Overview

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- Methodology
- Findings & Discussion
- Conclusion

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Introduction

- Sport coaching is considered a complex social activity (Jones et al., 2010; Cushion et al., 2014)
- However, coaching is often viewed in isolation & episodic as if operating in a social vacuum (Lyle & Cushion, 2017)
- Rather, shaped by social structures, power, history, and cultural trends (Cushion et al., 2014)
- Result, uncritical exploration (Cushion & Jones, 2014):
  - Coaching context determines coaches and athletes meanings and practices
  - Development of normative values & ideologies
  - Coaches and / or athletes constrained rather than enabled
- A sociological exploration of this therefore warranted to challenge:
  - Traditional, dominant, and unquestionable ideologies, discourses & rhetoric
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Paralympic and High Performance Context

- Increased global recognition has seen closer links between IPC & IOC and is now recognized as the 3rd largest elite multisport event in the world (Brittain, 2009)
- The Paralympic games is positioned as a vehicle to challenge society's perceptions of disabled people (IPC, 2017)
- Embedded within the wider field of disability research & policy (Barns & Mercer, 2010)
- Coaching practice, expertise, and development still critically underexplored in 'High performance Paralympic sport'
- Coaches' biographical influences (Duarte & Culver, 2014)
- Additional coaching implications (Burkett, 2013)
- Coach learning (McMaster et al., 2012)
- Coach education & knowledge (Cregan et al., 2007)
- Research fails to consider wider social context & notions of disability (Townsend et al., 2016)

Methodology – Sociological Exploration

- Participants:
  - 5 coaches of Paralympic medalists (Male: n = 3; Female: n = 2; Age: 20-58 years)
  - 4 FT and 1 PT coach
  - 14.8 years coaching experience & representing 4 countries (US, SA, AUS, UK)
  - Multiple disciplines (e.g. individual track-based, team court-based, individual target-based)
  - Impairment groups (Amputee, Spinal Cord, Cerebral Palsy, Visually Impaired)
- Design:
  - Qualitative research design
  - In-depth face-to-face semi-structured interviews
  - Each lasted between 2½ and 3½ hours
  - Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim
- Data Analysis:
  - Constructed grounded theory approach (Glaser, 1965)
  - The process followed inductive reasoning - data inductively reduced into themes
  - Critical exploration of the identified themes achieved through deductive application of a Bourdieusian theoretical framework

Findings & Discussion:

Guardians of the rules of the game (doxa)

Doxa (Bourdieu, 1998, p.46)

‘the mental structures through which they (coaches) apprehend the social world, are essentially the product of the internalization of the structures of that world’

The implications:

Coaching practice preserves the practical logic and ideologies of the high performance field, which manifest in them knowing how to ‘play and maintain the game’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.46)
Findings & Discussion: Guardians of the rules of the game (doxa)

The high performance doxa permeating the coaches interview data

- Applying non disabled standards
- Autocratic coaching approach
- More than winning

• ‘I guess through my own experience, my experience as an athlete in an elite programme... I kinda saw the standards that were necessary for success in an Olympic programme’ (Judy)

• ‘I treat them just like I do any able-bodied player, I’m going to drive them hard, I’m going to push them hard. I don’t allow them to give up, I’m not going to allow them to tell me that they can’t do something’ (Benjamin)

• ‘It was not good enough to win, to just win... It’s the mind-set that ‘I need to constantly push and constantly challenge’... that’s world class, because you’ve (referring to an athlete) just gone, gone above and beyond to prove to us that you want to be the fastest person in the world’ (Charles)

• Applying Bourdieu’s notion of doxa reveals high performance ideologies & discourses that influence coaches practice practice

- Non disabled standards required for success (Judy & Benjamin)
- Autocratic approaches to enhance performance (Benjamin & Charles)
- More than winning (Charles)

• BUT...

- These approaches lack clarity ‘polymorphic, supple and adaptable, rather than defined, calibrated and used rigidly’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1997, p.23).

- Instead they present a field dominated by high performance coach constructed ideologies and meanings legitimised as normal practice
Findings & Discussion:

Guardians of the rules of the game (doxa)

- Consequence...
- The high performance ‘doxa’ creates a hierarchical field of struggle
- High performance culture determining standards
- Coaches interpreting and embodying these standards according to their interests (winning)
- Cements their position within the coach field
- Their practices are legitimized as normal
- Practices are misrecognised as in the interest of the athletes
- The rules of the game are maintained

Conclusion

- Exploring coaching in its positioning within the wider sociopolitical agenda and the impact this has on practice
- Coaching practice is constructed according to power and relationally intertwined within high performance structures
- Highlighted unquestionable practices that are deemed legitimate, but constrain coaches and athletes development
- More critical approaches needed....

Thank you

- Any questions

References


