HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY IN SPORTS COACHING: THE IMPACT ON AUSTRALIAN FEMALE HIGH PERFORMANCE COACHES’ MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

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Focus on mental health and wellbeing in high performance sport has increased recently
Sports organizations now have whole teams dedicated to this area
In Australia, there are a number of player associations (AFL; NRL) providing Player Welfare staff
Very little focus on mental health and wellbeing of those coaches at elite level

Current Practice in Australia

• Australian Football – AFL Coaches Association
  – Provide management training (Leadership; Communicating with influence)
  – Coach performance review support

• Rugby League – None
  – Some wellbeing support through an Employee Assistance Scheme

• Netball – None
  – Only coaching qualifications and CPD opportunities provided

• Swimming – Australian Swimming Coaches and Teachers Association
  – Some education to support coaching performance

Current Practice in Australia

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Hegemonic Masculinity - is something that guarantees, or at least seems to guarantee, the “dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell, 2005, p. 77)

The Current Study

• 12 female high performance coaches
  – Diving (1); Lawn Bowls (2); Netball (5); Tennis (1); Triathlon (3)
• Semi-structured interviews focusing on the psychosocial factors
  – Impacting mental health and wellbeing
  – Strategies used to promote positive wellbeing
• An inductive thematic analysis conducted on all interview data

“It’s just not viable for me to continue. I just thought that maybe with a few more years in the system something could have happened - that I could have provided for my family and do what I really want to do. But the fact is that just didn’t quite evolve, and that’s disappointing.” – Peta Searle, The Age, Apr 2014

“If I’m not taking time off, I know that things will build up and I won’t be the best coach I can be. Emotional and physical recovery as a coach is extremely important.” – Lisa Alexander, Coaching Network, May 2017

“I absolutely had doubt about returning to coaching. I think we, as women, doubt ourselves more than men do, we question ourselves.” – Cheryl Chambers, Herald Sun, Feb 2017
“And then it's just blatant if he sees my athletes at races, he'll try and poach and steal and discredit me and say, “Why would you get coached by a coach that only does this time or can - is a female.” Most definitely said those big exact words so that's been pretty hard”

Normative / Expectant Behaviours

- “I have to constantly prove that I am better [than male coach]”
- “There's a lot of male chauvinism... alcohol does play a fair part”
- “It's a lot of after hours, weekend work, all that sort of stuff, so you're never sort of off the phone or away from it so to speak”
- “[sport] is being considered to be equal for men and women under the Equal Opportunity type scenario. But it actually isn't”
- “… stress and mental health support, it's not industry related except for go to the GP or go to a psychologist for that support”

Organizational Support

- “They lack insight. They don't see what we see what we see. I don’t think [women] are valued enough”
- “There are no role models for women in coaching”
- “[organization] do education seminars on mental health and stress reduction”
- “I'm not aware of any mental health support networks”
- “[sports organization] don't provide you with a mentor, you have to ask for one”

The Coach as a Role Model

- “we're two female business owners as a partnership which there is no other business in Australia in triathlon that is the same as ours. We need to encourage more”
- “We're the only females in Victoria [with that level of qualification]. It's pretty rare”
- “I'd say that mental health across the board, is definitely an issue for coaches… the sport attracts athletes that struggle with mental illness”

Self-Regulation

- “Time out with the family is the biggest one for me”
- “Make sure you get eight hours sleep a night. Make sure you plan in your calendar your own training and allocate the stuff you have to do for you, because that should be the most important thing”
- “Colouring things that might be stressful one colour and then your own stuff that's good for you in another... look at your week and say, this week coming up there's too much red ... so you can sort of predictively analyse what's coming down the funnel and maybe adjust things before you need to”

Impact on Performance

- “I think I've already been through certain stages of burnout”
- “After a game I spend hours coding and analysing. I can never sleep, so I just work. It's probably not great, but that's what I do”
- “I'm a much better coach than what I was six years ago, because I look after myself better”
Practical Implementation – Initial Observations for Coach Mental Health and Wellbeing

- The HP Coach:
  - Develop strategies to improve recovery and stress management
  - Become autonomous in their own mental health and wellbeing

- The Sports Organization:
  - Organizational support to promote positive mental health and wellbeing
  - Provision of resources to promote positive mental health and wellbeing

- The Policy Designers:
  - Provide clear guidance on best practice for coaches

- Linking of positive mental health and wellbeing with improved performance

Practical Implementation – Initial Observations for Women in Coaching

- The HP Coach:
  - Self regulation is important
  - Support other women in coaching

- The Sports Organization:
  - Promote women into HP coach roles
  - Provision of opportunities to develop

- The Policy Designers:
  - Provide specifically designed coach education programs
  - Designate quotas for women in coaching roles

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