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"Coaching soccer is a man's job!" – The influence of gender stereotypes on structures for recruiting female coaches to soccer clubs

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Abstract: Statistics published by the German Football Association indicate that women are significantly under-represented amongst soccer coaches, especially in the amateur leagues. In this paper we analyse how gender stereotypes influence the structural conditions surrounding the recruitment of coaches to soccer clubs that contribute to the exclusion of women from coaching positions. A qualitative study of five selected soccer clubs which are members of a German regional soccer association reveals that informal and personal decision-making practices still play a fundamental role in the recruitment of coaches. These practices undermine formal guidelines and give disproportionate weight to stereotyped preferences in the recruitment of soccer coaches. In this context, decision-makers' (functionaries') professed support of women largely serves a symbolic purpose and creates an illusion of equality concerning decisions that have already been taken at an informal level.

Keywords: female soccer coaches, gender stereotypes, sports organisations

Introduction

In Germany, as in many other countries, coaching is one of the most male-dominated fields in sports, particularly at higher levels. However, the situation in women's soccer seems to be slightly different. Women have successfully coached the German women's national team for many years and some of the regional associations employ full-time female coaches. A closer look, however, raises doubts as to whether women have full access to positions as coaches. On the one hand, a large number of girls and women who play soccer in clubs can imagine becoming soccer coaches. On the other hand, several studies of female coaches in regional sub-divisions of the German Football Association (Deutscher Fußball Bund [DFB]) show that, despite their willingness to become involved as coaches, female coaches are undoubtedly under-represented, particularly in the lower leagues, and have a low level of coaching education. For example, in 2006 only 11% of all the coaches with sole responsibility for the women's teams (approx. 190 senior teams) in the regional Football Association of Hesse (HFV) were female (Sinning, 2006). In the regional Football Association of Saxony (SFV) in 2008, only 18% of more than 300 girls' and women's teams were coached by women, mostly without an appropriate licence (Weigelt-Schlesinger,

2008). The discrepancy becomes even clearer when looking at current numbers of valid coaching licences issued by the German Football Association (DFB) in the year 2010. The German licence system consists of three educational steps: coaching licence B, coaching licence A, and soccer teacher (highest level).[1] According to the statistics, only 117 women hold one of these licences compared to 5,902 men (DFB, 2010). Although such licences are not a necessary requirement for a coaching job in lower-level soccer, these figures nevertheless indicate gender-specific segregation in the acquisition of coaching positions in soccer. The reasons for this continued under-representation of female coaches with licences needs to be clarified, because serious barriers obviously appear to exist preventing them from attaining a position as a coach in a soccer club.

The marginalisation of women as coaches is a complex problem. In this paper we will discuss the under-representation of female coaches as a structural problem for soccer clubs, since a coaching position can only be obtained if it is supported by the structural conditions underlying the recruitment process. The effect of the internal structures of sports organisations over time will be analysed, as well as where and how gender differences may or may not be relevant within these structures. In this context, gender research has identified gender stereotypes as fundamental factors contributing to the exclusion of women from certain position within organisations (e.g., Acker, 1990; Weinbach, 2004); such factors may therefore play a crucial role in the assumption of coaching positions. Gender differentiation when recruiting coaches may be encouraged by gender stereotype-based expectations on the part of the decision-maker (e.g., Bahlke, Benning & Cachay, 2003). Thus we assume that gender stereotypes and, in the ensuing evaluations, expectations and discrimination may play an important role in the marginalisation of women as soccer coaches during the recruitment of coaches by soccer clubs. This paper will therefore analyse the interrelationship between gender stereotypes (which are adopted by individuals) and the structural conditions surrounding the recruitment of coaches.

The paper is organised as follows: first, an overview of the current state of research into organisational barriers towards women's representation in coaching positions is presented, after which we will discuss shortcomings of this research. Theoretical considerations shed light on the social function of gender stereotypes. Following this, organisational structures in sports clubs will be considered from an organisational-sociological viewpoint, and the interrelation of gender stereotypes in the recruitment of coaches will be described. The next section deals with the methods used in the empirical study, and selected findings will be presented and interpreted. The paper closes with a discussion of the results of the study.

1 Other licences (e.g., C-licences) are awarded by regional Football Associations.

Literature review

Women and coaching has been the subject of numerous theoretical and empirical studies during the past decades. A considerable amount of research has revealed that female coaches are under-represented, particularly in elite-level sports in several countries, as well as in different kinds of sports. A lot of studies also focus on factors and barriers that attempt to explain the under-representation of female coaches by means of factors operating on an individual, interactional, organisational and societal, or cultural level (see e.g., summary by Norman, 2010a). In the following, we will look in more detail at studies that analyse reasons for the under-representation of female coaches. Gender issues in the practice of recruiting coaches at the organisational level have already been discussed extensively (e.g., Ascota & Carpenter, 1994, 2008; Bahlke et al., 2003; Greenhill et al., 2009; Hovden, 1999, 2012; Knoppers, 1987; Pastore, 1992, 1994; Sagas, Cunningham & Ashley, 2000). Studies indicate that the recruitment process for coaches mostly resorts to informal procedures and practices.[2] Structural barriers underlying the process of recruiting coaches by sports organisations have been identified as follows: several studies point to a lack of relevant criteria in hiring for elite sports organisations. Specific descriptions of competences and role expectations of a coach exist, which have gender-typical connotations (e.g., Danylchuck & Pastore, 1996; Lyle, 2002; Stangl & Kane, 1991). Coaching can be seen as a sex-typing position that requires certain personality traits, often stereotyped as masculine by the leaders (functionaries) of sport clubs and associations, as well as (male and female) athletes (e.g., Aicher & Sagas, 2010; Gieß-Stüber, 1996; Demers, 2004). So, women are often considered by decision-makers (external selection) to be only partially suitable for coaching jobs, because of typical female character traits (e.g., Bahlke et al., 2003; Hovden, 1999). Women are more likely to be described in terms of attributes such as their capacity for teamwork, communicative competence and fairness, while men are said to display confidence, assertiveness and leadership qualities (e.g., Sinning, 2006; Bahlke et al., 2003; Sartore & Cunningham, 2007). At the same time, studies show that women do not find the role of a coach attractive, or that they do not view themselves as being suitable based on male-connoted role expectations (e.g., Bahlke et al., 2003; Cunningham, Doherty & Gregg, 2007; Sartore & Cunningham, 2007; Weigelt-Schlesinger, 2008). Furthermore, it has been shown that most sports organisations do not have systematic or wide-ranging recruitment practices; instead, recruitment is mostly non-standardised and takes place informally (Hovden, 1999, 2012; Schreiner & Thiel, 2011). Consequently, decision-making bodies and specific gender distributions are significant to recruitment. The managing

2 Similar connections have also been demonstrated for the recruitment of female managers or functionaries by sport organisations (e.g., Combrink, 2004; Hartmann-Tews & Combrink, 2005; Hovden, 2000; Pfister & Radtke, 2006; 2009; Sartore & Cunningham, 2007; Schulz & Auld, 2006).

boards of sports organisations and the networks responsible for recruiting coaches are largely male (so-called "old boys clubs") (e.g., Lovett & Lowry, 1994; Roffey, 2001; Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2001; Whisenant, Vincent, Pedersen & Zapalc, 2007). Based on Kanter's (1977) theory of homologous reproduction, various studies have indicated that prevailing hegemonic masculinity is sustaining male dominance in the practice of hiring coaches (e.g., Greenhill, Auld, Cuskelly & Hooper, 2009; Lovett & Lowry, 1994; Stahura & Greenwood, 2001; Stangl & Kane, 1991; Whisenant et al., 2007). This leads to discriminatory hiring practices, because those who are in hiring positions and networks (mostly men) prefer individuals similar to themselves, as a means of reducing organisational uncertainty. Consequently, it appears that lack of formalisation of the recruitment process on the one hand and the male dominance of decision-making boards on the other hand encourage the exclusion of women from coaching jobs in elite sports (e.g., Ascota & Carpenter, 2008; Digel, Thiel, Schreiner & Waigel, 2010; Pastore, 1992; 1994; Sagas et al., 2000).

Although the existing studies have analysed different organisational aspects of female under-representation in coaching jobs, there are gaps in the present research, which can be summarised as follows: most studies have focused on elite sports and, within those, particularly on the higher performance segments of those sports. The situation of coaches working at a higher level differs from that of coaches at a lower level, who are responsible for women's or youth teams. However, there are also differences in the proportion of women in grassroots sport in the German Sport Federation, as well as in soccer. Furthermore, many studies analyse organisational conditions in Australia or North America, which differ entirely from the situation in Europe. Cultural differences in soccer also need to be considered. In Germany, soccer is primarily organised in the form of voluntary sports clubs (often by volunteer coaches), which suggests the need for further analyses in relation to this specific context. When analysing women's under-representation in sport organisations, gender stereotypes (as well as other reasons) are considered possible causes for restricting women's access to becoming coaches. However, there remains a lack of understanding as to how gender stereotypes and sports club structures interact to affect the process of recruiting coaches to soccer clubs. In particular, the procedural component of coach recruitment has rarely been considered. It is therefore unclear what kind of decisions precede the recruitment of coaches, what premises these decisions are based on, and furthermore, to what extent gender stereotypes selectively influence these.

Theoretical framework

Gender stereotypes and their social functions

Before dealing with the social function of gender stereotypes, it is necessary to consider the underlying concept of *gender*. A constructivist approach considers gender

and subsequent gender differences to be social constructions that are institutionally anchored in continually performed and internalised interactions. This suggests that gender differences are not *natural* but acquired and enacted, and also that they vary according to the particular social and gender order (e.g., Pfister, 2010; Wetterer, 2006). Thus gender is a construct with profound relevance to the social standards and structures that influence the order of all areas of life, e.g. roles in family, work roles. The disadvantage of the gender construct is not that a difference is made between women and men, but that these differences are valued and stereotyped in order to legitimise an unequal hierarchy and balance of power (West & Fenstermaker, 1995). Overlapping, socially divided and cognitively embedded knowledge structures of gender, i.e. gender-stereotyped assumptions about "typical" characteristics of women and men, are essential elements to this construction process (e.g., Alfermann, 1996; Ridgeway, 2001). Gender stereotypes are assumptions and simplistic generalisations about gender characteristics (e.g., biological sex), differences, and the roles of men and women (e.g., Eckes, 1997; Schneider, 2005). These gender-specific attributes are connected to specific general expectations regarding the behaviour of male and female individuals (Weinbach, 2004). Thus gender stereotypes can be viewed as socially shared structures of knowledge, which are not stored as lists of properties, but in a more structured way as clusters (or dimensions) such as strength/weakness or activity/passivity. We often characterise individuals differently or assign the same qualities to different degrees simply because they are male or female. While gender stereotypes are occasionally subject to changes, they are constantly reproduced in everyday speech so that the binary construction of gender is maintained (Goffman, 1977). In other words, we have internalised gender stereotypes and cannot abandon them easily, even if we wish to. However, it is important to emphasise that stereotyping should not be primarily understood as a superficial criticism. In social interaction, gender stereotypes serve as a means of orientation and organisation in order to reduce complexity, by assisting information processing and helping us to find a place within our social environment (e.g., Oakes, Haslam & Turner, 1994). The constructions created by stereotypes serve to distance ourselves from others, or to affiliate ourselves with them. However, such distance is never rigid or inaccessible to modification, nor does it concern every part of life (Hirschauer, 2001). Categorisation processes based on gender stereotypes are particularly problematic because they offer an orientation grid that seems comparatively easy to handle. On the one hand, such categorisation processes reinforce the need for clear gender affiliation; on the other hand, they catalyse differences by providing opportunities to play up the gender divide (e.g., Weinbach & Stichweh, 2001). Thus, stereotypical constructions contribute to a situation in which individuals exclude themselves or are excluded on the basis of gender-related (self-)positioning. As a result, gender-based modes of interpretation and perception become relevant to an individual's career opportunities (Acker, 1990; Eagly, 1987).

Sport is an action system with a focus on physical abilities, where gender can easily be maintained as a pattern of social order, since gender-specific attributes can be ascribed to biological differences between males and females (e.g., Hargreaves 1994; Pfister, 2010; Schell & Rodriquez, 2000; Theberge, 1993; 2000). Even today, certain types of sport construct and demonstrate masculinity. Soccer continues to be connected with toughness and aggressiveness, so that it is common for women who are actively involved in soccer (as players or coaches) to be viewed as not being "real" women (e.g., Pfister & Fasting, 2003). For soccer, in particular, it is assumed – at least in the still male-dominated Western world – that gender barriers are more tightly and more frequently erected than in other sports (e.g., Scraton, Fasting, Pfister & Bunuel, 1999; Sülzle, 2005). Despite the latest successful developments in women's soccer, soccer still serves as a means of producing and staging masculinity (e.g. Meuser, 2008), and becomes an "arena for masculinity" (Kreisky & Spitaler, 2006). This is reflected in the expectations toward the actions and competences of soccer coaches, which are often have gender-specific connotations (e.g., Sinning, 2006; Weigelt-Schlesinger, 2008). We can therefore conclude that the role of the coach in soccer is still traditionally stereotyped as masculine.

Structures of voluntary sport clubs und coach recruitment

Organisations are reproduced through the social practices of the actors, while a reciprocal relationship exists between structure and action (e.g., Schimank, 2000). In decision-making situations, organisational structures have two functions: on the one hand they provide important orientation, establishing order and meaning within an organisation. On the other hand, they can serve as guide rails, inside whose confines decisions are taken (e.g., Geser, 1990). According to Schimank (2000; in sports clubs see Combrink, 2004; Nagel, 2006), social structures in organisations manifest themselves in the following ways: (1) in the patterns through which the actors interact (constellational structures), e.g. well-established communication pathways and decision-making opportunities, as well as the hierarchies and power distribution within an organisation; (2) establishing general expectations towards the behaviour of actors (structures of expectations) that imply which actions are appropriate in which situations, and which are inappropriate; (3) structures of meaning, corresponding to cultural values and established points of view (e.g. stereotyped meanings in relation to gender behaviour in clubs). The actions of the actors in organisations are viewed in relation to club-specific structural characteristics. In this way, the structures offer contingent scope for action, depending on the degree to which the recruitment process is formalised.

The recruitment process is particularly relevant in organisations, since suitable and interested applicants do not find vacant positions automatically. How and on what basis appointment decisions are made, and who makes these decisions, is

equally relevant. The recruitment of a person into a position in an organisation therefore depends on the assumed match between the expectations of the organisation and the specific skills and competences of the individual (Acker, 1990). Recruitment processes are in essence linked to the uncertainty of matching the right person to the job, a task that not only depends on measurable and evidential expertise but also on the personality of the job-holder. This is why coaches are never simply job-holders. Their performance is significantly influenced by other life references, experiences and personality traits (Schreiner & Thiel, 2011). In order to minimise the recruitment risk, certain procedures and practices are applied in the recruitment process. Before the recruitment starts, it is necessary to define the coach's tasks and the requirements to be met by the candidates who may be suitable for a coaching position. The matter of who has the power to define the requirements of the coaching position within the club-specific constellation structures is crucial to the process of coach recruitment. Existing analyses show that criteria for recruitment decisions are on the one hand personalised, meaning that personnel decisions are taken by individuals or groups of people (Thiel & Mayer, 2009). On the other hand, recruitment processes are often shaped by informal procedures and practices (Combrink, 2004; Hovden, 1999; 2012). Personalised and informal recruitment practices in sports clubs permit a greater scope of individual preferences on the part of the decision-maker. Due to personalisation and the low level of formalisation in the process of coach recruitment, the flow of information regarding vacant coaching positions, as well as the selection of the appropriate person, can be made through informal contacts and networks. Dealing with gender equality is difficult when the structural aspects of recruitment in sports clubs continue to be dominated by men. Clubs often adopt a type of *fictional consensus* in which gender-related values and norms are construed and internally communicated (Shaw & Slack, 2002). Gender stereotypes often function as a form of intrasytem "guidance" that encourages men and women in clubs to "observe" things in a particular way based on established customs. Gender stereotypes are deeply rooted in the thinking structures of the actors and decision-makers, and can be understood as a type of script which inscribes the past and is continually recreated in the context of recruitment decisions. Existing studies show that decision-making bodies with a higher proportion of women have fewer expectations of masculine stereotypes compared with those including few or no women (e.g., Hartmann-Tews & Combrink, 2005). The relevance of stereotyped orientation in recruitment processes is revealed by gender stereotype-based assessments of function and expectations of competences. Those actors participating in the recruitment process can determine stereotypical expectations and preferences in criteria which are viewed as being relevant to coach recruitment, criteria that are considered negotiable and the practical constraints that are considered to be non-negotiable (Bahlke et al., 2003). This implies that the recruitment of women as coaches is clearly connected to the extent to which the coaching position is con-

nected to specific, masculine-connoted role expectations (Aicher & Sagas, 2010). It appears that where masculine-connoted stereotyping exists, women are rarely considered or not considered at all in the recruitment process for a coaching position (e.g. Hovden, 1999). Furthermore, the acceptance of women in coaching positions and the willingness and interest in working together with women may be limited. The effects of this on the selection of a soccer coach are seen, for example, in how a club coordinates and applies programmes for promoting women, and how women are motivated and supported in becoming soccer coaches. Occupying a position in an organisation is always also based on a process of self-selection, i.e. a person can also decide for themselves whether or not they want a position. The (formal and informal) definition and communication of the role and expectations towards the coaching position in the sports club does not only have an influence on the decision inside the club, but always also has an influence on the potential candidate. Potential coach candidates must be willing to meet the requirements and expectations of the position, and therefore be interested in and apply for the position. Here too, self-selection plays a role in that women may be influenced by their own stereotypical expectations and insinuations concerning the coaching position in soccer (e.g., Allan, 1993; Bahlke et al., 2003). Based on these theoretical considerations, this empirical analysis of the recruitment process in soccer clubs sets out to answer the following questions:

- How are decisions reached when appointing a coach? Who holds the power to make the decision when appointing a coach for a soccer club?
- To what extent do decision-makers in the recruitment process reproduce gender stereotypes when considering if and how women and men will be able to fulfil the requirements made of a soccer coach?
- To what extent are stereotype-loaded expectations and evaluations produced in relation to the expertise and leadership of female coaches?
- What influence do gender-specific competence attributions have on the processes of the external and self-selection of female coaches?

Method

The empirical analysis is based on a qualitative study examining five soccer clubs which are members of the SFV, a regional association of the German Football Association. The analysis was carried out exclusively in lower-level soccer clubs offering both men's and women's soccer; women's only soccer clubs were not part of the study. We collected data by carrying out interviews with individuals who hold central positions in the SFV and in the clubs (female and male decision-makers), as well as active participants in women's soccer (female and male coaches, female players). Various qualitative survey tools were developed, bearing in mind the theoretical considerations: (1) When considering the structure and the recruitment process, the sports club as a corporate actor can only be viewed indirectly through the statements

of specific, individual actors. Consequently, actors who are responsible for the strategic and operative leadership and management of the club were surveyed. Problem-centred expert interviews (Liebold & Trinczek, 2009) were carried out with selected decision-makers and functionaries in soccer clubs, focusing on the recruitment and support of female coaches, and on the expectations related to decision processes. These interviews were relatively open, despite being oriented towards theoretical considerations (Lamnek, 2005). (2) The analysis focused on the expectations of female players (potential coach candidates) and incumbent coaches. The female coaches and female players were questioned in narrative interviews (Holtgrewe, 2009). The aim was to detect different subjective perceptions and interpretations regarding female coaches in soccer clubs.

Table 1: Overview of the interview study

Functionaries from the SFV					
Presidential board / management (male) (n = 2) Chair of women's soccer committee (female) (n = 1)					
Interviewees in soccer clubs					
Club	*Number of teams, all (women & girls)*	*Number of female coaches (licence?)*	*Level of the women's team*	*Gender of committee members*	*Interviewed*
Club 1	16 (4)	2 girls' teams are coached by women (1 with c-licence)	third highest division	only male, 1 female (women's representative)	2 functionaries (male and female) 2 female coaches 2 female player
Club 2	12 (3)	1 girls' team is coached by a woman (without licence)	fourth highest division	only male	1 functionary (male) 1 female coach 1 female player
Club 3	7 (1)	only male coach (without licence)	lowest division	only male, 1 female (women's representative)	1 functionary (male) 1 female player
Club 4	12 (2)	1 women's team is coached by a woman (with c-licence)	fourth highest division	only male	1 functionary (male) 2 female coaches (1 without team) 1 female player
Club 5	13 (3)	1 girls' team is coached by a woman (without licence)	third highest division	only male	1 functionary (male) 1 female coach 1 female player

This study of the under-representation of female coaches in women's soccer is based on 21 qualitative interviews with (fe)male club functionaries, (fe)male coaches and female players of lower-level soccer. The random sample of the interviewees is com-

posed as follows: six (fe)male voluntary functionaries, six female coaches and six female players (and potential coaches)[3] from the five soccer clubs were interviewed. In addition, three functionaries (1 female) at the SFV were interviewed. Table 1 shows the male dominance at the functionary and decision-making levels of the five selected soccer clubs. Each interview lasted 60 to 100 minutes. All interviews were tape-recorded and analysed by means of a qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2003) using the MAXQDA data processing software for qualitative text analysis. For this purpose, a theory-led (deductive) category grid was developed as the evaluation scheme. The categories provided a first scheme for analysis. In the ensuing steps, we systematically defined inductive subcategories that were matched with statements from the interviews by using sequenced thematic sections.

Results

Recruitment procedures for coaches in soccer clubs

Firstly, the recruitment-related constellations are decisive in recruiting coaches. Initially, the results reveal a subordinate relevance of formalised search and selection strategies in coach recruitment. The search for an appropriate candidate for coaching positions is primarily undertaken through informal networks and personal connections. Formal job announcements that reach as many potential candidates as possible appear to be a very unpopular practice in soccer clubs.

> In our club, it usually works like this: you don't write a formal job advert. You simply go and talk to certain people you know and consider to be capable. (male funct., int. 2, club 5)

> You mostly know the club's potential candidates in person anyway. There is no special search recipe. We don't need one. (male funct., int. 19, club 1)

The functionaries often consider a recruitment practice using informal structures and personal networks to be a functional and effective way of searching for candidates in sports clubs, as has been shown in previous studies. In doing so, they are convinced that they already have their eyes on potential candidates. It becomes apparent that the uncertainty associated with recruiting a coach is primarily reduced by the personal acquaintance of the decision-makers. Personal acquaintance and informal networks form the central knowledge base concerning the availability and capabilities of particular coaches. These serve as the equivalent of a formal job advertisement. Even though they reduce the uncertainty in the search for a coach, such informal and personalised search practices must be viewed critically in regard to the equal treatment of female coaches in soccer clubs. This kind of network is often gender-distinct,

3 All female players answered "yes" to the question whether they could imagine becoming a coach.

especially in soccer clubs. There continues to be a high prevalence of males on soccer club boards and in the personal networks responsible for staff decisions. The fact that information and competence are connected to certain persons and personal networks within the club, produces exclusive freedom and responsibilities in regard to the search procedure for a coach within this privileged group (e.g., Greenhill et al., 2009; Lovett & Lowry, 1994; Stahura & Greenwood, 2001). This means that potential female coaches who do not have network affiliations and personal acquaintances within the club are not considered as candidates. They find themselves outside the range of observation of those at the clubs responsible for recruitment.

> I have to be honest about this. I only take marginal notice of the women's soccer at our club, and I look at it with slightly different eyes. I have not yet thought about it myself. But it's true that we have hardly any female coaches at the club. That's true, although we have been coaching good female players for years now. But it's not that the management becomes active and asks whether there is any woman who wants to work as a coach or wants to take part in a coaching course. (male funct., int. 19, club 1)

At the same time, the specific social structure for the flow of communication and information causes so-called "informational oligarchies" in the process of coach recruitment. In other words, only a few people control the flow of information and knowledge in the club (e.g., Thiel & Mayer, 2009). This produces exclusive responsibilities and encourages the possibility of power-based distortion and the blocking of information (Argyris, 1990). It clearly shows that relevant information – for example, regarding vacant coaching positions and educational opportunities – does not find its way to potentially interested female candidates. Women rarely have access to the relevant information, unless they have direct access to the decision-maker's information and knowledge. This appears to be a particular problem in soccer clubs whose committee does not include a representative for women's soccer.

> Again and again, certain kinds of information are not shared with the women's soccer section. We actually heard about the coaching course by chance. The soccer association had written to all the clubs, but it didn't get through to us. Mr. X simply didn't pass the letter on to those in charge of the women's soccer section. (female coach, int. 16, club 4)

> Well, I feel there is a serious lack of information on the part of the club. Far too little is made public. Many female players simply don't know that certain educational courses and support schemes for female coaches exist, or where they have to turn to. (female coach, int. 13, club 2)

Beyond the power-based distortion of information, our analysis also shows that in a male-dominated soccer environment, the decision-makers' information and commu-

nication during the recruitment process can be layered with gender discriminating descriptions and slogans. This can intensify and even radicalise internal communication within the club regarding gender, where gender differences are consistently internally communicated and accentuated.

> Again and again, certain members of the club management seem to suggest that we women are a burden to the club. They always come up with reasons why our women's teams don't actually belong there. (female funct., int. 5, club 1)

It is also interesting to note that even men who work as coaches in the women's sector are confronted with stereotyped statements:

> Our coach told us that a member of the management asked him if he was looking for a girlfriend, because he had started coaching women and stooped to that level. (female player, int. 8, club 3)

The use of such exclusive networks serves as a system-functional procedure for establishing contact with potential candidates during the recruitment process. If personal networks influence the recruitment process, the personal preferences of the decision-makers come into play. The functionaries state that they intend to contact primarily those people who they assume to have an interest in a coaching position. Male candidates are perceived as being more interested and are therefore contacted more often than women.

> You start by talking to those you consider likely to be interested in a coaching job. This is more often the case with men. (male funct., int. 7, club 4)

This quote reveals that functionaries often assume that women have little interest in a soccer-coaching job. They appear to have strong doubts about the female players' interest in a position as coach. As a result, women have to signal their willingness to become a coach very clearly in order to be considered at all by the club's functionaries. On the other hand, the results show that functionaries admit to explicitly contacting men first, demonstrating discriminative search practices, with those in positions allowing them to hire preferring individuals who are similar to themselves and who "fit" the club's rationale.

> At the moment it is like this: if people are sought for a coaching position, men are typically asked first. (male funct., int. 20, club 3)

Informal and personal approaches to searching and selecting coaches give greater latitude to the decision-maker. A female official recognises the clear advantage in favour of men. Firstly because, when considering candidates with similar qualifications, the male officials prefer male candidates, and secondly because males have stronger personal contacts among each other.

> If there is a vacant position as a coach, and a man and a woman have the same qualifications, our club will still take the man. It's as simple as that. But this is also because men stick very much together, so that a woman cannot easily gain access. (female funct., int. 5, club 1)

In this context, it is important to note that women themselves also develop prejudices and insinuations against the recruitment practices of the clubs' decision-makers. The results show that women develop a preconceived notion that club functionaries do not wish to consider women for coaching positions, and that preference is given to men.

> In our club, no member of the managing board would dream of hiring a woman as a coach. The club doesn't really want to search for women for this position. I believe they deliberately search for men, even for the girls' and women's teams. (female player, int. 8, club 3)

Competency expectations towards the soccer coach's role

Aside from search strategies, deciding on the job requirements also plays a major role in selecting and appointing coaches. However, the process within soccer clubs is rarely formalised. Relevant job specifications with concrete expertise expectations are often not stated, nor are specific qualification filters applied during coach selection.

> We don't have concrete requirement profiles and qualification conditions. We communicate among ourselves about who has been focussing on which specific people, and then we decide who is to become the new coach. (male funct., int. 18, club 2).

Another functionary indicates that the selection criterion *coach experience* is barely binding in his soccer club.

> Well, it would be rather hard for a newcomer to become a coach at our club. One must have gained experience as a coach somehow. One must have qualified oneself over a certain period of time. (male funct., int. 19, club 1)

These statements show that in many cases the selection criteria for recruiting coaches remain unclear and vague. Consequently the responsibility for appointing a coach creates a wide range of expectations towards the coach's role. The decision-makers base their premises of recruitment-related decisions on personal preferences in relation to relevant criteria and competences for the coaching position. As a result, the question is not whether and how male and female coaches differ, but how the decision-makers believe them to differ on account of gender-specific attributions. For this reason, the decision-makers were questioned about expectations and requirement profiles with respect to the role of a soccer coach. The results indicate that personality

traits are of central importance, but the focus is principally on *instrumental* features. This means that stereotype-based gender differences come into play especially when a particular person defines the coach's role, and this role is interpreted differently depending on the sex. From the point of view of the club functionaries interviewed, the following features are decisive in order to carry out a coach's job:

> In order to assert yourself as a coach, you need a male demeanour. A female coach must have the characteristics of a man. A female coach needs to be enough of a man. But few of them are. (…) If a woman is too reserved and too silent compared with a man, she simply doesn't have what it takes to coach a team. Either she clears this hurdle; or else she simply cannot do it. (male funct., int. 7, club 4)

These statements reveal that the decision-makers continue to project traditional gender interpretations as well as stereotypical beliefs onto the behaviour patterns of women. These obviously clash with their expectations concerning the role of a soccer coach, which has principally male connotations. Coaching in soccer can be seen as a sex-connoted position requiring certain personality traits that have been stereotyped by functionaries as being masculine. Women are often regarded as only partially suitable as soccer coaches because of stereotypical female leadership qualities (e.g., harmony-seeking, team-oriented, socially competent and empathetic). This leads to the fact that leadership- and task-oriented features are associated with male coaches, and communicative-empathetic traits are associated with female coaches. Accordingly, women are regarded as implicitly unsuitable as coaches because of their specific personality traits. However, it is worth noting that such attributes are seldom perceived in a pejorative sense. On the contrary, they often appear as positives; for instance, when female coaches are said to display high levels of team and social competence and described as being understanding, cooperative and harmony-seeking. The problem of attributing such stereotypes seems to lie in the fact that it insinuates that women in the upper hierarchy, i.e. in coaching positions, would be unassertive, soft and indecisive when interacting with female players and colleagues.

> In order for a woman to work as a coach, she must be able to assert herself. She must have and display self-confidence. There is no place for female restraint in soccer. (male funct., int. 2, club 5)

The club functionaries hold the opinion that authoritarian coaching and leadership of a team is essential and necessary during a match. Women, however, are considered not to have this ability. On the contrary, it is striking that the implied characteristics of female coaches reveal a strong reference to the role of a mother. This can be seen in an extreme form in the following functionaries' statements referring to female coaches as "surrogate mommies".

> You see it very clearly with the coaches. Women on the sideline are simply more even-tempered, rather like a typical mother image. This is typical female behaviour. I don't want to deny their competence. But a louder performance can reach the team better. (male funct., int. 7, club 4)

> Women as coaches are rather like mothers, who hug the girls now and again and so on. A man would hardly do that. A man often blusters and demands unconditional success; he wants to come over well personally with the team. (male funct., int. 20, club 3)

These quotes show that, from the functionaries' perspective, the position of coach in the soccer sector does not permit typical female traits. Functionaries do not say that women cannot be soccer coaches, but female coaches must have the characteristics of a man. In order to be accepted, the woman must first be a coach and then a woman; and as a coach she needs to react in a way that is perceived and interpreted as being masculine. But if women are self-confident, ambitious and demonstrate strong leadership skills, this is often interpreted as deviating from the feminine norm and downgraded as typical "male behaviour" or stigmatised as "un-feminine". Female coaches with such behaviour are often perceived as arrogant and even impertinent. By contrast, the same behaviour in male coaches is interpreted as confident and competent. Female coaches are in a dilemma if they do not want to be stigmatised as being un-feminine (see Pfister & Fasting, 2003).

> As a coach, you have to be energetic and consistent, just like a man. That's how you have to be. But nevertheless, you have to keep your femaleness somewhere. That is certainly not at all easy. (female coach, int. 16, club 4)

> Concerning the women's sector, there are many gentlemen in the club who have a problem with a woman who is determined and self-confident. I have to display male traits in order to appear competent and to assert myself. But from their point of view, this is not really woman-like. (female coach, int. 12, club 5)

A way out of this dilemma may be to trivialise and conceal one's strengths, in order not to be branded as being too ambitious and forceful, as quasi un-feminine. The analysis suggests that the female coaches interviewed sometimes refuse to orient themselves towards stereotypical feminine traits in order to satisfy common notions about the leadership style of a coach. Moreover they attempt to develop their own style without adopting typical masculine behaviour or without having to renounce their womanhood.

> Others always think they know better how to coach a team, and what it takes to be a good coach. If this is typically female or

> male, one must not be influenced by all those prejudices. That's difficult, sure. You have to develop your own style as a coach, and remain authentic; that's crucial. There are many examples in the National League of women who have their own style and who are also successful. (female coach, int. 4, club 1)

Furthermore women are often not accepted or trusted to be technically competent coaches. As a result, obvious femininity in the field of soccer coaching is associated with unprofessionalism and incompetence.

> Soccer is simply a man's job and it will always be that way. Women just don't have the same level of competence as men. (male funct., int. 20, club 3)

The doubts about professional competency are expressed in the form of gender-specific attributes, whereby women's practical and analytical skills are judged as being less pronounced than those of men.

> Women working as coaches need to be able to do the same things as men. But I am simply sceptical about that. In my opinion, clear differences do exist. Women are hardly ever able to give practical demonstrations. (…) I have never seen a female coach who perceives the game, who can read it the way it has to be read. (male funct., int. 18, club 2)

> Women and soccer – that's always a story in itself. It's always different when a woman comes along as a coach. The first reaction is, of course: "Oh, here comes a woman." One always asks oneself: "What will she be able to communicate to them?" It's just like everywhere. A woman is simply not at a man's level. (male funct., int. 17, SFV)

Consequently, it is enormously difficult for female coaches to hold their ground technically against male colleagues (see also Norman, 2010b). They have to demonstrate their soccer-specific analytical abilities over and over again in order to receive the same level of acceptance as a coach, while their male colleagues are accepted from the beginning. The result is that potential female coaches not only need a high degree of technical competency, they must also have a high level of self-confidence in order to overcome these reservations.

> A woman is mostly not considered to be the same as a man. I think few functionaries and coaches take a woman who wants to become a coach really seriously. She really needs to accomplish great things before they realise that women can coach a team successfully too. (female coach, int. 13, club 2)

> You do need a certain self-confidence to work as a coach. One always thinks about what they are likely to think of you as a

> woman. And sometimes, one feels a little bit out of place. Above all, you don't want to make a fool of yourself. (…) You mustn't be weak here as a woman. You must be three times as strong as a man in order to be accepted. (female coach, int. 14, club 1)

The problem of self-derogation

An analysis of the non-formalised competency expectations towards a soccer coach reveals that male functionaries often disregard women's soccer-specific competencies. At the same time, the role of a soccer coach has masculine connotations. These gender-specific attributions of competency lead women to doubt their own competencies and leadership skills, and to consider themselves unsuitable as soccer coaches. The following statement by a female functionary gives an example of this:

> Mostly, they really are competent. But they are not aware of this and tend to believe they aren't. That's the problem. (…) Often, we have women who are very competent but who are not self-confident enough to push forward and demonstrate their abilities. (female funct., int. 15, SFV)

It becomes apparent that female players and coaches often see the soccer club as being discouraging, because women are accepted less in technical respects by the male functionaries. This environment often appears to persuade women not to seek a coaching position in the club in the first place. Hence they avoid the pressure of seeking legitimacy in the face of a lack of acceptance and latent mistrust towards their soccer-specific competencies. This may have the effect of excluding them, particularly if women rely strongly on the feedback and acceptance of their male colleagues for self-rating and behaviour. This leads to the phenomenon of women excluding themselves (*self-derogation*) as soon as they are afraid of being stereotyped by male actors, and perceiving a lack of acceptance and trust in their skills on the part of the sports club (e.g., Bahlke et al., 2003). Women often exclude themselves from the beginning because of individual self-descriptive patterns, even though others, especially the club functionaries, do not see any formal reasons for exclusion.

> Most of the women think: "Well, I'm the only woman now and have to face all these men. They have different expectations and have been involved in soccer for much longer." This produces a certain type of uncertainty which simply keeps many women from becoming a coach. (female coach, int. 4, club 1)

It is an obvious strategy among decision-makers to refer to their willingness in principle to support women in the club, in order to implicate potential female candidates as showing a lack of initiative or faith in their own skills. In other words, gender neutrality and support of women is occasionally promoted on the proscenium (talk), and male functionaries often even perceive their recruitment practices as being gender-

neutral. Backstage (action), however, gender-specific attributions of competence that discriminate against women are still continuously reproduced and communicated in the club. In cases like this, one could also speak of *organised hypocrisy* (Brunsson, 2002), which aims to avoid any accusation of discriminating against women in the first place. Hypocrisy is therefore understood as a reaction to gender-specific tensions inside the club. Clearly, a communicated willingness to promote women often only serves a symbolic purpose, producing an illusion of non-discrimination in decisions that have already been made.

> We would support female coaches in principle. There are no barriers in the club, from my point of view. But mostly, the women themselves are not willing. There really needs to be some initiative on the part of the women. But most of them simply don't dare. (male funct., int. 19, club 1)

From a female player's point of view, it reads like this:

> Of course, the functionaries say that they want to support women too. However, the fact is that it is clear from the beginning who will get the job and who will attend the coaching course. All in all, women receive less support than men. Nobody contacts you to ask whether you could imagine working as a coach. (female player, int. 3, club 1)

Discussion

The aim of this paper is to analyse structural conditions surrounding recruitment procedures practised in (lower-level) women's soccer coaching, and the way in which these are dictated and affected by gender stereotypes. The analysis of the process of coach recruitment shows how the way in which gender is made relevant is part of the organisational interpretive patterns and horizons. The existing informal and non-standardised structures determine the recruitment process; the personalisation of recruitment-based decision processes, together with the power that functionaries possess within the organisational structures, and the dominance of men on the decision-making boards of soccer clubs lend disproportionate weight to individual preferences and attitudes in the coach recruitment process. Such interpretations transport female and male stereotypes as criteria for personnel decisions; the role of the coach in soccer is based on expectations of male-stereotyped competences, such as assertiveness, leadership skills and confidence. In addition, the soccer-specific competencies of women are also continually called into question. It is important to note that the results do not indicate that women cannot be coaches, but that a female coach should have the characteristic of a man. Male-connoted role expectations toward soccer coaches result in gender-specific discrimination, with the result that functionaries do not consider women as candidates because they favour men who fit their expectation

of the soccer coach's role. Declarations of support for women are usually no more than symbolic, serving to produce the illusion of gender-based neutrality in order to avoid accusations of discriminating against female coaches. At the same time, it should be noted that the women themselves can perpetuate gender stereotypes in relation to coaching practices, by suggesting that functionaries within sports clubs have a low acceptance of women in soccer and/or masculine stereotypical expectations of the coach's role. We can conclude that women have to overcome higher (informal) selection thresholds in sports clubs of masculine connoted sports areas like soccer. This can deter potential female coaches from taking up both, a coaching position, and a soccer coach education. Nevertheless, there are other influences that need to be taken into account, e.g. that coaching at a lower level may not be an attractive job for women; or the issue of the compatibility between having a family and coaching.

This latent focus on gender stereotypes is considered not as aiming to explicitly exclude women, but as making the inclusion of women more difficult. Finally, the question arises as to how the recruitment of female coaches can be supported by soccer clubs. While the influence of gender stereotypes in the context of the recruitment process cannot be completely eliminated, it can at least be mitigated to some extent. Based on the results of this study, the following points may be discussed:

1. *De-personalisation and formalisation of decision-making processes:* The structural conditions underlying the recruitment process in soccer clubs are characterised by non-standardised and informal arrangements. These allow single opinion leaders and decision-makers to repeatedly dominate the clubs' communication and decision-making processes through their stereotypical convictions against female coaches. In order to reduce such a personalised influence on the decision-making process, precise arrangements are needed that formalise the search process and define technical criteria for assigning coaches, and the structures for promoting female coaches need to be institutionalised. Only then can individuals and exclusive networks be effectively prevented from systematically enforcing their preferences during the recruitment process and bypassing the support of female coaches "through the back door". Formalisation of the recruitment process will not automatically reduce the gender imbalance of female coaches in (low-level) women's soccer. Nevertheless it can lead to better and fairer recruitment practices, which may support the inclusion of women in soccer coaching positions in lower leagues.

2. *Transparency of the decision-making structures:* Decision-making processes in clubs are often hidden within existing, informal information and communication networks, making them very difficult to trace and control. The extent to which gender differences can be reduced depends on how successfully women can gain access to these male-dominated networks. Yet recruitment processes should not be left to the chance of personal acquaintance and informal communication networks. Formalised systems of communication are needed, to guarantee a

feedback connection between the (vertical and horizontal) club structures in the recruitment processes.

3. *Mentoring and coaching female coaches:* The results show that low acceptance, based on the masculine connotations of the expectations towards the position of coaches in soccer, deters potential female coaches from taking up the position of coach. As a result, some women tend to question their own skills and competences as a coach in response to functionaries' gender-specific attributions of competence. Hence some women themselves contribute to perpetuating gender stereotypes and consequently have less interest in a coaching position. In order to reduce the danger of self-exclusion, female players and potential coaches need to break away from their usual thought patterns and learn how to become more resistant to and independent of the judgements of male colleagues and functionaries. It is therefore necessary for women to regard their own skills and competences as self-evident, rather than as discriminatory elements of their femininity. Mentoring programmes and individual coaching would assist with this, since they facilitate the entry of potential coaches into a coaching job, accompany them during their work, and provide (emotional) support when acceptance problems arise (e.g., Bahlke et al., 2003; Pfister, 2004).

The alternatives briefly discussed here indicate ways in which a practical realisation of support for recruiting and promoting female soccer coaches should be directed at the club level. To a large extent, however, this depends on the success of implementing *women's soccer-specific thinking* into the structures of the soccer clubs. Implementing such women's soccer-specific thinking is strongly connected to suppressing the gender-stereotyped attribution of skills and competence for coaching positions in soccer by male decision-makers. As long as it is not self-evident that women can also be competent soccer coaches, gender-specific segregation using gender stereotypes will be consistently legitimised. If such discriminatory mind-sets can ever be changed, they may well only be changed slowly. The dismantling of attitudes that militate against equal opportunities for women in the field of soccer coaching is a goal that is only likely to be scored in the longer term.

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