

“Where’s your passion?” Exploring Emotional Labour in Academy Football Coaching

Sam Page, The Department of Sport, Health Science and Social Work, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, UK.

Paul Potrac, The Department of Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation, Northumbria University, Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK

Jimmy O’Gorman, The Department of Sport and Physical Activity, Edge Hill University, Ormskirk, Lancashire, UK

Lee Nelson, The Department of Sport and Physical Activity, Edge Hill University, Ormskirk, Lancashire, UK

I submit this document as a Coaching Research abstract (High Performance Coaching, Coaching Children)

Introduction

In recent times, coaching scholars have begun to move beyond descriptions of practice as merely complex and ambiguous (Jones & Wallace, 2005; Jones, 2012). Instead, researchers are now beginning to discuss coaching as a political, ethical and emotional endeavour (Nelson et al., 2013). However, while it is argued that scholars in other fields (e.g. education and management) have recognised the centrality of emotions, they have been largely neglected in the sports coaching literature. Indeed, coaches continue to be largely presented as calculated, dispassionate and rational beings (Potrac, Nelson & Smith, 2017). This has left coaching science open to accusations of asocial and inhuman accounts of practice (Potrac & Marshall, 2011; Cassidy, Potrac & Jones, 2015). The result has been a call for the theorisation of emotion within coaching. Whilst scholars have begun to discuss the emotionally demanding nature of coaches’ work, limited empirical research has been conducted. Therefore, this study aims to provide some initial insight into emotional endeavours of academy football coaches.

Methods

8 coaches participated in the study all of whom were working within the academy at a professional football club. Data were collected over 1 year, this timespan included pre and post season. Data collection methods included emotion diaries (audio) and cyclical interviews. As part of an ongoing PhD, which is utilising an iterative approach to data analysis, this paper draws upon the work of Arlie Hochschild (1983) as the key sense making tool.

Results

A critical interrogation of the data revealed coaches experiencing an array of emotions across both pedagogical and political/organisational situations. Emotions such as pride, joy, guilt and anger were frequently encountered as part of coaches’ social relations with multiple stakeholders. Participants indicated they engaged in a process of strategic emotion management, purposely concealing emotions from others. Notably this strategic display of emotion was considered to be an integral aspect of their working practice.

Discussion and Conclusion

It was evident that coaches were engaging in *emotion work*, operating within an *emotion culture* (Hochschild, 1983) where specific *feeling rules*, which were learnt through a process of socialisation within the broader context of academy football, governed coaches’ emotional experiences. This often resulted in strategic displays of emotion, *surface acting*, where *display rules* governed the coaches’ expression of emotion. Through discussion about their emotional interactions coaches came to acknowledge emotionality as a central aspect of their work and the wider coaching culture.

Presenting Author Biography:

Sam is a lecturer in Sport, Coaching and Physical Education at Oxford Brookes University. Sam holds the UEFA A Licence (L4) coaching qualification and is currently an Academy coach at a Chelsea Football Club, where he has worked for the past 12 years. This study is part of his ongoing PhD exploring academy football coaches’ experiences of emotion.

References:

- Cassidy, T., Jones, R., & Potrac, P. (2016). *Understanding sports coaching: The pedagogical, social and cultural foundations of coaching practice* (Third ed.). London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Hochschild, A. R. (1983). *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling*. Berkeley: University of California.
- Jones, R. (2012). Editorial. *Sports Coaching Review*, 1(1), 1-3.
- Jones, R. L., & Wallace, M. (2005). Another bad day at the training ground: Coping with ambiguity in the coaching context. *Sport, Education and Society*, 10 (1), 119-134.
- Nelson, L., Potrac, P., Gilbourne, D., Allanson, A., Gale, L., & Marshall, P. (2013). Thinking, feeling, acting: The case of a semi-professional soccer coach. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 30(4), 467-486.
- Potrac, P., & Marshall, P. (2011). Arlie Russell Hochschild: The managed heart, feeling rules, and emotional labour: Coaching as an emotional endeavour. In R. L. Jones, P. Potrac, C. Cushion and L. T. Ronglan (Eds.), *The sociology of sports coaching* (pp. 54-66). London: Routledge.
- Potrac, P., Smith, A., & Nelson, L. (2017). Emotions in sport coaching: An introductory essay. *Sports Coaching Review*, 6(2), 129-141.