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Reflection and reflective practice discourses in coaching: a critical analysis

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ABSTRACT

Reflection and reflective practice is seen as an established part of coaching and coach education practice. It has become a 'taken-for-granted' part of coaching that is accepted enthusiastically and unquestioningly, and is assumed to be 'good' for coaching and coaches. Drawing on sociological concepts, a primarily Foucauldian lens, the purpose of this paper is to provide a critical analysis of reflection and to unpack some of the assumptions underlying it and problematize the seemingly unproblematic. This paper challenges the current dominant cognitive assumptions about reflection (and coaching) as an individual, asocial, ahistorical process and explores through concepts such as power/knowledge, discourse and the self, the extent that reflection is discursive and constructs coaches' subjectivities. The analysis considers unintended consequences of reflection as a form of surveillance that normalizes coaches' practices through the act of confession. The paper thus challenges the prevailing descriptions that stress the epistemological, and claim 'neutral', discursive-blind and non-political perspectives.

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Introduction

Reflection is ensconced firmly in the vocabulary of learning and professional development in sport (Huntley, Cropley, Gilbourne, Sparkes, & Knowles, 2014) and in particular in coaching and coach education (e.g. Cassidy, Jones, & Potrac, 2009; Gilbert & Trudel, 2001; Nelson & Cushion, 2006; Trudel & Gilbert, 2006, *inter alia*). Being a 'reflective' coach is seen as an essential part of coach learning (e.g. Cassidy et al., 2009; Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2003; Gallimore, Gilbert, & Nater, 2014; Gilbert & Trudel, 2001, 2006), considered a distinguishing feature of coaching effectiveness (e.g. Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Gilbert & Côté, 2013) and coach expertise (e.g. Cassidy et al., 2009; Irwin, Hanton, & Kerwin, 2004; Knowles, Borrie, & Telfer, 2005; Nash & Sproule, 2011; Schempp & McCullick, 2010). The literature on coaching and the reflective practitioner reveals the way in which the concept of reflection has taken centre stage. Reflection and reflective practice are extolled as being positive for practitioners and practice to enhance professional development (e.g. Culver & Trudel, 2006; Cushion et al., 2003), link theory and practice (e.g. Douglas & Carless, 2008; Irwin et al., 2004), promote critical thinking (e.g. Knowles, Gilbourne, Borrie, & Nevill, 2001; Knowles, Tyler, Gilbourne, & Eubank, 2006; Taylor, Werthner, Culver, & Callary, 2015) lead to 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; Gilbert & Trudel, 2001; Irwin et al., 2004). Few would question that coaches should practice without questioning their values, beliefs and ideas, and engage with a process to develop their knowledge and make sense of their experiences. However, despite the

plethora of written works related to reflection, particularly those privileging reflective practice in coaching, few interrogate these notions critically, instead reflection and reflective practice has been presented uncritically and enthusiastically accepted as 'good' for coaching and coaches.

In coach education the term 'reflection' has, arguably, become so overused that it has lost meaning, instead becoming a slogan disguising a range of practices—with differing understandings and the application of different approaches there is no unitary view of reflection meaning that practitioners will practice reflection in radically different ways, if at all (e.g. Cropley et al., 2012; Knowles et al., 2006). Reflection, therefore, is a contested concept whose meaning shifts to accommodate the interpretation and interests of those using the terms and is thus an example of 'common rhetoric' (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1991, p. 1). Rather than explore this, the existing research has tended to examine applying 'reflection' to particular practices (e.g. Gilbert & Trudel, 2001; Knowles et al., 2001, 2006; Taylor et al., 2015; Trudel, Culver, & Werthner, 2013) with limited attention paid to problems with its meaning (Cropley et al., 2012)—or actual impact on practice (Cushion et al., 2010). As a result, reflection and reflective practice are 'taken-for-granted' in coaching. There seems limited critical analysis of its theoretical foundations, its history or ideology, nor the underlying assumptions that guide it. Reflection, therefore, 'has not been interrogated with the rigor that practitioners in higher education would normally apply to their own disciplines' theoretical frameworks' (Bleakley, 1999, p. 135).

Foucault (1972) defines discourse as rule-governed, socio-historically situated language 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (p. 49) and that 'position subjectivities' (p. 182). Power produces discourses and knowledges—the couplet power-knowledge indicates that 'power produces knowledge' and that 'power and knowledge directly imply one another' (Foucault, 1972, p. 27). Therefore, power in coaching is exercised through coaching practice and the complex web of discourses and social practices that characterize it. These include discourses and practices of reflection—the discourse of reflection has formed discursive objects (e.g. reflective thought, reflective practice) and constituted subjectivities (e.g. the reflective coach) (Cotton, 2001). These discourses have largely been adopted uncritically into coaching and coach education and have become a 'subtle and persuasive exercise of power' (Gilbert, 2001, p. 200) enabling it to become a 'hegemonic, natural, indisputable discourse' that operates beyond question, specifying not only what to think but also how to think (Cotton, 2001, p. 514). A consequence of this hegemony is that debate about reflection and reflective practice is limited or sterile. Indeed, the literature in sport and coaching focuses on the instrumental of reflective practice and its development or expositions of a preferred theoretical approach (e.g. Cushion, 2006; Gilbert & Trudel, 2006; Trudel et al., 2013).

More sociological approaches show coaching as an institution that has a dynamic, complex and diffused network of power relations (e.g. Cushion & Jones, 2006; Denison & Avner, 2011; Jones & Corsby, 2015; Potrac & Jones, 2009). Wherein the discourse of reflection is embedded and related to other coaching discourses (e.g. coach education, coaching philosophy and coaching practice) driving coaching practice (Cushion & Jones, 2014). This contrasts to depictions in the more psychologically focused literature that ignores what Foucault (1980) describes as local discursivities and subjugated knowledge, and the reality of a domain of discursive practices. Instead, coaching is seen as neutral and benign where coaches are 'empowered' or made 'autonomous' (Cushion & Jones, 2014; Denison, Mills & Konoval, 2015). As a result, no research considers reflection and reflective practice critically as, for example, practices of subjectivity formation or as a disciplinary practice. Indeed, Denison, Mills, and Jones (2013) express surprise that critical analysis of reflective practice and reflection has not been undertaken given the taken-for-granted nature of coaching as a disciplinary practice. Hence there is a need for coaches to understand their own situation and give true ownership and utility to reflection, while contributing to the growing body of work that explores the discursive constitution of coaching and coaches (e.g. Denison et al., 2013, 2015; Denison & Avner, 2011).

The dominant psychologism and individualism of humanistic discourse running through the coaching and reflection literature (Cushion & Partington, 2014) has a number of taken-for-granted

assumptions that underpin ways of knowing and being in coaching. In the first instance, reflection is positioned chiefly in terms of epistemology in changes in knowing. Learning is assumed as the 'acquisition', 'construction' or re-organization of knowledge structures (e.g. Gilbert & Côté, 2013; Knowles et al., 2001; Taylor et al., 2015; Trudel et al., 2013; *inter alia*) and assumes that knowledge is neutral and foundational rather than socially and culturally constructed and thus non-foundational; experience is seen as unproblematic, a given and the source of authentic knowledge; and that there is a true self which exists independently of the social realm (Cushion & Partington, 2014). Despite espoused notions of 'constructivism' (e.g. Cushion, 2006; Taylor et al., 2015; Trudel et al., 2013) and acknowledgement of contextual forces, reflection is presented within assumptions bounded by positivistic epistemology with sequential steps, rational justification and measurable and observable outcomes—as if reflection has not been shaped by those same forces (Fendler, 2003) but is a 'logical chain of propositions that can be developed into a system of knowledge' (Jones, Edwards, & Filho, 2014, p. 3). The growing corpus of writing in coaching concerning 'reflection' fails to take any critical standpoint towards these assumptions, nor does it question or problematize the notion of reflection, instead providing legitimacy to the concept and defending the grounds for developing and articulating it (e.g. Cassidy et al., 2009; Cropley, Hanton, Miles, & Niven, 2010; Huntley et al., 2014; Nelson & Cushion, 2006; Taylor et al., 2015; *inter alia*).

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to foreground, and challenge, some of these issues not to offer clarity on the meaning of reflection per se but to consider critically the discursive complexities of reflection and reflective practice (cf. Fendler, 2003). A key dimension of this paper is to examine reflection through a Foucauldian lens. Foucault has been deployed usefully in other critical approaches to the coaching literature (e.g. Denison, 2010; Denison et al., 2013, 2015; Taylor & Garratt, 2010) but has not been applied directly to reflection in coaching. Hence an aim is to illuminate an aspect of coaching that has not been made apparent from other critical perspectives (e.g. Cushion & Jones, 2014; Potrac & Jones, 2009; Purdy & Potrac, 2014). Reflection to date has been portrayed in coaching as a natural, unbiased and objective process that occurs in a politically neutral environment. This paper seeks to uncover the discursive complexities of the concept thus undermining the naturalization of the term reflection, and calling attention to the power relations constituting what reflection means. As such, a further aim is to question and challenge reflection as an entirely positive endeavour and an 'academic virtue and a source of privileged knowledge' (Lynch, 2000, p. 26). A chief consideration is the extent to which reflection can actually serve to reinforce rather than challenge existing beliefs and assumptions. This paper unpacks some of the assumptions underlying reflection and problematizes the seemingly unproblematic. Building on the work of, for example, Denison et al. (2015) and Denison and Avner (2011), the significance of such analysis lies in not accepting passively 'what we do', but as Foucault (1980) suggests, emancipating local discursivities and subjugated knowledges to 'render them ... capable of opposition and of struggle against hegemonic discourses' (p. 85). Indeed, the use of Foucault problematizes reflection in a productive way 'to explain social order in such a way that it becomes itself the catalyst which leads to the transformation of the social order' (Fay, 1987, p. 27).

Conceptualizations of reflection

The scrutiny of coaching environments can aid in framing ideas of 'critical pedagogies' (Giroux, 1989; Williams & Manley, 2014). Understanding how coaches become entangled in dominant pedagogical ideologies and discourse requires critical scrutiny. For reflection this means examining how dominant narratives remain prominent in coaching vocabularies when interpretations are often vague and misunderstood. Importantly, research into reflection in coaching has avoided purposeful analysis of the concept. Hence, the first step is to attempt to offer a critical exposition of different meanings and interpretations of reflection and show how mixed messages and confusing agendas can begin to contribute to reflection becoming a tool for control and discursive domination. Indeed, part of the success of reflective practice establishing a hegemonic status has been, paradoxically, the fact that

the concept has remained confused, muddled and ill-defined: 'reflection can mean all things to all people' (Cotton, 2001, p. 513).

Many terms are employed to represent the practice (e.g. reflection, reflective practice, reflective practitioner and critical reflection), but their meaning differs depending on the underlying assumptions and the context that they are used, with much variance in the definition of any single term (Hébert, 2015). Terms are widely used, but often with an absence of understanding (Cropley et al., 2010, 2012) and the outcome is described by Fendler (2003) as 'the confusing mass of meanings, the "treacle" that we encounter in the use of the term reflection' (p. 17). This absence of clarity is problematic. Coaches are frequently asked to 'reflect' on their experiences without an articulated definition or rationale for reflection (Cropley et al., 2012; Cropley & Hanton, 2011) or have been engaging in reflection without a clear explanation of a model's theoretical underpinnings (Knowles et al., 2006). As Hébert (2015) argues, used uncritically and without an in-depth understanding of its complex meaning and history, reflection becomes a sort of 'conceptual and methodological portmanteau' (Morrison, 1996, in Moon, 1999, p. 3) that 'hides a variety of different ideas on the nature of reflection and its implications' (Bengtsson, 2003, p. 295).

Specifically, the term reflection can be considered in different ways. Dewey (1933) offers a rational-technicist model of reflection that emphasizes a conscious search for solutions to problems (Calderhead, 1989; Hébert, 2015). While Schön (1983) described this technical-rationality as instrumental problem solving made rigorous by scientific theory and technique where all propositions can be assessed through empirical observation or rigid rational analysis. This, Schön (1983) argues, is a 'positivistic epistemology of practice' (p. 21) and proposed an *alternative* epistemology of practice that is 'intuitive, personal, non-rational activity' (Akbari, 2007, p. 196), an experiential-intuitive model where knowledge is tacit, in action, and does not derive from rational thought or 'prior intellectual operation' (Schön, 1983, p. 51). Schön (see Gilbert and Trudel in coaching) concentrates on 'reflection in action' an interactive and interpretive skill in the analysis and solution of complex and ambiguous problems. Importantly, Schön's work attempts to problematize Dewey's rationalist-technicist approach, conceiving both knowledge and reflection differently, with discourse on intuitive reflection contradicting Dewey's association of reflection with the scientific method (Fendler, 2003; Hébert, 2015). Moreover, Schön advocates practice-based knowledge and rejects scientific or intellectual knowledge that is too theoretical or disengaged from messy problems in the 'swampy lowlands of practice'. Yet these distinctions are seldom recognized or explained in the literature. Indeed, Schön and Dewey are frequently both cited as part of the same argument often without making the differences clear (e.g. Burt & Morgan, 2014; Cassidy et al., 2009; Cushion, 2006; Taylor et al., 2015) despite significant points of departure between Dewey's scientific reflection and Schön's artistic reflection. This confounds the meaning of reflection particularly when, Fendler (2003) argues, reflective practice strives to be based on *both* scientific expertise and in intuitive uncertainty (e.g. Gilbert & Trudel, 2001; Irwin et al., 2004).

Schön's meaning of reflection as practitioner-based intuition versus Dewey's notion of rational scientific thinking should mean, on a practical level, different approaches to reflection treating the process, preconditions, and product of reflection differently (Fendler, 2003; Hébert, 2015). Reflection will actually have different meaning depending on epistemological beliefs about coaching and coach education into which a particular conception of reflection, and its presuppositions, has been incorporated (Calderhead, 1989). However, these critical considerations are beyond current literature relating to reflection in coaching (e.g. Cropley et al., 2012; Knowles et al., 2005; Nelson & Cushion, 2006) (or sport more broadly, e.g. Huntley et al., 2014). This limited thinking creates a significant gap that results in interpretations being a mix of ideological, academic and professional language. Therefore, reflection is not a benign concept or practice as no conceptions are politically neutral and will act to construct different truths, objects and subjectivities according to their regimes of truth and power (Cotton, 2001; Mackenzie, 2015). So while coaches recognize reflection and can be 'reflective practitioners', such recognition and practice are always socio-culturally, historically and politically situated.

Reflection discourse—object and subject

The language and discourse currently used to discuss, research and write about reflection is ‘cognitive’ in derivation and has an epistemic construction in the epistemological and ontological tradition of Cartesian rationality followed since the seventeenth century (Fendler, 2003; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). Indeed, Kant (1787) considered the individual as *cogito* a subject in an objective world; learners oscillate between objectivity and subjectivity that assumes reflexivity—the ability to see oneself as object—as a defining characteristic where self-awareness can generate valid knowledge (Fendler, 2003). Thus, in a Cartesian scheme of self-awareness, the self plays simultaneously the role of subject—who-reflects and the object that is reflected upon (Cushion & Partington, 2014; Fendler, 2003; Nadler, 1989) and, in-turn, is able to connect the subjective and objective worlds using universal and objective modes of ‘higher order thinking, processes or cognition’, that is, reflection. As Brufee (1986) argues, cognitive assumptions explain a process of reflection that is a reification of our unconfirmed and unconfirmable references to what happens in the ‘black box’ of our mind—reflection as a ‘cognitive process’, critical reflection as ‘higher order reasoning’—that are presented as universal, objectifiable and measurable (e.g. Gilbert & Côté, 2013; Gilbert & Trudel, 2001; Huntley et al., 2014; Knowles et al., 2001, 2005; Trudel et al., 2013). The coherence of this argument is rarely challenged, receives little critical scrutiny and, in coaching is sidestepped or assiduously ignored.

These discourses are produced by domains of power/knowledge and are not value free but prejudiced and socially constructed (Darbyshire & Fleming, 2008; Mackey, 2007). Discipline and knowledge creates coaches (Denson et al., 2015; Denison & Avner, 2011)—coaching discourses are internalized and the socialization process influences self-regulation and monitoring by turning the coaches’ professional gaze inwards through reflection (Cushion et al., 2003; Mackey, 2007). Coaching discourses regulate and discipline coaches by upholding what can be claimed as expert knowledge (Cassidy et al., 2009; Gilbert & Côté, 2013), and this as Mackey (2007) suggests, can be seen as a form of surveillance that, for coaches, produces normative coercion and constrains their ability to form their own way of working. Hence, reflection discourse ensures that coaching practices and learning to coach become grounded in ‘theory’ (e.g. Cushion, 2006; Gilbert & Trudel, 2001; Knowles et al., 2001; Trudel et al., 2013) and these links to theory ‘sanction’ the practice as ‘reflective’ and therefore legitimate. While Schön argues to dissolve the theory practice binary, the cognitive assumptions and disciplinary nature of reflection in coaching implicitly confirms these categories, and in turn contributes to what Fish (1980) calls ‘theory hope’ (p. 112)—the belief that whatever a theory sanctions us to do is correct, whatever we learn under its aegis is true, and whatever results we get using its methods are valid (Brufee, 1986).

Moreover, reflection discourses have at their core the assumption that coaching practice is an entirely conscious activity and available for reflective scrutiny (Cushion & Partington, 2014). Only a small part of human experience is retained in consciousness—experiences become sedimented (Berger & Luckmann, 1966)—coaching practices originally learned as part of a conscious process, become remembered as a habitual response forgotten in any conscious sense (cf. Cushion & Jones, 2014; Cushion & Partington, 2014). Therefore, coaches have learned and acquired a set of practical cultural competencies; dispositions that operate ‘below the level of consciousness and language, beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny and control by the will’ (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 466). Coaching practice, therefore, is not *wholly* consciously organized or orchestrated, there is ‘mastery acquired by experience of the game, and one which works outside conscious control’ (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 13). As a result, it would be a mistake to see coaching practice as entirely conscious. Indeed, Schön argued that knowledge in action (i.e. practice) cannot be articulated, is intuitive and implicit, existing in a tacit realm (Bleakley, 1999; Hébert, 2015). Yet, the coaching and reflection literature is unanimous in agreeing that coaches possess the capacity to identify, understand and articulate the determinants of their practice in its entirety; that they possess the capacity to function as entirely conscious and reflective beings. That is, that tacit or forgotten knowledge can be brought to the surface through reflection and the results of such reflection *is* knowledge rather than the conversation about internalized conversation—talk about talk (Brufee, 1986).

When reflection is understood as a turning back upon the self, the danger is that it will reveal no more than what is already known, thereby reasserting the existing state of affairs (Cushion et al., 2010; Fendler, 2003). In this sense, reflection can entail circular ways of thinking—and like reflective processes—ways of thinking and categories of understanding have already been moulded and disciplined by the social practices and relations the reflective process is supposed to critique (Fendler, 2003; Foucault, 1996). Thus, reflective practice may be exercises in justifying or rationalizing preconceived ideas, ‘rationalization may masquerade as reflection’ (Fendler, 2003; Loughran, 2002, p. 35) and in particular reproducing coaching ideology and rhetoric. Moreover, as practice is rooted in both past and present positions and experience, as well as being located in social structure external to them, the outcome of coaches’ reflection is more likely simplified statements of interpretation rather than the actual cause of their thoughts and actions (Cushion & Partington, 2014). As Brookfield (1995) argues,

to some extent, we are all prisoners trapped within the perceptual frameworks that determine how we view our experiences. A self-confirming cycle develops where our uncritically accepted assumptions shape the actions that serve to confirm the truth of those assumptions. (p. 28)

Reflection may offer possibilities for critical and meaningful thinking about underlying beliefs (Fendler, 2003), but there is a lack of reflexivity on the part of coaching practitioners and researchers to distinguish reflective practices that are transformative from those complicit with existing power hierarchies—existing research unquestioningly accepts coaches’ rhetoric and ideology (e.g. Gallimore et al., 2014; Irwin et al., 2004; Knowles et al., 2001). Indeed, Dewey’s (1933) critique resonates with this issue:

Beliefs that perhaps originally were the products of fairly extensive and careful observations are stereotyped into fixed traditions and semi-scared dogmas, accepted simply upon authority, and are mixed with fantastic conceptions that happen to have won the acceptance of authorities. (p. 194)

In reality, Mackenzie (2015) and Lloyd’s (2013) research with professional coaches discovered reflection not concerned with empowerment or the development of individuals but constituted as a ‘technology of the self’ (Foucault, 1995) with complex forms of normalization and coaching discourse inculcating and reproducing hegemonic ideologies. As Denison et al. (2015) argue, coaches become tied to specific ways of being and thinking, so ‘even when many coaches believe they are thinking “outside” the box, so totalizing is coaching’s dominant discursive formation that they fail to recognize how they are actually still thinking within that box’ (p. 9). Consequently, truly innovative, creative or progressive thinking is denigrated, dismissed and silenced and there is almost no space for coaches to generate alternative views, knowledge or practices leaving coaching’s dominant discursive formation untouched (Denison et al., 2015). Hence, as Foucault (1983) suggested, it is *only* upon actively and consciously engaging in an ongoing critical examination of the mechanisms and processes by which taken-for-granted assumptions and practices—in this case reflection—have come to be held and sedimented as truths, that individuals can subsequently design both innovative and effective interventions and become a positive force for change (Denison & Avner, 2011). Importantly, it is not, as Foucault warned, to install some ‘new’ knowledge as dominant because this leads back to the same situation as whenever a knowledge comes to be seen as ‘true’ or objective it can take on a level of unquestioned superiority, or naturalness, that constrains through locking in a particular pattern of thinking and being (Denison & Avner, 2011; O’Leary, 2002). The call here is for the development of a critical attitude both by coaches and researchers specifically to reflection as socially produced, developing a relentless commitment to the questioning of received knowledges and processes and of their potential problematic effects (Denison & Avner, 2011).

Reflection, governmentality and the self

Useful for analysing reflection is Foucault’s (1991) ‘power as governmentality’, in particular, that historically, power relations construct what it is possible to think and is ‘the governmentality of the self

by oneself in its articulations with relations with others' (Foucault, 1997a, p. 88), an 'encounter between the technologies of domination and those of the self' (Foucault, 1997b, p. 225). Governmentality casts reflection as a technology of self-discipline and self-governance, and these technologies problematize reflection because it is impossible to guarantee an unsocialized view (Foucault, 1980a; Fendler, 2003). Indeed, as Cushion and Partington (2014) suggest before a coach engages in reflection their subjective experience and knowledge has already been shaped by historical and cultural circumstances and ideology, and subjective perceptions and reflections are overlooked or not considered as effects of historical contexts (Fendler, 1999). However, reflection assumes coaches can develop unique meanings related to their experiences placing them outside of the discourses through which practitioners are produced (Gilbert, 2001). In addition, running through all of the coaching literature related to reflection is the belief in the unitary autonomous individual, that the individual self is the matrix of all thought with self-awareness (cf. Trudel et al., 2013) and that this reflexive self has agency, has the ability to make rational choices and assumes responsibility for decisions and actions (cf. Cushion & Partington, 2014).

This presupposition limits the analysis of self-formation to a process by which human subjects, as a matter of course, come to bestow meaning on or to represent their experience. It thus forecloses the analysis of the multiplicity of the practical, technical and discursive means by which self-formation occurs and the possibility that the meaning-giving subject of its own experience itself is a particular social and cultural category and dependent upon definite social and intellectual conditions. (Dean, 1999, p. 151)

This construction is problematic ignoring the social beyond the interactional (Jones et al., 2014) and not recognizing the effects of socialization, power, history and culture on subjectivity, nor the ways it is possible to be aware of ourselves as subject and object (Fendler, 2003)—while at the same time over-emphasizing coaches' agency, power and conscious action and reflexivity. The result is the uncritical presentation of a fixed and stable individual, a transcendent, unproblematized, self-aware and reflexive coach able to explain their practice.

The relationship between reflection, the social and the individual is consistently overlooked (Mackenzie, 2015). Coaches' practice takes place in a given social context and coaches' make meaning of their existence from the sporting cultures that they inhabit, they are part of the structure, and the structure is part of them (Cushion & Jones, 2014). Indeed, Lave and Packer (2008) argue that knowing is part of activity—it is socially and historically situated, therefore learning is not an entirely mental operation. That is, a subject's understanding of their self is mediated through other subjects and objects. Thus the idealized picture presented in the literature of unproblematic reflection in a uniform world of shared values and uniform culture contrasts to the reality of socially located coaches, more or less engaged in ongoing practice, different from one another, in conflict and in unequal relations of power, involved in projects that cross situational boundaries (Denison & Avner, 2011; Lave & Packer, 2008). In this more critical light, the practice of coaches' reflection is a product of power relations where reflection is a disciplinary technology and ways of thinking are subject to and produced by practices of discipline and normalization (Lloyd, 2013; Mackenzie, 2015).

Reflection as technology of power—surveillance

Technologies of power (disciplinary or political technologies) 'determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject' Foucault (1988, p. 18). People are managed through subtle and pervasive operations of power associated with disciplinary processes (Gilbert, 2001) that include technologies of surveillance. Reflection serves to make individual practitioners visible, and subject to modes of surveillance, and can be positioned within techniques of self-formation (Fendler, 2003; Gilbert, 2001). This includes the coach being incited, through speech or writing, to reveal the 'truth' about themselves—micro techniques include, for example, debriefing sessions, journal, log and diary writing and autobiographical and reflective narratives (e.g. Cassidy, Potrac, & McKenzie, 2006; Knowles et al., 2001; Douglas &

Carless, 2008; Trudel et al., 2013)—with literature unanimous in extolling the many benefits of such activities.

However, these activities can be considered critically as disciplinary technologies, a form of surveillance with normalizing and disciplinary effects. Surveillance requires a degree of visibility to be maintained (Gilbert, 2001), individuals must be aware and committed to act upon its effects. The exercise of power requires an agent who acts and then acts upon those actions (Gilbert, 2001). Coaches are asked to write and talk about their activity implicitly accepting responsibility for the agenda and consequential actions—common practice in coach education and encouraged in coaching practice (cf. Cushion et al., 2010). These micro techniques allow coaches thinking to become visible to others and once in the public sphere can be subject to interpretation and judgment (Cotton, 2001; Lloyd, 2013; Mackenzie, 2015). Such an approach tends towards sweeping inclusiveness attempting to construct ways of thinking in coaching and by coaches, as a hegemonic, natural, indisputable discourse, specifying not only what coaches think, but how they think (Cotton, 2001). Reflective practice becomes turned into a means of normative control both of professional identity and practice (Fejes, 2011). In coaching, the normative element regulates by subjecting coaches' practice to the norms and rules within prevailing coaching discourse and ideology. As Foucault (1991) argues 'the judges of normality are present everywhere' (p. 304). Thus, coaches engaging in reflection can be continually subjecting themselves to someone else's idea of 'normal' and such power can fulfil the need of surveillance and control (Denison et al., 2013). Specifically, coaches are presented with norms or truths against which they are scrutinized, for example, discourses of 'performance', development or 'winning', coaching 'philosophies or approaches', 'sport DNA', and 'athlete-centered coaching' (Cassidy et al., 2009; Cushion & Jones, 2014; Denison et al., 2015; Lloyd, 2013).

Instead of being a process for critical thinking and developing practice, reflection becomes a form of surveillance that objectifies. The coach is forced to confront their 'weaknesses' and 'failings' and is categorized compared and judged, but in relation to a *norm* or a fixed set of truths (Lloyd, 2013; Mackenzie, 2015). This can lead to coaches feeling that they need to conform to a given coaching norm (Mackenzie, 2015)—by inciting action upon the self through reflection, the coach becomes self-managing. Coaches (and athletes) are thus able to recognize the 'limitations' of their practice against particular norms and rules. However, coaching 'norms' are arbitrary and intimately linked to power relating to, for example, the underlying culture, a powerful individual, coaching ideology or tradition (Cushion & Jones, 2014; Mackenzie, 2015). Instead of freeing coaches to learn from their unique practice situations, reflection through the dominant discourse constitutes them as productive, docile and conforming workers, confined to instrumental ways of coaching and thinking (Cotton, 2001).

Reflection as technology of power—confession

A key premise of reflection is the individual making existing knowledge visible, contributing their knowledge through reflective practice—confessing to others (Cotton, 2001; Fejes, 2011; Foucault, 1991). Reflection encourages an 'obligation to confess' (Cotton, 2001; Foucault, 1991, p. 60; Rolfe & Gardener, 2006) and by disclosing themselves coaches are objectified and made visible for scrutiny and assessment. This process constitutes the coach as a 'reflective practitioner' (e.g. Gallimore et al., 2014; Knowles et al., 2005; Taylor et al., 2015) (Fejes, 2011, 2013; Gilbert, 2001). However, the working of power positions coaches hierarchically and internalizes the norm of a 'good' example of how to behave. Therefore, coach subjectivity is not determined but elicited, fostered and shaped (Fejes, 2008, 2013; Foucault, 2007) because through reflection a modification of behaviour is expected (Fejes, 2011; Gilbert & Côté, 2013). Reflection, therefore, is positioned as a central discursive concept shaping coaches as active subjects through practices of confession, verbal and written, where they disclose their knowledge and experiences in dialogue with themselves and others (Fejes, 2011, 2013). Such action means that the coach is objectified, scrutinized and assessed in

relation to the norm (Mackenzie, 2015), and as reflection is an individualizing technology, the norm is both producer and product of subjects (Fejes, 2011, 2013). This construction is not one of domination but one of subjectification. Coaches' are shaped and fostered in a situation of 'freedom' (Fejes, 2013) and individual coaches makes choices based on reflection, that is, governs the self. Consequently, reflection and reflective practice is turned into a means of normative control (Fejes, 2013) of both coaches' professional identity and practice (Lloyd, 2013; Mackenzie, 2015). This means that coaches are 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. 242), and through the uncritical reporting and acceptance of such discourse, the academic literature is complicit in such regulation and coercion of coaches. Furthermore, institutional sites, such as the university and governing bodies, can seek to control the distribution and appropriateness of reflection discourses (cf. Cushion et al., 2010; Gilbert & Côté, 2013; Knowles et al., 2006). Coaches' resistance or refusal to prescribed reflective strategies and prescribed ways of thinking can be seen by such institutions as unacceptable and 'unprofessional' (Nelson & Cushion, 2006). This can counter the intention of reflective practice as coaches are not free to learn and develop from their unique practice situations (Cushion et al., 2003), instead the discourse creates docile conforming coaches confined to existing ways of coaching who think in the ways that a particular institution wants them to (cf. Mackenzie, 2015).

In this situation reflection can be subject to both academic and 'professional' evaluation of type, level and appropriateness (e.g. Gilbert & Trudel, 2013; Knowles et al., 2001). For example, it is not uncommon to see an argument for a hierarchical order for types of reflection (e.g. Cassidy et al., 2009; Cushion et al., 2010; Knowles et al., 2006), with basic description of practice as the first step through to 'critical reflection' on assumptions and beliefs underlying practice being the last. The implication being as Fendler (2003) argues, that description is lower order, and therefore of less value than more 'critical reflection', which has explanation often with a theoretical grounding. However, there is a danger of imposing modes of thinking and devaluing description, this can censor certain ways of perceiving and talking about coaching resulting in a disciplinary or socializing effect rather than a generative one. Indeed, some interpretations (academic, Governing Body) and interpreters (academics, coaching 'experts') are seen as having greater legitimacy with institutional truth and normative judgments subjugating other views (cf. Mackenzie, 2015). Thus political regulation is exercised through normalizing judgments positioning coaches hierarchically within the discourse of reflection (e.g. Knowles et al., 2006). However, truth and experiences have differing horizons and no absolute or privileged position in relation to interpretations (Fendler, 2003)—coaches' description can be as reflective as a view one step removed or views grounded in theory, while descriptive and 'critical' reflection can both be instrumental in conformity to given ideological systems.

Furthermore, reflective or 'critical friends' can serve to reinforce practitioners' self-surveillance as well as contribute to the construction of docility (Foucault, 1979). A particular definition of experience can re-circulate and re-enforce coaching and wider stereotypes and ideologies and apply them to individuals in the form of expectations (c.f. Irwin et al., 2004; Mackenzie, 2015). Coaches can be forced to fit into conventional labels and contexts that define their practice and identity at the expense of other less inevitable possibilities (Cushion & Partington, 2014; Fendler, 2003). Therefore, reflection in this form constructs coaches as people who disclose and affirm their identity in terms of categories reflective of existing popular and ideological assumptions (Knowles et al., 2001, 2006). This construction is a technology of the self that perpetuates the status quo as any analysis is within the bounds of the historical and ideologically constructed conventions of the practice and its outputs (Fendler, 2003). This can be dangerous as it authenticates and promotes certain ways of thinking about and being a coach while obliterating others, and confounds the possibilities for thinking outside the existing categories as coaches are silenced by the dominant discourse (Cushion & Partington, 2014; Denison et al., 2015; Fendler, 2003).

Conclusions

The arguments here evidence the need for researchers, coach educators and coaches to examine critically their assumptions about reflection and reflective practice and its relationship to coaching and learning to coach. Using a Foucauldian lens, this paper has argued that reflection in coaching has a number of perhaps unintended consequences, in that the 'public expression of private thoughts' (Cotton, 2001) can be used as a means to discipline coaches and normalize practice. Moreover, in the wrong hands, reflection in coaching can, and in some cases is, as Rolfe and Gardener (2006) argue serve the function of 'Foucault's surveillance gaze—to produce a self-regulating, competent and docile workforce' (1996, p. 1142). A shadowy world of coaching and coach 'education' practice thus emerges that limits horizons and ensures conformity to a received ideal image of the coach where coaching is subjected to a powerful normalizing gaze. Coaching 'expertise' then becomes not a matter of what the coach can do or knows within a particular context (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. As a result, the prevailing descriptions that stress the epistemological, and present 'neutral', discursive-blind and non-political perspectives are not acceptable.

Yet the coaching literature (and coach education) presents and perpetuates an ideological discourse of reflection, where there is a failure to recognize the relationship between knowledge and power. This results in particular reflection discourses becoming reified and confirmed through repeated social practices and embedded in coaching to assume a status of truth (Foucault, 1980a). This, in turn, act as a structure for coaching identities and is legitimized as a valid explanation for coaches' thoughts and actions. Reflection in coaching therefore is itself an ideological structure 'a system of representations by which social agents express a particular mode of appraising reality, codifying information and processing practical outcomes' (Torres, 1999, p. 108). As a result, reflection is implemented in coaching to accommodate existing culture rather than change it—as such reflection has become a disciplinary technology to produce a 'docile body that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved' (Foucault, 1979, p. 136).

This paper also challenges the current dominant cognitive assumptions about reflection (and coaching) as an individual, asocial, ahistorical process. Coaching is a socially situated activity, and cognition alone is not an adequate way of thinking about reflection and learning to coach. Reflection is too easily construed as an unproblematic process and coaching and reflection should be understood as social and embodied (practical, physical, emotional as well as cognitive). The social character of learning to coach and reflection in many 'constructivist' approaches and its representation—as in much of the wider coaching literature—mostly consist of a small 'aura' of socialness (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000) that provides 'input' for the process of internalization, but still view the process as an entirely individualistic 'acquisition' of the ideological and cultural given (cf. Trudel et al., 2013).

As Fendler (2003) argues, we should maintain a 'skeptical and critical attitude about what we do', and it is not the role of research to become a 'normalizing technology that reproduces assumptions' (p. 23) about reflection and coaching. As Foucault (1996) asserts 'to reveal relations of power is ... to put them back into the hands of those who exercise them' (p. 144). Therefore, critical analysis of the complexity of coaching and reflective practices enable the unintended consequences of well-intended practices to be uncovered (Fendler, 2003) and encourage a 'hyper-and pessimistic activism' (Foucault, 1982, p. 231) in developing coaching and coach education.

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