“Women easily feel that they have lost a year if they don’t ski faster”:
Coaches’ Discursive Constructions of (Gendered) Dual Career Pathways

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Abstract

Contemporary athletes in Western societies are increasingly expected to combine their sporting careers with education and/or work. This dual career pathway (DC) aims to ensure that young athletes receive education or vocational training alongside with their sporting career, thereby helping their later employability and adaptation to life after athletic retirement. However, research indicates that socio-cultural discourses of gender are ingrained in dual career policies and practices, creating gender hierarchies and inequalities, and influencing athletes’ motivation, career-aspirations, decision-making, and well-being practices (Ryba et al., 2021). Current DC policy documents recognize the importance of equality and anti-discrimination in dual career practices and highlight how sport coaches should take into account athletes’ holistic development and socio-cultural circumstances (including gender) in their coaching practice (European Commission, 2012; 2014). However, coaches’ attitudes and beliefs on the compatibility of sport and education, as well as on issues related to gender, are not yet clearly understood. In the current study, we explored how coaches situated education in the athletes’ holistic development framework and how these views informed their coaching practice. We also examined how dominant discourses of gender informed coaches’ opinions and practices regarding athletes’ dual careers. Seven male and three female coaches, aged 25-62 (M = 38.5) participated in semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed with reflexive thematic analysis and interpreted through a feminist poststructuralist lens (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019; Butler, 1990). Four main themes were constructed in the analysis: (1) Completing secondary education is necessary for all athletes (2) Sporting career is the priority at the elite level (3) Girls and women need to invest in many careers (4) Coaching women is more challenging than coaching men. Our findings reveal that gender hierarchies persist in Finnish sporting culture and that coaches reproduce gendered discourses that may influence athletes’ dual career aspirations.

Keywords: coaching, dual career, gender, feminist poststructuralism, holistic development

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