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Article

'Long ball' and 'balls deep': A critical reading of female coach-learners'

experiences of the UEFA A Licence

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16 **'Long ball' and 'balls deep': A critical reading of female coach-learners'**

17 **experiences of the UEFA A Licence**

18 **Abstract**

19 In this article we present a critical reading of female coach-learners' experiences

20 of the Union of European Football Association's Advanced Licence (UEFA A),

21 which at the time of writing have been largely ignored. It comes at a point when

22 The Football Association's policy, the 2017–2020 Gameplan for Growth

23 Strategy, which focuses on the women's game, has been completed. We wanted

24 to understand better the challenges faced by female coaches as they navigate their

25 way through the male-dominated educational programmes. We interviewed nine

26 female UEFA A Licence holders who had participated in differing cohorts across

27 a ten-year span. Interpreting the female coach-learners' experiences through a

28 critical and broadly poststructuralist lens reveals how the language, structure and

29 assumptions inherent in the course affect female coach-learner experiences. The

30 data exposes a catalogue of androcentric assumptions, toxic masculinity,

31 sexualised language, dismissive practices, ignorance of the women's game, and

32 acts of resistance.

33 **Keywords**: androcentric, female coach, coach education, poststructuralism

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Introduction

Within this paper, we highlight the educational experiences of nine female coach-learners who attended the UEFA A Licence coach education programme and associated residential weeks. More specifically, we foreground the implicit and explicit power-laden interactions between coach-learners and educators and detail how the attendees dealt with the atmosphere, structure and delivery of the programme, while offering acts of resistance. Currently, there has been little published research considering the female experiences of the UEFA A programme and we believe this paper is timely as the increase in the number of female coaches is critical in maintaining the growth of the female game.

The Football Association (FA) administer the UEFA A programme delivery at their National Coaching Centre at St Georges Park (SGP), based in the United Kingdom (UK), where they regulate and control the certification and educational consistency of coach education programmes through gate-keeping practices and systems governance (Nelson, Cushion & Potrac, 2013). According to the FA (2020) in England, there are currently 34,581 qualified female football coaches across all levels of their coaching awards, of which 401 hold the UEFA B Licence (compared with 10,778 males). At the highest levels, only 82 females hold the UEFA A Licence (compared with 1,716 males).

Coach education in the UK has been the subject of criticism by a quantity of authors who cite a number of shortfalls including Avner et al. (2017), Lewis et al. (2018), and Stodter and Cushion (2019). These include: what constitutes best practice being accepted without critical questioning; that course delivery presents a decontexualisation of learning which fails to transfer to localised practice; and that coach-learners are prescribed 'the right way' to coach by course educators. Piggott (2012) suggests that within football coach education, educators cast themselves as authoritative agents who try to protect their positions by [re]producing a body

of prescriptive and authoritative knowledge. Such educational programmes have also been criticised by Chesterfield et al. (2010) who suggest that they are often over-timetabled, with high levels of contact time and few opportunities for contextualised coaching *in situ.* In addition, Chesterfield et al. contend that encouragement and opportunities for critical dialogue are limited and, when engaged in, are often discouraged.

While the published work has been insightful, it has not dealt overtly with the experiences of female learners, with Lewis et al. (2020) suggesting that the male-dominated profession of coaching is structurally problematic and, thus, the experiences of women as they negotiate such coach education programmes are themselves a subject worthy of further exploration and research. This paper seeks to respond to this call, offering a critical reading of the experiences of female coach-learners and highlighting the manner in which taken-for-granted assumptions about the nature of coaching and the women's game shape the conditions that the female coaches experience. Its aims are threefold: first to seek to give voice to those females who have navigated the UEFA A programme; second to expose the mechanisms by which androcentric practice are presented, [re]produced and seen as normal practice; and lastly to provide a critical reading of the data, one which aims to challenge existing assumptions and inform practice.

Female coaches, coach-learners and experiences of androcentrism

It has been argued that the landscape of sports coaching is distinctively male, where women are subject to explicit and implicit discrimination via a number of sporting, cultural and institutional mechanisms (Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018). These authors go on to report that female coaches who are trying to navigate their way through this androcentric terrain are often left feeling undermined, isolated and, at times, excluded, thereby highlighting issues such as unequal gendered relations, negative ideas of females' coaching competence and poor working

conditions (e.g. a lack of child support care). According to Clarkson et al. (2019), there is an atmosphere of sexism, often compounded by homophobia, racism and forms of biological determinism which cast females as fundamentally 'lacking' because they do not play, and presumably, coach, like men. Consequently, female coaches testify to surviving rather than thriving within their coaching roles and, even when successful, feeling that their authentic self has been compromised, marginalised and devalued (Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018). It is unsurprising, therefore, that many women choose not to engage or continue with formal coach education once enrolled and, consequently, "…a great potential for innovation is lost which could enrich the coaching business by opening up new topics and fresh perspectives" (Schlesinger & Weigelt-Schlesinger, 2012, p. 57).

Female coach-learners have criticised FA coach education courses for privileging male physical and psychological characteristics, which in turn influence the assessment and benchmarking of what is deemed accepted coaching behaviours (Welford, 2011). Not only are the coach education systems restrictive and restricting for female learners, but the way coaching as an activity is conceptualised, debated and defined is also dominated by this androcentric view. Thus, women are unfairly judged against a privileged masculine discourse that defines and constitutes accepted current and best practice within coaching; a situation that both excludes the female voice and limits the growth of a more inclusive and equitable understanding of what coaching is and could be. This acceptance of particular ways of being, knowing and learning to be a coach is underpinned by a catalogue of practices and belief systems which combine to manifest themselves in the institutional and cultural orthodoxy of coaching systems and those coach-educators who work with them (Lewis et al., 2018). We suggest the experiences of female coach-learners foregrounded in this paper are not unique to the FA's UEFA A programme and that androcentrism can be found throughout the practices of coaching, coach education and is indeed inherent in the fabric of sport.

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A critical (broadly poststructuralist) lens

118   A number of authors have used a broad range of critical theories, including poststructuralism,

119   to examine sports coaching (e.g. Blackett et al., 2019; Cushion, 2018; Gerdin et al., 2019;

120   Taylor et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2018) and coach education (e.g. Avner et al., 2017; Piggott,

121   2012; Zehntner & McMahon, 2019). In doing so, we argue, they have helped to illuminate the

122   hidden, yet powerful, structural and cultural practices that underpin particular and prevailing

123   orthodoxies. Engaging with Foucauldian theory, a number have suggested that particular

124   mechanisms embodied in coaching and coach education, individually and collectively,

125   underpin particular orthodoxies and taken-for–granted practices. Within our paper, we have,

126   also utilised Foucault, but have taken an approach that is slightly more eclectic by drawing on

127   the likes of Mathiesen (the subtlety of controlling structures), Usher (poststructalism and

128   critical educational theory) and Rose and Miller (aspects of governmentality). This critical

129   *bricolage,* we contend, provides new opportunities to sensitise both researcher and those

130   responsible for coach education to practices that hinder female learning and limit what

131   coaching might be.

132   Foucault (1977) argued that individual actors are the agents of the apparatus of coach education

133   (e.g. organisational climate, language, hidden structures, and texts) and subject to their

134   application. These apparatuses are imbued with powerful conditions, which act upon the

135   individual in a number of possible ways. They can be subtle, often seemingly innocuous and,

136   therefore, hidden and thus deemed innocent. As Mathiesen (2004, p. 11) suggests:

137   It is very difficult to pinpoint the limits … you often do not know whether you are

138   "confronted by them", or not; in this sense they are fleeting or transparent.

139 Within poststructuralist theorisation, the importance of language is paramount because, as How

140 (2003) suggests, through language discursive practices are amplified and orchestrated. Not only

141 is the spoken word recruited to be an agent of the privileged discourse, but also written text

142 and documentation become permanent examples of the authoritative voice which is perpetuated

143 through repetition and recruitment to become the official dialogue of coach education (Rose,

144 2000). Those who adopt particular forms of official language may, in its usage, engage in

145 micro-aggression where language is used to control, sanction and punish individuals.

146 Writing of a poststructuralist nature suggests that social practices are fragmented and

147 characterised by contested truths and the development of particular discourses that serve vested

148 and privileged positions (How, 2003; Miller & Rose, 2008). This establishment of so-called

149 truths is predicated on the exercise of a number of mechanisms which operate at different levels

150 and within different contexts. They generate a particular type of discourse, one that invades the

151 very nature of social interaction and, with practice, becomes the defining condition. Thus, we

152 argue that certain pedagogical practices found within the UEFA A Licence programmes lead

153 to what Foucault has referred to as "a society of normalisation" (1980, p.107). This

154 normalisation not only shapes the way that pedagogical practices, in this case coach education,

155 are formed and experienced, but also limits the manner in which we think about and relate to

156 particular social settings. The processes by which certain discourses become normalised and,

157 thus, pervasive, we suggest, are evident in the UEFA A education programme. By identifying

158 such practices, we aim to alert the reader to the concealed machinery by which particular

159 regimes of truth prosper and are reconstituted within and beyond the site of any social

160 intercourse (Foucault, 1977).

161 The adoption of a critical position also permits greater insight into the working of the UEFA A

162 programme, allowing us, as researchers, to examine the ways in which the female participants

163   are co-opted by the prevailing orthodoxy and themselves become co-conspirators. Foucault, in

164   his later theorising (1978), suggested that by the internalisation of certain behaviours and

165   beliefs, the subject, the female learner, becomes responsible for the 'conduct of their own

166   conduct'. The subjectification of the individual allows the subtle nature of the discourse to be

167   hidden because, in its adoption by those it seeks to repress, it has the power to recruit the subject

168   to be accountable and complicit at the same time. This acquiescence manifests itself in an

169   embodiment of practices that serve to reproduce the privileged orthodoxy and authoritative

170   truths. As Mathiesen (2004) indicated, if power was clearly visible in these regimes, it would

171   be more easily identified and witnessed, and where it is totalising in its effect, it could be faced,

172   tackled and confronted.

173   Adopting a critical approach enabled us to design an interview schedule capable of exploring

174   cultural and social intricacies. As such, this permitted us to become critically aware of the

175   problematic effects of dominant discourses and the [re]production of power relations (Denison

176   & Avner, 2011). The lead author, as a female and a professional coach, had first-hand

177   experience of the UEFA A coach education programme as a participant. While we argue, that

178   she was in a strong position to engage with and conduct the interviews and field data process,

179   we also are aware of the problems inherent in assuming an insider status and the ethics of

180   disclosing the thoughts of professional colleagues and friends.

181   ***Methodology and method***

182   This paper focuses on the experiences of female learners positioned at the upper end of the

183   coach education ladder. In attempting to give voice to the coach-learners, semi-structured

184   interviews were conducted to hopefully gather insightful data to uncover the *what*, *why* and

185   *how* (Aston, 2016). The interview schedule was informed by the research's central aims, a

186   literature review, our own critical commitments and the lead author's experience of FA coach

187 education as a participant and educator. The design of the interview schedule centred on five

188 key areas: (1) course content and design; (2) learning environment; (3) the learner's

189 experiences; (4) peer and coach-educator relationships; (5) female coach-learner insight.

190 The interviews were conducted face-to-face (n = 4) or by telephone (n = 5) by the lead author

191 each lasting over an hour in length; engagement (e.g. initial contact, briefing, interview and

192 any required follow up) with the interviewees was conducted over the period of a year (2018-

193 2019). Many of the interviewees knew the primary researcher and we argue that this familiarity

194 encouraged participants to offload their thoughts and experiences and engage in meaning

195 making (Aston, 2016). Our process of collection, analysis and write up was a recursive and

196 iterative process, which necessitated working back and forth between the data, theory, and an

197 understanding and questioning of the data (Taylor, W., 2014), thus refuting the idea that

198 analysis of data is something that occurs after the fieldwork and before the write up (Markula

199 & Silk, 2011). The analysis and reading of the data were guided by central poststructuralist

200 tenets, revisiting a number of critical theoretical text and being mindful that there are many

201 readings of any social phenomenon and that they are influenced by other associated conditions

202 such as incompleteness, and spatial and temporal contextualisation.

203 *Participants*

204 Once ethical approval had been obtained, nine female coach-learners were identified as suitable

205 participants, primarily because of their relevant and in-depth knowledge and their course

206 experience. Although we remain sceptical of the notion of generalisability, participants were

207 deemed to be representative, with nine out of the 82 existing female UEFA A Licence holders

208 in the UK engaged with during the study. The process for recruiting the participants was guided

209 by the following selection criteria: (1) female; (2) UEFA A Licence holder; (3) a minimum of

210 10 years of practical coaching experience; and (4) current member of the FA Licenced Coaches

211   Club. In addition, participants were selected due their participation in a variety of UEFA A

212   programmes over a 10-year period (2009-2019).

213   *Dealing with data and the politics of voice*

214   For qualitative researchers, dealing with pages of interview transcript is both a perplexing and,

215   we would argue, an ethically laden task (Taylor, W., 2014). The sheer amount of material that

216   confronts qualitative researchers can be daunting and necessitates ethical decisions about which

217   aspects of the data should be committed to paper and, thus, given voice, and which should

218   remain on the computer and, thus, silenced. The politics of voice were very much at the

219   forefront of our thinking during the management of the data process and we were mindful of

220   the time given to us by those whom we interviewed and the emotional labour involved for the

221   women who talked to us about their experiences and thoughts regarding the UEFA A coach

222   education programme. With this is mind, only where requested to do so by the participants, we

223   have made use of pseudonyms.

224   We talked openly about the data and considered what questions could legitimately be asked of

225   it (Taylor, W., 2014). A number of readings, returning to theory, and follow-up conversations

226   provided tacit agreement regarding the most potent and considered aspects of data that in turn

227   should be highlighted. The following section foregrounds four themes which we believe are

228   representative of the feelings and considerations offered by the interviewees. Here, we offer

229   the data foregrounded not as evidence, but rather, as our critical and broadly, poststructuralist

230   commitments suggest, as an illustration of the situations the interviewees found themselves in

231   and as an illumination of the barriers and pressures they experienced and endured.

232   *Footnote: some of the participants have been give pseudonyms where requested

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Overpowered and silently silenced

Language and voice

The importance of language, its use and misuse, intent and effect, is difficult to overstate. A number of the interviewees stated that from the start of the course they felt verbally under attack and that they had to answer questions a certain way in an effort to justify their presence on the course. Florence declared that as soon as she entered the room on the first day, it started:

> *Where do you work? What do you do? What do you know? I sat back a little and lacked confidence, I felt out of it.*

Not only did the participants feel under pressure to measure up to others' expectations, but also the course tutors did not manage the early discussions or seemingly take an interest in the way the cross-talk excluded some individuals. The following paired quotes illustrate Chloe and Jada's frustrations:

> *At first, it was difficult in the group discussions; you are in a group of 8 to10, it's hard to get your point across with so many all-male voices. I had to keep fighting it, to show I have knowledge to get them to start listening. (Chloe)*

> *The educators created discussions and had these 'home groups' where we chatted about sessions, but they did not facilitate it properly, ... there were some strong male characters in the group, given too much of a platform ... In one of the groups I challenged a coach ... my tutor was doodling on a pad whilst we were having a heated discussion about him not giving anyone else a chance to talk. (Jada)*

The verbal interaction experienced during delivery was androcentric in nature, with the male voice dominating the cross-talk and the manner in which others were permitted to add to the conversation or excluded outright. This marginalisation of the female voice took on an overtly

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258 sexual tone in the downtime outside the programmed delivery. The experience of the bar talk,

259 for Morgan, was shocking, and left her feeling angry and isolated:

260   *I only went twice [to the bar] … some things are hard for females to get involved with.*

261   *I recall a time one of the lads was talking about when he was fucking his wife and he*

262   *was "balls deep". I walk in and thought what can I bloody do with that? I was mortified,*

263   *embarrassed and awkward; how do I fit in? I don't want to listen to that … It is always*

264   *the social bits, the downtime, which is inappropriate … the isolating parts.*

265 Riley also experienced such excluding language, citing an incident where an ex-professional

266 seemed to have the attention of some younger and more impressionable males. Riley

267 remembers the ex-player saying:

268   *"I have a little girl and I am steering her away from footy because they are all*

269   *lesbians." So, I tried to sort of laugh it off a little … but I think other lads on the course*

270   *who were younger felt it was a bit harsh, a bit much, and they felt uncomfortable around*

271   *the situation because … some just joined in with him.*

272 The examples of bar talk forced the female learners to adopt certain positions: whether to

273 attempt to join in the conversations and actively challenge the tone and content and run the risk

274 of further isolation, or to accept passively the nature of the cross-talk and act as a co-

275 conspirator, leaving them silently silenced.

276 The trust placed in the male course tutors to govern the conduct of others was often misplaced,

277 with the tutors legitimising the disempowering experience for female learners. Morgan was

278 acutely aware that her presence was a challenge to the androcentric domain of many of these

279 courses and she recounts the mood change as she entered the classroom to deliver a mock

280 coaching session:

281   *I felt like I was ruining the normal male environment … I was first on, and the tutor*

282   *knew I was on … they [the other candidates] were swearing a lot, and saying certain*

283   *things, and I knew that as soon as they knew I was there, things would change. The*

284   *tutor said, "… oh, Morgan is here". Where do I fit in … do I alienate myself or do I*

285   *become one of them, one of the lads? The tutors were a part of it … they do not really*

286   *know how to deal with it. They were not sure how to engage with a female … I will be*

287   *honest, the constant references to "her indoors" really pisses me off.*

288

289   By the tacit endorsement of certain forms of language, either by repetition or by a lack of

290   challenge, each verbal encounter reinforces the acceptance of a particular male voice. Brogan

291   goes on to explain how language was used to exclude female learners from conversations and

292   learning opportunities:

293   *There would be a group talking, boys, tutors, men, doesn't matter who it is – for them*

294   *swearing is acceptable, the word cunt or slagging each other off is acceptable, the*

295   *moment a female steps into that everybody's behaviour changes, no swearing, or if they*

296   *do swear "… oh, sorry, Brogan". I think it is a manifestation of people, and the course*

297   *culture, and I think the tutors should not be joining in, they should toe-the-line and it's*

298   *a fundamental issue. One told me you need to "man up", you are coaching for the*

299   *men's pro-game.*

300   Because of the constant use of language as a form of knowledge exchange, the ever-present

301   undertone of sexist and dismissive comments became wearing for some. Maddison went on to

302   recount:

303   *My biggest pet hate is when people say "Ah, you're a good female coach, aren't you"*

304   *and I'm like no, I'm a good coach, there's no need for that female part in front.*

305 Wini found the informal interchanges equally tiring and frustrating. Some conversations were

306 not directed toward any particular member of the cohort, but became background noise of side

307 comments and throwaway lines:

308   *You still got some of that "it's just totally a man's game" and "what the hell are you*

309   *doing here" kind of thing ... Not singling you out, but it was just like silly little*

310   *comments, "Oh, she likes playing with balls", and stuff like that.*

311 The androcentric voice defined not only what was deemed of value in the learning interaction,

312 but in the informal settings where the verbal violence explicit in the sexual nature of' 'bar room

313 banter' also resulted in the physical exclusion of the female learners. Morgan and Brogan were

314 both aware of the powerful nature of the manner in which language shaped the course

315 experience:

316   *... I think getting a language right that everyone understands is important ... getting*

317   *the female content into the course, it is essential. (Morgan)*

318   *... they are making jokes at a female's expense; it is a very 'laddy' environment. Even*

319   *the other candidates will not include you in that type of banter, people use language to*

320   *include or exclude and it is the same with jokes and banter. (Brogan)*

321

322 **Androcentric referencing**

323 *Text and curriculum*

324 Even though the female coach-learners we interviewed had experience of attending differing

325 courses over 10 years, some aspects of the delivery remained constant. Morgan explained:

326   *I was the only woman, no females, no tutors or mentors, no learners, no female*

327   *administration staff, no female analysis staff, all males. I was the only woman; I found*

328   *it really tough and really isolating … It's all male directed, male material, everything*

329   *is to do with male football, I only spoke when they asked me a question. The lack of*

330   *female content affected my motivation, I would like to link what I am learning to female*

331   *sport, but there is no opportunity to. No references, no talk, no pictures, no audio, all-*

332   *male content.*

333   Anderson (2005) refers to this form of androcentrism as producing a hierarchy of knowledge

334   where the point of departure or symbolic referencing for what is presented as authoritative

335   knowledge is done with reference to the masculine. Here, not only were the discussions centred

336   on the men's game, but the structure of classroom practices and examples were male

337   dominated. Maddison, Chloe and Brogan recall:

338   *The course and topics were just linked to the male game. No workshops focused on the*

339   *female game … Everything was based around the elite male game and Premier League*

340   *statistics. (Maddison)*

341   *There were no references from the Women's Super League. We had a few guest*

342   *speakers, all male, all related to the men's game, and I was in the women's game. It*

343   *would have been nice to have a female speaker on the male-dominated course. (Chloe)*

344   *I think they should have women's football; they do not at the minute, they do not have*

345   *any reference to it at all which I think is a bit shocking. (Brogan)*

346   The privilege afforded to the male game also manifested itself in the documentation and content

347   of the course. In doing so it acted as a justification for androcentric referencing and legitimated

348   the continued endorsement that the delivery was really about and for the male game.

349   Maddison added:

15

350 *No references to gender specificity, no workshops focused on the female game, nothing*

351 *specific that I can remember. In the folder there is a few pictures of female coaches but*

352 *that's it.*

353 The exclusion of the women's game from the content of the curriculum further marginalised

354 the female coach-learners by casting their experiences as not worthy of representation,

355 discussion or consideration. By presenting a limiting and limited version of the game, the male

356 candidates' learning opportunities were also restricted and that helped to legitimise the notion

357 that the female game is merely a simpler version of the male one.

358

359 **Taken-for-granted practice**

360 *Assumptions*

361 It was not just the language used and the content of the course itself that left the females feeling

362 isolated and devalued. Subtle, but important aspects, such as the equipment used, reinforced

363 the sense of exclusion:

364 *Everyone got Nike kit. I am a short female, why would I wear men's kit? Do I look like*

365 *a medium man? I looked ridiculous, I did not feel comfortable; it is another example of*

366 *being undervalued and draws attention to me. I looked like an idiot. I felt like I was*

367 *doing the gardening. (Morgan)*

368 At times the male candidates and tutors not only exposed their lack of knowledge of the female

369 game, but they also cast doubt on the quality and depth of knowledge of the female game.

370 Riley, remembering a conversation, reported:

371 *… some of them would ask you questions and are quite keen to learn but some of them*

372 *are literally "Oh well, you wouldn't get that in a women's game, would you? Do you*

373   *get girls that, like, know the offside when you do a 11v11", and they haven't got an idea*

374   *about women's football whatsoever.*

375   While Chloe valued the opportunity to display her coaching ability the first time, the learners,

376   as a group, were asked to work with a team in a live setting where the default position was

377   again the male game:

378   *We all had to coach in front of the peers. For the first one we were coaching the peer*

379   *group ... but for the second session we had a male team come in and for us to coach*

380   *them.*

381   While undertaking coaching sessions with male peers or male players, the female learners were

382   also encouraged to adopt masculine coaching behaviours or to use tactics that were associated

383   with the male professional game. In their words:

384   *If you are a female coach, they [educators] think there is an elephant in the room*

385   *because they expect everyone to be guys. We are also asked to coach like a man.*

386   *(Brogan)*

387   *The tutors' understanding of the female game was poor, they have not had much*

388   *experience of the female game. I looked at the game from a female point of view and*

389   *some of the lads were saying you could maybe do a long diagonal ball 60 yards in the*

390   *opposite corner and you're thinking that would not happen in a women's game, so what*

391   *I actually want is to play it there and then back to there. (Riley)*

392   The pressure to coach like a male reverts back to a form of biological determinism where the

393   males' game is defined by physicality, strength and aggression and the female game, and its

394   coaching, is judged not on its own merits and qualities, but by its lack of male characteristics.

395 These assumptions were evident in the manner in which the males on the course wanted to

396 interact with and define the female learners:

397 *Some of the men do treat you as a sister or a daughter at times. Sometimes it is too*

398 *much though; "[they asked] ... do you want me to move the goal, the balls, etc.?"*

399 *(Florence)*

400

401 **Resistance**

402 *I thought, "Fuck this"*

403 As Malpas and Wickham (1995), Derrida (1998) and Foucault (1970) contend, where power is

404 present, the opportunity for resistance and counter conduct exists, and at times the female

405 learners were able to identify instances where they could challenge the orthodoxy. As one

406 acknowledged:

407 *We did a task where we had to research a team ... I asked to do an analysis on the then*

408 *Women's World Champions and I really enjoyed that. It was relevant, I learnt lots, it*

409 *helped me in my role, I had to present back to the group in 20 mins. I thought, "Fuck*

410 *this". For the last two and a half years I have had to listen to men's football; I did 45*

411 *mins! I thought, "Keep going, this is the only bit of women's football on the whole*

412 *course, you're going to sit through it". I could see they had switched off, it just wasn't*

413 *relevant to them. Welcome to my world! (Morgan)*

414 While examples of resistance provided agency for the females, there was always the chance

415 that such acts would damage their position and further alienate them from the others. Derrida

416 (1998) contends that central to this form of resistance is a sense of loss; e.g. that female coach-

417 learners may have to remove themselves from a process of education that that they are

418   fundamentally keen to participate in and gain from. Despite these fears, as Jada recounts,

419   challenges are made:

> 420   *We watched a session ... on setting a block, I watched the session where a bloke was*
>
> 421   *about 15 yards too wide, so it was the easiest thing to go around, on the half-way line*
>
> 422   *and totally unrealistic, and it did not look anything like it should have, and when I said*
>
> 423   *it back, it did not go down well.*

424   There were some opportunities for the female coach-learners to challenge the ongoing practice

425   experience on the course and also to make their voices heard at a more senior level.

426   Notwithstanding these opportunities, the feeling that their views would be dismissed and that

427   they would be cast as troublemakers was still there

> 428   *I was the token gesture female on the award; when I was at SGP I did bump into senior*
>
> 429   *management. I was asked, "How's the course?" I told the truth; I said, "I'm*
>
> 430   *disappointed with the lack of female content, reference points, a lack of inclusivity." I*
>
> 431   *found that quite tough; you make a choice as a female when you decide to feed that*
>
> 432   *back. I knew on the back end of that conversation that I would be made a scapegoat ...*
>
> 433   *(Morgan)*

434   In addition to the commitment to challenge the orthodoxy, some of the candidates believed

435   they had an obligation to help normalise the presence of female coach-learners on the course

436   by very their attendance:

> 437   *... there was this feeling of I need to do well for females everywhere so when the next*
>
> 438   *person steps up into this environment people are going to be a bit easier on them.*
>
> 439   *(Brogan)*

440 Chloe took on the challenge by fronting up in terms of adding to the classroom conversation

441 and practice sessions, believing that by excelling in these aspects she had more chance of being

442 included and valued.

443   *In the very beginning, it was a challenge, just in terms of the environment, me getting*

444   *to know them and being the only female, I felt like I had to play and speak up and coach*

445   *and for them to think "You know what, she's good and we will talk to her and get her*

446   *involved more."*

447

A critical reading of the data

449 This paper is framed within critical and broadly poststructuralist paradigms and we

450 acknowledge that our reading of the data is co-constructed, where notions of reality and truth

451 are both multiple and subjective. Our readings are particular and peculiar to the female coach-

452 learner on the UEFA A course, and, as such, we recognise the importance of the context and

453 the spatial and temporal conditions in which their experiences were founded. We further

454 acknowledge that this reading of the data is unique to our own histories; it is ours and ours

455 alone and we take responsibility for that.

456 Nonetheless, we contend our analysis and presentation of the data in this paper does support

457 our general tenet that the experiences of female coach-learners on the UEFA A course are beset

458 by sexism, an androcentric atmosphere and a lack of knowledge about and value afforded to

459 the female game (Lewis et al., 2018). By illustrating these female learner experiences, we argue

460 that we have shed light on the manner in which the male game is deemed normative and this

461 condition is sustained by privileged male authoritative voices, behaviour and expectations,

462 which we contend suppress and marginalise females. In doing so, we hope to have added to the

463 critical literature on coach education that contends there is more to do in tackling systematic

464 and institutional sexism.

465 As Usher and Edwards (1994) assert, a crucial component of the manner in which dominant

466 ways of knowing are established and maintained is by privileging a certain lexicon; one that

467 includes and excludes speakers and secures positions of power, and for those who cannot, or

468 choose not to, engage, this lack of a voice renders them silently silenced. As Rose (1999)

469 suggests, a regime of enunciation can influence who can speak and how language is authorised,

470 according to what criteria of truth and what forms of rhetoric, symbolism, persuasion, sanction

471 or seduction. Privilege here is concealed within language and, in the case of the UEFA A

472 Licence, certain words and phrases act as metonymies, where reference to 'the game' is

473 constructed, consumed and understood as the male version of football and running 'a good

474 coaching session' is one that explicitly exhibits masculine traits of power, speed and physicality

475 (Rose, 1999). Because these meanings are unspoken and consumed without notice, they pass

476 without attention and are, as Mathiesen (2004) suggests, more difficult to challenge.

477 The more overtly excluding language which was commonly experienced by the female learners

478 involved heavy use of the male nouns (chaps, lads, guys), instances of accepted cursing

479 (fucking, cunt) and derogatory female categorisation, often with sexual overtones (missus at

480 home, they are all lesbians, fucking his wife, her indoors). While seemingly easier to identify

481 and confront, these common acts of linguistic violence become examples of micro-aggression

482 (Sue, 2010). Because of their ongoing usage, they become a form of background noise, one

483 that is corrosive and wearing for those it objectifies and who are also subject to it. If female

484 learners want to participate in day-to-day banter they have to use phrases and language which

485 have currency and allow them to 'speak the speak', even if by their usage they corrupt their

486 authentic selves (Bodine & Crawford, 1998). In consequence, female learners become co-opted

487   in their own passivity by accepting this normalised language and conduct, rendering them

488   agents of their own acquiescence (Mathiesen, 2004; Lewis et al., 2018).

489   As Rose (1999) agues, language does not act independently of other structural conditions, space

490   and apparatus, with the 'bar area', a space the female learners described as "inappropriate,

491   isolating and awkward", being an example noted by a number of the interviewees. Because of

492   the cultural misogyny evident in the bar, female learners governed their own conduct in two

493   ways. The first was to try to join in with the banter (and become a co-conspirator and endorse

494   the behaviour) or the second was by self-isolating in the downtime (thus endorsing that the bar

495   is a 'male space' where men sexualise women through language and behaviour). We suggest

496   that the female coach-learners we interviewed feared the consequences of challenging this

497   pervasive orthodoxy, since they might be labelled a 'killjoy' or 'fun sponge' or 'too sensitive',

498   resulting in further marginalisation.

499   In discussing the structural conditions, it is important to consider the ways these elements (e.g.

500   distribution of coaching kit, content and workshops or set analysis tasks) are considered and

501   organised and how the tasks and objects of rule are codified and regulated by certain conditions

502   (Rose, 1999). Here, objects of rule, for example technical and tactical coaching detail, inviting

503   male teams in as bodies for sessions and tasks linked to the male Premier League, Europa or

504   Champions League, were contextualised and structured via reference to the men's game. Even

505   the distribution of kit excluded the female learners, with the male sizing and cut leaving the

506   females feeling uncomfortable and in some cases subject to ridicule. The women's game was

507   hidden by the dominant assumptions about the ways that football and its coaching are

508   reproduced, consumed and considered.

509   The importance and role afforded to the coach-educators on the programme is difficult to

510   overstate. The processes of observation and normalisation judgements and the examination of

511 certain tasks formed a process of disciplining practices and power (Foucault, 1977). The coach-

512 educators acted as agents in the legitimisation and governing of these existing truths by

513 managing the manner in which they were presented and given importance, and by their actions

514 displayed that "the navigation of power relations involves critically analysing the present

515 conditions in order to identify norms and practices that might reinforce the *status quo*" (Taylor,

516 D., 2014, p. 5). To that point, Foucault (1977) identified disciplinary power as a disciplinary

517 mechanism, where a hierarchal figure (coach-educator) can judge and endorse all practices,

518 including those within and outside of the curriculum, that produce and exclude individuals, to

519 reinforce and normalise whatever was 'true' (Denison & Mills, 2018).

520 It is important to highlight how female coach-learners engaged with acts of resistance through

521 micro-interactions within the UEFA course. Foucault (1990, p. 95) contended that "where there

522 is power, there is resistance"; however, whenever and wherever resistance is exhibited it could

523 be deemed as unacceptable and unprofessional and represent the 'wrong kind' of learner

524 (Downham & Cushion, 2020). Within the present study, some female learners made efforts to

525 challenge the conformity of how power traditionally operates through acts of resistance, by

526 speaking up, fighting to be heard, highlighting the women's game and reporting their concerns

527 about the nature of the course back to senior management. Here, where regimes of truth and

528 cultural orthodoxy were challenged, female learners used their judgement to shift alliances and

529 rise up from oppression to fight, resist and refuse 'what is' (Foucault, 1991).

530

531 **Conclusion**

532 This article in part answers the call of LaVoi et al. (2019) for researchers to focus on gendered

533 power and how this can both include and exclude women within organisations and their socio-

534 cultural environments. We have sought to illuminate female coach-learners' experiences of the

535 UEFA A Licence, using a broadly critical and poststructuralist lens to analyse the operatisation

536 of power and how this condition might exclude and marginalise the female learner. In doing

537 so, we have highlighted the regimes of truth that female coach-learners might experience within

538 this educational space. Our findings mirror the work of Lewis et al. (2018) and Clarkson et al.

539 (2019) who reported that female coach-learners struggled to understand, integrate, negotiate

540 and navigate their way through the FA coach education pathway and were left feeling

541 intimidated, devalued and uncomfortable.

542 We argue the UEFA A is currently delivered by men for the consumption of men and

543 reproduced by men, suggesting this gives rise to "a society of normalisation" (Foucault, 1980,

544 p.107). The result of this is that the body of knowledge generated by such normalised practices,

545 deemed of value and imbued with power, is both limited and limiting. It limits female coach-

546 learners who might wish to engage in the FA's award structure and, we argue, is limiting in its

547 rejection of the ways women's football and its coaching might add to the wider game. Anderson

548 (2005) calls for a reconsideration of the way knowledge is generated, suggesting that feminist

549 epistemologies would be the mechanisms that produce, validate and distribute new forms of

550 knowledge which do not in their dissemination and practice, exclude and devalue women's

551 experiences or contributions.

552 Following our critical reading of the data, we argue that there are a number of important

553 implications for the delivery of coach education. While we acknowledge the FA have begun to

554 address the underrepresentation of female coaches in the game with the 2017–2020 Gameplan

555 for Growth Strategy (The FA, 2020), we caution them not to be self-congratulatory. Although

556 the increased numbers may be deemed positive, this does not mean that the courses are more

557 inclusive or that certain practices have diminished. It could be that women are now hardened

558 to the androcentric nature of the delivery or have found new and robust ways to 'put up' with

559 the sexist dialogue and the marginalisation of their own practice. Furthermore, it could be

560 suggested that research such as ours and others (e.g. LaVoi et al., 2019: Lewis et al., 2018;

561 Clarkson et al., 2019) indicate that the FA suffers from systematic and cultural sexism and that

562 the way their coach education courses operate are indicative of ingrained institutional practices

563 and not the causes of them. It must be difficult for female coach-learners to be secure in the

564 value afforded to them when, in walking the corridors of the National Centre, the vast majority

565 of women they see are deployed in service roles, in the restaurant, behind the bar or in the

566 administrative systems. The importance of positive role models is difficult to overstate. Coach-

567 educators of all genders who set examples and engender an atmosphere that includes and

568 actively promotes the women's game should be given lead positions among those who design

569 and deliver coach education. The 'just add woman and stir' approach does not seem to work.

570 Not dealing with the sexist banter in the course downtime just reinforces the idea that tolerance,

571 just like equity, can 'be turned off and on' and 'as long as we include more pictures of women

572 in the course workbook everything will be all right'. We would go further than the

573 recommendations made by LaVoi et al. (2019), who argue that men with positional power

574 should learn more about embedded sexism and gender bias in sports coaching and suggest that

575 those who pander to a non-androcentric reordering should not be given responsibility for

576 delivering coach education. If the game of football is to harness the power it is believed to have

577 in effecting positive social and cultural change in communities and within individuals, it must

578 address androcentrism and the effect it has on coach education. Only by being critical of its

579 own assumptions and practices can 'the game' be considered as being inclusive of all who play

580 and coach it. If there is a real commitment to addressing the central concerns highlighted within

581 this paper, we may see a future where a richer contextualisation of what constitutes football

582 coaching is evident to all.

583

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