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Alienation, Othering and Reconstituting: An Alternative Future for Women's Coach Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to critique current women-only coach education initiatives, before suggesting an alternative approach to dealing with gender discrimination in coaching provision. Having increased in popularity over recent years, primarily through justifications as being “safe spaces” for participants, such initiatives have nevertheless become contested terrain. Whilst seeing some value in the initial “safe space” position, we argue that their substance should be focussed not so much on duplicating mainstream content (e.g., particular coaching pedagogies), but on developing a critical sociological consciousness, including both a deconstruction and reconstruction of (minority) coaching selves. Such a consciousness comprises (1) a judicious awareness of influencing social structures and why things are as they are and (2) a recourse to micropolitical agency in terms of a stance-related identity to develop a more secure coaching self.

KEYWORDS

Coach education; gender; critical sociology; micropolitics; identity

Introduction

The general purpose of this paper is to highlight the existing situation regarding coach education for women, before offering an alternative framework for future provision. In doing so, we begin by providing a brief overview of the current state of discriminatory play for women in coaching (e.g., Norman, 2020), where barriers identified over a decade ago by LaVoi and Dutove (2012) continue to exist. Additionally, although acknowledging their well-intentioned purpose, we critique the growth of women-only coaching courses as an antidote to such prejudice, as being rooted in a form of “defensive othering” (e.g., Ezzell, 2009). No doubt, such courses possess some merit in the current climate, particularly in relation to providing “safe” learning spaces, in addition to generating an attitude of, and motivation for, collective action (Arao & Clemens, 2013). The idea of “safety” here stems from a freedom from anxiety to share doubts and feelings on sensitive and controversial issues; what Arao and Clemens (2013) defined as “environments that support the challenging work of authentic engagement with regard to issues of identity, oppression, power, and privilege (p. 139). Nevertheless, in prolonging an “us” versus “them” narrative (Mohr, 2009), the greater ideal of female (and other minority) coaches being simply seen as coaches remains as distant or as

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elusive as ever. Hence, we believe that such provision should only ever be a step on the journey; not as an end in itself, but a means to the greater end of integration.

Accepting their current existence, the case is thus made within this paper for an altered focus for such courses, with an emphasis not on mirroring “mainstream” content or of merely providing a form of “defensive” sheltered space, but on developing a critical sociological consciousness among participants. Such a perspective is advocated for its ability not only in enabling an understanding of social trends and attitudes, but also to take issue and change them (Gardiner, 2000). The concept of critical consciousness can be identified in many writings and considerations, including, for instance, that related to social movements (e.g., feminism, civil rights), definitive theories (e.g., Anti-Oppressive Practice (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005); Critical Race Theory (Stefancic & Delgado, 2010)), and even particular scholars (e.g., Friere, 1974; Foucault, 1977). Such work itself, however, is rooted in earlier critical social thought (e.g., Marxist, post-structural) which sought to highlight the presence and effects of power, structure, and agency. As opposed to framing our consideration of future coach education for women within a particular framework then, we ground it within a general “critical reflexive” tradition. This involves a conscious concern with one’s location and habitus, and for engagement with social issues as practical problems rather than abstractions (Bourdieu & Waquant, 1992). Consequently, and following Lemert (1997) among others, our project is based upon unearthing the power of social structures to create particular relations (of domination) between and among social groups, whilst advocating for progressive change. Hence, it is to do not only with fostering a heightened understanding of circumstance, but also to use such “comprehension as the basis [for] conscious action designed to alter repressive social conditions” (Gardiner, 2000, p. 8).

Building on an initial deconstructing before reconstructing (non) gendered coaching practice, such a consciousness comprises (1) a prudent awareness of influencing social structures; and (2) a recourse to a position-related identity and connected micro-political agency. This is not to underplay the importance of learning about coaching pedagogies and athlete development, which we still consider crucial to coaching practice. Rather, it is to heighten awareness of structural power and agential action as the foundations upon which the doing of coaching rests (see Jones, 2019). In particular, emphasis is placed on gaining respect and the use of political astuteness whilst being a “stance-taking entity” (Goffman, 1961) in the development of a more secure coaching self. Finally, a reflective conclusion summarizes the principal arguments made in the paper before accentuating their originality and importance as ways forward for women’s coach education.

The significance of the paper lies in its considered evaluation of a significant practical issue that continues to bedevil coach education. In alternatively positioning instances of discrimination as social as opposed to merely sporting problems, a better understanding of its causes and enactments can be gleaned. Having said that, following Horowitz (1990), we also consider that, with so much social theory resting on notions of unequal distributions of status and power, we “tend to forget or ignore the extent to which individuals bring to the collective experience potential for changing such established relations” (p. xi). Hence, taking related theory “off the table and into the field” (Macdonald et al., 2002, p. 149) we offer a framework for more socially relevant preparation programmes for women coaches in particular (and for coaches in general), which not only better mirror the complex reality of their work, but gives an increased sense of possibilities in terms of the coaches and people they want to become (Jones, 2011).

Accepting that official certification for coaches is not an international requirement, this paper is positioned within the growing “professionalization” of the activity. No doubt, within the UK in particular, such a call has been subject to much discussion over the past decade or more (see Cassidy et al., 2016; North et al., 2019); a debate which has not been particularly productive. This has resulted in “professional standards” for coaching being established through the UK government appointed Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMPSPA) to oversee and ensure “industry agreed prerequisites” (CIMPSPA, 2018). Whilst acknowledging this and other such developments internationally, the case made in this paper is for the content of such courses to be reconsidered. Hence, following the case made by Norman (2020) and LaVoi and Dutove (2012) among others in relation to continuing discriminatory practices against women coaches (and those who wish to coach), we believe that a critical sociologically inspired curriculum is required to address more pressing problems for such coaches in practice. This is also where we differ somewhat from previous writings on “socially-just” coaching per se (e.g., Kochanek & Erickson, 2020). As opposed to being grounded in a psychological framework (e.g., positive youth development [PYD] (Newman et al., 2022)) where coaching is used as a means to another end (e.g., to develop “life skills”), we advocate a social approach where an understanding of social context (and the relations within it) is required for meaningful change to occur. Such a position also advocates for coaching to be considered from its own socio-pedagogic frame of reference within a sport performance paradigm (Jones, 2019; Jones et al., 2023), while taking specific issue with gendered-discriminatory practice within the coach education landscape.

The development of women-only coach education programmes

The current situation

Whilst participation figures have undoubtedly increased in the United Kingdom, a significant disparity still exists between the number of women who compete in sport and those who coach. This is particularly in senior positions, where women were recently found to occupy just 10% of “performance” coaching roles across all sports in the UK (UK Coaching, 2021). The disparity was evident not only in traditionally male-dominated activities, such as football and rugby (e.g., Barrett et al., 2021), but also where no such strong gendered cultural legacy exists. Thus, in the UK, of the top 100 athletes across all sports during 2019, only 8% had a female coach (Norman, 2020); a trend also echoed in the US (LaVoi, 2016).

In an effort to understand the causes of this under-representation, LaVoi and Dutove (2012) concluded that the related obstacles could be categorized as individual, interpersonal, organizational/structural, and socio-cultural in nature. At an individual level, an example might be feeling undervalued, while an interpersonal barrier could relate to a limited social network through which to facilitate a coaching career. Similarly, organizations that lacked important professional supportive structures whilst being culturally androcentric (i.e., being focussed on men) and comprising a masculine hegemony were considered unsurprisingly problematic. This was particularly so where women had to navigate existing power relations from traditionally marginalized positions (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012).

A principal way that the evident prejudice has been manifest is through microaggressions. These typically involve “subtler forms of discrimination, often flying under the ‘radar’ of modern political correctness” (Gearity & Metzger, 2017, p. 161). Being first termed by Chester M. Pierce in the 1970s, such actions describe the frequent covert and offensive acts or put-downs experienced by oppressed or marginalized social groups (Sue et al., 2007). Although recognition within sports coaching arrived somewhat later, recent work has highlighted their prevalence within practice. For example, in exploring the experiences of female candidates on the UEFA A Licence (the second highest football coaching qualification available [in Europe]), Sawiuk and colleagues recorded use of exclusionary language including “heavy use of the male nouns (chaps, lads, guys), instances of accepted cursing and derogatory female categorization, often with sexual overtones (missus at home, they are all lesbians, her indoors)” (Sawiuk et al., 2021, p. 13). Such discourse often became oppressive background noise, whilst not being able to call out such behavior led to feelings of passivity, complicit-ness and alienation among the female participants (Sawiuk et al., 2021). Given such and similar claims (e.g., Fielding-Lloyd & Mean, 2011; Lewis et al., 2018), the case for separatist coach education for women has gained traction, thus operating as a “counter-strategy to [the] peripheral positioning by men” (Fielding-Lloyd & Mean, 2016, p. 419).

Problematising women-only coach education provision

Such initiatives as alluded to above include National Governing Bodies adopting quota-based approaches for women, the inclusion of topics related to gender equality on existing courses, in addition to offering scholarships, cost reductions, or/and “no fee” arrangements to encourage female attendance (Ecorys, 2017). Perhaps the most crucial initiative of note, however, both in general and in terms of this project, relates to the establishment of women-only courses. To date, such provision has been developed and established in numerous sports; for example, cycling, cricket, boxing, hockey, tennis, handball, golf and, most obviously, football (i.e., soccer; Ecorys, 2017; Kelly & O’Regan, 2022). Although generally incorporating content and examples more relatable to a female audience, these courses fundamentally comprise material that deviates little from that offered on mainstream programmes.

Although welcome at one level, the rationale for such courses appears to echo earlier claims made by Fielding-Lloyd and Mean (2011), where the narrative around the absence of women in coaching, in addition to their progression, center on a perceived need for some kind of ego-orientated decontextualized “empowerment.” Indeed, much of their promotional content relates to developing women coaches’ perceived emotional and social inadequacies, often as an extension of a “blame-the-women” or “fix the women” narrative (LaVoi, 2016). In the words of LaVoi (2016), claiming the lack of women coaches as being due to a lack of confidence or skills suggests a linear solution that all is required is for women to be simply “coached up” through “professional development to bolster these deficiencies and weaknesses” (LaVoi, 2016, p. 22).

Further positioning women-only courses as a point of contention and contestation, work by Vinson et al. (2016, p. 295) found that female coaches themselves were not always supportive of them. Here, participants did not “want special consideration” simply because they were women, being fearful that such courses would only

reinforce the wider assumption that they needed extra support to achieve the same qualifications as male counterparts (Clarkson et al., 2019). Others, meanwhile, whilst acknowledging that they may encourage more women to enroll, have argued that such courses merely provide a “short-sighted and superficial quick fix” (Barrett et al., 2021, p. 35), thus failing to tackle the greater social patriarchal issues at stake. It is a criticism echoed in the wider social justice literature, where the role of so-called “safe spaces” for adequately and honestly preparing learners for workplace challenges has been questioned as counterproductive (Arao & Clemens, 2013; Cook-Sather, 2016). The accusation made is that professional certification acquired in a sheltered context does little to assist in negotiating with, and thriving in, a racial and gendered hegemonic wider society.

A further criticism of homogenic learning pathways is that they encourage a discursive uniformity, with the richness that diverse experiences bring to the learning context being absent (Clarkson et al., 2019). If learners are too alike, the variety and flow of information is restricted, an array of which is often important for generating new knowledge and insights (Burt, 1992, 2005). Hence, it has been claimed that whilst a women-only course may offer solidarity, some initial liberation, and a safety to express ideas (Holley & Steiner, 2005), the apparent “sameness” can result in an impoverishment of learning (Granovetter, 1973). It is a caution which extends to a perception of course attendees as only being qualified for women’s sporting roles, thus being exempt from more substantive positions (Fielding-Lloyd & Mean, 2016). In doing so, such courses have been claimed as powerful means through which the gender constructed status quo is maintained (Fielding-Lloyd & Meàn, 2008); what Barrett et al. (2021) labeled a “band-aid” (i.e., sticking plaster) response which hampers the accumulation of embodied cultural, and institutionalized capital for women coaches. Finally, such developments as women-only courses could also be interpreted as a form of “defensive othering”; a stigma management strategy where an often unintentional alignment with the dominant culture (of masculinity) is undertaken while the marginalized position becomes a negative “frame of reference” itself (Glynn & Brown, 2022; Klein, 1993; Mohr, 2009). Although such a rationale certainly resonates with the positive discourse associated with women-only coach education provision (e.g., to “empower” women), it does little to directly address the problematic exclusionary “us” and “them” narrative. Even with the best of intentions then, such programmes have the potential to result in the “othering” of women coaches, keeping them on the periphery of sport. Thus, questions have been raised as to whether separatist programmes are in fact counter-intuitive and counterproductive, alternatively serving to undermine equality rather than to promote it (Barrett et al., 2021).

Having interrogated the case for gender segregated coach education, we now present a version of professional development programmes more attuned to addressing pressing issues “on the ground” for women coaches. It is an account that extends further than developing the technical, tactical, and physical know-how of the sport, to a deconstruction and subsequent reconstruction of the socio-political landscape in which women coaches operate. We believe that doing so can better prepare women coaches to deal with and thrive within the social (gendered) realities of sporting practice.

The case for a critical deconstruction and reconstruction of gendered coaching practice

As argued previously (Jones, 2019), being critical of the rush to prescription, an in-depth understanding of context, and the actions which take place within it, is necessary for change. Such understanding ascribes to a deconstruction of practice through a sincere reflexivity upon “taken-for-granted” boundaries, and thus aiming for an appreciation of the social beyond the interactional (Jones, 2019). A principal point is to explain social systems to participant coaches so they can understand the powers in which their working lives are embedded. This general case, of course, has been made by many critical coaching scholars previously utilizing both theoretical arguments in addition to drawing on a degree of empiricism (e.g., Jones, 2000; Johns & Johns, 2000; Cushion & Jones, 2006; Denison, 2007, amongst others).

Being aware of the need to offer more than just a critical understanding of gendered practice, and thus to avoid the criticism of somewhat leaving female coaches to “take it from there,” a reconstructive “knowledge for action” way forward is also proposed. Indeed, this is where we differ from previous work in outlining how a developed critical consciousness can be put to the service of education. The purpose here is to provide instances of strong conceptual contributions, primarily related to developing a more secure, stance-taking, and astute sense of coaching self. Far from some sort of “gold standard” of behavior, however, primacy is alternatively given to individual theorizing in relation to the suggestions offered (Jones, 2019). Subsequently, agency is actively advocated for, with resulting actions encouraged that critically evaluate and experiment with practice in personally meaningful ways.

Deconstruction

Some time ago, Loic Wacquant professed “nothing was beyond the reach” of sociology. Here, he was not only claiming that the discipline enabled the turning of the “familiar into the wondrous” (Wacquant, 2005, B14), but also that it offered means by which we could understand ourselves and social being, including our respective “make-up, location, and trajectory in society” (Wacquant, 2005, B14). Such a critical awareness enables one to see the logic and landscape behind social structure, in addition to an ability to somewhat “disentangle the ramifying webs of action, power and history” (Wacquant, 2005, B14). Thus, sociology was posited as not only holding the means to dispel the fog of so-called common sense in exposing the arbitrariness of social arrangements, but also, and rather crucially for the case made in this paper, the power to suggest alternate paths for social change. The initial step, however, is to better understand the nature and conditions of periphery and marginality. In this respect, it relates to the ability to discern “social things” (Lemert, 1997) in terms of how we practice our professional (and personal) coaching lives with others. Such competencies relate to Wright Mills (1959) famous “sociological imagination”; that is, the capacity of people to recognize the influence of larger structural forces on their everyday lives and concerns (Jones, 2011). Such an awareness can lead to better comprehending individual (micro) behavior in terms of broad structural (macro) factors such as gender, thus providing a more complete grasp of interpersonal connections as to why people behave as they do (as well as being better able to imagine possible alternatives). In this respect, developing

a critical sociological consciousness holds particular relevance for coaches whose job it is to directly influence others (be they athletes, fellow coaches, or support staff) toward an agreed end, as it is to do with questioning, challenging and changing (or justifying) a status quo.

To develop such a critical social consciousness, particularly in relation to the issues at hand, following Butler (as cited in Stets & Burke, 2001), issue needs to be taken with the essentialising perspective that a unified gender identity actually exists. The point made is that gender identity is neither neutral nor fixed, but rather an enactment. It is a performance, albeit not always a freely chosen one due to the influence of normative social scripts (Stets & Burke, 2001). Still, in taking issue with deterministic notions of power and position, it is claimed that specific elements of performance scripts can (and should) be disputed, challenged and changed. This second wave feminism (as has been called) marks a movement away from assumptions related to the unity of women, to assertions of their differences and possibilities. Thus, any unity now is “understood to be based on strategic political goals, and not foundational claims about the nature of women” (Stets & Burke, 2001, p. 26); a perspective which again lays the foundation for greater agential action.

It would seem prudent here when acknowledging the nuanced nature of gender, to give credence to the related notion of intersectionality. Defined as the mutually constitutive relations among social identities (Sheilds, 2008), intersectionality has been claimed as crucially important in any current understanding of gender (McCall, 2005). According to Sheilds (2008), it is a strategy to explore the many and varied interconnectivities involved in power relations. These include comparing individualities and identity categories with each other, and how they then play out at individual, interpersonal, and structural levels. Indeed, as opposed to isolating and essentialising a “gender variable,” we agree that exploring and unearthing interlocking forms of oppression that women coaches may (or often) experience is a much-needed part of the advocated critical consciousness. These include those connections between sexism, class, racism, socio-economic status, disability, and sexual orientation among others; all of which contribute to a culture of privilege and a subsequent developed self (see Harris & Leonardo, (2018) for an insightful critique of intersectionality as an analytical framework).

Acknowledging that an identity status is contrived of many such features, far from being indiscriminate or superficial, intersectionality also allows a focus on one such feature while acknowledging that “it is not the only culprit in a particular crime” (Harris & Leonardo, 2018, p. 16). Hence, without wishing to marginalize or obscure alternative identity-based analysis (Harris & Leonardo, 2018), the focus of the current analysis lies in complicating or problematizing the sociology of masculinity as a core coaching attribute. This is particularly in terms of how it is experienced (perceived, enacted, resisted) by women. As opposed to seeing it as the power of one group over another (e.g., men over women, or coaches over athletes), such a sociology explores the diversity and logic of influence. Issue is consequently taken with an assumed hegemony of behaving like a coach (e.g., being direct, precise, strong; displaying visible leadership; see Corsby et al., 2022) and, hence, the need (either conscious or not) for women to unproblematically adopt such attributes if they are to become coaches (Graham & Blackett, 2022). In many ways, the shift is not to normalize women into coaching, but to develop a consciousness in women coaches of why discriminatory practices exist in the ways they do. Through such a deconstruction, the limits of the current hegemony are brought into view, allowing other currently suppressed ways of

influencing and generating respect such as “pedagogical care” (e.g., Noddings, 1984) (as long considered core aspects of coaching; see Jones, 2019) to come to the fore.

Reconstruction

In a previous paper, Corsby et al. (2022) in borrowing from Châtel and Soulet (2004), interrogated how marginalized and vulnerable coaches could contest processes of exclusion, stigma, and vulnerability. Such probing included questions such as what resources can be mobilized and how by the marginalized? What alliances and supports can be found in structural inequality? And, how can vulnerable and discriminatory social experience be reconstructed? We now similarly engage with such concerns in the interests of coach education for women, following from the belief that within a progressively “non foundational world, individuals have increasing space and leeway to construct their own narratives of self-identity” (Stets & Burke, 2001, p. 25).

Unsurprisingly, we begin our reconstructive case for the development of a more agential, confident self with Stets and Burke’s (2000) writings on identity. This firstly includes acknowledgment of a “social” identity, which involves a process of adoption to, or enactment of, a “code of behavior” considered relevant for the position held (e.g., acting like a coach) (Stets & Burke, 2000). It is where similarities are recognized or developed to become part of an “in-group” manifest through particular ways of speaking and acting. Indeed, it has been claimed that, similar to the deconstruction embarked upon above, raising such implicit tendencies to critical consciousness can play a crucial part in changing (coach) identities (De Martin Silva, 2016). For example, such progressed levels of self-awareness, including that of intra- and inter-subjective reflection (Finlay, 2002), particularly on expectations compatible with the coaching role, can lead to higher levels of agency; that is, about what is possible.

Of perhaps more salience than social identity concepts, however, particularly in terms of following a reconstructive agenda, are Stets and Burke’s (2000) associated writings on identity theory. Here, greater importance is placed on the verification of the self, as opposed to a recognition of intra-group belonging. Emphasis is thus placed on seeing the self in terms of the role occupied (i.e., in this case the coaching role). In the words of Stets and Burke (2000, p. 233) it is;

... the idea that people act to keep perceptions of themselves in the situation consistent with their (developed) identity standard. They take actions to modify the situation so that perceptions of the self are consistent with the standard in spite of situational disturbances or other influences.

An example here would be facilitating consideration among women coaches regarding what sort a coach they want to be? What they would like to emphasize in their practice and why? And, how would they want others to perceive them and why? Addressing such and similar questions moves from an agenda of understanding to one of action; where a critical consciousness of social forces and features can lead to a more confident sense of self, and, hence, to subsequent purposeful professional action. Engagement with the tenets of identity theory then, can not only reveal, but also encourage, a conceptualization of the self as a reflexive work-in-progress. In doing so, it holds the potential for developing greater recognition of possibilities of action in terms of how we portray ourselves to others.

Again, whilst never ignoring the influence of structural social or role identities, importance is placed on what (Carter, 2014) described as *person identities*; that is, the “self-meanings that allow an actor to realize a sense of individuality” (p. 249).

Relatedly, what can also be included within coach education programmes for women in terms of developing a more assured sense of self are Mead’s (1967) ideas of “me” and “I.” The “me,” somewhat akin to social identity theory described above, was considered as acquired through dealings and communication with others, before being internalized in the self. In this respect, it was considered that the “me” was not an individual invention, but rather what others come to treat one as being (Goffman, 1972, p. 327). On the other hand, the “I” was deemed to be as a response to the “me;” that is, a rejoinder to the perception of others. In this respect, although the “me” preceded the “I,” the latter was nevertheless viewed as acting creatively, albeit within the confines of the “me” (Mead, 1967). The case made is for an agential consciousness toward developing the “I,” whilst maintaining awareness of sociality and historicity in its creation (Jackson, 2010). It is where social interaction and context link to self and, through (again) reflexive imaginative analysis, enables a better sustaining self. Mead’s work then, as opposed to egocentrism, allows us to understand how to creatively and individually participate in social practice. Examples of questions to be interrogated by coaches here could include; how do societal expectations influence your coaching actions? How much of a “conventional habitual” individual are you (Mead, 1967); what is your response to the attitude of the collective? Could it be different? The purpose once again is to help develop in others a vision of the self as consciously fashioned through considered acts of self-construction (Jackson, 2010). As mentioned earlier, this is not a call for individual introspective atomized action, but rather a reflexivity incorporating inter-subjective social critique, thus locating the individual in relation to others; not only other people, but also other ideas, beliefs and intentions (Finlay, 2002; Jones et al., 2023). The latter is important in terms of judging the intentionality of practice (Jones & Ronglan, 2018), and the raising of critical consciousness as mentioned earlier. Doing so, is more likely to produce a progressively grounded, authentic coaching self, aware of both social constraints and possible agential action (Corsby et al., 2022), with authenticity being utilized here as a propensity to live one’s words.

A final area to engage with in this reconstructive respect is that of political action. The purpose here is not to unproblematically advocate for the dark arts of Machiavellian practice, but to conceptualize political action as a social means by which people get their voices heard and agendas fulfilled. Of course, this is not particularly new scholarship, as work related to civil servants’ discernible astuteness (Close, 2013; Hartley & Manzie, 2020), teachers’ strategic workings (Ball, 1987; Fry, 1997; Leftwich, 2005) and even coaches’ micropolitical actions have been well documented (Potrac & Jones, 2009). Such writings all highlight the means by which individuals navigate the social world to realize desired ends; a world where legitimacy not only rests on the exercise of any formal authority they may possess, but also on persuasion, credibility, and influence (Hartley & Manzie, 2020). Although supplying useful signposts, what such work nevertheless lacks (particularly in relation to this paper) is an appreciation that such action must be taken, not as a part of an existing hegemony, but from an alternative non-dominant standpoint or anti-oppressive framework (in this instance, one of gender equity and nondiscrimination). Consequently, arguing for political astuteness or micropolitical literacy alone would be inadequate. This is because minority practitioners trying to alter a cultural discourse cannot work so

unobtrusively, but rather must do so from a particular socio-ethical perspective (and personal power) which stands as an alternative to the status quo. Hence, the developing (or developed) self must be considered as a “stance-taking entity” that interprets both an identification with, and opposition to, an “organization” (Goffman, 1961). Such a stance, however, is not considered a zero-sum decision, but a consideration between an individual’s identification with, and distancing from, given practice. For Goffman (1961), such position taking was not about outright rejection of those deemed as unfit for action, but rather was a means to reassert the claims of the self and the sphere of activity into which inclusion was sought.

Accepting the need for a social or moral positioning, in their study of educational social justice leadership, Armstrong et al. (2013) argued that change management also necessitated a degree of technical and interpersonal competencies. Such aptitudes were listed as understanding organizational, local, and district hierarchical power structures and one’s place within them, in addition to grasping the cultural dynamics of particular contexts. As a first step then, as argued earlier, awareness and understanding were considered needed of the built-in gender-related power imbalances that exist within social (coaching) systems that, in turn, support hegemonic practices. To better connect such critical concepts to practice, questions to address here for female coaches could possibly include; how are “anti discriminatory” policies or documents organizationally enacted? How are status orders “played and dis-played” within meetings and coaching sessions? And, which “normative” behaviors are taken-for-granted and treated as routine? (Owens & Sutton, 2001). Subsequently, navigating and to a degree changing these dynamics requires developing political acumen and a repertoire of influence-related strategies and tactics (Ryan, 2012). Drawing upon Armstrong et al. (2013), such strategies could involve developing alliances and relationships, persuading others, consciously modeling and being visible in relation to just practices, in addition to clearly communicating related expectations and beliefs. In the current context, such practices would, of course, be carried out from an advocacy position related to gender equity (in terms of respect, discourse, resources, responsibilities, and opportunities). Consequently, although a strong underlying ethical framework appear critical to holding on to integrity encounters for marginalized individuals (Armstrong et al., 2013), micropolitical astute action can also be very useful, if not crucial, in the service of the broader argued-for perspective.

Indeed, in developing the above point, simply adopting and advocating a moral stance (no matter its obvious decency and virtue) is rarely enough as, unsurprisingly, promoting social justice is not easy to do. Consequently, such coach education programmes as we promote cannot ignore issues of power and influence. But, this should not take the form of some naive recourse to unproblematic empowerment, something Westwood (2002, p. 17) claimed as a “flawed project” alternatively asserting that there “is no social space beyond authority.” Rather, as opposed to the usually considered “power over” (Haugaard & Malesevic, 2008), more in line with Foucauldian thinking, it is for power to be considered as relational. This is where the apparently dominated are never truly without power, thus reaffirming Westwood’s (2002, p. 25) position that “there is no social without power.” Whilst appreciating its omni-presence, and not falling into an all-or-nothing position, some of French and Raven’s (1959) early work on the sources of individual power remain good to think with. In particular, these include legitimate, expert, informational, reward, coercive, and referential sources of power, with the first three perhaps being crucial for initially

changing perceptions and gaining respect. Utilizing such means in the service of carefully orchestrated and negotiated action, involving struggle, conflict, and collaboration as a part of developing micropolitical literacy, would seem necessary if women coaches are to successfully engage with the contested terrain of changing professional perceptions and practice.

Conclusion

What we have attempted to do in this paper is both to highlight the existing condition regarding coach education for women, and to suggest progressive future provision. Accepting the previous and current situation, and taking issue with women-only courses, we advocate that coach education should be based to a much greater degree on a critical sociological consciousness than is currently the case. Such is advocated for its ability to shape as well as understand social trends as justice movements, thus addressing some of LaVoi and Dutove's (2012) earlier identified barriers. In diverging a little from post-structuralist thought, the point here is not only to interpret, but to change social situations (Gardiner, 2000). Critical analysis is offered as a crucial component in developing an active evaluative reflexivity (Pollner, 1991) in not only fostering a heightened understanding of circumstance but also its use "as the basis [for] conscious action to alter repressive social conditions" (Gardiner, 2000, p. 8). Without considering individuals as "free floating actors" directly and solely capable of developing resilient selves, we alternatively position them as "actors in relation". That is, they always act in relation to others, contexts, and ideas, while capable to give professional actions new meanings and intentions.

Within this paper, we also take issue with women-only courses as initiatives rooted in a form of defensive othering. As a principle, we consider it a problematic distinction prolonging an "us" versus "them" narrative (Mohr, 2009). Having said that, we appreciate their value in not only providing "safe" learning spaces but also in generating an attitude of collective action through new streams of thought. However, although we do consider such courses to possess some merit in the current climate, our advocacy for them remains qualified. This is because in chasing the greater (idealistic) goal for female (and other minority) coaches to be simply seen as coaches, women-only courses should only ever be considered a step on the journey, a means to a greater end of integration. Relatedly, we actually see such course content as not only necessary for women coaches. Rather, it could or perhaps should be included within all "mainstream" provision as the larger problem lies in more general patriarchally constructed norms. This would allow men to also develop a greater awareness of how sexism operates within coaching and how they are implicated in that system with what they do and say. In addition, continuing along the current path of separatism could inadvertently exclude males who could act as possible allies and advocates, thus hampering the development of the wider critical consciousness project. To a degree then, it could be argued that a reimagining of coach education is needed, not just for women but also for men. Such a development would, in turn, further the case that women-only courses should (hopefully) not be permanent fixtures within the coach education landscape.

Finally, although any claims to this paper's novelty must be tempered by the use of existing theories and thinking, we do believe it possesses a considerable degree of originality. This principally relates to Cropley's (2016) ideas of "conceptual replication" (where the known is transferred to a new setting), "redirection" (where the known is extended in

a new direction), “reinitiation” (where thinking begins at a different point from the current one and takes off in a new direction), and “synthesis” (where ideas previously regarded unrelated are integrated). The significance of the paper also extends not so much in reporting what we already know, or already exists (e.g., LaVoi, 2016; Norman, 2020), but in suggesting that our identities could (or perhaps should) be ahead of us (Clifford, 1998). Following Clifford (1998), it is a case which refers to culture, not as a rather solid tradition handed down from a given past, but rather an inventive living process influenced by current practices of “exchange and reappropriation” (p. 185). Here then, identity, and all it entails, should be mobilized to engage with and potentially alter a culture to better legitimize and position women in coaching.

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