

Reflection in a High-Performance Sport Coach Education Program: A Foucauldian Analysis of Coach Developers

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Reflection is a contested but taken for granted concept, whose meaning shifts to accommodate the interpretation and interests of those using the term. Subsequently, there is limited understanding of the concept. The purpose of this article was to consider critically the discursive complexities of reflection and their articulation through coach developers' practice. Data were collected from a National High-Performance coach education program. Coach developers responsible for one-to-one support ($n = 8$) and on-program support ($n = 3$) participated in the research. Semistructured interviews were conducted with coach developers, and participant observations were undertaken of a coach developer forum and program workshops ($n = 9$). Foucault's concepts: power, discourse, and discipline were used to examine data with critical depth. Analysis explored "Discourse of Reflection," "Discipline, Power, and Reflection," and "Coach Developers: Confession, 'Empowerment,' and Reflection." Humanistic ideas constructed a discourse of reflection that was mobilized through coach confession. Coach developer efforts to be "critical" and "learner centered" were embroiled with intrinsic and subtle relations of power as "empowering" intent exacerbated rather than ameliorated its exercise. This article makes visible a different destabilized and problematized version of reflection, thus introducing an awkwardness into the fabric of our experiences of reflection.

Keywords: confession, discipline, discourse, Foucault, reflective practice

Reflection and reflective practice have become conspicuous parts of coach education and the terms enconced in the vocabulary of coach developers (Cushion, 2016; Cushion, Griffiths, & Armour, 2019). To be "reflective" is seen as an essential part of coach learning (e.g., Cassidy, Jones, & Potrac, 2009; Gallimore, Gilbert, & Nater, 2014; Gilbert & Trudel, 2001, 2006), and an examination of literature pertaining to coaching and the reflective practitioner reveals the way in which the concept of reflection has often taken center stage (Cushion, 2016). Reflection and reflective practice are positioned as essential tools for coach developers looking to enhance professional development (e.g., Culver & Trudel, 2006), link theory and practice (e.g., Douglas & Carless, 2008; Irwin, Hanton, & Kerwin, 2004), promote critical thinking (e.g., Knowles, Gilbourne, Borrie, & Nevill, 2001; Knowles, Tyler, Gilbourne, & Eubank, 2006; Taylor, Werthner, Culver, & Callary, 2015), increase self-awareness and understanding (e.g., Cassidy et al., 2009; Gilbert & Côté, 2013), empower coaches and athletes (e.g., Kidman, 2005; Richards, Mascarenhas, & Collins, 2009), and promote learning and enhanced practice (e.g., Cropley, Miles, & Peel, 2012; Cushion, Ford, & Williams, 2012; Gilbert & Trudel, 2001; Irwin et al., 2004).

Indeed, it is clear that coach developers should encourage coaches to question their values, beliefs and ideas, and engage with a process to develop their knowledge and make sense of their experiences (Cushion, 2016; Fendler, 2003). However, as Cushion (2016) argues, despite the significant work privileging reflective practice in coaching, little interrogates these notions critically; instead reflection and reflective practice are presented uncritically and accepted enthusiastically as "good" for coaching and coaches.

Research has tended to sidestep these wider sociocultural issues and instead focused on "applying" or developing reflection (e.g., Knowles et al., 2001; Taylor et al., 2015; Trudel, Culver, & Werthner, 2013; interalia), or providing expositions of a preferred theoretical approach (e.g., Cassidy et al., 2009; Cushion, 2006; Gilbert & Trudel, 2006; Trudel et al., 2013). This perspective is reinforced by Cropley and Hanton (2011), who argue that coaching has preached the positives of reflection, or "jumped on the bandwagon" (Cropley et al., 2012, p. 2) without fully appreciating the issues and problems facing coach developers aiming to cultivate reflective practice. Specifically, relations of power and their role in constructing the meaning of reflection and influencing how coach developer's enable reflection has been overlooked in existing work. Indeed, while guided reflection can offer much as an empowering and emancipatory process (Johns, 1999), no research considers if coaching culture, specifically coach development, accommodates this process or whether, as Cushion (2016) argues, reflection slips into a mode of reinforcing existing practice and power relations.

Despite their key role in formal coach education and coaches' learning, Cushion et al. (2019) argue that until very recently coach developers have remained largely absent from coach education research; a body of work which is understandably coach centric. This means that the role of coach developers and their practice and influence have been taken for granted, assumed, or simply rendered invisible. Indeed, while reflection has been a central feature in coach education research (e.g., Cassidy, Potrac, & McKenzie, 2006; Knowles, Borrie, & Telfer, 2005; Nelson & Cushion, 2006), coach developers' understanding, application, and overall contribution to this in practice have yet to be examined. This is problematic because coach developers, like coaches (Denison, Mills, & Konoval, 2015), are enmeshed within relations of power-knowledge. Indeed, they have a significant role in supporting reflection to achieve its

empowering intent through educating coaches to recognize and understand power–knowledge relations and their consequences.

Therefore, the purpose of this article was to consider critically the discursive complexities of reflection and reflective practice and their articulation with and through coach developer practice. Importantly, reflection and reflective practice are not benign or neutral concepts. Thus, through a Foucauldian lens, we aimed to consider how power operated and provide a critical analysis of the complexity of reflection with coach developers in a high-performance coach education program. The significance of the work, then, was as Foucault (1996) asserted “to reveal relations of power . . . to put them back into the hands of those who exercise them” (p. 144). Therefore, we undertook a critical analysis of the complexity of coaching and reflective practices to enable the unintended consequences of well-intended practices to be uncovered (Fendler, 2003) because “power does not just prevent things happening, it also produces effects” (Foucault, 1980, p. 59).

Approaches in Coach Development

The design and delivery of coach education and the work of coach developers, including the use of reflection, will have an approach informed by underpinning and sometimes implicit beliefs about learning (Cushion et al., 2019). One such approach influencing coaching currently is a humanistic approach, based on humanistic psychology (cf. Rogers, 1983; Usher & Edwards, 2005). The rationale underpinning the educational process and the role of the coach developer in a humanistic approach is “learner centered.” That is, where the learner is self-motivated and self-directed, exercising individual agency, and making their own authentic choices about self-development and self-realization (Usher & Edwards, 1994, 2005). In this approach, the coach developer is a guide and looks to make an “empowering” contribution developing autonomous learners to develop their subjectivity and identity. A key tenet of this approach is it purports to be “power free” or attempts to democratize power (Foucault, 1975). Adopting this perspective, coach developers might maintain that they have little or no power over others, or choice about how it is exercised (Brookfield, 2009). This means that coaching and coach education is seen as a neutral, benign space where reflection is a desirable activity to develop “better” coaches who are “empowered” or made “autonomous” (Cushion, 2016; Cushion & Jones, 2014; Denison et al., 2015). However, coaching has dynamic, complex, and diffused networks of power relations where reflection is in fact embedded in a persistent and resilient culture (Cushion, 2016; Cushion & Jones, 2014).

Mobilizing Foucault

Drawing on Foucault’s work is useful, as it helps us recognize more subtle forms of power, “as a productive network which runs through the whole social body” (Foucault, 1980, p. 119), where individuals who make up the social body are made by, and are the primary vehicles of, power (Orlie, 1997). Indeed, Foucault (1998) understood power as relations between people, therefore, omnipresent. Power is not an institution, a certain strength or a possession, “it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (Foucault, 1998, p. 93). Foucault (1980, p. 93) states that “relations of power cannot themselves be established, exercised, consolidated or implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse,” which

is a rule-governed, sociohistorically situated language. Discourse can refer to the written and unwritten rules that guide social practices and help to produce and regulate the production of statements that correspondingly control what can be understood and perceived, but at the same time, act to obscure (Foucault, 1972). In this sense, reflection can be considered a discourse that is embedded in and related to other coaching discourses (e.g., coach education, coaching philosophy, coaching practice; Cushion, 2016). Foucault (1975) connected power and knowledge, articulating that “power has a need for a certain form of knowledge . . . that the exercise of power creates and causes to emerge new objects of knowledge . . . and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power” (Faubion, 2002, p. xv).

Foucault used the category of discipline to extend the perception of how modern power operates to carefully construct and form subjectivities (Cole, Giardina, & Andrews, 2004) through surveillance and self-surveillance (Foucault, 1977). Foucault (1977) linked (self) surveillance to panopticism, a concept based on Jeremy Bentham’s architectural figure of the panopticon. According to Foucault (1977), the panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities through structures designed to induce a state of conscious and permanent visibility. Importantly, this visibility is unverifiable; that is, panopticism ensures that the subject does not know if or when they are being observed (or listened to). Together, this surveillance ensures the automatic functioning of power. Foucault (1977) identified these structures across institutions such as prisons, schools, hospitals, and factories. Indeed, all people, including coaches, are subject to surveillance through a normalizing (self) gaze and are under real or imagined pressure to conform to societal norms relating to their behavior (Denison et al., 2015). Importantly, this gaze has progressed from just observing behavior to include an interest in what people *think* as well as what they do (Rolfe & Gardner, 2006).

Foucault (1977) identified three disciplinary mechanisms that operate through the following gaze: hierarchical judgment, spatial organization, and examination. That is, bodies and minds are never just trained, but are subjected to normative judgment or what Foucault (1977) calls dividing practices. These practices produce and exclude individuals; for example, a coach developer may label a coach in line with the conventions of the prevailing discourse thus classifying, disciplining, and normalizing through social processes that they have little direct control over (Markula & Pringle, 2006). In coaching (Mills & Denison, 2018) and other practice-related fields (Cotton, 2001; Rolfe & Gardner, 2006), an increasingly unnoticed operation of power that supports dividing practices is confession that occurs in the presence of an authority, such as a coach developer, who has the ability to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile the confessor (Foucault, 1998). Mills and Denison (2018) have identified athlete confession in coaching that acted to address “abnormality” and so reinforce and normalize whatever was “true”. However, research is yet to consider how such disciplinary mechanisms may play out in coach education, specifically between coach and coach developer.

Together, disciplinary matrices create “docile bodies” controlled and regulated where “training” extends capacity and usefulness. While in one sense productive and perhaps desirable, docility does not necessarily mean optimal performance or achieving one’s potential (Denison, 2010). Docility can limit the development of skills and qualities, such as problem solving, decision making, and understanding capacities and capabilities (e.g., Denison, 2007;

Gearity & Mills, 2013; Mills & Denison, 2013). Indeed, docility can include the mind; as Cushion (2016) argued, concepts such as reflection can construct ways of *thinking*, as well as *doing*. Put simply, coach development that determines what coaches think, the techniques they use, and their efficiency is likely to reproduce existing ideas to be productive within established structures. This is not to say that some discourses and practices in coaching have not changed, indeed, “new” ideas are continually emerging and deemed possible, but this notion is often illusory as change must be within what is deemed acceptable (Mills & Denison, 2018). That is, discourses are produced and accumulated, they circulate and function, thus establishing, consolidating, and implementing relations of power (Foucault, 1980). In other words, power, through an overarching disciplinary framework remains, and coaching carries an incomplete and naïve understanding of this. Indeed, practitioners are often coerced into conforming to the dominant culture and find it difficult, if not impossible, to “stand outside it and see it for what it is” (Johns, 1999, p. 241). This “movement of power and the restrictions this places on coaches’ inventiveness can be problematic within a high-performance sport context where innovativeness is paramount for advancing athletes’ performances” (Mills & Denison, 2018, p. 298). Innovation has been considered an outcome of reflection and reflective practice and a mark of coach development (cf. Trudel, Rodrigue, & Gilbert, 2016). Therefore, coach development, in this context, needs to support coaches to achieve more than productivity as a docile body. Indeed, there are calls for coaches to be able to problematize their practice (e.g., Konoval, Denison, & Mills, 2018) and coach developers can play a central role in challenging existing discourse and practices, surfacing contradictions in practice, and shining a light beyond the status quo to disturb disciplinary practices, docility, and relations of power (Johns, 1999; Mills & Denison, 2018).

Indeed, while disciplinary practices are often taken for granted in coaching (Denison, Mills, & Jones, 2013) and have been associated with reflection, reflective practice, and confession (Cushion, 2016; Fejes, 2008; Fendler, 2003; Mills & Denison, 2018), no research has considered the role and influence of coach developers in this process. As a result, there remains no research that considers critical reflection and reflective practice as, for example, practices of “subjectivity formation” or as a disciplinary practice, nor connects this to the practices of coach developers. To explore the extent of these issues, we draw on Foucault’s concepts to explain how reflection has been operationalized and understood by coach developers in a high-performance coach education program.

Methodology

Background and Context

Under investigation was a high-performance coach education program delivered by a National Sports Organization (NSO) in the United Kingdom. The program was designed to be “beyond” the Sport Governing Body coach development. That is, “more advanced,” offering unique opportunities and experiences for coaches from multiple sports and the highest performance level. The NSO is a large national organization with a presence in coach education and is organized in terms of multidepartments, intra-organizational relationships, and distributed work arrangements. The program, spread over a 3-year period, involved residential workshops, one-to-one coach development sessions, and in situ visits to the coaches by coach developers. The research reported here forms

part of a larger 24-month ethnographic study that analyzed the delivery and impact of the coach education program on developing reflection and reflective practice. This included the perspectives of the coach developers, the coach learners, and the NSO in which the program was undertaken. This article focuses specifically on the coach developers and reports findings on their understanding and supporting of reflection and reflective practice with their coaches ($n = 11$) from the program. Eight coach developers were assigned to provide one-to-one coaching and mentoring support. These coach developers met their coach(es) every 4–6 weeks for a one-to-one session and provided distance support via e-mail or video call in the interim. Three coach developers were responsible for on-program support and observed the coaches on residential workshops and provided feedback.

Participants

The eight coach developers responsible for one-to-one support had executive coaching accreditation. The NSO selected three coach developers for each high-performance sport coach, who then assigned one coach developer to work with for the duration of the program. The participants were selected using criterion-based purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). Criteria considered their experiences and involvement in the program, which were conducive with achieving the aims of the research. Following Cushion et al. (2019), each participant is described individually (identified by pseudonyms) in Table 1, incorporating words from their own initial narratives. These narratives allow for each coach developer to allow each to “highlight critical episodes and events . . . providing insight into their understanding” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 69) of their experience and approach to reflection, coaching, and coach development. This detail shows that reflection had been conceptualized in lots of different ways and that coach developers operated without a consistent underpinning.

The three on-program coach developers worked for the NSO. Similarly, these participants are now described individually (identified by pseudonyms) in Table 2 incorporating words from their own narratives.

Research Design and Procedures

On receiving institutional ethical approval, data were collected during the 2-year ethnography using participant observation and interviewing (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). To capture how the coach developers understood and supported reflection and reflective practice, data collection had three phases.

Phase 1. Participant observation of coach education workshops ran throughout data collection. This included observations of nine coach education residential workshops, each running for 2–3 days and a half day coach developer forum. The coach developer forum focused on identifying key themes relating to “topics,” “successes,” and “challenges” experienced in the one-to-one sessions. The fifth residential workshop was also attended by the one-to-one coach developers; they supported group discussions with coaches during on-program tasks. During each observation, lecture style sessions, group work, and practical activities were observed. Field notes were made throughout these observations and included descriptive detail and key information such as the location, who was present, what social interaction occurred, and what activities took place (Bryman, 2016; Cushion, 2014).

Phase 2. Individual semistructured interviews were conducted with one-to-one ($n = 6$) and on-program ($n = 3$) coach developers

Table 1 Participant Details: One-to-One Coach Developers

Janet	“I was an elite athlete . . . I went to the Olympics, I graduated with a sports science degree, as an elite athlete I also did my PhD.” Janet’s work with the National Sports Organization started “10 years ago . . . it has been a natural progression delivering projects and the one-to-one mentoring role.” Janet identified reflection as “using your own brain to learn from the experiences that you’ve been through.”
Georgia	A former high-performance athlete who has worked in the training and development sector of a corporate business for 16 years. Georgia explained “I have been coaching now for 20 years and I am also a coaching supervisor, so I support coach developers.” Georgia described reflection as “that ability to think about practice . . . it is like with the plan-do-review cycle . . . you are able to get insight that influences how you do it next time . . . you are not only learning about the situation but you are reflecting on and refining your beliefs and how you see the world.”
Rebecca	An organization development consultant who specializes in organizational behavior and leadership. Rebecca has 20 years’ experience and is the managing director of her own business. Previously, she held a chief executive position in business. She has a master’s degree and coaching certification. Rebecca explained that “reflective practice is about raising self-awareness by noticing what I thought, felt and the sensations I experienced in relation to myself, the other and the situation and that for me is how I would define it [reflective practice].”
Emma	Has spent “20 years working on leadership development particularly starting with leadership assessment, for example, psychometric assessment using psychometric tools, personality tools’ with businesses and individuals . . . to identify their high potential pool, MD [Managing Director] successors, senior functional head successors [and] future CEO’s [Chief Executives].” Emma has executive coaching accreditation and a master’s degree. Emma described an example of a reflective practice conversation she might have with a high-performance coach after a championships “to get people [coaches] to stop and think, so ‘what have I learnt about myself and who I am as a head coach, or a leader of coaches, and what can I do with that learning, what have I learnt about my program, what have I learnt about my athletes and my other coaches and how I can use that information going forward.”
Isla	“My background is sports science, MPhil, exercise physiology . . . I was an international sport coach [and] an international performer.” Isla has had roles within sport-related publicly funded organizations and the private sector, “eventually I became a full-time consultant, trained up got the qualification in business coaching and since then have done business coaching, leadership development, but have always kept sport clients . . . I was passionate about coaching coaches . . . and then qualifications came along and it became an industry.” Isla described reflection as “bringing into consciousness what’s going on and attempting to make sense of it historically, in the moment for the future.”
Sophie	Has been the managing director of her own company, which specializes in executive leadership coaching, for over 10 years. Sophie works with both private and public sector businesses and organizations offering executive coaching. She has a master’s degree and published work focused on executive coaching. Sophie described reflection as the process of “shifting someone and getting them off the transactional, because they often give you the performance, but if nothing is changing and everything is stuck in this groove you can’t get better . . . ‘can we just get off this’ and go way below takes people courage.”
Poppy	Has been CEO for a business that specializes in “change” through executive coaching and leadership development for 25 years. She has worked with the National Sports Organization for 11 years; “I see my role as supporting these coaches on their learning and development journey . . . as trying to help bring some thread or glue to the program through the dialogue . . . primarily focused on the learning goals that we both identify and that immerse through the program.” Poppy went on to talk about her role in relation to influencing how reflection is perceived and practiced “If I can try to instill that it is about the reflection process and not getting to the end it may allow coaches to focus on the ‘in the moment,’ it doesn’t come to a natural end.”
Claire	Has been the director of a business which specializes in executive coaching, coach supervision and training for 14 years. Ahead of this, Claire ran her own independent consultancy business for 20 years. She has a master’s degree and is an accredited coaching supervisor. She explained her view on reflection through an example “I would start with ‘so tell me where you have got to with your thinking about this [coaching issue], because clearly you have been thinking about it.’ There’s your reflection.”

Table 2 Participant Details: On-Program Coach Developers

Will	Was a high-performance athlete and is currently a sport coach in a high-performance youth context. Will explained his role at the NSO: “I manage the coach development team, I set the strategy for our plans about how we go about developing coaches for the system to support the vision for medal winning success.” Will described reflection as “the ability to critically appraise activity or action with a view to learning from that critical thinking and thought process in order to apply that learning in the future context. I think it [reflection] can then be delivered pre, during, post activity, I think the skill is knowing how to use those reflections to adapt practice and shape future practice.” During data collection, Will moved from a role involving in situ coach support visits and workshop delivery to this strategic position.
Tim	Was responsible for organizing and coordinating the high-performance coach education workshops. During data collection, Tim also provided some in situ support to the coaches, led tasks at workshops, and provided coaches with individual written feedback. Tim believes that “some people aren’t maximizing the potential they’ve got in making the most of their experiences . . . it’s important to understand . . . what’s gone well or not and why and how they learn from it in the future.” In building on this, Tim described reflection as “looking back at what happened, and at your part in it . . . what happened and why . . . and what did I do or didn’t do, and can I learn from it.”
Alan	Participated in the early stages of data collection. Alan led residential workshops, supported coaches in situ, and provided feedback. He expressed that it is important “to try and work out the best way to get effective reflective practice for different individuals” and described reflection as “as looking back to plan forward.”

from months 9–12. These interviews were conducted face-to-face ($n = 4$), by video call ($n = 3$), and phone call ($n = 2$) and ranged from 41 to 75 min; the average was 56 min. Following Smith and Sparkes (2017), the interviews invited coach developers to tell

stories about their practice. This enabled them to explain the meanings they constructed from their experiences and describe their perspectives and behaviors in relation to reflection; in their one-to-one sessions, their individual methods or tools for

reflection, their perceptions of what reflection meant and how their individual context influenced their reflective practice support. This focused on understanding *what* the coach developers did and *why*, and *how* they constructed their work, role, and reflection.

Phase 3. Individual interviews conducted face-to-face ($n = 1$) and by video ($n = 6$) with one-to-one coach developers were conducted in month 21 and ranged from 30 to 60 min. By this stage, two one-to-one coach developers had left the program and one did not respond to the invite for a second interview. These interviews revisited data from Phases 1 and 2, with a view to considering how reflection was understood at this later stage and whether this had changed or remained the same. This meant that one-to-one coach developers had an opportunity to consider their previous comments and offer further insight (Smith & Sparkes, 2017). Altogether, the coach developers contributed four times to data collected.

Data Analysis

Data analysis included inductive (data driven) and deductive (theory driven) approaches, supported by the application of social theory, to identify both manifest (explicit) and latent (underlying) meanings (Clarke & Braun, 2017). The interviews were transcribed verbatim and the workshops as full field notes. Initially, a form of thematic analysis was used to identify patterns of meaning in data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Within this, initial coding reduced data, then the codes were collated based on their similarity. For example, initial codes identified through coach developer interview data included: “open minded,” “flexible,” “coach led,” “coach centered,” “nondirective,” and “supportive.” These were then grouped as “coach centered.” Examples from raw data were stored alongside the collated codes for future reference; for instance, “coach centered” data examples included: “it is about them and their learning . . . the sessions are about them and how the sessions can help them and shape their learning, it is not something I want to do for them or direct them toward.” In line with Braun and Clarke (2013), comparisons between the participants and conceptual and empirical reflection literature, in both coaching and more broadly in teaching and adult learning, were then explored. This form of thematic analysis provided what Braun and Clarke (2006) described as “a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data” (p. 78). Clarke and Braun (2017) explained that thematic analysis can be applied across a range of theoretical perspectives. In this research, deductive analysis applied Foucault’s concepts. This situated data within a theoretical framework enabling a move from concrete description to abstraction while retaining a constant grounding in data (cf. Cushion et al., 2019). Together, this iterative process of meaning making worked to explain data with critical depth. In following Clarke and Braun’s (2017) final stage of analysis, this is now presented through a discussion of three themes: “Discourse of Reflection; “Discipline, Power, and Reflection;” and “Coach Developers: Confession, ‘Empowerment’ and Reflection.”

Analysis and Discussion

Discourse of Reflection

For Foucault (1972), reality is constituted through discourse, a rule-governed, sociohistorically situated language “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (p. 49) that “position subjectivities” (p. 182). A dominant discourse comprises a particular language and a distinctive view where some things are regarded as inherently more important than others (Brookfield, 2009). In this case, reflection and reflective practices were seen as

an important and essential part of the coach education program, a “golden thread” running throughout, and a specific aspect that the coach developers were expected to lead. As a result, a discourse of reflection was constructed that comprised of a particular language *of* and *for* reflection, as well as distinctive and dominant views *about* reflection. Such views positioned reflection as being about facilitating learning through the discussing and solving of coaching “problems”:

Interviews:

Janet: I would say firstly it’s about you which is fairly obvious . . . I come very much from a view where I would like to help you solve your problems by asking questions by maybe sharing experiences but, sometimes telling, but not often, so it is about using you in the real world to develop you rather than anything else.

Poppy: It is usually related to a goal and or learning objective, but there can be random things come up, I never know what it is that someone wants to talk to me about.

In addition, reflection and, therefore, learning were grounded in using the knowledge that the coaches already had. Importantly, reflection on the program was a process that involved making coaches’ knowledge visible for scrutiny and assessment. In this example, the coach developer asks coaches for topics that will inform group reflection time (“white space”):

Field notes

Residential Workshop:

The coach developer refers to the flip chart paper, he asks for topics the coaches wish to discuss during their “white space” time later today.

Tim: This time it is your time to drive the real content of it, and what we are really trying to do always is to protect some of that time for you to hold the floor and get whatever it is that you want to get out of the time in the room . . . an opportunity to bring to life some of your topics . . . we have got 37 minutes, so we are going to have seven minutes writing down anything you could talk about and then half an hour within which you can pick one or two and then go into as much detail as you want and then we can address the rest over the next couple of days . . . I am going to write them up on this flip-chart paper.

Coach—Harry: A thought around the project, I am fascinated to know whether programs do share male—female ways of operating, how integrated it is and has anyone tried it? Linked in with that, is there is a massive push with the questioning approach in coaching, and balance of that over the ‘tell’ . . . I am curious as to how that is in other sports right now and what people’s thoughts and feelings are toward that.

. . . The group select gender to discuss further. They begin to share their thoughts—the focus is on what has worked for them and their experiences which are put forward alongside sport specific examples.

Furthermore, these data illustrate a typical discursive pattern, where the discourse included value judgments made by coach developers about the “nature” and quality of reflection. In addition, something of the normalizing aspect of reflection discourse is

revealed, where, for example, reflection was about “you” and the importance of seeing the “value” in doing reflection. Indeed, within the program, all the coach developers privileged reflection and reflective practice and presented it uncritically and enthusiastically, as “good” for their coaches and high-performance coaching (cf. Cushion, 2016).

A discourse also includes rules for judging what are good or bad, acceptable or inappropriate contributions and procedures. This meant that, to enable reflection, a series of “good” and “acceptable” pedagogic practices were espoused and practiced by the coach developers. These included one-to-one reflection sessions to facilitate “learning conversations,” individual and group discussion, and feedback in allocated “white space” or “reflection time” on residential workshops.

Importantly, these practices were underpinned by humanistic ideas of learner centeredness, empowerment, and self-direction:

Interviews:

Janet: It’s about you.

Isla: Let’s talk about what’s going on for you.

Emma: It’s about learning to learn . . . [and] managing yourself . . . Sometimes, awareness is change, it can be transformative.

Poppy: I never know what someone wants to talk to me about.

These ideas not only produced concrete coach developer practices, but were also a discursive production of meaning and objects on the program—reflective thought and reflective practice—that construed reflection as desirable and also constituted subjectivities. These discursive formations created the conditions of possibility for the shaping of coaches’ behavior by the discourse of reflection. In other words, the discourse shaped and fostered coaches to become the “reflective coach,” who was “empowered” by reflecting continuously to improve their practice and themselves (cf. Cotton, 2001; Cushion, 2016; Usher & Edwards, 2005). As the examples below show, this resulted in coaches who internalized this reflection discourse and, therefore, construed reflection as both a desirable and entirely positive activity:

Interviews:

Coach—Mike: Shaping that [understanding of self-] through the coach developer has been invaluable for me . . . just opening up the discussion to where you thought you were and where you feel you are now.

Coach—Wayne: I have got somebody [coach developer] who helps me and that’s the single most thing that I will get out of it . . . she just challenges and gets you thinking and thinking about listening and how you ask questions, I would say that would be the biggest influence.

These coach data show the strong sense of recitation and repetition of the humanistic reflection discourse where the coaches believed that “you” were taking control of “your” learning. On the surface then, reflection construed in this positive and “learner-centered” way appeared to avoid the reproduction of power, what Foucault (1977) describes as the “temporary inversion of power relations” (p. 26). But the discourse served to constitute the coaches as subjects. That is, they accepted the legitimacy of coach developer practices and the truth of the meanings they invoked—that they were “empowered.” However, Foucault states that power produces

discourses and knowledge—the couplet power–knowledge indicates that “power produces knowledge” and that “power and knowledge directly imply one another” (p. 27). Therefore, coach developer practices around reflection remained subject to power–knowledge formations and gave certain subjectivities significance. Indeed, according to Foucault (1980) “relations of power cannot themselves be established without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of discourse” (p. 93). Therefore, reflection and the coach developer’s practice were conditional upon, and a condition of, the exercise of power. Practices that were considered participatory and power free were, in fact, subject to subtle forms of power—disciplinary power.

Discipline, Power, and Reflection

Foucault’s (1977) model for the functioning of modern power is the panopticon, where everyone is “caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers” (p. 201), and the category of discipline extends notions of how power operates (Cole et al., 2004). Discipline refers to a technology (a technique as well as knowledge) that shapes and produces individuals through techniques of surveillance and self-surveillance that reverberate through social and individual bodies (Foucault, 1977). Disciplinary matrices create “docile bodies” and minds “that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (Foucault, 1977, p. 136). Importantly, in this case what counted as *improved* was shaped and supervised by the coach developers and the organization. The implication being that coaching “expertise” becomes not a matter of what the coach can do or knows (cf. Gilbert & Côté, 2013), but through reflection an articulation of the way coaches see, think, and even feel, and the socialized meaning ascribed to this (Gilbert, 2001). Thus, the “effective” coach, who by “reflection” develops their abilities, is a function of the production of institutionalized and discursive bodies. Crucially, this was in contrast to the program’s intentions that focused on supporting critical thinking and novel coaching practices. Thus, attempts to develop coaches “differently” are implemented without understanding how disciplinary power is present, active, and often unseen in all places and all of the time (Denison et al., 2015).

Foucault’s (1977) disciplinary mechanisms: gaze, hierarchical judgment, spatial organization, and examination were in operation on the program, and therefore, reflection can be considered usefully as techniques of disciplinary power. First, the coach developers, as discussed earlier, utilized a range of “pedagogical practices” within the program that was highly organized in terms of time and space and particularly for the coaches to engage with reflection. These dividing practices produced various coach groups for facilitated “reflective practice” where division, for example, by “experience,” “coach ability,” or “type of learner” had productive power to demarcate, circulate, and differentiate. Dividing practices are forces of normalization that produce and exclude, as the coach developers were able to utilize “a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify and classify” (Foucault, 1977, p. 184).

These practices also subjected the coaches to surveillance and self-surveillance, fashioning a panoptical discourse of control. For example, the discussion circle was reified on the program as democratic and learner centered and used frequently for facilitated reflection. However, this was a situation in which scrutiny and surveillance by the coach developers and by other coaches were dramatically heightened; a situation in which actions were carefully watched by the “judges of normality” (Foucault, 1977, p. 304). These judges (coach developers) were positioned hierarchically as experts and monitored

the extent to which the coaches were participating and “reflecting” in an appropriate manner. Coach developers, as judges of normality, overtly established the criteria for participation to operationalize the norm’s rule of conduct. For the coaches, there was the unspoken knowledge that a lack of participation or saying the “wrong thing” would be evident. Importantly, such normalizing gaze was not recognized; as Mills and Denison (2018) describe, it operated innocently and discreetly, through reflection on the program. The examples below demonstrate that coaches were classified as a certain type of learner or subject. The coaches in their efforts to be a “reflective practitioner” were examined and measured against an idealized “normal reflective coach.” This norm held that there was a particular type (e.g., informed, thoughtful, insightful) and quality (e.g., sophisticated, intelligent, with depth) of reflection undertaken. Reflection performances were judged through the products of the coaches’ reflection, and the coaches’ displayed abilities as reflective practitioners:

Interviews:

Isla: Her reflections are broader; she is in a different system and culture that is evoking emotional responses . . . because the playing field that she is on is much broader when she comes to reflect, she is either being guided or is reflecting on different things now.

Janet: I would say he is very reflective, how conscious he is; we probably haven’t gone there as much as we could have done.

Claire: He is in a very different place to some of them [other coaches on the program], he is very self-aware, astute and motivated, he uses; in a good way in my opinion, the whole experience of the program. If something doesn’t land for him, he shrugs and says, “I don’t see how I can apply it,” anything that does land for him he really applies so I think that is very grown up demonstrating discernment.

The coach developers worked in terms of these ideas of the normal, making them concrete and substantial to shape and produce coaches as reflective coaches; therefore, coach developers and coach education became a “subtle and persuasive exercise of power” (Cushion, 2016; Gilbert, 2001, p. 200). Through the program, the coaches became enfolded in a discursive matrix of practices that constituted their “learning needs” and helped define their path for self-development. This process was an effect of power because as data have shown, the coaches accepted the legitimacy of reflection, the need for reflection for their development, and were positioned as a particular kind of reflective coach. Importantly, power was not recognized as it was cloaked in what Usher and Edwards (2005) describe as the esoteric of objective knowledge (in the form of the coach developer), and because the coaches had internalized the humanistic discourse of personal empowerment. The apparently liberating and progressive use of reflective practice was a power-knowledge formation intertwining expertise and personal empowerment “displacing the need for active containment and overt oppression” (Usher & Edwards, 2005, p. 401).

Coach Developers: Confession, “Empowerment,” and Reflection

Dividing practices and examination include processes of confession and self-examination, which act to constitute the self through revealing and marking what is “known” (Usher, Bryant, & Johnston, 2001). Through reflective practice as self-examination, the coaches became what Usher et al. (2001) describe as active

accomplices in their own self-formation. Indeed, a key premise of the coach developers and the purpose of reflection on the program was that existing knowledge needed to be made visible. According to Foucault (1998), verbalization has become a central method of knowing through which people make themselves visible to themselves and others. Therefore, through reflection, coaches contributed their knowledge through verbalization—they confessed to others (Cotton, 2001; Fejes, 2011; Foucault, 1991b). Indeed, the program engendered an “obligation to confess” (Cotton, 2001; Foucault, 1991b, p. 60; Rolfe & Gardner, 2006), and coach developers positioned the coaches as being in need of confessing, acting to “guide,” and facilitate the confessional that brought forth the coaches’ personal histories:

Interview:

Poppy: It is about the coach talking about themselves or a situation they have found themselves in and about me asking questions and it is usually questions about both “how’s it been?”, “how’s it felt?”, “what were you thinking”, “what are you thinking now”, “how do you want to move this forward?” Those types of questions.

Field notes

Residential Workshop:

Will is leading a reconnect task, this includes a brief outline detailing what is to come over the next couple of days and relates to objectives and the value of the workshop.

Will: Tomorrow is really around this collaborative learning and bringing you guys together and learning and sharing from each other, we are going to talk about developing some of our inquisitive skills in order to then notice what we hear, what we feel and what we see in different environments in order to then ask good questions of each other about why we do what we do.

Interview:

Tim: Understanding what being a self-regulated learner is and the impact of that on reflection . . . [also] reflection through the guide of [one-to-one coach developer sessions], so trying to work with them to get the coach to be self-reliant—to reflect.

The coach developers, then, through reflection, acted to make knowledge visible and coaches disclosed themselves, sharing their personal histories for interpretation (Foucault, 1998). This meant knowledge could be objectified and made visible for scrutiny and assessment on the program. This process constituted the coaches as “reflective practitioners” (Fejes, 2011, 2013; Gilbert, 2001) and is demonstrated here with data from a residential workshop:

Field notes

Residential Workshop:

Will: I am going to ask you, if you are okay with it, is to just share one thing that you really want to bring to the group. I am going to ask Tim to record them, and then I think we have personal and collective responsibility to make sure that we bring those things. Shall we go around [the group], Stuart if you don’t mind starting us off give us one example of something you really want to bring to the group, Tim will write them down.

Coach—Stuart: One of my many objectives I have discussed with my coach developer is to try different styles of leadership.

Will: That is great for us [coach developers] to know because as observers, or people who are capturing through our own notes, what we are seeing and hearing, we can start to feed that back in about what we notice.

Later Will highlights that the group have started to reconnect:

Will: So, you have started to be very open, you have started to share as a group and share trust, in terms of what you will do with that information keep it within the four walls. But moving into how do we give feedback and have courageous conversations (workshop topics) I would like you to think about, in your head ‘if I could change one thing about the group it would be . . . ?’ and give that feedback to the group. Have a think about what this group doesn’t do well now and give them your feedback on that.

The group are given 30 s to think quietly.

Will: Ok, I am going to select one person to go and then they are going to select another person and they are going to go.

The coaches proceed to talk about their own weaknesses and things the group could do better. For example:

Coach—Richard: I need to give the group more time.

Coach—Daniel: We don’t get feedback from each other enough.

Coach—Ben: We don’t communicate in between residential enough.

Will responded positively: ok brilliant.

These data could be considered a typical discursive pattern from the program where the type of relationship between coach developer and the coaches meant that the process was driven by the developers while the coach directed their confessions, in part, to “real” and more powerful others (Foucault, 1998). Importantly, this type of discussion task was quintessential of the program and reified as coach led and learner centered. However, following Foucault, such practices were contrived situations that meant the possibility of surveillance was again heightened dramatically—“Tim to record them,” “Tim will write them down.” While certainly creating “different discursive possibilities” (Usher & Edwards, 1994, p. 91), these tasks nonetheless served to simply reconfigure the regulation of the coaches who were subject to the “immediate scrutiny and surveillance of their peers” (Usher & Edwards, 1994, p. 91), as well as the coach developers. This activity could be interpreted as performance theatre, a situation in which the coaches’ actions were carefully watched by the coach developers as the “judges of normality” (Foucault, 1977, p. 304). Coach developers, in this example Will, monitored the extent to which the coaches were participating and contributing in a suitable manner, intervening to select coaches “to go,” thus suggesting an unexpressed norm of what constituted a good discussion.

Interestingly, at the beginning of the discussion/sharing session, Will asks the coaches “if you are ok with it.” This seems a perfunctory attempt to gain consent, as there was the unspoken knowledge that a lack of participation or a poorly articulated coach contribution would be judged. In this case, the coach, Fran,

is quick to correct herself during a reflective discussion about a task:

Field notes

Residential Workshop:

External Expert: What are your reflections from yesterday, what have you learned or taken away from last night’s session? . . . Fran what about you? Have you taken anything away?

Coach—Fran: No

Laughter

Coach—Fran: Sorry I didn’t mean for that to sound . . . the task got me thinking about communication.

Coaches’ resistance or refusal to take part in such prescribed reflective strategies would be seen as unacceptable and “unprofessional,” and the coach considered as the “wrong kind of learner” or not being engaged, as these examples suggest:

Interviews:

Tim: The scenario (at the residential workshop) with George (coach); he was getting cheesed off with that guy—he saw it as “I’m right he’s wrong, I’d bin him off if I was working with him.” Not, “why is he acting like this?” “what am I doing to impact on that, what can I do to get the most out of him?” He was just like; “he’s gone.” Now for me that is just showing a lack of willingness, or emotions not letting him, to reflect on why that is.

Tim: Richard (Coach) didn’t engage whatsoever in the discussion and we didn’t challenge him and say: “you weren’t comfortable were you, and that’s why you [disengaged], you weren’t happy were you?”

Alan: Most people at this level are continual learners and you have to reflect to continue learning.

Importantly, reflection and reflection practices, as already suggested, were intimately entwined with humanistic discourses of empowerment that emphasized the need for the coaches to talk and know the truth about themselves. The premise being that the more the coaches developed an “authentic understanding of self,” the more “power” they would accrue and be able to learn according to their own perceived needs. At face value, such learner centeredness can be empowering, creating what Foucault (1998) calls “active” knowing subjects. Indeed, coach developers asked questions about what had happened, how the coach was feeling, their thoughts and beliefs during and after the coaching experience, and their ideas for future action. Such questions demonstrate the latency principle of confession (Mills & Denison, 2018), as they promoted “looking into yourself” and “finding your true self” to enable the emergence of self-knowledge (Usher & Edwards, 1994). For example:

Interviews:

Isla: “I am wondering why, I am wondering what went on for you there, I am interested in what you’re feeling now as you talk to me about this, what is going on for you now.”

Rebecca: Why is possibly a bit critical, the “why” is the most critical of all beginnings of questions.

Interviewer: So, how would you?

Rebecca: So, “I notice . . .” and “I wonder . . .” “what that’s about . . .” If you think, kids ask the most “why” questions . . . “why” is a penetrating, quite a provocative question . . . Well you usually ask a “why” question because in your world you don’t get that—you know morally, educationally, spiritually, whatever it is, “why did you do it that way?” You’re really curious because it is not the way you would have done it.

At the same time, however, issues of power were not recognized by coach developers or coaches because reflection was viewed as a neutral process that could enable effective action while remaining disconnected from power (cf. Usher & Edwards, 1994). Indeed, the coach developers were at pains to distance themselves from these issues and viewed the process as entirely neutral, for example:

Interviews:

Isla: . . . reflect on what is going on for you . . . you’re not giving them your solution you are just reflecting on it for yourself . . . So that then takes away judgment, so “this is what is happening for me when I am listening to your problem.”

Rebecca: If I apply a lens to myself around being better it would be an inquiry lens, full stop no judgment . . . If I speak to people about self-inquiry [instead of critical inquiry] they are much more open to what might happen next . . . because who is the judge of right and wrong really?

However, reflection on the program functioned as regulation through self-regulation and was disciplining through self-discipline, a process that may have felt and seemed empowering to the participants, but was within a regime where power was never absent. The “self-reflective coach” does not overcome power relations; instead the individual governs themselves within relations of power (Nicoll & Fejes, 2008). For as Denison et al. (2015) describe, Foucault (1977) argues that in regimes [programs] where individuals [coaches] believe they need to be “empowered” by another [coach developer] to learn and know more about themselves they are actually becoming “disempowered” in the very process of “self-empowerment.” That is, “as individual subjects, there is no transcendental position from which we can become ‘empowered’; there are only particular discursive positions within power/knowledge formations that we can occupy” (Denison et al., 2015, p. 7; Usher & Edwards, 1994). Therefore, empowering intent became submerged in the authority and authoritative actions of the coach developer as confessor acting to bring out more and more dimensions of the coaches, expanding the space for intervention and “development,” but also space for the exercise of power. Thus, making the coaches increasingly visible to normalizing judgments about the processes of reflection, as well as the quality of the knowledge generated, and reinforcing surveillance and coach self-surveillance. In response, coaches had little choice other than to “correct” their thoughts or behaviors in line with the developers’ therapy (Mills & Denison, 2018), as Fran demonstrated earlier “sorry I didn’t mean for that to sound . . . the task got me thinking about communication.” Microtechniques related to reflection were used, such as debriefing sessions, journal writing, and shared reflective narratives with the group where coaches had to write and talk about their activity. Despite the coach developers’ intentions, this was not a liberating, critical process, but acted to produce outcomes that constrained the coaches in what might be considered valid knowledge. In this example, coach developers explained that

“the content will be driven by you [coaches] as a cohort,” but then guided coaches to coach developer and program topics, such as managing meetings:

Field notes

Residential Workshop:

Coaches picture stories reflection task

Coaches talk through “where they are now.”

Discussion/Questions following Fran’s presentation:

Coach—Daniel: Where do you get your energy from?

Coach—Fran: Championships I like that bit, I am “do-er,” I am not keen on the meetings . . . I was coaching and leading all at once I learned that doesn’t work and it is hard to not to “tell” [people what to do]. I am highly skeptical, and I don’t trust easy, so it’s a bit of a dilemma for me because I have to give responsibility. I didn’t realize but apparently, I am [skeptical], so now I know how, I know my role, so I had a problem.

Will: So, you are brilliant at championships and that is where you get your energy, if you can run brilliant meetings, something [External Expert] talked about, what are you thinking about that?

In addition, these microtechniques were a further mechanism that allowed coaches’ thinking to become visible to others, and once in the public sphere could be subjected to interpretation and judgment (Cotton, 2001). Importantly, surveillance requires a degree of visibility to be maintained (Gilbert, 2001); individuals must be aware and committed to act upon its effects, as was the case on the program:

Interviews:

Coach—Ben: I think that we need a way where when you reflect there is some stuff that you could share rather than be it like “that’s mine I don’t want to share it with people.”

Coach—Daniel: I find reflecting in a group quite good . . . actually talking that [coaching issues] through as a group is probably the most powerful . . . I mean a lot of it is about self and developing you, but I get so much from the other coaches. The knowledge of how people do various things in their sport I find really really useful.

Coach—Harry: The more you work with someone like a coach developer, who asks you the right questions . . . you naturally start to ask the right questions yourself . . . in the last 12 months . . . the questions I think to myself about are at a higher level.

Through inciting the self to act upon the self through reflective practice, the individual coaches became self-managing. This ensured that between contact with the developers and program residentials, the individual coach could confront their “weaknesses” and act upon them. Coaches were thus guided to recognize the “limitations” of their practice, and through reflection a modification of behavior was expected (Cassidy et al., 2009; Fejes, 2011; Gilbert & Côté, 2013). Indeed, behavior change was the desire of all involved and the objectives and purpose of the coach education program:

Field notes

Residential Workshop:

Will: What we are ultimately trying to get to here is behavior change for you and your athletes or players.

Interview:

Will: We need to continue to focus on how they [coaches] have made sense of what they have just heard and bring that to life in their own environment so that they have reference points and something tangible where “I can see how I am going to apply this in my environment and this is worthwhile and therefore I am going to actively try and change me or an athlete’s behavior in order to get a different outcome.”

Therefore, through reflection, coach subjectivity was not determined but became elicited, fostered, and shaped (Fejes, 2008, 2013; Foucault, 2007) in a situation of “freedom” (Fejes, 2013), where the individual coach made choices based on reflection (i.e., governed the self).

Implications—Developing “Counter-Practice”

Foucault (1991a) argued that analysis should not generate advice, guidelines, or instruction as to what is to be done, seeking instead to unsettle what is taken for granted, rather than produce recipes for action. Therefore, rather than lead to suggestions for improvement in policy and practice or offer solutions to problems, our idea here was to make visible to coach education “policy makers” and coach developers, and coaches “on the ground,” a different, destabilized and problematized version of reflection. In this case, the purpose was to destabilize things about reflection that are currently and ordinarily taken for granted and to introduce awkwardness into the fabric of our experiences of reflection by making coach developer and coach narratives “stutter” (Nicoll & Fejes, 2008 [p. 5]; Rose, 1999).

This approach is in direct contrast to a significant body of research that presents and perpetuates particular discourses of reflection that currently fail to recognize relations of power—power that is not acknowledged in everyday policy making and practices of coach developers, coach education, or research into it. These discourses (as data in this case suggest) position reflection as an individual, asocial, ahistorical process within a “dominant psychologism and . . . humanistic discourse” (Cushion, 2016, p. 2). Such discourses have become reified and confirmed through repeated social practices; embedded in coaching to assume what Foucault (1980) calls a status of truth (e.g., Cushion, 2016; Huntley, Cropley, Gilbourne, Sparkes, & Knowles, 2014; Knowles et al., 2001; Taylor et al., 2015). The outcome of which has meant that reflection in coaching has retained a “seductive appeal” that has often deflected critical thought (Fendler, 2003, p. 22).

Although the developers and coaches positioned reflection as free from power, Foucault helps “read” reflection alternatively as a mechanism of power where individuals (shaping subjectivity) are governed and govern themselves within relations of power. Thus, the research enables us to see how generalized narrations of reflection as power “neutral” and “empowering” can be misguided. Moreover, the research shows that attempts by coach developers, through the coach education program, to be “critical” and “learner centered” are embroiled with intrinsic relations of power, and the

stated intention of being “neutral” and “empowering” may in fact exacerbate rather than ameliorate the workings of power (cf. Nicoll & Fejes, 2008). An implication, therefore, lies in not accepting passively “what we do,” but as Foucault (1980) suggests, emancipating local discursivities and subjugated knowledge to “render them . . . capable of opposition and of struggle against hegemonic discourses” (p. 85). In other words, to consider critically the discursive complexities of reflection and reflective practice and go some way to challenge notions of reflection portrayed repeatedly in coaching as an unbiased and objective process that occurs in a politically neutral environment (Cushion, 2016).

By focusing on the how and what of power, we have been able to take a critical attitude toward, and to question present understandings of, coach developer practice and reflection by making visible how power operates. Revealing, what Johns (1999) describes as, a shadowy world of surveillance where reflection practices extract and objectify confession and subject coaches to the powerful gaze of others, thus ensuring coach conformity to a received ideal image of coaching and practice, as well as of reflection itself. Importantly, and as Foucault reminds us, such “critique doesn’t have to be the premise of deduction which concludes: this then is what needs to be done. It should be an instrument for those who fight, those who resist and refuse what is” (1991a, p. 84). In other words, this research contributes to a “practical critique” in the form of transgression (Foucault, 1991c, p. 45), or what Biesta (1998, 2008) has called counter-practice. Thinking in terms of counter-practice helps resist the temptation to “fix” policy or practice. Instead, the critical work of counter-practice consists of showing that the “way things are” is only one (limited) possibility (Biesta, 2008). This tiny, but significant, step is crucial as it opens up the possibility for coaches and coach developers “of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think” (Foucault, 1991c, p. 46).

Counter-practice helps show that coach developers *can* play a crucial role in helping reflection fulfill its developmental and empowering potential. Acting as a “guide,” developers can help coaches to ask deep questions about self, relating the self-to-the-self and rooting out taken for granted or “natural” conflict and contradiction (Johns, 1999). This could enable coaches to see the constraints on achieving desirable practice within particular situations (Denison et al., 2015). Such an approach acts in opposition to a process of surveillance that currently considers self in comparison with a normalized other and where contradictions and conflict are rationalized against a norm. Therefore, counter-practice shows that the differences between such practices can be identified and empower coach developers. However, this does not position coach developers “outside” power, or indeed offer a “better” way. Rather, it supports them to see the culture and power relations they are in and prepares them to work within them. This provides opportunities for different ways of doing and being and can provide support for coach developers and coaches resisting or refusing particular subjectivities or subject positions (and also adopting particular subjectivities or subject positions). This requires judgment and as Fendler (2003) argues to maintain a “skeptical and critical attitude about what we do” and examine the role of reflection to avoid it becoming a “normalizing technology that reproduces assumptions” (p. 23). Therefore, whether coaches and coach educators accept particular subjectivities or subject positions is, at the end of the day, up to them. This research, therefore, encourages coach developers to not only consider what they do to construct reflection’s meaning and support reflective practice and why, but also what this meaning and what their practice *does* to coaches and relations of power

(Foucault, 1965). Coach developers cannot be an “enlightened guide” (Rolfe & Gardner, 2006, p. 595) if they themselves are not enlightened and this research helps make visible that there is at least some choice.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to consider critically the discursive complexities of reflection and reflective practice in high-performance coach developers’ support. Foucauldian analysis problematized the seemingly unproblematic, shining a light on power relations omnipresent in reflective practice support. Similarly to Mills and Denison (2013, 2018), the research did not intend to be critical of the methods coach developers employed, but rather the operations of power that formed methods representing reflection. Indeed, analysis highlighted the unintended consequences of the coach developers’ well-intended actions. Practically, the coach developers supported reflection and reflective practice through questioning, observing, and providing feedback, but this also fostered in the coaches an “obligation to confess.” Reflective practice was underpinned by a humanistic discourse, that dominated both the one-to-one sessions and coach education workshops. Together this approach to reflection was viewed unproblematically as “good” for coaches.

However, coach developers as reflective or “critical friends” served to reinforce practitioners’ self-surveillance and arguably contributed to the construction of docile and competent workers (Foucault, 1977). Importantly, this was the opposite of the coach developers’ and program’s intentions that focused on supporting critical thinking, innovation, and creativity. Instead, reflection in this form constructed coaches, unintentionally, as people who disclosed and affirmed their identity in terms of categories reflective of existing assumptions about coach education for high-performance coaching and coaches, such as “highly practical,” “learning from other coaches,” and “self-regulated learners.” This could authenticate and promote certain ways of thinking about and being a coach, while potentially dismissing others and possibilities for thinking outside existing categories, as coaches are silenced by the dominant discourse (Cushion, 2016; Cushion & Partington, 2016; Fendler, 2003).

Importantly, this exercise of power became subtle and persuasive through humanistic discourses of the developers that fostered notions of “empowerment.” Therefore, power had not been removed, but reconfigured, and resulted in a growing tension between the coach developer’s role to support, but also to judge. These findings suggested that coach developers cannot be detached from power as all negotiations, including those connected to reflection, are always within systems of domination (Foucault, 1982). It is, therefore, dangerous for power to be overlooked.

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