

'It's just a case of chipping away': a postfeminist analysis of female coaches' gendered experiences in grassroots sport

Paula Murray
Rhiannon Lord
Ross Lorimer

This is an Accepted Manuscript version of the following article, accepted for publication in *Sport, Education and Society*.

Murray, P., Lord, R. & Lorimer, R. (2020) "It's just a case of chipping away': a postfeminist analysis of female coaches' gendered experiences in grassroots sport'. *Sport, Education and Society*.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2020.1867527>

It is deposited under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.



“It’s just a case of chipping away”: A postfeminist analysis of female coaches’ gendered experiences in grassroots sport

Paula Murray^a, Rhiannon Lord^{b*} and Ross Lorimer^b

^aLoughborough College, UK; ^bAbertay University, UK

*Dr Rhiannon Lord

Division of Sport and Exercise Sciences, Abertay University, Bell Street, Dundee, DD1 1HG

R.Lord@abertay.ac.uk

A plethora of work has identified forms and sources of gender inequality in sport coaching. Quantitative studies with psychological framings dominate the literature. However, a smaller and more recent body of qualitative work has identified structural gender hierarchies as the root of inequalities, specifically the prevalence of hegemonic masculinity. Fewer studies have contextualised understandings of women's experiences of this, particularly at grassroots levels and there is little acknowledgement of a notable shift in the visibility of women's power and presence in society including sport. Thus, in this study Gill's (2007) *postfeminist sensibility* was used to examine seven female coaches' experiences of various grassroots sports settings, specifically what might be novel in women's contemporary coaching experiences, but also to acknowledge any persistent structural inequalities. Findings suggest that while female coaches are continually facing challenges borne out of dominant forms of masculinity which remain deeply rooted in sport cultures, they are actively contesting and navigating these by drawing upon performed masculinities. Consequently, new femininities have emerged, but these are fragile, often misinterpreted and can lead to women struggling to progress their coaching careers. Future work in this field should look to develop the use of postfeminist lenses in similar ways, to further identify new(er) femininities which have the potential to grow and develop women's representation in coaching.

Keywords: sports coaching; grassroots coaching; female coaches; postfeminism; hegemonic masculinity; gender negotiation

Introduction

The longstanding and well-documented gender gap in sport participation is narrowing particularly in the West/Global North (Wilson, 2016). However, the same cannot be said for women's leadership in sport, specifically sport coaching (Adriaanse, 2016). In the UK, the geographical context for this paper, 43% of coaches are women, a 3% decrease from 2017 and women are significantly more likely to coach at recreational levels compared to men who tend to coach competitive athletes at regional level or above (UK Coaching, 2020). These patterns are not new or unique to the UK. Similar trends are present in the US (LaVoi, 2018) Finland (Kaski, 2014) and Norway (Fasting, Sisjord & Sand, 2017). At elite levels, gender disparity is perhaps most visible at mega-events. For example, at the London 2012 Olympics, just 11% of accredited coaches were female (Norman, 2014). At the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, women formed just 13% of Canadian coaches, 9% of American and Swedish coaches and 6% of Norwegian coaches (Fasting et al., 2017). These patterns are still present after implementation of strategies and organisations to support women in sport (e.g., Women in Sport Foundation and the Female Coaching Network which were founded in 1995 and 2014 respectively).

Underrepresentation of female coaches is concerning for a number of reasons. First, it is an indication of structural bias and discrimination (Burton, 2015) where women do not receive the same opportunities to pursue career choices as men (Hartzell & Dixon, 2019). Women who do pursue coaching careers have reported significant challenges including a lack of support, social networks and roles, job insecurities, inadequate pay, balancing work and home commitments including working weekends and/or evenings (Bruening & Dixon, 2008; Norman, 2013). Although these challenges are not unique to female coaches, they are more likely to affect women's abilities to start and/or continue coaching (Lewis et al., 2018). Second, and perhaps more importantly, having fewer women in coaching positions has long-

term consequences, producing fewer role models for future generations of female coaches and athletes (LaVoi, 2016).

A plethora of work has sought to understand gender inequality in sport coaching, focusing on the challenges female coaches face and/or their intentions to leave the profession (Blom et al., 2011; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012; Walker & Bopp, 2010). Quantitative studies offer predominantly psychological perspectives on women's underrepresentation in leadership roles and have dominated much of the literature. In these studies, women's underrepresentation is explained by lower self-efficacy and self-confidence, their motivations to coach, coaches'/athletes' preferences and perceptions of one another, and/or gendered perceptions of coaching competence (e.g., Cunningham et al., 2003; Sagas et al., 2006). More recently, qualitative studies have offered structural explanations for gender inequalities in coaching including gender relations, poor working conditions and sexism interconnected with homophobia and, in some, cases racism (e.g., Fielding-Lloyd & Mean, 2011; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012; Norman, 2010). Norman and Rankin-Wright (2018) argue that we are reaching a potential saturation point for suggesting barriers and facilitators for female coaches. Thus, they call for more contextualised and interdisciplinary understandings of women's *experiences* of sport coaching to approach the 'problem' differently. This includes refocusing our attention to the performance level and type of sport women coach, as well as the culture, associated organisational practices and nuances that frame their experiences.

In this paper we offer insights into women's underrepresentation in and negative experiences of coaching by critically examining their *gendered experiences* of coaching various sports at grassroots levels in the UK, something that has been relatively absent from the literature. Grassroots coaching is an important starting point for many coaches' careers (Christensen, 2013) and warrants attention if we are to positively change women's representation and experiences at these and other levels of coaching (e.g., elite or

performance coaching). Moreover, not all coaching journeys are experienced in similar ways in all sports (Christensen, 2013) and examining women's accounts from different sports allows identification of potential nuances across sports cultures. The work that exists on women's *experiences* of coaching looks at coaching cultures or groups outside of the UK (Blom et al., 2011; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012; Walker & Bopp, 2010) or high level female coaches in the UK (Norman, 2010; Norman 2013; Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018). To achieve this, we draw upon Gill's (2007) postfeminist sensibility, a framework that is absent from the coaching literature, to examine tensions between women's relative freedom to pursue coaching careers at grassroots levels *and* ongoing, well-documented gender relations in sport coaching.

Postfeminist sensibility: A framework for understanding coaches' gendered experiences

Scholars have acknowledged a renewed interest in feminism across political and cultural spheres (Gill, 2016; McRobbie, 2015) including sport (Toffoletti et al., 2018). This is part of a wider cultural shift over the past two decades, which has seen women and girls reimagined as empowered, active agents in their own (re)creation of their identities and roles in society (Dobson & Harris, 2015). Since the 1990s, increased visibility of empowered women has given some credence to those arguing for and of the redundancy of feminism as we entered a world of supposed equality (McRobbie, 2009). This may account for some sense and argument of gender equality in sport, including coaching. Women and girls' participation have increased and elite sportswomen have become more visible (Cooky, 2018) and in the last three years 43-46% of the UK coaching workforce are women (UK Coaching, 2020). Moreover, female coaches have been appointed to high profile coaching positions. For example, Amelia Mauresmo coached Andy Murray (2014-2016) and Shelly Kerr was appointed as the Scotland Women's Football Team Coach in 2017. Arguably then, some

young girls and women have become empowered to create their own sport identities, as either athletes or coaches, seemingly successfully navigating well-documented patriarchal structures. However, the rise of online/social media has brought to the forefront a growing awareness of myriad, complex, multi-faceted femininities that exist in society and the ongoing systematic challenges women face on a daily basis (Keller, 2015). Subsequently there are calls for greater understanding of contemporary femininities, spurring an academic shift to postfeminist analyses.

Postfeminism is fraught with contradictions and confusions as to its meaning, because, unlike other concepts that are rooted in epistemological, methodological and theoretical frameworks, postfeminism spans cultural, political and academic spheres (Genz & Brabon, 2012). There is a consensus amongst most postfeminist scholars that this does not mark the end of feminism, but instead, like many ‘posts’, a paradigmatic shift. For some, this is a specific epistemological move from second to third wave feminism born out of consumerist ideologies and communicative changes in the twentieth century West/Global North, which brought about discourses of choice and self-governance (see Genz & Brabon, 2012 for fuller discussion). For others, including us, there is recognition of a complex and intertwining web of feminist and antifeminist ideas that cannot be separated. Gill (2007) suggests that postfeminism is a “sensitivity” that “is informed by postmodern and constructivist perspectives to examine what is *distinctive* about contemporary articulations of gender” (p.254). Postfeminist sensitivity is a critical analytical tool that enables recognition of “patterns in contemporary cultural life, which include emphasis on individualism, choice and agency as the dominant modes of accounting; the disappearance – or at least muting- of vocabularies for talking about structural inequalities and cultural influence” (Gill, 2016, p.613). Indeed, within postfeminist sensitivity Gill and Scharff (2011) caution against preoccupation with *newness* of contemporary femininities as this may produce “a sociology

of accelerated transformation, a version of social relations sped up” (p.2). Thus, like Gill and Scharff (2011) we wish to engage “with what might be understood as novel, but also with the old, unchanging and stubbornly persistent...force and power of the *very idea of binary gender difference*” (p.2) to understand women’s experiences of grassroots level coaching and *how* they are actively navigating structural inequalities in coaching settings.

Gill’s (2007, 2016) postfeminist sensibility primarily focuses on gender in the media. Thus, in sport research it has mainly been utilised in examinations of sports women in the media (Cooky, 2018), (sports)women’s use of social media or blogs (Riley & Evans, 2018) or websites (Nash, 2018). In this paper we extend the use of Gill’s (2007) postfeminist sensibility to examine women’s gendered experiences of sports coaching, paying particular attention to potential distinctiveness of coaching femininities, but also how these intertwine with structural gender relations. To do this, we have drawn upon Connell’s (1987) constructivist work on gender and power. Connell (1987) suggests gender is indicative of social relations and cultural norms that shape our interactions. There are multitudes of gender displays – *masculinities* and *femininities*. However, we tend to draw upon dominant forms of masculinity and femininity to do gender. Dominant conceptualisations of masculinity (hegemonic masculinity) and (emphasised) femininity are (re)constructed through active suppression of bodily similarities (e.g., coaching knowledge) and exaggeration of bodily differences (e.g., height, tone of voice), which in turn separate individuals into hierarchal social categories legitimising and reproducing gender inequalities. Hegemonic masculinity privileges muscularity, rationality and confidence (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). It is synonymous with cultural power and is used to oppress other gender groups, most notably women and homosexual men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). However, Connell (1987) posits that individuals can be *transformed* by social practices through managing ourselves and occupying space in different ways to form gender displays or performances.

Yet, men have relative freedom to engage in cults of physicality (e.g., sport and leisure) which develop their physical and cultural capital to occupy spaces, women, including sport coaches, have traditionally been restricted in these processes (Norman, 2010; Norman, 2013; Norman, 2014). Sport, and coaching in particular, should be a primary ‘space’ of interest. It has a longstanding history and organisational culture of creating and maintaining binary gender difference (Messner, 2002), but women are increasingly engaging in it and are increasingly contesting traditional gender discourses in and through it (Bunsell & Shilling, 2011; Wasend & LaVoi, 2019). Thus, to fully understand any progress, we need to recognise new or alternative femininities that are emerging to overcome longstanding patriarchal structures in sport, something which has been absent in studies of women in coaching to date. Postfeminist sensibility is an analytical lens that allows us to do this.

Method

Participants

Prior to participant recruitment, institutional ethical approval was granted. Participants were recruited using a purposive sampling strategy, specifically using criterion and maximum variation sampling methods (Patton, 1990). To participate, coaches had to be female, aged 18 years old or older and actively coaching for a minimum of two years at grassroots levels. We defined grassroots as club or recreational level (Trimble et al., 2010). Two years of experience ensured coaches had appropriate knowledge and understanding of contemporary cultural patterns of life as a female coach in their sport. This was key to enabling identification of individualism, choice and agency, and the potential disappearance or muting of structural inequalities via the analytical tool of postfeminist sensibility (Gill, 2016). In addition to these criteria, coaches from different sports were targeted for recruitment so subcultural nuances in coaches’ accounts could be examined. To recruit participants, posters

outlining the study and participant criteria were distributed to local sports clubs, National Governing Bodies and universities and colleges delivering sport courses. Volunteers contacted the researchers via email. Potential participants received an information sheet outlining the study in full before formally providing written consent to take part. In total seven coaches were recruited to the study. Collectively they had 60 years of coaching experience (ranging from four to 16 years) of coaching grassroots sport and various levels of qualifications, from no formal coaching qualifications to credentials that allowed them to coach independently. Four had achieved or were working towards gaining a Higher Education degree. Collectively they had coached six different sports. The participants all identified as white and were from a range of locations throughout the UK. None of the participants reported having a disability or health condition. Participants largely reflected the demographics of sports coaching in the UK (i.e., 76% of coaches are white and 23% report having a disability or health condition) (UK Coaching, 2020).

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect coaches' gendered experiences of sport coaching. An interview schedule was used to guide discussions. This was formed from a critical review of literature on women in coaching, gender in (sport) coaching and (sport) coaching careers and close attention to the aim of identifying new or alternative femininities as part of our postfeminist sensibility framework. For example, probes around *how* and *why* women contested and challenged patriarchal structures were embedded into the open-ended questions or topics on the schedule. Interviews consisted of four parts. First, a brief verbal (re)introduction to the study, including reiteration of the conditions of participants' consent and the interview process. Second, asking questions about participants' background to

establish rapport. Third, a series of open-ended questions based on the research aim, with probes as required. Key topics included perceptions and attitudes towards sports and sport coaches, motivations for having and continuing a coaching career, key challenges they experienced and if and how they overcame these, coach-athlete relationships, (e.g., Can you tell me about your early experiences of working with ‘club/group’? How would you describe the types of interactions, conversations, relationships you currently have with your athletes? When you tell people that you coach ‘football’, how do they tend to respond?). Finally, each interview concluded by asking participants whether there was any further information they wished to add before debriefing them.

Interviews took place in a university meeting room or at coaches’ sport clubs. Locations were negotiated with participants to ensure the interview environment was comfortable and convenient. Therefore, interviews had a relatively informal tone. Each lasted between 35 minutes and 90 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded and then later transcribed verbatim. In total 5 hours and 57 minutes of data were captured.

Coaches received copies of their transcripts to review and validate prior to data analysis. No requests for changes to their accounts were received. Coaches were not involved in confirming the themes/results of the study as they had limited knowledge of the theoretical framework and analysis process (Morse, 2018).

Data Analysis

Drawing upon the guidance of Braun and Clarke (2006), data were analysed thematically and therefore we adopted an interpretive lens. Thematic analysis minimally organises and describes data in detail by researchers identifying, analysing, interpreting and reporting patterns or themes within data in six phases – immersion, generating initial codes, searching and identifying themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and writing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As such, transcripts were (re)read numerous times to achieve

immersion. Once familiarity was achieved, initial codes were generated from three rounds of coding and listed for the entire data set. Throughout the coding process, postfeminist sensibility was used as a critical analytical tool to identify forms of individualism, choice and agency, and either muting, disappearance or maintenance of structural inequalities and/or cultural influences (Gill, 2016). Data relevant to each code was collated ready for refocusing analysis on identification of broader themes. Codes were sorted into possible or candidate themes and, through reciprocal and reflexive discussions among the researchers, questions were raised about how codes might be combined, split or extended and/or renamed to form an overarching theme and a meaningful narrative in relation to the research aim (i.e., identifying *potentially* new femininities in grassroots sports coaching). This involved using a postfeminist lens to check themes worked in relation to coded extracts from transcripts and revisiting the research aim frequently to inform decisions about what data was retained or discarded. We also leaned upon the cautionary guidance of Gill and Scharff (2011), to guard against a preoccupation with new femininities and thus neglect of longstanding structural inequalities, which were evident in data. Such processes are integral to analysis and ensures analyses are ‘trustworthy’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and reflexive (Day, 2012). All researchers, two of whom are women, were former or active coaches in different sports, one of which was represented within the data set. Reflexive discussions identified researchers’ biographical baggage, particularly our gendered coaching experiences, which inevitably shaped research processes including data collection and analysis, which were both female researcher led. Like Day (2012), we feel our positionality enhanced the research process, enabling participants to offer detailed accounts of their coaching cultures in a supportive environment and aiding our ability to understand and interpret meaning within these accounts. Ultimately, postfeminist sensibility guided our decisions on the themes identified and reported.

Four core themes were identified from our analysis – women’s role and position in sport, disparities in work opportunities and conditions, social interactions and relationships in male-dominated environments and gender negotiation mechanisms - each with several subthemes and all littered with (anti)feminist contradictions and tensions. During the last phase of our thematic analysis, we drew largely on our theoretical framing to aid coherence and attempt to untangle, as best as possible, the intricate web of (anti)feminist tensions within coaches’ experiences. Thus, we present our findings within the two broad foci of postfeminist sensibility (Gill, 2016) – structural inequalities and cultural influences that frame female coaches’ experiences and examination what might be *distinctive* and/or new in their articulation of gender in coaching

Discussion of Findings

Experiencing and contesting hegemonic masculinity in sport coaching

Women’s role and position in sport

Central to participants’ experiences were their and others’ ideas of women’s role and position in sport. Similar to previous studies on gender order in sport (e.g., Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messner, 2002; Pfister, 2010) and coaching (Aicher & Sagas, 2010; Lewis et al., 2018), coaches largely drew upon experiences that were deeply rooted in hegemonic masculine discourses. Specifically, men’s dominance in the organisation of their experiences both as (prior) participants and coaches. For most, this started at any early age during their school years:

I was at a catholic school and I wanted to play for the boy’s football team. I probably was better than most of them, so I went up to the Headmaster and said I want to play for the boy’s team. He told me not to be ridiculous and to go back to the girl’s playground.

So, I never got to play for the football team 'til secondary school and that always stuck with me.

Mary (Football Coach)

Some coaches, particularly those in male-dominated sports such as football and basketball, identified and witnessed displays of hierarchal gender order being actively formed around women's sport performances and coaching careers. For example, during interactions with new acquaintances and in comments on social media posts highlighting women's sporting achievements:

If I am speaking to someone, and they ask what sport I play and I say basketball, they look at me like *really*, you play basketball. Are you sure? Do you not need to be tall to play basketball or male to play basketball? The stereotypes in sport are hard to break down.

Bella (Football/Basketball Coach)

Social media about a women's team or a female coach...there's still quite a few comments, although they are getting less. Comments will be made that they should be in the kitchen or they should be doing this or that. Often they are just downright nasty. If those comments were made in relation to an ethnic minority, you would be arrested for racism, but [so] why are they not arrested for sexism? Why is this still allowed to go on in this day and age?

Carla (Football Coach)

Binary gender difference is still (re)created in and through some sport spaces ultimately restricting, or at least limiting, women's opportunities to freely take part in participation, organisation and leading of sports (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messner, 2002).

However, a level of contestation is also evident; Mary, Carla and Bella all challenged displays of hegemonic masculinity in interviews, highlighting this as problematic and called for change. Carla (above), calls for legal challenges of hegemonic discourses in response to adult behaviours. Others highlight specific success stories in their sport as forms of changing attitudes to women's role and position in sport:

I would say they [men] probably think female coaches are soft, not knowledgeable and not confident. I think it is changing slowly, but it is a big sport and its male dominated and it has been for years, but with the likes of Shelley Kerr getting the job, hopefully that will change the perceptions if she does well. Fingers crossed.

Mary (Football Coach)

Identification of role models and increased visibility women in sport (coaching) suggests that although hegemonic masculinity is clearly still privileged in male-dominated sports, other gender performances including femininities are becoming more visible and accepted. In some sport subcultures, particularly those that are female-dominated like gymnastics, some female coaches suggest they are accepted and recognise they are perhaps privileged compared to their coaching peers in other sports like football:

If people ask me what I do, I say I'm a gymnastics coach and people say that's really cool, but if I was to say I was a football coach they would be like ohhh. I think it's just based on everyone's opinions. I think everyone just thinks of football and thinks that's for boys and gymnastics is for women. I think it's all based on everyone's perceptions of the traditional gender of the sport.

Ann (Gymnastics Coach)

I think I have had an easy ride of things in this sport compared to others. I would say male coaches in all gymnastic disciplines are looked at more stringently than female coaches. For example, a parent would feel happier with a female coach looking after their child than a male coach as there's something less threatening about it in some ways.

Molly (Gymnastics)

Thus, the extent of gender negotiation required to have a successful career at grassroots levels of coaching is arguably dependent on the sport subculture and the normative gender displays within it. It is important to acknowledge women's recognition of gender performances that are actively contesting dominant gender discourses, particularly in male-dominated sports, such as football where female participation and coaching is rapidly increasing in the UK (The

Football Association, 2020). The femininities participants drew upon and enact(ed) were not new per se, but they were new(er) in these sports.

Disparities in work opportunities and conditions

Gender difference was at the root of what coaches perceived as inequitable career progression. Disparities were identified in the types of work (full time/ part time, un/paid positions) and the level of coaching/athletic performance (recreational /competitive/elite) they had (fair) opportunities to access despite having the right qualifications:

There have been instances where I have gone for a job and probably got the same qualifications as the males, but I have never got it because it's a male-dominated sport and it's just a case of still chipping away and trying to get in there.

Mary (Football Coach)

I have got really high with UEFA and FIFA in female sport however, if I have to go to a men's pro team and apply for a job, I have no chance based on my gender.

Carla (Football Coach)

Similar trends are noted in other coaching studies and reports (Norman, 2014; Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018; UK Coaching 2020), particularly in male-dominated sports like football (Fielding-Lloyd & Mean, 2011; Lewis et al., 2018). It is an inherent part of the 'old boy's network' in sport culture that limits women's coaching opportunities and leads to poorer experiences (Kerr & Marshall, 2007). However, we also identified this in sports that are dominated by women such as gymnastics, which is perhaps more concerning as there is a larger pool of potential women who could develop coaching careers following retirement from their athletic careers. Molly identified an imbalance in the number of female participants in trampoline gymnastics and the number of female coaches training athletes at higher levels. She also discussed the difficulties she faced in terms of her career progression,

specifically navigating coach education and having fewer female role models for support or inspiration.

Without a doubt there is a higher number of girls than males participating in gymnastics, but that flips round as you go into coaching. You get a lot of lower level female coaches and then higher-level male coaches... I am approaching that Level 4 phase, where there are less and less female coaches. So, if I was to arrive at a coaching workshop for that level, I think they would look at me because of my gender and think in some way I was inadequate.

Molly (Trampoline Coach)

Although the issues Molly highlighted were important because of the subcultural context of her sport, similar stories emerged from women in male-dominated sports:

Coaching courses, there will be like 25 men and you and you're the one everyone will be staring at. The one that everyone is wondering is she going to be good, is she going to fall on her face here? So, I think the pressures that you are put under there are quite hard. I think the other coaches and participants put pressure on you. You feel like you are being stared at all the time. Waiting on you to fail. Well that is what it feels like.

Carla (Football Coach)

Women's experiences of sexism, intimidation and sense of an unwelcoming atmosphere at coach education courses, particularly those that are dominated by men, have been well documented (Fielding-Lloyd & Mean, 2011; Lewis et al., 2018). However, the pressures coaches experienced to demonstrate their competence and gain respect was not isolated to these learning spaces, but also real-life coaching environments. Coaches across different sports had experienced male coaches and athletes being overly cautious around them and, in some cases, immediate and/or ongoing isolation:

In the football world, that's what I done [coached] first, I don't think it helped an awful lot. There was me, the only female in a team of five guys and they just kind of phased me out. I was young as well, so I was finding my feet.

Betty (Badminton/Football Coach)

It was with a men's pub team. It didn't work for me. I walked away and it didn't bother me because I knew a lot more than what they [male players] did in terms of the game. They were guys who were there for a kick about. They were all of the thought that females shouldn't be involved.

Carla (Football Coach)

Female coaches experiencing a lack of respect and isolation has been reported particularly in elite sport (Norman, 2010), but, based on our findings, this is also the case for coaches at grassroots levels, particularly those that are new to coaching. Carla's account highlights a willingness to walk away from these types of environments, thus suggesting forms of empowerment and confidence in female coaches' coaching knowledge, contribution(s) and self-worth. However, this was not the case for other coaches such as Betty, who tolerated less subtle forms of gender discrimination from coaching colleagues:

A couple of them would have a wee bit of a cheeky joke. They would say you're a woman you don't know anything. It was probably just a bit of banter, but sometimes I think it's a bit inappropriate, because if the kids hear it they may doubt my coaching skills.

Betty (Football/Badminton Coach)

Betty framed her experience as 'banter', a common 'excuse' for discriminatory behaviour in sport (Clark, 2018), but this is crucial to understanding the perpetual nature of hegemonic masculinity in sport coaching. Betty identifies this behaviour as inappropriate, because it was within earshot of her young participants and has the potential to reproduce and legitimise gender difference (Connell, 1987). She did not see this behaviour as problematic regardless of the audience and she does not condemn her colleagues' behaviour despite wider social movements around women's power and sport NGBs policies, strategies, education programmes and support networks for inclusivity. This leads to questions about the

effectiveness of these resources as tools in contesting hegemonic masculinity in sport work places.

Similarly, some coaches had experienced open questioning of their coaching competency from male athletes:

One of my older gymnasts really knocked heads on this with me and in a coaching course too, which was mortifying. He was twisting the wrong way. It is a common problem and I said no you are definitely twisting the wrong way. He went over to another [male] coach in the end, because he obviously did not trust my judgement, and he said 'no you are twisting the wrong way, she is right'.

Molly (Gymnastics)

In Molly's case, even where an established relationship had formed over a number of years with a male athlete, her competence was still questioned. Frustration with the athlete was clear in her account, but she also noted that she was embarrassed by the situation as it occurred during a coaching course with other (male) coaches in attendance. Importantly, despite 'old boys networks' in sport coaching (Kerr & Marshall, 2007), there is a good indication that her *male* colleagues supported her in these interactions and therefore, in some sports at least, that this might be changing and new(er) coaching femininities are being legitimised.

Moreover, some coaches had experienced little support from their female counterparts who might have otherwise mentored and supported them as they experienced hegemonic masculinity at play in their coaching environments. For example, Denise and Carla discuss their experiences of competition with other female coaches:

There is a lot of competition amongst female coaches to get the most qualifications, to get in with the boss and obviously get the better groups for the week.

Denise (Ski Coach)

Sometimes what is stopping females getting higher in these industries is other females. So, it's kind of like a stand-off. Maybe it's a bit of competitiveness between female to female coaches, like are you pinching my lime light kind of thing.

Carla (Football Coach)

Thus, data suggests hegemonic masculinity in sport spaces perpetuates forms of competitiveness in women to the detriment of their female peers, as they attempt to navigate coaching careers within patriarchal structures. In addition to trying to overcome the 'old boys networks' that are deeply engrained in sport cultures including coaching (Kerr & Marshall, 2007), there is a lack of a 'new girls network'. Similarly, Leberman and Burton, (2017) have acknowledged a "queen bee syndrome" among women in other sport leadership roles, where they fail to mentor and nurture junior women. Thus, while scholars have called for greater numbers and representation of female role models and mentors (Picariello & Waller, 2016), sport NGBs and organisations need to be cautious in any assumptions that women will automatically be better mentors or generally supportive of other female coaches based on these experiences.

Ultimately then, hegemonic masculinity remains deeply rooted in women's experiences of sport and coaching, particularly in male-dominated sports. Women experience a lack of respect, ridicule and questions of their competency, particularly from male colleagues and athletes, even at grassroots levels. In addition, other female coaches act in overly competitive ways, subsequently hindering their female peers. Thus, the extent to which strategies, initiatives and organisations formed to support women in sport are working need to be questioned. Our work identified some progress in female-dominated sports like gymnastics where there is evidence of acceptance and support from male colleagues. Women from all sports at this level are contesting hegemonic masculinity in and through sport, by calling for action, change and identifying success stories in sport and coaching. Thus, use of postfeminist sensibility (Gill, 2007) as an analytical lens, which has been absent from

coaching literature, has enabled us to identify the ways some women are doing femininity differently in coaching.

Navigating hegemonic masculinity: Performing new(er) femininities

Across women's experiences of hegemonic masculinity in sport coaching, they frequently talked about the ways in which they navigated the dominant gender order by seemingly performing new(er) or alternative femininities, at least within the context of their sport. Connell (1987) posited that the prevalence of hegemonic masculinity as a cultural norm influences individuals' self-identity and shapes the ways in which they use their body to navigate social interactions. To this end, we identified ways in which female coaches draw upon masculinities in sport (coaching) and subsequently use their bodies in particular ways to overcome the challenges associated with hegemonic masculinity. For example, coaches, across all sports, attempted to exert control over their participants:

If you show you have authority, they think ok this isn't going to be a play session. I think if you hold back, obviously I'm quite small and some of the boys are as tall as me, so you have to show them that you are going to teach them and that they have to listen, as they will probably just try and run circles round you. You really need to be able to show authority.

Ann (Gymnastics Coach)

I would be stricter with the boys just because they have a tendency more so in football to mess around especially with a girl coach. I need to be like, I am the Boss, in a let's do this without any messing around way.

Betty (Badminton/Football Coach)

In addition, they displayed their physical capital to overcome issues around a lack of respect or questioning of their competence:

I grew up playing football with guys and I am literally a guy on the pitch. So, it's like 'get out of my way'. So yes, you had to *gain* the respect instead of just walking on and instantly having the respect like guys would.

Bella (Football/Basketball Coach)

In terms of body language, that's a big thing, as soon as I walk in I pull my shoulders back. Usually, I'm a feminine girl but when playing football, I have a more athletic stance and walk about me and that comes right out of me when I don't feel as confident. I feel I have to be masculine to show that I have the knowledge.

Carla (Football Coach)

Some language participants used (i.e., 'I feel like I have to be masculine' – Carla, 'I am literally a guy' - Bella) leads to questions about women's perceptions of their gender performance as new(er) or alternative *femininities* or simply their attempt to replicate dominant masculinities. We question whether these coping mechanisms are actually empowering or in fact further reproduction of hegemonic masculinity, or indeed other masculinities, and subsequently limiting expression of distinct femininities in sport coaching. Likewise, participants in quantitative studies have scored female coaches' competence highly based on *masculinised* displays (e.g., Murray, Lord & Lorimer, 2018; 2020) suggesting masculinities, and not distinctly new femininities, remain privileged in sports coaching. Yet, coaches argued these gender displays were key to obtaining validation and acceptance from their participants:

Going in to teach men's teams I make a conscious effort to do small things such as kick balls over there. You then see a bit of ok she might know what she is talking about kind of thing.

Carla (Football Coach)

All the techniques I show them. They can see with their own eyes that actually she does know what she's doing and I'm with them the whole day skiing in front of them which is good.

Denise (Ski Coach)

Notably though, women utilised traditional feminine performances by adopting more of a caring approach in their coaching compared to their male counterparts:

I think having experience with kids that age [young children], you have a kind of mothering side. Maybe not mothering, but a more caring side that kind of gives you an advantage when you have kids of mixed abilities. I think that is quite biased, but sometimes when kids cry guys get awkward. Also, when kids hurt themselves guys struggle with being more emotional.

Betty (Football/Badminton Coach)

Similar findings are reported in work focusing on caring in coaching (e.g., Hardman et al., 2015; Siegele, Smith & Hardin, 2019), albeit none have specifically looked at this in relation to femininities in coaching. We suggest that in performing *combinations* of masculinities to overcome scrutiny of competence and gain acceptance, and femininities to offer caring coaching, female coaches are performing distinct and new femininities, although the latter are experienced as traditional gender performances enacted in specific interactions. As with other studies on women in coaching (Norman, 2013), the notion of women as caregivers in coaching, if not carefully managed, can become a hindrance to women's career progression, experience and the groups they coach. Indeed, some coaches had experienced this:

I think being a girl, I get the biggest challenge is going into the kinder garden area as they expect me to work with all the wee children, whereas all the guys get all the experienced skiers up the mountain having a great time. You get stuck in a wee small area, teaching all these infants how to ski.

Denise (Skiing)

Women's individual choice to adopt a caring coaching philosophy can be misinterpreted by coaching peers as a traditional feminine performance at grassroots levels where the majority of sport participants are young children. This misaligns them with the patriarchal structures that are deeply rooted in sport cultures and/or inadvertently reinforces and legitimises the dominant gender order (Connell, 1987).

Ultimately, although women are finding ways to navigate hegemonic masculinity in sport coaching, the extent to which they are drawing upon and displaying distinct femininities is questionable. Instead, they often draw upon masculinities and in turn re(produce) and legitimise the dominant gender order. Where women couple this with traditional feminine displays of care, particularly to young children, we might argue that the potential for distinct femininities are emerging. Women often talk about these gender displays favourably, attributing them to their successes, however, there is the potential for these to be misinterpreted as traditional femininities, which remain unprivileged in sport.

Conclusions

Our use of Gill's (2007) postfeminist sensibility, a lens which has been absent from coaching literature, has produced fresh insights into gender inequalities in sport coaching, specifically women's accounts of cultural patterns in various grassroots sports, which have been largely underexplored to date. Whilst this answers calls for more nuanced accounts of women in coaching (Norman and Rankin-Wright, 2018), we also demonstrate how this critical analytical tool can be used to understand first-hand accounts of sport (coaching) culture, in addition to female athletes representation in or use of media as has been the case previously (Cooky, 2018; Nash, 2018). Ultimately, we found coaches are successfully navigating sport subcultures, which remain steeped in hegemonic masculinity, by largely drawing upon masculinities to gain acceptance. While this allows women who chose to coach to do so effectively, it reproduces and legitimises the dominant gender order in sport and further suppresses the display of new(er) and/or distinct femininities that might otherwise lead to greater representation of women in coaching. However, unlike prior work on elite coaching (Norman, 2013), women coaching female-dominated sports at grassroots level like gymnastics felt they were accepted and experienced support from male colleagues. This

needs further examination as lessons from these sport subcultures might improve experiences of women in male-dominated sports. In addition, the emergence of strong yet caring coaching philosophies suggests beginnings of a potentially distinct and new coaching femininity, one that needs to be more fully capitalised upon by sport organisations in light of a moral panic surrounding care in sport (Piper et al., 2012). This is however a fragile gender performance that has the potential to be misinterpreted as traditional femininity(ies), which remains unprivileged in sport and subsequently leaves women potentially unable to effectively progress their coaching careers. Importantly, women at this level of coaching, across all sports, are contesting displays of hegemonic masculinity in and through sport suggesting scope for greater change is timely.

Whilst we offer nuanced accounts of coaching femininities in this study, our work is somewhat limited by a white, able-bodied and relatively small sample. Although this is largely reflective of the coaching demographic in the UK (UK Coaching, 2020), future work in this area might look at intersectional analyses using Gill's (2007) postfeminist sensibility to extend our knowledge of new(er) and empowering femininities in sports coaching.

References

- Adriaanse, J. (2016). Gender diversity in the governance of sport associations: The Sydney scoreboard global index of participation. *Journal of Business Ethics, 137*(1), 140-160.
- Aicher, T. J., & Sagas, M. (2010). Are head coaches in intercollegiate athletics perceived as masculine? An evaluation of gender stereotypes and the effect of sexism on intercollegiate athletics. *Gender Issues, 27*(3), 165-174.
- Blom, L. C., Abrell, L., Wilson, M. J., Lape, J., Halbrook, M., & Judge, L.W. (2011). Working with male athletes: The experiences of U.S female head coaches. *The ICHPER-SD Journal of Research in Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, 6*(1), 54-61.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101.

- Bruening, J. E., & Dixon, M. A. (2008) Situating work-family negotiations within a life course perspective: Insights on the gendered experiences of NCAA Division I head coaching mothers. *Sex Roles*, 58, 10-23.
- Burton, L.J., 2015. Underrepresentation of women in sport leadership: A review of research. *Sport Management Review*, 18(2), 155-165.
- Bunsell, T., & Shilling, C. (2011) Outside and inside the gym: Exploring the identity of the female bodybuilder. In: A. Locks and N. Richardson (Eds.) *Critical Readings In Bodybuilding. Routledge research In sport, culture and society* (pp.58-72). Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon.
- Christensen, M.K. (2013). Outlining a typology of sports coaching careers: Paradigmatic trajectories and ideal career types among high-performance sports coaches. *Sports Coaching Review*, 2(2), pp.98-113.
- Clark, A. (2018). 'I found that joking back actually made me not on edge, and I didn't feel threatened': Women's embodied experiences of sexist humour (banter) in a UK gym. *International Journal of Gender and Women's Studies*, 6(1), 15-29.
- Connell, R. (1987). *Gender and Power*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Connell, R., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: rethinking the concept. *Gender and Society*, 19(6), 829-859.
- Cooky, C. (2018). What's new about sporting femininities? Female athletes and the sport-media industrial complex. In K. Toffoletti, H. Thorpe and J. Francombe-Webb. *New Sporting Femininities* (pp. 23-41). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cunningham G.B., Sagas M., & Ashley F.B. (2003) Coaching self-efficacy, desire to become a head coach, and occupational turnover intent: Gender differences between NCAA assistant coaches of women's teams. *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 34, 125-137.
- Day, S. (2012). A reflexive lens: exploring dilemmas of qualitative methodology through the concept of reflexivity. *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 8(1), 60-85.
- Dobson, A. S., & Harris, A. (2015). Post-girlpower: Globalized mediated femininities. *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 29(2), 143-144.
- Fasting, K., Sisjord, M. K., & Sand, T. S. (2017). Norwegian elite-level coaches: who are they?. *Scandinavian Sport Studies Forum*, 8, 29-47
- Fielding-Lloyd, B., & Mean, L. (2011). I don't think I can catch it': women, confidence and responsibility in football coach education. *Soccer & Society*, 12(3), 345-364.

- Genz, S., & Brabon, B. A. (2009). *Postfeminism: Cultural texts and theories*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Gill, R. (2007). *Gender and the Media*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gill, R. (2016). Post-postfeminism?: New feminist visibilities in postfeminist times. *Feminist media studies*, 16(4), 610-630.
- Gill, R., & Scharff, C. (Eds.). (2013). *New femininities: Postfeminism, neoliberalism and subjectivity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hardman, A., Bailey, J., & Lord, R. (2015). Care and touch in trampoline gymnastics: reflections and analysis from the UK. In H. Piper (Eds.), *Touch in sports coaching and physical education: fear, risk and moral panic*. (pp.151-166.) Oxon: Routledge.
- Hartzell, A., & Dixon, M.A. (2019). A Holistic Perspective on Women's Career Pathways in Athletics Administration. *Journal of Sport Management*, 33(2), 79–92
- Kaski, S. (2014) *Example from Finland*. 6th IWG World Conference on Women in Sport. Helsinki, Finland, 12th-15th June 2014. Available from: https://www.icce.ws/_assets/files/news/IWG/Satu_Kaski_and_Kristiina_Danskanen-Example_from_Finland.pdf [Accessed: 26th May 2020].
- Keller, J. (2015). *Girls' feminist blogging in a postfeminist age*. London: Routledge.
- Kerr, G., & Marshall, D. (2007). Shifting the culture: Implications for female coaches. *Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching*, 7(4), 1-4.
- LaVoi, N.M. (2016). Introduction. In N.M. LaVoi (Ed.), *Women in sport coaching* (pp. 1–9). New York, NY: Routledge.
- LaVoi, N.M. (2018). Head coaches of women's collegiate teams: A report on seven select NCAA Division-I conferences, 2017-2018. Minneapolis, MN: The Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport
- LaVoi, N. M., & Dutove, J.K. (2012). Barriers and supports for female coaches: An ecological model. *Sports Coaching Review*, 1(1), 17-37.
- Leberman, S., & Burton, L. J. (2017). Why this book? Framing the conversation about women in sport leadership. In L.J. Burton and S. Leberman (Eds.) *Women in sport leadership: Research and practice for change*, (pp.1-15), Abingdon: Routledge.
- Lewis, C. J., Roberts, S. J., & Andrews, H. (2018). Why am I putting myself through this? Women football coaches experiences of the Football Associations coach education process. *Sport, Education and Society*, 23(1), 28-39.
- Lincoln. Y.S. & Guba, EG. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

- McRobbie, A. (2009). *The aftermath of feminism: Gender, culture and social change*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- McRobbie, A. (2015). Notes on the perfect: Competitive femininity in neoliberal times. *Australian feminist studies*, 30(83), 3-20.
- Messner, M. (2002). *Taking the Field: Women, Men, and Sports*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Morse, J. (2018). Reframing Rigor in Qualitative Inquiry. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp.796-817). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Murray, P., Lord, R., & Lorimer, R. (2018). The influence of gender on perceptions of coaches' relationships with their athletes: a novel video-based methodology. *The Sports Journal*. <https://thesportjournal.org/article/influence-of-gender-on-perceptions-of-coaches-relationships-with-their-athletes/>
- Murray, P., Lord, R., & Lorimer, R. (2020). How the perceived effectiveness of a female coach is influenced by their apparent masculinity/femininity. *The Sport Journal*. <https://thesportjournal.org/article/how-the-perceived-effectiveness-of-a-female-coach-is-influenced-by-their-apparent-masculinity-femininity/>
- Nash, M. (2018). Empowering “sporty sisters” through “active living”: A feminist multi-modal critical discourse analysis of the Lorna Jane fitness fashion website. In K. Toffoletti, H. Thorpe and J. Francombe-Webb. *New Sporting Femininities* (pp. 277-298). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Norman, L. (2010) Feeling second best: Elite women coaches experiences. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 27, 89-104.
- Norman, L. (2013) The challenges facing women coaches and the contributions they can make to the profession. *International Journal of Coaching Science*, 7(2), 3-23.
- Norman, L. (2014) Gender and coaching report card for the London 2012 Olympics: Report for the International Council for Coaching Excellence. https://www.icce.ws/_assets/files/news/IWG/Leanne_Norman-Gender_Coaching_Report_Card.pdf [Accessed 26th May 2020]
- Norman, L. & Rankin-Wright, A. (2018). Surviving rather than thriving: Understanding the experiences of women coaches using a theory of gendered social well-being. *International review for the sociology of sport*, 53(4), 424-450.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. London: Sage.

- Pfister, G. (2010). Women in sport-gender relations and future directions. *Sport in Society*, 13(2), 234-248.
- Picariello, M., & Waller, S. N. (2016). The importance of role modeling in mentoring women: Lessons from Pat Summitt legacy. *Physical Culture and Sport Studies and Research*, 71(1), 5-13.
- Piper, H., Taylor, B., & Garratt, D. (2012). Sports coaching in risk society: No touch! No trust!. *Sport, Education and Society*, 17(3), 331-345.
- Riley, S., & Evans, A. (2018). Lean light fit and tight: Fitblr blogs and the postfeminist transformation imperative. In K. Toffoletti, H. Thorpe and J. Francombe-Webb. *New Sporting Femininities* (pp. 207-229). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sagas M, Cunningham, G. & Pastore, D. (2006). Predicting head coaching intentions of male and female assistant coaches: an application of the theory of planned behaviour. *Sex Roles*, 54, 695–705.
- Siegele, J., Smith, A. B., & Hardin, R. (2019) Male collegiate student-athletes' experiences and perceptions of female head coaches. *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education*, 3(1), 30-52.
- The Football Association. (2020). Womens and girls football. Retrieved from: <http://www.thefa.com/football-rules-governance/policies/equality/womens-and-girls-football> [Accessed 4th June 2020]
- Toffoletti, K., Francombe-Webb, J., & Thorpe, H. (2018). Femininities, sport and physical culture in postfeminist, neoliberal times. In K. Toffoletti, H. Thorpe and J. Francombe-Webb. *New Sporting Femininities* (pp. 1-19). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Trimble, L., Buraimo, B., Godfrey, C., Grecic, D., & Minten, S. (2010). *Sport in the UK*. Exeter: Learning Matters.
- UK Coaching. (2020). Coaching in the UK 2019: Coach Survey. Retrieved from https://www.ukcoaching.org/getattachment/Resources/Topics/Research/Coaching-in-The-UK/CPS_Coaches_FINAL.pdf?lang=en-GB [Accessed 9th May 2020]
- Walker, N. A., & Bopp, T. (2010). The under-representation of women in the male-dominated sport workplace: perspectives of female coaches. *Journal of Workplace Rights*, 15(1), 47-64.
- Wasend, M., & LaVoi, N. M. (2019). Are women coached by women more likely to become sport coaches? Head coach gender and female collegiate athletes' entry into the coaching profession. *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal*, 27(2), 85-93.

Wilson, A.S. (2016). 45 years of Title IX: The status of women in intercollegiate athletics.

Retrieved from http://www.ncaa.org/sites/default/files/TitleIX45-295-FINAL_WEB.pdf [Accessed 5th June 2020]