

An elite hockey player's experiences of video-based coaching: A poststructuralist reading

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Abstract

In this article, we present a poststructuralist reading of Claire's (a pseudonym) experiences of receiving video-based coaching in elite level field hockey. Data were gathered through a series of in-depth interviews that formed part of a recursive and iterative data collection and analysis process. Interpreting Claire's stories through a neo-Foucauldian application of Mathiesen's synopticon revealed how the presence of a video camera mediated Claire's practice and imposed a critical gaze, one that became collectively and institutionally consumed. We argue that the thoughts presented in this paper have significant implications for coach practice and education and that, as a result, there is a need for further critical inquiry into coaches' uses of video-based technology.

Keywords Foucault, Mathiesen, post-Panoptic, synopticon, video-based coaching

Introduction

The utilization of various video and computer technologies to monitor and evaluate the performances of individuals in various organizations and workplaces has become an increasingly salient feature of modern life (Ball, 2001, 2010; Mason et al., 2002). For example, Ball (2010) noted that its normality in the workplace, as well as the prevalence of associated discussions of how to 'do it better', means that such monitoring and scrutiny is largely seen as 'good' and 'effective' management practice. Similarly, it has been reported that employees increasingly expect such technology to be deployed when reviewing their performances, gaining data on their activities and having performance objectives set (Ball, 2010). Interestingly, the existing literature has suggested that using technology in this way is not an entirely productive or, indeed, an unproblematic affair. While some contend that employee monitoring and surveillance can be beneficial when undertaken in a caring and supportive manner, others have argued that it also has the potential to negatively impact

upon employees' lives inside, as well as outside, of the workplace. It has been proposed that the latter is especially so when the use of monitoring or surveillance technology negatively effects existing levels of trust, control and autonomy (Ball, 2010; Mason et al., 2002).

While the mainstream literature in sociology has paid increasing attention to the application and consequences of using technology to monitor and assess individual performance, the critical consideration of its application in the context of elite level sport is sparse by comparison (Butryn, 2013; Carling et al., 2014; Groom and Nelson, 2013; Williams and Manley, 2014). To date, much of the existing sporting literature that has explored the use of video-based technology (i.e. the use of modelling and the provision of feedback) is grounded in (post)positivist research paradigms and has sought to generate recommendations *for* practice, through experimental research designs, rather than engage in the study *of* practice (Groom and Nelson, 2013; Jones and Wallace, 2005). While such inquiry has undoubtedly advanced our understanding of this topic, it has arguably ignored the complex, power-dominated nature of athlete learning and coach(ing) practice. A key issue to consider here is that reductionist work not only fails to acknowledge the individuality of learners and the cultural contexts within which coaches and athletes operate, but it has also served to 'sanitize' our representations of coaching by stripping away its inherent and dynamic cultural and political features (Jones et al., 2011). In an attempt to redress this situation, scholars have started to develop more 'reality grounded' accounts of the uses of video-based technology in coaching contexts. For example, such studies have highlighted the importance of considering the contextual factors, delivery approach and target outcomes of such sessions (Groom et al., 2011a), the impact trust and respect has in athlete learning (Nelson et al., 2014) and the consequence of utilizing authoritarian interactional practices on athlete talk (Groom et al., 2012).

While such work has provided some initial insights into some of the realities of video-based coaching practice, little is known about if, and how, an athlete may come to understand a coach's use of video-based technology as a form of discipline and control, as well as how he or she subsequently thinks, feels and acts in response to its usage. Indeed, recent poststructuralist research in sports coaching has suggested that dominant coaching practices (e.g. controlling times,

spaces and activities that athletes engage in, continuously recording and monitoring athlete progress and punishing non-conformity) have the capacity to render athletes' docile and compliant (Barker-Ruchti and Tinning, 2010; Denison, 2007; Denison et al., 2013; Gearity and Mills, 2012; Manley et al., 2012; Mills and Denison, 2013; Shogan, 1999). Following the earlier work of Groom et al. (2011b) and the suggestions of Groom and Nelson (2013) in taking a poststructuralist inspired position, the aim of this paper is to examine Claire's (an elite female field hockey player) experiences of being filmed during practice and match situations, in addition, to explore the complex relationships which ensue through the act of one's practices being recorded, viewed, analysed, replayed and archived ('the video-based performance analysis paradigm'). In doing so, we aim to highlight such relationships in action between Claire, the camera, the recording, the coach and her team-mates, thus challenging orthodox coaching practices evident in the use of video-based applications in elite level sport. In particular, we seek to argue that the use of such technology in coaching is not entirely innocent and has the potential to be considerably powerful in the control and normalizing of athlete conduct (Fusco, 2012; Manley et al., 2012). Therefore, this paper seeks to challenge the largely reductionist and sterile representations of technology usage in coaching as being both unproblematically productive and benign in nature. The significance of this paper, then, lies in presenting a neo-Foucauldian (1979) notion of surveillance by introducing Mathiesen's (1997, 2004) discussion of the synopticon, to develop a rich(er) understanding of Claire's experiences.

Surveillance, Panopticon and synopticon

In order to interrogate critically Claire's experiences, we suggest that a Foucauldian approach on the establishment of disciplinary thinking regarding the Panopticon might be advanced by Mathiesen's (1997, 2004) subsequent writings on surveillance in the form of the synopticon. We believe that this blending of sociological thought allowed us to establish new ground in terms of how we think about performance analysis technology, surveillance and pedagogical practices within the context of high performance sport. We contend that it provides a fruitful means for further developing our sociological understanding of everyday coaching practices and the technologies of discipline.

Foucault's (1979) historical treatment of the manner in which power is exercised saw him focus on disciplinary analysis and the production of 'docile bodies', the 'means of correct training' and 'Panopticism'. He described how the arrangement of time, space and activity, which he branded the arts of distribution, the control of activity, the organization of geneses and the composition of forces, led to the imposition of docility upon an individual body. Foucault also noted that while disciplinary power renders bodies docile through the arrangements described above, in a parallel disciplinary process, these bodies are 'correctly trained' to achieve a desired output and acquire related skills, a process of thought that in reality constructs a visible body, a body of actions, a body of knowledge, an athlete's body, a knowable body, one that can subsequently become subject to the workings of power (Foucault, 1982; Rabinow, 1984).

While the utility and potency of Foucault's thinking here should not be underestimated, authors such as Koskela (2003), Simon (2005) and Andrejevic (2005) have suggested that in postmodern societies, perhaps alternative and more nuanced theorizing is necessary to develop surveillance concepts such as Foucault's (1979) celebrated 'Panopticon'. Koskela (2003), Boyne (2010) and Lyon (1992) are among a number of writers who suggest that the concept of the Panopticon can no longer fully account for the development of modern tools of surveillance nor the manner in which they are exercised. While some, Simon (2005) being among these, are reluctant to abandon the legacy of Foucault's central tenet, there is acknowledgment that modernity provides an ever more complex and interconnected nexus between technology, the cultural potency of the moving image, patterns of media consumption and the apparent democratization of its usage (Hier, 2003; Lyon, 2003). As we live in the digital age, as Simon suggested (2005: 1), advances in technology 'fundamentally alter the organisation, practice and effects of surveillance relationships'. Not only have these developments led to the growth of more complex networks of surveillance and our relationship to them, but it has also altered the way we think about surveillance and its role in modernity (Yar, 2003).

These concerns may have motivated Mathiesen (1997, 2004) to review and elaborate upon Foucault's 'Panoptic' analysis and devise his notion of the synopticon. Mathiesen (1997, 2004) argues that modernity provides mechanisms and instruments, advanced by technological developments, which now enable the

many to gaze upon the few (e.g. Facebook, streaming broadcasts). In doing so, Mathiesen maintains that our relationship with modern media and technology may be best described as synoptic and not panoptic in nature. The synopticon, where the many now observe the few, can be seen *writ large* in a number of modern media platforms (Allmer, 2011). The result of this, according to Mathiesen, is that knowledge and culture become more or less homogenous across time and space. Due to increasing instrumentalization and the sophistication of surveillance technology, how and where individuals can and will be observed, as well as the location of the observer, is no longer constrained by physical structures such as the Panopticon (Lyon, 1992; Simon, 2005). Technology now allows instruments of surveillance to be mobile, de-institutionalized, hidden, personalized (e.g. GPS attached to an athlete) and located where needed by those whom it best serves. Those who watch the action of others now take on different roles to those described in Foucault's *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison* (1977); Mathiesen argues that the observing of others, via modern technologies of recording, is no longer constrained to a single person as in the sole prison officer described in Foucault's model of the Panopticon. This collective consumption of the action and behaviours of others opens up possibilities of communal witnessing of others' conduct, and, in doing so, the normalizing effect of judging others' actions instils self-discipline through compliance and acquiescence on those who watch. These communal witnesses according to Rose (2000: 227), are now co-opted to be 'partners in prudence' where the acts of compliance in watching and being watched blur into a collective responsibility for each other's behaviour. Andrejevic (2005) refers to those who now watch the action of their peers as being engaged in 'lateral surveillance'. The act of viewing peers distorts Panopticon notions of hierarchical relationships where the institutional powerful watched over inmates. This viewing of others will be mediated, for their own instrumental ends, by authoritative figures, such as coaches and performance analysts, so that what is being seen is tightly controlled (Manley et al., 2012). Here, the concept of the synopticon is presented as accounting for the development of modern technology which allows 'evidence of behavioural compliance' to be stored, broadcast, reviewed, revisited and modified. The potency of modern forms of technology advances the possibilities *of* and *for* acts of surveillance and, thus, is in need of additional research and consideration. Research in sports coaching has recently called for an elaboration of the

theorizing of surveillance and, for alternative readings, a post-panoptic analysis of surveillance (Manley et al., 2012). We argue that drawing upon new theoretical ideas of surveillance can help critique dominant coaching practices. Therefore, we draw upon Mathiesen's (1997, 2004) concept of the 'synopticon' to analyse our data and establish our findings.

The research process

This study was conducted from a poststructuralist perspective, as this paradigm is particularly well suited to understanding and problematizing dominant discourses in sports coaching (Avner et al., 2014). It is an approach that aspires towards bringing about social change by recognizing that research is a political and a reflexive act (Markula and Silk, 2011). In this respect, poststructuralist inquiry is 'particularly interested in the formation of current power relations and often critiques how discourses are used for dominance' in an attempt to bring about change (Markula and Silk, 2011: 52). Indeed, the poststructuralist position rejects and directly contests positivistic understandings of sport and those sporting practices that serve to promote docility (Avner et al., 2014). We suggest it can be used as a disruptive and deconstructive lens to offer, in this case, a reading of Claire's experiences of video-based coaching and opens up a reflexive space to think about this area of practice in critical and more ethical ways (Ball, 1995; Gulson and Parkes, 2010).

Two of the authors of this paper first met Claire through her participating in a university degree programme. At that time, Claire was a recently retired international field hockey goalkeeper. Claire's athletic commitment involved the attendance of residential training camps, numerous weekday coaching sessions and most weekends engaged in playing matches or further training. After gaining clearance from the appropriate university ethics committee, Claire was approached and asked if she would be willing to talk about her experiences of being subject to video-based coaching. Subsequently, with Claire's informed consent, we formally documented her experiences of having received video-based coaching at the international level. Claire was, therefore, selected as she was considered to be knowledgeable about the 'cultural arena or experience' to be studied (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 66). In doing so, we argue a case for the research making a substantive and novel contribution to the area and suggest that

for both coaches and those athletes who have had experience of being videoed, this account may have considerable resonance (Smith et al., 2014)

Claire's experiences were explored in five in-depth reflexive interviews (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003). These inter-related interviews considered how Claire interpreted and understood being video-recorded in training sessions and matches, as well as the subsequent use of video playback when providing feedback in a collective setting. During these interviews Claire was encouraged to set the agenda and lead the interaction into areas that she found held most resonance and impact for her. Each interview lasted approximately one hour in duration. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim and subject to a process of analysis.

Unlike the reporting of most research accounts, we were committed to reject the notion that the analysis of data was something that occurred 'after the fieldwork and before the write up' (Markula and Silk, 2011; Sparkes, 2002; Wolcott, 1994, 2001). Rather, the collection, analysis and writing up of our data formed part of a recursive and iterative process that entailed 'working back and forth between data and theory, the understanding and questioning of data' (Taylor, 2014: 182). Here, using the discussed theoretical frameworks, Claire's interview data were read from a particular standpoint. That is, theory aided the identification of meaningful data that were considered illustrative of a broader structural critique (Smith et al., 2014; Taylor, 2014). We are mindful of the limits of case study research, but suggest that the account presented will provide points for reflexive thought and encourage us to evaluate others' and our own practices critically. The use of these data and our reading of the case study is not an attempt to generalize the experience of this single case study nor to encourage any collective message being foregrounded; we have, instead, followed a less familiar route in seeking to deploy data evocatively and illustratively rather than simply as evidence. Here, what we offer is *one* reading, a critical reading that we consider to be informative and hope may serve to sensitize academics, coaches and coach educators to the possibilities that the 'taken for granted accounts' of the use of video may be open to new constructions.

Claire's experiences of video-based coaching technology

The camera and I

In sharing her experiences of the use of video-based coaching technology in elite field hockey, Claire initially outlined how, unlike her outfield colleagues, the goalkeeper's training sessions were always video-recorded. In this respect, she described how a camera with tripod and sound recorder were purposefully set-up in such a way that they were capable of recording all the actions of the goalkeepers. She noted:

The coaches, they would often set the camera up, check we knew what was expected of us, and then walk away to focus on the outfield players at the other side of the training pitch ... Some of that stuff [the outfield players] – don't get me wrong – it was filmed but they didn't have it as much ... It was definitely used on us the most, and, the outfield players the least.

Interestingly, Claire described how she found the video camera to be a poor substitute for receiving instantaneous feedback from the coach. She was jealous of the treatment the outfield players received in this regard. In her own words:

Why did they leave us and not really watch us properly? Why can't we have your undivided time? We're just as crucial in the team as an outfield player. So why weren't we given that time? In the feedback sessions, we'd (the goalkeepers) be the ones that would be annihilated for letting goals in ... At that time, as a player, you'd rather have the coach there watching you and giving you feedback there and then, and being able to watch you directly... Sometimes you just want that personal feedback there and then... sometimes you want that feedback to iron out any errors as quickly as possible.

She became acutely aware, however, that the recordings would be subject to the scrutiny of the coaches as well as her teammates. Claire shared with us the variety of ways in which she understood the continual monitoring of the camera to influence her emotions and behaviours in training sessions. On a positive note, she believed that the camera's presence certainly helped focus her concentration and the intensity of her physical efforts in training sessions, however, its use was not without tensions and issues for Claire. In her own words:

It probably made you try to perform to your optimal all the time, which is obviously a good thing... The camera was there to try to help... But at the time it was like

'Oh for god's sake! Turn that camera off... It's watching me. It's getting everything: the good, the bad, and the ugly!' ... Telling them [the coaches] that I didn't like the camera wasn't going to help because they probably would have just turned around and said that it's only a camera and it's not impeding how you perform. Maybe emotionally deep down it was, but it was just one of those things that I just didn't discuss...I just wanted to comply with, you know, the normality of it all, I suppose, and do as I should do not as I wanted to. You are always taught that the coach is right.

She also noted that such observations made her become risk adverse in training sessions. That is, she felt less able to experiment with new techniques, as she feared that any 'failure' that would likely accompany such efforts would be captured on film for others to see (i.e. the Head Coach). She appeared to lament the fact that the camera denied her the opportunity to 'try and fail' without sanction in coaching sessions. She noted:

It's weird...when that red light goes on [reference to red LED on top of the camera] you're on [laughs and smiles]. If you were quiet you could hear the video machine running...and there is always that light, the red light... Obviously, the word being training, you've got to try new things. Sometimes it didn't quite go right... The video is there to help put it right, but at the same time you don't want to have to look back at something that you're trying to do which isn't working. It would stress me out even more. You just want everyone to let you go off and try it – you know – try it in your own time...I think sometimes we could have done with [the] camera being removed or taken away...It's training at the end of the day and you're not 100% going to save everything. And you are human and what the camera picks up on, due to its positioning, isn't perhaps what actually happened... I did try and forget the camera was there and running, but it is difficult you know. I mean once it is in your line of vision it is there, even when my back was turned, you know, recording.

In a similar vein, Claire also believed that the camera's presence constrained her ability to 'let off steam' during the training sessions. In particular, she believed that her comments and behaviours would be recorded on camera, which may then be interpreted in a variety of problematic ways. Importantly, then, Claire believed that the camera's presence meant that she had to control the external projection of her thoughts and emotions. For example, she noted how she felt unable to engage in

some 'much needed' cathartic behaviour to help relieve the stresses and tensions of the intense training undertaken at this level of sport. In her own words:

Sometimes you're having a stressful moment or just need to let off steam and not feel guilty for moaning about a player ... Or say a few swear words under your breath...and you don't mean any harm by it. Sometimes I would be scared if a player had heard it on the video...but nobody says anything they just sit there and watch.

Equally, she did not want the camera to record any evidence of her making negative comments about the coaching staff. In her own words:

Sometimes you just wanted to just have a little moan about the coach, but the video camera is behind you... especially short corner training, you and your defenders would always be moaning. And players have been caught out bitching about the coach...and it's caught on the camera. Like, do you not want to do that! [Laughs]

Interestingly, she also highlighted how she felt the need to demonstrate the character traits and resilience that she believed were expected of her in this performance context. For Claire, this meant avoiding displays of weakness in front of the camera. She described how:

I tried not to show my emotions... If I get really cross with myself and they see this on camera do they think that I'm a really angry person all of the time and I can't deal with the pressure, the training, and the intensity...? If I was welling up or having tears, I would never done have that in front of the camera ... I would just have turned my back and walked away... You're scared of that red light being on and someone watching you all of the time. That camera was always there watching every move and I wanted to prove that I could deal with the pressure, deal with what was happening around me, and play like a superstar...! You do everything in your power to keep your place.

The coach(es), the camera and I

Following the training sessions, Claire was sometimes required to engage in individual debriefs with the coaching staff. Normally, these took place after what she considered to be a less than expected personal performance. On several occasions, she did not agree with images of her performances that were

presented on the video or, relatedly, the Head Coach's diagnosis and assessment of her decision-making and technical performance. She suggested:

Even if the feedback was one-to-one with the coaches, I would often watch myself and not recognize the movement, the...picture...or what I did ... It was, at times, like watching someone else not me. They say, don't they, the camera never lies, well it bloody well does ... It is not the same as being there but they believe it is. They point to the screen like it is the truth. Well sometimes, it makes you look like an idiot, like you're crap, and cannot play for toffee. I can play a bit. [Laughs]

While Claire felt less awkward discussing these issues with the goalkeeping coach, she chose not to verbalize such thoughts to the Head Coach, as she felt that such actions might endanger her position within the squad. Claire emphasized the vulnerability and angst that accompanied her engagement with the Head Coach in these meetings. She noted:

If you'd had a bad training session and they called you in for a one-to-one, I'd always be really scared because that would be the time when they'd say 'Sorry, you've got to go' and you just don't know when that time is coming ... I would always feel terrified going in there. I don't like going into, you know, the Headmaster's office. I was terrified; it was something that I'd worked hard for so long. How long was it going to last for?

The coaches, the camera, teammates and I

The video recordings were also utilized in larger group meetings with the coaches and the rest of the playing squad. Similar to her sentiments outlined in the previous section, Claire was reluctant to voice her disagreement with coaches' comments, even when she believed that it was the mistakes and errors of other teammates that were the cause of the opposition's success on the field. She was reluctant to challenge other players, as well as the coaches:

In the group sessions, I was quite quiet. I kind of took it on the chin ... I would be very quiet because I was very intimidated by all these other players and everyone knowing more than me or being in the set-up longer than me and having that experience. So, I kind of thought 'Yes, OK, take knowledge, take note, walk away and try again tomorrow'.

Given her junior status within this environment, Claire often felt anxious in the lead up to, as well as during, these meetings. While the sharing of her good performances in this setting was certainly rewarding, she often felt acutely embarrassed when any of her mistakes were openly displayed to the watching audience. She described how:

It's a bit like waiting for an audition. Oh god! Here comes me [Laughs]. You tend to remember which bits come first, the good or the bad. And you remember the drills and you're thinking, oh, this is where I absolutely flunked it or this is where I did a really good save and you take a sigh of relief ... I think that watching the video back with the other keepers is better than watching it with the other outfield players ... Everyone thinks, 'I could do that', 'It's easy'. But outfield players, if you put them in goal could they really do it? They probably scrutinize you a bit more ... It does make you get a bit paranoid thinking is every one going 'What the hell does she think she's doing?' I always wonder what everyone else thinks about what I'm doing or what I'm saying. Sometimes, I do let that bother me a bit...

A poststructuralist reading of Claire's stories

For Claire, her relationship(s) with the camera, the recorded image and the experiences of it being played back, in an individual and collective setting, gave rise to feelings of fear, heightened self-awareness and a sense of responsibility. The video image of her embodied behaviour both subjectifies and objectifies at the same time. This act of subjectification allows Claire and the coaches to personalize her actions. Claire became accountable and responsible, not just for her past, and now recorded, behaviour, but also for her future conduct, now designed to amend and comply (Rose, 2000). For Claire and the coaches 'the image as reality' subjectifies the captured behaviour because they are hers and, thus, any judgement of them is personalized and ultimately owned. They, also, are revealed as an objective representation of performance and behaviour, which in turn lends itself to be measured and referenced as truthful, meaningful and detached. Objectification of action, in the form of a reduction to measurable elements, adds to 'dataveillance' (Simon, 2005) which, in turn, can be seen as contributing to the bio monitoring of athletes and their bodies by presenting action as data (Latour, 1992). This allows the coaches, and other watchers, to distance them from the responsibilities of judgment and comment, for while 'objective' in nature this 'image as reality', and what it represents, remains Claire's

responsibility (Mathiesen, 2004). In turn, the collective consumption of her actions, in a synopticon sense, allows 'others' to contribute to the normalization of her actions and to engage in lateral surveillance and thus to become fellow actors in the scrutiny of others (Andrejevic, 2005; Miller and Rose, 2008).

As Miller and Rose (2008) suggest, the appropriation of 'others' to contribute to government of the 'conduct of one's conduct' at the same time divides and unites. By the silent and collective witnessing of Claire's performance, as it is played back to her, team members become supportive allies of the coach fearing that they too will be exposed and ultimately judged. The development of the synopticon elevates all watchers into actors of social surveillance (Mathiesen, 2004). In their silence, they become active agents of the normalization of action and expectation. United in judgment they become *silently silenced*, with passivity being construed as an acceptance of the regime of truth by those subject to their social gaze (Mathiesen, 2004). The process of normalization manifests itself not just in the actions and behaviours of an athlete such as Claire, but also moulds both the beliefs and acceptance of certain regimes of truth (Foucault, 1977). Mathiesen goes on to suggest that such is the intensification of the mechanisms of surveillance into every aspect of life, that there is a cumulative effect. Being watched mediates one's actions, according to Mathiesen, and being watched most of the time mediates most behaviours. This self-control limits opportunities to express agency and has the effect of silencing, in deed and in voice, those subject to almost continuous scrutiny. When Claire and her performance are videoed it is a continuation of being part of the 'era of the great global optic' (Virilio, 2002: 110); the silencing effect of yet another episode of being watched adds to the act of the silently silenced being made invisible to us (Mathiesen, 2004).

For Claire, this passive acceptance of the need for the use of video, the remote recording of practice in the coaches' absence and the public exposing of her performance itself adds to the illusion that the camera and its usage is ultimately benevolent. The interdependent relationships here are not about the coaches simply using the video camera as an agent of control, but all parties collectively acquiescing to its usage and presence. If Claire does challenge the existence of the camera acting as a surrogate coach, or the realities of what is shown on the screen, any resistance is temporary inasmuch as it fails to usurp the fundamental

embodied nature of the coach–athlete relationship. It remains a relationship where notions of athlete centredness are outwardly displayed, while the conditions and means of the governing of athlete conduct continue to manifest themselves in new and subtle ways (Bush et al., 2013; Groom et al., 2012). The notion of the collective gaze and the emergence of the synopticon and its relation with new technology adds to our understanding of the art of the government of behaviour and in the case of sports coaching, how it has been applied in the service of those whom it serves.

Conclusion

Within this paper we sought to challenge sterile and reductionist representations of using video-based coaching technology. In doing so, we suggest that coaches have appropriated video as an extension of their technologies of discipline and its usage adds to the government of individual action and collective consumption. Through our poststructuralist reading of Claire’s experiences, we suggested that her coaches’ use of video contributed towards her believing that she was under constant surveillance within the training environment. The application of video-based coaching, then, as a surveillance arrangement, contributed to the imposition of disciplinary and subjectifying power. Our considerations contribute to a growing body of poststructuralist literature which demonstrates how coaches render their athletes docile through diverse practices and mechanisms and how modern technology provides ever more diverse and nuanced applications (Barker-Ruchti and Tinning, 2010; Denison, 2007; Gearity and Mills, 2012; Johns and Johns, 2000; Lang, 2010; Mills and Denson, 2013; Shogan, 1999; Williams and Manley, 2014). It also adds further weight to the claim that ‘the application of video-based performance analysis feedback to enhance athletic learning is far from a straightforward and unproblematic process’ (Nelson et al., 2014: 32). This paper serves to illustrate the need to think critically about the application of video-based technology and the manner in which it is employed as a surveillance mechanism that is, in part, responsible for the disciplining of athletes.

It is our belief that Claire’s narrative, and our poststructuralist reading of it, has significant implications for coach education. If there is a genuine desire to develop critical thinking and ethically minded coaches and related coaching practitioners (e.g., performance analysts), we would strongly encourage coach educators to

devote some curriculum time to the social analysis of the role and use of such technologies. Being introduced to social theorizing, like that utilized in this study, would help practitioners be more reflexive towards how their intended or current integration of video-based technologies impacts the pedagogical experiences of athletes and the coach–athlete relationship it helps to build (Denison, 2007; Jones, 2013).

In responding to the call for more contemporary understandings of surveillance (e.g. Koskela, 2003; Manley et al., 2012), our reading of Claire’s experiences through the work of a neo-Foucauldian application of the Mathiesen synopticon demonstrated that video-based coaching can be seen as a novel application of surveillance instruments. In doing so, we contend that by theorizing Mathiesen’s notion of the synopticon, we become more alert to the subtle and detailed manner in which athletes are subject to monitoring and control.

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