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Title: Women rugby union coaches' experiences of formal coach education in Ireland and the United Kingdom: A qualitative study

Abstract

Although the sport of rugby union has expanded globally in both the men's and women's formats recently, there remains an under-representation of women coaches across all contexts. Research has focused its analysis on the under-representation of women coaches in a select few sports such as soccer. No extant research has empirically analyzed this under-representation within rugby union. This study addressed this research lacuna on why this under-representation exists from the perspective of 21 women rugby union coaches based within the UK and Ireland. The specific research objective was to analyze the coaches' lived experiences of attending formal coach education courses in rugby union. Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed thematically and conceptualized via an abductive logic against LaVoi's Ecological-Intersectional Model and Pierre Bourdieu's species of capital. Supportive and positive themes reported how the coach education courses had been delivered in a collegiate and lateral manner. Courses thus acted as settings where greater amounts of cultural and social capital could be acquired from both course tutors and peers. This enabled social networks to be made that were used for continual professional development beyond the courses. Barriers and negative experiences orientated upon the lack of empathy imparted by course tutors on account of men having fulfilled these roles on most occasions. Recommendations on how national governing bodies can improve the experiences of women coaches attending future coach education courses are discussed.

Keywords: Bourdieu, capital, under-representation; equality; marginalization

The world governing body of rugby union, World Rugby, has recently overseen an increase in global participation rates within all variants of the sport. According to Kanemasu and Johnson (2019), in 2016 global participation rates reached a total of 9.6 million whereby 581,000 participants were women. The increased participation rates for women have been regarded as a positive step forward in promoting rugby union as an inclusive sport for all genders. Indeed, World Rugby (2019) harbor the ambition of making,

rugby a global leader in sport, where women involved in rugby have equity on and off the field, are reflected in all strategy, plans and structures, making highly valued contributions to participation, performance, leadership and investment in the global game of rugby. (p. 3)

The number of women coaching rugby union, however, has not reflected the growth of women participating in the sport in both the UK and Ireland. Although specific data of women coaching rugby union across all contexts is scant, extant empirical research that has analyzed the overall number of women in coaching roles across sport has identified that women “remain peripheral figures on the coaching landscape” (Norman, 2012, p. 227). For example, Norman et al. (2018) reported that over 1.3 million people are now classed as regular, active coaches in the UK across all sports. These coaches, 70% of which are accredited with some form of coaching qualification, work with over seven million participants each week (Sports Coach UK, 2016). Whilst the number of men in coaching positions within the UK has increased in recent years from 54% in 2017 to 55% in 2019, the number of women in coaching positions has decreased from 46% to 43% at the same time (Thompson et al., 2019). This under-representation is notable in rugby union, both within the UK and Ireland amongst participatory settings, but significantly within elite domains.

To illustrate the under-representation within elite settings, there were only five women, compared with 21 men, who in 2018 held head coaching roles in the Rugby Football Union's (RFUs) newly established women's elite competition. Similarly, only two of the ten teams in Division 1 of Ireland's top women's club competition have head coaches who are women. Furthermore, the head coaches for the four provincial and the national sides are all men. The under-representation of women in coaching roles is further exacerbated when viewing the coaching profiles of professional clubs within the men's game. A review of the coaching staff profiles across the top two professional men's leagues in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland at the end of the 2019-2020 season shows that the coaching staff are solely comprised of men.

As research has indicated, such an under-representation of women coaches at elite levels is also indicative of other sports (LaVoi, 2016b; Norman, 2012). To understand why this under-representation exists across all sports, there has been a plethora of research which have analyzed this topic through a variety of disciplines and theoretical frameworks. The next section outlines this body of work.

Under-representation of women sports coaches: a review of literature

There has been an increasing desire over recent years that scholarly analyses further investigate the role of a coach as a result of it becoming ever more professionalized across Western Europe, North America and Australasia in particular (Sleeman & Ronkainen, 2020; Taylor & Garrett, 2010). As part of this burgeoning field of study, there has been an emphasis to focus on the pathways of coaches so that a greater appreciation of how coaching efficacy is developed (Blackett et al., 2018; Dehghansai et al., 2020; Ronkainen et al., 2020; Sherwin et al., 2017). Much of this research has been claimed to be "gender blind" (Sisjord et al., 2020, p. 3), however, by placing attention on the actions and perceptions of coaches who are men.

This 'gender blind' oversight in coaching research can perhaps be attributed to women having been positioned on the fringes of sport as both a physical and cultural space. Many sports,

including rugby union, have a cultural historicism of promoting hegemonic masculine ideals that produce patriarchal spaces (Giazitzoglu, 2020; Joncheray et al., 2016). Indeed, these sociocultural issues have transcended over to the role and identities of coaches through the homologous reproduction of male coaches (Darvin & Lubke, 2020; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012; Norman, 2010a; Reade et al., 2009; Schlesinger & Weigelt-Schlesinger, 2013). The social processes for how these gendered ideologies continue to be reproduced has been exposed by several studies that have thus contributed to our understanding as to why coaching positions are automatically assigned to men.

LaVoi's (2016a) Ecological-Intersectional Model (EIM) has served as a valuable tool to help analyze the multiple barriers and support mechanisms associated with women gaining entry, succeeding, and then staying in coaching. The EIM incorporates both macro and micro elements and thus addresses what sociologists term the agency-structure dichotomy. LaVoi (2016a) defined four levels to the EIM, from the micro (agency) level of individual and intrapersonal issues, through to the macro (structural) level issues that cover organizational and sociocultural contexts. In doing so, the EIM offers explanatory value in recognizing the variables which women coaches themselves have the capacity to control, but also the organizational systems and sociocultural contexts to which they are bound (LaVoi, McGarry & Fisher, 2019). Without having applied LaVoi's (2016a) EIM model, extant literature has reported on several restrictive processes at all levels and have thus detailed how these "different levels are intertwined and influence each other bi-directionally" (LaVoi et al., 2019, p. 137).

Structural, Institutional and Organizational Factors

The institutionalized gendering of the coaching workforce across North American collegiate settings has identified how prospective women coaches are marginalized by way of male sporting directors preferring to employ male coaches (Kane & LaVoi, 2018; Sagas et al., 2006). Within a European context, the work of Blackett et al. (2017, 2019) in the sports of men's

rugby union and soccer has indicated similar discriminatory practices. Blackett et al. (2017, 2019) reported that elite club directors strategically conducted subjective coach talent identification processes on prospective coaches located within their men's playing squads, using this space as a reservoir to firstly develop coaching talent and then to ultimately recruit from. Prioritizing individuals from within their men's playing squads when offering new coaching vacancies thus contravened UK government legislation such as the 2010 Equality Act, as they omitted transparent recruitment processes. In turn, this was judged as an organizational and structural "mechanism for the perpetuation of particularly disabled people and women coaches being underrepresented within the two sports" of soccer and rugby union (Blackett et al., 2018, p. 224).

This body of research has identified how the gendered cultural legacy of many sports acts as a structural barrier that restricts women accessing elite level coaching opportunities. Yet these structural barriers have been apportioned onto women themselves at an agential level. Women have been blamed for not applying for coaching roles because of not having the confidence nor desire to enter the coaching profession (Clarkson et al., 2019; Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2011; Kane & LaVoi, 2018). Such a view is "simplistic" and "myopic" (LaVoi et al., 2019, p. 137). Within the gendered space of sport, individuals are products of their environment, heavily accountable to subversive social processes that can either empower or suppress confidence to enter and then succeed in coaching (de Haan & Sotiriadou, 2019; Kamphoff, 2010; Norman, 2010b, 2014). In this case, therefore, the marginalization of women in sport deprives women of seeing coaching as a viable prospect in which they have the confidence to aspire and then succeed.

This gendered social construction of many sports has created a subconscious gendering of coaching identities (Hovden & Tjønndal, 2019; Wasend & LaVoi, 2019). In addition to the EIM, these issues have also been conceptualized through Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) praxeology,

notably his species of capital. Bourdieu's theoretical framework and associated concepts have been increasingly used within scholarly analyses on coach development and behaviors. According to Bourdieu (1986), the concept of capital not only covers economic wealth but includes cultural, social, physical and symbolic forms. These species of capital can be acquired in either embodied, objectified and institutionalized forms by individual coaches (Bourdieu, 1986), reprising as culturally accepted dispositions, valued knowledge and key social networks that aid the transition into coaching roles (Blackett et al., 2018; Sisjord et al., 2020). For example, research has shown how male athletes have the benefit of working alongside experienced male coaches, helping them accumulate greater amounts of esoteric knowledge (embodied cultural capital) but also valuable social contacts (institutionalized social capital) that raises their overall profile (embodied symbolic capital) for pursuing a coaching career upon their retirement from a competitive-athletic career (Blackett et al., 2018). The very nature of women being segregated from participating in men's sport as a cultural setting, in what Bourdieu defined as the concept of 'field,' means that these same species of capital are more difficult to acquire.

In conjunction with LaVoi's (2016a) EIM, therefore, Bourdieu's species of capital can help further theorize the sociocultural process for why women are overlooked and remain under-represented in sport, and particularly in men's sporting fields which has more professional opportunities and exposure (see Sisjord et al., 2020). Not being able to accumulate capital through a competitive playing experience in men's sports, such as experiential knowledge (embodied cultural capital), social networks (institutionalized social capital) and status (embodied symbolic capital) can be argued to hinder women's access into prominent coaching roles. Furthermore, Bourdieu's theoretical framework has also been employed by Lewis et al. (2018) to highlight how the language and actions of male educators and candidates on coach education courses further oppressed women coaches within the sociocultural field of English

soccer. The symbolism of these culturally inappropriate practices emphasized how the misogyny, sexism and abuse women coaches encounter still occurs across coach education settings (Lewis et al., 2020). Given that rugby union has a widely accepted culture of promoting masculine and hyper-masculine ideals, and thus being patriarchal (Giazitzoglu, 2020; Joncheray et al., 2016), raises the question as to whether these or other practices are encountered by women rugby union coaches based within the UK and Ireland. The present study therefore sought to address this by analyzing the lived experiences of women coaches attending formal coach education courses in the UK and Ireland.

Formal coach education courses are important settings to analyze. Attendance on them is a necessity for coaches to become certified to perform as coaches. Although these courses are designed to cover the technical, tactical and pedagogical content to help improve coaching knowledge and skills, coaches have been found to devalue them because of their inability to contextualise course content over to each coach's own sociocultural contexts (Stodter & Cushion, 2014). Even when separatist women-only soccer coach education courses have been delivered, these have been received mixed views. Some have been regarded as ineffective because gendered norms continue to be further legitimized, thus preventing women coaches from succeeding in the sport because of being continually seen as inferior to men (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2008). Conversely, Allen and Reid (2019) reported that women coaches valued women-only coach education courses in Scottish field hockey and that they helped improve confidence. Analyzing the experiences of women rugby union coaches' after attending formal coach educational courses can identify how course provision can be strengthened to further incentivize more women rugby union coaches to become certified. In turn, such analyses can contribute to the National Governing Bodies' (NGBs) strategic objectives of having a greater representation of women within rugby union.

Methodology

The study's objective was to analyze the lived experiences of women rugby coaches in the UK and Ireland. The ontological position of relativism where participants' views of reality are socially constructed was taken. This was accompanied with a subjectivist epistemology in which the interactions between participants and others, including researchers, helps construct knowledge from this reality. Semi-structured interviews were thus employed as these allowed participants to reflect and recall their personal lived experiences in depth whilst allowing the researcher to probe significant themes with further probing questions.

Study Participants

Four purposive sampling criteria were devised (Patton, 2002). These were: 1) participants had to be a minimum age of 18 years; 2) had to have at least a level two rugby union coaching qualification which had been acquired from either the RFU or Irish football Rugby Union (IRFU); 3) had to have attended their latest rugby union coach education course within three years, and; 4) were current practicing women rugby union coaches. A total of 21 participants were purposively sampled after confirming that they met all sampling criteria; nine participants had attained their coach accreditation through the RFU and the other 12 had acquired their coach accreditation through the IRFU. Participants were White British ($n = 13$), White Irish ($n = 5$), White Northern Irish ($n = 2$), and Irish Mixed Race ($n = 1$). Table 1 outlines the sample's characteristics in more detail whilst protecting each participant's anonymity in accordance with the ethical approval which the study received from the first and second authors' institutions.

[Insert Table 1 here]

Researcher Description

The authorial team all identified as men and have been involved in higher education teaching in either the UK or Ireland for a cumulative amount of 25 years. All three co-authors have families and daughters who were interested in sport and rugby union. This further underpinned the desire to analyze this issue and helped to conclude the proposed project to have practical

value in conjunction to making an original contribution to the scholarly field. All this contextual background information regarding the research team were reflected upon before data collection through the process of bracketing to prevent too much emphasis being paid on employing leading questions (Patton, 2002). This was intended to elevate transparency that helped attain honest, accurate and rich recollections from the participants' lived experiences.

Data Collection Procedure

Letters of invitation were distributed via email, post and in person. Written informed consent was then provided by willing participants. A minimum of 24 hours was afforded to each participant to review the ethical agreements and return these to the research team. Interview times, locations, or preferred methods were agreed at this point. Multiple modes for conducting interviews were offered to each participant, ranging from face-to-face, telephone, or online (Teams or Skype) methods and each participant notified the research team of their preferred mode (Gratton & Jones, 2010). There were no differences between the mode of interview and themes identified in the data analysis.

Interview questions addressed the past (lived) experiences of women rugby union coaches after attending their respective NGB's coach education courses. There were three main themes for the semi-structured nature of each interview: 1) the perceived value of formal coach education in developing their coaching skills (e.g., "what extent have the courses helped you develop as a coach?"); 2) the extent their experiences inspired or deterred them from continuing in coaching (e.g., "what positive and negative aspects have you experienced whilst attending formal coach education courses?"), and; 3) whether the culture promoted within these courses was a factor for the under-representation of women rugby union coaches or not (e.g., "what are your experiences of gender equality within rugby union coach education structures?"). Furthermore, throughout the interviews and through further probing questioning techniques, participants provided extended information regarding their: 1) demographic details; 2) athletic

experiences; 3) coaching pathways; 4) preferred modes of learning; 5) coach learning and continual professional development (CPD) preferences, and; 6) general attitudes towards men's and women's rugby. Participants were interviewed separately at their convenience. Interviews lasted between 32 and 90 minutes ($M = 54.28$ min, $SD = 18$). All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by the first and second authors, and a research assistant, producing a total of 646 double spaced pages of data ($M = 30.76$). Each participant received their interview transcript by email within a week of the interview to check for accuracy. There were no changes made to any transcripts.

Data Analysis and Methodological Integrity

Thematic data analysis was conducted simultaneously with data collection. Therefore, data analysis was an on-going, iterative process working back and forth between data sets, theory and our own interpretations of it (Taylor, 2014). After initially conducting line-by-line coding that described the raw data units, connecting themes were identified across the data set. Priority was afforded to the participants 'voices' during data analysis as these were regarded as the "primary source of knowledge" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 52), yet awareness of our own interpretations was acknowledged throughout this process. Here, the lead author produced reflexive researcher and theoretical memos on elements that had the potential to be interpreted differently. These reflections and memos were used to facilitate group discussions between all co-authors throughout the entirety of the study to crystallize (Ellingson, 2009) the theoretical analysis associated with the participants' lived experiences. As is detailed further in the following section, two overarching themes were identified from this process of data analysis, which relate directly to the initial research question. The discussion of results illustrates these themes and how they were derived from the data. When participants' direct quotes have been cited within the discussion, as much contextual information surrounding their individual

experiences has been provided to best allow the reader to appreciate each participant's lived experiences concerning rugby union coach education and our interpretations of it.

Results and Discussion

The results identified how coach education courses in both countries were largely seen as positive experiences and valuable in developing coaching knowledge and skills. Some anomalies for this theme were recorded, however. Latent and ancillary benefits of attending the coach education courses were also identified. These have been discussed in the reporting of results as part of the first section entitled 'Formal coach education: a space to accumulate capital.' The second section entitled 'Coach educators as support and barriers: a consideration of identities' discusses the value for having more women in coach educator roles as seen from the participants' perspectives. Differences between levels of course and the two nations were sought but none were identified.

Formal Coach Education: A Space to Accumulate Capital

The courses attended by the participants were overwhelmingly regarded as being positive experiences. Courses were highly valued for serving their purpose of improving coaching knowledge associated with technical and tactical awareness in addition to enhancing awareness of their identities as coaches. This contrasts with the general trend of results reported elsewhere when analyzing either women's or men's experiences of formal coach education (Ciampolini et al., 2019; Lewis et al., 2018; Piggott, 2012). Sophie's comments were indicative of these views: "Yeah, actually, level two was fantastic to develop me as a coach, not necessarily in technical ability, however, it did in my delivery, me as a person, and as a coach. One hundred percent fantastic."

A feature for why the courses were held in high regard was the applied nature in how they were delivered. Rather than course tutors delivering content in a reductive manner through 'chalk and talk' modes of how-to coach, there was an evident recognition that courses encouraged the

coaches to get ‘mud on their boots’ and learn from delivering coaching scenarios themselves. As Mel said: “It wasn’t sitting inside watching PowerPoints, it was out there, set up a coaching drill, you do it.” Debbie and Helen respectively added their views on this theme:

It was very much interactive. You were involved in the drills. You were coaching other coaches. It was actually really good. I just really enjoyed the fact that you were really involved in it... I really enjoyed the fact that we were so involved in it, you were running around like a big ‘eejit’ and everybody then was able to give different ideas and we had to coach. They asked for volunteers and let’s say I was coaching a particular section and I was telling the rest of them what to do and then they gave me feedback saying “look I wasn’t a 100% clear on x, y, z.” It was brilliant, really, really good.

I must admit I felt sort of out of my depth at the coaching course a wee bit because you’re sitting in a room and it’s full of young people and it’s like I haven’t played for 20 years what am I doing? Um, but it was all very inclusive and just because I am what age I am and what gender I am doesn’t seem to make any difference, you get stuck in.

As Helen’s comments indicate, however, all participants disclosed how they were initially apprehensive in registering and then attending a course because the courses were “very male-dominated” which made it a “bit daunting” (Mia). As Ger explained, the courses were reported to have usually consisted of “20 on the course” but “very few women were there, I think it was actually only two of us women there.” Tracy reported the least gender split of approximately a “70/30” ratio of men attending to women. Nevertheless, the knowledge that there would be an under-presentation of women attending the courses did induce some form of anxiety even before the courses began and was acknowledged to be a barrier. This is where ‘blame the women’ narratives have traditionally arisen (Clarkson et al., 2019; Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2011; Kane & LaVoi, 2018; LaVoi et al., 2019) whereby it is women’s *own* fault at an agential

(micro) level for not having the desire and confidence to apply for jobs or attend necessary coach qualification courses.

Yet through applying LaVoi's (2016a) EIM and Bourdieu's concepts to the data, rather than conceptualizing women coaches as having little self-belief and self-efficacy, the significance of the structural (macro) barriers can be identified as mechanisms for the apprehensions and anxiety the participants felt. For example, Mia was one who repeated these culturally ingrained narratives that formed part of the field's doxa like "it's how many women have put themselves forward to do it because of that daunting fact that it's very male-dominated, so you have to be quite a strong character". Similar narratives were regularly presented by other participants. These accepted attitudes, that it is women coaches' agential responsibilities to overcome these barriers and demonstrate 'strong characters' inferred to how this cultural attitude had come to be normalized. Importantly, this view overlooked the macro level barriers that hinder women succeeding in coaching. Instead, such views continued to apportion blame onto women for not having the necessary 'strong' individual character (de Haan & Sotiriadou, 2019).

Apart from Cath, who had attended part of her level two course that was "all-female because they made a course specific for a group at (university name)," all other courses attended were inclusive with all genders attending. Yet, Cath explained that "on the day of the assessments I was the only female there and then that was kind of awkward." Similar emotions were held by the other participants when attending courses with all genders. At the very beginning of arriving at the courses, the participants made comments concerning how they questioned their position on their course. In turn, this made them anxious because of how their credibility and value was perceived. These emotions were all found to be based on their gender and their sense of self being an 'outsider' (Norman, 2010b) due to the characteristics of rugby being a masculine hegemonic space. This indicates how although gender may have been initially overlooked by Bourdieu, recent critiques of his species of capital have now come to signify the presence and

importance of gendered capital (Lovell, 2000). Within the patriarchal field of rugby union, the participants felt their gender diminished their forms of capital which they had acquired in the field of women's rugby, as this was not seen to have been legitimized in the hegemonic field of men's rugby. Thus, the courses were in many cases the first instances where the two delimited fields of men's and women's rugby had begun to be bridged. Sophie's account offers insight into this:

Absolutely, I just thought they (courses) were really, really well run... but when you walked in it's so overwhelming. You are a female coach and you know absolutely nobody in the room, it's all men dominated and all the (professional club name 1) coaches are all sitting together on the couches by themselves talking. Nobody said hello... With any course you always have that concern of, do I know enough? Am I ok to be in here? I have only played so much... but other than that, after that it was brilliant.

As Sophie inferred, questioning her credentials and knowledge to justify her value in attending, her perception was that in the men's eyes women's rugby was devalued in contrast to the men's game meaning that she perceived herself to lack acceptance (embodied cultural capital) and potentially respect (embodied symbolic capital). This also influenced the amount of their institutionalized social capital as the number of contacts and networks the women held was considerably less compared to the men (Sisjord et al., 2020). In turn, feelings of isolation, a lack of self-belief and self-efficacy were reported which then manifested into anxiety (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2011). Darcey explained how the male coaches in the men's team of her own club were not even aware that she and another colleague coached in the same club with the women's team:

...on the course there was [sic] people from the club there. They saw some of us and didn't even know there was a girl's section at (club name 1) at the time. So it was like

kind of shocking for us because we were sat there like ‘Oh, we’re on the same course as you, how did you not know? We knew about you; how did you not know about us?’ We were there on the same day (of the course)!

Even though apprehension and anxiety were felt at the beginning of the course, having all genders in attendance brought latent and ancillary benefits in the way of accumulating capital. Prompted by further lines of probing questions, upon reflection the courses presented to be opportunities for multiple species of capital to be acquired. The boundaries between the delimited fields of the women’s and men’s games were also broken down. As Darcey continued, had it not been for her attending the course then the opportunity for her to position herself and make her presence known to the coach of her club’s men’s team may not have occurred. Moreover, Darcey went onto explain that as a direct consequence of this accumulation of institutionalized social capital, more continual professional development (CPD) opportunities beyond the course to further acquire embodied cultural capital were made available. For example, the men’s coaches offered to support some of the women’s coaches which were considered to have aided the men’s coaches as “it gave them a different dynamic coaching in the girl’s section than it did the boys because it’s like we were full of inexperienced players where they’re used to experienced players who know the game. So it challenged them.” This supportive mechanism was then returned as Darcey and her fellow women’s team coaches were provided with more opportunities to interact and practice with the men’s coaches and team, thus helping them acquire further embodied cultural capital: “then when we went to the boys, it then challenged us because we were like, well they know what they are kind of doing, so we’ve got to up [our performance] and make stuff harder than what we’re used to.”

The opportunity to acquire more institutionalized social capital and then embodied cultural capital as a direct consequence of attending the courses for use beyond them when returning to

their own coaching environments was reported by others too. Freya was one who explained how this institutionalized social capital from the course helped with her CPD:

Well, you meet loads of new people. So I met all the coaches from maybe like 10 different clubs and (province name 1) which helped because then I have a link there with them. You build rapport with them, then you can say here's a drill or you can get a game going or whatever it is just good... so you know who's where and that they've done the same coaching courses as you.

There were several advantages for the women coaches to attend such inclusively designed courses where additional species of capital were acquired. The ability to deliver practical coaching sessions to and in front of the men's coaches afforded them the chance to demonstrate their knowledge of the game and coaching skills (embodied cultural capital). In turn, this also enabled them to receive feedback from not only the tutors but also by the coaches in the men's game who may have possessed more coaching experience and practiced within the elite environments for which they were assigned with symbolic capital. In complementing some of the previously cited participant quotes, Eve explained how her perception of the capital she possessed began to grow after this as she

got a bit of confidence from that and you were in a room with lots of other coaches who probably had a lot more experience than we did potentially coach in coaching men's teams who probably were a higher level but you didn't feel out of your depth.

An important support mechanism in helping the participants build upon the capital they possessed were the roles and identities of the coach educators who in many cases provided unwavering support. In other cases, however, the participants reflected upon ways in which educators, tutors and mentors can be implemented differently to help better support them and other women coaches. The next section discusses this further.

Coach Educators as Support and Barriers: A Consideration of Identities

High levels of embodied cultural capital were assigned by the participants to some of their male coach counterparts who had been involved in the game for a significant amount of time and who had been in coaching positions at some elite clubs. This was therein converted to symbolic capital, so the ability to learn laterally from the other course candidates rather than just solely receiving feedback from course tutors in a hierarchical manner was a significant reason as to why the courses were positively received. The roles in which the course tutors occupied in facilitating this were warmly recognized. Ger and Sally respectively said, “the coaches were great they were, a lot of the trainers were fantastic” and “all the people that are running them are really helpful... really friendly as well...”

Emma, however, was one of the few participants interviewed who reported negative experiences about her course. She recalled a poignant episode where she received what she considered unconstructive and misogynistic feedback from a male peer, but acknowledged the role one of the male tutors served afterward when supporting her:

I left there not wanting to go back, absolutely, not wanting to go back. The experience that I felt, I felt like a complete outsider and I didn't know anything at all about the game... the way that the other coaches on the course told me that I wasn't great and I said after day one I wanted to leave... He (the tutor) was really positive, he didn't want me to just give up. Um, he was an employee of the RFU so I guess he had a vested interest in my development, and a woman dropping out of the course may not look good. However, he took the time to contact me and I thought, well this guy cares about me and I actually have an ally here and that gave me the confidence to carry on.

For others, there was an admission that the field's hegemonic culture (doxa) subconsciously influenced the language and feedback imparted by fellow coaches could be an underlying issue across coach education (Lewis et al., 2018, 2020). Mel explained:

There isn't an intentional attempt to alienate or disrespect the females at these courses, however, there is a distinct kudos that male coaches have superior technical knowledge that can be discourteous to those female attendees by either talking over them or not including them in certain discussions on technical aspects.

This indicates the important role course tutors need to fulfil in managing these assumptions and perceptions if positive experiences are to be had by all participants. Although course tutors in most instances did achieve to facilitate a cohesive and constructive atmosphere, the lack of women occupying the role of course tutor was deemed as an area that could be further considered to help mitigate these issues (Banwell et al., 2020). Should coach educators and tutors continue to be predominantly men, this could then possibly result in the subconscious reproduction of masculine forms of capital attached to language and other masculine characteristics being highly valued and practiced.

Only three participants recalled how on their respective courses that there was a tutor who was a woman. Claire was one who explained that there was "one and she can co-ordinate the girl's mini rugby, um yep, it may be the only woman I've come across in (Irish province)." Tracy was another who detailed how her tutor's role was somewhat ambiguous and not clearly defined as her male counterparts: "I don't know, was she helping out? It's an odd one, she was doing the practical alright... She was employed by the branch (regional NGB) yeah." This lack of representation and even marginalization of women in leadership roles amongst the courses was viewed negatively and acted as a structural (macro) barrier for pursuing a more established career within rugby, as Sally explained:

I used to want to do it and work for the RFU that sort of thing but, I don't know now. I think not seeing women doing it has put me off. I don't feel it enhances equal opportunities at all. There is not a lot of women there either.

For some, this under-representation of women tutors resulted in a lack of rapport having been established in the coach-tutor relationship. Furthermore, the identities of the course tutors also meant that subconsciously language associated with hegemonic masculinity was being used and which also transcended across into the video teaching material. Darcey explained how this further alienated her to a degree and meant the insight, knowledge and support provided by the tutors was not able to be transferred over into her context which meant the value of the course was diminished for her slightly (Norman, et al., 2018):

...it was mainly boys on their coaching videos that they were showing. You've got a group of boys there that have been playing since the age of five, they are now 14, they're gonna know the drills without someone telling them. What do I do with a group of people who've never played the sport before?... Yeah, there was a lot of "come on guys" doing this like, and for me, it didn't bother me because I was just like pff (shrugged shoulders), I'm used to that kind of situation by now... a lot of their experiences were like, "well our boys, and our boys" and it was like never interested in the girl's side. We were like wanting to know and wanting to learn and see. So it was kind of, I don't know, it was very much focused on what they knew rather than what we were dealing with.

This indicates how the tutors' subconscious assumptions in respect of their own experiences of having been involved in the cultural field of the men's sport were thus directing their delivery. In Bourdieu's praxeology, this is defined as the habitus and comes to signify how the hegemonic values of men's rugby as a cultural field implicitly informed the practices of the tutors as this was what "they knew." This also illustrates the macro level barriers signified in LaVoi's (2016a) EIM. To address this, the participants all strongly advocated for more women to fulfil the roles of coach educators. Having a greater presence of women occupying these positions and being in leadership roles across the RFU and IRFU was seen to help elevate

aspirations to stay and succeed in the sport. Importantly, however, there was a clear emphasis on avoiding gestures that could be construed as ‘tokenism’ as this would be counterproductive and readily criticized. Jo was one whose comments were indicative of the group’s: “key leadership positions not having token women involved because it ticks a box but having women involved in leadership if they are competent.” Having such a strategy would subsequently help bridge the two delimited fields of men’s and women’s rugby. It would also help legitimize and thus increase the diversity of coaches by having a greater presence of women in these roles.

Conclusion

The research objective was to analyze the lived experiences of women rugby union coaches in the UK and Ireland. We acknowledge that there is homogeneity of our study participants’ identities concerning race and ethnicity and that is a limitation of the study. Unfortunately, however, our participants’ identities can be considered as representative of women rugby union coaches across the UK and Ireland. Nevertheless, we encourage further analyses in this area to consider the intersectional identities of other women coaches in rugby union and additional sports be continued in this area. Whilst we offer caution of not over generalizing our study’s findings when providing recommendations based on these limitations, we believe that there are some noteworthy points for NGBs to consider when further developing the provision of coach education to help address the under-representation of women coaches.

Firstly, there was value in attending coach education courses held for all genders because of the ancillary benefits of accumulating more embodied cultural capital and institutionalized social capital (Sisjord et al., 2020). Some NGBs may have considered the merits of implementing separatist women-only coach education courses in ongoing attempts to address the under-representation of women in coaching. Based on our results, we conclude that this would be counterintuitive and counterproductive. Whilst such a strategy may overcome initial barriers of women enrolling onto such courses, our data indicates that this would be a short-

sighted and superficial quick fix. The additional benefits of accumulating more species of capital, such as institutionalized social capital that come in the form of networks and contacts are less likely to happen if this strategy of gender-specific courses is pursued. Moreover, it was the increase in institutionalized social capital which in many instances lead to further CPD opportunities that brought with them the possibility to acquire more embodied cultural capital. Subsequently, our first recommendation is that NGBs continue to be open in having all genders attend their coach education provision. Facilitated virtual introductions between course candidates prior to the course delivery can be a strategy to reduce pre-course anxieties by helping to merge the boundaries between the delimited fields of men's and women's rugby. By providing this recommendation we are, however, aware of the potential criticism that capital in this instance is still valued and assigned by men onto women across the fields of rugby union. The second and third recommendations we provide can potentially help reduce this gendered structural (macro) inequality.

Our second recommendation is aligned to NGBs promoting more of the recorded lateral learning opportunities in their coach education structures that facilitate collegiate group discussion across cohorts. Participants reported how the courses they had attended did not seem to be reliant upon traditional, reductive, top-down approaches towards education. This shows promise, indicating that the RFU and IRFU have seemingly acted upon the criticisms identified from past research which had detailed how coaches negatively value such one-dimensional modes of delivery (Ciampolini et al., 2019; Piggott, 2012). Designing the courses in such a way had broader repercussions that enabled our participants to have a greater voice and presence to further illustrate their embodied cultural capital concerning coaching knowledge, skills and overall practice. These opportunities seemed to underpin the development of the increased institutionalized social capital and may not have occurred had our participants been passive in the courses and not active members of the learning community. Tutors need to be

aware of how peer feedback can be interpreted on a gendered basis, however, where sentiments of devaluing women's knowledge and skills can be received. Tutors attending further equality training could help them to identify such instances.

Finally, both the RFU and IRFU amongst other NGBs need to pay more attention on how the diversity of their coach educators and tutors affects the experiences of women coaches, their capability to succeed, but also how it can contribute to growing the representation of women coaches across sports as there was a limited presence of women in these roles (Banwell et al., 2020). Doing so will contribute to addressing some of the macro barriers which LaVoi (2016a) identified within the EIM by having supportive tutors who impart empathy and who can act as inspirational role models for women coaches to succeed in rugby union (Allen & Reid, 2019). Nevertheless, the concept of meritocracy is important here, as the participants were critical of NGBs merely paying lip service to the issue by implementing token gestures in placing ineffective women coach educators just for the sake of diversity and inclusion. Such a strategy was seen to be counterproductive.

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