Take a chance, give a chance and give a real chance: Experiences and perspectives of volunteer women coaches in Ladies Gaelic football.

By

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Abstract

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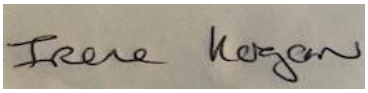
The voice of volunteer women coaches is underrepresented in coaching literature. This research explores the experiences of volunteer women coaches at the non-elite club level within the sport of Ladies Gaelic football.

To explore the experiences of volunteer women coaches the Ecological Intersectional Model (EIM) (La Voi 2016) was used. The EIM consists of four layers – individual, interpersonal, organisational, and socio-cultural - and was used to underpin all phases of the study. Phase 1 centred on the lived experiences of fourteen women coaches through semi-structured interviews. The coaches highlighted the importance of the interpersonal layer and specifically support from home, alongside contextualised, club-based education. Consequently, Phase 2 explored the influence of the club environment on eleven women coaches, from three clubs, that were participants in a Community of Practice (CoP), designed and facilitated by the researcher across a playing season. The EIM informed the interview guide and analysis with the results presented as a creative non-fiction account profiling three coaches and their club-specific experiences. The final phase comprised of three focus groups with women coaches upon the completion of the CoP. Reflexive thematic analysis was used in all phases and so the researcher's position, and interpretation of the findings were considered through an autoethnography.

Overall, a combination of the interpersonal and organisational layers are most significant for volunteer women coaches. Subsequently, this research implores club members to consider their perceptions and biases regarding the role of women in clubs. Such awareness will aid a move from traditional liaison and administrative duties to coaching roles. Additionally, those interested in coaching should commence, while existing coaches must give new coaches a chance. Moreover, those in decision-making positions must put the structures in place to give women coaches a real chance. Hence, this study can be summarised to 'Take a chance, give a chance and give a real chance' to women and girls in the domain of volunteer coaching.

Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis submission is entirely my own work, in my own words, and that all sources used in researching it are fully acknowledged and all quotations properly identified and referenced. It has not been submitted, in whole or in part, by me or another person, for the purpose of obtaining any other credit or grade. I am the researcher and author of this research and the principal author of the four articles that form the core of this thesis.

Signature: 

Publications

Hogan, I., Bowles, R., & Kitching, N. (2021). Using the ecological-intersectional model to explore the experiences and perceptions of volunteer women ladies Gaelic football coaches in Ireland. *Sports Coaching Review*, 1-23. https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2021.1933847

Hogan, I., Bowles, R., & Kitching, N. (2022). Exploring the influence of the community-based sports club environment on the support and development of volunteer women coaches in Ireland. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living.* https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2022.809092

See Appendix A and B for journal communications regarding copyright.

Conference Presentations

Poster Presentation at the All-Ireland Post Graduate Conference in Sport Science, Physical Activity and Physical Education in Athlone IT, May 10th 2019.
Title of poster: *Supportive online Community of Practice (CoP) for female LGFA Coaches.*

Oral Presentation (20 minutes) at the Cluster for Research into Coaching (CRiC), 5th International Conference in September 2019 at the University of Worcester, UK.
Title of presentation: *'Support is everything': Experiences of female Ladies Gaelic Football coaches in Ireland.*

Oral presentation (12 minutes) at the International Society of Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise (QRSE) Early Career Researchers and Student Conference (Virtual) in April 2021
Title of presentation: "*Experiences of a volunteer female coach and coach developer: An autoethnography".*

Accepted for poster at MSAI Movement & Skill Acquisition Ireland's conference in April 2020 **(Postponed due to COVID-19)**
Title of poster: *Same gender coach-athlete relationships: perceptions of female volunteer LGFA coaches*

Accepted for poster at QRSE International Conference in Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise in July 2020 **(Postponed due to COVID-19)**
Title of poster: *Perceptions of volunteer female coaches: adding to or reducing gender stereotypes?*

Abstract for oral presentation at the International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE) conference in December 2020 **(Postponed due to COVID-19)**
Title of presentation: "*Exploring the effectiveness of a Community of Practice (CoP) on the development of volunteer coaches"*

Co-author on paper external to this study

O'Brien, W., Coppinger, T., **Hogan, I**., Belton, S., Murphy, M. H., Powell, C., & Woods, C. (2021). The association of family, friends, and teacher support with girls' sport and physical activity on the island of Ireland. *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1123/jpah.2020-0386

Acknowledgements

It seems appropriate to start these acknowledgements using the analogy of a match to describe my Ph.D. journey. It was a long game but it had everything, drama, near misses, injuries, water breaks, times when I was winning and times when I was being beaten, extra-time and decisions I did not always agree with, a very supportive crowd in the stand, great teammates and two of the best coaches I could have hoped for in their role as my supervisors. Dr Richard Bowles and Dr Niamh Kitching epitomize the word SUPER in supervisor. I am indebted to you for the never-ending encouragement, positive affirmations and guidance throughout the study.

To my supporters in the stand and my teammates on the field; my family, parents, siblings, and extended family in aunts, uncles and cousins - thanks for the continuous support, check in's and acceptance of the times I was 'tipping away' and present in body only! Specifically, to my parents, thanks for instilling a strong work ethic, a lifelong love of sport and promoting the importance of education.

To my friends that have been so supportive and accepting of "DELL boy" travelling with us on any and all holidays. Instead of listing you, in case of missing someone, I am using WhatsApp groups so you can identify yourself, and for some, you appear in more than one! "The Hogan's it's official", "Sisters" "Over 40's & Young Irene", "Survive", "The originals", "1-2-3 Go", "Rusty Hurleys", "Dancy Prancy" "Lanza, here we come", "Number 9+1 stray", "The Original Plebs", "Good Times", "Virtual T Break". Thankfully none of you contributed too much to these groups to make me take my eye off the ball – for too long!

To the coaches, in this study, that gave of their time I hope I have done justice to your stories and have promoted your voice. Thanks for sharing your experiences and allowing me to work with your clubs. Thanks to the LGFA and their staff for always providing a sounding board and your progressive thoughts and ideas on coach education and development. To my colleagues and friends in the Department of Sport, Leisure and Childhood Studies, in Munster Technological University thanks for all the help, empathy, and pep talks over the last 5 years and beyond. Thanks to all those involved in the MTU Staff Doctorate programme that provided me with the opportunity to become a Ph.D. candidate. As the full-time whistle blows, I look forward to the post-match analysis.

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Glossary and Abbreviations

All-Ireland	Elite level competition within LGFA for all age groups including adult
CD	Coach Developer
CDA	Coach Developer Assessor
CNF	Creative non-fiction
CoP	Community of Practice
County	Region and/or competition
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
EIM	Ecological Intersectional Model
ESM	Ecological Systems Model
FG	Focus Group
FLO	Women Liaison Officer
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
G4M&O	Gaelic 4 (*for*) Mothers and Others
LGFA	Women's Gaelic football Association
LSP	Local Sports Partnership
MIREC	Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee
NGB	National Governing Body
TA	Thematic Analysis
U14	U denotes anyone under that age group in terms of teams

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and Introduction to the study

'Where is your coach?' This is a question many women coaches are asked, on a regular basis, before, during, and after games. The often-made assumption is that a woman with a team is in any other role, besides coaching. It is a question I have been asked and is probably a conclusion I also reached when chatting to other women involved with teams. Why does this happen and what can we do about it?

The opening vignette sets the scene for this original research that focuses on the relatively unheard voices of volunteer women coaches within the community club environment, in Ireland. More specifically this thesis explores the lived experiences of volunteer women coaches, at the non-elite level, within the female-only team sport of ladies' Gaelic football. This introductory chapter outlines the thesis format by describing the study objectives, research undertaken, methodologies used, relevant findings and conclusions.

The data collection methods included interviews, an initiative in the form of a club-based Community of Practice (CoP), focus groups, and a researcher journal. My biography, within women's Gaelic football, brings a unique perspective to the study, through my experiences in playing, coaching, coach developing, and coach developer assessor roles. Taking place across three data collection phases, this research highlights the overall and club-specific coaching experiences, of women, along with their perspectives regarding the influence of a season-long, club-based CoP on their support and development. The theoretical framework that underpinned all phases along with the links between the phases are outlined. The findings give a novel contribution to literature in the broad domains of coaching, coach education, and women in sport. The applied nature of the research gives clubs and the National Governing Body (NGB) practical recommendations to enhance the experiences of current and future volunteer women coaches.

Throughout the thesis I will, for the most part, write in the first person rather than referring to the researcher. From this point, I will refer to ladies Gaelic football as women's Gaelic football. The term ladies' Gaelic football is synonymous with the name of the governing body, (Ladies Gaelic Football Association, LGFA) and ladies' football is the term used to describe the sport. However, for the purpose of this study, I deem the term women's Gaelic football to be more appropriate and use it for the majority of the thesis. I will refer to the participants as coaches as opposed

to women coaches in an attempt to remove the gender labelling as I believe a study on men coaches would not allude to their gender but instead solely refer to them as coaches.

It is important to note, however, that I only arrived at these standpoints towards the end of my doctoral journal following many thought-provoking discussions with my supervisors. Indeed, as I embarked on this research, I always used the term female coaches, as in my naivety I considered women to describe 'older ladies' and that 'females' covered all age groups. I now know women and girls to be a more appropriate reference for this cohort. By using terms such as 'ladies' 'female coaches' and 'women coaches' I too was assigning gender to them and potentially adding to the hidden unconscious biases and stereotypes that their coaching experiences are laden with.

Terms such as 'the researcher', 'first author', and 'I' and secondly, 'Ladies Gaelic football', 'women's Gaelic football', 'female coaches, and 'women coaches' are used interchangeably within the published material. The use of these terms is reflective of the stage of my journey, and not realising the importance of the language I used, and sometimes to align with the reviewer and editorial feedback.

1.2 Researcher background

Each phase of this research illustrates how I connected with the participants and used my lived experiences to gain a greater understanding of women coaches' perspectives (Gearity, 2014). As I am a volunteer coach for the last 23 years and a coach developer for 17 years, within women's Gaelic football, my perspective is unique and relevant. My story, as presented in Chapter 4, describes my transition from a non-elite player to a volunteer coach and part-time coach developer using an autoethnographic approach.

Researchers must be aware of their philosophy on knowledge and understanding (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014) while a deep interest in a topic can be the starting point for designing a study (Agee, 2009). As such, I wanted to understand participants' experiences and perspectives through a form of interpretive research that was influenced by my background and personal history (Creswell, 2007). Examining these assumptions about the topic, research questions, methods, analysis, and rapport with participants is known as reflexivity (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Through reflexivity, I thought about my presence in the research and how

my views influenced the process and the outcomes (Wall, 2006). In this regard, I identified the impact of my personal perspective as a volunteer coach, on participant engagement and the conclusions reached (Yin, 2015).

This research was undertaken by a white, female Irish citizen, with 27 and 21-years of women's Gaelic football playing and coaching experience respectively. I played at a non-elite level and coached as a volunteer with club youth, adult, and inter-collegiate teams. These early experiences were extremely positive, and I have no doubt furnished me with life skills and a passion for sport that later translated into an undergraduate course in Business and Sport. I was a volunteer, in my women's Gaelic football club from a young age, as it was established by girls aged 18-23. Therein, began my volunteering contribution to my local club as I served as chairperson, public relations officer (PRO), county board delegate, coach, and referee at various stages over a 17-year period from 1998 to 2015. Through disclosure of my background and my various roles within women's Gaelic football, the reader can use a critical eye to determine if there is research integrity. My biography helped me to build a rapport and empathise with the participants' experiences and influenced the decisions I made on the research design and data interpretation.

1.3 Rationale for the study

A combination of my experiences as a coach and coach developer, within women's Gaelic football, were the starting point for this study. The sport of women's (ladies) Gaelic football was founded in 1974 and is governed by the Ladies Gaelic Football Association (LGFA), with over 188,000 members in 1200 clubs (LGFA, 2018). Women's Gaelic football is part of the Gaelic Games trio that also includes Gaelic football and hurling for men and Camogie (hurling) for women. Gaelic Games are of significant cultural value to Irish communities given the parochial and amateur ethos of the sports.

Although the Keller and Wright (2013) research focused on the Gaelic Games Association (GAA), which governs hurling and football for men, many of their conclusions are relevant to all Gaelic games including women's Gaelic football. The authors surmise that the volunteers that run clubs allow members to make lifelong friends through representing the pride of the community, across many familial generations, irrespective of social class (Keller & Wright, 2013).

The LGFA organise non-elite club and elite inter-county competitions in Ireland and in some countries internationally. Within the non-competitive area is an initiative called Gaelic for Mothers and Others (G4M&O), aimed at females over 25 years of age and not playing competitively. Women's Gaelic football boasts a significantly higher percentage of qualified women coaches, at introductory level, in comparison to other sports with figures of 65% (LGFA, 2020) and 37% (Sport Ireland Coaching, 2019), respectively. It is unknown why this disparity exists but potentially it is due to the sports increased participation levels over the last number of years. Given the high figure their coaching experiences within the sport warrant investigation.

An obvious gap appears in the literature regarding volunteer coaches, even though they are fundamental to sports organisations (Walsh, 2015), with women coaches even further underrepresented in research to date. Research is lacking on the experiences of women coaches considering the range of factors that impact them and the myriad of challenges they encounter (LaVoi, 2016). This research ties in with the NGB's (Ladies Gaelic Football Association, LGFA) strategic aims, with a specific emphasis on attracting coaches, helping in the development pathway, and contributing knowledge regarding the support of women coaches (LGFA, 2018).

A greater understanding of the lived experiences of women coaches within the sport was needed. During the delivery of countless coach education courses, I observed an even split, by gender, at the introductory level. Yet, in my experience, this did not translate to the number of women actively coaching in clubs. My rationale for starting this study was first, to establish why there was such a disconnect between women qualifying as coaches but not being active in their clubs, and secondly, I wanted to make an impact through effecting change for both current and future women coaches.

1.4 Research aim and objective

The aim of this study is to give a voice to volunteer women coaches to further the existing knowledge on what support and developmental assistance they require within women's Gaelic football clubs. The intention was to use their lived experiences to effect change for all women coaches. This is an ambitious target from one study and so is a lifelong project that is initiated through answering the study's specific research questions.

1.5 Research questions

Research questions can be the starting point or developed during the researcher's reflexive journey (Agee, 2009). Following extensive contemplation, these research questions were developed to address the study aims over three phases:

Phase 1 - How are the experiences of non-elite level volunteer women Ladies Gaelic football coaches influenced by the ecological systems around them?

Phase 2 - How do club environments support and develop the non-elite level volunteer woman ladies Gaelic football coach?

Phase 3 - How can a club-based CoP support and develop volunteer women coaches in Ladies Gaelic football?

Once the research questions were refined the most appropriate data collection tools were selected as outlined and explained in greater detail, relevant to each phase, in Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7. Sparkes and Smith (2014) state that once the how, why, or what questions are formulated the researcher can then generate a statement of purpose. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of volunteer women coaches at the non-elite level in women's Gaelic football clubs and use their voices to identify what can aid their support and development.

1.6 Overview of the study

This study was divided into three phases that are presented in manuscript format. Phase 1 explored the experiences of 14 volunteer coaches, representing 13 clubs, to establish how the ecological systems, surrounding them, influenced their coaching experiences. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the coaches in a face-to-face setting. Phase 1 is presented as a published manuscript in Chapter 5.

Phase 2 sought to understand the club specific experiences of a different cohort of coaches within three clubs that were taking part in a season-long, club-based, CoP, that I designed and facilitated. In-depth semi-structured interviews were held via Zoom, with 11 coaches. The findings were presented in Creative Non-Fiction (CNF) form, through composite vignettes that showed the main themes via three coach profiles (Section 6.4), A call to action letter, to women's Gaelic football clubs on behalf of current and future volunteer women coaches was drafted from the key themes (Section 6.4). Phase 2 is presented as a published manuscript in Chapter 6.

Phase 3 focused on a group of nine coaches that participated in their club-based CoP over a full playing season. Focus groups were held, via Zoom, with a mix of coaches from the three clubs to explore their perspectives on how effective the CoP was for their support and development. Phase 3 is presented in article format.

1.7 Significance of the study

LaVoi and Dutove (2012) suggest recommendations can be made to help improve the number of women coaches by (a) informing policies, (b) helping male coaches to support and mentor women coaches, and (c) seeking women coaches to reflect on their experiences across the various levels of coaching. This study is significant for several reasons. Firstly, this research is timely, as volunteer women coaches were rarely represented in coaching literature, especially in an Irish context. This research has the scope to contribute to both Irish and international sports coaching literature by giving a voice to the relatively unheard volunteer women coaches.

Secondly, an in-depth study that explores the coaches lived experiences highlights the areas that can be improved along with providing a deeper knowledge on the role clubs play in their support and development. This research can assist clubs and the LGFA to understand their coaches better and thus provide support in an attempt to encourage more women and girls to view coaching as an attainable option. An understanding of their experiences will inform both the governing body and the clubs' practices regarding volunteer recruitment, retention, and development. More tailored support structures can be put in place using the experiences of the coaches in this study. Current women coaches deserve a supportive environment that prioritises their development and longevity in the role which this study can provide direction on.

Thirdly, this new knowledge can be used in many community club settings that rely on volunteer coaches. From an international context the findings could be used in any country or sports organisations that rely heavily on a volunteer coaching workforce, within a community-based club setting. Moreover, club members and readers in similar contexts can reflect and interrogate their coaching environments and set about creating change in a positive way. Barriers are often mentioned more than supports in the literature on women coaches (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012) so it is important that this study focused equally on positive and negative influences. This was achieved by focusing on positive questions throughout all the data collection.

Inevitably the coaches referred to both positive and negative experiences in their answers or at times were interpreted as such during the analysis.

Finally, from a cultural and societal impact this research has the potential to showcase the value of having more women involved in coaching so it becomes the norm. The cultural significance of Gaelic games ensures it is one of the most popular sports in Ireland. Yet, there is competition from soccer and rugby and so coaching structures must be enhanced to ensure the players develop a love of the game and stay in the sport (Keller & Wright, 2013). Such coach development structures can include a club-based, season-long CoP similar to Phase 2 and 3 of this research. Evaluating the effectiveness of such an initiative on the support and development of women coaches has international appeal.

From a broader societal perspective as the number of girls and women participating in sport increases it is important that they have exposure to women coaches from the outset so women coaches are seen as the norm as opposed to an anomaly. The recent Citizen's Assembly on Gender Equality in Ireland called on the government to make changes to elements of the constitution (The Citizens' Assembly, 2021). One such area that is relevant to this study is regarding the archaic notion that the woman's place is in the home and that working should not cause them to neglect their duties within the home. Furthermore, the citizens assembly highlight that 98% of all full-time carers and childcare workers and 86% of lone parent households are women (The Citizens' Assembly, 2021). Women therefore struggle to have time to volunteer in sports activities and so the few that do deserve to have a positive experience.

Women in leadership positions in Ireland such as in government, business, and sports' governing bodies is at 23%,27% and between 8 and 27% respectively. Yet 38% of all Irish listed companies have no woman at the leadership level (The Citizens' Assembly, 2021). This study can challenge the narrative that the woman's role is solely that of caring or working within the home and having more women in coaching roles will help in this regard. Likewise, the report recommends gender neutral recruitment and promotion policies for leadership positions and the same is true for sports coaches at community club level.

Specifically, the outcomes of this project will (a) inform clubs and NGBs on strategies to use in the attraction and retention of women coaches, (b) help to

understand the impact of a club-based CoP on women coaches, (c) advance national and international literature on women coaches in non-elite level sport and (d) challenge the cultural and societal norms that do not expect women in coaching roles.

1.8 Scope of the research

The main aim of the research is to give a voice to the relatively unheard volunteer women coaches within women's Gaelic football; firstly, their experiences in generic terms, then club specific experiences, and finally, as members of a CoP. It was outside the scope of this research to get the perspectives of other club stakeholders in the clubs such as players, parents, men coaches, or club officers. Additionally, it was beyond the scope of this research to observe their coaching competencies or changes in their coaching behaviours as a result of the CoP in Phase 3. To successfully explore the aforementioned research questions and objectives, the research design was given careful consideration for each phase of the research.

1.9 Research design

The research design and data collection methods are outlined in full in Chapter 3, but a brief overview is provided here for context. From an ethical perspective, approval was gained from the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (A18-035) for all stages of data collection (See Appendix C). Study-specific information sheets and consent forms were sent to all potential participants during the recruitment part of each phase. All information sheets and consent forms are displayed in the appendices, in chronological order.

All participants were included using criterion sampling. In Phase 1 the NGB advertised the recruitment call for women coaches and those (a) over 18 years of age, (b) with at least five years of coaching experience, and (c) an introductory level LGFA coach education qualification from the previous ten years were included in the study. Coaches that met these inclusion criteria were asked to take part in an in-depth semi-structured interview (n=14) which was conducted face to face.

Participants in Phase 2 were coaches from the three clubs engaged in the CoP initiative. Inclusion criteria ensured only those (a) over 18 years of age, (b) actively coaching for the 2021 season, and (c) that attended at least one of the CoP sessions,

were included in this recruitment call. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, via Zoom, with the coaches that consented to take part (n=11).

In Phase 3 coaches, within the same clubs as Phase 2, that were (a) over 18, (b) actively coaching, and (c) had attended at least three of the CoP sessions, were recruited. The coaches that met the inclusion criteria, and provided consent, took part in one of four focus groups, via Zoom, with participants mixed across the three clubs (n=9).

The main data collection tools used were semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and a researcher self-reflection journal as expanded upon in the methodology section (Chapter 3). Figure 1.1 depicts an overview of the data collection tools, a timeline for when they took place, and an outline of the connection between the phases.

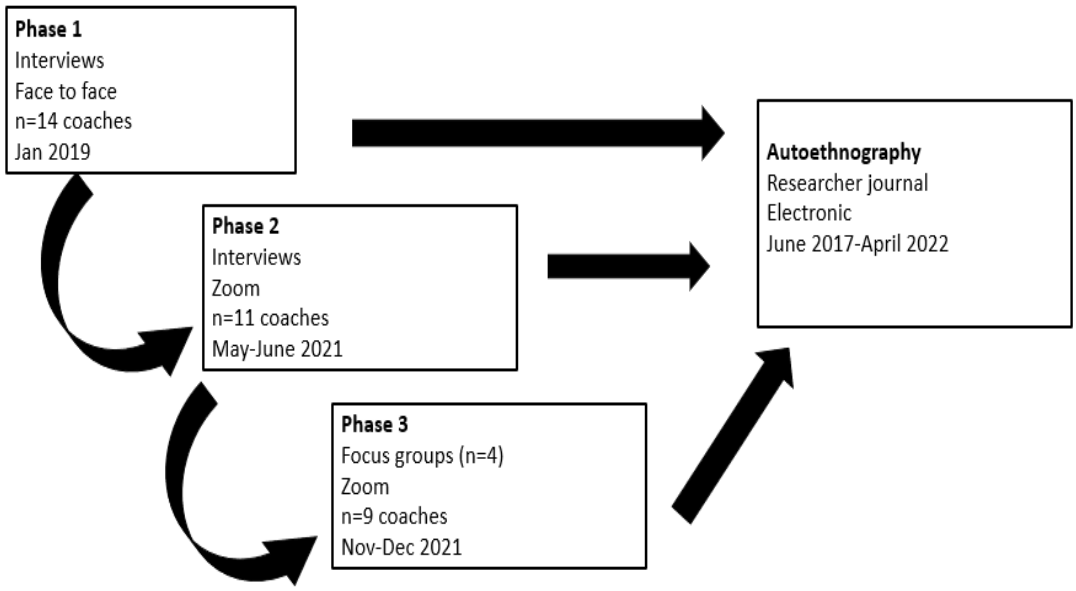

Figure 1. 1 Illustration of the data collection tools employed and the connection between the phases

All data analysis was managed using the N-VIVO software package (Version 12) to store the volume of data from the transcription of 25 interviews (Phase 1 & 2), and four focus groups (Phase 3). 200 typed pages from my researcher journal along with a log of the coding activities were also stored via N-VIVO. The analysis for each phase followed the same process of reflexive thematic analysis as proposed by Braun et al. (2016). This form of Thematic Analysis (TA) was used due to the

flexible nature of the researcher making decisions and the compatibility with constructivism (Braun & Clarke, 2006) that I align with. Braun and Clarke's approach has evolved since their seminal work in 2006 and they request a more in-depth thought process during analysis. These authors have since published many articles to this effect and so the reflexive TA they propose aligns well with this study across all phases as elaborated on in Chapter 3 and more specifically in the relevant phases.

A theoretical framework is part of an overall conceptual framework where the researcher's personal interests, backgrounds, and positionality on a topic are forming the research (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016). The use of a theoretical framework is developed further in Chapter 3. LaVoi and Dutove (2012) used Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model (ESM) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) for the first time in research on women coaches. The ESM includes four levels - individual, interpersonal, organisational, and socio-cultural (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012) and was later updated to the Ecological Intersectional Model (EIM) by LaVoi (2016) to understand the experiences of women coaches. LaVoi and Dutove (2012) concluded that a coach's experience is influenced by (a) surrounding environments (b) relationships within these environments and (c) changing dynamics between the levels. LaVoi (2016) promoted the EIM for use in future research and so was utilised as the theoretical framework to underpin each phase of this study as elaborated on in the relevant chapters.

This section outlines the chosen research design and the rationale for each selection which forms the natural history of the study (Silverman, 1999). A combination of factors such as findings from previous phases, conversations with supervisors, researcher reflections, and external factors such as participant availability all changed the research direction, at various time points. The overall research objective is to explore the support and development of volunteer women coaches at the non-elite level, within women's Gaelic football.

The three distinct but connected research phases are described in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, along with my personal biography (Chapter 4) and how it influenced the design, interpretation, and analysis of the data. The findings from Phase 1 launched Phase 2 and a combination of Phase 1 and 2, along with my background and biography, formed Phase 3 as I designed and facilitated a CoP in three clubs concurrently.

Phase 1 focused on the coaches' experiences and the EIM was utilised in the design and analysis as the themes were assigned to the four levels of individual, interpersonal, organisational, and socio-cultural. The interpersonal layer was the most significant aspect for the coaches starting and staying in coaching and secondly, they required support that was club-based and specific to their coaching contexts.

The organisational layer was the resulting focus of Phase 2 to determine how the club environment influenced the coaches' experiences. The third and final phase set out to explore the coaches' perceptions and experiences of attending the season long, club-based CoP, and how they deemed it supported and developed them as coaches. The EIM was again used to aid research design and examine the findings relevant to the four layers. Throughout my doctoral studies, I had a research journal that documented decisions regarding the overall study design, observations during data collection, and the facilitation of the CoP. The interviews along with designing and facilitating the CoP triggered moments of reflection on my transition through my player, coach, and coach developer roles, which is demonstrated in Chapter 4.

1.10 Thesis structure

This thesis consists of four journal articles of which two Phase 1 and 2 are published (See Table 1.1). My autoethnography will be submitted for review to the Internatioal Sports Cocahing Journal special issue on "Transitions in Coaching" before the May 2023 deadline. A full list of references is included at the end of the document rather than within the chapters, to avoid duplication. A brief researcher background relative to each phase is included along with the methodological decisions made regarding research design are discussed in Chapter 3.

Table 1. 1 Publication status of the Phases of this research

Paper	Publication status	Journal
Phase 1	Published (2021)	Sports Coaching Review
Phase 2	Published (2022)	Frontiers in Sport and Active Living

This chapter introduces the thesis and an outline of the various sections. Following this introduction Chapter 2 situates this study in the current research with a specific literature review illustrated within the introduction section of the four articles. Chapter 3 highlights the methodologies used, and the decisions made regarding study design, participants, ethical considerations, data collection tools, analysis, and interpretation. More specific methodological detail, about each phase, is covered in the respective chapters. Chapter 4 focuses on my story as the researcher and gives the reader an insight into my journey as I transitioned from player to volunteer coach and coach developer. My story is presented early in the thesis to provide context and an overview of my background, biography, and positioning within the research.

Phases 1 and 2 are presented in Chapters 5 and 6 respectively as peer-reviewed published articles. Chapter 5 is the initial study that focused on the lived experiences of 14 women coaches, representing 13 different clubs within eight counties. Chapter 6 builds on the findings of Phase 1 to explore the coaches' experiences, within their respective club environments. Phase 3 is developed in Chapter 7 which focuses on the final phase of the research exploring the women's experiences of a season-long, club-based CoP. Chapter 8 is a combined discussion and conclusion that focuses on the key findings from all three phases, applied implications, future research options and the study limitations.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 2: Literature review

A shortened literature review is presented, to avoid any duplication with content covered in Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7. The following topics are discussed briefly to provide context to the study: (a) women in coaching internationally, (b) women coaches in Ireland, (c) volunteer women coaches, (d) women coaches' experiences, (e) barriers for women coaches, (f) coach education and (g) community of practice.

An in-depth analysis of material from peer reviewed journals formed the basis of this literature review section and that of the individual Chapters 4-7. The EBSCOHost Collections database and in particular SPORTDiscus was used primarily as the searching tool using key words such as *women coach*, coach education, coach development, sport organisations, volunteer coach*, coach experiences, community sports and club environment.* At the start of the research journey key words were much broader and also included terms such as *female leadership, female barriers, female support, female sport,* and *coach gender*. In October 2017 I set up automatic alerts from the Scopus database resulting in weekly emails containing links to new articles reflective of the key words listed above.

In addition to the computer based searches that included Google Scholar and the databases a regular manual search was conducted on the main journals in the sports coaching domain including *Sports Coaching Review, International Sport Coaching Journal, Frontiers in Sports and Active Living, Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal, International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching and Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health.* Furthermore, a number of textbooks provided pertinent literature as cited throughout the thesis namely *Women in Sports Coaching, Improving Gender Equity in Sports Coaching, Coach Education and Development in Sport, Mentoring in Physical Education and Sports Coaching and Sport Volunteering.* Relevant content was also discussed on podcasts such as *WiSP Sports (Women in Sports), The Coaching Culture, The Coaching Discourses, The Women in Sport Podcast, The Coaching Bubble, The WISEAN (Women in Sport & Exercise Academic Network).*

Social media platforms of the aforementioned journals and those of notable authors were followed to ensure awareness of any new published material. All literature searches were primarily on research from the previous 10 years but for more seminal work the search included the previous 15 years and beyond. In all cases the

references list as provided in the articles were reviewed to ensure all significant research was discovered. The broad search criteria at the beginning of the doctoral journey was later more focused. The interaction with the literature was iterative as opposed to linear and it was evident that there was a lack of research particularly on volunteer women coaches both internationally and in an Irish context.

2.1 Women coaches internationally

Internationally, there is a lack of women at all levels of sports coaching. The option of coaching either a male or female team provides a dual career opportunity for men (Burton & LaVoi, 2016). Female sports participation in the United States (US) has increased due to the Title IX Legislation, enacted in 1972, that insisted government funded colleges must offer sports opportunities to males and females equally. However, the lowest number of female coaches of female college teams (20%) and youth sports is still recorded (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). A 37-year longitudinal study focusing on the number of women coaches in intercollegiate sport in the US, discovered that in 1972 90% of female teams had women coaches compared to only 40% in 2014 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). In the US, 98% of men's and 50% of women's teams at the competitive level are coached by men (Walker, 2016).

Women's sport is more attractive to male coaches now due to more teams (Buzuvis, 2015), money and exposure and so the employment rates of women coaches are at an all-time low (Kane, 2016). The transfer between the codes is aided by men and women competing on similar size playing pitches, with similar rules, equipment and training techniques (Burton & LaVoi, 2016). Paid coaches in in the UK alluded to underestimating themselves and having a feeling of imposter syndrome in their coaching roles (Norman, 2010). The sports organisation has a key role to play in ensuring that women are accepted as leaders and to move away from the male-dominated traditional norms (Kark & Eagly, 2010). Yet, all coaches should be recruited based on meritocracy as opposed to gender (Schaeperkoetter et al., 2017).

To date research on women in coaching has centred on (a) barriers e.g. Walker and Bopp (2010) (b) experiences of coach education e.g. Vinson et al. (2016) (c) negative only aspects of coaching e.g. Lewis et al. (2018) and (d) the lack of support from the National Governing Body (NGB) e.g. Larkin et al. (2007). There is a knowledge gap regarding women coaches, particularly in qualitative studies (Clopton, 2015) and the voices of volunteer women coaches remain relatively

unheard in sports coaching literature. Robertson (2016) spotlights many countries in an extensive view of the voices of women coaches internationally and surmises that there are low numbers of women in all countries with similar barriers worldwide. The US, Canada, and the UK are leading research into women in coaching with very little known from an Irish context. The experiences of volunteer women coaches in Ireland, needs exploring to determine their reasons for coaching, supports they have received and the barriers they have overcome to start and stay in coaching.

2.2 Women coaches in Ireland

Sport Ireland link with NGBs and are responsible for coach education qualifications, professional development programmes, along with devising and implementing coaching policies (Chambers & Gregg, 2016). The LGFA 2017-2022 Strategic Plan (LGFA, 2018) aims to provide support and development for their volunteers, considering the demanding roles they have within the sport. In Ireland, the majority of coaches are at non-elite level, as unpaid volunteers within community sports clubs as they comprise 97% of all coaches in Ireland (Walsh et al., 2011). A recent Gaelic Games Associations' survey established that of 10,647 coaches 90% coach at the club level with women comprising just 20% of participants (Horgan et al., 2021). Many sports, particularly in Ireland are devoid of the rich data needed to understand the experiences of volunteer women coaches even though they contribute greatly to children and youth sport. Attempting to fill this gap answers a call from LaVoi and Dutove (2012) who denote research on the lower levels of competition is required.

2.3 Volunteer women coaches

Research is needed on volunteer coaches in different contexts (McNeill et al., 2017) such as women coaches in community-based sports clubs. Volunteerism is central to all sports and so it is necessary to understand the needs of volunteers to keep organisations viable (Walsh, 2015). The role of the volunteer coach is complex with growing expectations, leading to difficulty in recruitment and retention (Hoye et al., 2019). Volunteers have social networks, personalities, and various interconnections to manage within the community-based sports club (Potrac et al., 2016). Yet, volunteer coaches, in sports organisations, often work in a vacuum with little research to inform their practice (Cronin & Armour, 2015). A qualitative focus on how women have entered and prevailed in sports coaching is warranted

considering internationally the majority of women coach at a non-elite voluntary level (LaVoi, 2016). Volunteer women coaches have a variety of reasons for coaching, future plans within the sport, and personal challenges and so clubs must make every effort to understand their experiences (Stride et al., 2020).

2.4 Women coaches' experiences

Experiences of women coaches are dependent on many factors that are often outside their control as they encounter numerous barriers in their role. Much research has been completed on the quantity of women coaches in different sports (Reade et al., 2009) but not much on understanding their experiences (Norman, 2010). The experiences-based studies have focused on the negative only (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012; Lewis et al., 2018) rather than the positive experiences. Little attention is given to the positive narratives and using them to enhance the experiences for volunteer women coaches and aid their recruitment and retention. Overall, there is a paucity of research on the experiences of women coaches working at a non-elite level with women-only teams.

Women coaches at the non-elite level face a lack of confidence, which is often a barrier (Clarkson et al., 2019) leading to the continued low numbers of women coaches (Robertson, 2016). Playing experience is linked to their confidence, particularly to help their sport-specific knowledge (Allen & Reid, 2019) such as the skills and rules of the game (Feltz et al., 2009). The cultural capital defined as playing experience, playing level, and role on the team is greater in women coaches than in men (Schaeperkoetter et al., 2017). Experiences as a player help to form a coaching identity (Watts & Cushion, 2017) and can be a major factor in a woman's decision to start coaching (Wells, 2016).

Coping strategies and solutions can be developed by identifying the barriers and supports faced by women coaches which in turn can inform and educate relevant club stakeholders (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). Stakeholders include referees and opposition coaches whom often bypassed a woman coach, at the collegiate men's rugby level, assuming the male assistant coach was the head coach (Walker, 2016). The findings from the Lewis et al. (2018) study on elite women coaches show that the participants wanted more female coach developers and were in favour of women only coach education courses. In general, a greater understanding is needed regarding what might cause women volunteer coaches to stay or leave the organisation (Rundle-Thiele & Auld, 2009) including barriers they encounter.

2.4.1 Barriers for women coaches

Women coaches around the world face a multi-level and complex set of barriers, and sometimes marginalisation (LaVoi, 2016) that affects them at various stages along their career path (Burton & LaVoi, 2016). The barriers include gender bias, structural barriers, women coaches with family commitments, and a focus on the sexuality of the coach (Burton & LaVoi, 2016). Clopton (2015) compared female athletes' (n=278) perceptions on becoming a coach and they referred to the glass ceiling and glass door phenomenon as the door prevents them from getting into coaching and the ceiling prevents them from progressing.

The glass ceiling suggests that the barrier is standalone when there are numerous and complex barriers that women coaches face (Burton & LaVoi, 2016). Eagly and Carli (2007) also believe the glass ceiling to be an incorrect metaphor as it assumes the women only struggle to get to the top level whereas the struggle is to get into coaching at all levels. Instead the authors suggest 'walls all around' as a better metaphor in the form of a maze the coaches must overcome (Eagly & Carli, 2007). The glass ceiling is a barrier for women to progress to the top levels of coaching but there are other more subtle barriers that women coaches face throughout their coaching journey.

The barriers for women are widespread with some difficult to overcome especially when networking opportunities occur in a male-dominated environment like a golf club which automatically adds to the poor visibility of women coaches (Robertson, 2016). Kark and Eagly (2010) have similar findings stating that many organisational recreational activities are focused around hunting, fishing, or other such male-dominated past times. Women Athletic Directors, in the US, refer to this as the 'old boys network' and deem it as their top reason for the low number of women coaches (Kane & LaVoi, 2018).

Sexism and micro-invalidations, that occurred for elite women coaches, due to the male-dominated coaching environment (Norman & Simpson, 2022), could translate to volunteer women coaches also. It is well documented that men occupy the majority of positions of power in all sports at all levels, which is problematic regarding the recruitment of women coaches (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). The same could be true for women coaches trying to attain volunteer coaching positions as

almost three-quarters (71%) of volunteers perceive the administration and management of sports in Ireland to be male-dominated (Sport Ireland, 2019b). Biases and false stereotypes can impact the retention and development of women coaches (Burton & Newton, 2021). For women, the voluntary nature of coaching may conflict with other roles placing a greater strain on their time demands, thus further impacting their coaching endeavours including engagement in coach education programmes.

2.5 Coach education

Women are involved in coaching but are either not progressing at all or not at the same rate as men (Reade et al., 2009). For women, starting and staying in coaching are often deterred by fear and lack of interpersonal and organisational support (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). Literature suggests that women coaches in assistant roles do not have an interest in going for the head coach position (Burton, 2015). Alternatively, as LaVoi (2016) suggests, the higher the level of competition or coach education the lower the number of women coaches.

Côté and Gilbert (2009) discuss the three aspects of effective coaching namely professional (technical and tactical skills) interpersonal (effective communication) and intrapersonal (self-reflection). As the first one is covered more in regular coach education than the latter (Walters et al., 2020) it is important to concentrate on how this skill-set could be enhanced outside of coach education. MacDonald et al. (2020) noted that coach behaviour after a coach education intervention went back to baseline, either consciously or unconsciously, suggesting that the behaviours changed positively during the intervention only. Similarly, research with grassroots coaches, on their perceptions of a one-day coach education programme, identified the majority approved of the content, yet, less than half used it or changed their coaching behaviour as a result (Søvik et al., 2017).

Negative experiences of coach education among women coaches included a lack of empathy from the male coach developers. (Barrett et al., 2021). The authors recommend having the best coach developers, irrespective of gender, and concluded that women coaches, in Ireland and the UK, had mainly positive impressions of coach education and formed networks thereafter (Barrett et al., 2021). Members of a community with similar issues often work together to find a solution (Whitaker & Lucas, 2012) often in the form of a Community of Practice.

2.5.1 Community of Practice

Chapman et al. (2019) contemplate an important aspect of coach development is when the coach is in their natural environment and can focus on individual needs they want to develop. Women coaches want their clubs to provide opportunities to improve their confidence levels and to enhance the club-based support structures (Hogan et al., 2022) (See Chapter 6). A club-based CoP could enable volunteer coaches to feel supported and valued in their role, through access to appropriate coaching resources (Nash & Sproule, 2012). The three pillars of a CoP are (a) domain (b) practice and (c) community (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). A CoP as a form of collaboration allows volunteers to use their networks to resolve any conflicts (Harman & Doherty, 2014), alongside discussing any coaching-related issues (North et al., 2020). Such collaboration would reduce the coaches operating in isolation and solely working with their respective teams at the club level (Hogan et al., 2022) (See Chapter 6).

An awareness of the club goals and open lines of communication are all positive aspects of an informal approach to knowing your volunteers (Schlesinger & Weigelt-Schlesinger, 2013). Walsh and Chambers (2015), promote clubs as good learning environments and places to distribute knowledge, but insist clubs need expertise when setting up such a programme. Clubs could engage in learning communities and networks through creating new knowledge in a sport-specific way that the coaches can apply to their practice. However, there needs to be a facilitator, designing, planning, and delivery phases with an involvement from the participants throughout (Culver et al., 2020). Participant involvement from the outset is important to ensure buy-in for any coach education initiative.

2.5.2 Women in coaching initiatives

Harman and Doherty (2014) highlight that many policies and initiatives are focusing on increasing the number of women in coaching. The Sport Ireland Sports Investments 2020 report shows women in sports investment has predominantly been in participation programmes (Sport Ireland, 2016). While it is positive that funding was received for women in sport it is still a paltry 4% of the €7.1m overall budget. Granted this figure has risen from 2% in 2016 but the budget has also increased from €5.8m to €7.1 thus making the increase insignificant. Women in sports initiatives in Ireland started in 2005 but it is difficult to ascertain how

successful this and other NGB-specific initiatives were in recruiting more women coaches (Purdy & Glynn, 2008).

While this literature is important for coach development there is a paucity of research into women coaches working with female athletes, understanding the experiences of women volunteer coaches, and determining the impact of these experiences on their longevity in coaching. The current literature highlights the underrepresentation of volunteer women coaches in community sports clubs. Sport governing bodies have been critiqued for not offering enough support to women coaches particularly as club-based initiatives. These areas need to be addressed to show young women there is a pathway for them as volunteer coaches or indeed in the coaching profession. Women students on a third-level coaching course (n=32) wanted to be exposed to women coaches as role models (Graham et al., 2013). Women coaches need to be role models (Moran-Miller & Flores, 2011) as same gender role models help women identify more with them, improve self-perceptions and begin to remove any negative gender stereotyping that may exist (Lockwood, 2006). Moreover, young athletes need exposure to women coaches (Wells, 2016) so they can aspire to be like them rather than returning to traditional norms of expecting male coaches only (Kane, 2016).

Research on volunteer women coaches, in Ireland, is warranted to inform all coaches, the governing bodies and athletes to attract and retain women coaches. The gaps outlined will be addressed in this study by exploring the experiences and perspectives of volunteer women coaches in community sports clubs at non-elite level. Additional literature is discussed in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 with further detail on women in coaching, volunteer coaches and community-based sports clubs. Many of the findings within these chapters relate back to the literature and so add to the sports coaching domain.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter highlights the methodologies used and the decisions made regarding study design, data collection tools, analysis, and interpretation. I introduce my epistemological and ontological beliefs and outline my background and biases that influenced the research. The study was divided into three phases, where Phase 1 interviewed 14 coaches to explore their lived experiences, and Phase 2 and 3 centred on the design and facilitation of a club-based CoP. In Phase 2, 11 coaches were interviewed to explore their coaching experience within their club environment. Phase 3 focused on evaluating how a club-based CoP can support and develop coaches through conducting four focus groups with nine coaches. My journey from player to coach, to coach developer, was focused on as an overall encompassing phase through my researcher reflection journal as discussed in Chapter 4.

Each phase is discussed on its' own merits and outlines the theoretical framework applied, participants, data collection tools, analysis, interpretation, and ethical considerations. The timing and reasons why decisions were made and the subsequent changes to the research design are also included. The data collection tools including my research journal allowed for constant reflexivity through acknowledging my biases and assumptions. Many of these biases only became apparent in years three and four of the study through conversations with my supervisors, as critical friends. For example, because of my allegiance to the LGFA, I was slow to criticise their practices even after hearing the participants' perceptions of the organisation in Phase 1. Recognising these biases is important, and with constant reflection, they can be reduced but not eliminated.

Reflexivity is imperative in relation to the topic, research questions, methods, and analysis (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) and understanding that my experiences and background influenced the research process (Cushion, 2014). It is important for both the participants and the readers that I disclose where I was situated and what informed my decisions around data collection and interpretation. The first person is used to denote the personal nature of writing (Creswell, 2007), to show my connection to the study and my positioning throughout the research. I remain mindful of the downsides of using the first-person voice such as sounding self-indulgent or losing the voices of the women coaches represented in this study. Throughout the phases, I included myself in the research and how I influenced

different aspects of the design, analysis, and interpretation based initially on my philosophical assumptions.

3.1 Researcher background and context

3.1.1 Philosophical Assumptions

To consider how a researchers' views influence a study, they must reflexively contemplate their assumptions and biases based on their understanding of ontology and epistemology (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Ontology relates to the nature of reality and recognising multiple realities through using participants' quotes to show these different perspectives (Creswell, 2007). Epistemology refers to what knowledge is and how we acquire it (Mallett & Tinning, 2014). I believe that reality is constructed by us and everyone has a subjective perspective on what has or is happening to them in any given situation. Our beliefs and values form over time from those around us such as family, friends, or social groups and we attach a meaning to events based on these beliefs.

Given this personal assertion, my background, knowledge, and experiences, I adopt a constructivist stance. Constructivism affirms that all participants have individual experiences and knowledge, which are relative and socially constructed (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014). In the context of this study, I believe the women coaches' experiences are their own and are socially constructed. By nature, qualitative research focuses more on the researcher being subjective rather than objective, so it is okay to use personal experiences to interpret the data (Stake, 2010). With constructivism, I want to understand participants' perspectives, by interacting with them and using my background and personal history to interpret their experiences (Creswell, 2014).

Research on volunteer women coaches could use other approaches based on different worldviews. For example, a transformative world view would view women in coaching as a social issue and use their voices as a marginalised group to seek reform and calls for action, by advocating for women coaches. Likewise, critical theory could give voice and freedom to the women coaches for any wrongdoing or oppression they faced (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). As women LGFA coaches are in the minority, these approaches could work but the first step must focus on understanding the women coaches' experiences, which this study does. Social constructivism and interpretivism guided the data collection, analysis,

interpretation, and writing elements of this study as shown within Chapters 5, 6 and 7. In order to fully engage with the coaches I needed to acknowledge my positioning as an insider or outsider in the research.

3.1.2 Insider and outsider role

Linked to my constructivist stance I assume both an insider and outsider role in this research. I adopt an insider perspective based on over 20 years of experience as a volunteer coach and 17 years as a coach developer along with other women's Gaelic football roles, so I can empathise with some of the participants' experiences. Elements of their stories resonated with me during and after the interviews and focus groups, as I recalled my motivations for starting and staying in coaching and some of the challenges I encountered. For transparency I disclosed my roles at the beginning of the interviews and focus groups. It is unknown if my background caused the participants to respond in a certain way or to give answers they thought I wanted to hear. While it might have been a concern at the beginning of the interviews and focus groups, once the participants got into the flow of the conversation, they were openly recalling their experiences. Questions regarding their opinions of LGFA coach education sought their generic experiences and participants were told to be as honest as possible irrespective of my role as a coach developer.

My background as a coach was advantageous in building a rapport with the participants during the interviews, CoP facilitation, and focus groups. I was an outsider while facilitating the CoPs with three different clubs, in that I was unaware of their individual club structures, dynamics, and politics. Not having prior knowledge of the club or the members, enabled me to adopt a relatively non-biased approach as I was not aware of internal club hierarchy and as such allowed everyone to be part of it irrespective of their coaching background. I wanted all participants to feel equal within the CoP and that they and their opinions and experiences were valued whether they were new to the sport or involved for many years.

As an outsider I was concerned that I may not be accepted or may find it difficult to integrate into the CoP clubs as Gaelic Games are very parochial in nature. Nevertheless, all three clubs and their members were welcoming and trusted that although I was working with two other clubs at the same time everything that was discussed would stay confidential to their club. Additionally, they were aware from

the outset of my research remit and that any use of club or individual data would be anonymised and confidential throughout.

At this stage of the research I was cognisant of women that did not feel confident enough in coaching roles, that they might be considered lesser in the club and not have a say and that there may be people in hierarchical positions in a club that might try lead the sessions and be dismissive of peoples' opinions. These sentiments were based on my experiences of clubs and informed also by this study. As I had a good rapport with the women following their attendance at one or more of the CoP sessions my outsider role was less obvious as they spoke openly about the effect of their respective club environments on their experiences.

My insider position far outweighed my outsider one, which allowed me to interpret the findings from the coaches' perspectives through my familiarity with women's Gaelic football. Qualitative research is inductive in that themes are developed from the data, as in this study, while deductive uses the theory to form conclusions about a hypothesis (Creswell, 2014). The deductive element in this study used the same theoretical framework as a lens across all phases.

3.1.3 Theoretical Framework

In this study the theoretical framework provided a lens to (a) devise the literature review, (b) form research questions, (c) determine the methodology and (d) analyse and discuss findings through categorising the data (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014). The Ecological Intersectional Model, based on the Ecological Systems Theory (EST) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) was used to underpin the study as a coach is influenced by their surrounding environment i.e. individual, interpersonal, organisational, and socio-cultural levels. The term ecological refers to the interactions between an organism and its environment (Sallis et al., 2008). Bronfenbrenner's EST places the person at the centre, with the impact of their surrounding environment influencing their development and the interaction of these systems affecting their experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Ecological models help us to understand how an individual interacts with their environment (Sallis et al., 2008) and have been applied in sports but are mainly used in health interventions and examining health behaviours (LaVoi, 2016). Bronfenbrenner's model in a sports context has been applied predominantly in qualitative studies of team sports in both elite and non-elite environments

(Domingues & Goncalves, 2014). LaVoi and Dutove (2012) in their review of coaching literature that featured barriers and support for women coaches (n=83) employed the Ecological Systems Model as modified by Sallis et al. (2008) to code the findings. The modifications, underpinned by the concept that behaviour has multiple levels of influence, included the layer name changes of Micro to Individual/Intrapersonal, Meso to Interpersonal, Exo to Organisational/structural, and Macro to Socio-cultural (Sallis et al., 2008).

The ESM was later renamed the Ecological-Intersectional Model (EIM) and included the intersectionality of the person, within the individual layer, comprising of gender, age, race, class, disability, sexual identity, and parental status (LaVoi, 2016). LaVoi (2016) proposes the Ecological Intersectional Model should be applied in future research to help understand women in coaching around the world and create change for them. The coach's development trajectory is influenced by (a) their surrounding environments (b) the relationships within these environments and (c) the ever-changing dynamics between the various layers and the individual (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). For this study, the coach was at the centre and I explored the influences of their surrounding environment, across all layers (Phase 1), and the interlinking of organisational structures (i.e. the club) on their development as coaches (Phase 2). Phase 3 involved a combination of the interpersonal and organisational layers to establish the effectiveness of a club-based CoP on their support and development as coaches (See Figure 1.1).

While it can be argued that critical theory, particularly feminist theory might be useful theoretical frameworks for this study the EIM was chosen and the others discounted. Initially, Self Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985) was considered as a framework to underpin the research as it identifies the coaches' perceptions of their autonomy, relatedness and competence in their role. The descriptions purported by Ryan and Deci (2002) outline that competence refers to the ability to express one's capabilities, relatedness refers to feeling connected and a sense of belonging and autonomy relates to expressing oneself with direction from others. Considering the purpose of this study was to explore womens' experiences and use their voices to identify what would aid their support and development SDT was dismissed. To use the SDT in a study like this would focus more on the psychological experiences of the women coaches or to understand their coaching

behaviour and actions as opposed to solely focusing on their holisitc lived experiences.

Feminist theory was also considered as the focus was on women coaches. Feminism has been divided into four waves with the earliest attributed to the suffragette movement and the most recent 3rd and 4th waves focusing on the rights of those previously ignored and the empowerment of women. Feminist theory focuses on the inequality experienced by women but I could not adjudge that this was true until I first established the coaches' overall experiences. I would not position myself as a feminist theorist in the academic sense where Sparkes and Smith (2014) highlight that many authors that used a feminist lens in research do so to examine the dynamic of power in various situations. Unlike many other feminist studies, I was not focusing on the impact of patriarchy or the inequalities they face in the club yet, if those themes developed from the data they would be identified and addressed accordingly. However, I could not determine from the outset if the lack of women coaches was as a result of them being oppressed in their roles within clubs and so I needed to establish their current experiences in the first instance.

Understanding women coaches' experiences and highlighting areas that can be improved in the club environment would benefit all volunteer coaches, irrespective of gender. Furthermore, as the existing literature focuses predominantly on barriers more than supports for women coaches (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012) this study aimed to focus equally on positive and negative influences whereas leading as a feminist based study may have started from a negative standpoint and dominated the narrative. As the findings within each phase show some inequalities that the women coaches did face future research, as discussed in Section 8.3, suggests that a feminist lens could add to this research and delve deeper into their gendered experiences and the subsequent impact on the coaches' experiences.

Critical theories aim to challenge inequities and power relations in the hope of making a difference to peoples' lives through creating structural and behavioural change (Mallet & Tinning 2014). While this study aims to change the club environment in a positive way for coaches this is as a result of the findings as established by using the EIM to explore the women coaches' experiences. I wanted to be a neutral observer of their experiences and not have the construct of fighting for social justice and transformative change. Similar to feminist theory I did not see

the women coaches as oppressed within their club and in need of emancipation and so both theories were dismissed in favour of the EIM.

This study was concerned with women coaches overall experiences and in the confines of their club and so the EIM accounted for this approach. As I use a constructivist lens to view the world the EIM best aligns with my viewpoint that we construct knowledge and perceptions based on our experiences and interactions with those around us. Hence the women coaches experiences and perspectives, that are the key aims of this study are influenced by those around them in the individual, interpersonal, organisational and socio-cultural layers. Neither Feminst, Critcial or Self Determination theories full encapsulated the aims, significance or research questions associated with this study in a way in which the EIM did. Ultimately as Osanloo and Grant (2016) state the purpose and research questions and theoretical framework must be closley aligned to provide a strong foundation for the research design and data analysis. In this regard because the overall objective is to explore the support and development of volunteer women coaches the EIM is the best placed for the design, analysis and ethical considerations of this research.

3.2 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was gained from the researchers' home institute, Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (A18-035), and research integrity was upheld throughout. All information sheets, consent forms, and interview guides will be addressed under the relevant phases with copies included in the appendices. The interviews and focus groups were voice recorded using a Sony TX650 Digital Voice Recorder and the audio files were stored on a password protected device that only I had access to. I transcribed the interviews and focus groups verbatim, after which the original audio file was deleted from the recording device.

Each participant and club were given a pseudonym and only I knew their identity. The three CoP clubs (Phase 2 and 3) were aware of each other's involvement as they attended courses together and were named in some materials promoting the CoP initiative. Fortunately, this did not affect the research element as every effort was made to ensure anonymity for all participants including those they named during the interviews and focus groups. Although some of the coaches, from the three clubs, attended courses together they could not adjudge which women from their own or other clubs were taking part in the interviews or focus groups as not all women from the CoPs participated. The use of composite vignettes in a creative

non-fiction account in Phase 2 (Chapter 6) ensured that the coaches' and their clubs' identities were anonymous. The focus groups, in Phase 3, were mixed between clubs in some instances and so participants would be aware of what the other members said but this is commonplace in focus groups.

Overall attendance at the CoP was not anonymous and each club on any given night had a number of coaches in attendance however, unless they spoke to each other about taking part in the interviews (Phase 2) or focus groups (Phase 3) they could not be identified thereafter. Likewise, others within the club that were not part of the study per se would not be in a position to determine what was said about their club or indeed by whom but instead can use the findings to reflect on existing club practices. While some people might be in a position to recognise whether their club does X or Y from the composite vignettes, they would not be able determine from the stories told who the individual coach was. Both supervisors were involved in one of the clubs and they could not determine who the particiapnts may have been in Phase 2 or in Phase 3. This enhanced my view that all participants and their contributions were anonymous and confidential throughout each element of the research design, data collection and analysis phases.

3.3 Research Design

This section describes the three individual, yet connected, research phases and illuminates my biography and how it influenced the design, interpretation, and analysis of the data. The research design of each phase is described in further detail in sections 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6. The next section provides a general introduction to the interviews, focus groups and analysis across the three phases.

(a) Interviews

Seidman (2006) suggests that interviews are in three parts namely (a) history, (b) experiences of participants, and (c) meaning for the participants of these experiences. This positioning formed the basis for designing the interview guide with later expansion using discipline specific research such as Norman (2010) to form the final interview guide. Interview and focus group guides were used as opposed to schedules. Schedules ensure the same types of questions are asked in the same order whereas a guide allowed for similar questions but in a different order depending on the flow of the conversation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). The interview and focus group guides were formed by relevant literature, the theoretical framework, and my personal experiences within the sport of women's Gaelic

football. Probing questions were used to clarify, elaborate, or give greater detail (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) for example You mentioned X earlier can you tell me a bit more about that? and What do you mean by Y? An encompassing question about anything that was missed or to set the record straight was asked at the end (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) i.e. Before we finish is there anything else you would like to add or anything else you thought we would be discussing but it has not come up?

I took notes during the interviews and focus groups to account for facial expressions and body language. At various stages, I gave a verbal summary of coaches' responses along with my understanding, to check for accuracy (Nash & Sproule, 2009). As Sparkes and Smith (2014) suggest the transcriptions were completed as soon as possible after the interviews and focus groups. While there are different methods, I chose verbatim which is word for word however, this does not take intonation into account. To counteract this limitation, I included all pauses, laughs, sighs, and emphasised words. My competence as an interviewer improved considerably as the interviews progressed and I noted a remarkable improvement between Phase 1 and 2 interviews, particularly around probing, listening, and implementing the guide in a more fluid manner. Data collection and analysis happened simultaneously and informed each other while I moved between my own experiences and that of the participants (Chang, 2007).

(b) Analysis

Miles et al. (2014) encourage the use of note-taking during analysis, identifying elements such as researcher reactions to what was said, disappointment with some of the interview questions, or a reminder to pursue a different line of enquiry in subsequent interviews. Worldviews and theoretical lenses are used to analyse the findings inductively to form themes while maintaining ethical standards (Creswell, 2007). The data analysis of my self-reflections, and all data collected, was managed using the N-VIVO software package (Version 12). The N-VIVO software provided a digital platform to store and organise all transcripts from the data collection and allowed for the analysis of initial codes and later the consolidating of the codes into themes. The initial meanings, that were interpreted from the hand notes on the margins of the printed transcripts, formed the list of codes inputted to N-VIVO with the list expanding during continuous reading and analysis of the transcripts. Through a drag and drop method a quote from a participant could be transferred to an unlimited number of codes with easy search functions thereafter.

The software provided an option to click on the participant quote that was assigned to a code or theme and be transferred directly to the relevant section of the full transcript which provided context for the quote selected and aided the interpretation process. It was also possible, via the software, to determine how the initial codes formed themes and to move quotes between themes if, after reflection they were deemed more appropriate based on definitions given to each meaning, code and theme. This was an efficient and easy to navigate system during the analysis and theme development phases.

At any timepoint the transparent trail of steps taken throughout data analysis was available for constant reflection via my researcher journal. Notes regarding decisions made during data analysis became the starting point for the next iteration of analysis. Reflexive thematic analysis was followed as outlined in Table 3.1 but also the steps taken show the systematic process followed in all phases to get to the eventual themes as discussed in the findings of each Chapter 4-7. Rigour can be determined from the process followed across all phases of the research in a systematic way showing the detailed analytic process (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Figure 3.1 shows a screenshot from N-VIVO of the Phase 1 data analysis where Part A depicts the 8 phases of data analysis, Part B shows the initial open coding and meanings with Part C illustrating the number of references and quotes inputted to each code.

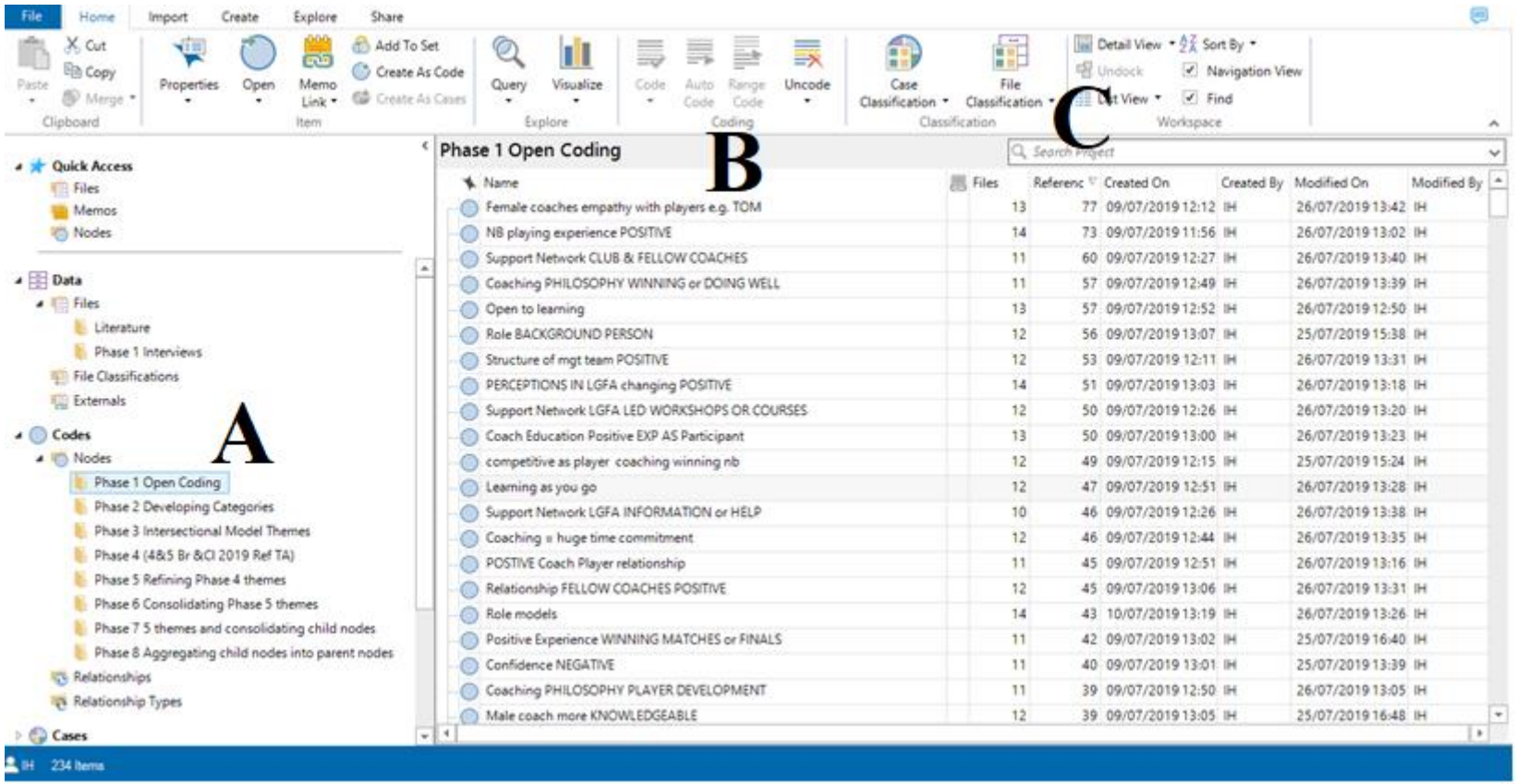

Figure 3.1 N-VIVO screen shot of Phase 1 analysis process

Thematic analysis (TA) was chosen as it is compatible with constructivism and allows flexibility for the researcher through the constant decision-making on the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The six-step reflexive TA was utilised, in all phases, to move from narrow codes to parent themes through active engagement (Braun et al., 2016). Table 3.1 illustrates the six steps of reflexive TA, that I followed for all phases.

Table 3. 1 Six step reflective thematic analysis relevant to all study phases

Braun et al 2016 Reflexive Thematic Analysis Phases	**Steps were taken relevant to this research across all phases**
Phases 1-2: Familiarisation and coding	• Conducting interviews & Focus groups • Listening to the audio recordings • Transcribing verbatim • Reading & rereading the transcripts • Note taking on main meanings to come from the data in the coaches own words • Assigning codes to the extracted meanings
Phases 3-5: Theme development, refinement, and naming	• Categorising and sorting codes into broad themes • Combining broad themes into narrow themes with possible sub-themes • Refining and naming the themes and sub-themes • Developing a narrative of the overall data with chosen quotes to add depth and interpretation
Phase 6: Writing up.	• Writing up the narrative with relevant data extracts for thesis chapters, conference presentations, and publications

3.4 Research design – Phase 1

Given my considerable involvement in women's Gaelic football, my doctoral research would inevitably centre on this sport, however initially I was unsure in what capacity. I wanted to understand why so few women were actively coaching, considering they contributed to at least half of the participants in coach education courses I delivered. Volunteer coaches, in a non-elite environment, was the group of coaches I had an affinity with as it was my level of coaching experience and where I felt most comfortable. I wanted to hear volunteer women coaches' perspectives on their lived experience so interviews were the chosen data collection method for the Phase 1 participants.

3.4.1 Participants

Within purposeful sampling, the sub technique of criterion sampling, as put forward by Patton (1990), was utilised, with inclusion criteria that were met before coaches were selected. Women (a) over 18 years of age, (b) with at least five years of coaching experience, and (c) an introductory level LGFA coach education qualification from the previous ten years were included in the study. More detail on the participants from the Phase 1 interviews is outlined in Section 5.3.3.

3.4.2 Data collection

(a) Interviews

Interviews took place in a face-to-face setting, of the participants choosing during January 2019. The interviews focused on the challenges, barriers, supports, and their overall coaching experiences. The interviews were semi-structured but conversational with probes and prompts and using the guide to ensure content was not missed and was steered by the answers given (Riemer, 2011). Based on Norman (2010) the following informed the interview guide for this study (a) background and early experiences of coaching (b) obstacles and achievements throughout their career (c) relationships with fellow coaches and (d) coaches' ideas for developing future women coaches (See Appendix D). Demographic questions were asked at the end of the interview e.g. age, length of time coaching, grade of the club, highest level coached and the highest level of coach education completed. These demographic questions align with the guide used by Norman (2010) but were asked at the end of the interview instead of the start as by then then the participant was more comfortable with the researcher. Newcomer et al. (2015) promote this

approach as it is less of an intrusion at the end of an interview. Some questions did not need to be asked based on deduction from answers given throughout the interview.

Other interview questions asked the participants about their recommendations to retain current and attract new women coaches. This reflective type of questioning was used by Lewis et al. (2018) to establish if women coaches could offer suggestions on how to improve the experiences of women in soccer coach education courses. Additionally, I showed the women a printed copy of the research question and asked them to comment on how they would answer it from their experience. The question at that stage of the study was - how are the experiences of non-elite level volunteer women Ladies Gaelic football coaches influenced by the ecological systems around them? A pilot interview was conducted to prepare for the interview process.

Pilot

A pilot interview, with an LGFA coach, known to the researcher, was completed to test the guide and my interviewing ability. Once a date was confirmed, I emailed a copy of the information sheet, consent form, and the interview guide to her. The coach was asked for feedback on the type of questioning and anything difficult to understand or answer as well as any area she thought was missing. The pilot helped to finalise the interview guide and strengthen my interview technique. As a result, I learned the importance of active listening and being comfortable with silence which were skills I developed and improved upon with each interview thereafter. Although she knew I was passionate about the topic she could not tell my biases or thoughts on the topic, which was affirming. The pilot led to the removal of interview items but was not included in the study analysis.

Questions that were removed included one on their understanding of the LGFA strategic road map and *What is your opinion of quotas being used to increase the number of female coaches in sport?*. The interview length did not change from the pilot and the differences in the length was based more on the coaches' personalities and their way of answering questions which for some were more detailed and others sometimes slightly off topic. Questions were also added to subsequent interviews following the pilot and researcher reflections on the answers given such as *Have you ever experienced burnout as a coach?*. The interviewee understood all

questions and felt having the list of potential questions beforehand allowed her time to engage with the content and contemplate her past experiences.

3.4.3 Analysis

As with all phases of this research the themes were inductively analysed as discussed in Section 3.3 using a reflexive thematic analysis approach. An in-depth account of the steps taken to analyse the 14 interviews is presented in Section 4.3.4.

3.5 Research design – Phase 2

3.5.1 Background and context

3.5.1.1 Online CoP

This element of the study was planned before the Phase 1 data collection and was explained to the participants at the end of the interviews. All coaches agreed a support structure, with fellow volunteer coaches, would be beneficial to their role. Subsequently, a researcher-led, online CoP was established for the 14 coaches from Phase 1 via the Slack online application (Slack Technologies Inc.). Evans et al. (2015) in their review on coach development programmes determined that many initiatives are delivered by the researcher but vary in terms of size, settings, and coaches involved. Van Hoye et al. (2015) favours coach developers over researchers for leading coach development programmes which bodes well for this study as I am a coach developer also.

A new email address (e.g. womencoach1001@gmail.com) and a link to the password-protected private Slack platform was set up for each coach. The coaches were asked to respond to discussion topics and to submit self-reflections after trainings and matches, throughout the season. Although they were anonymous to each other I encouraged them to include a biography of their coaching experience to provide context. Notifications were used to remind coaches to reflect after sessions, so as to increase compliance and response rates. I led some discussions and initiated feedback from the coaches where they had the option of answering in the group or personally via their self-reflection journals, that only I had access to. It was hoped this CoP would allow the coaches to interact in a supportive environment where failure is okay and different participants can lead which Norman (2012) promotes as a method to develop women coaches. However, the CoP failed to gain momentum as only 10 of the 14 coaches registered on Slack and apart from my initial postings there was zero participant engagement.

While there was no official stopping of the CoP it just faded out and the lack of coach engagement meant it arrived at its' own timely endpoint. On reflection, the following summarises my opinion on why the CoP failed (a) the coaches were not known to each other, (b) the CoP was too generic and did not focus on their self-identified areas of development (c) the CoP was not organically set up, (d) they all had different levels of coaching experience and (e) the Slack platform was new to all participants. As a result of this experience with the lack of engagement it steered the design and delivery of the CoP in Phases 2 and 3.

I was now aware that involvement and engagement in the CoP had to be on an individual basis and not forced together and likewise the content needed to be decided and driven by the participants and just facilitated by me which Clements and Morgan (2015) promotes as a horizotal rather than a top down approach. The coaches in Phase 1 were not in their natural club environment and were from 13 different clubs and it was a female only CoP so not reflective of their club enviornment. In Phase 2/3 I allowed club members to opt-in whenever they wanted as I was more aware of their time constraints as volunteer women coaches. Such circumstances would allow for buy in from the participants which Culver et al. (2020) considers imperative by having the participants involved in all stages of the design and delivery. In this regard a needs analysis was conducted with the coaches and the club co-ordinator before the Phase 2/3 CoP which did not happen in the Phase 1 iteration.

One positive of the COVID-19 pandemic was the introduction of more online modalities for coaches through webinars and the Zoom platform as used in Phase 3 which makes coaches more accustomed to online engagement. Further the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns and the stoppage of sport provided many with the time to engage in the CoP in Phase 3. These assertions suggest that timing of an initiative is an important factor to consider. In hindsight, using the interview findings to determine the support the coaches desired would have been a better approach. The CoP in Phase 3 adopted this coach-led approach, as is discussed in Chapter 7.

The findings from the Phase 1 interviews and the failure of the CoP were the springboard for the development of Phase 2. The findings, assigned to the four EIM layers of individual, interpersonal, organisational and socio-cultural formed the

basis for this phase of the study. Once coaching, the relationship with fellow coaches was significant in the interpersonal layer and there was an inherent need for support from other coaches. The support the coaches sought was club-based rather than the NGB-led coach education programmes that they had all previously completed. The coaches believed this context specific club-based support was critical for their development and longevity in coaching.

Considering the context specific support, the coaches required, the Phase 2 proposal was to mentor one of the 14 women coaches from Phase 1, across the 2020 playing season. I identified Linda as the coach and sent her the relevant details but in a follow-up phone call she declared she was not coaching for 2020. Instead she wanted help with her club's Gaelic for Mothers and Others (G4M&O) group as her club thought of that cohort as potential future volunteers. Following discussion with my supervisors, we decided this was too vague with such a newly formed group so instead I approached Grace, a different coach from Phase 1.

Grace, who coached at club level and was an assistant coach on an underage intercounty team was chosen due to the interest she showed during the interview along with her geographical location, relative to the researcher. We met in February 2020 and discussed what she sought to gain from the process, which was observation, feedback, and a sounding board for any coaching queries. We agreed a provisional outline but because of COVID-19 restrictions Grace was not coaching as normal so that plan was later dismissed.

By this time CoP funding was granted to the LGFA for a project external to this thesis (See Section 3.6.1). As a research team, we decided, that I should use the CoP participants as part of my data set. It was agreed by the stakeholders and research team that because of my coach developer experience, I should co-ordinator the initiative. This involved designing and facilitating the programme, in three clubs, along with completing all the administrative tasks. The intended delivery of the CoP was during the 2020 playing season but due to COVID-19 restrictions the playing season was very irregular. Thus, the research team deemed the 2021 playing season as a better fit for delivery and data collection and so applied for a 1-year extension to the funding, which was granted. The design and delivery of the CoP is elaborated on in Section 3.6.2 as it was the element at the centre of Phase 3. The

findings of Phase 1 clearly advocated for context-specific, club-based support, which the CoP provided.

I designed and facilitated the CoP drawing mainly on my 17 years of coach developer experience in women's Gaelic football. I have also been a player, coach, administrator and have a unique perspective of the sport, volunteer coaches and the dynamics in women's Gaelic football clubs. I was an outsider in the CoP which allowed me certain privileges when challenging the viewpoints and structures in the club. I was aware of my approach in this part of the study as I was an experienced coach developer and the attendees at times were expecting me to have all the answers.

My planning and delivery were undoubtedly impacted by the involvement of my supervisors' club as I was acutely aware of how they and their peers would perceive it. I did not approach the planning for this club with any more attention than the other clubs but I was certainly more conscious of my delivery and considered their perceptions of it more than I did the other clubs' participants. Even when they were not present, I was still conscious that their fellow club members could and probably would inform them of how the session went. While wearing the facilitator hat, I was also a researcher that wanted to explore the women coaches' experiences, through interviews. The club co-ordinator as discussed in section 3.5.3 acted as a gatekeeper to help in the recruitment of participants for the interviews.

3.5.2 Participants

Purposive sampling was used where the women had to have attended at least one of the CoP meetings and be involved in coaching for the 2021 playing season. I contacted four coaches, from each club, via email, and for familiarity, I used my name and their club's name in the subject bar. Six agreed to take part and I sent a follow-up email to six more and five of those consented. Allowing for a looser criterion than in Phase 1 meant that there was significant variation in the levels of coaching and years of experience. Being a member of the sub-group or culture helps to gain access to the participants and understand them (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) which aided the interview process.

The positive impact of familiarity among the women coaches and I, can not be underestimated in the recruitment process. 11 out of 12 women, that were approached, consented to take part, whereas in Phase 1 only 14 came forward

following a national call out. All coaches were given pseudonyms and I never distinguished which clubs the respective quotes came from. I removed all content from the interviews that might identify the coaches or their clubs and used a Creative Non-Fiction (CNF) method to present the findings in the published paper that follows in Chapter 6.

3.5.3 Data Collection

A timeline for the delivery of the CoP and data collection points was established which included (a) interviews with the club co-ordinator (b) a preliminary questionnaire for all participating coaches, (c) interviews with a sample of women coaches, and (d) my researcher field notes from the CoP facilitation. Each item of data is discussed further, in chronological order as they occurred within this phase.

(a) Coordinator interviews

Following confirmation of the three interested clubs, I held a semi-structured interview with the coordinators to gain an insight into their clubs. The questions were issued in advance to give co-ordinators ample time to speak to others, for a combined club response. Questions included - How would you describe your club coaching philosophy? What are your club's priorities for the upcoming season? What types of coach development does your club currently engage in? and What is the most important thing your club and coaches would like to get from this CoP?

Ongoing communication with the co-ordinator helped develop relationships with them as gatekeepers as they are aware of what the researcher was trying to achieve (Riemer, 2011). Building a rapport with the coordinators was important as they were the liaison person to arrange the meetings and advocate for and promote involvement in the CoP. They were also instrumental in recruiting women coaches, for the interview stage, as response rates in one club dramatically increased once they contacted the coaches on my behalf. A follow-up phone call was made at the end of the season prior to the CoP, to check that they were still interested in participating, and inform them of the upcoming coach questionnaire.

(b) Individual coach questionnaires

A preliminary questionnaire (See Appendix E) was distributed to all club coaches via Microsoft forms, to explore their coaching philosophies and expectations of the CoP. The questionnaire was finalised, with feedback from my supervisors, to inform my planning. I piloted the questionnaire with a coach, from another club, to

check for ease of use and understanding of the questions. This pilot helped to direct the line of questioning in a more appropriate manner. For example a question changed from 'What percentage of time do you spend on technical, tactical, physical and psychological aspects in your training sessions?' to 'I concentrate equally on technical, tactical, physical and the psycho-social development with my players' with options of rarely, sometimes, frequently and always. Following feedback from the coach she noted difficulty with accurately answering that question in the original format and so initiated the change. Additionally, following feedback direct questions on coaches' perceptions of the communication levels among coaches, club officers and parents was removed as this was a preliminary questionnaire to understand who would attend the CoP as opposed to delving into their club based experiences at this juncture. Overall, the pilot questionnaire allowed me to focus on just establishing the participants hopes and expectations of the CoP session as opposed to more detailed information on their club specific environments. A cover letter and the Microsoft forms link were sent via email to the coordinators, in January 2021, and they were asked to distribute it to their coaches, with a closing date of three weeks later.

A reminder was issued at the first meeting and coordinators promoted it once more. The participants consented to complete the questionnaire, after reading the information sheet that outlined the purpose. Questions asked included - What motivates you to continue coaching? How would you rate the collaboration between coaches in your club? 27 coaches from across the three clubs completed it and of this 27, 25 attended at least one of the CoP meetings with their clubs. The data formed a baseline to launch the CoP, meet their expectations and build a profile of any potential attendees in terms of years' experience and gain an insight into their coaching philosophy. I did not analyse the information garnered as it helped purely with background data and it was not anonymous as I wanted to relate it to the coaches coming to the CoP meetings. Some of those that filled in the questionnaire were women coaches that were later approached to take part in an interview to explore their club-specific experiences.

(c) Interviews with women coaches

In meeting the overall study objective of understanding the experiences of volunteer women coaches, 11 women coaches (4 club A, 4 club B, 3 Club C) were individually interviewed. The interviews sought to illicit answers regarding their

club-specific experiences, as the 14 coaches in Phase 1 were from 13 different clubs across eight counties. The CoP was a way of getting access to these coaches but the focus of this research phase was not on the CoP but instead on their experiences within their club environment. These interviews pursued the influence of said club-based experiences on the women's current and future volunteering plans.

I emailed the consent form, and interview guide and asked the coaches to reply with a date and time that would suit to conduct the interview, via Zoom. The participants received a copy of the interview guide (See Appendix F) to become familiar with it before the interview, and they digitally signed the consent form (See Appendix G). A similar protocol was adopted where questions were devised based on my experiences, the literature as well as findings from Phase 1. The EIM theoretical framework was also used to form the interview guide questions (See Appendix F). These interviews took place, via Zoom, in May/June 2021, were conducted at a time convenient to the women, and were voice recorded only, with permission. They were not video recorded, but the Closed Caption/live transcription Zoom function was enabled, and the participants were shown how to hide that on their screen to avoid distraction. This allowed for a start point for transcribing the interviews verbatim, within six weeks, and all stages were practiced during a pilot.

(i) Pilot

As with Phase 1, I conducted a pilot interview, and following feedback I made some changes to the guide e.g. I removed a question on writing a letter to your younger self outlining what you would do differently when starting volunteering. I continuously took notes during and after the interviews and recorded them in my researcher's self-reflection journal.

(d) Researcher Self-reflection journal

The researcher must work with the data and make sense of what is observed by personally engaging with the field being researched (Atkinson, 2017) through the CoP observations. I noted interactions, as suggested by Sparkes and Smith (2014), to look at what is not happening as much as what is happening. In this regard, across all clubs there was significantly less engagement when I asked questions of the entire group in comparison to when breakout rooms were used. Furthermore, there was greater engagement when the coaches were assigned to the breakout rooms alongside the coaches they were working with in a particular age group in the club.

Although coaches did not give this specific feedback during the sessions it was something I noted and was later referred to in the interviews and focus groups as they appreciated time to work with their fellow coaches. As a result the majority of the CoP sessions thereafter used the breakout room function. On occasions I pre-set the breakout rooms and allowed the participants to go to whichever topic area they felt best suited them.

The field notes helped to inform subsequent discussions (Jones et al., 2012) and elements of the CoP, for each club. These notes took the form of freehand notes that I thought were relevant to the study and might be of use later in the research such as dynamics between the club members and both positive and negative aspects of the club that were mentioned by the participants. I had some questions that informed my entries at the end of each CoP but they were more aligned to Phase 3 that would evaluate the effectiveness of the CoP such as what did the coaches get from the session? These self-reflection notes were the starting point for the iterative analysis of these interviews.

3.5.4 Analysis

The CoP was the foundation to access women coaches for interviews and the notes from the CoP helped check in with what they said. The CoP assisted me with understanding the group dynamics, strong personalities, and the influence the club structure had on their current and future volunteering. The interviews allowed me to gain an insight into what works or did not work in the CoP meetings from their perspective, so I could change the design and delivery of subsequent meetings.

The decision to use a CNF method to display the findings of Phase 3 was in the first instance to protect the coach's identity. As only three clubs were involved in the CoP and a limited number of women were active within each club I felt I could not give the reader the best insight into their lived experiences without identifying them or their clubs in some way. Along with wanting to keep them anonymous was my desire to express their voices and lived experiences in the most authentic way and so vignettes were chosen. The use of vignettes in CNF is supported as a method by Smith et al. (2015) and anonymity is considered a positive aspect of CNF (Douglas & Carless, 2009). In addition to the vignettes three distinct coach profiles of novice, experienced coach and a player-coach were used to mirror the participants as all could be assigned to one of the three coach profiles.

The profiles were also designed in the hope of making the research findings more accessible to those outside of academia as they could relate to their stories (Smith, 2013). The applied implications of this research were very important to me and the vignettes and profiles (See Section 6.4) along with the subsequent call to action letter to clubs as evident in Section 6.4 can be used immediately by clubs and the LGFA. Finally, CNF links with my constructivist beliefs as the coaches own words and direct quotes were used within each of the vignettes to bring their subjective perspectives and lived experiences to life. Phase 1 and 2 findings were combined to develop the third and final phase of the research.

3.6 Research design – Phase 3

3.6.1 Background and context

This was the most difficult phase to ascertain an objective for because of the potential breadth and the fact that the original phase 2 plans, with supporting and mentoring a women coach, did not transpire. It was evident from the phase 1 findings that club-based and context-specific support were fundamental to developing a CoP for volunteer, non-elite level coaches. Initially I intended to answer this research question - What effect do changes in my coach developer practices have on the coaches learning and self-development within the CoP? The study almost came full circle by introducing a CoP based on the Phase 1 findings, and not a pre-determined CoP as failed in Phase 1. As with Phases 1 and 2 there were design decisions made within this phase. Exploring the experiences and perceptions of the coaches, to establish how effective a CoP was in their support and development, was the main objective. Focus groups were chosen as the data collection method to allow a mix of coaches from the three clubs to share their experiences.

The CoP was organised in one county in Ireland which was selected based on the involvement of key stakeholders in a funding application, namely a local sports partnership (LSP), LGFA at regional and national level and Mary Immaculate College. The application was made to Sport Ireland dormant account funds and was led by the NGB with involvement from one of my supervisors. Funding applications are commonplace within the NGB sports sector in Ireland and usually with a short window of opportunity to apply. The vision was to improve coach development in the club, particularly for coaches working with teenage players. The budget requested would cover the provision of a CoP in the form of personnel, coaching

resources, and general administration costs. The application was successful and €11k was awarded of which €4910 was allowed for me as the programme co-ordinator.

Partaking in the CoP was based on an application process open to all women's Gaelic football clubs in the region (n=26). Four clubs applied of which only three engaged and confirmed involvement in the study. Initially, inclusion criteria were based on geographical location, socio-economic status and the club's desire to improve the attraction and retention rates among teenage players. Each club was asked to (a) outline how long their club was established, (b) ascertain the number of coaches and (c) nominate a coordinator as the driver and main contact person. The clubs were asked to establish three key goals they hoped to achieve from the CoP.

The CoP was designed and facilitated by me as an experienced coach developer in a horizontal rather than a top down approach as suggested by Clements and Morgan (2015). A focus of the CoP was on coaches' self-development while simultaneously aligning to an overall club philosophy, that is sustainable after the CoP ends. I planned certain facets, as can be seen in Appendix H which shows sample slides used with the clubs. Nevertheless, the CoP was flexible based on the data collected and any changes that occurred within the individual clubs. Such flexibility was to move away from the formal coach education with assigned syllabi and instead I concentrated my facilitator role on meeting the club and coaches' needs. While the focus of the research is on women coaches, I determined that the success of a CoP would be based on the involvement of all available coaches in the club. Both men and women coaches were included in the CoP as it is authentic to the composition of the clubs and moreover the coaches in Phase 1 were adamant women-only coach education would lead to further isolation. This sentiment aligns with previous research by Barrett et al. (2021) that is also not in favour of women-only coach education. Therefore, the design and delivery of the CoP was inclusive of men and women.

3.6.2 Community of Practice - Design & Delivery

As the CoP facilitator my philosophy was that it had to be collaborative in nature with the coaches involved at every stage of design and delivery. Clements and

Morgan (2015) surmised that people learn better when their varying experiences are taken into consideration, in a contextual manner. In this regard, the CoP moved beyond prescriptive formal coach education and enabled coach development within their club context including the respective structures, roles, and autonomy levels. The easiest option was to impart my knowledge to the participants similar to the coach education delivery that I am confident at and can almost do instinctively. Imparting knowledge was closer to the coaches' expectations which were based on their previous traditional coach education experiences. I was conscious of adding value to the participants on both an individual and club level. As a result, I believe a CD is best placed to be a CoP facilitator particularly at the start of the process.

The CoP covered a full playing season, ranging from nine to eleven months, depending on the clubs. Each club nominated a coordinator that would lead the club's involvement. Meetings were conducted virtually, via Zoom, due to the unreliable nature of the COVID-19 restrictions. Zoom was used as the main platform as many coaches were familiar with the application and features such as breakout rooms, Google Jamboard, polls and other interactive tools were used to stimulate group discussions. Virtual and face-to-face meetings took place spread across the three clubs. Face-to-face gatherings included practical coaching sessions in one club.

Originally, the design was aimed at all club coaches, but it transpired that club officers, coaches, parents, and members of the respective men's club with no involvement in women's Gaelic football, attended on different occasions. Such an open-door policy was encouraged to ensure the club had ownership of the CoP and that it was flexible in terms of design and delivery. A 12-month timeline was developed and distributed to the three coordinators for their perusal acknowledging it was a guide with adjustable delivery options based on their context-specific needs. The timeline included meetings, proposed content, external qualifications, and joint meetings with the other participating clubs (See Appendix I). The coordinator contacted all their relevant volunteers with dates of meetings and proposed plans and sought their input. Within the design and delivery timeline, data collection tools and time points were also identified for the CoP participants.

3.6.3 Participants

To ensure optimum coach buy-in and appreciating how time-poor volunteer coaches are, I permitted participants to opt-in or out of the process as and when it suited them. The only inclusion criteria for the clubs was that they were within the region and had an aim of increasing teenage player retention rates. Socio disadvantaged areas were given priority in the shortlisting process as per the funding guidelines. However, all 3 clubs that applied, were included in the CoP which was designed and delivered based on their requirements. Participants were coaches over 18 years of age, actively coaching and having attended at least 1 of the CoP sessions in their club.

I emailed 18 coaches across the three clubs, that were over 18, had attended at least two CoP sessions and were actively coaching for the 2021 season. Six agreed to take part initially, with a further three signing up after a follow-up email. The information sheet and consent forms (See Appendix J) were sent in the original email with options of dates and times that the focus groups could be held.

3.6.4 Data Collection

Focus groups (FG) were the chosen method of data collection for this phase to ensure that a mix of coaches' voices could be heard. In FG 1 all three clubs were represented with one coach from each, two clubs were represented in FG 2 and FG 3 and 4 had two coaches in each, all from the same club. The composition of these focus groups reflected the size of the clubs and the number of women coaches that had taken part in the CoP. The FGs were held virtually via Zoom due to the COVID-19 related restrictions at the time. All coaches were familiar with this platform from the CoP sessions they had attended. More details on the FG sessions can be seen in Section 7.3.3.

3.6.5 Limitations

The limitations of this phase can be grouped under the headings of (a) application and delivery, (b) the facilitator, and (c) coach or club related. Firstly, as it is the first of its kind in women's Gaelic football there was no blueprint for the delivery, and it may be difficult to sustain after the CoP is finished as it is resource heavy. Secondly, facilitating three clubs at the same time made it confusing and, on occasions, I was swayed by one club and led other clubs in the same direction. For example, if one club suggested a practical coaching session would be useful, I

suggested that as an option to the other two clubs. Likewise, when one club wanted to delve into their club philosophy through a club stakeholder questionnaire, I posed that as an option for the other clubs also. Thirdly, the timing of the meetings during the prolonged off-season due to COVID-19 worked well but during the in-season and the summer holidays, the level of engagement decreased significantly, across all clubs. Finally, my role facilitating a CoP for the first time, which is so different from the traditional coach education, is deemed a limitation. The next and final section of this chapter focuses on the methodological considerations of my story through an autoethnography.

3.7 Autoethnography

3.7.1 Background and context

This section shows how I connected with society, culture and other research by using the social issue of women in coaching and my experiences to help further our understanding in this domain. To provide context for the reader, I position myself in the research, to give an insight into my thoughts and beliefs so the basis for my interpretation of the study's findings can be appreciated.

My researcher journal provided an added perspective to the study and was deemed integral due to its broad yet in-depth reflection over a 5-year period. Entries in my research journal, started in June 2017, just prior to officially commencing my Ph.D., in September 2017. I took notebooks to all meetings, events, and conferences I deemed relevant to my forthcoming studies. Alongside the notebooks, I used a word document to write freehand into and date stamped it accordingly. My journal evolved from notes regarding the Ph.D. to focusing on my role in the research process, through to interrogating my various women's Gaelic football roles.

I considered how my values, belief systems, and biases had formed. The comprehensive nature of the topic required a stringent effort to remain true to the study objectives. While some of the journal entries were considered irrelevant to the research question, they were all analysed for suitability for the autoethnography in Chapter 4. An extract from my journal (Appendix K) shows a sample of the self-reflections as written in freehand throughout this research. In general, notes in my journal were the starting point for the iterative data analysis process across the study phases. The journal entries explored the following perspectives (a) as a researcher (b) as a coach developer and (c) my journey from player through to coach developer

assessor. Figure 4.1 depicts the early part of this research as presented at a research conference in March 2021. I considered key moments from the Phase 1 interviews and how they influenced my thoughts in relation to my three main roles of playing, coaching and coach developing.

Thoughts about my background, roles and triggers from Phase 1 interviews were recorded in my researcher journal. The entries were analysed using literature and methodological tools to make it understandable, to both those inside and outside, while being aware of how others might interpret my experiences (Ellis et al., 2011). My journal was read in a reflexive manner whereby as I read through sections I added more thoughts and reflections and date stamped them accordingly. In some instances, the reflexive approach allowed me to delve deeper into my own experiences that ultimately informed elements of the research design. Meanings were assigned to the respective entries and moved to N-VIVO 12 software to categorise and refine them in a digital repository.

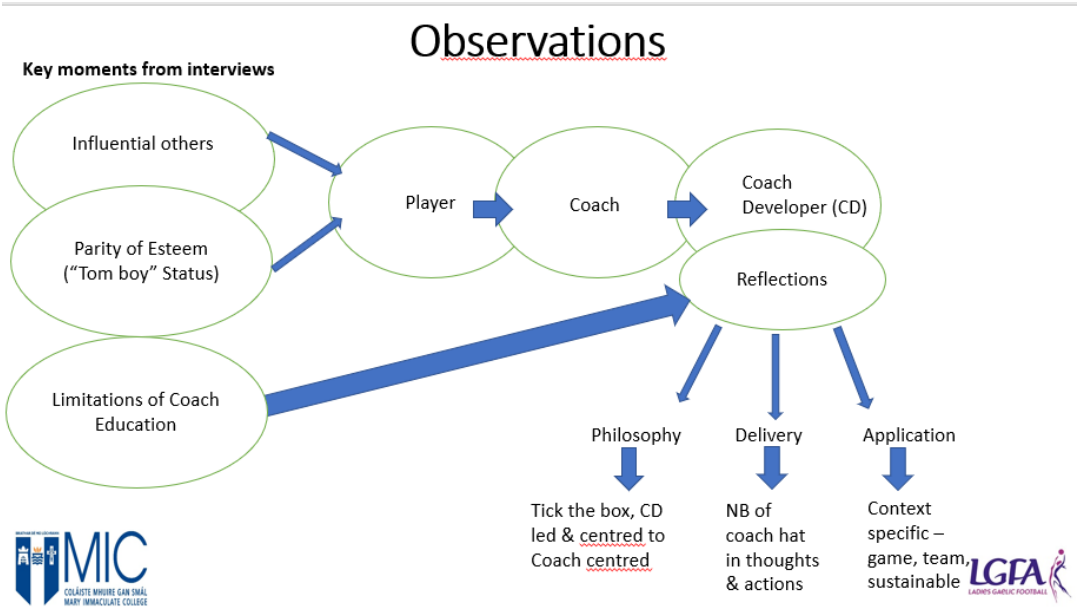

Figure 4. 1 Slide from conference presentation March 2021

To transfer my reflections and interpretations, into the research, autoethnography was suggested by my supervisors in June 2019. Initially, I was averse to the idea because I did not relate to terms like narcissism and self-promotion, which were often used by disapprovers of this methodology (Sparkes, 2002). As such, I recorded the following in my journal in June 2019:

> The debate about autoethnography being self-indulgent and narcissistic is miles away from what I would describe myself as or indeed would be happy to be exploring and putting out there for the world to see. 6 June, 2019

As time progressed, I reflected on my time as a player, coach and coach developer and how the intertwinement of these roles explained my lived experiences. I wondered about the hats I wear, including player, coach, coach developer, coach developer assessor and researcher. An extract from my researcher journal a few days later was the starting point for this autoethnography:

> Can you ever really have one hat on over the other or are all hats just intertwined into one? 8 June, 2019

Autoethnography is a combination of autobiography and ethnography when an author writes about their personal experiences in a retrospective manner as they were not experienced for research purposes, in the first instance (Ellis et al., 2011). Thoughts, feelings, emotions and observations of a researcher form an autoethnography to help the reader understand the context by critically examining the background, experiences and relationships within the research through reflexivity (Chang, 2008). Autoethnography allowed me to draw on past experiences that were key moments in my life and analyse them albeit the experiences are selective in nature (Ellis et al., 2011). Auto-ethnographers are encouraged to develop data collection techniques that suit the research goals (Chang, 2007) which this study did with interviews (Phases 1 and 2), focus groups (Phase 3) and a researcher journal across all phases.

The mix of the researcher's experiences, and those of the participants, enhances knowledge as an individual is best placed to describe their own experiences (Wall, 2006). Autoethnography aligns with my constructivist positioning as an insider in the domain of women in coaching. Without acknowledging my journey and lived experiences the study would be devoid of my voice and leave the reader to question how design decisions and interpretations were reached. Yet, I struggled with writing in the first person after years of using the third person academic writing style which Groom et al. (2014) suggest is common as each researcher decides whether to write themselves in or out of the research.

I elucidate my journey from player to coach to coach developer while recognising the significant support, encouragement and influential people I encountered. I agreed and disagreed with the literature and the participants' interviews, based on my own lived experiences. I constantly interrogated my values and beliefs with questions such as - Does coaching experience help you to be a better coach developer and does playing experience help you to be a better coach? To answer this, I believe past experience gives context to the roles, understanding and empathy for the people in those positions but ultimately, doing the role and experience and support within the role make you better at it. I am cognisant that without exposure to playing one may never view coaching as an option and likewise without coaching becoming a coach developer might not be an option either.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter outlined my epistemological and ontological approaches along with details on the methodological decisions and data collection tools used, in each phase. My beliefs and value system that the world is socially constructed and we all have very subjective interpretations of events in our lives was the foundation of my approach to this study. The qualitative and autoethnographic approach using a constructivist worldview should give an in-depth insight into the experiences of women Ladies Gaelic football coaches in Ireland. The data analysis, ethical considerations, and study limitations were explained in a chronological and transparent manner for each phase. Within this chapter the reader can appreciate the steps that were taken and the decisions made around the design and analysis of each phase.

A clear account of the reasons for the choice to use CNF, an autoethnographic account and the EIM as the theoretical framework is also considered. Wicker and Hallmann (2013) propose that researchers can chose which theory they choose to use depending on the perspective they take. The EIM was a strong theoretical lens that underpinned the study and placed a structure on the findings throughout all the phases. Although the EIM was first used with professional coaches, it was also relevant and appropriate for volunteer coaches. Firstly, a theoretical framework can help with the interpretation of autoethnographic findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Through analysing my self-reflection journal and interpreting my transition from player to coach to coach developer I could assign the main meanings to the four layers of individual, interpersonal, organisational and socio-cultural.

An ecological model can be used to examine women coaches' experiences across the four levels (Burton & LaVoi, 2016) and so it formed the basis of Phase 1 to establish the women coaches' experiences. Once it was established that Phase 2 was focusing on the club-based experiences the EIM was deemed suitable and in particular the focus on the organisational layer. Nonetheless, the interview guide mapped questions according to all four layers of the EIM (See Appendix F). Finally, in Phase 3 the EIM was employed for continuity between the phases but also because the focus was still on the club (organisational level) and the coaches' experiences of a club-based CoP. Within the Phase 3 findings the individual and interpersonal layers were also prominent alongside the organisational layer.

The next chapter shows my journey from player to coach and my transition from coach, to coach developer, to coach developer assessor. This transition was a significant element of my background that was relevant to this research, especially in the design and delivery of the CoP across Phases 2 and 3. Therefore, I reference that part of my journey to build a broader picture of my experiences before and during this research.

CHAPTER 4

MY STORY

Chapter 4: My story

The transition from player to volunteer coach: An autoethnography of one woman's journey.

4.1 Abstract

Transitioning from a player to a volunteer coach to a coach developer is uncommon for a woman in these traditionally male dominated roles. Little attention is given to understanding the journey and critical events that shaped the transition, particularly the positive aspects. This autoethnographic research focused on the 4-year self-reflection journal of the first author, outlining her transition from non-elite level player to volunteer coach to coach developer.

The Ecological Intersectional Model (EIM) (LaVoi, 2016) was employed as a lens to inform the research design and illuminate the journey by discussing the intertwinement of these roles. The key themes of (a) Acceptance of 'Tom boy' status, (b) becoming a coach (c) the challenges due to an overlap of playing and coaching roles and (d) coach developer training and development are discussed via the EIM levels of individual, interpersonal, organisational and socio-cultural. Parity of esteem as a player on a boys' team initially and later on an adult team, along with influential women role models nurtured her transition into coaching following her first coaching qualification, at age 16. Commencing coaching while still playing was a natural progression and so was completing a coach developer training course at the tender age of 24. To recruit and retain women coaches and coach developers they need to feel included and supported throughout their journey to ensure a seamless transition and lasting involvement.

The findings provide suggestions on how to support and develop women and girls transitioning from playing to coaching to coach developing. Acknowledging the homogenous nature of the authors' experiences recounted here, this paper outlines the potential for women and girls to challenge the culture and the norms that exist at non-elite levels within sports such as Gaelic Games. Finally, the paper provides suggestions on how to support and develop girls and women transitioning from playing to coaching and coach developing while acknowledging that it is multifaceted and specific to each individual.

4.2 Introduction

Amassing 17 years of playing, 21 years coaching and 17 years of coach developer (CD) experience, is uncommon for a woman, in these traditionally male dominated roles. This research was undertaken by the first author, a white, female Irish citizen

with non-elite level playing and volunteer coaching experience in women's Gaelic football. This manuscript uses an autoethnographic approach to outline the first author's journey from playing into coaching and subsequently coach development in order to advance coaching research. Research on transitioning into coaching has focused predominantly on the journey (a) of elite players into coaching e.g. Blackett et al. (2018), (b) to coaching at the expert level e.g. Turner et al. (2012), (c) to coaching at high performance level and (d) to coach developing as a profession e.g. Norman and Rankin-Wright (2018). Little is known about the journey from non-elite level playing to volunteer coaching and coach developing, within a community sports club, in an Irish context.

In Ireland, 32% of coaches are women (Sport Ireland, 2019b) with Gaelic football the most popular sport for females. Women's Gaelic football is governed by the Ladies Gaelic Football Association (LGFA), with over 188,000 members across 1200 clubs (LGFA, 2018). The LGFA's remit is to organise non-elite club and elite inter-county competitions in Ireland and in some communities internationally. The LGFA also has a recreational programme, aimed at females over 25 years of age and not playing competitively, known as Gaelic for Mothers and Others (G4M&O). The LGFA 2017-2022 Strategic Plan (LGFA, 2018) and The National Sports Policy 2018 – 2027 (Government of Ireland, 2018) aim to increase the number of women coaches. Currently, women make up two-thirds of LGFA accredited coaches (LGFA, 2020) which exceeds the 37% figure across other sports in Ireland (Sport Ireland Coaching, 2019). Given this statistic their pathway into coaching merits investigation.

The timing of the introduction to coaching, completing formal and non-formal education opportunities, and having a mentor are all beneficial for coach learning (Taylor et al., 2014). Coaches learn in many different ways and from different life experiences that inform their learning, actions, and decisions (Callary et al., 2012). Silva et al. (2020) stated intrapersonal skills and knowledge related to self-awareness and reflection are core competencies in the process of becoming a successful coach. Coaches bring personality types and playing experience into coaching situations which might be the reason why certain coaches choose different levels of competition to coach at (Sullivan et al., 2012).

Youth sports coaches benefit from coach education, irrespective of the competitive level they coach (Sullivan et al., 2012), as it provides certification and qualifications through personal and professional development (Ciampolini et al., 2019). Similar to Culver, Werthner, et al. (2019), participants attending LGFA coach education programmes come from a range of biographies in terms of age, profession, years, and levels of playing and coaching experience. Sports involvement is essential for later becoming a coach (Brasil et al., 2017) as playing serves as an internship to make judgements on what good coaching is, thus forming a coach's identity (Watts & Cushion, 2017). Flaws from their own coaches, different mentors, and communities of practice all help to form a coaching style (Callary & Werthner, 2011).

Volunteers are the foundation of most sports organisations (Walsh, 2015), and yet these coaches remain under represented in coaching research (Griffiths & Armour, 2012; Trussell, 2016; Wicker, 2017). There is a further knowledge gap among women coaches (Pfister & Norman, 2017) who tend to leave coaching quicker than their male counterparts, which further exacerbates the low numbers of women coaches (Burton & Newton, 2021). Having more women coaches is important as it provides same-gender role models for young girls who may view coaching as a future option (Schull, 2016). Key areas that need to be addressed, to showcase the experiences of women in coaching, include firstly, the experiences of females trying to enter this traditionally male dominated domain and secondly, to focus on the positive narratives to aid their recruitment and retention.

In women's Gaelic football the majority of qualified coaches are women and so it is important to understand their transition into coaching or progressing to CD roles or both. Research on coach developers is only recently coming to the fore and showing signs of future potential (Culver, Werthner, et al., 2019), yet, little focus has been on gender in coach education as the majority of sports coaches, coach education participants and coach educators are men (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2021). The transition from coach to coach developer often happens as a result of life events, personal interest and motives, as well as social relations with family and peers, all of which are individual to the coach (Brasil et al., 2017). Coaches will define these individual experiences as meaningful or not and they may influence decisions about their future career path (Callary et al., 2012). Coach educators also build their perceptions and beliefs from their playing and coaching experiences and

so their journey into coach developing informs their view on coaching and coach education (Watts et al., 2021). Nevertheless, information is lacking on what these experiences are for a female trying to enter this traditionally male dominated role and so their individual voices and experiences should be explored.

This research addresses calls from Rundle-Thiele and Auld (2009) for research on the organisational push and pull factors for volunteer coaches, and Potts et al. (2019) on women coaches at different levels. The autoethnographic approach, to this study, enabled an in-depth view of the experiences of one woman on her journey from playing into coaching and coach developing. Autoethnography is a combination of autobiography and ethnography as the first author writes about her personal experiences which were not experienced for research but which are now retrospectively narrated (Ellis et al., 2011). She draws on key moments in her journey, in order to illustrate the transition from player to coach to coach developer, within women's Gaelic football, using a layered account following interactions with the literature and personal experiences (Ellis et al., 2011).

The story told is of a non-elite level player that moved into the role of volunteer coach and later coach developer within the sport of women's Gaelic football through recalling events. While Dorken and Giles (2011) believe an over reliance on personal memory or lack of confidentiality are the negative aspects of autoethnography they also purport that most sports research is focused on the participants with the researcher missing. While this narrative gives a voice to the largely unheard volunteer women coaches, it is not suggested that the journey recounted is the same for every other woman coach.

This research is unique by giving a voice to a predominantly positive experience of transitioning from player to volunteer coach to coach developer. Autoethnography is supported by Cooper et al. (2017) who point to the lack of autoethnographic research on volunteer coaches, while comparatively there is a heavy focus on the lived experiences of athletes. Likewise, Gearity et al. (2016) note there is little autoethnographic research on women in coaching and suggest this type of research may alleviate the lack of and the failure to recruit, educate and retain women coaches. Fleming and Fullagar (2007) state that autoethnographies can lead to change by disrupting the norms of what is known of women's sport.

Autoethnography aligns well with the school of thought that coaching is a socially constructed and subjective phenomenon, where ethnographers' lives are embedded within their research field, over a period of time (Cushion, 2014). Literature and methodological tools are used to make lived experiences understandable to those internal and external to the culture, with an awareness of how others might interpret them or determine a connection between their story and the literature (Ellis et al., 2011). This research illustrates how I, the first author, connected with my lived experience, to help further the understanding and perspectives of women in coaching (Gearity, 2014).

4.2.1 Theoretical Framework

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) suggest that the interpretation of autoethnographic findings can be aided by the use of a theoretical framework. In order to illuminate my experiences the Ecological Intersectional Model (EIM) (LaVoi, 2016), was employed. This model was based on Bronfenbrenner (1979) Ecological Systems Theory and was introduced to coaching research by LaVoi and Dutove (2012) to understand the supports and barriers women coaches encounter. LaVoi and Dutove (2012) concluded that a coach's experience is influenced by (a) surrounding environments (b) relationships within these environments and (c) changing dynamics between the levels which align with this study's aims.

The EIM has four layers - individual, interpersonal, organisational, and socio-cultural where the individual is the nearest to the coach and socio-cultural is the furthest away (Burton & LaVoi, 2016). In short, traditional gender-related stereotypes along with structural and organisational barriers are considered within both the organisational and socio-cultural layers. The individual layer focuses on the coaches' values, personality, and expertise while the interpersonal layer centres on relationships with significant people in the coach's life such as family, friends, and fellow coaches. This research builds on previous work by the authors, that employed the LaVoi (2016) EIM as a framework, firstly, to explore the experiences of volunteer women's Gaelic football coaches (Hogan et al., 2021) (See Chapter 5) and secondly to probe the lived experiences, of another group of women coaches, regarding the support and development within their respective organisation i.e. the community sports club (Hogan et al., 2022) (See Chapter 6). The EIM informed the research design, analysis, and interpretation which were also influenced by the researcher's background.

4.3 Methods

4.3.1 Research context and design

While some researchers believe they should remove themselves from their research, use the third person voice and give clear and generalisable findings (Gearity, 2014), it is important to acknowledge how subjectivity and emotions influence the researcher (Ellis et al., 2011). To apply a research design the researcher must understand their assumptions on worldviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Given my background and knowledge, I adopt a constructivist stance as I believe reality is socially constructed and people's interpretations of events differ and are subjective based on interactions within their respective environments. I align with interpretivism as a way to view the world, as a social interaction between thoughts, emotions, and behaviours that can be used to understand coaches' experiences and report their reality (Gearity et al., 2016). Within this paradigm, I acknowledge the degree of subjectivity that is involved. Firstly, my own subjective experiences along my journey, and secondly that of my co-authors that acted as critical friends on this paper, in their supervisory role for my doctoral research.

4.3.2 Participants and subjectivity

As the researcher, I write as a final year doctoral student and reflect on key timepoints as I transitioned from player to coach and coach developer with the roles overlapping for a while. Both co-authors, as my doctoral supervisors, encouraged the use of autoethnography to highlight my voice and experiences. As with Taylor (2014), the co-authors must be considered part of the research as they bring a collective subjectivity to the data collection and analysis phases. Subjectivities include variances in time, place, events and interpretations so the findings are not generalisable, yet, they shine a light on experiences that may not occur through other research methods (Mallett & Tinning, 2014). Both co-authors are coaches within the same women's Gaelic football club and the third author as a female coach can relate to elements of my journey.

During earlier drafts of this manuscript, the co-authors suggested that I delve more into the influence of Marian, one of the influential others along my journey and so their contributions as critical friends aided trustworthiness within the study. Both co-authors enabled the development of my academic voice, while I remain conscious that other supervisors may have resulted in a different story being told

(Fleming & Fullagar, 2007). As with many supervisory teams, within doctoral research, they were integral to the development of this manuscript.

Through this research, I will give the reader an insight into my background more generally first, and then relative to women's Gaelic football. I am the second eldest in a family of four with an older and younger sister and a brother as my youngest sibling. My earliest memories include helping on the family farm and many family gatherings that included hours of playing football, soccer, hurling, tennis, and any other sport we had the space and equipment for. I also played sports at break time in primary school and played on their mixed-gender team, which continued in the club playing on the boys' team up to and including 14 years of age, when a girls' team was formed.

My first taste of coaching was as a 16-year-old in secondary school where I completed an introductory level coach education course. From then I shadowed older women coaches in my club, that were coaching younger teams, and from the age of 18, I was taking elements of the sessions on my own. My undergraduate degree combined my first love of sport with a secondary subject business. I was a volunteer in the aforementioned club, from a young age, as a chairperson, public relations officer (PRO), regional committee representative, coach, and referee at various stages, over a 17-year period. These roles gave me a unique perspective of the sport, volunteer coaches, club dynamics, and coach education, all of which aided this research design.

Ethnography aligns with the assumption that coaching is subjective and socially constructed, yet as a method, it can be accused of lacking perspective (Cushion, 2014). It is essential to identify how my social, cultural, and ethnic positioning shaped my story (Schaeperkoetter, 2017) along with my assumptions to provide a thoughtful representation of myself (Misener & Doherty, 2009). It is worth noting that the Irish population, is still at almost 92% 'White' with 82% of that cohort identifying as 'White Irish' (Central Statistics Office, 2016) and these by extension are true of members of Gaelic games clubs also. Along with this over subjective perspective on my life events, there is as Holland and Harpin (2015) refer to the issue of recalling memories and key moments that have shaped my journey from a non-elite player to a volunteer coach and part-time coach developer.

4.3.3 Research procedure and data collection

This paper focuses on the 4-year self-reflection journal I created during my doctoral research which included both hand-written and electronic notes. Reflexivity was employed where my thoughts, feelings, emotions, and observations were recorded (Chang, 2008). Initially, the journal focused on decisions relating to the study design, methodologies, and my thoughts and feelings as a researcher which later turned to internal dialogue around my background and experiences. Therefore, underpinning this project is the effect of my biography and background on the study design, analysis, and interpretation of the findings.

4.3.4 Data analysis

The data analysis of my self-reflections was managed using the N-VIVO software package (Version 12). Thematic analysis (TA) was chosen as it is compatible with constructivism and allows flexibility for the researcher through the constant decision-making on the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The six-step reflexive TA was utilised to move from narrow codes to parent themes through active engagement (Braun et al., 2016) with my reflective journal. In phases 1 and 2, I reflected on my lived experiences as a player, coach and coach developer. Initially, there were 94 meanings which included all aspects of the diary entries from researcher concerns, and research design decisions to the later personal experiences content. These meanings were consolidated into 16 categories that included effectiveness of coach education, self-confidence as a coach, and coaching competency and style such as creating a positive environment, empowering players, and being adaptable.

To further refine these themes, I focused on the categories relevant to my playing, coaching and coach developing experiences, which encompassed reflections on my journey, the importance of interpersonal support, and coach biography. To fully illuminate my experiences as a coach and coach developer, I aligned the themes and scaffolded the critical incidents from my experiences into a timeline. This process completed phases three to five of theme development, refining, and naming. The final phase of the write-up was undertaken for this manuscript and the overall doctoral thesis.

4.3.5 Ethical considerations

From an ethical perspective, approval was gained from Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (A18-035). While details of my club and college are recognisable to those that know me, the individual members are not identified as Ellis et al. (2011) highlight the need to consider the relational ethics with regard to people that are referred to in the research to ensure their anonymity.

4.4 Findings

By using the EIM I place myself at the centre of the model and give an in-depth and nuanced focus on my experiences. Table 4.1 shows a sample of journal entries and their assignment to the EIM. My initial perception was that the socio-cultural layer was least influential on my journey but that later changed following reflection and supervisor feedback. As such, the sociocultural layer does partially overlap, firstly, with the organisational level which incorporates my community-based club, schools, and college, and secondly, with the individual and interpersonal layers.

Without the positive socialisation and cultural acceptance in sport and society, the interpersonal and individual layers would not have come to such prominence during my journey. Influential others, such as coaches, role models, and familial support, are all assigned to the interpersonal level which is the most significant layer for me. My coaches and role models were supported and obviously empowered within their respective organisations to move outside the traditional norms and allow girls to play with boys, for example.

Along with the overlapping of the EIM layers and my playing, coaching and coach developing roles so too do the findings of this study. While I consider my journey and key events in chronological order my coaching journey is not linear. The key themes that were constructed from the thematic analysis phase were (a) acceptance of my 'Tom boy' status – parity of esteem, (b) becoming a coach – when, why, and who helped? (c) challenges due to the overlap of playing and coaching roles and (d) coach developer training and development. To accurately display the intricacies of my journey, sub-themes are used to provide context to my experiences.

Table 4. 1 Extracts from reflection journal and assignment to layers of Ecological Intersectional Model

Sample of relevant quotes from Self Reflection Journal	*Meaning assigned to SRJ quote*	*Relevant categories from SRJ*	*Ecological Intersectional Model (EIM) Layers*
Own experiences of being a coach starting at sixteen with a coach education course in school and getting involved from eighteen with a team of underage players. 29th June 2018	Coach education in all girls' school	Initial coach education experiences / First experiences of coaching	Individual/Organisational
I was coaching teams and not yet driving so my mother drove me to those matches/trainings as well as my own and both my parents were supportive of me even with playing on boy's teams. 8th June 2019	Support at home	Familial support	Interpersonal
Listened to a podcast and the term 'Tom Boy' was used which is something I was referred to as a child and I deserved the tag but I never deemed it as a negative. 10th June 2019	'Tom boy' status	Accepted Tom Boy status	Interpersonal/Socio-cultural
Many women in sports authors believe lack of confidence is just another narrative to blame on the women however I think it is relevant for volunteer female coaches. It was for me. 10th June 2020	Confidence as coach	Coach Biography / Coaching Competency & Style/ NB playing experience	Individual
Male coaches in club instilled normalcy in playing with the boys even - ahead of their time. 2nd November 2020	Boys same as girls	Parity of esteem	Interpersonal/ Organisational/Socio-cultural
I played football with my best friends at the time and many still are great friends. All had a commonality – during that time no other sports, hobbies interests so football was our thing. NB of the environment we grow up in. 2nd November 2020	Playing sport was norm		Individual/ Interpersonal
One mentor was one of the biggest influences on my life not that she would ever know it. She took me to games as a player and when I started coaching was a role model that made me think it was fine to coach or more importantly, I never thought any different. 26th Jan 2021	Importance of role models and influential others	Influential others / role models	Interpersonal / Organisational
Obviously other support factors are also important i.e. support from organisation and society but those supports alone won't help female coaches or keep them coaching. 25th Aug 2019	Societal impact not as important as other layers	Lack of impact of societal layer	Socio-cultural

4.4.1 Acceptance of my Tomboy status – parity of esteem

(a) Home life

When considering how my biography aligned with my intertwined roles, I deemed myself a 'Tom Boy' and this was also a title bestowed on me by my parents, though I did not consider it a negative connotation. To disclose the impact of this identity on my journey into coaching and coach developing I resonate with the description by Fleming and Fullagar (2007) about being a 'Girly Girl' 'A Tom Boy' and 'Being one of the boys'. These were terms I, and others, used and still use to describe the difference between the two distinct categories. It was as if either label would excuse what you were or were not doing about sports participation.

I was just doing what made me happy, which was a sport, irrespective of whether that was with boys or girls at the time. I was happy playing sports that were perceived as boys' sports and wearing tracksuits and trousers but did not want to be seen as or actually be a boy or never considered I was resisting gender norms (Holland & Harpin, 2015). In a study of childhood experiences from mothers and their daughter's perspectives, mothers wanted their girls to be more girly and feminine (Holland & Harpin, 2015). Luckily for me, my parents supported me throughout and never frowned upon what I was involved in or how much I was involved. Their overall acceptance of my 'Tom Boy' status, playing sports instead of other traditional activities for girls and allowing my involvement on the boys' team and older age groups was the catalyst for lifelong involvement in sport.

Similar to Fleming and Fullagar (2007) my childhood passion for sport was fostered and encouraged by family, coaches, and the school and club philosophy. Parents offered emotional and practical support and coaches provided leadership style and feedback (Lawler et al., 2021). The love of sport instilled by these influential others ensured my sports participation was always intrinsically motivated and social ties and friendships were significant to my continuation (Lawler et al., 2021). My parent's acceptance was not something I considered as a child, or indeed in adulthood until this research commenced causing me to consider how this normalisation paved my pathway in sport. I do not know though how comfortable my parents were with my increasing involvement in sport and very often with the boys which did not happen with my older or younger sisters.

(b) School life

Lunch breaks, in my rural primary school, involved playing soccer with all the boys and most of the girls which were mirrored in the sports I played at home with my cousins. We would pick teams, outline the pitch, referee the games, and keep the scores. In school we had the opportunity to play the same sports and on the same teams as the boys both formally for competition and informally during unstructured play. This playtime transferred to competition by playing with the boys' teams in both my primary school and club as girls' teams were not yet established. It was the norm and accepted without any hint of bias or segregation which must have been difficult to achieve in the 1990s.

(c) Club life

I loved playing sports and representing my community but never dreamed of playing at an elite or representative level and was solely interested in doing my club and local area proud. It is difficult to explain the cultural and local significance of Gaelic games within a region but is understood by all that are involved as it is almost like a hidden language or currency. Gaelic games are based within a community or region and are very parochial in nature and often with a deep-rooted tradition. Family associations with Gaelic games clubs often transcend many generations and as such when representing your club, you are by default representing your lineage.

I was skilful enough to win competitions at mixed-gender Gaelic games camps which instilled confidence and thankfully, I never experienced negative comments from those on opposing teams, their coaches, or their supporters. Due to NGB rules, girls had to stop playing with the boys at 14 years of age which was understood and accepted by all. The impact of this rule on other girls, and I, was alleviated when a girls' team was established at the same time.

(d) Life inside and outside of sport

My first sporting memory, aged 10, was being dressed for a match early on a wet day and hoping it would not be cancelled, but it was, and I was so disappointed that I would not get to play or see my friends that day. I played football and hurling with my best friends at the time and my core friends' group still revolves around sports connections. My playing experiences align with Tannehill et al. (2015) who discuss how young people value playing with their friends in a fun environment. Fun and enjoyment, learning new skills, and the positive influence of peers on my playing

career were integral to my journey (Bailey et al., 2013). Playing experience gave me confidence in the technical aspects of the game (Allen & Reid, 2019) and confidence is a key characteristic for volunteer women coaches through learning the rules, skills, and strategies of the game (Feltz et al., 2009).

I played as much sport as possible throughout secondary school and college and I rarely missed training and matches by ensuring my sister provided instant cover in our communal part-time employment. I played with an adult team from the age of 16 in a neighbouring club as the opportunity was yet to become available in my club. Despite, the 10-year age gap, between the majority of the other players and I, intergenerational bonding was not something I contemplated as we integrated well. I credit those that were involved in the clubs and teams, at that time, with enabling us to play and be treated equally to the boys initially and then the older players.

I never felt either being a girl or a younger player on an adult team was a burden or a hurdle as I was continuously exposed to positive coach-athlete relationships. My positive experiences of inclusion and acceptance as a player encouraged me to be inclusive and to not only accept women in coaching roles but to expect them. We must all examine and reduce our biases in relation to the perception, value, and evaluation of women coaches (LaVoi, 2019). In this regard, I have to work on my biases regarding gender in coaching and it disappoints and somewhat angers me that I, at times, portray gender bias, albeit somewhat unconsciously. Perhaps it is a result of my playing experiences being sheltered with zero exposure to different intersectional identities such as people with disabilities, from different cultural and social class backgrounds. This lack of exposure to diversity continued in my coaching role notwithstanding it is reflective of Ireland and Gaelic games in general and not just my journey.

4.4.2 Becoming a coach – when, why, and who helped?

My pathway was firmly associated with timely and relevant input from influential others comprising familial support and women role models. I was introduced to coach education as a 16-year-old when a foundation-level course was organised by my secondary school, which was non-traditional at the time, especially in a single gender school. This was possibly outside of the norm as in other Irish schools, albeit mixed gender schools, girls had to fight for all and any sporting opportunities that were automatic for the boys (McSharry, 2017). The physical differences between

boys and girls are often reported as a reason for the disparity in what sport was available for girls in comparison to boys (Holland & Harpin, 2015). As I was attending an all-girls school, internal competition between boys and girls was not an issue. Additionally, any physical differences were irrelevant in a coaching context. My completion of coach accreditation was solely intrinsically motivated for self-improvement and for the paperwork to consolidate my identity as an effective coach. Coaches want to become better coaches but as Denison et al. (2019) point out there is no such thing as a perfect coach and instead, coaches should aspire to just being good enough. Shortly after gaining the qualification, I started coaching, alongside older women coaches in my club, whom I later identified as influential mentors and role models.

(a) Influential others

The women coaches that I shadowed were role models, but I did not realise it at the time. There was a generational gap in terms of our life stages, as I was in secondary school and college and they were working and had family commitments. I considered myself a peer, with equal contribution, through taking aspects of the training, making decisions on player selection, and contributing to the team talks which led to me always identifying as a coach.

During that time, Marian, one of the coaches, was one of the biggest influences on my sporting life as she encouraged me that not only was coaching normal, but it was attainable. Marian was my main role model in a sports context and was almost like a mother figure as she protected and promoted me in equal measure. This experience aligns with previous research as women coaches can act as role models to see coaching as a future possibility for them (Schull, 2016). These role models were or are not aware of the significant impact they had on my decisions to go from playing to coaching to coach developing. The lack of acknowledging these feelings, particularly to Marian, is unfortunate especially as this study calls to change the narrative and focus on the positive aspects of womens' journeys within the coaching domain.

Harvey and Price (2021) describe coaching-related covert mentors and role models which resonates with me, as I was informally mentored by Marian, someone I shared the same coaching values as, so the generational gap was not evident. The involvement of these mentors and role models i.e.18-22 years of age was ideal

timing to be moulded into a coach and stay involved in some capacity as outlined by Harvey and Price (2021). Marian was a mentor but very much in an informal capacity as it was never labelled and as Griffiths (2015) suggests it was more than the transfer of sport-specific knowledge. Volunteer coaches, like me, gain support from others in a similar role through mentoring and shadowing (Walsh, 2015).

(b) Developing a coaching philosophy

As a coach, Marian focused on player welfare and wellbeing. Even though she had played for a neighbouring club and only moved to our club when she got married, she was very passionate and a driving force from the outset which gained her the utmost respect from players and coaches alike. I often played matches motivated solely by wanting to do my best for Marian as opposed to myself or anyone else. This line of motivation may have stemmed from a half time talk during a competition when I was 13 years old. We were losing dramatically, and we were never going to win, but she spoke about pride and passion in the jersey and pleaded with us to do better than our below-par performance. She was reduced to tears before the end of her speech and I had a feeling in my stomach similar to when you feel you have let someone down. In hindsight, we were never going to win that game, or indeed perhaps the team talk was not age-appropriate, however, it instilled in me a long-term goal of doing my best for her, always.

At a later stage, our coach-player relationship transitioned into a lifelong friendship and Marian was the coach I emulated most in terms of my coaching philosophy and practices in both club and college. I based my early coaching style on mirroring the strengths and avoiding any perceived weaknesses of my coaches. In identifying factors that have influenced the development of this coaching philosophy, I believe it was formed based on how I liked to be treated as a player.

My philosophy centres on being remembered by players for the right reasons, being approachable, adaptable, and self-aware. My philosophy faced challenges, particularly when coaching my adult club team and players I had previously played alongside, which led to difficulty finding the balance moving from peers and friendships to a role of authority. My passion and drive for the club could not be questioned but that is not enough to be an effective coach, a label I primarily judged on how I perceived players were feeling, without ever seeking their feedback to confirm or disprove. While this might be true for all coaches and not solely the

experiences of women coaches, from my perspective it is linked to confidence levels and the need to be liked as a coach.

(c) Gaining coaching experience

Upon graduating I started work, as an administrator, in a third-level education setting and immediately got involved with the camogie and women's Gaelic football teams as an assistant to the established men coaches. I progressed to head coach and over a 10-year period, I coached college teams and garnered instant respect as a staff member and was confident in the role except for some negative occurrences, external to our group. Such occurrences included opposition coaches and referees asking me where our coach was or bypassing me to shake the hand of my male assistant coach. At the time there was a lack of women coaches in most clubs, colleges, and representative teams so I blamed their ignorance on a lack of visibility, and I did not allow it to affect me. As with Clarkson et al. (2019), I had never experienced overt sexism but on reflection, I felt it occurred implicitly in most cases.

The volunteer nature and the second-tier status of women's Gaelic football meant there was rarely competition for coaching roles. I was, of course, conscious of how people would view me as a coach, relative to my knowledge and age profile. I always felt that if my success as a coach was determined by trophies or winning percentages then I would not be deemed successful. Conversely, if I was judged on how players felt, I believe I would score much higher. Such self-doubt and insecurity are deep-rooted in me but considering my positive experiences I cannot fully comprehend where it stems from, but I am grateful it never deterred me in my roles.

(d) Negative aspects of coaching

My various and overlapping coaching and administrative positions, led to burnout and to stopping coaching for a few years until I returned to coach the adult women's team in my club. While Bentzen et al. (2014) focused on burnout among professional coaches the findings I relate to include negative experiences within the environment through relationships with colleagues and my own motivation levels. McNeill et al. (2017) studied coach burnout, with full-time coaches, and the element that resonates with me is the feeling of emotional fatigue. Overall, my burnout was simply exhaustion as Engelberg-Moston et al. (2009) consider a key contributor to

burnout for community-based volunteer coaches while acknowledging personal factors also play a part. There was no one incident that caused my attrition, instead, I just wanted a break. These feelings are in line with Walsh (2015) who talks about time-poor volunteers which makes sense as I was working full time, playing, coaching, and taking on administrative roles and responsibilities in the club while also coaching the college team.

My commitments outside of sport are that of a single woman without caring responsibilities working in academia and completing postgraduate studies for ten of the last twelve years. In order to make time for my studies, particularly the doctoral research, I significantly reduced my coaching and stopped at college and club level except for the recreational level G4M&O group in my club. I do not miss the competitive coaching space or the difficulties around coaching players I played with or coached in my club and the pressure of leaving a lasting positive impression. In this regard, one monumental error was focusing more on the opposition over our own team strengths, in the biggest game in my club's history. A change to our team structure resulted in a greater negative psychological impact on the team than it did on the hoped-for performance enhancement.

All coaches have regrets and deliberations on past decisions and for me the regret centres on how my actions impacted individual players. Although it has never been discussed with the players it is often referred to in conversations in social settings with members of that team, even now ten years later. While this experience might be considered non-gendered, my lived experience hinges on the hyper empathy I have for players, albeit in a retrospective manner in this instance. Such a negative experience shaped my coaching thereafter with club and college teams where my decisions were predominantly based on sentiment and player feelings rather than performance and subsequent success.

4.4.3 Challenges due to overlap of playing and coaching roles

As a coach of the team I played with, I struggled with the apparent flippant view of the younger members of the team, in that my peers, and I viewed football as more important than work and socialising. This was a difficult space to navigate and one I never truly did, but years later I realised it was a coach-centred and not the player-centred approach which I had always sought to achieve and considered my philosophy to revolve around. I needed to appreciate their standpoint and reasons

for playing as they were less intrinsically motivated than I or my former teammates were. This culminated in a heated conversation with one of the players that was ten years my junior as I questioned her commitment to the team particularly her regular injuries that eliminated her from training but I knew she was playing with other teams. I resented her attitude that football was not the number one priority as it had been for me however, that resentment turned to regret the moment she started crying. This among other events showed me that the transition into coaching was not as smooth as I initially thought probably due to coaching players I had played alongside the previous season.

My first experience of being a substitute, regularly, gave me a different insight when my coach never considered me worthy not only of a starting place but of any game time whatsoever. While I understand this is the scenario for many players, my coach at the time further devalued my playing role by asking me to be an umpire or the score taker on numerous occasions. It is easy to recall the emotions and feelings of this particular period in my playing career. The constant feeling of embarrassment and insignificance was something I vowed I would not impose on another player. I am extremely grateful to my friends and teammates, at the time, as their constant encouragement ensured I continued to play and stay involved as a player beyond that coach's involvement. I replaced that same coach a few seasons later and I am confident I was true to my self-declaration of never making a player feel as bad as they made me feel.

I enjoyed coaching at the college level, and I considered my role was to ensure players enjoyed their college sports experience. Player development and progression were a secondary aim and almost a by-product of having the right environment for these young adults. From the limited student and graduate feedback, I think I achieved this outcome as some mentioned reigniting a love of football and a desire to continue playing thereafter. My coaching is still on pause but not indefinitely and I am confident my reflections from this study will positively inform my future practice. While my part-time coach developer work was limited during this research due to time constraints, I was still active in the role.

4.4.4 Coach Developer training and development

(a) Opportunistic recruitment for coach developer role

Sport and coaching defined me as a person and gave me an identity that evolved over time from a player to coach to coach developer. Brasil et al. (2017) surmise that moving from coach to coach developer (CD) is as a result of life events, personal motives, and social relationships with family and peers, and I concur. My decision to start as a CD was not based on securing a future in the sport after playing and coaching, it was more spontaneous than that. I applied based on having an interest in the area, thinking I would enjoy it and one of my best friends was going to apply also. Following an opportunistic recruitment call, at an LGFA introductory level coaching course I attended, I applied for the role as an LGFA CD. At the time, I was only two years post-graduation, so my Curriculum Vitae (CV) was limited to assistant coaching roles in college and my club along with some experience in various administrative positions. My decision to apply, was spontaneous with no expectations of being accepted, as I assumed tutors needed to be older and have coached to an elite level, so as a 24-year-old I did not feel competent. However, I was accepted, and the other trainee coach developers were similar in age to me, while there was an equal gender balance, which was comforting.

Gender relations and equality was not something I considered too deeply at the time but are more so a major consideration now. At the time I was happy to not be the only woman in the group of trainee CDs. The LGFA were perhaps moving away from the norm by recruiting equal numbers of men and women as well as accepting younger applicants. Qualifying as a CD affirmed my coaching ability, afforded me the opportunity to continue my immersion in sport, and was later a pivotal feature in my career decision to work in academia.

(b) Philosophy as a coach developer

Similar to Carson et al. (2021) the transferrable and life skills gained in playing and coaching enhanced my coach developer skill-set. The term coach developer is relatively new as prior to that it was referred to as tutor or coach educator. The more recent term of developer encapsulates educator and supporter of coaches. I believe coach educator is a ‘one size fits all’ approach as you educate on a topic or module within the syllabus while the level of coach experience is not considered to the degree it should be.

During this research, I questioned my CD training, competency levels and changes to my approach since I started the role. The majority of my delivery was at foundation level so I never felt pressure to 'know it all'. My tutor training and experience afforded me enough knowledge to answer the coaches' questions. Delivering the courses, in an almost instinctive way, allowed poor habits to emerge as evaluations and assessments were solely for the newly qualified CDs. I often co-delivered with the same group of CDs which led to familiarisation and enabled specialisation in certain sections of the course, over others. As new coach developers were recruited, we were encouraged to progress to the higher-level courses, and moving away from the mundanity of foundation level content and delivery suited me. Within the higher-level courses, the participants generally had a greater range of coaching experience and expectations. I often co-delivered with the same tutors and routinely delivered the same sections of the course which again became familiar and almost robotic.

My CD philosophy has changed over time. Originally, I saw my role as imparting knowledge while adhering to the course syllabi and delivering it in an engaging manner. The more recent term of 'developer' better reflects my philosophy as a CD to enable coaches to (a) empower their players, (b) be adaptable, (c) be self-aware and (d) be willing to learn and develop. Within this philosophy empowering players relates to increasing their time on decision-making activities, giving them autonomy and ownership within training sessions and matches. By being adaptable, I want to enable coaches to modify based on different scenarios that may arise, for example if a player is sent off.

(c) Perceptions and biases as a coach developer

My transition into coach developing was peppered with elements of self-doubt and I wondered if a male CD would be better or more effective. While deep down I did not feel lesser than the male CDs, I did view it through the eyes of the participants; would they automatically rank him as higher? Would he get more respect? Or would a more experienced woman that had coached to a higher level be better placed in this role?

My perception of older men coaches on the courses was that they were disappointed with me, as an unknown entity in the sport. Therefore, I needed to impress them, using my personality and facilitation skills while acknowledging the weaknesses in

my coaching experience. On numerous occasions, I recall strong feelings of insecurity, particularly in the beginning and especially if I was delivering with a male CD or a female with elite level playing experience. Bias from the men coaches was never blatant but instead centred on challenging the course content or always directing questions at my fellow tutor, rather than me. During such occurrences I would rely on the fact that I was one of the more established CDs and that I always received favourable post-course feedback, so I knew I would prove my worth in the end. Thankfully, these occasions were in the minority and never disheartened me enough to stop and I never spent too much time dwelling on the issue.

I am conscious that most negative experiences were solely based on my perceptions of the male attendees. Likewise, I had pre-conceptions about the female participants as I longed for them to be capable, and yet, I was often surprised if they were. I immediately deemed that the men had either high levels of playing or coaching experience, or both. These latent biases based on my gendered experiences comprised of expecting women participants to be either mothers that were getting involved with their daughters or former players that were now starting to coach. I would help the women more, almost expecting lower standards and I contemplated if this approach was because I related more to the women coaches or that I wanted them to succeed or that I wanted to instil some confidence in them or that I wanted to show the men coaches how competent a coach and CD I was? Overall, I wanted to contribute to their coaching experiences, similar to how people had positively impacted on my journey. LaVoi (2019) call for us to examine and reduce our biases in relation to the perception, value and evaluation of women coaches. However, prior to this research I was not aware of my biases so could not begin to reduce them.

(d) Coach developer role as launchpad for progression

For the most part my coach developer philosophy is difficult to implement, as a part-time coach developer within a system of traditional and prescriptive coach education courses with set time frames, syllabi and evaluations. The real catalyst for change was my involvement in the LGFA coach education review group from 2012. I was privileged to be part of this group and felt I had something to contribute, as I was one of the longest serving LGFA CDs at the time. The group had responsibility for annual CD in-service, as well as changing and developing the suite of coach education programmes. The annual in-service Continuous

Professional Development (CPD) aimed to change the CD mindset from dissemination of course content to empowering participants to think and act as coaches. Constant CD reflection was encouraged but very often only for that day, as there was no constructive or formal follow up. On one occasion, there was a call to volunteer for CD assessment but as my peers from the review group were the assessors, I did not opt for it.

Like many of this review group I was also part of a mentoring initiative during this time. From 2012, I was a mentor for new tutors as they completed their training through shadowing, part delivering and co-delivering aspects of the foundation level coaching course. While I aimed to deliver at my best, I was conscious the mentees had more extensive understanding of tutoring skills than I had, when I started. For example, their questioning style and allowing the participants to think more as coaches was a strength I only considered when I was more experienced. I gave the mentees feedback on aspects of their delivery, but mainly I offered a 'tips and tricks' on how to navigate the specifics of our course facilitation. My competence in this mentoring role was not assessed and so my approach remained friendly and empathetic but not hierarchical in nature. I assured my mentees and always introduced them as fellow tutors and never alluded to their trainee status, as I knew we would be peers within a short time.

In Phases 2 and 3 of this research I evaluated my coach developer role in designing and facilitating a CoP at club level. I reflected on if coaching experience makes a better CD and if playing leads to better coaching. For me it contributes, as I think experience in one role gives context, understanding and empathy for people in the other roles. Experience and support within the role improve competency levels and on my journey the preceding role led to an opportunity in the next role, for example, coach to coach developer. I credit the approaches, open-mindedness and foresight of the influential people around me that encouraged and supported my transition from player to coach to coach developer. Undeniably the support I constantly received, far outweighed the minimal negative experiences and the influential others provided a foundation to allow me to develop, progress and remain a coach and coach developer. My CD duties still involve course delivery, course development and mentoring and the latest layer I added is a coach developer assessor qualification.

I completed intensive training as a coach developer assessor (CDA) over a weekend in 2017, alongside a group of women's Gaelic football CDs that were nominated by the LGFA. This illuminated fully what the CD role entailed as I always saw the role as a coach education provider as opposed to a coach developer. In recent years, I clearly understood the need for coach education to be coach centred as opposed to NGB centred, in the form of achieving targets. Yet, a coach centred approach is difficult to achieve when the 20-30 course participants have varying backgrounds, levels of experience and coach in different contexts and grades of competition. As a result, part-time CDs, like me, lack the time, resources and capacity to support thirty coaches per course, as intended in the role description, and referenced in the CDA training.

The CDA training was challenging as we were acting as CDs in order for the other members to practice assessing. Although it was a supportive environment, among the facilitator and the other five CDs, I had an overwhelming sense of self-doubt and feeling very self-conscious. On completion, we were qualified to assess tutors/coach developers in any sport and were encouraged to move outside of LGFA assessments, when possible. I completed assessments on three table tennis CDs within two years of qualifying.

Sport Ireland has asked me to co-deliver on the residential training of the new CDs but I have yet to commit to this role mainly due to low self-efficacy relating to the tasks involved. For example, I would need to complete a 'best practice' style delivery which would fill me with dread as I would always consider my delivery to be good and effective but still shy of 'best practice'. My strength would lie in other tasks of observing the trainee CD and providing feedback on what they could change in their own delivery. I am confident my feedback would be appropriate and accurate as I could quote items they said or give examples of timings they used. However, within this element of the role, I would be nervous of confrontation or having to tell the CD that they need to redo their assessment. Overall, the lack of confidence that is evident in many of the coaches' stories in this study are also true, of me, when wearing my CDA hat. As a CDA, I reflected on my CD practices, particularly around course outcomes, self-awareness and contemplating what feedback I might receive from an assessor.

My coach, CD and CDA roles have at all times been underpinned by my philosophy, beliefs and worldviews, albeit it latently until this research commenced. Developing and facilitating the CoP, in Phases 2 and 3, led to further reflections on my coach developer role and in particular the key differences and challenges between the CoP facilitation and the delivery of traditional coach education.

4.5 Discussion

This paper set out to elucidate my journey, as I transitioned from non-elite player to volunteer coach and coach developer, by highlighting the most significant milestones. This section highlights the key learning for those interested in developing the field of sports coaching particularly relating to volunteer women coaches and coach developers as outlined using the EIM layers of (a) individual, (b) interpersonal, (c) organisational, and (d) socio-cultural.

(a) Individual - biography and background of potential coaches and coach developers

Involvement in sports and coaching defined me as a person, gave me an identity (Jones, 2006), was a source of self-confidence, and improved my communication abilities (Naslund & Pennington, 2011). The importance of my biography cannot be underestimated as it enabled me to pursue these paths in a sport that must ensure others have the opportunities afforded to me. Playing experience was a direct link into coaching as without playing and because I do not have children, my gateway into coaching would be limited. Playing experience is a major factor in women starting coaching (Wells, 2016). Skills gained from playing such as leadership and interpersonal skills, (Morris et al., 2014) along with resilience, teamwork, and dealing with conflicts, are highly transferable to coaching (Naslund & Pennington, 2011).

The high participation rates in women's Gaelic football bodes well for the increased future involvement of women coaches. Caution is required though, as Diedrich (2020) suggests high participation does not automatically translate to increased numbers in coaching roles. Coaches bring personality types and playing experience with them into coaching situations and often the less knowledgeable coaches go to the lower levels of competition and vice versa which is closely connected to their levels of self-efficacy (Sullivan et al., 2012). Once current players are recruited into coaching roles, irrespective of the level, it is important that their confidence is developed on a continuous basis.

(b) Interpersonal – Support from fellow coaches and influential others

Relationships and support from coaches, parents, and peers, are important contributing factors to adolescent involvement in sports (Lawler et al., 2021). Youth sports coaches can have a dramatic impact either positively or negatively on a youth player's decision to continue in the sport (Naslund & Pennington, 2011). Current women coaches can offer positive opportunities by being informal mentors for their players and instilling a love of coaching from an early age (Cuskelly & O'Brien, 2013). Soler et al. (2021) propose girls need exposure to women coaches, in a supportive environment, to enable them to make an informed decision about coaching, rather than basing the decision solely on a stereotype.

Although Wasend and LaVoi (2019) surmised that having a woman coach did not influence female athletes to become coaches, yet, those that subsequently became coaches, stayed in coaching longer than those that had male coaches previously. This study advocates for support structures around potential coaches initially in an informal capacity, via influential others, that are already in their lives, and later by fellow coaches. Norris et al. (2020) imply that social support from friends and fellow coaches, especially those they considered more experienced, were the main forms of support for coaches. Naslund and Pennington (2011) call for more experienced coaches to engage in intergenerational dialogue with new coaches, especially at the volunteer level where there is a high turnover, so they can pass on their experiences and knowledge and form a mentoring relationship.

In hindsight, my confidence to follow this coach and CD path was due to the overall acceptance of my 'Tom Boy' lifestyle at home and in sports settings, along with noteworthy female role model support. However, not all females have the desire and passion for sport, like I did, nor do they have the same influential people in their lives. I had male and female allies throughout my journey as a player with the boy's teams, adult teams and while coaching. This was underpinned throughout by the right amount of parental involvement (Bailey et al., 2013) that enabled my transition through these roles. Coach education bolstered my confidence, as did shadowing other coaches in a supportive environment.

(c) Organisational – support and coach education

An all-girls' secondary school organising a coach education course was a non-standard practice at the time. This initial coach education experience bolstered my

confidence to get involved in coaching in a shadowing capacity. My coaching practices were informed by coach education across several sports both during my undergraduate degree and external programmes. NGB-led, school-based, coach education programmes should be considered to show young people the coaching pathway in a controlled environment, among their peers. I favour this method over the conventional coach education courses that have multi-generations and experience levels which might be a deterring factor for teenagers. I am conscious that not all clubs are as open to viewing players and coaches equally, irrespective of gender. The onus is on clubs to provide the support young coaches need to continue whether that is in the form of a mentor, role model, or having club structures that encourage them to get involved in coaching.

Cushion (2015) argues mentoring is more valuable than coach education for the development of coaches as it involves coaches' interactions with more experienced coaches in an unstructured and informal manner, with learning ensuing. Observing others in similar roles or shadowing is considered by volunteers to be a productive way of learning and developing (Walsh, 2015). Another appropriate strategy is promoting a practice of co-head coaching where two coaches work together at the same level and without hierarchy, even if one is more experienced. This study advocates for these approaches as when I coached with Marian, and others, we were all deemed equal. I concur with Greenhill et al. (2009) who purport the importance of an informal network for women coaches among other women they know prior to coaching.

Hogan et al. (2021) (See Chapter 5) determine that the varying skill level within the non-elite setting and the multiple roles the coach must undertake pose an extra challenge for volunteer coaches. Considering this evidence, care must be taken to reduce the chances of coaches feeling overwhelmed or burned out, resulting in them stopping coaching.

(d) Socio-cultural - Perceptions of women coaches

Negative encounters or insecurities might cause women to disengage completely from the sport. I am acutely aware that while I overcame my insecurities and the infrequent negative experiences, not all women have the will or the support to do so and subsequently disconnect from the sport. Walker (2016) and Murray et al. (2020) reference the fact that women sometimes adopt the qualities of a male coach

to be accepted and deemed credible. Harvey and Price (2021), further this by concluding women coaches often require more experience to be given the same opportunities or credibility as men. Clarkson et al. (2019) found that women coaches at the recreational level experienced a lack of confidence often brought about by feeling undervalued among their male counterparts. Biases and misperceptions regarding women coaches must be addressed so that women in coaching are seen as the norm and not the exception.

4.6 Conclusion

The utilisation of an autoethnographic process to me as a coach is valuable, as it is a way of formalising my coaching development (Zehntner & McMahon, 2014). The culmination of 30 years involved in the sport as a player, coach, and coach developer, with some overlap, gives a distinctive insight into what stakeholders within non-elite level sports can do to support and develop women and girls in these positions. Throughout this paper, I explored the impact of one or more of these critical incidents not occurring and I contest that without them it might have signaled the end of my involvement in sport, once I finished playing. This study illustrates, to those trying to recruit and retain women in the domain of coaching, that encouragement is needed from the beginning and throughout their journey to ensure they have the desire to develop and progress and are supported to do so.

The story relayed in this research seeks to change the 'women in coaching' narrative away from negative experiences, barriers, and challenges towards the positive elements of a coaching journey. The Ecological Intersectional Model (EIM) (LaVoi, 2016), was employed as a lens to provide an autoethnographic narrative of a woman's transition from non-elite level player to volunteer coach and coach developer. This work was completed as Ellis et al. (2011) propose to ignite a conversation and invoke a response to a topic.

The findings have the potential for clubs to use this research as a starting point to consider how current players can be supported, from adolescence, through a timely exposure to coaching. This research clearly shows there is a place for non-elite level female players to transition to volunteer coaching and then coach developing providing the appropriate support structures are in place to ensure an empowering and lasting experience. This study proposes that the correct support structures from the start of the player's journey and throughout the stages of transition should lead to positive experiences and ultimately increase the numbers of women in coaching.

A combination of parity of esteem as a player, exposure to coaching, and coach education as a teenager, and influential others all combine to invoke a sense of normality, to start coaching. Championing parity of esteem in clubs and NGB's along with support and mentoring those that can fulfill the role of influential others, gives girls and women the best opportunity to accelerate their transition from playing to coaching. It was envisaged this initiative would present the LGFA with tools for future dissemination in clubs seeking development and support within their specific contexts. However, similar to LaVoi et al. (2019) this study indicates that women coaches are not operating in isolation but instead their experiences are influenced by those surrounding them. Therefore, transitioning from playing to coaching to coach developing is multifaceted with a different set of variables in place for each individual. As such the authors are hesitant to suggest that this account applies to all, but it is reflective of the first author's lived experience.

Further studies can, as Cooper et al. (2017) suggest, focus on a more diverse background in the form of race, disability, and cultural backgrounds which is acknowledged as a limitation within this study. Autoethnography has been criticised for being overly subjective and focusing on personal memories rather than analysis and interpretation (Chang, 2007). The researcher's journal was not used for the sole purpose of writing an autoethnographic tale and so recall only is used to remember the thoughts, emotions, and feelings as discussed. Future research could examine as Watts and Cushion (2017) suggest a longitudinal study with women coaches throughout their journey and explore how their experiences changed over time. Findings from this study can be advanced by utilising the EIM as a focal point for other women coaches to explore their nuanced experiences and specific transitional journeys and outline the layer with their greatest supports and areas needing improvement.

In conclusion, this chapter highlights my journey from a non-elite level player, to volunteer coach, to coach developer and finally to coach developer assessor with many of the roles intertwined and overlapping at times. I believe my journey to be relatively atypical in that the number at CDs and CDAs is low in comparison to the numbers in coaching with the numbers of women in all roles still less than men. Additionally, many women CDs and CDAs are involved in elite level sport as coaches or played at that level which further shows the atypical nature of my journey. In this regard there are many aspects of my journey that are unrelatable to

other women in coaching based on the CD and CDA roles. Nevertheless, there are many underlying elements such as self-confidence and gender bias that are evident throughout this study and the coaches' experiences. These coaches' experiences are delved into throughout the next three chapters but in the first instance their overall lived experiences across all levels of the EIM are explored in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

PHASE 1

USING THE ECOLOGICAL INTERSECTIONAL MODEL TO EXPLORE THE EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF VOLUNTEER WOMEN LADIES GAELIC FOOTBALL COACHES IN IRELAND

Chapter 5: Phase 1 - Publication - Using the ecological-intersectional model to explore the experiences and perceptions of volunteer women ladies Gaelic football coaches in Ireland

5.1 Abstract

Volunteer women coaches in non-elite sport are underrepresented in coaching literature. To address this gap, 14 women were interviewed to explore their lived experiences as volunteer coaches within a female-only team sport of women's Gaelic football at non-elite level in Ireland. The participants met the following inclusion criteria (a) over eighteen, (b) with at least five-years of coaching experience and (c) a coach education qualification. The Ecological-Intersectional Model informed the design and analysis phases. The findings show how support within the home is essential for their coaching involvement. The relationships with fellow coaches and athletes are integral to a positive experience and all coaches indicated a player-centred coaching philosophy. However, there are still some negative perceptions of women in coaching at societal level such as conscious and unconscious gender bias. The findings highlight the need for club-based support structures to attract, support, develop and retain volunteer women coaches at non-elite level.

5.2 Introduction

The introduction section of this article forms the literature review which followed a methodology used in all phases of this study as outlined in the literature review section in Chapter 2. Figure 5.1 shows a mindap developed prior to writing this paper that informed the literature search as taken from my researcher journal.

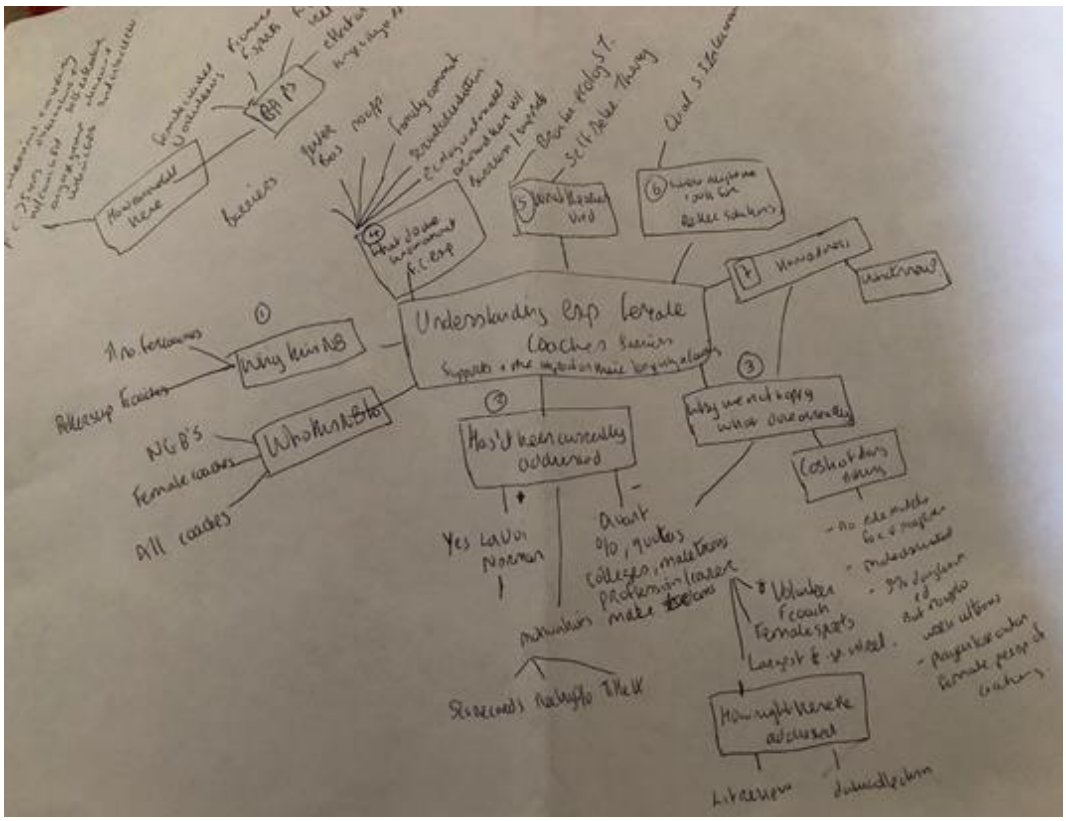

Figure 5. 1 Mindmap prior to literature search for Paper 1

Historically volunteer women coaches have been underrepresented in sports coaching research. A review of literature from the years 1974-2001 found no reference to volunteer coaches, 34% of the articles did not distinguish coach gender and less than 5% were on women coaches solely (Gilbert & Trudel, 2005). Instead, more recent research has focused on women coaching (a) at intercollegiate level e.g. Borland and Bruening (2010); Morris et al. (2014) (b) in elite sports e.g. Bertz and Purdy (2011), Shaw and Allen (2009) and (c) as a profession e.g. Machida and Feltz (2013), Nash and Sproule (2009). Furthermore, there is both an abundance of literature noting the underrepresentation of women in sports coaching (Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2016) and a need to examine women coaches lived experiences (Norman, 2010). Such a qualitative focus should include coaches from different contexts (Shaw & Allen, 2009) to allow a deeper understanding of experiences and perceptions (Nelson et al., 2014) of women coaches at all levels.

Most coaches are at non-elite voluntary level (LaVoi, 2016) and are the cornerstone of sports organisations (Walsh, 2015) but remain under-researched (Griffiths & Armour, 2012; Wicker, 2017) especially in youth sport (Wiersma & Sherman, 2005). While most coaches are men, having more women coaches provides same-

gender role models for female players to see coaching as an active possibility (Schull, 2016) rather than traditional norms of expecting male coaches only (Kane, 2016). In order to increase the number of women coaching, we must first understand the experiences of current women coaches.

LaVoi and Dutove (2012) determined that a coach's experience is influenced by (a) surrounding environments (b) relationships within these environments and (c) changing dynamics between the levels of the ecological systems model and the individual. Ecological refers to the interactions between an organism and their environment (Sallis et al., 2008) and the Ecological Systems Theory (EST) centres around the person, with their surrounding environment influencing their development and experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). EST has been utilised in qualitative studies of team sports in both elite and non-elite settings (Domingues & Goncalves, 2014). A review of coaching literature (n=83) featuring barriers and supports of women coaches employed the Ecological Systems Model (ESM) as modified by Sallis et al. (2008) to code the findings (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). The modifications, underpinned by the concept that behaviour has multiple levels of influences, included the layer name changes of Micro to Individual/Intrapersonal, Meso to Interpersonal, Exo to Organisational/structural and Macro to Socio-cultural (Sallis et al., 2008). The ESM was later renamed the Ecological-Intersectional Model (EIM) and included the intersectionality of the person, within the individual layer, comprising of gender, age, race, class, disability, sexual identity and parental status (LaVoi, 2016).

Much of the research on women coaches' experiences has focused on (a) barriers e.g. Walker and Bopp (2010) (b) experiences of coach education, e.g. Vinson et al. (2016) (c) elite-level coaches, e.g. Norman (2012) and (d) negative aspects of coaching, e.g. Lewis et al. (2015). There is a lack of research on the experiences of women coaches and although similar worldwide, certain country specific cultural, economic and social variables will influence such findings (LaVoi, 2016). In this regard, there is a paucity of research particularly within a non-elite setting and from an Irish context apart from (Barrett et al., 2021).

In Ireland there are around 400,000 sports volunteers, comprising 11% of the population, with each contributing on average 3.5 hours per week (Sport Ireland, 2019a). Volunteering is a key action area of the National Sports Policy 2018 – 2027

(Government of Ireland, 2018) and with 70% of coaches male, increasing the number of volunteer women coaches is a particular focus. While studies on women volunteer coaches are few, two studies from the Irish context have some relevance here. Purdy and Glynn (2008) sought to understand the experiences of four elite women Irish coaches and showed that time and perceptions of other coaches and athletes were negative aspects, but they did not let it affect their coaching. Another study tracked the development of Irish coaches (n=129), with women as one-quarter of the sample, and found that work and time commitments were among the reasons for leaving coaching (Larkin et al., 2007). Conversely, they identified family, friends, athletes and other coaches as their main source of support but felt they received very little support from their respective clubs or National Governing Body (NGB) (Larkin et al., 2007). It is essential that coaches are supported and trained (Griffiths & Armour, 2012) and such training is predominantly led by the NGB with sport specific programmes. The NGB at the centre of this study is the Ladies Gaelic Football Association (LGFA), a sport which has not come to the attention of sports coaching academic literature heretofore.

5.2.1 Ladies Gaelic football

Gaelic Games are the most played sport and hold significant cultural currency in Ireland, particularly given the organisations' amateur ethos. Ladies Gaelic football, founded in 1974, is governed by the LGFA, and has over 188,000 members across 1,200 clubs (LGFA, 2018). Non-elite club and elite inter-county competitions are organised by the LGFA in Ireland and in some ex-patriate communities internationally. The LGFA also have a recreational playing programme, called Gaelic for Mothers and Others (G4M&O), aimed at females over 25 years of age and not playing competitively. In Ireland, 37% of qualified coaches at introductory level of coach education are women (Sport Ireland Coaching, 2019), while 65% of LGFA coaches at the same level are women (LGFA, 2020) and so their experiences merit investigation.

Part of the LGFA strategic plan 2017-2022 (LGFA, 2018) is to become the first-choice sport for females and it is on target to achieve this, with record figures of 56,114 attending the national championship finals in 2019. The LGFA strategic aims have emphasised attracting and developing women coaches and designing a model for future women leaders. This research can add to these goals while also addressing calls from LaVoi and Dutove (2012) to investigate coaches at the lower

level of competition and LaVoi et al. (2019) to focus on what helps women to start and stay coaching by including cohorts that are rarely researched. Therefore, this study has significant scope for contributing to Irish and international coaching literature by focusing on volunteer women coaches in the non-elite club environment. The research question is - How are the experiences of non-elite level volunteer women Ladies Gaelic football coaches influenced by the ecological systems around them? The ensuing sections detail the theoretical framework, methodology, data collection, and analysis phases.

5.3 Materials and methods

5.3.1 Researcher background

In order to consider how researcher views might influence the research process and outcome, it is important to reflexively consider assumptions and personal biases within the research process (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). This study is part of doctoral research by the first author, a white, female, Irish citizen. Given my background, knowledge and experiences, I adopt a constructivist stance and acknowledge how my biases and subjectivities can shape and influence the questions asked and the stories told. I have 27- and 21-years women's Gaelic football playing and coaching experience respectively through playing at a non-elite level and coaching as a volunteer with club youth, adult and inter-collegiate teams. I also have 15 years LGFA coach developer experience and I am a coach education tutor assessor, covering all sports in Ireland. From these experiences I witnessed some of the barriers and poor visibility for women coaches. This lived experience helped build a rapport and empathise with the participants' experiences and make informed decisions on the study design and inclusion of a theoretical framework.

5.3.2 Theoretical framework

Following LaVoi and Dutove (2012), this study employs Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (EST) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and specifically the Ecological Intersectional Model (EIM) (LaVoi, 2016). LaVoi and Dutove (2012) used the original ESM to assign women coaches' experiences as barriers or supports. Although many of their findings were based on professional coaches, the framework was an ideal instrument to guide the interview and analysis within the context of this study.

5.3.3 Participants

A qualitative interview study was undertaken using in-depth semi-structured interviews following ethical approval from the authors' home institute, Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (A18-035). In order to ensure widespread engagement, and at the request of the first author, the LGFA sent the participant recruitment email to their database of women coaches (n=9217) and posted the call on their social media platforms. The shortened social media post signalled interested parties to contact the researcher for criteria information while the more detailed email outlined the inclusion criteria from the outset (See Appendix L). In total fifteen women emailed the first author expressing an interest in the study and all were emailed the information sheet outlining the inclusion criteria before arranging the face-to-face interviews. Fourteen participants replied and met the inclusion criteria, signed the consent form, and received a copy of the questions to familiarise themselves with the interview content and context. Two of the coaches were known to the researcher and a further two identified during the interview that they attended a coach education course delivered by the researcher.

In this study volunteers are as reported by Robertson (2016) coaching a few hours per week outside of work. Criterion sampling was used and women (a) over 18 years of age, (b) with at least five years coaching experience and (c) an introductory level LGFA coach education qualification from the previous ten years were included in the study. In Ireland, 3-10 years is the average contribution of volunteer coaches (Walsh et al., 2011) hence, five years was deemed appropriate to have some coaching experience and coach education completed. The participants were all white, middle class, non-disabled, heterosexual and Irish (See Table 5.1). All participants could withdraw at any time without repercussions and their names and clubs were given a pseudonym. The interviews focused on the majority of their coaching experience which was at the non-elite club level.

5.3.4 Interview guide

The interview guide (Appendix D) was informed by literature, personal experiences of the first author (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) and the four EIM layers of individual, interpersonal, organisational and socio-cultural (See Table 5.2). Vignettes describing a woman coach being overlooked by male coaches (See Appendix M) and a brief video produced by Ontario Sport in Canada were included. This can be accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mFW6UsU266c. The vignettes

and video were at the end to reduce their influence on the conversation while permitting the researcher to probe further. These prompts were used to help participants reflect on their experiences as it might be less threatening when based on unknown characters (Groom et al., 2014) and they were also asked to give their reaction should it happen to them (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

Table 5. 1 Characteristics of the participant coaches

Coach	Age	Level of playing experience	Coaching experience (Years)	Highest level coached	Sport-specific Coach education	Occupation	Significant other	Children
Ann	34	Non-elite club	5	Intercounty underage	Level 2	Finance	No	No
Bernie	24	Elite Intercounty	8	Club underage	Level 1	Primary Teacher	Yes	No
Ciara	43	Non-elite club	16	Club underage	Foundation	Finance	Yes	Yes
Doreen	53	Elite Intercounty	9	Club underage	Level 1	Dental	Yes	Yes
Edel	35	Elite Intercounty	20	Intercounty Adult	Level 2	Marketing	No	No
Fiona	47	Non-elite club	5	Club underage	Level 1	Recruitment	Yes	Yes
Grace	49	Non-elite club	8	Intercounty underage	Level 1	Retail	Yes	Yes
Imelda	50	Elite Intercounty	32	Intercounty underage	Level 2	Primary Teacher	Yes	Yes
Joan	40	Elite Intercounty	5	Club underage	Foundation	Project Management	Yes	Yes
Kate	46	Recreational	6	Club underage	Level 1	Legal	Yes	Yes
Linda	47	Recreational	5	Club underage	Level 1	Project Management	Yes	Yes
Martina	50	Elite Intercounty	10	Club underage	Foundation	Special Needs	Yes	Yes
Natalie	40	Recreational	9	Club underage	Level 2	Primary Teacher	Yes	Yes

Age profile: 42(+/-8),
Coaching experience: 12(+/-7),
Reasons started coaching: own children involved (n=7), love of the game (n=7)

Table 5. 2 Details of the interview guide

Area of interest from the interview guide	Source	Examples of questions used in interview guide
Playing experience and significant people involved in their coaching experiences	Harvey et al. (2013)	What were your main reasons for starting coaching?
Obstacles and achievements in coaching and relationships with other coaches	Norman (2010)	Can you recall any positive or negative experiences you had while coaching? How would you describe the relationship with your fellow coaches?
Experiences of playing for both men and women coaches	Blom et al. (2011),	Tell me about your LGFA playing experience? Were any of your coaches role models for your own coaching?
Ideas for the empowerment and development of women coaches	Norman (2008)	How confident are you in your coaching ability? How much autonomy have you in your coaching?
Influence of people and structures surrounding the female coach (i) the individual coach (ii) interpersonal (iii) organisational (iv) societal	Ecological-Intersectional Model (LaVoi, 2016)	What are your future LGFA coaching plans? What is your understanding of the coach–athlete relationship? What is your experience of LGFA coach education? What impact do societal and cultural norms have on women coaches?
Coaching philosophy/style	First author experience	Describe your coaching philosophy/style?
Ideas for attracting future women coaches	First author experience	What do you think can be done to attract and retain women coaches?

A pilot interview, with an LGFA woman coach known to the first author, was completed to test the guide and the researcher's interviewing ability. Following feedback and reflection, the interview process was streamlined with improved listening and probing skills as well as increased familiarity with the guide. The pilot data was not included in the study but did lead to the removal of interview items, e.g. knowledge and impact of the LGFA strategic plan and their thoughts on quotas at leadership level. All fourteen interviews, ranging from 31 to 103 minutes in duration, with an average of 63 minutes, were conducted, transcribed, and analysed by the first author. Notes and observations were recorded during and after each interview and the researcher kept a reflective journal that contributed to the iterative process of transcript analysis and interpretation.

5.3.5 Analysis

The data analysis was managed using the N-VIVO software package (Version 12) as outlined in Section 3.3. Thematic analysis (TA) was chosen due to the flexible nature of the researcher making constant decisions and the compatibility with constructivism (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The six-step reflexive TA was followed to move from narrow codes to parent themes in a reflexive manner, rather than a step-by-step process, which allowed for active engagement (Braun et al., 2016). This process is based on the seminal work of Braun and Clarke (2006) with a new approach of being reflexive as the authors surmised that there was a variety of analyses conducted under the term TA (Braun & Clarke, 2016).

The six phases include familiarisation and coding (Phase 1-2) through the first author conducting and transcribing the interviews. Theme development, refining, and naming (Phase 3-5) were influenced by the researcher's experiences of being a women's Gaelic football coach and coach developer. Each transcript was printed with wide margins, as Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest, actively reading while seeking patterns and meanings within the data. Initially, 236 meanings were extracted, usually in the coaches' own words such as positive and negative encounters, who they bounce coaching issues off and reasons for starting coaching. These meanings were consolidated to sixteen broad categories that included barriers to coaching, coaching philosophy, and the NGB's role in their coaching. The EIM was then introduced in a deductive way with the four broad headings used as a way of coherently presenting the 16 categories (See Figure 5.1). This inductive and

deductive approach allowing for the researcher's subjectivity aligns with reflexive TA as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2020). The sixth phase write-up was undertaken for this manuscript and the overall doctoral thesis.

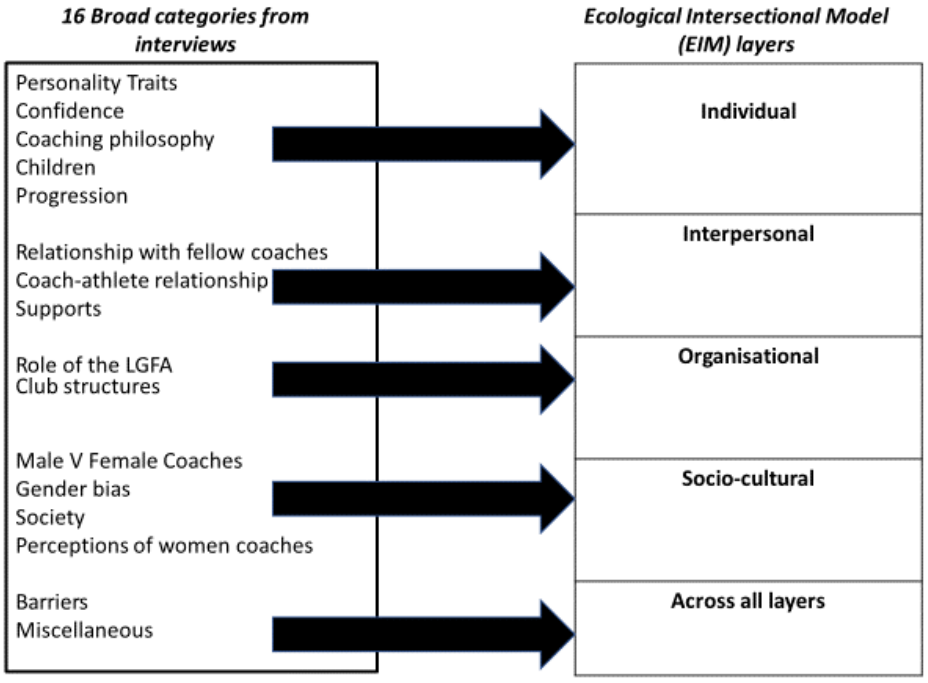

Figure 5. 2 Broad categories from the interviews as assigned to the Ecological Intersectional Model (EIM)

5.4 Results

The coaches' experiences are presented through the EIM levels of (a) individual (b) interpersonal (c) organisational and (d) socio-cultural, with subthemes within each.

5.4.1 Individual

This is the closest layer to the coach and includes personal, biological, and psychological aspects with the subthemes of (a) coaching philosophy and (b) coach personality.

(a) Coaching philosophy

When asked about their coaching philosophy some of the coaches did not know what it meant but all indicated being player-focused and basing it on their past coaches. Edel, who has twenty years of coaching experience, considered her philosophy:

> I am open to other areas; it is not a dictatorship. I never go with an approach that I know everything; I am constantly trying to learn and learn from other people.

Natalie, a primary school teacher who started coaching to give something back referred to the social aspect for players:

> I want to keep them all interested, keep them friends, I do not want anyone to feel like they are rubbish. I want kids that mature at different times to get the same, but I do want to stretch the ones that need to.

Kate, who began coaching when her daughter started and played LGFA at a recreational level, explained her approach:

> I like to get the kids involved, I do not like talking to the kids too much and telling them what to do, I like to ask questions, get them to demo, tell them why I am doing something and give them feedback.

On reflection, the coaches were not always player-centred as Linda, who was coaching for five years noted:

> I just said ye can play better than that, I kept saying 'ye, ye'. And when I went away, I said it is not ye, it is we, it is we but at the moment it was ye, I should have said we, and I was kicking myself.

Such focus on a player-centred approach and openness to new ideas are positive personality traits among the coaches.

(b) Coach personality

According to the participants, good coaching competencies and characteristics were not gendered but instead were personality based and confidence was the main trait they referenced. An unexpected finding was the importance attributed to playing experience for gaining confidence and knowledge of the game. All coaches had playing experience although for some it was later in life and at a recreational level only through the G4M&O initiative. Fiona, who started coaching to help her daughter's team and played at a non-elite level shared:

> Obviously, when you have played before people will see your ability and it probably gave me a bit of a standing in terms of look, she kind of knows what she is doing.

Not only was playing experience integral to their confidence, it may hold women back from coaching as Doreen, the oldest participant at 53, with vast playing experience, indicated:

> I think what stops women from coaching is probably confidence, sometimes they just do not have the confidence they feel oh this really is not for me, a male coach would be much better. Girls who have children, that have never played football themselves, they definitely do not have the confidence to coach.

Confidence was also boosted by coach education as Grace, who reported starting coaching by accident when covering for the female liaison person with her daughter's team, described:

> I would not have been great confidence wise until I did courses, it gives you more confidence and makes sure that you are 100% right in what you are coaching and that you are not teaching them wrong.

Empathy was another key attribute that shone through the interviews as Natalie showed:

> I order bigger jerseys so that nobody would be body-shamed because I knew that they would be developing in that way and so the male coaches were saying 'oh they are fine they will get another year out of them' so there are certain things that women coaches bring to it.

Martina, who started coaching without playing experience and coached with her husband, also displayed empathy:

> We have done things wrong, myself and my husband have nearly cried nights because you are out for the win and poor Mary did not get on and Mary cries and we all cry because we know we were wrong.

This empathy shows the interpersonal connection between the coaches and their players.

5.4.2 Interpersonal

Interpersonal refers to the relationships between the coaches and the main stakeholders relative to their coaching. Subthemes here are (a) support network in

the home, (b) relationship with fellow coaches, and (c) the coach-athlete relationship.

(a) Support network in the home.

The support network at home was the initial and most powerful factor influencing the experiences of the women coaches. There was a distinction at this stage, between those who were in a relationship and had children and those who were single with no children (n=4). Parents and siblings were the support for the latter, whereas for the former the significant other was the main support along with their children, as usually, the women were coaching their own child(ren). While sexual identity was not indicated in the interview it was inferred, by those in relationships, that all were heterosexual as they mentioned their male partners. For those with children the age of the child(ren) was important as Grace elaborated:

> I could not have done it ten years ago because my kids were too young, as they have got older, it is easier at home you do not kind of feel guilty and I have a very very understanding husband.

Conversely, although children are time-consuming and limit the availability of women coaches many of them started coaching primarily because their daughters were playing, and some referred to leaving coaching when their daughters finish playing as echoed by Fiona and Natalie respectively:

> My first love would be with my kids and if something happens, I do not have great ambitions to be running the senior team, it is move up with your kids is where I am at.

> My interest is in the team that I am with at the moment because my daughter is on that and as long as she is involved in that team I will keep going.

When the support at home enabled them to start coaching ultimately a good relationship with their fellow coaches was necessary for their continuation.

(b) Relationship with fellow coaches

Principally the women had positive relationships with their fellow coaches, once their mindset and coaching philosophy aligned. When team management functioned poorly it was due to negative incidents or as Ciara, Ann and Linda recalled experiences of male coaches 'taking over' while they were actively coaching. The formation of team management varied from being arranged by the

women to being formed before their involvement, but cohesion was fundamental as stated by Doreen and Fiona respectively:

> It was very easy, there was no prime coach, everything was completely democratic. I think a lot depends on the personality, that is number one, sometimes it can be different and the dynamics are not as good.

> You could have a brilliantly skilled, talented person but if you do not get on with them it will not work and especially when it is voluntary, I am sorry, I am out the door.

Good relationships with coaches are integral as are positive coach-athlete relationships.

(c) Coach-athlete relationship

Prior to direct questioning about the coach-athlete relationship the coaches alluded to the personal side of coaching, connecting and developing them as people as well as players and Kate was testament to this:

> The main positive is dealing with the children and your relationship with them, football wise and then socially wise, kids will only play football if they get on well with their coaches and if the coaches know them and like them.

Unsurprisingly within youth coaching the parents were frequently mentioned and often in a negative manner. Ciara who coached for 16 years denoted it is the "difficult part of coaching and the children are NEVER the issue". Ann who coaches at both club and inter-county levels, and who had the Level 2 coach education qualification completed, felt that some parents did not support the coach but instead saw sport as a "babysitting club". Likewise, respect was central to the interpersonal relationships with players, parents and fellow coaches and for Martina she was "terribly hurt" if the respect she gave was not reciprocated while Edel had "mutual respect" with her fellow coaches. The various interpersonal relationships can be dependent upon the structure and support within the organisational layer.

5.4.3 Organisational

In this study, the organisational level includes the NGB and the club with the former having little impact on the coaches outside of coach education and accordingly the

coaches seeking more club-based support. The subtheme of coach education, development and support encapsulates the experiences here.

(a) Coach education, development, and support

The coaches were willing to learn and develop and all had completed at least the lower level of LGFA coach education. Encouragingly half of the cohort had completed the second level and three of the coaches had completed the highest available level (Level 2). The coaches had positive experiences of LGFA coach education and liked the mixed-gender group with the majority resistant to women-only courses. Hazel, a Physical Education teacher with considerable LGFA administration and refereeing experience and a coach developer conveyed contrary views:

> It might be more beneficial for the females that might be a bit quieter and might feel that they do not have the confidence or feel a bit embarrassed saying things in front of what they might think as more experienced men.

Similarly, Edel as the other coach developer in the cohort, liked the women-only coach education that she attended as a coach in a different sport:

> We were able to relate to each other, it comes back to confidence, everybody felt at ease and if you were to ask me if they were on a mixed course would they have felt as at ease, probably not. It does create a safer environment, or it felt like a safer environment where if you make mistakes, they are more inclined to pick each other up.

Regarding the extensive references to confidence Edel thought the LGFA should shift the focus of coach education:

> I know lots of capable people who have done courses, but it has not transferred onto the field. I do think that support and maybe more of a buddy system within a club, that network of learning, once they have done a course, they are all put in touch with each other, a platform where they can feel comfortable. Once they do the course, they feel quite isolated.

Other coaches supported Edel's call for a change in coach education and specifically for more club-based support as Ann suggests:

> Club support is the biggest thing. I think if you were not happy you are going to step away or also you see when you volunteer to do something all of a sudden they expect you to do a million and one things and they do not help out. I think it all comes down to support.

While the LGFA is considered positively the coaches advocated for club-specific support particularly for novice coaches as Kate elaborated:

> I do not think any coach would say I am giving up, all they say is I want to do a bit less or get a bit of support. I would love somebody to help plan a year ahead and just give you a map. If I got more support, age-appropriate support I would like to see myself continuing. If I was the LGFA, I would be watching the likes of me, this is where we are beginning to lose out on valuable and good coaching.

In terms of support for the coaches the majority get such support from their fellow coaches that they work alongside in the club and Doreen considers this as key to a successful coaching team:

> Fellow coaches is a huge thing and that has to be a team a really good team the way it works.

Ciara believes other club coaches can be a source of support so long as they are not in a dictator style role:

> Someone that might help but not in a kind of telling them what to do, more in a supportive role, no one needs a dictator.

Without relevant and appropriate support and development at club level there is a fear of losing women that do not feel they can continue as coaches as Kate reports:

> My fear is and I think it is a big issue with female coaches, I will reach a plateau under 11s is still fine under 12s and then you get to the under 13s and all of a sudden I think I will feel a bit out of my depth and that is when I begin to go is there somebody else who could do this because I do not feel confident in competitive matches and people watching the league and the results and if you are not getting results then somebody else will want to take over, which is possibly what is happening and that is holding things back.

Martina was also critical of the LGFA for the lack of support as she implied:

> If we had a development officer that was more visible and would organise a blitz, then I do not have to do it so that would be beneficial to me. It is more of them we need streaming through the country like veins. It has to be led by the top-down, they have to make the decisions and maybe they are a little bit removed. I feel very strongly that the powers that be have an awful lot more to do.

Fiona continued the request for club-based support:

> There is nowhere during the season, a connection point for all coaches to get together and have a chat, just a forum and having anchor points in the club that are experts and willing to give back, that you can learn from and build confidence from.

Focusing on club-based supports may lead to higher attraction and retention of volunteer women coaches despite any socio-cultural challenges.

5.4.4 Socio-cultural

Society has valorised men's sport and coaching in comparison to women's (Burton & LaVoi, 2016) and so focusing on the socio-cultural level can create change although it is the furthest layer from the coach (Kane, 2016). This level has the subthemes of (a) perceptions of women coaches and (b) conscious and unconscious gender bias.

(a) Perceptions of women coaches

Women in coaching is changing within the LGFA and Ireland in general as Ann explained:

> It is changing, we are more involved now but the old style was you had to have a woman because of the girls in the dressing room, you are the woman that sends out the texts, books the pitch, or even the manager, you are the mum of the group but I think that has completely changed.

However, the change is slow as Edel declared:

> I would love to be at the stage where we are just talking about coaches as opposed to female coaches, where it becomes that normalised.

This normalisation among the players is necessary as Imelda, the coach with the most coaching experience (32 years) and the most decorated former player commented:

> Now I am not saying that the young players I have coached, in a few years would not see me as being a valid person, but certainly, the senior players would not consider that there could possibly be a woman coach, which is ridiculous.

Joan, who coached at underage and played at recreational level, was hopeful that her coaching would encourage other women to coach:

> Being involved in coaching and meeting the mums I think that might change perceptions a little bit. Just to see God, they are actually able to.

However, these perceptions are affected by conscious and unconscious biases about the role of women in society and sports in Ireland.

(b) Conscious and unconscious gender bias

As coaching has predominantly been male-dominated, women coaches are often compared to their male counterparts by players, fellow coaches, society, and other women. Thus, gender bias is regularly cited in women in coaching literature and arose in this study when none of the participants viewed the mother as a coach until it was obvious at the end of the video. Ciara who was outspoken about "girl power" and gender parity admitted:

> Initially, I thought she was just her mother.

Edel, as someone that has experienced gender bias, shared similar thoughts:

> I am disappointed with myself, I am surprised with myself but it is the reality, it just shows we do have presumptions, straight away I presumed she was doing her motherly role, so it does make you more aware.

Awareness is important as gender bias occurs with a variety of stakeholders e.g. opposition coaches as experienced by Ciara:

> They always go over and shake my co-mentors' hands and the co-mentors would very rarely say it is actually Ciara who is the lead mentor.

Referees also display unconscious bias as Linda suggested:

> The referee will always go to the male, they will just pass you by and they will say where is the coach and you are standing there looking at him – I am here.

For Grace a female parents' concern was that their coaching team was limited without a male coach:

> I remember one of the parents coming up to me 'do you want my husband to stand with you on the sideline?' and I said 'why for what reason?' and she said 'just to be there'.

Linda feels the source of bias was family, friends, and peers and that must change in the first instance:

> That is coming from society, their parents, and friends so it is just breaking that down.

To help this change Ann believed males should be allies for women coaches:

> You are in this together or you have a man who does not have the ego, who is very open to having a woman with him where he is not thinking of her as the jersey washer.

From these examples, both unconscious and conscious bias exists in different formats for volunteer women coaches and should be addressed imminently.

5.5 Discussion

The findings extend previous research by illuminating the experiences of women volunteer coaches in non-elite settings. Some of the individual level challenges are relatable for all volunteer coaches, e.g. time commitment and ignorance for the complexity of the role, however, roles and responsibilities at home are further compromising women coaches. Balancing family and work commitments with coaching was the most constant challenge faced by women across all levels of coaching (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). This challenge is more pronounced for the volunteer women coaches that work full-time in addition to extra responsibilities at home with a 40% and 14% gap between men and women in Ireland for household duties and caring responsibilities respectively (European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), 2020). Leberman and LaVoi (2011) noted that full-time working mothers often assume a third role of voluntary coaching and in this study the mother's entry into coaching coincided with their child(ren) starting to play which

concurs with Busser and Carruthers (2010) findings. Furthermore, the mothers alluded to leaving coaching when their children stopped playing. These societal influences have repercussions for coach education, recruitment, and retention of volunteer women coaches.

This study highlights that support within the interpersonal layer, especially at home, is vital and is similar to Vinson et al. (2016) who surmised that coaching and home life are not mutually exclusive. In addition, previous Irish research reported how women coaches consider support from family and fellow coaches as paramount (Larkin et al., 2007). Overall the women had positive interactions with their fellow coaches and felt supported by them and learned from them which is in accordance with Norris et al. (2020) and North et al. (2020) respectively. Volunteer coaches want support from their fellow coaches in the form of guidance and autonomy, conflict resolution, and mentoring (Harman & Doherty, 2019). Norris et al. (2020) implies that social support from friends and fellow coaches especially those they considered more experienced were the main forms of support. However, volunteer coaches had fewer support networks than their paid and part-time counterparts suggesting that these networks need to be developed further (Potts et al., 2019). The final area of support, within the interpersonal layer, was from the athletes.

The quality of the coach-athlete relationship can be determined and shaped by the interaction between the coach and athlete (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007) which from the coach's perspective was deemed positive. In line with previous research, this interaction starts technically and tactically and then progresses to support, advice, and rapport building (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). The purpose of life skill development for the players is synonymous with Leberman and LaVoi (2011) as the coaches placed great value on their role in improving not only their own children but the entire team. The clear trait of empathy throughout is in contrast to Walker (2016) who suggested that qualities associated with male coaches were required for credibility. Murray et al. (2020) concur as they determined women overcame inequalities by sometimes taking on male characteristics to gain acceptance.

Confidence is an essential characteristic for volunteer women coaches. The findings suggest the coaches linked playing experience to gaining confidence on the technical skills and rules of the game. The importance of playing experience is

consistent with Feltz et al. (2009) corroborating that playing leads to self-efficacy and confidence through learning the rules, skills, and strategies of the game. In addition, this pre-coaching is common ground for coaches to gain their philosophy (Larkin et al., 2007) and the leadership and interpersonal skills gained as athletes are highly transferable to coaching (Morris et al., 2014). Wells (2016) states that playing experience is heavily linked to women starting coaching and Clarkson et al. (2019) found women coaches at the recreational level experienced low confidence subsequent to feeling undervalued among their male counterparts. Knowing what helps to improve confidence is important as Robertson (2016) posits that low confidence contributes to the underrepresentation of women coaches.

Many coaches strive for a player-centred approach and it was regularly indicated by the participants in this study also. Bowles and O'Dwyer (2019) acknowledged that while the approach is recommended by the main NGB's, in Ireland, practical guidelines on how coaches should apply it are scarce. This study purports that the varying skill level, which is more prevalent in the volunteer non-elite setting, makes the athlete-centred approach even more difficult to attain. Likewise, due to the parochial and inclusive nature of the LGFA anyone living in the vicinity of a club can play irrespective of their skill level. Furthermore, the volunteer is tasked with multiple roles which combined with the varying skill levels demand a higher coaching competence, yet the only training available is generic coach education. Perhaps this is why coaches use their own networks to solve their coaching problems rather than seeking the NGB-specific supports (North et al., 2020) such as coach education.

While the confidence gained from coach education courses is important, many referenced perceived weaknesses that would require upskilling, but the time commitment required places extra demands on them. Volunteers are time poor (Walsh, 2015) which can hinder the coaches from resolving issues (North et al., 2020) causing stress for coaches which NGBs should focus on reducing. Despite this the coaches were willing to learn and develop as coaches which reflects what Walsh et al. (2011) attributes to volunteers wanting to be competent and confident in their role and being prepared to engage in effective training to achieve same. Nevertheless, the coaches would like a focus on building confidence just not via women-only coach education. The participants who favoured women-only courses were coach developers, one of which had already completed a similar programme

in a different sport. Her experience aligns with previous studies that reported women prefer single-gender courses as they often felt inferior or uncomfortable among male attendees (Graham et al., 2013; Lewis et al., 2015). While the coach developers appreciate the benefit of women-only courses the other participants felt it would lead to further isolation.

The coaches did not just want NGB coach education provision but instead an emphasis on club specific support. Similar to Larkin et al. (2007), coaches would like post-course support from NGB's and links with more experienced coaches to shadow and learn from. Support at club level in the form of administration, resolving conflict with parents and coach support in the form of autonomy, communication and mentorship (Harman & Doherty, 2019) would support the women coaches. To facilitate this, increased funding is required for more development staff at grassroots level rather than the current status of four people, across the country, with a remit for regional coach development. An initiative focusing on mothers proved successful (Demers, 2009) which bodes well for the LGFA G4M&O programme operating in 256 clubs in Ireland as currently those members are a relatively untapped pool of potential coaches. However, any such recruitment initiative can be short lived if the correct developmental support is not in place.

The socio-cultural layer of the EIM indirectly affects women coaches (Burton & LaVoi, 2016) while this study argues that this layer has a lesser impact, than the other three layers, on volunteer women coaches' experiences. Male coaches have more access to opportunities in both male and female sport whereas women coaches predominantly gain their experience from coaching females (Kane, 2016). There is still a distance to go for women coaches to be accepted as the norm and not be impacted by an inherent bias even if unconsciously on some fronts. Although most of the coaches had experienced gender bias or acknowledged it exists, they too exhibited unconscious gender bias when shown the video. All fourteen coaches admitted to not seeing Mom as the coach until it was obvious in the final scene. This could be linked to Schlesinger and Weigelt-Schlesinger (2012) finding that women coaches focus more on the female attributes of the coach than they do on their coaching ability, potentially furthering this gender stereotype. Walker (2016) supports this theory and argues women can be their own barrier as they display gender bias and are conscious of society norms in relation to coaching.

Overall, societal views need to change to allow women coaches to be deemed equal to their male counterparts as typical social norms within sports coaching often prevent opportunities for women (Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013). Nonetheless, the intention is not to consider males as the opposition but to see them as allies that can work with women coaches through increasing awareness of unconscious biases so it can be removed or at least reduced. Moreover, there is an onus on everyone associated with volunteer sports coaching to change the societal perception that women are only involved for child protection reasons and instead are present in a coaching capacity. Therefore, education concerning biases and assumptions as well as promoting and publicising successful women coaches is necessary, in order for women coaches to become more visible and accepted.

5.6 Conclusion

This study set out to develop a better understanding of the experiences of volunteer women coaches within a non-elite setting using the four levels of the Ecological-Intersectional Model (EIM) as a lens. Firstly, the interpersonal layer is the most important for volunteer women coaches who require support from home to start and continue coaching. Furthermore, the role of mothers in volunteer coaching is significant as in this study the mothers not only began coaching when their daughters started playing but their longevity is dependent on their daughters still playing. Secondly, within the individual layer the coaches' personality trait of self-confidence and a player-centred philosophy was evident throughout. Thirdly, the impact of the organisational level for coach support and development is firmly based at club level and must be specific to their needs; this is a clear message to the NGB to develop and provide such support maybe as Banwell et al. (2019) advocate via mentoring or a more professional relationship of sponsorship.

A coach development volunteer role at administration level in each club, similar to other NGBs in Ireland, might be successful as an internal person should promote greater adherence to any initiatives, provided they are suitably trained by the NGB. To use the coaches' voices in this way to inform policy and change (Krahn, 2019; LaVoi et al., 2019) could be beneficial. In addition, the NGB should contemplate methods of attracting more women into coaching through targeting past players and mothers as there is an obvious link between playing experience and confidence. Finally, societal perceptions and biases contribute to negative experiences for

volunteer women coaches and so a shift is needed to view men and women equally in the coaching domain.

Coaching is undeniably a complex role and it is argued that for the volunteer coach at non-elite level it is even more so. The gender of the coach adds to the complexity as the volunteer woman coach overcomes obstacles to start coaching in the first instance and secondly to develop as a coach. The findings provide a foundation for future studies on volunteer coaches in a non-elite setting and to design programmes suitable for supporting the development of the volunteer woman coach which will add to previous research (Allen & Reid, 2019; Culver, Kraft, et al., 2019). The homogeneous cohort of participants in this study is a limitation, and future investigations should consider the multiple identities and dispositions of volunteer women coaches (LaVoi et al., 2019). Moreover, the relationship between motherhood and starting and remaining as a volunteer coach is worth exploring.

This study answers the call from LaVoi et al. (2019) by focusing on solutions rather than problems with a number of proposals arising from the insights of volunteer women coaches. Based on these findings the next phase of this doctoral research involves supporting volunteer women coaches over a playing season through a club-based CoP using the coach developer experiences of the first author. This phase will add to the contribution of Culver, Kraft, et al. (2019) that shows the value of a CoP for coaches with emphasis on self-directed learning and will align with Banwell et al. (2019) by replacing a blanket approach in favour of a more context specific one.

This chapter highlights the experiences for women coaches of which the support and development they require is at club level and context specific to their needs. With this in mind the next chapter focuses on the club specific experiences of eleven women coaches, across three clubs that took part in individual semi-structured interviews. The chapter is presented as a peer-reviewed publication.

CHAPTER 6

PHASE 2

EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF THE COMMUNITY-BASED SPORTS CLUB ENVIRONMENT ON THE SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT OF VOLUNTEER WOMEN COACHES IN IRELAND

Chapter 6: Phase 2 - Publication - Exploring the influence of the community-based sports club environment on the support and development of volunteer women coaches in Ireland.

6.1 Abstract

In Ireland, the majority of coaches at non-elite level are volunteers and within the female-only team sport of women's Gaelic football, most qualified coaches are women. Yet, little is known on the club specific experiences of volunteer women coaches in non-elite sport. To address this gap, 11 women coaches, from three Gaelic Football clubs, were interviewed to explore the influence of the community-based club environment on their support and development in the role. The participants were actively coaching and part of a Community of Practice (CoP) focusing on developing their club's coaching structures. A Creative Non-Fiction (CNF) approach combined the key themes from the 11 interviews into three coach profiles of a novice coach, experienced coach, and a player-coach. Retention and recruitment, support structures within the club, and club culture and norms were the key themes identified. This study recommends that clubs employ support structures that support and develop volunteer women coaches and address any behaviour in the club that negatively impacts on their role.

6.2 Introduction

Internationally, the majority of coaches are at non-elite voluntary level (LaVoi, 2016) and are considered the cornerstone of sports organisations (Walsh, 2015), yet continue to be under researched (Griffiths & Armour, 2012; Trussell, 2016; Wicker, 2017). In the UK, most (89%) are at recreational and club level, with almost half (46%) of all coaches doing so in a voluntary capacity (UK Sports Coach, 2019). Although a coaching workforce survey has not yet been conducted in Ireland, some of the National Governing Bodies (NGB's) have completed their own sport specific version. In line with previous research, among 10,647 Gaelic games coaches surveyed, 90% of the respondents coached at club level, and only 20% of the respondents were female (Horgan et al., 2021). This is in line with the EU Gender Quality in Sport Report 2014 that highlighted 20-30% of all coaches in Europe are female with figures varying between countries and sports (European Commission, 2014). Hence, governing bodies should organise campaigns to recruit more women coaches, whilst also putting structures in place to monitor their development, education, and retention (European Commission, 2014).

Volunteer coaches have a complex set of relationships with parents and committee members and often work in a vacuum with little research evidence available to inform their practice (Cronin & Armour, 2015). Research to date on volunteer coaches has been centred around their motivations to start coaching but less is known about their experiences once involved. One concern previously reported by sports clubs is that once a volunteer coach has commenced their role, their engagement proves more difficult to predict (Egli et al., 2014). Consequently, more research is needed in order to explore the experiences of volunteer coaches (McNeill et al., 2017) from a variety of contexts in their respective coaching environments.

Volunteer coaching is multi-faceted, with increasing workload and expectations from parents and club members alike (Hoye et al., 2019) and arguably for women, it is even more complex. Internationally, volunteer women coaches are behind their male counterparts and underrepresented in coaching research causing a knowledge gap for this group of coaches (Pfister & Norman, 2017). Potts et al. (2019) call for research on women coaches at different levels of coaching as well as at different transitional points in their lives. Burton and LaVoi (2016) go further and believe research must understand the organisational and socio-cultural challenges that are also impacting women coaches. Yet, little is known about volunteer, non-elite women coaches' experiences, particularly at grassroots level in community-based sports clubs in Ireland.

Currently, around 400,000 volunteer coaches in Ireland contribute on average 3.5 hours per week to coaching and only 32% of these are women (Sport Ireland, 2021). The National Sports Policy 2018 – 2027 (Government of Ireland, 2018) wants to increase this figure but to achieve such an increase, it is important to understand how to attract, develop and retain women coaches. Similar to Schlesinger et al. (2021) findings, Ireland does not have any outward exclusions, rules, or procedures that prevent women from coaching or attending coach education. Yet, it is unknown what hidden and/or informal challenges they face when they do engage in these activities. Such latent obstacles might include gender bias, a lack of role models, low confidence, and limited support structures. Although Norman and Simpson (2022) focused on elite women coaches the micro-aggressions they referred to, such as sexism and micro-invalidations, could also be the case for volunteer women coaches who work in the male dominated coaching environment.

Moreover, women coaches are often faced with additional complexities to start and continue in the role as many work full time, possibly alongside extra responsibilities at home. There is a 40% and 14% gap between men and women in Ireland for household duties and caring responsibilities, respectively (European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), 2020). Further challenges include the gender bias and stereotypes that impact the recruitment, retention, and development of women coaches at all levels (Burton & Newton, 2021). It is imperative to examine these challenges and why they occur (Hovden & Tjønndal, 2021) as women tend to quit volunteering quicker than their male counterparts, resulting in a continuous cycle of low numbers of women coaches (Burton & Newton, 2021). Hence, we must examine their club specific experiences and make recommendations to those in decision making positions, such as sports' NGB's.

The NGB at the centre of this study is the Ladies Gaelic Football Association (LGFA), governing the amateur sport of Ladies Gaelic football, with over 188,000 members across 1200 clubs (LGFA, 2018). The LGFA's remit is to organise non-elite club and elite inter-county competitions in Ireland, and in some international communities. The LGFA also have a recreational programme, aimed at females over 25 years of age and not playing competitively, known as Gaelic for Mothers and Others (G4M&O). In Ireland, women account for 65% of those that have completed LGFA introductory level coach education (LGFA, 2020), which significantly exceeds the national rate of 37% across other sports (Sport Ireland Coaching, 2019). Given the high numbers of qualified women's Gaelic football coaches, it is essential to understand their experiences within the club environment, so improvements can be made, where necessary.

The LGFA 2017-2022 Strategic Plan (LGFA, 2018) considers volunteers as the foundation of the association and deem it vital to provide for their continuous development; especially with the increased demand and expectations they encounter. The strategy aims to improve the alignment between the NGB at national level and the grassroots club via assessing and auditing of current volunteer structures and, subsequently, enhancing them. Underpinning the strategy is to promote female leadership across the sport, which includes coaching. Such an approach, is not unusual according to Harman and Doherty (2014) given the

significant contribution that volunteer coaches provide to sport. Understanding the factors that influence their recruitment and retention is essential to ensuring the long term sustainability of sport; particularly for community level organisations (Hoye et al., 2019).

There is very little known on the impact organisations have on volunteers particularly given the changing nature of volunteer attitudes and expectations, thus there is a requirement for innovative ways of managing volunteers (Hoye & Kappelides, 2021). Furthermore, women in coaching research must include an understanding of gender within organisations (Pape, 2019) as many of these processes rely on socially constructed ideas of masculinity and femininity and can lead to biases and stereotypes for women at all levels of coaching (Burton & Newton, 2021). Rundle-Thiele and Auld (2009) call for research to focus on the push and pull factors for volunteer coaches within an organisation. Such factors may include training and support of coaches, which Griffiths and Armour (2012) consider key. The majority of training is organised by NGBs through their sport specific coach education programmes.

NGBs must understand the needs of their volunteer coaches, which centre around access to appropriate coaching resources and feeling supported and valued in the role (Nash & Sproule, 2012). Subsequently, any effort to enable them to feel part of something and develop, such as involvement in the design and implementation of coach education, should aid their retention (Nash & Sproule, 2012). In addition, understanding how the club structure can impact long term volunteer commitment (Schlesinger & Weigelt-Schlesinger, 2013) is warranted; alongside acknowledging that time is a stressor for volunteer coaches (Potts et al., 2019). An awareness of the club's influence on volunteer women coaches' experiences would answer Schinke et al. (2020) request for applicable research that makes an original contribution to the sport and exercise domain.

This research builds on previous work by the authors including an applied study on female women's Gaelic football coaches, that used LaVoi (2016) Ecological Intersectional Model (EIM) as a framework to explore their experiences (Hogan et al., 2021) (See Chapter 5). Findings revealed that interpersonal support from family, friends, and fellow coaches was key to their continuation; while club-based, context specific support facilitated their development (Hogan et al., 2021) (See Chapter 5).

These findings led to the establishment of a CoP with three women's Gaelic football clubs, on an individual basis, to focus on their self-identified goals. Culver, Werthner, et al. (2019) champion this self-directed learning approach as a positive aspect of CoPs and Banwell et al. (2019) favours this method over the one size fits all approach of standardised coach education. The CoP was designed and facilitated by the first author as part of a different project that became linked to and embedded in the earlier phase of this research. The CoP afforded the first author access to women coaches as the interviews and CoP sessions ran concurrently. Eleven women coaches, from the three CoPs, were interviewed to further understand the club-based support and development required by volunteer women coaches and assist the NGB with tools to enhance their club environment.

To best address the aims of this research, the authors considered using a theoretical framework to form the interview guide and aid with analysis and interpretation. Depending on the perspective that the researcher takes, some theories are useful and others may be dismissed (Wicker & Hallmann, 2013). This study adopted a combination of the Psychological Contract (PC) and the Ecological Intersectional Model (EIM) to frame the study. Burton and LaVoi (2016) state that an ecological model can be used to examine women coaches' experiences across the individual, interpersonal, organisational, and socio-cultural levels. The EIM was used as an add on to the previous phase of this research on women coaches' experiences where the interpersonal and individual layers prevailed (Hogan et al., 2021) (See Chapter 5).

This study aims to establish the influence of the club's environment (organisational layer) on the support and development of volunteer women coaches and so the PC was introduced to delve further into this layer of the EIM. The PC covers both transactional (e.g. economic) and relational (e.g. socio-emotional) exchanges between the volunteer and the organisation (Taylor et al., 2006). Hoye et al. (2019) promote PC as a lens to view the relationship between the volunteer and the organisation, while also considering the multiple variables that impact their experiences and, subsequently, identify ways in which the organisation can enhance this relationship. Furthermore, the PC enables the examination of volunteer perceptions regarding the value the organisations place on their contributions (Kappelides et al., 2019). Millar and Doherty (2016) call for organisations to build their capacity for more volunteers but to do so organisations must be aware of their needs and come up with strategies to address any issues. Therefore, this study can

address this call and build on the work of Hanlon et al. (2019) to help organisations improve their ability to integrate more women. However, this would be an onerous task without first understanding their organisational level experiences. Hence, both the EIM and the PC were used in the research design, analysis and interpretation which were also influenced by the researcher's background.

6.3 Methods

6.3.1 Researcher background

This research was undertaken by the first author, a white, female Irish citizen, with 27 years playing experience at non-elite level and 21 years as a volunteer coach with club youth, adult and inter-collegiate teams in women's Gaelic football. Since I finished playing, my involvement in women's Gaelic football has been as a coach, coach developer, or coach developer assessor giving me a unique perspective and understanding of volunteer coaches. I identify the impact of my perspective as a volunteer coach, on participant engagement and the conclusions reached in this study (Yin, 2015). A more in-depth reflection on my women's Gaelic Football roles is ongoing for another research paper as part of the overall doctoral research project (Chapter 4).

Research involves the intersection of philosophy, research design, and methods, in that the researcher must understand their assumptions on worldviews in order to apply a research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Given my background, knowledge, and experiences, I adopt a constructivist stance, to understand participants' perspectives, by interacting with them and using my background to interpret their experiences (Creswell, 2014). It is important, however, to acknowledge the influence of a researcher's epistemological and ontological positions on the creation of the stories told in research (Smith et al., 2015).

I align to interpretivism as a way to view the world, as a social interaction between thoughts, emotions, and behaviours that can be used to understand coaches' experiences and report their reality (Gearity et al., 2016). Linked to my constructivist stance, I adopt an insider position based on my previous and current women's Gaelic football roles, so I can empathise with some of their experiences. Overall, social constructivism and interpretivism guided the research design, interpretation, and writing phases of this study.

6.3.2 Research design

Semi-structured individual interviews were undertaken with eleven coaches, from the three CoP clubs, following ethical approval from the authors' home institute, the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (A18-035).

6.3.3 Participant recruitment

As part of the wider research project, I designed and facilitated a CoP in three clubs, throughout the 2021 playing season. My involvement focused on supporting their club's coaching pathway and structures through meetings with the club members and more regular phone and email interactions with their appointed co-ordinator. For the duration of this study, including the CoP rollout, COVID-19 restrictions were in place requiring all meetings to be held virtually, via Zoom. For the most part, COVID-19 restrictions aided the attendances at the online CoP as the numbers declined once government restrictions were reduced allowing sport to recommence. However, for some the online environment did not suit and subsequently, these individuals never attended the sessions. Although this study took place during COVID-19, it was not as a result of COVID-19, as it was planned in advance of the pandemic and so it was a contributing factor but not the main variable. For example, I was cognisant that women reported higher levels of perceived stress, compared to males, during the lockdown period in 2020 (Santi et al., 2021).

Criterion sampling was used and women that attended at least one of the CoP sessions, and who were actively coaching for the 2021 playing season were included in the recruitment process (n=12). I emailed four women coaches from each club, and six of the twelve agreed to take part. A further five signed up after a follow up email. The only coach that was contacted but did not take part had not replied to any communications about the research and had also stopped attending the CoP after the first two sessions. As the CoP facilitator, I had an insider role in the respective clubs, through meeting them on eight occasions each throughout the 2021 playing season. Being a member of the sub-group or culture helps to gain access to the participants and understand them (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

The CoP gave context to the interviews to compare my observations throughout the CoP with what the women reported. Observing the interactions between the women coaches and their fellow club members helped form the interview guide and the subsequent analysis. For example, when coaches mentioned their club did not have

an induction process for new coaches, I recalled this as something the overall club wanted to work on during the CoP.

The individual emails contained the consent form, interview guide, and a request for a convenient date and time to conduct the virtual interviews via Zoom. COVID-19 restrictions, at the time of data collection, meant face to face interviews were not an option. However, coaches were familiar with the platform from the CoP sessions. Synchronous interviewing, like this, may allow participants to be more forthcoming with information and are more time efficient and convenient (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Conversely, though, the online interviews are sometimes considered impersonal and may lead to missing verbal and non-verbal cues from the interviewee (Sparkes & Smith, 2014); alongside possible technical difficulties for the participants (Archibald et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the advantages of single click access, live transcriptions, password enabled access, the waiting room feature (Lobe et al., 2020), and security and interactivity levels (Archibald et al., 2019) outweighed any disadvantages.

These interviews took place in May and June 2021, were conducted at a time convenient to the women, and were voice recorded only, with permission. They were not video recorded, but Zoom's Closed Caption transcription function was enabled, and the participants were shown how to hide it to avoid distraction. This file formed the starting point for the verbatim transcribing of the participants' interviews which ranged from 28 to 90 minutes in duration with an average of 44 minutes.

6.3.4 Participants

Eleven women coaches (club A n=4, club B n=4 club C n=3) were interviewed and all were white, middle class, non-disabled, heterosexual, and Irish. Table 6.1 outlines the characteristics of the eleven coaches and Table 6.2 shows background detail on the participating clubs.

Table 6. 1 Characteristics of the 11 participant coaches

Characteristics	Description ranges
Age (years)	20 to 52
Parental status	Parents (n=9)
Coaching experience (years)	2 to 10
Coaching category	Novice (n=5), Experienced (n=4), Player-coach (n=2)
Level of sport specific coach education	Foundation to Level 1
Team coaching for 2021 season	Under 6 to under 14 age group
Future plans as coaches	Willing to continue with daughter's group (n=5) Would like to progress to older age groups (n=6)

Table 6. 2 Characteristics of the three participating clubs

	Club A	Club B	Club C
Location	Rural	Urban	Rural
No. of playing Members	109	60	138
Age Groups catered for	Under 8 to Adult	Under 8 to adult	Under 6 to adult
No. of coaches in the club	19	9	20
No. of female coaches (%)	7 (37%)	6 (67%)	3 (15%)

The interview guide (Appendix F) concentrated on their club specific coaching journey. All participants could withdraw at any time, without repercussions, and their names and clubs were given a pseudonym. Keeping the eleven coaches anonymous, was important due to the parochial nature of the sport and the promotion of the NGB led CoP initiative. Anonymity was upheld throughout the analysis and write up phases with names, locations, or any other identifying material removed or changed. Kaiser (2009) believes that anonymity and

confidentiality in research, protects participants from harm if they are unidentifiable but stresses that anonymising the data should not lead to the participants' voices being supressed. Because the use of quotations could lead to the reader deducing who the participants are, this study uses CNF composite vignettes, which combined the stories of all eleven coaches. Douglas and Carless (2009) support CNF suggesting it gives a cloak of anonymity to participants. Likewise, Smith (2013) consider such research more accessible to those outside of academia, as the credible characters can resonate with people and promote dialogue. Based on these benefits, CNF vignettes were employed to represent the findings from the interviews.

6.3.5 Interview guide

The interview guide (Appendix F) was informed by the literature and my personal experience (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Table 6.3 outlines a sample of the questions and the sources used to form the interview guide, which was emailed to the coaches before they signed the consent form (See Appendix G). A pilot interview, with a woman coach, known to me, was completed to test the guide but this data was not included in the analysis phase. Following feedback and reflection, some questions were removed e.g. outlining what you would do differently when starting as a volunteer. The interviews sought to illicit answers from the women regarding their club specific experiences and the influence of said experiences on their current and future coaching. A sample of questions used to understand their club specific context from their perspective included - What should be done to attract and retain more volunteer women coaches in your club?, What do you think the club currently does well for their volunteers in terms of supporting them?, What areas would you like support in to develop your coaching further?

I continuously recorded notes to a self-reflection journal both during and after the interviews. During the CoP, I noted interactions, as suggested by Sparkes and Smith (2014), to identify what is not happening as much as what is happening and look for recurring patterns, actions (saying and doing), and reactions (responses to what is said and done by others). While names were not mentioned during the interviews regarding different scenarios in their club I was aware without it being made explicit. For example one coach spoke about being treated poorly during a training session by a male coach from Team X and I could infer who she was talking about from the CoP sessions. These field notes helped to inform subsequent discussions (Jones et al., 2012) during the interviews and the analysis phase.

Table 6. 3 Details of the interview guide

Topic of interest for interview guide	Source	Examples of questions used in the interview guide
Motivations for starting coaching	Harvey et al. (2013)	What were your main reasons for getting involved in volunteering with your club?
Obstacles and achievements in coaching and relationships with other coaches	Norman (2010)	Can you recall any positive or negative experiences you had while coaching? How would you describe the relationship with your fellow coaches? How would you rate the collaboration between coaches in your club?
Confidence and autonomy levels in their coaching	Norman (2008)	How confident are you in your coaching ability? How much autonomy have you in your coaching?
Club specific coaching experiences	Shaw and Allen (2009)	What do you think the club currently does well for their volunteers in terms of supporting them? How has your role in the club changed over time? What areas would you like support in to develop your coaching further?
How relevant the CoP was to their respective role	Clements and Morgan (2015)	How relevant is it to your role with the team? What elements would you like more of? Less of?
Support structures as a coach	Hogan et al. (2021)	What should be done to attract and retain more volunteer women coaches in your club? Who do you discuss your volunteering highs and lows with and perhaps seek guidance from and why? How would you describe your relationship with your fellow mentors and players in the teams you work with?
Future coaching plans	Vinson et al. (2016)	What are your future LGFA coaching plans? What motivates you to continue volunteering?

6.3.6 Analysis

The data analysis was managed using the N-VIVO software package (Version 12) and occurred in two stages. Firstly, the interview transcripts were inductively analysed using Braun et al. (2016) reflexive thematic analysis (TA), which then led to the creation of three coach profiles with interwoven themes. The six-step reflexive TA was followed through constant engagement (Braun et al., 2016) with familiarisation and coding (Phase 1-2), which occurred naturally while conducting and transcribing the interviews. Theme development, refining, and naming (Phase 3-5) were influenced by my women's Gaelic football experiences. Forty initial meanings were extracted, usually in the coaches' own words to keep the story close to their lived experiences (Carless et al., 2014). These meanings were consolidated into six themes that included recruitment, retention, knowing your volunteers, support structures, club culture, and coach biography. Figure 6.1 shows the transition from initial meanings to the consolidated themes. The initial meanings are in the coaches own words as derived during transcribing and re-reading the transcritps. This step of re-reading took place via N-VIVO and additional meanings were coded and later formed into themes. Consolidating themes occurred through revisiting the first-round themes and the associated quotes to ensure they were reflective of the participants' voices. The sixth step of the reflective analysis was undertaken in writing this manuscript and the overall doctoral thesis.

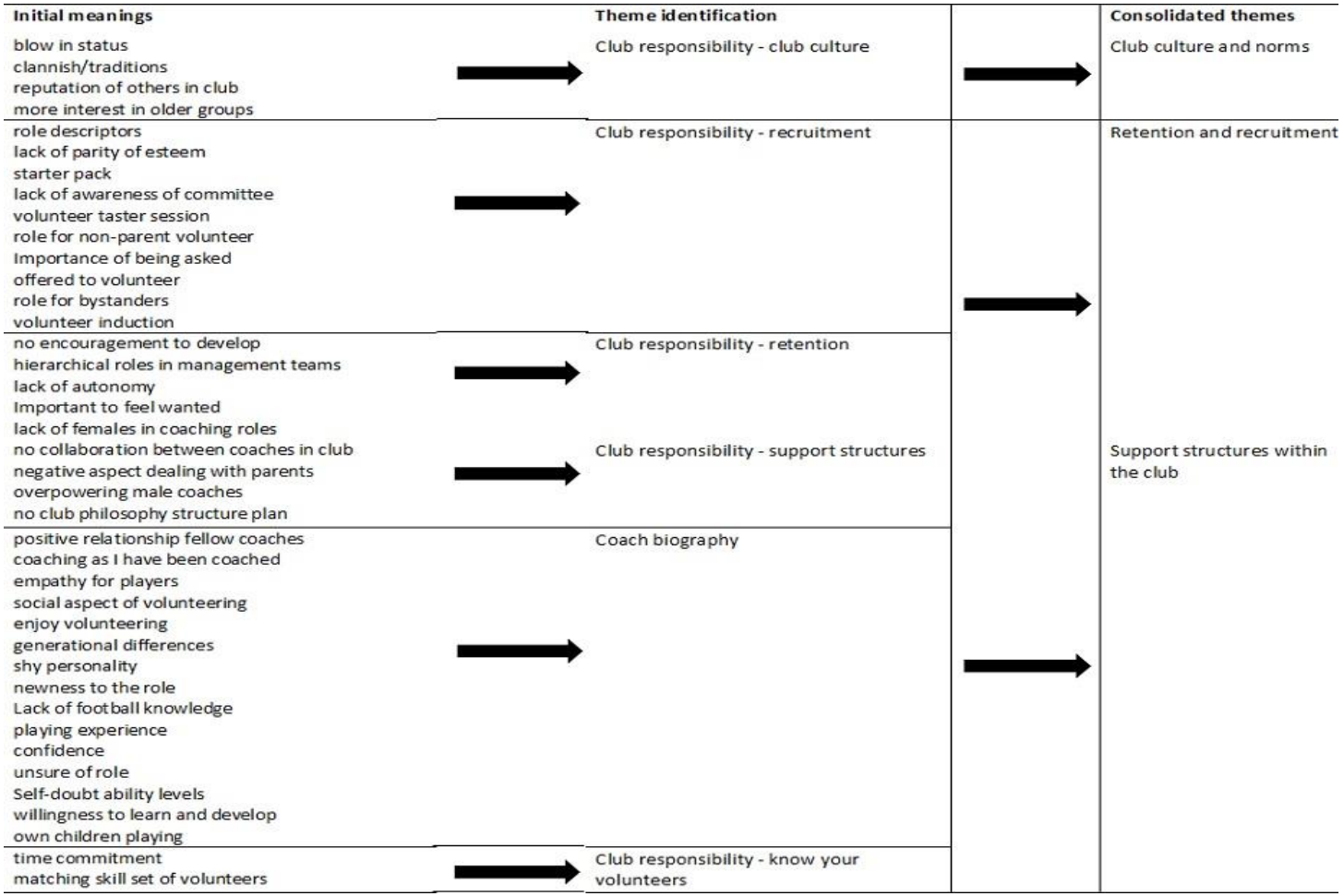

Figure 6. 1 Transition from 40 meanings to consolidated themes

The second stage of creating the composite vignettes was to resonate with the readers and showcase the unique profiles and perspectives of the coaches, while not representing any one coach, but instead displaying the commonality of the identified themes (Paquette et al., 2019). The Smith et al. (2015) study on creative non-fiction supported the process of developing the vignettes. In the context of this study, the interviews were the predominant source of data collection. Creating the vignettes was challenging and there was a process undertaken, firstly through assigning the 40 meanings to the three coach profiles. Stride et al. (2020) seek research to understand the lived experiences of volunteer women coaches through showcasing their differences, hence this study views three different types of volunteers; albeit all are white and able bodied. Nonetheless, it was deemed that these profiles were a mix of the eleven coaches and are reflective of the types of women coaches active in women's Gaelic football clubs.

I am not proposing that the scenes or the conversations that are depicted in this transcript are the actual events that took place (Lewis et al., 2020) or that the stories told happened in that exact order for the coaches but instead these are told to best reflect the themes (Smith, 2013). I have used the interview data along with my observations and lived experiences to best describe the key themes that I selected to answer the research question. The penultimate step was to give the profiles a name and make them as real to life as possible to stir reflections (Paquette et al., 2019) and an interpretive response from the reader (McNeill et al., 2017) in relation to the themes. The construction of characters centred on who they were, what story they would tell, and how they would interact with each other, through the use of dialogue, to bring the characters and the story to life (Smith et al., 2015).

Trustworthiness and credibility can be gleaned from the fact that I outlined my background as a coach and coach developer with years of experience in a similar club setting and the second and third authors acted as 'critical friends' similar to studies by Cavallerio et al. (2017) and Smith (2013). The second and third authors are involved in women's Gaelic football clubs and one is a female volunteer coach that could resonate with the stories and appreciate them from the participant's viewpoint. Similar to Smith (2013), the critical friend's approach was used to check for evocation and cohesion in the stories. As critical friends, they questioned if the content was written in the participants' words or more formal and reflective of my researcher tone. For example, initially, the vignettes included terms like 'club

philosophy' and 'matching volunteer skill-sets' which were later removed as those terms were not used by the women. Furthermore, trustworthiness was considered as the vignettes and letter were sent to all participants to garner if they were reflective of their lived experiences and how the letter might be used in their club, if at all. This process clarified the usefulness of the club letter, and the compatibility, with elements of the coach profiles and stories but did not lead to any requested changes to the vignettes. This approach was in line with Smith and McGannon (2018), as not considering it as member checking to prove the rigour of the study but instead as a form of member reflection to add to the research.

The plot and story line needed to have a start middle and end through the use of scene setting and internal dialogue (Smith et al., 2015). The vignettes were constructed to tell the important points as opposed to all of the themes being included in each story (Smith et al., 2015). Therefore, any miscellaneous themes were removed or consolidated e.g. knowing your volunteers was subsumed into the support structures in the club, and retention and recruitment were combined as a single theme. The themes are evident from all three coaches' stories suggesting that while one might be more prominent for one coach they are relevant to all participants (Clarkson et al., 2019).

The three profiles are reflective of the eleven coaches interviewed and show three typical stages of a coaching pathway; one with long term experience, one novice coach and one that both plays and coaches for the club. All eleven women coaches are categorised into novice, experienced or player-coach, for the purpose of this study with some of their experiences and direct quotes reflected across the three vignettes. Finally, once the vignettes were created, I read and identified their central messages to determine if they matched the main themes and kept in line with the coaches spoken word as reflected in the results section.

6.4 Results

As involvement in the CoP was publicised locally and there were only a few women active in the process, anonymity was a concern. Therefore, the results compiled in the composite vignettes include the key themes across the interviews, as told from three perspectives. These vignettes are intended to illustrate the responsibility on clubs to provide an appropriate environment for the support and development of women coaches. The vignettes are a novel way to present the findings; yet, it was not the intention during data collection to create these coach profiles to tell their

story, but it is the form the analysis took once themes were identified. The six themes (recruitment, retention, knowing your volunteers, support structures, club culture, and coach biography) were subsumed and then depicted as three themes: (a) retention & recruitment, (b) support structures in the club, and (c) club culture and norms. Direct quotes and own words from the coaches are interspersed throughout the vignettes to maintain their voice (Clarkson et al., 2019). The coach stories are based on three distinct female coaches with various backgrounds and motivations for starting and staying in coaching and are representative of the eleven coaches in the study.

Amy is a novice volunteer coach and the vignette shares her early experiences, particularly on the first night and two months into the role. Brenda reflects on her eight years of coaching involvement in the club, before sharing her experiences with her friend that is interested in volunteering. Carol is the third coach, who has a few years of coaching experience and also plays with the adult club team. It is hoped the reader will identify the three key themes intertwined in the three coach profiles. The final part of the results section is a letter drafted to the club on behalf of volunteer women coaches, with recommendations of how to enhance their experiences, based on the core themes.

Coach 1, Amy reflecting on her first night as a volunteer coach.

> It is my first night at training and it is also the first night of the new season. Before this, I was a bystander parent watching from the side lines, and just standing around, but I was never asked to assist until recently when John asked me. I am glad he did, as I could not say no in person, even after ignoring the numerous texts requesting parental involvement. The personal touch of being asked to help was the only approach for me, as I would not have the confidence to offer my assistance otherwise. Also, the timing is better now as my children are older and I have more time to give back to the club. I am apprehensive though as I have no confidence in my coaching ability and no previous playing experience, but I really want to be involved with the team, particularly as long as my daughter is playing with them. As a result of these nerves, I arrive early for the session. Driving to the pitch I think about what would make tonight's session easier for me and other coaches starting on their journey, such as a session plan and knowing what

is expected of me. Perhaps a taster session would have helped, with an experienced coach describing the role and setting out drills to show us what works for different age groups. I then recall the reasons why I decided not to volunteer in the past, which were all focused on barriers I perceived regarding the key people in the club. These barriers included whether you have a child playing, are from the locality, and/or have previous playing or coaching experience.

I refocus on the present and think about the upcoming training session. The butterflies in my stomach notch up a few gears as I wait patiently at the entrance to the pitch for John, the main coach, to notice me. The minutes go by as I observe John chatting with the other two male coaches, Mike and Barry. Mike does not have a daughter playing with the team, but he is an ex-player and highly regarded as a knowledgeable coach in the club. All three male coaches have been with my daughter's team for the last number of years.

As the coaches move onto the pitch, I approach and greet them and John says, 'Oh sorry, I totally forgot you were starting tonight, fair play for coming, what would you like to do?' To which I respond, 'Just watch, if that is ok?' And that is how the session transpires, I stand on the outskirts and almost return to my bystander role. The induction training and supports I envisioned, did not materialise.

Two months have passed, and I am still in observation mode. My duties are limited to bathroom visits, tying shoelaces, and liaising with referees. I am eager to learn as a coach, but my biggest fear was not having the knowledge or confidence to demonstrate skills, or plan and deliver a full session. However, I feel I am the token female. Admittedly, I enjoy my involvement, particularly when my daughter is present. I also enjoy getting to know people as I am a blow-in to the club. I often reflect on my expectations and consider, is this the reality for all female parents/bystanders who start volunteering? I will continue until the end of the season, and although I would love to stay volunteering for as long as possible, I am unsure if I will, in a similar capacity, thereafter. I wonder if the coaches, or indeed the club,

will recognise this and support my desire to build confidence and competence as an active coach.

Coach 2, Brenda, reflecting on her coaching journey before chatting to a friend that is considering volunteering.

My friend Debbie wants my opinion on starting to volunteer in our club, causing me to reflect on my experiences to date. I am in my 9th year and I would describe my involvement as at a distant level. I only recently considered myself a coach as opposed to a helper role that has minor status in the club. So why did I not see myself as a coach before this?, Was it because (a) I only got involved when my daughter started playing, (b) I never played, (c) I am not from the area, (d) of my low self-confidence as a coach or (e) the club never recognised me as a coach?

My main role was handling the paperwork, while the men did all the coaching and I supervised if the players needed to go to the toilet. I help out when the coaches want me, but normally, I hang back and leave them to do it and they have always been happy to take over. Now that I see myself as a coach (after the CoP facilitator referred to me as one), maybe I need to query why my voice is not heard within my coaching team. Being completely ignored like this has caused frustration and led me to question my future involvement. I really enjoy doing something with my daughter that she likes doing and watching her get better at it. I would like to continue coaching until my daughter gets to the age where they do not allow coaches like me, as it will be too competitive. However, I do not feel encouraged to continue coaching by the club or my fellow coaches. I would have to push myself, probably too much, but I will not be pushed out by other coaches either.

I consider Gaelic Games as an integral part of the community and I enjoy the social aspect of volunteering and getting to know new people, because I am your traditional blow-in. The club prides itself on prioritising fun and participation although I have never seen or heard anything communicated by the club as to how we should conduct our sessions. We are all left to our own devices and there is little communication between club coaches or even from the club committee, who only get involved at the start of the year, or if there is an issue. It is only since the CoP that I have thought about what

our individual skills are and if they are being utilised to the best effect. To me, they are not, and the basic requirement of coaching seems to be having a daughter involved with a team or being an ex-player.

So, what would I like or expect my club to do to support and retain me? My club cannot instil equality for all volunteers in the club and feel on par when the men's club has more participants, facilities, coaches, and finances. Our side of the club is not taken as seriously as the men's, even though we are all representing the same community. Is this our fault? Is it the culture or is it because at a national level they are two distinct organisations and we are considered the second tier? What will change this? I want to continue coaching so I think the club must tackle conscious and unconscious bias in relation to gender, parental status, playing experience, and blow-in status. I think most people do not realise the biases and it is just accepted as the norm. I am now at a crossroads; the team is moving to the under 16 age group next year, which is more competitive, and I do not know how I will fit in. I want to and I would like the club to, ensure I am a retained volunteer and not another lost one.

Coach 3, Carol is an adult team player that also coaches and has been asked to encourage her team mates to start coaching.

A club administrator has asked me to encourage my teammates to start coaching. While my experiences are mainly positive, I have also experienced some negativity. I volunteered as part of my college course as an assistant coach and now I am the main coach with an underage team. I liked being the assistant coach, as it was less pressure to come up with drills and ideas. There is a lack of coaching resources in our club, so I probably coach how I have been coached and get ideas from my coaches, who incidentally have always been male. From early on, I was left on my own to do training, which definitely built my confidence.

My negative experiences have centred on my age as much as my gender as it is mainly male coaches in the club, and all are middle-aged or older and I feel they treat me differently. I have experienced overpowering male coaches within my club and with opposing teams. Sometimes when you go to matches, they tend to liaise with Nathan as the man, even though I

organised the game and he is my assistant coach. I feel even the parents treat me differently to Nathan. There is a lack of equality in the club between the boy's and the girl's teams so maybe that is where the different treatment stems from. I find that girls are often shoved aside and men always seem to be the main driving force behind the club or even if the boys won the league and the girls won the league; there would be more thought of the boys winning it.

Things have happened to me as a female that would not if I was a male but if I were ever to stand up and say something, it would become a bigger situation. I believe the club could do more to improve these aspects that may discourage younger female coaches. However, I think the committee avoid confronting people as we cannot afford to lose volunteers. It would also be great if we could get more support from the men's side of the club, as we are sometimes overlooked by the men's committee and coaches are more difficult to get, whereas they will jump for the men's side. It also seems easier to get the parents involved and it is unusual for me to be involved, as I am the only person involved in underage coaching that is not a parent.

Thankfully, the negative confrontations are rare, but I need the club to recognise that I have other commitments outside of football. It is difficult when I am playing and coaching because we have similar seasons where sessions often clash. I need reassurance from my club that the assistance is there for me to miss sessions on such occasions. For my teammates, I think there is also a fear of the unknown and fear of long-term commitment. Maybe if we were allowed to coach with our friends or buddied up with a more experienced coach or take a part of the session that we are comfortable with, then more might start coaching. It would be great if there was an easy route for us as adult players from playing to coaching in the club. Overall, though, I enjoy coaching and I think my peers would too, but we need more work from the club to make this happen.

From gaining an insight into the three coaches' journeys, one must acknowledge the club environment plays an integral role in the volunteer women coaches' experiences. Hence, the following is a letter from the women coaches to their clubs with recommendations based on the significant themes.

Dear Club,

We are writing on behalf of current and future volunteer women coaches in the club with our proposed changes, under the umbrella of retention and recruitment, support structures, and club culture and norms. We highlight some key considerations under each heading that we believe will help all women coaches in this club.

(i) Retention and Recruitment

- Approach females in your club such as the bystanders, G4M&O, and current adult players.
- Use your current coaches as recruitment personnel to ask people they know in a more targeted manner
- Conduct a taster and/or induction session for all club positions to show what the role entails
- Devise a starter pack to include:
    - A typical session relevant to specific age groups with coaching resources
    - Clearly defined role descriptions
    - Requirements of new volunteers regarding coaching qualifications, safeguarding, etc.

(ii) support structures within the club

- Appoint a volunteer officer as the connection between the volunteers and the committee who can organise training, support, and collaboration between all club coaches.
- Know your volunteer's biography – What is their background? What are their skills and competencies and match these to the roles required in the club? Use the training needs to create a pathway for all coaches to develop and progress.

- Have regular check-ins with volunteers throughout the season both formally and informally.

(iii) club culture and norms.

- Introduce a club philosophy, informed by all stakeholders i.e. committee, parents, coaches, and players, and communicate it to all members. The coaching philosophy should include what is important to the club e.g. playing experience, coaching qualification, coach-athlete relationships, and characteristics of good coaching.
- Recognise and reduce the club's barriers to participation
- Champion parity of esteem
    - between the men's and ladies club in the community, and organise bias awareness training in relation to gender, age, blow-in status, playing experience and parental status
    - that coaches and helpers at all levels are valued equally in the club
- Challenge those that are not conforming with the club philosophy

While we appreciate the above will take time to implement, we are confident that they are achievable in the short-term, leading to positive long-term benefits for all involved.

Yours Sincerely,
Current and future women coaches

6.5 Discussion

For both anonymity purposes and in order to communicate the women coaches' voices, CNF was chosen to present the findings. The organisational layer of the Ecological Intersectional Model (EIM) (LaVoi, 2016) and the Psychological Contract (PC) were the foundations for the design and analysis of this research. This study extends previous research by illuminating the influence of the non-elite club environment on the experiences of volunteer women coaches and provides a starting point for clubs to examine their organisation. The vignettes illustrate the experiences of three coaches within the same sport but at different stages of their coaching journey through three different profiles. The first profile was a novice

coach, the second an experienced coach, and the third, a player-coach. These three profiles are representative of all eleven women coaches interviewed. Each story portrays individual lived experiences and overall themes common between them, namely retention and recruitment, club culture and norms, and support structures within the club. The stories also highlight the recommendations for clubs to address some of the challenges they faced and further enhance the positive experiences mentioned, starting with retention and recruitment.

6.5.1 Recruitment & Retention

Internationally volunteer coach recruitment and retention are issues most sports systems have to overcome (Hoye et al., 2019). Recruitment and retention are closely linked and this study argues for increasing the effort in retaining current volunteers to reduce the need for continuously seeking new ones. Nagel et al. (2019) concur and propose that volunteer retention should be a focus, along with recognition and support, in the form of splitting workload among volunteers. Sharing the workload and not expecting too much from a small number of volunteers is a priority for women coaches that often have greater caring roles and responsibilities within the home. Plausibly, the profiles created in this study, namely a novice coach, an existing coach, and a coach that is still playing, are representative of female coaches in most women's Gaelic football clubs. Due to the parochial nature of women's Gaelic football, people rarely move to a different club, unless they are moving residence. Yet, they may volunteer their time with other non-profit organisations instead or quit. In this regard, it is essential that clubs know their volunteers and their respective needs, in order to establish the necessary support.

Rundle-Thiele and Auld (2009) argued that several factors could lead to someone quitting coaching. These include burnout, concerns about self-efficacy, lack of enjoyment and lack of time. Contrary to some narratives that confidence is not a barrier for women coaches, Clarkson et al. (2019) argue that it is; especially at non-elite and recreational levels, and this study supports these findings. The coaches refer to a lack of confidence in their coaching ability and allude to ways it could be improved by the club, which is positive, given that Robertson (2016) state low confidence contributes to the under representation of women coaches. Moreover, the clubs in this study have women coaches at underage but their potential fallout from coaching roles with older age groups, due to a lack of confidence or not seeing a place for them, is concerning. Research like this study is similar to that proposed

by Rundle-Thiele and Auld (2009) which suggests that more focus is needed on both the pull and push factors that impact coaches' decisions to stay or leave the organisation.

Females coached by females are more likely to stay in coaching (Wasend & LaVoi, 2019). This is a pull factor that bodes well for women's Gaelic football clubs, as if current players are coached by females, they too might transition into coaching. Along with seeing female coaches, an opportunity to sample coaching in a supportive environment with their peers can help females make an informed decision on coaching, as opposed to basing the choice on stereotypes that do not view women coaches as the norm (Soler et al., 2021). Carol, as the player-coach, advocated for this approach to encourage her team mates to start coaching by allowing them to work together with support from a more experienced coach. Moreover, playing experience is crucial for women coaches' sport specific knowledge and confidence levels (Allen & Reid, 2019) and is heavily linked to women starting coaching (Wells, 2016).

Amy and Brenda consider their lack of playing experience as a weakness and refer to their fellow male coaches' extensive playing experience equating to a reputation as knowledgeable coaches. This thought process is reinforced by a Gaelic Games coaching survey where almost 20% of the female coaches have never played and only 30% playing until adult grade in comparison to 4% and 58% respectively among male respondents (Horgan et al., 2021). In fact, similar to Carol, 29% of females in the same survey were still playing while coaching, in comparison to 19% of their male counterparts (Horgan et al., 2021). This further highlights the throughput current players might be as future coaches. Recruiting players is advantageous, as they are familiar with the organisation compared to those external and without previous involvement; whom require different recruitment practices (Hoye et al., 2019).

Although the coaches' experiences varied, they are eager to stay involved with their respective coaching roles and need the club to do more to ensure their retention. Volunteers are more likely to stay if they feel needed and attached to the club; even if overall job satisfaction is low (Schlesinger et al., 2013). This study is in accordance with the findings of recent studies that claim retention of women coaches is also connected to the involvement of their children (Schlesinger et al.,

2013), as mothers will often start coaching coinciding with their child's involvement (Leberman & LaVoi, 2011) and will continue as long as they stay involved (Busser & Carruthers, 2010). Thus, highlighting the importance of player retention for this purpose and also as Clarkson et al. (2019) reported, players can be a group of potential coaches. However, in order to fully support female players transitioning into coaching, it is important that they are encouraged and supported from the beginning of their journey.

6.5.2 Support structures within the club

This study, along with Clarkson et al. (2019), suggest that support structures and networks are important components in retaining volunteer women coaches. To establish appropriate support structures, it is imperative that clubs know their volunteers' biographies, so they can meet their expectations through matching their skill-sets to suitable roles. Egli et al. (2014) recommend the use of an entry questionnaire or interview, to assist with meeting expectations. However, this study proposes a less formal introductory process through inductions and asking people to get involved, which Amy promoted, over generic calls for parental assistance. This informal, but individual, approach will aid open communication and provide information regarding the club goals (Schlesinger & Weigelt-Schlesinger, 2013), which Brenda calls for, as she is not aware of any communications about her club's aims, even after being involved for eight years.

Although volunteer coaches are time poor (Walsh, 2015) they are still willing to learn and develop to gain confidence and competence in the role (Walsh et al., 2011). While the majority of LGFA qualified coaches at the introductory level are female, this figure may be skewed as the sport is relatively new, and historically, coaches completed the male sport equivalent course which is recognised as suitably qualified. Furthermore, it is known, anecdotally at least, that the number of active volunteer women coaches is not reflective of this statistic and so data regarding the development and retention of women coaches is warranted.

This study outlines the experiences of the women coaches and while they have been recruited successfully, Amy, Brenda and Carol may leave coaching, if the correct structures are not implemented to support and encourage them to progress; particularly as their daughters progress to the older age groups. Hancock et al. (2017) refer to the "leaky pipeline" for female administrators in collegiate sport and

Wells (2016) refers to it with females as professional coaches, so the same could be true for volunteer coaches progressing through the age groups. Females need role models to see coaching as an active possibility (Schull, 2016), so ensuring effective support structures are in place has the potential for a snowball effect, which could lead to the recruitment of more women coaches.

The coaches suggested favourable recruitment practices should include taster sessions, guidance from more experienced volunteers, and a point of contact, such as a volunteer officer. Matching the needs and expectations of volunteers is crucial to their longevity and commitment to the role (Egli et al., 2014). Having an organised method of matching experiences and meeting expectations could be within the remit of a volunteer officer. Hogan et al. (2021) (See Chapter 5) propose a volunteer role at the administration level in clubs and this study furthers the proposal by outlining some of their duties. Such functions could include a point of contact between the committee and coaches, along with facilitating inductions and developing a starter pack for new volunteers. Amy, reflecting on her first night of coaching, endorses some form of induction and a starter pack and Brenda supports this further by alluding to the lack of matching volunteer skill sets. From Carol's perspective, there is a lack of coaching resources in her club, which causes her to coach how she has been coached. Early stage assistance should lead to a positive experience for women coaches, and further club-based support structures are essential throughout their coaching journey.

The club can provide club-based training and as with Søvik et al. (2017), a move away from traditional coach education to collaboration among coaches of different levels is proposed. Engaging in coaching dialogue will connect volunteers (Allen & Reid, 2019), particularly if coach development focuses on a common goal (Clements & Morgan, 2015) through learner centred content, based on the coaches' biographies (Leduc et al., 2012). The coaches' biographies can be used as a starting point to recognise their training needs and create a pathway for them to develop and progress. However, to react to the coaches' needs, based on their biographies, there is an onus on clubs to know their volunteers and understand their background, strengths, and areas for development.

A CoP could suit coach development, where ideas and expertise are shared in a safe environment. The success of a CoP will depend on a dedicated facilitator, regular

meetings, common goals, and building on coaches' strengths (Bertram et al., 2016). Although Bertram et al. (2016) believe coaches can set up their own CoP, the findings of this study indicate, a clear readiness for change and acceptance of a move away from the traditional coach education, as prerequisites. Furthermore, as indicated by Brenda, club coaches operate in isolation with their particular age group, which was deemed a negative aspect of her club. This lack of formal or informal collaboration between club coaches needs addressing, in the first instance, to reap the benefits of working together.

Once collaborating, volunteers use their networks with fellow coaches for guidance, conflict resolution, mentoring (Harman & Doherty, 2014), and solving coaching problems (North et al., 2020), which can then become the norm. These progressive and combined approaches of coach development could be introduced in the club and if established may lead to a positive club culture relating to coach development. These measures align with Rundle-Thiele and Auld (2009) in that the decision of volunteers to stay or leave is predominantly a personal one. Yet, the organisation can impact the decision by ensuring a positive environment and culture for volunteer coaches. Importantly, Millar and Doherty (2018) claim that readiness to change is a significant factor in whether or not community sports organisations can build their volunteering capacity. This study shows organisations the starting point for their respective clubs so that they can first identify what needs changing and then address it, which may include the club culture and norms.

6.5.3 Club culture and norms

The norms and culture in a club can have both a positive and negative impact on the women coaches' experiences. Hogan et al. (2021) (See Chapter 5) call for women to be viewed as more than female liaison personnel and to recognise them as coaches, which may require club members to reduce their biases through awareness training. Carol, as the youngest of the three coaches, experienced gender and age-related bias, as she felt the older male coaches treated her differently. Yet, the male coaches were never confronted by the club, in case they stopped volunteering. There is a need to challenge such behaviour through awareness training on how this could negatively impact the experiences of the younger female coaches. This is supported by Walker and Sartore-Baldwin (2013) who imply that societal views need to change to deem women coaches equal to their male

counterparts, as typical social norms often prevent opportunities for women in coaching.

All three women coaches profiled alluded to a lack of equality between the women's and men's side of the club. Similar to Clarkson et al. (2019), this study supports the finding that women coaches feel a lack of respect, among their male peers in the club, and women predominantly coach at lower levels of competition. Such conscious and unconscious biases can feed into the culture and norms in clubs. Lewis et al. (2018) purported that women coaches often feel intimidated and encounter sexist comments when in male dominated coaching environments. Addressing such organisational biases includes exploring how coaches conform to these identities to fit into the environment (Burton & Newton, 2021) and clubs could try and disrupt negative discourse and norms for women coaches (Stride et al., 2020). Managing the culture in the sports organisation in the form of ongoing communications, philosophy on winning and volunteer coaches feeling valued, are key components (Burton & Newton, 2021). Allen and Shaw (2013) suggest leaders and decision makers reflect on the values, structures, and supports of their respective organisations and memberships.

The culture and perception of considering men to be better coaches than women was apparent in all the coaches' stories and often occurred naturally and without evidence, which aligns with the findings of Schull and Kihl (2019). Invariably, all eleven coaches referred to their blow-in or outsider status, due to the parochial nature of the sport, which is attributed, anecdotally at least, to the overall Gaelic games culture. While it is regularly used in jest it can also lead to unconscious bias in the club and potentially inflates the status of some coaches, most often males, that have a perceived greater knowledge based solely on their playing careers.

This study showed that level of coaching, age, and gender were among the biases that the coaches encountered in their clubs. Additionally, non-parent, women coaches should not be treated as if they have more time or availability to coach, as doing so is also forming a bias (Burton & Newton, 2021). In this regard, reducing the biases that exist within the club on parental status, age, gender, blow-in status and playing experience, will enhance the experiences for existing and future women coaches. It is important for clubs to recognise and address the barriers to

participation in their club and they must champion parity of esteem for all in women's Gaelic football.

While the recommendations in this text are considered to have the potential to improve the experiences for all volunteers in the club, one must be cognisant of the limitations facing clubs. Restricted resources in terms of personnel that are often engaged in multiple volunteer roles; is one, along with a collective willingness for change. In this regard, the NGB could consider these recommendations and put the supports in place to train and develop club members to adopt these roles and become more diligent in supporting and developing volunteer coaches at non-elite level. The role of the volunteer officer needs an official title and role description from the NGB, perhaps after trialling it in a sample of clubs over the 2022 season. This would then help inform best practice for additional clubs in 2023. This study advocates an ideal candidate as someone with volunteer coach experience, good interpersonal skills, and an in-depth understanding of the organisational functions within a club.

Further to the organisational level improvements that clubs can make to improve their volunteers' experiences, there is a need to address the culture within the club. The three coaches highlight the cultural imbalance and norms within the club and it is clear that parity of esteem is a difficult ask, and, one that will take time to improve. The women want to feel as valued and important as the men, which requires open communication between both committees, as well as some common activities and initiatives. Those in decision making positions will need to promote this change and invest time, and perhaps, financial resources to have it as a future vision for the club. Ultimately, all the blame should not be aimed at the males but, instead, the decision-making positions need to take ownership of what they can do to attract, develop, empower and retain, volunteer women coaches.

In the first instance the culture within the club regarding the role of the female coach and the perception of what their duties should include needs to be addressed. Although Brenda's involvement is lengthy, she continued doing minor tasks and was rarely involved in the coaching aspects. Through her story, it is apparent that the male coaches she has worked alongside take over and she does not feel she has an opportunity to be involved as her daughter progresses to more competitive age groups. This transition from participation to competitive levels suggests that the male coach is the best placed coach in this scenario. It appears acceptable for

women coaches to stay with the younger teams, but they do not feel competent, or indeed, welcome with the more competitive teams.

There is an obvious power dynamic within the club that, from Brenda's perspective, is heavily based on masculinity, while Carol, a much younger coach, with more playing than coaching experience, has negative experiences from domineering male coaches. While many of the coaches in this study had negative experiences, there was still a sense of overall enjoyment in their volunteer roles. The eleven participants were eager to stay involved in coaching, yet their continuation will be dictated by others in the club. Therefore, it is incumbent on the club to ensure that enjoyment is the overarching sentiment of volunteer women coaches and through adopting some of this study's recommendations, that could be achievable.

While this study focuses on the impact of the organisational level on the coaches' experiences, this is only one aspect of their lives and as Potrac et al. (2016) acknowledge, there are various interconnections, social networks, and personal identities that community based coaches must also manage. Hence, this study does not suggest that this is an exhaustive understanding of the women coaches' perspectives in respect of their organisations, as it is complex, with multi-layers and variables impacting their experiences. Volunteer women coaches have varied motivations for coaching, individual challenges, and plans to continue. Therefore, clubs and NGBs must be cognisant of this and try to understand and care about their circumstances (Stride et al., 2020). Furthermore, volunteer management programmes can aid recruitment, development, and retention of volunteers through role descriptions, induction and balancing the needs of the club and the volunteers by considering their perspectives (Hoye et al., 2019), which this study also supports.

6.6 Conclusion

Volunteer women coaches have been under represented in coaching research to date (Pfister & Norman, 2017), even though there have been many policies and initiatives focusing on increasing the number of women in coaching (Harman & Doherty, 2014). This study set out to develop a better understanding of how the club's environment influences the support and development of volunteer women Gaelic football coaches. It is envisaged that this research will resonate with those involved in women's Gaelic football and start a conversation on the role of volunteer women coaches and, more importantly, what is required, from a club perspective, for their support and development.

This study purports that these findings are common in many Gaelic games clubs but may also be true for other volunteer sports. Ultimately, knowing and understanding your volunteer, providing the correct support structures, and tackling the negative aspects of the club culture, can lead to positive recruitment and retention of volunteer women coaches. Retaining women coaches is a priority, as women tend to quit volunteering quicker than their male counterparts (Burton & Newton, 2021). While this study focused on women coaches, there is nothing to suggest that these improved organisational practices would not also benefit men volunteers in a non-elite club setting.

Clubs are advised to incorporate some of the key findings from this study to best serve their current and potential women coaches. Accordingly, clubs can use these vignettes as a starting point to identify which category of coaches they have and if the stories are reflective of their lived experiences. Once armed with this information, clubs can plan and prepare their organisation in the most context-specific way to retain their volunteers. In the short term, the three clubs represented will have access to the findings to highlight their strengths and possible areas for improvement. More broadly, the LGFA can use the findings to share with clubs to self-assess regarding their volunteer profiles and experiences. Such widespread dissemination may inform current and future practices at the non-elite club level.

Within these practices, the role of the volunteer officer is key to the success of any future recruitment and retention initiatives that a club introduces. Training and support for these officers will be necessary from the NGB, in the first instance, as well as support from all club members. This study recommends that clubs devise a philosophy, created by all relevant stakeholders, and anyone in breach of these guiding principles is encouraged to upskill and develop. This research could be used by other NGBs as a starting point to understand the gendered perceptions of their volunteers and use it to build a more positive environment, with a cumulative effect on volunteer retention and recruitment.

The limitations of this study help to focus researchers for future studies such as the lack of intersectional identity of the women coaches; albeit they are representative of the active women coaches in women's Gaelic football in Ireland. Further, the participants were all active volunteers and were interested in continuing, so were presumably having an overall positive experience in their respective organisations.

Future research could focus on a more diverse range of female volunteer coaches in the club, to give a voice to those that are starting or have recently left or even those that have not commenced. Additionally, research could focus on the organisational voice when it comes to the support and development of women coaches to see how the two perspectives align. A further limitation is that the three clubs had volunteered for the CoP, indicating their ambition, which may skew the results in a positive way; a less progressive club may unearth an interesting contrast to this study. As such other stakeholders, such as players, parents, and club officers, within the clubs could also be the focus of future research in order to determine their context specific club experiences. Further studies could build on this work and oversee a club that has implemented some of these proposals and determine if volunteer women coaches' experiences have been enhanced as a result.

The use of vignettes and the club letter is a novel approach to showcase research on women in coaching and addresses the opportunity proposed by Smith (2013) to have research available to those outside of academia. The member reflections, of the vignette and club letter, position this study beyond research. They can be used as a tool to ignite discussions and a club audit to establish their status, and potential improvements, in relation to their volunteers. Having the stories based on others may foster a deeper understanding of hidden messages and act as a call to action for changes in the current approaches to recruitment, retention, support, and development of volunteer women coaches at non-elite level across all sports; not just in women's Gaelic football.

This chapter was as a direct result of the findings from Phase 1 as the coaches had different experiences across their clubs. Understanding their club specific experiences were important for the overall study. As the coaches were part of a CoP, in their club, the next phase was to establish how effective a CoP is in their support and development. The next chapter (Chapter 7) is written in the format of a journal article that explores the thoughts and perspectives of 9 coaches across 3 clubs that took part in one of 4 focus groups. Chapter 7 is not yet published but has been submitted to the International Sports Coaching journal for review, in May 2022.

CHAPTER 7

PHASE 3

A CLUB-BASED COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE (CoP) AS A TOOL TO ENHANCE THE SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT OF VOLUNTEER WOMEN COACHES

Chapter 7: Phase 3 - Title: A club-based Community of Practice as a tool to enhance the support and development of volunteer women coaches.

7.1 Abstract

The support and development of volunteer women coaches, at club level, have been underrepresented in coaching research to date. In an attempt to address this gap, a club-based Community of Practice (CoP) was initiated and facilitated in three women's Gaelic football clubs in Ireland. Nine participating women coaches, from the three clubs, took part in four focus groups to determine the effectiveness of the CoP on their support and development. The findings showed the positive influence attending the CoP had on their confidence levels both for speaking up within the club and also in their coaching roles. The coaches highlighted the importance of an external facilitator to lead the CoP so that everyone is treated equally, and the normal biases and stereotypes are reduced. NGBs should invest both personnel and finances in the facilitation of context specific, club-based CoPs that focus on the club's self-identified developmental needs.

7.2 Introduction

Most youth sports coaches in Ireland are volunteers within community clubs. To date, Ireland does not have coaching workforce data, however, the Gaelic Games Associations surveyed 10,647 coaches with 90% coaching at the club level and only 20% of participants were female (Horgan et al., 2021). This is lower than the number of women that comprise 32% of the 400,000 volunteers contributing on average 3.5 hours per week to Irish sport (Sport Ireland, 2021). In Ireland, National Governing Body (NGB) coach education qualifications, professional development, and coach developer training are conducted by Sport Ireland (Chambers & Gregg, 2016).

Under the remit of Sport Ireland, the Ladies Gaelic football Association (LGFA), govern the amateur sport of Ladies Gaelic football, with over 188,000 members across 1200 clubs (LGFA, 2018). The LGFA organises non-elite club and elite inter-county competitions in Ireland and in some international communities. The LGFA 2017-2022 Strategic Plan (LGFA, 2018) aims to provide support and development for their volunteers, considering the demanding roles they have. Within women's Gaelic football, 65% of those qualified with introductory level coach education are women (LGFA, 2020) which is larger than the 37% figure across other Irish sports (Sport Ireland Coaching, 2019). Despite these high figures,

women coaches, in Ireland, have only recently been included in the research literature. Volunteer women coaches want their clubs to enhance the club-based support structures and provide opportunities to improve their confidence levels (Hogan et al., 2022) (See Chapter 6). Other international research also considers support structures and networks as vital to the retention of volunteer women coaches (Clarkson et al., 2019).

Women coaches encounter both hidden and informal challenges which may result in their low representation in coaching (Schlesinger et al., 2021). These may include biases, lack of role models, low confidence levels, and a lack of support (Hogan et al., 2022) (See Chapter 6). The role of the volunteer coach is complex with growing expectations, leading to difficulty in recruitment and retention (Hoye et al., 2019). Volunteer coaches are willing to learn and develop in their role (Walsh et al., 2011) which comes from playing and coaching experience (Watts & Cushion, 2017) as well as formal and non-formal coach education (Taylor et al., 2014). Coach education helps coaches with qualifications but should keep the coach at the centre, via a constructivist approach (Ciampolini et al., 2019). While training and support of coaches are key elements (Griffiths & Armour, 2012), volunteer attitudes have changed in recent years which requires organisations to manage them in more innovative ways (Hoye & Kappelides, 2021).

Recent research has highlighted the failings of traditional coach education as coaches do not spend adequate time acting as coaches and therefore have no change in behaviour, thereafter (Stodter & Cushion, 2014). While coaches appreciate the content covered in courses, less than half used it or subsequently changed their coaching behaviour (Søvik et al., 2017). MacDonald et al. (2020) echo similar findings noting that coach behaviour improved during the coach education intervention only. Very often coach education programmes do not allow ample time for competence learning and self-reflection but instead are driven by content (Walters et al., 2020) which is true for LGFA programmes.

Many coach developers believe the courses they deliver, are often decontextualised and lack impact (Watts et al., 2021). Lewis et al. (2018) further this by highlighting the gap between what NGBs think coaches want from coach education and what coaches actually want and need. For women coaches, Allen and Reid (2019) suggest basing the content on their needs, building the content over time, and

focusing on guiding rather than prescribing. Having an input into the design and implementation of a coach development initiative should aid volunteer retention (Nash & Sproule, 2012), provided it is specific to their contexts (Clements & Morgan, 2015).

Team sports coaches, in Ireland, prefer informal learning opportunities that are based on self-directed learning and practical coaching experience as opposed to more formal approaches (Sherwin et al., 2017). Clubs can move from traditional coach education and encourage more collaboration between coaches (Søvik et al., 2017). Such collaboration allows coaches to form a connection (Allen & Reid, 2019), particularly if focusing on a common goal (Clements & Morgan, 2015). This common goal should include learner-centred content that is specific to the coaches' backgrounds (Leduc et al., 2012). Overall, life experiences inform coach learning, actions, and decisions (Callary et al., 2012) and so volunteer coaches should have regular discussions with their fellow coaches (Naslund & Pennington, 2011).

Clubs can form learning communities by creating new applied knowledge, in a sport-specific way (Culver et al., 2020). A Community of Practice (CoP), as a form of collaboration, allows volunteers to use their networks to resolve any conflicts (Harman & Doherty, 2014), alongside discussing any coaching related issues (North et al., 2020). A club-based CoP could enable volunteer coaches to feel supported and valued, through access to appropriate coaching resources (Nash & Sproule, 2012) thus reducing working in isolation with their respective teams (Hogan et al., 2022) (See Chapter 6). Previous authors highlight the complexities of implementing a coach education programme and believe collaboration with club participants along with support and encouragement from a club's leadership is necessary (Søvik et al., 2017). A readiness for change is required from the club decision-makers to believe in the potential of a CoP in comparison to the traditional coach education they are accustomed to (Bertram et al., 2016).

A CoP can influence the development of inter and intrapersonal skills considering traditional coach education focuses more on the technical and tactical skills (Garner & Hill, 2017). Chapman et al. (2019) propose a co-constructed course, whereby coaches engage and identify their philosophy and how it impacts the planning and delivery of their sessions. Elements of a successful CoP include a dedicated facilitator, regular meetings, common goals, and understanding individual strengths

(Bertram et al., 2016). A facilitator, and participant involvement in the design, planning, and delivery phases, are needed for a successful venture (Culver et al., 2020). Coaches' prior knowledge and expertise should be considered for coach developers to move from instructor to facilitator mode (Chesterfield et al., 2010). Appreciation of the coaches' background and biographies allows for identifying the coaches' developmental needs (Hogan et al., 2022) (See Chapter 6) as opposed to the blanket approach of standardised coach education (Banwell et al., 2019).

Most of the coaches, coach developers, and participants in coach education courses are men so there has been little focus on gender in this research domain (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2021). This study builds on previous research that explored the experiences of female women's Gaelic football coaches that established club-based, context-specific support was required for their development (Hogan et al., 2021) (See Chapter 5). The second phase of research was conducted with a different cohort of women coaches, to unearth the influence of their respective club environments on their coaching experiences (Hogan et al., 2022) (See Chapter 6). The Ecological Intersectional Model was employed in both studies to inform the research design and analysis phases of the research. The EIM is based on the Ecological Systems Theory as propositioned by Bronfenbrenner (1994) and was developed by LaVoi (2016) to understand women coaches' experiences using the four layers of individual, interpersonal organisational, and socio-cultural.

Volunteer women coaches are also the focus of this study and the EIM was utilised firstly for continuity between the studies and secondly because the authors agree with LaVoi (2019) that the experiences of women coaches are influenced by those around them. For this study a CoP was designed and facilitated, by the first author, with both men and women coaches within three individual women's Gaelic football clubs, focusing on their self-identified areas for development. The research question at the centre of this study is - How can club-based CoPs support and develop volunteer women coaches in Ladies Gaelic football?

7.3 Materials and methods

7.3.1 Researcher background

The first author, as the researcher, identifies as a white, female Irish citizen. I have 27 years of playing experience, at the non-elite level, and 21 years as a volunteer coach with club youth, adult, and inter-collegiate teams in women's Gaelic football.

My current involvement centres on roles as a coach, coach developer (CD), and Coach Developer Assessor (CDA) giving me a unique insight into both the club environment and the experiences of volunteer coaches. I have 17 years of coach developing experience within women's Gaelic football coach education programmes. I adopt a constructivist position, as I align with Chapman et al. (2019)'s approach that coach education is based on social interaction through guiding learning as opposed to instructing or dictating. My interpretivist view of the world aligns with Gearity et al. (2016) as a social interaction between thoughts and behaviours. I use my extensive background to interpret the participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2014). I acknowledge my stance in order to highlight how it impacts the decisions made in the research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

7.3.2 Research design

Ethical approval was granted from the authors' home institute, Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (A18-035). Focus groups were conducted with women coaches from three clubs participating in individual club-based CoPs. The clubs were recruited by the LGFA, via an application process and all three clubs that applied were included. Each club identified a coordinator as the contact person with the CoP facilitator (researcher). Eight meetings, with each club, occurred across a full playing season from February to November 2021. Table 7.1 describes the clubs involved and the representation of coaches at the CoP sessions. External CPD courses, such as safeguarding, disability awareness training, and psychological skills training were arranged, for interested club members, in addition to the CoP meetings.

This study builds on work from Ireland by Walsh and Chambers (2015) that focused on collaborative learning for all members including coaches, athletes, mentors, and administrators, through sharing knowledge and problems. The CoP covered a full playing season, ranging from nine to eleven months, depending on the clubs. Meetings were conducted virtually, via Zoom, due to the unreliable nature of the COVID-19 restrictions. Zoom was used as many coaches were familiar with it and the features such as breakout rooms, polls, and other interactive tools were used to stimulate discussions.

Overall, the online sessions and COVID-19 restrictions increased the numbers, in the beginning, as all sport was stopped. Numbers deteriorated once restrictions were

lifted and sport recommenced, however, it may be the case that virtual sessions did not suit some coaches and so they never attended. During the design and delivery phases, I was integrated into the dynamic and existing relationships to bring greater cohesion to their club's coaching structures. Yet, my outside status enabled me to challenge some of the viewpoints and structures in the clubs.

Table 7. 1 Characteristics of the three participating clubs and coaches

	Club A	**Club B**	**Club C**
Location	Rural	Urban	Rural
No. of playing Members	109	60	138
Age Groups catered for	Under 8 to Adult	Under 8 to adult	Under 6 to adult
No. of coaches in the club	19	9	20
No. of women coaches (%)	7 (37%)	6 (67%)	3 (15%)
No. of participants at 1 or more CoP sessions	17	9	17
No. of women participants (%) at 1 or more CoP sessions	6 (35%)	7 (78%)	11 (65%)
No. of women in Focus Groups	2	2	5

To ensure optimum coach buy-in and appreciating how time-poor volunteer coaches are, participants could opt-in or out of the process at any time. The CoP meetings were designed using elements from the LEARNS model by conducting engaging sessions that promote learning through allowing participants time to be coaches (Walters et al., 2020). The LEARNS model is an acronym for Learner-centred, Engagement, Applying knowledge, Reflect, New knowledge, and Stretch by way of growth and development (Walters et al., 2020). The LEARNS model focused on my ability as a CD to self-reflect and garner new knowledge from the coaches by identifying their needs, in a context-specific way (Walters et al., 2020). Moreover, the CoP aligned with the description of Wenger et al. (2002) where a common goal, concern, or passion for a topic was shared among the members, and knowledge was deepened through ongoing interactions. As the CoP meetings were not voice or video recorded, my observational notes were summarised after each

meeting and disseminated, via the coordinators, to assist with planning the next meeting.

Similar to Clements and Morgan (2015) the CoP allowed coaches to work together on a self-selected area of development. As with Walsh and Chambers (2015), a needs analysis was conducted with the club, to understand their perspectives and expectations through a coaching questionnaire (Appendix E) and several phone conversations with the club-assigned coordinator. Although the initial CoP sessions were similar across all clubs that was because as the facilitator, I was focusing on the individual coach questionnaire responses. Many of the responses were broad and generic hopes for developing their coaches and club such as retaining players, recruiting more volunteers and sourcing more coaching materials. As these were common across all clubs the initial two sessions were focused on these broader aims until we established what the participants from each club wanted to highlight and focus on for the remainder of the CoP sessions. In this regard the clubs had varying priorities and action points as outlined in Table 7.2.

Table 7. 2 Details of content and dicussions during the club specific CoPs

	Club A	Club B	Club C
Clubs self-identified focus	Club Philosophy	Volunteer recruitment	Coach development
Areas discussed during CoP	What does the club mean to the CoP participants? Who are the key stakeholders in the club? How do we get their input into what the club philosophy might entail?	Identify what roles are needed? How do we recruit new volunteers? How good are we at inducting new volunteers?	How to plan a session? Psychological aspect of coaching players?
Action Points	Conducting questionnaire on all stakeholders to establish key elements for the club philosophy	Established list of all volunteer roles needed in the club? Targeted people to ask to get involved outlining the roles	Practical coach education session X2 Use of LGFA Coaching competency chart (See Appendix Q) More discussions and planning with fellow coaches Attendance at two-part Psychological skills training session designed specifically for CoP clubs
Outcome at end of CoP	Draft one of club philosophy established with a working group formed to continue it for 2022 season	Increased number of volunteers in a number of roles More structed approach and plan for recruiting future volunteers with roles identified and allowing interested parties to opt in	Forming a coach development committee

This study aimed to emulate the attributes of a successful CoP as outlined by Bertram et al. (2016) including (a) a dedicated facilitator to keep the members engaged (b) regular meetings (c) a common context for participants and (d) coaching-related discussions that build on coaches' strengths. Subsequently, I designed and facilitated three CoPs with my philosophy centred on the collaborative nature of participant involvement, at every stage. Akin to Cronin and Lowes (2016) I was critical of my CD practices through my CoP observations and answering the following questions as proposed by Culver et al. (2020), (a) in what learning activities are coaches engaging?, and (b) what have they learned? However, analysing my CD role, in facilitating the CoP, was outside the scope of this manuscript, and instead, the focus is solely on the women coaches' experiences.

7.3.3 Data Collection

Data collection centred on focus groups with a sample of women coaches from the three clubs (n=9). Initially, I spoke to all club co-ordinators, on an individual basis, to gain an understanding of what the club and the respective members wanted to gain from the season-long CoP. Building a rapport with the co-ordinators was important as they were the liaison person to arrange the meetings and advocate for and promote involvement in the CoP among their club members. The coordinators were key gatekeepers and aware of what the researcher was trying to achieve (Riemer, 2011), in this case with individual club coaches. Using a Microsoft forms survey, I explored coaches' experience and expectations of the CoP. 27 coaches from the three clubs completed the questionnaire with 25 of these attending at least one of the CoP sessions. The data formed a baseline to (a) launch the CoP, (b) meet their expectations, (c) build a profile of any potential attendees, and (d) provide contact details for the focus group recruitment.

(a) Focus groups

Four focus groups were held with the women participants, at the end of the CoP, to determine how effective it was in supporting and developing them as coaches. Criterion sampling was used for participant recruitment, with the inclusion of coaches that attended at least three CoP sessions and were coaching for the 2021 season. I emailed 18 coaches across the three clubs, and six agreed to take part. A further three signed up after a follow-up email. Some of these coaches (n=7) had previously participated in the interviews for Phase 2 of this study. As I had met the coaches on at least three occasions, virtually and/or face to face, I was known to

them and Sparkes and Smith (2014) suggest that being a member of the sub-group or culture helps to gain access to the participants. The club co-ordinator was also pivotal in this regard as they promoted my calls for research participants.

The emails contained the consent form, potential questions, and possible dates that the focus groups would be conducted via Zoom. This platform was chosen as it allowed for security, and interactivity levels (Archibald et al., 2019), and the participants were familiar with it from the previous CoP sessions. Furthermore, live transcriptions, password-enabled access, and the waiting room feature (Lobe et al., 2020) were deemed beneficial. The focus groups were voice recorded only and Zoom's Closed Caption transcription function was utilised. This aided the verbatim transcription, which ranged from 45 to 85 minutes in duration with an average of 68 minutes. Nine coaches took part in four focus groups and all were white, middle class, non-disabled and Irish. All three clubs were represented in FG 1, two clubs were in FG 2 and FG 3 and 4 had two coaches in each, all from the same club.

The focus group guide was informed by the literature and my personal experiences (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) along with the EIM as the theoretical framework (See Appendix N). Table 7.2 outlines a sample of the questions as emailed to the coaches before they signed the consent form. All participants could withdraw at any time, without repercussions, and their names and clubs were given pseudonyms. The focus groups sought to examine the coaches' experiences of the year-long club-based CoP.

7.3.4 Analysis

The data analysis was managed using the N-VIVO software package (Version 12) with the focus group transcripts inductively analysed using Braun et al. (2016) six-step reflexive TA, through constant engagement. Familiarisation and coding (phases 1-2) occurred while conducting and transcribing the focus groups (Braun et al., 2016). Phases 3-5 included theme development, refining, and naming with 55 initial meanings identified, such as the appropriateness of the CoP for all club members, improved confidence, and space for coaching discussions. These meanings were consolidated into eight themes that included CoP design and delivery, the role of women in clubs, and the CoP focusing on club and coach development in equal measure. The writing was carried out for this paper and the

doctoral thesis. The eight themes were subsumed into five main themes as discussed in the findings section.

Table 7. 3 Details of the focus group guide

Topic of interest for interview guide	**Source**	**Examples of questions used in the interview guide**
CoP in comparison to previous formal coach education	Cassidy et al. (2006)	How does the CoP compare to other coach education programmes you have attended?
Experiences of the CoP	Wenger et al 2011	Any barriers or challenges that have impacted your experiences within the CoP? How did the CoP impact your confidence levels as a member of the coaching personnel in the club? What if any aspects of the CoP would I like the club to continue into the 2022 season?
Relationships with fellow coaches	Norman (2010)	How would you rate the collaboration between coaches in your club?
Confidence and autonomy levels in their coaching	Norman (2008)	How confident are you in your coaching ability? How much autonomy have you in your coaching?
Club specific coaching experiences	Shaw and Allen (2009)	What areas would you like support in to develop your coaching further?
How relevant the CoP was to their respective role	Clements and Morgan (2015)	How relevant is it to your role with the team? What elements would you like more of? Less of?
Impact of EIM layers on the women coaches (a) Individual (b) Interpersonal (c) Organisational (d) Socio-cultural	Ecological-Intersectional Model (LaVoi, 2016)	What are your future coaching plans? How would you describe the relationship with your fellow coaches? What areas of support do you needed from your club? What impact do societal and cultural norms have on women coaches?

7.4. Findings and discussion

Some of the themes outlined in this combined findings and discussion section might be true for all coaches, irrespective of gender, however, they are particularly reflective of the lived experiences of volunteer women coaches. The five main themes include (a) self-perceptions, (b) perceptions of women's roles in clubs, (c) women coaches' perceptions of other club members (d) importance of external (female) facilitator.

7.4.1 Self-perceptions

Self-perceptions refer to how the coaches viewed themselves with an account of pre and post CoP participation included as well as researcher observations under the sub-themes of (i) Improved self-confidence and having a voice and (ii) not identifying as a coach.

(a) Improved self-confidence and having a voice

All nine coaches remarked on their improved confidence, following the CoP, and finding their voice. Aoife, a former player and coaching for three years, refers to:

> It was the third meeting before people started to voice their opinion, when you have a male structure already it is hard for females to stand up and voice your opinion.

Molly, the head coach of her group and in her third year of coaching, thought that the CoP gave everyone a chance to speak:

> Other people give their ideas and have a platform where they could speak.

Gail, as someone new to the club, but not to the region, felt the CoP encouraged her to continue coaching:

> I would have turned up to training, did it, turned around, and went home. Whereas now I see people, I can have a chat. It gave me the confidence to be part of it and it helped me to feel I can help out or train. I would not have had that if I had not completed the CoP. It gave me the confidence to be involved, to continue, and to voice my opinion.

This report from Gail aligns with Schlesinger et al. (2013) to have an open line of communication among volunteers and one that fosters contact where everyone is

aware of the club's goals. Giving everyone the opportunity to have a voice, as the coaches mention, is in line with research by Burton and Newton (2021), by focusing on communication structures, club philosophy, and future plans for the club. The fact that the coaches only now have a voice poses the question why did they not have a voice already, or why were they not confident enough to use it before partaking in the CoP? This study goes towards answering these questions in that their low confidence levels probably ensured they did not speak up and the culture and norms within the club were more used to and in favour of men in the leadership roles. Dee, as a past player in the club she now coaches in, also grew in coaching confidence during the CoP:

> I would not be confident to speak up and say this is how you do X whereas from the CoP I am speaking up, saying this is the drill we should be doing, whereas before I would NEVER have. I would have sat back and waited for them to say we are doing this drill, you are doing that, whereas I would set out the drills now.

Low confidence can be a barrier for women coaches, especially at non-elite levels (Clarkson et al., 2019), and can lead to women not engaging in coaching (Robertson, 2016). Gaining knowledge regarding what can improve a coach's confidence levels is an important aspect of the CoP.

(b) Not identifying as a coach

Identifying as coaches is key to confidence levels as many of the participants refer to themselves as helpers, as is evident from a sample of introductions, at the start of the focus groups:

> I am Beth, I work with the under X team, and I have worked with the club for nearly 10 years.
>
> Aoife: I am with the X team.
>
> My name is Ella and I was with X this year, and I have been involved for four years.

Terms such as 'helping', 'involved with', and 'working with' were used by all coaches in their introductions at the start of the focus groups. None of the participants said they were coaches of team X or Y. Beth, as the most experienced coach, acknowledged that she would not have identified as a coach prior to the CoP:

> Something I took from very early on was women helping out, and men as coaches. I realised I am nine years helping out, but I have changed over to nine years coaching. I call myself a coach now, so that was from the CoP. It has opened up to a lot of people who now feel more confident to continue coaching.

This is a positive acknowledgment from Beth, yet she did not call herself a coach during the introductions which shows more work is needed to get her and others to identify as coaches. Claire, as the only club officer among the participants, believes that Beth is not alone in this regard:

> We have loads of people that do loads of work behind the scenes and their name is never mentioned. Not that they are looking for gratification, but they have never considered themselves as a helper or a coach or even probably being involved with the team.

Gail furthers this sentiment by stating that:

> We always say we are helping out rather than saying we are trainers or training them I tend to say I will help out, so I think we are not confident.

Even Aoife, as someone with extensive playing and relevant professional experience, refers to herself as a helper:

> I would have seen myself more as a helper, even though I am a qualified personal trainer, and I played football for years but I would not have seen myself as being qualified to be a coach.

It is unknown if not identifying as coaches is solely self-perceptions and low confidence or because they were never referred to or treated as coaches by other stakeholders in their respective clubs.

7.4.2 Perceptions of women's roles in clubs

The perception of women, and their roles within their clubs, was commented on frequently by the coaches. In the context of this study, the other stakeholders include fellow coaches, parents, club officers, and opposition coaches. Claire is conscious of the terms used to describe women's roles and how others view them within the club:

> Women are probably still helpers, but it is the perception, even from parents. With one of our teams, we have two ladies and one man. They look at him as being the coach and we are the mammies, the ones getting all the texts, contacting the coaches, doing the fixtures, the gear, and yet they look at him that he is the coach but that is perceptions. Other clubs look at him as the coach too. They do not talk to you, they look to him and they will say how many players do you have? and he will say, Claire, how many do we have? It is perception, that is probably a thing that stops some women from getting involved because you are the Female Liaison Officer (FLO). I know why it was brought in, but in a way, it was a curse because it gave an official title to the helper role and you were never going to get out of it.

Current coaches, which are predominantly men, are accepting of women's involvement in the FLO role because they are obligated to under child safeguarding legislation in Ireland. Women are pigeonholed into FLO related duties in clubs which Claire alludes to and describes as a curse on women. Men coaches with men's teams are the norm, and so male liaison officers were never required, sparing the knock-on effect of stereotypes and this curse that impacts women coaches. Women in predominantly FLO roles become the norm and leads to continuous barriers for women coaches. Additionally, the negative perceptions go beyond the FLO roles. Aoife and Claire, from two different clubs, experienced being pushed towards administrative roles, even though they both wanted to coach instead:

> I was asked to be the secretary, but I do not want to be the secretary. I am not a secretary, I hate it. I do not like anything like that, I want to be on the field. I have a role that I like, so, I do not want to be pushed into a role that I do not want.

> I never played football, but I got pushed into the administration role. When my kids started, I asked the coach did he want a hand and he said no. A year or two later I got asked about doing secretary, but I never wanted an administration role. I would have much preferred to be on the pitch but that is the perception that is there.

Considering Aoife and Claire are coaching in different clubs, it shows that it was not just an isolated incident but is perhaps more commonplace. It is disappointing that firstly, in Claire's case she was turned down when she offered to assist as a

coach. Secondly, Aoife had relevant qualifications and a background in the sport and was still approached to be an administrator only. Both examples are cause for concern as most clubs are seeking to recruit more coaches, so any barriers that turn away potential volunteers need addressing especially as Hoye et al. (2019) state recruitment and retention is an ongoing concern for most sports clubs.

Being ignored, considered a FLO, or being pigeonholed into administrative roles were among the main forms of negative stereotypes these coaches encountered. To move away from these and other negative stereotypes is difficult as Claire indicates many of the men are unaware of the perceptions, biases, and stereotypes they portray, but believes a CoP can help:

> It could be addressed alright. Are they even aware of it? Do they know that they are doing it? There is Mary, can she help with the teas and coffees? but Mary cannot come and give a hand with the team. I doubt if a lot of them realise that they are falling into that stereotype all the time, unbeknownst to themselves.

Other coaches also believe that the CoP can go towards addressing these stereotypes and biases about the role of women in clubs as Jill suggests a CoP "will create an awareness amongst the men" and Beth believes the CoP can work to change perceptions but that it is a "huge ask" and "these things will only change small bits at a time. The CoP is a really good place to start because you have coaching discussions with everybody discussing it together". Considering Beth had not identified or considered herself a coach, even after nine years in the role, this is high praise regarding the potential positive influence a club-based CoP can have. Aoife concurs and thinks a CoP can change perceptions and biases organically:

> I think it has done it by itself, as the weeks went by, I think it happened without actually having to address it or label it.

While some of the blame lies with club stakeholders, the coaches, in this study, also had perceptions and biases about others within the club and often place other coaches on a pedestal, based solely on their playing experiences.

(a) Women coaches' perceptions of other club members

The high status given to former players, in the clubs, negatively impacts the women's perceived coaching status, due to their low level of playing experience. Fidelma, that was new to the sport, but coached in another sport, shared her view:

> What would hold me back is that I have not played as much as possibly others do.

In Aoife's club there is a culture of respect for the male members:

> When you have a male structure in place, it is the same people that are there since the start and they would all be very, very well respected and they would be very big into Gaelic Games. They are all strong characters and they have played football too but maybe not even at the same level as I played, I do not know but that is a confidence thing.

Claire furthers this perception of the men in the club by viewing them in a hierarchical manner:

> The men are the coaches and we are the helpers and I am only new to it, so I am not telling them where they are going, wrong or right, and some of them are excellent. The hierarchy in things is you are looking to the male coaches to see what are they saying?

Beth also had perceptions of others in her club prior to the CoP:

> You develop perceptions about them, they have been playing football for years, so they know all about it. What do I know? But when you come into a group like this, you can actually get commonality with everybody in the group. You can see that there is potential to be involved more, it definitely opens up ways of being involved and also the confidence of being involved.

These accounts are similar to the findings of Schull and Kihl (2019) that purported women often perceived men to be better coaches and often without evidence. Club members need to address the negative narratives and norms for women coaches (Stride et al., 2020) in comparison to their male counterparts. A change is needed regarding giving playing experience a higher status than coaches without playing experience. It is unknown if this is a cultural norm within Gaelic games or if it is a self-perception among volunteer women coaches. There is a tendency to promote

former players into coaching roles based predominantly on their playing experience as opposed to coach education qualifications (Blackett et al., 2015). Either way, these perceptions need addressing for the sake of volunteer women coaches at the club level, possibly as Hogan et al. (2021) (See Chapter 5) recommend via bias awareness training for club members.

Fidelma, coaching within the youngest age group in her club, suggests that high levels of playing experience should translate to continuing as a coach:

> It should be encouraged that women stay within coaching, particularly those that have played at great heights so that girls can relate to them.

Ella, a current player, counters Fidelma's thoughts and believes the focus on the importance of playing experience needs to be reduced to allow women to feel valued as volunteers:

> Encourage them to come down and explain that they do not need to have a background but they can learn on the go, it is just about being involved, that they are there and they are valued no matter if they had a background or not but as a volunteer, their input is valued.

Allen and Reid (2019) claim playing experience improves women's confidence and sports-specific knowledge and Wells (2016) believes it helps women start coaching in the first instance. Within Gaelic games, 20% of the female coaches surveyed have never played and only 30% played until adult grade, which is in contrast to their male counterparts of 4% and 58% respectively (Horgan et al., 2021). This trend could result in the continued underrepresentation of women in coaching roles at the club level. While coaching knowledge gained from playing experience is valued, caution is required to not fast track players into coaching roles (Sherwin et al., 2017).

(b) Importance of external (female) facilitator.

The opportunity to engage in coaching discussions was welcomed by the coaches as it did not happen before the CoP as Gail and Jill indicate:

> There was no collaboration, you were your own separate entity, do your own thing. We do not get time to sit down and chat, having that sharing of resources. What can we do? What works well?

> We never have an opportunity to get the coaches together, everything else you do is very single-focused and I do not think anything else feeds into the mentality of getting everyone to work together and looking at a broader picture.

Other authors have established this building of networks as a key benefit of coach education courses along with collaborative group discussions (Barrett et al., 2021). Similar to Carson et al. (2021) having an opportunity to share experiences helped to remove the feelings of isolation by setting up a collaborative network. Women like to have an informal network of other women coaches (Greenhill et al., 2009) and collaborations like this are among the main forms of support for coaches (Norris et al., 2020). In general, coaches were left to their own devices, and it is unknown if this was due to a lack of understanding of the benefits, time constraints volunteer coaches have, or people within the club not having the capacity to facilitate such discussions. Likewise, perhaps coaches are happier to have complete autonomy and not be bound by an overall club coaching plan.

The role of the external facilitator was commended as significant to the CoP's success as the coaches referenced being treated equally within coaching discussions because there was no politics or no one to influence the direction of it. This suggests that the women in the past felt that there was perhaps a dictatorship style running of their clubs. They now felt valued within the club and that their opinion counted as Beth reports:

> You have male and female, everybody with their own opinions and insights and it just brings everybody. I like that idea of the CoP, it is a community where we are all the same, and we can all contribute in our own way. There is a lot more equality in being a square on Zoom as opposed to in a room, it gives everybody more of an equal footing.

All group members were considered as equals to improve autonomy and the sense of identity within the group (Walsh & Chambers, 2015). Ella and Jill regard an external facilitator as crucial in this regard:

> Definitely at the start an external person because they listen to everybody and nobody is taking charge and influencing their decision.

> To begin with, I do not think it should be internal, with politics within every club, people saying I am not going to go because Finn is doing it and what does he know about X, Y and Z? You are setting yourself up for clashes and people not turning up as a result.

Feeling valued should aid coach retention as Schlesinger et al. (2013) states feeling needed and attached to the club makes them more likely to stay even if job satisfaction is low. Although the CoP helped the coaches find their voice, it may only be within the CoP environment and may not translate to their respective coaching groups. A CoP gives time-poor volunteers a chance to put a development structure in place so working in silos is lessened and a more structured club and coach development plan is implemented. Allen and Shaw (2013) suggest that decision-makers should reflect on the values, structures, and supports within their organisations.

A woman facilitator was deemed positive considering much of the coach education they have been involved in was male-led and male-dominated. This would align with the Lewis et al. (2018) reference to low numbers of female coach developers resulting in higher levels of sexism in coach education courses. A woman facilitator may instil a feeling of inclusivity and normality, for the women, by being treated equally. It is plausible that a woman facilitator acts as a pull factor for the women returning and possibly a push factor for the men not attending. Many of the coaches commented that it was mainly women that took part in the CoP which raises the question is the CoP more suited to those coaching at lower levels who are most often women, as Beth, Jill, and Gail insinuate:

> We definitely were top heavy on the lower part of the coaching structure, the lower age groups.

> Most of the coaches beyond under 14 are male and they were not there. Does it suit female coaches better than males?

> Females might be more drawn to a CoP, that you feel part of a community.

Coaches that consider themselves less knowledgeable and lack self-confidence often stay in the lower levels of competition (Sullivan et al., 2012). This study agrees with these findings as participants are active but only up to and including teams under 14 years of age. Hogan et al. (2022) (See Chapter 6) point to the decline

of women coaches in the competitive grades, in clubs, due to a lack of confidence or not feeling welcome at that level. In this regard, there was a mixed response to having a women's only CoP. Some could see the benefit of confidence building but others felt it would be a backward step as the club's endeavour to move away from gender-based segregation. Gail, who started coaching when her children started playing, appreciated seeing other women in roles in the club as it made her think it was also possible for her:

> Some females have been training in the club for a long time, so to speak to them was great and to see it can be done when you have kids.

Dee believes a women's only CoP would be beneficial for building pre coaching confidence:

> It would bring on their confidence before they even get on the pitch. It would be great if there were more females because if you see more females you might think well if they can do it, maybe I can actually continue and do it.

In contrast, Molly does not approve of a women-only option as she feels splitting the CoP would "Lose the originality of it" especially as clubs are trying to reduce gender-based segregation. Molly's reaction is in line with other studies that reject the need for women-only coach education programmes (Barrett et al., 2021; Hogan et al., 2021). This CoP was offered to integrate coach education and development in a context-specific way. Having the coaches in their natural environment allowed concentration on their individual needs (Chapman et al., 2019) as Jill alludes to:

> I liked being grouped in our age group because we were always thinking about how we can adapt what we are doing for our age groups. We were constantly thinking about our individual group.

Aligned with Clements and Morgan (2015) the intervention was stronger at the end than at the beginning. A step-back approach was a key factor, so the CoP had the best opportunity to continue after the 2021 season, without the presence of the external facilitator.

7.5 Conclusion

This study set out to establish how a club-based CoP can support and develop volunteer women coaches, within a non-elite setting, of women's Gaelic football. A CoP in women's Gaelic football was novel and so allowed for a blank canvas in

relation to the content being designed and delivered in a context specific way based on the self-identified, developmental needs of the club. A season-long CoP, like this, can act as an induction into coaching, for women, within their respective clubs. This study explicitly shows that, through partaking in this CoP, the coaches perceived that their confidence increased not just by giving them a voice within their clubs, but also by transferring into their coaching roles. The increase in confidence was supported by the equitable treatment they experienced within the CoP with credit given to the role of an external facilitator.

The findings highlight the biases and stereotypes that the women coaches must endure in their respective clubs. For some, they are hidden and unconscious biases such as the Female Liaison Officer (FLO) role being considered the main and only job for women. The status given to playing experience needs to change to enable the women to engage in coaching. Moreover, the women need to start identifying as coaches and not helpers. Clubs should engage in bias awareness training for their club members to address these issues (Hogan et al., 2021) (See Chapter 5) so they can view women as potential coaches and not consider them solely for administrative type roles, for example.

The researcher designed and facilitated the CoP, in three clubs, concurrently, based on her extensive 17-year coach developer experience. This may be a limitation in that the facilitator also conducted the focus groups, in her researcher role, possibly leading to positively skewed responses from the participants. Alternatively, due to the rapport between the researcher and the coaches they may have been more open and comfortable sharing their experiences. COVID-19 allowed for the early sessions to be well attended but once movement restrictions were lifted the numbers dwindled and so future research should trial CoPs in clubs during a regular season.

Using this study as a baseline, future studies could return to the clubs in a year or two and check the levels of engagement in the CoP and establish what, if any, challenges they encountered without the support of an external facilitator. Additionally, researchers could use this study to focus on the other stakeholders in the club namely, players, parents, and club officers to determine if the CoP resulted in any lasting positive impacts from their perspectives.

It is hoped that this research will resonate with those that want to get into coaching as well as those currently engaged in coaching at the community level. In summary,

this study would like the slogan of ‘Take a Chance, Give a Chance and Give a Real Chance’ to be the parting message from the findings. This slogan was the culmination of five years of doctoral research of exploring the experiences of volunteer women coaches and bringing their voices to the fore through using catchy but effective messaging. To those women and girls that are eager and willing to start on their coaching journey, the authors encourage them to ‘Take a Chance’ and get involved. In order for them to do well, current coaches, both men, and women, need to ‘Give (them) a Chance’ through providing the opportunity to take elements of the coaching session or to be given more coaching duties than the more stereotypical FLO roles. Finally, to have a lasting impact on both the women coaches and the club, those in decision-making positions need to ‘Give (them) a Real Chance’ by putting the necessary structures and supports in place to help with their development and subsequent retention as coaches. Such structures might include the establishment of a club-based CoP that is externally facilitated and allows for equal membership for all. Either way, this research can start a conversation on different developmental and support structures that can be implemented for the benefit of not only women coaches but all volunteer coaches, at the community club level.

The previous three chapters (5,6 and 7) combined the main data chapters for this thesis. Phase 1 (Chapter 5) interviewed 14 coaches to explore their overall experiences while Phase 2 (Chapter 6) focused in on the club-specific experiences of 11 women coaches. Throughout Phases 1 and 2 the coaches were eager and willing to learn and develop. Although the majority had taken part in formal coach education, they considered club-based context specific education as crucial to their support and development. Hence, this Phase focused on the effectiveness of such a club-based CoP on their support and development through conducting focus groups with nine coaches. The next chapter concludes the thesis by highlighting the key findings and the relevant literature as well as applied recommendations and future research opportunities.

CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 8: Discussion, conclusion and recommendations

This study is unique, timely and has significant scope for contributing to Irish and international sports coaching literature. While each phase had a specific discussion and conclusion, this chapter illuminates the overall key findings and their applied implications. The findings will give the LGFA, and clubs in general, an insight into the experiences of women coaches at the grassroots level so they can tailor their support structures accordingly. Readers in similar contexts might use the results to reflect and interrogate their experiences and practices and perhaps influence changes in their coaching environments. Limitations of the overall study are also discussed, many of which provide a foundation for future research opportunities. The next section summarises the key findings from the three phases of this research.

8.1 Summary of key findings

The EIM is utilised to illuminate the key findings from the three phases. The significance and implications of these findings are discussed alongside relevant literature. Table 8.1 illustrates the main findings within the EIM layer(s) that they are best aligned to, along with the overlap across the three phases. The strength of the findings is enhanced as the majority were evident across the three phases.

Table 8. 1 Key findings as aligned to the EIM and the respective phases

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Individual			
Own children playing			
Time/caring responsibilities			
Identifying as a coach			
Self-confidence			
Biography/Background			
Playing experience			
Interpersonal			
Support from home			
Fellow coaches			
Other club stakeholders			
Organisational			
Support structures e.g. induction, mentoring			
Volunteer officer			
Club-based coach education			
Coach collaboration			
Progression opportunities			
Parity of esteem			
Perceptions of women's roles			
Culture and norms			
Socio-Cultural			
Culture and Norms			
Perceptions of women			
Biases/Stereotypes			

8.1.1 Individual

(a) Own children playing

The majority of the coaches had their children playing women's Gaelic football and as such reported that as the sole reason they started coaching. Other literature supports this as mothers will often start coaching coinciding with their child's involvement (Leberman & LaVoi, 2011). In addition to their children influencing their coaching commencement their longevity is linked to their children's continued invovlement which is reflected in other research also (Busser & Carruthers, 2010; Schlesinger et al., 2013).

The significance of their children playing is twofold, firstly it shows the importance of player retention with the aim of ultimately retaining their mothers, and secondly to see mothers as a pool of potential coaches. The rapid increase in the number of G4M&O sites, in recent years, points to another group of potential coaches that may not have past playing experience but will have a knowledge of the game from playing it even at this non-competitive level. The important consideration is to ask women to get involved in a coaching capacity. All women should be approached including the 'bystander' that Amy in Phase 2 referred to herself as. The volunteer officer or any club officer could do a semi-formal approach, but it is more likely that existing coaches will be the most successful recruiters.

(b) Time and caring responsibilities

Linked to the coaches having their child playing, as their initial exposure to coaching, is the fact there was a window of opportunity for when coaching could happen. Those with smaller children, particularly in Phase 1, referred to not being able to coach until their children were older. This burden of caring responsibilities on women within the home is a contributing factor in the uptake of women in coaching positions, even in a voluntary capacity. LaVoi and Dutove (2012) reported that the single constant challenge for women across all levels of coaching was balancing family, work, and coaching commitments. While male coaches may have similar commitments there is an argument for women facing even tougher challenges due to their additional responsibilities within the home.

According to a recent European report, there is a 40% and 14% gap between men and women in Ireland for household duties and caring responsibilities respectively (European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), 2020). Furthermore, during the

pandemic the caring responsibilities for women were exacerbated resulting in women having less time for themselves (National Women's Council, 2020). Consequently, coaching can become an extra workload that women just cannot commit to as Leberman and LaVoi (2011) imply that mothers working full time would be taking on a third role if they were to start coaching. Nevertheless, the participants in this study that had their own children playing were able to find the time to start coaching and so many others will too but a lack of confidence is a constant barrier.

(c) Self-confidence and identifying as a coach

Self-confidence was a common theme across all phases as the participants were lacking in confidence to identify as a coach, act as a coach, and progress as a coach. Not identifying as a coach came to the fore in Phase 3 but it was also evident through the language the coaches used in Phases 1 and 2 to describe their roles. Terms such as 'helping', 'working with', and 'involved with' were used to describe their roles irrespective of how long they were coaching or what their background was prior to coaching. It is unknown why the participants used this language or had these perceptions of their roles. Was it because they were never viewed or treated as coaches in their clubs or were they initially recruited as the helper with the team and so found it hard to break away from that mold they were predisposed to? There is an obvious relationship between playing experience and confidence levels among the coaches.

(d) Biography, background and playing experience

Playing experience is one element of the background and biography for all coaches and is something that enables them to identify as a coach. The status attributed to playing experience within their clubs leads to a lack of confidence. Women coaches often need more playing and coaching experience to be afforded the same coaching opportunities or credibility as men (Harvey & Price, 2021).

Both the coaches, in this study, and the other club members appear to hold playing experience in high esteem, as almost a prerequisite for coaching, as it helps with the technical and tactical knowledge of the game. Many skills gained, through playing such as leadership and interpersonal skills (Morris et al., 2014) along with resilience, teamwork, and dealing with conflicts, are highly transferable to coaching (Naslund & Pennington, 2011). Considering this evidence, women are at a

disadvantage from the outset as women's Gaelic football is a newer sport in comparison to the men's equivalent. As such, men enjoyed more playing opportunities than women and girls. This assertion is supported by a recent Gaelic Games coaching survey that reported 20% of the female respondents had never played and only 30% played until adult grade in comparison to 4% and 58% respectively among male respondents (Horgan et al., 2021).

A comparative figure between men and women, in relation to playing experience, may not still increase the numbers of women coaches. Not all players will be suitable coaches which is a sentiment shared by Sherwin et al. (2017) to not fast-track players into coaching roles. Diedrich (2020) also calls for caution as high participation does not automatically translate to increased numbers in coaching roles. While caution is required in this regard and not assuming that all players will want to coach, there is still significant opportunity to recruit coaches from the playing cohort in a club. Clubs should consider ways of approaching current and past players to engage in coaching roles. To be successful in this regard clubs must acknowledge and understand the other commitments current players have such as college, work, social life along with the teams they are playing with. Carol, as the player coach profiled in Phase 3 was adamant that a lack of empathy for other commitments was a reason more players do not take up coaching roles.

These findings are reflective of the individual layer of the EIM and one that is difficult to implement changes in because it is specific to each coach. Yet, the elements such as self-confidence, identifying as a coach, and the status that is given to playing experience can be influenced in combination with some of the findings assigned to the other layers.

8.1.2 Interpersonal

(a) Support from home

The interpersonal layer was the most significant in Phase 1 as the coaches acknowledged the need for support from home to start coaching in the first instance and later to continue coaching. Support within the home was from their significant other, parents or siblings. Vinson et al. (2016) stated that coaching and home life are not mutually exclusive and this study concurs. Having children has already been discussed under the individual layer but support from home is even more prevalent for women that have young children and want to coach. It is difficult for clubs and

NGB's to influence this apsect except to continuoulsy raise awareness of the importance of having women in coaching. Women coaches have the ability to instill a love of coaching among their young players (Cuskelly & O'Brien, 2013) which can lead to players viewing coaching as a future option (Schull, 2016).

(b) Fellow coaches

Once women were coaching their relationships with others within the club, such as players and coaches were key to their enjoyment and longevity in the role. Positive relationships with fellow coaches and their players was important to the participants and the sometimes-fraught relationship with parents was also alluded to. A positive relationship with fellow coaches is important to both learn from them (North et al., 2020) and to feel supported (Norris et al., 2020). Support in areas such as guidance, conflict resolution, and mentoring are important for volunteer coaches to receive from their peers (Harman & Doherty, 2019) along with those more experienced than them (Norris et al., 2020).

Clubs can influence the support required by encouraging coach collaboration and coaching discussions as was evident in Phase 3 as opposed to expecting that these discussions happen organically among the coaches. It was obvious within the CoP clubs that even those coaching with the same teams had little time for coaching related discussions let alone having the opportunity to engage in conversations and learning with coaches from across the club. While it is difficult to expect volunteers to give even more of their time to the club and their respective coaching roles the benefits of having these coaching collaborations are extermely valuable according to the coaches from Phase 3.

(c) Other club stakeholders

Negative experiences with fellow coaches or other club stakeholders were in the minority and usually linked to biases, stereotypes, and misperceptions. The role of women in clubs and the perceptions of others in this regard were most prominent in Phase 3. Helper or Female Liaison Officer (FLO) roles were heavily criticised by the coaches, yet, they did not identify as coaches themselves either. It is plausible that the women were conforming to what was expected of them in a role with teams and the norm was the majority were in FLO roles. The FLO role seems to be the default option for many women in clubs or else clubs tend to pursue women as potential club officers irrespective of their aspirations to coach, as happened in two

different clubs, as reported in Phase 3. Considering many of the participants did not identify as coaches it is perhaps more understandable then as to why others in their clubs did not perceive them as coaches either. While the coaches' self-perceptions were prevalent it was not to the same extent as the perceptions of others.

Within the overall study the interpersonal layer is important but the focus in phases 2 and 3 was predominantly on the organisational layer. Specific experiences within the club environment and the effectiveness of a CoP on their support and development were the focus of these phases. Many of the aspects aligned to the organisational layer can and do overlap with the interpersonal layer such as collaborations and relationships with fellow coaches.

8.1.3 Organisational

During the completion of Phase 1, the organisational layer was deemed to be less impactful on the coaches than was later realised in Phases 2 and 3. At that time the NGB was considered the main component of the organisational layer and so was too far removed from the non-elite level, club-based coaches. As the research progressed it was obvious that the club environment was the main element of the organisation as opposed to the NGB. The research design reflected this change, and Phases 2 and 3 focused on the club environment firstly, to establish overall experiences, and secondly to determine how a CoP can potentially support and develop women coaches. As a result, many of the key findings relate back to the organisational layer and the club environment that is very context-specific for the coaches. Within the organisational layer there were four main findings namely (a) support structures, (b) volunteer officer (c) club-based context specific coach education and collaboration, (d) lack of opportunities to progress and parity of esteem and (e) perceptions, biases, culture and norms.

(a) Support structures

For new coaches, the support structures within the club were of utmost importance. While it can be argued that many new coaches have playing experience and so are familiar with the sport there is nothing within a playing role that explains how to set up a training session, how to coach a skill or how to organise games. If these attributes are missing for a former player what hope has a person that is new to the sport entirely? The coaches from Phase 2 were strong in the view that taster sessions, inductions, a starter pack, and a volunteer officer would all greatly assist

their transition into coaching. These sentiments were true irrespective of their past playing experience or if they were new to the sport or not. Coaching should be treated like a new job in that the expectation is you will receive some form of induction or training and a brief insight into the company. It would not be commonplace for a new member of staff to be left to their own devices and solely learn on the job as is often expected of novice coaches. Inductions and taster sessions are important factors to aid the transition for new volunteers into coaching. Such an approach is supported in the literature that shows sampling coaching in a supportive environment, among peers, aids the decision for women to enter coaching (Soler et al., 2021).

(b) Volunteer officer

A volunteer officer within the club was signalled by the coaches as a positive aspect to help on their journey, particularly new coaches. A suitable candidate for the role could be someone with previous volunteering experience, an approachable personality, and a good knowledge of the workings of the club. They can be a contact point for all volunteers but especially new ones, so direction and support are provided from the outset in a context specific manner.

(c) Club-based context specific coach education and coach collaboration

Although time-poor, volunteers are willing to learn and develop as coaches so they can be competent and confident in their role (Walsh et al., 2011). The coaches were in favour of coach education and the majority had completed the introductory level LGFA course on which they had mainly positive experiences. Completing the introductory level coach education course is now a prerequisite and a mandatory requirement under child safeguarding legislation in Ireland. This is a good incentive to give people a taste of the sport-specific coach education on offer, but it might cause resentment among some coaches. It is unknown how many of the coaches in this study engaged in coach education because it was mandatory and how many did so by choice.

Coaches that completed the higher levels of coach education, particularly the coaches in Phase 1, were obviously by choice as it was not a requirement. Yet, the coaches, in Phase 1, felt the support they needed was at the club level so it could be context-specific to their needs. Other research has criticised the standard formal coach education and also seek more context appropriate informal learning. For

example, Cushion (2015) argues for mentoring as coaches' interactions with more experienced coaches in an unstructured and informal manner enables learning more than regular coach education. Walsh (2015) proposes that observing or shadowing those in similar roles helps volunteers to learn and develop.

The CoP, at the centre of Phase 3, was a context-specific approach and deemed a success for the support and development of women coaches. The main elements of the CoP were allowing the members to decide on the direction and even the format of the CoP sessions. The members decided the date, time and content to cover which included requests for practical coaching sessions in some clubs. Having autonomy like this over the content and delivery methods undoubtedly aided buy-in from the members as they appreciated how the CoP could benefit them individually and as a club.

Among the elements of the CoP that received praise was the opportunity for coaching discussions with their fellow coaches that prior to the CoP did not happen. It seemed common within the clubs, in Phases 2 and 3, that the coaches operate in isolation within their particular age group, and so the benefits of working together are never achieved. Collaborations, like the CoP ignited, allowed the coaches to feel valued and enhanced their confidence within the role. It is in these networks that coaches tend to solve their coaching-related problems as opposed to relying on NGB support (North et al., 2020) in the form of coach education.

Networks and collaborative group discussions are the main benefits of coach education (Barrett et al., 2021) and can remove the sense of isolation (Carson et al., 2021). Clubs can focus on a common coach development goal (Clements & Morgan, 2015) to move away from traditional coach education (Søvik et al., 2017) which will connect the volunteers that engage in the coaching dialogue (Allen & Reid, 2019). This was true for the coaches that attended the CoP sessions as an overall vision was decided upon and all attendees had an input throughout the CoP. Women, in particular, like to have informal networks around them, made up of other women coaches (Greenhill et al., 2009), yet, the proposition of women-only coach education was met with mixed opinions.

Those that support women-only courses cite that women felt inferior and uncomfortable within a mixed-gender course (Graham et al., 2013; Lewis et al., 2015). In Phases 1 and 3, some coaches thought it would be a good idea to gain

confidence and have a safe environment to express their opinions. However, there were dissenting voices, in equal measure, as the coaches felt it would lead to more segregation and further isolation for women coaches. Overall, for coach education to be effective, it needs to be specific to the needs of the coaches and not based on gender. Likewise, for a CoP to be successful it needs buy-in from coaches at all levels within the club and the preference for the coaches in this study was for an external facilitator. Implementing this action is challenging for clubs to find someone with the knowledge to do so and even more challenging for the NGB to implement on a larger scale. To counteract the challenges with implementation, a generic plan could be administered initially, in a few clubs at the same time. Once the foundation is in place, the facilitator re-engages on an individual club basis to concentrate on their identified goals. An advantage of doing more clubs concurrently might allow for the joint delivery of aspects that are relevant to all clubs, thus reducing the resources required.

A step-back approach is proposed after a season-long CoP where the facilitator is still available just to a lesser extent as the impetus to continue must be from within the club. With regards to the longevity of the CoP this study cannot comment as to how it may or may not progress but the assumption is it will set the foundation in the club as to the benefits of a united approach across the club. The obvious concern is who takes on the mantle for the club, considering the overwhelming support in the findings within Phase 3 that an external person was the best option for the facilitator role. This may signal that clubs will struggle to continue it, at least to the same level.

(d) Lack of opportunities to progress and parity of esteem

Despite the eagerness among the coaches, to learn and develop, progression is an issue for women coaches as they often start and remain at the lowest levels of competition. Most coaches in this study were involved in the younger age groups with those involved in older teams, adult teams, or intercounty teams a rare occurrence. Often, those that were involved in higher levels of competition were in assistant type coaching roles. Such an observation is probably reflective of the makeup of women coaches in women's Gaelic football, in general. A myriad of factors hinder women from progressing to coaching at the higher levels of competition. Clarkson et al. (2019) argue that a lack of respect among peers is one

of the reasons that most women coach at the lower levels of competition. Women often perceive men to be better coaches even without having evidence to support these perceptions (Schull & Kihl, 2019), as was evident throughout this study. As already outlined men's football is available much longer than women's football proving a disadvantage for women to be considered equal to men in coaching roles in a sport the men are already so accustomed to.

From a societal and cultural perspective men are still considered the natural and default option for coaching and it is only studies like this and others that will go towards changing the norm. Clubs and other coaches must try to reduce the perception that men are better coaches and encourage and enable more women to be involved in higher levels of competition. This is particularly important as women's Gaelic football gets to a stage where women comprise a high percentage of those with coach education completed in addition to years of experience with the younger age groups. It is imperative that there is a pathway for these coaches that want to progress and that we do not have many cases like Brenda in Phase 2 that felt someone like her would not be accepted in the higher levels of coaching in her club. It is disappointing to think she had this impression given she had eight years of coaching experience and had been involved with her daughter's team throughout. Accordingly, volunteers that feel attached to and needed by a club tend to stay in their role (Schlesinger et al., 2013).

More women involved in a coaching capacity can become a new norm in clubs and potentially enable current players to view coaching as attainable and normal. A sense of being undervalued stemmed in most cases from stereotypes, negative perceptions, and biases regarding the women's roles within the club. Parity of esteem was clear across all three phases as the coaches felt at times they were undervalued by fellow coaches, club officers, parents, and opposition coaches. The treatment received by the coaches and how much they felt valued by fellow coaches, players and other club-based stakeholders influenced their coaching experiences. Feeling undervalued among male coaches has led to a lack of confidence among women coaches (Clarkson et al., 2019), which has already been identified as a leading cause of the low numbers of women coaches. As recruiting new volunteers is a priority for most clubs it is counterproductive to lose current coaches for any reason, especially due to negative experiences. Turning away coaches, as happened

in Phase 3 where the women were willing to coach but were pushed towards administrative positions instead needs to be tackled by clubs as it appears to be based on perceptions and biases.

(e) Perceptions, biases, culture and norms

Negative biases and stereotypes can become part of the culture and norms within the club and as such can take time to change. Gender bias is almost expected within a study like this, yet, age related, playing experience, blow-in and parental status also arose as biases for the coaches. Irrespective of the type of bias, many of the coaches believed there was a lack of awareness by those portraying them. In equal measure, though, clubs did not react or respond to thwart these negative behaviours.

Some of the coaches alluded to their clubs not wanting to challenge the negative attitudes in case they would lose volunteers. It is interesting that, according to the coaches, the clubs were fearful of challenging the coaches in case they would leave but there did not appear to be the same consideration given to losing women volunteers over the same negative perceptions and biases. Clubs need to do better to support all their volunteers and to equally act towards solving any issues that are causing negative experiences for volunteers and see the loss of any volunteer as problematic, irrespective of their gender.

The participants in Phase 1 were also guilty of biases as they did not view the mother in the video as a coach and they had perceptions about other coaches in the club also. This is in line with what Schlesinger and Weigelt-Schlesinger (2012) noted regarding women adding to the gender stereotypes by focusing more on the female attributes, of the coach, than they do on their coaching ability. Walker (2016) further supports this theory arguing that women can be their own barrier by paying too much attention to societal norms regarding coaching.

The findings strongly recommend that clubs tackle the biases and make people aware of their own, albeit unconscious ones. Challenging the biases is important irrespective of whether it is relating to parental status, age, gender, blow-in status, or playing experience. Awareness training will shed a light on the hidden biases and misperceptions that exist and might help to reduce them in the future. Edel, from Phase 1, mentioned being disappointed and surprised that she jumped to the presumption of the mother's role in the video. The use of a video like this could be the starting point to ignite a conversation in clubs about potential biases that

individuals may have. Managing the club culture, for coaches, requires ongoing communications with all stakeholders so volunteers feel valued (Burton & Newton, 2021). Every effort is needed to disrupt the negative narratives that affect women coaches (Stride et al., 2020) in both the club and society.

8.1.4 Socio-cultural

(a) Culture and norms

The fourth layer of the EIM is the socio-cultural layer and by design is the one that is furthest away from the coach and as such indirectly affects women coaches (Burton & LaVoi, 2016). In terms of impact across the three phases, it was of least significance, but it did overlap with the other layers with regards to some of the main themes. Culture, norms, biases, stereotypes, and perceptions of women were relevant across all phases and align to this layer along with the organisational layer. Current social norms in coaching do not deem men and women equal and so limit women's potential coaching opportunities (Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013). While Brenda from Phase 2 referred to not seeing a place for her coaching in the older age groups this can be attributed to the norms and expectations within the club but likewise it can be a direct result of societal norms and expectations. In essence, club environments can become a microcosm of society, and culture and norms, either positive or negative, can dominate the perceptions of women and their roles.

(b) Perception of women

There are fewer women than men in different sectors of society such as politics, business and leadership and so a similar trend in sports coaching just mirrors this. The use of quotas and targets within politics, business and leadership positions may have a latent knock on effect on sports coaching. More visibility for women in leadership positions across society will show other women and girls it is possible and seeing women in these positions along with coaching will not seem such an anomaly in the future. While this study does not suggest quotas as a fix for the situation the quotas in other sectors will hopefully make those in power more aware of their current status regarding gendered representation. Instead the onus is on all involved in clubs to tackle any negative behaviours or stereotypes that exist by calling them out and addressing them. Women coaches need allies in the club as they start and continue in the role. These allies comprise of current coaches, both men and women. Improving in this way will help current and future women coaches

and reduce the need to introduce quotas. The requirement of having a woman with girls' teams is like a quota or a target clubs had to achieve and this study shows it has not helped much in promoting women coaches and reducing biases.

(c) Biases and stereotypes

Attempting to address societal issues is too great a challenge for volunteer club members. Giving women the chance and opportunity to get involved in coaching roles will help the biases in that club but also other clubs, sport and society more broadly. Seeing women in coaching roles will begin to change the narrative and expectation away from expecting a man to be the coach. Anything that helps change this narrative in a club will hopefully translate to other areas in society where men are the dominant gender and women due to culture and norms are playing catch up. Treating the club as a smaller version of society and addressing issues relating to negative biases, stereotypes and misperceptions may have a ripple effect towards societal change.

8.2 Applied implications of the research findings

Krahn (2019) believes using women coaches' voices can lead to change at a policy level. Having considered the voices of 25 coaches through interviews and nine in focus groups there are multiple practical and applied implications of the research findings. These are subdivided into the relevant headings of (a) targeted recruitment, (b) appropriate retention strategies, and (c) coach development and support (See Table 8.2).

Table 8. 2 Key and applied implications of this research

Call to Action	By whom	When	How	Implications
Targeted recruitment	• Volunteer officer • Other club officers • Existing coaches • Development committee	• Pre-season • During the season	**Approach** • Women and men equally • Current players including G4M&O group • Bystander parents **Provide** • Taster sessions, induction pack, context specific coach education **Match** • Coach/volunteer skill sets to roles required	• Increased number of volunteers/coaches • Coaches feel valued and wanted • More diversity in volunteer group • More confident/competent coaches • Coaches feel understood and valued • Volunteers are doing a role they are comfortable doing
Appropriate retention strategies	• Club officers/committee • Existing club members • NGB led education programme or initiative	• On an ongoing basis	• Sharing the workload and tasks • Change perceptions on women's roles in clubs -Educate members that the FLO role is not the only one for women • Challenge biases - Educate and make members aware of their own biases and seek change	• Prevent coach burnout/dropout • Will help women coaches more due to time pressures with increased caring responsibilities in the home • Enables women to be considered for coaching roles • Improved environment for all in the club if all biases are identified and challenged
Coach development and support	• Club officers	• On an ongoing basis	• Know your coaches' biographies and background • Initiate coach discussions and collaborations	• Working to their strengths so they are comfortable with the role and will have greater commitment to the club • Coaches appreciate sharing knowledge and having discussions with their fellow coaches and learn and develop together

8.2.1 Targeted recruitment

For many women, their own children playing the sport is an introduction to coaching and sometimes the sport. To ensure this opportunity is maximised clubs should ensure they approach all parents and guardians and not just the men when recruiting new coaches. Women that are current bystanders, while their child is playing, should be approached as potential coaches as generic calls for help does not work according to the coaches in this study. A lack of confidence with regards to offering to help was the usual barrier. The growth of the G4M&O initiative is an obvious choice to target for recruitment as they have exposure to the skills and rules of the game.

Based on the strong relationship between playing experience and the coach's confidence and perceived competency levels, there is a need to focus attention on recruiting coaches from cohorts of current and past players. Current adolescent and young adult players can also be approached for a timely introduction to coaching. Players are an easier group to attract compared to externals, due to their familiarity with the sport (Hoye et al., 2019). If the club is successful in attracting younger players, appropriate coach education and an easy to navigate coaching pathway are necessary. Providing coaching opportunities in a safe and controlled environment, among their peers, in either school-led or NGB-led programmes is important for the younger cohorts.

Irrespective of who is targeted in the recruitment drive, clubs should adopt the findings from this study and implement taster sessions, inductions, starter packs, matching skill-sets, and the introduction of a volunteer officer. The NGB will need to inform clubs initially as to the role of a volunteer officer and encourage the implementation of such a role. The clubs will then be responsible for recruiting the right person for the role and ensuring they have training and support along with communicating the importance of the role to all club members. When contemplating their starting point the coaches in Phase 2 promoted that any of these aspects would have assisted their transition into coaching.

Matching the needs and expectations of volunteers is critical to retaining coaches (Egli et al., 2014). A volunteer officer would be best placed to support these initiatives, with a remit for facilitating inductions, developing a starter pack, and being a link between new volunteers and the club committee. A volunteer officer

may not be deemed as important in a club, as the role of chairperson or secretary and recruiting additional personnel for the role might be challenging but it should reap benefits. These suggestions will take time to implement, yet, they have the potential to enhance the experience for all new volunteers, irrespective of gender.

Given that this study highlights the majority of women are at the underage level in clubs more is needed to ensure they stay and progress as coaches. The ingrained gender bias in clubs has formed over many years and in many cases is cemented so changing it will be difficult and time consuming. Awareness is the key to starting the conversation with club members as many would probably consider themselves to have little or no biases. Therefore, illuminating where their biases exist, helping them to acknowledge it and act on reducing and ultimately removing them is necessary. Providing such awareness to the club members can be done individually in the first instance and followed by some group awareness training. The members can identify what and how biases exist and how these translate into the club setting informing the culture and environment. Enhancing the positive aspects of the club environment can positively influence retention efforts.

8.2.2 Appropriate retention strategies

Volunteer coaching is challenging due to the varying skill levels, among players, along with the various other duties required of the coaches. Clubs need to place a greater emphasis on volunteer retention through recognition, support, and sharing of the workload between volunteers (Nagel et al., 2019). Women coaches, due to their extra roles and responsibilities in the home, are more in need of the workload being shared. With this in mind, clubs need to ensure that coaches do not end up burned out and wanting to leave. Coaches experiencing negative stereotypes and biases may result in coaches attrition from their voluntary roles.

The FLO role was the most frequent area of bias for the coaches as it has almost given club members a right to expect that this is the only role for a woman in a club. Coaches, across all three phases, referred to their role as the ‘mammy’ with the team where their roles rarely extended beyond organising games, tying shoelaces and supervising toilet breaks. These misperceptions and biases are one of the biggest causes of negative experiences for women coaches.

The FLO role was introduced because the majority of coaches were men and so from a safeguarding children perspective clubs were mandated to have a gender

balance in roles of responsibility with teams. The same would have been true if there was a majority of women coaches working with men's and boy's teams but alas that was never a concern. As such the women were needed in these 'helper' and 'mammy' type roles and so moving away from this is difficult as all involved in girl's sport know that at least one woman must be present in a FLO role. These inherent biases need to be addressed imminently through creating awareness in the first instance.

While this study suggests awareness training a formal qualification is not required instead, a short workshop should suffice. Awareness training, for all club members, should enable them to identify biases when they arise and choose the correct thoughts, words and actions to not display the bias. The NGB could design a short online or in-person workshop that would address the main forms of biases and create awareness among club members. As a first step the NGB and clubs could share a video similar to Phase 1 to raise initial awareness among all stakeholders in women's Gaelic football and start a conversation on the topic. Awareness training, as outlined, should aid volunteer retention and assist coach development.

8.2.3 Coach development and support

Coaches, within the clubs represented, were often left to their own devices without direction and support. To best service the development needs of club members it is important to first know their background and biographies. The volunteer coaches in this study had various coaching experience and motivations for continuing. Stride et al. (2020) calls on clubs to be aware of and understand the individual circumstances of their coaches. Hoye et al. (2019) supports this and requests that clubs introduce volunteer management programmes to understand the volunteers' perspectives, which includes role descriptions and managing their needs.

Matching skill sets of volunteers with appropriate roles is only possible if the club knows their volunteer's biography and background. The use of composite vignettes to display the findings within Phase 2 (Section 6.4) was novel as was the resulting call to action letter for clubs (Section 6.4). These tools could be used by clubs in their current form to understand their coaches and if they can relate to any of the coach profiles. The letter could be used as a check list or audit to determine what elements the club are doing well and what areas need improving.

Coach education was received positively by the coaches, but they would prefer to have more club-based context specific support. In this regard, the CoP, that the coaches in Phases 2 and 3 participated in, was praised for the opportunity to engage in coaching discussions that did not occur beforehand. A similar CoP type programme could be used by the NGB and or clubs as a template regarding content, design, and delivery. A key feature for the success of a CoP based on this study's findings is to ensure the content is centred on the club members, self-identified needs. An obvious limitation with running a club-based CoP is the intensive resources needed to bring it to fruition, especially as the coaches favoured an external facilitator. However, this should not be a reason to leave the status quo of traditional formal coach education as the main form of coach development to the detriment of club-based context-specific opportunities.

The key applied implications of this research are clearly outlined and can be seen as 'nice to haves' or 'wants' for the club or NGB. It would be an error in judgement to view these recommendations as something that can only be implemented by the bigger club or the longer established club. Likewise, it would be an error for clubs to take the position that implementing any of these changes would suggest there was something wrong in the club heretofore. Having a targeted recruitment strategy will benefit all club members including the players as the best people for the roles will be approached. More volunteers mean less chance of burnout for all other volunteers and the smoother running of the club. An increased number of women in coaching roles will bode well for more women to get involved, thus also increasing the number of volunteers.

After coaches are recruited or immediately for those already recruited the club needs to focus their attention on the retention of these coaches. If the environment is supportive and coaches feel they can develop in the role and progress in the club they are more likely to stay. Supporting the coaches is key to this aim but the support does not lie exclusively with formal coach education which become almost 'tick the box' exercises. Instead coaches need context specific supports that are focused on their needs and their self-identified areas of development. For example, a coach of an u12 team wants to learn about coaching that age group and is not concerned with what an adult team coach might find useful. This type of a 'one size fits all' approach to coach education is one of the errors to date as although participants get a taster of the technical, tactical, psychosocial and physical aspects

of the game they are pitched at the same level irrespective of the coach's background or prior knowledge.

I believe a club that is proactive and implements these recommendations will reap the benefits of an increased number of volunteers, both men and women. Furthermore, their volunteers will feel happier about their role and involvement in the club and will ultimately decide to continue and progress. Nonetheless, this will not be an easy task and there is an obvious disconnect between academic research and the applied setting in many instances. To counteract this, the LGFA considered the key elements worthy of publication in their PEIL magazine which is freely available in digital format on the NGB website (See Appendix O). In addition this research will feature on the LGFA TV Youtube channel (https://www.youtube.com/c/LadiesFootballTV/videos) as one of the 15 minute research pod series in early 2023. I also discussed the rollout of more CoPs in clubs and to disseminate the overall findings of this study with members of the LGFA National development team. As a team they have committed to discussing the opportunity of incorporating the 'unconscious bias' findings through a campaign or self-paced training module, with discussions ongoing.

Having a platform to circulate these findings will be a key starting point for progress and development at club level. The findings and the roll out of same will be endorsed and supported by the NGB which will give it a significantly higher standing than a once off publication might do. The NGB are proactive in taking on new projects, such as the CoP from Phases 2 & 3, which is encouraging as I embark on making these academic findings impactful in an applied setting. Conversations are ongoing about a joint application, between the researcher and the LGFA, for the 2022-2023 Sport Ireland Research Funding Scheme (€15k)**.** If deemed appropriate by the NGB to seek this funding and if successful the scheme will support the roll out of a follow up study on the clubs that have engaged in the CoP for this research and/or to recruit new clubs to be involved in a similar CoP. Implementing the findings of this study has the potential to bring about systemic change for volunteer coaches. While the main findings are obvious in this section and throughout the thesis there were also some limitations to the study. These limitations can act as a launchpad for future research in this area.

8.3 Recommendations for future research

There is a plethora of options for future research that both the findings and the limitations of this research have unearthed. The current research was solely interested in the voice of volunteer women coaches in community-based sports clubs. Future studies could examine the perspectives of other stakeholders in the club i.e. the parents, players, and club officers. To continue listening to the coach's voice a study could focus on different cohorts such as those that have just started, have recently stopped or have never started to understand their perspectives.

There was an obvious lack of intersectional identities, among the coaches, as all were white, able bodied and Irish, albeit representative of current women's Gaelic football coaches. Future research can, as Cooper et al. (2017) suggest, include more diversity in the form of race, disability, and cultural backgrounds. Using a feminist theory as a lens to explore the lived experiences of women coaches would add to the current literature. There was a clear and obvious link between women coaching when their children were playing and many referenced quitting coaching when they stopped so an in-depth study into the role of motherhood and coaching is worthy of investigation.

Using the coach profiles and the club letter from Phase 2 would be an interesting starting point for future research with a club. The research could focus on using the letter to check where the club currently are and follow them as they try to implement the various recommendations. A further phase could establish if the recommendations enhanced volunteer coach experiences or not. In a similar vein, following a woman coach over a period of time to determine how her experiences may have changed would be an interesting study. The EIM can continue as a theoretical framework to underpin research on volunteer women coaches to explore their experiences within other sports or from different levels of coaching.

The CoP was successful but a limitation was the fact that it was during COVID-19 so research could be conducted with the same clubs in a year or two to determine how the CoP is progressing, if at all. Additionally, facilitating a similar CoP in a club within a regular season that was not impacted by COVID-19 related restrictions would add to the research. While my role as a coach developer was discussed in Chapter 4 there is scope for more in-depth research on coach developers. Such a study would answer calls from Culver, Werthner, et al. (2019) and Barker-Ruchti et al. (2021) that imply the majority of literature to date has

focused on men in coach education. Including any of these options for new studies would advance the literature on volunteer women coaches and the club coaching environment in general.

8.4 Conclusion

Based on the evidence presented in the key findings section and throughout the thesis this research has the potential to influence the experiences of current and future volunteer women coaches in community clubs. This study addresses the gap as outlined by LaVoi et al. (2019) by focusing on solutions rather than problems, with many of the solutions coming directly from the coaches. The findings and discussions within this thesis should form a starting point for those involved in volunteer coaching to reflect on what is working and not working for coaches within women's Gaelic football. Conversations can centre around women's roles in clubs and the perceptions and biases that may form barriers against them starting and progressing as coaches. In this regard, the request from Schinke et al. (2020) for applicable research that makes an original contribution to the sport and exercise domain is presented throughout this study.

An improved environment that enhances the experience of volunteer women coaches also has the potential to improve the conditions for all volunteer coaches, irrespective of gender. Using this holistic approach to improving the experiences of women coaches is important. Clubs and the LGFA need to put structures in place to help in this regard. From Phase 1 it is clear that the coaches are mostly influenced by those in their immediate environment, within the interpersonal layer. This includes support from home without which they would not start coaching in the first instance.

Phase 2 centred on the club environment with very clear recommendations outlined in a letter to the club. This answers the call from Smith (2013) to have research available to those outside of academia. Therefore, the letter could be used by clubs to audit their current position and use it as a developmental tool to work from as a template. Any improvement in the areas of recruitment, retention, support, and development of volunteer women coaches could benefit other community-based sports clubs also.

Other sports such as rugby and soccer have similar community-based sports clubs that rely on volunteers for the majority of their roles. These sports could benefit

from using some of the findings as a starting point to audit their own volunteer recruitment, retention and development strategies for both men and women coaches. For example, women might get involved in coaching, similar to women's Gaelic football when their own children start playing or they might transition from playing into coaching roles. Biases may also exist in these clubs that will benefit from similar recommendations to make members aware of them, address them and reduce or remove them.

As this thesis began with my story and my journey through the research and giving a voice to volunteer women coaches, I wanted to finish with my voice alongside that of the coaches. My journey as alluded to in Chapter 4 left my future coaching plans as open-ended. I intend returning to coaching, but the timeline is unclear. I will continue to coach my clubs G4M&O team for the 2022 season and guest coach with groups I have promised. Those requests are from underage team coaches that just want a change of voice for their players. When I return to coaching, I think it will be at underage level as opposed to the older and more competitive teams. It is so long since I have coached at competitive level the rustiness would be more apparent than it would be at underage. Although I live 25 miles away from my club, for the last 20 years, I have never contemplated getting involved in the club in my current area. 'One life one club' rings true for me and I will continue to volunteer within the club in whatever capacity I can.

Gaelic games are the only sports I know well enough to coach and so I will stay in these sports. I will continue as a coach developer although I have stopped doing those courses over the last few years as I finished this study. It was great to be involved in new and innovative types of coach and club development, through the CoP in Phases 2 and 3. Subsequently, I want to encourage the LGFA to focus more resources on this form of coach development. I have promised to shadow other CDAs on upcoming CD training courses to build up my confidence and competence levels to get more involved in this role.

My interest in coaching, coach education and development will endure, and I hope to add to the current publications and ensure that this research is broadly communicated in an effort to effect change. As a researcher this study was an enlightening journey that enabled me to interrogate my own biases and specifically What am I doing for the betterment of women coaches in my sport? I hope this

research will improve the situation even if only for the participants in the study to view themselves as coaches and to feel confident enough to continue coaching and progress within their clubs and beyond.

To incorporate the key findings through a simple take-home message I provide the following slogan 'Take a Chance, Give a Chance and Give a Real Chance'. This slogan was organically formed mid-way through the research as I was asked to give an online presentation to LGFA members to promote my research (https://youtu.be/mpIGEJGPfyw). This was later printed in the LGFA PEIL magazine (See Appendix P). I wanted to give a parting message, in a non-academic way that might resonate with the different groups that can impact on women in coaching.

Take a chance: is the message to all those women and girls that are interested in trying coaching. Give a chance: appeals to those in current coaching positions, both men and women, to give those same women and girls the opportunity to coach. Firstly, not assigning women as the FLO or officer-type roles that women are so often limited to and secondly, enabling them to take elements of the session they are comfortable with and providing a supportive environment are crucial aspects. Give them a real chance: as the final step, this is urging clubs and those in decision making positions within the club and the NGB to enable them to continue coaching after the other two steps have been implemented.

Supportive, welcoming club environments and spaces to develop and progress are key to the longevity of women in coaching roles. Some might believe that 'give a chance' should come before 'take a chance'. However, I believe even with the best environment women have to make the decision to get involved before they can experience the positive environment. A positive environment alone will not guarantee they will start coaching especially if their own individual and interpersonal circumstances are not suitable.

Addressing negative stereotypes and behaviours and incorporating club-based coach development initiatives will, according to this study, significantly enhance the success of this plan. New and innovative club initiatives, such as a CoP, have the potential to benefit all coaches in a non-elite club setting and not just women coaches. Ultimately progress that benefits all coaches will move towards removing the gender label from coaches so all can be viewed equally. To conclude a quote

from Edel from Phase 1 sums up my future hopes for volunteer coaches in women's Gaelic football and beyond "I would love to be at the stage where we are just talking about coaches as opposed to female coaches, where it becomes that normalised".

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Appendix C - MIREC Ethics Approval

Mary Immaculate College
Research Ethics Committee
MIREC-4: MIREC Chair Decision Form

APPLICATION NUMBER: A18-035

1. PROJECT TITLE

Experiences of female Ladies Gaelic Football coaches in Ireland: the impact on development and longevity in the role.

2. APPLICANT

Name:	Irene Hogan
Department / Centre / Other:	Arts Education & Physical Education
Position:	Postgraduate Researcher

3. DECISION OF MIREC CHAIR

	Ethical clearance through MIREC is required.
	Ethical clearance through MIREC is not required and therefore the researcher need take no further action in this regard.
✓	Ethical clearance is required and granted. Referral to MIREC is not necessary.
	Ethical clearance is required but the full MIREC process is not. Ethical clearance is therefore granted if required for external funding applications and the researcher need take no further action in this regard.
	Insufficient information provided by applicant / Amendments required.

4. REASON(S) FOR DECISION

A18-035 – Irene Hogan - Experiences of female Ladies Gaelic Football coaches in Ireland: the impact on development and longevity in the role.

I have reviewed this application and I believe it satisfies MIREC requirements. It is, therefore, approved.

5. DECLARATION (MIREC CHAIR)

Name (Print):	Dr Áine Lawlor
Signature:	Áine Lawlor
Date:	23rd July 2018

Appendix D – Phase 1 Consent form & Interview Guide
Phase 1 Participant Information sheet and consent form

Experiences of women Women's Gaelic football coaches in Ireland; the impact on development and longevity in the role.

Participant Information Sheet

Thank you for your interest in this study.

What is the project about?

Women coaches are underrepresented worldwide and relative to this study low numbers also exist in the Women's Gaelic football Association (LGFA). This study will focus on the experiences of women LGFA coaches to better understand the impact of their positive and negative coaching experiences on their development and longevity in coaching. Efforts will be made to enhance the learning and development of the coaches through self-reflection and a CoP with fellow coaches.

Who is undertaking it?

My name is Irene Hogan and I am a Postgraduate student attending Mary Immaculate College. I am presently completing a PhD by research in Education in the Department of Arts Education and Physical Education under the supervision of Dr. Richard Bowles and Dr. Niamh Kitching. The current study will form part of my thesis.

Why is it being undertaken?

The objective of the study is to engage with women LGFA coaches in Ireland to understand their coaching experiences and to help retain current coaches as well as recruiting new ones.

What are the benefits of this research?

It is hoped that the data gathered from participants will (a) enhance our understanding of the experiences of women LGFA coaches and (b) address any supports or barriers they may have encountered and (c) inform future practices and process within the LGFA to encourage more women into coaching as well as retaining current coaches.

Exactly what is involved for the participant (time, location, etc.)

The study will consist of two phases – Phase 1 is a one to one interview conducted by Irene Hogan at a time and location convenient to you. The focus of this interview will be on your experiences to date – please find attached a sample of the interview questions that will be posed. The interview will be voice recorded on a handheld device for accuracy and recall purposes for the researcher. The audio files will be stored on a password protected device that only the researcher has access to and the original recording will be deleted from the device once transcribed. The transcribed data will be anonymised and stored on a password protected device that only the researcher has access to. Informed consent will be given prior to the interview by the participant and signed by both participant and investigator at time of interview.

Phase 2 will involve coaches keeping a self-reflection journal throughout the 2019 playing season and engaging in a CoP with other women coaches to enhance the learning and development of all coaches.

Right to withdraw

Your anonymity and your clubs/county anonymity is assured throughout by giving pseudonyms to all participants. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without consequence by contacting the primary researcher via email. All data relating to you will then be deleted and permanently removed from the study.

How will the information be used / disseminated?

The data from your interview will be combined with that of the other participants in this study and used to form the results section of my thesis. Summary data only will appear in the thesis, individual participant data will not be shown. The findings may be reported on by the LGFA on their social media sites to enhance the profile of women coaches in their sport. Presentations at conferences may occur throughout the study with generic findings but confidentiality will be maintained.

How will confidentiality be kept?

All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party. A random ID number will be generated for each participant and it is this number rather than the participant's name which will be held with their data to maintain their anonymity and their clubs/county anonymity.

What will happen to the data after research has been completed?

In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all research data may be held indefinitely as required by the researcher.

Contact details:

If at any time you have any queries/issues with regard to this study my contact details are as follows:

Irene Hogan
irene.hogan@mic.ul.ie

or my supervisors' details are

Dr. Richard Bowles,
Lecturer in Physical Education
Department of Arts Education
& Physical Education
Room R201A
Mary Immaculate College
Tel: 00353 (0)61 204912
E-mail: richard.bowles@mic.ul.ie

Dr. Niamh Kitching
Lecturer in Sports Coaching and Sports Management
Limerick Institute of Technology
Moylish
Limerick
E-mail: niamh.kitching@lit.ie

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC). ***If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:***

Mary Collins
MIREC Administrator
Research and Graduate School
Mary Immaculate College
South Circular Road
Limerick
061-204980, Email: mirec@mic.ul.ie

Experiences of women Women's Gaelic football coaches in Ireland: the impact on development and longevity in the role.

Participant Consent form

Dear participant,

As outlined on the **participant information letter** the current study will investigate the experiences of women LGFA coaches to better understand the impact of their positive and negative experiences of coaching on their development and longevity in coaching.

Your anonymity your clubs/county anonymity are assured throughout and you may withdraw from this study at any time. All information gathered will remain confidential to the researcher and will not be shared with any third party. In accordance with MIC Record Retention Schedule all participant data may be held indefinitely as required by the researcher.

Please read the following statements before signing this consent form

I have read and understand the participant information sheet
I understand what the project is about and what the results will be used for
I am fully aware of all the procedures involving myself and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.
I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason and without consequence
I am aware that the interview will be audio-recorded but that I can request not to have it audio-recorded if I wish and that the researcher may follow up with me for clarification on the interview data.
I am aware that my details and interview answers and club details will be kept confidential.
I have read this form completely, I am over 18 years of age and happy to take part in this study on women LGFA coaches in Ireland.

Participant **Investigator**

Name (printed) _____ _____

Name (signature) _____ _____

Date _____ _____

Phase 1 Interview guide

Background & Early experience of coaching

- Tell me a bit about yourself, Your club – level of teams, dual club, roughly how long is it established?
- Can you give a brief synopsis of your LGFA coaching to date including coach education courses?
- Main reasons for getting involved in coaching?
- Role/main jobs you do when coaching teams within the LGFA?

Experiences of coaching

- Can you recall and describe Positive experiences/encounters you have had while coaching? and negative
- The impact of these experiences on your coaching?
- How much autonomy have you had in your coaching career to date?
- How would you describe your relationship with your fellow coaches?
- How confident are you in your own ability and competence levels as a coach?
- What part of the game are you most comfortable with?
- How would you describe your coaching philosophy/style?

I want to move on to a different topic now

Supports and barriers during coaching career to date

- Knowledge (if any) of the LGFA coaching structures, pathways and supports available to you and other coaches? What kind of involvement does the organisation have in your coaching? What development opportunities has the LGFA provided for your coaching?
- What has your experiences of LGFA coach education courses been?
- How does this compare to other coach education courses you have completed?
- 73% of CD in LGFA are female – what are your thoughts on this? how does this impact on the courses do you think?
- What is your opinion/experiences of female only coaching courses?
- What about quotas of females at leadership level?

- How do you think family life or work life might impact either positively or negatively on female coaches? Can you describe any examples of this from your own experience?
- Have you any experience of coach burnout?
- Where have your greatest supports come from?

Females in coaching

- How often would you see female coaches with other teams in your club or with the opposition?
- 34% of all qualified coaches in Ireland in all sports are female and between 2013-2017 72% of all fundamentals qualified coaches were females – what do these figures mean to you?
- "Female athletes prefer male coaches" – what is your opinion of this statement?
- Explain to me your understanding of the coach –athlete relationship? How important is it for the success of the coaching experience?
- How does the coach gender impact on this do you think?
- What impact do you think society norms and cultural norms have on female coaches and your own experiences in particular?
- How aware are you of the 20X20 initiative?
    - It's about increasing attendance, media coverage and participation by 20% but no mention of coaching – however how do you think these three may impact on females in coaching if at all?
- Part of LGFA strategic plan 2017-2022 is to become the first choice sport for females (ii) continue the coach development pathway, (iii) recruit coaches, (iv) to actively support the organisations volunteers, and (v) to define a model to help future female leaders within the Association.
    - Bearing this in mind is there anything else they can do to encourage more female coaches or retain current female coaches?

Progression & longevity in coaching

- What do you think your future as an LGFA coach holds?
- What is the highest level you have coached at? Have you ambitions to go higher in the levels?
- What type of coaching self-reflection do you engage in after a training

session or game?

- What areas would you like support in to develop your coaching further? Any part of the game you would like more help support with?
- What do you think can be done to retain current coaches like yourself and recruit new female coaches?
- If you had a chance to make a change for the better for female LGFA coaches what would it be?

Mentoring/Communities of Practice

- Who would you discuss your coaching highs and lows with and perhaps seek guidance from and why?
- What types of peer learning/support, mentoring or communities of practices are you aware of and/or been involved in?
- Have you had any coaching role models either male or female that have impacted on your own coaching and coaching philosophy?
- How interested would you be in having a mentor for your coaching?
- What would you expect from them?

All that is left now is to talk about two quick stories and show you a one minute video clip but before I do that is there anything else you want to add to the conversation that you think we didn't get across or cover fully already? Is there anything you expected to be asked in an interview on female coaches in LGFA that hasn't been covered?

This is the overall research questions I am trying to answer one for my PhD but also for the LGFA – is there anything else that you can think of that might help with answering this question that we haven't already covered?

Age	
Occupation	
Name of club	
Dual	
Currently coaching	
No. Years coaching	
Highest Level coached	
Highest Coaching course completed	Fundamentals
When coaching course completed	
Playing experience	
Involvement in other sports	

Appendix E – Phase 2 Individual Coach Questionnaires

Limerick Coaching CoP Preliminary questionnaire

Dear Coach,

My name is Irene Hogan and I am the co-ordinator for the upcoming Limerick LGFA Coaching CoP (CCoP) which your club is signed up to. It will start in January 2021 and in order to plan for it I want to get an insight into the coaches and their respective clubs. I am asking for your name so I can compare before and after the CoP and also prepare for the CoP based on you and your club's needs. You and your answers will remain anonymous and confidential throughout.

Thank you for taking time to complete this questionnaire and I look forward to meeting and working with you during the programme.

Name_____

Club _____

Email address _____

Gender _____

Profession _____

Year of most recent Safeguarding training _____

Have you completed the CARA disability inclusion training? _____

Role in the club (tick all that apply)

Coach/mentor/trainer/helper _____

Club officer (please name) _____

Parent of underage player _____

Player _____

Length of time coaching (Years)_____

What age group(s) do you coach?_____

Highest level coached

Club underage _____

Club Adult _____

Intercounty underage _____

Intercounty adult _____

Coach Education completed (Tick all that apply)

Ready Steady Coach _____

Fundamentals/GAA Foundation/Camogie_____

Level 1 _____

Level 2 _____

Gaelic for girls _____

Gaelic for teens _____

Coaching experience in a different sport - name sport and length of time _____

Main reason for starting coaching?

What motivates you to continue coaching?

Describe any key events that have impacted your coaching to date?

What elements of support would you like as a coach?

What are your future plans in LGFA coaching?

How would you rate the collaboration between coaches in your club?

Very good ___ Good ____Neither good nor poor ___ Poor____ Very poor ____

How would you rate the communication between club officers and coaches in your club?

Very good ____ Good ____ Neither good nor poor ____ Poor____ Very poor __

How would you rate the communication between parents and coaches in your club?

Very good ____ Good ____ Neither good nor poor ____ Poor____ Very poor __

I concentrate equally on technical, tactical, physical and the psycho-social development with my players?

Always___ Frequently ____ Sometimes-_____ Rarely _____

Questioning of players has been shown to help their autonomy and decision making – how would you describe your use of questioning as a coach?

How well do you think you understand the womenathlete?

Very well __ Well __ Neither well nor very well __ Not very well__ Not at all ___

What type of self-reflection do you engage in after a coaching session or a match?

What do you consider your clubs strengths?

What do you consider your clubs areas for improvement?

What are your future hopes for your LGFA Club?

Appendix F - Phase 2 CoP interview guide for women coaches

Background & Early experience of coaching

- Tell me a bit about yourself, your club and LGFA experiences to date i.e. playing and/or coaching
- How would you describe the main roles/jobs you have within your LGFA club?
- What were your main reasons for getting involved in volunteering with your club?
- Describe your first night volunteering in the club?
- Can you recall and describe positive experiences/encounters you have had while volunteering in your club?
- Can you recall and describe any negative experiences/encounters you have had while volunteering in your club?

Individual layer

- How would you describe your coaching philosophy/style?
- How has your role in the club developed over time?
- How confident are you in your current role in the club?
- How much autonomy have you had in your role to date?
- Have you had any coaching role models either male or women that have impacted on your own coaching/volunteering? If so how?
- What are the main barriers/challenges you face in your role?
- Have you ever experienced volunteer burnout?
- If you were to write a letter to your younger self about volunteering in your club what advice might it include?
- Have you ever considered stopping volunteering with your club and if so why?

Interpersonal layer

- How would you describe your relationship with your fellow coaches in the teams you work with?
- Where do your greatest supports come from?
- Who would you discuss your coaching highs and lows with and perhaps seek guidance from and why?

- How would you describe your relationship with the players you work with?

Organisational layer – including club structures, hierarchy, relationships.

- What have your experiences of LGFA coach education courses been?
- How does this compare to other coach education courses you have completed?
- What is your opinion/experiences of women only participants at coaching courses?
- How would you like your club to be viewed internally and externally?
- Tell me about the relationships between all the stakeholders (i.e. coaches, players, club officers, parents) in your club from your experience?
- How would you rate the collaboration between coaches in the age group you are involved in and within the club overall?
- If you were to think of an ideal coaching environment in your club what would it involve?
- How accepted are new coaches in your club? Does the coach gender impact this level of acceptance in your opinion?
- What do you think the club currently does well for their volunteers in terms of supporting them?
- If you could anonymously advise the club on what should be done to attract and retain more volunteers like you what would you say based on your experience?
- Putting yourself back to when you started coaching how might a club-based support network work for you?
- If you had 1 wish for your club going forward what would it be?

Societal layer

- In my experience women will often say they are "working with" or "helping out with" a team but men in similar roles will say they are "coaching" or "managing a team". Can you relate to this and in your opinion why do you think this might be the case?
- Have you ever experienced gender bias in your club or externally?

Progression & longevity in coaching

- What do you think your future in your club holds?
- How involved are you in the future of coaching in the club?
- What is the highest level you have coached at? Have you ambitions to coach at higher levels?
- What areas would you like support in to develop your coaching further?

Communities of Practice

- How did you feel before the CoP started? And now after attending a few sessions?
- How relevant is it to your role with the team?
- What elements would you like more of? Less of?
- In your opinion how might the CoP progress or not after the 2021 season?

Some demographic questions to finish

- Age
- Length of time coaching
- Highest level of coach education
- Occupation
- Involvement in any other sport

Appendix G – Phase 2 Women coach interviews consent form

Experiences of female Ladies Gaelic Football coaches in Ireland: the impact on development and longevity in the role.

Participant Consent form

Dear participant,

As outlined on the **participant information letter** the current study will investigate the experiences of female LGFA coaches/volunteers to better understand the impact of their positive and negative experiences on their development and longevity in coaching.

Your anonymity and your club/county anonymity are assured throughout, and you may withdraw from this study at any time. All information gathered will remain confidential to the researcher and will not be shared with any third party. In accordance with MIC Record Retention Schedule all participant data may be held indefinitely as required by the researcher.

Please read the following statements before signing this consent form

- I have read and understand the participant information sheet
- I understand what the project is about and what the results will be used for
- I am fully aware of all the procedures involving myself and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.
- I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason and without consequence
- I am aware that the interview will be audio-recorded but that I can request not to have it audio-recorded if I wish and that the researcher may follow up with me for clarification on the interview data.
- I am aware that my details and interview answers and club details will be kept confidential.
- I have read this form completely, I am over 18 years of age and happy to take part in this study on female LGFA coaches/volunteers in Ireland.

Participant **Investigator**

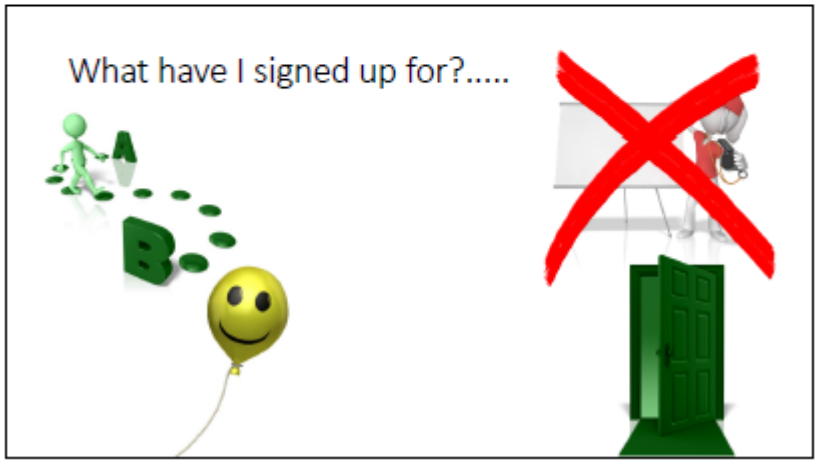
Name (printed) _____ _____

Name (signature) _____ _____

Date_____ _____

Appendix H - Sample slides from CoP sessions

1



2

PROPOSED TIMELINE	
Meeting	***Timeframe***
Meeting 1	Feb 2021
Meeting 2	March 2021
Meeting 3 with CoP Safeguarding training & Coaching kids & Disability Inclusion training	March 2021/April 2021
Meeting 4	April 2021
Meeting 5 with CoP Meet with OTHER clubs	April 2021
Meeting 6	May 2021
Meeting 7	July 2021
Meeting 8 with CoP Meet with OTHER clubs	August 2021
Meeting 9	September 2021
Meeting 10 with CoP wrap up	October/November 2021

4

What are your expectations of this CoP?

- Using the chat or unmute
- Questionnaires suggest
  - Player recruitment and retention
  - Volunteer recruitment
  - Self-development
  - Club plan/structure
  - Resources
- Suggestions on night One
  - *Specific workshops on "what" of coaching*
  - *Professional approach to a coaching system/structure across the club*
  - *Discussions with peers for new coaches to learn from more experienced coaches*

6

Task

- What words would you like to be associated with/represent your club both from within and externally?

https://jamboard.google.com/d/1LRH9SSDXIygiiaxpaiwSI5E80GmjeA24mXBi2oWZY_k/viewer?f=0

7

Club philosophy

Can we develop/enhance our club philosophy based on words used earlier or words we would now like to include?

8

Matching expectations?

- How close are we to the club philosophy/words now?
- Where do we want to be in the future?

- How can we get there?

9

LGFA COACHING PRINCIPLES #FREDA

F FUN/ENJOYABLE
- Inclusive, Value Driven, Challenging

R RELEVANT
- Process v Outcome, Player Centered, Age Appropriate

E EXCELLENCE
- High Standards, Be the best you can be!

D DIRECTION
- Clear Focus, Vision, Long Term Development

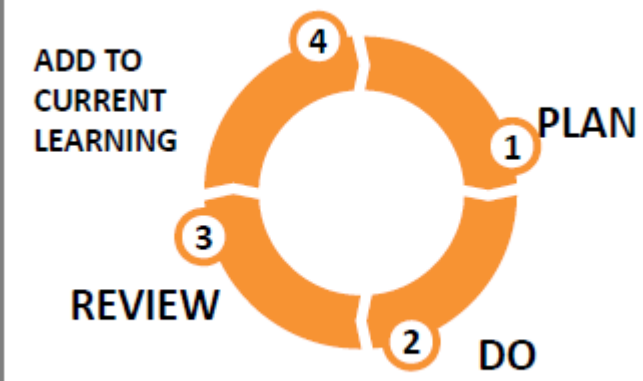
A ACTIVE
- Regular, Game Based, Varied and Creative

11

Coaching competencies

12

PLAN, DO, REVIEW



13

Desired Outcomes for CoP – red ink Night 2 working towards achieving same

- Questionnaires suggest
  - Player recruitment and retention – club philosophy, player competency
  - Volunteer recruitment – volunteer recruitment plan, player competency, matching expectations
  - Self-development - club philosophy, player competency,
  - Club plan/structure – volunteer recruitment plan, club philosophy, player competency
  - Resources drills, webinars etc. - *LSP workshops & LGFA programmes/webinars*
- Suggestions on night One
  - *Plan for future of club e.g. 10 years time and working towards that now - –* group brain storming tasks, volunteer recruitment plan, club philosophy, player competency

21

Questions to reflect on…

- How do I know I am doing a good job?
- How do I know my players/club are improving?
  - And where is the evidence of this?
- How do others see me in my role in the club?
- How do I/we know we are communicating effectively with all the relevant stakeholders i.e. players, fellow coaches, parents, committee

16

To do list between night 2 and night 3

1. Watch LGFA coach education webinar – creating a positive coaching environment 9mins-29mins https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5VFdO74bNk

2. Look at the LGFA Player Development competency chart with your group

2.5 Use a profile wheel to say where we are from 1 o 10 under each of the headings technical, tactical, mental, physical, lifestyle/personal (psychosocial).

22

Task - Club philosophy – 10 mins

1. Can we develop/enhance our club philosophy based on these words used earlier or words we would now like to include?
2. What does our club look like in 10 years time – some suggestions as to what needs to happen now to get there.

17

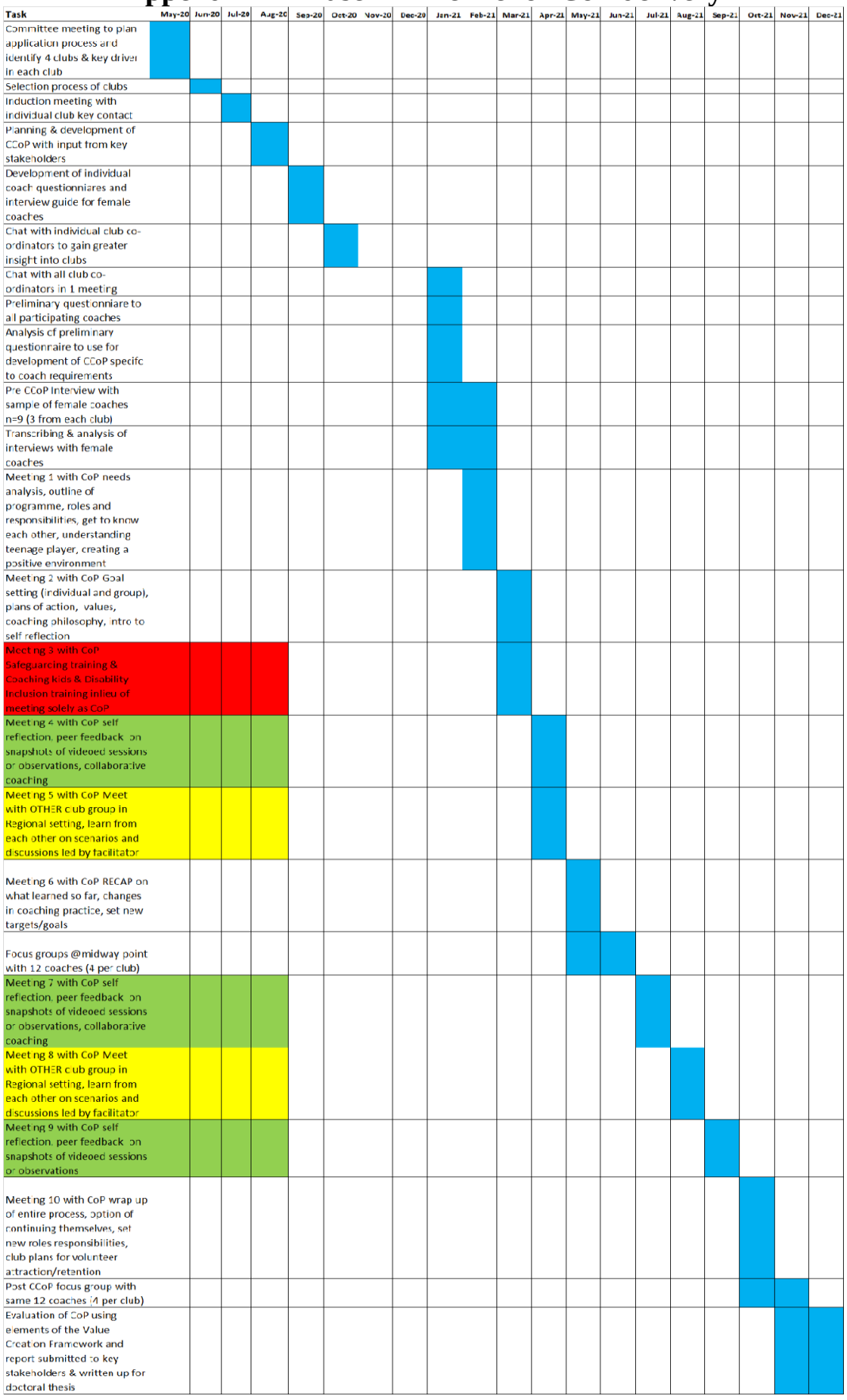
Task - Matching expectations

- BO rooms with people from age group you are/will be involved with and/or club officers.

- 15 minutes - some prompts
  - What happened in previous years? E.g night we trained, number of players, management team etc?
  - What roles do we need filled e.g. coaching, administration, first aid etc?
  - What do I/can I bring to the group?
  - What am I NOT comfortable doing?
  - *What area of development/support do we want as a group?*
  - *Plan for volunteer recruitment - What does it need to include?*
  - *Plan for professional coaching structure – what does this look like? Who is involved? etc*

18

Appendix I - Phase 2 Timeline for CoP delivery



Appendix J – Phase 3 Focus groups Information sheet and consent form

Experiences of female Ladies Gaelic Football coaches in Ireland; the impact on development and longevity in the role.

Participant Information Sheet

Thank you for your interest in this part of my study.

What is the project about?

Female coaches are underrepresented worldwide and relative to this study low numbers also exist in the Ladies Gaelic Football Association (LGFA). This study will focus on the experiences of female LGFA coaches to better understand the impact of their positive and negative coaching experiences on their development and longevity in coaching. Phase one involved interviews with 14 women coaches to get an insight into their lived experiences. Phase 2 involved the facilitation of a Community of Practice (CoP) within your club for the 2021 playing season and interviews to explore the experiences of 11 women coaches in relation to their specific club environment. This current and final phase will examine women coaches' experiences of being a member of the CoP across the 2021 playing season.

Who is undertaking it?

My name is Irene Hogan and I am a Postgraduate student attending Mary Immaculate College. I am presently completing a PhD by research in the Department of Arts, Education and Physical Education under the supervision of Dr. Richard Bowles and Dr. Niamh Kitching. The current study will form part of my thesis.

Why is it being undertaken?

The objective of the study is to engage with female LGFA coaches/volunteers in Ireland to understand their experiences and to help retain current coaches as well as recruiting new ones. This phase aims to inform clubs and the LGFA of what club-based supports are most effective for the support and development of volunteer women coaches and determine the effectiveness of a CoP in this regard.

What are the benefits of this research?

It is hoped that the data gathered from participants will (a) enhance our understanding of the experiences of female LGFA coaches/volunteers (b) address any supports or barriers they may have encountered and (c) inform future practices and process within the LGFA to encourage more females into coaching as well as retaining current coaches.

Exactly what is involved for the participant (time, location, etc.)

The study will consist of a focus group facilitated by Irene Hogan to explore your experiences of the CoP in your club. A copy of the format and questions will be made available to you prior to the session. The focus group will be voice recorded on a handheld device for accuracy and recall purposes for the researcher. This audio file will be stored on a device that only the researcher has access to and the original recording will be deleted from the device once transcribed. The transcribed data will be anonymised and stored on a password protected computer that only the researcher has access to.

Informed consent will be given prior to the focus group by the participant and signed by both participant and investigator on the day.

Right to withdraw

Your anonymity and your clubs/county anonymity are assured throughout by giving pseudonyms to all participants. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without consequence by contacting the primary researcher via email. All data relating to you will then be deleted and permanently removed from the study.

How will the information be used / disseminated?

The data from your interview will be combined with that of the other participants in this study and used to form the results section of my thesis. Summary data only will appear in the thesis and individual participant data will not be shown. The findings may be reported on by the LGFA on their social media sites to enhance the profile of female coaches in the sport. Presentations at conferences may occur throughout the study with generic findings but confidentiality will be maintained.

How will confidentiality be kept?

All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party. A random ID number will be generated for each participant and it is this number rather than the participant's name which will be held with their data to maintain their anonymity and their clubs/county anonymity. All participants are asked not to discuss the content of the conversations outside of the focus group.

What will happen to the data after research has been completed?

In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all research data may be held indefinitely as required by the researcher.

Contact details:

If at any time you have any queries/issues with regard to this study my contact details are as follows:
Irene Hogan, irene.hogan@mic.ul.ie
or my supervisors' details are

Dr. Richard Bowles,
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Room G49
Mary Immaculate College
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E-mail: richard.bowles@mic.ul.ie

Dr. Niamh Kitching
Lecturer in Physical Education
Department of Arts Education & Physical Education
Room G45
Mary Immaculate College
Tel: 00353 (0)61 204374
E-mail: niamh.kitching@mic.ul.ie

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC). ***If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:***
Mary Collins
MIREC Administrator
Research and Graduate School
Mary Immaculate College
South Circular Road,
Limerick, 061-204980 Email: mirec@mic.ul.ie

Experiences of female Ladies Gaelic Football coaches in Ireland: the impact on development and longevity in the role.

Participant Consent form

Dear participant,

As outlined on the **participant information letter** the current study will investigate the experiences of female LGFA coaches/volunteers to better understand the effectiveness of a club-based Community of Practice (CoP) on their support and development.

Your anonymity and your club/county anonymity are assured throughout, and you may withdraw from this study at any time. All information gathered will remain confidential to the researcher and will not be shared with any third party. In accordance with MIC Record Retention Schedule all participant data may be held indefinitely as required by the researcher.

Please read the following statements before signing this consent form

- I have read and understand the participant information sheet
- I understand what the project is about and what the results will be used for
- I am fully aware of all the procedures involving myself and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.
- I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason and without consequence
- I am aware that the interview will be audio-recorded but that I can request not to have it audio-recorded if I wish and that the researcher may follow up with me for clarification on the interview data.
- I am aware that my details and interview answers and club details will be kept confidential.
- I have read this form completely, I am over 18 years of age and happy to take part in this study on female LGFA coaches/volunteers in Ireland.

Participant **Investigator**

Name (printed) _____ _____

Name (signature) _____ _____

Date _____ _____

Appendix K - Self-refection journal entry from 8th June 2019

Still reading up on methodologies to decide how I go about analysing. Reading other peoples' theses now and among them is Niamh Kitching's (NK). Ethnography had been suggested to me as a methodology and I have just come across critical ethnography in her study however, the idea of observations means that I should be watching coaches in their everyday environment for a prolonged period of time but I am not. I had originally thought about observing the coach in their coaching sessions but as of now that is not happening so ethnography is no longer suitable.

NK in her thesis talks about her own biases and subjectivity from being a golfer, a staff member of junior golf Ireland and now a researcher and I am similar. I have experience working for the LGFA as a coach educator, being a player and coach myself. NK also recalls informal chats and experiences she has had in the past in relation to the gendered space within golf. I have events within LGFA which I can recall too. My anecdotal experience of seeing females at coach education courses or with other teams I have been in opposition to.

Still reading NK methods section and thinking about autoethnography, my experiences as a player, coach, coach educator and now researcher cannot be separated from the study so autoethnography might be a way of putting it in context for the reader. However, the debates about it being self-indulgent and narcissistic is miles away from what I would describe myself as or indeed would be happy to be exploring and putting out there for the world to see.

Reading Richard Bowles (RB) thesis and I like the idea of the perspectives and giving the reader a chance to see the context of where I am coming from so player perspective taking it back to my positive experience in primary school, secondary school, underage club, college, and how that has shaped my coaching philosophy now of player-centred approach and the coach athlete relationship being paramount. RB has a teaching perspective so I can do coach and coach developer and then research perspective maybe even LGFA fan/supporter perspective. Can you ever really have one hat on over the other or are all hats just intertwined into one. What about my role as club officer from age of 18, different roles and how that formed my assumptions on the sport and the organisational structures?

Coaching started for me with U16 and u18 when I was 20 or so. A feeling I was better than or as good as the club based coaches because of my qualifications that they probably did not have however they were female coaches working with me would I have thought the same if I was with male coaches in the club? Those female coaches were, looking back now, role models for me in the coaching sense but I did not realise at the time. I was coaching teams and I was not driving age so different neighbours that had kids playing on teams, I was involved with, would take me or my mother to her credit would take me to those matches as well as my own. I never felt like it was out of the ordinary I was doing something I loved doing and I was pretty good at.

Another year I was coaching in camps with cork ladies football board and the calibre of the other female caches was intimidating for me as they were also Cork players at the time. Always lacked confidence in my own ability to be good at what I was doing but learned as I went along and soon realised it was as much about keeping the players occupied and entertained as it was anything else. I have fond memories of my own trips to summer camps stayed with my cousin because they were in the village where the bus went from.

I was the only girl in my family that played and my brother did not play for as long as I did. All my family are supporters of Gaelic games but none with the same level of involvement as me so the role models were not at home but likewise there were no barriers at home either. It was never frowned upon when I was involved or indeed how much I was involved.

My role as a coach educator since 2007 has seen many females in attendance but very few are outspoken or take the lead in any group tasks or group discussions. Seeing so many females at these courses is partly the reason I chose this as my area of research. Even my role as a Safeguarding tutor shows the level of change that is still required to get everyone using a child first approach and not necessarily from the perspective of preventing child abuse but in regards to the participation and enjoyment and ultimately continued involvement. Even after all these experiences though have I done anything to improve or change the status quo within ladies football?

Appendix L - Phase 1 Recruitment letter/email to LGFA staff

Recruitment letter/email to LGFA staff

Dear LGFA staff member,

Thank you for agreeing to send out the below email to your database of women coaches as well as promoting it on your social media platforms. I appreciate the help and support of the LGFA in this regard.

Regards,

Irene Hogan

PhD candidate

Mary Immaculate College, Limerick

irene.hogan@mic.ul.ie

Recruitment email to all women coaches on LGFA database

Dear coach,

This email is being sent by LGFA Croke Park on behalf of Irene Hogan, PhD candidate in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. Irene is seeking a number of women coaches that are currently coaching teams (at any age group/grade) in the LGFA to take part in her study. Please see email from Irene below.

Dear coach,

Would you like to be involved in new research investigating the experiences of women LGFA coaches in Ireland?

Would you like to increase the number of women coaching at all levels in LGFA?

Would you like to inform future practice for recruiting and retaining women coaches in the LGFA?

If you are answering yes to any of these then please read more on how you can take part in this new and exciting research.

To participate in this study, you must meet the following criteria;

Be over 18 years of age

Be actively* coaching for 5 years

Have completed an LGFA coach education course (a minimum of Fundamentals level) in the last 10 years.

This study aims to give a voice to women LGFA coaches to understand their varied experiences of being a coach and how these experiences have impacted on their development and progression in coaching.

Attached please find a more detailed information sheet and a consent form that all participants are required to sign. The interviews as well as the CoP will be conducted at a time and venue convenient to you. All information will be anonymised so you or your club/county will not be identifiable from the content of the study.

Thank you for taking the time to read this email and please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any queries and/or if you are interested in taking part in this study.

Regards,

Irene Hogan

PhD candidate

Mary Immaculate College, Limerick

irene.hogan@mic.ul.ie

For the purpose of this study actively coaching is defined as involved in coaching or assisting in coaching sessions with Women's Gaelic football teams either as the main coach or one of the selectors or mentors that takes elements of the coaching session on a regular basis. This involvement does not have to be with the same team for the 5 years.

Status/tagline for social media platforms recruitment

Are you a female coach in LGFA? New exciting research on female LGFA coaches as part of a PhD study have commenced. Follow the link below to find out more and become involved.

Appendix M - Phase 1 Vignettes from Interview guide

Vignette 1

A female coach with a male assistant/selector is approached before a match by one opposition male coach looking for the team coach and after a match on a different occasion is bypassed and the hand of the male assistant coach/selector is shaken in commiseration assuming he was the coach.

Vignette 2

A female coach assistant with an underage LGFA team asked a more experienced female coach to take a session for them. On the night the assistant female coach engages with the more experienced coach and asks questions, takes notes and is actively involved in the session encouraging players etc. As soon as the male coach arrives (half way through the session) the female assistant coach stops engaging and stands to the side, stops asking questions and taking notes and only gets involved again for the colleting of equipment at the end of the session. The male coach doesn't ask any questions of the more experienced female coach and just says "I often do what you have just done with them there".

Appendix N - Phase 3 Focus group guide

- Experiences of the CoP in comparison to previous formal coach education courses based on Cassidy et al. (2006)
    - *Demographic and previous coaching experience, how did you get involved in coaching? (already in MS forms)*
    - Experience with coach education programs prior to participating in the CoP - What knowledge and experiences have you gained from attending?
    - The design, content and delivery of the CoP compared to other coach education programmes/workshops?
- How did the CoP live up to your expectations of it?
- Any barriers or challenges that have impacted your experiences within the CoP?
- Indicators and guides from the Value Creation Framework literature (Wenger et al., 2011)
    - Any significant aspects of the programme that you recall? What element if any was most influential for your coach development/support?
    - How relevant was the CoP to you in your current/future roles in the club?
    - How did the CoP impact your perspective or understanding of the coaching structures in the club?
    - How did the CoP impact your confidence levels as a member of the coaching personnel in the club?
    - What if any aspects of the CoP would I like the club to continue into the 2022 season?
- How might a CoP like this be used, if at all, to aid the recruitment and retention of more women coaches?
- How has the CoP influenced the club as a whole and not just your individual role/involvement?
- How would you describe the autonomy you or your club had in the direction, content and delivery of this CoP?
- How has the CoP involvement influenced your thoughts on future coaching involvement in the club?

- How effective was the CoP in supporting & developing you as a volunteer coach?
- What are the most important attributes for the CoP facilitator to have?
- Any advice you would give clubs wanting to start a CoP in 2022

Appendix O - PEIL Magazine article Summer 2022

INFLUENCE OF THE CLUB ENVIRONMENT ON THE EXPERIENCES OF VOLUNTEER WOMEN COACHES

This article highlights the key findings from Irene Hogan's PhD in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, under the supervision of Dr Richard Bowles and Dr Niamh Kitching. Irene is a coach and coach developer from the Bride Rovers club in Cork while both Richard and Niamh coach in the Oola club in Limerick, with Richard an active coach developer for the LGFA and GAA.

The PhD research focused on the experiences of volunteer women coaches across the island of Ireland. 25 women representing 16 LGFA clubs across nine counties were interviewed to explore their experiences as volunteer coaches in their respective clubs. A further nine women, from three clubs, took part in focus groups to determine the effectiveness of a club-based, season long Community of Practice (CoP) that their club was participating in. This article focuses on the coaches' experiences within their respective club environments. Direct quotes from the participants are outlined, along with a call to action for all club members. It is hoped these quotes will resonate with you or someone you know and/or start a conversation to consider if your club environment evokes similar experiences.

The sample quotes from the coaches highlight areas of improvement at club level regarding the perceptions of women's roles in clubs and the possible biases that exist. A combination of the coaches' experiences culminated in the development of a "Dear club" letter as outlined below. This letter can be used by LGFA club members and officers as a checklist to determine what their club is doing well and what areas need improving.

> "I REALISED I AM NINE YEARS HELPING OUT, BUT I HAVE CHANGED OVER TO NINE YEARS COACHING. I CALL MYSELF A COACH NOW, SO THAT WAS FROM THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE."

> "I DESCRIBE MYSELF AS THE TOKEN FEMALE BECAUSE THEY HAVE TO HAVE A FEMALE. I WAS VERY MUCH STANDING ON THE SIDELINES, JUST IF THE GIRLS NEEDED TO GO TO THE TOILET OR THAT KIND OF STUFF. NOW I'M TRYING TO GET A BIT MORE INVOLVED IN THE ACTUAL COACHING."

> "FRUSTRATION PARTICULARLY WHEN I AM JUST COMPLETELY IGNORED, WHICH DOES HAPPEN NOW AND AGAIN BUT I PROBABLY WILL CONTINUE COACHING UNTIL MY YOUNGEST GETS TO THE AGE WHERE THEY DON'T ALLOW COACHES LIKE ME."

> "I NEVER PLAYED FOOTBALL, BUT I GOT PUSHED INTO THE ADMINISTRATION ROLE. WHEN MY KIDS STARTED, I ASKED THE COACH DID HE WANT A HAND AND HE SAID NO. A YEAR OR TWO LATER I GOT ASKED ABOUT DOING SECRETARY. BUT I NEVER WANTED AN ADMINISTRATION ROLE. I WOULD HAVE MUCH PREFERRED TO BE ON THE PITCH BUT THAT IS THE PERCEPTION THAT IS THERE".

> "I REMEMBER ONE OF THE PARENTS COMING UP TO ME BEFORE A COUNTY FINAL SAYING 'DO YOU WANT MY HUSBAND TO STAND WITH YOU ON THE SIDELINE?' AND I SAID 'WHY FOR WHAT REASON?' AND SHE SAID 'JUST TO BE THERE'".

Dear Club,

We are writing on behalf of current and future volunteer women coaches in the club with our proposed changes, under the umbrella of retention and recruitment, support structures, and club culture and norms. We highlight some key considerations under each heading that we believe will help all women coaches in this club.

Retention and Recruitment
- Approach females in your club such as the kydonders, CAMMS, and current adult players.
- Use your current coaches as recruitment personnel to ask people they know in a more targeted manner.
- Conduct a taster and/or induction session for all club positions to show what the role entails.
- Devise a starter pack to include:
  - A typical session relevant to specific age groups with coaching resources
  - Clearly defined role descriptions
  - Requirements of new volunteers regarding coaching qualifications, safeguarding, etc.

Support structures within the club
- Appoint a volunteer officer as the connection between the volunteers and the committee who can organise training, support, and collaboration between all club coaches.
- Know your volunteer's biography – What is their background? What are their skills and competencies and match these to the roles required in the club? Use the training needs to create a pathway for all coaches to develop and progress.
- Have regular check ins with volunteers throughout the season both formally and informally.

Club culture and norms
- Introduce a club philosophy, informed by all stakeholders i.e. committee, parents, coaches, and players, and communicate it to all members. The coaching philosophy should include what is important to the club e.g. playing experience, coaching qualification, coach-athlete relationships, and characteristics of good coaching.
- Recognise and reduce the club's barriers to participation.
- Champion parity of esteem:
  - Recognise the men's and ladies club in the community, and organise their awareness training in relation to gender, age, level of match, playing experience and parental status.
  - Treat coaches and helpers at all levels are valued equally in the club.
- Challenge those that are not conforming with the club philosophy.

While we appreciate the above will take time to implement, we are confident that they are achievable in the short-term, leading to positive long-term benefits for all involved.

Yours Sincerely,
Current and future women coaches

Take home messages for EVERYONE involved in LGFA i.e. coaches (male and female), mentors, players, referees, committee members, supporters etc. Clubs should approach all players, parents and guardians, and not just the men, when recruiting new coaches.

- Most women coach at the underage level, so more is needed to ensure they stay and progress as coaches.
- The Female Liaison Officer (FLO) role was the most frequent area of bias for the coaches as it has almost given members a right to expect that is the only role for a woman in a club. Coaches referred to their role as the 'mommy' with the team where their roles rarely extended beyond organising games, tying shoelaces and supervising toilet breaks. Awareness training, for all club members, should enable them to identify biases when they arise and choose the correct thoughts, words and actions to not display the bias.
- Coaches were often left to their own devices without direction and support. To best service the development needs of club members, it is important to first know their background and biographies and match skill sets of volunteers with appropriate roles in the club.
- Coach education was received positively by the coaches, but they would prefer to have more club-based context-specific support i.e. suited to the ages they are working with along with collaboration among all club coaches.

If you have any questions relating to this research, please contact Irene Hogan, irene.hogan@mic.ul.ie. Further articles on this research can be viewed at https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2021.1933847 and https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2022.809092

CALL TO ACTION	BY WHOM	WHEN	HOW	IMPLICATIONS
Targeted recruitment	• Volunteer officer • Other club officers • Existing coaches • Development committee	• Pre-season • During the season	**Approach** • Women and men equally • Current players including CAMMS group • Bystander parents **Provide** • Taster sessions, induction pack, context specific coach education **Match** • Coach/volunteer skill sets to roles required	• Increased number of volunteers/coaches • Coaches feel valued and wanted • More diversity in volunteer group • More confident/competent coaches • Coaches feel understood and valued • Volunteers are doing a role they are comfortable doing
Appropriate retention strategies	• Club officers/committee • Existing club members • hiGB led education programme or initiative	• On an ongoing basis	• Sharing the workload and tasks • Change perceptions on women's roles in clubs. Educate members that the FLO role is not the only one for women • Challenge biases - Educate and make members aware of their own biases and seek change	• Prevent coach burnout/dropout • Will help women coaches more due to time pressures with increased caring responsibilities in the home • Enables women to be considered for coaching roles • Improved environment for all in the club if all biases are identified and challenged
Coach development and support	• Club officers	• On an ongoing basis	• Know your coaches' biographies and background • Initiate coach discussions and collaborations	• Working to their strengths so they are comfortable with the role and will have greater commitment to the club • Coaches appreciate sharing knowledge and having discussions with their fellow coaches and learn and develop together

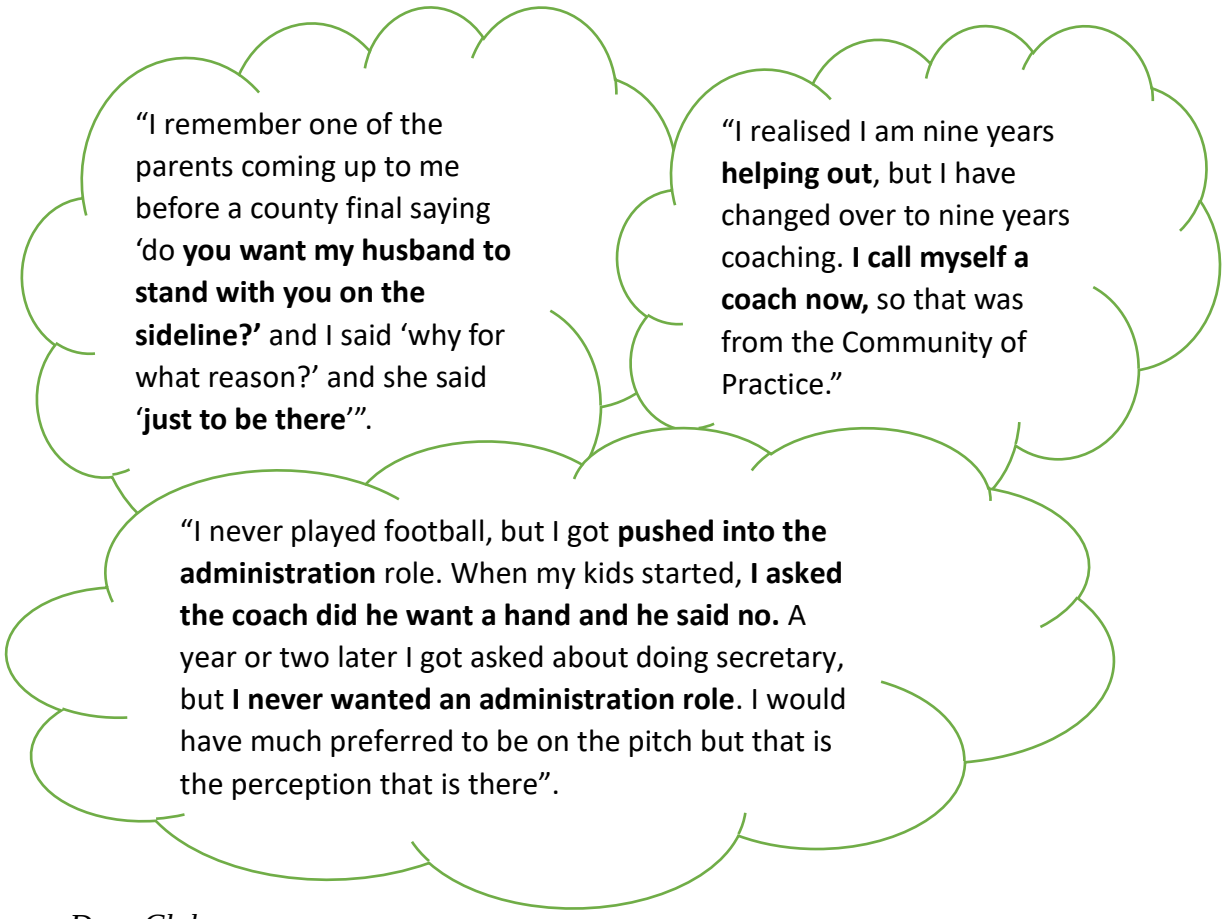
Article title: Influence of the club environment on the experiences of volunteer women coaches.

This article highlights the key findings from Irene Hogan's PhD in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick under the supervision of Dr Richard Bowles and Dr Niamh Kitching. Irene is a coach and coach developer from Bride Rovers club in Cork while both Richard and Niamh coach in Oola club in Limerick with Richard an active coach developer for the LGFA and GAA.

The PhD research focused on the experiences of volunteer women coaches across the island of Ireland. 25 women representing 16 LGFA clubs across 9 counties were interviewed to explore their experiences as volunteer coaches in their respective clubs. A further 9 women, from 3 clubs, took part in focus groups to determine the effectiveness of a club-based, season long Community of Practice (CoP) that their club was participating in. This article focuses on the coaches' experiences within their respective club environments. Direct quotes from the participants are outlined along with a call to action for all club members. It is hoped these quotes will resonate with you or someone you know and/or start a conversation to consider if your club environment evokes similar experiences. The sample quotes from the coaches highlight areas of improvement at club level regarding the perceptions of women's roles in clubs and the possible biases that exist. A combination of the coaches' experiences culminated in the development of a "Dear club" letter as outlined below. This letter can be used by LGFA club members and officers as a checklist to determine what their club is doing well and what areas need improving.

"**Frustration** particularly, when I am just **completely ignored,** which does happen now and again but I probably will continue coaching until my youngest gets to the age where they don't allow coaches like me"

"I describe myself as the **token female** because they have to have a female. I was very much **standing on the sidelines just if the girls needed to go to the toilet** or that kind of stuff. Now **I'm trying to get a bit more involved in the actual coaching**"



Dear Club,

We are writing on behalf of current and future volunteer women coaches in the club with our proposed changes, under the umbrella of retention and recruitment, support structures, and club culture and norms. We highlight some key considerations under each heading that we believe will help all women coaches in this club.

(b) Retention and Recruitment

- *Approach females in your club such as the bystanders, G4M&O, and current adult players.*
- *Use your current coaches as recruitment personnel to ask people they know in a more targeted manner*
- *Conduct a taster and/or induction session for all club positions to show what the role entails*
- *Devise a starter pack to include:*
    - *A typical session relevant to specific age groups with coaching resources*

- *Clearly defined role descriptions*
- *Requirements of new volunteers regarding coaching qualifications, safeguarding, etc.*

(c) support structures within the club

- *Appoint a volunteer officer as the connection between the volunteers and the committee who can organise training, support, and collaboration between all club coaches.*
- *Know your volunteer's biography – What is their background? What are their skills and competencies and match these to the roles required in the club? Use the training needs to create a pathway for all coaches to develop and progress.*
- *Have regular check-ins with volunteers throughout the season both formally and informally.*

***(d) club culture and norms**.*

- *Introduce a club philosophy, informed by all stakeholders i.e. committee, parents, coaches, and players, and communicate it to all members. The coaching philosophy should include what is important to the club e.g. playing experience, coaching qualification, coach-athlete relationships, and characteristics of good coaching.*
- *Recognise and reduce the club's barriers to participation*
- *Champion parity of esteem*
    - *between the men's and ladies club in the community, and organise bias awareness training in relation to gender, age, blow-in status, playing experience and parental status*
    - *that coaches and helpers at all levels are valued equally in the club*
- *Challenge those that are not conforming with the club philosophy*

While we appreciate the above will take time to implement, we are confident that they are achievable in the short-term, leading to positive long-term benefits for all involved.

Yours Sincerely,
Current and future women coaches

While this letter is penned on behalf of current and future women coaches it is expected that improving the club environment, for this group of coaches, will benefit all coaches, irrespective of gender. The "Call To Action" table below provides a toolkit for clubs to start and/or continue best practice in the areas of targeted recruitment, retention strategies and coach development and support.

Call to Action	By whom	When	How	Implications
Targeted recruitment	• Volunteer officer • Other club officers • Existing coaches • Development committee	• Pre-season • During the season	**Approach** • Women and men equally • Current players including G4M&O group • Bystander parents **Provide** • Taster sessions, induction pack, context specific coach education **Match** • Coach/volunteer skill sets to roles required	• Increased number of volunteers/coaches • Coaches feel valued and wanted • More diversity in volunteer group • More confident/competent coaches • Coaches feel understood and valued • Volunteers are doing a role they are comfortable doing
Appropriate retention strategies	• Club officers/committee • Existing club members • NGB led education programme or initiative	• On an ongoing basis	• Sharing the workload and tasks • Change perceptions on women's roles in clubs -Educate members that the FLO role is not the only one for women • Challenge biases - Educate and make members aware of their own biases and seek change	• Prevent coach burnout/dropout • Will help women coaches more due to time pressures with increased caring responsibilities in the home • Enables women to be considered for coaching roles • Improved environment for all in the club if all biases are identified and challenged
Coach development and support	• Club officers	• On an ongoing basis	• Know your coaches' biographies and background • Initiate coach discussions and collaborations	• Working to their strengths so they are comfortable with the role and will have greater commitment to the club • Coaches appreciate sharing knowledge and having discussions with their fellow coaches and learn and develop together

Take home messages for EVERYONE involved in LGFA i.e. coaches (male and female), mentors, players, referees, committee members, supporters etc.

- Clubs should approach all players, parents and guardians and not just the men when recruiting new coaches.
- Most women coach at the underage level so more is needed to ensure they stay and progress as coaches.
- The Female Liaison Officer (FLO) role was the most frequent area of bias for the coaches as it has almost given members a right to expect that is the only role for a woman in a club. Coaches referred to their role as the 'mammy' with the team where their roles rarely extended beyond organising games, tying shoelaces and supervising toilet breaks. Awareness training, for all club members, should enable them to identify biases when they arise and choose the correct thoughts, words and actions to not display the bias.
- Coaches were often left to their own devices without direction and support. To best service the development needs of club members it is important to first know their background and biographies and match skill sets of volunteers with appropriate roles in the club.
- Coach education was received positively by the coaches, but they would prefer to have more club-based context specific support i.e. suited to the ages they are working with along with collaboration among all club coaches.

If you have any questions relating to this research please contact Irene Hogan, irene.hogan@mic.ul.ie. Further articles on this research can be viewed at https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2021.1933847 and https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2022.809092

Appendix P - PEIL Magazine article Winter 2020

RESEARCH

Experiences of the Volunteer Female LGFA Coaches

LGFA Coach Developer **Irene Hogan** has undertaken a PhD in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, under the supervision of Dr Richard Bowles and Dr Niamh Kitching.

She is exploring the experiences of volunteer female coaches in the LGFA in order to better understand how we can support female coaches in the sport. Below is her outline of her research to date.

Why this research?

I am a volunteer coach for over 20 years, after starting to coach as a result of key female role models in my club - Bride Rovers, Co. Cork. They coached me as an underage player and later encouraged me to start coaching as a teenager. I have been an LGFA coach developer for the last 15 years and noticed the high number of females taking part in coach education courses, but knew there was still a lack of active female coaches in clubs. (See Table 1 for a breakdown of the qualified coaches and comparisons to other sports in Ireland).

The data shows that females make up over half the number of participants at all course levels within the LGFA and are well in excess of their counterparts in other sports in Ireland. So, if we have that many qualified female coaches, where are they? What is their primary role in clubs? Why don't we have more in coaching roles? In order to answer these questions, I had to first speak to current female coaches to understand their coaching experiences.

Level of coach education	No. of Female LGFA qualified coaches	% of qualified LGFA coaches across gender	% of qualified coaches in other Irish Sports across gender
Foundation	9581	65% (F) V's 35% (M*)	37% (F) V's 63% (M)
Level 1	526	51% (F) V's 49% (M)	28% (F) V's 72% (M)
Level 2	23	53% (F) V's 47% (M)	28% (F) V's 72% (M)

Source LGFA and Sport Ireland Coaching. *F= Female, M=Male

What did the research entail?

Following a national call out for participants, 14 women coaches from all over Ireland took part in interviews, answering questions relating to their LGFA coaching experiences. Inclusion criteria meant they had to (i) be over 18 years of age, (ii) be currently coaching, (iii) have a minimum of 5 years coaching experience and (iv) have completed the Fundamentals coach education course in the previous ten years. The following table highlights the characteristics of the coaches involved in this study. The interviews were informed by my experiences as a player, coach and coach developer within LGFA, as well as relevant academic literature. The conversations explored the coaches' background and early experiences of coaching including supports and barriers they have encountered in their role. The coaches were also asked for suggestions on attraction and retention of female coaches.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FEMALE COACHES	
Age	Ranging from 34-50 years
Reasons for starting coaching	Own children involved (n*=7), love of the game (n=7)
Coaching experience	Ranging from 5 -19 years
Coach Education completed	Fundamentals (n=3), Level 1 (n=6), Level 2 (n=5), Coach Developer (n=2)
Highest level of coaching experience	Club underage (n=9), Club adult (n=1), Inter county youth (n=3), Inter county adult (n=1)
Playing experience	Non-elite/club (n=5), elite/intercounty (n=6), Gaelic for Mothers & Others GAM&O (n=3)

*n= denotes the number of coaches

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RESEARCH

What were the main findings?

- Women need support within the home, from partners, to initially start coaching and then to continue coaching, and this is especially true for women that have children. Those without children cited partners, parents and siblings as their main sources of support.
- Those coaching their own children suggested that once their children are finished playing, they will finish coaching.
- Confidence is key for women coaches and they linked such confidence to playing experience.
- To develop as coaches, they want club-based support in an informal setting, to learn from their fellow coaches. They believe this will help retain current female coaches and attract more.
- All 14 experienced gender bias at some stage as a female coach but they too were guilty of gender bias during the interview stage, when they did not recognise a "mom" as a coach in a video clip and instead assumed "dad" was the coach.

Direct quotes from the women coaches below summarise the main research findings.

Support at HOME
"You have to have so much family support if you have young children it is actually really difficult."
"I could not have done it ten years ago because my kids were too young. They have got older it is easier at home you don't kind of feel guilty and I have a very very understanding husband"

Unconscious bias...EVERYONE
"There is still unfortunately that negativity that the man coach is better, the girls don't want it (female coaches)"
"They always go over and shake my co-mentors' hands (male coach) and the co-mentors would very rarely say it is actually Ciara who is the lead mentee here"

Confidence from playing
"Girls who have children, that have never played football themselves, they definitely do not have the confidence to do coaching" "I started playing and that's when my confidence really started and learning the rules and all that and being able to transfer that then to the younger ones."

Club Support & Development
"We probably haven't built up enough of a coaching community in our club."
"A lack of support with coaching and lack of direction and being left to your own devices".

Take home messages for EVERYONE involved in LGFA i.e. coaches (male and female), mentors, players, referees, committee members, supporters etc.

1. Consider your unconscious biases – Do you recognise the female as the coach or do you assume it is the male and think the female is perhaps in a non coaching role e.g. administration, physiotherapist or the Female Liaison Offices (FLO)? Do you perceive a male coach to be a better and more experienced coach? Be conscious of the first thought you have and consider if it is biased – if it is try to change it before you act on it.
2. Take a chance – If you are a female with any interest in being involved in coaching, then do it! Get involved at some level and build up your experience and develop from within your LGFA club.
3. Give a chance – Clubs, fellow coaches (male and female), those in decision-making positions need to give females a chance to coach by approaching them and asking them to get involved. When they are in, you must give them a REAL chance by ensuring there are support and development structures available to them in the club.

Next steps in this research

To continue the development for volunteer coaches, and in conjunction with other stakeholders (Sport Ireland, LGFA, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick LGFA County Board, and Limerick Sports Partnership), a coaching community of practice (CCoP) will be rolled out in three identified Limerick LGFA clubs for the 2021 playing season.

If you have any questions or comments relating to this research, please contact: **Irene Hogan, irene.hogan@mic.ul.ie.**

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Peil Magazine

This study is part of Irene Hogan's PhD in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick under the supervision of Dr Richard Bowles and Dr Niamh Kitching.

Title: Explore and understand the experiences of volunteer women LGFA coaches

Why this research?

I am a volunteer coach for over 20 years after starting to coach as a result of key women role models in my club - Bride Rovers, Co. Cork. They coached me as an underage player and later encouraged me to start coaching as a teenager. I have been an LGFA coach developer for the last 15 years and noticed the high number of women taking part in coach education courses but knew there was still a lack of active women coaches in clubs. (See Table below for a breakdown of the qualified coaches and comparisons to other sports in Ireland). The data shows that women make up over half the number of participants at all course levels within the LGFA and are well in excess of their counterparts in other sports in Ireland. So, if we have that many qualified women coaches where are they? What is their primary role in clubs? Why don't we have more in coaching roles? In order to answer these

questions, I had to first speak to current women coaches to understand their coaching experiences.

Level of coach education	No. of Women LGFA qualified coaches	% of qualified LGFA coaches across gender	% of qualified coaches in other Irish Sports across gender
Foundation	9581	65% (F*) V's 35% (M*)	37% (F) V's 63% (M)
Level 1	526	51% (F) V's 49% (M)	28% (F) V's 72% (M)
Level 2	23	53% (F) V's 47% (M)	28% (F) V's 72% (M)

Source LGFA and Sport Ireland Coaching.

*F= Women, M=Male

What did the research entail?

Following a national call out for participants, 14 women coaches from all over Ireland took part in interviews answering questions relating to their LGFA coaching experiences. Inclusion criteria meant they had to (a) be over 18 years of age, (b) be currently coaching, (c) have a minimum of 5 years coaching experience and (d) have completed the Fundamentals coach education course in the previous 10 years. The following table highlights the characteristics of the coaches involved in this study.

Characteristics of the women coaches	
Age	Ranging from 34-50 years
Reasons for starting coaching	Own children involved (n*=7), love of the game (n=7)
Coaching experience	Ranging from 5-19 years
Coach Education completed	Fundamentals (n=3), Level 1 (n=6), Level 2 (n=5), Coach Developer (n=2)
Highest level of coaching experience	Club underage (n=9), Club adult (n=1), Inter county youth (n=3), Inter county adult (n=1)
Playing experience	Non-elite/club (n=5), elite/intercounty (n=6), Gaelic for Mothers & Others G4M&O (n=3)

**n= denotes the number of coaches*

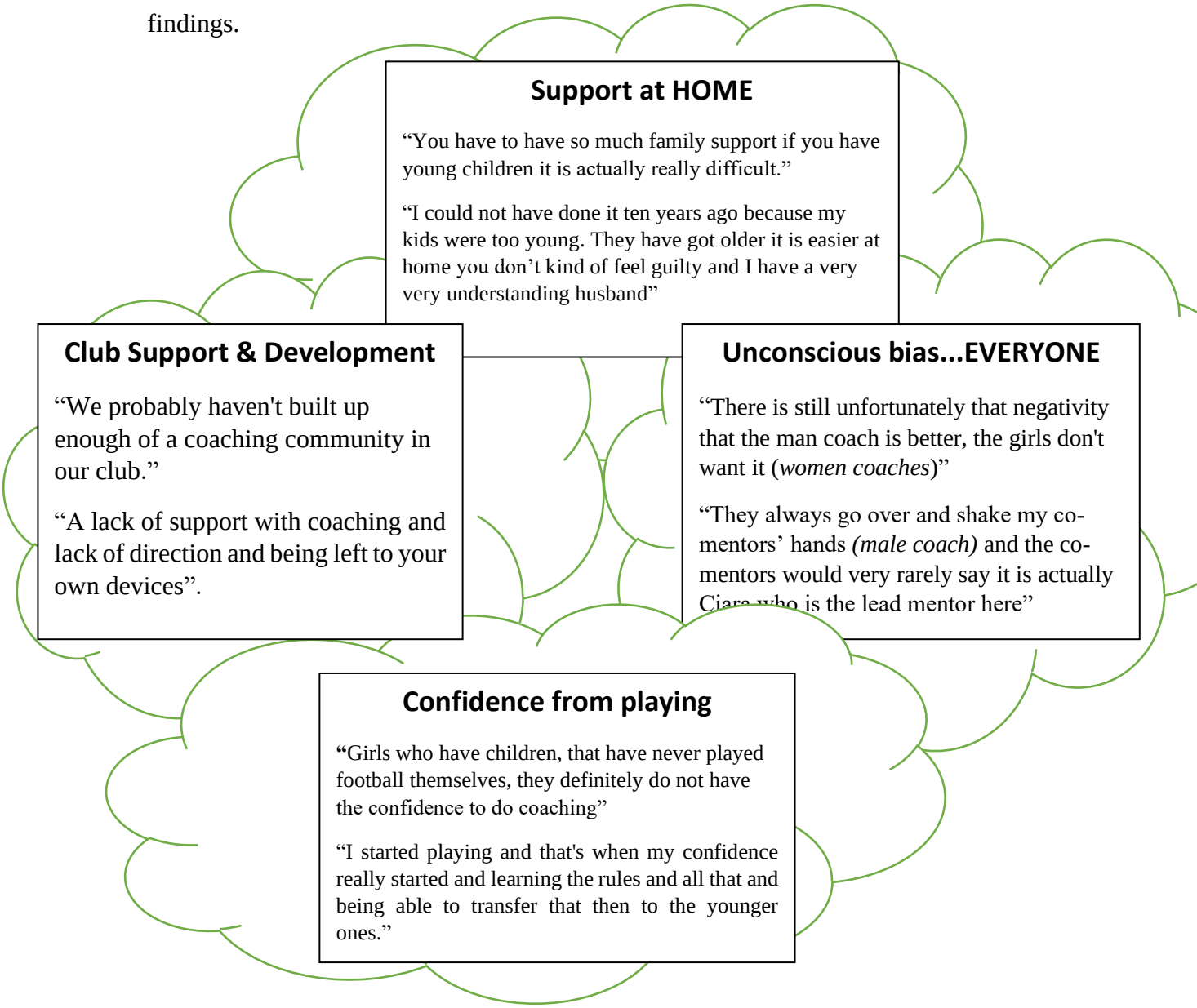
The interviews were informed by my experiences as a player, coach and coach developer within LGFA as well as relevant academic literature. The conversations explored the coaches background and early experiences of coaching including supports and barriers they have encountered in their role. The coaches were also asked for suggestions on attraction and retention of women coaches.

What were the main findings?

- Women need support within the home, from partners, to initially start coaching and then to continue coaching and this is especially true for women that have children. Those without children cited partners, parents and siblings as their main sources of support.
- Those coaching their own children suggested that once their children are finished playing, they will finish coaching.
- Confidence is key for women coaches and they linked such confidence to playing experience.

- To develop as coaches they want club-based support in an informal setting to learn from their fellow coaches. They believe this will help retain current women coaches and attract more.
- All fourteen experienced gender bias at some stage as a women coach but they too were guilty of gender bias during the interview stage when they did not recognise a "mom" as a coach in a video clip and instead assumed "dad" was the coach.

Direct quotes from the women coaches below summarise the main research findings.



Take home messages for EVERYONE involved in LGFA i.e. coaches (male and women), mentors, players, referees, committee members, supporters etc.

1. **Consider your unconscious biases** – Do you recognise the women as the coach or do you assume it is the male and think the women is perhaps in a non-coaching role e.g. administration, physiotherapist or the Women Liaison Officer (FLO)? Do you perceive a male coach to be a better and more experienced coach? Be conscious of the first thought you have and consider if it is biased – if it is try to change it before you act on it.
2. **Take a chance** – If you are a women with any interest in being involved in coaching then do it! Get involved at some level and build up your experience and develop from within your LGFA club.
3. **Give a chance** – Clubs, fellow coaches (male and women), those in decision making positions need to give women a chance to coach by approaching them and asking them to get involved. When they are in you must give them a **REAL** chance by ensuring there are support and development structures available to them in the club.

Next steps in this research

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Appendix Q – LGFA Club Player Development of Competencies Chart

https://ladiesgaelic.ie/lgfa-hub/coaches/club-player-competencies-chart/