Women Easily Feel that They Have Lost a Year if They Don’t Ski Faster”:

Finnish Ski Coaches’ Discursive Constructions of Gendered Dual Career Pathways

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Abstract:

Contemporary athletes in Nordic countries are increasingly expected to combine their sporting career with education and/or work. This dual career pathway 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. Recent research indicates that socio-cultural discourses of gender are ingrained in dual career policies and practices - creating gender hierarchies and inequalities – which may influence athletes’ motivation, career-aspirations, decision-making, and well-being practices (Ryba et al., 2021). While the current DC policy documents underscore the importance of gender equality and anti-discrimination in coaching practice (European Commission, 2012; 2014) there is a gap in the literature on how coaches’ attitudes and beliefs on the compatibility of sport and education as well as issues related to gender shape their coaching practice. In the current study we examined how coaches’ beliefs on athletes’ holistic development are interlinked with broader socio-cultural discourses of gender. 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; Weedon, 1997). Two main themes
with four supporting subthemes were constructed in the analysis: (1) Fluid positioning of education with subthemes (a) Achieving secondary education is important and (b) Sport is the priority at the mastery level and (2) Holistic development is important for female athletes with subthemes (a) Female athletes invest in multiple careers and (b) Coaching female athletes is challenging. Our findings reveal that gender hierarchies persist in Finnish sporting culture and that coaches reproduce gendered discourses that arguably influence athletes’ dual career aspirations and gendering of dual career pathways.

*Keywords*: coaching, holistic development, dual career, gender, skiing

**References:**


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