

'I don't think I can catch it': women, confidence and responsibility in football coach education

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“I don’t think I can catch it”: Women, confidence and responsibility in football coach education.

Whilst women’s participation in sport continues to increase, their presence remains ideologically challenging given the significance of sport for the construction of gendered identities. As a hegemonically masculine institution, leadership roles across sport remain male-dominated and the entry of women into positions of authority (such as coaching) routinely contested. But in powerful male-typed sports, like football, women’s participation remains particularly challenging. Consequently, constructions of gender inequity in coaching were explored at a regional division of the English Football Association through unstructured interviews and coaching course observation. Using critical discourse analysis we identified the consistent re/production of women as unconfident in their own skills and abilities, and the framing of women themselves as responsible for the gendered inequities in football coaching. Women were thereby strategically positioned as deservedly on the periphery of the football category, whilst the organization was positioned as progressive and liberal.

Introduction

Due to its worldwide popularity, football has long had to make sense of its (lack of) diversity.¹ Nevertheless, football in the UK still places great value on masculinity, toughness and aggression and there is little evidence of any real will for this to change. Sugden and Tomlinson identified football’s worldwide appeal as arising from its ‘physiologically democratic’ nature claiming: ‘You do not have to be a particular shape, size or physique in order to excel...’². Yet physical and ethnic constraints are apparent in many world regions, and one of the most widespread constrictions is that football remains a man’s game. Indeed in the UK women’s football still faces much hostility,³ remnants of the historical hostility that permeated the official organizations that regulate, and effectively ‘are’, football.⁴

The English Football Association, “the FA”, controversially took control of women’s football in 1993. Argued to be a reluctant response to pressure from football’s international governing body (Federation Internationale de Football Association, FIFA) to support and develop the women’s game, women’s facilities remain routinely inferior to men’s despite the apparent gain in FA financial support and resources.⁵ Whilst female participation rates in English football have soared⁶, women’s increased presence has not been translated into leadership positions⁷ and men continue to play key management roles

in women's football clubs. Indeed, many sport organizations remain strongly masculine despite the increasing presence of women⁸ and continue to be gendered through the dominant discourses of their members who explain exclusionary cultures and practices in ways that preserve male dominance.⁹ That this should happen in English football is not surprising, given its ideological and cultural significance. Indeed, exclusion is important, but the *nature of inclusion* (i.e. female participation) is highly significant since mere presence, often used to demonstrate equality and inclusivity, is not (necessarily) equivalent to acceptance, inclusion, and equity.¹⁰ Resistance remains evident in the continuing limited provision for females in many football clubs, despite claims of policy enactment to promote female participation. For example, the regional FA division we studied *aims* to have 25% of its boys clubs offering girls football,¹¹ revealing problematic provision for girls that is systemic. Organizational provision that ultimately perpetuates the common organizational excuse that limited numbers of experienced females are available for professional development and promotion.

Football coaches: a pivotal role

Coaches play a vital and visible role in maintaining and challenging dominant sporting discourses¹² as coaching itself is the practice of transferring knowledge. This is especially salient in coach education where the ideologies, discourses, and identities of football are explicitly taught.¹³ However, coaching and coach education remain gendered occupations where males are the norm and females *othered*.¹⁴ Sportscoach UK currently estimates 74% of all coaches in UK are male¹⁵, and 61% of coaches for FA-affiliated *women's* football clubs are male.¹⁶ Consequently, male-defined practices continue to dominate sport.

Occupational gendering arises from meanings ascribed to activity.¹⁷ Given the task of nurturing and facilitating students' potential, coaching could be perceived as 'relational practice' oriented towards others,¹⁸ rendering traditional feminine discourses (e.g. nurturing, supportive, etc.) applicable. Indeed, such discourses have been deployed by women athletes to frame themselves as better role models.¹⁹ That this has not happened in coaching, or applied to women as coaches, is indicative of hegemonic thinking and practices. Indeed, the negative framing of women's coaching qualities in comparison to the autocratic and forceful male coach²⁰ suggests resistance to women's

increased presence and emerging *gender-disruptive* discourses; resistance that serves the powerful by maintaining the status quo.²¹ Sport has long been resistant to the entrance of women, deploying powerful gate-keeping practices²² to protect its boundaries.²³

Context and analytical framework

The common gap between policies of gender equity in sport organizations and everyday gendered discursive practice is centred on two contradictory themes: the denial of gender inequalities and the rationalization of gender inequalities. Whilst these strategies are intricately related they can be usefully explored separately. As such, we have discussed the denial strategy in football coaching discourses elsewhere²⁴ and now focus on the contradictory strategy of rationalizing gender inequality, a significant practice in discounting organizational (causal) responsibility for inequity. However, our approach positions the “organization” as a process constructed and enacted by its individual members.²⁵ We argue that identities, including institutionally relevant identities such as who is/is not a member, are a function of embedded power relations²⁶ re/produced by people as they “do” the organization²⁷. In this paper we explore how challenges to the masculinity of football have been managed within a regional FA in relation to coaching. We are especially interested in the routine re/production of gendered discourses and definitions, and the undermining of women’s membership and category entitlements²⁸ within accounts of coach training and training practices by organizational members.

Consequently, the re/production of, or challenges to, traditionally gendered discourses in an organization can be usefully explored through the talk and discursive practices of those who enact and implement the organization (especially the most senior members). Our concern is therefore with the re/production of discourses, power, and definitions within the everyday actions and discursive practices of a specific sport organization,²⁹ especially given its wider impact as a powerful social institution.³⁰ As such, and akin to other studies,³¹ we explore how members of a predominant sport organization (a regional FA) account for their work and organization. However, a key component of the re/production of discourses, and hence the discursive work evident in accounts, concerns the construction of identities and the routine achievement of category membership and entitlement.³² Indeed, the cultural significance of this sporting site for identities suggests that the re/production and performance of identities would be a crucial

aspect of discursive action.

English football is a highly masculinized and powerful cultural institution. As such it provides an interesting site to explore the *naturalized* enactment of gendered ideologies and resistance to the challenges of women's presence. Strongly linked to male identities, football typically re/produces a form of heightened, aggressive hegemonic masculinity³³ and men's membership of the football category and its entitlements) is typically *given* (assumed). In contrast, women's claims to membership remain typically challenged or rendered invisible.³⁴

Sport and its institutions are typically framed as meritocracies³⁵ within which appropriate skills and assets will *naturally* lead to success and progress; highly problematic if sporting skills and assets are naturalized as male possessions. Indeed, Knoppers identified a common belief that effectively defined women as deficient in the assets required in the sporting workplace.³⁶ This provided an account of why women *naturally* failed to progress and/or succeed. But maintaining and justifying prevailing gendered inequalities requires the successful re/production of the male/female dichotomy.³⁷ Consequently discourses about *natural* differences, intertextually linked to other powerful discourses such as religion and biology, provide potent resources for practices that construct difference; discourses widely deployed to frame women's failure as intrinsic and exonerate organizational culpability.³⁸

As the governing force in English football, the FA is the dominant site for teaching and re/producing the routine meanings and practices of football, coaching, and associated norms and values.³⁹ Indeed, the significance of football in England means the FA wields significant cultural influence on gendered understandings and discourses on the wider social context.⁴⁰ Thus, like the game, the FA has been noted to be highly masculine and resistant to women.

English coach education, regulated by the FA, is where football coaches are most explicitly taught the meanings of football, within the process of gaining the qualifications mandatory for entry into the coaching category. Equally, given the significance of coaches on the subsequent enactment of football, we consider coach education to be an especially salient context for the exploration of gendered understandings and gender equity.

Taking the position that talk and discursive practices are motivated and strategic, we used critical discourse analysis (CDA) with a focus on discursive and rhetorical features⁴¹ to analyze interviews with organizational members and observations of coach training. Given that rituals, values and norms are re/produced and enacted in the micro level of language, *everyday talk* provides an opportunity to explore subordinating strategic practices that are often denied and rendered invisible under direct scrutiny.⁴² This approach assumes that talk and texts construct rather than merely describe, providing a significant site for the construction and performance of identities, definitions, and other forms of knowledge that arise from particular discourses and their related ideologies.. As such, talk and texts have social and political consequences.⁴³

Focusing on the rhetorical and discursive aspects of talk enables us to explore how discourses are “used to bolster particular versions of the world and to protect them from criticism.”⁴⁴ Indeed, Potter treats rhetoric as a feature of the “antagonistic relationship between versions: how a description counters an alternative description, and how it is organized, in turn, to resist being countered.”⁴⁵ Therefore, this approach considers accounts to be motivated and strategic; that is, to be *worked up* to re/produce “truths” (discourses) that are independent of the speaker. However, describing talk as motivated is not meant to suggest that there is necessarily cognitive insight; indeed there remains a dispute amongst proponents of this approach as to whether cognitive insight is possible or even desirable. Instead, speakers are considered motivated to collaboratively re/produce or resist identities, related discourses and, hence, ideologies evident in the discursive and rhetorical practices of talk, rather than cognitive elements. Therefore, the focus remains on the action arising from the strategic deployment of discourses (i.e. what is being achieved within accounts). As such the analytic approach we use has developed from conversation analytic work⁴⁶ and focuses on the features of talk as indicative of underlying action.

Method

The research was undertaken at one of 43 County Football Associations (CFAs). CFAs are responsible for the regional development of grassroots football, including the promotion and delivery of referee training and coach education. A well-established CFA, located in a northern English city, was selected for convenience and henceforth referred

to by the pseudonym “Scullam”. Scullam CFA’s promotional literature states their aims as: i) “increase participation [in football] at all levels”; ii) “improve the quality of standards in a wholly inclusive and safe environment”. Unfortunately, protecting anonymity means we cannot source or over-detail Scullam CFA’s texts.

Currently five levels of coach education are run by the FA in affiliation with UEFA (Union of European Football Associations). Our research focused on the two lowest level qualifications (the Level 1 and Level 2 Certificate in Coaching Football, L1CCF and L2CCF) since these are the most frequently delivered. More importantly, we argue that these are the most significant for teaching the foundational meanings of the category. As entry-level qualifications these courses act as gatekeepers to continued participation and progression in coaching, and participants aspire to attain membership and shared identities. Furthermore, graduating coaches become conveyors of knowledge to, and gatekeepers of, players and are most likely to coach young and entry-level players, including girls. Both courses comprise class-based lectures and practical sessions. L2CCF further includes “the planning, conducting and evaluation of ethical football coaching sessions” (Scullam CFA promotional literature, 2003) which qualifies participants to coach without supervision.

Participants and interviews

The interviews and field notes analyzed for this paper were part of a larger study that included observation of two Scullam CFA coach education courses (L1CCF and L2CCF) and 27 interviews with staff at Scullam CFA, partnering CFAs, coach educators, and L1CCF/L2CCF participants using purposive sampling. Due to our focus, for this analysis we used *all* 11 CFA staff interviews (Scullam and partners) to explore the gendered negotiation and management of coaching. Ranging in age from mid-20s to early 50s, 6 of the staff interviewed were male, 5 female.

Transcription and analysis

Following approaches that focus on the discursive and rhetorical action of talk, our analysis concerns both the content and features (e.g. pauses, repairs, hesitations) of talk. Not typical of many qualitative methodologies, this form of CDA considers *how* something is said to be highly significant for interpretations of discursive meaning. Interpretation and analysis were initially performed independently and collaboratively by

the two authors⁴⁷ using multiple features of talk; such as Owen’s notions of repetition, recurrence as indicators of intensity, alongside more strategic elements of intensity, such as hesitation and extrematization from Sacks’ work⁴⁸. Where there was no agreement, analysis was discarded. However, this approach relies on transparency of data and analysis to address “validity”, allowing the reader to directly scrutinize and evaluate the authors’ analysis. This form of transparency is considered the most appropriate⁴⁹ given the likelihood of multiple interpretations or, in contrast, the production of one version as valid through the rhetorical deployment of scientific devices such as inter-rater reliability. This necessarily then requires a substantive extract to provide context alongside minimal reference to unreported data. However, while we selected extracts representative of the discourses we identified in the wider dataset, the analysis focuses on the strategies and achievements that re/produce identities, discourses, and naturalized “truths” within these extracts only. Nonetheless, we do provide a simple indication of the prevalence of the discourses by providing a count of how many people *explicitly mobilized* the identified discourses; rather than implicitly put them into action. Further detail concerning analysis and transparency in the process of interpretation are available elsewhere.⁵⁰ Interviews were transcribed using Condor’s⁵¹ conventions (see Table 1). Field notes were recorded verbatim in situ, hence lack the detailed, nuanced transcription available with audio-recorded data.

Table 1. Transcription conventions

(1)	Measured pause of one second or greater
(.)	audible pause of less than one second
<u>Talk</u>	emphasized talk
talk-talk	Self – interruption
[...]	omitted talk
()	unclear reading, no hearing achieved
‘talk’	intonation of quotation
[talk]	Clarifying or supplementary information
talk { talk {talk	overlapping speech

talk =	contiguous utterances
< talk >	slower rate of speech
> talk <	faster rate of speech

Analysis and discussion

Two intertextually linked strategies were identified as deployed to frame women's experiences and entitlements within football and coach education: i) women coaches lack confidence, and ii) women are responsible for change. Both strategies effectively blame women for their positions, deploying gendered discourses about women's experiences and abilities to deny organizational responsibility and negate discourses of sexism.

Women coaches lack confidence

A prevalent narrative accounting for the lack of women and their progression as coaches was that women lack confidence in their own abilities. The FA have claimed this to be the most prominent reason for the provision of women-only coach education courses⁵² and this was replicated in interviews with Scullam CFA staff (explicitly stated by 6 of 11 staff). In deploying a common discourse of female deficiency, such ideas require the discursive re/production of this as a natural truth. Truth or *facticity*⁵³ is often achieved by distancing self from the account and constructing it as independent of the speaker and this is highly persuasive compared to talk that emphasizes the motivations and stake of the speaker.⁵⁴ Extract 1 demonstrates how a senior male official in football development constructs women lacking confidence as a natural barrier to coaching which simultaneously serves to remove responsibility from the organization and its members.

Extract 1 – Senior male

501 S: <It's that> (.) erm (1) still not being comfortable in-in front of a big group you know >sort of
502 again generalising but< I'd say eight out of ten female coaches (.) will find it difficult to (.) to
503 stand up in front of a group and say 'Yeah listen. I know this >this this and this.<' They still
504 feel that there's this male (.) sorta dominance and (.) and-and again there's-there's there's a
505 bit of knowledge missing err they-they still feel there's a bit of knowledge (1) 'cause of a lack
506 of experience (.) err 'Can I stand up in front of this group?' And then I think again it-it's just
507 the sort of female make up () I was trying to explain before this sort of psychological (.)
508 thing it's quite difficult to get 'em to stand up and say 'Yeah well I am good at this.' And really
509 express themselves.

The hesitations and corrections in this account (e.g. lines 501: “<It’s that> (.) erm (1)” and 504: “and-and again there’s-there’s there’s a”) suggest the speaker is engaging in “tricky” work that is argued to be indicative of addressing a difficult task requiring strategic work.⁵⁵ We suggest that the hesitating and careful language selection is linked to the problematic and potentially contentious claim that female coaches are unconfident in their own abilities and public speaking. The speaker’s acknowledgement that this is “again generalizing but” (line 502) serves to inoculate (pre-empt) against this being used to undermine his claim. The “but” further indicating he has some other knowledge to work up the facticity of his account. Indeed, the generalization problem is immediately countered with the culturally familiar pseudo-scientific claim that “eight out of ten female coaches” (line 502) lack the necessary confidence. Such a strategy serves to remove the speaker’s stake, constructing this as a fact, while also working up his own identity as a coach who has extensively experienced this.

The subsequent use of active voicing, i.e. using an emblematic or generalized “quote”,⁵⁶ is deployed four times in this account (e.g. Lines 503: “Yeah listen I know this >this this and this.<”; 506: “Can I stand up in front of this group?”) to further work up its facticity. Simultaneously working up the speaker’s identity and removing personal stake, the deployment of active voicing implies the speaker has witnessed such or similar statements which renders the account persuasive and difficult to undermine. However, he also makes claims about the causes of women’s lack of confidence. In lines 503-504, the speaker claims women “still feel that there’s this male (.) sorta dominance and (.) and-and again there’s-there’s there’s a bit of knowledge missing err they-they still feel there’s a bit of knowledge”. Here the hesitations and reparations suggest the speaker is addressing problematic content. Whilst acknowledging sexism, the combination language choices of “still feel” alongside the minimizing description of “male (.) sorta dominance” works to undermine sexism as a serious concern. Indeed, given this claim the speaker quickly repairs his potentially sexist claim that women have “knowledge missing”, to suggest that women themselves feel they have missing knowledge. This also serves to frame the problem as not one of sexism, but within women themselves.

The framing of women as responsible for their own lack of confidence is worked up

further with the explicit deployment of traditional gendered discourses about women's biological and psychological "make up" (line 507). The societal power of these "empirical" yet naturalized discourses makes their deployment significant, arguably suggesting that it is *natural* for women not to feel confident. This implicitly positions men as the opposite, with a natural claim to the confidence and knowledge required to coach, and working up the category as male.

Overall these discursive strategies work up the speaker's identity and entitlement to be knowledgeable and, thus, to claim that most women coaches lack confidence whilst dismissing male-domination as an issue. Similarly, coaching was re/produced as a male category and women's failure to succeed linked to *natural* biological and psychological characteristics. As such, the lacking confidence discourse for coaching was extended to include women as players, serving to undermine women's membership of the wider football category. In extract 2 a senior male FA employee describes his different coaching approach to women players.

Extract 2 – Male senior FA employee

- 586 S: [excluded data] I just think it's
587 that psychological (.) side you-you really have to always be aware that (1) if you say
588 something (1) err (.) if you have a dig at somebody (.) or if somebody misses (1) erm (.) you
589 know y-you've gotta be aware that 'Hang on (.) their confidence level will drop.'
- 590 I: What has that happened and (.) from your experience and players have (.) have reacted
591 badly to that?
- 592 S: On the confidence side?
- 593 I: Yeah. If you've (1) {perhaps criticised (.) something.}
- 594 S: {Err (.) if you said (.) yeah. } Well I-well I think-I think in the main
595 ninety-ninety nine per cent of the time () it's not-it's just being aware of that and I don't-I
596 haven't come across that because (1) I've-I've made sure I haven't done that. And-and I
597 worked with [...] and he did the same. But (.) certainly the side (1) so so that doing that you
598 know I-I've perhaps I've not experienced that. But I've certainly experienced the side where
599 (1) you know and pr-well with all players but (.) you know goalkeeping's (.) err probably the
600 easiest area to-to sort (.) sort of err identify that.
- 601 I : It's very individual.=
- 602 S: =Yeah because-yeah. (1) If a goal goes in (1) I mean I-I've seen the [senior level]
603 goalkeeper <go from being technically> or seemingly technically very able at catching
604 crosses saving shots. A couple of goals have gone in (.) <and seemingly> (.) she can't catch

605 the ball. She can't (.) dive. She can't->and-and< its all to do with the the psychological side.
606 Technically she's course she's (.) within half an hour she's not become a technically bad
607 goalkeeper but (.) () the psychological side said to her 'When the ball's coming in I don't
608 want to go and catch it. I don't think I can catch it.' So yes I've see-I've definitely seen it in
609 terms of (.) of the psychological side because something's gone wrong in-within a game or in
610 a in a (.) practice session. That's the thing you've gotta be very careful. So what-what I'd do if
611 I was working with goalkeepers is (.) rather than (.) smash the ball in the back of the net on-
612 once it goes in (1) I-I tend to then (.) play a (.) a softer one in that makes sure she can save
613 and you know build her confidence up that way again and (.) and then knock it a bit harder.
614 So you get-it's just (.) you know they're-they're the sorts of coaching techniques you've just
615 (.) which might be slightly different than-than lads. >So I say< they'll-they will (). In the main
616 they'll they'll take the knocks a bit-a little bit better and they'll-they'll get on with it. (1) So
617 yeah it's really it's the confidence.=

In this extract the problematic issue of *perceptions* versus *actual* experience of women lacking confidence is apparent. In claiming women's "*psychological*" vulnerability to losing confidence (lines 587-9), the speaker mobilizes familiar feminized discourses that are arguably so familiar that he does not show the need to work up (or *warrant*) this claim. Consequently, when the interviewer asks for examples, his talk shows rhetorical and discursive efforts (lines 594–99 multiple hesitations and repair work) that reflect the tricky work of warranting this claim⁵⁷ until he finally provides the satisfactory example of goalkeeping later in the account (line 600). Generally, prior to the goalkeeping example, his account is predominantly defensive. This potentially arises because he has been asked to warrant his claim by the interviewer. This task is arguably further complicated by the potential undermining of his own coaching identity and category membership, as well as the category in general, which might arise if he provides examples of undermining player confidence as evidence to support his claim.

Thus, the speaker explicitly states he hasn't experienced confidence drops because he has "*made sure*" (line 596) not to criticize female players. This claim works up his identity and category entitlement as a good coach because he has done a good job of combating this female tendency "*ninety nine per cent of the time*" (line 595). The deployment is powerful because of its familiarity as a persuasive empirical statistic, but also because it implies without stating that there is a small percent available to prove his

case. His account of his actions as necessary is worked up by claiming that a colleague takes the same approach (line 597); an example of *consensus warranting*.⁵⁸ This further works up the claim as common knowledge and a common approach amongst coaches.

The subsequent example given of goalkeeping (lines 603-17) is used to demonstrate and justify the differential treatment of men and women. The acknowledgement that *all* football players need help and support (line 599) provides a useful and common disclaimer that often precedes a serious but problematic claim.⁵⁹ In this instance he works up his coaching identity and non-sexism by stating both males and females need support, but then provides evidence to justify gender differences. The specific *real life* example of a high-level female goalkeeper who lost confidence after conceding goals (lines 602–608) is a significant aspect of this achievement. The example simultaneously works up his position as a coach and witness and, thus, as possessing *special*, unchallengeable knowledge. This is further warranted through deployment of a form of active voicing (e.g. lines 607-608) in which the utterance is designed to be heard as if it was said, making it *emblematic* of what people, in his experience, say even though not an actual quote. This serves to infer the facticity of his account by distancing himself from the production of the account while simultaneously working up his category membership as having often heard or experienced this sort of talk. The example is also a form of extrematization,⁶⁰ a strategy acknowledged to work up the truth, veracity and persuasiveness of accounts. This occurs in a number of ways including: use of a *senior* female, rather than junior; failure to save a “*couple*” of goals (a minimal amount) equates as “*can’t catch the ball*”; not a problem with technical skills but “*definitely*” psychological side (lines 604-09). Indeed, the deployment of extrematizing terms in lines 598 (“*I’ve certainly experienced*”) and 608 (“*I’ve definitely seen*”) frame the speaker as an experienced witness, working up his category membership and therefore further justifying his practice of coaching according to gender.

Arguably, because his assumptions about female players’ deficiency have been successfully warranted as truth, it does not actually matter how well his female players perform. His account enables his female players’ success to be claimed as *his* success because his differential treatment has been worked up as necessary and appropriate. Therefore, no matter what these players do, the underlying assumption that women in

football lack confidence is not challenged. Indeed, he claims that “*you’ve gotta be very careful*” (line 610) with women and that it’s “*slightly different than-than lads*” (line 615) serve to simultaneously achieve his status as a good coach and re/produce gendered differences. Deployment of the language choice “*slightly*” serves to work up the skill and subtlety that comes with being a good coach while minimizing potential claims of sexism. The features of talk suggesting tricky work, combined with the rhetorical minimization suggest that he is discursively managing a problematic topic, namely gender. This is further indicated in the hesitant repetition (“*than-than*”) that suggest searching for an appropriate language choice by which to refer to the males. The language choice “*lads*” is an interesting one since it is a choice which has been observed in this context to simultaneously mark authority and solidarity with the male players⁶¹ and a term that can be applied equally to older and younger males. Overall, in claiming that men and women players require differential treatment, the speaker needs to identify a distinction between their abilities. This is provided by his example of kicking the ball towards the net softly at first for females (lines 612-23). If, as the speaker states, this builds confidence (line 613) the question arises as to why this isn’t considered effective for *all* players. If this is a good coaching strategy male players may be missing the benefits of this approach. Indeed, the approach to coaching boys has been noted to re/produce dominant, traditional masculinity, maintaining football as a game for hard, aggressive males.⁶²

Positioning women players and coaches as different (i.e. naturally inferior and deficient) inevitably leads to lower performance expectations and this was observed on the L1CCF course on which there were 17 male participant and one female participant. All coaching staff were male. At the end of day one, each participant was given a “topic” (i.e. drill) to coach to the group for practical assessment. Each participant’s name was read aloud and the coach educator then picked their topic.

Extract 3 – Field notes, day 1, L1CCF

CE: ‘[women’s first name] we’ll give you a nice easy one. Traffic lights. Bet you were hoping for traffic lights.’

Traffic lights was openly considered the easiest drill of the course; a simple warm-up exercise involving dribbling the ball, stopping and turning. The coach educator (CE) explicitly that Traffic lights is the easiest drill and that the female participant was probably “*hoping*” for this drill. Whilst this can be seen as merely playful camaraderie and part of the confidence building approach exemplified in Extract 2, as the only female on the course this actually has significant discursive consequences for the framing and positioning of the woman. Explicitly and pointedly giving the easiest drill to the woman can infer she needs an easier drill because of her lower ability and confidence. Furthermore, framing her as hoping for the easiest drill positions her as knowingly vulnerable and unconfident. The inclusive use of “*we’ll*” by the CE is also an interesting strategy as it serves to position himself as part of the collective authority and remove his personal stake in making the decision. Equally, the framing of self as the benevolent authority serves to diminish and render invisible the insult to her and her coaching ability. Ultimately, a strategy that assumes women want and need the easier tasks, to match their psychological characteristics, means female players and coaches may not receive the opportunity to discover their full potential nor work up shared category membership with male peers. Similarly, it explicitly teaches the coaching participants by example that women need to be taught and coached differently; thereby explicitly re/producing gendered discourses within coach education.

Indeed, an FA strategic development document stated lack of confidence as the most prominent reason for women-only coach education courses.⁶³ In common with other separatist settings in sport (such as women-only gyms) greater confidence, comfort and participation is expected when men are excluded, without much questioning of underlying explanations. In the following extract from a joint interview with Scullam CFA’s coaching programme administrator (CPA; male) and football development officer (FDO; female) the discussion centred on disappointing numbers of women attending the L2CCF and the problems faced by those who did participate.

Extract 4 – Male CPA (M) and female FDO (F)

82 F: Erm (.) finding the time to commit and also I think it’s a confidence thing in that aswell erm

83 (2)

84 M: I-I’ve found that if we’re running a course and there’s-there’s one woman on it (.) they generally

85 want to back out unless there's another woman on it.
86 I :Really?
87 M: They-they try to get their friends to come along and they say "Has so-and-so sent in an application
88 form?" I say no and they say "Oh well I'm not too sure I'm willing to carry on now. I don't want to
89 be on my own with all those men."
90 [...]
91 So (1) I've never actually observed how the course is run where there's been just one woman. I'm not sure
92 whether they've been included in the group outright or whether they just didn't push themselves enough.
93 F: I mean, I was lucky when I did my prelim I did it on a women's only course but the err (.) I mean (1) it
94 was quite a while ago and everything. So I think I (2) in situations like that I'd say sometimes it gives
95 people a bit more confidence to join in the practical demonstrations. Especially maybe some of the
96 blokes who've been involved in pro clubs or are doing the Coaching Certificate or higher qualifications
97 to work with a pro club (.) to work at academy level and everything like that then err (.) you know. (.) a lot
98 of the time on the women's side (.) there isn't the (.) I don't think there's the opportunity to use your high
99 level coaching to the same extent. You know (.) so I think that can be a bit of a barrier (.) definitely in
100 terms of taking part in the practical sessions.

In this extract the female officer (F) initiates the issue of women's confidence (line 82) but starts to hesitate, arguably realizing the potential problems associated with this positioning. The male administrator (M) then picks up this theme and initially makes a strong personal claim "*I-I've found that*" (line 84). This both works up and uses his status (e.g. *found* from experience rather than 'thinks') which is powerfully mobilized by the inclusive "*we're running a course*" that enacts himself *as* the CFA. The facticity and authority of his knowledge is further warranted through active voicing in lines 87-89 ("*they say "Has so-and-so sent in an application form?" I say no and they say "Oh well I'm not too sure I'm willing to carry on now. I don't want to be on my own with all those men.*"). This account appears to frame the potential female participants as lacking the confidence to follow through and attend courses, as they are not willing to be alone with the men. This positively positions the CFA by revealing that women want to attend their courses, and positions the women as then failing to participate. Equally this positions himself as not culpable for failing to witness coach training that included women to establish whether women have "*been included in the group outright or whether they just didn't push themselves enough*" (line 92).

This framing of the issue also uses extrematization to minimize the problems and

complexity of sexism and emphasize the discourses that blame women for their failure. Framing the issue of inclusion and participation as an issue of “*outright*” inclusion simplifies the subtleties and nuances of exclusion and bias. Instead, inclusion is positioned as an extreme which is, therefore, easy to identify. Contrasted linguistically (“*or whether*”) and through narrative structure, the idea that women “*just didn’t push themselves enough*” becomes rhetorically deployed as the more ordinary and likely explanation,⁶⁴ in turn intertextually mobilizing gendered discourses. As such, this utterance locates the blame and the solution for the problem within the women themselves.

Somewhat countering this position, the female officer (F) then claims to have been “*lucky*” (line 93) to participate in a women-only L2CCF (formerly known as “*the prelim*”). Positioned as a personal claim, the language choice (*lucky*) implies there are benefits to being on a women-only course and that open-entry courses may be problematic for women coaches. Whilst this serves to resist the framing of women as the problem, the subsequent talk suggests that this version may be risky for the speaker as it requires some reparation work, arguably self-disciplining, to more appropriately reflect the current organization and her membership. Thus, in lines 93-94 the start of hesitation and repair work (“*but the err (.) I mean (I) was quite a while ago and everything*”) suggests that this inference raises some problematic identity work for her as a member of the CFA and the football category. Implying sexism and/or organizational issues exist for women potentially risks her football/organizational category memberships, positioning her salient category membership as female; especially problematic if the positioning is seen as feminist.⁶⁵

Consequently, she shifts her account to an historical view, suggesting past problems have been improved (line 94), and then switches footing (from herself), topic, and gender from women to people (lines 94-5: “*gives people a bit more confidence*”). The increased smoothness of her account reflects her increased ease now she has switched to an apparently unproblematic topic, such as the benefits of coaching with experienced “*blokes*” from “*pro clubs*”, etc. (lines 96-7). The ease of providing an account that is explicitly and implicitly masculine in linguistic terms suggests the implicit masculinity of the categories being mobilized.

The smoothness of her account remains until she raises the issue of potential barriers to women's opportunities (lines 97-9: "*a lot of the time on the women's side, there isn't the (.) I don't think there's the opportunity to use your high level coaching to the same extent. You know, so I think that can be a bit of a barrier*"). In this statement she repairs the factually stated "*there isn't*" to the more personal evaluation "*I don't think*", a significant switch that uses only her own identity category and its entitlements to make the claim. As a claim, this renders it somewhat weaker in facticity, power and status given that it is not claimed from an organizational position (contrast with use of "we" an inclusive organizational claim) and she does little to work up her own category status to support the claim. She further fails to significantly substantiate this claim, seeking corroborative consensus from the listener ("*You know*") and minimizing the barrier by framing it as a "*bit of a barrier*".

In summary, the accounts so far reveal the re/production of essential differences between men and women in football, serving to construct a powerful dichotomy that identifies men as members of the category (i.e. "they can") and women as non-members (i.e. "they cannot"). By basing this dichotomy on the idea of non-members' differences and deficiencies, the solution to inequality becomes located in the individual non-members themselves rather than within institutional practices and discourses. However, even where institutions are not held responsible for inequality, there is an impetus for organizational policies and solutions to combat inequity. Consequently the discourses mobilized to account for the success of policies and practices, or rather locating the blame for the failure of these policies and practices, is crucially significant for framing organizational responsibility and action, or inaction and exoneration. In the following section, the speakers' discursive strategy of locating the solution within the individual women, rather than the organization and/or wider cultural sexism, in order to remove accountability is explored.

Women are responsible for change

As inextricably linked discourses, constructing women players and coaches as lacking confidence was often associated (as noted in extract 4) with accounts framing change as women's personal responsibility, rather than the organization's. Indeed this idea was *explicitly* raised by 6 of 11 CFA staff interviewed. In many ways this is not surprising as

people often work to position themselves as successful organizational members by re/producing organizational discourses and practices as natural and true, and distancing their organization, and hence themselves, from criticism and attack. However, given the significance of football as a cultural category impacting on wider gendered discourses, we would expect these processes to be especially significant at this site. Thus, in extract 5, a female FDO acknowledges women's minority sporting status but fails to locate responsibility within her organization.

Extract 5 – Female FDO

156 S: Still a male dominated environment so you've still got to (.) force your way
157 through but there's more and more women comin that (.) it's become less the case. Erm and I
158 think sometimes it's the (.) females own perceptions of their own ability (.) to be able to do
159 it. (2) Sometimes it is a male perception (.) that females (.) won't be able to but I think
160 frequently it's a female (.) perception of their own.
161 I : They're doing it all on their own?
162 S: Well the perception that 'Oh I couldn't do that.' You know. 'I've never played. I wouldn't be
163 able to do it.' D'you know what I mean? So it's their own thing

Males' dominance of football coaching and their possible prejudiced attitudes are acknowledged (lines 156: "*Still a male dominated environment*" and 159: "*Sometimes it is a male perception (.) that females (.) won't be able to*"). However, the speaker frames the main issue as "*women's own perceptions*" (line 158) combined with a remaining need to "*force your way through*" (lines 156-7). This frames women as responsible for their position whilst framing the male environment as accessible with enough effort. Her initial liberal framing of men's (line 159) and women's (line 158) perceptions as both "*sometimes*" responsible is ultimately asserted as women being "*frequently*" responsible for their own perceptions.

Active voicing is then used by the speaker (lines 162-163) to work up her category entitlement and the facticity of her claims as a response to the interviewer's questioning challenge (line 161). Interestingly her active voicing includes a rather problematic extrematization "*I've never played. I wouldn't be able to do it*" (lines 162-63). Powerfully re/producing that women lack confidence as a general characteristic, this framing in an officer responsible for developing football as an inclusive environment is

alarming. It suggests dismissal of the valid confidence concerns of *first-timers* in any sport, but notably in what remains a male game. Equally, the emblematic nature of active voicing suggests she has either encountered many females with *no* experience, yet has no sympathy for their position, or frames them as possessing none; either is problematic but neither is problematized in her account.

The speaker works up her organizational membership by framing the CFA as on a continuous and progressive path (lines 156-157) that while “*Still a male dominated environment*” it has “*become less the case*”. This is a common discursive device that positions dominance as historical rather than political.⁶⁶ It positions the prevailing organizational culture as acceptable and positively changing, thereby silencing criticism and debate about problematic gendered practices.⁶⁷ Additionally, the discourse of evolving change has the rhetorical advantage of implying a slow, gradual and natural process within which current inequalities should be tolerated.⁶⁸

As a successful woman in football, the speaker is likely to have encountered and tolerated the same exclusionary discourses that surround women in sport organizations. Yet, she primarily frames women as being responsible for their failure, which also serves to position her success as her own which also works up her own sport category membership. Whilst women’s *hostile witness* evidence is often used as a powerful claim against sexism and inequality, viewing hegemony as a process enables the complexity of participation and resistance to one’s own continued repression to be more fully explored.⁶⁹ In the male dominated site of sport, women athletes often simultaneously re/produce and resist traditional gendered hegemonies to construct their own athletic identities and combat attacks on their hetero/sexuality.⁷⁰ Notably this includes mobilizing traditional feminized discourses *other* women and avoidance of the potential exclusion via the slur of politics and feminism.⁷¹

As such, the speaker’s *othering* of women functions to frame herself as an exception from typical women. Hence, she is acceptable as a member of the category within the dominant discourses and definitions of sport, football, and the CFA. Challenging these would be to risk her category membership and identity, both personally and organizationally, successfully policing her experiences and understandings to fit within the FA’s predominant discourses and definitions.⁷² Indeed, later in her interview, the

speaker concluded her success in football coaching arose from her assertive style, providing personal evidence that re/produced the organizational discourses of non-sexist, liberal, individualism as appropriate and natural, re/producing the FA as a meritocracy and *other* women as not meriting success.

As noted previously, re/positioning problems of inequality away from the CFA and onto women as individuals serves to remove organizational accountability for women's minority status in football coaching. This strategy was successfully utilized by the male speaker earlier in extract 1, but not fully addressed in our prior analysis. So we now return to a specific part of extract 1 to explore how, in tandem with the previously discussed discursive strategies, the C/FA are rendered not responsible for either causing or curing women's subordinate position.

Extract 6: Detail of Extract 1 – Senior male FA employee

503 S: [excluded data] They still
504 feel that there's this male (.) sorta dominance and (.) and-and again there's-there's there's a
505 bit of knowledge missing err they-they still feel there's a bit of knowledge (1) 'cause of a lack
506 experience (.) err 'Can I stand up in front of this group?' And then I think again it-it's just
507 the sort of female make up () I was trying to explain before this sort of psychological (.)
508 thing it's quite difficult to get 'em to stand up and say 'Yeah well I am good at this.' And really
509 express themselves. So so there's all sorts of reasons why but we're not-we're still not
510 getting erm (.) enough female coaches through.

As previously noted, lines 503-504 comprise a form of active voicing in which the speaker constructs a persuasive version of how women coaches think and feel in relation to their lack of knowledge. However, what is of additional interest to this analysis is how these thoughts and feelings are rendered inappropriate or incorrect. As noted earlier, the issue of lack of knowledge was repaired from a general perception to women's perception. The language choice "*still*" (line 503) positions the context of male dominance as historically valid but the subsequent use of "*still*" (line 505) alongside claims of "*missing*" knowledge and "*lack of experience*" frames the current problem as the women. As argued before, framing the problem as historical and progressive positions the organization as blameless. However, lack of knowledge could be seen as an organizational responsibility; that is, as a failure to ensure all trainees feel adequately

trained. Thus, repositioning the problem as not really about knowledge but about experience firmly positions the responsibility with the individual, since organizations can provide opportunities for experience but not teach it. Thus, the *nature* of experience, and organizational influence over this, is not addressed.

In lines 509-10, the speaker claims many reasons for too few women yet only one reason is provided (i.e. women lack confidence); one that blames women. Furthermore, the deployment of “*just....sort of female make up*” (lines 506-507) is significant and serves several functions for the speaker’s account. First, “*just*” downgrades the sociopolitical, and potentially contentious, significance of his claim that women are emotionally predetermined to be unsuccessful in coaching, and presents this as having an established, rational basis.⁷³ Second, it removes accountability for current inequities from him and the organization since the fault, hence solution, lies with women. Third, in combination with a claim to powerful discourses of biological and psychological difference, it provides him with argumentative closure. The implication is that the speaker has made a rational assertion that is ultimately constructed as relatively insignificant, thereby giving the account a sense of finality.

Implications

Overall, the prominent discourses re/produced by the CFA staff associated with coaching and football development re/produced women as lacking confidence arising from gendered differences that were, ultimately, the individual’s responsibility.

Locating the solution to women’s unequal status in coaching within the women themselves is an example of liberal individualism⁷⁴ which assumes equal access to opportunity. Therefore, women’s lack of achievement becomes attributed to apparent gender differences that must be minimized. As such organizations, like the CFA, become responsible for providing only the opportunities, such as coach education, for women to gain skills, without having to address the content and nature of the provisions or in/equity in the wider organizational culture. In this context, women coaches are expected to change, adapt and, ultimately re/produce the discursive practices that oppress them, with no recognition of the need to explore possibilities of change in the way sport is constructed, maintained and organized.

Women’s lack of confidence was not constructed as a problem for football or its

organization, but framed as appropriate given their non-membership of the football category. Thus, no solutions or responsibility to systematically build up women's confidence were provided outside gendering coaching practices, such as going easy on girls. In contrast, framing the solution as stemming from women as individuals rendered the CFA's responsibility to address these problems invisible and deniable. This also ensured there was no acknowledgement or admission of any need to explore changes in the prevailing discourses of football coaching which devalue and problematize women. These findings are similar to other studies that found that the *victims* of discriminatory practices in sport are often claimed to be the source of the problem and continued discrimination justified, including populations as diverse as young girls⁷⁵ and British Asian footballers.⁷⁶

Similarly, alternative explanations for women's reluctance to participate in open-entry courses, other than gender-attributed lack of confidence, were not evident amongst those interviewed at Scullam CFA. One available alternative is that women are *choosing* not to participate in open-entry courses because of expected inequity and predicted mistreatment. Women entering coach education will have already experienced and be familiar with the popular discourses of masculinity surrounding football and, like women in other male-dominated fields⁷⁷ (e.g. fire fighters, police officers), will know the barriers and discriminatory practices they face. It is understandable, therefore, that many women may want to, and wait to, participate in a course with other women in order to gain some support, solidarity, and, arguably, witness to the explicit and subtle nuances of sexism.

However, the existing interpretation *expects* women to be nervous about their own ability, rather than the treatment they will receive during the course. Thus, essentialist, biological explanations, rather than socio-cultural ones, are deployed.. Until these accounts become consistently questioned women's exclusion from the category will continue both ideologically and in practice, and lack of participation will continue to be used as evidence of women's natural failure to earn central membership of the football category.

CFA staff's discursive and rhetorical practices suggest work or effort to consistently naturalize and legitimize the differential status of women in football

coaching by re/producing constructions of difference. The accounts constructed women as having natural characteristics or deficiencies in confidence which were used to explain their own failure to succeed. As such, we can understand this as the re/production of power at the everyday and individual level as effort to maintain the C/FA “version” as the status quo⁷⁸, alongside the identities and definitions linked to these discourses. Indeed, it is not surprising to observe organizational members working to re/produce these discourses. Given that these identities are powerful, these organizational and football category memberships, and the preservation of their boundaries, make subjecting self and others to these discourses and definitions more likely and, arguably, extremely hard to resist.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, we would also expect to see resistance to these discourses and definitions as well. But our focus within this paper was on revealing the subtle processes and strategies embedded in everyday practices that re/produces a pejorative gendered organizational discourse or narrative that continues to dominate policies and practices..

Amongst organizational members interviewed, women lacking confidence was consistently mobilized which, alongside its representation in a core FA document, suggests this is a widespread organizational definition of women. However, while some women may indeed lack confidence, there are alternative accounts that recognize women’s widespread and historic lack of privileged membership of the football category, rather than being intrinsically about women as a gender or sex. Thus, dominant constructions of women lacking confidence in their skills and abilities can be seen as essentialist narratives or myths re/produced to maintain the definitions of football as male, thereby justifying the continued positioning of women at the peripheries. The discourses of women’s deficiency and difference simultaneously work up men’s ability and consequently maintain their entitlement to central membership of the football category.

¹ Knoppers and Anthonissen, *Making sense of diversity in organizing sport*.

² Sugden and Tomlinson, *Soccer culture, national identity*, 4.

³ Meân, ‘Identity and discursive practice’; ‘Everyday discursive practices’.

⁴ Lopez, *Women on the ball*; Meân, ‘Everyday discursive practices’, ‘Making masculinity’

⁵ Scraton, Fasting, Pfister and Bunuel, ‘It’s still a man’s game?’

⁶ Football Association, ‘Women’s: Getting Involved’.

⁷ Knoppers, ‘Skill levels of men’.

⁸ Shaw, ‘Scratching the back’; Shaw and Hoerber, ‘Strong man is direct’.

⁹ Knopper and Anthonissen, ‘Gendered Managerial Discourses’.

¹⁰ Meân, ‘Identity and Discursive Practice’; Meân and Kassing, ‘I would just like to be known as an athlete’

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- ¹¹ Fielding-Lloyd, *Gendered Discourses in Football Coaching*.
- ¹² Knoppers, 'Skill levels of men'.
- ¹³ Fielding-Lloyd, *Gendered Discourses in Football Coaching*.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Timson-Katchis and North, *UK Coach Tracking Study*.
- ¹⁶ Scraton, Caudwell and Holland, 'Bend it like Patel'.
- ¹⁷ Hearn and Parkin, 'Gender and organizations'.
- ¹⁸ Holmes, *Gendered talk at work*.
- ¹⁹ Meân and Kassing, 'I would just like to be known as an athlete'.
- ²⁰ Knoppers, 'Explaining male dominance'.
- ²¹ Foucault, *The order of things*.
- ²² Gumperz, *Discourse Strategies; Language and Social Identity*.
- ²³ Meân, 'Identity and discursive practice'; Meân and Kassing, 'I would just like to be known as an athlete'.
- ²⁴ Fielding-Lloyd and Meân, 'Standards and separatism'.
- ²⁵ Shaw and Allen, 'Experiences of high performance women coaches'.
- ²⁶ Benwell and Stokoe, *Discourse and Identity*.
- ²⁷ Cameron, 'Is there any ketchup?'
- ²⁸ Meân, 'Identity and discursive practices'; Sacks, *Lectures on conversation*.
- ²⁹ Fielding-Lloyd and Meân, 'Standards and separatism'; Meân, 'Everyday discursive practices'.
- ³⁰ Foucault, *The order of things*; for more on the power of (sport) organizations and their wider implication see Meân, 'Identity and discursive practices', 'Everyday discursive practices' and van Dijk, 'Critical discourse analysis'.
- ³¹ Knoppers and Anthonissen, 'Gendered Managerial Discourses'; Fielding-Lloyd and Meân, 'Standards and separatism'.
- ³² Sacks, *Lectures on conversation*.
- ³³ Parker, 'Soccer, servitude and sub-cultural identity'.
- ³⁴ Fielding-Lloyd and Meân, 'Standards and separatism'; Meân, 'Identity and discursive practices'.
- ³⁵ Knoppers, 'The skill levels of men'.
- ³⁶ Knoppers, 'Gender and the coaching profession'.
- ³⁷ Lakoff, *Women, fire and dangerous things*.
- ³⁸ Meân, 'Identity and discursive practice'; Meân and Kassing, 'I would just like to be known as an athlete'.
- ³⁹ Fielding-Lloyd and Meân 'Standards and separatism'; Meân, 'Everyday discursive practices', 2003.
- ⁴⁰ Meân, 'Identity and discursive practices', 'Everyday discursive practices'; van Dijk, 'Critical discourse analysis'.
- ⁴¹ Potter, *Representing Reality*.
- ⁴² Fielding-Lloyd and Meân, 'Standards and separatism'.
- ⁴³ Grant, Keenoy and Oswick, 'Organizational discourse'.
- ⁴⁴ Potter, *Representing Reality*, 33.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid, 108.
- ⁴⁶ Sacks, *Lectures on conversation*.
- ⁴⁷ Owen, 'Interpretive themes in relational communication'.
- ⁴⁸ Meân and Kassing, 'I would just like to be known as an athlete'.
- ⁴⁹ Potter, *Representing Reality*.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid; Meân and Kassing, 'I would just like to be known as an athlete'.
- ⁵¹ Condor, *Pride and prejudice*.
- ⁵² Football Association, *The football development strategy 2001 - 2006*
- ⁵³ Rapley, 'Discursive construction of facticity'.
- ⁵⁴ Potter, *Representing Reality*, 150.
- ⁵⁵ Sacks, *Lectures on conversation*.
- ⁵⁶ Potter, *Representing Reality*, 161.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid; Tracy, *Everyday Talk*.
- ⁵⁸ Potter, *Representing Reality*.
- ⁵⁹ Tracy, *Building and Reflecting Identities*.
- ⁶⁰ Pomerantz, 'Extreme case formulations', 227
- ⁶¹ Meân, 'Identity and discursive practice'.

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- ⁶² Wellard, 'Men, sport, body performance'.
⁶³ Football Association, *The football development strategy 2001 - 2006*.
⁶⁴ Weltman, 'Pragmatics of peremptory assertion', 349
⁶⁵ Meân and Kassing, 'I would just like to be known as an athlete'
⁶⁶ Edley and Wetherell, 'Jekyll and Hyde', 450; Meân and Kassing, 'I would just like to be known as an athlete'
⁶⁷ Meân and Kassing, 'I would just like to be known as an athlete', 133.
⁶⁸ Edley and Wetherell, 'Jekyll and Hyde'.
⁶⁹ van Dijk, 'Critical Discourse Analysis'.
⁷⁰ Meân and Kassing, 'I would just like to be known as an athlete'
⁷¹ Ibid.
⁷² Cohn, 'How can she claim equal rights?'
⁷³ Weltman, 'Pragmatics of peremptory assertion', 349.
⁷⁴ Meyerson and Kolb, 'Out of the armchair'.
⁷⁵ Flintoff and Scraton, 'Stepping into active leisure?'
⁷⁶ Bains and Johal, *Corner flags and corner shops*.
⁷⁷ Garcia, 'Difference in the police department'.
⁷⁸ Foucault *The Archaeology of Knowledge*
⁷⁹ Meân, Identity and discursive practice', Meân and Kassing, 'I would just like to be known as an athlete'

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