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1 **‘Long ball’ and ‘balls deep’: A critical reading of female coach-learners’**  
2 **experiences of the UEFA A Licence**

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14 **Word Count 8311**

15

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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## 43 **Introduction**

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

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

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

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

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

83

#### 84 **Female coaches, coach-learners and experiences of androcentrism**

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

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

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

116

117 **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 (poststructuralism 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

233

234

235 **Overpowered and silently silenced**

236 *Language and voice*

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

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

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

247 *At first, it was difficult in the group discussions; you are in a group of 8 to 10, it's hard*  
248 *to get your point across with so many all-male voices. I had to keep fighting it, to show*  
249 *I have knowledge to get them to start listening. (Chloe)*

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

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

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:

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

#### 448 **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) argues, 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 operationalisation  
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

584 **Acknowledgements**

585 We would like to thank the reviewers for their valuable feedback on earlier drafts of this  
586 manuscript and to acknowledge the participants who took part in this study for their willingness  
587 to speak openly and honestly about their experiences.

588

589 **Declaration of Interests Statement**

590 None declared.

591

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