

“I feel like I am, quite often, a bit like a chameleon, trying to be different things to different people at different times”



Chameleons of confidence: the dramaturgical practices of female practitioners.

Background: Female leaders continue to face numerous challenges as they seek to navigate their roles in sport (Sisjord *et al.*, 2021; Knoppers *et al.*, 2022). While existing scholarship has acknowledged confidence as one variable among others in relation to broader critiques of gendered sport culture (e.g., Fasting *et al.*, 2019), we lack richly detailed insights into the everyday *emotional* and *performative* dimensions of (un)confident practice among women. Such knowledge is essential to further critically examine and inform the work of female sport leader and those who deploy and support these practitioners (e.g., Governing Bodies, clubs, coach mentors etc.).

Methods & Findings

8 participants

Semi-structured interviews

Phronetic iterative analysis



1 Generating perceptions of confidence is key!

“If you don’t come across as confident, you’re not going to hold any power... people are so shocked that I have an opinion, but it also does kind of empower you.”

Rowing coach, <25 years old, county and national level athletes.

2 Performances of confidence are judged differently. Understanding audience expectations matters!

“a woman presenting themselves in a really confident manner is almost perceived as being a bit bitchy. A bit kind of, only out for themselves, you know; that type of mentality. Whereas a man presenting themselves confidently, it’s like, ‘Oh yeah, they know what they’re on about’.”

Self-employed triathlon coach, >30 years old, national and international level athletes.

Result 1: Gender and coaching norms informed notions of idealised image.

- *Display rules* constrained authentic displays of emotion.
- Feeling “out of place” (lone woman) further emphasised the need to perform a confident front.
- Blending in by conforming to the gendered norms of a sport coach: e.g., little use of makeup, long hair tied back, wearing the assigned ‘uniform’.
- Loud and bold coaching approach; making presence known.

Result 2: Strategies were used to manufacture confidence.

- Preparation away from their audience(s).
- Mental rehearsal.
- Making changes to their appearance, manner and use of props.
- Hiding / masking key emotions to portray a false sense of confidence to others.

Performing confidence came at an emotional cost, females felt like they had to change their persona to portray confidence.

Key sense making and future directions: Goffman (1959), Hochschild (1983), and Scott (2005) offer valuable interpretive insights into the *(non)doing* and *(non)being* of confidence by these participants. For instance, the emotional labour, deep and surface acting involved in portraying themselves in often more ‘masculine’ ways. Future studies should further examine perceptions of female practitioners’ interpersonal strategies from the perspectives of various audience members.