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TITLE:

Coach-Athlete Sexual Relationships: Coaches' Opinions

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Abstract

The focus of this article is the opinions and attitudes towards coach-athlete sexual relationships presented through the voices of female (n=24) and male (n=12) elite-level coaches in Norway. The results are based on in-depth interviews and the data were developed around the following question: “There are examples of athletes that fall in love with their coach and about sexual relationships between a coach and an athlete – what are your reflections around such coach-athlete relationships?” The coaches found such relationships very problematic and unacceptable. When it occurs, openness, i.e. to talk about it, is important. But the rule of thumb was that the coach-athlete relationship had to come to an end. In their elite-coaching role, these coaches believed it is important to have strict rules and clear boundaries. Furthermore, they should be aware of the power that they have and not exploit it. The results are discussed with respect to the professionalization of the coaching role, and the importance of including ethics in the education of coaches.

Introduction

Over the past 20 years, we have gained more knowledge about social relationships in sport coaching, and particularly about the coach-athlete relationship. [1-4] Parallel with studies of the coach-athlete dyad – whose primary goal has been performance enhancement – knowledge about sexual relationships between athletes and coaches seems to be very rare. This is the focus of the article, i.e. the opinions of and attitudes towards coach-athlete sexual relationships presented through the voices of female and male elite-level coaches in Norway.

In a recent article, Johansson and Larsson (2016) claim that “within sport sociology coach-athlete sexual relationships have been framed predominantly in a sexual abuse discourse.” [5, p.1] They also point out that coach-athlete sexual relationships (CASR) are under-researched and an overlooked area. Likewise, Bringer, Brackenridge and Johnston (2006) wrote many years ago that there was a “dearth of information about coaches' views of sexual relationships with their athletes.” [6, p.466] Ten years later Johansson, Kenttä and Andersen (2016) argued “there is a need for further studies on both coaches and athletes, experiences, including effects on individual well-being and sport performance, of legal CASR that are defined as consensual and mutually desired.” [7, p.595] These authors focus on the fact that coach-athlete sexual relationships can be complex, complicated and problematic, and often result in ethical dilemmas. There are different opinions on this topic, so our intention is to discuss this issue based on the voices of Norwegian elite-level coaches.

Legal CASR is defined as consensual and mutually desired between adults above the age of consent. [7] Accordingly, it is different from sexual abuse so these concepts should not be confused. Most definitions of sexual abuse emphasize that sexual abuse is non-consensual. One example is the International Olympic Committee's definition of sexual abuse as: “Any conduct of a sexual nature whether non-contact, contact or penetrative, where consent is coerced/manipulated or is not or cannot be given.” [8, p.1021] Nevertheless, some would also say that a sexual consensual relationship between a coach and an athlete above the age of consent is problematic due to the power dynamics between coaches and athletes. [9] Bringer, Brackenridge and Johnston (2002) mention that this power can take many different forms such as: power over team selection, playing time, access to facilities, competition, and expertise. [10] Some have argued that this power difference between the coach and the athlete is a risk factor in itself. [9] Kirby, Greaves and Hankivsky (2000) for example write that “If one person is in a position of authority over another the other cannot give consent. Consent is simply not possible in such circumstances.” [11, p.82] Likewise, Brackenridge and Kirby (1997) focus on the idea that even among adults it is a conflict of interest and a betrayal of fiduciary. [12] Similar concerns are stated by Griffin (1997) in a document from The Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS).

Griffin questions whether a sexual relationship between coaches and athletes are truly equal and consensual because of the power inequities that exist between them:

The coach determines who starts, who gets playing time, and can even influence future coaching career or competitive opportunities for some athletes. These factors create the potential for the abuse of power and coercion in a sexual relationship. Moreover, the potential for long-lasting psychological harm for the athlete is also present in these unequal relationships. [13]

Age of consent and codes of conduct

In a world-wide perspective the age of consent varies between 12 and 18 years, in Norway it is 16 years of age. [14] Norway does not have, as some other countries do, e.g. Canada and Denmark, a special law about 16- 17 year olds if there is a relation of authority between coaches and athletes. Sexual relationships between consenting coaches and athletes above the age of 16 years are therefore not prohibited by law. Thus, some would say that it is ok if an adult athlete and a coach fall in love and develop a sexual relationship. On the other hand, relevant questions might be: will it affect the coach-athlete relationship, how should they tackle the situation, what consequences may this have for their own roles as an athlete and as a coach, and what are the consequences for the other athletes in a team or group? It seems that such questions seldom are asked in research, and studies about sexual relationships are scarce. Both coaches and athletes may be able to answer these questions; however, the present article will focus only on the opinions and experiences of the coaches.

Many sport organizations have ethical guidelines and/or specific codes of conduct for coaches, though not all of them mention coach-athlete sexual relationships. Those that do, often discourage coaches and athletes from engaging in sexual relationships, regardless of age and informed consent. The umbrella organization the International Council of Coaching Excellence (ICCE) states for example in their Code of Conduct that: “Coaches do not start sexual relationships with their athletes and also discourage attempts from the athletes to initiate sexual relationships with them.” [15, p.3-4] Another example is the coaching code of ethics of the US Olympic Committee: “Coaches do not engage in sexual/romantic relationships with athletes or other participants over whom the coach has evaluative, direct, or indirect authority, because such relationships are likely to impair judgement or be exploitative” [16, 1.14b], and that “Coaches do not coach athletes with whom they have engaged in sexual intimacies” [16, 3.04]. Further that, “Coaches should not engage in sexual intimacies with a former athlete for at least two years after cessation or termination of professional services.” [16, 3.06] In another paragraph, the reason is clarified:

Because sexual intimacies with a former athlete are so frequently harmful to the athlete, and because such intimacies undermine public confidence in the coaching profession and thereby deter the public's use of needed services, coaches do not engage in sexual intimacies with former athletes even after a two-year interval except in the most unusual circumstances. [16, 3.06]

In 2010 the Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic and Confederation of Sports [NIF] developed 10 guidelines that should apply to everyone in Norwegian sports [17]. One of the guidelines is of relevance for this paper: "Avoid dual relationships. If a reciprocal relationship is established, the situation should be raised and clarified openly in the milieu." [17, p.4]

What do we know?

How common is a sexual relationship between an adult athlete and his/her coach, and what do we know about coaches' experiences and thoughts about coach-athlete sexual relationships? According to Johansson (2013) "coach-athlete romantic relationships and consensual sexual relations are commonly accepted among coaches and athletes." [18, p.678] However, few empirical studies can confirm this statement. In a study among former high school athletes in the US, 12 (5%) of 264 female athletes had engaged in sexual intercourse with a coach. [19] A Canadian study of 266 athletes (14-60 year of age) revealed that 58 (22%) had had sex with a person in a position of authority over them in a sport context. [13] But we don't know whether this was only coaches, or whether it was consensual or not, nor the age of these athletes. Among those 58 athletes, 15 had been insulted, ridiculed, punched or beaten, i.e. abused. If the remaining 43 (16%) have had consensual sex and were above the age of consent it might be an indicator of a sexual relationship, but the authors did not mention whether it was consensual or not, and characterized the behavior as sexual abuse. In a Danish study among 1,660 athletes (aged 18-50) revealed that almost one-third reported to have experienced an intimate relationship with a coach during their sport career. [20] These relationships occurred during the athletes' childhood (0.5%), adolescence (8%), and adulthood (28%). About half of the athletes in the last group experienced the relationship as predominantly positive, which can be interpreted as consensual sexual relationship. The author does not however reveal any information whether these relationships were consensual or not.

We have found only one study that asked youth directly about a consensual relationship to their coach. Among the athletes (n=2,707.40)⁴ in a study of adolescents in Quebec aged 14 to 17, 1.6% reported having had consensual sexual contacts with a coach during the last year. [21] This constitutes sexual abuse under Canadian law. The age of consent in Canada is 16 years, but when there is a relation of authority between the

⁴ Weighted sample.

adolescent (through 17 years) and the adult, the relationship is considered as sexual exploitation of the adolescent.

A qualitative study among 19 male swimming coaches from England found that sexual relationships with athletes under the age of 16 were unanimously considered to be inappropriate [9]. When discussing sexual relationships above the age of consent, responses ranged from inappropriate to arguing that it was within a coach's civil liberties to enter into such a sexual relationship with an adult athlete. In another Danish survey two-thirds of 207 female and male coaches rated sexual relationships with athletes over the age of 18 years as acceptable, and 41 (20%) reported having engaged in such a relationship. [22] Six (3%) of the coaches had had an intimate relationship with an athlete under 18 years of age, which was found unacceptable by 93% of the respondents.⁵ Lastly, in a study among coaches and athletes in Zambia, the participants were asked about their perception of the acceptability of an intimate coach-athlete relationship when the athlete was below or above 16 years of age. The answers were marked on a 5 point scale from 1="completely acceptable" to 5= "unacceptable and very serious". The results show that almost all participants marked this behavior as "unacceptable and very serious". [23, p.33] The study also revealed that this type of behavior was considered as slightly more unacceptable when the athlete was below 16 years of age both among the athletes and the coaches. However on both items the behavior was ranked significantly more unacceptable by the coaches than by the athletes.

One can sometimes read about romantic relationships between coaches and their athletes in the media, but as shown above the empirical data with respect to prevalence and coaches' opinion about such relationships is scarce. The few figures presented above vary widely, both in relation to prevalence and in relation to whether it is acceptable for a coach to have a sexual relationship to one of his/her athletes. Based on the numbers presented, there seems to be a higher consistency with respect to looking upon the issue as unacceptable when the athlete is under the age of consent. In many countries this is a criminal act.

Methods

The results in this article are based on in-depth interviews with 24 female and 12 male elite-level coaches who took part in a larger research project aimed at increasing the knowledge about Norwegian elite-level coaches with a particular focus on the experiences of, and the attitudes towards, female coaches. The interviewees were recruited from a survey among Norwegian elite-level coaches (n=309). The sampling of interviewees was represented by: national team coaches, club coaches and inactive coaches. The sampling also covered a variety of sports.

⁵ In Denmark the legal age of consent is raised from 16 to 18 years of age in situations like coaching and teaching.

A semi-structured interview guideline was developed and tested among four elite-level coaches before the actual study commenced. The guidelines covered several themes related to experiences and perceptions of being an elite-level coach. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded into thematic text segments by the use of MAXQDA, a software program for qualitative data analysis. After having read through the text many times, and having used memos for emerging themes relevant to answer the purpose of the study, different segments of the text were assigned code names. The code system was organized on two levels. This is in accordance with what Sparkes and Smith describe as higher order and lower order themes, when using computer-assisted data analysis. [24] Due to the scope of this article data from the code “ethics, values and violence” (first level) which included among others the sub-code “double relationships” (second level) are presented. The text segments analysed in this code were based on the data developed around the following question: “There are examples of athletes that fall in love with their coach and about sexual relationships between a coach and an athlete – what are your reflections around such coach-athlete relationships?” We did not mention the coach-athlete age differences, or the age of the athletes in this opening question, as we wanted to explore their general attitude and then follow up with probes and prompts depending on their answers. Examples of how the conversation could unfold were related to questions like: how did they rationalize such situations in relation to the coaching role and in relation to their personal coaching philosophy, what did they think was important, and what did they do to avoid getting into ethically difficult situations?

The 36 coaches represented 25 sports disciplines; 15 of them were national team coaches, 13 were club coaches, and seven were not active at the time when the interviews were carried out. Most of them were coaching adults, but many were also coaching elite level younger athletes. They were highly educated, both in general and with respect to specific sport coaching education. Most of them had also been elite-level athletes themselves. Of interest for this article is that not all of them had signed ethical guidelines in connection with their coaching job, eight (38%) of the women and seven (78%) of the men.

Ethics

The coaches were guaranteed confidentiality and were informed that the project was approved by the Norwegian Data Supervision Bureau (NSD). They also signed a declaration of consent and received an information letter with contact details of the head of the project if they later had any questions or wanted to withdraw from the study.

Many sports in Norway have relatively small milieus at the elite-level and especially the low number of female elite-level coaches means that those familiar with a particular sport will be able to deduce the names of the participants. Thus, sport affiliation is omitted and all quotes are provided with pseudonyms.

Results

Only a few of the coaches had been involved in a coach-athlete sexual relationship. One male coach had married one of his female athletes and one female coach had, when she was an athlete, married her male coach. They were both still married. In addition, one female coach, when she was an athlete, had had a relationship for a while with one of her male coaches. Furthermore, many of the coaches mentioned that they had observed, or knew about, male coach-female athlete sexual relationships. This may indicate that it is not that uncommon, even though only three of the 36 coaches in our sample had been involved in a coach-athlete sexual relationship.

The analysis revealed four major themes, which will be presented and discussed below. These are: 1) General attitudes towards coach-athlete sexual relationships; 2) Opinions or views on the impact on the sport, the athlete, the team and the coach; 3) Opinion or views on how such relationships should or could be handled by the parties involved; and 4) Performing the coaching role in a professional manner

General attitudes towards coach-athlete sexual relationships

All coaches seemed to disapprove of a sexual relationship between a coach and an athlete. This was expressed in terms such as: “not good,” “not acceptable and often kept secret,” “would be difficult,” “I am critical to it,” “should not happen,” “not okay,” “never a good idea,” “a challenge,” “important to have ‘a clean relationship’ between a coach and an athlete”. One of the coaches expressed it like this:

I would not have done it, because it may create terrible problematic situations. Not because one person cannot manage the situation with distinctive roles, but it is how other people look at you and interpret your reactions or attention towards someone. It is the same problem when a father shall be coach for an athlete.
(Anna)

A head coach was quite firm in stating that “[I]t is impossible to have a coach and an athlete on a team when they have a relationship.” (Hans) A couple of the coaches mentioned that they had internal rules:

We have a rule for the team that this should not happen. I think this is very favourable in relation to all, because we are travelling so much together [...] if one or two of the coaches should be together or a coach with an athlete, then it would have an impact on many, not only those two. So, I think this is a really good rule, because it is unhealthy to be together with someone in one’s own team.
(Ingrid)

One coach came from a foreign country and has worked for many years with safeguarding and athlete protection. She said that she was shocked when she came to Norway because of the lack of rules and regulations in her sport. Therefore, she had made her own rule:

I made a rule with the whole team that none of the men could be alone in a room with any of the girls. Especially with the door closed [...] and that is not because I don't trust anyone, but it's just for everyone's protection, so that there are no accusations. [...] So just being sure that everyone is protected, so there is no problem in the future, and everyone seems OK with that. (Liz)

Overall, there seemed to be no differences between the female and male coaches, except that the female coaches varied somewhat more in their comments. Most of them mentioned that "this could happen," "to fall in love is a natural part of life," "not something you can regulate," "love has no boundaries," "one can become very fond of each other also as a coach and an athlete," etc. Only one male coach had a similar comment: "I can understand that it can happen."

Opinions or views on the impact on the sport, the athlete, the team, and the coach

Many coaches described the impacts a sexual relationship might have on the different actors in the sport. The most common opinion seemed to be that it is problematic and that it could be negative. One male coach said:

[T]he problem is that if you coach a team, and you have a relationship to one of those girls you are coaching, for example, that may not work. It might work for this one girl, it might work for one or two other girls, but you always end up in a situation where the relationship is questioned concerning the energy used for the single athlete. So that would make it really difficult [...]. (Ola)

The one male coach who was married to one of the athletes he had coached stated that, "It hasn't been easy for her [...] she had to do everything better than the others, I demanded much more from her than from the others on the national team." (Per) Another male said that "I know about one club, where the milieu did fall apart when a coach-athlete relationship was revealed. It also turned out that it had gone on for a while before it was known." (Kristian) A male coach said: "We have had some examples in Norway that I think have not been good. And I believe that in a way it weakens you as a coach." (Petter), whereas one of the female coaches stated:

From an athlete's perspective I believe it can be problematic for the athlete [...] always to be in the athlete-coach relationship, which you never can take a break

from. [...] It is a demanding situation and in the long run it impacts a lot on either the one role or the other. (Anna)

There was also the thought that it not only affects those involved, but also other athletes: “One thing is that it becomes difficult for those two involved, but it also becomes very complicated for all the others.” (Solveig) One coach related that at his sport school they had had an application for a free position from a coach that they knew had a relationship with a student athlete. For that reason, he was evaluated as unsuitable for the job. To leave the club and team, while preferable, didn’t always happen. One of the coaches who was married to her former coach said:

I don’t think it created so many problems, because we were very aware that we should not create any problems. We never lived in the same room. We were never together except when we were together with the others. But of course it creates problems, particularly if you have people who don't manage to separate between the case and the person. (Helen)

Opinion or views on how such relationships should or could be handled by the parties involved

So what can or should be done when coach-athlete sexual relationships occur? The coaches in our study were very clear on this point. Firstly, it is important to talk openly about it: “We have had such dual relationships. We talked about it, we are a small environment, and I hope and believe that it was OK that we were open about it.” (Tone) Another female coach also talked about the importance of being open in the group/team, and talk about it. Secondly, many believed that the coaching relationship has to come to an end, i.e. either the coach or the athlete has to quit because “if not things get too complicated.” Most of the coaches were of the opinion that it is the coach who has to leave. This is mirrored in the following reflection: “If I had been a coach for an elite team, and had been together with one of the girls on the team, then maybe I should have, resigned and been a coach for another team.” (Robert) Another coach stated: “In a situation like that, then you must just quit the job, [...] for me it is as simple as that.” (Hans) A couple of the females knew about cases where the coach either had withdrawn or had to leave his/her position. The female coach who as an athlete had had a relationship with an assistant coach had first told it to the head coach and suggested that either she should leave the national team or that he should quit as the national team coach. The head coach had then talked with all the women on the team, and they thought it was OK. Today she said “It is very common, but not very smart. [...] It is very complicated.” (Maria)

Performing the coaching role in a professional manner

How did these high-level coaches react and behave with respect to praxis when they experienced problematic and challenging situations? Some focused on the necessity of having clearer limits that should not be crossed: “Even if you are a young coach, there are some limits that you should not cross.” (Robert) “I am very careful about telling my athletes that there is a border between adults and children, and in relation to youth, I think it is very important to draw clear boundaries.” (Irma) This was also expressed in the following quote from a male coach:

Well, towards girls, if you are a male coach and you coach girls, between 15 and 20, then you have to make sure that you stay far enough away from any relationship. I think that is very important, as a coach that you really stay away. (Ola)

Similar perceptions were revealed by other coaches: “One has to be professional and put the feelings away, all shall be evaluated by the same standard, and it is a part of the job, not to favour those that one likes better than the others” (Dag), and: “I think it is important not to have too close a relationship at the personal level, one must keep a certain distance to the athletes.” (Sverre) These quotes indicate that this is an important part of the professional coaching role. Likewise, others focused on the importance of separating work from one’s private life: “One has to give of one’s own personality, but one also has to be very clear on where the boundaries between work and private life are.” (Gertrud) One of the male coaches agreed on this:

I have said the whole time that I have a private life, and I have been very strict on social media, and talked very little about my social life at home. At work, one is a coach, and at home one is a father and a husband.” (Edvard)

The male coach who was married to an athlete he had coached told us that when he arrived at practice then they were coach and athlete, and had a clear separation between the two roles.

As mentioned earlier, the male and the female coaches had many of the same opinions about the coach-athlete relationship, but it is interesting to notice that only female coaches seemed to talk explicitly about the importance of being aware of, and conscious about, sexual relationships. “I think it is natural that an athlete becomes infatuated by a coach, but I think that for a coach it is very important to be aware about the ethical concerns around this.” (Marit) It was also only the female coaches that focused on the power that is imbedded in the coaching role: “We are sitting on a lot of power, even if I don’t feel it like that.” (Maria) The female coach who was married with the coach she had as athlete said:

I see that it is easy for the young girls to fall in love with their coach. [...] [Y]ou have very much power as a coach, and it is easy to look upon the coach as something else than the coach [...] I have not talked to the girls about it, but I have talked about it with the male coach, told him to be careful, and be conscious and aware of it. (Solveig)

Discussion

The results of the analysis of the interviews can be summarized as follows:

1. Only three out of 36 coaches had been in a coach-athlete sexual relationship. The stories the elite-level coaches tell however, indicate that such relationships are not that uncommon.
2. The elite-level coaches found such relationships very problematic, and something that is not acceptable for various reasons. It seems to have a negative impact upon the coaching milieu [teammates] and can create problems for both the coach and the athlete.
3. When it occurs, openness, i.e. to talk about it is important. But the rule of thumb is that the coach-athlete relationship had to come to an end, either the coach resigns or the athlete leaves the team or club.
4. In their elite-coaching role, these coaches believed it is important to have strict rules, clear borders, and that they should be conscious about limits that should not be crossed. Furthermore, that they should be aware of the power that they have and not exploit it.
5. The female coaches seemed to be more open to a sexual relationship developing
6. between a coach and an athlete. They also talk more about the importance of being aware of the power embedded in the coaching role and its consequences.

How can these findings be understood and explained, and should they have any consequences for coach education and for coaching practice? Unlike the athletes in the studies from Canada [11] and Denmark [22] who appeared to have some tolerance toward sexual relationships with their coaches, the coaches in our study were of the opposite opinion. However, one could argue that they were mirroring or reflecting what is politically correct. On the other hand, we do not have any reason to believe that the critical attitudes these coaches had towards coach-athlete sexual relationships was an expression of what they really mean. It may be interpreted as an expression of a professional attitude towards their coaching role. In an international perspective, coach-athlete sexual relationships, independent of the age of the athletes, is often forbidden through codes of conduct, as shown at the beginning of this article. We further found that there was a tendency that the female coaches were more nuanced in their comments than the males. This may mirror gender stereotypes, or what Connell [25] calls emphasised femininity,

which is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men and is characterised by heterosexual attractiveness, compliance, nurturance and empathy. Accordingly, if men have a more professional attitude towards their coaching role, can it be partly explained by their gender? A study from England found that male athletes and coaches rated ambiguous coaching behaviours as less appropriate than their female counterparts. [26] The authors suggested that male coaches in England are probably becoming more cautious in their coaching following increased concerns about allegations of sexual harassment and abuse. The Zambian study mentioned earlier [23], revealed antithetical perceptions; female coaches were more strict than the male coaches with respect to accepting an intimate relationship with an athlete both below or above 16 years of age. Other studies have documented the views of coaches on the issue of false allegations. [27-28] Fear of false allegations has also reduced the quality of the training according to some coaches. [6, 10, 29] Pépin-Gagné and Parent (2016) by referring to studies both inside and outside sport however show that false allegations are very rare. [30] The authors focus on the importance of establishing codes of ethical conduct that contain clear boundaries for what is to be considered appropriate or inappropriate behaviour in the coach-athlete relationship, such as touching, a sexual relationship, verbal interactions etc.

There were surprisingly few of the elite-level coaches in our study who had signed any codes of conduct, at the same time that many of them mentioned the importance of having clear boundaries and rules. To have signed ethical guidelines and/or codes of conduct or to have coaching information about drawing up clearer boundaries, could be helpful for coaches with respect to this issue.

In discussing coach-athlete sexual relationships, the role of the coach is sometimes compared with other professional roles, such as in health care and teaching, particularly with reference to ethical guidelines that exist for such professions. Our findings can therefore be discussed in relation to the professionalization of the coaching role itself, particularly with respect to the ethical dimensions of the coaching role. The International Council for Coach Education (ICCE) problematizes this in their position paper *Sport coaching as a “profession”: challenges and future directions*. [31] In discussing criteria associated with professions they refer particularly to ethics and social responsibility and write “Initial coach education and systematic long-term CPD (continuous professional development) in areas of legal and ethical aspects of sport coaching are essential to support the professionalisation of sport coaching.” [31, p.104] They further mention the need to address cases where coaches abuse trust and fail to respect to the integrity of the participants. With reference to studies about sexual relationships across the power imbalances of supervisor/student and therapist/client, Burke (2011) writes that:

“[T]he difference in power between coach and athlete exists regardless of the age of the athlete, and while coping or resistant mechanisms may be more developed

in older athletes, the ‘consent’ of older athletes is not the trump card in deciding the ethical nature of the relationship.” [32, p.117]

The coaches in our study seemed to be of the same opinion, since they emphasized that independent of the age of the athlete, coach-athlete sexual relationships are problematic and should be avoided. Another finding of the study was that the female coaches talked more than the males about the importance of being aware of the power that an elite-level coach often possesses, which may reflect women’s high awareness of gendered power relations. The importance of awareness about coaches’ power and its impact is also mentioned by Duffy et al. (2011) who focus on the significance of doing research which can inform the practice of coaching, particularly with respect to research on power, sub-culture and risk. [31]

Conclusion

Based on the empirical findings one might emphasize the need for not only codes of conduct, but for education, which could help coaches in their practice to learn more about ethical concerns. Though the perceptions and meaning of coach-athlete sexual relationships did not vary much among these Norwegian elite-level coaches other studies show that they vary a great deal regarding the appropriateness of sexual relationships with adult athletes, as shown in the literature review. Burke (2011) states that most coaches receive no formal education about the ethics of sexual relationships with athletes and they should be given an opportunity to learn about ethical principles such as justice, beneficence and non-maleficence. [32] Correspondingly, this should have implications for coach education since this theme is rarely mentioned. It should be focused on, as it does not disappear by silencing it. We therefore echo Burke’s (2011) statement:

It may be time for all governments to enact laws regulating the relationships between coaches and athletes, and for coach accreditation bodies and sporting organizations to implement ethics education so that their coaches will embrace the underpinning foundations of these laws. [32, p.128]

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