Manuscript title: Negotiating a coach identity: A theoretical critique of elite athletes' transitions into post-athletic high-performance coaching roles.

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Abstract

There has been a growing trend of elite athletes being fast-tracked into post-athletic high-performance coaching roles in association football and rugby union in England and Wales. This has been facilitated by an increase in bespoke and condensed formal coach education courses that are designed to accelerate current and/or former elite athletes in attaining their coaching accreditation. Hitherto, however, the individual lived experiences of former athletes on this career trajectory during their transition to coaching remains under-investigated. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to analyse how elite male association football and rugby union athletes based in the England and Wales (re)created, re-negotiated or transformed their identities when negotiating a fast-tracked career pathway into a post-athletic high-performance coaching role. Fifteen male rugby union (n=10) and association football (n=5) athletes were interviewed on two separate occasions over twelve months. Interviews coincided with the start and end dates of the level three coach education course which they were concurrently enrolled on. Interviews focused upon how they (re)created their professional identities upon negotiating the career transition into a post-athletic high-performance coaching role. Data were critically theorised against sociological concepts associated to the theoretical frameworks of Bourdieu, Goffman and Foucault. Results identified how the development of a coaching identity was articulated through the need to define a 'coaching philosophy'. Upholding a coach identity in an 'honest' disposition so athlete to coach respect could be best attained was expressed by all participants and contrasted with Goffman's concepts of front and back stage impression management. Self-reflexive practices of Foucault's askesis were engaged to varying levels to create a coach identity. In three cases this resulted in participants contestation of their respective club's identity/culture and losing employment as a coach. Finally, recommendations on how coach education structures can further support these coaches in their career transitions are made.

Keywords: coach development; coach education; career transition; coach philosophy; identity recreation; athlete retirement

The desire to achieve increased athletic performance outputs has meant greater attention has been paid to understanding how high-performance coaches learn and develop the skills to become effective in their roles (Holmes et al., 2020). An emerging body of research in this area has identified that, for coaches, experience as a competitive-athlete acts as an important phase in which coaching knowledge and skills are initially acquired (Christensen, 2013; Watts & Cushion, 2017). A competitive-athletic career prior to a high-performance coaching role has also been considered to enable former elite athletes to build and then utilise embodied social, cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) which helps them to firstly access high-performance coaching roles (Rynne, 2014) and then legitimise their positions of power by quickly garnering athlete 'respect' (Blackett et al., 2017).

Although this may be the case, at present the impact a competitive-athletic career can have on the development of coaching efficacy has received only limited analysis. Irrespective of this lack of empirical understanding, within the UK, football and rugby union are two sports which frequently see former elite athletes appointed as high-performance coaches within elite adult teams and/or youth high-performance academies (Blackett et al., 2017, 2019). Indeed, national governing bodies (NGBs) of sport seemingly support this pathway as they afford elite athletes who have not completed lower level coach accreditation courses to be fast-tracked on to advanced level coaching qualifications (Blackett et al., 2018; Rynne, 2014). The basis for offering a fast-tracked pathway often rests on the assumption that the career trajectory and transition from elite athlete to high-performance coach is unilinear and straightforward (Christensen, 2013). Yet when the lived experiences of elite athletes who transition into post-athletic careers have been examined, both within and away from sport, several difficulties have been highlighted which are often based on their over-investment and dedication to their sports (Lavallee & Robinson, 2007). For instance, former elite male football players have been reported to encounter problematic issues regarding the re-negotiation or (re)creation of their

identities after having been heavily socialised to football's cultural and athletic norms (Crocket, 2014; Jones & Denison, 2017). The onset of athletic retirement can also leave athletes with feelings of injustice and social exclusion (McKenna & Thomas, 2007) due to their strong attachment and self-identification with their sporting role (Lavallee, 2005), and through embodiment of their sport's cultural values (McKenna & Thomas, 2007). When individuals maintain a "strong and exclusive athletic identity up to the point of retirement," the likelihood of experiencing transitional difficulties upon exiting an athletic career is increased (Grove et al., 1997, p. 198).

Nevertheless, Lavallee and Robinson (2007) have suggested that self-identity is a dynamic process, something that is continuously formed rather than a fixed entity. Given that elite athletes encounter the transitional milestone of career termination much earlier in their lives compared with most other professions, whilst their transition into a post-athletic coaching career is often fast-tracked within their respective sports, a greater understanding of this transition is required.

The purpose of the present study, therefore, was to investigate how elite male football and rugby union athletes based in the UK (re)created, re-negotiated or transformed their identities when negotiating a fast-tracked career pathway into a post-athletic high-performance coaching role, and to investigate the potential challenges or difficulties they experienced in doing so. Specifically, we wished to 'walk with' current and aspiring coaches who were actively undertaking this career transition so that the temporal nature for how their identities were (re)created and/or transformed could be captured. To conceptualise this process, we have critically appraised our data against several sociological concepts relating to Bourdieusian, Foucauldian and Goffman's theoretical frameworks. All three have been frequently applied to scholarly analyses of coaching practice, development and identity. In so doing, we report how the Foucauldian concepts of *askesis*, *ethic of self care* and *technologies of the self* conceptualise

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these experiences in contrast to the frequently used concepts attached to Bourdieu and Goffman's theoretical frameworks which have been commonly applied within coach education and development research. After Roderick's (2014) claim that "cultural power operates through identification," (p. 157) we consider how the value of analysing sportspeople's career transitions and identity formation through a sociological lens can lend itself to understanding how fast-tracked coaches negotiate their career transitions and potential changes to their identity. By undertaking such analysis, taken-for-granted norms and dominant discourses surrounding individual actions can be conceptualised against the social cultural context, thus recognising the agency-structure dichotomy (Jones et al., 2010). Hence, the manuscript first outlines the core concepts of these approaches in relation to their utilisation in existing literature that has focused upon coach identity and career transitions.

Coach identity creation and transformation

Outlined in his text '*The presentation of the self in everyday life,*' Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model has been an oft-utilised analytical framework for sports coaching research. Goffman (1959) centred his analysis on what has been termed as "micro-sociology" relating to the everyday interactions performed by social agents when negotiating an information game through which impressions are conveyed to others in two forms: "expressions given and expressions given off" (p. 16). According to Goffman, individuals engineer the way in which they present themselves by calculated means that are both conscious (intentional) and subconscious (unintentional). Goffman (1969) termed these aspects of self-presentation as "impression management" (p. 13) or façade during the promotion of positive social values in order to maintain power by avoiding embarrassment or stigma (Goffman, 1963). In a sports coaching context, such performances represent the way in which coaches' intentions to retain power for legitimising their positions of authority are enacted through the

strategic manipulation of their behaviours whilst engaging with athletes (Consterdine et al., 2013; Partington & Cushion, 2012; Potrac et al., 2007), fellow coaches (Thompson, et al., 2015), and coach educators (Chesterfield et al., 2010). Such interpretations infer that coaches can and do employ multiple identities depending how each coach assesses their ability to retain the balance of power in their favour (Jones, 2006).

Alternatively, the formation of coach identities and how coaches retain power has been commonly conceptualised via a Bourdieusian lens, particularly through utilisation of the habitus concept (e.g. Blackett et al., 2017; Light & Evans, 2013). Enculturation within the field of sport significantly contributes to the development of youth coaches' behaviours and coaching practices which take the form of "tacit beliefs that are so taken for granted that they cannot be recognised or verbalised" (Cushion et al., 2003, p. 223). Amongst Bourdieusian scholars, habitus is usually considered an effective concept to help explain how sports coaches subconsciously acquire coaching knowledge through repeated exposure to the dominant practices of a sports field (Cushion & Jones, 2014; Light & Evans, 2013). These practices produce and reproduce embodied knowledge and capabilities via *hexis*, the imprinting of cultural values onto the corporeal body that result in the embodiment of habitus as *deportment*, the subconscious adoption of these culturally accepted symbolic values (Bourdieu, 1986). Collectively these are then considered to constitute part of a coach's identity (Hassanin & Light, 2015). When one transitions into a new role, however, including elite athletes fast-tracked into post-athletic high-performance coaching roles, embodied knowledge and values are considered so ingrained that they can be difficult to change if required. These concepts can be used to conceptualise the research on athletes' transitions out of sport (e.g. Groves et al., 1997; Lavallee, 2005; McKenna & Thomas, 2007), after they reported athletes to encounter difficulties adjusting to life after sport because of their attachment of sporting norms through over-investment and embodiment of the fields' values. Such a mismatch between an existing

habitus and new field creates *hysteresis*, which signifies the "disparity between new opportunities associated with field change and agents whose habitus leaves them unable (temporarily, at least) to recognise the value of new positions" (McDonough & Polzer, 2012, p. 362).

Bourdieu's account of habitus development, however, has been subject to "widespread criticism, mainly on the basis of its latent determinism" (Reay, 2004, p. 423), whilst others have stated that the "habitus seems a particularly passive construct" (Noble & Watkins, 2003, p. 526). Contrastingly, and perhaps as a result of this criticism, other scholars have utilised Foucauldian concepts to explain coach behaviour and identity construction. Such analyses have conceptualised how sports cultures (Denison et al., 2017) and club cultures (Blackett et al., 2019) employ technologies of power, or disciplinary processes that intend to normalise and regulate coaches. These institutions are situated in the 'outside terrain,' within which coaches are situated, and which both act upon them at the same time as being constituted by them and others in the sports field (Evans, 2016). Yet, Foucault (1980) theorised power to be omnipresent, existing in "capillary forms" (p. 39) meaning that agents possess the agency to produce, reproduce or resist technologies of power located in the outside terrain. In a Foucauldian sense, therefore, coaches have a degree of power through which their own will and judgement can be mobilised to "challenge, transform and (re)create themselves within discursive power relations through enacting technologies of self" (McGannon, 2012, p. 82).

Indeed, coaches have been found to undertake continuous introspection for (re)creating or negotiating their identities (Jacobs et al., 2016). Described by Foucault (1988) as *askesis*, this introspection denotes the "exercises in which the subject puts himself in a situation in which he can verify whether he can confront events and use the discourses with which he is armed" (p. 37). Askesis also explains how through reflexivity and engagement, existing unknown knowledge becomes known. Hence one's values and practices can change on the

inside terrain whilst still being set within discourses and technologies of power located in the outside terrain (Foucault, 1997). Seen in this way, power acts upon agents at the same time as being constituted by them.

Whilst we acknowledge each of these theoretical frameworks has strengths and limitations, we have nevertheless taken their concepts forward as sensitising concepts (Bowen, 2006) to inform our study of coach identity formation in the context of career fast-tracking within football and rugby union. As outlined in the following section, we have critically appraised the outlined concepts associated to these theoretical frameworks against the data. By doing so, we highlight how in this instance Foucauldian concepts provided us with a more helpful conceptualisation of the processes our substantive sample encountered when negotiating their new coaching identities from their previous competitive-athlete identities.

Method

Participants and context

We used three participant sampling criteria: firstly, participants had to either be current professional athletes in the sports of football or rugby union or had retired from a playing career within 12 months of being first approached. Secondly, participants had to be enrolled onto their respective NGB's senior professional's level three coach accreditation courses (otherwise commonly referred to within the data as 'senior pro's courses') because they intended to transition into a post-athletic coaching career. Thirdly, because the fast-tracking career trajectory was more prominent in men's sports, all participants had to identify as men.

The senior pro's course enrolment criteria did not require that the candidates possess prior level one or two coaching qualifications. Both courses were held over 12 months and were only accessible to current or former competitive athletes within the professional English

and Welsh league structures. Two separate residential teaching blocks bookended both courses. The first residential was held over three days and comprised of group classes and practical coaching sessions. Participant recruitment occurred during the first residential day of each course. After spending the intervening period coaching in their own settings with visitations and support from their respective course mentors, course candidates then returned for a concluding two day residential where final coaching practical and presentation assessments were completed. At the time of writing, the equivalent level three courses for non-former elite athletes in the UK cost between £700 in football and £1100 in rugby union.

A total of 15 male participants (n=10 rugby; n=5 football) were individually interviewed on two separate occasions. Seven participants had been full international athletes and another three had represented their country at either under 21 or under 20 age levels. When first interviewed six participants (n=4 rugby; n=2 football) were still professional athletes. All but two rugby participants had retired from their competitive-athletic careers when the second interviews were conducted.

Procedure

The first author conducted all data collection. The project took a longitudinal approach by collecting data over 12 months in two iterative cycles using semi-structured interviews. First iteration interviews were conducted as close to the start of the courses as possible in order to help the participants recall and project on issues associated to their career transition. Prospective questions were integrated into these interviews alongside retrospective questions (McLeod & Thomson, 2009). This prompted the participants to reflect on not only their past and current experiences but also project their thoughts forward when they were asked to consider their future intentions, including their intended career trajectory, and in (re)creating a coaching identity. The questions focused upon participant background information covering

topics such as: the level of athletic participation and length of career; coach recruitment processes; sources of coach learning; and, future personal aims for coaching development.

A second iteration of data collection was conducted 12 months later to coincide with the culmination of the course and best allow participants to reflect on its impact. Questions within the second iteration's interviews were individually tailored to participants' case profiles but also covered the overarching themes that had been identified at the aggregate group level from the first iteration. Subsequently, the second iteration's interviews had conversational characteristics that were fluid and more unstructured because of the highly individualised nature of each participant's case profiles. Questions like "what ways have you developed as a coach?" and "how do you see yourself as a coach now compared to when we last spoke?" were posed. This allowed each participant to be reflexive by looking forwards and backwards to interpret their recent individual experiences (McLeod & Thomson, 2009). Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or over the telephone depending on the preference of the participant (Gratton & Jones, 2010) and lasted between 22 minutes and 59 minutes (*M*=37.33, *SD*=10.51).

Data analysis

Individual case profiles were created and analysed through initial descriptive line by line coding after the first interviews were completed. Free nodes that described the raw data's characteristics were produced. Linking categories based on shared characteristics between the free nodes were then identified to produce overarching themes across all case profiles for the first iteration's data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Line by line coding and then thematic comparisons across case profiles were once again completed at the end of the second iteration. The themes from each participant's first and second interviews were compared with one another to identify continued themes which indicated commonalities to how participants

negotiated the pathway and how they (re)created their coaching identities. Differences between sports were searched for in data analysis but none were identified.

Methodological rigour

A Higher Education institution's ethics board granted ethical approval for the study with the condition that participants' identities were protected. The names of all participants, their clubs and individuals referred to during interviews have therefore been assigned pseudonyms to maintain participant anonymity (Saunders et al., 2015). All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by the first author. All participants were provided with the opportunity to check their transcripts via email within ten working days after each of their interviews. One participant made minor changes to one of their answers by removing an incoherent sentence.

Rigour in data analysis was achieved by the first author providing summaries to the second and third authors at the completion of the first iteration to explain the basis for how themes had been developed. The co-authors acted as critical friends who highlighted alternative coding and thematic analysis at both a micro and macro level (Sparkes & Smith, 2009). Differences of analysis at the end of the first iteration resulted in the second iteration's questions being designed to further probe these interpretations in the hope that the forthcoming data would clarify these discrepancies. The same process of summarising the aggregated themes was repeated at the end of the second iteration. When differences of interpretations arose at this point led the first author to re-analyse the data through the process of constant comparison of other participant data and the findings of extant literature (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This process helped further crystallise (Ellingson, 2009) the theoretical analysis at the macro level when appraising the data against Bourdieu, Goffman and Foucault's concepts.

Results and Discussion

Two overarching themes were identified: 1) the creation of a coaching philosophy for a coaching identity, and 2) maintaining a fixed or fluid coach identity. The development of a coaching identity was universally articulated with a need to define a 'coaching philosophy.' Paradoxically, although the development of a 'coaching philosophy' was considered to be pivotal in both 'becoming' a coach and in creating a new coach identity, many participants struggled to articulate explicitly, or coherently, what their coaching philosophy was. Nevertheless, a need to consolidate a personal coaching philosophy was projected by all participants as a way to ensure that their personal values were reflected in their coaching practice. As part of this process for consolidating a personal coaching philosophy, all participants stressed the importance of upholding an 'honest' disposition so that athlete to coach respect could be garnered.

In a similar fashion to that reported in other research on coaching practice and development, athlete to coach respect was deemed by the participants as fundamental for performing as a coach and being considered effective (Potrac et al., 2002). To help attain 'respect,' participants considered that presenting a façade in their coaching practice alternative to their everyday persona, in a mode reprising as Goffman's (1959, 1969) front and back stage impression management, as being dishonest to themselves and their athletes. Indeed, dishonesty was perceived to be a root cause of an athlete's loss of respect for a coach, or of the athlete never developing that respect in the first place.

The discussion is presented in a manner which reflects the point of the participants' career trajectories for when these themes were encountered. After we initially highlight how Bourdieusian concepts can at first conceptualise the basis for why and how the participants developed their coaching philosophies, the discussion continues by expanding upon the social processes the participants encountered when consolidating or further developing their

philosophies and thus identities. Here, Foucault's concepts have been applied to the data after critically appraising the limitations found in Bourdieu and Goffman's theoretical frameworks.

Creating a coaching philosophy for a coach identity

Participants in this study attached significant importance to the need of developing a 'coaching philosophy.' The term 'philosophy' was ubiquitously used as a synonym to depict participants' descriptions of their coaching identity. Some participants were able to clearly articulate their perceived 'philosophy', and in so doing noted subtle differences between a 'coaching philosophy' and a 'playing philosophy'. Tristan explained these differences when he described that his coaching philosophy was based upon:

> …a playing philosophy is how you want the boys to play on the pitch, a coaching philosophy is how you interact and that stuff with the players. That's how I understand it… I think for me again your coaching philosophy is around your sort of core values that sort of stick with you, it's who you are as a person really, your beliefs. So, you know, although it's [senior pro's course] made me sit down and really sort of articulate it, I don't think your core values change overnight really. (Tristan, football)

Unlike Tristan, however, many of the participants conflated the two terms by referring to outputs of styles and strategies of play as being reflective of their coaching philosophy, rather than their playing philosophy. This was evident in Oscar's (football) case, for example:

> I think a coaching philosophy is what formation is and or what team did I like playing in most, and what way did I enjoy my football. And to be honest the games I've watched and the players I've watched and other managers' philosophy, and I've looked at their principles in how they see the game… I like to play out from the back you know always looking to play through the middle, play through the thirds and just try to have comfortable players on the pitch that are comfortable in possession.

Cushion and Partington (2014) have argued that much existing coaching research further espouses "coaching rhetoric" and "pseudo-principles" (p. 853) because of having frequently applied the term 'philosophy' without full appraisal of its nuanced meanings in relation to coaching practice. The conflation of the two terms by participants in the present study illustrated that this misunderstanding was also evident. For example, when participants

described their philosophy, either coaching or playing, it seemed they did so in relation to their perceptions of their coach identity. This seemed to encompass several collective principles and features, including: 1) coaching strategies (methods of how to coach); 2) general management behaviours for developing a cohesive team environment; 3) playing strategies associated to team performance outputs of tactics and style of play; and 4) personal dispositions relating to character. As Tristan's statement above highlighted, such philosophies were considered to be shaped by each participant's "core values" in a way which coheres with Bourdieu's notion of the intersection of the habitus with practice (Cushion et al., 2003). Connor's comment further emphasised this point as he described such values to be "inbuilt":

> I think mine [philosophy] is really developing. You know, like I said at the time it's something that you know is inbuilt really. But mine's all about getting the environment right, making sure that you know the people that you've got in your organisation are buying into, making it wholly successful… (Connor, rugby)

The assumption that core values were synonymous with innate personality traits, or part of a coaching 'game sense,' appeared to create problems for some participants in articulating exactly what a coaching philosophy was, and how it intersected both with their identity as a coach and the coaching practice in which they engaged. For instance, when asked to reflect on their professional identity as a coach, Max described:

> Mate, to be honest with you, I struggle to get my head around that [a coaching philosophy] really. I think because I wrote down a philosophy and I suppose it's changed a little bit but it's pretty much like my life philosophy is: you've got to work hard and enjoy it, if you don't work hard you won't succeed, if you don't enjoy it then you're not going to work as hard so it's pretty much that. (Max, rugby)

The ability to reflect on their own competitive-athletic experiences in order to explain how their values, beliefs and dispositions had been created was commonplace and considered as a useful personal resource by all participants. The enduring effects of a competitive-athletic career also appeared to be the main reason why the participants perceived the senior pro's courses to have little impact on shaping their coaching identities. New and explicit knowledge disseminated in these formalised coaching courses was initially 'filtered' and then largely

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rejected as it did not match their existing beliefs and values towards coaching that had been

derived from their competitive-athletic histories (Stodter & Cushion, 2017). Casper (rugby)

explained this conflict:

> I just have a massive problem with the way we are being taught to coach. Now I'm not saying I'm doing it the right way, I've just developed the way I coach because of the situation I've been in and the situations I've been through. That's not necessarily right but I'm struggling to buy into the way they (coach educators) want me to coach.

This finding reflects others reported in wider coach development literature in regard

that developing coaches prefer to rely on prior competitive playing experiences to contextualise

coach learning rather than formal coach education courses (e.g. Watts & Cushion, 2017).

Barney (rugby) was one who outlined how the participants preferred to reflect on their

experiences and their previous coaches to shape their coach identities by stating: "I've tried to

take the best out of the best sides that I've played in and tried to apply that to my coaching

philosophy". In a similar fashion to that described by Jones et al. (2003), participants also

reflected on the negative features which, in their opinion, former managers and coaches had

exhibited:

> I've seen negatives in coaches that I've had over the years that will then influence me not to be in that way. So, I mean I can't say I'll go out and coach like for example, Hamish who was one of my coaches. I'm not saying I'll go out and coach exactly like he did, but I would say he had an influence on my coaching philosophy, my coaching style. (Roger, rugby)

Together, these articulations of the origins of participants' coaching philosophies

signified how their former competitive-athletic careers were considered a resource from which

to draw inspiration. Previous experiences were drawn upon to project participants' aspirations

forward in their search to create their own coaching identity. Here the participants indicated

that they conducted greater levels of reflexive practice than can be easily accounted for within

Bourdieu's theorisation of habitus formation (Noble & Watkins, 2003; Reay, 2004). In such a

light, rather than inferring to Bourdieu's habitus the participants instead inferred to the

employment of technologies of the self to (re)create their emergent coach identities from their

athletic identities. For some this was a continual process in which they problematised their existing athletic identities, consciously reflecting upon how their previous coaches practiced, and relating these reflections to their own beliefs and 'philosophies' to create their own coaching identity. For others this process of discovery was considered already completed. These latter participants were more concerned in consolidating their coaching identity and tended to regard this a fixed construct. The next section discusses these differences in greater depth.

Maintaining a fixed or fluid coach identity

Although experience as a competitive-athlete was the preferred source to shape a coach identity, the second iteration identified the participants to believe that the act of mimicking behaviours exactly on former coaches' practices was deemed problematic. All participants recognised that they possessed different personal qualities and dispositions compared to coaches they aspired to be like. Instead, participants desired to seek consistency with their 'true selves,' which was judged to be the best method to attain athlete respect. Notably, honesty to oneself meant that excessive mimicry of their past coaches' practice was considered problematic and may result in athletes noticing a lack of authenticity and genuineness in their own coaching practice. This was described by Gavin (rugby):

> It comes back to if I have to live a *front*, I have to carry on with that, so I can't copy you the whole time and live like you or coach like you all of the time. I want to be myself so I don't have to turn a switch on every time I come to training and say I am Stuart Lancaster[1] again tonight and when I go home I am Gavin you know. I'm Gavin all the way through coaching, playing, whatever, and that's how I see myself... Even if I go up into the Premiership or whatever setup, I'll be myself... I'm not going to put up a *front* just to get approval off you. That's the way forward you know, being myself, be honest with them [athletes] and be honest with myself. That's the way I do things and then I get the *respect* that I'm getting now. (emphasis added)

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[1] At the time of the interview, Stuart Lancaster was the Head Coach of England's men's RU team.

The prioritisation of upholding truth to one's own values so that an 'honest' coaching identity could be presented contrasts with the way in which previous studies have conceptualised the actions of coaches when engaging with their athletes. For example, Consterdine and colleagues (2013) drew upon Goffman's impression management strategies to explain how an elite athletics coach theatrically staged his interactions with an athlete (front stage) in an alternative manner to his non-coaching (back stage) persona. When explaining the development of their coaching identities within the present study, participants did not describe any intention to employ front stage impression management like Consterdine and colleagues (2013) reported. Such idealised projections of their emerging coach philosophies were principally based upon reflections on the failed actions of their previous coaches, which had at times resulted in a loss of respect due to their tendency to present a coaching persona that was different to what was perceived as their true selves. Conrad (rugby) expressed this point in relation to how his previous coaches presented what he deemed as a dishonest 'front' in their coaching practice:

> …I look back and honesty is the key. I remember a number of times, players can smell bullshit a mile off, and if you bullshit someone suddenly you've got: he'll go whisper at someone else, he'll go whisper at someone else and then suddenly you've got infighting, well not infighting but a tide at your gate.

Moreover, 13 out of the 15 participants had obtained a coaching role at a club they had previously represented as a competitive athlete. Hence the possibility to present a 'front' to other athletes and colleagues was considered to be limited; such 'returning' coaches were well-known to them through their athletic careers. Participants consequently described how it was unfeasible to attempt any front stage management, which would likely result in a loss of credibility, perceived sincerity and, worst, loss of 'respect.'

Thus, instead of presenting multiple identities in relation to front and back stage impression management strategies, our participants suggested that they would engage in a more deep and meaningful process of reflection to (re)create and negotiate what they perceived to

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be an effective coach identity. This theme was particularly prevalent amongst participants who had transitioned into a coaching role within youth academies compared to those transitioning into senior elite environments. One reason for this was because the conditions and social expectancies of youth coaching were considered different to those of the high-performance field (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). The rules, regularities and norms of the youth academy fields did not totally reflect the coaches' own habitus that had been developed during their time in the senior high-performance field. This necessitated in a more extensive process of introspection, or *askesis*. Eamon explained how the difficulty in adjusting to this context affected him when he first entered the youth academy of the same club he last represented as an athlete:

> I struggled to start with to realise that it wasn't, or it's not just about winning the games which was a massive thing. That was probably the biggest thing for me… It was on my mind because you come from a winning environment, a winning mentality, because it's your job and the more you win the more rewards you get. So it's difficult to rein yourself in and *it's like re-programming yourself*... if you come from a winning mentality as such, everything you know, winning is all that matters. As I said to you before, *you have to change yourself* a little bit because it's about developing the players, and yeah, that took a little bit of getting used to. (Eamon, football - emphasis added)

An internal division akin to *hysteresis* was encountered by those who transitioned into these youth development contexts from their elite performance contexts. This meant that their highly competitive values which did not match their new field's expectations of developing young athletes over winning matches had to be adjusted in contrast to paying lip service and merely presenting a superficial coaching front of just 'fitting in.' Instead, the process of "re-programming" described by Eamon was suggestive of an intention to employ technologies of the self by reflecting on existing values. A greater level of reflection was suggested as this process was constantly related to the necessity of maintaining an honest disposition in what Foucault (1988, 1997) categorised as an *ethic of self care*.

Participants were also asked to reflect on whether they would seek to develop their coaching identity/philosophy at the culmination of the second phase of interviews (e.g.

"Looking towards the future, as a coach how do you want to develop?" and "In what ways do you want to continue to develop your coaching philosophy?"). Responses centred upon two categories, as participants described having either a 'fixed' or 'fluid' coaching identity. Max's (rugby) response represents how those with a fixed mind-set responded: "I wouldn't change my philosophy at all". Fluid coaches were open to conscious and continued reflexivity to further (re)create their coach identities as they considered themselves to be partway through a path of continual development (Turner et al., 2012). Kieran was one participant who had a fluid perspective on his development:

> I say my philosophy is still going. They asked me this at the interview actually at Marsh United FC: "what was my philosophy?" And I said it's still developing… So, like I said, my philosophy is not embedded in stone... (Kieran, football)

Previous coach development research has shown how youth academy directors employ discursive and disciplinary techniques for socialising fast-tracked coaches to the club's culture (Blackett et al., 2019). Athletes fast-tracked as coaches in this instance were considered docile bodies, readily consenting to the club's overarching culture, and were thus a preferred population to recruit from over external candidates. The finding of fluid coaches within the present study suggests, however, that instead of exhibiting only docility, such participants had the capacity to be reflexive by employing technologies of the self, particularly the ethic of self-care and aesthetic self-stylization (Markula, 2003), to transform their coaching identities. Here, participants categorised with a fluid attitude to their coach development did demonstrate that if they had been socialised to their club's norms through their competitive-athletic careers, they were not entirely constrained to present a coach identity that completely reflected the club's values. As such, this offered these fast-tracked coaches the prospect to (re)create their own coaching identities.

Nevertheless, the process of negotiating a coaching identity was significantly hindered by structural constraints located in the 'outside terrain' of coaching subjects. Several transitional difficulties were encountered, as Kieran's (football) case illustrates. After having been socialised into his club's values as a player, Kieran transitioned into a coaching role situated within the same club's youth academy. Kieran's apparent fluid attitude towards (re)creating his coach identity resulted in the Academy Manager considering his actions a form of resistance, resulting in Kieran being released from his coaching position:

> …I don't believe my way of working or philosophy fit in with the Academy Manager who was there at the time. And that is one of the reasons why I subsequently lost my job, and the under eighteens manager did who I played with, as we had a different view to the Academy Manager… so that's the difficult thing really because yeah your philosophy, although they encourage you on the courses to develop your own, you tend to have to fit in with your job or where you're actually coaching so that's a difficult one really… you have meetings and you get told how to do things and you know sometimes you've got to bite your tongue, but sometimes you can't. So that was another thing like you are talking about, how has the job been and stuff, that's one thing I've learnt, you have to toe the line a bit more than what you did as a player.

Similarly, Sebastian (football) and Roger (rugby) also left their positions because of a perceived lack of cultural 'fit' with their clubs, which was brought about by having a fluid attitude towards their coach identities. Such cases highlight the micropolitical environment the participants were operating within (Thompson et al., 2015) whilst also further adding to the critique of Bourdieu's deterministic notions of the retrospective, unconscious formation of the habitus (Noble & Watkins, 2003; Reay, 2004). Kieran, Sebastian and Roger, had all initially transitioned into post-athletic coaching roles within the same clubs they had represented as athletes, but had then begun to enact technologies of the self to (re)create their coach identities according to their own reflections, rather than conform to established club cultures. Effectively, therefore, coaching identities were considered to have the potential to be further developed and refined for those with a fluid mind-set, although their core beliefs were usually considered to stay the same. This meant that in such cases, participants had left their initial coaching roles as they began to contest normative club cultures. In this light, Foucault's focus upon the capability

of agents to reflexively negotiate their own identity construction has enabled us to understand the processes for how fast-tracked coaches negotiate the career transition from elite athlete to high-performance coach and create their coach identities.

Conclusion

The present study investigated how fast-tracked elite athletes negotiated the career pathway with regards to the challenges they faced in (re)creating their coaching identities following an athletic tenure. Notably, the predominance of participants who described their coach identities through the term of 'coaching philosophy' is illuminating, particularly when most participants seemed to have misinterpreted and conflated the meanings of a 'coaching philosophy' and 'playing philosophy'. This infers that there is a need for coach education structures to be designed to assist such fast-tracked coaches to clarify this point. In turn, this could reduce the continued reproduction of "coaching rhetoric" and "pseudo-principles" regarding the inaccurate understanding of what a coaching philosophy is, which this substantive group seemed to uncritically perpetuate (Cushion & Partington, 2014, p. 853).

Furthermore, even after collecting data at two timepoints, we have also identified how for some participants the formation of a coach identity was considered a fixed entity, rather than the dynamic process that other scholars regard it to be (Lavallee & Robinson, 2007). Identifying whether coaches hold a fixed or fluid mindset toward their coaching can potentially help coach educators better understand and then work with mentees more effectively. Ascertaining this perspective from the outset of a coach education course can help mentors further appreciate the context for why either a fixed or fluid identity is held, thus helping strengthen the mentor-mentee relationship (Sawiuk et al., 2018). This also highlights the need for the same senior pro's courses to further promote and direct reflexive practices toward those with a fixed attitude towards their coach identity throughout the entirety of the senior pro's

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course and after to ensure continual professional development can be achieved. As is becoming more common across formalised coach education structures, continuing to engage with individualised in-situ mentorship opportunities beyond the official completion of coaches' formalised accreditation can further support them to be ever more reflexive (Griffiths et al., 2018). Without encouragement to be continuously reflexive, Denison and colleagues (2017) have argued that coaches could act in an uncritical manner which reproduces outmoded practices and inhibits the advancement of the coaching process.

This finding does not represent the perspective of all our participants, however. Here, we also identified a minority of participants who were open and fluid in the creation of their coaching identities, and actively employed self-reflexive practices. The present study advances our understanding of this fast-track coach pathway by finding that coaches can and do contest their club's philosophies after transitioning into coaching roles, even within the same clubs they once represented as elite athletes. Even at the expense of losing their coaching jobs, these individuals questioned their subconscious assumptions; they considered their coach philosophies to be fluid, and thus indicated a willingness and an ability to "re-programme" and (re)create their coaching identity against the cultural expectations of their clubs. This process indicated reflexive self-awareness having been performed, signifying a more relational conceptualisation of power than what the extant literature in this area had reported (Blackett et al., 2017, 2019). Indeed, such reflexivity is difficult to account for using Bourdieu's theory of habitus and practice (Noble & Watkins, 2003: Reay, 2004), whilst Goffman's oft-cited concept of impression management also had limited explanatory power with regards our data. Instead, Foucault's concept of *askesis* in line with an *ethic of self-care* was helpful, because it reflects the importance placed by the participants on practicing as a coach in an 'honest' manner by 'staying true to their selves.' The alternative of engaging in the presentation of multiple identities was perceived to result in coaches' loss of athletes' 'respect,' or else never gaining it

at all. As this sample of participants become more experienced coaches, and more secure in their coaching identities, this could potentially change however, as much of the coaching literature which has used Goffman's concepts has sampled elite and experienced coaches (e.g. Consterdine et al., 2013). To help capture these potential changes future research which continues to 'walk with' such coaches over a greater duration is recommended, whilst also building upon the work of women's coach development studies (e.g. Sisjord et al., 2020) by analysing the experiences of women who make the transition from athlete to high-performance coach.

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