

Coaching and ‘self-repair’: Examining the ‘artful practices’ of coaching work.

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Word count: 8629

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Abstract

The significance of this paper lies in examining how sports coaches construct and negotiate their professional sense making; what Goffman (1971) described as the practices engaged in to manage ‘ugly’ interpretations. Using the work of Garfinkel (1967) and Goffman (1971), the article pays attention to coaches’ ‘ethno-methods’; that is, the background knowledge and practical competency employed in forming and maintaining social order. In doing so, the explanatory accounts of Christian (an author who supported the co-construction of this work), a coach, collected via recorded interviews over the course of a 3-month period during a competitive season are used to explore and analyse the procedures used to ‘achieve coherence’ in what he did. The analysis employed Garfinkel’s (1967) description of ‘artful practices’ and related concepts of ‘self repair’ to demonstrate the fundamental interactional ‘work’ done by Christian, not only to understand why he did what he did, but also how he would ‘get things done’ in future. Such analysis highlights the mundane routines of coaching in particular, and work settings in general, to reveal the backstage manufacturing individuals ‘do’ to maintain a sense of ‘practical objectivity’ to their continual inferences, judgements and justifications of practice.

Keywords: *Garfinkel; Goffman; self-repair; repair; accounts; coaching*

Introduction

Taking a lead from sport sociology more generally, the study of sports coaching has seen notions related to power, compliance and interaction come to the fore. As opposed to locating the coach within the confines of a self-centred, highly explicative process, coaching has alternatively been considered as complex situated action, albeit within inter-subjective and cultural sensitivities. Here, increased emphasis has been placed upon the uniqueness of coaches' work in shaping the behaviours of those subject to such actions. From this perspective, the daily work of coaches has been positioned within that of organisational life, as a 'detailed site of work' (Corsby & Jones, 2019a), with related identities and development being grounded in, and forged by, contextual pressures and opportunities. Although insightful in and of itself, such a perspective, both within coaching and the social sciences more generally, has tended to treat concepts such as 'norms' and 'culture' as governing behaviour, rather than examining how people actually create such order (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2009; Ablitt & Smith, 2019). Alternatively, this paper is concerned with how professionals, in this case coaches, achieve a sense of 'practical objectivity' to their continual inferences, judgements and justification(s) of practice. Although situated within a particular work setting (i.e., coaching), which holds peculiarities of its own, it is proposed that the inferences drawn may be applicable to other forms of work, thus providing an example of the contingencies of practical action. In this respect, it provides a case of what it means more generally to both 'have a practice' and to be 'constituted by [a] practice' (Gad & Jensen, 2014).

More specifically, despite acknowledgement of coaching as performed labour, related studies continue to be more concerned with reporting the 'meaning' coaches attach to behaviour(s), rather than how such explanations are produced and maintained in and of themselves. For example, although power and discourse has been touched upon as a crucial feature of coaching practice (e.g., Mills, Denison, & Gearity, 2020), the assumption that language 'just works', particularly within individual interactions, remains largely de facto. Consequently, although interactionist studies have for some time observed and documented the unpredictability of individual and collective acts, a considerable portion of the scrutiny and inquiry undertaken in coaching can be accused of lacking engagement with 'the water it swims in'; what Kosík (1976) termed 'pseudo concrete' analysis (Gardiner, 2000, p.7). Alternatively, taken that any language-in-use is central to how meaning is constructed between participants in any social encounter, this paper is principally interested with how coaches manage and negotiate their sense making; what Goffman (1971) described as the practices undertaken to

manage ‘ugly’ interpretations. Here, individuals’ accounts (i.e., explanations or justifications of behaviour) are positioned as ‘socio-rhetorical’ devices that align actors’ previous conduct with the shared demands of any situation (Vaisey, 2009). Indeed, this understanding of everyday life remains a fundamental function of sociology (Douglas, 1971); to appreciate how we, as social actors, develop our manifold capacities as both individuals and collectives (Gardiner, 2000).

Consequently, the paper does not purport to be ‘about’ coaches’ accounts, but rather focusses on the construction ‘of’ such explanations. Drawing principally on the writings of Garfinkel, it thus pays attention to coaches’ ‘ethno-methods’; that is, the background knowledge and practical competency employed in creating and maintaining social order, and their place within it. The questions which drove the study included; how (and why) do coaches’ explain their everyday decision-making? How do they make sensible their working experiences? Where and how do coaches confirm such explanations? What lines of action do they pursue as a consequence of such confirmatory action? And, how are related, and inevitable, tensions negotiated?

Inspired by the writings of both Garfinkel and Goffman, the principal value of the paper lies in addressing the complicated space where the reproduction of dominant roles and performances collide with coaches’ attempts to crystallise their idealised persona(s). Such an examination of the dialectic between the ‘front’ and ‘back’ regions, however, is not to provide some functional or serviceable ‘blueprint’. Rather, it is to illustrate how thought and action are reconciled in everyday coaching life, allowing a glimpse into an aspect of the activity’s ‘just whatness’ (Auhor B, 2017). In particular, the paper details how the ‘indexical meanings’ of daily life, often derived from apparently ‘trivial’ activities, are fundamental to coaches’ preparatory work. This indexicality refers to the readily available, taken-for-granted natural attitude that social actors (in this case coaches) use to make the apparently irrational rational (Garfinkel, 1967). Hence, the significance of the paper also lies in bringing mundane occurrences to the fore in the hope of developing a sensitivity towards coaches’ immediateness of things; of their relation to the world and subsequent complex interconnections. Hence, justifications of behaviour are not treated as reflecting ‘inner’ motivations that drive forward action, but as post hoc explanations that align previous experience with the interpretive expectations of the context (Garfinkel, 1967).

Although no doubt the article is, to an extent, theoretically driven, the analysis is principally concerned with coaches’ “practical sociological reasoning” for actions undertaken (Garfinkel, 1967, p.1). The intention, therefore, is to present a rigorous illustrative case of

accounting practices as central to understanding coaches' everyday 'work' (see Corsby & Jones, 2019a). In doing so, we assert that careful investigation can reveal the connection between wider social forces and how individual scripts are constructed for forthcoming lines of behaviour; an interpretive link between the 'here-and-now' and future intentions. In this respect, the paper contributes to a reading of coaching as 'repair orientated' (Jones, 2019, p. 344); where coaches continually (re)construct themselves in response to the ever-present ambiguity, insecurity and inescapable tension inherent within their work (e.g., Jones, 2006).

In terms of structure, the following section reviews the features of 'remedial' or 'repair' work both generally and more specifically in coaching, before the design of the study is presented. The remainder of the article is dedicated to describing the accounting practices of a single coach, Christian, an author who supported the co-construction of this work. We conclude by discussing the social and practical implications for coaches in terms of managing and accomplishing everyday meaning in what they do.

Accounts as everyday (self) 'repair'

The idea of 'repair-related' phenomena has a considerable history within the social sciences, including that linked to speech errors in psychology, ritual and culture in anthropology, vocalised repair in conversation analysis, and social and embodied troubles in sociology. With particular regard to the latter, Schegloff (1992) cautioned against analysing such 'troubles' and related restorative work as the sole possession of individuals. Alternatively, the accounts given to 'explain untoward behaviour' (Scott & Lyman, 1968), should be viewed as crucial characteristics in the production and management of social order (Orbuch, 1997; Heritage, 2008).

According to Orbuch (1997), individuals' accounts can reveal many things; a sense of control, how they cope with emotional situations, how they manage the sense-making of others and, in doing so, establish daily relational experiences. Hence, such accounts become a mechanism for justifying behaviour, for decisions taken, and for explaining future courses of action. In this respect, they are considered central to the production, maintenance and repair of meaning within social interaction. Far from being ascribed then, social roles (e.g., that of a coach) can be considered as continually achieved and re-achieved through practical 'accountable' means (Garfinkel, 1967).

Whereas Garfinkel (1956, 1967) was interested in how accounts were achieved, Goffman's (1971) discussion of 'remedial interchanges' described a range of social strategies to control others' interpretation(s) of any given act. This restorative work involved three main devices: (1) *Accounting* (i.e., a re-structured explanation of events which might lead to the

exoneration of an individual); (2) *Apologising* (i.e., gestures through which guilt is admitted, while the individual also dissociates from the behaviour); (3) and *Requesting* (i.e., asking for permission for a violation that has not yet been specified). Each ‘interchange’ possesses the specific function of displaying that the offender’s attitude was not a fair reflection of him or herself, and, hence, can be considered an on-going act of ‘remedying’ perception through self-presentation (Goffman, 1971). Despite appearing naturally then, such accounts provide an empirical resource of how individuals renovate and maintain order, while also protecting or reconstituting personal identities.

Precisely because these affairs are based upon attending to rules, or obligations, the connection between Goffman and Garfinkel’s writings has been subject to much debate (see Maynard, 1991). For example, although Denzin proposed a synthesis between ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism (a label Goffman incidentally rejected; Raab, 2019), Zimmerman and Wieder (1971) claimed ethnomethodology’s purpose of illuminating the methods used to make sense of events as a point of difference. In addition, Goffman’s use of a dramaturgical framework has been largely criticised by ethno methodologists for ignoring the ‘here-and-now’ temporality of producing coherent social order, thus merely possessing an “episodic emphasis” (Garfinkel, 1967, p.174).

Acknowledging such differences, general agreement exists that both Goffman and Garfinkel were united in the belief that interaction was ordered in its own right, and, hence, that ordinary action(s) are an essentially collaborative affair. The strengths of both approaches then; that is, ethnomethodology’s sensitivity to the temporality and contingency of unfolding events, and Goffman’s acute descriptions of face-to-face work, offers a complementary imaginative analysis of performed social ‘goings on’ (Maynard, 1991).

Recent work by Jones (2019) also considered such performative acts by coaches, comprising “a complex repertoire of emotionally laden gestures and tone(s)” (Dant, 2010, p.1), as necessary in the process of ‘self repair’. Such acts simultaneously contribute to, and constitute, an unremarked, everyday, professional resilience. Although possibly perceived as being self-justifying indulgence, it has been argued that coaches need to engage in such practice simply to deal with the inherent uncertainty of their work. It is an ambiguity which fuels a continuous drive for control and, rather paradoxically, the taking of risks; both of which can become stressful in the extreme (Jones, 2006). Although it may appear mundane, piecemeal, and apparently inconsequential then, the restorative action involved is unquestioningly a political activity in itself, and thus eternally contestable. A further problematic issue is that many aspects of this personal remedial work must be carried out in public. Hence, it is

performed in “full view of those who have a direct concern with the process” (Smith & Hall, 2016, p.149); something which not only increases the tension and anxiety associated with ‘self correction’, but also ties the conceptualisation of personal repair to that of Garfinkel’s and Goffman’s retrospective ‘accounts’ of action.

Becoming the phenomenon: Research design

The design for this study explored the social procedures that individuals use to ‘achieve coherence’ in their everyday lives. The central concern, as highlighted by Rawls (2006), was not with cognitive processes per se, but with what can be made publicly known, accountable, and accepted by others. In this regard, rather than being ‘about’ the accounts of coaches, the focus concerned what Garfinkel (1967) described as a method of ‘discovering agreements’; that is, interrogating the personal work undertaken to provide certainty of practice. In this regard, we, as authors, initially identified or discovered ‘office chats’, usually on the Monday following the weekend’s competition, as a ‘mundane’ site of coaching that is often taken-for-granted. Doing so followed Mehan and Wood’s (1975) description of researchers studying their own sense-making work by ‘becoming the phenomenon’. Previous examples of such inquiry include David Sudnow’s (2001) study of becoming a jazz player, and Lawrence Wieder’s (1974) personal meaning processes of paroled inmates. It involves researchers using their ‘membership knowledge’, not as an implicit resource, but as an explicit ‘topic’ of study (ten Have, 2002). In this way, as a direct consequence of our employment as coaching researchers, combined with our various roles as coaching practitioners, we claim adherence to the principle of ‘unique adequacy’ (i.e., to be competent members in the practices under study; see Morriss, 2016). More specifically, Christian, previously a professional football player and current UEFA ‘Pro’ Licence coach holder (the highest level of coaching qualification UEFA currently offer), was the central focus of the conversations. Operating in the country’s highest national league, Christian has a history with the football club spanning over a decade, and was principally responsible for the men’s senior 1st team squad, which included approximately 25 players.

The data collection process involved two interrelated phases. To begin with, the authors recorded fortnightly conversations with Christian (a co-author on the paper) over a three-month period during a competitive season. Attempting to preserve the ‘scenic’ features of the setting (Garfinkel, 2019), the recordings captured an on-going, reflexively embedded effort to ‘make-sense-of’ Christian’s everyday embodied practice. The purpose here was not to explicate Christian’s theoretical understanding of his coaching practice, but rather, the conversations

were akin to Gadamer's (1975) 'art of testing', which involved an effort to 'question' and 'lay open' common dialogue. Each conversational episode lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and was taped via Dictaphone for transcription, which culminated in over 10 hours of recordings. For ten Have (2002), such recordings have a 'data utility' that allow for phenomena that might previously have been missed to be further interpreted. This is not to suggest the recordings obtained an objectifying effect, similar to that claimed in conversation analysis (Heritage & Atkinson, 1984). Rather, the purpose was to provide a 'presence' to the data that promoted intersubjective constituted discussion and understanding.

The second related phase involved all authors in a further six months of fortnightly 'data analysis sessions' that inspected the audio recordings for explicit and implicit sense-making; to understand what was happening, and the meanings attached. Such sessions were collaborative activities that allowed and encouraged insightful thematic dialogue. They were collaborative in the sense that a process of constant data evaluation and critique, in addition to that of the unfolding sense making was embarked upon (Titchen, 2003). It involved a constant refinement of interpretation through group discussion and challenge, this stimulating the development of new knowledge through debate (Titchen, 2003). In practice, the majority of such analysis sessions were attended by all the authors who were charged with pre-reading certain sections of the data thus bring semi-formed ideas to the 'table'.

Here, every effort was made to interrogate the formulation of common understandings between the research team and, in doing so, document the work required to create Christian's 'accounts' "in the first place" (Garfinkel, 1967, p.74). In terms of procedure, the general analysis involved on-going data-coding and iterative premise development. Rather than depict the findings as definitive 'themes', in order to analyse such explanatory practices, ethnomethodological sensibilities were drawn upon to attend to Christian's 'achievements of investigation' (Garfinkel, 2002). Such sensibilities related to understanding accounts of practice, not as conscious or intrinsic intentions, but as constructions designed to align temporal actions with the interpretive expectations of the context (Garfinkel, 1967). In this respect, they were taken as evidence of Christian's practical competency in constructing and maintaining the social order of his working context.

The concern here lay with generating understanding of the relationship(s) established between coaching self, others and environment (i.e., how sense was made of coaching practice). Therefore, the analysis interrogated the 'background' work, as put into play by ourselves as actors, which allowed for an 'informed interpretation' of events (Rawls, 2006). This reflexive procedure was deemed a means to interrogate the seemingly intuitive, unplanned

accounts of Christian's coaching, which accommodated the "unforeseeable contingencies of particular situations" (d'Arrippe-Longueville et al., 2001, p. 277). Thus, the topics of discussion throughout the project were constructed from a sustained 'seeing' and 'doing' of coaching. Additionally, although Christian was the sole subject of study here, the purpose was to position his actions and accounts as somebody more generally engaged in micro processes of social relations, thus illustrating something of culture through a character.

Following approval from the University's ethics committee, the ethical issues associated with the project began with better appreciating the data collection processes intended for use. Despite claiming some uniqueness to the setting, the purpose was not to search for rich data 'about' Christian's coaching practice. Rather, following Garfinkel (1967), the method aimed to discover the common-sense agreements characteristic 'of' such practice. Consequently, potentially sensitive issues or topics in relation to Christian's explanations and justifications, whilst being further interrogated when needed, were handled with care and consideration. This was both in terms of respecting Christian as a participant (and co-worker) who had forgone anonymity, and the fundamental integrity of the work. Hence, clarifying questions such as: "Is that what you mean?", "What do you think having discussed 'that' scenario?", "How did this make you feel?" and "Are you comfortable with this explanation?" were regularly utilised within the investigative dialogue. Additionally, the privacy assured as part of the project extended to the omission or use of pseudonyms in relation to any revealing features of characters and identities mentioned. Having said that, akin to the 'aspirational ethics' found in Southern, Smith, and Oliver (2005), the intention was to go above and beyond ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, in order to appreciate the relationships and people woven into the recounted stories.

The remainder of this article illustrates and analyses Christian's accounts of his coaching. The first section demonstrates the on-going reflexivity used to make-sense-of the varying coaching situations discussed, while the second details how the prospective and intentional character of the accounts presented were created. Finally, a third section appreciates how such sense-making was 'framed'.

Coaches' accounts as self-justifications: Arriving at 'stable' accounts of meaning

The accounts examined in this study not only recognised aspects of 'coaching' practice, but stitched together past experiences. In this respect, they reflected or produced a "corpus of knowledge that has, in part, the form of a chronological story, and, in part, the form of a set of general and empirical relationships" (Garfinkel, 1967, p.107). However, the 'corpus' of these

ideas, turning to Merleau-Ponty (1962), was not ‘possessed’, but continually arrived at and ‘reciprocated’ through a shared discussion and dialogue with others (i.e., the everyday sense-making with the researchers). In this respect, each account had the retrospective character of ‘recalling’ a particular incident enabling meaning to be ‘reintegrated’ and ‘stabilised’ in the subsequent explanation of coaching practice. The example below illustrates Christian’s on-going work detailing the selection of an individual:

Coach (Christian): “We’ve had another injury last night so I contacted the assistant to discuss the scenario. Immediately, I asked, ‘have I got to swallow my pride over Robert and include him in Saturday’s team?’ I’ve had several disagreements with the player concerning his attitude and commitment to the Club. But now we don’t have a different option. I said he’ll never play again: Should I stay principled and stay true to my own word, or do I do what’s best for the team and put my personal feelings aside? Irrespective of my feelings, I’ve got to invite Robert back into our environment. I’ve started the process by speaking with the assistant. I’ve already framed it...”

Int: “So you know what you are you going to do?”

Coach: “I’ve got to be totally honest, I don’t think he’s a bad egg; I just think at times he gets carried away with his perceived ability. To him, he should start every week...I think he can contribute, I think he can help the team. I don’t mind him as a person but he can’t undermine me with the way he acts...”

Int: “So what will you do?”

Coach: “I could go with Lee and I don’t think we’ll get much change in the team. Neither [Lee or Robert] will do great shakes for us. So, literally it’s a 50-50. I could change the system and Lee would fit that much better, which I’ve spoken with the assistant about. We could quite easily play more people in central areas. That would totally confuse their centre halves, so if that’s the case I don’t need him [Robert] ¹.”

[Recorded extract, March]

The extract presents an effort to stabilise personal interpretation in relation to the potential selection of a particular player, while ensuring the account is sufficiently ‘hooked’ into past events. Here, as a condition of explaining team selection, Christian recalled, explored and refined his justification as part of the sense-making practice (i.e., ‘staying principled’; ‘bad

egg’; ‘change the system’). Interestingly, the unfolding extract also illustrates the reflexive (re)working required to stabilise the given account. The (re)interpretation comprised a ‘fine-tuning’, where the initial muddled or muddled version became substantive. Such fine-tuning however, was not mechanical or neutral, but self-interested and directed towards managing how others would understand the unfolding presented opinion (i.e., who is going to be selected and why). Through such means, Christian came to decide which features (descriptors) were relevant to the ‘sense-made-of’ the situation (see Corsby & Jones, 2019b).

As opposed to being carefully premeditated, for Crossley (2011), the adeptness to stabilise any account may ‘surprise’ or even ‘excite’ the teller as the explanation unfolds, allowing for a firmer grasp on the sense made. This, however, does not mean that he or she is free to articulate an account from an array of linguistic choices. Rather, options are confined by context and history (i.e., what is generally allowable and what has gone before), in addition to the desired image being presented of a principled, consistent actor (e.g., the recognition of not being ‘undermined’ mentioned above).

The following extract illustrates how Christian suggested to both himself and others where to search in the sense-making refinement process. This background work does not just refer to the ‘correctness’ or ‘success’ of the decisions, but also establishes a sense of agreement. This includes where the coach *might* search for agreement, to confirm or refine the sense-made with others and, in doing so, demonstrates to others *where* to search:

Int: “How did the game go yesterday? Disappointing result I gather.”

Coach: “After yesterday’s game, I text [sic] some of the players to ask them ‘how was this... how was that?’ I already know what will come back... Driving back with the assistant [coach], he thinks I should go with Alex this weekend; he has pace and can cross etc., but I think he is too inconsistent to justify picking him. He hasn’t convinced me enough; I’ve made the decision.”

[Recorded extract, January]

In the case presented above, the sense-made in Christian’s explanation (and justification) of the ‘decision’ follows the ‘logical proceedings’ that respects the socio-historicity of the scene, whilst exhibiting what was ‘known’ about the game. Of particular practical concern then, was not just the football specific details (i.e., pace; crossing) as a resource to justify the evaluation, but the kind of agency exercised in confirming the final decision (i.e., responsibility over team

selection; tactical plans). The explanation also presents an idealised image of a ‘coach-in-charge’ (Goffman, 1959) through making ‘public’ what he knows, and what he thinks others (i.e., the assistant) can learn about “the local orderliness of the event” (Lieberman, 2013, p.251). Indeed, examining how such practices are stabilised, which includes both their explanatory and confirmatory nature, reveals the possibilities of gaining power and controlling context (i.e., in this case, the evaluation of the players).

Background expectancies and the intention of accounts

In identifying coaching as involving micro-politics and power-plays (e.g., Gibson and Groom, 2017), related actions have come to be considered as situated. This means that they are not only deemed contingent on a particular time and place, but bound to the shared understandings and background expectancies of context. This is not to deny individuals’ agency in terms of how they act and communicate but, more specifically, that actions must be recognisable (accountable) so that social order is maintained. Any explanation or justification then, as well as providing an account for on-going action, must also (re)affirm underlying shared understandings (or background rules) that structure situations. Such stabilising of the account allows for meaning to be generated. Garfinkel (1967) recognised these processes not merely as individuals responding rationally to a perceived reality, or simply following procedural rules, but as on-going ‘artful sense-making practices’. The following example illustrates how, when highlighting a critical incident from the previous weekend’s game, background expectancies were continuously constructed (i.e., ‘social rules’ or ‘social contract’ of compliance):

Coach: “This weekend we spoke at half-time about not playing the ball short to the striker because we want to go in behind. The game begins, Rick, the striker, comes short and spins long and Jamie plays short. I say ‘Jamie, we’ve spoke (sic.) about it, go long’. He’s on the pitch at this time and he mumbled something. I couldn’t hear what he said but it was disrespectful. We lost; after the game I was furious. I asked ‘what did we say?’ ‘Did I say we go long?’ and everyone nods, so ‘Why the fuck are you going short then, Jamie?’ He sat there shaking his head. ‘I’m not having you shaking your head, get out,’ I said, ‘get out’. He had to wait outside while we continued.”

[Recorded extract, January]

According to Garfinkel (1967, p.93), the ‘stability’ of background expectancies only come into play “after a set of normative features have been motivated” (e.g., a team-talk addressing

players in the changing rooms). The half-time instruction recounted was framed as ‘trying’ to advise the player. The subsequent direction recalled, not only guided the players’ performance (see Corsby & Jones, 2019b), but also illustrated the expected (hierarchical) order imposed on the proceedings. In this way, notwithstanding Jamie acting as ‘any other’ might given the perceived tone of the message, Christian’s explanation was a case of re-affirming implicit expectancies (structure) regarding compliance and acceptance of the case made (i.e., “I’m trying to help you improve”). Therefore, rather than breaching the background expectations, the reaction of ordering Jamie out of the dressing room was explained in terms of re-affirming the requirements of reciprocity; an act of confirming what the coach believed should be ‘known’ by all, whilst simultaneously re-establishing personal ontological security through the production of a coherent explanation.

Christian’s account in this regard, could also be regarded as an exercise in ‘repair’. Not particularly that of a game plan which had gone awry, or even of a relationship with a key player, which would naturally have to be engaged with at a later date. Rather, what was evidenced here was a repair of personal belief, where Christian was given an opportunity to affirm his version of events with little fear of contradiction. The recounting thus, was read as a passage of self-justification; a search for collective (re)validation and thus personal stability. In this respect, the remedial work evident involved a degree of normalisation where any ‘brokenness’ described needed reconstituting to a given ‘fixed’ state. When later probed about the incident, rather than emphasising the contingency of the action, Christian provided a functional explanation of expectations (i.e., athlete compliance within the coaching context):

Int: “How were you (all) after the game?”

Coach: “...The dressing room and bar after the game are different physical spaces, they have different feels. What happens in the dressing room stays in the dressing room; I can fall out with a player and see them on the training ground a few days later and act like nothing has happened. That is not to say I don’t care, but it’s a job. Yes, it has an impact on what is going on, but it is black and white for me.”

[Recorded extract, January]

The above extract provides an example of the front and back stage regions found in Goffman’s (1959) work; in that the sense-made of the event by Christian was reliant upon those involved recognising different coaching performances for different settings. However, unlike Goffman’s

(1961) total institutions, where individuals were denied a 'backstage' to gain respite, Christian's account asserted coaching 'spaces' as highly structured. That Christian was conscious of his performance (particularly in the previous extract where Jaime was ejected from the dressing room) again follows a Goffmanian line of analysis. This is in terms of Christian's behavioural calculation to elicit the desired response from the players both immediately (a harsh lesson related to 'listening' and 'doing better') and in the slightly longer term where they were expected to congregate collegially as a group following the game. Here then, actors were obliged to behave differently in different spaces; an expectations which gives considerable power to the dramaturgical framework. This, of course, was an obligation that stretched to others within the club (principally the players), and not only applicable to Christian himself.

Additionally, building upon the premise above, for the players to act as he expected (i.e., that they should [would] accept his reaction), what Garfinkel referenced as 'trust' needed to be present (or established); that is, as a mutually understood background condition necessary for producing recognisable order, particularly in the absence of unequivocal rules (Rawls, 2006). In this regard, although 'what happened' might be ambiguous, the action was not senseless. To be senseless, Garfinkel (2019, p.161) explained, would be to leave the players "without a frame of possibilities". Rather, the ambiguous nature involved the players deciding what or which, among a set of alternatives, Christian had meant by his actions. In this way, the reaction from the player(s) (i.e., to accept the instruction) legitimised and reaffirmed the action (i.e., the berating/dismissal was deemed 'natural' by the players). Following West and Zimmerman (1991), the event can be considered an example of 'doing' coaching; that is, the order of the event did not just emerge, but illustrated and perpetuated the wider assumption(s) and power dynamics between coach and athlete.

Further still, the significance of such retrospective event 'telling' not only demonstrated the situated rules for sense-making, but also served as a projection for Christian's subsequent understanding and intention(s); there was a 'forwardness' to the explanation of 'doing' the 'job' despite having 'fallen out' with the player. In this way, while the retrospective nature of the account served as a here-and-now process of (self) interpretation (i.e., confirming or repairing meaning), there also existed a prospective nature of the account, which formed the basis of future action. As opposed to an exclusive restorative nature, such analysis echoes the repair work conceptualised by Jones (2019), in illustrating 'how' such sense-making practices possessed a generative character.

Indeed, such explanations comprise a dialectical tension between necessity and freedom, between continuity and change, which often leads to transformation. This is because any breakage brings with it the possibility of “becoming something else” (Martinez, 2019, p.6). The data excerpt above then, whilst perhaps not totally realised through Christian’s justifications, certainly gave insight into how future actions *could* be constructed. This is what Garfinkel (1967) described as ‘artful practice’, where the sense-making provided takes both a retrospective (i.e., coherent explanation of previous decisions) and prospective (i.e., the deliberate and calculable corpus of knowledge for future action) character (Mehan and Wood, 1975). Consequently, tracing and locating ‘backstage’ accounts hold the potential to illustrate how a position, once settled upon (i.e., retrospectively stabilised), might be used to sustain a particular course of action (i.e., a prospective decision).

For example, the backward-looking character of the account below makes ‘known’ the agreement with the assistant, while the forward-looking character illustrates the importance of cultivating ‘influence’:

Coach: “I suppose talking to Dave [the assistant coach] afterwards, on the phone or in the car. I suppose there is an element of seeking comfort; did he see what I saw? Yesterday we agreed Matt did Ok even though the team was poor.”

Int: What about others?

Coach: “I find the conversations with players are always invaluable. Now, whilst the players won’t reveal all, it gives me a good insight into some of their thoughts. Those conversations load the way I am able to respond at a later date. I don’t use those conversations as a way to trip the players up. In the car, for example, those conversations stay in the car, and I value them. Like last week, Tommy was discussing buying a house with his partner. That is important to know... to know what is going on outside of [sic] football.”

[Recorded extract, March]

The explanation of ‘seeking comfort’ cannot simply be reduced to that of decontextualized action (i.e., with the assistant coach or with the player in the car); doing so would separate the individual from the inter-subjective fabric. Rather, the explanation illustrates the configuration of ‘working acts’ among the ‘group’. This idea of a collective, Rawls (2006, p.45) explained,

“involves a particular set of premises for action that other members of the group must then use if they want to be treated as members”. In doing so, Garfinkel (2006) advocated that, when the actions and consequences of a group occur with sufficient regularity and order, a range of descriptive statements could translate the premise of the relationship(s) formed. These are not explanations to ‘debunk’ communicative practices, but rather, they illustrate the possibilities and intentions of collective action².

Additionally, the analysis highlighted “how the organised features of ordinary settings” were used as procedures for Christian to make the appearance of ‘coaching’ a usual matter (Garfinkel, 1967, p.180). This point is illustrated in the quote below when dealing with ‘poor’ performance:

Int: “So, what about when the players push back, or search for some security from you?”

Coach: “Yes, you can tell when they come ‘cap-in-hand’. Freddie. He is brilliant. After training he scurried past me, ‘Oh, oh, are you free tomorrow? Are you free? I just want to catch up with a few things.’ I know he wants something because he fucked up last Saturday, so I say, ‘No, I’m sorry. I’m busy all day. See you Thursday.’”

[Recorded extract, March]

In turn, Christian’s explanations (above and throughout) illustrate his search for ontological repair; of providing convincing accounts of action(s) that contained a ‘certainty of practice’. Leaving little room for externally expressed doubt or hesitation, what was witnessed was a constant self-work of persona; an outward expression of the need for personal security. Far from being prescribed action however, an aspect of Christian’s agency here involved producing descriptions that accounted for, and were accountable to, the background expectations required to maintain order among the group (i.e., the coaching context experienced). Doing so, also required a reflexive recognition of what would be accepted by whom; and it is to such a consideration that we now turn.

‘Framing’ and ‘doing’ accounts

A central demand of coaching is – constructed from our interviews – officially concerned with the management of self, others and environment. What has been illustrated thus far depicts coaching as shifting between the accounts of those involved, but also the result of the various social space(s) in which the activity unfolds. Although the site of data collection was refined

to ‘backstage’ discussions, a practical issue for Christian concerned the intimate dialogue between front and back-stage performances. Thus, this final theme examines the dialectical relationship between dominant fronts coaches present (i.e., as a result of background expectancies) and their ideal impressions (Goffman, 1959). It is here where the lived details of coaching lie; that is, the space where the continuous ‘work’ required for coaches in relation to influencing self, other and environment exist.

For a coach to be understood in the context, the interaction must be reflexively organised on a ‘no time out basis’; that is, so that members can recognise the action as ‘intelligible’ (i.e., the interpretations members use to make sense of conduct, affairs and events). Hence, the importance of stabilising and fine-tuning such accounts. However, it would also be accurate to assert that a person’s (e.g., a coach’s) account must also be ‘performed’ (Goffman, 1959). For example, the description below recognises the coach’s impression is bound to detecting and managing the sensitivity of the underlying order:

Coach: “I can be strategically grumpy. After the game yesterday I said to the players, ‘some of you will never play for this club again.’ I wanted them to feel guilty last night. I’m already setting the mood for tonight’s training...But afterwards I might chat to one of the senior players and say, ‘Do you know I was just making sure that the standard was set tonight.’ I have to frame it.”

Int: “What was the purpose after the game?”

Coach: “So, after game I pulled two players aside and said that wasn’t aimed at you. They are the ones that will be playing the next game. I know I’ll need them all but, for some of them, the next time I’ll need them to play is March. It was certainly a deliberate strategy so some of the younger players know what to expect, but it was a collective as well.”

[Recorded extract, February]

In this way, the ‘seen-but-unnoticed’ sense-making practices outlined earlier also informed Christian’s ‘idealised (coaching) performance’ (Goffman, 1959). The unfolding explanation provides an empirical resource for careful attention to coaches’ sensitivity to shape and be shaped by the local order of action. In the same way that the experience came to be ‘known’ (i.e., from accountable practices; fine-tuning narrative), individual relationships result from

“working acts performed with reference to another actor” (Garfinkel, 2006, p.145; see also Jones, 2006). For example, when speaking about a disappointing result in a cup final, the following extract illustrated the paradoxical account of Christian’s isolating yet connected experience of ‘doing’ coaching:

Coach: “I suppose it is a case of putting on that face. I tried to show that it didn’t affect me then, but it really did. Sat on the bus on the way home, I sat on my own and everyone could see that it had affected me. It did affect me... so yeah, that one was tough. It was a tough one. But again, I suppose I dealt with that on my own again, I didn’t go and seek support.”

[Recorded extract, March]

The embeddedness of the above account illustrates the complicated relationship between the ‘official line’ (i.e., the explanation in the interview data) with whatever proceeded and whatever is to follow in the course of the communication. Paradoxically, the account demonstrates that the repair undertaken was not an individualistic process, but a performance to others that Christian was ‘affected’ by the result. While reflecting on the experience, the unfolding ‘repair’ work related to the coach’s ontological security in terms of having to ‘deal with’ disappointment. However, such security is always positioned in relation to others, context and embedded identity (Rawls, 2006). Consequently, despite the individualised nature of the explanation, Christian was not able to escape historical ‘nuisances’ (Garfinkel, 1967). Indeed, when revisiting an earlier example such ‘nuisances’ were made known:

Coach: “Maybe it’s my grudge. Maybe it has to be on my terms; I don’t know. The instance with Jamie [cited earlier], I was not in a million years going to back down...my annoyance that he...the sheer contempt of him disagreeing. How can you disagree? We’ve all just agreed, and you’re sat there just shaking your head at me. I’m not going back to say sorry. I couldn’t believe it...”

[Recorded extract, February]

Although the practical purpose of the referred to team-talk (above and earlier) was accomplished, such explanations illustrated the enduring features of Christian’s coaching practice. From this perspective, the data ‘makes known’ the on-going personal and professional restorative ‘work’ Christian was required to undertake to go on ‘doing’ coaching.

Conclusion

Principally inspired by Harold Garfinkel's (1967) and Erving Goffman's (1959, 1971) writings on 'remedial' work in interaction, this study examined the construction, management, sustainment and interpretation of everyday coaching order. From this perspective, in keeping with previous sociology of the everyday (e.g., Gardiner, 2000), accounts of action were not considered as 'inner' desires and motivations that propel behaviour(s), but rather as post hoc explanations designed to construct a consistent narrative (e.g., Garfinkel 1967; Goffman 1971; Vaisey 2009). The analysis points to the contingent and constructed character of Christian's accounts of what he did; what Garfinkel (1967) described as the 'artful practices' of individual sense-making. The paper, thus, illustrates the fundamental interactional 'work' done by Christian to 'get things done'; that is, the on-going explanatory practices required to manage and repair meaning. While such efforts to transform or reposition meaning provided generative opportunities, Christian's reports illustrated a greater reproductive character; a self-justification of action and confirmation that served as an indicator of 'correctness' of the original (coaching) practice. Although no doubt self-serving on one level, such practices render visible the ambiguous and uncertain nature of coaching (e.g., Jones, 2006); of how individuals can make rational potentially irrational behaviours that confound the expectations of others. Achieving stability and a sense of identity security in this way, the constructed explanations nevertheless served as a means for Christian to reflect on his practice and his justification of it; a reflexivity that additionally fed the desire to somewhat innovate when he considered the context allowed.

In addition, and perhaps more generally, the article considers the 'seen-but-unnoticed' of decision-making, while paying recourse to the day-to-day struggles associated within complex and dynamic occupations. Seeking to contribute to a richer understanding of the mundane occurrences and practices of coaching 'work', the specific contents of the accounts provided point to the on-going need to stabilise self, context, and environment. In doing so, the paper contributes to the deconstruction of coaching, not so much in terms of what kind of decisions were made, but rather, the backstage preparatory work of how they were continually 'done'. In this way, an illustrative description of the on-going struggle within coaching to balance a required progressivity (i.e., justifying decisions; influencing others) against the need to maintain the security of inter-subjectivity is provided (Heritage, 2007). In a more general sense, the paper also extends our understanding of how individuals observably construct working relations within similar comparably dynamic occupations (e.g., theatre performers, doctors, and teachers), where the need to justify focussed practices and directions of travel

appear necessary to maintain the required influence to ‘do the job’. Such justifications have been termed a ‘normativity of practice’ (Gadinger, 2016), which becomes a social practice in itself, where claims of legitimacy are tested are constructed under conditions of uncertainty.

In keeping with sociological analysis that has questioned the influence of ‘norms’ and ‘systems’ over behaviour (e.g., Housley & Fitzgerald, 2009; Ablitt & Smith, 2019), examining the accomplishment (and negotiation) of such accounts as provided offers one way to bridge the divide between the analysis of coaching ‘cultures’ on the one hand, and the instantiation of coaching as individual on the other. For, as Lynch (2012) described, ‘actions-in-context’ establish individual’s sensibility, not as epiphenomena, but as here-and-now requirements to produce social order. Analogous with Garfinkel’s ‘cultural dopes’, which refutes the treatment of individuals as automatic, re-enactors of norms, this analysis makes visible the everyday, reflexive, and astuteness a coach must bring to his or her respective context. Such a critical re-reading of coaching, which appreciates the on-going everyday endeavours of coaches, allows for the personalised logic of practice to be seen against a recognisable field of practice.

Finally, the article also calls for a broader recognition of coaches’ accounts and their importance within everyday life. This is not just a move away from treating coaching as a localised discipline, but more broadly appreciating the wider entanglements of coaching as work; entanglements which can reveal precarious relationships and the ceaseless negotiation of compliance, obligation, and performance. What has been revealed is relentlessly social, arguing that irrespective of ‘private’ or ‘inner’ feelings and desires, reality emerges at the “intersection of social meanings and ongoing processes of self-creation” (Brickell, 2006, p.96). Although we appreciate the analysis is located as an empirical example of ‘remedial practices’, we believe the paper speaks to what it is like to be a coach more generally; inclusive of the continual justification of practice, making-sense of uncertainty, and influencing others. Indeed, the analysis of the accounts illustrated the continual self-explication required to cultivate power in coaching. Such achievements speak to the inherent negotiation and evaluation coaches must deal with in the immediate, while remaining considerate of future projections.

Footnotes

1. Robert was subsequently included in the team environment. Although he was not selected on this occasion, the initial mention of ‘integration’ in this extract was pursued as a course of action.
2. Adapted from Garfinkel’s (2006) discussion in ‘Seeing Sociologically’, Christian’s explanation can be described as ‘influence’ as a premise of action; that is, the coach’s

action intends to change (or confirm) some element of the background expectancies in the course of action (i.e., acceptance and support for the coach's assessment of the performance). In this way, the explanation is situated but progressive towards developing a sense of the situation that might not be immediately available (Lieberman, 2013); learning more about those who comprise the coaching context than has already been identified.

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