

1 Negotiating gender in the English football workplace: Composite vignettes of women head
2 coaches' experiences

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14 Abstract

15 Historically, men have dominated the English football workplace; as a result, the number of
16 women in coaching positions has been limited (Williams, 2013). The aim of the present study
17 was to explore the lived experiences of women head coaches to identify the extent that
18 gender influences the English football workplace. Semi-structured interviews ($N=12$) were
19 conducted with women head coaches operating at the (a) youth recreational, (b) talent
20 development, and (c) elite levels of the English football pyramid. An inductive thematic
21 analysis was performed which informed the development of composite vignettes, a form of
22 creative non-fiction. Three vignettes were developed comprising women head coaches'
23 stories at each pyramid level. Findings from the thematic analysis identified themes of gender
24 stereotyping, proving yourself, and confidence at the youth recreational level; work-life
25 conflicts, limited career mobility, and marginalization at the talent development level; and
26 tokenism, undercurrents of sexism, and apprehensions of future directives at the elite level.
27 The vignette stories demonstrate that gender negatively influences coaches' interactions and
28 confidence early in their career in youth recreational football; gender bias is embedded within
29 discriminatory organizational practices which limit career mobility for coaches working in
30 talent development; and gender is used to hold elite level women coaches to higher scrutiny
31 levels than male colleagues. Recommendations (e.g., [in]formal mentoring, male advocacy,
32 recruitment transparency) are made to practitioners for a targeted occupational-focused
33 approach regarding support, retention, and career progression of women head coaches in
34 football.

35 *Keywords:* female; coaching; underrepresentation; leadership; vignette

60 & McNeill, 2012), interpersonal (e.g., work-family conflict; Dixon & Bruening, 2007),
61 organizational (e.g., lack of training opportunity; Shaw & Allen, 2009), and sociocultural
62 levels of analysis (e.g., homophobic climate of sport; Cunningham & Sagas, 2003). In their
63 updated review of research, Burton and LaVoi (2016) called for a focus of attention away
64 from the individual and interpersonal levels of analysis towards influencing change at the
65 organizational and sociocultural level. Moreover, Norman, Rankin-Wright, and Allison
66 (2018) argued underrepresentation of women coaches must be reframed as “a *symptom*, or an
67 outcome of a deeper issue, rather than the problem *in itself*” (p. 395). Hence, this study
68 sought to examine the organizational (i.e., organizational policies and professional practices)
69 and sociocultural context (i.e., social norms and cultural systems) that women football
70 coaches operate within to understand why in England they hold only 9% of head coaching
71 jobs in women’s football.

72 *The History and Development of Women and Football in England.*

73 Football is known as England’s national sport, but has shown itself to be associated
74 with hegemonic masculinity, endorsement of conservative attitudes, and the exclusion of
75 women (Fishwick, 1989; Tomkins, 1993). A turbulent history of women in English football
76 exists. Women were excluded by The Football Association (FA) from participation with
77 affiliated clubs and at football grounds in 1921 after being declared unsuitable for the game
78 (Williams, 2013). Preceding the ban, matches between women’s factory teams, formed
79 during World War I (1914-1918), regularly attracted crowds in the tens of thousands and
80 women’s football was in robust health (Newsham, 1994). Women’s exclusion lasted for over
81 four decades and was argued to be part of the FA’s deliberate attempt to restrict women’s
82 performance of gender to traditional visions of a woman’s role, and recoup the masculine
83 image of football, which had been lost during the war (Newsham, 1994; Williams, 2003).

84 Women footballers consequently became invisible, with their popularity, knowledge
85 and skills lost as a result of exclusion from organized competition. The women's game
86 became quickly overshadowed by the growth of the professionalized men's game. Under
87 pressure from UEFA in the early 1970s, the FA rescinded their ban and the Women's
88 Football Association governed women's football until its dissolution in 1993 when power
89 was transferred to the FA (The Culture, Media, and Sport Committee, 2006). However, the
90 social taboo of women's participation in football lingered in subsequent years, and the sport
91 centered on the participation growth rather than the commercialization, spectator support, and
92 media interest that had rapidly grown in men's football during the period of the ban
93 (Williams, 2003).

94 Women's football has been fast growing with figures showing that the number of
95 registered players increased from 10,000 in 1993 when records began, to 2,050,000 in 2017
96 (FA, 2017a). Women's football, however, continues to experience a significant image
97 problem in English football culture, with female players repeatedly experiencing gender
98 discrimination and stereotypical attitudes (Scruton, Fasting, Pfister, & Bunuel, 1999). Despite
99 these challenges, women's elite-level football has evolved in the past twenty years from an
100 amusing eccentricity to full professionalization of the top-tier of women's football (FA,
101 2017b; Williams & Woodhouse, 1991). The FA's England girls' talent pathway supports the
102 identification and development of elite players at different stages of the football pyramid:
103 from community clubs at the bottom, through Regional Talent Clubs (RTCs) and regional
104 development programmes, to national performance camps and international selection at the
105 top.

106 *Research with Women Coaches in Football*

107 While a large body of literature has examined the underrepresentation of women in
108 sports leadership, sports-specific investigations into the professional challenges facing

109 women coaches have been scarce. Given the cultural significance of football in England, its
110 deeply masculinized history, it is imperative that research focuses on the organizational and
111 sociocultural contexts in which women in football operate. Emerging research has
112 demonstrated that multiple informal factors prevent women coaches' full unpermitted access
113 to the football workplace (e.g., Lewis, Roberts, & Andrews, 2018; Norman, Rankin-Wright,
114 & Allison, 2018). Informal and deep-rooted cultural bias presents a range of pressures for
115 women coaches, despite formal barriers to women coaches' entry to English football (e.g.,
116 governing body policy) having long been removed. For example, Lewis et al. (2018)
117 identified the cultural practices of men coach educators and candidates as disparaging
118 towards women and reinforcing of gender stereotypes. Women coaches interviewed by Lewis
119 et al. (2018) reported being met with hostility and treated like an outsider on the FA's coach
120 education courses, and that as a result they felt a "lack of self-worth" (p. 33). Coach
121 educators can be effective in preventing women from striving towards a career in coaching
122 by engaging in cultural practices that stem from patriarchal habitus (i.e., ingrained habits),
123 such as the devaluing of women's social stature on courses (Bourdieu, 1986; Lewis et al.,
124 2018). While Lewis and colleagues' (2018) study has stimulated discussion of the difficulties
125 faced by women in coach education provision, research has failed to extend this knowledge
126 and illuminate the lived experiences of women football coaches in their places of work.

127 Research demonstrates that women perceive the coach education atmosphere in
128 England to be intimidating and uncomfortable, despite the FA's own guidelines for respect
129 and fair play (FA, 2014). This finding suggests national governing bodies' (NGBs)
130 employees play a pivotal role in the implementation of equality policies. In an analysis of
131 organizational culture in the FA, Norman and colleagues (2018) conducted interviews with
132 women coaches and women coach educators and identified three tenets that have salient
133 influences on their experiences, retention, development, and progression: inclusive

134 leadership, supportive and horizontal relationships, and visible pathways for career
135 development were most influential. Women who felt most supported in their career
136 progression worked in central or regional FA roles, whereas women coaches operating
137 outside of the organization were left feeling frustrated by a lack of access to continued
138 professional development. Women coaches' experiences, therefore, do not appear equitable
139 in the football workplace, suggesting gender as an influential factor in a coach's career
140 growth. At present, negligible attention has been given to organizational differences in how
141 gender is experienced by women coaches operating at different levels of the football
142 pyramid. Are difficulties felt most by women at the start of their career at the recreational
143 youth level and felt less later in their career when ingratiated within its culture through talent
144 development and elite levels?

145 Due to the limited nature of investigations concerning women football coaches,
146 researchers can look to scholarly investigations of women in non-playing support roles (e.g.,
147 coordinators, secretaries, treasurers) to signify the challenges facing women football coaches.
148 Active resistance by men to women's presence, pressure to conform to masculine ideals,
149 construction of women's work as inferior to male counterparts, and hidden femininity have
150 been theorized as 'invisible' factors impeding women's position in football (e.g., Fielding-
151 Lloyd & Meân, 2008, 2011; Welford, 2011). These factors serve to maintain men's
152 entitlement to central membership of football and position women at the peripheries of the
153 sport. Such practices as these inhibit women's coaching ability and opportunities to realize
154 their full potential within their career trajectory.

155 Men are more likely to respect women and view them as equals when exposed to
156 competent women leaders (Fink, LaVoi, & Newhall, 2016). Role congruity theory of
157 prejudice proposes that attitudes are less positive toward female than male leaders when there
158 is perceived incongruity between the female gender role and leadership roles (Eagly &

159 Karau, 2002). Women coaches are more present at lower levels of the football pyramid where
160 it is reasonable to assume the strength of dominant discourses (i.e., discourses that affect
161 relations and create forms of dominance) are less prominent than at higher levels where
162 women coaches do not have much exposure (UEFA, 2017). Hence, it is likely that the extent
163 to which women coaches negotiate gender in the football workplace will be largely
164 determined by the context of the organization and the level of the football pyramid in which
165 they operate.

166 *The Present Study*

167 With literature suggesting an existence of sexist and disparaging language, behavior,
168 and cultural practices towards women in English football culture, further attention is required
169 to comprehend the organizational and sociocultural factors at play for several reasons. First,
170 there is limited knowledge of the football coaching workplace, and further examination will
171 importantly extend our understanding of how women coaches operate in this sport, given its
172 deeply masculinized history. Second, a dearth of knowledge exists concerning the
173 pervasiveness of gender inequality facing women head coaches in their navigation of gender
174 in different roles across the football pyramid. Taking an occupational-focused approach will
175 extend our understanding of whether barriers that women coaches face are consistent or differ
176 in specific organizational areas (i.e., youth recreational, talent development, and elite level)
177 and better inform practice and future research. Third, this study responds to the call made by
178 Burton and LaVoi (2016) to add knowledge of organizational and sociocultural factors that
179 impede women sports coaches. Therefore, the aim of the present study was to explore the
180 lived experiences of women football head coaches operating at multiple levels of the football
181 pyramid in England to illuminate the pervasiveness of gender in the football workplace.

182 *Theoretical Framework*

183 Connell's (1987) hegemonic masculinity theory has been adopted as a lens to study
184 sociocultural inequalities within the football context. Hegemonic masculinity is situated as a
185 sociocultural barrier in LaVoi and Dutove's (2012) ecological model. Drawing on Gramsci's
186 (1971) notion of cultural hegemony (i.e., the dominance of one social group over others),
187 Connell contends that hegemonic masculinity is a pattern of practice (i.e., engaged activities,
188 not just an identity or role expectations) that can be characterized by acts which reinforce
189 male privilege, support conformity to an idealized version of masculinity, and subordinate
190 women in order to maintain the system of patriarchy (Bryson, 1987; Connell &
191 Messerschmidt, 2005). The ban of women from organized participation in football is seen as
192 an early expression of hegemonic masculinity, and male dominance in English football
193 continues to be evidenced by the emphasis of masculine ideals in the sport by the media
194 (Caudwell, 2011), underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions (Women in
195 Sport, 2016), and the absence of women in coaching positions (Welford, 2011). Women's
196 historical absence and men's privileged and dominant positions in football facilitate the sport
197 as a site for male hegemony. The research reviewed in this study shows women's
198 participation in football has increased, but women coaches fight against patriarchal norms.
199 Further examination through the hegemonic masculinity lens is required to fully uncover how
200 powerful gender bias is in the football workplace and if male hegemony thrives across all
201 levels of the football pyramid. LaVoi and Dutove's (2012) ecological model was also used to
202 underpin the examination of organizational and sociocultural barriers and supports to women
203 coaches.

204 **Method**

205 *Philosophical assumptions*

206 Critical inquiry underpinned this study: we hold that ideas are mediated by power
207 relations in society, certain groups are privileged over others, and that researchers are

208 responsible for a critical stance towards the culture they are exploring (see Smith & Sparkes,
209 2016). In line with this philosophical stance, we believe that the investigator and participant
210 are interactively linked and create findings together and as such, qualitative creative non-
211 fiction methods were employed to provide in-depth accounts of the head coaches' lived
212 experiences and give precedence to the female voice (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992).
213 Particular emphasis was placed on how to balance approaches which stress the central role of
214 participants' knowledge with the expert knowledge of the researchers. Rather than engage in
215 recently criticized member checking, inter rater reliability or universal criteria methods for
216 establishing rigor in qualitative research, rigor was developed via member reflections where
217 the participant and researcher explore the findings to generate additional insight (Smith &
218 McGannon, 2018). Member reflections differ from member checks as they are less a test of
219 research findings as they are an opportunity to engage in collaboration and reflexive
220 elaboration (Tracy, 2010). The interpretation of findings was discussed with a subsample of
221 participants (i.e., one head coach per vignette) to identify any gaps or disagreement in the
222 results. Participants' voices were prioritized over the researchers. No disagreements were
223 found, and minor additions were made to the vignettes to fully illuminate stories.

224 *Participants*

225 Participants were purposively drawn from the population of women actively coaching
226 football in England. Head coaches operating in English football were purposively targeted as
227 participants due to the relevance of this governance context to the study purpose. Twelve
228 head coaches volunteered to take part in the study. The sample comprised women who
229 identified as White British (84%), Black British (8%), and Mixed-Race British (8%).
230 Participants were categorized as either operating in youth recreational level (i.e., coaching in
231 recreation football; $n=5$), talent development level (i.e., coaching in youth academy football;

232 $n=4$) or elite level (i.e., coaching in adult professional football; $n=3$). Eleven participants
233 were head coaches of girls' or women's football teams and one participant coached an elite
234 boy's academy team in a men's professional football club. The inclusion in the sample of one
235 woman head coach working in men's football was not only appropriate but also could be
236 argued representative of the women coaching population working in men's sports; research
237 from North America reports only 2% of all men's sports team coaches to be women (Reade,
238 Rogers, & Norman, 2009). Head coaches had from 2- to 15- years' experience ($M = 6.00$
239 years) with combined football coaching experience of 72 years¹. The highest level of
240 obtained coaching qualification of the participants was FA Level 4 in coaching football (i.e.,
241 UEFA A license; $n=1$), FA Level 3 in coaching football (i.e., UEFA B license; $n=4$), FA
242 Level 2 in coaching football (i.e., UEFA C license; $n=5$), and FA Level 1 in coaching football
243 ($n=2$). Participants' ages ranged from 20–38 years old ($M = 28.67$ years). All head coaches
244 delivered a minimum of two training sessions per week with either one or more teams and
245 attended match days. Coaching was the full-time occupation for only 3 coaches; the majority
246 of head coaches supplemented their coaching with additional work duties, which were:
247 community department staff in professional men's football clubs ($n=2$), physical education
248 teacher ($n=2$), futsal coaching business owner ($n=1$), university lecturer ($n=1$), county FA
249 development officer ($n=1$), and students in higher education studies ($n=2$). The athletic
250 achievement of the participants was diverse, comprising current or ex-local league level
251 players ($n=3$), ex-youth academy players ($n=5$), ex-domestic professional adult players ($n=3$),
252 and an ex-international professional adult player ($n=1$).

253 *Procedure*

254 To engage in fully reflexive research, researchers must consider how their own
255 positions in the world influence the way in which they perceive it (Temple & Young, 2004).

¹The FA's coach education pathway maps the learning journey from an introduction to coaching with the FA Level 1 in coaching football, through to the advanced qualification required in elite football, the FA Level 5 in coaching football (FA, 2016).

256 The lead author identifies as a White woman and as a Level 3 qualified football coach with
257 12 years' coaching experience. The lead author had not experienced overt sexism in her
258 coaching practice but upon reflection had experienced subtle sexism in the form of odd looks
259 and lack of conversation from male colleagues (i.e., sexism that can be either hidden or
260 unnoticed because it is built into cultural and societal norms). Anecdotally, the lead author
261 had heard of such overt instances from fellow women head coaches, which had initially
262 stimulated interest in understanding the scope of gender in the football workplace. Her
263 positionality made her suitable to be viewed as an "insider" to research participants
264 (McCorkel & Myers, 2003). To limit issues of positionality (i.e., author bias or assumptions
265 that might shape the research process), the research team regularly engaged in discussions
266 about the framing of interview questions and data representation from a position of neutrality.
267 We were forthright in communicating positionality with participants, and cognizant not to
268 assume gender bias in the football workplace (Bourke, 2014).

269 Following institutional ethical approval, head coaches were approached by the lead
270 researcher based on personal associations and invited to participate in a one-to-one interview
271 with the lead researcher. There was no prior knowledge regarding whether the head coaches
272 had experienced sexism in the workplace. A semi-structured interview guide was developed
273 to facilitate interviews and divided into two sections: (a) football coaching experiences (e.g.,
274 "can you recall any critical periods in your life that have been important in your coaching
275 career?") and (b) experiences of being a woman head coach in a male-dominated sport (e.g.,
276 "to what extent have you ever experienced any negative attitudes towards you as a woman
277 head coach based on your gender?"). Questions constructed by the lead researcher in line
278 with the research question and extant literature were examined by the second and third author
279 to determine their appropriateness. To facilitate the flow of the semi-structured interviews,

¹The FA's coach education pathway maps the learning journey from an introduction to coaching with the FA Level 1 in coaching football, through to the advanced qualification required in elite football, the FA Level 5 in coaching football (FA, 2016).

280 probes (e.g., “could you expand on what you mean by [the issue]”) and elaborations (e.g.,
281 “could you explain [the issue] in more detail”) were incorporated. Individual interviews were
282 conducted either in person or on the telephone at a time of the participants’ choosing.
283 Although face-to-face interviews have been described as the “gold standard” for qualitative
284 research (McCoyd & Kerson, 2006, p. 389), there is little evidence that data loss or distortion
285 occurs in telephone interviews and enabled us to reach a geographically dispersed population
286 (Novick, 2008). Therefore, telephone interviews were offered to coaches unable to participate
287 in face-to-face interviews. Interviews lasted between 44 and 69 minutes ($M = 55.18$, $SD =$
288 7.78) and, once transcribed verbatim, generated 85 pages of single-spaced text. Each
289 participant was sent an interview transcript to verify accuracy before data analysis
290 commenced. No changes were required.

291 *Data Analysis and Representation*

292 Considering the potentially sensitive nature of the stories told, participants’ accounts
293 were developed into composite vignettes, a form of creative nonfiction. Identities were
294 protected by the composition of a synthesized account of multiple interwoven individuals’
295 stories (Smith, 2013). Secure anonymity enabled the contributors to speak freely and fully in
296 their discourses. A two-stage data analysis procedure was followed. An interpretative
297 thematic analysis was conducted in the first stage to act as a foundation for the second stage
298 of analysis, the development of composite vignettes used to reconstruct the participants’
299 stories. A key advantage of this novel research approach is the ability to facilitate new
300 understandings of the organizational and sociocultural issues that shape women coaches’
301 navigation of gender in the football workplace by holistically sharing the complexity and
302 nuances of participants’ lived experiences. These experiences are likely to resonate with a
303 diverse audience (e.g., coaches, managers, players, and practitioners), and invoke a greater
304 sense of reflection than other qualitative research techniques (Schinke, Blodgett, McGannon,

305 & Ge, 2016). Creative nonfiction practices, whereby the authors move from story analysts to
306 story tellers, have been advocated by qualitative researchers (e.g., Schinke et al., 2016) in line
307 with scholarly investigations into the professional challenges of sports scientists (e.g., Hings,
308 Wagstaff, Anderson, Gilmore, & Thelwell, 2018) and cultural dynamics in athlete transitions
309 (e.g., Schinke et al., 2016).

310 *Stage One: Thematic Analysis*

311 In the first phase, Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage model for data-driven thematic
312 analysis was followed to identify, describe, and interpret patterns across the dataset. Audio
313 recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and anonymized, and then the authors
314 independently immersed themselves in the data, reading interview transcripts several times.
315 The data were entered into NVivo 11 qualitative data analysis software (QSR International
316 Pty Ltd, 2015), and explicitly stated meanings expressed in the data were then systematically
317 coded. Next, a process of theme development, refinement, and naming was conducted to
318 cluster codes and distinguish themes. Each higher-order theme was convened around a
319 central organizing concept to ensure its coherence and meaningfulness (Braun, Clarke, &
320 Weate, 2016). Themes generated were reviewed and then comprehensively defined. Lastly,
321 the themes' broader meanings and implications were scrutinized to theorize their significance
322 to the research question. All themes were used to structure the content of the vignettes.

323 *Stage Two: Creative Non-Fiction*

324 The second stage of data analysis involved a creative analytic practice (CAP) known
325 as creative non-fiction. This new qualitative research method is grounded in empirical data
326 but uses creative writing techniques to resonate with readers (Schinke et al., 2016). Using
327 stories is a powerful way to reveal complexities within sporting environments (e.g., Hings et
328 al., 2018), and creative non-fiction can be used to share real-life events and illuminate
329 subjectivities, complexities, and fluidities in lived experiences (Smith, 2013). Such forms of

330 narrative inquiry have been promoted by sport management scholars in recent years as a way
331 of reaching wider audiences (e.g., Hoeber & Shaw, 2017; Stride, Fitzgerald, & Allison,
332 2017).

333 *Composite Vignettes*

334 Overarching themes from the first analysis stage were used to structure the content of
335 the vignettes. Each composite vignette provided one synthesized account from multiple
336 individuals combining their experiences from the participant perspective, drawing upon the
337 empirical data that was systematically gathered to move the reader towards a deeper
338 understanding of the topic (Smith, McGannon, & Williams, 2015). Key phrases and stories
339 were extracted from the interview transcripts to best represent each theme, with the inclusion
340 of as many direct quotes as possible to maintain the participants' spoken words. Phrases and
341 stories were then merged together to ensure a natural flow to each vignette with a coherent
342 and powerful account rich in description (Smith et al., 2015). Once fully formed, the
343 vignettes were independently reviewed by each author against the interview transcripts to
344 check that no information had been misrepresented.

345 After the authors re-read the interview transcripts, intersecting views emerged among
346 participants in similar occupational areas and at similar stages in their career, as well as
347 diverging accounts between those at different occupational areas and points in their career. A
348 categorization approach was adopted whereby the identification and grouping together of
349 classifying features formed typologies (e.g., Christensen, 2013), resulting in the composition
350 of three vignettes that told the separate stories of a youth recreational head coach ($n=5$), a
351 talent development head coach ($n=4$), and an elite level head coach ($n=3$). While some
352 overlap in themes emerged between participants at different levels of the football pyramid
353 (e.g., confidence was a prominent theme at the recreational level but also mentioned, to a
354 lesser extent, at the talent development level), themes were categorized to a particular level of

355 the football pyramid only when common amongst all participants at that level and with
356 enough data to support them (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

357 **Results**

358 *Introduction to the first vignette: Gender stereotyping, having to prove yourself, and*
359 *confidence*

360 In the first vignette, experiences of gender stereotyping in interactions with players
361 and colleagues, having to prove competence to gain respect, and the negative impact of those
362 interactions on well-being are explored. Contributors in this vignette described experiences of
363 exclusion early in their careers, resistance to women's increased presence, the constant
364 necessity to prove claim to membership of the coaching workforce and the impact on their
365 confidence. It tells the story of Janet, a recreational head coach with three years of coaching
366 experience with girls' and boys' teams at a local-league club. Janet started coaching whilst at
367 university where she was able to access university financial bursaries and fund her first
368 coaching qualification.

369 *Janet: A youth recreational head coach's story (early career)*

370 Up until a couple of years ago, I did not think it was even possible for women to
371 become football head coaches; as a player I had never met a professional woman coach. To
372 develop into the best head coach I can be, I know I need to be able to adapt to different
373 environments and to coach both boys and girls. I feel confident coaching the girls' team, but I
374 am struggling to feel the same way with the boys' team. It would be easier for me to be an
375 assistant coach. I cannot express myself with male players in the same way I can with female
376 players. I feel judged on my ability to head coach because of my gender. Male players at our
377 club just do not give me as much respect as much as they do to their other (male) head coach.
378 For example, I arrived in my first week to give the pre-game team talk to little comments
379 from the players: "are you here to clean our boots after the match?" and "it should be you

380 who washes our kit.” I felt completely put on the spot and did not know what to say. In the
381 first training session the following week I demonstrated a skill in training and one of the
382 players said: “wow, a girl just kicked a ball.” I have played football for twelve years of my
383 life, but because of that one comment I felt I should not be kicking a ball at all. I remember it
384 really made me wonder whether I was good enough to be a head coach. Confidence has such
385 a big impact on my coaching at the moment.

386 It is really important to me that in recreational football girls’ and boys’ teams are
387 treated equally. When I was younger, the boys’ teams got all the club’s resources, equipment,
388 and support, and the girls’ teams were lucky to get what was left. I do not want my girls to
389 grow up being treated second best and experience those same obstacles. I get frustrated that I
390 have to fight for them in that way, I do not have to for my boys’ team—it is a given. At
391 committee meetings, the male head coaches can be a little patronising. It is little comments
392 like “oh, I am surprised you have managed to get the match on,” and I will just think why are
393 you surprised? The members of the committee also call me “love” all the time. That annoys
394 me. You would not be calling me “love” if I was a male colleague.

395 Now I reflect on these situations, gender actually affects a lot of what I do. I have to
396 prove that I know what I am talking, just to get eye contact from male head coaches I have
397 met on courses for example, let alone get them to take on board what I am saying. On the first
398 course I went on, we had to get into small groups to debate a particular topic and then present
399 arguments back to the class. I remember being the only woman on the course, being called
400 “lad” within five minutes, and my name not even being included in the presentation. After a
401 lot of debate between the other head coaches in the group, I spoke up and answered one of
402 their questions. As I talked, I saw this head coach sit up, he was the leader in our group, his
403 neck went back and I could see the surprise written across his face like “oh, she might
404 actually know what football is about and what she is doing.” I would say that early coaching

405 course experience had quite a negative influence on my confidence. You are certainly put in
406 some uncomfortable situations, as I have described: men think that they are better than you,
407 that they understand football more than you, and that they are a better head coach than you.

408 *Introduction to the second vignette: Work-life conflicts, limited career mobility and*
409 *marginalization*

410 In the second vignette, experiences of work-life conflicts, limited career mobility, and
411 an ingrained system of prejudice in which men hold the power and women are largely
412 excluded from career progression (i.e., marginalized) are explored. The talent development
413 head coaches represented in this vignette described the organizational barriers they have
414 faced in their efforts to further their coaching careers. The second vignette tells the story of
415 Sarah, a full-time community head coach also working part-time as girls' academy head
416 coach for a professional football club in England. Sarah described receiving a career-ending
417 injury as a player and being encouraged by her father to get into coaching so that she could
418 stay involved in football.

419 *Sarah: A talent development head coach's story (mid-career)*

420 My life is football, football, football. I recently started coaching in the girls' academy
421 at my club, in addition to juggling my full-time job in the community department. It is where
422 I ultimately want to be full-time in the girls' academy, but the funding is only there as a part-
423 time role so at the moment I work every day of the week apart from Sunday to fit it in. In the
424 talent development stage of the football pyramid there is a lot of pressure from the club, my
425 managers, players, and parents who all have a vested interest in my team performing well. I
426 have probably taken on too much but being part of the women's game and having an impact
427 on the future generation of potential England players is worth it.

428 I am one of only a few women head coaches in the girls' academy. I do feel that we
429 are pushed towards coaching the younger age groups, and the male head coaches get to work

430 exclusively with typically older, and better, age groups. Having women head coaches as role
431 models for the older players is just as important as the younger players, and I am just as
432 qualified as my male colleagues, so it is upsetting that there is such limited opportunity to
433 progress in my career here without any apparent explanation. I experienced this a few years
434 ago when I worked as a boys' academy head coach with a professional club. I was on lots of
435 short-term contracts and I wanted to apply for the permanent position the club decided to
436 create. My line manager told me I could not apply for the position because the club did not
437 want to hire women to coach in elite talent development. I asked him why he employed me
438 on lots of short-term contracts if I was not a good enough head coach in the first place. He
439 had no reply. I left and joined another academy. But even with that job, I initially had to go
440 through three levels of management to secure the position because the senior head coaches
441 initially did not want to employ me because I had children and they assumed I would call in
442 sick quite a lot because of it. It was such a kick in the teeth. I felt there was just barrier, after
443 barrier to career progression.

444 Over the last few years there have definitely been improvements to the coaching
445 opportunities to women and the breakdown of some barriers. In my opinion, it is going to be
446 another couple of decades to change the mindset in this country to the point women are fully
447 represented in the coaching workforce. If you look at the typical age of coach educators, they
448 are mid-50s and have grown up with a stereotypical philosophy towards women in football,
449 and we simply have to wait for them to move on. I have been called "lad" and "boy" on
450 coaching courses so many times I could not count them all. They probably do not even
451 realize they are doing it. Little things like the use of gendered language on courses can make
452 a big difference to women like me. At the last course I went on I challenged the male tutor on
453 this. He had said once we had completed a group task "one of you boys can present back to
454 the class." So, I said "okay, I will not present then." He changed his language the next time to

455 “one of you people,” I think he was just ignorant to what he had said and did not really know
456 what he should be saying in those moments. Unfortunately, in my experience not all women
457 head coaches I know have the confidence to speak up like that.

458 *Introduction to the third vignette: Realities of elite level football, prevalent undercurrents of*
459 *sexism, and apprehensions about future directives*

460 In the third vignette, the realities of working at an elite level of football are explored
461 in addition to concerns for the implementation of future directives that promote women
462 coaches. The elite women head coaches represented in this third vignette described the
463 development of an undercurrent of sexism which has substituted overt discrimination of the
464 past; their use of affirmative action to their advantage; and their apprehensions about future
465 directives that aim to increase the number of women head coaches in football. The third
466 vignette tells the story of Emily, a woman coach educator and head coach of a women’s team
467 for a semi-professional club in England. Emily played international football from the age of
468 12 years and described being inspired to get into coaching by her coaches once her playing
469 career ended.

470 *Emily: An elite head coach’s story (late career)*

471 Elite football is another world, it is ruthless and tough for any head coach, let alone a
472 woman head coach. I am completely numb to it now and I know I am fortunate to be
473 surrounded by supportive head coaches in the professional club I currently work in, but I was
474 not always. As a woman head coach at an elite level whether that’s in men’s or women’s
475 football, you are under enormous pressure to consistently deliver results for the financial
476 performance and reputation of the club. In one of the first men’s professional academy jobs
477 that I had, one of my male colleagues kept undermining my position as head coach. When I
478 offered to make a cup of tea for my colleagues, he shouted across the room, “Is that not what
479 you are actually employed to do, to go into the kitchen and make us a cup of tea?” I went

480 home and thought, do I really have to deal with this on top of the pressures of the job? It
481 really got to me. I was shocked by what he said but knew I had to stand up for myself and
482 call him out on his sexist comments, which I did. He never made another comment again. But
483 it did knock my confidence, I kept wondering what head coaches might be saying behind my
484 back and questioning whether I deserved to be in that academy role. I felt I had to work twice
485 as hard to get half the recognition my male colleagues did in that job. But the reality is, as
486 women in elite football, we are always going to have to constantly prove ourselves because
487 of our lack of numbers, although women's football in my opinion is more inclusive.

488 It is so important for women coaches wanting to work at the elite level [of the football
489 pyramid] to be aware of the realities of that workplace. Over the years, even in my current
490 role in charge of a semi-professional women's team, I have grown to expect little comments,
491 odd looks, or lack of any conversation in my direction because of my gender. I do think
492 [gender discrimination] is getting better though, I do not tend to hear derogatory comments,
493 noticeably since I gained employment in women's football. You do, however, know when a
494 male colleague is acting differently around you, looking down upon you, or feels superior to
495 you. I have experienced that a lot in football; men feeling insecure around me and trying to
496 assert their dominance with sexist "banter" either in the dugouts on a matchday or around the
497 training ground. I think a lot of head coaches are ignorant, they do not realize what they are
498 saying is not playful humor and can be hurtful to others taken out of context. Even a male
499 referee has acted this way with me. Having experienced both, there is a big difference
500 between making a flippant comment and being ignorant about the effect it has, and someone
501 saying something discriminatory on purpose

502 I am also a coach educator and act as a course tutor on the NGB's coaching courses. I
503 can guarantee that 99% of the courses that I tutor on, all of the candidates are men. Every
504 course tutor has to prove they are an expert head coach to their candidates when they are a

505 running a course, but I already know before I step into the room that I will be on the back
506 foot the moment I walk in and they see a woman tutor. I have had candidates do a double
507 take and look at me twice because in front of them is a woman that does not fit their
508 stereotypical view of women and football. I would say a woman head coach in a male-
509 dominated sport like football has had to develop more skills than her male counterpart for
510 that very reason. I have good coping skills, I am thick skinned, and I process information
511 before I act on it. I know that, because of my gender, if I say something wrong, and it is
512 compared to the same situation with a male colleague, my club would come down on me like
513 a ton of bricks more so than they would him. You do get labelled as the token woman, but to
514 be honest I am okay with that if it gets me somewhere I want to go, because once I interact
515 with people I prove why I am here.

516 My biggest worry at the moment is that clubs are motivated to employ a woman head
517 coach because they want to “tick a box” for the governing body, not because they are
518 interested in creating a diverse workforce. If those head coaches are not good enough, they
519 should not be there—men or women. We need the right people. I am 100% in support of
520 encouraging women head coaches into football and having networking opportunities as we
521 are often isolated from other women in our coaching jobs. But I have mixed feelings about
522 this if I am honest. The more we brand ourselves as women head coaches, the more
523 everybody else will do so, instead of as head coaches. For instance, I know there are women-
524 only UEFA B coaching courses now but I would never opt to go on one of those. I would
525 choose the mixed gender course because I would learn more from having a mix of men and
526 women candidates with a diverse range of experiences that contribute to the course. I do
527 understand some women are intimidated by traditionally male run coaching courses. Another
528 example I could give is the women coaching conference I recently attended. It was fantastic
529 to see all of these women head coaches from different sports in one place, and I enjoyed

530 being able to talk to other women with similar experiences. But I was sat there thinking, why
531 not have a coaching conference with all big-name women guest speakers that both men and
532 women attend to mingle with each other? I believe the more I call myself a female coach, the
533 more other people will call me a female coach when really, I am just a coach.

534 **Discussion**

535 Through the novel presentation of vignettes, the consistent impact of gender in the
536 football workplace was illuminated, which facilitated a deeper insight to, and extended our
537 understanding of, the numerous sociocultural and organizational barriers women head
538 coaches face in specific occupational areas. It was revealed that: (a) women head coaches
539 experience isolation and a lack of confidence, and have to fight for equipment and resources
540 in youth recreational football (vignette 1), (b) gendered organizational practices take place
541 that limit career mobility of women coaches and place extra pressure on them to develop
542 players into elite performers (vignette 2); and (c) “token” women face increased scrutiny at
543 the elite level to consistently deliver results and are concerned with initiatives that are heavily
544 dependent on preferring female candidates over male candidates (i.e., positive gender
545 discrimination) (vignette 3). Overall, these results support the theoretical tenet of hegemonic
546 masculinity in the football workplace and makes two significant contributions to the
547 literature. First, we present an in-depth examination of what football coaching means as a
548 woman at the organizational and sociocultural levels of LaVoi and Dutove’s (2012)
549 ecological model. Second, we facilitate new understandings of the issues that shape women
550 coaches’ navigation of gender in the football workplace through the novel methodological
551 approach of creative nonfiction.

552 The first vignette (Janet) indicated women head coaches resist, challenge, and
553 transform expectations of hegemonic masculinity in recreational football from early in their
554 career. Janet described uncomfortable experiences with male players and head coaches at her

555 club and at league committee meetings, demonstrating that football as an institution is a
556 ground for sexism and privileges dominant masculinity (Pringle, 2005). As the only woman
557 head coach in her club, Janet was isolated with minimal support but demonstrated resistance
558 to restrictive power relations in football culture by ensuring that her players felt equal to their
559 male peers and had equal access to resources and equipment. Access to few resources and
560 minimal support have been cited by former women coaches in recreational football as reasons
561 for leaving the coaching profession, especially early in their career (Cunningham, Sagas,
562 Dixon, Kent, & Turner, 2005; Kamphoff, 2010). In the development of their ecological
563 model, LaVoi and Dutove (2012) contend that a perceived absence of support for women
564 coaches (an interpersonal barrier) results in a lack of upward mobility. The early career
565 women coaches who participated in this study worked in organizations without adequate
566 support, suggesting that access to few resources is also a multidimensional barrier existing at
567 the organizational level of the ecological model. Hence it is crucial that initiatives be put in
568 place to increase women coaching networks and role-models to ensure women, such as Janet,
569 do not feel isolated, have adequate support, and do not leave recreational football or the
570 coaching profession early in their career. Despite their existence, researchers know little
571 about the adoption by sports organizations of formal women coach mentor schemes that
572 match promising early-career coaches with established coaches. For example, the FA's coach
573 mentor program offers on-ground personalized support to all recreational coaches across the
574 country. Building awareness among women coaches is imperative so coaches like Janet are
575 aware of support structures from early in their career.

576 Janet's lack of experience with other women coaches may be due to a distinct
577 shortage of experienced coaches available to serve as mentors. As Emily identified,
578 experienced women coaches already feel as though they have to work twice as hard to get
579 half the amount of recognition and may not have the time to spend mentoring others. Given

580 the extra time burden mentoring may place of women coaches, NGBs should boost the
581 inclusion of men as cross-gender mentors to buffer women coaches from overt sexism and
582 help their mentee to circumvent structural, social, and cultural barriers to career advancement
583 (Sagas & Cunningham, 2004). Male mentors are also more likely to be in influential
584 decision-making positions than women and able to assist the career development of women
585 coaches (Weaver & Chelladurai, 2002). Shadowing a mentor is likely to provide substantial
586 benefits such as positively influencing Janet's career expectations and goals, and by
587 providing Janet exposure and networking opportunities at professional conferences
588 (Cunningham et al., 2005). In their model, LaVoi and Dutove (2012) summarize mentoring
589 as both a potential interpersonal level barrier and support for women coaches. This body of
590 work has largely examined mentoring functions from only the mentee's perspective and
591 omitted the mentors whose ability to provide support can be diminished by high workloads
592 and pressure to perform at high levels (Bower, 2011). Researchers must address this
593 important gap in knowledge to understand the leadership behaviors that best support
594 mentee's advancement.

595 In line with previous research (e.g., Lewis et al., 2018), Janet perceived the coach
596 education atmosphere to be intimidating and uncomfortable. In particular, male coach
597 educators maintain the status quo in football culture by sustaining dominant beliefs and
598 practices associated with the exclusion of women coaches. A major shortage of women coach
599 educators exists in England; women represent only 3% of all coaches with the minimum FA
600 Level 3 coaching qualification required to become an FA coach educator (UEFA, 2017). The
601 Professional Football Association (PFA) only appointed their first woman coach educator,
602 former England manager Hope Powell, in 2016 (Press Association, 2016). In addition to
603 implementing strategies to increase the number women coach educators (e.g., concessions for
604 UEFA-level courses and promotional campaigns), gender equality training should be

605 implemented within annual continuous professional development events for coach educators
606 to ensure that those in charge of coach education courses possess the knowledge and tools to
607 provide an unthreatening environment for women during coach education programmes.

608 In the second vignette (Sarah), women head coaches described gendered
609 organizational practices that limited their career mobility. The deeply masculine nature of the
610 professional football clubs that Sarah experienced advantaged men in hiring, denied women
611 career advancement, and perpetuated women's underrepresentation in the football workplace.
612 A novel finding to this study was that the gender-based allocation of organizational positions
613 in the talent development stage of the football pyramid entrapped Sarah to coaching younger
614 age groups, reflecting the strength of gender stereotypes surrounding women's work and that
615 women are naturally better suited to low status roles (Kane & Stangl, 1991). It is evident that
616 when women are placed in less desirable positions than men at talent development stages,
617 marginalization occurs through persistent absence at the elite level (Kanter, 1977). Being
618 restricted to roles that are consistent with gender norms (e.g., maternal nurturing of younger
619 players; Welford, 2011) is a barrier to career mobility for women football coaches who have
620 more to offer but have no avenue to do so. This practice is a double standard—men have
621 been integrated within women's sport, yet women remain restricted from men's sport
622 (Walker & Bopp, 2010). Women like Sarah bring professional qualifications and coaching
623 expertise plus increasing experience of playing women's football to offer female players. We
624 purport that football organizations should consider women as an untapped resource and
625 coordinate with governing bodies to open the closed routes experienced by women head
626 coaches in this study to transform recruitment transparency and accountability. Changes may
627 include appointment protocols and clear publicized selection criteria to assess candidates and
628 justify decisions in relation to gender (Van den Brink, Benschop, & Jansen, 2010).

629 Sarah's lack of belief in her abilities could be linked to the deep structure of gender
630 inequality in talent development football. Sarah described complex working environments
631 which were outside of simple resistance and reproduction of hegemonic masculinity, but
632 instead were spaces where women and men negotiated power in multiple ways. Being in a
633 sociocultural environment where patriarchal devaluing of women in sport occurs can have an
634 eroding impact on women head coaches' self-confidence (Norman, 2014), who often have
635 lower self-confidence than men (Cunningham, Doherty, & Gregg, 2007). Sarah is at a
636 crossroads in her career; under pressure to produce elite performers after coaching football
637 for 5 years, the average length of time when women typically leave the profession
638 (Cunningham & Sagas, 2003). This is a structural turning point in her career (Hodkinson &
639 Sparkes, 1997), typified by movement from an early professional to an established top-level
640 coach (Barker-Ruchti, Lindgren, Hofmann, Sinning, & Shelton, 2014). She has moved from
641 part-time to full-time coaching, under pressure from stakeholders in the talent development
642 stage of the football pyramid to mold players into elite level performers, and is in a
643 demanding phase where work-life balance is often compromised (Dixon & Bruening, 2007).
644 Previous evidence on work-family balance identified in LaVoi and Dutove (2012)'s
645 ecological model suggests that women coaches negotiate work-family balance more easily
646 when single and without children (Reade et al., 2009). Our finding adds to our existing
647 knowledge on work-life conflict by providing contextual insights on gendered experiences of
648 mid-career coaches in the unique context of talent development football.

649 Sarah's story also highlights the pattern of normative practice that has allowed men's
650 dominance over women in football to continue, as well as how the theory of hegemonic
651 masculinity makes sense of gender diversity and sameness in the football workplace. That is,
652 Sarah recalled men asserting their dominance in football knowledge, that they were naturally
653 superior, and were better coaches than women like her (Messner, 1992). Sarah documented

654 that the costs of hegemony to her were a compromised work-life balance and limited career
655 mobility. Our study adds to a body of evidence that suggests sport is one of the most visible
656 contexts where hegemonic masculinity is reproduced (Krane, 2001; Satorre & Cunningham,
657 2007). Within this context, women in football are, however, challenging the acceptable
658 gender boundaries and serve to disrupt the male-defined, suitable behaviors of women. The
659 addition of resistance from patriarchal organizations to Sarah's presence could have led to her
660 leaving the profession at this crucial stage of her career. At this level of the football pyramid
661 coaches are typically appointed if they hold the FA Level 3 qualification with relevant
662 coaching experience or FA Level 2 coaching qualification with significant elite level playing
663 experience. Gender diversity decreases at this level of the football pyramid: qualification
664 transitions are such that women represent 4% of FA Level 2 qualified coaches and only 3%
665 of FA Level 3 (i.e., UEFA B) qualified coaches (UEFA, 2017). Therefore, organizations
666 cannot ignore structural inequalities if they wish to keep these head coaches, who bring key
667 skills such as enterprise in the face of adversity, within the profession. This may be in the
668 form of opening their practices to independent researchers to discover how women in their
669 organization strategically negotiate their work and life responsibilities and its' consequences
670 on career progression to get to the crux of why some women stay while others leave coaching
671 at talent development levels of football. This finding adds to our theoretical knowledge of
672 barriers for women coaches identified by LaVoi and Dutove (2012) with the addition of job
673 distributions at the organizational level.

674 The third vignette (Emily) revealed "token" women face increased scrutiny at elite
675 levels and are concerned by positive gender discrimination. Elite level coaching can be
676 particularly isolating for women when historically there has been limited access to leadership
677 positions and minimal existence of old girls networks (Norman, 2008; Talbot, 2002). Despite
678 this, Emily firmly believed that men and women head coaches should only be advanced if

679 they held the right expertise. At this level of the football pyramid, coaches are typically
680 appointed if they possess the FA Level 5 (i.e., UEFA Pro) coaching qualification, or the FA
681 Level 4 (i.e., UEFA A) qualification with relevant coaching (or playing) experience.
682 Qualification transitions are such that the negative trend at the talent development level
683 continues at the elite level and gender diversity decreases further: women represent 2% of FA
684 Level 4 qualified coaches and 1.5% of FA Level 5 qualified coaches (UEFA, 2017). Emily
685 expressed her concerns that organizations might be pressured by NGBs to focus on increasing
686 their number of women head coaches rather than employing those with the required
687 expertise. Numeric balancing has been argued to be too simplistic a solution that might
688 exacerbate the situation rather than solve it (Norman, 2008; Theberge, 1993). Another finding
689 of this study was that Emily interestingly viewed her token status positively, if it got her “foot
690 in the door” and gave her access to people in power, she was confident her coaching expertise
691 would shine through and surpass her gender. This perhaps helps to explain why Emily did not
692 want to be known as a *woman* head coach and would not choose to attend single gender
693 courses that often have the connotation of lesser standards (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2008). It
694 is not surprising that Emily did not want to be viewed as an outsider unable to achieve the
695 necessary (male) standard, nor be seen as needing extra help to achieve the same goals as her
696 male colleagues. This finding is novel in that it is in direct contrast to that of previous
697 research of Lewis et al. (2018) that 80% of women football head coaches interviewed were in
698 support of women-only coaching courses. However, we recognize that what differs is that
699 Lewis et al.’s participants worked at various levels of the football pyramid, whereas our head
700 coaches’ view might be shaped by occupation in elite football.

701 A distinct finding was that women coaches operating at the elite level of the football
702 pyramid did not want to create a dichotomy of “us” and “them.” Separatism between genders
703 can reinforce differentiation and the absence of women from these environments, meaning

704 that male-dominated norms are not challenged, but perpetuate gender inequality (Fielding-
705 Lloyd & Meân, 2008). Critics of this perspective might suggest that, by striving for
706 sameness, the hegemonic male standard is reinforced as the norm and women ultimately
707 conform to the inequality gender practices that they wish to reject (Shaw & Hoerber, 2003).
708 Emily's story highlights how new configurations to women's identity and practice as
709 professional coaches in the football workplace can impact the traditional gender hierarchies.
710 Emily described being accepted by her peers once initiated in their culture, but women must
711 remember that hegemonic masculine patterns can change by incorporating elements from
712 others (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In respect of this perhaps elite level coaches should
713 exercise caution in (unintentionally) encouraging other women coaches to behave similarly to
714 their male counterparts. Emily's views differed from Sarah's and Janet's regarding gender
715 support, demonstrating differences in opinion depending on the stage(s) of career
716 development and specific occupational area. NGBs should note, therefore, that gendered
717 support for head coaches (e.g., women-only coaching courses) was supported by the head
718 coaches in the early-career and mid-career vignettes, and a targeted approach delivered
719 consistently across regional football associations towards women at early-mid stages of their
720 careers and operating at lower levels of the football pyramid is recommended. This finding
721 adds to our theoretical knowledge of supports for women coaches identified by LaVoi and
722 Dutove (2012) with the addition of occupational-targeted gendered support at the
723 organizational level of analysis.

724 Furthering emerging research by Lewis et al. (2018), all women interviewed noted
725 that the repetitive adoption of language which was insensitive and which reinforced gender
726 stereotypes that the head coaches were trying to resist. Whilst women might be motivated to
727 disprove gender stereotypical beliefs of male coach educators, research has shown that
728 women's excessive achievement concern can impair their performance (e.g., Hively & El-

729 Alayli, 2014). Being called “lad” or “boy” was frequently reported by women head coaches,
730 and based on their accounts, coach education courses privileged male needs and ideals of
731 coaching, thereby denying them the opportunity to explore alternative styles which might
732 better suit them (Welford, 2011). This approach assumes that the responsibility is on women
733 to fit within highly gendered cultural practices of coach education provision, rather than for
734 such practices to adapt and change. All women reported recent experiences of sexism despite
735 the NGB’s drive to increase the number of women coaches in football. NGBs and researchers
736 should further interrogate the cultural practices that underpin the stories presented here by
737 consulting women coaches on their developmental needs as women operating in occupational
738 areas outside of patriarchal norms.

739 *Limitations*

740 Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, by highlighting commonalities
741 between women coaches, the experiences of women from other marginalized social identities
742 were not explored (e.g., race, sexual orientation, education, and socioeconomic status).
743 Future work may wish to draw attention to understanding how other identities interact with
744 gender (i.e., intersectionality) to produce different experiences in the football workplace.
745 Second, semi-structured interviews were employed within this study to allow for flexibility in
746 theme elicitation, however there is no perfect genre of data representation in qualitative
747 research (Smith et al., 2015), and researchers might wish to consider life histories as a
748 methodology to permit greater exploration of the specific themes that this study highlights
749 over time. Third, our study is limited to the binary conceptualization of men and women,
750 future research should go beyond masculinity and femininity hierarchy to integrate
751 hegemonic masculinity into the illustration of cultural practices in football. Lastly, we
752 acknowledge that the classification of each participant’s occupational area was no perfect
753 grouping. However, as Barker-Ruchti et al. (2014) argued, any classifications are a flawed

754 system as linear development and stages of career that all women pass through does not exist.
755 Some themes existed across levels of the football pyramid, for example evidence of gender
756 bias (e.g., having to prove yourself) appeared in more than one vignette. It is not surprising
757 that overlapping themes existed, given the elite level coaches are likely to have been
758 recreational coaches in an earlier stage of their career. The relevance of the themes to each
759 occupational area was determined by their prevalence among the participants' spoken words.
760 For example, both Janet and Emily mentioned gender bias in their accounts, however Janet
761 not only spoke about this bias to a much greater extent than Emily but also described the
762 current gender bias she experienced as negatively impacting her wellbeing, whereas Emily
763 did not. By presenting separate vignettes based on stages of career, we open the capacity to
764 multiple understandings of how gender permeates the workplace, and how this is
765 differentiated by career experiences and life perspectives, extending previous literature.
766 Researchers may wish to consider the background of women coaches to understand how they
767 have arrived at critical points in their career. In the future, it may also be prudent to expand
768 this line of enquiry in football from women head coaches to whether gender inequality
769 stretches across other roles in football with similar increased scrutiny (e.g., women match
770 officials).

771 *Conclusion*

772 In summary, the present work highlights the consistent impact of gender for women
773 in the football workplace: negatively influencing head coaches' interactions and confidence
774 early in their career and in youth recreational football, embedded within discriminatory
775 organizational practices which limit career mobility, and used to hold elite level head coaches
776 to higher scrutiny levels than male colleagues. This study corroborates hegemonic
777 masculinity as a valid theoretical lens to the study of women coaches and male-dominated
778 sports (e.g., football) at the sociocultural level of analysis, and adds occupational-focused

779 gendered provision as a support at the organizational level of LaVoi and Dutove's (2012)
780 ecological model. By gaining deeper insights into the numerous sociocultural and
781 organizational barriers women head coaches face during their careers using creative non-
782 fiction to tell first hand stories, this study offers governing associations reasons to move away
783 from a present "one size fits all" approach to supporting women head coaches, and towards a
784 targeted approach by career stages and specific occupational areas to aid their career
785 progression.

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