'Why am I putting myself through this?' Women football coaches' experiences of the Football Association's coach education process

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In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the provision of formal coach education. However, research has repeatedly demonstrated how coach education has had a limited impact on the learning and development of coach practitioners. To date however, these investigations have avoided female coach populations. Ten women football coaches who had recently completed various association football coach education courses participated in this study. Following the interpretive analysis of 10 semi-structured interviews the findings revealed high levels of gender discrimination and inappropriate cultural practice. The women’s experiences are discussed in line with the Bourdieuian notions of social acceptance, symbolic language and power. The women coaches provided a number of recommendations for future coach education provision, which in turn, may help to improve the experiences for those women who participate in the coach education process.

KEY WORDS: Sports Coaching; Formal Learning; Gender Inequality; Soccer; CPD

Introduction

The latest active sport participation data for women in the UK reveals that association football (from now on referred to as football) is currently one of the most popular participation sports. At the time of writing football is the second most popular sport for women, currently 0.17% behind netball (Sport England, 2015). The creation of the Women's Football Association in 1993 and the development of the Female Football Development Programme are considered to be *inter alia* major contributors behind the recent explosion in women's participation in football. However, despite the reported increases in participation levels, the number of qualified women Football Association (FA) coaches in the UK remains modest at best (Norman, 2012).

This state of affairs is, to some extent, broadly reflective of the sport coaching profession in general. For instance, there is compelling evidence that only a small minority of women (when compared to males) enrol on formal coach education courses, and actively pursue a career in sport coaching (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2011). Women's engagement (or not) in *bona fida* sport coaching is currently a vastly under researched area (Norman, 2012). Thus, following the guidance offered in previous studies (i.e. Mercier, 2001; Norman, 2008) we agree that researchers should begin to expand their coaching investigations beyond that of 'typical' male populations.

Previous research has illustrated how coach education provision tends to be dominated by males, with course educators often demonstrating a predisposition towards associated male attributes, orientations and characteristics (Fasting & Pfister, 2000). Likewise, there is evidence to suggest that formal coach education courses typically reflect associated male behaviours such as aggression and toughness (Schlesinger & Weigelt-Schlesinger, 2012). Fielding-Lloyd and Meân (2011) have argued how a woman's unequal coaching status is often attributed to perceived gender differences, and for them is 'an example of liberal individualism which assumes equal access to opportunity' (p.360). This notion is supported by Norman (2012), who has criticised the current lack of support and coaching opportunities for women, arguing that in order to develop and increase confidence, knowledge and ability, women coaches need to be provided with more coaching and leadership opportunities. For instance, at the time of writing, only two women occupy managerial and leadership roles for the 18 Women's Super League (WSL) football teams.

As the national governing body (NGB) for English football, the FA's coach education provision 'cannot be overestimated' as the driving force for enhancing coaching standards (Lyle 2002, p.275). The FA's own code of conduct for coaches highlights that coaches should 'respect others involved in the game', 'promote fair play and high standards of behaviour' and to 'never engage in, or tolerate, offensive, insulting or abusive language or behaviour' (The FA, 2014, p.4). However, in contrast to these aspirations, a number of individuals employed within the FA, and the wider international football community, have provided incongruous examples, and disparaging attitudes towards women. This includes the investigation of the current English Premier League chief Richard Scudamore who recently, was forced to apologise for exchanging inappropriate emails with colleagues. The terminology and language used in this context included; referring to women, as 'gash' and how he 'had a girlfriend once called a double decker…happy for you to play upstairs, but her dad got angry if you went below' (Drake, 2014). Perhaps more worryingly, Sepp Blatter, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) President was quoted in 2004 as saying 'Let the women play in more feminine clothes like they do in volleyball. They could, for example, have tighter shorts' (BBC, 2004). Additionally, Mike Newell (then manager of Luton Town FC 2003-2007) was publically criticised for questioning Amy Rayner's (assistant referee) presence, position and power in 2006 because of her gender. Newell was reported to ask the question 'what are women doing here?' Before concluding how he felt 'she shouldn't be here' (Caudwell, 2011). It has therefore been argued, that the challenge for women coaches is not only to survive within this challenging and often discriminatory culture, but also to understand, and ultimately challenge, these pre-determined and often socialised views (Norman, 2012).

Unfortunately, little empirical research currently exists, which examines women's experiences of coach education particularly within football. As Schlesinger and Weigelt-Schlesinger (2012) remind us 'we do not know exactly why women keep away from the associations' coach education programmes or do not take on coaching positions' (p.58). Accordingly, for change to occur, the issues concerning the existing cultures and recruitment policies, at the heart of the underrepresentation of women, need to be accurately identified and understood (Mercier, 2001).

Formal coach learning

Sport coaching and more specifically learning how to coach, has previously been labelled as a socialisation process, similar to that of an 'apprenticeship' (Cushion, Armour & Jones, 2003). Somewhat critically, Nelson, Cushion and Potrac (2006) referred to formal coach

education provision, as a process more aligned to 'indoctrination' (p.251). Similarly, Rogers (2002) suggested that coach educators engage in 'activities that set out to convince us (i.e. coaches) that there is a right way of thinking, feeling and behaving' (p.53). In this respect it is argued that 'indoctrination' denies the learner the opportunity to question or examine the content they have learned, and so are more likely to abide by the prescribed cultural values, attitudes and practices presented to them (Nelson *et al.*, 2006).

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the provision of formal coach education and the associated importance attached to them (Gilbert & Trudel, 1999). It is widely acknowledged that NGBs adopt a range of learning opportunities for accrediting coaches to enhance their knowledge and underpinning theory. However, as Chesterfield, Potrac and Jones (2010) stated, 'while this body of literature has provided scholars and practitioners with valuable knowledge about the role, nature and impact of coach education programmes, very little is known about how coaches experience such programmes' (p.300). Consequently, Denison (2007) and Denison and Avner (2011) have suggested that scant attention has been paid to exploring coach education effectiveness, in particular, amongst women coaches.

In order to examine the notion of woman's inequality within coaching, the focal point of the research inquiry must be gender (Norman, 2008). As Norman (2008) has argued previously, gender is 'conceptualised as the organising principle that influences and moulds individuals' lives and consciousness, as well as shaping institutions and determining how social power and privilege is distributed' (p.449). The central concern for inspecting potential gender inequality is therefore considered to be the suspected disregard for the enforcement of equal opportunities. As Hargreaves (1993) reminds us, 'attempts to remove or compensate for the ascriptive and social impediments that prevent women from competing on equal terms with men, without otherwise challenging the hierarchical structures within which both sexes operate' (p.168).

English football has recently been described as a deeply masculinised institution (Norman, 2012). Previous research has attempted to understand and explore the existing barriers associated with recruitment strategies, underrepresentation and negative influences women have faced (Norman, 2008). In coach education terms, it has been argued that gender-stereotypical beliefs, and expectations of the male coach educators, and male candidates leads to the natural exclusion of women during their formal learning (Hartmann-Tews, 2006). Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that many women choose not to continue or indeed engage in the formal coach education process (Schlesinger & Weigelt-Schlesinger, 2012).

Similar to Norman (2008) then, it is argued, that what is missing from previous coach education inquiries is an examination of current coach education provision, through the voice of the woman. Given the previously reported gender inequalities inherent within football coaching (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2011; Norman, 2008), formal coach education courses may be considered an appropriate starting point for exploring, and understanding these issues in more depth.

In this regard, the work of Pierre Bourdieu is worth considering as Bourdieu's work constitutes a powerful attempt to comprehend the social structuring of human relationships (Cushion, 2011). Furthermore, Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital and habitus have recently been adopted as a conceptual framework with which to examine coach learning (i.e. Townsend & Cushion, 2015). As Townsend and Cushion (2015) emphasised, incorporating a Bourdieuian lens is appealing, as it offers numerous 'possibilities for grasping the complexity of coach education and presenting it as a construct embodied within social practice' (Townsend & Cushion, 2015, p.2).

Therefore, the aim of this study was to examine the experiences of a number of women football coaches following the completion of the FA's coach education process. By following an interpretative phenomenological framework, this study will offer a unique theoretical and sociological insight into the cultural practices of male coach educators, and coaches as experienced by woman coaches. Furthermore, the work of Bourdieu and in particular notions of field, capital and habitus are adopted to build on earlier work, to better understanding formal coach education as a complex social encounter. In this respect, it is anticipated that following this framework can contribute to our understanding and provide a more detailed insight into the 'unknown world' of women football coaches' experiences of formal coach education.

Methodology

Participants

Prior to the data collection process, a local university ethics committee provided ethical approval, and the research protocol was conducted in accordance with institutional guidelines and procedures. In an attempt to adhere to similar research methodologies (i.e. Norman, 2012) purposeful sampling procedures were employed. Specifically, contracted women football coaches currently working in a County FA (CFA), the WSL or the Women's Premier League

(WPL) were contacted regarding their possible involvement in the study. The participant's elite athletic achievement in football varied. At the time of data collection, one was still actively playing in the WSL; five were playing in the WPL and one in a CFA league. Additionally, three had recently retired. Following an initial verbal acceptance, the participants were informed about the nature of the study by the first author, who at the time was working as a coach at a professional league club in the third tier of English football. Following formal written consent and assent, 10 participants finally agreed to take part in the study. Each participant has been given a pseudonym.

At the time of the data collection process all of the participants were actively coaching women's football in a variety of different environments, which included: local amateur football clubs, semi-professional football clubs and professional football clubs. The participant's ages ranged from a low of 17 years to a high of 26 years and collectively they had a combined total of 48 years football coaching experience. More importantly, all of the participants had at some stage in their coaching career attended a formal coach education course, as stipulated by their NGB. In total, 60% of the participants had completed their coach education course in the north west of England. The level of the attained qualifications ranged from the 1st4Sport Level 1 Certificate in Coaching Football to the Union of European Football Association (UEFA) Standards 'A' Certificate. The only pre-requisite for admission onto the coach education course was the successful completion of the preceding level of qualification. So for entry onto a level two qualification for example, the coach must already hold a level one qualification. For a more detailed breakdown of the participant profile please refer to Table 1.

Table 1. Participants Characteristics

Participant	Age	Qualification	Location of coach education course	Coaching experience (years)	Current coaching role
Amy	17	Level 2	North West	3	WPL
Beth	26	UEFA A	South East	8	WSL
Charlotte	18	Level 1	North West	2	CFA
Danielle	22	Level 1	North West	2	CFA
Eve	24	UEFA B	North East	7	WSL
Faye	21	Level 2	North West	4	WPL
Georgia	23	Level 2	North West	6	WPL
Helen	25	UEFA B	East Midlands	5	WPL
Ivy	19	Level 2	North West	2	CFA
Jennifer	26	UEFA B	East Midlands	9	WPL

Data Collection Process and Interview Procedure

The current study adopted an interpretive line of enquiry. In order to capture the women's experiences and perceptions of the coach education process, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interview process was relaxed and informal in nature, and conducted at locations previously decided by the participants. The questioning protocol was informed by the current gaps in the coach education literature, and was structured around five central sections. The opening section focused on the participants coaching background and qualifications, in order to create a sense of their current coaching status, and previous coaching roles. The second section focused on the participants' overall satisfaction and experiences of the coach education process. The third and fourth sections were designed to elicit detailed information surrounding the cultural practices of their coach education course educators, and

male peers. In particular, the coaches were prompted to outline and expand on any difficulties or challenges they encountered. This included the recording of specific language, and associated practices adopted by the male coach educators and fellow male coaches. The fifth and final section was reflective in nature, and required the coaches to consider recommendations and possible suggestions, which in turn, may have improved their recent coach education experiences.

The 10 in-depth interviews were audiotaped using a CL-R10 digital voice recorder and transcribed verbatim by the first author. The duration of each of the 10 interviews was approximately 90 minutes. The interview process mirrored the interpretative framework advocated by Reinharz (1983) as the criterion presented included 'completeness, plausibility and understanding and responsiveness to…subjects' experiences' (p.171). As a result, the data collection process from a participant's point of view was regarded as morally significant and honourable.

Data analysis

In order to critically analyse the data, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) procedures were employed. According to Sparkes and Smith (2013), IPA has 'two complementary commitments: the phenomenological requirements to understand and 'give voice' to the concerns of participants; and the interpretative requirement to contextualise and 'make sense' of these claims and concerns' (p.126). The importance of using this data analysis approach is that the rich perceptions of the interviewees, which are 'regarded as the primary source of knowledge' (Moustakas, 1994, p.52), can be interpreted and analysed so that the participants insights can be easily identified and discussed. The work of Pierre Bourdieu and in particular the notion of field, capital and habitus were also weaved into the analysis. It was considered the use of Bourdieuian concepts would provide a more detailed insight into the 'unknown world' of women football coaches' experiences of participating in formal coach education.

According to Sparkes and Smith (2013), when performing IPA there are a number of key procedures to follow. Firstly, the process of reading and re-reading of the participant's transcripts was performed in an attempt to fully understand the dialogue. During this stage descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments were recorded and highlighted for further detailed examination. Secondly, data from the interview transcripts, observational notes and

memos were examined to ensure the captured data provided a clear representation of the participant's views. Thirdly, themes were identified and connected with other participants views. Here clusters of concepts with shared meanings or references, or dissimilarities were generated. The final stage involved a complex process of searching for patterns across data and within the transcripts to identify repeated patterns or new emerging themes. Trustworthiness of the data and subsequent data analysis was applied through member checking. This process was performed in conjunction with the second and third authors, who both have previous experiences of conducting and analysing in-depth interviews (Andrews, 2010; Roberts, 2011). The coded interview transcripts were forwarded to each participant to guarantee complete accuracy of coding, and allow the participants the opportunity to make any corrections deemed necessary. Despite some minor grammatical errors, the data transcripts, codes and final themes were all considered to be an accurate reflection of the interviews and data analysis procedures.

Theoretical Framework

The work of Bourdieu (1977) offers a useful lens in order to 'capture the reality of different groups' unequal interactions, and situations' (Cushion & Jones, 2006, p.145), and thus provide a more critical understanding of the nuances of coach education. Bourdieu (2000) argued that in order to 'encounter' rather than reassemble the social world, we should move closer to the site of practice and production so that we may complete 'the sociological picture' (p.50). According to Bourdieu (2004) the social world can be viewed as a multi-dimensional space created on unequal foundations of power between social agents. In the context of coach education, or more specifically, in the context of formal coach learning (i.e. through the participation on a coach education course), it can be perceived as 'a field of struggles' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.101).

Bourdieu's conceptualisation of field according to Smith (2012, p.254) is a 'powerful heuristic' for understanding the social practices and relational struggles in institutional arenas. Crucially, it allows social agents, to pursue, protect and enhance their social position and 'to impose the principle of hierarchisation most favourable to their own products' (Bourdieu, 1989, p.40). Moreover, Hunter (2004) illustrated that focal to the functioning of any social space (e.g. a coach education course) is the concept of capital. Capital, is essentially a form of power, which ensures individuals endlessly do their utmost to maximise their capital, due to social positions being allocated by the volume of capital attributed to them (Ritzer, 1996). As Denison, Mills and Jones (2013) remind us, power essentially dictates who speaks, where,

when and with what authority. Therefore, individuals continuously pursue strategies to enhance and transmit their 'power' to gain hierarchal positioning (Cushion & Jones, 2006).

Furthermore, it is important to note that Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence also demonstrates how inappropriate language and actions are transferred to indirectly establish social positioning. Symbolic violence refers to the imposition of systems of symbolism and meanings upon groups "in such a way that they are experienced as legitimate" (Jenkins, 2002, p. 104). As Kim (2004) reminds us, it is this legitimacy that disguises the existing power relations, thus making them distorted and hidden. In essence, the concept of symbolic violence will lend itself to exploring the ways in which coach educators and fellow candidates interact and communicate with female candidates on association football coach education courses.

Results and Discussion

In total, five thematic categories emerged following the data analysis. In this section, the over-arching themes are presented, along with extracts from the interviews. It further, discusses the contextual nuances of women football coaches, following the completion of a formal FA coach education course.

'Why am I putting myself through this?' Notions of field, habitus and capital

Bourdieu (1986) highlighted how the concept of field can be the site of struggle, for access, for acknowledgment and of acceptance. Agents (i.e. coaches) that engage within the field take up a position that is relative to their individual quantity of capital that they possess. For instance, Cushion and Jones (2006) remind us how capital can occur in a number of forms: economic, cultural, social, symbolic and physical, of which one's social position is defined in relation to one's access to the relevant form of capital. Furthermore, habitus is referred to as 'a system of acquired dispositions or categories of perception and assessment held by the coach at the level of practice' (Taylor & Garratt, 2014, p.126).

Within the present study, numerous dispositions of capital, which devalued the women's social stature, were reported. For example, the majority of the women (9 out of 10) mentioned how they felt unappreciated and to prove themselves. The following three participant's points below illustrate this point.

"I just felt like I had to prove myself all the time. I just used to look at them and think who are you to put me down? It was hard to accept. Part of me understands it, when it's

the other coaches, but to feel like I did, just for the tutor's benefit just took the piss" [Charlotte]

"Because I was like a female he made me feel a bit silly and useless. I was made to make a show of myself most of the time which just killed my confidence. I was starting to ask myself why am I putting myself through this?" [Beth]

"It was hard because in that environment you felt like you had to earn your place, just because you're a female football coach" [Jennifer]

It becomes apparent how the majority of the women football coaches interviewed struggled to adapt to the coach education environment, and reported feelings of 'not being welcomed' and a perception of a 'lack of self-worth'. These concerns were initially generated by the language, behaviour and cultural practices adopted by the male coach education team. Bourdieu (1986) discussed how power determines the position and construction of the social agents in the social field, particularly based on the differentiation of power between the social agents. It is apparent that the language, behaviour and cultural practices employed reflect the interests of the dominant group to ensure they acclaim their 'rightful' honour and prestige (Bourdieu, 1986). Therefore, it could be argued that the reproduction of social inequalities within the field provided a 'sense of the position one occupies in the social space' (Bourdieu, 1990, p.235). Consequently, it appears that the women were far from members of the traditional 'boys club' – a hypothetical club which the male coaches were typically granted access. In contrast, the women were met with hostility and became increasingly 'angered and frustrated' by being treated like 'an outsider'. For instance, when asked to comment specifically on this topic, the women mentioned how they needed to 'prove themselves', and 'earn the right to be present on a formal coach education course'. Due to the limited number of women on the courses (when compared to men) it could be argued, that as a consequence of their gender, the quantity of cultural and social capital that they possessed was, in essence lowered (Bourdieu, 1989).

'I'd love to give her one'. Socialisation and symbolic language and violence

The socialisation process appeared to maintain a particular social order throughout the participant's experiences, and the production and exercise of power was illustrated in the form of symbolic language and violence (Jenks, 1993). Symbolic language and violence is often associated with the notion of misrecognition, and involves a series of actions or words that eventually affect performance and commitment (Bourdieu, 1977). When prompted to comment on their experiences of abusive, derogatory or sexist language nearly all of the women (9 out of 10) provided numerous examples to support this particular point. These included derogatory actions by both fellow male coaches and members of various coach education teams. The following extracts cited during the interviews help to support this view:

> "You kind of felt a little bit patronised, so you know, you got the feeling that he would kind of think, oh, so you can kick a ball. It just makes you question whether you can be bothered anymore" [Danielle]

> "You did really well, considering you're a female…that's all he kept saying." [Faye]

> "The course tutor kept forgetting my name *on purpose* (emphasis intended) and then he just kept calling me that girl which I was really quite annoyed at. It was humiliating. I got to the point when I just blurted out…Why not just ask me my name? I was very annoyed by that" [Charlotte]

> "I overheard one of the lads say *I'd love to give her one*, and then he made a humping action with one hand on the back of his neck and the other on his hips…I also heard one comment about my bum at some point as well. But it's strange; there is a nothing you can do. You are made to feel as though you just have to accept it" [Eve]

Symbolic violence involves engagement of reproducing the interests of the dominant group (Bourdieu, 1977). In this case, the women coaches experienced what Bourdieu termed as misrecognition: 'the process whereby power relations are perceived not for what they objectively are, but in the form that renders them legitimate in the eyes of the beholder' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p.xiii). Symbolic violence reinforces the position of those in power; whilst also disguising the actions and language that they are indeed employing (Cushion & Jones, 2014). Bourdieu (1989) also argued that in 'advanced' societies, domination in its principal mode is actually more symbolic than actual. However, whilst this could be argued in

this instance, the often abusive, derogative and sexist language evidently affected the women and consequently made them feel 'annoyed' and question whether they 'could be bothered anymore?'

Cushion and Jones (2014) summarised in their study that the coaches at Albion Football Club (pseudonym) imposed their language, meanings and system and culture onto the players through a process of symbolic violence. Indeed, so desperate were the players to earn a professional contract, it was accepted as legitimate. In the current study there were a number of similarities. For example, the women reported having to just 'accept it…as this is how it's done'. Thus indicating how they considered this behaviour to be standardised and commonplace and so, subsequently, carried an awareness and understanding of women football coaches' social position. For example:

> "Come on lads...come over boys...right fellas…does he even know that I'm a woman? I mean I am standing right there and quite clearly have a bigger chest than the rest of the other people standing there, it's quite obvious to me really" [Amy]

> "His favourite line was right chaps, which didn't exactly make me feel great when he was addressing the group" [Ivy]

During the completion of the coach education process the women had to repeatedly endure degrading comments such being called one of the 'lads' and 'fellas', and educators mocking them regarding their athletic prowess. The course educators also turned a 'blind eye' when other candidates commented on how they would like to 'give her one' and performed inappropriate sexual actions in front of the woman. More worryingly, it would appear that the behaviour of the course educators, and the language they adopted helped to reinforce a number of gender stereotypes. For instance, although the woman reminded the educator on several occasions, they continued to refer the woman as either: 'lads', 'boys' or 'fellas'. This lack of sensitivity towards their gender, and the treatment they received caused some of the women to question their commitment to coaching and their desire to continue with the coach education process. Indeed, one of the coaches did reveal how she recently had to leave a coach education course, due to the inappropriate sexual advances from a member of the coach education team, following an evening of drinking in the bar. This will be reported in more detail in a follow up paper.

'Disgusting, absolutely disgusting'. Where are the female role models?

Norman (2012) suggested that increasing the cogency of existing high-performance female football coaches as role models, may inspire other women to perceive football coaching as an achievable profession. Drawing on the data collected in this study it was evident that only one of the 10 women interviewed had ever experienced working with a female football coach educator. The ratio of the male and female coach educators that the participants had been exposed to during their coach education experiences was 46:1 in favour of the males. The women's frustration with this state of affairs was evident, and typically perceived as harmful and damaging. The following points below offered by 6 out of the 10 participants help to illustrate this point.

> "How they cannot have a female member of staff when there's females on the course is disgusting, absolutely disgusting" [Beth]

> "I think if another female can get like high up then it obviously might help us to think, you know, they can do it so it's not just a male dominated industry" [Eve]

> "It would, maybe, be good to see a female coach educator as well to balance it out so people can say yes, women can be coaches too" [Faye]

> "100% lack of female role models. Who do I have to look up to?" [Charlotte]

> "[Laughs] they didn't take me seriously. I was the only girl so I can see why I found it hard" [Amy]

> "I would have felt more comfortable and confident with a female coach educator there. It would attract more females and be a less intimidating environment" [Danielle]

Similarly, when questioned about the behaviour of their fellow male candidates that were present on the course, three of the participants illustrated how they were afforded a genuine lack of respect. For instance:

> "What really wound me up though, was that as soon as it was my turn to coach, all the men seemed to take it in turns to mess about. You know, mess things up on purpose. Make you look stupid. I don't know why the course tutors team allowed them to get away with it too be honest – but they did" [Ivy]

> "You really have to bite your tongue. When I was coaching you could see them laughing and sniggering, really taking the piss. They would openly hold conversations with each other when I was trying to explain a drill or practice. I was like, come on guys, show some respect" [Jennifer]

'Why are you isolating them?' The need for women only coach education courses

When questioned about possible strategies to help improve the current situation for women on coach education courses, one suggestion was the introduction of women only coach education courses. This recommendation was highlighted by 8 out of the 10 participants. For example:

> "Maybe doing female courses so we feel comfortable in our own environment. If female football coaches feel more comfortable then there might be more than there is now doing courses" [Eve]

> "I think female only courses would encourage more girls to do it, yes, definitely" [Danielle]

"I would prefer it if it was all women course if I am honest… I can understand why not all women carry on going higher than a level one, if they know they're going to be surrounded by men, who, in the most part are sexist pigs" [Helen]

"Why are you isolating them on different courses? Why don't you put all the women together so it's like a little bit of camaraderie?" [Beth]

"It was embarrassing. I was having to deliver to all these men and didn't have one other female there to support me or for me to even look at to make me feel, well, even just calmer than I was" [Ivy]

"Confidence is mainly the biggest barrier. I think delivery to boys the same age is difficult and if it were girls it would be different. That could put girls off" [Amy]

Norman (2012) suggested the need for the creation of supportive networks for women to develop 'in a more accommodating, encouraging environment in which they are not afraid to learn and sometimes fail, but have the opportunity to take the lead' (p.232). The majority of women interviewed expressed their positivity towards women only courses, suggesting it would be less 'embarrassing' and supplement 'a little bit of camaraderie'. Using the words of one of the coaches, 'if female football coaches feel more comfortable then there might be more than there is now doing courses', which may help to increase the number of women football coaches performing, and sharing coaching practices and experiences away from an often male-dominated environment.

'Pointless and not realistic at all…has to be a certain way otherwise you fail'. Time for change?

Previous coach education research has suggested that the content of the theoretical elements of coach education courses needs to come under much more scrutiny (Nash & Sproule, 2012). Chesterfield et al. (2010) reported how questions were raised regarding the design and delivery of formal coach education programmes and that their participants were

critical of the 'one size fits all' approach. In the present study, some women reported a number of positive aspects. For example, when questioned about the courses organisation and content, Amy and Georgia's comments included:

> "Beforehand I wasn't really sure what to expect, but I was happy with what we had learnt after I had completed the course" [Amy]

> "It was good because I didn't really know a lot of technical detail before we started so what I picked up really helped me learn more about what and how to coach" [Georgia]

Similar to Chesterfield et al. (2010) the findings suggested the women experienced some positive learning episodes during their formal coach learning. Positive comments generally included reference to the practicality and relevance to some of the coaching material. However, others made reference to its unrealistic application in the real world setting and the value and effectiveness of the awards. Coach education has previously been described as being too focused on sport-specific skills and tactics (Cassidy, Jones & Potrac, 2004). When questioned about the course applicability and its value in the real world of coaching Beth, Helen and Jennifer stated:

> "All I was thinking was when the hell would I use this? I couldn't exactly say to half the team just go and sit over there for twenty minutes whilst I coach this lot could I?" [Beth]

> "If I'm going to be honest, it's hard because the way the practical's are delivered they're very structured and focus a lot on stop stand still. When I coach back at my club, if you've got something to say you're in and out within about 20 seconds. On my course, you had to speak for about one, sometimes even two minutes, which to me is pointless and not realistic at all…has to be a certain way otherwise you fail. He said something like the FA would tell you to do it this way, but I'm telling you to do it this way" [Helen]

> "I've not used hardly any of the content since I passed, and I don't think I will to be honest. I think the FA need a re-think. I think it might be time for a change" [Jennifer]

The evidence contained within the present study suggests that the FA's coach education programme had very little, if any impact on the development and professional practice of the women coaches. One of the more qualified coaches (UEFA A' licence) stated they had 'not used it since' and another was going to find it 'hard' to incorporate because of its 'stop stand still' nature. According to Chesterfield et al. (2010) 'the best practice presented standards set by the coach educators were considered to be somewhat out of kilter with the respondent coaches' understanding of their daily realities' (p.306). In this respect, Guskey (2002) suggests that rather than conveying change in candidates by endeavouring to adjust their beliefs and values, coach educators need adapt and acknowledge how their practices can be contextually applied in 'live' coaching situations in the real world coaching setting.

The women stated how the course educators were keen on developing 'competent workers' equipped with the skills to do the 'job'. However, this seemingly came at a price. It was clear the course educators requested the candidates to abide and emulate their own values and ideologies. Subsequently, the women, such as Helen and Ivy, commented on how they 'couldn't deviate from the format presented to them', and so 'had to do what the educator told me'. Interestingly, they spoke about a reluctance to challenge the educator workforce and were worried about asking questions. For instance, using Beth's words 'you did it their way otherwise you fail'. Sadly, such a finding is not unique, and is consistent with previous authoritarian behaviour found within football coaching (Cushion & Jones, 2006).

Concluding Thoughts

The findings from this study provide a revealing insight into some of the challenges and difficulties women experience in their attempt to gain certification through the FA's formal coach education system. The women interviewed reported a number of issues associated with the often sexist and bigoted nature of the coach educators, and their male peers. Primarily, it has been established that some of the women didn't feel particularly welcomed and found the atmosphere intimidating and often uncomfortable.

The woman recounted numerous examples of being exposed to overtly sexist behaviour and ensured degrading comments such as being referred to as a 'lad', 'boy' or 'fella'. Therefore, based on the evidence reported, it is our contention that researchers, coach educators and women football coaches must begin to critically engage and reflect on their formal coach

education experiences to increase awareness and transform representation to reconstruct the field.

Our findings also demonstrate how there is a major shortage of women coach educators and potential role models, which may help to address some of these particular problems. This in itself is somewhat worrying state of affairs given that role models are 'a source of norms and values and operate as standards for self-evaluation' (Norman, 2012, p.236). Consequently, women are finding it difficult to comprehend and integrate themselves in an established male dominated coaching hierarchy.

According to Lyle (2002), coach education 'acts as a gatekeeper to the profession and ensures, therefore, that the competence of the practitioner can be assured' (p.275). However, the findings of the present study suggest that there is still a disconnect between what coach education organisers and coach educators perceive as being relevant for personal development, and what coaches actually desire.

In summary, consulting and listening to the experiences of women football coaches may help to ensure that future coach education provision meets the developmental needs of those women wishing to pursue a career in sport coaching. A failure to do so may unfortunately lead to more of the same, and consequently through no fault of their own, women coaches may continue to find themselves in an obtuse position. Hopefully this paper can begin the process of widening the discussion surrounding women's experiences of formal coach education provision. Future investigations should consider different sports and NGBs in order to ratify a number of the claims documented in this paper.

Acknowledgements

The author(s) would like to acknowledge the women coaches who participated in this study, and for their willingness to speak openly and honestly about their experiences. Finally, the author(s) acknowledges the two anonymous reviewers for their comments and questions, which have undoubtedly enhanced the quality of this paper.

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