Reviewing the sports coach mentoring literature: A look back to take a step forward

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This article takes a look back, in order to take a step forward, for sports coach mentorship within both academia and practice. Consequently, this article aims to review the contemporary trends within the sports coach mentoring literature and beyond to build upon earlier foundations. Throughout, four areas of significance are identified: (1) A sociocultural analysis of sports coach mentorship; (2) multiple-mentors and developmental networks; (3) developing sports coach mentors; and (4) gender and role models. The existing literature within each area is introduced, analysed, and critiqued, before an innovative future research agenda is established. Whilst mentorship is regularly utilised within sports coaching, the practice remains undertheorised and conceptually vague. Therefore, this literature review attempts to reconstruct sports coach mentorship by highlighting gaps in our knowledge and instigating innovative research agendas to produce contextually and culturally bound empirical evidence. Thus, this article advances our understanding of mentoring practice within sports coaching.

Keywords: multi-mentoring, literature review, coach development, mentorship, coach learning

Introduction

Mentoring is a practice which operates across various domains, yet suffers from a lack of conceptual clarity, with no universal definition currently present (Dawson, 2014; Lefebvre, Bloom, & Loughead, 2020). Mentoring's implementation across an array of social contexts has contributed towards the practice remaining contested and ill-defined (Colley, 2003; Dawson, 2014), with it being acknowledged that mentoring is "used differently in different settings and for different purposes" (Kemmis, Heikkinen, Fransson, Aspfors, & Edwards-Groves, 2014, p. 155). Despite its contested nature, mentoring has generally been considered a dynamic and reciprocal relationship between a mentor (advanced knowledge and experience) and a protégé (a mentee who is seeking new knowledge and experience) to enhance career development (Newby & Heide, 2013). Thus, mentoring is typically perceived as a process of support, with a more knowledgeable 'other' facilitating the development of a neophyte practitioner. Indeed, it is suggested that learners who are mentored by a more experienced individual become open to an array of psychosocial and career development benefits, including enhanced self-confidence, increased professional competence, and accelerated career progression (Kram, 1985; Newby & Heide, 2013). Consequently, mentoring has been adopted as a professional learning strategy for practitioners across health care, education, and business domains (Lefebvre et al., 2020), with organisations using the practice as a "vehicle for handing down knowledge, maintaining culture, supporting talent, and securing future leadership" (Darwin, 2000, p. 197). Indeed, the associated value of mentoring combined with its potential to situate learning in context has seemingly led to the inclusion of, and advocation for, mentoring programmes within sports coaching (Bloom, 2013; Fraina & Hodge, 2020).

Within sports coaching, mentoring traditionally involves an experienced coaching

practitioner supporting the professional learning and practice of a less experienced coach (Nash & McQuade, 2015). Recently, the sports coaching field has encountered a rhetorical 'rush to mentoring' (Bailey, Jones, & Allison, 2019), with literature that explores sports coach mentorship steadily increasing (e.g. Bloom, 2013; Chambers, 2015, 2018). In shaping the research landscape on sports coach mentorship, the seminal literature review by Jones, Harris, and Miles (2009) is significant. Within this review, the authors explored empirical evidence on mentoring across varying disciplines, whilst offering tentative suggestions towards developing effective sports coach mentorship. In concluding their review, Jones et al. (2009, p. 276) proposed that sports coach mentoring literature lacks conceptual clarity and argued that future research should begin to critically explore "the dilemmas and nuances of mentoring relationships so that superficial, one-dimensional accounts are avoided". Over a decade on, there remains a need to build upon Jones and colleagues' (2009) work, by exploring and understanding the contemporary trends within the sports coach mentoring literature.

Research since 2010 has tended to portray mentoring as a solution for the professional development of coaches due to its ability to provide contextualised learning, which overcomes some traditional critiques of coach education (Cushion, 2015; Griffiths, 2015). Mentoring is a pedagogical approach which supports the experiential learning of sports coaches (Nash & McQuade, 2015), with learning from 'experience' playing a significant role in coach development (Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2003; Groom & Sawiuk, 2018; Lyle & Cushion, 2017). Therefore, mentoring has been advocated as a method of harnessing the influential power of experience through guidance, observation, and reflective practice, allowing coaches to become better equipped to deal with the uncertain nature of coaching (Cushion, 2015; Cushion et al., 2003).

Sports coach mentoring can be conceptualised as formal or informal in nature. As proposed by Cushion (2015), informal mentoring is frequent and ongoing, referring to observations and interactions with other coaching practitioners, without oversight from an organisation. Alternatively, formal mentoring programmes are often controlled by Governing Bodies (GBs), where dyadic mentorships are structured and monitored through the obtainment of objectives (Sawiuk, Taylor, & Groom, 2018). However, it is important to acknowledge mentoring is a social process involving interactions, interdependence, and the interests of a range of stakeholders (Cushion, 2015). As Potrac (2016) explains, the mentoring process entails various stakeholders, including mentors, mentees, GBs (if formalised), clubs, athletes, and parents. Thus, mentoring practice does not operate in a social, political, or technological vacuum. Such an acknowledgment has underpinned the recent reconceptualisation of mentoring beyond dyadic relationships, to include possessing multiple-mentors (Sawiuk, Taylor, & Groom, 2017), developmental networks, involving all people who provide support (Higgins & Kram, 2001), and e-mentoring via technology (Grant, Bloom, & Lefebvre, 2020).

For over 20 years, the coach learning literature has depicted mentorship as one of the most meaningful formal or informal 'learning situations' coaches engage with. Indeed, research seeking to understand the learning journeys of coaches has frequently highlighted the value of mentors at different developmental stages (e.g. Bloom et al., 1998; Fairhurst, Bloom, & Harvey, 2017). Thus, it would appear mentorship, in one form or another, is generally regarded as positive for coach development. Yet, research which simply presents sports coach mentorship as straightforward, benign, and always beneficial for sports coaches should be challenged, as it fails to capture the true complexities and realities of practice (Cushion, 2015). Whilst mentoring is frequently conceptualised as either a formal or informal 'learning situation' for coaches, the wider

nuances of mentorship (e.g. mentor behaviours, development of rapport) within the coach learning process are often overlooked. For example, how mentee coaches 'filter' information from their mentor and choose to either adopt, adapt, or reject new knowledge within mentorship is generally unknown (Stodter & Cushion, 2017), despite trust, respect, and organisational beliefs, amongst other factors, likely to influence the process (Jones et al., 2009; Leeder & Cushion, 2019). Moreover, research has tended to neglect mentor biographies, recruitment, and training, often assuming expert coaches naturally possess all the attributes of an effective mentor (e.g. Bloom et al., 1998; Chambers, 2015).

Jones et al. (2009) strived to eliminate some of the conceptual 'fog' and provide enhanced clarity regarding sports coach mentorship. Yet, we are still struggling to reconstruct and imagine what transformative mentoring practice for coaches entails (Bailey et al., 2019), justifying the need to take a reflective look back to take steps forward for sports coach mentorship. Recently, Lefebvre and colleagues (2020) utilised a novel citation network analysis to ascertain how scholars utilise career mentoring literature from wider disciplines to inform sports coach mentoring research. In concluding their analysis, the authors highlighted three research agendas for sports coaching: alternative mentoring models; marginalised groups; and formal mentoring. However, we believe contemporary research has to some extent addressed these areas, for example alternative mentoring approaches (Grant et al., 2020; Sawiuk et al., 2017), marginalised groups (Banwell, Stirling, & Kerr, 2019; Fairhurst et al., 2017; Sawiuk & Groom, 2019), and formal mentoring (Leeder & Cushion, 2019; Sawiuk et al., 2018; Zehntner & McMahon, 2019).

Thus, this article aims to review contemporary trends within the sports coach mentoring literature and beyond to update Jones and colleagues' (2009) work, whilst identifying four areas of significance. These four areas are: (1) A sociocultural analysis

of sports coach mentorship; (2) multiple-mentors and developmental networks; (3) developing sports coach mentors; and (4) gender and role models. The existing literature within each area is introduced, analysed, and critiqued, before an innovative future research agenda is established.

Sports coach mentorship: A sociocultural analysis

The sociocultural foundations of mentoring

Sports coaching is frequently understood as a social process, where an interaction of macro and micro elements influences how the practice is perceived and enacted (Lyle & Cushion, 2017). Similarly, mentoring practice within sports coaching will be shaped by social structures, trends, and power relationships (Cushion, 2015). Perhaps most predominantly, the influence of social structures, political agendas, and power can be evidenced through the formalisation of sports coach mentoring (Sawiuk et al., 2018). Here, a GB will adopt a structured approach to mentoring by establishing objectives, highlighting key practices, matching mentors and mentees, and delivering training (Cushion, 2015; Sawiuk et al., 2018). Problematically, formalised mentoring is often situated within institutional frameworks, inclusive of narrow learning outcomes, with external interests influencing the process (Sawiuk et al., 2018).

Formalised sports coach mentoring generally involves episodic, *in-situ* observations of coaching practice, enabling bespoke coach learning to occur (Cushion, 2015). However, a mentor's observations are likely to be informed by institutional agendas, potentially associated with perceived coaching workforce demographic needs, qualification targets, and prescriptive coaching models (Sawiuk & Groom, 2019). Therefore, questioning the effectiveness of formalised sports coach mentoring appears rational (Trudel & Gilbert, 2006). Since Jones and colleagues' (2009) review, several empirical studies informed by sociological theory, specifically Pierre Bourdieu and

Michel Foucault, have critically analysed formalised sports coach mentoring. These studies have attempted to outline the inherent nuances and tensions, to help deconstruct mentoring practice and problematise taken-for-granted assumptions (Lyle & Cushion, 2017). The benign nature of sports coach mentoring is challenged, presenting the practice as relational, contested, and as a system of power which can reproduce differences and normative beliefs (Cushion, 2015).

Formalised sports coach mentoring: A Bourdieusian analysis

The use of Pierre Bourdieu's praxeology has been adopted to understand mentoring as an embodied and social (re)productive practice within various coaching domains. Griffiths and Armour (2012) examined formalised mentoring as a learning strategy for volunteer sports coaches by looking to understand how a group of coaches and mentors engaged in, and made sense of, the mentoring process. In drawing upon Bourdieu (1990), mentoring practice was outlined as a complex, ambiguous, and developmentally staged learning process, underpinned by volunteerism. It is proposed that meaningful interactions within mentoring are mediated by context (*fields*), where the *habitus* of volunteer coaches is shaped and re-shaped, with their learning impacted by dispositions, actions, and interpretations (Griffiths & Armour, 2012). These findings suggest that formalised sports coach mentoring is contextually bound and influenced by organisational factors (Griffiths, 2015).

Within elite coaching contexts, Sawiuk and colleagues' (2018) Bourdieusian analysis argued that formalised sports coach mentoring programmes could be conceptualised as a form of social control, where organisational agendas override meaningful coach learning. Due to a lack of *capital*, mentors were unable to challenge the orthodox culture which prevails within their own sporting *fields*, undergoing a process of *misrecognition*, uncritically accepting the arbitrary culture of their GB (Bourdieu,

1990). Further challenges encompassed over-formalising the mentoring process and the negative impact of micro-politics between the various stakeholders involved, alongside funding and 'target hitting' tensions (Sawiuk et al., 2018).

More recently, Leeder and Cushion (2019) explored the extent that a GB's coaching culture was reproduced through a formalised sports coach mentoring programme, evidencing issues with external GB interests. Specifically, the coaching culture was embodied by mentors during their training, before later being espoused and reproduced during their mentoring practice. In short, the findings present formalised sports coach mentoring as a source of cultural reproduction, where mentors attempted to reshape the *habitus* of mentee coaches to align with the *field's doxa* (Bourdieu, 1990). Having embodied the requisite dispositions, mentors promoted the organisation's coaching culture to their mentees, which over time became internalised, influenced by mentors' enhanced volumes of *capital*. Thus, in a similar manner to other Bourdieusian inspired research (e.g. Griffiths & Armour, 2012; Sawiuk et al., 2018), it would appear that context and the entrenched cultures of varying *fields*, in addition to organisational agendas, are significant in influencing mentoring practice and mentee learning.

Formalised sports coach mentoring: A Foucauldian analysis

As Cushion (2015) contends, mentoring is assumed to be positive, yet the practice is a social construction, operating within distinct cultures involving power relations. Mentors have the capacity to define what counts as legitimate knowledge, whilst potentially reproducing organisational norms uncritically (Cushion, 2015; Leeder & Cushion, 2019; Sawiuk et al., 2018). Consequently, issues surrounding *power-knowledge* within the mentor–mentee relationship has led to a body of research informed by Michel Foucault.

Zehntner and McMahon (2014) presented the disciplinary mechanism of *surveillance* and *power* at work within mentorships in the Australian swimming culture. In utilising autoethnography, it was argued mentor coaches act as mediators of the organisation which employs them, utilising practices to encourage conformity and create *docile* coaches (Foucault, 1979; Zehntner & McMahon, 2014). Foucault's (1979) concepts of *hierarchical observation, normalising judgement, surveillance*, and the *examination* were adopted to present formalised sports coach mentoring as a system of discipline, where mentors were used to ensure coaches subscribed to a normalised set of behaviours (Zehntner & McMahon, 2014). Zehntner and McMahon (2019) drew upon Foucault's (1979) ideas surrounding *disciplinary power* and the *panopticon* to explore mentee swim coaches' experiences of a formalised mentoring initiative embedded within coach education. The findings mirror the lead author's own experiences, where *power* was exercised through the mentoring programme to ensure mentees' coaching practice conformed to social norms, creating a social climate where mentee learning and practice were culturally constrained (Zehntner & McMahon, 2019).

Alternatively, Leeder (2019a) drew upon Foucault's ideas surrounding *pastoral power* to critically analyse formalised mentoring. Although not based on empirical data, it is argued sports coach mentors act as officials of *pastoral power*, encouraging confessional techniques for their mentees to adopt an inward gaze and self-examination (Leeder, 2019a). Having acquired knowledge of their mentee's consciousness through a subjectifying process, a mentor can mould their mentee's thoughts and behaviours towards their organisation's agenda. From a Foucauldian stance, it would seem GBs may adopt formalised sports coach mentoring provision to maintain their own interests, seeking to reproduce uncritically accepted coaching ideologies (Leeder, 2019a; Zehntner & McMahon, 2014, 2019).

Setting a new agenda: Researching formalised sports coach mentoring

There remains limited evidence of successful formalised sports coach mentoring programmes (Bailey et al., 2019). However, the studies highlighted within this section have begun to problematise and challenge formalised mentoring's effectiveness. Bailey and colleagues (2019) have recently called for mentors to support their mentees in apprehending the social structures which influence coaching practice. However, before this can occur, mentors need to adopt a critically reflexive stance and recognise the very social structures and power relations which impact upon their own knowledge and practice. Therefore, embracing sociological theories may prove useful in revealing the tensions which exist between GB beliefs, power, and mentor dispositions, creating space for the critical mentor whilst accounting for individual agency.

Future scholarly work should continue to disrupt dominant ways of thinking with respect to formalising sports coach mentoring (Sawiuk, et al., 2018). Whilst postmodern/poststructuralist approaches (Bourdieu, Foucault) have proved insightful, perhaps researchers may wish to draw upon interpretive sociological frameworks (e.g. Goffman, Garfinkel, Hochschild) to help understand the social and relational interactions (Potrac, 2016), in addition to the construction of subjectivities, within sports coach mentoring. Moreover, the application of wider pedagogical/learning theories (e.g. behaviourism, cognitivism, social constructivism) or a focus on more intricate interpersonal (e.g. trust), emotional, and micro-political tensions may help to present sports coach mentoring as considerably more than a 'benign' activity (Cushion, 2015). Furthermore, the use of inductive and primitive research approaches (e.g. grounded theory) may appeal to scholars to help develop a distinct theorisation of mentoring which can both inform and underpin policy and practice (Jones, 2019).

Mentoring reconceptualisation: Multiple-mentoring and developmental networks

Moving beyond dyadic mentoring

The field of sports coaching is playing catch up to the reconceptualisation of mentoring within the broader literature, in that a mentee at the centre of either a multiple-mentor or developmental network will experience different guidance, knowledge, and support from each mentor (De Janasz & Sullivan, 2004). The only empirical article to date to address this issue within sports coaching is by Sawiuk et al. (2017), who highlighted how sports coach mentors felt no single mentor could provide a mentee with all the answers. In part, this argument provides an important justification for going beyond investigating traditional dyadic mentorships. Subsequently, Higgins and Kram (2001), alongside De Janasz and Sullivan (2004), have called for more scholarly attention into the concepts of multiple-mentoring, developmental networks, and relationship constellations. Moreover, the reconceptualisation coincides with the advancement of technology in the workplace, with sports coaching and coach education following suit. As a result, mentoring in practice might embed technology into the learning process (Higgins & Kram 2001), incorporating aspects of e-mentoring (Grant et al., 2020).

Multiple-mentoring

Multiple-mentoring was first discussed by Kram (1983), who proposed a mentee would seek developmental support from multiple-mentors throughout their career. The concept of multiple-mentoring suggests a mentee might receive "mentoring assistance from many people at one point in time, including senior colleagues, peers, family and community members" (Higgins & Kram, 2001, p. 264). Multiple-mentoring is more effective than dyadic mentoring, with the mentee benefitting from access to several skill and support functions. This cluster of mentors can include individuals both inside and outside the organisation (Baugh & Scandura, 1999). Thus, the support these mentor types provide might result in career advancement, higher organisational commitment, job satisfaction,

less role conflict, or reduced desire to seek alternative employment (Baugh & Scandura, 1999). Within the context of academia, early career mentees might need a mentor for a specific skill (i.e. knowing why, how, or whom), whilst a second mentor may provide role model or emotional support (De Janasz & Sullivan, 2004). Moreover, De Janasz and Sullivan (2004) suggest mentees might need to develop different competencies across their career span, with a need to reflect upon the following questions: *Is this what I want? How do I attain the skills? Who can support me*? Therefore, a 'mentor of the moment' will provide personal support at the right time (Baugh & Scandura, 1999). However, mentors of the moment need to recognise when micro-politics, amongst other factors such as 'gaps' in their own knowledge, may compromise the mentoring process.

Within the context of sports coaching, Sawiuk and colleagues (2017) reported mentoring relationships within formal programmes have begun to move beyond dyadic relationships towards multiple-mentors. For instance, a mentee might have access to a sport specific mentor and a mentor from a different sport or occupational domain. The work of Sawiuk and Groom (2019) features a contextual example, where a female mentee highlighted the importance of accessing the bespoke knowledge of multiple-mentors, which enabled her to become the best version of herself following practical experience and observations. Moreover, Sawiuk et al. (2017) drew on Kram's (1985) work and acknowledged how sports coach mentors were at times limited by their own knowledge and would need to effectively 'signpost' and think 'outside the box or outside the sport itself' to provide meaningful learning experiences. Multiple-mentors can help combat some of the micro-political problems within sport. For example, mentors using 'knowledge as a shield' or mentors perceived as 'spies', whereas mentors from another sport or outside of sport do not possess 'political baggage' (Sawiuk et al., 2017). Here, non-sport or cross-sport mentors were considered less threatening which enabled more

trustworthy mentoring relationships to evolve. In sum, multiple-mentoring may reduce the probability of *dysfunctional* mentoring.

Developmental networks

Developmental networks are increasingly commonplace within the mainstream mentoring literature, originating from Kram's (1985) idea of a *constellation of mentors*. Also, Higgins and Kram (2001) applied a theoretical network lens to mentoring, and subsequently academic research on the concept of developmental networks began to gather momentum (e.g. Higgins, Chandler, & Kram, 2007). To date, only Sawiuk et al. (2017) have discussed the nature and benefit of developmental networks within sports coach mentoring, whilst calling for an increase in empirical research within this area. The egocentric concept of a developmental network consists of "the set of people a protégé names as taking an active interest in and action to advance the protégé's career by providing developmental assistance" (Higgins & Kram, 2001, p. 268). Figure 1 provides an example of a developmental network structure:

*****INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE*****

These networks are subsets of a mentee's entire network or *social capital*, spanning organisational boundaries and incorporating friends, family, and colleagues who provide different forms and volumes of support (Higgins & Kram, 2001; Higgins et al., 2007). It is important to recognise that developmental networks differentiate from multiple-mentors by acknowledging mentor-mentor relationships within the same network, namely *tie density*. Table 1 defines the characteristics of developmental networks.

*****INSERT TABLE 1 HERE*****

Developmental networks have become increasingly important for upward career mobility, as the workplace is increasingly described as *boundaryless* (Higgins et al., 2010). Therefore, a sports coach mentor from the same organisation as a mentee might provide support regarding job role, advice on a colleague, contextualised organisational (club) coaching dilemmas, expectations, culture, or philosophy. However, mentors from outside the organisation have a reduced bias and are more likely to think about a mentee's role objectively (Murphy & Kram, 2014). Perhaps the concept of developmental networks might help researchers to understand how coaches learn or advance their career in the dynamic and chaotic environment of sports coaching.

Setting a new agenda: Researching multiple-mentoring and developmental networks

Sports coaching research on interpersonal relationships or the educational dimensions of multi-mentor strategies is absent, with Sawiuk et al. (2017) calling for increased scholarly attention on multiple-mentor and developmental networks mentorships. In part, mainstream mentoring research can aid our thinking and practice (Lefebvre et al., 2020), yet, within sports coaching we must create our own contextualised body of empirical work. Mentoring in sport is a culturally and contextually bound activity, with aspects such as 'credibility', 'technical knowledge', 'understanding the environment', and 'domain specific knowledge' influencing the process (Sawiuk et al., 2018). Moving forward, sports coaching scholars should consider the use of critical and self-reflexive research methods, such as insider research (Wiser, 2018), autoethnography, and duo-autoethnography or collaborative autoethnography (McMahon, 2016). These methods will help to explore both mentors' and mentees' social norms or issues within personal accounts of mentoring, as part of a constellation, to help facilitate dialogue and empathy whilst influencing political and pedagogical practice.

Additionally, within sports coach mentoring the answers derived from questions such as *Is this what I want? How do I attain necessary skills? Who can support me*? remain vague. A novice coach might require sport-specific knowledge, or perhaps first aid, safeguarding, and athlete behaviour management guidance. A youth development coach might seek advice on maturation or bio-banding, holistic coaching, pedagogy, or technical detail, whilst an elite-level coach working with senior athletes may require mentoring support with regards to micro-politics, media, leadership, recruitment, or psychology. As a result, the longitudinal mapping of a mentee's or mentor's career journey might help researchers to understand how the nature and type of mentoring support evolves over a coach's career and impacts upon their career outcomes.

Furthermore, scholars within the field should consider how we could engage critically with visual research methods, with the 'visual' being accepted as a central aspect of contemporary social life. MacLaren's (2018) article on egocentric developmental networks within nursing is particularly relevant, where mentoring constellations are mapped out to demonstrate the viewpoint of different members of the constellation and provide insight into *tie strength*, mutuality, and reciprocal mentorships. Visual methods, perhaps via Gephi software, may 'open the door' for us to understand cultural significance, social practices, trust, and power relations at a macro-level. Scholars might want to consider researcher or participant photographs (Phoenix & Rich, 2016), alongside video diaries, e-learning platforms, webinars, blogs, social media, or video-based capture of coaching delivery to align mentoring to the modernisation of technology. In sum, these methodological approaches could enable researchers to engage with individual mentoring experiences in an empathetic, participatory, and aesthetic manner.

Developing sports coach mentors

Recruiting and training sports coach mentors

Within sports coaching, mentors rarely receive any form of professional development or training (Chambers, 2018). This is problematic, as Nash and McQuade (2015, p. 212) argue: "mentor learning and development is a vital component of any effective mentoring programme". The lack of support available to sports coach mentors may relate to how the practice is perceived, alongside assumptions about what a 'good' sports coach mentor constitutes. Generally, mentoring is often treated as a secondary role for sports coaches, a sometimes unwanted 'add on' to their primary profession of enhancing athlete development (Chambers, 2018).

As facilitators of coach learning, sports coach mentors should be trained and provided with ongoing support. Although mentor training alone does not guarantee successful mentorships (Chambers, 2015), it is important to set clear objectives and enhance role clarity (Lyle & Cushion, 2017). At present, mentor training rarely extends beyond episodic workshops (Griffiths, 2015), and may function as a mechanism to reproduce organisational beliefs of 'good' mentoring to structure mentor practice (Leeder & Cushion, 2019). Whilst the training sports coach mentors receive is often absent or lacking in depth, the initial recruitment is also a concern. The recruitment process of mentors can be best described as loose and haphazard (Chambers, 2015), with individuals often recruited because they are simply enthusiastic, alongside exemplifying the right attitude (Chambers, 2015; Jones et al., 2009). Moreover, formalised mentoring programmes are often driven by institutional agendas (Leeder & Cushion, 2019; Sawiuk et al., 2018), hence, mentors might be recruited due to their portrayed acceptance of the employing GB's beliefs and values (Leeder, Russell, & Beaumont, 2019).

Practical coaching experience and being a highly qualified coach have also been reported as desirable prerequisites to becoming an effective mentor (Leeder, 2019b). Indeed, Bloom (2013) argued that sports coach mentors should be knowledgeable, whilst

also possessing the right amount of social, cultural, and symbolic *capital* (through experience and qualifications) to obtain respect from their mentees (Cushion, 2015; Jones et al., 2009). Within Leeder's (2019b) research, a distinct divide was present between mentors who believed *capital* in the form of coaching qualifications and experience was required to become an effective mentor, in contrast to mentors who attempted to valorise *capital* as naturalised traits. Despite these contrasting perspectives, the coach learning literature has suggested that once coaches reach a certain level of expertise, mentoring novice coaches becomes a seamless and natural transition (e.g. Bloom et al., 1998; Fairhurst et al., 2017).

Problematising sports coach mentor development

The coach-to-mentor transition is portrayed as natural and somewhat inevitable within sports coaching, with individuals finding themselves in mentoring positions without realising, and more importantly, without training (Cushion, 2015). Through discourse, mentors are positioned as 'educators' rather than 'learners', which often justifies the limited support they receive and reinforces the importance of experiential learning 'on the job' (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006; Leeder et al., 2019). Within formalised sports coach mentoring, it would appear GBs inherently 'trust' their mentors to do the 'right thing' without significant guidance, due to mentor recruitment being grounded upon the embodiment and portrayal of desired beliefs (Leeder et al., 2019). However, assuming coaching experience or embodiment of a GB's normative beliefs will naturally lead to successful mentoring poses challenges. Nash and McQuade (2015) have cautioned quite succinctly that despite good intentions, not all coaches should be mentors, and that an array of interpersonal skills and transformative training is necessary.

Despite evident problems with the recruitment and training of sports coach mentors, the literature base which specifically examines the learning and development of

these individuals is limited. Koh, Ho, and Koh (2017) explored the developmental experiences of basketball coach mentors, with their findings suggesting that prior experiences as a coach alongside exposure to other mentors influenced the development of mentoring knowledge, whilst self-directed learning helped mentors to enhance their practice. More recently, research has begun to demonstrate the substantial influence of wider mentoring experiences throughout a mentor's life course (Leeder, 2019b). The development of these dispositions will impact on how a sports coach mentor elects to engage with mentor training content, in addition to their interactions with other mentors in the workplace (Leeder et al., 2019). Based upon this body of work, it would seem sports coach mentor learning and development are structured by individual, contextual, and cultural factors which inform future mentoring practice (Koh et al., 2017; Leeder, 2019b; Leeder & Cushion, 2019).

Setting a new agenda: Researching sports coach mentor development

Sports coach mentors are involved in multiple networks of learning throughout their role (Potrac, 2016), however, at present we know little about how these influence mentoring practice. Thus, future research into sports coach mentoring must challenge the distorted and overlooked aspects of learning to mentor by revealing the "essential social and relational complexities" inherent within the learning process (Potrac, 2016, p. 84). The literature to date has presented sports coach mentor learning as an idiosyncratic process (Koh et al., 2017; Leeder, 2019b, Leeder et al., 2019). In following this stance, researchers should continue to explore how individual (past experiences), contextual (coaching domain), and cultural (organisations) elements impact upon the development of dispositions towards mentoring practice. Moreover, positioning mentors as 'learners' may help to unearth the reciprocal benefits and learning available for sports coaches who perform a mentoring role (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006).

Research should investigate how coaches are recruited and trained as mentors within different contexts, by different organisations, to work with coaches of different domains. Researchers might consider moving closer to the site of mentor development through longitudinal immersion and ethnographic observations of mentor training (Cushion, 2014), to help appreciate mentor learning as a multifaceted interaction between individual, context, and culture (Koh et al., 2017). The exploration of innovative mentor training initiatives, alongside the construction of legitimate knowledge, is required to enhance the professional learning of sports coach mentors. For example, individuals might wish to engage with transdisciplinary research approaches, where researchers and practitioners from different fields collaborate over a set period to develop conceptual and methodological frameworks, potentially resulting in new theoretical approaches (Polk, 2014). Whilst the benefits of cross-sport and non-sport mentoring have recently been reported (Sawiuk et al., 2017), perhaps now is the time to bring together mentoring researchers and practitioners from multiple disciplines, to develop a practice-driven conceptual framework for mentor education and training, to avoid superficial and uncritical initiatives.

Gender and visible role models in sports coach mentoring: 'You can't be what you can't see'

Gender and coach education

Scholars continue to problematise formal coach education, for example the entrenched in-gendered discourse which frequently 'others' and disadvantages the minority (Lewis, Roberts, Andrews, & Sawiuk, 2020). The problematic underrepresentation of women in sports coaching is well documented (Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018; Norman, Rankin-Wright, & Allison, 2018), with sports coaching predominantly a white-male occupation (Norman, 2016). Furthermore, female coaches have reported 'surviving' rather than

thriving within their coaching role (Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018), with the value of mentoring for female coach career advancement and personal development being of great significance (Sawiuk & Groom, 2019).

Gender and cross-gender mentoring

Within the broader mentoring literature, the term diversity encompasses cross-gender (male-female dyads) and cross-cultural (international mentor or mentee) dyads, alongside cross-race (ethnic minority mentee) dyads. Ragins (1997) has highlighted diverse mentorships where individuals possess different characteristics, for example race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, religion, or disability, which have become key for underrepresented mentee career success (Bearman, Beard, Hunt, & Crosby, 2007). Career progression for women into management roles has often been prevented by a *'glass ceiling'* (Bearman et al., 2007). This notion in academia, business, and education has been redefined as a *concrete ceiling*, which Bearman et al. (2007, p. 386) describe as "an impermeable barrier that keep women and BAME people effectively locked out of the corridors of power in organisations". Unsurprisingly within sports coaching, Norman and colleagues (2018) suggest female coaches and coach developers feel as though a *concrete ceiling* exists and is preventing their career advancement.

Mentors tend to be white males in positions of power, with female mentees reporting a greater number of promotions when they have their support (Ragins, 1997). A 'masculine hegemony' environment exists, where women in positions of power are absent (Norman et al., 2018). Therefore, perhaps mentorships can support women in climbing these 'greasy poles', with female mentees tending to prefer female mentors who can help them to make sense of '*what works for me*?' (Sawiuk & Groom, 2019). Male mentors in a cross-gender mentorship can pose several problems, such as contrasting personalities or work style, being overpowering and overprotective, or having restricted

accessibility (Murphy & Kram, 2014; Sawiuk & Groom, 2019). For cross-gender mentorship success, there must be similarities between the mentor and mentee, which enables both to 'see themselves' in the other. Given the reported external barriers, including unequal competence perception of men and women, homologous reproduction hiring (e.g. employing similar coaches), homophobia, and a disconcerting lack of female mentors and role models (Norman, 2016), successful cross-gender mentorship appears idealistic for diverse and underrepresented groups within sports coaching.

Within sports coaching, LaVoi and Dutove (2012) and LaVoi (2016) have recently utilised an ecological systems theory (EST) model to further understand the barriers and facilitators for women coaches within mentoring relationships. Indeed, mentoring can be considered an important vehicle for women coach development, with recent research identifying the potential benefits mentoring has (Banwell, Kerr, & Stirling, 2020; Banwell et al., 2019). However, mentoring for women coaches can be problematic, with accusations of special treatment and fast-tracked career advancement being reported (Banwell et al., 2020). Whilst some of the benefits and challenges of mentorship for female coaches have been identified, Banwell et al. (2019) have cautioned that more scholarly work is needed to explore gender-based differences, which includes mentoring outcomes and optimal support within both male-mentor female-mentee and female-mentor female-mentee mentorships.

Mentoring, role models, and underrepresented groups

Gibson (2004) defined *role model* as a cognitive construction based on the attributes of people in social roles which an individual perceives to be similar to themselves and desires to increase their perceived similarity by emulating those attributes, behaviours or values. *Role models* provide three interrelated functions: to provide learning; to motivate and inspire; and to help an individual define their self-concept (Sawiuk & Groom, 2019).

LaVoi (2016) recommends female coaches need to 'see' and 'interact' with supportive female coach *role models*, in the form of friendship, networking and mentorship, to progress their careers and survive the male dominated world of sports coaching. This recommendation is supported by Sawiuk and Groom (2019), where being around supportive *role model* female coach mentors helped a high-performance female coach advance her career and deal with challenging scenarios e.g. decontextualised coach education. Here, the mentee accessed different knowledge from mentors, such as emotional intelligence and tactical strategies, which helped her to develop knowledge-in-action and increased self-confidence through practical observations.

Within effective mentorship, Kram's (1985) seminal work on mentor role function consists of *psychosocial* (e.g. role modelling, friendship, acceptance, counselling) and *career-related* (challenging tasks, exposure, protection, sponsorship, coaching, knowledge, networking) functions. The purpose of the *psychosocial* mentor function is to enhance a mentee's sense of competence, identity, self-worth, and effectiveness in a professional role and beyond, through mentorship grounded in a strong emotional bond with high levels of trust (Kram, 1985), with *role modelling* the most frequently reported *psychosocial* function. Consciously or unconsciously, mentor *role modelling* helps the mentee emulate the mentor's attitudes, values, and behaviours (Ramaswami & Dreher, 2007), although it is important for a mentee to identify multiple *role models* rather than searching for a 'whole' *role model.* Drawing upon Bandura, Sawiuk and Groom (2019) argued *role models* help shape and influence a mentee's self-identification and motivational aspects of personality. However, the extent to which a mentee will self-actualise (see current and ideal self in the mentor's practice) will differ, with the mentee making informed decisions on which aspects of their mentor to embrace and reject (Sawiuk & Groom, 2019).

Setting a new agenda: Gender, role models, and underrepresented groups

The importance of female coaches, mentors or developers as visible and accessible *role models* cannot be underestimated as an imperative aspect of female coach development (Sawiuk & Groom, 2019). Research must contribute to challenging the outdated gender stereotypes about women and leadership (LaVoi, 2016), and more specifically "interrupt the downward transmission of pedagogy centred on hegemonic masculinity" (O'Callaghan, 2015, p. 72). Future research on female mentees and mentors might consider adopting a feminist informed methodological approach which aims to academically explore lived experiences of women's voices and issues, with the aim of challenging inequality (Cooky, 2016). Unfortunately, at present there is a dearth of empirical research in the field of sports coaching that explores the concepts of gender, cross-gender, *role models* or underrepresented groups (race and ethnicity) within a mentoring context. O'Callaghan's (2015) chapter has illuminated some of the disconcerting challenges within mentorships, for example favourable treatment of the dominant culture, stereotyping, and racism (from a subtle undertone to deliberate racial harassment). Moreover, diversity within the mentor workforce will enhance a mentee's ability to 'imagine themselves there' through bespoke, sensitive, and inspirational mentoring practice (O'Callaghan, 2015; Sawiuk & Groom, 2019). Methodologically, researchers might further consider the use of phenomenological (Clark, Ferkins, Smythe, & Jogulu, 2018), case study, or narrative enquiry (Hodge & Sharp, 2016). These approaches can help to explore the specific temporal complexities from a lived experience of a phenomenon (individual, dyad, constellation, group, sport, organisation), focusing on underrepresented group mentoring for career progression.

Lefebvre and colleagues' (2020) work identified Kram (1985) as the most widely cited mentoring text. If the sports coaching field wishes to develop new knowledge and

insight, perhaps it is time to further our understanding and go beyond Kram's (1985) workplace mentoring theory. Coaching scholars must move towards a contextualised reconceptualisation of Kram's ideals on mentor role function and types of support, for example *career-related*, *psychosocial* and *role modelling* functions. Furthermore, we must consider which mentor support functions might be more appropriate for a mentee coach within a specific coaching context (participation, development, or elite). Research should explore how holistic demands (technical, tactical, physical, social, psychological) interconnect with pedagogy (behaviour, philosophy, relationships, learning) and multidisciplinary components (performance analysis, recruitment, strength and conditioning) to support a novice coach's or a high-performance coach's bespoke needs.

Concluding thoughts and steps forward

This article has reviewed the contemporary sports coach mentoring literature by focusing on four significant areas of interest: (1) A sociocultural analysis of sports coach mentorship; (2) multiple-mentors and developmental networks; (3) developing sports coach mentors; and (4) gender and role models. By reviewing the existing literature, we argue future research should continue to embrace interpretive sociological frameworks, investigate the utility of multiple-mentors, critically analyse mentor training provision, and challenge problematic assumptions in relation to gender and role modelling within sports coach mentorship. Whilst the four identified areas are by no means an exhaustive list, this article significantly contributes to the sports coach mentoring literature by building upon Jones and colleagues' (2009) original foundations and shaping future research endeavours in sports coach mentoring, ensuring the practice can become more clearly conceptualised and understood as empirical evidence begins to increase.

We acknowledge a number of reviews into sports coach mentorship are present within the literature (e.g. Bloom, 2013; Fraina & Hodge, 2020; Jones et al., 2009;

Lefebvre et al., 2020), however, these tend to focus on wider research from broader domains (e.g. health care, education, and business), merely highlighting 'take home messages' for the sports coaching field to contemplate. In contrast, this article has discussed the contemporary trends within the sports coach mentoring literature and illuminated areas worthy of further exploration, whilst outlining novel methodological approaches for researchers to adopt. In doing so, we have provided a concise start point for scholars and students who may wish to investigate and critique the nuances of sports coach mentorship. Moreover, we believe this work can significantly inform both GBs and sports coach mentors with the design and delivery of mentoring initiatives by encouraging critical reflection on their current beliefs, practices, and perceptions. Thus, in looking back, this article can help sports coach mentorship take a critical step forward within both academia and practice.

Problematically, despite the associated merit of mentoring for coach development, little evidence connects engagement with mentoring to a change in coaching practice. Therefore, the impact and evaluation of formal coach mentoring programmes is worthy of increased consideration. More specifically, areas such as structure and evaluation, successful achievement of purpose, and the role of the programme director warrant further investigation. There is a lack of evaluation-based research exploring sports coach mentoring programmes within the literature, with indicators of effectiveness absent at present (Bloom, 2013). This shortfall needs to be addressed to help provide further research evidence of mentoring practice, as the current research landscape falls short of robust evaluation and detailed analyses relating to mentoring's impact (Cushion, 2015). Furthermore, exploration of sports coach mentoring should be extended to mentee-mentor career outcomes and the role of gender and cross-gender (Banwell et al., 2019), in addition to the influence of technology on the mentoring relationship (Grant et al., 2020).

We encourage scholars to be brave in their approach to researching sports coach mentoring by adopting methodologies which go beyond description, unearthing the multifaceted, contested, and concealed complexities of mentorship. Recently, conceptual grounded theories have been developed to understand the delivery of performance analysis (Groom, Cushion, & Nelson, 2011) and sports coaches' professional learning (Stodter & Cushion, 2017). We believe that for sports coach mentoring practice to take a step forward, a substantive grounded theory is required to understand how both mentors and mentees construct and make sense of the mentoring process.

Currently, empirical studies investigating sports coach mentoring have utilised a quantitative approach (e.g. Schempp et al., 2016), which has tended to present mentoring as a linear process, where a set number of 'predictable' mentor functions exist. Nonetheless, Jones et al. (2009, pp. 276-277) previously argued that "insightful qualitative observations perhaps complemented by reflective, in-depth interviews need to be engaged with". Therefore, researchers could begin to utilise more exploratory, conjectural, and original research methods when investigating sports coach mentorship (Jones, 2019), adopting a multiple-method approach to capture the 'complete' mentoring picture. Such examples of innovative qualitative studies into sports coach mentoring exist, utilising both autoethnography and narrative ethnography (e.g. Zehntner & McMahon, 2014, 2019). However, in building upon the suggestions of Voldby and Klein-Døssing (2019) within coach education, sports coach mentoring researchers might wish to consider the use of action research in order to co-create practice-based knowledge between GBs, mentors, mentees, and scholars. Well-designed action research projects within sports coach mentoring will influence multiple levels of practice rather than producing generic knowledge (Elliott, 1991); for example the development of enhanced

mentor training by GBs, improved pedagogies adopted by mentors, and alterations to mentee coaching practice (Voldby & Klein-Døssing, 2019).

In concluding this article, despite increased academic work on mentoring practice since Jones and colleagues' (2009) seminal review, gaps in our knowledge are still evident, thus making it difficult to decipher what works and why within sports coach mentoring relationships. It is hoped this look back and review of contemporary sports coach mentoring literature has sparked curiosity within coaching scholars' minds to address the newly set research agendas and beyond, helping to take a step forward in our quest to both comprehend and conceptualise sports coach mentorship.

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