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"A Woman to Command Men": Becky Hammon's First Year as an Assistant in the NBA and Conversations about Sport Culture on Twitter

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“A WOMAN TO COMMAND MEN”: BECKY HAMMON’S FIRST YEAR
AS AN ASSISTANT IN THE NBA AND CONVERSATIONS
ABOUT SPORT CULTURE ON TWITTER

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
Communication, Technology and Society

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ABSTRACT

Previous research has shown that Twitter has become a place where cultural discussions can occur and that Twitter has the potential to undermine hierarchies of authority and power by affording a voice to those who are not heard in the mainstream media. Becky Hammon's hiring as the first full-time female assistant coach in the NBA provided a rich opportunity to utilize Twitter as a way to study perceptions of Hammon throughout her first year on the NBA sidelines and specifically, as a way to hear both mainstream and marginalized voices. Radian6 was used to collect tweets mentioning "Becky Hammon" throughout her first year in the NBA and the data was analyzed utilizing a thematic analysis. The results suggested that while many sports fans and individuals on Twitter were supportive and encouraging of Hammon as an NBA coach, resistance to women to coaching men was prevalent and fueled by a reliance on traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Furthermore, this research displayed how Twitter is an important space for both cultural conversations and dialogue but also has the ability to be a tool of change, advocacy and progress.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the passage of Title IX legislation in 1972, women have made significant strides in the sport world. This landmark legislation made gender discrimination illegal in any educational setting (including athletics) and has contributed to an unprecedented increase in female sport participation. For example, in 1972, just 7% of high school athletes were females. In the 2010-11 academic year, 48% of high school athletes were females (Title IX and Athletics, n.d.) Compare these statistics from 1972 with data compiled during the 2013-14 academic year, which indicated that over 3 million high school girls participated in sports (High School Participation Increases for 25th Consecutive Year, 2014). The number of female athletes playing National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) sport has increased from less than 30,000 in 1972 to nearly 200,000 as of 2011 (Title IX and Athletics, n. d.). Furthermore, women's professional sports have reached new heights. The Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) will celebrate its 20th season in 2016. The Women's World Cup Championship soccer game between the United States and Japan in July of 2015 brought in over 20 million viewers in the U.S., breaking viewing records for both men's and women's soccer in America. (Chappell, 2015).

These examples suggest that women have taken advantage of the opportunities afforded to them by Title IX and now participate in sport at record-setting levels. Nevertheless, when it comes to coaching and leadership in collegiate and professional sport, women are significantly underrepresented, especially in the four major men's North American sports (Major League Baseball (MLB); National Basketball Association (NBA); National Football League (NFL); and National Hockey League (NHL)). Yet, it is

not uncommon to see men coaching women's professional and collegiate sports. For example, at the time of the 2015 WNBA season, seven of the league's 12 coaches were men (WNBA, n.d.). On the other hand, the number of women coaching in men's professional sports is almost nonexistent. One notable event, however, may be changing that reality.

On August 5, 2014, the NBA's San Antonio Spurs hired Becky Hammon as an assistant coach. Hammon became the first female full-time assistant coach in the history of the NBA. She is also the first full-time female assistant coach in any of the four major professional sports in North America. On July 3, 2015, following her first season as an assistant with the team, the Spurs announced that Hammon would be the team's Summer League (for rookies and other players trying to make the team) head coach, the first female to be a head coach in that league. On July 20, 2015, Hammon led the Spurs to the NBA Summer League Title. Following her Summer League success, Spurs Head Coach Gregg Popovich said, "I don't even look at it as, well, she's the first female this and that and the other. She's a coach, and she's good at it," (Gregg Popovich Praises Becky Hammon, 2015).

Hammon's hiring has brought arguably unprecedented levels of publicity and media attention to the issue of women participating in male dominated sport. In fact, since Hammon's hiring, four more women have been hired to coach in men's professional sports. On July 31, 2015, the NBA's Sacramento Kings hired Nancy Lieberman as an assistant coach and on July 27, 2015, the NFL's Arizona Cardinals hired Jen Welter as an assistant coaching intern for training camp and the preseason (Nancy Lieberman: Becky Hammon Opened A Lot of Doors, 2015; Jen Welter Hired by

Cardinals, 2015). Thus, from August 5, 2014 to July 31, 2015, three women were hired to coach in North American major men's professional sport. Furthermore, on September 29, 2015, MLB's Oakland Athletics announced the hiring of Justine Siegal as a guest instructor for the team's 2015 instructional league (Footer, 2015) and on January 21, 2016, the NFL's Buffalo Bills hired Kathryn Smith as the first full-time assistant coach in the league's history (Rodak, 2016).

In addition to media coverage from traditional press outlets, these unprecedented personnel moves have also generated social media discussions about women coaching men in major North American sport. Twitter, in particular, has become a platform where fans go to converse about sport (Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012; Sanderson, 2013); and where cultural conversations take place (Brock, 2012). Twitter also serves as a place where ideas and beliefs about sports culture are discussed (Antunovic, 2014). Furthermore, Twitter functions as a setting where women's sport can gain more attention (Vann, 2014) and where gender narratives and ideologies in sport can be debated and challenged (LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014).

In that vein, this research explores Hammon's first year as an assistant coach in the NBA, starting with her hiring in August 2014 and ending with her Summer League Title in July 2015, and how it was discussed on Twitter. In doing so, this research examines how Twitter provided an avenue for larger discussions about the role gender plays in sport culture. Additionally, this work also illustrates how Becky Hammon's hiring and subsequent success has provoked both challenges to and protection of sport culture, a dialectic that generates significant discussion on social media platforms such as Twitter.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sport Culture

Most theoretical work on sport has fallen into one of two categories: an idealist notion of sport as a realm of freedom not constrained by social or political factors or a materialist analysis that views sport as a cultural mechanism through which the dominant classes control the unknowing (Messner, 2007). Sport tends to reflect society's capitalist relations, promoting and legitimizing constructs such as competition, meritocracy, consumerism, and militarism (Brohm, 1978; Hoch, 1972). However, Gruneau (1983) and Hargreaves (1982) argued that those advocating this position viewed sport too simply and failed to see how people, both athletes and sports consumers, are not passive objects who can be duped into meeting the needs of capitalism.

Neo-Marxists of the 1980s argued for the necessity of placing an analysis of sport within a more reflexive framework, meaning culture is seen as independent from the economy and human subjectivity which occurs with structural limits and boundaries (Messner, 2007). This theory acknowledges that people are indeed affected by historically formed structural conditions such as class structures and power struggles. Messner (2007) discussed how a reflexive historical framework could help scholars understand how sport is a place where dominant social ideologies are perpetuated and contested. Included within the dominant social ideologies is the topic of gender roles and relations. Critcher (1986) and McKay (1986) called for a restructuring of reflexive theory to include gender as an important process rather than simply a part of class dynamics.

Much of the research done on gender and sport in the late 1980s and early 1990s was focused on the effects of sports participation on an individual's gender identity and

values (Sabo & Runfola, 1980). However, Kimmel (1986) argued that although gender identity was important, studies often ignored the extent to which sport helps shape societal conceptions of masculinity and femininity, which are the product of historically and socially constructed gender relations. Therefore, more modern research has embraced the idea that “organized sport is clearly a potentially powerful cultural arena for the perpetuation of the ideology of male superiority and dominance,” (Messner, 2007, p. 34).

Sport as a Masculine Domain

The sport environment has been described as hypermasculine (Wilson, 2007), defined by violence, aggression, confrontation, and competition. Messner (1992) argued that within sport, profound hierarchical foundations have been established in relation to gender ideology and traditional meanings of masculinity. Messner (1992) also observed that beginning at a very young age, male dominance in sport is reinforced through messages that suggest that men are more knowledgeable about sport, naturally physically superior, and better sport leaders and participants than women. Indeed, gender ideology embeds the notion that “masculinity is synonymous with sport” (Anderson, 2008, p. 7). Furthermore, according to Woodward (2007), the sport context is a stronghold of masculinity where traditional gender binaries continue to be reinforced.

Steinfeldt, Rutkowski, Orr, and Steinfeldt (2012) suggest that social gender norms influence acceptable behavior for both men and women. They argue that such norms, guide and constrain men’s and women’s understanding of how they are supposed to think, feel, and act in society. Specifically, masculine gender norms are socially constructed unwritten rules that convey strong message about what it means to be a man (p. 343).

Messner (2000) performed a study on gender norms in sport analyzing the team names selected by 156 youth soccer teams. He coded the names into three categories: (a) sweet names (Blue Butterflies, Barbie Girls etc.), (b) neutral or paradoxical names (Team Flubber, Little Tigers etc.) and (c) power names (Killer Whales, Sea Monsters etc.). Messner found that male teams were much more likely to chose a power name than anything else while female teams tended to chose either sweet or neutral names. Interestingly, only one out of 87 male teams chose a sweet name. Idealized maleness is generally represented in association with being tough and heroic (Wellard, 2009), thus, even from a young age; males attempt to depict themselves in this way, especially in a sport setting. Indeed:

Contemporary sporting practice produces and promotes an environment where displays of traditional masculinity, those which present competitiveness, aggressiveness and toughness, are seen as normal and necessary. It is the perceived understanding of traditional, 'natural' version of masculinity which dominates sport and continues to hold immense power (Wellard, 2009, p. 14).

Furthermore, because of the coach-player relationship, it is likely that these gender norms are passed down from male coaches to their male and female players. Steinfeldt et al. (2012) claim, "sport is an influential environment wherein boys learn values and behaviors (e.g. competition, toughness, independence) that are considered to be valued aspects of masculinity within American society" (p. 343). Therefore, sport is a masculine domain that can serve to create strong gender-role expectations for those working or participating in the sports industry. Interestingly, the hypermasculine culture

of sport directly contradicts a more nurturing and inclusive masculinity that society is increasingly and gradually embracing (Graham & Dixon, 2014).

Women in Sport

Historically, female participation in sport has been actively resisted (Meân & Kassing, 2008) and women's sport consistently gets "left behind" in media coverage compared to men's sport (Bruce & Hardin, 2014). What sport celebrates, demands and rewards has not reflected much of women's experience in the world and thus, women have traditionally been alienated from sport, indifferent to it or reluctant participants in sport (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983). However, since the passage of Title IX in 1972, female participation in sport has dramatically increased. Even though equality between men and women in the sport world is perhaps a distant goal in terms of funding, programs, facilities, and media coverage, substantial gains have been made in the last 15-20 years (Messner, 2007). Messner (2007) argues that women's movement into sport represents a woman's quest for equality, control of their own bodies and self-definition but also presents a challenge to the ideological foundation of sport - male domination. Specifically, Messner (2007) argues that the framing of the female athlete by the sport media threatens to negate any counterhegemonic progress women have made as athletes.

As one might expect, research suggests there is a significant discrepancy in the media coverage of women's sports compared to men's sports (Billings, Angelini & Duke, 2010; Billings, Angelini, MacArthur, Bissell, Smith & Brown, 2015) and that women are portrayed in ways that focus more on their sexuality and less on their athletic performance (Clavio & Eagleman, 2011). For example, Rightler-McDaniels (2014) examined photographic newspaper coverage of female high school athletes and found

that females received 38.4 percent of the overall coverage while males received 61.6 percent. She also discovered that photographs of female athletes depicted them as showing more emotion, a characteristic often associated with femininity. In a study of broadcast commentary surrounding the 2000 men's and women's NCAA Final Four basketball championship, Billings, Halone and Denham (2002) found vast differences between how broadcasters discussed male athletes compared to female athletes. Specifically, they observed that with male athletes, comments centered on their athleticism, while with female athletes, comments centered on their personality, appearance and background.

These trends also were observed in media coverage of major worldwide sporting events, such as the Olympic Games. In Tuggle and Owen's (1999) analysis of the media coverage of the 1996 Olympic Games and in Billings et al. (2015) analysis of media coverage of the 2012 Olympic Games, both sets of scholars found that NBC gave very little coverage to sports that required women to exert enormous power or those in which they engaged in extensive physical contact. Tuggle and Owen (1999) as well as Billings et al. (2015) both found that female athletes in more typically "feminine" sports (e.g. gymnastics, swimming, diving, beach volleyball & track and field) received more coverage, but that the coverage was laden with comments that reinforced female stereotypes. Specifically, female athletes were more likely to receive comments about their emotions or attractiveness. As one example, female gymnasts received more comments about their appearance than their male counterparts (Billings et al., 2015).

These media representations do not go unnoticed in other sport contexts. Female athletes often experience significant issues in combatting gender stereotypes in sport. For

instance, Meân and Kassing (2008) interviewed professional female athletes and found that they were severely limited in the ways that they could portray their athleticism and had to engage in complicated gender work that continued to place them on the outer edges of sport. Furthermore, Whiteside and Hardin (2012) studied women who work in college sports information offices through the lens of the Frohlich's (2004) friendliness trap, which suggests that by virtue of their gender, women have an inherent advantage over men in communication-related fields. They found that women became frustrated by the inability of this perceived advantage to help them advance and that it often diverted their efforts into activities that had little utility for their career development.

Women in Coaching

Sport is a masculine domain and thus, many aspects of the sport industry are gendered as masculine which leads to the troublesome perception that women are not qualified to hold leadership positions in sport (Whiteside & Hardin, 2012). Coaching represents one visible area where gender stereotypes play out in sport. As of 2012, women currently represented less than 3 percent of the coaching positions in men's intercollegiate sports while men represented more than half of the positions in women's intercollegiate sports and roughly 97 percent of the positions in men's intercollegiate sports (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012). As of 2015, over 50 percent of WNBA head coaches are men (WNBA, n.d). Scholars have suggested that one of the major reasons why women are underrepresented in coaching is that leadership positions within sport are closely tied to masculine traits, creating the perception that women are not viable candidates for coaching positions (Burton, Barr, Fink & Bruening, 2009). Furthermore, hegemonic masculinity, legitimizes and naturalizes the role of men as leaders in all

realms of sport, including both women's and men's sports (Walker & Bopp, 2011; Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013). Hegemonic masculinity is the configuration of gender practice that legitimizes the patriarchy, and thus, the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell, 2005).

Walker and Bopp (2011) interviewed 10 female coaches who were either previously or currently involved with women's or men's intercollegiate basketball. They found that female coaches felt their presence in men's college basketball was not welcomed and referred to men's college basketball as "an old boy's club" (p. 56). The authors also found that participants felt a lack of respect as women, which was eloquently captured by one participant who stated, "I think a woman would get looked over for a head coach (in men's basketball) like she's a joke" (p. 58). These findings illustrate an institutionalized and embedded bias and discrimination against women that impedes their ability to coach in male-dominated sports and further reifies the notion that coaching is men's work (Kamphoff, Armentrout & Driska, 2010). Walker and Sartore-Baldwin (2013) argued that sport cultural norms are a significant hindrance to women in their endeavors to coach in male-dominated sport and argued that if a woman was given the chance to do so, gender ideology and stereotypes could be challenged.

Kilty (2006) discovered four subcategories of external barriers and four subcategories of internal barriers that interfere with female coaches' professional opportunities. The four subcategories of external barriers are: (a) unequal assumption of competence, (b) hiring from a principle of similarity, (c) homophobia, and (d) lack of female mentors. Unequal assumption of competence occurs when a male coach is automatically assumed to be more competent than a female coach. This assumption is

supported by common myths such as “women don’t win as much,” “women are less intense,” “athletes prefer male coaches,” and “older female coaches don’t have the skills and knowledge to coach highly competitive programs,” (Coaching- Do Female Athletes Prefer Male Coaches?, 2000). Hiring from a principle of similarity is characterized by homologous reproduction or when someone seeks to hire a candidate similar to her/himself because it is the easiest and most comfortable thing to do. Homophobia is the third subcategory that Kilty (2006) discusses as a barrier to females in the coaching profession. Griffin (1998) claims sexual preference can be turned from a private behavior into a stereotype that perpetuates a negative image. Finally, Kilty (2006) posits that a lack of female mentors as the fourth barrier for female coaches. Female mentors can provide guidance and can facilitate networking and contacts but coaches frequently cite a lack of females in the coaching profession and consequently, a lack of female mentors. Everhart and Chelladurai (1998) confirmed the relevance of this barrier in their investigation of gender and coaching. Their findings indicated that female athletes with women coaches were more likely to aspire to be a coach than female athletes with men coaches.

Kilty (2006) also found four internal barriers to female coaches’ opportunities: (a) perfectionism, (b) lack of assertiveness, (c) inhibition in promotion of accomplishments, and (d) high stress of balancing work and life. Kilty (2006) found perfectionism was prominent in the coaches studied in that they were very highly trained and competent but also very self-critical. The impact of perfectionism manifested, as coaches were less likely to apply for coaching positions when they became available on the basis that they weren’t qualified. The second subcategory, lack of assertiveness, was characterized by female coaches feeling a need to be liked and thus, less likely to exert their authority.

Inhibition in promotion of accomplishments occurred when female coaches had trouble identifying their individual accomplishments and constantly used language of “we” rather than “I” when referring to past accomplishments. Finally, with the fourth subcategory of internal barriers Kilty (2006) found was high stress balancing work and personal life. She discussed how the coaching profession is very time consuming, including long hours, weekend practices or competitions and out of town travel during the season, as well as long hours for recruiting purposes in the off season. Women also cited the challenges of working such a time-consuming job while also trying to start or raise a family.

When the Spurs hired Becky Hammon as an assistant coach, it provided an opportunity for her to demonstrate the inaccuracy of gender stereotypes in sport as well as for people to discuss the deviation of gender norms stemming from women’s intrusion into male dominated sport. Her first year in the NBA provides an excellent platform from which to put the numerous claims regarding gender, sport and coaching to the test.

Social Media and Sport

Social media is an ambiguous term. The term has come to be synonymous with user generated content and the rapid dissemination of ideas and information (Farrington, Hall, Kilvington, Price & Saeed, 2015). Social media is also seen as a tool for the disenfranchised and a mechanism to cause change largely due to the mainstream coverage it received during the “Arab Spring” and other popular uprisings (Howard & Hussain, 2013). For van Dijck (2013), social media is seen as an online facilitator of human networks that promotes connectedness of social value.

Traditional media (newspapers, magazines, television) has been supplemented with social media platforms (websites, blogs, Facebook, Twitter etc.), and the two have

integrated to provide a more complex and involving media experience (Vann, 2014). Social media is now seen by many as the first call for information, especially on current and unfolding events (Farrington et al., 2015). Social media can present an unmediated version of events (Mason, 2013), which traditional media simply cannot provide. There are a growing number of people that are currently utilizing the many different social media platforms. As of January 2016, Facebook has 1.55 billion users, Twitter has 320 million and Snapchat has 200 million (Leading Social Networks Worldwide as of January 2016, n.d.). Facebook-owned Instagram recently surpassed Twitter as the second most used social media platform when it reached 400 million users in September 2015 (Kharpal, 2015).

If the major social media platforms were placed on a scale of least transparent to most transparent in terms of accessing user content, Twitter would certainly fall on the most transparent side of the scale (Farrington, et al., 2015). Launched in 2006, Twitter is a micro-blogging social media platform that restricts users to messages (tweets) of no more than 140 characters. While there is a mechanism for tweeting private messages using the direct message (DM), much of the conversations and discourse on Twitter is available to the public.

While Twitter has become popular in many contexts, sport has become an immensely viable sphere for Twitter (Browning & Sanderson, 2012; Kassing & Sanderson, 2015; Sanderson & Truax, 2014). As the relationship between Twitter and sport has blossomed, researchers have explored topics such as how athletes use Twitter (Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, Greenwell, 2010; Frederick, Lim, Clavio & Walsh, 2012); how sport organizations educate athletes about Twitter (Sanderson & Browning,

2013); fan behavior on Twitter (Sanderson, 2013; Sanderson & Truax, 2014) and how Twitter is affecting sport journalism (Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012). Furthermore, sports fans have always demonstrated “intense collective passion” (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012, p.101) and now these values can be transferred to the Internet and social media, a distinctly participatory environment (Vann, 2014).

Furthermore, scholars have suggested that social media can open up cultural spaces where women’s sports can be discussed and promoted (Bruce & Hardin, 2014; LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014). These scholars have pointed to elements of community building (Antunovic & Hardin, 2012) and a shift of ideological control away from men (LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014). Vann (2014) also points out that social media, specifically Twitter, has shown an ability to accelerate the growth of women’s sports and provide a supplement for the lack of women’s sports coverage in mainstream media. Similarly, in her essay entitled “What Can Feminism Learn from New Media?” (Mann, 2014) claims that new media has the potential to undermine hierarchies of authority and power and is a platform in which marginalized voices (i.e. women) can be heard.

Nevertheless, social media is filled with misogynist discourse (LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014; Sanderson, 2013) and this accounts for, at least, currently, the inconclusive nature of Twitter and other social media platforms to challenge traditional gender narratives in sport (LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014). Indeed, some research suggests that even with the ability to selectively self-present via social media platforms such as Twitter, female athletes and broadcasters continue to portray themselves in ways that confirm gender stereotypes (Label & Danylchuk, 2012).

Despite all the work that has been published on Twitter and sport, Butterworth (2014) has called for more work that examines Twitter's role in fostering active and engaged citizenry in sport and sport culture. Some work has explored how Twitter enables athletes and fans to engage in more activism and advocacy (Antunovic & Hardin, 2012; Schmittle & Sanderson, 2014), yet there is still a significant gap in this literature.

Therefore, research on how sport culture and specifically, how gender roles are perpetuated and depicted in sport culture as discussed on social media is still inconclusive and under-developed. Becky Hammon's groundbreaking hiring presents an opportunity to examine gender roles in sports culture and Twitter is a platform in which this study can occur.

METHOD

To investigate conversations on Twitter surrounding Becky Hammon's hiring and performance and their subsequent implications for sport culture, a textual analysis of tweets mentioning the term "Becky Hammon" was conducted. In recent years, textual analysis has become a favored method for many scholars who are interested in investigating media content. Textual analysis inquiry focuses on the underlying ideological and cultural assumptions of a text (Fursich, 2009). Furthermore, a text is understood as a complex set of discursive strategies that are situated in a cultural context (Barthes, 1971). Many recent scholars have employed textual analyses in order to analyze media and specifically, Twitter content (Sanderson & Truax, 2014; Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012; Clavio & Kian, 2010).

Data Collection and Sample

Data consisted of all tweets mentioning the term "Becky Hammon." The Radian6 software was used to collect tweets. Radian6 is a social media tracking software program that allows users to search publicly available social media posts within specific time parameters for user-defined search terms. The time frame selected to capture tweets mentioning the term "Becky Hammon" was August 1, 2014 through July 31, 2015. This time frame was selected because the Spurs hired Hammon on August 6, 2014 and she finished her first year of coaching duties on July 20, 2015, when she led the Spurs to the NBA Summer League Title.

I limited the search only to Twitter as previous research indicates that Twitter is arguably the most popular platform for sport conversation (Browning & Sanderson, 2012; Kassing & Sanderson, 2015). Additionally, Twitter is the most accessible text-based

social media platform, as all tweets have been disseminated by a public user's account that can be accessed, which is not the case on other platforms. For example, on Facebook, users have to approve "friend" requests before one can see their content unless their profile is public.

Utilizing the Radian6 software, I searched for tweets with the term "Becky Hammon" for each of the 12 months of the year time frame. It was decided to only use one search term ("Becky Hammon") because the search yielded over 150,000 results and thus, provided an adequate amount of data for analysis. Therefore, the search for "Becky Hammon" was from the 1st to the 31st, and the process was repeated for each subsequent month. All tweets containing original content were collected, however, "as is" re-tweets were removed from the data. Re-tweets are re-transmissions of another Twitter user's message, and can be re-transmitted "as is" or by the user performing the re-tweet while also interjecting their own unique commentary. The "as is" re-tweets were removed because they are simply duplicates of another tweet that do not include any new information. Additionally, "as is" re-tweets are ambiguous in intent and thus, are extremely difficult to interpret. However, if a re-tweet included user commentary, then it was included it in the sample.

Utilizing the Radian6 software, the initial search for "Becky Hammon" from August 1, 2014- July 31, 2015 resulted in 179,169 tweets. August and July each produced over 50,000 tweets and in the interest of time, I elected to use the first 10,000 tweets collected from August and July rather than the entire samples. In addition to the 20,000 tweets collected from August and July, there were 3,482 tweets from September 1, 2014- June 31, 2015. From the initial sample of 23,482 tweets, there were 17,648 "as is" re-

tweets, leaving a sample of 5,834 tweets for analysis. By month, the tweets were as follows: August (1,301), September (155), October (1,119), November (208), December (578), January (196), February (142), March (550), April (194), May (79), June (28) and July (1,284).

Data Analysis

A textual analysis was conducted using an inductive coding scheme (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) with each tweet serving as the unit of analysis. First, the researcher became immersed in the data through an initial active reading of the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) noted that this type of reading involves researchers searching for meanings and patterns, rather than just casually reading through the data. This approach allows for identification of possible patterns to emerge and be shaped. This process also involves making notes about what is interesting in the data and generating initial categories. Braun and Clarke (2006) observed that this process can be driven by data or theory and I employed a data-driven approach, allowing categories to emerge as data analysis unfolds rather than *a priori* (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009).

Thematic categories were then developed by micro-analyzing and classifying tweets into emergent categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) based on how audience members on Twitter discussed Hammon's hiring and job performance in the context of sports culture. Tweets that appeared to involve more than one theme were placed into the thematic category that exemplified the most dominant theme of the tweet. Development, clarification and refinement of themes continued until new observations did not add substantively to existing themes, thus, allowing the researcher to gain insight into the usefulness of the developed thematic categories (Suter, Bergen, Daas & Durham, 2006).

After completing this analysis, it was discovered that 248 tweets were not relevant to the study (e.g. spam messages, posts not related to Hammon's hiring, tweets in a language other than English, etc.) and these were removed, leaving a final sample of 5,586 tweets. Through the data analysis described above, seven categories emerged: (a) informative/promotional; (b) sense-making; (c) support; (d) breaking barriers; (e) resistance; (f) objectification in gender roles; and (g) male benevolence.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

Tweets are reported verbatim from the data, and spelling and grammatical errors were left intact. For ease of reading, the notation [link] has been inserted to notate where the link was located in the tweet, rather than providing the link.

Informative/ Promotional

One of the most common ways that people utilized Twitter to discuss Becky Hammon's hiring and her subsequent first year as an assistant coach in the NBA was by sharing news and information with their Twitter followers. Some tweets specifically focused on providing factual news about Hammon. This occurred in statements such as, "@SlamOnline The Spurs have hired Becky Hammon as an asst. coach, making her the NBA's first female coach: [link];" "@SportsCenter THIS JUST IN: Spurs hire Becky Hammon as assistant coach, first woman assistant in NBA history;" "Becky Hammon becomes the first female coach for the NBA [link] #sports #nba [link];" "Becky Hammon Debut at Spurs assistant coach!;" "@spurs coach Becky Hammon named ESPN's Woman of the Year [link];" "Becky Hammon is the first female head coach in NBA summer league history to win a title after SA Spurs beat Phoenix Suns 93-90 in the final."

Users also tweeted information in response to other tweets, to clarify facts about Hammon. For example, "@FriesAndDesy becky hammon is an assistant coach for the spurs;" "@FemaleExecMag You spelled Becky HAMMON's name wrong in your magazine in the headers, it's not HammonD;" "@Araksya Becky Hammon is not a referee, she is a coach;" "@trentvmathis The NBA has Becky Hammon with the Spurs, and the Kings just hired a woman as well!" In some cases, people felt the need to clarify facts regarding Hammon without being provoked by other users. "Back to #spurs Becky

Hammon's behind the bench. She was on the bench pre-season. She's supposed to be behind it her whole rookie season #nba;" "Becky Hammon US origin. Russian national Double Olympian Basketball."

While these informative tweets were not explicitly supportive or conveyed any particular opinion about Hammon or her status as an assistant coach in the NBA, the tweets do show that Hammon was a popular talking point on Twitter, and her employment was national news after she was hired, and her first NBA season on the sidelines also continued to prompt considerable conversation. The fact that people were tweeting about Hammon showed that there was interest in her, to the point that people devoted their time and attention to promote discussions about her. Furthermore, this behavior set in to motion a serial transmission, or what occurs when one person passes on information to another (Sutton et al., 2014). When serial transmission occurs, the message that is being transmitted is amplified from formal sources and thus, the message reaches a much larger audience than it would originally.

As news organizations continued to tweet out information about Hammon, including her hiring, her NBA debut, and the awards she garnered and her victory in the NBA Summer League, more and more people began to notice, understand what was happening, and took to Twitter to join in the conversation. However, news providers can only tweet about a person or event so many times as they have other stories they are covering. Arguably, tweets about Hammon occurred at such a high rate when she was hired and then throughout her first year because people *other* than news outlets were participating in discussions that featured Hammon which included broader conversations about the NBA, WNBA, professional sports and gender and sport. With Twitter, users

had the power to continue to tweet about Hammon after news outlets initially shared the information and moved on.

Furthermore, users began to take matters into their own hands, tweeting information about Hammon rather than just re-tweeting or quoting a news outlet. Also, users were seen responding to others with information about Hammon, either in response to that user or to clarify something that was said about Hammon. This showed that the public was educated about Hammon, either on their own accord or from news sources, and cared enough to clarify information about her.

In addition to factual information tweeted by both news outlets and individual Twitter users, another way in which people tweeted about Becky Hammon during her first year in the NBA was via promotion. One of the most common promotional practices was when a user tweeted out a link to content (article, video, pictures) involving Hammon in the form of their own personal tweet rather than re-tweeting a news outlet. For example, “Nice piece on Becky Hammon, new asst. coach of the #Spurs [link];” “You want to know all about Becky Hammon, the Spurs new assistant. Read this from @nrarmour: [link];” “Wise words from a basketball icon Becky Hammon. Must watch [link];” “Assistant Coach Becky Hammon getting ready for her first game on the bench for the Spurs! [link];” “Wonderful feature on Becky Hammon who yesterday became the first female assistant coach in American pro sports. [link].”

Similarly, users also promoted content about Hammon by re-tweeting other users messages about Hammon but adding their own commentary. This occurred in tweets such as, “RT @SASStars @nytimes: How Becky Hammon became the N.B.A.'s first full-time female assistant coach [link] another great read!;” “RT @infamousKAYCE3 Spurs

hire Becky Hammon, first female assistant coach in NBA history. Salute [link];” “RT @VargheseMathewP "Becky Hammon Takes Big Steps From Russia to San Antonio" via NYT [link] #socialmarketing #blogging #Entrepreneurs #ff;” “RT @kimydavis For the record, Becky Hammon is 2nd woman to join an NBA coaching staff. Lisa Boyer was an assistant for Cavs in 2001-02. #chalktalk.”

News outlets also seized the opportunity to promote Hammon. Examples of this include, “1st Female full time assist coach Becky Hammon's Journey from Rapid City to NBA Spurs [link] via @BleacherReport;” “LIVE episode on @RadioSimmons today at 3pm EST. We'll talk #FIFA & #gender discrimination, Becky Hammon as #NBA coach and more! #realtalk;” “SPORTS: Becky Hammon and the Future of Women in the NBA – [link];” “Becky Hammon: Digging In for the Win. Read more at #TheBestYou magazine [link]; “(WPost: Business) On Leadership: Podcast: Becky Hammon on leadership [link];” ““Meet Becky Hammon, the NBA's First Female Coach" [link] via @marieclaire.”

Tweets that fell into the promotional theme also set into motion a serial transmission (Sutton et al., 2014) in which users were passing information on to other users by tweeting about Hammon. However, instead of stating facts or clarifying information about Hammon, the majority of promotional tweets were opinionative in nature in that users were not just passing news on, but also overtly adding commentary about the significance of her hiring. Promotional tweets were overwhelmingly positive; promoting Hammon in ways that discussed her journey, her ability or her leadership skills. Additionally, other tweets promoted her appearance on a TV show or radio program or an upcoming game in which Hammon and the Spurs would be playing in a

certain arena or venue. Collectively, these tweets raised the profile and visibility of Hammon's hiring and sustained it as a significant sports media topic.

Sense-making

Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005), define sense-making as “the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing” (p. 409). Hammon's hiring was an unprecedented event in professional sports history and therefore, many individuals grappled with making sense of Hammon's presence in the NBA by asking questions about topics such as what a woman could bring to male sport. For example, “Has anyone paid attention to this? Becky Hammon a female pro basketball player is the assistant coach; [link];” “Seriously, what kind of coaching does Becky Hammon have for Duncan or Parker?” “You think the Spurs players really listen to Becky Hammon?;” “How Spurs' hiring of Becky Hammon impacts future of women in male-driven sports.” Is Becky Hammon Paving The Way? [link];” “I wonder when Becky Hammon will get to be 1st Female coach in the NBA to actually sit on bench? She's in the second row.....;” “@PhirstCon10tion what does Becky Hammon mean for the league?;” “@spurs @NBA will becky hammon be allowed in the spurs lockerroom?”

Users also posed questions to other individuals on Twitter, asking each other Hammon-related questions. For instance, “Spurs fans: Whats yall opinion on the job Becky Hammon is doing?;” “@JD1871 bit premature to call Becky Hammon great, no?;” “@kick_freak12 How you feel about that Becky Hammon move boss?;” “Has anyone paid attention to this? Becky Hammon a female pro basketball player is the assistant [link];” “@PhirstCon10tion what does Becky Hammon mean for the league?”

Individuals specifically asked well-known people in sports, media members and even NBA players such as the San Antonio Spurs' Boris Diaw and the Cleveland Cavaliers' LeBron James about their opinions of Hammon's hiring and her coaching in the NBA. Examples of these tweets include, "@ErinAndrews What are your thoughts on Becky Hammon being the first female assistant coach in the NBA?;" "@theborisdiaw what are you thoughts on working with coach Becky Hammon this upcoming season. #askboris;" "@KingJames what are your thoughts on Becky hammon?!;" "Hey @JeanieBuss, how bout Becky Hammon as the next @Lakers coach?"

Similar to informative and promotional tweets, sense-making tweets continued to set into motion a serial transmission (Sutton et. al, 2014) and further encouraged people to discuss Hammon and express their views on the issue. The unprecedented nature of Hammon coaching in the NBA brought a woman into the male-dominated world of sport and users struggled to make sense of a woman coaching men. Walker and Sartore-Baldwin (2013) argued that sport cultural norms serve as a significant hindrance to women in their endeavors to coach in male-dominated sport and if a woman was given the chance to do so, gender ideology and stereotypes could be challenged. After Hammon was hired and throughout her first season in the NBA, individuals on Twitter struggled to process a woman coaching in the NBA and thus, traditional gender roles in the masculine realm of sport were challenged, which resulted in many users attempting to make sense of this new reality.

Support

Hammon's hiring was a historic event in professional sports history and many users were supportive of Hammon and the job she was doing throughout her first year as

an assistant coach in the NBA. One of the main ways in which users supported Hammon was through congratulatory remarks. For example, “Congratulations to Rapid City's Becky Hammon on being named the first female assistant coach for a professional basketball team!;” “Congrats to Becky Hammon, first female coach in one of the major pro sports!;” “@TheSpursZone: Congrats to Becky Hammon for being named ESPN's woman of the year! [link] couldn't of said it better;” “Congrats @BeckyHammon! Internet broken - at least in my humble opinion. Becky Hammon named ESPN's Woman of the Year [link];” “Congrats to Becky Hammon on making the Colorado Sports HOF. Cool segment on Altitude right now;” “Congrats to coach Becky Hammon and San Antonio Spurs winning Las Vegas Summer League title! #NBA [link].”

Another manner in which users tweeted support of Hammon was by claiming they were inspired by Hammon or she was their role model. “#FierceFriday Shout out to Becky Hammon the 1st Female Coach in the NBA!!! Really inspiring story. [link];” “Becky Hammon, you're my hero;” “Great role model for girls: Meet Becky Hammon, the NBA's First Female Coach [link];” “Becky Hammon is my idol #SAS #GirlPower;” “@NBATV Becky Hammon is definitely an inspiration!! Besides, she is wats good about basketball.”

Furthermore, users showed support for Hammon through expressing feelings of respect toward her and what she has accomplished. For example, “Much respect to the career of and career to come for Becky Hammon! #winning #respect;” “Not really a WNBA fan but Becky Hammon is a great player and she will be a great coach. Believe that;” “Respect for Becky Hammon!! She overcame a lot of odds! On to the NBA now;”

“Wait Becky Hammon still PLAYS!?! And is gonna be a Spurs assistant coach? Total badass move. #respect;” “Salute Becky Hammon, first female NBA coach.”

Tweets not only conveyed respect for Hammon but also emphasized how she was deserving of the opportunity to coach in the NBA and to possibly become a head coach in the NBA in the future. “Spoiler: 'cuz she knows the game. How Becky Hammon Became N.B.A.'s First Full-Time Female Assistant Coach [link];” “I like the hiring of Becky Hammon by the Spurs...regardless of gender fundamentals and coaching are the same;” “She's PERFECT for the job " @HowardBeck: On Becky Hammon: basketball prodigy, adrenaline junkie and pioneer. [link];” “YAY Becky Hammon. Congratulations! Greatness is Earned;” “BECKY Hammon...First future female NBA Head Coach... #GoSpursGo #Spurs Nation [link];” “Becky Hammon will be a coach in the NBA one day. Book it. I hope she is honestly. No reason why she can't be.”

In many instances, supportive tweets about Hammon focused on her gender in a way that celebrated the fact that she was breaking through the male dominated NBA. For instance, “Awesome story on first female #NBA assistant coach Becky #Hammon: [link] #GameChanger #women #sport;” “" @marieclaire: Meet Becky Hammon's—the @NBA's first female coach: [link] "YOU GO GIRL!;” “Becky Hammon, the NBA's First Female Coach [link] via @marieclaire #thisgirlcan and did;” “You GO, girl! // Meet Becky Hammon, the NBA's First Female Coach [link] via @marieclaire;” “GIRL POWER! Could San Antonio Spurs Assistant Becky Hammon Soon Make History? [link] via @Forbes;” “I always knew that women really rule the world. Congrats to Becky Hammon with the #Spurs. Nancy Lieberman w/the #Kings, & Jen Welter #NFL;”

“The announcers were talking about Becky Hammon being the first female NBA coach & I got chills, how awesome is that? :D :D #ProudFeminist.”

Supportive tweets discussed Hammon’s hiring and her overall presence in the NBA as an assistant coach as a positive thing for society, the NBA, or for users personally. Users took the time to congratulate Hammon on her hiring, her ESPNW Woman of the Year Award or the Spurs’ Summer League Championship. Supportive tweets displayed that people understood that what Hammon accomplished during her first year in the NBA was an impressive feat and thus, she deserved to be honored for her achievements.

Individuals also claimed Hammon inspired them, citing her as their hero and someone they admired. Furthermore, respect for Hammon was evident in users’ supportive tweets. It seemed that people wanted their followers to know they had great respect for Hammon but also wanted their followers to support and respect Hammon as well. Along those same lines, supporters made it clear they believed Hammon was deserving of being an assistant coach in the NBA, regardless of her gender. Indeed, some supportive tweets specifically focused on her gender, transitioning it from a hindrance into an asset by sending Hammon messages such as “girl power,” “you go girl,” and “this girl can.” While these supporters did not explicitly discuss the gender barriers that Hammon defied by becoming the first woman to coach in the NBA, they did consider her gender as an important part of what was transpiring. According to supporters, Hammon’s gender showed the power and ability of females to thrive in a male-dominated sphere such as professional sports.

Breaking Barriers

Before Becky Hammon, no woman had ever held a full-time assistant coaching position in the NBA or in any of the four major North American professional sports leagues. Her hiring was unprecedented and in many ways revolutionary, as it marked the first time a woman had accomplished such a feat in the coaching realm. Thus, many saw Hammon's entry into the NBA as a breaking of a previously impermeable barrier or the shattering of a glass ceiling that existed for women in coaching. For example, "Becky Hammon just shattered a huge glass ceiling [link];" "Hear the cracking glass? Boom! Becky Hammon on being Spurs assistant coach [link] via @USATODAY;" "Love seeing women breaking down barriers - How Becky Hammon Became N.B.A.'s First Full-Time Female Assistant Coach [link]."

Tweets also emphasized how Hammon's hiring showcased the progression of gender roles in sports and the evolution of how women are viewed in the coaching world. "Congrats, Becky Hammon on your first NBA coaching win! Progress - wonderful progress!;" "Want to talk about PROGRESS? Becky Hammon sitting on that Spurs bench @NBA;" "With all the talk about Dean Smith's racial integration, Pop employed Becky Hammon as an assistant coach. A woman to command men. Great;" "Women moving forward! Meet Becky Hammon, the NBA's First Female Coach [link] via @marieclaire."

People cited Hammon not only as an example of progress in sports but also as a catalyst for further change. For example, tweets emphasized how Hammon was paving the way for other women to also break into the male-dominated coaching world and continue to induce change. "Becky Hammon is paving a new path for women in sports as NBA's first female coach #sportsbiz [link];" "All women in sports can't help but be

inspired by Becky Hammon;” “Becky Hammon interview was great. Changing the face of the game!”

As previously noted, in the summer of 2015, the Arizona Cardinals of the National Football League (NFL) hired Jen Welter as a training camp coaching intern and the NBA’s Sacramento Kings hired Nancy Lieberman as an assistant coach. Following the announcement of those hires, users emphasized how Hammon had paved the way for Welter and Lieberman to be afforded the same opportunity she was. Examples here included, “Looks like Becky Hammon has started a new trend! Congrats to @jwelter47 and the @AZCardinals for making history! [link];” “It is safe to say Becky Hammon's success is opening the doors for other highly talented women: [link];” “The Kings are expected to hire Nancy Lieberman as an assistant coach, according to @ailene_voisin. Becky Hammon has set a trend for women;” “Becky Hammon Hoping to Spur on Other Women To Succeed [link].”

However, for some, while being an assistant coach in the NBA was significant, but they believed that Hammon could become a head coach in the NBA in the near future and emphasized that she was deserving of that role. For example, “@TBob53 @FletcherMackel wants Becky Hammon for the Pelicans head coach position. Here's why: [link] [link];” “I can see woman #NBA head coach someday; more than in college. Becky Hammon proving she belongs in NBA [link] via @nypost;” “[USA Today: For The Win] - Former NBA GM says Becky Hammon deserves a head coaching job [link];” “@blazerwheels I'd take Becky Hammon as a head coach & be damn happy w/ her. She's going to be the 1st & set the trend.”

Many users felt that Hammon was a pioneer, breaking barriers such as the coaching glass ceiling that had existed in major North American professional sports prior to her arrival. Throughout Hammon's first year, tweets continued to emphasize the unprecedented nature of what Hammon was doing and the change she was affecting. Individuals also wanted people to know that Hammon paved the way for others and that the Welter and Lieberman hirings would not have been possible without her. Many also expressed the opinion that Hammon deserved consideration for a head-coaching job at the NBA level, an idea that seemed virtually impossible prior to Hammon joining the Spurs coaching staff.

The revolutionary nature of conversations on Twitter about Hammon's hiring, her success in her first year in the NBA and the possibility of Hammon becoming a head coach in the league suggest that Twitter is a space where important cultural conversations, specifically in the world of sports, can occur. Scholars have suggested that social media sites such as Twitter are platforms in which sports and specifically women in sports can be discussed (Bruce & Hardin, 2014). Furthermore, Butterworth (2014) recognizes that social media can enable sport to be a platform for important political discussions.

With Hammon coaching in the NBA, people were able to employ Twitter as a way to express their views on Hammon and how she was revolutionizing the sports world by breaking down a barrier that had existed for essentially, all of North American professional sport history. Individuals who did not believe Hammon's hiring was revolutionary or significant also were able to express their opinions as well and thus, a cultural discussion regarding gender in sport developed on Twitter. Consequently,

Twitter is not only a platform where users can advocate for change or for a person affecting it, but also a venue where they can be exposed to different viewpoints than their own, which can further fuel conversations and discussion about important cultural issues in sport that may not be given much attention in the mainstream media.

Resistance

Individuals who expressed resistant views toward Hammon, her presence in the NBA and women in sport also gained a voice in the conversation. Some people expressed skepticism about the revolutionary nature of Hammon's hiring. For instance, "@LinkedInPulse The Becky Hammon Hire Is Great; But The Glass Ceiling Still Exists [link];" "@NewhouseSports 1 week after Becky Hammon's hire by the Spurs folks still wonder if she is the game changer [link];" "No. RT @msnbc: Will Becky Hammon's new role with the San Antonio Spurs inspire change in the @NBA? [link];" "Sports analysis: No NBA coaching revolution, Spurs hired Becky Hammon for ... - WJLA [link];" "The legend that I never heard of until 2 weeks ago @JayBilas: Cool Nike ad honoring San Antonio's Becky Hammon. [link]."

In addition to the resistance to Hammon as a revolutionary figure and a catalyst for change, users also discredited her ability to coach professional basketball and specifically, men's basketball because she was a woman. Examples include, "No nba player wants a women coach the fuck? Becky hammon isn't lasting;" "Don't get why the Spurs hired Becky Hammon. There's a difference between men's and women's basketball. Both evolving but never the same;" "Becky hammon never dunked in a game she not a real coach;" "People have hard times seeing women in power position in sports such as coach for a professional team. Becky Hammon. [link];" "I honestly believe if Becky

hammon becomes a head coach, certain players couldn't handle a women being in control;" "Spurs' assistant Becky Hammon named ESPNW Woman of year. This Bitch needs to go coach some women. What does she have to offer to a Man's game."

Furthermore, after Hammon led the Spurs to the 2015 NBA Summer League Title, and some users expressed the possibility that Hammon could become a head coach in the NBA in the near future, others expressed their stark opposition. For example, "Becky Hammon bout to get a Head Coaching job before Patrick Ewing..all she did was coach Summer League;" "Becky Hammon would be the worst NBA coach in the history of the NBA;" "Great job Becky Hammon, you can win a Summer League Title. She won nothing, lets move on folks;" "How many Summer League Championship coaches have had fans demanding they be NBA head coaches straight away like Becky Hammon?;" "LOL michelle beadle thinks Becky Hammon is being groomed to be the Spurs next head coach. HAHAAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAH."

Individuals also discussed Hammon in a sarcastic manner, making fun of her, her hiring or the Spurs. Examples of sarcastic tweets include, "Congratulations to Becky Hammon who will finally get to see people in the stands at professional basketball games;" "@mcuban Assume Spurs will be starting Becky Hammon tonight. Tell your guys to lay off the hand-checking;" "Funniest tweet I've seen in a while.. RT @PlaintiveWhale: @ArturoGalletti Or Becky Hammon, assume the Spurs will be suiting her up;" "In Rondo's first game as a Mav he'll face off against Austin Daye, Becky Hammon, the Spurs Coyote and a real coyote;" "Spurs Starting Lineup vs Knicks: C - Popovich PF - Fan in Section 124 (Row 2-Seat 12) SF - Sean Elliott SG - Ime Udoka PG - Becky Hammon."

Sport is strongly linked to masculinity and thus, it is assumed that one must be a man or at least possess masculine characteristics in order to succeed in sports and specifically, in men's professional sports. Therefore, individuals felt the need to convey resistance to Hammon coaching in the NBA, because they felt, as a woman, she did not possess the traditional masculine characteristics necessary to coach men's basketball. These, individuals specifically cited her gender as a reason why she should not be coaching a male sport. People also discredited her accomplishments and credentials, such as winning the NBA Summer League Title or being one of the best female basketball players in WNBA history, as a way to protect and reaffirm the masculine nature of sport. Sarcasm was also used as a mechanism to discredit Hammon, through joking about her playing in an NBA game and thus, further discrediting her playing career and what she accomplished in the women's game as a college and professional athlete.

There is no doubt that resistant conversations about Hammon and sarcastic and negative language directed toward Hammon can be seen as a lack of evidence of cultural change that many other users believed has started to occur because of Hammon. However, it also represents how Twitter and social media is a democratic platform in which anybody can express their opinions of cultural issues in sport. Accordingly, people also took advantage of the participatory nature of Twitter to express their resistance by citing traditional gender roles as a reason why Hammon did not belong in the NBA and why she would not be successful in her NBA endeavors.

Objectification in Gender Roles

In addition to tweets that were resistant to Hammon coaching in the NBA and a woman coaching men, rhetoric surrounding Hammon employed traditional gender roles

as a way to objectify Hammon. Individuals expressed concern about Hammon's appearance, commenting repeatedly on how she looked and what she was wearing during Spurs games. Examples include, "Becky Hammon is hot!!! She'd be a total distraction to most teams;" "Becky Hammon is hot and a nba coach;" "Becky Hammon is sexy I can't wait to see her on the sidelines during the Spurs games;" "Becky Hammon, that ponytail is on point girl. I see you #Spurs;" "bruh, becky hammon is dressed to impress!" Tweets also repeatedly referred to Hammon as their "Women Crush Wednesday," "WCW" or "bae", focusing on Hammon's appearance and rarely discussing coaching, basketball or the NBA.

Other users mentioned Hammon being in a male locker room and the idea that the Spurs players and male coaches would try to pursue her sexually. For instance, "I say Tony Parker should tap Becky Hammon.! Lol;" "I wonder how many Spurs have tried to smash Becky Hammon;" "Bet bread Tony Parker has already hooked up with Becky Hammon.;" "No way Becky Hammon doesn't get hit on constantly as the only female coach in basketball;" "Pop Hitting Becky Hammon." Sexual rhetoric about Hammon reinforced the ideology that women, specifically in sports, exist only to serve at the sexual pleasure of men and have no other purpose.

In addition to the plethora of sexual comments, individuals reinforced gender roles and stereotypes through sexist and degrading comments toward Hammon. Examples include, "@geoffsheen760 If I were married to her, I'd constantly say—_. Becky, Hammon Cheese sandwich please!;" "I wonder if Becky Hammon gives the Spurs players pats on the butt when they do a good job. #CopAFeel;" "Question: What will Becky Hammon bring to the #Spurs? Answer: "B***jobs & sandwiches. Boris Diaw

will love her." #coldpiece!;" "Becky Hammon out here trying to teach n****s how to pick and roll, bitch pick out these groceries and make me a sandwich;" "I'm like 88% sure that Kawhi Leonard's defense is secretly powered by Becky Hammon's resting bitch face. #GoSpursGo."

These comments continued to perpetuate the idea that women are considered second-class citizens, who are not equal to men in the sports world. The data contradicts the belief that sports are a meritocratic utopia of equality, free from the inequality and prejudices that exist in society. Therefore, even though scholars have detailed how social media can be a place of increasing respect for women's sports and women in the sporting world, this study conveys that though that claim may be true in certain cases, there is still a long way to go for women to gain the necessary respect in the sports world to affect significant change.

Male Benevolence

In contrast to tweets that portrayed Hammon as a history maker and a trailblazer, other individuals emphasized how the San Antonio Spurs and Head Coach Gregg Popovich were the history makers in the situation, not Hammon. Individuals reinforced the idea that Hammon's hiring as an assistant coach in the NBA was strictly a product of the revolutionary actions of Popovich and the Spurs organization. These tweets attributed Hammon's success not to her ability, efforts or merit but to the decision-makers of the male-dominated NBA. One of the ways this rhetoric manifested was in focusing on the San Antonio Spurs as an organization that "does everything right" and empowers minorities.

For example tweets labeled Hammon’s hiring as an event that transpired because it involved the right team and was at the right time. For example, “San Antonio #Spurs: Right Team, Right Time For Becky Hammon [link];” “[Bloguin: NBA Draft Blog] - San Antonio Spurs: Right Team, Right Time For Becky Hammon [link];” “ “Why Becky Hammon is the right coach at the right time for new NBA [link];” “San Antonio Spurs: San Antonio Spurs: Right Team, Right Time For Becky Hammon #SanAntonio [link].”

Other examples included, ““The @spurs showed they weren't done being the best" - @MHarrisPerry on the hiring of Becky Hammon #nerdland #champions #GoSpursGo;” “Hiring: How The Spurs Did It Right With Becky Hammon #spurs #hiring #women [link];” “Becky Hammon Learning the "Spurs Way" [link];” “Becky Hammon said the Spurs have an "enabling environment." Nice term. I imagine the Knicks have the exact opposite of that;” ““I want to commend the @spurs for hiring Becky Hammon as the first female full-time assistant coach in the @NBA" —”President Obama;” “Spurs hire Becky Hammon, continue to redefine NBA history [link] #Spurs #NBA.”

Furthermore, individuals not only applied the “right team, right time” rhetoric to the Spurs as an organization but also to Head Coach Gregg Popovich. For instance, “Popovich as #innovator again. How Becky Hammon Became #NBAs First Full-Time Female Assistant Coach [link];” “Gregg Popovich Makes More History By Hiring Becky Hammon As First Female Assistant Coach;” “Completely forgot #Spurs had a woman, Becky Hammon, assistant coach. Nice to have Gregg Popovich as a mentor in her development as a coach;” “Pop's the best. RT @highkin: Gregg Popovich on Becky Hammon in a new interview with KNBR in the Bay Area: [link];” “RT @Jason_Wacker

Greg Popovich is a trend setter. More female assistants being hired in the NBA since Becky Hammon. #GoSpursGo.”

In attributing the revolutionary nature of Hammon’s hiring to the organization and men that hired her, individuals emphasized that Hammon made it to the NBA sidelines strictly because of other people and not based on her own merit. Additionally, the San Antonio Spurs are an organization primarily run by men, such as Head Coach Gregg Popovich and thus, not only were people taking credit away from Hammon but they were placing the credit right in the hands of men, the group that benefits from the glass ceiling many say Hammon shattered. The “right team, right time” narrative downplays Hammon’s involvement in her own historical hiring and reinforces the rhetoric that women are only able to break into male-dominated sport with the assistance of males.

DISCUSSION

This research explored how individuals on Twitter reacted to an unprecedented event in professional sports history, the hiring of Becky Hammon as the first ever full-time female assistant coach in any of the four major professional North American sports leagues. The emergent themes from the data led to some significant implications for the field of communication and sport. First, the research illustrates that social media channels and more specifically Twitter, are a venue where important cultural discussions can occur (Brock, 2012). Indeed, Twitter provides a space where individuals can discuss and debate sports news, but along with that, the important cultural issues that arise in the sport world such as the hiring of Becky Hammon. Twitter provides a formidable venue for cultural discussions regarding other important issues in sport such as amateurism in athletics, the rise of domestic violence incidents among athletes, high-profile athletes using their voice for political activism, LGBTQ athletes' rights and more.

When the Spurs hired Hammon, major news outlets reported the story and dispensed the details of the hiring online. As this news circulated, individuals on Twitter began tweeting about Hammon, in an informative, but also controversial manner, discussing her hiring and what it meant for the sport world. As they did so, discussion about Hammon proliferated, and arguably, more importantly, conversations about gender issues in sport also became a prominent part of the discourse. This turn of events was significant because women's sports and women in the sporting world generally receive less media-coverage from mainstream outlets than their male counterparts, causing them to feel marginalized and left out of the coverage (Bruce & Hardin, 2014). Via Twitter, news about Hammon's hiring morphed from congratulatory messages that championed

the significance of the event to discussions that centered on the possibility of women gaining a more prominent position in coaching men in the four major North American sports. These discussions continued as the NFL hired Jen Welter and the NBA hired Nancy Lieberman as female coaches in male professional sports leagues.

Additionally, Twitter enabled participatory conversation, as both mainstream news organizations, reporters and fans joined together in creating and distributing narratives surrounding Hammon. Scholars have suggested that social media can open up cultural spaces where women's sports can be discussed and promoted (Bruce & Hardin, 2014). Moreover, digital media affords women's sport stakeholders the power to construct and disseminate visual and textual narratives that increase attention and respect for women's sport and shift ideological control away from men (LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014). Whereas this study did not examine the gender of the individuals who tweeted about Hammon, but it does display that Twitter has the ability to undermine hierarchies of authority and power and is a platform in which marginalized voices (i.e. women) can be heard (Mann, 2014).

This manifested primarily in the "support" and "breaking barriers" themes that emerged from the content. Twitter gave Hammon's supporters a platform in which they could congratulate, stick up for and defend Hammon in a masculine-dominated sporting society that might not be so quick to do so via traditional media platforms. Messner (2007) stated that the framing of females by sports media threatens to negate any counterhegemonic progress women have made as athletes. Therefore, one of the key contributions of this study is that it illustrates how Twitter affords a voice to those questioning the place that women have in sport culture, specifically their lack of

underrepresentation in the coaching ranks of the four major North American sports. Indeed, the results discussed here exemplify how Twitter offered individuals the ability to discuss how Hammon's first year in the NBA was changing the sport landscape and how she was breaking down barriers and glass ceilings that had defined the sports world prior to her arrival. Furthermore, the conversational nature of Twitter provided Hammon supporters a community where they could discuss her hiring and show their support for her. Twitter became a place where individuals who were passionate about Hammon and women's sports could come to find others like themselves.

While one study does not and cannot suggest that significant change in sport culture has occurred, this research shows that the glass ceiling is no longer as limiting as it was in the past and cracks are beginning to emerge in a once impenetrable barrier. These cracks in the glass ceiling, a second implication of this study, were visible through the outpouring of support for Hammon after she was hired and throughout her first year as an assistant coach in the NBA. Individuals on Twitter not only supported Hammon but also emphasized how her presence in the NBA was changing gender expectations in sport and changing perceptions of what women were capable of accomplishing in such as masculine domain.

Hammon's revolutionary status was further supported when the NFL's Arizona Cardinals hired Jen Welter as a training camp coaching intern and when the NBA's Sacramento Kings hired Nancy Lieberman as the second full-time female assistant coach in NBA history. The Welter and Lieberman hirings offer further evidence that Hammon was affecting change as other women were being afforded opportunities to coach in men's professional sports leagues. This potential "tipping point" was picked up by people

on Twitter who attributed the progress and increased female presence in the NFL and NBA to Hammon, calling her a “trailblazer,” “pioneer,” and a “hero.”

However, despite the significant amount of support for Hammon and the perception that her hiring led to progress, change and shattered the glass ceiling, there was still significant resistance to the idea that Hammon’s presence in the NBA had accomplished anything substantial. Thus, the third implication from the research found that there are still those who feel the need to sexualize, degrade and demean women in sport, particularly when they are seen to be intruding into an area traditionally dominated by men. Research has suggested that there is a significant discrepancy in the media coverage of women’s sports compared to men’s sports (Billings, Angelini & Duke, 2010; Billings, Angelini, MacArthur, Bissell, Smith & Brown, 2015) and that women are portrayed in ways that focus more on their sexuality and less on their athletic performance (Clavio & Eagleman, 2011). Much like traditional media outlets, the results of this study displayed the nature of individuals on Twitter to focus on Hammon’s sexuality and not on her merit, achievements or qualifications.

Gender roles were ever-present in this study, as some individuals emphasized Hammon’s gender as the main reason why she was not qualified for a job in which she was required to lead men. Sport is a masculine domain, and thus, many aspects of the sport industry are gendered as masculine which leads to the troublesome perception that women are not qualified to hold leadership positions in sport (Whiteside & Hardin, 2012). The resistant discourse that was analyzed in this study was misogynistic, disrespectful and made Hammon a victim of her gender and the roles that have historically been assigned to women. The results further illustrated how hegemonic

masculinity continues to shape societal norms. Hegemonic masculinity legitimizes and naturalizes the role of men as leaders in sport, including both women's and men's sports (Walker & Bopp, 2011; Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013). Many individuals on Twitter just could not process a woman leading men, as that notion does not comply with the gender roles assigned to men and women in our society.

Indeed, Hammon poses an identity threat to some male sports fans and to the masculine nature of sport, as her presence on the NBA sidelines supports the notion that a woman might possibly be more qualified and knowledgeable than a man pursuing the same profession. While Hammon's hiring is an unprecedented and significant step for women in sport, it will be interesting to see, going forward, how female coaches are treated as more and more rise up in the coaching ranks. Many believe sport is the last bastion of masculinity left in our society and like many other instances in history, the dominant group will do everything in its power to protect and continue to assert their dominance.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The research possessed one significant limitation in that it was limited to content about one person and one incident. However, at the time the research began, Becky Hammon was the only full-time female assistant coach in any of the four major North American professional sports leagues and therefore, studying her was the only plausible option. Since her hiring, the NBA, NFL and MLB have hired women to coach in their respective leagues. In July of 2015, the NBA's Sacramento Kings hired Nancy Lieberman as the second full-time assistant coach in the league. In addition to Lieberman's hiring, the NFL's Arizona Cardinals hired Jen Welter as a training camp coaching intern and the Buffalo Bills hired Kathryn Smith as the first full-time female coach in the NFL on January 21, 2016. In the MLB, the Oakland Athletics hired Justine Siegal to serve as a hitting instructor in their fall camp in September 2015.

Another limitation of the data was that the first 10,000 tweets from both August and July were used in the data analysis instead of the entirety of the samples from the two months. This was done because the samples were too large from each of those months. Sampling the first 10,000 tweets however did limit the study, as tweets from the beginning of the month could be significantly different than those from the end of the month. Furthermore, individuals tend to be emotional on Twitter and therefore, some of the reactions to Hammon's hiring might be not representative of the general public's views on the issue. Tweets might express a visceral reaction or emotionally invested response that would not have been captured if the individual was speaking directly to another person or to Hammon. In the future, surveys could be used to sample individuals

about their opinions regarding female coaches in the attempt to gather more genuine responses.

Hiring women to coach male athletes at the professional level is no longer unprecedented and therefore, future research could study fan reaction on social media to the hirings of Lieberman, Welter, Smith, Siegal and other women as they continue to break into coaching at the highest levels. Furthermore, it would be fruitful to compare fan and media perception of Becky Hammon as an NBA coach to the perception of Lieberman, Welter, Smith and Siegal. Is the public more accepting of female coaches in men's professional sports since the hiring of Becky Hammon? Do fans react differently to the NBA hiring a female coach in comparison to the NFL or MLB hiring a female coach? Does perception of Hammon as a coach change throughout her career in the NBA?

Future research could also explore if gender plays a role in how fans feel about a female coaching men. Are women more likely to support a female coach coaching men in one of the four major North American professional sports leagues? Do men and women have different opinions on women coaching men? Additionally, it would be interesting to study how other factors affect people's feelings about women coaching men such as age, race, geographical location, nationality and fan identification. Finally, coaching represents only one portion of the leadership positions in sport, and thus, it would be useful to examine perceptions of women obtaining positions in management and ownership in professional sports and even further, perceptions of women in positions of extreme power in other careers such as a woman as President of the United States or CEO of a major corporation.

CONCLUSION

Social media and specifically Twitter has become an immensely viable sphere for the discussion of sport and sport culture (Browning & Sanderson, 2012; Kassing & Sanderson, 2015; Sanderson & Truax, 2014). In addition to Twitter becoming a hotbed of cultural discussion and discourse, Mann (2014) claims that new media has the potential to undermine hierarchies of authority and power and is a platform in which marginalized voices (i.e. women) can be heard. Becky Hammon's hiring as the first full-time female assistant coach in the NBA provided the perfect opportunity to utilize Twitter as a way to study perceptions of Hammon throughout her first year on the NBA sidelines and specifically, as a way to hear both mainstream and marginalized voices. The results suggested that while many sports fans and individuals on Twitter were supportive and encouraging of Hammon as the first full-time female coach in a male professional sports league, resistance to women to coaching men was prevalent and fueled by a reliance on traditional gender roles and stereotypes. However, this research does show that as more women obtain positions of power and leadership in sports, Twitter is an important space for both cultural conversations and dialogue but also has the ability to be a tool of change, advocacy and progress.

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