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## **Women Training to Coach a Men's Sport: Managing Gendered Identities and Masculinist Discourses**

Despite increasing female participation in English football (aka soccer), the sport remains rooted in the values and discursive practices of orthodox masculinity (Williams, 2014). This is exemplified by the English Football Association (FA), which has been criticized for its ineffective responses to addressing the inclusion and progression of women as players and workers within the organization (Sequerra, 2015). Female membership in male dominated organizations is not readily achieved given the dominance of masculinist discourses and the risks of overtly challenging these (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2008, 2011; Walsh, 2001). In this study we explored the discursive management of gendered and/or footballing identities from interviews with participants in an English regional FA's women-only football coach education program. All of the participants described the peripheral positioning of women in English football. Analysis identified evidence of both collaboration with and resistance to the dominant masculinist discourses in the accounts of their experiences in football, while also reproducing the most valued footballing identities and knowledge as male. We connect this to the complexities of negotiating and managing gendered identities for women in male-dominated organizations. All of the participants described the value and benefits of women-only coach education and the majority noted they would prefer women-only coach education in future.

5 key words: football/soccer; gendered discourses; identities; sport organizations; coach training.

Across the globe, football remains a demarcator of traditional gender boundaries steeped in discourses of heterosexual masculinity. Football's highest regulatory body, the Fédération Internationale de Football Associations (FIFA), continues to be found resistant to efforts to effectively integrate women into the organization as well as the sport itself across nations and contexts (e.g. Equalplayfc, 2014; Wadesango, Machingambi, Ashu, & Chireshe, 2010). This is echoed at the European (UEFA) and national levels to the extent that the substantive rise in female participation over the last 30 years in a variety of roles (UEFA, 2013) has been met with continued resistance (e.g. Harris, 2001; Meân, 2003; Norman, 2014; Pfister, 2013). But a lack of progress in addressing gender has been particularly notable in English football (e.g. Williams, 2014) and the English Football Association has come under persistent pressure from both UEFA and FIFA as well as domestic organizations (see Lusted, 2009) to address the continued concerns about poor gender inclusion and provision since they were pushed by FIFA to oversee English women's football in 1993.

The English FA's most recent action has been the development of policies aimed at diversifying its workforce and clarifying anti-discrimination sanctions (Football Association, 2012a, 2015), mentoring female coaches (Football Association, 2014a) and creating an effective commercial strategy for the women's game (Football Association, 2012b). These have employed a (neo)liberal approach which assumes that by offering the same, or similar opportunities to men, women will be successful (Shaw, 2013). However, evidence suggests the FA has not made as substantive progress as might be expected in the effective integration and inclusion of women. Of the 1.162 million registered female football players in Europe, women's participation appears stagnant with 91,656 registered players in 2013 (an increase from 89,640 in 2012) and, whilst recent data is not available on the number of qualified women coaches at all levels across men's

and women's football, the ratio of male/female coaches in women's football specifically is 89/11% (UEFA, 2013). In English football governance, of the 346 positions on the FA board and committees, only 14 are filled by women (Football Association, 2014b). Similarly, many clubs (professional, semi-professional and amateur) still do not have provisions for girls to play stifling female youth development and the potential future of the women's game.

As the regulating body of English football, the FA has the ability to implement substantive change that could lead to a wider cultural shift. However, the cultural significance of football for masculinity makes such change extremely challenging given its connection to ideologies and identities as a foundational discourse (Meân, 2001). As such, sport knowledge and expertise, for example in the coaching role, continues to be intrinsically linked with masculinity (Knoppers, 2006; Schull, Shaw & Kihl, 2013; Shaw & Hoeber, 2003). Leadership positions remain routinely held by males in both men's and women's football, and access for boys remains substantively easier than for girls.

Pivotal to the implementation of cultural change in English football are the County Football Associations (hereafter CFAs) who govern and administer the game at the regional level, the lowest level of regulatory organization in England. As Lusted (2009) explains, CFAs are semi-autonomous in that they enjoy relative financial independence in their governance and are not subject to the very visible accountability that the FA has been subjected to in recent years in responding to external pressure to reform its structure and policies. Indeed, Lusted has shown that County FAs routinely reproduce hegemonic ideologies of meritocracy. However, the FA's Football Development Strategy in 2000 saw the introduction of 'Football Development Officers', some with a specific gender equality remit, who are managed more directly by the FA but work alongside CFA staff.

As part of their work, entry-level women-only coach education courses are delivered at CFAs. However, whilst provision focused on women may appear empowering, it can also become problematic by reproducing socially constructed gender differences (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2008; Pronger, 1990). Specialized provision can offer safe space and support for women coaches and bring attention to these problems. However, it is also underpinned by a liberal approach to gender equity in sport that focuses on 'fixing' women, who are assumed to be less knowledgeable and capable, rather than fixing the organization itself (Shaw and Hoerber, 2003; Shaw, 2013). Indeed, the prominence of institutionalized gendered formations means provision such as women-only coach education courses are often demeaned and used to consolidate the positioning of women as *othered*- and possessing needs and skills that are "naturally" different from men's. Such gendered discourses also reproduce accounts that blame women for their own failure to succeed (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2011; Knoppers, 1992).

Indeed, most football sites remain separatist given that they are predominantly male-only as a normalized cultural default. But the invisibility of this long-term privileging of masculinity and the blaming women for their own failure together serve to maintain the deniability of the organization's continued impact on women's positioning and performance (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2008).

#### Managing Gender and Identities in Sport Organizations

For the men and women involved in football, prevailing gendered discourses make the management and negotiation of their own intersecting identities (sporting, gendered, organizational, etc) and the positioning of women complex. Similarly to the ways in which the acceptance of black football players has been shown to be determined by their ability to assume the language and practices of whiteness (King, 2004), women in football are cognizant of how

they must perform and negotiate their gendered identities if they are to be accepted as entitled members of football culture.

The challenges of achieving diversity in male-dominated industries are widely evidenced (e.g. Hardin, Whiteside & Ash, 2014; Parker & Griffin, 2002; Schull et al, 2013), but the ideological and cultural centrality of sport make it especially challenging. To minimize the threat of such gender disruption, women in a category naturalized as male often deploy the female apologetic (Davis-Delano, Pollock & Ellsworth Vose, 2009) as part of the continued reproduction of dominant discourses, practices, and associated identities. In sport these strategies by women have been noted in a number of ways such as: the denial of the importance of women's sporting endeavors (Felshin, 1974); the emphasis of women athletes on their hegemonic, heterosexual femininity (Caudwell, 2007; Meân & Kassing, 2008); distancing from behaviors and ideologies that may be perceived as masculine (Krane, 2001) or feminist (Meân & Kassing, 2008). These practices undermine the emancipatory potential of women's sporting participation and prevent their achievements from being "held up" by women or "by feminists as exemplars" (Woodhouse, 2002, p.58).

Similarly, Walsh (2001) observes two key identity management strategies employed by women in male dominated organizations to achieve inclusion as an entitled member of the organization. The first is the *deployment of the normative and powerful masculinist discursive practices*. For example, women in such organizations may reproduce the organisation's dominant norms and values as valid and emphasise the ways in which they themselves conform to them. This strategy assumes acceptance should be unproblematic as the 'sameness' of identity would be forefronted, regardless of gender. However, women's use of normalized (male) discursive practices can be strategically ignored or misinterpreted when gender is made relevant

(Cameron, 1998) as has been evidenced, for example, in the discursive action of male football referees with female players (Meân, 2001). Indeed Welford (2011) notes that striving to present sameness is problematic for advancing women's progression in sport because it reinforces existing hegemonic order, naturalizing masculine formations and practices. Equally, women adopting typically masculine discursive styles without managing their heterosexual femininity are commonly 'othered', thereby justifying their limited or exceptional advancement (Shaw & Hoerber, 2003). Therefore, we argue that employing such a strategy would be similarly problematic for women in English football coaching in achieving inclusion as entitled members of the Football Association.

The second strategy Walsh noted (2001) was *challenging the unproblematized status of masculinist norms* by repositioning discursive practices most typically associated with femininity (i.e. supportiveness, nurturing), thereby empowering women to explain and understand their experience in more positive ways. For example, football coaching could be defined as an occupation where nurturing players and facilitating their needs is of prime importance, meaning that women are ideally suited for such roles (Knoppers, 1992). However such repositioning does not guarantee acceptance or being valued within mainstream organizational definitions. Instead gender can remain the primary categorization of members and the performance of these alternative discursive practices reproduced as feminized (Cameron, 1998). In turn these can be framed as peripheral or devalued (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2008; Meân, 2001).

Regardless, people simultaneously negotiate multiple discourses and identities since these are neither fixed nor voluntary but managed in everyday communicative, discursive action in ways that are inconsistent, fragmented and contradictory (Edley & Wetherell, 1996). It is in the challenge of managing these disparate identities and understandings that discourses and cultural

formations become observable as resistance reveals their substance (Foucault, 1972). Nonetheless some discourses and identities like sport (Meân, 2001) are considered especially problematic to challenge given their significance for socially constructed categories like gender, sexuality, and race (Maingueneau, 1999). The ideological significance of football in the UK is multifold as it serves as a prominent site for wider cultural constructions of gender as well as a significant site for identities of those who directly participate and identify with football across multiple levels (as fans, players, coaches, parents, etc). This suggests most people are subject to its discourses (even if you hate it and avoid it) and that the people who actively adopt to identify with football are highly subject to its gendered discourses, rendering resistance especially ideologically and emotionally challenging. This does not mean the re/production, resistance, and management of football as a male site and the associated masculinist discourses are necessarily overt and intentional, but produced and reproduced within the strategic and rhetorical performance of identity categories and their membership in everyday interactions (Potter, 1996); that is, through the discursive action and practices connected to identities. As such, for women the challenges and risks connected to negotiating their identities and managing gendered discourses in football are high as their gender means their membership is not readily given or achieved and they can easily be categorized as outside and excluded regardless of discursive performances (Meân, 2001). Indeed women's re/production of masculinized discursive performances of "doing" sport and self-distancing from female and feminized ways has been evidenced in a variety of ways (e.g. fans, Farrell, Fink, & Fields, 2011; Mewett & Toffoletti, 2011; athletes, Meân, 2001).

Exploration of the professional identities of women who are in the process of achieving positions of leadership within male-dominated sporting organizations remains highly relevant for



monitoring change and the socio-cultural processes related to power and gender. This makes entry-level female football coaches and women-only coach education useful sites to explore such ideological challenges. Specifically we explored the ways in which the women trainees managed the apparent contradictions between their gender and organizational identities alongside dominant, gendered understandings and experiences within the hyper-masculine culture of English football and the FA.

### Method

The research was undertaken at a CFA henceforth referred to by the pseudonym “Richmoss”. There are currently five levels of coach education run by the FA in affiliation with UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) and Richmoss FA frequently delivers the lowest level at their headquarters: the Level 1 Certificate in Coaching Football (L1CCF). The L1CCF is primarily aimed at those coaching young players (under 16 years, male or female) in a professional or voluntary capacity and is the first step to further coaching qualifications. Therefore, L1CCF participants are on the boundary of securing peripheral membership of the FA. It is the members at the periphery of an organization who are most invested in observing and fulfilling its ideological expectations (Meân, 2003), making the L1CCF a significant site for gatekeeping and the construction of meanings in English football coaching at the FA. The researchers took the opportunity offered by the scheduling of a women-only four-day L1CCF for one of the authors to join the course as a participant observer, taking part in the same classes, coaching drills and assessment as the participants. The observation was overt as all participants were informed of the author’s research aims and participation at the course outset.

The course had 21 other participants of whom 12 agreed to be interviewed during and after the course. Interviews were conducted by the author who participated in the course, at times

and locations convenient to the participants (the training facility, participants' homes or workplaces) on or after the last day of the course. All interviews were completed within a month of the course ending and their duration varied between 30 and 90 minutes. Interviews were unstructured with an emphasis on a conversational style to facilitate the exploration of themes and narratives raised by the participants in response to three main prompt questions which focused on: why they were doing the Level 1 training; why had they selected this course; what did they think of the course? To start the interview in what was intended to be a natural and unthreatening way that would offer the chance to "conversationally" all participants were asked why they were taking Level 1 training. If it did not naturally arise they were also asked why they had selected this course. The overall aim was to explore their experiences of the course and football generally rather than to ask them directly about their experience as women in football. As such, the issues and experiences of being a woman in football were only explored in response to participants directly raising them. Participants were not required to provide biographical information, but the interviewer identified all the interviewees as white and ranging in age between early twenties and early fifties.

The data used for the analysis reported included the interviews of the 12 women-only L1CCF participants. Whilst it is noted that this study is presenting a small sample of women at one CFA, we would counter that our findings are indicative of wider issues and are not intended to be wholly representative. Following Cameron (1997), we argue that basing our analysis on a group of women at one CFA enables us to provide a local account that can accommodate the differences and contradictions that are to be anticipated in the performance and management of competing identities. In such approaches transparency is important for validity which is achieved by restricting analysis to data explicitly reported. However some descriptive analysis is also

offered to provide context and relevancy information given that discursive analysis is detailed (hence lengthy), limiting the amount of data and analysis that can be included.

#### Analytical and Theoretical Framework

Taking the position that identities are constructed and performed through talk and discursive practices, we used critical discourse analysis with a focus on rhetorical features (Potter, 1996) to explore the ways in which identities, positions, and structures are re/produced, negotiated and challenged by women at Richmoss CFA. This approach emphasizes that memberships of a category (e.g. knowledgeable and skilled football coaches) are not necessarily given, even by appropriate qualifications, but are negotiated and achieved through communicative, discursive action that is motivated (Potter, 1996) and impacted by social constructs like gender (Cameron, 1998). Therefore gender, race, etc. means 'people can fail to be treated as having certain memberships' (Potter, 1996, p.133). Identities are therefore achieved and denied through discursive actions and collaboration or non-collaboration with these (Potter, 1996; Meân, 2001) as gatekeeping strategies (Gumperz, 1982) that function to protect central category definitions, like gender.

This perspective assumes talk to be motivated and strategic as people work to re/produce identities, discourses, and related "truths". But since we have multiple identities it is expected that antagonisms will be evident within talk as speakers negotiate through competing identities, discourses and versions of the "truth", and that these are both analytically observable and meaningful in the content, detail, and features of talk and texts (Edley & Wetherell, 1996, 2001; Potter, 1996; Sacks, 1992). Analysis can usefully identify what strategies are evident and what these appear to be managing. However talk should not be understood as motivated in the traditional cognitive sense, rather speakers are motivated to re/produce and/or resist discourses

and ideologies through which their own identities and understandings are embedded or challenged (Potter, 1996). Given this analytical focus, interviews were transcribed manually using conventions adapted from Condor (2000) (see Table 1) and all participants given pseudonyms. Analysis was initially performed independently by two researchers. Incidents of disparate interpretation were explored and excluded if no agreement was achieved.

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 Insert Table 1 here  
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### Analysis and Discussion

Strategies deployed by the women participants to manage their identities within the football coaching workplace proved complex and contradictory as the women managed the predominance of masculinist discourses and definitions that were evident in the data. This is not unusual as people manage the complexity of powerful and familiar dominant formations even as they work to resist and redefine them. Two key discursive and rhetorical elements that the women consistently negotiated through are discussed in this analysis. The first primarily involved the acknowledgement and resistance to the naturalization of men as central members of the football category and, as such, men's perceived entitlements to knowledge and expertise for coaching and women's peripheralized status. Managing this as it pertained to the framing of potential benefits of women-only coach training was a central facet of this as evidenced in the data. The second was more collaborative with the masculinist discourses through which the significance of gender was minimized and the routine re/production of men's centrality and women's peripheral status was re/produced. But before providing data that allows us to explore

these as complicated negotiations that require managing, the representativeness and contextualizing of these data is warranted.

#### Descriptive Detail

The following sub-section provides some data and descriptive analysis that offers a broader sense of the participants' perspectives on their experiences. The lack of attention on rhetorical and discursive elements means that the data are taken more at face value and, in keeping with this, line numbers are not included. All but one of the participants had become involved with Level 1 training through their children's involvement (or in one instance a nephew). The exception was a highly experienced player who was still playing and hoping to start a career as a coach. Of the nine that mentioned their playing experience, eight had played as children. Rebecca, the only participant to directly report no personal experience of playing noted instead that she had always been a fan observing that "*.....you don't have to be able to play football to be, to be a good coach...*" citing Mourinho (currently with English Premier club Chelsea) as "*a great representation of that.*" All of them reported taking Level 1 in response to club or team needs. For example, in response to the question "*So how come you decided to take a coaching course?*" Anne answered:

Um, because my little boy plays football now, he's five. And uh, I mentioned at presentation evening that I've done my level one a long time ago, and um, the, and they just said oh we need a coach, would you be interested? We, we, we're setting up a girls' football team, all these girls who are interested and they obviously won't get involved unless there's a female involved...

Four of the participants, all of whom had been on mixed training courses before (e.g. first aid), had purposefully selected the women-only Level 1 training. The others all described attending

the course because it was the first available and that they had been willing to go on a mixed course. Indeed most of them did not know a women-only course was available. But these participants all had positive reactions on learning it would be women-only such as being “*glad*” (Carly) or “*relieved*” (Iris and Suzanne). This was echoed by Hailey, an experienced and evidently highly skilled player who had been willing to “*go in with men*” but “*they like to grumble at the women*” and so “*I would've probably hated it.*” Hailey also referred to her childhood experiences of taking the place of boys in teams and that the Dads would “*kick off [get angry] because I was playing and their sons weren't getting in*” because “*it's football isn't it, it's a man's sport.*”

This last statement by Hailey is really emblematic of the central issue – the membership of women in the category of football and the entitlement to knowledge about football that is often simple “given” to men – by both men and women. All of the participants explicitly noted a need for women coaches and all stated that their teams or clubs were actively supportive of their involvement, but all of them continued to represent football as a male site with continued barriers to inclusion due to being women (2 explicitly used the word barriers) providing examples of exclusion and double-standards. For example, Georgia reports being told she couldn't volunteer coach because she hadn't got her level 1, but then an unqualified man was invited to volunteer coach. These issues of managing inclusion in football as a practice and an identity category are pivotal. This is apparent in Evelyn's account of a conversation with a woman on a concurrent “mixed” Level 1 course in which she was the only female as describing the men as “*...a bit, what are you doing here and, said they're a bit off and she said no one wanted her in their group.*” Given this it is not surprising that all but one of the women expressed a strong preference for women-only courses in the future.

The continued everyday re/production of gendered accounts and actions in practice, and in spite of good intent and active policies (organizational and national), arises from deeply embedded discourses and identities. All people in football are subject to the dominant discourses that construct football as a male site which means managing the alternative, resistant discourses is tricky and therefore complex – but women have no real choice but to negotiate through these contradictions else their continued progress and self-categorization (self-inclusion) becomes questionable. The next two sub-sections deal directly with the discursive and rhetorical management of these discourses with an emphasis on the complexity of negotiating through these for these women as the peripheralized and marginalized ‘other’.

#### Managing Resistance to the Privileging of Masculinist Discourses

In Extract 1, L1CCF participant Belinda discusses the potential benefits of women-only coach education. This extract contains a variety of rhetorical features that indicate the ‘tricky’ work (Sacks, 1992) of managing controversial and identity threatening content.

##### *Extract 1:*

- 1 I: ...what other advantages do you think of, of being around with uh, uh, just women?  
 2 B: I suppose they can-you can relate to them a little bit better (.1) in the sense that you're  
 3 a female playing football (.1) which is in-in a minority. Um (.2) so: and a-also [strong  
 4 outward breath] this is a very big generalization, but sometimes >talking to men saying  
 5 you play football they view it < there's always that (.2) 'Oh right you play football, oh  
 6 right yeah, I'm sure', kind of thing you know they don't take you seriously you know  
 7 whereas being around other women, (.1) they-they-they're in the same position, they've-  
 8 they've got the same passion (.) similar experiences (.) and you can (.) you-you can be  
 9 taken a bit more seriously really, you know?

At the start Belinda says “*I suppose*” (line 2) which distances her from having established ideas about the topic, but an immediate reparation (e.g. self-correction) from “*they can*” to “*you can*” changes the footing (Goffman, 1979) to an inclusive position as a member of this “*minority*.”

The claim to personal experience substantiates this as factual (Potter, 1996), defending against the subsequent tricky claims and generalizations about men in football. Indeed the repetition of “*in*” prior to specifying “*minority*” followed by hesitation “*um*” (line 3) suggests hesitancy with this claim, possibly due to the political ramifications of the term minority and the risk of being positioned as feminist. The hesitations and reparations that follow this claim “*Um (.2) so: and a-also*” (line 3) indicate her effort to find a way forward through a tricky topic while maintaining her category memberships. This is supported by her strong outward breath which suggests both a difficult resolution and a concession in making the subsequent claim about men’s reactions to women football players (lines 4-6). She also strongly inoculates against these claims framing them as “*a very big generalization*” and only “*sometimes*” (line 4). This minimizes the strength of her criticism, the emphasis on “*very*” particularly functioning to dismiss the potential censure of the example and its applicability.

However this minimization is countered by Belinda’s subsequent description of men “*always*” questioning women’s football inclusion claiming “*there’s always that (.2) ‘Oh right you play football, oh right yeah, I’m sure’*” (lines 5-6). Here she uses active voicing (an emblematic quotation, Potter, 1996; Wooffitt, 1992) typical of her past experiences with men in football. Positioning it in past experiences increases the factualness of the claim (Rapley, 1997) and Belinda’s credibility as a witness (a special category for building “truthfulness”, Potter, 1996). The plural active voicing – deploying the general category of “*men*” and how “*they view it*” – also makes it easy to hear the account as “*a general experience of a range of people*” (Potter, 1996, p.161, emphasis in original). Together with “*it’s always*”, the plural active voicing frames her as having witnessed such interactions multiple times. Equally, her use of “*you*” rather than ‘me’ or ‘I’ throughout the account also frames the narrative as emblematic of all women’s



experience in football. The effect of this discursive choice is that Belinda's self-inclusion within the category of women who play football and their shared experience is promoted. Her self-positioning within this category and representativeness of is also apparent in the subsequent claims (lines 6-9) "*whereas being around other women, (.1) they-they-they're in the same position, they've-they've got the same passion (.2) similar experiences*".

The hesitations, reparations, and repositionings throughout Belinda's account indicate the "tricky work" (Sacks, 1992) of criticizing men and identifying with women. This is also apparent in the minimizations that soften Belinda's criticism "*little bit*" (line 2) and "*a bit more*" (line 9), downgrading the significance of her claims that women-only coach education courses take women 'more seriously' (line 9) and further reducing potential accusations that she is critical of men. Such minimization of women's experience appears to be in contrast to her claim that men "*always*" behave in a particular way, but such contradictions and inconsistencies are typical features of talk, especially 'tricky work'.

Overall the evidence suggests Belinda positioned herself as a member of the football category and reported the prominence of problematic gendered understandings and practices. But it is also apparent that she minimized the confrontation and potential controversy in her account. In doing so she overtly avoided threatening the dominant organization and football as male dominated, hence the risk to her identity as a footballer. This simultaneously works to lessen accountability for the organization within which she is peripherally working (the FA). Equally by positioning the issue as about men generally in football as a cultural site, rather than the organization as a powerful part of this, Belinda re/produces a framing that keeps the organization's role, hence responsibility, in the problem invisible. Nonetheless at the broader level what is evident is how this all manifests from the continuing problem of consistently

having to deal with and the peripheral positioning of women as members of the football category and the denial of women's entitlements to knowledge, passion, etc., about football that come with 'proper' membership.

In extract 2, Georgia explains her decision to participate in a women-only course. In this account the courses are positioned as responding to the wider organizational and cultural gendered formation that make institutionalized sexism normative and problematic for women's participation.

*Extract 2:*

1 G: Well I just think you'd be, you know the-the experience I've had with (.) playing  
2 football with men or (.) being involved in >football with men< is just that you get  
3 completely sidelined because they've got (.) you know they've all been doing it since  
4 they were little (.1) um and (.) don't really think that women can do it. It's a bit of a joke.  
5 And I think, you know, with the younger women (.) they've got the sk-you know they  
6 have the skills and they can go in there and show them that they can do it—

7 I: - Like the younger girls on the course?

8 G: Yeah they were really good those- some of those girls on the course were fantastic  
9 footballers. But for somebody that didn't have much knowledge of football but wants to  
10 get, wants to do the coaching it was just like (.) well I say my experience with the  
11 coaches that-the male coaches that I've seen, were just like 'well you can (.) hold the, you  
12 know, hold the erm (.1) changing kit or whatever'. You know, they don't take you  
13 seriously. They don't think you've got anything to offer.

14 I: Right. So what were your perceptions (.) what did you imagine that the women's only  
15 (.) course would be like in comparison?

16 G: Well I just thought they would be a bit more open and a bit more supportive and  
17 actually take you seriously (.) that you wha-what you wanted to do. Which was right, I  
18 mean, it was, the women on there were (.) even the ones that were really good at football  
19 (.) you were-you know, there was no trying to show you up or (.) not take you seriously  
20 or (.) it was just, you know people were kind of celebrating how good they were but not  
21 in a way that (.) was putting other people down.

As in extract 1, tricky work and softening to minimize the impact of contentious claims are evident in the talk about men's treatment of women in football. Georgia emphasizes this in her account (line 1: *"I just think you'd be, you know the-the experience I've had"*), even switching footing from a general experience *"you'd be"* to the *"I've had"* to avoid over-generalizations. But this also builds the facticity of her account as real life experiences and her reliability as a witness, build up the truthfulness of her emphatic account of getting *"completely sidelined"* (line 3) and claim that men *"don't really think that women can do it. It's a bit of a joke."* (line 4). To support this claim she deploys consensus and corroboration (*"you know"*) as she invokes the culturally familiar category entitlement of football as male (line 3: *"you know, they've [men] been doing it since they were little"*) which strategically positions men as central members of the category and their footballing authority as a fact. Making claims about the everyday culture of an organization, as Georgia's account does, often requires the use of 'externalizing devices', such as corroboration and consensus, to draw attention away from the speaker and seek to establish the independent nature of reality (Potter, 1996, p.159). In this account, and to a lesser extent in Belinda's above, there are several occurrences of the utterance *"you know"*. On repeated listening to the audio recordings of the interview, we propose that the tone suggests Georgia is not asking a question but is seeking corroboration and consensus from the female interviewer. As a female with peripheral involvement in football culture, and as a co-participant in her coach education course, Georgia can easily assume some shared experience, category membership and, hence, entitlements that suggest the female interviewer would understand and support her claims. However, politeness means that consensus and corroboration also discursively function to position the listener as having to accept the speaker's position, as if in agreement, even if they disagree as questioning routine discursive features like *"you know"* is

often impolite, aggressive, and argumentative (Heritage, 1984). As such, the casual deployment of “*you know*” can be a strategically powerful tool for managing tricky conversational work and constructing shared category membership, which is highly relevant to the management of controversial gendered issues.

Indeed the issue of gendered identity categories and the tricky elements of this is evident in the implications of Georgia's reference (lines 5-6) to the “*younger women*” who have the skills and can “*show them [men] that they can do it*”. This contrast between some of the younger women who were “*fantastic footballers*” and other women is further used to account for male coaches' dismissive treatment of women wanting to coach (lines 9-13). While this is positioned as about men and implicitly acknowledges women's previous exclusion, to the wrong listener this could actually function to frame most women as not deserving inclusion due to poor skills, especially as this is equated to having limited knowledge (line 9). Consequently Georgia has to defend her account from accusations of overstated generalizations and her experience as not directly about her but witnessed (lines 10-11: “*well I say my experience with the coaches that the male coaches that I've seen*”). This is achieved in the switch from claiming this experience as direct (her experience with coaches) to more indirect (“*I've seen*”) which substantiates her claim and defends against accusations that this might be about her football skills, rather than women's experiences generally. The facticity of her claims is enhanced by her active voicing (lines 11-12) “*well you can (.) hold the, you know, hold the ern (.1) changing kit or whatever*” as emblematic of male football coaches in Georgia's experience. This culminates in the strong general claim that male coaches “*don't take you seriously. They don't think you've got anything to offer*” (lines 12-13). The reparation from coaches to the emphasized “*male coaches*” (line 11)

clearly positions this as about gender, an idea substantiated in her subsequent description of women as supportive regardless of their skills.

The central issue of men's disparaging of women's football is emphasized by the subsequent contrasting of women's supportiveness and the benefits of participating in women-only coach education. Men's resistance to women's presence is implicit in her observation that "*there was no trying to show you up (.) or not take you seriously*" (line 19). Indeed she re/produces traditional gender differences in men's competitiveness and women's supportiveness that she "*thought*" would be the case (line 16) and that "*it was just, you know people were kind of celebrating how good they were but not in a way that (.) was putting other people down.*" (lines 20-21). In this utterance "*just*" minimizes the claim, making it ordinary and less controversial. However since the standards of women-only courses are often questioned in football this minimization also serves to reduce the difference between women-only and open-entry courses to *only* one of mutual support. This defends against familiar claims of poorer standards to manage the lesser footballing skills of women. This management of female footballing discourses is an important task for women in football coach education as whilst some have critiqued separatist provision as potentially being perceived as sub-standard (Cohn, 2002; Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2008), others have emphasized the mutual support that it can provide (McDermott, 2004). Georgia counters the first position and supports the latter perspective, challenging the male orthodoxies of football while also re/producing traditional gendered norms that construct women as intrinsically supportive, and less competitive. However this framing may also reflect that the women-only course provides, or is perceived to, a place where the women do not have to constantly strive for inclusion within the football category – where this membership is assumed and 'given' rather than questioned based solely upon the saliency of

gender categorization (e.g Cameron, 1997; Meân, 2001). Indeed, as noted above, *all* the participants expressed they were glad to be on the women-only course, even if they hadn't actively chosen it. Anne noted less performance pressure on the women-only course: "*it wasn't as much pressure*" continuing that "*there would have been more pressure ability wise.....I would've felt some pressure (.5) I would've still done it, but I probably would've felt oh I can't really do this.*" This is significant given that women typically have to work hard to perform and "achieve" their membership of the football category, while in contrast for men this is "given" by their gender and further enacted by their mere presence in a football context. This experience is supported by Iris's claim that she has had to show parents "*that I know what I'm talking about, I know what I'm doing*" and there were "*kids [boys] saying oh my Dad didn't think I should be coached by a girl.*"

#### Minimizing Gender and Collaborating with Masculinist Norms

The complexity of negotiating gender alongside the cultural significance of men's centrality to the football category and their entitlement to football knowledge is also evident in extract 3. In contrast to Georgia's claims above, Carly frames gender as generally unimportant while simultaneously positioning women as needing the confidence of a women-only course to manage this. In this account, the different types of courses are positioned as equivalent and their provision as about women's confidence rather than any organizational or institutionalized formations.

#### *Extract 3:*

1 C: you see the pe-the people that will take part in these [women-only] courses, I don't  
 2 think they're actually that fussed about (.1) men or women (.) whether they're working  
 3 with men-cause it's a course that they wanna do. It's just (.) it just gives you a bit more  
 4 confidence to walk into an all female (.1) course, because you think 'ah: it's men they  
 5 know loads about football, I know nothing'.

When asked if the FA should continue to provide women-only coach education courses, Carly avoids the conundrum of gender – hence implications of the FA training as gendered – by removing gender from her response. Thus she ignores the women-only aspect, using the term “*people*” instead – albeit hesitantly (line 1) and claims that people aren’t “*fussed*” (line 2). This frames the FA and its training as egalitarian and the equivalence of the separatist sport provision. Minimization strategies are evident in Carly’s account in the ways that she works to reduce the significance of differences between men and women in football coach education and the motivations of women who participate in separatist provision. Her emphasized use of the colloquial “*fussed*” downgrades the perceived anxiety and lack of confidence that could be attributed to female coaches participating in courses away from men (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2011). This serves to render gender invisible as an issue, as is typical of accounts that embrace and reproduce the existing masculinist discourses that become powerful within male-dominated institutions (Walsh, 2001).

In the FA, such discourses naturalize the gendered category entitlements of men possessing football knowledge, positioning women as less confident in contrast (lines 3-5) and invoking the discourses that blame women for their own lack of confidence (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2011). Initially Carly deploys minimization (line 3-4) to explain that women-only courses “*just*” provide that “*bit more confidence*” for participants to downgrade the significance of the difference between courses (Weltman, 2003). Women’s motivations to participate in separatist provision that has been explained as lacking confidence to be around men and their category centrality is evidenced in the self-inclusive active voicing (line 4-5) “*because you think ‘ah: it’s men they know loads about football, I know nothing’*”. The active voicing is understood as

emblematic given that she was talking about women generally (line 3: “*they’re*”) and reflects her attempt to voice the experience of a range of women. But her switch in footing to “*you*” (lines 3 & 4) suggests this might also be self-inclusive and based upon experience. Overall, Carly re/produces discourses that position women-only courses as predominantly about managing women’s lack of confidence, minimizing other gendered elements. This not only fails to challenge the traditional male order in football culture but also renders gender as an individualized female issue rather than an organizational phenomenon (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2008).

Extract 4 is part of a discussion of potential disadvantages of women-only courses with Suzanne, who grapples with the tricky work of managing the potential disadvantages of participating in a women-only course in what she is trying to re/produce as a gender integrated organization. Thus in trying to establish a disadvantage, Suzanne attempts to minimize gender as a significant organizational issue while effectively re/producing the centrality of men and their entitlements in football.

*Extract 4:*

- 1 S: I suppose (.) it’d be quite good to have guys (1) who (.) >you need to get their  
 2 confidence and authority and you need to be able to control it<. Be-because I suppose  
 3 what this course is doing is teaching you how to run a group of people and if those  
 4 group of people are going to be men (1) then I suppose it might be quite a good idea  
 5 to-to-to be training and doing that with them.
- 6 I: Right ok. Well so you-you’re kind of isolated from that experience?
- 7 S: I think so, yeah, but-but it seemed to me a lot of the focus was on younger (2) age  
 8 groups anyway (.) so (3) I’m not sure whether that’s a (.) valid disadvantage.  
 9 I’m-I-I’m presuming that if you were a female coaching men, you probably have  
 9 got to that stage for a reason. And I don’t think you’d be doing that like I am, totally (1)  
 10 totally sort of (.) a-as a novice. I don’t think you’d go straight to coaching men.



Suzanne's account appears equivocal about the positives and negatives of separatist coach education, which might be about searching for disadvantages and the difficulty of negotiating this terrain. The initial deployment of an uncertain and speculative "*I suppose*" suggests she is not sure about the disadvantage and is perhaps searching to find one. The quickened pace and emphases in the phrase ">you *need* to get their confidence and authority and you *need* to be able to control it<" (lines 1 and 2) might suggest Suzanne's increasing certainty about her point, but the quickened pace could also indicate embarrassment and a rush to finish this tricky work. Indeed throughout the account she is working through a number of issues and contradictions raised by her example. Her uncertainty is echoed in a general lack of substantive support.

Revisiting the idea that women participating alongside men is advantageous (lines 4-5) Suzanne again claims that it "*might be quite a good idea*" (emphasis added) effectively downplaying the significance of the claim and not providing strong support. Furthermore, the vagueness and uncertainty of the terms "*I suppose*" (chosen three times), "*I'm not sure*", "*I don't think*" and "*I'm-I'm presuming*" serve contradictory functions. Firstly, they minimize and make uncertain the potentially controversial claim that women need to participate alongside men in order to learn football culture; controversial for both the FA as the availability of separatist coach education is their stated policy but potentially also to the female interviewer who was known to the participants as someone who was invested in the inclusion and progression of women within football. Secondly, they position Suzanne as uncertain of her account and as unauthoritative, particularly since the use of "*I*" without additional evidence to support her sources aligns the account very closely to herself. This is relevant given her lack of status as an

authority means she needs greater distance between herself and her claim to position her account as objective and truthful (Potter, 1996). However, Suzanne's word choices make it explicit that these are her own subjective and tentative interpretations, opening them to attacks from multiple perspectives. In fact she counters them herself and in doing so re/produces the traditional gender order of football.

Despite the tentativeness of the framing, the observation that women "*need*" to be able to run a group with men in it (lines 3-5) suggests Suzanne is broadly supportive of measures to promote women's progression within football's hierarchical structure and would challenge its masculinist norms (Walsh, 1997). In lines 7-8, she notes the training is focused on "*younger (2) age groups*", the lengthy pause suggesting she is searching for the right word which we can speculate may have been about managing who the course is training the women to coach across the child/adult and gender categories. In light of this she revises her example of a disadvantage of not working with men noting "*I'm not sure whether that's a (.) valid disadvantage*" (line 8); the slight pause before using "*valid*" suggests that she was finding a way to indicate that she cannot totally disclaim this as a disadvantage but question its legitimacy. She then enacts the traditional gendered order of football (lines 9-10) as she makes a statement about women coaching men and men's football knowledge, but it is clear that this is tricky gender work given her hesitations and careful emphases. The initial hesitancy of "*I'm-I-I'm presuming*" suggests uncertainty and a searching for the *right* words, making her language choice of "*presuming*" firmly position this as beyond her experience and knowledge given that "*if*" you were a "*female coaching men*" (emphasized) you would be at "*that stage for a reason*". This not only frames the "*female coaching men*" scenario as not simply beyond her experience but as unlikely and, therefore, warranting "*a reason*" rather than just a normative occurrence. The emphasis on

females coaching men indicates that gender is the significant issue here and its implications implicitly understood, which effectively reproduces the naturalized differences between women and men in sport (Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2005). This positions men in football generally as a higher stage and level at which women do not normally work as coaches, re/producing the dominant discourse of adult men as the highest standard in football. Overall, the hesitations and content of this account suggests the managing of gender alongside the reproduction of the dominant gendered discourses and related understandings. But this is not unusual since Walsh (2001) proposes that embracing existing masculinist discursive practices is an effective tool for women to manage their inclusion and progression in male dominated institutions. Indeed, discursive effort to achieve membership of the football category has been observed to be more prominent in peripheral members (Meân, 2003), such as the participants of entry-level coach education, making them more likely to re/produce gendered understandings. But this peripherality also intersects with gender given resistance to women's central membership regardless of their actual status, skills, and knowledge in highly masculinized industries and organizations like sport. This is exemplified in Suzanne's observation that "*...people want to watch men more than they want to watch women. So, I mean, just the way the world is.*" This is a claim that dismisses other accounts and naturalizes this position. It is also evident in Hailey's statement regarding opportunities for women in coaching "*If it comes to football, I think they'd pick the man rather than the woman. That's just the way I see it*" as she continues to connect this to a general lack of presence and money in women's football but concludes "*I don't know what the FA could do.*" This echoes a general tendency not to view the FA or other institutions as culpable and influential in constructing, and hence changing, the status quo.

### Conclusion

The data and analysis reported here indicate that for the women in this study, their work and training in English football continues to be constrained by prevailing gendered discourses – ones that are effectively masculinist in their continued privileging and naturalizing of men's centrality in football. The women in this study have to negotiate the management of their gender and gendered understandings while also using these to account for their own and other women's wider experiences in football. The complexity of managing established discourses and orthodoxies evidenced in similar contexts (Meân & Kassing, 2008; Walsh, 2001) were again apparent in the rhetorical and discursive strategies deployed by the women participants in this study as they both re/produced and resisted the normative gendered masculinist definitions and entitlements.

In spite of the inherent risks of the sub-standard positioning of women-only courses generally (Walsh, 2001) and football specifically (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2008), women-only coach education was recognised as a potential site for embracing female category entitlement and as a counter-strategy to peripheral positioning by men. But as part of the management of this risk, the significance of gender within the organisation and the occupation was minimised. Nonetheless, the women not only reported their experiences of being subject to prominent masculinist norms but also evidenced their own self-subjection to these marginalizing discourses. This is not surprising given the social and historical prominence of these gendered positionings and the relative recent resurgence of women's inclusion in English football, hence the contradictory and fragmentary performance of identities (Edley & Wetherell, 1996).

Overall, it was striking that there was frequent use of minimization strategies in the women's accounts which downplayed the significance of potentially controversial claims regarding both football culture and women's progression within the organisation. Similarly while

deploying normative masculinist practices has the potential to promote inclusion of the individual, the participants risk reinforcing hegemonic order (Welford, 2011). This highlights the multiple risks that these women managed within their accounts, as evidenced elsewhere (Meân & Kassing, 2008; Walsh 2001). As participants on an entry-level coach education course, the women are peripheral members of the football category in two intersecting ways, as women and entry-level. As such there is a likely to be a limit to the ways and extent to which they can challenge the dominant organisational discourses given the risk to identities and of exclusion. But this risk is potentially further heightened by their participation on a women-only course which cannot readily support their category entitlement in the wider footballing contexts, because of its marked difference and lower status organisational framing within the FA (e.g. Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2008).

Nonetheless, what speaks out loud and clear over and above the detail of the discursive action and rhetorical framing reported here is these women's preference to participate in a women-only course and accounts of being consistently explicitly subject to men's re/production of masculinist discourses and undermining definitions. It is these 'stories' that often resonate across women's experiences in football and sport generally, and it speaks to the issue of the substance of change and the impact of policies developed for managing equity and diversity in sport and related organizations. Of course, since these discourses are so deeply embedded and connected to identities, the women also subject themselves to these discourses as well as resist them. But, as peripheral members, women are also less likely to be able to effect organizational change and are most vulnerable to the inherent risks of trying to effect change given one's own peripheral identities (Cameron, 1997; Meân, 2003). For organizations a key issue then remains as to who, as well as how, policies and practices are enacted. The management of 'otherness' and

differences, like gender, needs to become a consistently central and routine organizational concern for *all* members at *all* levels - rather than addressed in and through written policies put into action in specific contexts (for example, separate training courses), individualized cases, or by those detrimentally impacted. Prominent and problematic discourses re/produced and naturalized through the everyday inter/actions of the organisational members (central and peripheral) require continued effort and attention to shift definitions and effect deep systemic change.

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Table 1: Transcription key.

(1)	Measured pause of one second or greater
(.)	audible pause of less than one second
<u>Talk</u>	emphasized talk
talk-talk	Self – interruption (e.g. hesitation, reparation, correction)
'talk'	intonation of quotation
[talk]	Clarifying or supplementary information
< talk >	slower rate of speech
> talk <	faster rate of speech