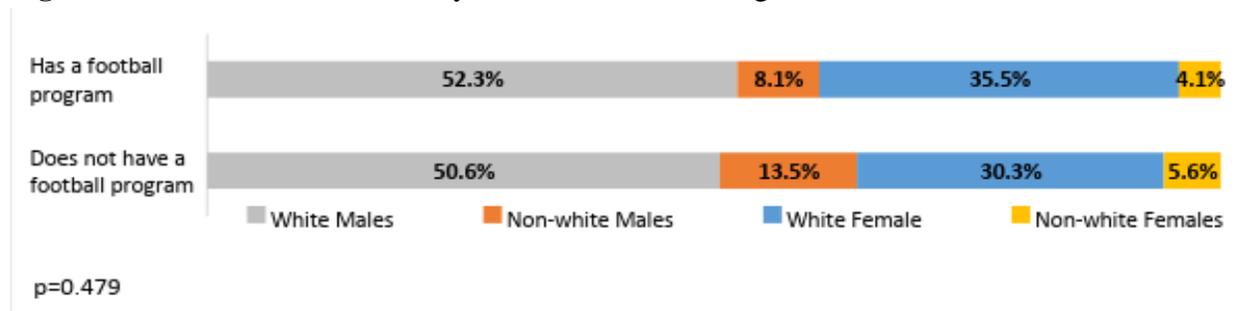


Though football creates additional opportunities for Black men at the rank of assistant coach, it does not improve overall opportunities for women or minorities in any other position. We can speculate that these additional opportunities for Black men are associated with the expansive size of the football coaching staff. What the analysis reveals is that in general, women and minorities are more represented at all of the professional ranks in athletic departments at universities that do not field a football team; football may improve diversity on the field of play, but its absence produces diversity at the professional ranks.

Overall, women and minorities are underrepresented in athletic director (AD) and athletic administrative positions across Virginia public universities. For example, ADs at all 12 public universities in Virginia are male and 83.3 percent are white. The exception to the “white men’s club” at the Virginia publics is Carla Williams, appointed AD at the University of Virginia in 2017.

Additionally, a majority (60.8 percent) of athletic administrators, e.g., assistant athletic directors, directors of operations, strength and conditioning trainers, across Virginia public universities are male and 85.4 percent are white. Only ten percent of athletic administrators are non-white males and 4.6 percent are non-white females.

When specifically examining schools with and without a football program across Virginia public universities, we see very little positive movement in the proportion of women holding athletic administrative positions at schools without a football program. Specifically, there is no statistically significant difference in the likelihood that women will hold athletic administrative positions in universities that field football and those that do not. In short, in the entire case of Virginia publics, women hold only slightly more than one-third (39.2 percent) of all athletic administrative positions.

**Figure 3.** Athletic Administrator by Race and Gender, Virginia Public Universities 2016-2017

It is important to note that for schools without a football program, we see an increase in the proportion of minority men and women who hold athletic administrative positions across Virginia public universities. For example, for schools with a football program, 12.2 percent of athletic administrators are non-white, yet for schools without a football program, the proportion of non-white athletic administrators increases to 19.1 percent, with non-white males comprising 13.5 percent of athletic administrators and non-white females comprising 5.6 percent of athletic administrators. Thus, the presence or absence of a football program impacts the proportion of minority men and women who serve in athletic administrative positions across Virginia public universities, even if it does not impact the overall arrangement of opportunities for women.

### Conclusion

In the landscape of college football and men's basketball, in which more than half of participants are Black (nearly three-quarters of men's basketball players are Black), opportunities to lead teams and make a living as coaches or athletic administrators have not accrued equivalently to Black men (Smith, 2014). Nor has women's participation in intercollegiate sport increased opportunities for women to coach or serve as athletic administrators. In fact, as is well-documented and as we have demonstrated elsewhere (Hattery, 2012; Hattery, Staurowsky, & Smith, 2007), in the nearly 50 years since Title IX, opportunities for women to participate as athletes have increased exponentially while opportunities for women to coach and lead as athletic administrators have declined by 50%.

This study expands on previous research (Hattery, 2012; Hattery, Staurowsky, & Smith, 2007; LaVoi & Wasend, 2017) by documenting the impact of the presence of football on opportunities for minorities, both men and women, in athletic administration. Though the *absence* of a football team did not impact women's opportunities overall, it did increase the opportunities for minorities. Or, put another way, though the presence of a football team increases opportunities for Blacks to participate in intercollegiate sport and even earn a scholarship, the presence of a football team does not increase opportunities for Black men as coaches, nor does it impact women's opportunities at all.

Guided by an intersectional framework that required us to look beyond gender and examine race as well, we examined the impact that football programs have had on the coaching and leadership opportunities at colleges and universities, specifically our case study, the Virginia publics. And though many scholars, including us (Smith, 2014) have explicated the role that football programs play in overall athletic budgets, no other scholars have demonstrated the role

that the presence of a football team plays in contributing to not just gender inequality, but also racial inequality among intercollegiate athletic program opportunity structures for minorities.

As Patricia Hill Collins (Collins & Bilge, 2016) notes, an intersectional approach requires social action. So, what is to be done? Clearly dismantling football programs in order to create meaningful opportunities for minorities and women is not a strategic approach. That being said, our study opens the door for conversations about the role that football plays in furthering inequalities of race and gender. With that in mind, just as in other areas of the university from academic units to student affairs, athletic directors could be required by the NCAA, Human Resources, and alumni to ensure that the same best practices are in place to build diverse hiring pools and advance career opportunities for minority men and women who desire to make a living in coaching and athletic administration at the college and university levels.

### **Limitations**

As with any study, this one has its limitations. First, the analysis is based on a case study. Though there are many ways in which the Commonwealth of Virginia is similar to other states we might have selected as a case, as with any case study, the generalizability is not certain. Second, we rely on data from a small time period. However, given the small and slow gains in access for women and minorities, we do not believe that by analyzing a bigger time frame, our results would have differed. Finally, race is a political construct (Bonilla-Silva, 2013), and as such, using raters to code racial identity leaves open a threat to the reliability of the study. That being said, as noted, when we were unsure or felt we could not make a clear racial identification, subjects were excluded from the analysis.

Finally, we note that analyzing our data through the lens of intersectionality significantly strengthened our research and we encourage other research scholars to become fluent in this approach and apply it to other questions that face the discipline of sport sociology.

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