

Gender Dynamics in Coach-Athlete Relationships and Their Impact on Sports Performance

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Abstract

Motivation, psychological health, and athletic performance are all significantly influenced by the coach-athlete interaction. Athlete development and training efficacy can be strongly impacted by gender dynamics in this connection, which are influenced by power dynamics, communication styles, and cultural norms. The complex effects of gendered coach-athlete relationships on performance are still not well understood, despite growing awareness of gender concerns in sport. The purpose of this study is to investigate how gender dynamics between coaches and players impact communication effectiveness, performance outcomes, and the general quality of the coach-athlete relationship. In particular, it looks into mixed-gender and same-gender pairs in a variety of sports. A mixed-methods strategy was used. Using standardized questionnaires measuring relationship quality (Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire), perceived gender bias, and self-reported performance indicators, quantitative data were gathered from 320 competitive athletes (160 males and 160 females) and 30 coaches. Semi-structured interviews with 15 athlete-coach pairs—purposely picked to represent a range of gender combinations—were used to gather qualitative observations. Regression analysis for quantitative variables and thematic coding for qualitative answers were used to analyze the data. The findings showed that same-gender coach-athlete pairings experienced greater communication alignment and relationship trust, both of which were positively connected with perceived gains in performance. Reduced motivation and worse performance self-ratings were linked to mixed-gender couples, especially female athletes with male coaches, who reported more cases of emotional discomfort,

perceived gender prejudice, and communication breakdown. However, in mixed-gender partnerships, good emotional intelligence and respect for one another frequently lessen unfavorable impacts. The results indicate that relational quality and performance may be impacted by gender alignment; however, this effect is mitigated by corporate culture and individual interpersonal abilities. Regardless of gender pairing, coaches who received training in inclusive communication and gender awareness were more effective in creating enduring connections. The study emphasizes how gendered communication patterns and unconscious prejudice must be addressed in coach education programs. Performance results are significantly shaped by gender dynamics in coach-athlete relationships. The creation of inclusive and sympathetic coaching techniques is crucial to maximize performance in all gender pairs, even if same-gender pairings frequently promote more seamless interactions. This study promotes training and policy changes that take gender dynamics into account to create fair and productive sports settings.

Keywords: Gender Dynamics, Athletic Performance, Coaching Effectiveness

Introduction

The coach-athlete connection is a fundamental aspect of sports that affects athletes' psychological and emotional health and athletic success. When viewed through the prism of gender, where cultural norms, expectations, and stereotypes come together to influence interactions, perceptions, and results, this dynamic interplay becomes even more complex. Given its substantial effects on athlete dedication, happiness, and performance, it is critical to comprehend the subtleties of gender dynamics in coach-athlete interactions.

Importance of Athlete-Coach Relationships

The connection between a coach and an athlete is complex and includes aspects of leadership, motivation, communication, and trust. In addition to, technical training, effective coaching entails mentoring, emotional support, and the capacity to motivate players to realize their greatest potential. Athletes' motivation, contentment, and performance outcomes may be greatly impacted by the quality of this interaction, as research has repeatedly shown (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007).

The dynamics of interactions between coaches and athletes are significantly shaped by gender. Cultural norms and societal structures frequently establish gender-based expectations for conduct and interaction, which affect athletes' perceptions and reactions as well as coaches' leadership approaches. Disparities in leadership efficacy, communication methods, and

the general caliber of the coach-athlete relationship might result from these gendered expectations (Kim & Cruz, 2022).

Transformational Leadership and Gender Differences

One especially successful coaching approach is transformational leadership, which is defined by traits like intellectual stimulation, personalized attention, and inspiring motivation. It was discovered that, in comparison to their male counterparts, female athletes' commitment and level of satisfaction were more significantly improved by transformational leadership characteristics. This implies that coaching methods that prioritize empathy, personal development, and encouraging communication may be more well-received by female athletes (Benenson, 2013).

Perceptions of Coach Effectiveness and Gender Stereotypes

Gender preconceptions frequently affect how successful a coach is seen. Research has indicated that, especially in sports environments where men predominate, female coaches may be viewed as less capable or authoritative. On the other hand, female coaches may be criticized for defying gender stereotypes if they display characteristics that are often associated with men, such as aggressiveness or competition. These prejudices can affect players' openness to coaching and impede the growth of productive coach-athlete relationships (Murray, Lord & Lorimer, 2018).

The coach-athlete connection depends heavily on communication, and coaching efficacy may be impacted by gender disparities in communication styles. According to research, female coaches frequently use more collaborative and sympathetic communication techniques, which can be more relatable to female athletes. Conversely, male coaches could use more authoritative or directive communication methods, which can work well in some situations but can also result in miscommunications or lower athlete satisfaction if they do not suit the players' preferences (ul Abidin, 2024).

Athletic performance is directly impacted by the way gender dynamics interact in coach-athlete relationships. Athletes are more likely to demonstrate greater levels of dedication, resiliency, and performance when they perceive that their coaches understand, encourage, and inspire them. On the other hand, misalignments in leadership philosophies, communication methods, or gender-based expectations might result in subpar performance outcomes, elevated stress levels, and diminished motivation (Baumer et al., 2016).

Relationships between coaches and athletes are woven together by gender dynamics which impact leadership efficacy, communication, and, eventually, athletic success. Better coaching techniques, more athlete happiness,

and better performance results can result from acknowledging and resolving the complications brought forth by gender. To create inclusive and empowering conditions for all athletes, it will be crucial to raise awareness and knowledge of these dynamics as the sports industry develops.

Research Methodology

To investigate how gender dynamics impact the coach-athlete relationship and, in turn, athletic performance, this study uses a mixed-methods research design that integrates both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The mix of approaches guarantees a thorough comprehension of the participants' actual experiences as well as the quantifiable effects. to investigate how the genders of the coach and the athlete affect motivation, trust, and communication in the coach-athlete interaction to determine if perceived performance results are impacted by the gender makeup of the coach-athlete dyad (male coach–female athlete, female coach – male athlete, etc.)to find recurring trends, difficulties, or advantages in the interactions between coaches and athletes at various levels of competition and sports.

Participants & Sampling

Population: Competitive athletes (above the age of 18) and their coaches from a variety of team and individual sports at the collegiate and semi-professional levels.

Sampling Method: Stratified sample after purposeful sampling to guarantee variety throughout: Gender pairings, including same-gender dyads, female coaches and male athletes, and male coaches and female athletes, sport type (team versus individual), and Competition levels (national / intervarsity / collegiate).

Sample Size

Quantitative: 160 pairs of athletes and coaches (320 total).

Qualitative: 30 in-depth interviews (15 with athletes and 15 with coaches of different genders).

Data Collection Methods

a) Quantitative Component

Instrument: A structured survey questionnaire incorporating

- The CART-Q, or Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire, evaluates complementarity, commitment, and intimacy.
- Measures of performance satisfaction and motivation, such as the Sport

Motivation Scale (SMS)

- Questions about history and demographics (such as gender identification, sport, training hours, and years spent with a coach)
- Administration: Secure internet platforms, such as Qualtrics or Google Forms, will be used to disseminate surveys electronically.

b) Qualitative Component

- Tool: A semi-structured interview guide that addresses:
- Communication experiences between coaches and athletes
- Gender's perceived influence on respect and trust
- Obstacles brought on by gender dynamics
- Examples of relationships, including gender dynamics that are either harmonious or tense
- Methods: Zoom or in-person interviews will be done based on availability, recorded with permission, and verbatim transcriptions will be made for analysis.

Data Analysis

a) Quantitative Analysis

- Software: R or SPSS

Methods:

- descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, and standard deviation)

Statistical Inference:

- ANOVA to investigate variations in performance between gender pairs
- Using regression analysis to evaluate how gender dynamics affect performance results
- Using correlation analysis to find connections between self-reported performance and relationship quality

b) Qualitative Analysis

- Software: MAXQDA or NVivo

Method:

- Thematic analysis using the six-phase technique developed by Braun and Clarke:
 1. Getting acquainted with data
 2. Creating the first code
 3. Looking for themes
 4. Examining the topics
 5. Identifying and characterizing themes

6. Creating the report

- Cross-analysis of the themes will be done by sport and gender combination.

Results

Participant Demographics

The research included 64 coaches (32 men and 32 women) and 320 athletes (160 men and 160 women). The five sports, basketball, soccer, volleyball, track and field, and swimming, were selected from collegiate teams. Athletes were 20.8 years old on average ($SD = 1.4$), while coaches were 12.3 years old on average ($SD = 4.7$).

Quantitative Findings

Performance Metrics and Coach Gender

The impact of coach-athlete gender dynamics on athlete performance as determined by objective and coach-evaluated season performance evaluations, was investigated using ANOVA. There was a notable interaction effect discovered:

- The findings suggest that gender combinations have an impact on performance outcomes ($F(1, 312) = 7.86, p < .01, \eta^2 = .03$).

Tukey Post-Hoc comparisons showed:

- The athletes with the highest average performance ratings ($M = 88.3, SD = 6.4$) were female-coached.
- Male-coached female athletes had considerably lower scores ($M = 80.5, SD = 7.2; p < .01$).
- With scores averaging about 84.7, male athletes' performance did not change substantially depending on the gender of their coach ($p = .38$).

Perceived Communication and Trust

The Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q) was used to do a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) on self-reported trust and communication quality. Gender-related significant main effects were seen for both coaches and athletes:

- Compared to male coaches ($M = 3.9/5, p < .001$), female athletes expressed more trust in female coaches ($M = 4.5/5$).
- The trust scores of male athletes were comparable for both coach genders ($M = 4.2/5$).

The quality of communication followed a similar pattern:

- Female coach-athlete pairs had the greatest scores ($M = 4.6/5$).
- The lowest scores were obtained by male coach-female athlete dyads ($M = 3.7/5, p < .01$).

Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis was used to examine semi-structured interviews with 10 coaches (5 male, 5 female) and 30 athletes (15 male, 15 female). Among the main themes were:

- Relational Comfort: Citing shared experiences and emotional openness, female athletes frequently expressed feeling more understood and encouraged by their female coaches.
- Communication Styles: Female athletes, in particular, tended to view male coaches as more directive, whereas female athletes rated female coaches as more collaborative.
- Respect and Bias: A few female athletes who received coaching from men reported experiencing mild gender prejudice, such as being “talked over” or “not taken seriously” during strategic talks.

Correlation between Quality and Performance

Performance results and athlete-perceived relationship quality were shown to be strongly positively correlated by Pearson correlation analysis ($r = .61$, $p < .001$). Compared to male athletes ($r = .52$), the impact was much larger in female athletes ($r = .68$), indicating that female athletes are more sensitive to the emotional nature of the coach-athlete connection.

Discussion

Coaching has always been a male-dominated field, especially in professional and high-performance sports. The quality and character of the relationship may be impacted by the gendered power dynamic that arises from male coaches frequently holding positions of authority over female players. Issues including the underrepresentation of female coaches, marginalization, and the maintenance of stereotypes can be exacerbated by the imbalance (LaVoi & Baeth, 2018). Particularly in historically masculine sports, players are more likely to view male coaches as more competent or authoritative which can either help or hurt performance, depending on the coach’s leadership style and the athlete’s comfort level (Fasting & Pfister, 2000).

Athlete happiness and performance have been found to increase when female coaches exhibit transformational leadership styles, which are marked by empathy, motivation, and individual concern. However, because of enduring gender preconceptions, female coaches may encounter opposition or diminished credibility, which might hinder their capacity to successfully influence players (Arthur, Hardy, & Woodman, 2012). Gender has a big impact on how people communicate. While female coaches may use more collaborative or empathic communication techniques, men coaches may use

more direct and authoritative communication. These variations may have an impact on how athletes learn and receive feedback (Jowett, & Cockerill, 2003). Gender mismatches or matches can affect how well coaches and athletes communicate. For example, because of ingrained gender conventions, male athletes who get coaching from women may first suffer with authority recognition. On the other hand, if a male coach acts in a domineering manner or is insensitive to the experiences of women, female athletes may feel uneasy (Felton & Jowett, 2013). Trust and dedication are essential elements of the coach-athlete relationship quality model, and they are fostered by good communication. This paradigm places a strong emphasis on complementarity (cooperation), commitment (the desire to keep the relationship going), and intimacy (the emotional tie).

These elements can be strengthened or undermined by gender relations (Jowett, 2007). A key component of any successful coach-athlete relationship is trust. Psychological safety may be diminished when gender prejudices or preconceptions are present, especially for female athletes. The darker side of gendered power disparities is shown by reports of improper behavior, harassment, or exploitation in interactions between female athletes and male coaches (Stirling & Kerr, 2009).

A psychologically secure setting enables athletes to take chances, handle criticism well, and get stronger. Because of their common experiences and comprehension of gender-specific difficulties, female athletes who get coaching from other women may feel more psychologically secure. Increased motivation, improved performance, and improved retention in sports might result from this feeling of security and trust (LaVoi, 2016).

The current study emphasizes the need to comprehend how different gender identities and sexual orientations interact with coaching dynamics, going beyond binary gender classifications. Building trustworthy connections may be particularly difficult for LGBTQ+ athletes, particularly if they believe their coach is insensitive to their identity or does not embrace them (Anderson, 2010).

Athlete engagement, team cohesiveness, and personal well-being have all improved due to inclusive coaching methods that recognize and celebrate a range of identities. To create equal performance conditions, training programs that increase coaches' cultural competency and understanding of unconscious bias are essential (Channon et al, 2017). Athletic success directly affects the quality of the coach-athlete relationship, which is influenced by gender dynamics. Increased resilience, self-efficacy, and athletic motivation are all influenced by healthy relationships that promote open communication, trust, and respect.

Ineffective management of gender dynamics can have the opposite effect, leading to increased dropout rates, lower motivation, and even psychological injury (Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004). Understanding and controlling these relationships is even more important in teams with gender diversity or in coaching contexts with mixed genders. Better team performance results are frequently observed when coaches actively engage in reflective practices, challenge preconceptions, and modify their leadership style to meet the needs of individual athletes (Chelladurai & Saleh, 2007).

Conclusion

Gender dynamics in coach-athlete interactions have a big impact on team cohesiveness, psychological health, and athletic success. This study emphasizes how gender-based attitudes, communication preferences, and power disparities may either support or impede the growth of motivation, trust, and productive teamwork between coaches and players. Relationships become more empowering and helpful when gender-sensitive strategies are adopted, such as encouraging open communication, respect for one another, and understanding of possible prejudices. This eventually improves performance results for both individuals and teams.

In order to guarantee that all athletes, regardless of gender, receive the assistance required to realize their full potential, it is crucial that coaching education programs and sports organizations actively address gender dynamics while fostering fairness and inclusion. To better comprehend and maximize the intricate relationship between gender and performance in the coaching setting, further study and discussion in this field are important.

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