The aim of this paper was to explore facilitative and debilitative factors (to increase the number of women high performance coaches) that are experienced by current women high performance coaches (WHPC).

Overview

- **Introduction**
  - A low proportion of women high performance coaches, often about 7.5% - 20%.

- **Method**
  - A qualitative survey
  - Open questions
  - A female network of national coaches
  - In total 36 coaches agreed to participate

- **Preliminary results**
  - WHI a major hindrance no matter gender
  - Self-awareness and vulnerability plays a role

- **Conclusions and applications**
  - Better prepare and support high-performance coaches across gender in terms of WHI
  - Promote more diverse coach profiles

Based on experience, please describe freely your thoughts regarding **hindrance** and **facilitative** factors to increase the number of WHPC:

**Hindrance**
- Family/home N=7
- Time demand N=4
- Too much travel N=4
- Few/no role models N=4
- Culture N=4
- Men chose men N=3

**Facilitative**
- Role models N=3
- Fun job N=3

How come you are still in high-performance coaching?

- Fun/rewarding/developing N=13
- Enjoy to see the athletes develop N=12
- Create better conditions to develop my sport N=11
- Love, passion to the sport N=11

How do you manage to balance coaching and private life?

- Supporting family N=11
- Ok – good N=11
- Poorly/bad N=9
- Less time for friends, no family stopping me N= 6
Please describe how your self-awareness and identity have been influenced by being a WHPC in a male dominate environment?

- No problem – not influenced N=7
- Are aware of and trust my own competence N=6
- Positive influence since men and women collaborate N=17
- Sport is unfair in terms of gender N=5
- Have to overachieve in order to proof competence N=14
- Cannot be my-self N=7

How do you experience acceptance and being met as a WHPC by (A): the high-performance context, (B): from elite athletes, (C): from your staff/support team, (D): from people outside of HPS:

- A) Positive-ok from the HP-context N=20, varying responses N=6, and not taken seriously N=10
- B) Positive from elite athletes N=34 and varying responses N=2
- C) from staff/support team positive N=22, varying responses N=8, and bad N=5
- D) from outside positive N=21, varying responses N=9, and bad/not taken seriously N=7

What do you think about expressing/showing vulnerability within high performance sports? Potential benefit as a women in comparison to men...

- Important to express/show vulnerability N=21
- Do this with people close to me N=7
- Not accepted/not happening in sport N=11
- Can be daring/difficult to show N=6
- Do not express/show vulnerability N=14

How did it feel to answer these questions about being a WHPS?

- It felt ok, good, important topic, chance to reflection N=43
- Difficult, male coaches should also be surveyed N=9
- The coach profession needs to be adapted to better manage WHI, more differences btw individuals than btw gender N=7

Conclusions

- Better prepare and support high-performance coaches across gender in terms of WHI
- Prevent a “stereo-typed” coach-profile
- Promote more diverse coach profiles
- What´s mental toughness got to do with it?

Final thoughts regarding ”old-school-stereotype“ role models with a masculine bias...

What’s on the flip-side of the coin?
Mental toughness

Vulnerability

An asset
A strength

Thank you for your attention

Att vara elittränare/ledare är krävande! Hur hanterar du din egen hälsa och ditt välbefinnande?

• Egen träning/fritid 16
• Tid med familj/vänner 11
• Egen tid/återhämtning 10
• Sätta gränser/delegera 8

How have you perceived to answer these questions about being a WHPS?

• It felt ok, good, important topic, chance to reflection N=43
• Difficult, male coaches should also be surveyed N=9
• The coach profession needs to be adapted to better manage WHI, more differences btw individuals than btw gender N=7

Three of the most important lessons learned:

✓ To take one day at the time and to be in the present moment
✓ To be kind to my-self is just as important as looking after my training routine
✓ How much I love to be a part of the national team
Introduction: The title, "Women, Naturally Better Leaders for the 21st Century," might be completely true. However, this statement is not reflected by the low proportion of women high performance coaches, often about 7.5%–20% (Bentzen, Lemyre, & Kenttä, 2016; Fasting, Sand, Sisjord, Thoresen, & Broch, 2008; Kidd, 2013). These numbers should also be reflected towards the fact that the Olympic village host the same number of women and men athletes. With this background, we would argue that a larger variation among coaches is need–reflected by a large proportion of female high performance coaches. To our knowledge, few previous studies have explored this low percentage of high performance coaches. Thus, previous studies among the general female coach population have indicated explanatory variables of the individual level (e.g., knowledge, skills and confidence), and the interpersonal level (e.g., support systems), and organizational level (e.g., culture; LaVoit & Dutove, 2012). Additionally, it has been argued that the sports climate needs to change for female coaches experience them to be less inhospitable (Fasting, Sand, & Knorre, 2013). The aim of this paper was to explore facilitative and debilitative factors that are experienced by current women high performance coaches.

Method: A network consisting of current female high performance coaches was approached for this study. In total, 36 coaches agreed to participate. An expert panel developed a semi-structured questionnaire based on research and applied experience. The questionnaire started with an open question followed by themes. The first open question was phrased, “Based on your experiences and what you learned, can you please outline/develop your thoughts about debilitative and facilitative factors, bearing in mind that we wish to have more female coaches at the high performance level.” Following this item, themes covered was well-being/ill-being, retention, work-home interference, self-awareness with special attention to being a women in a male dominated world, perceived acceptance of the role as a female coach, vulnerability, and finally a question regarding how they perceived answer the questionnaire. All written responses were content analyzed for emerging themes by the team of authors. Finally, the analysis team derived several individual responses to common themes and a data tree was created to capture more generic themes.

Results: The thematic analysis resulted in these emerging themes: Lack of role models, Work Home Interference, vulnerability, and finally a question regarding how they perceived answer the questionnaire. All written responses were content analyzed for emerging themes by the team of authors. Finally, the analysis team derived several individual responses to common themes and a data tree was created to capture more generic themes.

Discussion and Conclusion: The findings indicate that female high performance coaches to a large extent experience the same facilitative and debilitative factors related to being a coach as reported in research conducted with male coaches. For instance, WHI was reported as a debilitative factor although this is not expected to be the strongest predictor at female-coaching HP coaches (prediction consisting of 82.5% male Bentzen, Lemyre, & Kenttä, 2016). The authors argue that facilitative and debilitative factors need to be challenged specifically to gender-based research at HP coaches. Instead of regarding arguments and practices as impact for men in the male dominated world, it needs to be challenged as impact for women in the female dominated world. The authors argue that coaching as a more sustainable work-life balance is a necessity for coaches in general. Ultimately, this means a more diverse coach population.