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# '[Trails] and tribulations': exploring wash-out in cycling coach education

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**ABSTRACT**

The mechanisms underlying occupational socialisation and wash-out following formal coach education are not well understood. This study explores eight cycling coaches (6 males, 2 females) navigating these challenges as they transition into their everyday coaching role. Using ethnographic interview data (collected over 18 months) and inspired by creative non-fiction (CNF) literary techniques, the accounts of three characters (Emily, Mark, and Yvette) offer rich insight into the workplace conditions that facilitate and inhibit wash-out: *ignored and forgotten*; *the challenges of wearing two hats*; and *triumph on the trails*. We discuss the challenges of becoming immersed and accepted into occupational cultures, the socialising force of observing other coaches, and the impact of (mis)aligned goals between the individual and organisation. This work has potential to inform the support offered to coaches following formal training.

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## Introduction

Learning to coach is a complex, social, and context-dependent process, requiring the integration and dissemination of knowledge in dynamic, ill-defined contexts (Collins et al. 2022). The education provision offered by National Governing Bodies of sport (NGBs) is one source for coach learning, traditionally positioned as the primary medium through which coaches are trained and certified to work within the field (Piggott 2012). Thus NGB programmes are a powerful socialising agent (Lyle and Cushion 2017), where coaches 'acquire' the 'values, sensitivities, skills, and knowledge deemed ideal' for the profession (Lawson 1983, 4). Although attempts have been made to create learner-centred education, knowledge and power ultimately remain with the educator (Dempsey et al. 2021). The provision is heavily criticised (e.g. Cushion et al. 2010), and the questionable effectiveness of NGB programmes leaves learners ambivalent, accepting and internalising socialisation, or acting to change the socialisation setting (Zeichner and Tabachnick 1981).

Upon completing an NGB programme, neophyte (i.e. newly qualified) coaches enter diverse socio-cultural communities (i.e. a variety of environments, athletes, parents, peers) which necessitate different knowledge (Sawiuk, Taylor, and Groom 2018). Evidence would suggest this transition from formal learning to the occupational setting is not always smooth (see Billet 2004; Griffiths, Armour, and Cushion 2018). Indeed, the occupational setting is a place for knowledge construction and the

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remaking of practice (Culver and Trudel 2006). This social milieu is another socialising agent, where coaches might experience narratives constructed through relationships and the broader sociocultural context which frame how coaches should act and perform (e.g. *performance*, Gearity 2010; *masculinity*; Steinfeldt et al. 2011; and *risk*; Collins and Collins 2013). Observing more experienced and established coaches, neophytes can often become initiated into the traditions, habits, and practices as they accept (or reject) the occupational and cultural norms of their coaching environment (McMahon, McGannon, and Palmer 2022). Experiencing these participatory practices can lead to the erosion or 'wash-out' of knowledge and skills learned in formal training (Stroot and Whipple 2003).

The concept of 'wash-out' is an enduring issue for beginner practitioners (i.e. neophyte coaches) (Blankenship and Coleman 2009; Stolz and Pill 2016). Lawson (1989) identified a number of interdependent processes that exacerbate the problem. First, the local and national political and economic landscape might not support or fund new ideas. Second, a misalignment of goals between the individual, colleagues, and the wider organisation means that those who perceive their interests are given little respect or time may be reluctant to practice as trained. Third, balancing numerous roles and commitments accelerates wash-out (Stroot, Faucette, and Schwager 1993). Fourth, a desire for acceptance and enthusiasm can mean that resistance to activities and certain pedagogical practices facilitates the abandonment of methods learned in formal training (Blankenship and Coleman 2009). Consequently, navigating wash-out appears to be easier for those who: have control over what and how coaching happens; operate in supportive cultures, with encouraging authority figures; or are 'rebels' who enjoy challenge and independence, and leave the organisation (Curtner-Smith et al. 2008).

To highlight how the cultural and normalised values within coaches' everyday practice influenced wash-out, we used selective ethnographic CNF techniques. CNF condenses action into a tale that spans and adjusts time and place, reorganising, and recreating participants' lived experiences in a less fragmented way (Clayton 2010). The CNF in this study uses real stories, told by real people, based on real events: committed to the truth; fictional in form, but factual in content (Sparkes and Smith 2013). CNF is increasingly used to present qualitative research (see Leeder, Dempsey, and Chapman 2022; Stodter 2021). Although not as sensitive as some CNF topics (e.g. McMahon and McGannon 2021), we appreciated coaches' vulnerabilities in disclosing their coaching experiences and this approach increased anonymity. Using CNF, we hope readers *feel* and vicariously connect with participants' experiences, engaging wider audiences outside of academia by highlighting participant's lived experiences in familiar ways (see Bochner and Ellis 2016; Smith 2013).

Theoretically, this work builds on previous qualitative sport coaching research in the community coaching domain (e.g. Gale et al. 2023; Ives et al. 2021; Roberts et al. 2019) by focusing on the conditions that facilitate or inhibit wash-out. Methodologically, our work advances sport coaching research by engaging with participants (employing observations and interviews) for an 18-month period, as they are inducted into their everyday coaching contexts (see Stodter and Cushion 2014, 2017).

## Methodology

With a background in psychology and sport coaching, I (first author) had my own lived experiences of coach learning and development but outside of a cycling context. Although I did not have any pre-existing knowledge of cycling, due to the collaborative nature of the research project I received support from the staff and education team at British Cycling (BC).

Employing participant observation (around 40 hours), field notes, and interviews, this research explored coaches' occupational socialisation following the completion of a BC coach education course. This work employed numerous ethnographic principles. I had lengthy, regular contact with participants over an 18-month period. As outlined by Hammersley (2006) and Townsend and Cushion (2021), this lengthy contact with participants captured,

first hand, coaches' practice as they became fully involved in day-to-day practice, performing new tasks, functions, and mastering new understandings. I was immersed in the participants' natural environment, contextualising their behaviours and activities, focused on understanding specific behaviours in participants' everyday setting(s), more than trying to portray a cultural system in its entirety (Hammersley 2006). Unlike previous ethnographic sport coaching research (i.e. Cushion and Jones 2006), as a novice ethnographer, I began wedded to Loic Wacquant's (2002) 'top down' ethnography searching for a sociological theory to frame and interpret my observations. However, inspired by the work of Elijah Anderson (2002), I came to appreciate that a focus on the everyday interactions I observed, with an awareness of a few sociological theories, was more important, without a theoretically informed map to explain coaches' experiences.

This ethnography was inductive in nature, informed by a relativist ontology and epistemologically positioned within a constructionist paradigm; respecting participants' multiple realities, and embracing no absolute truth (Duneier 2002). By exploring the sociocultural elements of participants' coaching, this ethnography uncovered participants' stories of lived experience. To bring meaning to this data, and explore this meaning and experience, we employed a narrative methodology. Stories captured the messiness and complexity of social life; they are both personal and social, which allow us to think about people as unique individuals with agentic capacities to shape the socio-cultural worlds they live in *and* as socio-culturally shaped by the stories in the worlds they live (Brett and Sparkes 2009).

## Theoretical framework

A symbolic interactionist conceptualisation of social context (e.g. Charmaz, Harris, and Irvine 2019) was utilised to examine how culture, environment, and networks impacted day-to-day coaching practice. Interactionist thinkers argue that we engage in social interaction through an internal dialogue, where we actively construct social realities, creating, handling, and modifying meaning through an interpretative process as we choose, explore, reject, and change meaning to guide and shape our action(s) (Blumer 1969). We attach specific meanings to anything that can be indicated, pointed at, or referenced – including physical (e.g. coaching handbooks), social (e.g. coach), or abstract objects (e.g. morals/beliefs) – and it is this meaning that informs how we see, act towards, and talk about objects (Blumer 1969). Taking this view: we choose how we engage with our world; meaning the same object can have different meaning for different individuals; meaning we operate within different 'worlds' to one another, each experiencing things differently, leading to a variety of interpretations and interactions (Blumer 1969).

As a theory of experience and social structure (Denzin 1992), symbolic interactionism was fruitful for exploring how coaches interpreted their interpersonal situation, defined meaning in those instances, and acted (see Nelson et al. 2016). To gain a deeper understanding of how the social milieu coaches operate within impact socialisation, we considered Blumer's interactionist assumption that individuals come together to develop joint acts – the collectively agreed behaviours we develop when establishing mutual understanding, expectations, and meaning – where we handle new, undefined scenarios by fitting together individual conduct to share workload. Here, mutual goals, shared opinions or views, specific interpretations, and long-standing assumptions, represent frameworks to make sense of the world in shared ways (Blumer 1969).

## Participants

Following institutional ethical approval, eight cycling coaches (6 males, 2 females) aged 32–73 ($M$ = 49.25, $SD$ = 13.97) were recruited (see Table 1). Purposive sampling focused on coaches who were in the final stages of their BC Level 2 cycling qualification, entering designated cycling (club) settings.

Table 1. Participant information.

| Participant | Age | Gender | Club (cycling discipline) context | Number of interviews |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 32 | Female | Road/Track | 10 |
| 2 | 58 | Male | Track | 4 |
| 3 | 34 | Male | Mountain Bike | 7 |
| 4 | 54 | Male | Road | 6 |
| 5 | 42 | Male | Multi-discipline | 5 |
| 6 | 63 | Male | Multi-discipline | 5 |
| 7 | 73 | Male | Multi-discipline | 5 |
| 8 | 38 | Female | Mountain Bike | 6 |

All participants provided signed consent and were informed they could withdraw from the study at any time.

## Data generation

Semi-structured interviews ($N = 48$, see Table 1) totalled 2,739 minutes (ranging from 13.42 to 101.62 minutes; $M = 55.89$; $SD = 19.35$). An interview guide, developed in line with Castillo-Montoya (2016) (i.e. aligning interview questions with research questions; constructing an inquiry-based conversation; receiving feedback on interview protocols; and piloting the interview protocol), ensured general areas were covered across participants with flexibility. Interviews were socially constructed, where the participants and I played an equal role in creating the narrative accounts (Brinkman and Kvale 2015; Rubin and Rubin 2011). This dialogical nature ensured multiple voices contributed towards making sense of specific events and experiences in relation to wash-out, reflective of their narrative truth, rather than pristine, objective truth (Roberts 2020). Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Interviews were complemented with approximately 40 hours of overt participant observation (travelling 4,958 miles to nine different cycling locations across the United Kingdom) (Smith 2013). I acted as a complete observer, as a researcher attached to a university working in collaboration with BC, employing an etic position (Sparkes and Smith 2013). Observations were captured in field notes, using a systematic approach (e.g. descriptive notes capturing all details regarding people in the setting, their actions, the space they moved in, events that occurred; progressively narrowing my attention into the elements of the setting within which I was immersed) (Thorpe and Olive 2016); looking for nothing, yet recording everything (Wolcott 1981). Field notes were supported by photos, videos, and voice memos, prompting multi-dimensional memories of socially, physically, and sensory loaded fieldwork. Observations offered insights into participants' everyday coaching (e.g. the types of activities they included in the sessions they delivered, their interactions with the coaches they worked with, and the range of physical spaces coaches coached within), discussions of everyday experience through informal talk (e.g. conversations before and after sessions), written materials and documents (e.g. emails, text messages, session plans, and information posted at coaching sites), and reflexive storied accounts (e.g. detailed descriptions of the scene and characters within interactions).

## Data analysis and representation

Transcripts captured diachronic data, with temporal information about sequential relationship of events. Analysis started by studying 'what' was being said in the stories that participants told, rather than the structure, identifying common elements to theorise across stories (Riessman 2008). This process involved reading the transcripts several times and using semantic coding to provide a descriptive analysis as communicated by participants (Braun, Clarke, and Weaste 2016). Different iterations of code clusters were tracked on an Excel spreadsheet, developing themes and subthemes, and identifying core narrative elements associated with each theme (Byrne 2022; Trainor and Bundon 2021). We were reflexive in our approach, which complemented the study's constructionist positioning, where meaning resided at the

intersection of the data and our contextual, theoretically embedded, interpretative practices (Braun and Clarke 2021). Thinking consciously and critically, we identified patterns within and between stories by considering 'what thread(s) occur consistently?'; 'what experiences and actions occur within story threads?'; and 'how are wash-out experiences discussed in story threads?' (Frank 2012; Smith 2016). Following Gubrium and Holstein (2000), the authoring team moved back and forth, alternating focus between the 'what' and 'how' of stories, conducting an interpretative practice to assemble a contextually scenic and contextually constructive picture.

Moving to a storyteller position, we used creative analytical practice to transform written records into a creative, evocative, and accessible form of presentation (Smith, McGannon, andWilliams 2015). Three composite narratives, developed from dialogue and field notes, were created over a period of months, sketching the story and developing the plot and characters in line with the purpose of the study (Smith 2016). The CNFs; *ignored and forgotten*; *the challenge of wearing two hats*; and *triumph on the trails* are embodied by three central characters (Emily, Mark, and Yvette). Using a third-person narration offered clarity around the verbal exchanges, enhancing the flow between characters, while providing rich descriptions of scenes and transitions in time (Cavallerio 2021; Gutkind 2012). Observational data helped visceral accounts of surroundings, sounds, sights, and the way characters interacted within their setting (Cavallerio 2021). Direct quotations woven throughout the CNFs reflect the participants' experiences, maintaining authenticity and embodying the dynamic talk heard throughout data capture (Finley and Finley 1999).

### *Rigour*

Regular meetings with the research team offered reflexive support (i.e. in-person during data generation and analysis, and via MS Teams during the writing phase) to help navigate biases around my own experiences of coaching and coach learning, while facilitating narratives that represented participants' experiences (Orr et al. 2021). The CNFs contribute theoretically and practically to community-based coaching settings; focus on the purpose of the study by providing insight(s) and understanding of the facilitators and inhibitors of wash-out; embody a credible, 'real' sense of lived experience by using multiple data collection methods; and are (hopefully) emotionally and intellectually interesting by combining insights gained through the multiple data collection methods with literary techniques to develop stories that resonate with readers (Smith, McGannon, and Williams 2015). The second and third author challenged reflections and sense-making as 'critical friends' through discussions on broader conceptual considerations (Levitt et al. 2017; Smith and McGannon 2018). The CNFs that follow represent the experiences of Emily, Mark and Yvette navigating wash-out following the completion of BC's Level 2 coaching qualification. We ask the reader to consider these stories in terms of their relationship to them and their experiences as they *feel* their way through them (Sparkes 2020), assessing the impact of this work on them, their actions, practices, and generation of new questions (Burke 2016).

## Findings

### *Ignored and forgotten: Emily's story*

Emily freewheeled the last few metres, riding straight into the paved compound, the club's regular meeting point. With a satisfied smile etched across her face, she realised that she had been racing the audiobook – trying to reach her destination before it ended. She was always looking for the next competitive encounter – even if it was with Audible®!

She expected a hum of excited riders, but she was alone. She wasn't late. The other coaches must have left without her. If only they had shared their plan. She rammed her phone back into her pocket and yanked at her zip until it shut. She slammed into her pedals and headed to the local park – the usual location for sessions.

Without Audible® for company, her thoughts were simmering. She loved a challenge, but achievable challenges. This current battle seemed impossible. Her qualification preached coaching the 'BC way'. Emily saw her coach educator as a role model who helped her improve her cycling technique. With a background in competitive cycling, Emily did not want to be told how to coach. She wanted to learn the techniques the Olympic coaches used to improve performance and improve cycling performance at a national level. She felt qualified to make a real impact at a performance level. She had the declarative knowledge, and, without question, the drive. Yet, these amateurish moments – like not communicating a session plan – were frustratingly common occurrences. She disconnected from the sessions offered in her club. She felt a fraud, unable to respond to the needs of those she coached.

Entering the park, Emily saw the riders in the distance, looping around a circuit of inclines and declines. This was her first glimpse of today's session plan.

'Nice of you to join us', one of the coaches smirked. 'Forget to set the alarm?'

Emily was beyond trying to explain herself.

'How can I help?' she asked, with a smile.

'You can take this next bit?' the other suggested. 'It's technical, needs a *proper* rider'.

Wanting to demonstrate her expertise, she agreed. But Emily hated this impromptu, seat of your pants way of doing things. She felt unprepared and worried in case she got it wrong. A minute to mentally prepare would have been nice. She had the technical ability but lacked the coaching skills to successfully deliver a positive, learning experience. At least when she took an active role, she didn't have to watch the other coaches – that was a bonus. While delivering her session she was distracted realising how different she was to these coaches. She was struggling to create her identity and embrace the rituals of the club. She felt an outsider. Her drive and determination meant she wanted to progress and develop in a different direction to those around her. She was tired of delivering the sessions her club needed, rather than the sessions she wanted. She felt she was cheating riders of the experience they deserved and worried that she would not fulfil her potential. She wanted to provide practical knowledge that facilitated a meaningful learning experience to riders who were genuinely motivated and engaged. She realised her ambitions were at odds with the club and the list of things she disagreed with was growing.

In that moment, she glanced up from a rider she was observing, and on the horizon, saw the Olympic Velodrome. The Olympic legacy was a constant source of inspiration: that's where she needed – and wanted – to be. When the coaching session ended, she made a hasty departure without reason – explaining herself would only spark comments about how they'd been there and done that. Fuelled by adrenaline and aspiration she set off.

Entering the velodrome, Emily took a seat overlooking the track. She had stumbled into a BC talent session. Emily recognised her coach educator in the centre of the track. Seconds later, she received a text, inviting her to join the group. She couldn't pass on this opportunity. Sessions were held every few weeks and she returned for each one, without fail. She began observing elite coaches: experienced, organised, and competent. Impressed, she tried to copy their practice. She loved the interaction with the riders and the freedom to try out different ways of coaching. At last, she was beginning to make a positive impact on the riders and contribute to developing cycling at a national level. This way of working was aligned with her biography and emerging professional identity. She stopped working with the club coaches, transitioning away from her club. This became her core coaching activity.

Three months later, at the end of a session, she felt the buzz of her phone. She opened her phone to an email notification. She had been nominated for a national coaching award. Yes! Her hard work, dedication, and commitment had been recognised.

Or had it?

Her initial excitement faded. Was she a legitimate coach? Since moving away from her club, the talent sessions reduced to once a month. Over time, she felt isolated from coaching; left out in the cold. Her competitive nature had pushed her to work with more competent coaches and riders.

Despite being immersed in the performance environment, she felt lost, seeking extra validation. She felt unworthy of the award, unable to attribute her coaching to any rider's success(es).

Feeling a fraud, she declined the nomination. She had moved too quickly, and in a different direction to those around her, leaving her isolated, ignored, and forgotten.

Perhaps it was time to find the next challenge.

### *The challenge of wearing two hats: Mark's story*

'Olivia, come and get your bike', Mark asked his daughter from the back of his car.

Herding his three children was not getting easier, despite the practice.

'Matt, please stay on the path', he instructed. 'Actually, ride to the clubhouse, and take your brother and sister with you. I'll catch up shortly'.

He embraced the quiet. His coaching position permitted time with his children, but the mayhem of parenting often distracted him from his coaching role. Breathing in the cold, autumn air, he reminded himself that this was his hobby, a new challenge – a distraction from life's stress.

The car park was filling up with children being dropped off. He knew the drill; he was a parent at the club before he started coaching. It wasn't a smooth transition though; moving from the back to the front stage changed his status and relationships within the club. 'Coach' emblazoned across his back probably didn't help, but he liked his new label and the positive impression it created. He had enjoyed his recent coach education and was keen to use the methods and techniques he had learned.

Mark walked towards the club house, searching for his children through the gathering crowd of parents and riders.

'Morning, Karen', Mark said, walking through the clubhouse door.

'Good morning', she replied, with a smile. 'Here's your register and your session plan for today. You're on section two of the circuit. Have a good one'.

'You're a star, Karen. Thank you'.

Taking his coaching pack, he collected a trolley of equipment and headed towards his assigned area. The club's organisation was second to none. Everything was provided: his session plan, equipment, coaching uniform, and even where he was coaching. He didn't need to think about anything; he could coach stress free. This support, however, also felt restrictive. Mark didn't complete risk assessments, which he found frustrating given this formed a large part of his formal education. Likewise, planning became a redundant skill. The club had developed their own rider pathway of a series of levels across various age groups. Although this offered consistency, the same pre-planned sessions were recycled every six weeks, leaving him repeatedly coaching the same skills. The club were good at building their volunteer numbers; Mark was proof of that. He coached with the support of three other coaches who would feedback to riders, control behaviour, and progress the session according to the pre-determined script. Mark had little control or creative licence. Over time, the lack of autonomy curtailed his development. He saw things with fresh eyes, but the club's routines prevented him from coaching the way his training encouraged. This was not what he had expected a qualified coach to look and feel like.

'Going ok, isn't it?' one of the supporting coaches remarked.

'Yeah, not bad'. Mark replied. 'I wish we could shake things up though. You know, go rogue and break away from the pre-planned routine. Like, is this relevant? Maybe we could use the grass, or a bit of banking, to get the kids on different terrain?'

'When they progress to other groups, they'll cover that'.

'But they have to get there', Mark said, a little louder than he expected. 'What if we bore them and they lose interest, and drop out?'

'We can't concern ourselves with that'.

'I'm just saying, if *we* find it boring, *they* must. It's the same thing, week in and week out', Mark replied.

'Hmm . . . perhaps'.

Mark craved the flexibility to introduce variety, creativity, and experiment with his coaching methods. But the structure was rigid, and he lacked the authority to break the mould. He considered exploring coaching opportunities on his own, but ultimately, he enjoyed being with his children and those who he coached alongside. He saw the effort of making sessions possible. He didn't have time for committee meetings or other positions. When he finished work, his brain was fried. Coaching was his release. A chance to explore other roles and develop a better version of himself. Coaching needed to be enjoyable; not stressful. Wearing two hats, he split himself across the role of being a parent and a coach. Yet, he was torn between the mundane constraints of his current role and the freedom to experiment, with more adventurous ways of coaching. Mark thought good coaching was about being adaptable and flexible – perhaps he was wrong!

### *Triumph on the trails: Yvette's story*

Yvette always coincided her arrival with the opening of the woodland themed café; the hub of riding activity and the centre of a series of ridable trials through the forest.

'Morning', she beamed at a couple reading some laminated trail maps.

They acknowledged her with a smile. She walked through to Mike's office, the Coaching Manager and an experienced coach who supported her through her qualifications.

'It's going to be a good one today', Yvette predicted with a buzz of excitement.

'Hey, Miss Optimistic!' Mike said, looking up from his phone. 'How ya doing?'

'Yeah, good, thanks', Yvette replied. 'It's been a long week, but I'm ready for today. I've been on socials searching some of the riders registered, just to see what they can do, but it's not ideal. It's impossible to plan. I pull some ideas together, then someone turns up I didn't know about, and it throws everything out. It's easier when I'm repeating the same session, but I just want to give people the best experience'.

'You think too much like a teacher', Mike smirked, swiping through his phone. 'Just go with the flow like I do'.

Each time she communicated her concerns, Mike closed her down. She left him to his phone and headed back into the café.

The stained wood floor and cladded walls felt appropriately rustic for their forest location. She sat in front of the roaring fire, striking up conversation with the couple on the next table, offering advice on their riding plans where she could. They moved on, quickly replaced by some of Yvette's friends, and they chatted about last weekend's riding.

Yvette headed to the counter for coffee. She placed her order and stepped back. She'd spent the previous night with the coaching handbooks, but they proved little help. She had always preferred watching and copying things – but knew this was not ideal in the long term. She found a YouTube video of today's skill on her go-to channel, with a step by step break down and coaching points. She watched the video, on mute, amongst the mix of riders congregating in the café. Hearing her order called, she swiped off the video, locked her phone, and put it in her pocket. It was busier now. She collected her drink and weaved through the crowd towards her group of riders gathered at the back of the room.

'How are we all doing today?' she asked the table, pulling up a chair.

She was met with the usual replies and signed disclaimers.

'Great. So, what are you all looking to get out of today?' Yvette asked.

She developed this routine to understand riders' abilities and goals, navigating the lack of rider information from Mike and developing her pedagogic agility. It helped build relationships that would strengthen throughout the day. For her, cycling brought people together, so she tried her best to emphasise this social aspect. She was an advocate for empowering women through cycling. This series of one-day sessions, targeted at developing the technical skills of female riders to increase their confidence on the trails, were wholesome for Yvette. Progression was over the day, rather than a series of sessions, like Yvette's formal education had promoted. She had identified a gap in the

facility's offer, which surprisingly aligned with Mike's plans. They would spend four hours as a group, led by Yvette.

Yvette layered up her clothing and led the group outside. They ascended through the trees. She was a mountain biker. She loved the forest and the thrill of descending through the trees. She had disconnected with the generic nature of her coaching qualifications. Her goal had always been to coach days like today. She loved the group of people she rode with, and she was jealous how they were able to ride today's prime conditions while she was coaching. Yet coaching gave her chance to make a difference. She needed to remind herself of that.

Yvette pulled the group to the side of the fire track road, and ventured through the trees, to an opening where there was a small series of rolling bumps. She had ridden these trails for years but learning how to coach on them was another challenge. Luckily the other coaches had shared good locations for certain skills. Yvette had the riders ride these bumps, and then loop back around on the flat, and then go again. She liked keeping groups moving, rather than starting and stopping.

'Tall like a giraffe', Yvette prompted as riders reached the top of the bump. 'And then small like a mouse', she continued, as riders were at the bottom of the dip.

Yvette's teaching background were the cause of her metaphor use, quickly creating images for learners. She pulled her phone out of her pocket and asked permission to film. Nobody objected. She filmed one rider and pulled her aside for feedback, showing her the recording. It was a win-win: riders loved seeing themselves, and Yvette liked showing what she was describing.

'Coming through!' Someone shouted.

Yvette pulled her group in, yielding to a rider flying down the trial. This was standard practice. He looked a skilled rider, a good opportunity for a demonstration at speed.

'Look at his hips', Yvette praised.

Another, more uncontrolled rider followed.

'Lock your arms', Yvette instructed.

Yvette's group observed this unexpected, real-time demonstration. Yvette explored this opportunity for corrective feedback. They had a few more attempts before moving to another area of the forest. She loved seeing development – in people and riders. This transformation was why she coached. She momentarily forgot her desire to ride, wishing she could coach full-time.

## Discussion

This study explored wash-out effects in neophyte cycling coaches as they were inducted into their everyday coaching contexts. Findings provide insights into the occupational settings coaches enter upon completion of this NBG's education programme, illustrating experiences of becoming fully involved in new tasks, functions, and mastering new understandings, as they react to the flow of situations in becoming (neophyte) coaches (Blumer 1969; Lave and Wenger 2001). In line with existing literature, these stories highlight participants' acceptance into an occupational culture, the powerful impact of context on occupational socialisation, and the ways in which more experienced coaches shape learning experiences (see Nash and McQuade 2015). A strength of this work is the exploration of wash-out in sport coaching using a longitudinal design. The study's ontological and epistemological underpinning mean findings are contextualised to cycling with caution required in translating findings across other sports (Levitt et al. 2017; Smith and McGannon 2018). This discussion takes a symbolic interactionist view to investigate the wash-out of coaches' knowledge through the tools, objects, language, symbols, role-taking, and joint acts (Blumer 1969).

Data was theorised into three CNFs: *ignored and forgotten*; *the challenge of wearing two hats*; and *triumph on the trails*. Emily, Mark, and Yvette represent multiple voices into shared accounts, merging key participants with similar perspectives, highlighting how the cultural and normalised values within coaches' everyday practice influenced wash-out. By presenting our findings using CNF and its associated literary techniques (e.g. realistic details from field notes, captured conversations with participants, metaphors, and emotions; Caulley 2008) we hope we have created images that readers can *feel* and

vicariously connect with, physically, intellectually, and emotionally. In doing so, these pieces of CNF could be used as educational tools within coach education (see Allan et al. 2021; Douglas and Carless 2008), monopolising on their ability to disseminate knowledge to non-academic audiences (Bochner and Ellis 2016; Smith, McGannon, and Williams 2015). Consequently, this work begins to develop evidence-informed strategies to support coaches entering the occupational domain.

Emily's story captures a coach with 'lofty' ambitions; dedicated to her cycling discipline but driven away from her club by the power brokers who legitimised the club as a patriarchal and masculine space (Norman 2010). This aligns with literature demonstrating the struggle women face in entering and sustaining their involvement in coaching (Hinojosa-Alcalde et al. 2018; Kamphoff 2010). These repetitive microaggressions (Norman and Simpson 2022) meant Emily did not operate within a true community of practice, because she did not share a common sense of purpose (Lave and Wenger 2001). This left Emily seeking other coaching opportunities rather than experience wash-out or exit her coaching role. Her interpretation of this interpersonal situation, framed by her competitive character, shaped her actions to pursue opportunities with more competent coaches and riders, who she valued more. This shift in focus highlights how misaligned goals between individuals hinders joint acts; moving between active participant and passive by-stander reduced Emily's accountability and inhibited repetitive and stable joint action (Blumer 1969). Moreover, the economic and political landscape of the club (e.g. a focus on mass participation) conflicted with her core, long standing assumptions of coaching practice (e.g. to improve the racing ability of riders at a national level) (Lawson 1989). Ultimately, Emily's rebel tendencies (Curtner-Smith et al. 2008) isolated her from regular coaching activity, leaving her questioning her legitimacy as a coach; left out in the cold, ignored, and forgotten.

Mark's story portrays a parent becoming a coach, on a journey of discovery, exploring a different role and its associated experiences. His movement from back to front stage, because of his new 'coach' title – a social object he modified through an internal dialogue (Blumer 1969) – changed his relationships within the club. His day-to-day coaching was overpowered by the club's established cultural routines, potentially preventing him from being biased towards his own children (KurtzFavero et al. 2023). Yet these practices (e.g. the pre-planned sessions) held little value for Mark, as they provided a curriculum of knowledge (Shulman 1986) that shielded him from the larger picture of rider development. This supports KurtzFavero et al.'s (2023) reflections that more needs to be done to support parent-coaches to become effective coaches. Findings also add to the literature of parent-coaches, identifying how clubs' support can be perceived as restricting practice (and the ability to transfer new knowledge and new ways of coaching), becoming a barrier to coach development. Mark valued the club support, but reproducing institutionalised practicewashed-out his formal education (see Lawson 1989). Mark's story highlights how, when challenging the status quo, part of the challenge of moving towards full participation within the socio-cultural community is learning when to be silent and when to talk (Curtner-Smith et al. 2008; Lave and Wenger 2001).

The transactional club support captured in Mark's story aligns with Harman and Doherty's (2014) findings, where support through resources and administration were the most cited expectations from coaches. Yet the relational support these authors identify (e.g. guidance, communication, and autonomy) are better captured in Yvette's story. Unlike Emily and Mark, Yvette undertook a larger role within her club, carrying more responsibility for her coaching activity (Lave and Wenger 2001) as she established meaning, acted towards, and talked about her new 'coach' role (Blumer 1969). Her freedom guided and shaped her actions as she targeted an identified gap, claiming ownership over her sessions. This encouraged her to develop her own routines and rituals within her coaching environment: the full day sessions, and using the café as a meeting place. Her story demonstrates how the freedom and support she experienced allowed triumph on the trails as she effectively navigated wash-out. Of course, there were undefined scenarios (e.g. a lack of rider information) but she learned to share her workload with riders, establishing joint acts (Blumer 1969) through informal chats to understand riders' goals and aspirations, rather than her peers. Here, Yvette chose how she acted and engaged with her social world, actively constructing meaning to her coaching through the

social element of cycling. Her focus on life skill development and transferability of life skills to other domains through the delivery of her sessions aligns with work by Super, Verkooijen, and Koelen (2018).

In summary, findings highlight the importance of social support for coaches operating in the community coaching domain, the multiple roles (and associated challenges) that (typically volunteer) coaches within this domain hold, and the factors that might enable coaches to feel success(ful). Importantly, we see how a supportive environment that aligns with the coach's ideas around practice (i.e. Yvette's story) *navigates* wash-out; but a supportive environment that does not support the coach's preferred practice (e.g. the pre-planned session plans in Mark's story) *causes* wash-out.

Methodologically, this study employed a lengthy ethnography that can be difficult to conduct alongside the many pressures of higher education. As such, future research should strive to complement this work by using other methodological approaches. For example, daily diaries could capture participants' wash-out experiences more regularly than scheduled interviews and observations. Similarly, recruiting experienced coaches to write letters to their younger self would create collective stories that draw on the benefits of hindsight to broaden the narrative environment and discover new stories of wash-out experiences, widening the narrative resources available on this topic. This would employ novel data collection methods, extending the use of written methods, in this area of research. From an applied perspective, future studies should explore wash-out in other sports, as well as the differences in wash-out experiences between male and female coaches; and explore if wash-out experiences differ across domains of coaching (e.g. club and performance). This will further develop strategies supporting newly qualified coaches as they enter their occupational setting. More broadly, future research should explore the everyday contexts of sport coaching by spending time in the field, observing coaches' everyday interactions, painting a more detailed picture of coaching activities in different sports, across different domains. This would provide detail of the contexts of coaching, transitioning from the idea that formal education is an ideal that needs to be replicated in practice.

## Disclosure statement

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