ASU Global Sport Institute

Arizona State University

Field Studies:
A 10-Season Snapshot of NCAA
Power Five Head Coaching Hires

working paper series

Abstract

The purpose of this report is to explore and describe coach hiring and firing trends at the highest collegiate levels. We sought to explore head coach hiring patterns over the past 10 seasons in the Power Five conferences. All data presented have been gathered from publicly accessible sources, such as news articles and press releases, that report on coaches' entrances into and exits from coaching positions. Trends in hiring and firing related to race are examined, along with patterns related to coaching pipelines and pathways. Implications for future research and need for data-driven policy are discussed.

Introduction

Tom Fears (New Orleans Saints) was the first Latino American head coach in the NFL (1967), and Joe Kapp was the first Latino American NCAA Division 1-A coach at a predominantly White program (1982, University of California-Berkeley). Tom Flores (Oakland Raiders) was the first Latino and Coach of Color in the NFL's modern era (after the 1970 NFL-AFL merger). Art Shell (Los Angeles Raiders) became the first Black head coach in the modern era (1989), and Willie Jeffries was the first Black NCAA Division 1-A coach at a predominantly White program (1979, Wichita State). The push for greater representation of Coaches of Color within the NFL has been well-documented, especially since the 2003 adoption of the Rooney Rule, which requires NFL teams to interview ethnic-minority candidates for head coach and senior football operations jobs. In the NCAA, this topic has also been a part of recent discussions by journalists (e.g., Myerberg, 2018; Newberry, 2020) and researchers (e.g., Turick & Bopp, 2016). The Global Sport Institute, with the help of the Paul Robeson Center for Innovative Academic & Athletic Prowess at the University of Central Florida, sought to answer one question: **What can we say about hiring of head Coaches of Color by NCAA member institutions?**

Aims

We sought to explore head coach hiring patterns over the past 10 seasons in the Power Five conferences: Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Big Ten Conference, Big 12, Pac-12 Conference, and Southeastern Conference (SEC). Rather than exploring the question in the snapshot of a single year, we examined this issue with an in-depth approach. We analyzed who was hired and fired and looked for patterns from the 2009-10 NCAA football season through the 2018-19 season. The data contained in this report are not exhaustive, and we will continue to build on this research, looking for more patterns and additional questions. The total number of coaches in this data set is insufficient for inferential statistical analyses. **The purpose of this report is to explore and report on coach hiring and firing trends, not to extrapolate how or why these patterns occur.**

Method

All data presented have been gathered from publicly accessible sources, such as news articles and press releases, that report on coaches' entrances into and exits from head coaching positions. There were multiple phases of research. The first was data collection done by the Paul Robeson Research Center for Innovative Academic & Athletic Prowess (PRRC). This data collection phase was followed by an analysis of the PRRC data, as well as a secondary data collection, both conducted by the Global Sport Institute. The final step was an analysis by the Global Sport Institute that considered both data collections.

PRRC, under the direction of Dr. C. Keith Harrison, compiled data from all head coach changes within the NCAA Power Five Conferences from the 2009-10 through the 2018-19 seasons. Teams were included in these analyses if they were in a Power Five conference at the conclusion of the 2018-19 season, even if they were not a Power Five team for the entire 10-season timeframe. In total, 65 schools were included in the data set. Notre Dame football, which competed outside a conference, was included, as they contractually play four to six games per year against ACC opponents. And, Notre Dame is a member of the ACC for most other sports. A list of the total schools included can be found in the appendix. Data include information on the race/ethnicity of both hired and fired coaches, the prior coaching position of each, their win/loss records, and the next coaching position (in the case of the coach leaving the position). The Global Sport Institute added age, highest playing experience, coaching tenure, and basic descriptive statistics, and conducted analyses of all data. Two separate researchers verified data using publicly-available sources. Discrepancies were reconciled by the two researchers by accessing multiple sources, with the preponderance of information determining correct information.

Over the 10-season window included in our analyses there were 111 coaching changes. Table 1 provides the total number and percent of outgoing head coaches, and Table 2 provides the total number and percent of newly-hired head coaches in our analyses, each broken down by race.

Table 1

Total Number and Percent of Outgoing Head Coaches 2009-10 through 2018-19 by Race

	Total Number	Percent
White	97	87.4
Black	12	10.8
Latino	2	1.8
Total	111	100

Table 2

Total Number and Percent of Newly-Hired Head Coaches 2009-10 through 2018-19 by Race

	Total Number	Percent
White	87	78.4
Black	21	18.9
Latino	3	2.7
Total	111	100

It is our goal to show trends, and, in future iterations, provide potential explanations and discussion points for next steps in terms of research and considerations for sustainable change. We see these findings as complementary and supplementary to the foundational and ongoing commentaries of Dr. Harry Edwards and the important and groundbreaking Race and Gender Report Cards produced by Dr. Richard Lapchick and The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES) at the University of Central Florida. All figures represent data collected prior to the start of the 2019-20 NCAA football season in order to capture hiring and firing outcomes of the 2018-19 season. Figures do not represent any coaching moves that occurred during the 2019-20 season as the hiring cycle we identified will not be complete until August 2020.

In our analyses, we defined "hires" as officially-hired coaches who were not designated "interim." We excluded interim coaches because, by definition, they are temporary and transient in nature and therefore may add variability to the data that is not representative of actual hiring patterns. However, if a coach was hired as an interim and then immediately hired as the next full-time head coach, we included that coach. We defined a season as one year, from August 1 to July 31, to align with the typical academic calendar. "Age" represents the age of the coach at the time the coach was hired at the specific college or university. We calculated the age based on hire date and birthdate, both of which were found in publicly available sources. "Next Coaching Position" is the next coaching opportunity a coach received within our analyzed timeframe.

Results

Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of NCAA New Hire Power Five Head Coaches – 2009-10 vs. 2018-19

The majority of head coaches hired in the 2009-10 season were White. That majority increased in the 2018-19 season. Figure 1 shows the percentage differences for White, Black, and Latino head coaches hired by Power Five teams for these seasons.

Figure 1

Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of Percentage of New-Hire NCAA Power Five Head Coaches (2009-10 vs. 2018-19)
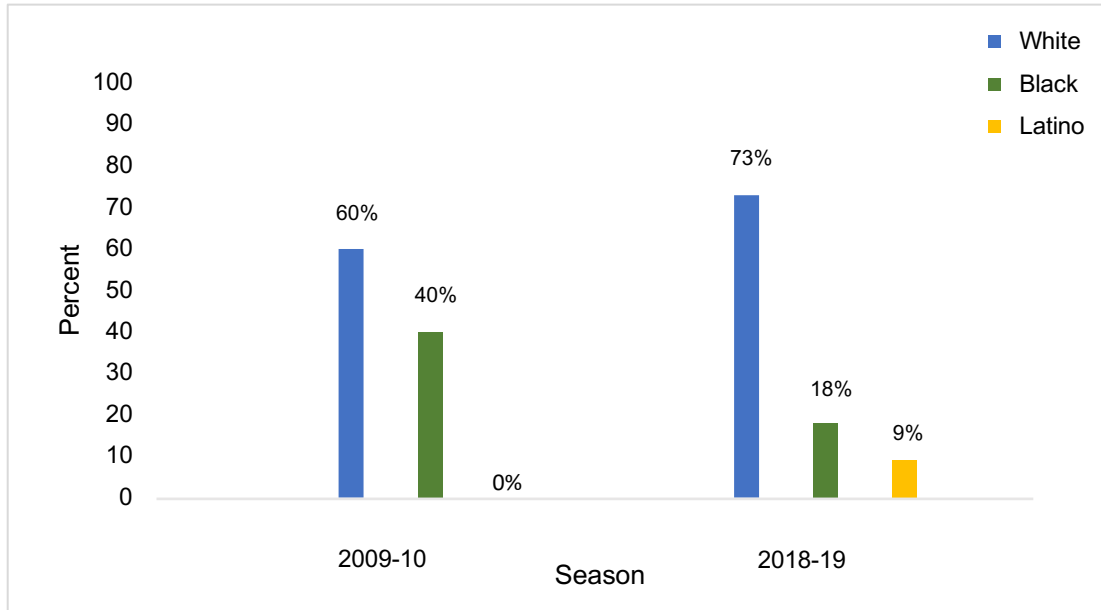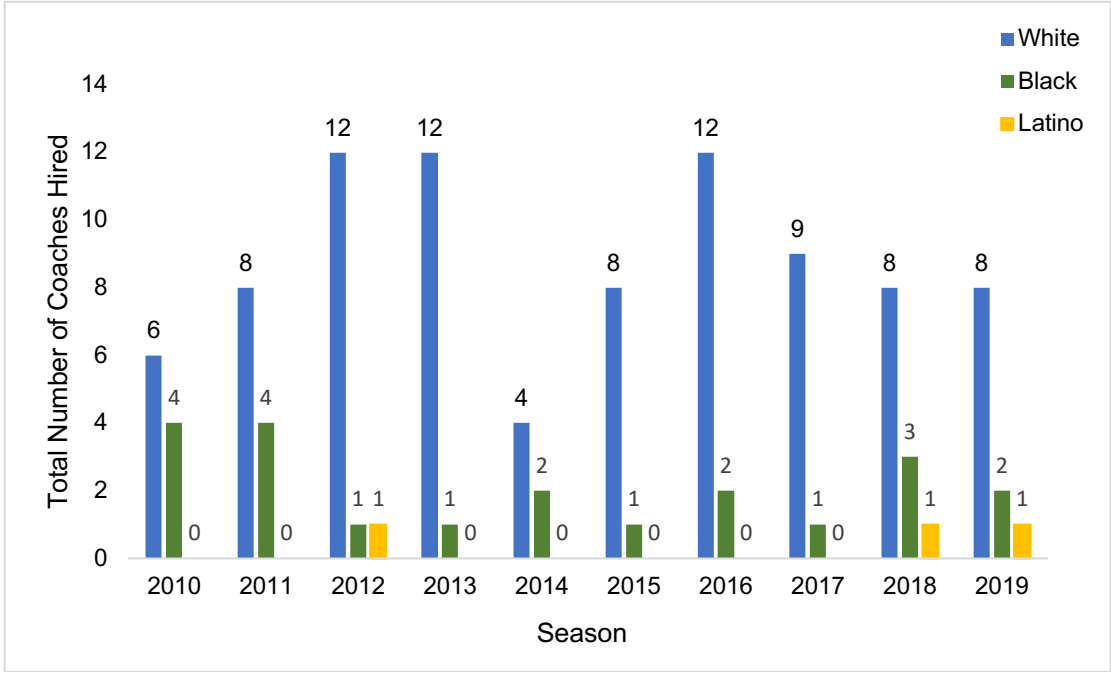

Note. The season 2009-10 indicates the season ending in 2010; the season 2018-19 indicates the season ending in 2019.

A glance at the total number of newly–hired Coaches of Color year-by-year shows variability. However, within that variability, the biggest increases are in the number of White head coaches hired. Figure 2 shows the total number of White, Black, and Latino coaches hired each season.

Figure 2

Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of Total Number of New-Hire Head Coaches (2009-10 through 2018-19) Each Year

*Note.* Each year indicates the year in which the season ended.

Looking at yearly changes and total numbers only provides a cursory overview. If we just compare the season ending in 2010 to the season ending in 2019, there is a decrease in the proportion of head Coaches of Color hired compared to White head coaches hired despite the addition of a Latino head coach. However, a decade-bookended snapshot and yearly total numbers do not paint the full picture of hiring patterns. So, we took a deeper dive to look at more details about these hiring patterns.

Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of New-Hire Head Coaches by Former Coaching Positions (positions are at the college level unless otherwise specified) – 2009-10 through 2018-19

Over the 10-season window, only three Latino head coaches were hired. Given this small sample size, we examined trends for Coaches of Color by combining Latino and Black head coaches for the remaining analyses. The majority of all college head coaches in this sample came from other college head coaching positions. However, a higher percentage of Coaches of Color came from coaching positions in the NFL compared to White head coaches. Figure 3 shows percentages of newly-hired head coaches coming from each prior coaching position across all 10 seasons.

Figure 3

Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of Coaching Position Immediately Before Being Hired as Head Coach 2009-10 through 2018-19
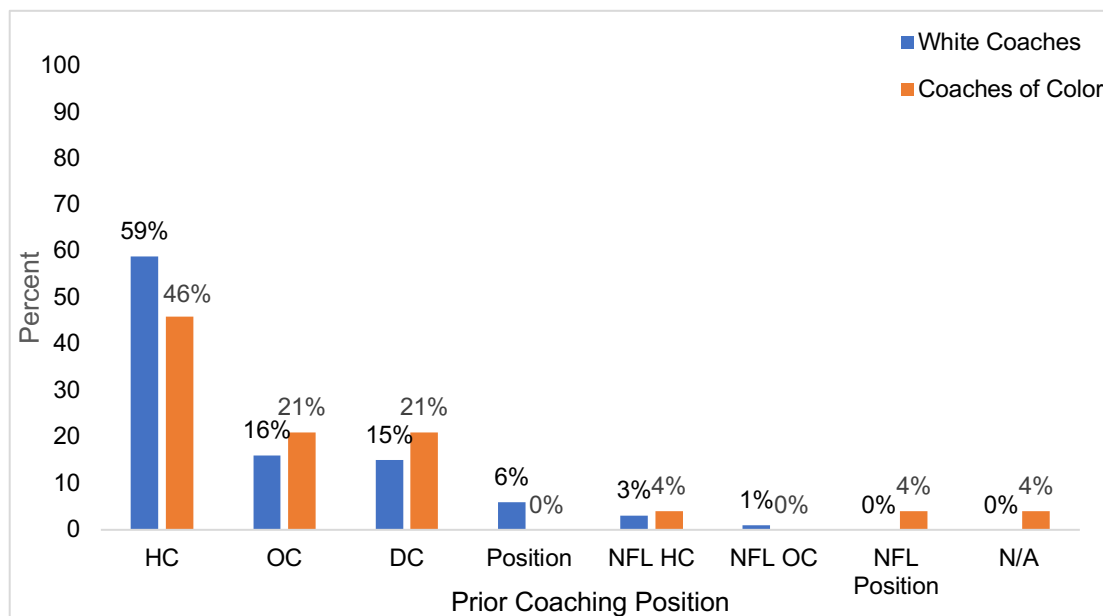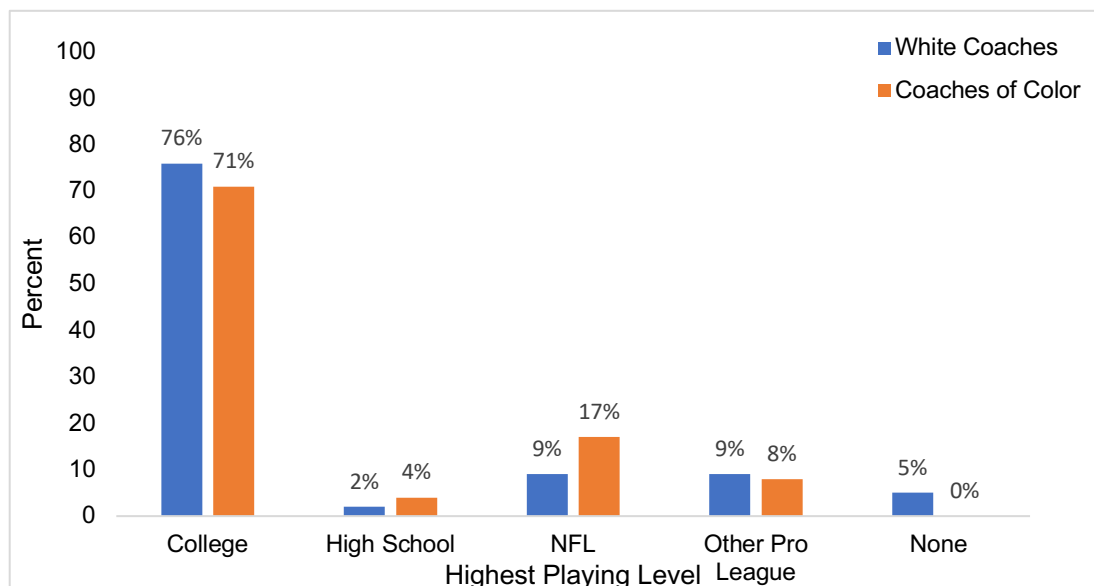

Note. Coaches of color include Black and Latino head coaches; NFL = National Football League; all positions are college coaching positions unless designated as NFL positions; DC = defensive coordinator; HC = head coach; OC = offensive coordinator; Position = position coach; N/A = held a non-coaching position immediately prior to hire.

Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of New-Hire Head Coaches by Former Playing Positions – 2009-10 through 2018-19

The majority of all Power Five head coaches played at the college level regardless of race. A higher proportion of Coaches of Color played in the NFL compared to their White counterparts. All head Coaches of Color played at the high school level or above. However, only White head coaches obtained head coaching positions in the Power Five with no record of football playing experience at any level. Figure 4 shows the playing experience of newly-hired head coaches across the 10 seasons.

Figure 4

Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of Playing Experience of New-Hire Head Coaches 2009-10 through 2018-19

Note. Coaches of color include Black and Latino head coaches; NFL = National Football League; Other League = professional league other than the NFL; None = no playing experience or no playing experience above youth league; Percentages have been rounded and may not equal 100.

Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of NCAA Power Five New-Hire Head Coaches by Hiring Age – 2009-10 through 2018-19

Head Coaches of Color and White head coaches in this time period were hired at about the same average age. The minimum age is slightly higher for Coaches of Color, and the maximum age of hire is slightly lower. Table 3 shows the average ages and ranges for newly-hired head Coaches of Color and White head coaches.

Table 3

New-Hire Head Coaches' Ages and Age Ranges at Time of Hire

	Minimum Age	Maximum Age	Mean Age	Standard Deviation
White Head Coaches	33	67	46.2	7.0
Head Coaches of Color	38	63	47.0	5.8

Note. Age is in years.

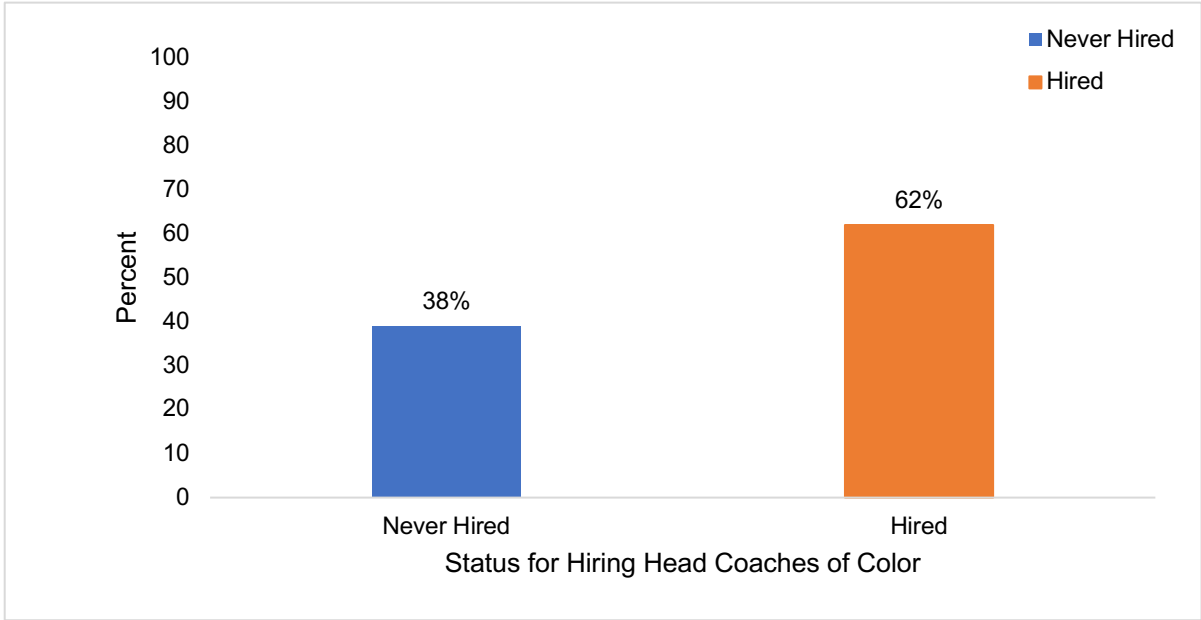### Historical Record of Diversity in Head Coach Hiring by NCAA Power Five Teams

Among the 65 NCAA Power Five teams included in these analyses, there are a number of teams that have never hired any head Coaches of Color, even beyond the 10-season window included in this study. Figure 5 shows percentages of teams that have never hired head Coaches of Color compared to those that have.

Figure 5

*NCAA Power Five Teams' History of Hiring Head Coaches of Color*

Note. Chart represents the historical record of hiring for all the teams included in this data set.

While the number of head Coaches of Color hired across the Power Five schools is low overall, diversity in hiring is not consistent across conferences. The SEC has hired the lowest proportion of head Coaches of Color. Big 12 schools have hired the highest percentage of head Coaches of Color. Figure 6 details diversity in head coach hiring by conference historically, beyond the 10-season window.

Figure 6

NCAA Power Five History of Hiring Head Coaches of Color by Conference
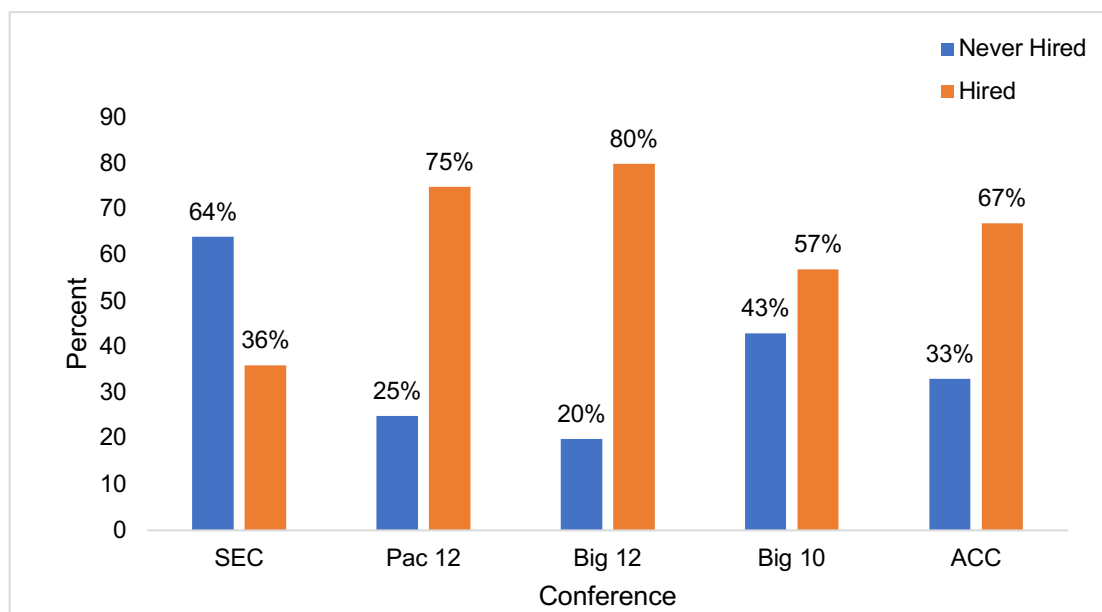

Note. Chart represents all the years in conference histories for the teams included in this data set. SEC = Southeastern Conference; Pac-12 = Pac-12 Conference; Big 12 = Big 12 Conference; Big 10 = Big Ten Conference; ACC = Atlantic Coast Conference.

Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of Next Positions for Outgoing NCAA Power Five Head Coaches – 2009-10 through 2018-19

A higher percentage of Power Five White head coaches were hired into the NFL compared to Coaches of Color. Indeed, 6.2% of White coaches went directly to NFL head coaching positions, but no Coaches of Color did so. When Coaches of Color moved directly into NFL coaching, the move was made as a position coach, but White coaches moved into multiple NFL coaching positions, including offensive coordinator, a frequent pathway to NFL head coaching (Brooks et al., 2019). Figure 7 shows coaching positions obtained by White head coaches immediately after leaving their current positions. Figure 8 represents next coaching positions for outgoing head Coaches of Color. The scope of our current analysis was limited to the immediate subsequent coaching positions obtained after the coach left a Power Five head coaching position.
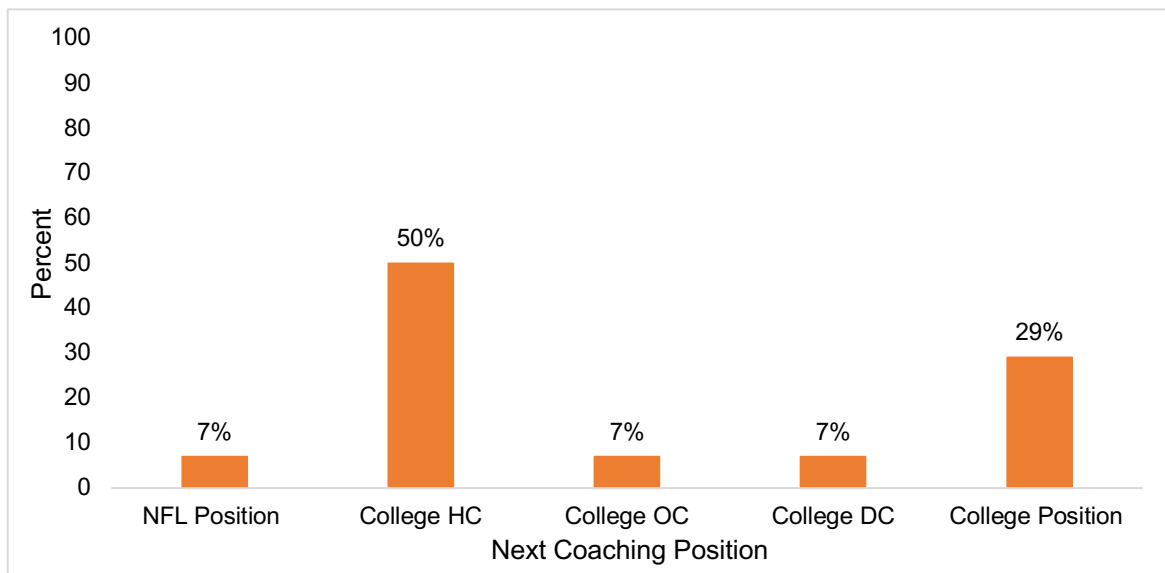
Figure 7

Next Coaching Positions Obtained by Outgoing White Head Coaches
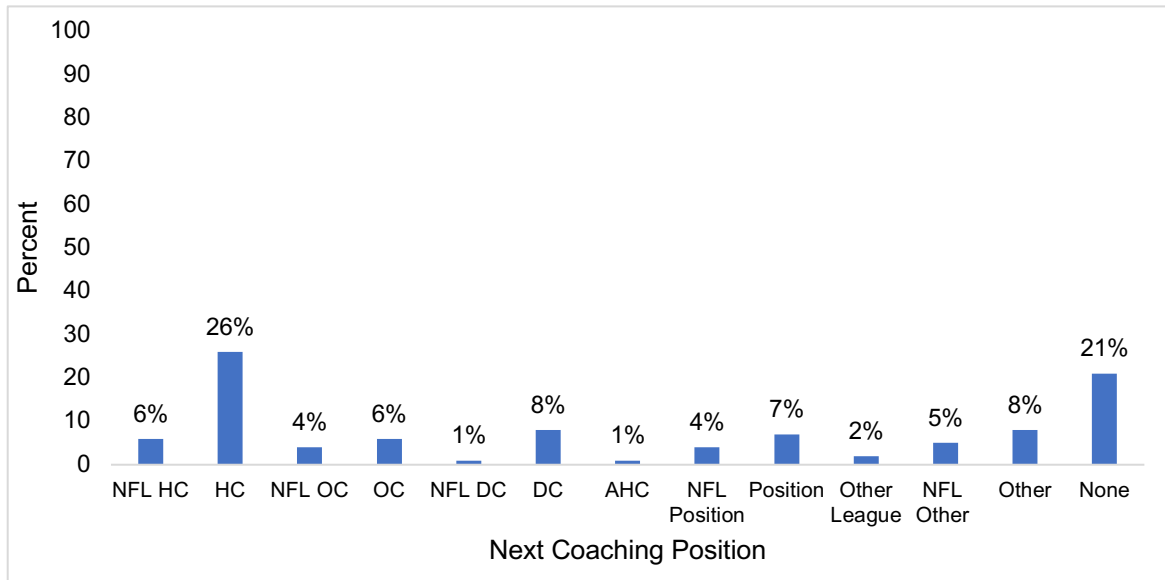
Note. All positions at the college level unless otherwise specified; NFL = National Football League; HC = head coach; OC = offensive coordinator; DC = defensive coordinator; AHC = assistant head coach; Position = position coach; None = held a non-coaching or no position as next position; Percentages have been rounded and may not equal 100.

Figure 8

Next Coaching Positions Obtained by Outgoing Head Coaches of Color

Note. All positions at the college level unless otherwise specified; NFL = National Football League; HC = head coach; OC = offensive coordinator; DC = defensive coordinator; Position = position coach.

NCAA Outgoing Head Coaches Number of Years with the Team 2009-10 through 2018-19

The maximum number of years White coaches served as head coaches on a given team was more than seven times longer than the tenure of Coaches of Color. The maximum number of years a Coach of Color held a head coaching position during this timeframe was six years. More than one third (35.1%) of White coaches exceeded that six-year mark, holding head coaching positions for seven or more years. Table 4 provides the mean and range of coaching tenures for outgoing head coaches.

Table 4

Means and Ranges of Head Coaching Tenures by Race

	Total Number of Coaches	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
White Head Coaches	97	1	46	6.8	6.49
Head Coaches of Color	14	1	6	3.43	1.70

Note. Minimum, maximum, and mean are in years.

Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of Win-Loss Percentages

When we look at winning proportions for White coaches and Coaches of Color, the numbers are similar. Table 5 details the mean proportion of games won for White head coaches compared to head Coaches of Color during their tenure with the team.

Table 5

Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of Win-Loss Percentages for Head Coaches

	Total Number of Coaches	Mean Win Proportion	Standard Deviation
White Head Coaches	97	.54	.16
Head Coaches of Color	14	.46	.17

Note: Mean Win Proportion = mean winning proportion during coaching tenures.

Discussion

Data have to be interpreted with caution, given the limited number of Coaches of Color who have held head coaching positions over the past 10 seasons in the Power Five conferences. However, the trends we observe show that Coaches of Color have not had the same opportunities as their White counterparts. The total number of Coaches of Color hired in this 10-season window shows that barriers still exist. There are few Coaches of Color hired as head coaches in the Power Five conferences. White head coaches are being hired with proportionally lower levels of playing and coaching experience. When Coaches of Color are hired, their tenure is shorter on average, and the range of ages at which they are hired is truncated compared to White head coaches. In contrast to White head coaches, when Coaches of Color leave head coaching positions, they have fewer avenues for future coaching opportunities, and they do not move directly to NFL head coaching positions. Further, they do not move directly to NFL offensive coordinator positions, a main pipeline for future NFL head coaches. Although we observe these differences between White head coaches and Coaches of Color in terms of coaching experience, playing experience, next opportunities, and length of time as head coach, the winning and losing percentages do not support the greater opportunity afforded White coaches. Last, Coaches of Color includes Latino and Black head coaches, which does not inform the potential differences between these groups, and we do not have any Asian and Pacific Islander or Native American head coaches.

Our analyses describe the patterns of *what* is happening in NCAA Power Five head coach hiring. Our analyses do not answer *why* these racial and ethnic barriers exist, nor do we suggest a solution. In future work, we will look at what is happening in other sports and focus on predictive factors for these hiring patterns and policies that better support diversity in coach hiring. We encourage future researchers to investigate the causes and contributing factors that can lead to changes.

References

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Newberry, P. (2020, February 9). Shame on college football for lack of black coaches. *Chicago Tribune.* *https://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/college/ct-college-football-black-coaches-20200210-jqsv6qbjpfdyxnxnvmcattnfmi-story.html.*

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Appendix

List of Power Five Schools Included in Analyses (schools in Power Five conferences as of the end of 2018-19 football season)

Atlantic Coast Conference
Boston College
Clemson University
Duke University
Florida State University
Georgia Institute of Technology
University of Louisville
University of Miami
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
North Carolina State University
University of Pittsburgh
Syracuse University
University of Virginia
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Wake Forest University
University of Notre Dame

Big Ten Conference
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Indiana University Bloomington
University of Iowa
University of Maryland, College Park
University of Michigan
Michigan State University
University of Minnesota
University of Nebraska – Lincoln
Northwestern University
The Ohio State University
Pennsylvania State University
Purdue University
Rutgers University
University of Wisconsin – Madison

Big 12 Conference
Baylor University
Iowa State University
University of Kansas
Kansas State University
University of Oklahoma
Oklahoma State University
Texas Christian University
University of Texas at Austin
Texas Tech University
West Virginia University

Pac-12 Conference
University of Arizona
Arizona State University
University of California, Berkley
University of California, Los Angeles
University of Colorado Boulder
University of Oregon
Oregon State University
University of Southern California
Stanford University
University of Utah
University of Washington
Washington State University

Southeastern Conference
University of Alabama
University of Arkansas
Auburn University
University of Florida
University of Georgia
University of Kentucky
Louisiana State University
University of Mississippi
Mississippi State University
University of Missouri
University of South Carolina
University of Tennessee
Texas A&M University
Vanderbilt University