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Citation: Magill, Simone, Nelson, Lee, Jones, Robyn and Potrac, Paul (2017) Emotions, identity, and power in video-based feedback sessions: tales from women's professional football. *Sports Coaching Review*, 6 (2). pp. 216-232. ISSN 2164-0629

Published by: Taylor & Francis

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2017.1367068>  
<<https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2017.1367068>>

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# **Emotions, identity and power in video-based feedback sessions: Tales from women's professional football.**

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**Abstract**

While video-based feedback has become an increasingly salient feature of practice in high performance sport, it has received relatively little attention in the coaching literature. Data for this study were generated through a process of collaborative critical reflection and cyclical, in-depth interviews with elite female footballers. Using fictional narratives as a mode of representation, we highlight the emotional, embodied, and relational features of two athletes' experiences of video-based feedback. Burkitt's (1999, 2014) writings addressing (complex) emotions and social relations are used as the primary sense-making framework. Consequently, the analysis is grounded in the interconnections between sensate, corporeal experience, and the power relations and interdependencies in which high performance athletes are enmeshed.

**Key words:** Video-based feedback; athlete; emotion; identity; social relations.

## **Introduction**

The use of various video and computer based technologies to analyse, support, and monitor athlete performance has become an increasingly pervasive feature of high performance sport (Jones, Marshall, & Denison, 2016; MacKenzie & Cushion, 2013; Taylor, Potrac, Groom, & Nelson, 2017). However, the popularity of their application has not been matched by a corresponding amount of scholarly inquiry into their use. As argued by others, the critical understanding of such technologies as coaching tools is at an embryonic stage of development (Groom, Cushion, & Nelson, 2011; Groom & Nelson, 2013a, 2013b). Indeed, much of the available literature investigating the pedagogical utilisation of computer and video-based technologies has focused on their potential to support the skill learning of athletes. This work has tended to adopt a (post) positivist orientation, focussing on objective accounts of ‘what works’ (e.g. Bertram, Marteniuk, & Guadagnoli, 2007; Guadagnoli, Holcomb, & Davis, 2002; Moreno, Moreno, García-González, Ureña, Hernández, & Del Villar, 2016). While such inquiry has contributed to the advancements of evidence based ‘good practice’ guidelines, a call for more critical inquiry into the lived experiences of those subject to them has also arisen (Groom & Nelson, 2013a, 2013b).

Foundational work in this area has sought to document how the application of computer and video-based technologies are inextricably grounded in dynamic contextual relations between coaches, athletes, and a range of significant others. For example, Booroff, Nelson, and Potrac (2016) and Groom et al.’s (2011) investigations highlighted how coaches’ understandings of the socio-political demands of organisational life influenced their use of computer based technologies, while Manley and Williams (2014) and Jones, Marshall and Denison (2016) addressed concerns regarding the potentially harmful and ‘controlling’ impacts of such technologies. Similarly, Taylor et al. (2017) depicted an athlete’s fears and disquiets regarding the continual video-based monitoring of her performances in training and

competition and, relatedly, the public evaluation of her decision making and actions. The subsequent insights generated have challenged the often dominant and functionalistic discourses surrounding the use of technology in sport. This critique, however, has not been universal. Here, Collins, Carson and Cruikshank (2015, p. 1088) claimed that such work has “raised the alarm prematurely, inappropriately and on somewhat shaky foundations”. In asserting that the essence of coaching is about ‘decision-making’, they alternatively argued that such technologies can significantly ‘alter’ (read improve) that decision making and subsequent practice.

In engaging with this debate, we believe greater attention should be given to exploring the inherently emotional, embodied, and relational features of athletes’ pedagogical engagements with performance analysis technologies. While educational theorising has increasingly recognised that learners (and teachers) experience a wide range of emotions (e.g., joy, boredom, excitement, and vulnerability) and embodied sensations as they engage with information, activities, and feedback from others (e.g., Värlander, 2008; Christie, Tett, Cree, Hounsell, & McCune, 2008), there has been little consideration of these issues in the context of sports coaching. Such inquiry then, can contribute to an epistemology of coaching that reflects “the bodily being in the world [and] what it is to be human” (Burkitt, 2014, p. 172). In doing so, it gives primacy to how emotion, “feeling and thought...are intrinsic in any situation we encounter” (Burkitt, 2014, p. 101).

The intention of this paper is to stimulate critical reflection on athletes’ meaning making in video-based feedback sessions. This is particularly in terms of how their embodied expressions and feelings are “bound up in power relations and interdependencies” as manifest through such technologies (Burkitt, 1999, p. 128). In adopting a relational perspective, the purpose is to break new ground in the theorising of sports coaching by highlighting how emotions matter to our understanding of “action, culture, and self” (Walby, Spencer, & Hunt,

2012, p. 4). Here, we conceptualise emotion as “the experience of social relations” which takes place at the interface of the self and social structure (Walby et al., 2012, p. 4). However, rather than delimiting the academic gaze to a particular emotional state (i.e., guilt or anger or joy), the significance of the paper also lies in its focus on the overlapping nature of “emotions in action” (Walby et al., 2012, p. 4). This is particularly in terms of how “emotions that characterise interaction” can “move from negative to positive and back again in rapid succession” (Stets, 2010, p. 267). In doing so, the study holds potential to generate rich insights into the dynamic ‘emotion flows’ that are a feature of individual and collective work place experience (Stets, 2010; Wharton, 2014).

In terms of structure, the paper is divided into four sections. Following this introduction, the academic benefits of creative fiction and narrative representation are outlined. The primary sense-making framework deployed is then introduced; Burkitt’s (2014) theorising on complex emotions. The inclusion of theory reflects the belief that scholarly work should entail more than presenting (hopefully) interesting and engaging stories (Jones, 2009; Potrac, Jones, Gilbourne, & Nelson, 2013). Like Denison (2016, p. 9), we believe “the obvious presence of social theory in our narratives” is important to the production of analyses of social life that recognise its complex and embodied nature. The two narrative fictions, which chart Megan’s and Abigail’s (pseudonyms) respective experiences of video-based feedback sessions in top-level women’s football, are then presented. The stories not only seek to illustrate the various and sometimes contradictory emotions (e.g., fear, anger, guilt, joy, and pride) each experienced, but also their efforts to navigate relations with others. The narratives are accompanied by a suggested theoretical reading. The emphasis here is on illuminating how their emotional and embodied experiences are “to do with social relations and interdependencies”, rather than being solely biological constitutions (Burkitt, 1999, p. 127). Finally, the key arguments are summarized, advocating greater critical consideration of



the entwinement of emotion, social relations, and the pedagogical utilisation of video and computer based technologies in high performance sport.

### **Collaborative inquiry and the use of multiple methods**

The methodology utilised in this paper was inspired by, albeit not totally beholden to, Titchen's (2003) notion of 'critical companionship'. Specifically, we utilised a collaborative process that entailed the gathering, evaluating, and critiquing of self, other and peer practice for the purpose of knowledge creation (Jones & Ronglan, 2017). At the core of this exercise was the detailed consideration of lived experience and personal consciousness, as well as the theoretical interpretation of them. This mode of inquiry then, combined "the expressive, intuitive process of relationships and creativity" with rigorous "analysis, critique, and evaluation" (Vanlaere & Gastmans, 2007, p?). In the context of this paper, we not only focused on developing rich descriptions of athletic experience, but also of making analytical headway concerning the unavoidable interdependence of emotion, identity, and social relations in video-based feedback sessions.

Traditionally, the collection, analysis, and writing-up of data are considered three distinct and sequential phases in the production of a research paper (Tracy, 2012, 2013). In this study, however, they were fused together to form a cyclical and iterative process of inquiry; one that combined data generation, narrative writing, and emic and etic sense making (Taylor, 2014; Tracy, 2012, 2013). The data, and the stories we subsequently produced from them, were generated through concerted and co-operative critical reflection and debate that lasted for a period of 6 months (Titchen, 2003; Chang et al., 2013; Jones & Ronglan, 2017). This began with me, the lead author, sharing written accounts of practice based on attendance at video-based feedback sessions as a professional footballer. This material was further supplemented with interview data obtained from 10 female professional footballers. Here, semi-structured interviews were used to explore understandings of such ('coaching') practice

within wider work relations, learned subcultural expectations, and the management of contextual interactions. These accounts formed the basis for collective discussion, debate and exploration, which primarily occurred in weekly face-to-face meetings and, to a lesser extent, via email. During our discussions, my co-authors, Lee and Paul frequently asked me to “tell us more” about my specific embodied emotional experiences (Chang et al., 2013, p. 28). They also asked questions relating to ‘when’ and ‘why’ a player might display or hide certain emotions in this social milieu. Such questioning informed the cyclical interrogation of both mine and the interviewed players’ experiences.

Alongside the generation of data, we also sought to develop a theoretical reading of the issues combined in my personal narrative and the players’ interview transcripts. On one level, this entailed an emic, or emergent, reading of the data. This cycle of analysis comprised three phases; data immersion and primary-cycle coding, hierarchical coding, and writing (Tracy, 2013). The initial phase was used to fully consider the richness of the gathered data and to establish tentative ideas about, and descriptions of, the social processes evidenced within them. Following this, the developed codes were grouped into a hierarchical umbrella that sought to make conceptual connections between them (Tracy, 2013); what Richards (2005) referred to as analytical coding. That is, the coding was grounded in the interpretation of, as well as reflection upon, meaning. This aspect was driven by the aims of the research project and associated research questions (Merriam, 2009). Once the data had been organised and coded into appropriate themes, the stories presented in this paper were generated. Reflecting our shared emic consideration of the data, these narratives were based upon three inter-related assertions; a) the interconnection of emotion and a playing identity, b) the regulation of emotional displays, and c) the precarious nature of employment in women’s professional football.

These themes, as well as the codes and meaning units contained within them, were also subject to a process of etic analysis. Here, analytical memos were used to develop preliminary links from the data to potential explanatory frameworks (Tracy, 2012, 2013). Although a variety of theoretical perspectives from the sociology of emotion literature were discussed (e.g., Bolton, 2005; Stets & Turner, 2014; Zembylas, 2006), Burkitt's (1997, 1999; 2002, 2014) corpus of work was ultimately adopted as a sense-making lens. Importantly, the etic readings raised further questions that prompted additional cycles of data generation, both in terms of my personal narrative and follow-up interviews with the players. Engagement with Burkitt's ideas supported the development of the final narratives presented in this paper, as they led us to consider already documented experience in a more detailed and nuanced way. Such an iterative and recursive approach to inquiry not only allowed social experience to be considered in an intimate manner, but also helped produce a deeper level of analysis than may otherwise have been achieved (Chang et al., 2013; Tracy, 2012, 2013).

Fictional narratives were chosen as a mode of representation for a variety of reasons (Gearity, 2014). Principally, as has been outlined elsewhere (e.g., Beames & Pike, 2008; Potrac, Nelson, & O'Gorman, 2016; Rinehart, 1998; Sparkes, 2002), for their ability to (1) highlight specific features of human experience, (2) stimulate discussion about such experience, and (3) inform lines of future inquiry aimed at enhancing our understanding of them. Barone (1997) argued that, when deployed in this way, fictionalized narratives have a legitimate and important role to play in social science scholarship. While the events presented in this paper could be considered as a 'sociology of witness' (Frank, 1995, p. 23), the happenings, interactions, and people contained within the stories presented are both fashioned and dramatized (Denzin, 2014; Potrac et al., 2016). Accordingly, the characters featured are composite creations, not based on any one person but amalgams of several that featured in our discussions of the data. The ultimate concern of the stories was the explication of

meaning making and social process, as opposed to a ‘factually correct’ re-telling of any experience (Jones, 2006, 2009).

For this paper, two separate but progressive stories are presented (Purdy et al., 2008). The first, *‘Anxiety, humiliation, and (concealed) anger’*, focuses on the interplay between Megan’s emotions; her interactions with the Head Coach, and, relatedly, her efforts to manage emotional displays in situationally expedient ways. The story seeks to illustrate the connections between specific emotions (e.g., anxiety, fear, and anger), identity, embodied experience, and an interpretive understanding of local power relations; in this case, the asymmetrical relationship that existed between Megan and the Head Coach. The second story, *‘Frustration, (concealed) pride, and self-loathing’*, develops this theme. Specifically, we consider how Abigail’s experiences of specific emotions were not only reflected in the interconnection between her playing identity and understanding of subcultural values, but also in her immediate reluctance to avoid being seen not to act in the “right way” (Fineman, 2008, p. 7). Indeed, this story begins to address the ‘policing’ role that colleagues, as well as coaches and managers, can play over an athlete’s display of emotion within video-based feedback sessions (Haman & Putnam, 2008).

### **Theoretical framework: Complex emotions and social relations**

As stated, the primary theoretical framework used to guide our interpretations was Burkitt’s (1997, 1999, 2002, 2014) work on emotions and social relations. His thesis rejects the reductionist, heavily psychologised explanations as limiting understanding of emotion to cognitive predispositions and neuro-circuits (Burkitt, 2014; Holmes, 2015). Equally, however, Burkitt (1997, 1999, 2002, and 2014) cautioned against restricting accounts of emotion to solely social and cultural factors, believing it similarly led to the production of incomplete and misleading accounts of human experience. He suggested that although

emotions “are products of both the body and discourse”, they “are reducible to neither” (Burkitt, 2002: 153).

Rather than considering emotions to be expressions of inner processes, Burkitt (1997, 1999, 2002, 2014) positioned them as modes of communication within social relationships and interdependencies; as complex, relational, and embodied phenomena. The complexity of emotions lay in their intricacy, which include interconnections with the various aspects of human experience; that is, “the bodily, the discursive or linguistic, and the biographical” (Burkitt, 2014: 15). In his text, *Emotions and social relations*, Burkitt (2014: 15) argued that such a perspective allows a better understanding of how “socially meaningful relationships register in our body-minds and are [subsequently] felt” in social circumstances. At the heart of his theorising lay the belief that “without the body-mind, we could not feel our situations and patterns of relationships, yet without the social meaning of these relations, our feelings and emotions would be random and meaningless” (Burkitt, 2014, p.15).

Burkitt’s (1997, 1999, 2002, 2014) writings share many similarities with the relational theorising of Emirbayer (1997), Gergen (1994), and Crossley (2011). Here, emotion is not regarded “as a thing or substance that exists separately from relationships”, but is performed within our interactions with others and the world around us (Burkitt, 2014, p. 18). In illustrating the point that there would be no emotion “without that relational sense”, Burkitt (2014, p. 15) argued that we cannot love or hate anyone without reference to the ways in which that individual is related to us within a social encounter or context (Burkitt, 2014). It is this relational component that gives our “feelings meaning and sense, in that when we love or hate someone it is usually for a reason to do with the way that they have affected us or the way they have behaved in a certain situation” (Burkitt, 2014, p. 15).

Burkitt’s (2014) perspective also recognised how an individual’s emotional experiences are connected to wider cultural norms and practices; for example, social class,

ethnicity, and gender relations. The belief thus exists that networks of relations both intersect and overlap allowing no separation of “the macro- the relations between classes, groups, and factions- from the micro- the face to face interactions of particular situations” (Burkitt, 2014, pp. 20-21). However, while acknowledging that local contexts are influenced by wider networks of social relations, Burkitt (2014) argued that this does not happen in an overly-deterministic manner. Rather, he suggested that, although people may script emotional scenarios and encounters, they also bring with them emotional dispositions that have developed during the course of their respective biographies (Burkitt, 2014). As such, social relations retain elements of dynamism, unpredictability, and are ultimately co-created, with no one person in total control over their development (Burkitt, 2014). Burkitt (1997, 1999, 2002, 2014) also suggested that within social networks, varying degrees of power exist that have ramifications for both individual and collective emotional experience. For example, some individuals may have more influence than others, which can manifest itself in tensions, conflicts, jealousies, and rivalries.

Burkitt’s (1997, 1999, 2002, 2014) perspective also acknowledged that emotions have corporeal and embodied aspects. In drawing upon the work of Bourdieu (1979, 1984), Dewey (1922, 1983), and Elias (1978) among others, Burkitt (1999, p. 36) described how people appropriate “certain forms of bodily carriage and movement”, as well as “ways of handling objects and manipulating them, which are culture specific”. Rather than simply suggesting that the body comes into situations with “ready-made feelings and muscular experiences”, Burkitt (2014, p. 116) argued that “the body is also essential in making (rather than simply experiencing) meaning”. In striking a note of caution, however, he also warned against understanding embodied experience biologically, as opposed to through language and social meaning. Instead, he contended:

speech, like feeling, is one of the uses and modulations of our body...what we feel and think is never something different from the sense of speech and, more generally, of language and social meaning (Burkitt, 2014, p. 15).

### **Megan' story: Anxiety, humiliation, and (concealed) anger**

It had been a great week. The sessions had been fast paced, the level of play high, and the banter sharp. I was also revelling in my status, as the younger players sought my advice. I was training well. I felt light, energized, happy. However, as the first game of the season drew closer, the tension on the training ground became palpable. There were more over-hit passes, the players' first touches were not as crisp and controlled. Accusing looks accompanied the breakdown of any pattern of play. I watched his face increasingly darken. *He's worried we're going to make him look bad! And kick-off is just 24 hours away.* As we arrived back at the team hotel, he announced an evening meeting. My heart sank. It was the way he said it; the hard-edged speech, arms folded across his chest. *He has more to say.* My body reminded me of painful times gone by. My stomach churned. I was worried.

I arrived early for the meeting. 22 seats were neatly organized into two rows in front of a large video screen. I took my place in the front row, where the senior players were expected to sit. As the others filed in, my anxiety increased. I couldn't help it. *Maybe it'll be ok? Maybe there's nothing to worry about.* The room was quiet. I fiddled with my phone. *I know most of us found these sessions uncomfortable.* My chest tightened. As he entered the room, I quickly switched off my phone and sat upright.

He began by emphasising the need for good habits, of striving for continuous improvement, and the need to repay the club's investment in us. Steve, the performance analyst, had loaded footage from a recent game. *Oh no, not that one! That was awful. Why is he showing that?* I shifted uncomfortably in my chair. Steve pressed play. *How is this*

*supposed to motivate us for the game tomorrow? Why is he doing this? Keep looking him in the eye.*

The video played. The section was entitled ‘Missed chances’. The first clip showed me bearing down on the opponent’s goal. *Here we go.* I felt sick. I hit my shot cleanly but the goalkeeper made a good save. *I should have scored. I really should have done better. I know, I know.* Heat rose through my body. My face reddened. He paused for a second then replayed the clip in slow motion. *Nooooo. Why?* My miss looked even worse. *This is so belittling.* He paused the footage. I locked my knees tightly together. “That was a great opportunity for us there. The quality of the first touch is important. A not so good one has made the angle for the shot even more acute”. The pulsing heat in my cheeks intensified. He looked me in the eye. “I know a shot to the near post may surprise a goalkeeper, but I think we really need to aim for the far post in these situations. We won’t get too many chances like that at this level, so we must make the most of them”. He puffed out his cheeks. “Everyone ok with that?” *I know, I know.* As I nodded, my ribs squeezed. I could feel eyes boring into me from behind. I felt naked, on display. I wanted to tell him. *This isn’t helping me at all! All it does is make me anxious. I scored 20 goals last season or have you forgotten?* Of course, I didn’t. *Conformity is everything.* The last person to do that was gone; labelled as having a bad attitude. I sat straight backed. The team talk moved on. I tried hard to look at him and listen but couldn’t focus anymore. The damage had been done. *Come on, Megan. This is just how it is. Accept it and move on. You can’t afford not to.*

### **Making sense of Megan’s story: A relational reading**

In developing a theoretical interpretation of Megan’s story, we used Burkitt’s (2014, p. 86) contention that “there is no emotion without a reason”. Our sense-making illustrates how Megan’s emotions were inextricably linked to her identity as a professional footballer and her relations with others in this context (Burkitt, 2014). For example, Megan’s anxiety



reflected her previous experiences within the subculture of professional women's football more generally, and the identity threatening nature of this video feedback session more specifically (Burkitt, 2014). Such a paranoid outlook is in keeping with the work of Thompson, Potrac, and Jones (2015), which highlighted the "dark side of organisational life" (Hoyle, 1982, p. 7) in professional football as manifest in a neophyte coach's subjugation to ceremonial 'degradation'. Here, the coach's workplace identity "was [publicly] transferred into something lower in the local scheme of social types" by his more senior colleagues (Garfinkel, 1959, p. 420). This was what Megan feared for herself in the feedback session.

Similarly, the embarrassment and guilt Megan experienced when watching (and re-watching) the video clip reflected the salience of her identity as a professional footballer, the non-verification of this identity by the coach, and its playing out in front of her peers (Burkitt, 2014; Turner & Stets, 2005). Turner and Stets (2005) suggested that when an identity is high, the failure to have it confirmed by others can produce strong negative emotions, which include embarrassment, shame and guilt. Megan's guilt also reflected her belief she had failed to live up to subcultural expectations regarding appropriate role performance (Burkitt, 2014; Turner & Stets, 2005), while her anger was a defensive response to what she considered a shaming public evaluation from someone in authority (Turner & Stets, 2005).

Megan's experience of these emotions was clearly embodied. The blushing of her cheeks, for example, reflected her understanding of personal shortcomings being critically dissected in public. Similarly, her effort to control bodily deportment represented a desire to maintain poise in an identity challenging situation (Burkitt, 2014). Rather than being a solely cognitive phenomenon, Burkitt (2014) argued that the self is based on feeling, and ought to be understood as such. Indeed, Megan's understanding of her professional footballer self was a 'deeply felt entity' that, when perceived to be threatened, included a variety of physical

sensations which could not be separated from the intonations, words, and evaluations of others (Burkitt, 2014).

Despite experiencing visceral feelings of anger at her treatment, Megan suppressed their public expression. Her efforts illustrate Hochschild's (1983, 2000) notion of 'surface acting'. According to Hochschild (1983), surface acting occurs when an individual regulates his or her emotions to create a situationally appropriate and "publicly observable facial and bodily display" (p. 7). Here, the emphasis is on "deceiving others about how we are really feeling without deceiving ourselves" (Hochschild, 1983, p. 33). For Megan, this not only required the active management of various sensations, but also the maintenance of a bodily deportment that demonstrated her deference to, and respect for, authority (Burkitt, 2014). This was both stressful and alienating, and required considerable emotional stamina on her part (Burkitt, 2014; Hochschild, 1983).

Megan's surface acting arguably reflected two interconnected factors. The first was the role script she was expected to comply with as a professional footballer (Burkitt, 2014; Hochschild, 1983). Here, her socialisation experiences led to clear perceptions of the display and feeling rules that were situationally appropriate (Hochschild, 1983). For Hochschild (1983), display rules focus on 'when' and 'how' overt expressions of emotion should occur, while feeling rules refer to the specific emotions that an individual should experience in a situation. In turn, Burkitt (2014) highlighted how these rules are shaped by dominant power relations. That is, they should not be understood separately from other agents' efforts to use emotion to "direct the field of social action"; to control and manipulate others (Burkitt, 2014, p. 150). In this case, Megan not only considered her anger to contravene the feeling and display rules expected, but also recognised that its display could have significant ramifications given the asymmetrical power relations that existed (Jones et al., 2011). Hence, she considered the public expression of her anger to represent a deviant act, which could

stigmatise her as having a ‘bad attitude’ (Cushion & Jones, 2006). It was a label that could not only have a detrimental effect on her immediate selection in the team, but also her continued employment at the club. Megan’s attempts to regulate her emotions, then, also reflected her understanding of the uncertain nature of her work. Here, she considered the regulation of her emotions an essential strategy for navigating the demands of “a competitive labour market... characterised by a constant surplus of talent” (Roderick, 2016; Roderick & Schumacker, 2016; Thompson et al., 2015).

### **Abigail’s story: A tale of (hidden) frustration, (concealed) pride, and self-loathing**

We’d lost the game. I clasped my hands together in anticipation. *I did ok. More than ok in fact. I was ‘the player of the match’. He’d told me. Those extra hours of training were paying off!* As the video highlights loaded onto the big screen, he asked the usual question, “What are your thoughts?” I raised my hand. Before I could speak, our captain interjects; “We weren’t good enough, too many mistakes. All over the pitch, no one looked up for this game!” Another senior player piped up, “The intensity and desire just wasn’t there. Everyone needs to look in the mirror.” The coach nodded his head in agreement. My shoulders sagged. *I should know by now. This is what always happens.* I lower my hand. Nobody noticed. I closed my eyes. *That was lucky. What was I thinking there?* I put on my ‘we must do better face’. I disagreed with most of what was said. I hated what they were doing. *That’s right, blame the younger players. You know they won’t say anything back. That’s how you cover up your mistakes.* I dug my nails deep into my hands. I said nothing.

He asked for the first clip to be played. The ‘in-possession’ title flashed across the screen. *It’s me.* I’d received the ball in the middle of the pitch. Three defenders closed me down; I lost the ball. *Think Abigail. What could I have done better there?* My stomach rolled. My breathing accelerated. *I had no-one to pass to. I was isolated. I can’t say that. I can’t blame them.* “Abigail, what do you need in this situation?” *Think Abigail, quick.* “I should

have held the ball up better and waited for the support to arrive”. *That should do it.* “Well actually, you needed support to arrive much earlier” he replied. The tension released. “The initial position you took up is spot on, your first touch is great. I can’t really ask more of you there” he continued. I had to work hard to stifle a smile. I made sure not to make eye contact with anyone. *I can’t be seen to be happy. They’d have something to say.*

He turned to the group. “Midfielders, how could you have helped Abigail in this situation?” *This should be interesting.* “No-one wanted to get there. There’s got to be more desire” said a senior voice from the back. “Some of the younger ones have to do things quicker. They’re forcing me to play deeper than I ought to. I just can’t get there” *Hang on, don’t blame the kids! You’re part of the problem here. Look at the video. Focus on what the images are showing!* I felt my anxiety rising. The following conversation, however, moved away from events on the screen to banal generalities of “wanting it more than them”, of needing to be “hungry for it”, and the “young guns” needing to “wise-up”. *This is bullshit! He’s letting them do it again. At least one of them should have got closer to me in that passage of play. He never really takes them on, not really.* My body tensed. I wanted to call them out. *You’re cheats and bullies.* But I said nothing. Thoughts of self-loathing raced through my head. *Come on, Abigail. Say something! This isn’t right. You know it isn’t.* I said nothing. *Maybe next time.* I looked down at the floor. *I’m on the team sheet. That’s what really matters.*

### **Making sense of Abigail’s story: A relational reading**

Abigail’s story sheds further light on the multi-faceted nature of an athlete’s emotional experiences in a video-based feedback session. It charts feelings of pride, anger, and guilt, which were simultaneously grounded in her (embodied) identity, her understanding of contextual social relations, as well as her immediate reading of situational power dynamics (Burkitt, 2014). The pride experienced reflected the salience of her playing identity, her

commitment to it, and her understanding of this identity being confirmed by significant others (Burkitt, 2014; Turner & Stets, 2005). Equally, her anger stemmed from her belief that senior players were failing to fulfil their normative role expectations in this network of relations (Burkitt, 2014; Turner & Stets, 2005). Furthermore, by consciously not challenging what she saw as unjust interactions, Abigail considered herself complicit in sustaining their potentially damaging impact on others (Turner & Stets, 2005).

Like Megan, Abigail engaged in the active management of her emotions and their expression. Her attempts to actively suppress visible signs of personal satisfaction (e.g., stifling a smile) reflected her understanding of subcultural expectations about appropriate feeling and display rules following a defeat, as well as her status within the relational system (Burkitt, 2014). To appear visibly happy with her own performance was, from Abigail's perspective, tantamount to transgressing widely held values related to the importance of collective responsibility for competitive outcomes. She thus understood that the failure to conform to subcultural norms could result in her being labelled as 'selfish', 'not a team player', and (like Megan) as having a 'bad attitude'. She feared marginalisation from the group (Burkitt, 2014; Haman & Putnam, 2008). It could be argued that Abigail's biography oriented her to make sense of this situation in a particular way, with "the patterns of her relationships from the past" being embodied in her understanding of the situation, her bodily dispositions, and her perception of others (Burkitt, 2014, p. 5).

Equally, the feelings Abigail experienced when deciding to publicly acknowledge, or suppress, her happiness at her performance reflected the contradictions, dilemmas, and paradox that are an inherent feature of organisational life (Burkitt, 2014; Jones & Wallace, 2005; Stacey, 2011). Here, Abigail experienced "a conflict of impulses", whereby she debated "two contradictory feelings...or impulses...in dialogical, polyphonic consciousness" (Burkitt, 2014, p. 135). Despite experiencing a clash of relational loyalties (i.e., to voice or

suppress her views on the positive features of the team's performance), her understanding of situational demands featured significantly in influencing how she dealt with this emotional dilemma (Burkitt, 2014); that is, a strategy of silence and the outward expression of disappointment.

A particularly salient feature of Abigail's story was the importance attached to her peers' evaluations within the session. While their analysis of the team's shortcomings and apparent privileged status was a source of considerable anger for Abigail, she purposefully chose not to exhibit her irritation. Indeed, she felt powerless to address their behaviour in any meaningful way. Her outlook in this situation reflects Burkitt's (2014, p. 150) contention that "emotion is always interwoven in power relations, both shaping and being shaped by them". Here, Burkitt (2014) suggested that, as there are varying degrees of power within a social network, members' relationships with each other are rarely completely harmonious. Instead, he argued that the dynamics of power and status can lead to the formation of rivalries, tensions, and conflicts. In a similar vein, Walby and Spencer (2012, p. 186) claimed that there is much to be learned from exploring how "people narrate their frustration, indignation, and resentment" of formal and informal hierarchies.

Abigail's story also illustrates how emotion management in sport extends beyond the athlete-coach dyad to include a wider network of social actors (Burkitt, 2014; Crossley, 2011; Haman & Putnam, 2008; Nelson et al., 2013). While the academic literature has principally explored the emotional labour that occurs because of managerial surveillance and control, there has been a paucity of inquiry addressing how employees' expressions of emotion might be "controlled by other workers" (Haman & Putnam, 2008, p. 62). An exception was that by Haman and Putnam (2008) who highlighted how, to avoid conflict, individuals suppressed emotions in order to aid effective problem solving and the maintenance of co-worker relationships. They also avoided taking concerns to managers, as a 'good employee' was

considered not to make complaints about other staff members. Such social practices, Haman and Putnam (2008, p.68) argued, can not only “become a source of great frustration and stress” but also “cause resentment to fester, lower job satisfaction, ...and [could] lead to employee burnout”.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this paper was to stimulate reflection on how high performance athletes’ participation in video-based feedback sessions can be understood as emotional, embodied, and relational affairs. Building on previous work, as opposed to being critical of an uncaring or manipulative coach, the broad purpose was to tell of a ‘culture through characters’; of characters that engage, that feel pain and joy as they move through any given plot (Gilbourne, Jones & Spencer, 2014). The value of the paper can be understood to exist at several levels. These include highlighting the various emotions (e.g., pride, guilt, anger) athletes experience in these pedagogically intended encounters, in addition to how these emotions are embedded in contextual “power relations and inter-dependencies” (Burkitt, 1999, p. 128). Indeed, Megan and Abigail’s respective sentiments and feelings not only consisted of “sensate, corporeal components...necessary to the lived experience”, but were also socially constructed in nature (Burkitt, 1999, p. 116). That is, relations, behaviours, and feelings were inextricably intertwined (Burkitt, 1999, 2014). Here, emotions were grounded in Megan and Abigail’s understandings of three inter-related factors: a) the perception of their identity as professional footballers, inclusive of the reactions and evaluations of significant others; b) their biographically informed beliefs about the precarious nature of their employment; and, c) their understanding of dominant subcultural discourses regarding appropriate emotional dispositions (Burkitt, 1999, 2014). Importantly, the paper draws attention to how athletes’ sense making of feedback sessions are always grounded in their understandings of the working culture and their place within it.

A further point we wish to raise here concerns the levels (or layers) of emotion management that athletes may engage in. Indeed, while Abigail and Megan's stories explored emotion management in relation to separate coach-athlete and athlete-athlete relationships, an athlete may engage in these layers (and others) of emotion management simultaneously, thus adding another level of complexity to the phenomenon (Haman & Putnam, 2008).

Consequently, while not a specific aim of the paper, the exploration of individuals' emotional management within a network of social relations represents a further potentially fruitful avenue for future inquiry if we are to understand better athletes' emotionality within high performance sport (Nelson et al., 2014).

Given the arguments made, we encourage coaching scholars to further examine the social relations in which coaching technologies are deployed and responded to by coaches and athletes (Mason, Button, Lankshear, Coates, & Sharrock, 2002). Such inquiry has the potential to develop accounts of the ways in which the pedagogical application of video-based feedback technology in particular, as well as coaching technologies more generally, cannot be known separately from the relations of power, interdependence, and communication in which social actors are enmeshed (Burkitt, 1999, 2014). A greater understanding of the intended and unforeseen consequences of using this technology could contribute to the development of a more finessed approach to its application; one where greater attention is paid to the social environment in which it is utilised, and the social sensibilities that underpin its application (Cameron & Webster, 2005; Taylor et al., 2017).

Finally, from a practical perspective, we recognize that video-based feedback is not of itself entirely unproblematic or, indeed, problematic (Collins, Carson, & Cruishank, 2015; Taylor et al., 2017; Williams & Manley, 2016). As such, the question should not be to utilise video-based feedback sessions or not. Instead, it should focus on the intentionality of these sessions in relation to their possible latent effects. Here, coaches would benefit from



reflecting upon how they frame and subsequently engage in these interactions; especially in terms of athletes' interpretations of them (Collins et al., 2015; Jones, Glinzmeyer, & McKenzie, 2005). What is advocated here then is a call for coaches and coach educators to develop a historicising and scrutinising imperative of the wider structures within which elite sports performance occurs.

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