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## **Abstract**

This study focuses upon UK professional coaches' experiences of equity training and the impact of the conceptualisation of equity as a matter of equal opportunities on this education and subsequent coaching practice. The research employs a critical feminist approach to connect the ideological framing of gender equity by sporting organisations to coaches' ability to understand, identify and manage issues of gender equity, equality and diversity. The discussions are based on interviews with four coaches, Jack, Peter, Charlotte and Tony, who had all recently undertaken equity training, and all of whom represented sports and different stages of the coaching pathway. The data highlights that seeing gender equity through an 'equal opportunities' lens results in a narrow conceptualisation of such issues by coaches, fails to challenge dominant and discriminative ideologies, and does not enable coaches to address equity within their practices. Consequently, coaches struggle to understand the importance of and manage such issues. The participants' experiences reveal that gender relations, intersected principally with religion and ethnicity, underpinned their everyday coaching practices. The findings illustrate the need for sporting organisations to redefine how they approach equality and equity and for a more sophisticated sociocultural educational programme for coaches.

**Key words:** • Equity • Coaching • Gender • Feminist • Intersectional

## Introduction

With the increasing prominence that sport plays in modern societies, it is widely advocated that sport can play an important role in the moral and social education of its participants (Arnold, 1997). It is even argued that sport can provide meaningful life experiences (Essed, 1991, Arnold, 1997). Within these experiences, the role of the coach is central. It is a profession that requires an individual to be responsible for not just an athlete's physical and technical development, but also for their psychological and social well-being (Horn, 2002). Indeed, DePoy and Gitlin (2005) contend that the coach is the central actor in establishing and monitoring ethical sporting behaviour. Notions of 'fair play' and 'respect' are found in all performance domains and the moral role of coaches remains pertinent at all levels of athletic performance (DePoy and Gitlin, 2005). Thus, given that sport now holds such high regard in Western society for its contribution to athletes' social and moral welfare, then it would appear reasonable to expect coaches to understand their role as one that requires an ethic of care and thus within ethical terms, rather than just the technical. An ethic of care within coaching relates to coaches' relationships with their athletes, how coaches make sense of their own knowledge and assumptions that they bring to their role, and about making coaching more accessible as well as inclusive (Denison, 2007). However, beyond stating the importance of social justice training for coaches (e.g. Lough, 2001, Jones et al., 2004), no empirical research exists that evaluates this component of the UK coaching professional development programme. In this article, I adopt a critical feminist standpoint to explore how coaches experience issues of equity within their daily practices and based upon their narrated experiences, I make the case that while equity issues lie at the heart of coaching practice, such issues are misunderstood and underestimated by policy makers, coach educators and coaches alike. I begin my paper with an overview of the political and ideological foundation underpinning how issues of equity are conceived within UK sporting organisations with a focus on the role of the coach in applying these ideologies. Second, I will outline my methodology to study professional coaches' experiences of equity issues within the UK and will present the findings from this research. I will conclude with suggestions for future directions for sport and coaching policy makers, educators and researchers.

Addressing issues of equity, equality and diversity within sport in the UK will be a tall order for those tasked to do so and will require a seismic change to the status quo (Arnold, 1997). Sport has long been a site for the naturalisation of oppressive ideologies related to gender, race, sexual

orientation, class and able-bodiedness, whereby we have to come to 'naturalise' discriminatory social constructions of different individuals and groups' sporting skills and abilities (Messner, 2011). In the UK, certain equity issues were put on the organisational agenda through lobbying by the charities the Women's Sport Foundation (now named 'Women in Sport') regarding gender in 1984 and Sporting Equals (related to racial equality) in 1998. This drive gathered pace as a consequence of the growing intolerance to and legislative action challenging inequality initiated by the Labour UK government that came into power in 1997. For example, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport urged sporting organisations to develop guidelines and plans to encourage a greater representation of minority groups in sport. In this context, sport became to be perceived as a method of addressing equality, diversity and the relational, functional and power dimensions of social inclusion whereby individuals have the opportunity to become empowered and enhance their skills, where all groups and individuals feel valued as participants and have their needs met (Hickey, 2008, Bailey, 2005). In response, in 2004 UK Sport and the four Sport Councils attempted to unify the approach to different strands of equity issues and devised a generic strategy for social change in the form of the 'Equality Standard: A Framework for Sport' (Krane, 2001). This Standard is a framework for helping sporting organisations and governing bodies to improve access to their services as well as the representation of minority individuals, groups and communities within their sport (Sports Council Equality Group, 2012). The Standard also rewards organisations with four levels of good practice, from foundation level where organisations are described as committed to equality, to advanced level in which organisations are seen to be providing fair and equal opportunities to its staff and the communities it serves (Sports Council Equality Group, 2012). At the time of writing, out of the 200 sporting organisations included in the Standard, only one had been awarded an advanced level of good practice and only 20 had reached the third, termed 'intermediate', level out of a possible 327 organisations. At levels one and two of the Equality Standard, sporting organisations and NGBs are only *requested* to collect data to monitor the profile of their staff, it is not compulsory (Arnold, 1997). In this way, equality and diversity are conceptualised almost as 'figures' that can be measured in the absence of any intervention or real change in practices or cultures (Rogers, 1969).

However, while this framework has been crucial in raising awareness and measuring levels of equality within UK governing bodies, diversity in sport within the UK amongst athletes, coaches and administrators remains low at all levels of performance. More men play sport than women at all levels

of the performance domains, more higher middle class individuals play sport than those from lower socio-economic statuses and four times the number of those who identify as White play sport than individuals from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups (Sports Coach UK, 2011, Sport England, 2013). In terms of coaching, 70% of all coaches are men, 92% of the coaching profession are able-bodied, 97% of the coaching workforce are White, and almost half of coaches are middle class (Sports Coach UK, 2011). While some progress has been made to increase the representation of minority groups as participants and at lower levels of coaching, these statistics demonstrate that this progress has been slow. This is because sporting organisations and governing bodies themselves have changed little in their working practices, in the way competence is defined and rewarded, in the way that sociocultural issues are understood and interpreted, in the way differences between groups and individuals continue to be supported, and changes to the leadership of sport have not been sufficiently substantial (Ely and Meyerson, 2000). Thus, sport remains an inequitable institution and partly the reason for this is how sporting organisation define and problematise 'equality' and 'equity'. The ideological framework for equity policies dictate how the 'problems' of equity, equality and diversity are framed and the solutions to these 'problems' (Brackenridge, 2001).

### **Understanding Equality and Equity**

In the UK, despite the lack of diversity *within* sport, individuals play and coach sport against a backdrop of improvement in wider social attitudes and legislation towards equality and diversity. This is in part due to the increasing interest in and emergence of equalities on the agenda of policy makers and organisations, and the trend towards mainstreaming equality across the sectors (Mulderigg, 2007). Legislatively, this has accumulated in the recent Equality Act (2010) which has embedded all previous legislation related to improving equality and diversity, such as the Sex Discrimination Act (1975), the Race Relations Act (1976) and the Disability Discrimination Act (1995), into one document, forming the basis of anti-discrimination law for Great Britain. This is for all 'protected characteristics', including sexual orientation, disability, race, sex, gender / gender reassignment, and religion or belief (including lack of belief) (Burgess et al., 2003). Equality in this context is the issue of sameness and difference between individuals and groups (Mulderigg, 2007). In using these equality strands as the basis for the Equality Act (2010) the aim is equality between individuals in relation to their identification with one or more of these protected characteristics (Mulderigg, 2007). What this

means for sporting organisation and national governing bodies (NGBs) is that the equality drive means the onus is on the sports sector to increase participation by the inclusion of a more diverse pool of participants (Koivula, 2001). With the recent trend towards equality in wider society, governing bodies and organisations too are working towards an idea of a 'level playing field' (equality) by providing more for those groups and individuals who need extra help in accessing an equal system (equity). This idea of sport equity originates from the 1990s and while some evolution of philosophies and ideas have certainly changed since then and the issue taken more seriously, the persistence of the equity as a targeting of underrepresented groups and the provision of extra programmes and services, rather than deep structural and cultural change and sport development per se, remains (Houlihan and White, 2002). With the recent legislative changes, sporting organisations will also have a greater accountability and responsibility towards equity issues. In more general terms, the Equality Act (2010) means that the onus and spotlight is on sport more than ever to examine their discriminatory policies, to ensure they are addressing inequalities, that they are educating their workforce to be sensitive and knowledgeable about equity issues, and to create inclusive environments for all their participants. However equality and equity are complex concepts, involving the idea of distribution amongst groups and access to resources as well as the quality of relations between individuals and whether they relate as equals (White, 2007).

To this end, Baker (2004) and Baker et al. (2009) presented a number of complexities when attempting to 'unpack' the discourses and debates surrounding equality. They presented a number of key questions when addressing the issue of equality. First, to grasp equality, the patterns of *inequality* must be identified. Second, an appropriate framework must be utilised to challenge these patterns. Third, the objectives of equality must be identified and fourth, the most effective institutional frameworks for achieving equality in different contexts must also be identified. From this, within a particular context, what institutional policies would be most effective at promoting equality should be outlined. Finally, the best political strategies to realising equality should be identified. For Sen (1992), the third question, in essence 'equality for what?' is the most important question and concern underpinning the debates around social equality. Baker et al. (2009) contend that the most popular response to this and the subsequent strategy of institutions has been to centralise the importance of bettering the conditions within which individuals live to achieve their own aims (i.e. equality of opportunities). Therefore, the approach of many institutions, sectors, and organisations is to strive for

equality (everyone has the same chances and access to the system) with a number of initiatives, programmes and services to ensure equity (to offset possible inequalities for individuals and groups). This is opposed to the other two main types and approaches of equality, as posited by (Burchardt, 2006): equality of process and equality of outcome. Instead, it is the concept of equality of opportunity that has underpinned the strategic approaches of many sectors and organisations within the UK in the most recent decades (Baker et al., 2009), including sport.

### **The Ideological Framing of and Policies Influencing Gender Equity in Sport and Coaching**

Sport remains an inequitable institution. As part of this, sport also remains a gendered, hegemonically masculine institution, that is, meanings, identities, organisational practices and processes of control and action are distinguished between / for men and women in favour of and dominated by men (Acker, 1990, Fielding-Lloyd and Mean, 2011). The unequal gender divide within sport has been extensively discussed in the research literature. What remains less well-documented is the connection between how approaches to gender equity and equality at a structural level shapes knowledges and practices which subsequently influence gender relations.

Ely and Meyerson (2000), in their review of feminist literature on gender theory and change within organisations in general, have offered three frameworks that are rooted in liberal theories of inequality that have typically shaped approaches to equity related to gender and the link to gender relations. One of which is 'fix the women', an approach based on the equality principle of meritocracy (Ely and Meyerson, 2000). From this approach, organisations aim to eradicate sexual inequality by strengthening women's skills and attributes so that they can compete with men. Sex is synonymous with gender and it is the sex-role socialisation process that has led to women's poor performance in business. Thus, women would be able to have the same opportunities to succeed and progress if they possessed the same skills as men. Second is the approach of 'value the feminine' which is near opposite of the first approach (Ely and Meyerson, 2000). Rather than attempting to equalise sex differences, this framework to gender equity is to celebrate women's differences to men and champion their unique skills. Feminist critics of this framework however contend that it ignores other aspects of one's identity in addition to gender and that it does not free or transform women from oppressive notions of femininity (DiStefano, 1990). Alternatively, there is the framework of 'creating equal opportunities' (Ely and Meyerson, 2000). Within the UK sporting context, most sporting

organisations and governing bodies have endeavoured to make their sports more inclusive through what Brackenridge (2001) and Ely and Meyerson (2000) agree to be a 'creating equal opportunities' ideological framework. Research that has examined the UK governing bodies and organisations' equality and diversity policies share this view of the ideological framework (Hylton, 2003, Lusted, 2009, Green, 2004, Spracklen et al., 2006). Once equity has been accomplished, then the focus is on treating everyone the same (Bagilhole, 2009), and entails focusing upon the structural barriers preventing minority groups from accessing sports participation and leadership roles. Such structural barriers include a lack of coaching role models, recruitment practices not favourable to minority coaches, progression challenges and glass ceilings, and the segregation of men and women's sport (author, 2014). The focus on treating individuals equally is evident within Sport England's definition of equity: "fairness in sport, equality of access, recognising inequalities and taking steps to address them. Sports equity is about changing the culture and structure of sport to ensure that it becomes equally accessible to all members of society whatever their age, ability, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious beliefs or socio/economic status" (Sport England, 2000). Thus, the aim is to create a level playing field and the approach for change is the creation of policies to accommodate for structural practices, such as positive action or flexible working practices (Ely and Meyerson, 2000).

The benefits of working to improve inclusion through an equal opportunities ideological framework are that inequality in sport provision and opportunities is challenged, breaches of fairness are not permitted, and minority groups have more chances to be recruited, trained and retained in leadership positions (Brackenridge, 2001, Ely and Meyerson, 2000). This can reduce tokenism, improve access to networks, improve the cultural visibility of different sports, and can enable individuals to feel more welcomed in environments and organisation if they are less isolated (Ely and Meyerson, 2000). Nevertheless, little impact is made on the culture of sport. Instead, underrepresentation of minority groups as participants and leaders is understood as 'their problem' (Ely and Meyerson, 2000). An approach of 'equal opportunities' allows organisational structures and cultures to go unscrutinised and instead, switches the focus of the causes of underrepresentation to external factors (Shaw and Slack, 2002, Lusted, 2009). Through targeting social minorities and disadvantaged groups, negative stereotypes are reinforced (Carrington and McDonald, 2003). Other scholars have further questioned the commitment of organisational drives for equity and equal opportunities in sport, speculating that such policies are mere attempts to attract funding, satisfy legislative requirements



(i.e. tick boxes) or viewed as marginal concerns altogether in favour of high performance, elite sport (Green, 2004, Hoeber and Frisby, 2001, Shaw and Penney, 2003). A lack of problematisation of what sporting equity really means beyond number crunching and a drive to manage this (Hylton, 2003, Spracklen et al., 2006) consequently means instead, that individuals are given a share of the inequitable system rather than organisations confronting the cultural practices that support inequality (Brackenridge, 2001). Aspects of an individual's identity become seen as 'add-ons' rather than understood as relations of power or influences on how individuals experience their lives (Ely and Meyerson, 2000).

Examples of interventions within this ideological frame include mentoring programmes for aspiring and developing coaches from underrepresented groups such as BME individuals and women, providing alternative career pathways within sports leadership such as community coaching and volunteering, giving extra council funding to smaller sports that can attract members of diverse communities, and establishing partnerships between sport councils and smaller equity groups to use sport to remove barriers to participation and engage minority groups. The drive for equal opportunities, widen sporting participation and increase the number of coaches means that there has also been a greater investment in coaching in the UK in the last ten years. This has accumulated in the recent UK Coaching Framework: A 3-7-11 Year Action Plan (Sports Coach UK, 2008). Central values underpinning this plan for the development and delivery of sports coaching and increase sporting participation in the UK includes fair play, equity and inclusion. Coaches are viewed as key players in implementing and realising these values, as professionals who are required to promote social inclusion (Taylor and Garratt, 2010). However, in order to be responsible for the welfare of athletes, coaches need to understand how their practices affect and are affected by social issues and injustices (Tinning, 1997).

The ideological framing of equity is no more evident than in the component of the national coaching curriculum that addresses social justice issues. Coaches are offered the opportunity to undergo training in equity issues to understand how to make their practices more 'accessible' through workshops called 'Equity in your Coaching', provided by the UK's central coaching agency, Sports Coach UK. The aim of these national one-off workshops is to educate coaches as to how to identify and deal with any barriers (inequities) to sports participation for minority groups in sport, eliminate practices that make it difficult for such groups to join clubs and compete, as well as understand how to

interpret the legislation relating to equality for their clubs and practice, and develop methods to make coaching sessions more accessible to all their athletes (Sports Coach UK, 2010). Evaluation of this form of education for coaches in terms of research is non-existent from a UK perspective. One closely related study is the work of Blundell and Cunningham (2007) which sought to create a coach education course for community sports coaches based upon citizenship education. In an effort to break away from the restrictive, conventional models of coaching that the coaches did not believe set up them to deal with the realities of coaches, Blundell and Cunningham (2007) constructed a course that involved educating coaches as to the social contexts of practice. The intention was to provide coaches with appropriate knowledge and understanding of the unique context they work in (Blundell & Cunningham, 2007). The result was that the authors felt the role of 'community sports coach' was enhanced through greater professional identity and commitment of the coaches to community involvement (Blundell & Cunningham, 2007). Further research exploring sociocultural education for coaches, internationally, is also rare. In the work by (Culp, 2014), 43 US student-coaches engaged in a 16 week course in social justice, underpinned by social constructivism. Issues of inequity were presented and discussed throughout the course. Following the course, analysis of student journals indicated changes in coaches' philosophies regarding social justice, an appreciation for the perspectives of underrepresented groups and emergent critical perspectives when examining sport processes. Culp (2014) concluded that the findings implied that a focus on democratic education and constructivism in coaching preparation programs may be of benefit. Therefore, there is an obvious need for further research into this area to build an evidence base towards the experiences and impact of equity education for coaches with a more refined focus on specific strands of (in)equality.

Operating through a 'creating equal opportunities' ideological framework means that sport councils, organisations and governing bodies root their interventions in liberal theories of inequality. Consequently, gender is conceptualised as differences between men and women resulting from different structural opportunities and resources (Ely and Meyerson, 2000). Therefore, while interventions are laudable for their attempt to provide the chance for women to gain participatory and coaching opportunities to that of men, the beliefs that legitimate gendered inequality in sport remain unproblematised (Ely and Meyerson, 2000). This narrow definition of gender, sport equity, equality and diversity may mean that unequal gendered social relations manifest themselves in unequal social practices. It may also mean that coaches are not given the knowledge to understand the complex

relations they experience day-to-day with their athletes. For example, previous research has highlighted that gender relations are at the heart of women's sporting experiences and constitute reasons for their underrepresentation within sports leadership or for unequal athletic experiences (author, 2010, 2013). The research literature also demonstrates that gendered relations between male coaches and female athletes can be poorly managed and misunderstood (author, 2013; Tomlinson and Yorganci, 1997, Stewart and Taylor, 2000). Therefore, the study drew upon a critical feminist framework. Existing literature on equity, sport and policy from a feminist perspective is rare. Aside from a few broader exceptions, a crucial element also missing to previous research is a critical examination of the impact of an 'equal opportunities' framework, how it shapes approaches to equity and gender and the subsequent effect on knowledge and practices of individuals and relations between men and women. This study addresses this paradigmatic gap by drawing upon the strength of the feminist critical project to understand the experiences of coaches, in their own words, as subject to the organisational practices of their profession. From a feminist critical approach, how gender inequality and equity is reproduced forms the focus of inquiry (Hall, 1996). A crucial component of this critical feminist project is to qualitatively understand how personal experiences are shaped by these larger cultural and structural forces (Krane, 2001). Precisely, the focus of the present study was upon how coaches understand and approach gender equity and how gender interacts with other aspects of identity within their daily practices, underpinned by their governing body's ideological approach to equity and equality. As part of this, the study aimed to collect coaches' understanding of 'difference' between men and women as well as other aspects of identity, following attendance at an equity course. A further aim of the work was also to examine the role of the coach in contributing to the production of gender (in)equality and how they respond to gendered ideologies within their coaching practice.

## **Methodology**

### ***Participants***

The four coaches included in the study each represented a different sport and different levels (of which there are four) of the UK Coaching Certificate. The study focused upon sampling coaches who had the most sustained contact with their athletes and were the most immersed within their governing body. With this in mind, the research was aimed at professional coaches, that is, men and women who were paid on at least a part-time basis to coach. Recruitment for the research was open

to coaches from any sport, individual or team, in order to understand whether the contexts of different sports yielded similar or contrasting experiences of gender relations for the coaches. Four coaches agreed to share their experiences of equity and gender issues within their practice. For the purposes of confidentiality and anonymity, each coach will be referred to using a pseudonym throughout the paper.

Firstly, Tony is a level one part-time badminton coach who has been coaching at an inner-English city club for 18 months. His athletes include adults and girls and boys aged 14-17 from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and all are able-bodied. Tony self-identifies as White English (sexual orientation or (dis)ability was not discussed by any of the coaches) and is aged between 50-60 years old (precise ages were not ascertained). Secondly, Jack is a level two swimming and kayaking coach, coaching on a part-time basis at a rural club with three years' experience. His athletes include both girls and boys up to the age of 18. All of Jack's athletes are White and the majority are able-bodied. Some of his swimmers have learning difficulties or physical disabilities, such as limb impairment. Like Tony, Jack self-identifies as White British, and is aged between 40 and 50. Thirdly, Charlotte is a national coach in an aquatic sport (given the few numbers of women coaches at a national level, the precise sport will not be named). She coaches full-time, at both a club with young male and female athletes, in a suburban area outside a major northern English city, and with high performance athletes, including men and women. Charlotte coaches athletes from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and both able-bodied athletes and athletes with a disability. She too self-identifies as White British, is aged between 40 and 50 and has been coaching for approximately 20 years. Finally, Peter is a full-time martial arts coach, who coaches both at club level and with high performance (World Championship) athletes in a large English city. He has twelve years coaching experience. His athletes include men and women from different ethnic backgrounds and all are able-bodied. Peter self-identifies as White British and is aged between 30 and 40. The four coaches were recruited through an advert sent by a national coaching organisation to a list of practitioners who had recently attended one of their county-based equity training workshops (within the last three months). This also formed part of the recruitment strategy for the study in order to engage with coaches who had recently reflected upon equity issues within their practice. Strategic sampling of participants protected against a common criticism of qualitative sampling, that of being "ad hoc and vague" (Mason, 1996, p.95). Prior to the research, formal ethical approval was provided by the University's ethics committee and

all research was carried out in accordance with the University's ethical guidelines. Participants received letters of information detailing the research study and completed participant consent forms prior to interview.

### ***Data collection and analysis***

Data were collected utilizing one-to-one in-depth semi-structured interviews in order to achieve a greater understanding of their experiences and to privilege the participant as the authority on their own experiences. Considering the participants as the authority on their own experiences in an interview situation was an attempt to equalize the potentially powerful position that a researcher can occupy over participants as well as form a collaborative relationship with the participants (DePoy and Gitlin, 2005). The sample size also allowed for an in-depth exploration of the coaches' experiences. Within feminist research, experiences are the central focus of inquiry. Experiences act as appropriate and valid sources of knowledge of relations, interactions, private and vicarious encounters as well as general knowledge, which an individual utilizes to inform their understanding of injustices (Essed, 1991). Experiences are also a valid source of knowledge because prejudices are frequently conveyed in subtle ways (Essed, 2002). The overall content of the interview was based upon an interview schedule (Patton, 1990) devised for the purpose of the research and focused on (1) the participants' background in and early experiences of coaching, (2) philosophies and practices of the coach in regards to gender and equity, (3) the participants' experiences of gender in coaching, and (4) how equity training had impacted the participants' understanding and practices regarding gender equity, and (4) the coaches' evaluation of organisational support for their professional practices related to gender equity. Participants were also asked to elaborate extra, relevant information that arose during the course of the interview. Each interview lasted between 90 and 120 minutes during which the participants spoke at great length about their experiences and ideas regarding issues of equity. All interviews were tape-recorded and analysed using the constant comparison method of data coding (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This method of data analysis was selected its rigour and for how it purports to stay close to the participants' feelings, thoughts and actions (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). Although the method was originally developed for a grounded theory approach, Lincoln and Guba (1985) added significant procedural details to the steps involved and Maykut and Morehouse (1994) have since validated the method for other types of analyses. Therefore, the data analysis for

the present study took the following phases as according to those outlined by Maykut and Morehouse (1994). This involved unitizing each interview transcript into smaller units of meaning and the response to each interview question comprised a unit. Each unit of meaning identified in the preparation stage was then compared to other units of meaning, and was then grouped with similar units to form an over-arching category. When a unit of meaning could not be grouped with another, it formed a new category. Rules of inclusion for each category were written and connected to similar categories to show relationships and patterns across the data. The trustworthiness and respect of the participants was sought through the data analysis stage. For this, the technique of respondent validation of the interview transcripts was employed through providing each of the four coaches with a transcribed account of their interview. Such a technique is popular with feminist researchers who seek to ensure that their study is respectful towards and appreciative of the participants' experiences (Olesen, 2000) and as an effective method of maintaining that the findings correspond with the experiences and perspectives of the participants (Bryman, 2012). On receipt and examination of the interview transcripts, none of the participants requested any changes to be made.

### **Findings**

Three of the categories derived as a result of the data analysis related to: the coaches' understanding and definition of gender equality and equity; how they managed equity issues within their practice; and how they perceived their sporting organisational climate towards issues of gender and equity. These themes are an illustration of the framing of gender equity and its connection to 'equal opportunities' and how such a narrow conceptualisation of equity issues and sociocultural education for coaches mean that coaches struggle to understand and manage 'difference' within their professional practices.

#### ***Coaches' Perceptions of Equity, Equality and Diversity Issues within their Practice***

Before seeking to understand the coaches' approach to issues of gender equity, the participants were asked for, more broadly, their definition and understanding of equity, equality and diversity. For all of the four coaches, they admitted their understanding was vague and were unsure as to what these terms meant both pre and post attending equity training. The coaches all attested to a lack of awareness of issues around equity, equality and diversity within their everyday coaching practices, mostly conflating the terms as one or using them interchangeably. When asked to define equity, for

example, Jack responded with a long reply that included several ideas as to what he thought these terms meant:

I probably thought they [the terms equity, equality and diversity] were all one and the same. I think it's almost a little bit insulting to think that people don't [implement that] anyway. But I understand, in life, you meet different people...you don't expect everybody to say 'Thank you' when you give them something, these days... You think, well, why should you have to tell me to speak to people in that way? Because I would do that naturally. ...I mean, equal opportunities. It's really the legality of it, isn't it? It's the legislation that's involved in the process. But I struggle to find much difficulty between equality and equity, if you see what I mean? I kind of ...in my head, that's much the same.

This quote illustrates Jack's understanding of equity as everyday politeness and manners, and equality as legislative processes in providing individuals the same opportunities. Charlotte too, defined equity, equality and diversity as one term and as an issue of access to sporting opportunities:

I would say that it [all] means being fair, being so that people have exactly the same access to the sport and the coach as well as everybody else and just so that it is accessible for everybody...You have to put things in place so that everybody can access it.

Peter demonstrated a lack of understanding and more apathy towards such terms, dismissing the concepts altogether as irrelevant to his coaching practice:

I'd never really heard the term[s] before. Skin colour and race, religion – it doesn't really have any meaning. I mean, to me, I honestly don't really care. I just...I don't. There's certain things I have an issue with. If I'm going to train you, I need to be able to see your face. So the whole thing with the burkha [for example]... So from that point of view, maybe that's a bad thing...But in terms of anything else, race, religion, skin colour, creed, whatever, I don't care...I've never really heard of equity before. I sort of had an idea what it meant...It had something to do with making all people equal rather than treating people equal. It was treating everybody equal... I can't remember the answer.

During the interview, Peter's dismissal of equity, equality and opportunity was inferred as an attempt to be open to everyone and to treat all of his athletes equally. In doing so, Peter approached his

coaching 'gender blind' but his reference to his female athletes who are required to wear burkhas demonstrate that gender and ethnicity are pertinent to his everyday coaching practices. The conflation of equity, equality and diversity to mean fairness also extended to Tony:

I [think] of myself as being fair-minded, and I've seen a lot of injustice in my time. I have suffered some injustice myself, and I regard myself as rather enlightened and liberal on these matters... Without ever having ticked any boxes on the equity front, I [do] regard myself as being very fair.

Sport England's conceptualisation of equity as fairness and access to opportunity is shown here to be ingrained into the coaches' understanding of such issues. It demonstrates the salience of organisational culture and ideologies and the impact on coach education and practitioners. It is also perhaps this idea of what constitutes equity and its narrow definition, i.e. legislation, access, fairness, for the reasoning behind, what will be revealed as, all four of the coaches' contradictory approach and perceptions of such issues. The final part of this section will deal with the coaches' perception of the significance of equity for their professional practices. Leading on from this, the next section will discuss the complex issues of equity that are present and that have to be managed by the coaches. Within this discussion, the contradiction in their narratives will be revealed.

Following the coaches' discussion of what they understood to be equity, equality and diversity, the coaches were asked to describe the pertinence of these issues, as they defined them, to their practice. Three of the coaches, Peter, Charlotte and Jack, attached little importance to the notion of equity and to the identity of their athletes. In doing so, the coaches failed to identify issues of inequity or inequality within their practice and thus overlooked the pertinence of an individual's intersectional identity. Throughout the interview with Peter, he consistently dismissed why it was important to identify and understand possible discriminations within his sport:

Different people groups, male/female, whatever. It doesn't really matter to me. The thing about martial arts...is things like racism and sexism and that kind of thing...don't come into it... I don't understand. I literally don't understand the whole thing about racism and stuff like that... I kind of get why people have an issue with religion because there's a lot of... very funny ideas [within religions]... I did that [equity] course...and to be honest, I came out of it not upset but more like...almost like I'd been insulted...It was one of those ones where I thought, well, I already do



this. I already have no issues. I just don't care, more than anything... It didn't affect me because I was already doing it... I mean because marital arts in general, is very inclusive, there's no reason why you'd stop anybody training really.

For Charlotte, she too believed her practices were already equitable and that she had little use for the knowledge imparted as part of her equity training. Therefore, the workshop, in its current form, had little impact on her and had no effect on her coaching practice. Based on the definition of equity as access, set out in the training syllabus, Charlotte believed that such issues did not exist for her club:

I suppose...everybody's got equal access, so I think I cover that in work on a day to day basis, so from the course, as I say, it didn't really change anything from before to after. We don't have any issues as such. We do have disabled people in the club; we do have ethnic minorities in the club, so nothing that we've come across.

For Jack, a coach in a club with all White, middle class athletes, he struggled to assign importance to the course and to understanding equity issues. He felt such matters had little application to his coaching context but yet his language revealed otherwise:

I won't say I didn't come away without learning things [on the course] because I was more aware of what I should be looking for, but it wasn't a revelation... We don't have [these sorts] of the issues... I don't see gender as an issue... There's no issue about sexuality. I've never, ever seen anybody in our club discriminate in any way... If I can throw one [example] back at you that really annoyed me... I was on the Committee and... we had to have our own Constitution, blah, blah, blah. And they [the governing body] wrote to us one day and they said, "We don't have a copy of your policy for equality and sexual discrimination and ...general blah, blah, blah." And particularly, we didn't have one on race discrimination... [But] our Chairman said, "Well, we've never had one because we don't feel we need one." And the governing body said that we had to have a structure whereby we had to have a percentage of ethnic people as part of our club structure. In other words, if a Chinaman came [to our club] next week, we more or less had to have him on the Committee... But I found that almost insulting, that they were telling us that we had to have people from different backgrounds on the Committee, you know, religious or coloured or whatever.

During the interview with Jack, his use of the term 'coloured' and his dismissal of related issues in the above quote ("religious or coloured or whatever") appeared to be a product of his lack of understanding as to the impact of his language and of his out-dated knowledge of equity issues. For Tony, through his experiences of coaching at an inner-city badminton club, he was exposed to a more diverse athlete base. Being White, Tony described himself as being in the minority at the club. For these reasons, Tony ascribed more value than the other three coaches interviewed, to understanding and addressing issues of equity:

We're not so intensive on the sporting achievement as ensuring that it's a nice social environment in which we coach... we are desperately keen on things like equity, diversity and all the rest of it... That really is a very strong element in everything that we do...It took me a little while to get used to the idea that this wasn't conventional sports club coaching. It was...getting them [the young athletes] off the streets, giving them something productive to do and hoping that they were better at the end of it than at the beginning.

This section highlighted the coaches' confusion and vagueness in understanding what the terms equity, equality and diversity imply for their coaching practice. Sporting governing bodies do not clarify precisely what the terms mean and instead, loosely define these terms as issues of legislation, access. Within three of the coaches' accounts however, they failed to understand the importance and relevancy of equity, equality and diversity for their everyday practices. This is evidence that how these issues are currently defined, have little meaning for these coaches. These narratives are also evidence that current sociocultural education has little impact on coaching practices; the coaches believed they were already 'doing equity'. Yet, their own experiences, only briefly alluded to in this section, reveal deeper perceptions that run against equality, for example gender blindness or discriminatory language.

### ***Salience of Intersectional Gender Relations within Coaching Practice***

Even though the coaches dismissed initially, the principle of equity (in their eyes, all individuals had equal access to their coaching), their stories of what equity issues exist within their everyday practices demonstrate the complexity and salience of relations and ideologies that present themselves to practitioners. When asked to identify or describe incidents of inequity or possible inequalities, or issues related to discrimination or identity within their coaching contexts, while it was

noted in the interviews that the tone of the coaches' replies appeared dismissive or defensive at first, the consensus between the participants' responses were that gender relations, intersected with religion and ethnicity, framed their coaching experiences. This dismissal, mostly by Jack and Tony, was interpreted as a symptom of lack of confidence and understanding, as too was the defensive tone, often displayed by Peter. For Peter, who was the most vehement in questioning the importance of sociocultural education for coaches, the salience of gender intersected with ethnicity within his coaching experiences became evident over the course of his interview:

There's certain things you can say to a man that you can't say to a woman... I need to find somebody who can explain that to me 'cause I need to be able to translate what I do with ladies to what I do with the gents. Do you know what I mean? But I haven't quite worked that one out yet... I had this brother and sister come down and do a try out class with me. I think the brother was the older one...I think they were... from the Middle East...to be honest I don't really know cause I don't really pay much attention to that...But I made a comment that the sister was really good. And I thought, oh, wow, yeah. She's a brilliant. Definitely get her training. She's going to be really, really good. Never came back since. And I spoke to my instructor and he said, "Did you make a comment about the lad?" And I was like, "Well no."...I really wanted to boost the girl a bit. And my instructor said, "Probably cause you boosted the girl more than the lad." And that really annoyed me... But, when you get the cultures where they take the man as being more important than the woman, it annoys the crap out of me...But if you promote the girl over the boy, they're [the athlete's family are] not interested. The thing I've probably learnt, if I have that situation where I get a brother and sister, I'll go, "Oh that brother's dead good. You should really bring him. She could be quite good as well but she needs to follow him."

Peter went on to admit that he changes his coaching style when he works with female athletes, alluding to a less serious approach and a more sexual element to his practices with women, as a heterosexual man:

I try to have fun with them [my female athletes]. I've been told I flirt...When I'm teaching, I do have a bit of fun with girls. And I am aware, certainly with the teenagers that you sort of get that...adoration. I mean I have heard of people who have got involved with their students

which I just don't think you can do [but] I mean, if she's old enough and you're old enough and you've both made an adult decision that you both want to go together, all right.

This quote illustrates the power that a coach possesses in their relationship with their athletes. For Peter, this power is, at times, gendered. While Charlotte asserted that she did not experience gender as significant between herself and her female or male athletes, for one of the sports that she coaches, she did experience being a woman in a male dominated profession as difficult. She understood this as an issue of male power in wanting 'possession' of the more accomplished athletes:

I'm going to say in [one sport that I coach] I don't really have any problems at all with working alongside male coaches... Predominantly, I haven't had any problems. [But] I've come from [my other sport] and that was very male dominated, and...they were like 'this is my athlete, this is not, you know, [your athlete]'.

For Tony, while he appeared to possess the most understanding of the importance of equity to sport, he did not demonstrate this in his descriptions of the types of issues that present themselves in his everyday coaching. The interrelation of gender, ethnicity and religion underpinned Tony's coaching experiences. For example, in his description of the athletes that come to his club that also serves as a cricket club, Tony utilised language that appeared to belittle or dismiss Asian male players and demonstrated that there were racial segregations within the club and gendered, racial hierarchies:

We're really, really big on cricket [here at the club]...It's very, very popular but very, very Asian. I'm not criticising it for that, but I'm saying that the first few times that you see that, you think 'oh yes, what a pity'. But you see them coming in on Friday evenings or other evenings in the week, or even during the day time, and they're all kitted up like proper cricketers and they're all carrying their luggage like cricketers. But they're all Asian, every single one of them.

Tony's description of the cricketers at the club as akin to 'proper cricketers' and his assertion that it is a pity that all of the players are Asian is illustration of a hegemonic masculinity culture that exists within his club. Those even though he is in the minority in his club as a White man whiteness is hegemonic above other ethnicities within the male players and coaches that attend the club. His

views towards religion and disability also appeared belittle ethnic minorities and the normalisation of able-bodiedness:

We have disabled Muslim groups as well, and that's another sort of group that you have on the premises, and you can't help but notice them. They're all in wheelchairs or they're all whatever they are all...and it's quite striking. If you thought you were going into an ordinary sports club, then you're in for a few shocks.

Tony's language belied his dominant ideas around gender and ethnicity even after undergoing equity training. The complexities of the intersectional gendered relations were revealed further within Tony's other stories of the equity issues that are present within his coaching practice, this time, related to gender and religion:

So the male female issue [is] quite a strong [issue], quite an unexpected one. I was a little disappointed, but then I shouldn't have been, by the issue of, these are not all talented young sports kids. Some of them can barely walk putting one foot in front of the other... [The strong Muslim presence at the club] That's what I attribute it to. I could be wrong, but I think I do attribute it to that. The girls wanted to remain in a group of girls. They didn't particularly want to do badminton... and the boys just wanted to lash a shuttlecock over the net in some wild manner. Each of them was a problem.

Tony went on to describe the difficult relations he has with his male and female players as a consequence of what he described as the strong patriarchal culture within the Muslim religion. This led to him feeling intimidated by his Muslim male players and unable to connect with his female players. Again, his description of the gendered, religious and ethnic relations he has with his athletes belied Tony's dominant ideas of men and women. In the following quote, he described the relationships he has with his players and his thoughts of women's sporting abilities:

I've found that [my relations with my Muslim female athletes] more difficult than I did with the boys. I've found the boys slightly more socially experienced, socially skilled, and I don't know whether that was the confidence that they'd built up at home and at school, because they are the sort of masters or think of themselves as that, so that gives them a confidence where they can look you in the eye and, I was going to say treat you as an equal; I sometimes sense that

they're treating you as second class. But they're used to engaging with people on an equal footing. The girls on the other hand really needed to be brought out of their shell, all of them. They were comfortable with each other, but they weren't comfortable with the boys, and they weren't at first comfortable with me, and it's been quite a long process... slowly, slowly over time you get used to them and they get used to you.... I think badminton is an ideal sport for girls and women...it's not physical contact so they can approach it on an equal footing...and they can become quite skilful without having to break into too much of a sweat or develop too much physical strength, and if skilful enough, they can run rings round the boys....non-contact is especially important.

Tony, Peter and Charlotte had all attended equity training and yet for Tony and Peter, their descriptions, language or perceptions still could be conceived as discriminative towards minority groups. This contradiction was a recurrent theme throughout the coaches' stories. For Jack, who had earlier stated that understanding gender and sexual orientation was irrelevant to his coaching, he later argued gender relations play a complex and significant role in his coaching practices:

I've seen [discrimination in our club] on sexual grounds. That's quite clear...it's nearly all female. The Head Coach is male and I'm male. And everybody else...they're all female. So it's very much a female environment I work in. And that can be difficult. The one issue I have with my Head Coach. It's not major but he likes boys and if gets a swimmer, he'll concentrate on one. Bring him through. And there might be an equally good girl, but he won't give her the attention. And when he writes things up on our club reports...he won't mention the girls. And this happened three or four times. And I've said to him, you can't just almost [write them out]...like they [the female swimmers] didn't go. "

Jack believed that difficult gender relations and sometimes how gender was conflated with sexual orientation were the basis for his own feelings of being discriminated against, in his club context:

I think women are harder, sometimes. I feel ostracised quite a lot...I find that difficult...I think they [women coaches] view males as a threat...There have been issues in the club where I've not been told things and I've questioned why wasn't I told that. And, "Oh well it's because you're a man." A simple issue was, we had two girls that joined the club that got moved into the area and there was certain child protection issues involved in them...And [the women

coaches] weren't prepared to tell me because they said, "Oh well, it's all private. It all involves the girls." And to me, that was sexual discrimination... And the other one...another Sports Centre we swim in, we've got the area where you arrive and then the swimming pool and then there's the girls' changing, the boys' changing and then you can go round and come out through a Life Guard door. And the first day I ever went there...all the ladies were already by the poolside. So I said to the Head Coach, I said, "Where did they come from then?" And he said, well they come through the girls' changing rooms... And then weeks later, I was sat and I was thinking, I wonder why they're allowed to walk through the girls' changing. So I said to the Head Coach...and he said, "No. But we're not allowed. We have to walk round the outside." I said, "On the same issue, then, why don't all the women walk round the outside?" "Well, they just don't". And I brought it up at Committee meeting...And one woman actually sat at the Committee meeting and said, "Well, paedophiles are men aren't they?"

While Jack experienced that he was subject to discrimination as a consequence of gender relations with the women coaches within his club, he did benefit from male power within his relationships with his athletes:

I'd rather teach girls. I find, often, I'm more comfortable with a group of girls than boys. The main reason, I would say, is that I think boys tend to play up on you a little bit more because you're a bloke...Whereas the girls, I only have to tell them once, largely, and they always want to seem to try and please you... And they're good as gold... And the thing is, I've watched them before now, and I've noticed that they don't necessarily say thank you to the ladies... I had one [woman coach] say to me, "Hmph, they never say 'thank you' to me."

When going on to discuss his experience of the equity coaching course, like Tony and Peter, Jack demonstrated that his language and perceptions around gender, ethnicity and disability remained 'out of touch' and discriminatory:

But in swimming, there's very few coloured swimmers. So [the workshop leader] said, "Why do you think there's not very many coloured swimmers?"...And she went to this other girl and she said, "Cause black people don't float the same as white people." And I just ...I mean I giggled. I can tell you females float better than men, because, largely because of your breasts. It's the fat percentage isn't it? [And] Disability comes in many forms, as you know. I

mean sometimes, mentally disabled as opposed to physically, we've got some of those [here in the club]... There they are in the corner. Stay there, you're not coming over here. And sometimes that's easy to pick out but when we ...when they join the club... I mean if we've got an ADHD, we'd like the parent to tell us that before we work it out for ourselves. You can usually work it out for yourselves, quite quickly.

These rich, in-depth narratives highlight the complexity and intricacy of equity issues that are present within the coaches' everyday professional practices. To this end, the examples and stories provided by the coaches contradict the first section, that while the coaches believed the concepts of equity, equality and diversity as framed by their governing body had little relevance or meaning to their practices, their stories reveal the opposite. They all described their experiences of coaching as shaped by gender, religious and ethnic relations. For the male coaches interviewed, their language also belied their perceptions around women, disability, ethnic minorities and religious groups. These excerpts from the interviews are evidence that current sociocultural education for coaches in the UK does not adequately impact practice nor change coaches' ideas and beliefs around 'difference'. These examples are also evidence that framing equity, equality and diversity as issues of equal opportunities, legalisation, access and fairness is not sufficiently far reaching to enable coaches to make sense of and manage far more complex issues.

### ***The Organisational Context and Approach to Equity***

It is important to contextualise the coaches' understanding and approaches to issues of gender equity as a product of organisational practices towards equality that shape the culture of a sport and determining "the ways things are" within coaching practice. The culture of sport and its organisation explains the coaches' practices and their conformity to organisational values around equity. As stated earlier in this paper, sport has long been a gendered institution. For these reasons, the participants were asked to describe how they perceive their governing body and club's approach to, and how they experienced the training they had received in understanding, gender equity and equality.

The consensus amongst all four of the coaches was that their clubs or governing bodies were apathetic towards issues of gender equity more broadly. This was coupled with a sense of 'inertia'



within the club towards challenging inequitable practices and promoting equality and diversity within the club and the wider community. The four coaches only enrolled onto the equity training course because the club either wanted to secure its 'Clubmark' (this mandatory component to attend equity training has since been removed for many sports) or because it was 'their turn to go' on the club rota. Jack described the apathy within his swimming club towards issues of gender intersected with social class and towards equity issues in general. He again reiterated his understanding of equity as an issue of access and revealed his own perceptions towards social class:

I would have to say, from the outset, probably nothing positive [from the club towards promoting equity]....I think as a club at the moment, we're very stalled. We're not actually going anywhere.... I don't just teach [athletes] to swim. You teach them to be human beings, don't you? You teach them right and [wrong]... But the bottom line was, the Leisure Centre closed. So we ended up having to go out to satellite stations....So our numbers dropped and dropped. ..And most people don't know where we are... So we don't promote equity or anything, to be honest. We have to conform to all the Swim 21, the ASA and all that kind of stuff, all their guidelines. But nobody actually takes a lead. I think the club could do more to kind of promote ...all sorts of people in the community could come swimming. Although, like I say, rurally, we don't have quite as many, I'll say, the ethnic mix is slightly different here or the race/religious mix or whatever...I think sometimes, swimming is seen as a bit of an elitist sport ...I mean the classic, is the girls that come and swim with us from the private school, when you take the register, you can look down the names and go ...they're from the school, they're from the school, they're from the school, they're from the school. Cause they've all got those lovely names that ...and I know that's discriminatory but they're not called Sarah or Jane. They're called Sophia or ...you know what I mean? They're all called sort of fancier little names. And I sort of find that...I do find that quite funny. There have been issues, little bits of issues, with integration with them, with our swimmers.

For Peter, his club have also done little to challenge discrimination and promote diversity. In his role as head coach of the club, the impetus to initiate equity comes from him in the first place and he admitted that these issues were not of priority. In the following quote, like Jack, Peter then contradicted himself by arguing that while he didn't want to receive equity training, he did not

understand the implications of 'difference' and wanted to know how athletes' religious beliefs impacted his coaching :

I personally don't see the point that I need more equity training. I really don't see the point. I don't understand these differences. They're all artificial rubbish... Do I actually feel I need to do anything more on equity? Probably not ...I'd like to do something where I can learn more about maybe specific religions... So something where you can cross those boundaries would be useful... And give you more ideas of how you can link it in, link people's beliefs into what you do. Although, again, I sort of struggle a bit... I've never done anything like [promoting diversity within the club and community]. But probably because I've always assumed it was a given....But then you've got to sort of go out and tell people you don't care about race or religion or any of that rubbish. It's just not relevant...I haven't ever actually approached any group or even looked at doing something like that. When I advertise my [club] we walk the streets putting leaflets in people's doors. I mean ...I don't know. It's something that's never occurred to me to do because, again, it's not something you do.

This lack of action was the case too for Charlotte's aquatic governing body, but she felt that her club was more proactive:

I think probably no [we do not receive enough governing body support towards promoting equality], not really, because if you don't have to do it [then people won't do it], and I think that's what the difference is... [But in my club] we've recently just done a lot like... some disability swimming sessions and things, so we're running a learn to swim programme in the club, and we've offered that out to disabilities to run alongside our regular lessons, so they're not excluded because they're in at the same time, but obviously there's space and there's the benefit of pool hoists and things available, so they can come along and access those sessions for that, and we do have some disabled swimmers in the club. [But] a lot of the people [at the equity training]...were there was because they needed it for club mark...I'm supposed I'm as guilty as the next, but we were there because we had to update ours.

Charlotte's quote again demonstrates that equality is conceived as having the same access to sporting facilities and that coaches often attend equity training because the club sends them as part of

the Clubmark scheme. In Tony's club, the ethos was around fairness and access to sport, rather than athletic development per se. The club's mission was to build links with minority groups and to integrate these groups within the club and community through sport. To this end, Tony believed his club were already 'doing equity' but within the wider governing body, he did not feel a connection or support. This quote also reiterates Tony's idea that equity means fairness:

There have only been a few occasions when I would have welcomed that sort of support, and there was one in particular... There was an argument over the selection of a boy... But we didn't want to be quizzed about that and didn't think that we should be quizzed about it, and we were made to feel rather lonely... So that's my only real experience of a need for support in doing what I do... perhaps I shouldn't think it's [governing body support] never going to happen; I don't think I've yet had an allegation of unfairness .... [But] I don't know whether it [governing body support] would be forthcoming.

The coaches' earlier assertions that they often did not see the need for understanding equity for their practices and their conflation of equity, equality and diversity as all meaning the same is set against a backdrop of club or governing body apathy towards such issues. While it cannot be doubted that there have been significant steps towards improving gender equity, equality and diversity within sporting structures in the last few years, the beliefs that legitimate inequality still remain.

Sociocultural education for coaches, in the form of equity training, is grounded in an equal opportunities ideological frame. This final section of the findings provides evidence that this training, in its current form and its current ideological base, is useful for UK coaches, but not impactful in terms of beliefs, practices or relevancy. Earlier in the paper, Charlotte's dismissal of equity training was presented. However, later in the interview, she attributed this dismissal to its current content and format. She believed the sociocultural education that is available for UK coaches was not fit for purpose because it does not support the sorts of complex issues that coaches face, as explored in theme two:

To be fair I don't think it's [my ideas about equality] changed at all... [The workshop] didn't change what I thought about it at all... it didn't really change anything from before to after... it's not the best. Okay doing a lot of scenarios and what if and whatever, but I think the issue is actually you coaching children or athletes or whatever and the relationship that you have with

them I think...I think it's probably not enough on the actual what it is right; what it is and how things can affect [athletes]... I think people need to understand that a little bit more. I don't think I came away with anything more, I don't think I learnt... a lot of the people on the course... they didn't know that their sport did no longer need[ed to attend]...so they were like "oh well we're here for nothing really", and I'm like "well are you here for nothing or to be fair? Aren't you going to learn something anyway or maybe it could help you somewhere along the line?" ... I think there should be more...I think there's a lot of things that you could add into coaching qualifications... especially when you've got younger coaches on the scene...and realistically they're still fairly young and fairly inexperienced at dealing with things, I think there's probably things out there that could help them and support them. I think people need to understand that a little bit more.

The coaches' language and terminology during their interviews is also evidence that the training had little impact on their dominant beliefs. While all four coaches remarked that it had been useful in making them 'think' short-term about certain issues, the one-off session has had limited impact beyond that. The issues that the coaches have to manage and resolve within their practice are largely gendered in nature, intersected with religious, ethnic and racial relations. Yet, these issues were not dealt with in great detail during the training workshop in which even one workshop leader admitted was only attended by coaches because it was compulsory for some sports, as Jack found:

Certainly nobody else from my club has been on it [the course] or would want to go on it... The lady that took the course...from the start [said], "I know you've all dragged yourself out here tonight and you don't want to be told that you've got to say this and do this."... I never considered some of the things she brought up that perhaps, if you lived in a city with a more diverse culture, yeah [maybe you would]... It wasn't really anything much based on gender. It didn't seem to me to be whether you were trying to encourage more males or females. It seemed to be more about the inclusion of disabled and ethnic minorities I would guess.

The focus on the inclusion and recruitment of minority groups is symptomatic of the framing of equity as a means to ensure 'equal opportunity', designed to enable coaches to eliminate practices that make it difficult for such groups to join clubs and compete. In this way, for Peter, many issues were discussed but were not interrogated in great length or depth. Instead, there were an array of exercises

around words, inclusive language, a brief mention about gender, and limited discussion around other equality strands:

There were only about... three of us... on the course in the end. There should have been more but they didn't show up... We discussed sort of male/female stuff. There was a black guy on the course. We did a lot of that sort of thing with regards to how people viewed different skin colour. I think we did a little bit on religion but I don't seem to remember it was that much. But the burkha thing did come up and what's happening in France with all that. That sort of came up when we did discuss that at some point. Do you know, this is really bad. I'm really struggling to remember everything we did on that course.

The workshop only appeared to briefly touch upon issues on men and women and women's underrepresentation in sport. For Peter, it had no obvious impact on his (unequal) ideas of women as athletes:

No [the course didn't affect my perceptions of women]. It's reinforced what I thought, that women can do 99% of what men can do. I say 99% because a man is probably always going to run slightly faster than a woman cause we're built that way physically... A man is always going to be strong across the top half of his body, so if you're doing javelin, he's probably always going to throw further than a woman. But that's a logical thing.... And a woman is not designed to do that job.

Tony spoke more positively of the equity training workshop for refreshing him as to the correct language to use when coaching athletes. He described the content of the course as mainly focused upon appropriate terminology to use when coaching which was a similar experience of the workshop for Peter, Charlotte and Jack. However, when discussing the issues around legislation and related to minority groups, Tony questioned the accuracy of the course:

I think particularly for me I needed that to be reminded about what I was doing and why I was doing it, and to be warned off some of the things that I might have been tempted to do, and also to be reminded that my vocabulary was out of date... I will, as a result of that workshop, be much more aware of the dangers [of unfairness], and I'm grateful for that, because otherwise I might well have blundered into some ghastly unfairnesses [sic], not

because I intend to be unfair, just because I wouldn't be aware of it.... [But] there were some comments made [about areas of law] with which I might have argued, because I thought they were factually wrong. I didn't argue with all of them. I thought that in the ad-libbing, in the sort of ebb and flow of that sort of seminar, some of the commentary could have been more carefully controlled because I strongly disagreed with it.

In all four of the interviews, none of the coaches described a change in their coaching practices as a result of undergoing equity training. Nevertheless, they all understood the importance of this type of education for coaches, even if paradoxically, they did not always acknowledge the significance of the concept of equity for their own practices or were able to define the meaning of terms such as equality and equity. The course led to the coaches being reflective in the short-term of the impact of their coaching styles and how they engage with their athletes. The consensus was that while this component of the UK coaching curricula is needed for all coaches to undertake, in its current form it does not sufficiently impact practice nor adequately make the link to improved athletic performance for coaches to understand the worth of such a course.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This study revealed how the ideological framing of gender equity as the pursuit of equal opportunities shapes coach education and consequently, coaching practice. The findings demonstrated that coaches failed to define and understand the importance of undergoing equity training in its current form. The coaches believed they were already 'doing equity' because people could come to their club and participate without barriers. Yet, the coaches all described having to manage complex and intricate gendered, religious or ethnic relations on a day-to-day basis. These contradictions throughout the coaches' stories, in dismissing equity and yet having to address inequalities on a continual basis, are symptomatic of how this type of education for coaches is perceived as 'irrelevant' and abstract. Equity training failed to enable them to deal with these issues because of how equity is currently defined by sporting governing bodies and organisations (e.g. access, fairness, or legislation). It does not set up coaches to deal with the complexities of the 'everyday', a common criticism of coach education in the UK more broadly (e.g. author, 2012, 2013; Jones, 2007, Cassidy et al., 2009, Potrac et al., 2002). In conceptualising gender inequality as differences between men and women that are a result of unequal structural practices of power that

prevent opportunity for women and other minority groups to participate (Ely and Meyerson, 2000), the present study shows that this has little impact on coaches' beliefs or practices. There is little doubt that the course led to these coaches to reflect upon their approach towards making their coaching more 'equitable', particularly in relation to the most appropriate terminology to use. Nevertheless, the course appeared to have little impact on their understanding of the worth of equity, equality and diversity or on their deep-rooted beliefs.

In the interviews with the coaches, a recurrent finding was a narrative of 'them and us'. In this way, the coaches appeared detached from issues of equity and inequalities. Their descriptions from a White British standpoint of ethnic minority athletes, of women as athletes (in the case of the male coaches interviewed), of their disabled athletes, and towards religious groups illustrates that these coaches experienced difficulty in relating to these identities. This is symptomatic of how the concept of difference, constructed by an equal opportunities ideological framework, shapes coaches' thinking about themselves in relation to others who do not share the same aspects of identity. A 'them and us' narrative was also the foundation of the equity training workshop. Rather than interrogating how their own identity will impact their relations with others or how they themselves have different intersectional identities, the workshop required coaches only to consider the aspects of identity of others in a separate, abstract and detached manner. For example, coaches were asked to think about how to make their coaching more accessible to disabled participants or ethnic minority groups. This ignores the salience of various facets of identity of the coach themselves. Thus, the coach is 'removed' from the problem and placed as an outsider looking in. The problem with this form of social categorisation is that it leads to prejudiced assumptions and conceptions towards individuals to which the coach feels unrelated (Perdue et al., 1990). This is perhaps not just a criticism of the conceptualisation of equity, equality, diversity of difference by sporting organisations, but a criticism too of the format and structure of UK coach education per se. Existing research suggests that coaches want educational programmes that can make a direct impact on their ability to practice (Nelson et al., 2013). In the present study, while coaches gained more knowledge from attending equity training, the format was not always conducive (described as only briefly touching on issues and at times, inaccurate) and the coaches deemed it had limited impact on practice. The limited influence of UK coach education on coaching practice is a common finding within previous research (Jones et al., 2004, Chesterfield et al., 2010, Lyle, 2007). This is because coaches desire education that is relevant (Nelson et al., 2013).

Equity training for coaches, as highlighted in the present study, in its current form does not satisfy what coaches need to be able to manage the complex equity issues within their practice. Learning will only occur when the subject knowledge is perceived to be relevant by the learner because they will have the opportunity to explore and solve issues that impact their practice (Rogers, 1969). This is a similar finding to the work of Blundell and Cunningham, who also documented UK coaches' frustrations at some aspects of their education that failed to deal with the realities of their profession (Blundell and Cunningham, 2007). Therefore, there is a disparity between what coach education providers think coaches need towards 'doing equity' to what practitioners experience in their everyday coaching contexts. This is a finding shared by other research that has evaluated the broader provision of UK coach education (Chesterfield et al., 2010). The present study adds to previous literature by demonstrating that structured coaching knowledge, or "brick-upon-brick of content and information" (Rogers, 1969: 178) does not transfer into tacit, relational knowledge and that the power and impact of coaches' cultural understandings within coaching practice is underestimated.

The contribution of the present study is not only in highlighting the weaknesses of the conceptualisation of equity as access and legislation, but also in revealing the intricacies of everyday coaching practice. Gender is salient in the coaching context and serves to create complex hierarchical relationships when it interacts with other aspects of identity (Marshall, 2000). The stories of the participants in the present study are evidence of the strengths of intersections of social categories. The findings highlight that when examining the role of coaches and their relationships with athletes and other coaches, gender, race, ethnicity, (dis)ability, sexual orientation cannot be ignored because it is these markers of difference that are influence power within a relationship in which the coach already possesses considerable authority (Potrac and Jones, 2009). These are findings that are consistent with the small body of research that has also found that gender, as a social construction (socially created meanings, relationships and identities organised around biological difference (Glenn, 2000)) rather than sex as a biological concept as treated by some previous work, is salient within coaching practice (e.g. author, 2013; Messner, 2011, LaVoi, 2007). As discussed earlier in this paper, coaches are important agents of social change and in implementing the visions and values of equity, equality and inclusion. Therefore, sociocultural education for coaches is vital. Coaches play a significant role in reproducing social exclusions in sport through the manner in which they are educated and developed (Anderson, 2007). The present study highlights however, that this needs to



be redefined and repackaged so that coaches can understand how gender and its interaction with other relations of power impact their practice and athletic development, and manage this accordingly. The coaches interviewed in the present study did not understand the advantage of this component of their curriculum. In this case, as other research has found, it is reasonable that coaches should not want to enrol if they cannot identify how to implement it (Dodge and Hastie, 1993).

Going forward, a suggestion for further work within this research area would be to examine how ethical coaching can be connected to 'real-life' practice to engage coaches as to the relevancy of sociocultural education. Underpinning this should new theoretical foundations that generate knowledge that is relevant for coaches, requires coaches to consider their sociocultural values, and enhances their practice. As it is, the findings from the present study suggest that social science and sociocultural issues are deemed irrelevant by practitioners, a finding congruent with the work of Culp (2014) who argued that coaches are occupied with technical and tactical acumen, required to possess 'soft skills' such as motivation and inspiration, and spend a great deal of time on planning and preparation. Within this, the concept of ethical coaching practice remains unaccounted for or deemed irrelevant within coaching curricula (Culp, 2014). To this end, the focus of coaching is on the behavioural response of athletes and how they physically perform as a consequence of their coaching (i.e. what the body 'does'). The coaches interviewed in the present study were not overly concerned with who their athletes were (i.e. what the body 'is'). Some coaching scholars may offer the explanation that this is a result of the over-influence of bio-scientific knowledge on coach education that leads practitioners to view the body as a 'machine' (e.g. Denison, 2007, Gilbert and Trudel, 2006). The response is that coaches may place too much value on these disciplines or approaches thus limiting their ability to work with their athletes because the focus resides on the athlete's performance rather than a more holistic understanding of the coach's own practices and how they influence the athlete (Denison and Avner, 2011). How coaches frame issues that arise within their coaching will influence how they identify and solve subsequent problems (Denison and Avner, 2011). Meaning in this case, that as long as equity is framed in the manner it currently is (equality of opportunity, fairness and access) then coaches will continue to understand ethical coaching in that way making it unlikely they will scrutinise themselves within the process and will be unable to manage complex relational issues. The coaches' stories in the present study make the case for an alternative way of thinking about people, relationships, how we conceive the body and define performance within

the current sociocultural component of UK coach education. New approaches which provide a framework through which coaches can critically explore and challenge their assumptions of who, how and why they coach can in turn aid the professional development of practitioners (Denison and Avner, 2011). One alternative approach may be aligned to the four perspectives of coaching knowledge, grounded in Foucauldian theory, offered by Denison and Avner (2011) to encourage coaches to think differently about their practice. Firstly, coach education should explore the holistic movements of the body from a somatic perspective rather than a narrow anatomical and physiological one. Secondly, sociocultural education for coaches should advocate practitioners to conceive power as relational rather than as the coach as the 'authority' possessing absolute power. Thirdly, and most relevant for the present study, that is rather than coaches understanding their athlete's identity as a fixed and stable 'entity' that determines their character and qualities, a coach could view the athlete's self as something formed through discourse and therefore subject to change. And finally, work in this area should encourage coaches to understand their practices and knowledge as socially constructed instead of as a formation of knowledge built on 'objective' sport science, thus enabling the coaches to envision and devise new coaching practices and training regimes themselves. An alternative theoretical approach, utilised by Culp (2014) to educate US student-coaches on issues of social justice, is a sociocultural constructivist-informed ethical coaching programme for coaches. Culp, in his work, advocated Giddens's structuration theory (Culp, 2014). It gives coaches the opportunity to question, consider and invent new knowledges of social justice (Culp, 2014). This is through five underpinning principles (Fosnot, 1996, Light and Wallian, 2008): (i) learning is development: allow the coaches to raise their own questions and hypotheses and test them, (ii) disequilibrium facilitates learning through challenging, open-ended real life scenarios that disrupt prior understanding and preconceptions, (iii) reflection is the driving force of learning, (iii) thinking and learning within communities such as the class or a group of coaches, (iv) and learning and meaning-making proceeds toward the development of structural shifts in perspective. The point of this is to encourage coaches to think more critically of the coaching context and their own sociocultural values whilst impacting their ability to practice. Coaches will have more autonomy and choice to participate in learning, which are important aspects of professional development (Sandholtz, 2002).

A focus on an adherence to legislation and access, i.e. rights, and equal opportunities results in a narrow definition of what gender equity could or should be in sport and coaching (Singleton,

2012).. Interventions, such as equity training for coaches, that attempt to change structures that produce inequality without corresponding interventions into the beliefs that legitimate this inequality have little effect, as evidenced by the coaches' narratives (Ely and Meyerson, 2000). While more women participate in sport than ever before, gender inequality in sport is played out in alternative ways, such as unequal social relations, invisibility or heterosexist representation within the media, invisibility within sports leadership, less value ascribed to sporting and leadership performances, and gendered expectations and ideologies (Messner, 2011). The idea of gender as difference supports an equal opportunities ideological framework yet precisely, this is the root of gender inequity in sport (Ely and Meyerson, 2000). Sport has historically implicitly and explicitly placed a higher value on male identity, male ability and male experience (Burgess et al., 2003, Hickey, 2008). Sporting practices preserve male dominance by coding activity as male sports and female sports and assigning meaning as male/masculine and superior, or female/feminine and inferior (Koivula, 2001). Implicit in these practices as well is the differential valuation associated with other identity-based distinctions, for example, race, ethnicity, and (dis)ability, which further uphold particular forms of masculinities. A reconceptualisation of gender equity in sport is required as too is a definition and vision of equality. Currently, sports organisations are occupied with providing means (equity) to the existing (unequal) system. As part of this, gender specifically, needs to be redefined. Drawing upon Ely and Meyerson's (2000) vision for gender equity, gender needs to be understood by sporting organisations as not just a basis for discrimination or an add-on of an individual's identity. Gender needs to be understood as a complex set of social relations enacted across a range of social practices (Ely and Meyerson, 2000). It is these relations through which the "categories of male and female, masculine and feminine, derive meaning and shape experience" (Ely and Meyerson, 2000, p. 10), influenced in part by all other social relations, including class, race, ethnicity, able-bodiedness, and sexual orientation. Social relations then manifest themselves in gendered social practices that preserve male privilege (Ely, 1999). The types of social practices within sporting organisations that reinforce male domination are, according to Acker (1990) and Ely and Meyerson (2000): 1) formal policies and procedures; 2) informal work practices, norms, and patterns of work; 3) narratives, rhetoric, language, and other symbolic expressions; and 4) informal patterns of everyday social interaction. This is in agreement with the work of Shaw and Slack (2002) who also argued that sporting organisations need to address their gendered language, policies and practices as the basis for addressing unequal gendered relations.

This is a far more complex understanding of gender equity. Sporting organisations need to move the focus away from solely barriers and facilitators to the recruitment of a more diverse sporting and coaching population. This is because gender and its interrelation with other social categories is an organising principle underpinning sport and therefore, the social construction of gender must become one of the lens through which we view the realities of coaching (Messner, 1990). An interrogation of the social order is required, that is how structures, practices, relations and values maintain and enforce particular ways of relating and being, and result in unequal social relations. This will require a more in-depth, reflective examination by organisations and a willingness by individuals to enact a new kind of gender equity (Shaw and Slack, 2002). Addressing the types of gendered social practices that exist within sporting organisations and ideologically reframing gender equity and equality are avenues for change to the current (sexist) status quo within sport.

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