

**POWER AND INCLUSION IN COACHING: THE ROLE OF HUMOUR**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Within the field of sports coaching, a burgeoning belief exists that sociological thought has the potential to challenge and shape the boundaries of related knowledge. Such enquiry has set about explaining how coaches manipulate their ‘social competencies’ (Lemert, 1997: x) in order to maintain and improve their various contextual relationships (Jones, 2011a). Despite such developments, a paucity of research still exists examining how humour serves as a vital ingredient in establishing, developing and maintaining social interaction within the coaching context. The aim of this PhD thesis therefore, was to explore what type of humour is used, why it was used and the effects of such humour on the context that it occurs. In adopting an interpretive methodology, through ethnographic methods, data were collected by tracking and observing the coaches and players of Senghenydd City F.C. (pseudonym) during the course of their domestic season. The ‘coding’ of the results moved away from the traditional inductive theorising and used the constant comparative method to revisit existing ideas in respect of the new data collected. The findings were subsequently subject to a ‘light’ theoretical analysis through Goffman’s (1963; 1967; 1983) presentation of self, impression management and interaction order, and Garfinkel’s (1963; 1967) work on social order to highlight how individuals used varying degrees of inclusionary, shared, self-deprecating and disciplinary humour to manage the often micro-political landscape of sports coaching. The results contribute to the recent investigative upsurge into humour and sports coaching by bringing to light the mundane, taken for granted discourses of interaction evident within the relational, everyday aspects coaching.

## PUBLICATIONS

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# CONTENTS

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction	p.1
1.2 Aims of Study	p.4
1.3 Objectives	p.4
1.4 Theoretical and personal rationale	p.5
1.4.1 Theoretical rationale	p.5
1.4.2 Personal rationale	p.7

## CHAPTER II: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction	p.10
2.2 A (historical) summary of coaching research	p.11
2.3 More recent critical engagement with the complexity of coaching	p.15
2.4 Coaching as a social practice	p.20
2.4.1 Role theory and its significance to the coaching context	p.22
2.4.2 Social interaction within the coaching context	p.25
2.4.3 A Conceptualisation of power in the field of sports coaching	p.28
2.5 New theoretical explanations of sports coaching	p.35
2.6. The importance of humour research	p.42
2.7 An overview of humour research	p.43
2.7.1 Definition of Humour	p.47
2.7.2 Humour Theories	p.50
2.7.2.1 Superiority Theory	p.50
2.7.2.2 Incongruity Theory	p.52

2.7.2.3 Relief Theory	p.54
2.8. Humour Functions	p.55
2.8.1 Humour and Leadership	p.57
2.8.2 Humour and interactions within the workplace	p.60
2.8.3 Humour and relationships	p.62
2.9. Humour and Sport	p.65
2.9.1 Humour in coaching practice	p.67
<b>CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY AND THEORY</b>	
3.1. Introduction	p.71
3.2. Locating the ontological and epistemological roots of the study	p.71
3.3. From epistemology to methodology	p.76
3.4. Adopting a qualitative approach	p.77
3.5. Critical review of ethnography as a qualitative genre	p.79
3.6. What is reflexivity?	p.87
3.6.1 Entering the field: a lesson in reflexivity	p.89
3.7. The position of researcher	p.90
3.8. My lens	p.92
3.9. The writing process; a reflexive methodology	p.93
3.10. Methods and procedure	p.95
3.10.1 Participants and club in context	p.97
3.10.2 Participant observations and field notes	p.100
3.10.3 The case for ethnographic film and my personal reflections	p.104
3.10.4 My reflections	p.107

3.11. Data Analysis	p.110
3.11.1 Organising the Data	p.114
3.11.2 The [re]presentation of data	p.116
3.11.3 Judging the study	p.118
3.12. Ethical Considerations	p.120

## **CHAPTER IV: RESULTS**

4.1 Introduction	p.124
4.1.1 Setting the scene	p.125
4.2 Inclusionary humour	p.125
4.3 Shared humour	p.132
4.4 Self-deprecating humour	p.138
4.5 Disciplinary humour	p.138

## **CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION**

5.1 Introduction	p.153
5.2 Inclusionary humour: <i>'Putdowns' among friends</i>	p.153
5.3 Shared humour: <i>The arena of struggle</i>	p.160
5.4 Self-deprecating humour: <i>The role of the class clown</i>	p.165
5.5 Disciplinary humour: <i>Did you enjoy the view?</i>	p.170

## **CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION AND FINAL THOUGHTS**

6.1 Introduction	p.175
6.2 Recapping the aims and objectives of the study	p.176
6.3 A summary of the main research findings	p.177

6.4 Recommendations for future research	p.180
6.5 Final Thoughts: My journey	p.183

## **REFERENCES**

**CHAPTER I**  
**INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Introduction**

Recent literature has come to recognise the dynamic social essence of sports coaching (Jones, 2007). Here, Potrac and Jones (2009) have positioned coaching as a personal, power-ridden endeavour where coaches use many and varied strategies to manipulate the context and those around them to reach their desired goals. In this respect, coaching has been acknowledged as a contextual, complex activity that is influenced by many factors; a social process, comprising a series of contested outcomes between structurally influenced agents within an ever changing environment (Cushion, Armour & Jones, 2003; Jones, Potrac, Haleem & Cushion, 2006)

This particular body of literature has drawn attention to a ‘play of powers’ between coaches and athletes (Westwood, 2002) which, in turn, influences the subsequent interactions between significant others within the contextual climate (Purdy, Potrac & Jones, 2008). This engagement with the dynamic, intricate nature of coaching has served as a means to better contribute towards the generation of theory that is more faithful to the complex realities of coaching than has previously been achieved (Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2004). Indeed, this sociological examination has emphasised the problematic and integrative elements of a coach’s role, identifying the need to link the personal with the social (Cassidy, Jones & Potrac, 2004), so that the holistic nature of the coaching process can be better understood (Jones & Armour, 2000; Potrac & Jones, 1999; Potrac, Brewer, Jones, Armour & Hoff, 2000).

The emergence of this sociological lens has also allowed researchers’ (Potrac & Jones, 1999; Jarvie, 1990) to argue that social thought is the crucial ‘invisible ingredient’ in understanding the contested nature of coaching (Jones, Potrac, Cushion & Ronglan, 2011). Such work recognises the practical value that sociology has to offer the field of sports coaching. Not only does it seek to unearth the mundane, taken for granted nature of the activity, but holds the power to infuse coaching at a level of understanding and critical reflection beyond the

narrow and instrumental thinking that can oversimplify coaching's inherent complexities (Cushion, 2010).

Establishing this alternative conceptual framework from which to explore sports coaching has led some academics (e.g. Cushion, 2010) to claim that the activity is inherently an embodied process, one that emphasises the integration of agent, world and activity (Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1979). Indeed, due to the many contradictory variables within the coach-athlete dyad, Bowes and Jones (2006) suggest that coaches are constantly 'working at the edge of chaos'. In this respect, they suggest that coaching can be characterised as a series of non-linear micro-states that emerge from social interactions between agents trying to meet a desired end. Here, dynamic, power-influenced interactions try to balance order and chaos where outcomes can never be totally anticipated between learners and 'more capable others' (Jones, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978).

Acknowledging that coaching is vulnerable to differing social pressures and constraints (Potrac & Jones, 2009) resonates with the work of Jones, Armour and Potrac (2002) who contend that coaches are social beings operating in a social environment. Consequently, their activities ought to be examined and explored as such. It is an agenda related to what Stones (1998b) referred to, as how we manage the pressures, constraints and possibilities of action. This exploration into the intricacies and nuances of coaching has enabled numerous scholars to highlight the affirmed social competencies of coaches, acknowledging that the 'crux' of coaching lies in recognising the situation, and understanding and responding to the people you work with (Jones et al. 2004). Such work, has attempted to explain the emotions that coaches experience in their everyday lives and how this has become embodied in their practice (Jones, Kingston & Stewart, 2011b). It is a deconstruction of seemingly ordinary actions which has shed light on the relational daily aspects of sports coaching (Potrac & Jones, 2009).

Although this current sociological analysis has confronted the problematic reality of coaching, there remain many avenues of required investigation. One such area relates to the sociology of humour. An important dimension of humour in the coaching context lies in its tightening of social bonds, as it is a valuable communicative resource that is ubiquitous in human activity occurring in all types of social interaction (Martin, 2007). In this regard, such sentiments echo Garfinkel's work on social structures, and how people make joint sense of their social world together. Seen in this way, the exploration of humour in coaching allows for an understanding of social procedures or methods (humour) that are socially shared (between coach, athlete and other stakeholders), and which are used to understand, resist, transgress, contest and act in the common sense world of everyday life.

Previous work by Snyder (1991) suggested that, due to its problematic nature, sport provides a fruitful area for the emergence of humour. He stated that humour in sport may be viewed as a play, a process of social integration that prompts superiority and disparagement. It is, therefore, somewhat surprising that very little research examining the use of humour in sport and coaching, particularly from a sociological perspective, has been carried out (Jones et al. 2011a). This, according to Ronglan and Aggerholm (2013), may be viewed as a paradox, especially considering sports' linkage to play in various meanings of the concept.

With social interaction arguably being at the heart of the coaching process (Jones et al. 2004), humour can be used in different ways by both coaches and athletes', on and off the field/track/gym. As such, humour should not be considered as something that goes on besides the coaching process; rather it should be viewed as embedded in the process itself (Aggerholm & Ronglan, 2012). In this respect, the coaching environment provides the opportunity to clearly examine how coaches and athletes use varying degrees of humour to exercise some control over the dominant discourses that are inherent in social situations (O'Brien & Kollock, 1991: 141). Indeed, Jones et al. (2011b, p. 185), suggest that 'due to its vibrant sociality, the

exploration of the multi-functional use of humour, its intent, manifestation and effect within the often emotionally charged world of coaching holds very interesting possibilities’.

## **1.2 Aim of Study**

The purpose of this study is to undertake a social investigation of humour within coaching. It aims to explore the social significance of humour as a critical component in the negotiation of coaching relationships. The focus of the study lies in specifically examining what type of humour is used, why it is used and the effects of such humour in the context in which it occurs. These overall aims are addressed through four mutually informing detailed objectives.

## **1.3 Objectives**

- a) To explore the ‘power exchanges’ between coaches and athletes as expressed through humour.
- b) To examine what sort of humour is used within coaching, why it is used and what are its consequences?
- c) To examine how humour contributes to the production of social ‘hierarchies’ in a coaching context; and
- d) To highlight how humour plays a significant role in developing peer group identities and culture.

## **1.4 Theoretical and personal rationale**

### **1.4.1 Theoretical rationale**

It has been argued that to build upon the re-conceptualisation of coaching, researchers must continue to step outside the confines of bio-scientific enquiry and examine the activity in terms

of the contextual social factors which impinge upon it (Potrac & Jones, 1999). Building on this portrayal of coaching as an interaction between coaches and athletes in the socio-cultural context, several scholars (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Denison, 2007) have depicted it as a negotiated activity located within particular situational constraints. Here, Potrac, Brewer, Jones, Armour and Hoff (2000) ascertain that coaching does not exist in a social and cultural vacuum but in the complexities of modern day sport, which involves connections between coaches and athletes of different genders, ethnicities, sexualities, motivations, experiences, values and philosophies in a particular contextual setting. Consequently, seeking to explore the connection between one relationship and another, and between the relationships and activities which sustain them, is paramount, as they are considered to be the fabric of society (Ross & Van den Haag, 1957).

In an attempt to widen the theoretical lens through which the coaching role can be viewed, this study seeks to use the work of Goffman (1959, 1963, 1967, 1983) and Garfinkel (1963, 1967) to illuminate how humour serves as a way of exposing and deciphering the usual mundane practices that are symbolic to coaching. The significance of the study then, is grounded in the need to better explore the micro realities of coaching and to describe the restrictive norms that confine coaches' behaviour, thus bringing coaching out of the 'dusky realm of secrets that everyone knows but rarely discusses' (Lemert, 1997: 32). Such exploratory work will allow for the engagement with the collective nature of coaching, where multiple stakeholders use various social practices (like humour) as a means to preserve their shared dignity. In this way, it can be argued that such actions can be seen as a performance aimed at leaving the 'right' impression, so that individual actors maintain 'face' in the wider social order (Goffman, 1959).

The value of such sociological inquiry into sports coaching further lies in its potential to make sense of a culture beyond its conscious 'surface' appearance (Hatchen, 2001), thus

providing a thick description of social practices (Geertz, 1973). It can also highlight where coach and athlete often fall short in their 'social competencies' (Lemert, 1997: x), and how these individuals use humour to understand and act in their unique social world (Heritage, 1984). Indeed, within the coaching context, the deconstruction of humour can serve as a means in our quest to understand the dynamics that underpin the complex coaching environment. In doing so, it can better develop an acute coaching awareness that helps uncover the 'constitutive rules of everyday behaviour' and how they influence the actions of skilled social actors in their everyday lives (Goffman, 1974: 5)

A shared mutual understanding of humour within coaching also holds the potential to provide a meaningful and coherent sense of reality to help demystify the so called 'mythical art' of the activity. In this respect, applying a theoretical lens that acknowledges coaching as an obligation-ridden social activity, as opposed to an 'uncluttered world of free-floating heroes and villains' (Jones, 2006a; Stones, 1998b), would appear very appropriate and warranted within current coach education programmes. This is because it would allow coaches to develop a greater insight into how they manage their respective contexts, thus exposing the hidden art of coaching; a place where existing coaching discourse prevents us from going. The value of the study then, ultimately extends into informing more realistic professional preparation programmes for coaches as they struggle with their daily relational dilemmas.

#### **1.4.2 Personal rationale**

This study has grown from many personal sporting experiences, not least of which is related to my current coaching role, a position that has been [and continues to be] a rollercoaster of emotions. As such, it is my intention to shed some light on the social, interactive character of coaching and highlight how humour is negotiated, expressed and contextualised within the

football culture over which I preside. In recent years, I have been heavily involved in trying to change the culture of a semi-professional football team. Disparities between players' perspectives and my expectations have led me to encounter some reluctant, painful and, at times, exhilarating experiences. Throughout, I have struggled to work with the everyday explicit processes and operational mechanisms that are confined within sporting sub-cultures. That is, those that are bound by the unwritten rules, precedents, values and patterns of belief that exist in modern day sport. This endless tugging and massaging of egos has led to many battles when trying to influence and inspire players to improved performances.

In order to win over often dampened resistance, I have become aware of the need to be sensitive to the training culture. This has required constant 'face work', with humour being a central strategy. Rather than being embroiled in retaliatory action with the players when there was opposition to change, I found myself frequently using humour as a communicative resource to productively manipulate the environment. Over time, I have learnt that sarcastic comments and ridicule is not the answer to balancing the sometimes fragile atmosphere. It is the acknowledgement of the fine line that exists between 'laughing at' and 'laughing with' the players that has enabled me to feel somewhat comfortable using humour, and more importantly self-deprecating humour to regulate the status difference between myself and the players.

Fundamental to this thesis, is how I have witnessed the use of humour by both players and coaches. Here, I have come to recognise how humour has been spiritually uplifting and scathingly challenging in structuring the unifying forces in sport. The case, thus, is about illuminating how the humorous actions of certain individuals facilitate or restrict the actions of others on and off the playing field. More importantly, it is the recognition of this social practice that has allowed me, and significant others, to use our own 'practical wisdom' (Flyvberg, 2001)

to deal with the unpredictable and irreducible degree of ambiguity that is endemic to the coaching endeavour (Jones & Wallace, 2005)

Finally, it is this experience and tacit knowledge that has led me to hopefully manage individuals who often push the boundaries with their own language and rules. As such, I have recognised that to increase my influence over the social processes that are embedded in the coaching context I must use varying forms of humour [along with other relevant capabilities] to control the tensions that continue to exist between myself and the players. Indeed, it is through this humorous ‘face work’ that I present a compelling front, one that is confident and in control, so that I generate the appropriate relationships with the individuals that I coach.

**CHAPTER II**  
**LITERATURE REVIEW**

## **2.1. Introduction**

With regards to the structure of this chapter, a brief historical summary of coaching research is initially given. This is followed by a review of more recent work that perhaps better deals with coaching's complex nature. The third section shifts to focus on coaching research carried out from a sociological perspective. Here, an analysis of the social roles within sports coaching is addressed, that is, how the concepts of role, social interaction and power have been used to better explain the social world of sports coaching.

Following this outline and critique of the coaching science literature thus far, the chapter then provides an overview of humour research. Whilst not providing an exhaustive account, consideration is given to the dimensions that are related to humour theories, drawing attention to humour as production, as interpretation and appreciation, and as function. At this point, the discussion leads onto the literature surrounding leadership and humour in the workplace setting.

The chapter then switches to explore humour and its ambivalence in the coaching context. Here, the focus is on the relationship between humour and coaching as a social practice, its relation to identity construction, and humour as a tension regularity resource. The final notion explores humour as related to power and everyday interactions. A particular aspect examined here is how humorous interactions can strengthen, calm or even contest existing power relations, depending on the participants' position within the social structure. To conclude, a summary of humour and how it is a valuable communicative resource in the complex world of sports coaching is given.

## **2.2. A (historical) summary of coaching research**

Unlike the more established subjects of psychology, physiology, biomechanics and sociology, coaching has only recently been recognised as a bona fide area of sport related study (Jones, 2005a). Early coaching literature was underpinned by positivistic research into sports coaching as found by Gilbert and Trudel (2004). Studies that were conducted during the period 1970-2001 were overwhelmingly guided by a quantitative research epistemology. In fact, the dominance of behavioural psychology as the subject's traditional disciplinary guide (Cushion et al, 2006), and its core concept of reductionism, portrayed coaching as a rational, mechanistic activity; one that was measurable and causally derived, thus a predictable and controllable practice (Smith, 1989).

The majority of the work related to this line of inquiry was carried out through the application of systematic observation where the focus was upon instructional strategies (of coaches) through quantitative description (Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke & Samela, 1999). The approach was established in physical education settings with a purpose to better observe and describe the pedagogical styles adopted by coaches within their practice (Jones, 2005a). Its lack of appreciation however, for coaching's critical pedagogical nature where the ultimate objective is athlete learning (Jones, 2006) highlights the shortcomings of such a mode of research. Despite this, empirical studies were carried out by Pratt and Eitzen (1989) to examine the relationship between effective leadership and variables such as decision-making, coaching style and creativity. Such work marked an attempt to analyse the whole coaching process through its individual parts, thus searching for a single, comprehensive and definitive coaching model or schema (Cushion, 2007).

This positivist approach allowed for questions to be asked related to effective coaching and performer learning. Indeed, numerous authors claimed priority for one aspect of the coaching process over the other. For example, Fuoss and Troppman (1981), Carrerio da Costa and Pieron (1992) and Jones (1997) highlighted *communication* as the key for effective coaching. On the other hand, Horn (1984, 1992), Mancini and Wuest (1987), and Stewart and Corbin (1988) believed *instruction* to be the most important factor of a coach's role. Fischman and Oxendine (1993, p.11), however, considered that the 'core of successful coaching was the understanding of the *motor learning process*. This fragmented approach, which tended to view coaching as a sequential process, was also supported through the work of Lyle (1986: 1991: 1996) who argued that for improved athletic performance to be attained, a planned, coordinated and progressive process must be adhered to. Whilst some clarity emerged from this early research, the findings tended to be generalised, providing a one-dimensional snapshot of coaching, thus taking little account of the contextual complexities within which coaches and athletes operate.

This led many academics to attempt to capture the coaching process through a series of models, based on the argument that 'coach effectiveness' or 'coaching success' could be achieved through the identification, analysis and control of variables that effect athletic performance (Bush, 2008). The purpose of these models was to provide a framework for observing good and bad coaching practice (Jones, 2006a). The 'model' approach considered both models *of* the coaching process (underpinned by empirical research), and models *for* the coaching process. Models *for* were developed by Fairs (1987), Franks, Sinclair, Thomson and Goodman (1986), Sherman, Crassini, Maschette and Sands (1997) and Lyle (2002), and reflected idealistic representations developed from an identification of a set of assumptions about the activity (Bush, 2008). For instance, the work of Fairs (1987) adopted a reductionist approach to the coaching process. Whilst appearing logical and interrelated, the model

proposed a subdivided approach to coaching, thus its boundaries were limited to episodic delivery (Cushion et al., 2006).

In addition to the literature which advocated the use of models *for* coaching, several academics (e.g. Mclean & Chelladurai, 1995; Côté, Samela, Trudel, Baria & Russell, 1995b; d'Arrippe-Longueville, Fournier & Dubois, 1998) proposed models *of* the coaching process. These studies used qualitative methodologies, typically in the form of in-depth interviews, to unearth practitioner knowledge and the value of coach-athlete interaction. Much of this research, however, remained informed by the positivist tradition. For example, the coaching practice model proposed by Côté et al (1995b) collected empirical data that recognised the complexity of the coaching process but did not refer to this complexity in sufficient detail. Hence, according to Saury and Durand (1998) it did not adequately deal with the operational dimensions and dynamic aspects of the process.

Relatedly, the work of Cushion et al. (2006) suggested that the models approach was too simplistic, as it failed to embrace the essential elements of effective practice. Similarly, Werthner and Trudel (2006) argued that to 'model' coaching is a complex task in itself as there is a need to consider the influence of both the coach and the athlete's personal characteristics whilst also being aware of the specific contextual factors that are omnipresent in the coaching environment. Likewise, Martindale, Collins and Daubney (2005) argued that the modelling approach does not consider the different needs of each individual athlete at different stages of their development which would lead to a diversification in the coaching environment.

The models approach then has provided only a basic and simplistic view of the coaching process. It represented coaching as a 'knowledgeable sequence' which, according to Usher (1998), did not take into account the interpersonal aspect of the activity. Tinning (1997) suggested that, through this work, practitioners often adopted a modernist or technocratic lens to their practice which resulted in many coaches finding it difficult to grasp the complex [post-

modern] social world in which their professional work is located. Consequently, coaching, inclusive of values, beliefs and practice, remained largely unchanged as coach education continues to be utilitarian, lacking a micro-political consciousness and a social criticality (Cushion et al., 2003; Fernandez-Balboa, 2000).

In a more recent related line of enquiry, Abraham and Collins (2011) proposed a model for the activity inclusive of the commonalities across coaching research, one that summaries the major theoretical points yet practical enough for application by coach educators and coaches. In doing so, they claim to have acknowledged the inherent complexities of coaching and argue that coaches can be educated (through the model approach) to cope with the intricacies of the activity through a professional judgement and nested decision making process (Abraham & Collins, 2011).

Despite the considerable work carried out into modelling the coaching process, as mentioned above, much of it has not been well received by many practitioners (Saury & Durand, 1998; Jones et al., 2003). A great deal of the critique suggested that the work had failed to explore and interpret coaches' subjective 'life worlds'. The criticism was in relation to relevancy, suggesting that many 'blank spaces' in our knowledge of coaching continue to exist (Jones, 2007). According to Jones, Potrac, Haleem and Cushion (2006), this was a result of many scholars choosing not to engage with the complex social character of coaching. Instead, they preferred to either label such apparent shapelessness the unknowable, mystic 'art of coaching' or to un-problematically represent it as a series of arrows and boxes in linear model (Jones, 1997). In this respect, the models approach adopted a structural 'outside-in' approach, as opposed to a problematic, emotive 'inside-out one (Sparkes & Smith, 2002). This was particularly so in terms of understanding the complex reality within which coaches work and how they manage it (Bowes & Jones, 2006),

### **2.3. A more critical engagement with the complexity of coaching**

Early research from a number of scholars from social-constructivist and social psychological perspectives attempted to engage with the research that deals with the intricate, dynamic nature of coaching. Indeed, work by Saury and Durand (1998) and d'Arripe-Longueville et al. (1998) examined the perceived effectiveness of interactions between coaches and their athletes, thus, taking a cognitive approach to examining interpersonal behaviour. Findings from the former's study on expert coaches' knowledge in elite sailing, highlighted that coaching interactions were bound by a set of interacting constraints that generated complex and ill-defined problems. They suggested that coaches' operating modes appeared to be based on organisation routines, cognitive anticipation on flexible plans, flexible on-site adaptation, joint control of training with athletes, and involvement in the training situation based on past experiences (Saury & Durand (1995).

Similarly, d'Arripe-Longueville et al. (1998) examined coaches' and athletes' behaviours in elite French judo and their perceptions of respective interactions. Conclusions from the study, considered the actions in term of the complex coaching context; however, the analysis moved away from its original focus and considered sport leadership styles, in particular, the autocratic behaviours outlined by Chelladurai and Saleh (1980) and Chelladurai (1993a). More importantly, the underlying factors of the interactions within the study were 'fine-tuned' using Côté et al.'s (1995) leadership model. Nonetheless, their study focused on a detailed interpretation of coaches' and athletes' personal characteristics and interactions within a given sporting culture (Cushion et al., 2006).

Building on this work, d'Arripe-Longueville, Saury, Fournier and Durand (2001) investigated the temporal and contextual organisation of coach-athlete interactions in elite archery. Adopting a theoretical approach from ergonomics (Theureau, 1992), the study attempted to describe courses of actions (from both coach and athlete) and the way in which

these interactions resulted in an effective, co-ordinated and co-operative coach-athlete dyads. Results indicated that cognition (or action) is in-dissociable from experience, thus, closely linked to ecological constraints. According to d'Arripe-Longueville et al., (2001), such an approach must be studied *in situ* and that the points of view of actors have to be considered. Whilst the study attempted to highlight the course of interactions within the coach-athlete relationship, the data gathered focused on the delivery of technical information disregarding interaction away from the instructional component, thus a limited view of interaction within the coaching context emerged (Harris, 2010).

Although these studies attempted to grapple with the complexity of coaching, it can be argued that they failed to fully encompass the so called 'social agenda' of practice. Hence, an increasing number of scholars subsequently turned to sociological theory to construct and make sense of coaching contexts and processes (Pringle, 2007). Indeed, to bridge the gap in our knowledge base, several authors (e.g. Cassidy, Jones, & Potrac, 2004; Cushion & Jones, 2006; Jones et al. 2004; Potrac et al. 2000) have sought to provide a deeper, and more meaningful perspective on how coaches and athletes work within the coaching environment (Potrac et al., 2000; Trudel, Côté & Donohue, 1993). This line of inquiry has attempted to emphasise the constructivist nature of coaches' knowledge, coaches' agency, interaction in the coaching context, coaches' power and how they use it, and coaches' social roles. For example, the work of Purdy (2009) examined the power-influenced coach-athlete relationship, the interactions that shape it, and the subsequent context or climate created. Earlier, Jones (2000) argued the case for such body of work, stating that it had the potential to move us away from solely focusing on the athlete's mechanistic body, and bring in "the social person" (Jones, 2000, p. 35). Similarly, Maykut and Morehouse (1994) suggested that it had the capability to 'capture' what people say and do, and to understand how they perceive the world.

Adopting a socio-cultural lens from which to view sports coaching has allowed literature to provide us with what Cushion et al. (2006) call a “more sophisticated and realistic insight of what actually is involved when coaching takes place” (p.90). In this respect, such a practical sociology has provided a more nuanced understanding of the activity, reinforcing the burgeoning belief that sports coaching is inherently an interactive, communal endeavour; a social practice (Jones, et al. 2011a). Such an approach was built on the assumption that studies carried out *in situ* can provide a more knowledgeable picture of coaching activity; one that, according to Cushion (2007), offers rich opportunities to enlighten coach education. It is a stance that is supported by Jones and Potrac (2009), who proposed that depicting coaching as a contested activity holds much promise for future investigation as it can provide us with a better understanding of what the job actually entails.

Although such scholars have highlighted the value of a sociological viewpoint for coaches, others (e.g. Sorhaug, 1996) have suggested that trying to consider ‘everything’ within one superior framework has the potential of reducing something very complex to something one-dimensional. Such a viewpoint was maintained by Abraham and Collins (2011), who argued that in order to offer a better service to coaching practitioners the high explicative power ideas or theories within the sociological literature need to be refined, or even ‘culled’. They claimed that certain epistemologies have become arcane and are in jeopardy of having less and less impact on the field being researched. In addition, Abraham and Collins argue that using new and discrete topics such as social or political perspectives (e.g., Potrac & Jones, 2009) challenge the natural integration that is surely the real essence of real life practice. In short, they proposed that although this recent literature has offered new avenues to explore the ‘swampy lowlands’ (Schön, 1987) of coaching practice, the descriptions and processes offered are so complex that the inherent complexity still remains unaddressed. Similarly, Fleming and Jones (2008) stated that there is clearly some scepticism regarding such an approach. They

highlighted that a number of existing professional coach education and academic coaching courses question the relevance of a sociological viewpoint and how it can help improve coaching practice.

Research by Poczwardowski, Barrott and Henchen (2002), however, attempted to offer a better understanding of the wider social factors that affect coaching by presenting a detailed analysis of the coach-athlete relationship. Through adopting a phenomenological approach and employing qualitative methodologies (participant observation and in-depth interviews) they sought to interpret the coach-athlete dyad and coaching practice as a holistic phenomenon (Cushion et al., 2006). The key themes elicited from their findings highlighted that coaching was not a simple step-by-step sequential process, but an activity bound by shared interactions between athlete, coach and context. In doing so, they supported the view that the coaching process is an interpersonal, dynamic and multifaceted process of social interaction (Poczwardowski et al. 2002)

As this particular body of work has progressed, so too has the academic rigour to better explain coaching practice. Indeed, the growing appreciation that coaching is both a critical sociological and pedagogical endeavour has challenged the portrayal of the activity as a systematic, de-personalised set of standardised models and procedures (Jones, 2005a). Recent studies (e.g. Cushion and Jones, 2006; Jones et al., 2004; Potrac et al. 2002; Potrac and Jones, 2009) have acknowledged that social interactions lie at the centre of the coaching process, as “coaches are social beings operating in a social environment” (Jones et al., 2002, p. 35). Cushion and Jones (2006), however, argue that the social dynamics within coaching are not yet sufficiently understood. With this in mind, Jones and colleagues have provided new ways of developing the coaching literature. By adopting different social theories, in particular the work of Ervin Goffman, they have presented a more meaningful theory-practice link that has helped develop the field (Cushion, 2010a).

Through their work on the behaviours of elite football coaches, Potrac et al. (2002) used the sociological concepts of 'role', 'power' and 'social interaction' to interpret the behaviour of the coach under study. Here, they principally used Goffman's classic text, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday life*, to carefully explain how coaches build up protective self-images in the face of adversity so that they do not lose the respect of athletes. Their work points to how the behaviour of coaches is bound to their own and their athletes' expectations of the coaching role (Jones & Potrac, 2009).

In a similar vein, Potrac, Jones and Cushion's (2006) study attempted to highlight the micro-political nature of coaching. The purpose of this work was to illuminate the strategic methods used by a coach to get players to 'buy into' his pre-set training regime. The authors centred on how the coach deliberately used calculated tactics to avoid direct confrontation so that he could manage and manipulate certain social situations to his advantage (Potrac & Jones, 2009). Findings purported that the coach focused on using strategies related to 'power', and 'impression management' to create a coaching 'front' in order to secure his players' respect and subsequent acquiescence. In this respect, the coach chose his role or rather he chose how to manifest it, which displayed some influence over his role behaviour (Rodman, 2000). Indeed, he convinced the players in his charge that he was in control by manipulating and managing those relationships and the social context to achieve a desired end (Fleming & Jones, 2008). It was this understanding that led the coach to recognise that the coaching environment was a 'contested area', where he needed to be sensitive to the ideologies and expectations of those he worked with if he was to successfully implement his coaching (Potrac & Jones, 2009)

This recent upsurge in coaching science literature has given greater credence to how a sociological analysis of sports coaching can contribute to more critical and contextual coach education programmes. It is through the explicit examination of the 'dark side' of coaching that the inherent ambivalences, dilemmas and non-logical logics of real-life coaching can be

illuminated (Gardiner, 2000). Indeed, such a conceptualisation lead us to consider how ‘social thought’ can be used as a theoretical framework by coaching scholars and coach educators to explore and make sense of the sensuous and complex nature of the everyday micro-interactions that are omnipresent within coaching practice (Jones et al., 2011a).

#### **2.4. Coaching as a social practice**

The essence of coaching has become subject of much debate. In recent years, there has been an acknowledgement that coaches do not merely focus on the technical aspects of coaching; rather, they are practitioners who engage in a socialised process that involves countless interacting variables (Cushion, 2007; Jones, 2000; Lyle, 2007). As such, the case has been presented that coaching is constructed and deeply embedded within social and cultural contexts that involves the relationship between the coach, athlete and the environment (Cushion, 2010a). With this in mind, Jones (2000) suggests that coaching can be considered as a unique occupation that combines an array of roles where practitioners are responsible for balancing individual and collective needs while managing the many and varied dilemmas that are inherent in such a complex social activity (Potrac et al., 2000).

Acknowledging sports’ coaching as a social activity holds the potential for shedding new light on many enduring coaching issues, subsequently generating new questions about this most messy of jobs (Jones et al., 2002). In fact, by adopting certain sociological perspectives (e.g. Berger, 1963), coaches can see the general in the particular, the strange in the familiar, and the personal choice in social context, thus actively engaging and understanding more deeply the social worlds of the athletes they coach (Fleming & Jones, 2008). Such a perspective also recognises the socio-cultural constraints and influencing factors that impinge upon coaching, hence problematizing the often taken-for-granted assumptions of this dynamic and fluid endeavour (Cushion et al., 2006).

Such a conceptual framework also appreciates the social sphere of the coaching process; acknowledging that each coaching situation consists of varying activities within differing settings (Douge & Hastie, 1993; Schempp, 1988; Woodman, 1993). Coakley (2006) further explains that social theories “enable us to see things from new angles and perspectives, to be able to understand more fully the relationship between sports and social life, and make informed decisions about sports and sport participation in our lives, families, communities and societies” (p.32). It can be argued, therefore, that the application of interpretive social thought to deconstruct coaching compels us to problematise conventional or common-sense ways of thinking about the activity (Jones et al., 2011). It thus, holds the potential to better understand the personal worlds of athletes and coaches and to interact with them more effectively, thus, avoiding an “oddly inhuman account of the most human of jobs” (Connell, 1985, p.4).

According to Potrac et al. (2006), it is the stimulation of discussion and debate surrounding coaching as a social practice that is key to further intellectualising the activity; a process essential to defining coaching’s identity and in meeting the challenge of becoming a bone-fide profession (Cushion, 2006; Jones, 2007; Nelson, Cushion & Potrac, 2006). Without this underpinning research that offers a meaningful theory-practice link, coaches become simply ‘knowers’ of theory (Scott, 2000) unable to cope with the embodied processes and cultural disposition of coaching. Indeed, it can be argued that through this line of social inquiry, ‘certain openness to new ideas and alternatives to improvement’ (Hellison & Templin, 1991, p.9) can help make us make sense of the everyday ‘taken for granted’ actions of sports coaching.

#### **2.4.1 Role theory and its significance to the coaching context**

In our modern, diverse culture, multiple roles are a common feature of everyday life. It can be argued that on any given day the average social actor will negotiate in many behaviours

congruent to a particular social category or position. These categories include statuses in formal and informal settings alike. For example, fathers in families, an employee at work, a customer in a shop (Montgomery, 1998). In this respect, the concept of 'role' has been compared to a scripted theatre where the behaviours that we display are dictated by such means as location, norms, values, beliefs or role set members (Ashworth, 2001). According to Danna-Lynch (2007), without an understanding of these social roles, we cannot appreciate the pluralistic activities of daily life in which social actors are engaged. 'Role' is thus, an interesting yet complex notion which greatly influences how we act and behave in the different aspects of our lives (Jones, 2004).

The traditional concern of role theory stems from the examination of social structures and how the individual behaviours of those within the social sets are influenced by the desire to fulfil and satisfy the needs of others (Shaw, 1981). This structural or functionalist perspective determines the features and workings of social roles (e.g., role playing). Here, role theory provides the context in which the behaviour of those individuals is rendered understandable or meaningful to themselves and to other group members (Mack & Gammage, 1998). To an extent, such a notion reduces individual action to the level of mere compliance to social belief (Raffel, 1998). Seen in this way, actions are deemed to be driven by expectations; that is, the expectation an actor holds for oneself, and the expectations an actor believes others hold over him or her (Troy & Younts, 1997). A functionalist approach then, considers the notion of role, as something that is created by society and is more or less universally agreed upon (Danna-Lynch, 2007).

There is, however, much debate surrounding the construction of roles. Rodham (2000) suggests that the aforementioned perspective fails to capture the complex and dynamic nature of role behaviour, arguing that traditional role theory tends to highlight the constraining and determining features of social roles. Alternatively, the interactionist approach supports the

notion that individuals have much more creative independence in how they shape their social role[s], thus giving greater credence to agency in dictating action (Raffel, 1998). Hence, it is thought that social actors are actively involved in the process of role-making as opposed to passively role-playing (Callero, 1994). This reciprocal process shifts the focus of role away from stable norms and values (functionalist) toward more changeable, continually re-adjusting social pressures (Plummer, 1991).

To produce a more comprehensive understanding of role theory, several academics (Handel, 1979; Heiss, 1981; Stryker & Statham, 1985) have suggested that both perspectives need to be integrated if a more insightful analysis of role theory and human behaviour is to be developed. In doing so, such a stance provides a better interpretation of the dual impact of (and the relationship between) structure and agency on the formation and development of social roles (Jones, 2004). As such, Callero (1994) offers the opinion that roles can be examined from a 'resource perspective'. That is, an individual's behaviour is composed of decision-making (agency) whilst to a certain extent influenced by wider social factors (structures) (Coakley, 2006). This analysis appreciates the complexity of role behaviour by recognising the expectations of various social settings and how individuals negotiate the dynamic interaction between them (Rodham, 2000).

It is hoped that recognising the structural constraints that affect the day-to-day behaviours of most social actors lead us to understand, explain, and thus better support coaching *per se* (Jones et al., 2004). Indeed, such a sociological analysis provides a broad framework within which to understand the coaching process. Adopting this theoretical peg, allows for the identification and better interpretation of the social sets (e.g., society, athletes) that are manifest within coaching. Indeed, an understanding of role theory has the potential to shed light on the interplay between structure and agency amid the multiple roles that coaches occupy in their social exchanges with athletes and significant others (Jones, 2000).

Additionally, the significance of such an approach lies in acknowledging the interpersonal dimensions of coaching which are fundamental to effective practice (Jones, 2000).

Building on this particular body of work, which links the social roles of individuals to daily life, can help us understand the performance of a coach's role and how coaches negotiate their complex working environment. This was explored by Jones et al. (2002) who used Callero's (1994) notion of role as a theoretical hook to better understand coaching as a complex social encounter. Here, they suggested that coaches are socialised into certain behaviours, via the expectations placed on them by the demands of their athletes and the coaching context. Such work, built on the earlier work of Jones et al., (2002), who advocated that accepted roles have the potential to become a vehicle for agency, hence, a coach may use his or her role[s] to gain advantage over significant others.

Further studies (e.g. Jones et al., 2002; Jones et al., 2004; Jones, 2009a) have explored alternative concepts of role theory. The notion of 'self in role' was examined in Jones et al.'s (2002) study where coaches were found to protect their carefully built up self-images in the face of contextual difficulties. Here, the role becomes something that is essentially worth doing for the individual, in that it has personal significance, and is not just something that is expected and needs to be complied with (Jones, 2004). Furthermore, the concept of 'role distance' (Goffman, 1969) has been explored through highlighting how coaches distanced themselves from the seriousness of their role by engaging in 'white lies' or using humour to make athletes believe in their coaching agendas (Potrac & Jones, 2009). In this respect, the coaches' role performance allowed for individual expression whereby the coaches' became 'committed improvisers' in an effort to create charismatic leadership (Jones et al., 2004).

This insightful analysis of role theory provided a broad framework within which we can better understand the complex, evolving coaching role; particularly so, in relation to how coaches' engage in social exchanges (with their athletes) in highly inventive ways (Lemert,

1997). Such a conceptualisation demonstrates how coaches' display a sense of autonomy when 'playing their role' or 'making their role' in differing contextual circumstances. According to Jones et al., (2004), it is this appreciation of the social, interactive dimensions of coaching that could lead to coach education programmes including components that reflect on the influences of structure and agency on role fulfilment, so that they develop committed yet adaptable and caring coaches.

#### **2.4.2. Social interaction within the coaching context**

In the previous section, the work of several academics (e.g., Goffman, 1969; Callero, 1994) was used to suggest how the notion of role theory can be applied to coaching. It is inevitable then, that there would be some kind of overlap between role theory and interaction, as role theory is fundamental to the sociological understanding of face-to-face interaction (Jones et al., 2004). This however, should not be considered a problem; rather, it makes it possible to address these principle issues in coaching from different angles (Ronglan, 2011). In fact, it is the social competencies, that is, the ability to productively shape and manufacture face-to-face interactions between coaches' and significant others, that are essential to effective coaching practice (Cushion et al., 2006). An example of such overlap can be illustrated in the work of Jones et al. (2004). The coaches interviewed here, articulated how they balanced between playing and making the role[s] they adopted. They also suggested that they adjusted their behaviour according to contextual and athlete expectations through using individual humour and intense personal involvement in an effort to create appealing leadership (Jones et al., 2004).

According to Ronglan (2011), as social beings we internalise informal rules and norms of behaviour that help develop and maintain interaction in everyday situations. These shared exchanges are not limited to isolated conversations between individuals (coach and athlete), but involve a mutual set of connections between them and the many others within a wider web of complex, cultural relations (Cushion & Jones, 2006). Indeed, it is these social interactions,

derived from individual agency that helps construct the basis of all social structures (Cialdini, 1988). From a sporting perspective, several authors (e.g. Jones et al., 2004; Jones, 2006; Cushion & Jones, 2006) have drawn upon the work of Goffman (1959; 1963; 1969;) and Bourdieu to better explain and interpret the collective nature of coaching and its vulnerability to many and varied related pressures. In particular, their work has attempted to explore the coach-athlete relationship in terms of power, structure and accompanying discourse within the existing social milieu (Cushion & Jones, 2006).

Although mainly focused on the coach-athlete relationship, this work has provided a foundation for increasingly critical recognition of coaching as a context bound activity. Through Goffman's (1959) theory of interaction, Jones et al., (2004) employed a dramaturgical approach (the expressive and symbolic aspects of social interaction) to explain how coaches tactically manipulate the social setting and others' impressions of themselves in order to coax out their athletes' and teams' potential (Jones et al., 2002). Utilising such an approach allows individuals to deliver a semi-theatrical/dramaturgical performance in accordance with their desired goals (Branhart, 1994) Such an act refers to the work of Jones et al., (2004), who suggested that social interaction comprises a constant and dynamic 'two-way street' between engaged parties, and the strategies that they use to get their way within it. By highlighting how coaches deliver theatrical performances, the above mentioned research has allowed Jones et al. (2004) to compare such acts to Goffman's (1959) theory of 'front'. Here, they hinted that coaches constantly created and recreated their social selves in order to sustain a particular image or impression of themselves in relation to the coaching role they occupied (Jones et al., 2002).

Through using Goffman's theory of 'front', the work of Cushion and Jones (2006) proposed that coaches' behaviours and actions were bound by the struggle for authority, status and power. As such, the coaches' they studied consistently engaged in impression management

to avoid losing the respect of their players. Indeed, recent literature (e.g. Potrac et al., 2006) has demonstrated further evidence of impression management within the field of sports coaching. Here, then, such work has attempted to illuminate how coaches juggle a number of social strategies in order to effectively influence the coaching context, in getting players' to buy into their coaching agenda.

Through adopting the theoretical framework of Goffman (1959; 1963; 1969), Jones (2006a) also gave an insightful portrayal into how he, as a coach, used the various strategies of 'impression management' and 'face work' to better interpret his practice. Through an autoethnographical vignette (Sparkes, 2002), his tale was centred on a pre-match setting where he battled to perform (in a dramaturgical sense) and maintain the respect of his players through presenting a particular image. The story highlights the issues of frustration and anxiety that led him to, at times, question his coaching identity, fearing failure and loss of face. In this respect, the interpretation of the story was informed and shaped by how, as a social actor, he presented a compelling front to manipulate the impressions of contextual others.

Although studies such as those mentioned (e.g. Cushion & Jones, 2006; Jones 2006a; Jones et al., 2004) have highlighted how coaches use various social mechanisms to convince others to believe in their coaching means, Potrac and Jones (2009a) alternatively utilised a micro-political perspective to illuminate the power ridden nature of coaching. While not empirical in nature, the work revealed messy issues embedded within coaching, highlighting the activity as an arena of struggle (Jones & Wallace, 2005). Here, coaches were portrayed as engaging in calculated micro-political actions in order to secure their objectives. Indeed, drawing on work from the educational field (e.g., Kelchermans & Ballet, 2002a; 2002b), the paper highlighted how coaching behaviour and approaches were "manipulated simultaneously and instrumentally to serve micro-political purposes" (Potrac & Jones, 2009a, p.231). In doing

so, Potrac and Jones (2009a) suggested that positioning coaching as a micro-political act can lead to a more detailed analysis of coaches' practice.

### **2.4.3. A conceptualisation of power in the field of sports coaching**

Theorists such as Bourdieu and Foucault have attempted to theorise and understand power in differing ways. For instance, Bourdieu (1986) makes sense of power as something that is culturally and symbolically created, contested and legitimised through the interplay of agency and structure. Likewise, Westwood (2002) suggests that power is not something that is 'free floating', but has definite forms through which it can be exercised (modalities) and where it is exercised (social spaces). Foucault (1978) meanwhile sees power as ubiquitous and beyond agency and structure. His work suggests that power is relational; it is everywhere and always present, thus power can be seen as embodied in people's everyday actions. For Foucault, power does not operate in a top-down manner, it is not a possession that can be "acquired, seized or shared" (p.94). Therefore, from a Foucauldian perspective, power is neither structural nor personified; rather, power is something that is part and parcel of social life (Öhman, 2010).

Drawing on this Foucauldian standpoint, Gruneau (1993) suggests that power is present in all social relationships and possessed by all individuals and social groups, arising out of their connections to each other. In everyday terms, Öhman (2010) suggests that power is often associated with something that limits people's freedom by means of coercion and oppression, thus it reflects the ability of one individual to influence another person or persons (Stahelski & Payton, 1995). As such, Synder and Kiviniemi (2001) suggest that even the most basic interaction is "indelibly tinged by issues of power differences" (p.133). Seen in this way, power is not located in one place, institution or person, but is constantly reinvented and renegotiated through social actions (Westwood, 2002). What is more, McDonald and Birrell (1999) suggest

that power can also be seen as productive as well as repressive, operating in hidden ways, unique to each situation, and possibly shaping the lives of those who exercise it and those who are subjected to it.

Taking account of power's omnipresent nature, Lyle (2002) believes that coaching and the coach-athlete relationship and no exception, with the exercise of power being an internal social issue. Thus, it is important to examine the way in which power remains hidden and mobilised in apparently apolitical structures, such as coaching (Jones et al., 2004). The way in which power is attained (from a coaching perspective) can be understood from both a structuralist and interactionist approach. The former indicates that as a coach steps into the role, he/she immediately assumes power (legitimate power) out of respect for their position (Potrac et al. 2002). Conversely, the latter suggests that the coach is involved in 'role making' (Callero, 1994; Raffel, 1998) as their actions and performance acquire power.

Shogan (2007) claims that the way in which power operates in the coach-athlete dyad will be affected by the particular demands of the institutional context. In this respect, Potrac et al. (2002) emphasised that practitioners must be aware of the usurpation of the various forms of power, and the resistance expressed in coach-athlete relationships if effective coaching is to be achieved. In further emphasising the importance of power, Jones (2000) believes that any examination of power would be incomplete without attention to the resistance against it. Indeed, Dunning (1986) argues that as long as an individual in a social encounter has a function and a value, then they are not entirely powerless which, according to Jones (2000), adds to the complexity of understanding interactions between agents. As such, Jones et al. (2011a) argue that central to understanding the complexity of coaching is the transient and dynamic nature of power within social interactions. In fact, Jones et al. (2002) drew upon several working definitions to highlight that power is an essential and ever present component of any social activity.

Much of the research (e.g. Jones et al. 2002; Jones et al. 2004; Potrac & Jones, 2009; Purdy et al., 2009) that has addressed the social essence of coaching has highlighted the importance of power through the constructs of interaction and role. In this respect, the work has acknowledged coaching as a personal endeavour, one that is inherently linked to manipulation and strategy (Potrac & Jones, 2009a; 2009b), particularly in relation to the moral dilemmas that coaches face in their everyday practice (Jones, Kingston & Stewart, 2011). Earlier work (e.g. Potrac, 2001; Potrac et al. 2002; Jones et al. 2004) in this regard theorised the role of the coach through the framework of power developed by French and Raven (1959). The focus was to highlight how coaches utilised the six different bases (or sources) of power afforded to them in order to get others to do their bidding (Potrac & Jones, 2011). Such research has highlighted that for coaches to be respected and to exercise influence over athletes, they must engage in a range of power types, i.e. legitimate, expert, informational, coercive, reward and referential (Potrac et al. 2004).

The work of Potrac and colleagues (Potrac, 2001; Potrac et al. 2002; Jones et al. 2003) suggests that the acquisition and demonstration of legitimate, expert and informational power is essential to gain and hold the respect of athletes. Such power bases were evident in their research into the practices of elite soccer coaches. Here, the coaches deemed it necessary to 'act like a coach' so that they filled the role which was expected of them. The demonstration of their knowledge base and expertise was also paramount so that they maintained the all-important respect of their players. In interpreting how such behaviours were related to role theory, Jones et al. (2004) and Jones (2006a) explored the often taken for granted side of coaching. The purpose was to highlight the performative nature of social power within coaching and how coaches construct their identities; that is, how they use various social strategies, such as feigning ignorance and self-deprecating humour, to protect their own personas (Potrac & Jones, 2009).

The case for the use of social theory to make sense of coaching has been further highlighted in the work of Cushion and Jones (2006). Their study used the workings of Pierre Bourdieu to make sense of ethnographic data collected over a 10 month period. The research demonstrated how an authoritarian discourse was established and maintained within the coaching environment. Here, the findings highlighted how such discourse was structured by, and subsequently structured, the coaching context, and how associated behaviours were perceived as legitimate by both coaches and players (Cushion & Jones, 2006). Similarly, Purdy et al.'s (2008) study used Bourdieu's notion of capital (goods or resources that are at stake in a particular context) to demonstrate how power was defined, used and negotiated by social actors in elite sport. The significance of such work lies in presenting the case further, and more fully, for utilising appropriate sociological thought to view and explain sports coaching.

A number of empirical studies have drawn upon Foucault's theoretical construct to examine and highlight the issues and problems that can subsequently arise from coaches' use of power. Early examples of power being wielded inconsistently by coaches were outlined in Shogan's (1999) study. Through the work of Foucault, she provided a powerful critique of how the discourse of expertise located within a culture of conformity led to athletes adopting an unquestioning, dependant and compliant role within the coach-athlete relationship (Jones & Wallace, 2005; Jones, 2011a). Her work looked at the ethical issues and dilemmas that occur when athletes' and significant others make decisions on how far to push the physiological and psychological limits of sporting performance.

In addition to Shogan's (1999) study, Johns and Johns (2000) examined the eating and training habits of middle distance runners, rhythmic gymnasts and wrestlers. Here, they highlighted how the athletes' were influenced by the 'normalising gaze' (Foucault, 1977) of their coaches so that they engaged in self-disciplinary practices to conform to the dominant norms and ideals of their respective sporting cultures (Johns & Johns, 2000). Further work by

Jones, Glintmeyer and Mckenzie (2005) explored the experiences of a former elite swimmer, Anne, whose career was interrupted and finally terminated by disorder eating. The case study offered a way in which to tell the athlete's tale in relation to compliance within a culture of slenderness and norms, and the role of the coach within that culture (Potrac & Jones, 2009). The findings illustrated how the potency of the coach's power led to drastic action on Anne's (the athlete) behalf in terms of her own surveillance (Jones et al., 2005). In particular, the story presented an account of the accompanying discourse of the coach in relation developing disciplined, homogenized athletes without due consideration to their individualised identity forming biologies, sociologies and histories (Jones et al., 2005).

More recently, Denison (2007) and Purdy et al. (2009) have included the thinking of such sociologists as Foucault, Bourdieu, Nyberg and Giddens to better inform coaching practice. Indeed, Denison's (2007) workings provided an alternative theoretical position to explain the interaction between coach and athlete. Foucault's (1979) theory of disciplinary power was used to observe the structures that shaped the discursive practice of his athlete. The purpose was to make sense of the many coaching practices that lay 'hidden' in the often problematic coaching context. In his own words, Denison explained that he had become an 'agent of normalisation', whereby he dictated the athletes' training environment, through constant surveillance and manipulation, to such an extent that he had stripped the athlete of his identity (Denison, 2007:378). In this case, even though Brian (the athlete) was empowered by his own goal orientation, he soon became compliant to the various forms of disciplinary power (e.g., strict training regime, controlled lifestyle) employed by the coach. Such an analysis relates to what Foucault suggests as an examination of power that effectively shapes the discursive practice [of a coach] through the constant surveillance and manipulation of the context (Johns & Johns, 2000).

Likewise, Purdy et al.'s (2009) study adopted an autoethnographical approach to chart the complex and dynamic coach-athlete relationship. In using Nyberg's (1981) and Giddens' (1984) concepts of power and resistance, they were able to recognise the power-ridden nature of coaching, and how a fruitful coach and athlete relationship soon turned into a dysfunctional one. The findings highlighted how the balance of power that existed between the coach and the subordinate group, in this case rowers, changed over time due to the coach's actions. Her authoritarian, inconsistent manner led the crew to engage in open verbal exchanges that challenged her authority. Thus, the crew withdrew best efforts to exercise some control over the environment (Purdy et al. 2009). According to Potrac and Jones (2011) such a conceptualisation of power reaffirms Foucault's notion that power is relational, where the dominated are never really without power.

More recent empirical investigations (e.g., Cushion & Jones, 2012; Purdy & Jones, 2011) have sought to explore coaching through the theoretical tenets of Pierre Bourdieu and Antony Giddens. Through a Bourdieusian framework, Cushion and Jones provided an illustrative account of how socialisation and coaching's hidden curriculum, served as a powerful means to which a social group can produce and reproduce a culture. During a 10 month ethnographic study within a professional football club, findings highlighted that the everyday taken-for-granted practices (the culture and related discourse) were ideologically saturated and contributed toward the formation of social identities and the production of internal dispositions (Cushion & Jones, 2012). Similarly, in adopting a Giddensian lens, Purdy and Jones (2011) aimed to uncover how elite athletes understood the instructions and pedagogical practices of their coaches. In using Giddens work to deconstruct the context, the findings illustrated the inherent complex interactions in coaching, inclusive of social obligations. Additionally, the results highlighted the importance of social expectations within

the coaching context, and how such expectations must be partially met if coaches are to gain and maintain the respect of athletes (Purdy & Jones, 2011).

Such a theorisation has provided a valuable insight into the multi-faceted and dynamic nature of power within coaching. By presenting this analysis through such theorists as Bourdieu and Foucault (amongst others) we can begin to explain how social thought can be used to understand the powerful interplay between coach, athlete and context (Potrac & Jones, 2011). However, Denison (2007) suggests that rarely does a coach look to social theory to better explain practice. He further argues that such theoretical constructs are more than often excluded from the traditional realms of applied sport science literature when examining sports coaching. As such, Jones and colleagues (2011) have called for coach education provisions to better prepare practitioners for the complex realities of the coaching context. In order to achieve this, they believe that such courses should provide a wider perspective of social theory and its value in understanding the taken for granted nature of power-relations in sports coaching (Potrac & Jones, 2011).

## **2.5 New theoretical explanations of sports coaching**

As coaching has become recognised as a social endeavour, more and more scholars (e.g. Jones & Potrac, 2009; Purdy et al. 2009; Ronglan & Havang, 2011; Cushion & Denstone, 2011) are using alternative social theorists to better interpret the activity. These new perspectives have set about 'shining a torch' on the current landscape thus, providing increased critical understanding of the dynamics that underpin the social world of coaching (Jones et al., 2011a). In this respect, the research has attempted to uncover and appreciate both the commonalities and uniqueness's within contextual interactions (Hemmestad et al., 2010). In this manner, the work has allowed us to 'break out of the silences by looking at the practical realities' [of coaching] as related to the assumptions' biases and stances of everyday life' (Lemert, 1997:46).

The significance of the above work lies in addressing the theory-practice gap in coaching. Here, the intention was to further establish and expand the relevance of social thought as a framework through which coaching can be viewed. It can be argued that the work pays greater credence to the inherent ambivalences, dilemmas and non-logical logics of real life coaching practice (Gardiner, 2000). Indeed, this, analysis [of coaching] can be viewed as a further set of eye glasses that ‘brings into focus, sharpen, and angle our understanding of what might otherwise be a blurred stream of perception’ (Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul, 1997: 228).

Drawing primarily on the workings of Hochschild, Blau, Habermas and Luhmann, this research has pushed the boundaries of sociological thought in its theorisation of sports coaching. In attempting to increasingly put the person back into the study of coaching (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Jones, 2009a; Potrac & Jones, 2009a), Potrac and Marshall (2011) explored the emotionality of the activity through the work of Arlie Hochschild. Her writing, although not directly related to sport, focused on the emotions between people and the way they are displayed in the social context. Linked closely to the dramaturgical workings of Erving Goffman, and in particular his concept of impression management, her work offers us a way of seeing and understanding feelings as part of the presentation of self (Hochschild, 1983). The crux of Hochschild’s research, as applied to sports coaching, lies in how coaches [as social actors] are able to employ expressive devices such as the ability to change *how* they feel, or *what* feelings they show, in order to interact with their athletes in effective ways. Indeed, Grandey (2000) suggests that such emotional labour involves managing emotions so that they are consistent with organisational or occupational rules [e.g. coaching context], regardless of whether they are discrepant with internal feelings.

In adopting this theoretical peg, Potrac and Marshall (2011) highlighted how constructs of Hochschild’s work (e.g., emotion management, feeling rules, surface acting/deep acting, emotional labour and in authenticity of self) can provide a valuable analytical framework to

develop a more critical understanding of the interactive nature of coaching. Their work set out to make sense of the micro strategies used by coaches and the inherent emotions that are involved in their everyday coaching. More importantly, their work suggests that the challenges, tensions and dilemmas faced by coaches and their athletes are not just cognitive or social in nature, but are actually emotional phenomena and need to be understood as such (Potrac & Marshall, 2011).

The sociological tenets of Peter Blau have also been utilised to illuminate the dependant nature of sports coaching. The principal theoretical notions of Blau's work provide a connecting link between the study of everyday life and human behaviour (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Blau's main sociological writings are concerned with the study of macro-social structures where he analysed the large-scale systems of organisations, social classes, and the dimensions around which societies are structured (Scott & Calhoun, 2004). One particular construct of Blau's work that holds great relevance to sports coaching is that of exchange theory. The essence of this work sets about explaining how social life becomes organised into complex structures of associations (Blau, 1986). In this respect, it highlights how social relationships are guided by interdependence and regulated by norms such as rewards, reciprocity and balance; impressing others, unspecified obligations and trust; and differentiations and legitimation of power (Jones & Bailey, 2011).

The notion of exchange theory as a relationship between specific actors 'contingent on rewarding reactions from [each] other' is considered in the recent work of Jones and Bailey (2011). Here, they provide an interesting portrayal of how social exchange theory, inclusive of dependency and alternatives can be used to make sense of how coaches and athletes rely on each other within the coaching context (Jones et al., 2011). Using a personal vignette to critically reflect on practice, this sociological theory is explicitly drawn upon to explain a common struggle that many coaches face in trying to influence and inspire athletes to improved

performance. The plot centres on the coach's frustrations when his athletes withdraw their best efforts in training, and do not 'live up to their part of the bargain' (Jones & Bailey, 2011).

This differentiation of power (Blau, 1986) leads the coach to share his thoughts with the athletes, explaining that their efforts do not meet his expectations and that his presence comes at a cost. In portraying the desired image so he could meet the complex obligations of his position (Jones et al. 2004), the coach sets about maintaining order through the legitimised power vested in his role (Jones & Bailey, 2011). This links to Blau's writing on social exchange and the differentiations of status and power whereby the positive imbalance of benefits generate feelings of legitimate power towards a leader (Blau, 1986). It is from this work, Jones and Bailey (2011) suggest, that Blau offers a framework that could potentially make sense of the inherent balance of power and dependence that always contribute to messy, awkward interactional problems and issues within coaching.

The work of Potrac and Barrett (2011) meanwhile has provided a fruitful avenue in which to explore Jürgen Habermas' critical theory in relation to sports coaching. His work on moral consciousness, the discourse of ethics, and communicative action offers a useful analytical tool in which to advance our current theoretical understanding of social relationships and interactions within coaching environments (Jones et al., 2011). A central feature of Habermas's work is that of communicative action and universal (or formal) pragmatics (Outhwaite, 2009). Here, his work focuses on how ordinary people use their communicative skills to create and maintain social relationships (Edgar, 2006).

In Barrett's coaching commentary (Potrac & Barrett, 2011), he critically reflects on the relevance of Habermas's concept in relation to his own practice. After engaging with the theory, he is critical of his own actions, the taken for granted aspects of football and the ethics that underpin them. It is here that Barrett questions the culture (or instrumental rationality) of

football, and how there is an element of humanity missing, acknowledging that young players are often treated like objects rather than emotional beings. It can be argued then, that the significance of Habermas's work allows us to examine the underling actions of coaches and athletes [what they say and do] and the contextual factors that influence them so that mutually agreeing relationships within the coaching context can be developed.

Ronglan and Havang (2011) drew upon the work of Niklas Luhmann to further problematise coaching. Luhmann's work describes social phenomena such as interactions, organisations or societies as 'systems' (Bechmann & Stehr, 2002). Such thinking suggests that the theory denies the 'human being' a central role in society. This is not because of its lack of respect for humans, but rather because they are such a complex grouping that cannot be adequately understood in terms of a single concept (Moeller, 2006). According to Ronglan and Havang (2011), these systems are made up of self-organising structures of communication (social systems) consisting of, and created by, communication alone (Ronglan & Havang, 2011). Such theory serves as a line of inquiry that enables individuals to observe and understand the dynamics of social life better (Blute, 2002).

Taking the ambiguous nature of the coaching process and its inherent dilemmas, Luhmann's core constructs of complexity, contingency and communication have the potential to help us better understand the coaching environment (Ronglan & Havang, 2011). Ronglan (2010) suggests that to interpret the coaching environment through Luhmannian glasses we must view the group as made up of communication rather than concrete individuals, and to focus on differences rather than identity; or multi-contextuality rather than unity. For example, the group dynamics and social interaction within the coaching milieu offer ways in which to explore how coach[s] and athlete[s] operate and make sense of the social context of coaching.

Subscribing to such thought, Ronglan and Havang (2011) believe that coaches should manage their own social competencies so that they can influence the social setting. In doing so, 'communicative competencies' (Ronglan & Havang, 2011) allow them to use the diversity afforded and the expectations of their role to manipulate face-to-face interaction (with their athletes) merely by their presence. For example, Havang, through his own role as an elite coach manipulated different language 'games' in order to influence the coaching context. The use of this 'behavioural flexibility' (verbal and non-verbal cues) stimulated his own and player activity so that the 'act' of communication allowed for observation and reflexivity within the group. Demonstrating these communicative social skills enabled Havang to develop a better feel for how he approached his coaching. The importance here relates to seeing communication as more than just words, to something where every utterance is important. Additionally, attitude, engagement, body language and gestures are key constructs to the communicative processes.

In locating coaching as social practice, Jones, Bailey, Santos and Edwards (2012) moved beyond the usual areas of 'what' or 'how' to coach and towards the 'who' is coaching. Through their work, they argued that the role of the coach must be more than that of a 'mountain guide' (Mayer-Kress, 2001) where things just merely happen. It is a position they believe demands sincere engagement with the contextual social dimensions (of coaching) that allow us to see past the edges of our own vision (Ely et al., 1997). In attempting to shift the focus of the current coaching landscape, they explored the role of 'the self' through the theoretical workings of Agne (1998) and Goffman (1963). This avenue of inquiry was further developed through the constructs of Garfinkel (1967). Utilising his work on ethno-methods and shared understanding they highlighted the importance of creativity in coaching. It can be argued that through this agenda they attempted to engage with issues that are seemingly

overlooked within coaching research and, in doing so, make sense of its abstract, yet very real nature (Jones et al., 2012).

Aligning to such thought has allowed several academics (e.g. Potrac, Jones, Purdy, Nelson & Marshall, 2013; Purdy, Potrac & Nelson, 2013) to set about developing an emotional understanding of sports coaching. Through this work, they extrapolated how coaches can better deal with the cluttered, emotional realities of everyday practice. The significance of this line of investigation lies in attempting to move away from Fineman (1983) and Hargreaves' (2005) belief that the activity, inclusive of coach and athlete, is calculated and dispassionate. Indeed, Potrac et al., (2012) have utilised the tenets of Denzin (1984), Hochschild (1983) and Zembylas (2005) to make sense of how coaches and athletes use varying emotions to navigate the muddled and dynamic nature of the coaching process. Although originally used to explore emotions within the field of education, Potrac et al., (2013) argue that the central purpose of these frameworks was to highlight the contradictory tensions, ambiguities and emotional rules that tend to dichotomise the field of sports coaching. In this regard, they suggested that such an approach may serve to prepare and support coaches and athletes to recognise the role of personal feeling in practice.

While others have continued to build on these 'new' conceptualisations of coaching, Jones, Bailey and Thompson (2013) and Santos, Jones and Mesquita (2013) have further critiqued the notion of orchestration. Building on the original metaphor, and inspired by the writings of Hoyle and Wallace (2008) on social irony, Kletchermans and Ballet's (2002a; 2002b) notion of micro-political literacy and Mason's work related to the discipline of 'noticing', an attempt was made to increase the relevancy of the notion. Jones et al. (2013) for instance, highlighted how coaches continuously managed the constant evolving political circumstances surrounding their work. In borrowing from such theoretical sign posts, they

posited that the uncertain nature of coaching can't be solved; rather, the problem is of living within it.

Building upon the orchestration concept, Santos, Jones and Mesquita (2013) explored the practice of five elite Portuguese coaches, in terms of if and how such practitioner's manipulated interactions and context towards desired ends. Results highlighted that in order to generate compliance and respect, the coaches carefully and strategically considered their actions and behaviours. In doing so, increased credibility was given to the concepts of power, social obligation and the flexible scaffolding of learning within coaches' practice. Santos et al. (2013) subsequently argued that exploring and accepting the constructs of these additional perspectives go some way to uncovering the 'rules of practice' within the micro-contextual nature of coaching.

Although much of the recent developments within the field of sports coaching have focused on how coaches and significant stakeholders negotiate, comply and collaborate towards productive social relationships, there has been little investigation into the importance of trust within such encounters. Given such a perspective, the work of Purdy, Potrac and Nelson (2013) sought to illuminate trust and its potential value in making sense of coaching relationships. Adopting the work of Sztompka (1999), the argument was made that coaches need to manage the uncertainty that lies within work place interactions. They argued that it's the ambiguity and lack of control over the actions of others lead Sztompka to contest that trust, is a micro-political act which attempts to deal with the uncertain nature of individual action. In light of such thought, Purdy et al. (2013) believed that such a line of inquiry offers a fruitful avenue for ways in which the dynamic nature of coaching relationships can be better understood.

## **2.6 The importance of humour research**

According to Graham (2010), humour research is important because the phenomenon is pervasive and significantly affects individuals, groups, and social systems. Due to its distinctly human dynamic (Vogler, 2011), humour offers a chance to understand social relationships in the context of a nearly universal experience, as it mirrors the social realities of dominance, oppression, and difference as well as those of connection, joy and intimacy (Westwood & Rhodes, 2007). The academic world, however, has been slow to distinguish the value of studying humour (Lake, 2008). Indeed, Raskin (2008) suggests that a paradox exists in the field of humour studies where scholars criticise the lack of support for (and sometimes even prejudice against) their area of interest.

Simultaneously, many dedicated researchers (e.g. Billig, 1996; 1998; 1999; 2000; 2001; 2005; Martin, 1984, 1989, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2007; Romero, 2005; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006; Ruch, 1981, 1983, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 1999) have persisted in their studies of humour regardless of institutional resistance. As such, there is an abundance of knowledge about humour which exists mostly tucked away and is rarely discussed. On the other hand, Fox (1990) suggested the work that has been published has tended to apologise for having the nerve to actually draw humour to the attention of serious minded colleagues, and that such analysis will destroy the intrinsic fun of the topic under study. Therefore, the intended purpose of this next section is, by necessity, to provide a brief overview on aspects of humour research as background information relevant to this thesis.

## **2.7. An overview of humour research**

The scope and significance of the academic literature surrounding humour is vast. This is reflected in the interdisciplinary nature of the field. Scholars from sociology (Eastman, 1921; Ross, 1995; Billig, 2005), psychology (Fink & Walker, 1977; Boyle & Joss-Reid, 2004, Martin, 2003; 2007), anthropology (Driessen, 1997; Carty & Musharbash, 2008), communications

(Berger, 1976; Lynch, 2002), and management (Hatch & Elrich, 1993; Grugulis, 2002) have developed their own internal debates to unravel the limitless boundaries of humour, and how it is a central component of social life. As these canonical texts have continued and developed, a pattern of major concern has emerged and consolidated. Such literature has focused on the *causes* of laughter and smiling, *structures* of humour, *functions* of humour, *effects* of humour on the individual, *the role* of humour and the *differences* of humour in various cultures (Rutter, 1997).

Throughout the continued empirical, conceptual and analytical study of humour there has, according to Billig (2005), been an oversimplified approach by some psychologists and philosophers who suggest that one single principle will provide clarity to the definition of humour. Billig claims that such an assumption fails to address the multi-layered nature of the concept. For Polimeni and Reiss (2006), the history of what has become known as ‘humour research’ can be traced back to at least classical antiquity, when the Greek philosophers’ Plato and Aristotle expounded early theories on the subject. Here, their work reflected on comedy and the nature of ‘the ridiculous.’ For Provine (2000), however, this appeared to discuss the effects of laughter rather than humour *per se*.

Whilst the interest in understanding the function of humour has its roots as far back as the Greek philosophers, its modern meaning comes from the work of early humour theorists such Thomas Hobbes (1661), John Locke (1664) and Immanuel Kant (1790) (Bremmer & Roodenburg, 1997). The attempts to untangle the mysteries of humour, however, first appeared at the end of the nineteenth century with Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud being key pioneers (Jauregui, 1998). The initial theoretical lens of humour research consisted of correlational and observational studies on laughter and smiling, most notably by Allport (1931), Bergson (1911) and Eastman (1921).

A second phase of humour research dealt almost exclusively with the Freudian theory of wit and humour (Goldstein, 1976). The early work of Sigmund Freud (1900; 1905; 1928) gave an alternative interpretation as to the meaning of humour by building on his principal discoveries of mental activity. In elaborating on his work *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) he provided an analytical, synthetic and theoretical approach to humour. In his subsequent book, *The Joke and its Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), Freud discussed the mechanisms of jokes and made use of the principle elements of dream work. In this respect, he suggested that a strong link exists between the unconscious, and both humour and dreams. To understand just why it is that jokes are humorous to us in the first place, Freud analysed a few critical concepts. Here, he looked at the many different forms and style of jokes, distinguished their meaning, and then examined the roles people play in relation to their telling (Billig, 2005). A central focus of Freud's work was that individuals enjoy jokes and humour because of the illicit pleasure and gratification they get from releasing some of their unconscious aggression and sexual impulses (Martin, 2003).

Although Freud's humour theory has been widely accepted and largely unchallenged over the years, modern critics (e.g. Newirth, 2006; Altman, 2006) have contended that his work is artificial and unclear. In this respect, they argue that Freud's theories on humour (joke, comic and mimetic) are divided more in a semantic way than a functional one. Thus, they suggest that all three (theories) could involve the dynamics of the conscious and the unconscious. According to Kuipers (2008), further criticism of Freud's work lie in the un-falsifiability of his theory: the references to underlying drives are, by necessity, veiled and, therefore, hard to disprove. Martin (2003) also suggests that it is worth noting that Freud's theory does not take into account the interpersonal context and social functions of humour. Rather, it considers the dynamics that take place within the individual.

While there is no 'general theory' of humour (Chapman & Foot, 1976), this psychoanalysis led to the proliferation of various forms and meaning of the concept. Indeed, Lynch (2002) suggested that the literature can be split into two broad categories: first, the individual level- why individuals use humour, and second, the societal level- the function humour has within a social setting. According to Robinson and Smith-Lovin (2001), the dualistic function of humour research from sociology and the motivational theories from psychology offer a valuable insight into the phenomenon.

Within the individual or psychological category of humour research, the focus is on motivations for the creation and interpretation of humour (Hampes, 1992). Indeed, much of the psychological research in the past few decades has examined this trend, broadening the meaning of humour while retaining the view that it is conducive to mental health (Martin, 2000). Psychologically then, humour may enhance coping (Holdaway, 1983), relieve boredom (Taylor & Bain, 2003), and foster creativity (Barsoux, 1996; Consalvo, 1989; Holmes, 2007). In fact, research by Martin (2003) suggested that humour involves both cognitive and emotional elements that can occur in interpersonal contexts, such as characteristics of a stimulus to mental processes involved in creating, perceiving understanding and appreciating humour.

In a review of studies examining sense of humour, stress and coping strategies, the work of Abel (2002), Kuiper, Martin and Olinger (1993), and Lefcourt and Thomas (1998) offers a way of describing the beneficial effects of a sense of humour when individuals are faced with potentially stressful situations. Their findings support the proposal that individuals with a sense of humour may facilitate coping and adjustment in relation to the sort of social and cognitive stressors they encounter (Mishkinsky, 1997). Their work then, argues that humour appears to buffer an individual against the negative effect of stress.

The difference between sociological theories of humour and other fields (such as psychology) is that the research is not concentrated on the question of why we laugh, but more on the cultural context of humour and its enhancement of social relationships (Billig, 2005). Early work from the sociological discipline, however, focused on the great structural transformations of the modern times (e.g., modernisation, industrialisation, urbanisation) thus, being little interested in the ‘unserious’ business of everyday life; that of interactions, emotions, play, leisure and private life (Kuipers, 2008). In this respect, the work on humour tended to address the often problematic social issues of race and ethnicity, political conflict, social resistance and gender inequalities (Kuipers, 2008).

Acknowledging that humour is quintessentially a social phenomenon (Martin, 2003) scholars of sociology have attempted to make sense of the meaning of the concept. Through varying approaches (e.g., functionalist, conflict, symbolic interactionist, phenomenological and comparative-historical) it has been highlighted that humour is central to the cultural and moral order of a society or social group[s] (Kuipers, 2008). Early literature (e.g. Radcliffe-Brown, 1952; Coser, 1959, 1960; Sykes, 1966) adopted a functionalist approach to touch on the social functions (relief, control, cohesion) of humour, and how they maintain social order. For example, the micro-sociological study of humour by Coser (1960) looked at the patterns of laughter during staff meetings in a hospital ward. Findings suggested that the amount and direction of joking reflected the social hierarchy, thus maintaining social order or social control by keeping people ‘in their place’.

While the beneficial character of humour has been extensively examined, more recent studies have attempted to look at the multiple functions of humour, those that pose a threat, as well as contributing to social compliance (Kuipers, 2008). From a different perspective, the work of Holmes (2000), Martin (2006), Mulkey (1988) and Palmer (1994) have considered humour as an expression of conflict, inciting, ridiculing or satirising others. This transgressive,

aggressive and conflictive approach to humour has, more recently, been expounded through the work of Michael Billig (2005). In his writings, Billig offers a more critical lens in which to make sense of laughter's shameful, darker side. Here, he proposed that, although humour is usually recognised for bringing people together in moments of pure, creative enjoyment, it is the less easily admired practice of ridicule that is core to humour and social life. This interesting social critique puts forward a theory of humour as a social corrective, one that is linked with embarrassment where cultures use ridicule as a disciplinary means to uphold norms of conduct and conventions of meaning (Billig, 2005).

### **2.7.1. Definition of Humour**

Due to humour being an extremely broad concept, its meaning varies greatly across cultures and social situations (Graham, 2010). A comment or behaviour considered humorous in one context may be interpreted quite differently in another. For example, recent research (e.g., Romero, Alsua, Hinrichs & Pearson, 2007) has highlighted the cultural context of humour within different regions of the US. Findings here emphasised the regional variations regarding self-defeating humour, the creation and performance of humour, and the use of humour in social situations. Similarly, cross-national differences related to uses of humour in business contexts were described by Mulholland (1997). Here, it was found that the joking, teasing or leg pulling between Australians in business interactions made Asians very uncomfortable. This diversity in cultural variation has been reflected in the fractured nature of the literature, where a variety of definitions of humour exist. To deepen the confusion, some scholars even within the same discipline often conceptualise humour differently. Inconsistencies within the research led Martin (1998) to write:

Different researchers bring to the study of humour their own theoretical views, assumptions, and biases regarding personality and human nature in general, and apply the methodologies and techniques that they have learned in other fields of study. . . [This] leads to a confusing babel [*sic*] of voices and little productive interchange among researchers from different theoretical traditions. Rather than facilitating a coherent

accumulation of knowledge, the current plethora of approaches makes for a hodge-podge of diverse and often conflicting findings that are not easily integrated with one another. (p. 57)

This absence of consistent terminology makes it difficult to isolate one common definition of humour. Thus, the concept has lost its focus and has evolved to become a broad umbrella for all laughter related phenomena; e.g., wit, comedy, sarcasm, irony, satire and ridicule (Martin, 2003). Indeed, due to this terminological overlap, humour, and the functions that it can play within society, are readily ascribed and discussed without a definition in sight (Lake, 2008). This, however, has not prevented scholars from probing into the topic of humour to find an all-embracing definition which, according to Attardo (1994, p.1), has led to “epistemological hair-splitting”.

In order to provide a working definition of humour, it is important to distinguish between the terms of wit, humour, jokes and laughter. For instance, the term joke can be interpreted as anything said to deliberately provoke amusement, and to which context is free (Winick, 1976). Yet, Duncan (1984) chooses to use the terms joke and humour interchangeably. In addition, Lyttle (2004) argues that laughter is an expression of humour, not humour itself. This confusion in the broad and multi-faceted literature of humour makes it all the more important for a clear definition of terms to avoid further misunderstanding.

Acknowledging that humour is a complex and multi-dimensional concept, Cooper (2005) suggested that it can be defined in different ways according to the perspective and focus of the person creating the definition. Indeed, the inherent conditions (e.g., cultural background, education, environmental conditions, age, and level of maturity) that differ from person[s] and context[s] make a universal definition of humour almost impossible (Uhlig, 2010). The work of Berger (1976) defined humour as a specific type of communication that establishes incongruent relationship or meaning and is presented in a way that causes laughter. Moreover, the work of Miczo and Welter (2006) purport that humour is a verbal or nonverbal action or

behaviour with incongruous elements intended to obtain a positive mental or emotional response from the targeted individual or group. Martin (2007) on the other hand, suggests that a multi-dimensional definition of humour involves perception, cognition and responses including anything that a person says or does perceived as funny.

From an organisational perspective, humour involves “amusing communications that unite, direct and energise people in ways that benefit the individual, group or organisation” (Romero & Pearson, 2004, p.53). Alternatively, Cooper (2005) defined humour as an intentional and mutual behaviour initiated by one person to amuse and influence another person[s] or group[s]. Critchely (2002:1) meanwhile, offers an apt definition stating that “humour is produced by a disjunction between the way things are and the way they are represented”. These differing definitions of humour support the work of Hughes (2005) who argued that definitions change according to the perspective and focus of the person creating them; in essence, theory defines humour. What is more, Graham, Papa and Brooks (1992) suggest that understanding theories of humour is more important than constructing a specified definition the phenomenon.

### **2.7.2. Humour Theories**

Humour has been the focus of much dispute and discussion for centuries with over 100 theories in evidence (Foot & McCreddie, 2006). A significant amount of the seminal research on humour can be loosely categorised into three major theories: superiority or disparagement, incongruity, and relief (Carrell, 2008). These theoretical signposts form the conceptual basis from which to address the core philosophical issues at the heart of the humour debate (McCreddie & Wiggins, 2008). Additional theories (e.g., biological, surprise, ambivalence, release, configuration) have been proposed within the literature (Lyttle, 2004), but are either subsumed under one of the three aforementioned dominating theories, or have not received enough attention within humour research to warrant debate here (Cooper, 2008). On the other

hand, Krikmann (2006) argues that most of the humour theories ever proposed are actually mixed theories. Consequently, contemporary researchers believe that humour in its totality is too huge and multiform a phenomenon to be incorporated into a single integrated theory.

### **2.7.2.1 Superiority Theory**

Superiority or disparagement theory is one of the oldest themes in the analysis of humour (Lynch, 2002). It dominated the theoretical exploration of humour until the eighteenth century, capturing moments of imagined domination and subservience such as in the telling of jokes between races and cultures (Critchley, 2002). Usually, this conception of humour as a form of superiority is linked to the writings of Thomas Hobbes (Berber, 1993). In his work, Hobbes proposed that humour was elicited by a feeling of superiority by laughing at people or things. He considered laughter as expression of a sudden realisation that we are better than others, a manifestation of ‘sudden glory’ (Kuipers, 2008). Buijzan and Valkenberg (2004) argue that such humour has a primarily emotional function, helping the humourist to build confidence and self-esteem, while Berger and Wildavsky (1994) suggest that it is fundamentally scornful, providing superiority over those who are the object of the laughter. Indeed, Billig (2005) suggests that this concept of humour is essentially a theory of mockery and ridicule, aimed at disparaging and degrading others.

The work of Raskin (1985) defines superiority theory as socio-behavioural, which deals with the relationship between the speaker and the listener. Humour as an expression of superiority can also be portrayed as either a mechanism of control (La Fave, Haddad & Maeson, 1976) or a form of resistance (Weaver, 2010), thus reinforcing self-superiority. In this way, Billig (2005) argues that the theory may lie at the root of social order in the form of disciplinary humour, serving as means of reducing or reinforcing status differences among people, whilst also expressing, through power relations, individual and group compliance. A number of humour thinkers (e.g. Berger, 1993; Meyer, 2001; Ruscher, 2001) have argued that such a

theory has negative consequences at both the individual level and the macro-sociological level. For instance, they suggest that initiation of superiority humour serves as a discordant function as it reinforces hostility toward a targeted group (Ford & Ferguson, 2004).

Early modern theorists who adopted the superiority approach to humour include Bain (1865), Bergson (1911), Leacock (1935), Ludovici (1932), and Sidis (1913). More recent empirical studies by Oring (2003) and Billig (2001a) have highlighted how humour as a form of superiority can be used to diminish and break social taboos. Indeed, in Elliot Oring's work 'The Humor of Hate' and Billig's study of the Klu Klux Klan, they illuminate the humorous expressions of a racist group[s] and how humour within a culture is rooted in repression. Here, jokes afforded individuals a way of expressing feelings of aggression to what they disliked or to feel superior to, which would otherwise be frowned upon.

Although there has been much said about this negative aspect of humour, there are outspoken contemporary advocates. Indeed, the work of Charles Gruner (1978; 1997) dispels the notion of aggression and disparagement within this form of humour. He argued that "ridicule is the basic component of all humorous material, and ... to understand a piece of humorous material it is necessary only to find out who is ridiculed, how, and why" (Gruner 1978: 14). The basis of Gruner's perspective lies in the propensity that competitiveness and aggression is the main function that has enabled humans to survive and flourish (Martin, 2007). Building on Albert Rapp's 1949 evolutionary theory of laughter, 'thrashing laughter', Gruner's analysis has argued that humour is a form of play; where the discourse that is used within humorous exchanges can lead to winners (who express jubilant and triumphant feelings) and losers. It is through this notion that Gruner suggests that humour evolved in humans, from the laughter of triumph in battle, through to the mockery and ridicule, to word-play, jokes and riddles (Martin, 2003).

### 2.7.2.2. Incongruity Theory

Incongruity as a construct of humour is founded on the idea that surprises and uncommon circumstances stimulate humour (Meyer, 2000). It is, according to Billig (2005), the most substantial approach to the study of humour and laughter and was conceptualised in the eighteenth century by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Judgement* as a reaction against the Hobbesian view of laughter. Kant suggested that laughter is a perceived affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing (Piddington, 1963). A more explicit and influential account was produced by Schopenhauer in *The World as Will and Representation* (reprinted in Morreall, 1987, p.52) where he described incongruity theory as 'the true theory of the ludicrous' (Lippit, 1994). In short, Martin (1998) suggests that such theory is where something which is originally perceived in one (often serious) sense is suddenly viewed from a totally different perspective (usually implausible or ludicrous). Thus, the original expectation bursts like a bubble, resulting in a pleasurable experience accompanied by laughter.

Incongruity occurs in many different types of humour, and addresses more specifically the cognitive aspects of perceiving, interpreting and appreciating humour (Martin, 2007). Seen in this way, humour's communications are different from what we normally expect. They are, according to Wyer and Collins (1992), incongruous, peculiar or diverse. This juxtaposition of humour can be thought of as viewing situations with wit, amusement and irony, and with an appreciation of the incongruous, surprising and unexpected aspects of situations (Morreall, 2010). Indeed, Martin (2007) purports that it is this simultaneous activation of two or more contradictory perceptions that is the essence of humour.

Critics of this theory, however, suggest that the concept is too broad to be very meaningful. It is insufficiently explanatory in that it does not distinguish between non-humorous incongruity and basic incongruity, and that revised versions still fail to explain why

some things, rather than others, are funny (Martin, 2003). Relatedly, Richie (2004) notes that the concept of incongruity is vague and ill-defined as there are somewhat different conceptualisations of its function. In further critiquing the inconsistencies within the theory, Wang and Yang (2010) claimed that it did not pay attention to the influence of surrounding factors. Furthermore, they suggest that it cannot explain why we can hear the same humour more than once and still find it funny, in addition to why not all incongruities are funny.

### **2.7.2.3. Relief Theory**

According to Lynch (2002), relief or arousal theory incorporates the belief that laughter is the release of repressed humour. This particular construct of humour focuses mainly on the recipient[s] of humour, and the psychological feelings of the individual[s] (Krikmann, 2006). While many versions of relief theory exist, they all purport that responses to humour, such as laughter, serve as a psychological escape for nervous energy (Morreall, 1983). Some authors (e.g., Carrell, 2008; Morreall, 1997; Raskin, 1985) consider relief theories within their own category, while Attardo (1994) believes that such a theoretical lens is just a more descriptive analysis of what occurs when humour as incongruity is perceived.

The origins of such theory lay in the nineteenth century with the philosophers Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) and Alexander Bain (1818-1903), who formulated respective versions of the concept (Billig, 2005). However, the modern study of relief theory has been reinforced and brought to prominence by the psychological/psychoanalytic discoveries of Sigmund Freud. Building upon Spencer's physiological explanations of humour and laughter, Freud, argued that laughter fundamentally provides pleasure as it can release tension and 'psychic energy'

(Critchley, 2006). Thus, Freud conceptualised humour as a relief from tension (Cooper, 2008). Freud's development of relief theory was based on his view that humour was a relatively clandestine way of expressing the socially forbidden urges of sexual and aggressive repression (Freud, 1960). He describes through joking, comic or wit, and humour pent up psychic energy is discharged through laughter (Smuts, 2009). According to Gunther (2003), the strength of relief theory is that it explains the tendentious as well as aggressive language in humour, as it accounts for the surprise rules regarding language (i.e., puns, word play).

In criticising this perspective of humour, Smuts (2009) suggested that relief theories do not provide us with a way of distinguishing humorous from non-humorous laughter. Indeed, although this theory characterises some of the feelings individuals experience during laughing situations, they are in fact too narrow to capture all, or even most of, the conditions which are associated with humour (Krikmann, 2006). Similarly, Morreall (1991) points out that relief theories are vague as they are non-contextual so cannot incorporate social specifics into their viewpoint. Consequently, they fail to recognise the difference in laughter between different environments. Finally, Phillips-Anderson (2007) argues that relief theory is unclear as it fails to explain why we laugh; rather, it reaches too far, it grasps principles that are too theoretical for their real world application.

## **2.8. Humour Functions**

Inherent to the different theories of humour is its function. Much of what has been written about the phenomenon tends to describe its purpose from either an individual or social group perspective (Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 2001). In fact, the paradoxical nature of humour allows us to delineate existing social boundaries by serving as a way of communicating with others (Billig, 2005). Anecdotal evidence argues that humour does in fact have different adaptive consequences. Previous research (e.g., Hay, 2001; Rogerson-Revell, 2007) has suggested that

humour can fulfil various functions within social situations. The work of Ziv (1984, 1986) suggests that humour's functions can be divided into five main categories; aggressive humour (which include two types, superiority and frustration), sexual humour, social humour, humour as a defensive mechanism, and intellectual humour. In addition, Provine (2000) purports that humour can be a simple response to comedy, a cathartic mood-lifter, or a social vocalisation that binds individuals together. Likewise, Romero and Pescosolido (2008) and Romero (2005) allude that humour has the potential to keep groups together, serving as a social lubricant. Besides these serious functions, Martin (2007) argues that it can also be used purely as a pleasurable form of social play. He claims that individuals abandon (or at least temporarily) conversational goals so to playoff one another, (through funny anecdotes, gestures and facial expressions) so that they can overcome the ritual, implicit norms of the playful activity.

Although the concept has been acknowledged as a societal activity that allows individuals to have fun and express emotional pleasure, it can be argued that humour is a 'double edged sword' (Rogerson-Revell, 2007). Its psychological function, from a positive 'sharp edge' perspective, can be correlated with a decrease in anger and an increase in creativity (Bolman & Deal, 1992), a sense of joy and positive mood (Eisendardt, Kahwajy & Bourgeois, 1997), individual productivity (Duncan & Feisal, 1989) and the ability to deal with unexpected (negative) events (McLaughlin, 2001). In this respect, Morreall (1997) claimed that humour allows individuals to create mental distance when dealing with difficult or complex situations. In contrast, humour and its 'blunt edge' can be seen to hide negative emotions. For instance, Morreall (1997) proposed that individuals within a group who have feelings of insecurity may use the negative function[s] of humour, through denigrating context, to ridicule others, which may negatively affect the interpersonal as well as group trust.

Through the inconsistent nature of humour, it is evident that it does not merely provide psychological functions (e.g., emotional release or serve as being a coping strategy) *per se*

(Wakefield & Elliot, 2000). It can also perform numerous social purposes through the way it communicates meaning to others (Billig, 2005). Indeed, Billig (2001) argues that we become socialised through humour as it is integral to relationships and interaction. For example, Ronglan and Aggerholm (2013), highlighted (with relevance to sports coaching) four basic social functions of humour as it relates to social identity and belonging, tension regulation, creativity, and power relations. In this respect, their work resonates with that of Romero and Pescolido (2008) who also proposed that the positive use of humour can lead to increased productivity and improved group cohesion, thus bringing a reduction in social distance and, therefore, a sense of belonging to a group.

### **2.8.1. Humour and Leadership**

Within organisational research, the work place is a serious business. As such, managers/ leaders often fail to take humour seriously or realise its benefits due to its social play connotations (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). Previous literature which has explored leadership effectiveness has tended to focus on the role of communication for leadership processes through charismatic and transformational leadership styles. Such work has failed to highlight the discursive practices that workplace leaders use to communicate with their subordinates in everyday interactions (Schnurr, 2008). There is, however, growing empirical support that the pervasive nature of the phenomenon can make a positive contribution to leadership outcomes (Hughes & Avey, 2009). Due to management, and in particular leadership, being a communicative activity, humour offers leaders a valuable communicative resource (Holmes, 2007). As such, the work of Schnurr (2008) has stressed that understanding the multifunctional role of humour within work groups can actually lead to effective management of personnel. In her work, she provides an interesting portrayal of how women leaders skilfully employ humour to resolve the challenges they face in a masculine domain. Findings highlighted that through the use of

versatile (humorous) discursive strategies, such leaders are able to portray themselves as effective and advance their workplace objectives, whilst at the same time survive as the 'odd girls out' in an otherwise male dominated environment (Schnurr, 2008).

An increased awareness of the benefits of humour on leadership performance was further manifest in the empirical work of Barsoux (1993), Duncan and Feisal (1989) and Cooper (2005). Their work discussed organisational interactions between managers and subordinates with findings illuminating humour as a type of ingratiation behaviour that induced a favourable mood and thus increased employee effectiveness. Barsoux's work, for instance, suggested that humour facilitates a sense of belonging and that a humorous remark bridges the differences in the work place. In this sense, Barsoux (1993) suggested that humour provides an open minded climate which can contribute to the advancement of transactional goals.

Additionally, the work of Christopher and Yan (2005) suggested that humour has the ability to create and maintain interpersonal relationships that positively impact larger organisational outcomes. Further work on humour and leadership has also explored links between employees' perceptions of their superiors' use of humour. Empirical research that explored the armed forces in the US (e.g., Priest & Swain, 2002) established a quantifiable link between cadets' perceptions of good leadership and those leaders' use of humour. Relatedly, the type of humour used within different organisations was studied by Pogrebin and Poole (1988). They reported that subordinates within a suburban police department would use varying degrees of humour (e.g., jocular aggression, audience degradation) to express discontent with their superiors or the organisation itself.

Humour and leadership has also been studied in pedagogical interactions, between teacher[s] and student[s]. Such work, has explored the relationship between teachers' use of humour and student learning (Wanzer, Frymier, Wojtaszczyk & Smith, 2006; Fovet, 2007,

2009), and students' perceptions of teachers' humour (Stuart & Rosenfeld, 1994). The work of Fovet (2009), for instance, examined how humour was used in classrooms where adolescent students had social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The findings suggested that those teachers who successfully engaged with humour in their interventions were those who established a platform of reciprocity and genuine relationships with their students. While many studies have examined the use of humour from a teacher's perspective, Hobday-Kusch and McVittie (2002) explored the use of students' use of humour in the class room setting. They specifically highlighted the role of the 'class clown' and how specific discursive practises limited the classroom discourse.

Findings from the study highlighted that the disruptive behaviour of students allowed them to negotiate power within given situations so that their own roles were not marginalised. Through an ethnographic approach, Kehily and Nayak (1997) further built on the notion of humour within the classroom. Their focus was on the social significance of humour and the resulting exchanges of male pupils in secondary education. Particular attention was paid to humour's negations, through game-play, mythical storytelling and ritual insults. Findings portrayed humour as an organising principle which allocated pupils in different subordinate peer groups that were constitutive of heterosexual masculine identities.

The ambiguous nature of humour, however, has led some academics to address how it can impede or destroy relationships in educational settings. Indeed, researchers of pedagogical humour (e.g. Berwald, 1992; Neuliep, 1991) have illustrated that it is a unique teaching tool capable of improving or harming the classroom environment depending on its use. Wanzer et al., (2006) meanwhile highlighted the negative use of humour in the classrooms. They claimed, that it is problematic to determine a fixed positive relationship between instructional and student learning due to its relational nature. Here, then the point is made that certain aspects of a teacher[s] use of humour will violate social norms due to what they say may be perceived

inappropriate. Finally in this context, Fovet (2009) pointed to the potential dangers of the wrong type of humour, suggesting that teachers run the risk of falling into ‘sarcasm’, thus affecting the outcomes of the learning process.

In seeking further analysis of humour as an everyday relational tool, the writings of Goffman and Garfinkel offer interesting perspectives. In this respect, the corpus of both their work is concerned with the micro-orientated ways of how individuals use their social competencies (e.g., humour) to make their interactions successful. Although Goffman never studied humour in a systematic manner, his writing[s] were known for moments of levity and droll wit (Delaney, 2013). Whilst not concerned with the functions of humour, he attempted to make sense of and understand the structure of humour through his work on Asylums (1961) and Frame Analysis (1974). In fact, Jacobsen (2010) points out that his work on Asylums is saturated with sarcastic and ironic metaphors that describe patients’ life-strategies. Here, Goffman drew upon Garfinkel’s (1956) concept of ‘degradation ceremonies’ to highlight the significance of humour and joking in relation to inmates’ self-identity (Goffman, 1961), and how the notion of ‘framing’ allowed individuals to ‘switch’ acts and [re]adjust expectations, and thus to carry on with their daily routines (Goffman, 1974). Consequently, Edmondson, (1984) considered that Goffman consistently pursued humour and irony as a conscious strategy to support his [re]organising of perceived ‘natural sequences’ in everyday reality.

Garfinkel on the other hand, utilised his own ‘breaching experiments’ to illustrate how social actors used everyday methods and procedures (e.g., humour) to create meaning in social situations. From this ethnomethodological lens, the lodgers within his so called ‘experiments’ manipulated social norms, the social order, and the unwritten rules of everyday behaviour. Some of the ‘exercises’ implemented were, according to Lynch (2011), akin to ‘humorous’ practical jokes aimed at disrupting the balance between disclosure and concealment in ordinary interaction. Relatedly, Garfinkel’s (1967) chapter on Agnes highlighted the complexities

associated with the interaction order. In order for Agnes, the transsexual, to manipulate her 'sense making capabilities', Garfinkel argued she had to balance the practical rationality of managing mundane social 'methods' (e.g. humour) accordingly to meet the normal status of being a female (Maynard, 1991).

Drawing upon this work, several scholars (e.g. Bolton, 2001; Kotthoff, 2000; McCann, Plummer & Minichiello, 2010) have used such principles to provide a wider view of humour in organisational life. The work of Bolton (2001), for instance, offers an interesting insight into social encounters in which the significance of humour is illuminated. Borrowing from the writings of Goffman (1959, 1961, 1967), the theoretical pegs of the 'presentation of self' and the 'interaction order' were used to make the claim that nurses, as accomplished social actors, were able to manipulate their social competencies (e.g., humour) to juggle the emotional demands of their job. Here, the point made was that to meet the desired performance or 'face' (e.g., sincere face, cynical face, professional face, smiley face and humorous face) nurses had to manipulate the social 'traffic rules' that govern interaction depending upon the social climate in which they worked. This, according to Bolton (2001), is where nurses effectively 'embrace the role' (Goffman, 1961) thus, adopting a detached, but caring face of the professional carer. Of particular interest here, is the way in which nurses supplemented their professional 'feeling rules' (Hochschild, 1983) and the notion of 'framing' (Goffman, 1974) so that, when needed, they skilfully used humour to re-define a stressful situation or to lessen embarrassment within interaction (e.g., with a patient).

Understanding the impact of humour has also been explored through gender and joking. In adopting a Goffmanian lens and the concept of 'face work', Kotthoff (2000) provided a series of anecdotes where females tended to depreciate themselves through humour. Insights into such narratives, explain how humour and irony play a vital role in the cultural affirmation, shaping and alteration of gender. Indeed, it was discussed that those telling the story do so

through self-mockery, so that they give the impression that they do not have a problem. According to Kotthoff (2000), the use of humour in this sense highlights how it becomes one of the techniques to negotiate gender hierarchies.

Acknowledging that acceptable social norms in a given society are passed on using commonly understood symbols, McCann, Plummer and Minichiello (2010) adopted Goffman's (1975) concept of 'other' to portray humour's dark side. In exploring the formation of male identity, they utilised humour's subversive ability to parlay social relations, thus exploring how social actors managed acceptance or dealt with rejection when groups establish their social boundaries. Through socially performed displays, individuals used humour's function as a theatrical domination of everyday life (Lyman, 1987) to create their own sense of heterosexuality and successful masculinity in opposition to the 'other' sexualities that were considered failed.

### **2.8.2. Humour and interactions within the workplace**

Within work place settings, humour is used by managers and workers in a variety of ways. Indeed, Barsoux (1996) argues that it is seldom neutral or random; it is inextricably woven into the context of occupational tapestry as a means to an end. The relational impact that it has on the work place allows individuals and groups to be able to work towards and negotiate everyday organisational goals (Roth & Vivona, 2010). As such, numerous studies (e.g. Decker & Rotondo, 2001; Cooper, 2005) have explored the prevalent and pervasive social meaning of humour within work place settings. The salient findings of Bradney's (1957) study of sales associates in a department store found that those co-workers that negotiated in joking exchanges were more likely to form close social bonds than those who did not engage in such humorous actions.

Likewise, Holmes (2007) provided further evidence of humour's effective nature in the construction of successful working relationships. Through her work, Holmes analysed the everyday common practices of white collar workers in a New Zealand organisation. Findings highlighted that humour not only contributed to the building of productive work place relations but also kindled intellectual activity that promoted the achievement of organisational objectives. The evidence provided from the aforementioned studies offers what Barsoux (1993) calls organisational stability, where humour allows individuals to negotiate social exchanges in favour of conformity.

In expressing humour as a valuable social tool, Grugulis (2002) explored the incongruous nature of the term within private sector organisations. Acknowledging its discursive ambiguity allowed for an insight into how humour challenges established social norms. Her work illuminated situation specific humour and how its comic impact relies on more than one interpretation of reality. For example, those individuals that criticised work place practices with a 'playful' frame of reference (Raskin, 1985) did so without fear of recrimination. This was because they could defuse potential offensive sentiments by distancing themselves from the situation by protesting that they were 'only joking' (Grugulis, 2002). Here, the findings highlighted that for humorous exchanges to be made sense of, individuals must have a common understanding of the context in which they occur.

Paradoxically then, humour offers an insight into events where it is not easily articulated in 'serious' conversations. Previous research (e.g., McCarroll, Ursano, Wright & Fullerton, 1993; Moran & Massam, 1997; Alexander & Klein, 2001; Schulman-Green, 2003; Roth & Vivona, 2010) has led to a particular sensitive area of humour research where individuals have attempted to construct humour within two different frames of reference. The expression of humour by emergency personnel has provided an insightful perspective of how individuals understand and make use of the purposeful application of humour within specific

work contexts (Roth & Vivona, 2010). Conclusions drawn from Moran and Massam (1997) work suggested that researching the concept is difficult in such sensitive situations. They did, however, note that the use of humour was spontaneous and ephemeral where workers used humorous expressions as coping strategies to adjust and deal with critical incidents.

Likewise, the incongruous nature of humour was evident in Scott's (2007) investigation into sudden death work within an accident and emergency unit. Particular reference was made to how the sharing of macabre jokes facilitated a range of ways of coping with the emotionality of exhausting situations. Here, seven expressive themes emerged as to how workers narrated their own humorous stories to provide a vehicle for solidarity through shared laughter. Similarly, Young's (1995) study illustrated how police officers would break the codes of what society would deem appropriate when using sick and twisted gallows humour to maintain emotional control in a particularly gruesome situation. While not directly looking at humour, recent research (e.g., Cain, 2012) has also explored ways in which hospice care workers emphasise compassion through behaviours that include dark humour. In theorising through Goffman's 'Presentation of Self' (1959), and in particular the writings of the front and back regions of social life, it became apparent how the workers would parade opposing behaviours as a means to deal with the difficult and sensitive nature of their job. Analysis drew upon the symbiotic relationship between the two activities and how the keeping of official (front stage- conforming to the expectations of their role) and unofficial behaviours (back stage- that of morbid humour about death and suicide) were important components of managing the stress of the emotional labour that is inherent to the role of hospice care workers.

In following this sociological inquiry of humour in the work place, Sanders (2004) explored how, in the sex industry, prostitutes made use of humour as a form of 'emotion work' to protect and distance themselves from the pressures of such a high risk profession. Empirical data reported how these workers engaged in varying humorous rituals to play out their 'working

identities', particularly the duty of performing the role of the 'prostitute'. Furthermore, analysis suggested that the female sex workers dealt with illegitimate characteristics of the job by consciously using humour as a defensive mechanism to protect their personal and emotional well-being (Sanders, 2004).

### **2.8.3. Humour and relationships**

As previously mentioned, humour is often used as a symbolic resource through which individuals and groups share common experiences (Pogrebin & Poole, 1998). Martin (2007) makes the point that due to its inherent ambiguity, humour may well serve as a tool that can unite or exclude, it can violate social norms or enforce them whilst holding the potential to liberate and or suppress. Mallett and Wapshott (2014) meanwhile suggest that humour can lead to dysfunctional interests that challenge managerial control and employee resistance. By exploring employment relationships in small enterprises, their work highlighted the limitations of humour's exchanges by describing its disruptive influence as limiting the formal work place procedures on a daily basis. The findings here argued that humour's ambiguous and, at times, problematic nature can compound already uncertain relationships and tensions.

In light of such findings, Charman (2013) provided an interesting portrayal of how humour acts as a key component in the production of working relationships in two separate organisations; that of emergency policing personnel, and ambulance staff. The nature of the findings was three-fold. To begin, Charman (2013) highlighted that individuals engaged in acts of superiority and exclusive humour to deal with the sensitive and often emotional demands of their respective jobs. The point was further made that individuals within different cultures are able reinforce group values and strengthen bonds through such discursive practices. Finally, it was emphasised that organisational cultures and the relationships within them are bound by tacit, yet implicit rules that suggest occupational humour in the workplace creates a shared, cultural understanding in which varying organisations can work (Charman, 2013).

An exploration of humour and its equivocal qualities was further highlighted in the writings of Nielsen (2011). Encouraged by the work of Radcliffe-Brown (1940), she attempted to illuminate how identity work, through humour, goes far beyond amusement in everyday prison interactions by demonstrating how officers used humour to manage and negotiate the institutionalised aspect of prison life. Through adopting an ethnographic methodology, Nielsen (2011) believed that the joking relationships between prison staff and prisoners fostered conflict avoidance. Here, humour allowed officers and prisoners to temporarily redefine social structures in a socially sanctioned manner. In drawing conclusions from the work, Nielsen purported that humour, as a communicative resource, unites the 'real' from the 'unreal'.

In discussing the role of humour within an organisational context, Godfrey (2014) provided an interesting account of how it was used as disciplinary technology in the British military. Moving away from the extant literature surrounding humour and its effect on managing control or employee resistance, this study examined the memoirs of recently served military personnel. Through such tales, a discussion unfolded whereby individuals, through rank and order, were able to use humour to pervade the power relations that structure organisational life (Godfrey, 2014). The case was made for how humour as 'control', shapes the notion of '*orderly disorderly*' as an alternative role in the formal and informal disciplinary practices that regulate behaviour and conduct (Godfrey, 2014).

Similarly, the work of Franzen and Aronsoson (2013) explored how disciplinary humour was used for creating and maintaining [dis]order within a youth offender's home. Through an ethnographic methodology, the findings highlighted that both staff and the young offenders would regularly engage in a jocular form of interaction, notably teasing, so that hierarchical positions were challenged. The staff, for instance, would use humour's ambiguous nature to participate in temporary breaches of social order, while at the same time reinforcing local rules of conduct. Meanwhile, the boys would use rebellious humour in the form of joking

with the staff by exaggerating and disobeying such institutional divides. Conclusions drawn from the study highlighted that humour has controlling factors than can both upset and impose order within organisational workplaces. Relatedly, it was argued that participating in disciplinary humour and its disciplinary practices allow those in positions of authority to acknowledge it as an important social skill when dealing with the micro-political nature of everyday work (Franzen & Aronsson, 2013).

## **2.9 Humour and Sport**

According to the work of Snyder (1991), humour has an insidious characteristic within the field of sport. Yet, there is very little sociological inquiry that attempts to highlight how it manifests itself within the context of the activity. Research which has drawn attention to this social phenomenon has tended to argue that humour within sport is dependent on the discourses and language that are rooted in one particular culture (Ronglan & Aggerholm, 2013). Indeed, an analysis of humour within these realms has the potential to expose and communicate the contours of sport and the subcultures that are bound to it (Snyder, 1991). The work of Ciupak (1980) was one of the early investigations into the sociology of sport and, in particular, humour. Through her work on the observations of fans at sporting stadiums and their objective perspective of sporting life, her writings explored how the humorous side of sport, through situational laughter, is only recognised through the social evaluation of the features of humour and the environment in which it occurs. She also noted that the individual nature of a culture, the sporting ideologies shared and the changing structures of the group in question create a favourable foundation for humour to be contextualised.

It was not until the work of Snyder (1991) that a true exploration of humour within sport was undertaken. Ignoring the earlier psychological and Freudian perspectives on humour, his seminal work discussed the general characteristics of humour and how they are manifest in sport. Although he did not intend to provide a comprehensive overview of the sociology of

humour in sport, much of what he wrote argued that the problematic nature of sport offers a fertile area for the emergence of humour to flourish. In using a variety of theoretical and conceptual frameworks (e.g. Functionalist, Marxist and feminist perspectives) he brought to light an attempt to develop a dense interpretation of the social phenomenon. Linking both sport and humour, where there is generally a desire for victory, Synder claimed that individuals deal with the 'structural inconsistencies' of sport and play by interacting and communicating through humour. In sum, he suggested that the phenomenon is undoubtedly a commutative activity where it is used as a common ritual by team members to deal with, and expose, the latent dimensions of a culture.

While not exploring humour *per se*, Eichberg (2009) attempted to reconstruct the fundamental connection between modern sport and laughter. Through the sociology of game play, he considered the phenomenology of laughter in popular games. Central to his critique was that the contemporary world of sport has ignored the virtue of laughter due to the seriousness of sport in the industrial age. In considering such a view, he argued that laughter has become marginal and dysfunctional due to the controlling of results, tactics and techniques that exist in such competitive acts. In revealing such connotations, he exposed how laughter manifests itself as a bodily discourse about the imperfect human being.

Recent work that has sought to explore the influence of humour within sport includes that of Aggerholm and Ronglan (2012) and Ronglan and Aggerholm (2013; 2014). In exploring the use of humour through philosophical and psychological conceptualisations, they argued that humour can make a fruitful contribution to talent development in the domain of invasion games. In this respect, they claimed that using of the concept as a social virtue can act as a valuable component in balancing and structuring the dogmatic structures that are associated with the social training environment. In this sense, they proposed that humour can facilitate

creative game performance and training by coping with pressure, tension and anxieties that are inherent in sport (Ronglan & Aggerholm, 2012).

While providing an investigating of humour in invasion games in elite sport, Ronglan and Aggerholm (2013) further explored the use of the phenomenon. Building on Synder's (1991) recommendation that sport is worthy of a sociological analysis, Ronglan and Aggerholm (2013) specifically examined the use of humour within sport coaching. Focusing upon four social functions of the concept (e.g., social identity and belonging, tension regulation, creativity and power relations) they highlighted the importance of humour within the coaching context. Through their work, they argued that humour is not something that goes on beside the process but is actually embedded in the process itself. As such, they discussed the potential of humour in managing the contingent reality of sports coaching.

### **2.9.1 Humour in coaching practice**

While these aforementioned studies have written about humour from a sociological perspective, much of what has been highlighted is more about the general characteristics of humour and how they are manifest in sport. Although not setting out to explore humour *per se*, several empirical studies have discussed the often direct and ambiguous nature of humour in different sporting contexts. For example, the discourses and language embedded in Cushion and Jones' (2006) study highlighted the 'dark side' of humour. The aggressive use of humour, through ridicule and cynical comments from the coaches' led to a harsh training environment where players become oppressed within a culture. Cushion and Jones (2006) argued that this strategy was used by the coaches as a form of disciplinary power so that their athletes complied with the social norms. Likewise, Purdy et al. (2008) highlighted the power differences between coach and athletes. The authoritarian coaching environment here, led to athletes using condescending nicknames, sarcasm to resist orders, and openly making jokes at the expense of

the coach. The resulting actions led to the coach being marginalised within the environment and ultimately leaving her job.

In contrast, a space for shared laughter was evident in Fine's (1984) study. Here, the work explored how small groups and cultural traditions were developed and created through the more welcoming use of friendly humour (e.g., joking and teasing) in the identity formation of a youth baseball team in the U.S. Relatedly, d'Arripe'Longueville et al. (1998) revealed how locker room humour amongst French judo athletes helped them deal with the discursive and unreasonable pressures created by their coaches'. Although not researched as a distinct coaching behaviour, humour was also evident in the writings of Cushion and Jones (2001). Their study into the behaviour of professional youth soccer coaches in England outlined that humour was aimed at developing cohesion and integration with players as well as establishing appropriate working environments. Likewise, the use of humour as a tension regulator was evident in the work of Jones et al. (2004). In discussing the social role of the coach, some of the elite coaches' interviewed hinted that they used self-deprecating humour, through quirky comments, to elevate the pressures associated with the job. Similarly, humour as a valuable discursive resource was highlighted in the work of Ronglan and Havang (2011). In discussing how coaches used their social competencies to influence social situations Havang illuminates how humour is an important construct in his role as a coach. Here, then, he makes the point that he would often use indirect, self-ridiculing humour as a deliberate tactic to make the environment less serious. The intention of such a strategy was to regulate the power difference between himself as a coach and his athletes whilst also attempting to re-affirm authority within the group.

In acknowledging humour's prevalent nature within coaching, Ronglan and Aggerholm (2014) have continued to explore how coaches use humour to influence those that they work

with and the situations they find themselves in. Through adopting a Goffmanian lens, most notably that of performance, social roles and impression management, they argued that humour allows coaches a performance that can be considered a 'balancing act'. Humour, as such, is viewed as a balancing act between the inherent tensions of 'seriousness and fun', 'distance and closeness' and 'authenticity and performance' within the existing coaching milieu (Ronglan & Aggerholm, 2014). In refining humour's situational presence in such a manner, Ronglan and Aggerholm believe that the concept will be taken more seriously by those trying to understand the social nature of sports coaching.

**CHAPTER III**  
**METHODOLOGY & THEORY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the methodological procedures undertaken within the thesis. To begin, my ontological and epistemological stances are addressed, with particular focus given to the interpretive paradigm. Subsequently, a brief insight is provided as to why ethnography as a qualitative genre, inclusive of the methods used, was decided as the most appropriate research means. This leads to a critical review of ethnography, the position of the researcher, and the ‘social baggage’ that I carried into the thesis. The process of writing as a reflexive methodology is then discussed, paying particular attention to the struggles I encountered when writing. The research design is described, followed by the methods of data analysis, where existing social theory (principally that of Goffman’s [1963, 1967, 1983] presentation of self, impression management and interaction order, and Garfinkel’s [1963; 1967] work on ethnomethodology) is drawn upon to highlight how sociological thought can be related to the humorous coaching context. The concluding section outlines the ethical considerations associated with the study and how they were addressed.

### **3.2 Locating the ontological and epistemological roots of the study**

The fundamental principle underpinning the methodology employed was to best suit what Patton (1990) terms ‘methodological appropriateness’. In light of this, Crotty (1998) purports that no methodological argument can be separated from a debate about paradigms, and the ontological and epistemological assumptions related to them. May (1999), however, suggests that such philosophical deliberations tend to lead to confusion over the nature of research and the methods used to answer the research questions. Such discussions centre on a basic set of beliefs [paradigm] within which researchers work (Cresswell, 1994). These principles help shape a framework for making sense of the world. This, however, is not always as clear as anticipated, due to the complex and distorted strands of the paradigm debate.

In order to understand the concept of paradigm, and how we gain knowledge of the social world, it is necessary to consider the relationship that exists between paradigm and research. According to Sparkes (1994), as with any form of belief system, values and assumptions are learned through and developed via the process of socialisation. At the core of this procedure is the taking-on of certain assumptions related to questions of ontology and epistemology (Sparkes, 1994). Such ontological assumptions raise questions about the very nature of existence; that is, the very nature of subject matter (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Linked to the issue of ontology is that of epistemology which according, to Denzin and Lincoln (1994, 2000), refers to questions about the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the inquirer and the known. This is to say that a researcher's ontological assumptions are determined by whether they consider reality to be external and objective (imposed on a person) or internal and subjective (the product of a person's mind). In essence, Schempp and Choi (1994) argue that a research paradigm directs and shapes how a researcher frames questions and decides on methodologies.

Habermas (1971) argued that human knowledge and enquiry have been historically and socially directed by three principal paradigms. Empirical analytical sciences (positivism), which generally adopt quantitative methods, assume external reality, allowing the researcher to determine 'how things really are' and how things really work (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Interpretive sciences (constructivism), on the other hand, employ qualitative methodologies. Ontologically, this paradigm assumes multiple (social) realities with its epistemology suggesting that knowledge is created in interaction (Cornbleth, 1990). Finally, the critical sciences discard the notion that knowledge is either simultaneous or solely the result of human interaction but is, in actual fact, historically shaped and socially located (Cornbleth, 1990). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), the purpose of research in this paradigm is not only to report but to also critique and transform social structures.

Due to the contested nature of paradigms, others also exist; for example, post-positivist (Hammersley, 1992), feminist (Olsen, 2000), post-structural (Lathers & Smithies, 1997) and post-modern (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In trying to make sense of these ‘world views’, I have wrestled with many forms of expression to locate my own standpoint. Specifically, I have struggled to comprehend the blurred boundaries that exist between the interpretivist and critical paradigms. This is due to the lack of clarity within the common currency (e.g., scientific verses naturalistic, empiricist verses interpretive, deterministic verses voluntaristic) to explain the argument (Sparkes, 1992).

In response, much like the work of Haleem (2006), I read the relevant literature and discussed the various approaches with my supervisors. It was here that I found concerns surrounding the diverse paradigms due to their bound and constrained guidelines. Such deliberation links to the work of Gioia and Pitre (1990). They argue that selecting an appropriate paradigm requires taking a ‘meta-paradigm’ perspective, so that an overview of the underlying restraints and possibilities offered by alternative assumptions may provide differing lenses on how to view the world. With this in mind, I felt that, on the one hand, my ontological stance constructs social reality as being mediated by specific contexts (where there are multiple realities), and that the mind plays a central role in their construction (Sparkes, 1992)

On the other hand, however, I believe and argue for an element of objectivity within research thus, avoiding a collapse into total relativism. This, according to Lincoln and Guba (2000), suggests that my ontological lens is somewhat ‘interbred’, where the conflict of divergent theorists and paradigms may be informing my own personal perspective. I would argue that such a position is not spelt out and is implicit rather than explicit. Nevertheless, I believe that my ontological and epistemological presuppositions are pivotal in shaping the methodological approach to this study. Therefore, as I write, I am aware that I am engaging in research and making sense of the world through my own paradigmatic lens (Sparkes, 1994).

Drawing upon my ontological and epistemological assumptions then, this thesis is situated within the interpretivist paradigm that offers an internal-idealist approach to research. This allows for an understanding of humour in sport, and in particular football, by focusing on the subjective nature of the participants in their context.

It is the adoption of this perspective that allows me to seek an understanding of this phenomenon (humour) rather than test causal laws or manipulate variables. Such an approach is supported by Klein and Myers (1999) and Cushion (2001), who promote the use of interpretivist research to underpin studies within both social and organisational contexts. This, according to Sparkes (1994), allows the reality to be mind dependant, even multiple, subsequently enabling different individuals the capacity to shape and locate their own subjective truths. Thus, the interpretivist nature of this study helps to interpret and comprehend actors' reasons for action, the way they create their lives and the meanings they attribute to them (Sarantakos, 1998)

The foundation from which this thesis is written is based on the way I interpret and make sense of the world. This position is concerned with how I view the very nature of social reality and its existence; it is what I see as real, and can be referred to as my ontology (Crum, 1996). It is from these ontological assumptions that I derive my epistemological perspective. According to Atkinson (1995), these characteristics create a holistic outlook of how knowledge is regarded. My own lens views coaching as an activity that is inherently linked with complex issues, that makes its very nature problematic. I believe that the often messy world of coaching offers similarities to the cluttered domain of qualitative study, where researchers and coaches use various approaches to explore and make sense of their own life worlds. Early coaching research on the other hand, perceived the job to be rationalistic, where linear steps would attempt to replicate idealistic coaching scenarios. Such work is reflective of the positivist paradigm whereby everyday subjective interpretations are neglected in favour of objective,

absolute knowledge that bases research upon a nomothetic protocol and technique (Sparkes, 1994). From my perspective, this is divorced from coaching reality, where ill-defined problems constantly occur.

Understanding the essence of sports coaching, that is, the social processes that underpin it, is something fundamental to its [re]conceptualisation. In order to make sense of the micro-realities that exist within coaching, research methodologies that permit an effective in-depth exploration of actions must be sought (Jones, Bowes & Kingston, 2011). This, I feel, can be obtained through the intricate and complex appreciation of the act of coaching; one which deals with the conflicting interactions and negotiation of coach and athlete in context (Cushion & Jones, 2006). Therefore, I hope that through my own ontological lens, this thesis will contribute to a better understanding of the social reality that reflects the sub-culture under investigation.

As stated, my ontological position influences (and influenced) my epistemological assumptions: that is, how my perception of social reality informs my knowledge creation (Steffe & Gale, 1995). According to Lincoln and Guba (2000), the question here relates to whether I see knowledge as a hard body of objective reality or as a subjective experience. Developing from ontological stance, my epistemology considers all human behaviour as meaningful and has to be made sense of within the context of social practice (Usher, 1996). The need to understand the complexity of social reality in this way will, without doubt, determine the methodological practices to be used.

### **3.3 From epistemology to methodology**

Much like the work of Darlaston-Jones (2009), I believe the ability to identify the relationship between epistemological foundations and methodological practices are crucial for any research to be truly meaningful. With regards to this study, and to make sense of the subjective experience of individuals, *meaning* orientated methodologies such as interviewing and

participation observation (under the umbrella of ethnography) were employed. In this way, the culture, interests, values, and ethos of the individual[s] and sub-culture being explored can be addressed (Kaplan & Maxwell, 1994). Indeed, Krauss (2005) argues that the goal of research is to understand the multifaceted world of human experience and behaviour from a point of view of those being studied. Such work resonates with that of Carr and Kemmis (1986), who proposed that researchers within the interpretive paradigm do not stand above or outside their research; they are entwined within it, so that their findings are the result of meanings of actions as expressed within the specific social context.

In sum, this study is located within an internal-idealist ontology that assumes multiple realities, and where the mind plays a central role in their construction (Sparkes, 1992); a subjectivist epistemology (understanding the subjective meaning of a phenomenon); and an ideographic methodology (ethnography). In constructing this interpretivist research lens, I was mindful of the need for reflexivity on my part, taking into account my own position as the main research tool (Aull-Davies, 2008). It is through this process of reflection, that Russell and Kelly (2002) claim researchers become aware of what allows them to see, as well as what may inhibit their seeing. In this respect, I was aware that I must provide an insightful ‘insider’s’ view of a particular group and the social actors within it, but without imposing my own view of social reality on that culture.

In resonating with Woolcott (1990a), I was not trying to discover a readymade world; rather I was seeking to understand a social world that we are continuously in the process of constructing. The methods selected were aimed at furthering our knowledge of humour, and how it is used and negotiated within the complexity of coaching relationships. What is more, although I chose to adopt the ethnographic genre to explore the coaching context, I was

conscious that it is not *the* method through which to examine coaching; no method can deliver an ultimate truth (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) or in fact, grasp all the delicate variations in on-going human experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Much like Lincoln and Guba (1985), however, I believe that the interpretive methods used in this study are more suitable than others (that may have been selected) for conducting research on human construction of social realities.

### **3.4 Adopting a qualitative approach**

The traditional rationality-dominant discourse of coaching has limited forms of expression about it. Hence, in order to address the objectives of this study, alternative research methods were needed to develop an increasing post-modernist conceptualisation of the activity (Jones, Santos & Mesquita, in press). As such, I deliberated on a number of issues when considering the choice of methods for this thesis. I wanted to grasp what type of humour was used, why it was used and the effects of such humour on the context in which it occurred. I wanted to capture this as it happened, where it happened. To do this, I needed to adopt methods that would portray complex events and situations in language specific to the events themselves (DeMarco, Mancini & West, 1997). In addition, I was conscious to avoid reducing the complex interactions or behaviours into a web of statistical calculations (Powney & Watts, 1987). To escape this, it seemed that an interpretive methodology through the ethnographic genre would provide the kind of insight into the phenomena under study. It seemed then, that ethnography, a “picture of a way of life of some identifiable group of people”, was an appropriate approach (Walcott, 1990, p.188).

Within a broad ethnographic framework a range of qualitative methods were utilised. Such an approach has been termed ‘methodological eclecticism’ (Hammersley, 1996), which emphasises the practical nature of research as the driving concern to ensure an appropriate fit between the method and the research question. Given the exploratory nature of this investigation, and through adopting an ethnographic lens, the study aimed to capture the often

overlooked everyday aspects of social life within coaching (Jones, 2009). The work of Geertz (1973) suggests that such a qualitative approach enables an understanding of life beyond surface appearances, and produces ‘thick description’ of social practices. In fact, ethnography is ideally suited to investigating dynamic and complex activities, such as sports coaching, as it requires in-depth contact with a research site and with the people in it over a prolonged period of time (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). According to Krane and Trudel (2005), this immersion assists the researcher in beginning to observe and recognise the routine events, behaviours and conversations that are manifestations of the complex patterns of social practice. Within this ethnographic framework, three principal methods were used to observe the everyday social of the participants. They included; participation observation, field notes and ethnographic film. Such an approach provided a multi-layered account of the humorous world of coaching and held the potential to offer a rich detailed portrayal beyond transcribed, textual representations of some alternative qualitative research methods (Cherrington & Watson, 2010).

### **3.5 Critical review of ethnography as a qualitative genre**

Within the qualitative paradigm, there are many ways of conducting research. One particular genre that is both a methodological approach to, and analytic perspective on, social research is ethnography (Van Maanen, 2011). Elliot-Sim (1999) proposed that ethnographic inquiry is by its nature an inductive, qualitative technique that is principally concerned with the study and representation of a culture. Indeed, its central premise is to allow researchers to explore and make sense of the social dynamics of human interaction, which would otherwise not be possible through more quantitative or statistically oriented research. Such an approach requires the ‘ethnographer’ to adopt a cultural lens through an *emic* perspective, so that a ‘thicker description’ of events occurs (Fetterman, 2010). In order to do this, efforts are made to grasp what Malinowski (1922) termed the “natives’ point of view” (p.25). Fetterman (2010) believes

that this mode of investigation is more than a ‘one day hike through the woods; it is an ambitious journey through the complex social world of interaction’ (xi). From this then, it can be argued that ethnography is an interpretive craft that focuses on the meaning of individuals’ actions and explanations, the ‘how’ and ‘why’ rather than the quantifiable ‘how much’ or ‘how many’ (O’Reilly, 2005).

The diversity of the ethnographic approach has allowed many academics, across disciplines, to provide a penetrative insight into better understanding individuals’ lives. Indeed, O’Reilly (2012) suggests that this line of inquiry offers the potential to learn, in depth, about a varied range of multifaceted social phenomena. Early ethnographical work (e.g., Malinowski, 1922) offered an insight into remote and detached cultures of social life. More recently, however, technological advances have allowed for a shift to new, contemporary ethnographic accounts of everyday cultural processes. The result has been an engaging and critical insight into various aspects of society; from personal experience of self-esteem (Adler & Adler, 2007), to the globally structured net-working of organ trafficking (Scheper-Hughes, 2004), to schoolgirls’ friendships’ (Hey, 2007), to how humour is used by healthcare workers in organisational settings (Griffiths, 2004).

Although these modern studies have adopted an ethnographic approach, the range of methodologies used have confronted conventional means of investigation from which researchers produce an empirical, fully nuanced non-reductive text (Taylor, 2002). This challenge has led Oommen (1997) to suggest that such an interpretive mode of research is in fact a theory or set of ideas that rest on a number of criteria. Such connotations resonate with the eclectic work of Willis and Trondman (2000). Their belief is that ethnography comprises a family of methods that should be theoretically supported with a critical emphasis and significance for cultural politics, thus explaining the irreducibility of human experience. Indeed, the complexity of ethnography led Brewer (1994) to argue that the concept is both a

method (data collection technique) and a methodology (a theoretical and philosophical framework).

Through its variable nature, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) suggest that there is considerable overlap between ethnography and other forms of qualitative inquiry such as 'fieldwork', case study and even life histories. Therefore, a critical definition of ethnography remains difficult as it is used in different ways in many disciplines with diverse traditions (O'Reilly, 2005). Indeed, Savage (2000) purports that there is no standard definition of such an approach, as, like many other academic terms, it is a contested landscape. Nonetheless, he argues that the significant feature is often participant observation entailing prolonged field work. In providing a loose meaning for the term, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) proposed that ethnography in its most characteristic form involves the 'ethnographer participating in people's lives, overtly or covertly, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of the research' (p.3).

It's perhaps fair to say that the roots of ethnography lie in the nineteenth century mainly within the discipline of anthropology (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Originating from the Greek word *to write* (Vidich & Lyman, 2000), ethnography largely concerns itself with the recording of the habits and lives of people from different cultural societies, usually geographically different to one's own (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffen, 1998). The evolution of ethnography within sociology has seen it move from its historical background of 'ethnology' to a more empirical, theoretical and comparative explanation of social life and culture. Such a shift has attracted sociologists to use associated methods to research the social. Early ethnographical work emerged through two independent developments; one British and the other North American. The former was characterised by British colonialism and the need to look at remote civilisations that were once ruled by the Empire (Brewer, 2000). According to

Stanley (1990), the birth of this work can be glossed as ‘travellers’ tales’, where canonical texts such as Malinowski’s (1922) *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Mead’s (1928) *Coming of Age in Samoa*, and Evans-Pritchard’s (1940) *The Nuer* reflected the scholarly activity of the time.

On the other hand, the parallel development of the Chicago School of Sociology in the 1920’s, sought to document the social practices of inner city life and how these were shaped by the developing urban ecology (Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland & Lofland, 2001). Such work appeared the opposite of the above, as it tended to shed light on the darker corners of society; the strange and the dispossessed. Here, Brewer (2000) suggested that the expansionist tendencies of the Chicagoans bestowed sociology with classical studies of taboo subjects or unusual sub-cultures, from prostitutes to drug dealers to subordinate urban occupations. Key characteristics of this work included attention to the minutiae and micro-politics of everyday life. Core texts such as Anderson’s (1923) *The Hobo*, Thrasher’s (1927a) *The Gang*, Wirth’s (1928) *The Ghetto* and Whyte’s (1943) *Street Corner Society* highlighted the face-to-face interactions of social life. Not all research however, concentrated on the deviant groups of Chicago. For example, Zorbaugh’s (1929) work explored the prosperous areas of the city known as the “Gold Coast” on the shores of Lake Michigan. According to Hammersley (1989), it was these ground breaking ethnographic practices that developed, changed and surpassed the accepted confines of social science.

The considerable influence of these ‘core’ ethnographies served to highlight how the Chicago School fundamentally shaped ethnographic work. In first establishing ethnography in sociology, the Chicago School, through the writings of Robert Park, Ernest Burgess and their doctoral students, illustrated the processes by which social life reproduced itself (Brewer, 2004). Influenced by the ideas of symbolic interactionism, their descriptive narratives provided innovative empirical research methods that generated a vital picture of urban life and human

behaviour (Deegan, 2001). Much of the 'School's' work saw field research and observational methods as key to understanding the 'natural ecology' of Chicago (Bulmer, 1982). Pole and Morrison (2003) argued that the importance of the collective nature of this work was in its methodology, as ethnography is not bound to the far away or the untoward. Rather, it lends itself to a study of structures and interactions which shape diverse locations, communities and social groups. Despite this robust, pioneering research, and the significant contribution to the development of ethnography (as both a method and methodology within sociology), traditional Chicago ethnographic methods fell out of fashion in the 1960's before a rebirth in their popularity in the 1970's (Delamont, 2004).

Since this period, ethnography has moved into other areas of the social sciences. Various sub-disciplines (e.g., geography, education, industry, social movements, health and medicine, and more recently sport studies) have adopted the ethnographical genre to make sense of and understand their own particular fields (Hammersly & Atkinson, 2007). Indeed, such a qualitative practice has been accepted as it offers a credible epistemological alternative to positivistic approaches that have tended to dominate the study of social life, institutions and process (Pole & Morrison, 2003). Within health care and medicine, for example, the use of ethnographic methods has led to the understanding of patients' and clinicians' worlds from their own perspective (O'Reilly, 2012).

Relatedly, the work of Estroff (1981) utilised participation observation techniques to interpret the lives of psychiatric patients, regarded as mentally ill, yet not hospitalised. Her work explored the psychological, social and economic facts of life of a group of discharged mental-hospital patients who struggled to survive in the local community. More recent work provided a critical examination of the diagnostic and popular discourses of eating disorders. For example, Saukko's (2008) *The Anorexic Self*, provided an account of the personal and

political implications of anorexic suffers, in addition to how we relate to ourselves, others and the societies in which we live.

Ethnographic research in educational settings has had a concentrated history for more than three decades in a number of countries (Gordan, Holland & Lahelma, 2001). From a British perspective, much of the work has focused on social class, social interaction and the structures that constrain teachers and pupils (Delamont & Atkinson, 1995). The use of ethnography within the educational setting was orientated to generate a critical perspective on the resistance and interplay of domination and struggle in relation to marginalised or oppressed social groups (Hammersley, 2006). Here, Paul Willis' classic text (1977) illustrated how working class children reproduced class status to take control of their own 'unofficial' timetables so as to better organise their life spaces. Through ethnomethodological, phenomenological and symbolic interactionist approaches, the focal point of these educational ethnographies, (e.g., Woods, 1979) sought to lay bare the practices that explain how individuals deal with the interpersonal relations and processes of the hidden curriculum and the wider social context.

Relatedly, previous ethnographic research by Corrigan (1979) and Ball (1981) sought to investigate the practical activities that challenged the larger social structures of schooling and classroom life. Corrigan's work explored the experiences of working class youths in a north-east city. His penetrative account suggested that the youths believed there was no, subsequently organising themselves against the repression and power that schooling offered. Ball's research sought to investigate schools as a societal structure to describe what [social] mechanisms were evident in explaining the disappointing (academic) performances of working class pupils. More recent educational literature (e.g., Demie & Lewis, 2010) has also used the ethnographic genre to elucidate how low parental aspirations and social deprivation were major

factors in white working class school children having low achievement levels within the English school system.

The legitimacy of ethnography as a research genre and the shift in the academic landscape has also benefited sport. It can be argued that the seminal work of Roberts, Arth and Bush (1959) was the first attempt at investigating the effect of sport on cultural and social systems (Sand, 2002). Here, the eclectic mix of research methods that ethnography offered allowed for more pertinent ways to critically investigate the everyday, cultural life of sporting sub-cultures. Previous sociological work within the field of 'sport studies' led to scholars working in isolation as they faced a daunting task determining how to conceptualise and analyse the complexities of the sporting world (Silk, Andrews & Mason, 2005). Ethnography, on the other hand, allowed for the production of insightful, in-depth accounts of human interactions, organisations and sub-cultures (Silk et al, 2005). If nothing else, such work offered an opportunity for previously silenced groups to find voice and meaning in and through the cultures, life worlds and identities within sport (Silk et al., 2005).

The 'epistemological revolution' (Ingham & Donelley, 1997) as related to the sociology of sport has seen an opening in the discipline where ethnographic studies have been utilised to make sense of the widespread domination and oppression within contemporary (sporting) cultures (Sands, 2002). The work of Clifford Geertz (1973) provided a notable contribution to the study of sport and culture, and led to a proliferation of research (i.e. Chinese female track athletes [Bronwell, 1995], bodybuilding [Bolin, 1997; Klein, 1993] baseball [Klein, 1991], Black sprinters [Sands, 1999], windsurfing [Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998) all of which highlighted the centrality of ethnography as a research tool. Findings from these studies argued that such an in-depth qualitative method provided an understanding of the marginalisation of

sub-cultures and its members, and how they lived out the gendered dynamics of power and masculinity within certain sporting practices. Waquant's (2004) work *Body & Soul* although not actually about sport, but *bodily craft* and its practical logics (Waquant, 2005), provided further evidence of the value of ethnography as a 'sporting' research methodology. His creative and analytical account of boxing in a Chicago's South Side provided a compelling account of a sport culture and its concomitant behaviours. Employing Bourdieu's concept of habitus as a theoretical peg, he sought to further our understanding of human action by demonstrating the social and sensual logic that informs boxing as a bodily craft in the Black American ghetto (Waquant, 2004).

Whilst many of these writings advocated the use of ethnography in social sciences, resistance to such an approach continues to exist. Indeed, the work of Gilbert-Brown and Dobrin (2004) argued that certain fields of scholarship have questioned the assumptions, aims and methods of ethnography to the point of rendering such practice obsolete. The criticisms of the ethnographic genre within social science research has, in fact, emanated from almost opposite sources; from the natural sciences and postmodernism. According to Brewer (2000), proponents of the natural sciences have dismissed the parodies of ethnography as 'mere journalism' or 'hanging loose' and thus, failing to meet the canons which form the proper measures of methods. Simultaneously, condemnation has been made of representation and construction of text, the value it places on 'thick description', and the reliability and validity of the data presented (Miller & Brewer, 2003).

Indeed, the unstructured and flexible 'subjective' methods of data collection associated with the genre breach the principles of the highly structured and 'objective' means of quantitative research (Brewer, 2004). The claim here, is that those working in the ethnographic field do so obtrusively and, therefore, influence their data with skilfully manufactured accounts of social reality that may appear 'too subjective', unreliable and elusive (Dey, 1993). To

eliminate the effects of this mode of data collection, Brewer (2004) claims that those working within the natural social sciences believe that for ethnography to be accorded a role in research; it must be used as an initial sensitising tool to collect data, which would then be evaluated through quantitative means.

The problematic nature of ethnography has also been criticised from a postmodern perspective. Here, ethnographers themselves question the *reliability* or *the representation of truth* of resultant descriptions of everyday life (Hammersley, 1992). Relatedly, Lambert and McKevitt (2002) contends that ethnographic findings can be deemed thin, trite and banal for not having appropriate, agreed criteria for their quality and value. Linked to the aforementioned ‘objective’ sense making lenses, there are issues raised about how ethnography can actually lead to a different interpretation of events, therefore, not accurately replicating the natural setting. Such concerns are highlighted by Woolgar (1988), who suggested that the contradictory observations and subsequent writing of the ethnographic text are problematic. This is due to researchers’ failure to reconcile the juxtaposition of what is said, with what is observed in cultural practice. Similarly, Miles and Huberman (1994) argued that this lack of academic rigour casts serious doubt over the ‘reliability’ and ‘validity’ of ethnographic findings, so much so that the value of such an approach may be brought into question.

In trying to overcome such concerns, Bresler (1996) proposed that just simply ‘telling the truth’ regarding the multiple interpretations and understanding of individuals and cultures is no longer satisfactory. This viewpoint is shared by Rossman and Rallis (2003), who claim that such issues are intricately related to the ontological and epistemological suppositions of the work. In order to avoid the trap of subjectivism, there is a burgeoning belief amongst researchers that there should be a common code of ethics for academics of ethnographic inquiry (May, 1987). This, it is argued, can allow for a balance to search for ‘the truth’ within the ethical challenges that often co-exist in ethnography (in light of post-modern critiques). The

'shift' towards these procedural rules has been rationalised by Schensul, Schensul and LeCompt (1999) who suggests that ethnographic methodology is scientific; it is rigorous and logical and has the potential to offer knowing insights into the 'actual worlds' of different sub-cultures, but only if it is judged and understood by its own paradigm's lens. In fact, Wolcott (1999) proposed that the salutary preoccupation with the postmodern critique and its "crisis of representation" has helped ethnographers become sensitive to their roles as 'fieldworkers' and thus more attentive to their writing and subsequent conclusions.

### **3.5 What is reflexivity?**

The way in which ethnographers acknowledge the impact of their research has been a cause for common debate. Indeed, the ethnographic critique of ethnography placed the discovery of reflexivity at the centre of methodological ideology (Seale, 1999). As such, Aull-Davies (2008) makes the claim that for the subjective experience to be a salient and intrinsic form of an individual's research, then a 'reflexive stance' must be taken. Rather than being self-indulgent or narcissistic this method asks the researcher[s] to deal with the politics of representation of their data. It is hoped that engaging in such inquiry will enhance the self-awareness of what we do with, and how we represent, our social scientific accounts (Lynch, 2000). Defined as thoughtful, conscious, self-awareness (Finlay, 2002), reflexivity evokes an interpretivist ontology that aims to illuminate a deeper and nuanced understanding of the blurred boundaries between objectivity and subjectivity (Eagleton-Pierce, 2009).

Finlay (2002), however, points out a simple recourse to reflexivity do not come without its problems. This is due to the muddied and challenging pathways that accompany such a practice of self-disclosure. The challenge arises from the necessity to integrate academic rigour as well as subjectivity to the way a researcher[s] interprets the social world. Here, there is an argument to suggest that the ambivalent nature of the practice may lead to accounts of navel gazing, where the researcher's position can become overly privileged (De Vault, 1997). As

such, the intended nature of reflexivity is to strike the appropriate balance between the two constructs so that questions can be asked regarding the understanding of personal experiences in relation to the issues under study, while also exploring further how these experiences may relate to a broader context of personal past, present and future selves (Savin-Baden, 2004).

It can be argued then, that a reflexive approach enables researchers in the field to do more than just tell a story. It can seek meaning and understanding of ideological structures and values inherent to group cultures. Pratt (1986) suggests that it allows for a binding of personal experience with originality of expression. In this way, ethnographers have challenged the traditional forms of the method by probing beyond the level of straight forward interpretation, and declare beliefs, interests and practices in the form of investigative transparency and honesty (Woolgar, 1988). In this respect, the intrinsic constitutive role of the researcher and the intense personal narrative and authority of text is, according to Clifford (1986), a construction of self that acknowledges the boundaries of the ethnographic process. In this way, reflexivity recognises that there is no uniform experience or understanding, thus accepting that the political and theoretical stances of the researcher expose the conceptions and limitations of the findings being reported (Ball, 1982).

The outcome of such reflexivity and voice on ethnographic findings has helped shaped the current landscape. The confine between the subjective and objective has, according to Aull-Davies (2008), disappeared. This is due to researchers accepting that they need to move away from the 'shop worn' judgement criteria's of the positivist genre. Accordingly, what has followed is an emerging framework[s] (e.g., Lincoln and Guba, 2000, Richardson, 2000 and Ellis, 2000) that provides an alternative representation of interpretive text. Moving away from these objective ideologies has, however, been problematic. In fact, Ceglowski (1997) argues that by obscuring the field with fictional tools such as short stories, the academic community has endangered the scientific status of the subject area. Although Ceglowski's work alerts us

to a lurking danger, Sparkes (2002) argues that scholarly activity within the qualitative domain needs to 'break away' from these long established methods and explore new '*avant garde*' approaches. With this shift, reflexivity is placed at the centre of methodological thinking, allowing for a methodological self-consciousness (Seale, 1999) that adds vitality rather than 'deterioration' to this complex line of inquiry (Sparkes, 2002).

### **3.6.1 Entering the field: a lesson in reflexivity**

In adopting the role of researcher within my place of work, I soon realised that I could navigate beyond some of the challenges that has faced by so many previous ethnographers. In knowing how the cultural dynamics functioned, and how humour was negotiated, there was no need to engage the formal manners of the internal 'gate keepers' in order to gain acceptance into the group. Instead, I was able to experience the environment in a natural setting and observe how others existed within the multiple layers of ordinary life. Of course, I was aware of the problems associated with the closeness of this research. It was hard to avoid any neutrality. Nevertheless, I continued to operate 'inside' the culture with an incumbent fear knowing that questions would be raised about the subjectivity and authenticity of the data.

In acknowledging this sensitive position, I wanted to portray a 'truthful' representation of the sub-culture. In order to search for the balance of this 'truth' in my work, I viewed (and continue to view) the term as equivocal. Relatedly, I didn't want to reduce the effects of my data with 'sanitised' written accounts. Therefore, in order to deal with the continual dilemmas that challenged the authority of my inquiry I became more detailed in my reflection I attempted to 'bracket' (Caelli, Ray & Mill, 2003) my own presuppositions, so that my way of knowing and interpreting would not overly influence the data collection in a damaging way (Dwyer & Corbin, 2009). Here, I chose to interpret the term 'bracket' as a way of recognising and managing my own epistemological lens, thus trying to reduce the subjective research process.

This, according to Ellis and Bochner (2000), required me to look back on self and observe more deeply at self-other interactions. Lending on such an interpretive insight provided me with the potential to offer a self-reflexive analysis, inclusive of my own experiences, that writes the author *into* the text and, more importantly, allows me to consider how I speak *of* and *for* others within the description presented. As such, the principle intention of my reflexive thoughts was to address how I could better relate to the problems of 'how to be' in the field (Castellano, 2007).

### **3.7 The position of the researcher**

The work of Junker (1960) considers a typology of theoretical roles that a social researcher may inhabit when undertaking observational research in the field. In doing so, he argues that individuals adopt roles that are more or less objective versus subjective and/or empathetic versus sympathetic. As such, Junker (1960) purports that the social researcher may become a complete participant, participant as observer, observer as participant and complete observer. He also acknowledged that the researcher may move between these roles spending various amounts of time in each. Such a perspective is supported by Robson (2002), who recognised that the researcher at any given time may occupy multiple roles, simultaneously, within one field setting.

In accepting this view that researchers inhabit many roles within the field, my subsequent position is one that was unconventional; as researcher, participant and coach. Rather than considering this issue from a dichotomous viewpoint, such a position allowed me to indwell; to be an insider to the context. It consequently allowed me to be acutely tuned-in to the characteristics and social practices of the culture, while also being aware of my own biases and how they may be influencing what I was trying to understand (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). In relating to the insider epistemology, my position allowed for sufficient balance

between subjectivity and objectivity. It was a membership role that Adler and Adler (1987) would suggest is a 'complete member researcher'.

In order to align to postmodern critique and provide greater credence to my situational identity (Agrosino, 2005), I consciously made aware my role[s] to others within the culture being studied. In doing so, I wanted to avoid any confusion between my role of researcher, participant and coach. Acknowledging that in some research situations such a position may be inherently problematic, I argue that in this particular thesis the benefit of me adopting such role[s] outweighed the potential disadvantages. Nonetheless, I was mindful that my own cultural experiences of the phenomenon under study could misrepresent and be detrimental to my data analysis and even collection. As a result, I felt the need to convey the importance of understanding my own researcher context as part of a narrative of interpretation (Agrosino, 2005). In borrowing from the work of Corbin-Dwyer and Buckle (2009), I will leave it up to the reader[s] to agree whether or not my 'insider' perspective improved or hindered my ability to carry out this thesis.

That said, I consider it important to provide an insight into the wealth of experience that I bring to, and could not be separated from, the focus of my research. As Ely et al. (1997) suggest, researchers bring to their writing all that they are, and this includes what may be referred to as their 'baggage'. Indeed, Agar (1980) purports through his work *The Professional Stranger* that ethnographers carry considerable inner baggage by way of growing up in a particular culture, developing idiosyncrasies, and going through a professional training that conveys a particular set of lenses. With this in mind, I feel I must highlight the 'social baggage' I carried and currently carry which, without doubt, shaped my work. Much like the work of Ely et al. (1997), I offer the term 'baggage' in a positive manner, one which allows me to express throughout my writing a unique life experience.

An aspect to further consider within my role in the field, was that I was not only a coach in the club under study, I was the head coach. This was a position which afforded a further power dynamic over the context and the actors which inhabited it. Within such an integrated position lay a somewhat inevitable paradox. Prior to engaging in the field my position as head coach was relatively unproblematic as I was able to [re]position and [re]negotiate my role in line with different situations, different spaces and different people (Fuller, 1999). Carrying out such duties, however, became increasingly difficult and demanding as I was in a precarious position where an array of concerns seemed to come to the fore. As the study progressed, it was a challenge to detach my corporeal view as the head coach, due to a combination of professional and personal identities. Here, I often considered the actions of the players and if they ‘acted’ differently around me just to gain selection into the team or indeed acceptance within the group.

These inherent challenges led me to be concerned with how I attempted to move between my various identities. Put simply, the persistent questioning of oneself led me to develop an awareness of the constant [re]negotiation of positionality and the effect this would have on my research as a whole (Kanuha, 2000). ‘Switching’ between my head coach position, researcher ‘lens’ and participant ‘role’ may have seemed an implicit act for those observing me. This ‘switching’ of role, however, was less than straightforward. For instance, seldom did I get the opportunity to ‘work’ the relational demands of the job without fearing the often dichotomous nature of my position[s]. Relatedly, when I stepped into the head coach role, I questioned my ability to carry out this unconventional ‘insider’ function. To a large extent, my own insecurities led me to struggle with how I could ‘accurately’ and ‘adequately’ interpret what others could see as a fluid, yet multi-layered position[s]. Such criticality, led me to appreciate the ‘space’ between role[s] so that I did not abdicate responsibility associated with any of my position[s]. Rather, I learnt to accept that my ‘place’ within the field referred to what

Goffman (1963) described as 'self-in-role'. Here, the point is made that my role identities overlapped, thus lessening the transition between *who* I was and *how* I interpreted and expressed myself as a coach, participant and researcher (Purdy & Jones, 2013). Furthermore, although reflexively aware of the influence of such a role over the players and the other coaches, I nevertheless came to consider myself an indwelling contextual actor. That is, I was actually a part of the context I was studying as much as other actors or the physical parameters evident. This made me, to a certain degree, both object and subject of the work; something I became increasingly comfortable with (although never totally so) as the work unfolded.

### **3.8 My lens**

In undertaking this study, I acknowledged that it had to be right for me. I had some initial doubts. For instance, I'm not a young, fulltime PhD student I am a thirty something, married father of three. My professional sporting career has long finished. Consequently, I am trying to establish a career in academia. As such, I sought to write a thesis that would enable me to relate to some of my own past experiences and personal interests. After all, the 'jocular' humour of the football dressing room played a large part in making sense of the latent dynamics that existed within the culture that I presided in; that of a former professional footballer and now coach existing within a dynamic, multi-layered environment.

Having been a contextual insider for a number of years, I was and am aware of the frivolous nature of humour. In the context in which I work[ed], humour is often used superficially as a tool to incorporate and initiate conversations between players and coaches alike. Taking account of its often indirect and ambiguous nature, I witnessed, and was subjected to, discursive humorous practices (teasing, name calling, practical jokes) that often challenged, while also reinforced hierarchical salience. In learning to understand the particularities of the sporting environment, I learnt to contextualise the different forms of humour so that they

became part of my own interactive strategies. I doing so, I am able to share the tacit 'humorous' knowledge common to the group. As such, I often used the incongruous nature of humour spontaneously during interaction or when it occurred in a supporting role.

There was, however, a significant use of the darker side of humour, one that played out negative connotations within the male dominated environment. Although there was a set of humorous references known to individuals within the culture, there were times when the embedded, interactive and referential contours of humour served to fracture the shared affiliation of group members. Indeed, conversational jibes and 'put downs' were frequently heard in displays of competitive aggression. On many occasions, it acted as a legitimising strategy, from both coaches and athletes as a way to air unacceptable views or opinions. These 'unofficial' barbed, institutional norms proffered contradictory messages that camouflaged caustic, disparaging comments.

### **3.9 The writing process; a reflexive methodology**

According to Muncey (2010), writing is one of the hardest activities within the research process. This is particularly so when people begin to write as they often wrestle with moments of silence (Ely et al. 1997), and struggle with the dynamic immediate properties of speech that are frozen and lost within their writing (Bolton, 2005). Indeed, Mykhalovskiy (1996) discusses how his 'writing froze' as he attempted to compose in a voice that did not fit his purpose. Therefore, before we become too confused and insecure in whether we have the insight or skill to write, O'Connor (1985) claims that to learn about the process of writing we must discover the ideas that often lurk below the surface of conscious thought, and that to say it over and over again is essential in the quest for understanding the writing process (p.ix).

Building on this notion, that writing liberates discovery and learning, Richardson (2001) argues that writing as a method draws upon deep experience that creates closer contact

with emotions and thoughts. She suggests that it permits the researcher to use 'self as instrument' to write into personal experience, and in a way that makes sense of the social world around them. Supporting this view, Ely et al. (1997) propose that, the act of writing involves a quest; that through the medium of writing we are led on a journey that allows us to draw meaning from our research data and present it in sense making ways for others.

Several scholars (e.g., Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) have advocated the use of 'writing as inquiry' to inform their practice. This form of writing takes the opposite to the planned approach, thus encouraging the writer to break away from the original essay format and to be surprised with what appears on the page (Doherty, 2009). This process of 'inquiry' can be best understood as a way of writing that allows the researcher to access unconscious ideas, thoughts and feelings that flow in us all, and produce a narrative of written accounts that serve to 'reflect the universal human experience of time and link the past, present and future' (Richardson, 1990, p.65).

In the past, much like the work of Haleem, Jones and Potrac, (2004), my formal academic voice has attempted to overshadow and suppress my athletic voice for reasons of authority and fears of compromising credibility. Now, as I write, I talk to myself, stopping temporarily, to reconsider what I have just written with a critical and reflective eye. I often change the emphasis; re-order my thoughts and words as I try to capture a more meaningful way of expressing what I want to say. This reflective writing has enabled me to challenge the way I understand and use language in my thinking and writing. It has allowed me to bring the unconscious to the surface by engaging the self in reflexive conversations about other and context, and the subsequent interactions that occur (Jones, 2009).

Acknowledging and valuing the role of 'self' within the research process has enabled me to make some sense of my experiences. These experiences have helped to contextualise

football matters from a multi-faceted perspective. As my writing has unfolded, I have sought help from a critical friend who has listened, sometimes supporting, and often challenging my ideas (Krane, Anderson & Streaan, 1997). In doing so, we have discussed how this reflective writing has brought me on a journey, one which has disciplined my development as an aspiring academic. It is through this process of systematic sociological introspection, reflexivity and emotional recall that I have been able to relate the personal to the cultural (Richardson, 2000; Ellis, 2004) allowing my writing to serve as an avenue for disclosing the social world in which I live and work (Bochner, 1997). In this respect, I feel that the study can not only offer a 'humorous' view of coaching relations but, in turn, the social value(s) of the work may provide a significant factor in affecting a greater variety of people. Thus, assist in untangling and making sense of situations which can occur within the interactive coaching context.

### **3.10 Methods and procedure**

The present ethnography involved tracking the players and coaches of Senghenydd City Football Club (pseudonym) during their domestic season. Data collection began on July 13<sup>th</sup> 2012 and concluded at the beginning of May 2013. For the most part, I spent the majority of the data collection actively coaching the group and where possible observing everyday actions with players and coaches alike. Three training sessions and two matches per week were observed over the course of the competitive programme (10 months), meaning a minimum of 17 hours per week was spent engaged with the individuals of the club. This extensive observation period was predominantly spent in, but not exclusive to, the team's training ground and match day facilities. This prolonged immersion in the field allowed for the opportunity to observe social interactions and understand their meanings within a broader historical and personal context. To supplement these observations, I maintained a field work diary throughout the research period. This allowed me to record my observations and thoughts.

Following the training sessions and matches, I would look to add depth to my field notes. Here, I tried to recall from memory events and link them to the loose texts already made. Due to the nature of my role (e.g., coach, participant, researcher), however, and the occurring job related responsibilities elsewhere, I had serious concerns regarding the ‘richness’ of the data collected. For example, jotting down notes at training and matches was often challenging due to my multiple commitments. This regularly exhausted me and prevented me from writing extensively during the day. In reading over the initial stages of my field work (3 weeks), I felt that the notes provided me with a particularly sanitised and dense interpretation of humorous interactions from the field. Thus, my data collection was at a disadvantage. As a result, I expressed my anxieties to my supervisor. After much discussion, I chose an alternative ethnographic method. One which would allow me to observe the interactions of the group without compromising my position and the data collected.

During the remainder of my field work (August – May) I utilised ethnographic film, through the use of a video camera which allowed me to manage the social context towards a desired end. Although I still used field notes to gather data, my intention for the camera was two-fold. Foremost, it was employed to allow me capture as much information as possible, thus addressing the issue of accuracy within my work. Relatedly, it acted as a support mechanism or ‘refresher’ when I later looked at my notes for analytical purposes (Harris, 2010). In doing so, the camera allowed me to move freely around the club to interact with players, coaches and support staff without fearing for the credibility of my work.

### **3.10.1 Participants and club in context**

During the 2012/2013 season, Senghenydd City Football Club supported a squad of 40 players, 7 coaches and approximately 4 support staff (e.g., strength & conditioning coach, psychologist, performance analyst and club secretary). All of the players were aged between 18-25 years of

age with coaches and support staff aged between 22 and 61 years of age. The players' careers varied from ex-professionals to semi-professionals, with the coaches holding varying levels of football qualifications with the highest being the UEFA 'A' Licence. In order to shed light on the club and the principal actors which comprised it (and my study) it would appear beneficial to provide a brief biography of all involved. The purpose here is so that the reader[s] gain[s] an understanding of each individual and how their character helped contribute to the nature of the findings.

### **The Setting**

Senghenydd City Football Club was a prosperous semi-professional football team, who, at the time of the study, were playing in the second tier of the Welsh League pyramid system. The setting under study was made up of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> squads. Over the last few decades, the Club had established a progressive reputation for nurturing and developing young players. More recently, the Club had enjoyed a successful time with many on field achievements. Such achievements had created an expectation with the coaches placing an ever high emphasis on professionalism, values and beliefs throughout the squad[s].

### **'The Actors'**

#### ***The coaches***

I was the head coach, the researcher and a participant. During the time of the study, I played [and continue to do so] an active role within the everyday workings of the club. Having had a lengthy career as a professional player in Wales and England, where I gained international honours during a relatively successful career, I moved to Senghenydd City FC. The move into coaching was unplanned and only materialised as a result of being approached by the chief

executive of the Club. My initial two years as head coach was tough, with many sacrifices having to be made. This required me to work hard both, on and off the field, to change the perception and culture of the Club.

### ***John***

Forming part of the coaching staff was John (a pseudonym), a 53 year old assistant coach. John worked with me, and the players, to encourage an inclusive environment within which to work and develop. His initial contact with the club came at the end of the previous season where he acted as something of a mentor (for want of a better phrase) to myself and the players. As a senior figure within the structure, he earned respect from all those within the environment. Away from Senghenydd FC, he had enjoyed a successful career in the English and Welsh semi-professional leagues. Upon retiring, he embarked on a successful career as a coach and academic with several University teams, but most notably as a coach, within a junior academy of a current Premiership Football Club in England.

### ***Sam***

Sam, 23, was the reserve team coach, He previously played three seasons for Senghenydd FC but an injury put paid to his career. Although Sam held the necessary coaching qualifications, he struggled, initially, to make the transition from player to coach. This was due to the lack of respect for his role from some of the senior players. In order to legitimise his role, Sam would often challenge the ideas and decisions of Jim, the reserve team manager.

### ***Jim***

Jim, 37, was the reserve team manager. Although not an experienced coach, Jim had won the reserve league the previous season. He was not known for his playing ability, but rather for his nonsensical comments about football. Relatedly, he was recognised within the club as more of an organiser rather than a coach. Jim's infectious character led him to have a strong

bond with many of the players, although he lacked the respect of several first team squad players.

### *Support Staff*

#### *Mike*

Mike, 61, the club secretary, had a long history with the club. Initially, he turned up to watch as a fan. His involvement, however, grew, and at the time of the study held the position of Club Secretary. Mike had the respect of all, primarily for his honest and down-to-earth manner.

#### *Lee*

Lee, 40, was the Club's strength and conditioning coach. Largely external to the footballing environment, he worked on a weekly basis with the squad regarding their fitness. He was a renowned hard character who was not particularly liked by the players but was respected through his position.

### *The (principally featured) players*

#### *Jamie*

Jamie, 21, the Club captain. Although his initial career within the Club was chequered, he was prominent player within the group during the period under investigation. While an eccentric, his open, friendly and funny demeanour allowed Jamie to maintain many friendships.

#### *Dan*

Dan, 21, and Jamie's best friend. Following his initial first season in the reserves, Dan established himself as a first team player as his friendship with Jamie grew. His rapid rise through the ranks of the Club, and sometimes inflated ego, often antagonised a few of the other players.

#### *Ewan*

Ewan, 19, a former professional player. Ewan joined the Club following his release from the professional ranks. He was one of the younger members of the team but nonetheless earned respect from his team mates for his on-field performances. Ewan was a reserved character who tended to shy away from much of the ‘off field’ interactions.

### *Alan*

Alan, 21, a controversial character at the club. His enigmatic nature made it hard for him to uphold close relationships with the rest of the squad. Although he divided opinion, he was one of team’s outstanding players.

### **3.10.2 Participant observations and field notes**

In terms of the observational approach adopted, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) advised against trying to be an all-hearing, all-seeing ethnographer, which could impact negatively upon the information exposed to in the long term. Thus, identifying optimal times for observation, whilst ensuring a variation of observation times and participants was an important part of the procedure development. During the on-going observations of the participants, a number of skills were needed. These included subtle eavesdropping (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998), asking questions and engaging in dialogue with participants. This required a conscientious observation of seemingly mundane social interactions, norms, conversations and events (Krane & Baird, 2005); thus, allowing me to see the complex in the routine and the routine in the complex (Smith, 2001). Due to my unconventional role within the club, my own biographical experiences of football, and the cultural language used allowed me to stimulate and increase meaningful relationships with the players and staff. As a result, I was able to establish trust and

reciprocate honesty and even friendship with the players, coaches and other interested parties (Clayton & Humberstone, 2006).

A principal method associated with ethnography has been participant observation. As the name suggests, this involves the researcher becoming a participant or a part of the culture and context being observed. Participant observation rests on the principle of interaction, and the 'reciprocity of perspectives' between social actors (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998). Thus, it can be argued that such a method is a complex, politicised way of gathering data involving a variety of problematic issues. Inherent issues include how to enter the context, the role of the researcher as a participant, the recognition, collection and storage of field notes, as well as the analysis of data. During 'fieldwork' then, researchers are expected to both blend into and actively participate in the context, in the quest to observe and understand the experiences of those being studied (Sands, 2002). Many researchers also carry out several tasks and even 'play' different roles to collect whatever data may be useful for the research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Purdy & Jones, 2013). These 'roles' or 'stances' relate to the degree to which the researcher actively participates in the culture under study.

The roles that individuals undertake within the field are generally considered to stem from four inter-related perspectives. The *complete participant* often requires the researcher to conceal his/her identity within the group to avoid disrupting the normal everyday practices (Gold, 1958). Such a role, however, brings ethical dilemmas due to the covert nature of the position and the apparent related deception of those being studied. The *participant as observer* perspective also allows the researcher to be an active participant within the group. Yet, here, the researcher is more interested in observing than participating. The inevitable limitations of this role stem from the trade-off between the depth of data exposed to the researcher and the level of confidentiality that is given to the group for the information provided (Kawulich, 2004).

The *observer as participant* stance is where the researcher has only minimal involvement in the social setting that is being studied. Here, Gold (1958) explains that the researcher has a connection to the setting, but is not naturally and normally part of the social milieu. Finally, while the previous ‘stances’ have allowed involvement within the field of study, the *complete observer* does not take part in the social setting at all. In this case, the observation is unobtrusive and (like the *complete participant*) sometimes even unknown to the participants (Adler & Adler, 1994). Unsurprisingly then, due to the dichotomy of ‘roles’ that a researcher can occupy within the field, participant observation can often require months or even years of intensive work (Fetterman, 2010: xi).

In light of this literature concerning the roles that individuals take within the field (e.g., Gold, 1958; Adler & Adler, 1994; Kawulcih, 2004; Fetterman, 2010) I somewhat contradicted what has been written. Indeed, the four inter-related perspectives that have been highlighted, to some degree, became blurred as they fail to encompass the dichotomy of roles that I fulfilled. Here, I believe that in order to maintain integrity as coach, participant and researcher I was required to be an ‘active’ research member, so that ‘rich’ exchanges could be gathered (Purdy & Jones, 2013). In attempting to play out my multiple role[s] I acknowledged that the process would be problematic due to the constant renegotiation of role[s] and context. In line with Purdy and Jones (2013) dictum, I became aware that it was impossible not to affect the data being collected. As such, I did not conceal my identity (due to my position within the club under study) as all data was gathered in an overt manner. Neither did I take a ‘back seat’ to observe the everyday nuances of action that became apparent. Relatedly, I was aware that I had close relationships with those in the group, and that I was already an ‘insider’ to the context (Lofland, Snow, Anderson & Lofland, 2006). Although it could be argued that I was too close to the culture to be critical (Naples, 1997), I was nonetheless, comfortable with my

unconventional position as it allowed me to be part of the ‘fabric’ of the context, whilst allowing space for critical reflexivity.

In terms of the current study, extensive field notes were recorded during observations, informal conversations, and meetings. Rather than producing detailed field notes that required systematic qualitative coding that produce ‘grounded’ analysis (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2001), the notes provided loose text so that the intuitive experience of being within the culture was not lost (Mulhall, 2003). However, in some instances notations of smiles, laughter and specific features that assisted in the definition of humorous utterances were noted (Hay, 2001). Indeed, the natural occurring talk (Silverman, 2001) obtained from the fieldwork was recorded using traditional field work techniques (pen and paper) and a mobile phone, which provided a particularly unobtrusive tool for studies in contemporary sporting cultures (Clayton & Humberstone, 2006). If for any reason field notes were not taken, for example, in a post-match talk which may have distracted the players, then notes were added to immediately upon leaving the field. Here, they were contextualised so that they highlighted primary information about the setting, environment, behaviours, outcomes, and key themes. They were also transcribed into readable coherent descriptions each evening or within six hours of the event to minimise recall bias (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2001).

The observations were supported by additional ‘field notes’, where researchers write something down in relation to their observations of, or interactions with, context. These could be an indication of what was said (a direct quote), or some key terms to be elaborated upon later. ‘Later’, more than often, means that evening, once the field work is over for the day, “where one types a report of the night, using the notepad as an *aide-mémoire*” (Alasuutari, 1995: 178). Such recorded impressions become the ethnographer’s data. Wolfinger (2002), in quoting Van Maanen (1998: 223) however, reminds us that such a process is not straightforward; that such “inexact notes are the secret papers of social research”. In

questioning ‘where do field notes come from?’, Wolfinger’s point here is that such notes are not taken in a socio-historical vacuum, but are inevitably influenced by an ethnographer’s background and biography. This is knowledge that is “seen but unnoticed” (Garfinkel, 1967: 118). Another interesting claim here is that ethnographers frequently “choose to record a particular observation because it stands out...because it is deviant” (Wolfinger, 2002; 90). This problematizes the assumption of ‘looking for regularities’ in a data set, as, by their very nature, such occurrences are infrequent. The purpose of citing such complexities is to bring to attention that, despite best efforts at reflexivity and self-critique, ethnographers are never able to ‘call it as it is’, just as ‘they see it’.

### **3.10.3 The case for ethnographic film: My personal reflections**

There is a growing debate within the social sciences that to capture and express the social world beyond the linguistic and verbal requires a certain amount of methodological creativity and innovation (Mason, 2007). Within sociological theory, photography and photographs have largely dominated such interpretive ‘extensions’ into social life. Banks (2001) and Pink (2007a) however, suggest that we need to encompass the diverse visual methods that are on offer so that we can illustrate different and complimentary ways of ‘telling’ and ‘seeing’ the social. This said, one particular visual technique that is still under-utilised in social research is that of the video (Brown, Dilley and Marshall, 2008).

Adopting such an alternative approach through ethnographic film can provide a modern, contemporary account to the extensive written record that is the hallmark of traditional ethnography (Nastasi, 1999). The central purpose of this line of inquiry is for elicitation (Aull Davis, 2008). Indeed, Pink (2007b) suggests that this mode of research has the potential to frame, and thus foster, an understanding of the complexity of a situation or the sequence of actions or events. While recognising that this method is intrusive, as there is no actual escape

from the researcher's gaze ethnographic film can evoke reflection in participant[s] so that they better interpret the social interaction as it happened.

The use of such qualitative methods has gained increasing popularity in recent years. For example, the fields of anthropology, sociology, education, cultural studies and American studies, to name but a few, have utilised this approach to redefine established concepts from epistemological, methodological and representational standpoints (Jones, Santos, Mesquita & Gilbourne, 2012). This shift to a so called innovative method has allowed for a more contextualised account of research findings that provide opportunities for a deeper understanding of the social world. In this respect, DuFon (2002) suggests that it can provide a more complete sense of who people are and the nature of interactions that they acquaint themselves to. This is not to say that visual methods and ethnographic film in particular, are more pertinent than any other forms of qualitative investigation. What they do offer when used appropriately however, is a powerful indicator regarding the multiple meanings embedded within different cultures (Phoenix, 2010). From a researcher perspective, they also offer greater attention to reflexivity and subjectivity, and the notion of the visual as a critical 'voice' within research (Pink, 2003).

Despite its growth however, the ethnographic film has faced many issues in trying to convince traditional, social (and sport) sciences of its benefits as a method of research inquiry (Grady, 2008). Indeed, incorporating visual methods has led some to argue that the crossing of discipline boundaries is not an easy road to take due to the dangers of 'amateurism' (Pauwels, 2000). This reflects the constant argument against the interpretation, representation and ethics that surround this alternative line of inquiry and the problem of ascribing anonymity or confidentiality.

One way in which to overcome problems related to [mis]representation of events is the use of a variety of methods when conducting qualitative research. Acknowledging that a

neutral, objective observation of the data is not possible (Pink, 2001), Kawulich (2004), suggests that such an approach allow researchers to reflect on the data recorded so that any distorted, biased interpretation can be revisited to provide a richer understanding of the social context and the participants therein. Therefore, accepting such a stance allows those rooted within a postmodern belief and a social constructivist epistemology to *make sense of* rather than providing the *truth* about the phenomenon under study (Lynn & Lea, 2008).

With regards the nature of my study, I did not use this creative method in order for the participants to express themselves or tell their own story. Neither was it used to provide me with a more advantageous position to gain greater access to what individuals think or feel. The generic and formal characteristic of the film was for research purposes only where I could use a camera impassively to observe the participants in a naturally occurring setting. The purpose of such a protocol then was not to compromise the naturalness of my data, but to allow me to weave a thicker description into my field work. Although others may render such an approach inadequate, my intention was to use this means of representation symbiotically in order to provide a more rounded and comprehensive ethnographic account.

#### **3.10.4. My reflections**

Due to the very nature of my doctoral work and the methods used, I took up an unconventional role as a researcher, participant and coach. As such, I deliberated on a number of issues when considering the choice of methods for my thesis. I wanted to grasp what type of humour was used, why it was used and the effects of such humour in the context in which it occurred. I wanted to capture this as it happened, and where it happened. To do this, I needed to adopt methods that would portray complex events and situations in language specific to the events themselves.

Having been an insider within context for numerous years, capturing such implicit, humorous behaviours and actions would be easy, or so I thought. Entering the 'field' as an ethnographer, the explicit acts were obvious to see. I could observe the players' actions and language clearly, so the writing of my notes became easy. Yet, each night when I would look to elaborate on my 'loose' findings, my texts were dense, limited and redundant. They did not seem to convey what my eyes had seen. Although I thought I could trust my own cultural 'lens', I found it hard to visualise events as they happened. Trying to bring to life the nuances of humour and its resulting actions became difficult, very difficult. My work became transparent, it had no meaning. There was a missing link between text and experience. Using my supervisor as a critical friend, I would ask how my notes should look and what they should portray. Although reassurance was given, I still remained unhappy with what I was writing. I wanted to catch everything while my unusual role within my research limited me (so I thought) to what I could see. I was worried that what I was seeing, was not providing a 'true' representation of the culture in which I was working and researching.

Before undertaking my PhD I read the literature that helped inform my mode of inquiry. The texts argued that my ethnographic 'eyes' would be frail and the muscles weak. Such was the case. So, I began to read and write within my own work, issues surrounding reflexivity and how it applied me, which certainly led to greater criticality. Nevertheless, the issue of capturing 'everything' within my observations over took my thoughts. I feared missing crucial interactions; I wanted to find the most appropriate way to find voice within my field work. I constantly considered my intentions and why events did not, on paper, appear as they happened. In wrestling with these frustrations I struggled to contextualise many of my earlier observations. This tussle led me to consider alternative ethnographic methods. What I was seeking, was a qualitative technique that evoked deeper reflection on hidden, embedded cultural practices. In trying to provide sufficient balance between subjectivity and objectivity,

my continued frustrations centred on my 'complete member researcher' role (Adler & Adler, 1987). At first, I feared that this 'wrestling' with my notes was due to inexperience. I soon acknowledged, however, that the displeasure felt was due to one principal reason; that of trying to occupy multiple roles within the field. I had serious concerns regarding the 'richness' of the data collected

It was here that I considered the use of a video camera. Why? Because I thought it would allow me to 'better' observe the inherent daily interactions of context. What I hoped for was a 'richer' account of individual[s] and group life; one that I could rely on if I missed something in the moment. To begin, my camera was used as a way of re-affirming my already written texts. I would use it as my support network. Although there is an argument that such a tool is intrusive, I found the camera to be quite the opposite. Placed in obvious positions in the team's dressing room, training pitches and facilities, it soon became part of daily life. The camera became a 'social actor' within our culture, it was soon forgotten. With such an approach, I found that my own ethnographic skills became sharper. I knew that I could delve deeper into individual interactions without the fear of compromising any of the data collected. Subtleties in behaviours became more obvious, I could see beneath the surface of what was going on. Implicit messages/actions (through humour) were more readily observed as I knew I had the camera as my supporting lens.

Although I would refer back to the camera as a way of trusting my own eyes and observations, my field notes never became secondary to my exploration of humour. So that I could focus on my role[s] as coach, participant and researcher, the ethnographic film aided me in providing a 'thicker description' of social reality, one that if not used would have missed the everyday idiosyncrasies that are apparent in such multi-layered cultures. The use of such

technology allowed me to find an alternative way of dealing with the difficult experiences of expressing myself verbally in my writing. It offered cues that elicited reflection so that my notes became more aesthetic in their creation. In this respect, I came to appreciate that what the film record provided me with, was not so much additional information, as a reaffirmation of what my developing ethnographic skills had already seen. Suffice to say, I became more relaxed in my fieldwork. Much like the work of Spyrou (2011), when writing up my tales from the field, I was able to use the sensitising ethnographic footage to help narrate the distorted ‘stories’ that are visible in such a context.

This, for me, was an opportunity to engage in the critical, reflexive research that gave voice to myself and others within the text. Whilst the ethnographic film provided me with a more pleasurable and accessible way of conducting my research I was mindful that my notes were not an authentic depiction of social reality as the film images were a selected representation of where the camera was positioned. Nonetheless, such an approach offered me a way of effectively carrying out my coaching practice while exploring the experiences and voices of the social actors within my research.

### **3.11 Data Analysis**

The data were transcribed and analysed as soon as they were collated. This involved line-by-line scrutiny of the field notes and the deconstruction of the ethnographic film so that sociological theory could be integrated into the analysis. In doing so, the approach served as a means to develop a deeper, more critical understanding of humour and how it is used and negotiated in coaching. In order to make sense of the contested practices [humour] of coaching, the need for a light[er] theoretical framing is provided. Therefore, existing social theory that is Goffman’s (1963; 1967; 1983) presentation of self, impression management and interaction order, and Garfinkle’s (1963; 1967) work on social order were applied to highlight how

sociological thought can be related to the coaching context. Adopting such useful theoretical signposts allowed for a more insightful understanding of ambiguous experience to become more visible and apparent.

To date, the work of global theorists such as Goffman, as well as Bourdieu and Foucault have been used by Jones and colleagues as sensitising frameworks to better understand the interactive relational nature of coaching. One such theorist whose work has had little prominence in the coaching science literature so far is that of Harold Garfinkel. Garfinkel's early work, although ridiculed in some quarters for being 'peculiar', has nevertheless had an influential bearing on much of the subsequent sociological literature (Rawls-Warfield, 2002). Linked to the workings of Erving Goffman and his ideas on the interaction order, Garfinkel's writings coalesced into a sociological sub-discipline known as ethnomethodology (Heritage, 2008). The term ethnomethodology refers to a particular socio-cultural group (*ethno*), the practices that they use in everyday life (*method*) and the systematic observation and description or study of these practices (*ology*) (Morriss, 2014). In light of such manifestation, it can be argued that ethnomethodology is concerned with the pool of shared knowledge and reasoning procedures that members of a society use to respond to the circumstances in which they find themselves (Garfinkel, 1967).

Garfinkel's writings on ethno-methods [or social rules] shed light on the shared understandings we have that make interactions work [to ensure that we know what each other is actually speaking about] (Jones et al., 2012). According to Garfinkel (2002), what is important here is using the background knowledge ('what we see' with 'what we know') to 'fill in' the meaning of what people say and do to create the orderliness of social life. It can be argued then, that without such a shared understanding, no functional social interaction would occur. Such thinking allows ten Have (2004) to elaborate on such thoughts by suggesting that ethnomethodology is a social inquiry that sets about explaining ways in which members,

collectively shape and maintain, a sense of order and intelligibility in social life. Relatedly, the work of Cheng (2012) further explains this notion by suggesting that it's the examination of the shared rules we use to understand and create reactions in the course of interaction that becomes ethnomethodology's area for exploration.

In order to explain to the constitution of social facts Garfinkel borrowed from other fields (e.g., linguistics and phenomenology) to provide ethnomethodology with its own detailed vocabulary (Coulon, 1995). The related core notions of accountability, reflexivity, and indexicality provide an insight into how [ethno] methods can help individuals make sense of the social world. Within the writings of Garfinkel, the terms accountability and reflexivity offer two different meanings as to their common connotations (ten Have, 2004). While accountability can be referred to as liability, reflexivity is defined as thoughtful, self-awareness (Finlay, 2002). From a Garfinkel lens, accountability denotes that the social actor makes his or her own actions clear to others within their interactions. To provide a conceptualisation of this notion, ten Have (2004) offers a neat interpretation of those who stand in a queue in a shop. Here, he explains that the actor must stand in line in a certain position in order to make 'accountable' that they are consistent with others in the same queue. The resulting action requires 'understandability' of and from others [members] in the line [social practice] to make the act observable (ten Have, 2004). While on the other hand, reflexivity can be described as a practice of self-reflection where individuals engage in on-going approaches that make evident, for each other, the lucid character of organised, everyday affairs (Garfinkel, 1967).

Indexicality, according to Garfinkel, focuses on the natural incompleteness of words and how those words only make sense in relation to the context of how they were produced (Coulon, 1995). Here, the point is made that the utterances and language we use, and the

significance of the words that are used to frame them, are contextually and historically bound by the speaker's biography, the relationship with the listener and any past conversations (ten Have, 2004). Indeed, Heritage (1984) claims that Garfinkel valued the indexical expressions involved in making sense of social order because their intrinsic nature to a culture were fundamental to the aims of the ethnomethodological genre.

In acknowledging that ethnomethodology is primarily concerned with the study of the mundane order of human activity (Maynard & Clayman, 1991), Goffman's work offers a slightly different perspective on everyday life. His work on the ordinary social aspects of daily interaction was both significant and contentious within the sociological domain (Best, 2005). Indeed, Goffman established the study of face to face interaction and described how language is situated in particular circumstances within social life (Johansson, 2007). Through his writings, he claimed that all actions are social acts that aim to emit and uphold desired impressions of the self to others (Williams, 1998). This micro-sociological viewpoint is best discussed in his seminal work *The Presentation of self in Everyday Life* (1959), *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity* (1963), *Strategic interaction* (1969a) and *Frame analysis: An essay on the organisation of experience* (1974). It is through such work that he borrows the imagery of the theatre, and argues that all humans are actors playing a performance for an audience. The case is made for how individuals use 'fixed props' such as houses, clothes, and job situations to adopt discrepant roles and communicate out of character (Goffman, 1969). In adopting a dramaturgical analysis, Goffman (1969) believed that individuals can strategically occupy multiple roles within face to face interaction in order to control social situations.

An important aspect of how individuals negotiate interactions was considered to depend upon the 'front' they adopted (Dillon, 2010). The structural features of dramaturgy enabled the 'character' or 'performer' to control others' impressions of themselves. Hence, the action was

termed 'impression management' (Goffman 1967). It was argued that by using the metaphorical notions of *front* and *back* stage appearance, the self becomes recognised as a social construction or more specifically an interactive construction (Johansson, 2007). In this case, individuals can (and do) create specific impressions to sustain a performance that fits the requirements of a particular situation (Smith, 2006)

Goffman was also concerned with what he termed the 'interaction order'. This, according to Goffman (1983), included the implicit, unspoken norms and rituals (e.g., acknowledgements and gestures) or social rules that individuals abide by in face to face interactions. In considering such a term, Burns (1992) suggests that the interaction order "is fundamentally an unfinished order where individuals are continually engaged in work, not just establishing, promoting and reinforcing the social order, but producing, reproducing and arranging it" (p.82). In attempting to make better sense of face to face interaction, Goffman suggested that the rules that govern everyday interaction are founded on a peculiar combination of cynicism, ritual and trust (Manning, 1992). Such codes are essential to the structure of interaction with some being viewed as instructional, others as expectations, and still others as obligatory which are still subject to interpretation within any given context (Jones et al., 2011).

### **3.11.1 Organising the data**

Although I analysed the data as an on-going process, I was still daunted by the prospect of 'sifting' through the masses of data collected once I had left the field. Like all ethnographers leaving the context. I knew that I had to produce a coherent and focused analysis of the social world, one that connected to the wider, outside audience (Emerson et al., 1995). That said, I set about scrutinising the many pages of field notes and the endless hours of ethnographic film. To begin, this was overwhelming and difficult, due to the 'loose' notes and boundless hours of film that related to the incidents recorded within the everyday occurrences. Acknowledging

these initial struggles, I returned to the literature to shape my thoughts and make sense of '*what to do*' as opposed to '*what I was looking for*'. In doing so, I considered the work of Patton (1990), who suggests that the principle aim of analysis is to make sense of the massive amounts of data, reduce the volume of the information, identify patterns and construct a framework for communicating an essence of what the data reveal.

In light of this, I subsequently returned to the field notes, repeatedly reading through then as a whole corpus to generate familiarity and a detailed interpretation (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). I looked to identify threads that could be laced together to tell a tale[s] about the observed sporting sub-culture (Emerson et al., 1995). In doing so, I was able to elaborate upon and refine earlier thoughts. I also used the ethnographic film to support my original 'hunches' and check for little nuances that may have been missed. This process of analysis, allowed me to engage with greater reflexivity and intensive analysis so that emergent themes became more apparent. This said, I moved away from adopting the classical, line by line inductive analysis, as I perceived it more appropriate to firstly identify larger episodes of humorous interaction. Here, it can be argued that I began 'coding' my work, incident by incident (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001). This comparative study of incident by incident 'coding', allowed me to conceptualise my ideas, thus identify properties of my emerging themes. What is more, such an approach enabled me to analyse the mundane behaviours of individual[s] actions, which traditional line by line coding would not have allowed due to the nature of the context observed (Charmaz, 2006)

In adopting this procedure, I started to see re-occurring 'humorous' episodes within the text. For example, I started to notice that the coaches would use 'disciplinary humour' as way of re-affirming messages to control players' behaviour. As such, I began to deconstruct such accounts in relation to the aims and objectives of the study. Thus, in taking each identified humorous issue, I analysed in terms of what type of humour was used, why it was used, what

allowed its use, and what were the consequences. Here, I began to scrutinise the data from the 'large' to the 'small' (Charmaz, 2006). This mode of analysis moved away from the traditional inductive theorising from small units to overarching themes. This enabled me to analyse the consequences of humour without fracturing the data and losing the contextual essence of what was taking place. In this respect, the familiar routine and the mundane were made unfamiliar and new. Thus, my work echoed the sentiments of Charmaz (2003) relating the constant comparative method. Here, in engaging with reflexive practice, I constantly revisited existing constructions in light of new data (from both field notes and film).

This procedure follows the work of Veal (1997) who argues the essence of any analysis procedure must be to return to the research question and begin to sort and evaluate the information gathered in connection with question posed. Relatedly, in considering the intended nature of the study, Patton (1990) believes that this form of content analysis requires the researcher to make sense of and interpret the data without imposing pre-existing expectations on the study. This was invariably tied to my unfolding appreciation of the research, which helped, through reflection, to guide further on-going data collection. In this way, I was engaged in an unfolding conversation with the literature as the study unfolded. To this end, having deconstructed the episodes in a largely inductive nature (Charmaz, 2005) the notes, film footage, and events recounted became literal objects to be considered and scrutinised with a series of analytical and presentational options in mind (Emerson et al., 1995).

### **3.11.2 The [re]presentation of data**

Acknowledging I had engaged in interpretive research, I was mindful, as an ethnographic researcher, of how to [re]present my data. In keeping with the work of Denison and Markula (2005), I accept that all research is storied, and that all researchers tell tales, but it's to what extent that the researcher is explicit about their role in the stories that are told. In light of such

thoughts, I still questioned how I would best express the social reality of the culture under study. This led me to the work of Sparkes (1995) and the 'crisis of representation' within qualitative research. Such work recognises the issue of writing and the issue of voice, thus, it was my responsibility to adopt the most appropriate style that would best suit the stories of my participants. There were however, a plethora of genres to choose from; the realist and confessional tales to ethnodrama, poetic and fictional representations (Sparkes, 2002).

Accepting that there were various styles that could have been chosen, I opted for a form of writing that allowed me to let the reader feel and share a particular sense of my experience in the field (Sparkes, 1996). To disclose the nature of my findings and present the experiences of the coaches, players and support staff, I chose to adopt an alternative narrative form of writing; that of creative non-fictional tales. This, according to Sparkes (2002), is where the author is able to write themselves into the text. This, I feel, is the case in the [re]presentation of my data, as my character is central figure in the stories told.

Also known as narrative history, literary journalism and biography, creative non-fiction is a combination of creative imaginings and factual evidence (Hackley, 2007). Its descriptive style tends to be character driven with sharp, vivid features that humanise richer, deeper understandings to past events and people. The term 'creative', places great emphasis on the fictional writing techniques of the genre while the word 'non-fiction' acknowledges the attempt to tell the truth within this mode of writing (Gutkind, 2000). The crux to creative non-fiction lays the ability of the researcher 'being there' at the time of the event, as it actually happened. According to Sparkes (2002), these claims of 'being there' gives great credence to this form of narrative approach as it provides credibility for the stories told.

In adopting such an approach, I feel that such a storied genre allowed me to represent my research findings in a way that captured how humour was used, challenged and resisted in

the complex coaching context. In doing so, it was hoped that the unfolding, creative non-fiction narratives reached beyond the realms of academia to offer a contextually bound understanding of a sporting sub-culture. This is due to the everyday language that is used which promotes meaning-making and evokes imagination so that research knowledge presented can be disseminated and thus, advance ways of knowing about social life (Smith, 2013). With these points in mind, I followed the work of Caulley (2008). Here, the suggestion was made that an ethnographic creative non-fiction offers stories that use facts, deeply committed to the truth, from systematic research. In doing so, they use many techniques of fiction to communicate the results in a compelling and vibrant way.

Rather than compromise the intended nature of the study by embellishing any details collected, I used the creative non-fictional genre to 'bring to life' the data gathered. In order to do this, I used literary craft (e.g., voice/tone, context, and character biographies) to express a story-orientated narrative that shaped moments about real people and real events. Much like the writings of Smith (2013), the accounts told in the narratives are 'real', but they don't always follow the exact order in which they unfold in the data collected. What is more, to make the tales more credible and engaging, I followed the constructs of the creative non-fiction genre by setting specific scenes and context so that they avoided being a plain depiction of the actual experience (Sparkes, 2002).

Adopting this storied genre allowed me to provide accounts of the participants and my interpretation of them (Purdy et al. 2009). Nonetheless, I was still mindful of the work of Foucault (1998), who reminds us, that the relationship between text and author is not a straightforward process and that writing data about other's experiences does bring problems. Although I acknowledged that issues exist when researchers strive to 'paint a picture' of the individuals and context under study, I believe I embraced the work of Hastrup (1992) and considered the value of interpretation and sociological insight. Here, I recognised that

fieldwork is an interpretive act, not one that is observational or descriptive (Agar, 1986). As such, the stories told are reflexive narratives that elaborate on the field notes and ethnographic film footage taken.

### **3.11.3 Judging the study**

Positivistic researchers have suggested that the results of qualitative research lack the validity, reliability and generalisability of quantitative studies. Such scepticism has led many qualitative researchers to counter such claims by adopting notions such as trustworthiness, credibility, dependability and conformability to address this judgement debate (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Nonetheless, Sparkes (1995) claims that as qualitative researchers continue to conceptualise validity from an array of possibilities, the dispute regarding judgement criteria for qualitative forms of research continues.

In light of such a debate, there have been questions raised regarding how to judge new qualitative writing practices (Sparkes, 2002). Indeed, numerous academics (e.g. Richardson, 2000; Sparkes, 2002) have struggled with this problem, suggesting that the traditional criteria used to judge scientific research is too rigid. This then, must lead us to ask the question, how should these new ways of writing be judged, and what can be offered as criteria for quality of narrative research? (Eisner, 1997). A view expressed by Sparkes (2002), is that for alternative forms of inquiry to be judged in terms of their process and product; they must be evaluated using criteria that are consistent with their own internal meaning, structures and purposes. This view is maintained by Markula, Grant and Denison (2001), who suggest the following:

“Because we no longer have a unified research philosophy, neither can we demand a unified criterion that validates all research. Instead of such criterion, we need to better understand the premises of each tradition to ensure that their results contribute to our knowledge..... The acknowledgement of multiple research traditions does not translate into an acceptance of poor-quality research but instead requires us to contextualise each study carefully within its paradigm”

(pp. 261-262)

In this regard, Sandelowski (1994) argues that for a qualitative piece to be judged good or bad we must educate ourselves to recognise the difference and judge the genres accordingly using the appropriate criteria. This said, I drew upon the work of Richardson (2000) and Sparkes (2000) which considered approaches to evaluate narratives and case studies. Accordingly, I have considered the work of Richardson (2000) who has provided a supporting criterion for judging ethnographic work. What I sought in this study, therefore, is for the reader to evaluate and judge my work through its substantive contribution, reflexivity and whether it expresses a reality (Richardson, 2000).

How can this be done? To begin, I feel there is need for the reader to judge the work [re]presented in light of whether or not it has contributed to and demonstrated a deeper, more grounded understanding of social life (Richardson, 2000). In relation to this, the thesis must also be judged on the reflexive nature of the text portrayed. Here, then, questions must be raised on how I dealt with and managed my own epistemological lens, in relation to reducing the subjective nature of information gathered and how it is written (Richardson, 2000). What is more, as previously mentioned, there is a need for the study to be considered and judged on whether it expresses a reality. According to Richardson (2000), what I am seeking here, is for the reader to view the study in terms of its credibility in providing a cultural, social, individual or communal sense of the 'real'. In sum, the text of this ethnographic research should provide an authentic understanding of the subjective world of the participants and how they think about their own experiences, situations, problems and lives (Runyan, 1984).

### **3.12 Ethical Consideration**

Like all research that involves human participants, ethnographic studies raise significant ethical considerations (Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland & Lofland, 2001). Indeed, due to the

critical ethnographic research undertaken, it was inevitable that there would be ethical concerns. In acknowledging this, I was cautious about the ethics of representing those who are unable to present themselves in writing, or to offer meaningful consent to their representation by someone else (Couser, 2004). Therefore, I drew guidance from the work of Wall (2008) whilst recognising that due to the nature of the research the intricate connection between the personal and the cultural will make it impossible to write about others without creating an ethical dilemma.

In preserving the intended nature of the study and representing how humour can be a valuable means for investigating the realities and problems of human interaction, the thesis adopted a common ethnographic practice. Hence, the research was not deceptive, covert, involved vulnerable populations, nor did it involve biomedical or clinical interventions. Thus, no such approval related to these issues was required. The ethical issues that were apparent (e.g., confidentiality and anonymity) were addressed through recourse to the Cardiff Metropolitan University and the British Sociological Association's (BSA) ethical procedures.

In line with the work of Harris (2010), context was deemed vital within this study, thus, it was necessary to highlight the key 'actors' within the culture so that the reader[s] gains an understanding of those being represented. In doing so, it is recognised that with such detail of characters and context being provided then there is a risk that individuals may well be known despite the use of pseudonyms for the club and participants. Therefore, I reminded the individuals within the study that it would be difficult to disguise their identity without introducing an unacceptably large measure of distortion into the data (British Sociological Association, 2012).

In anticipating such issues, and attempting to be 'true' to the real essence of ethnographic research, a full explanation of the study's aims and methods were explained to the participants, together with the degree to which they would be given anonymity and

confidentially. What is more, and following Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) dictum, I did not have the power to ensure that all participants freely consented to be involved due to the constant interaction within the natural setting. Once more, I followed the British Sociological (BSA) ethical guidelines and was aware that due to the prolonged research context that consent was not considered a once and for all prior event. Therefore, I reminded all participants that they were being studied on a monthly basis so that the consent process was subject to ‘re-negotiation’ over time. Such a protocol aligns to the work of Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) who argued that although such ethical issues are made clear to individuals at the beginning of a study, it is not uncommon for participants to forget they are being studied. To counter this, I made sure that I actively built a rapport with all individuals to minimize reactivity (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007)

Relatedly, participants were made aware that, where appropriate, characters within the text would be given pseudonyms’ to protect their identity and maintain their anonymity (Jones. Potrac, Hussain & Cushion, 2006), whilst also omitting personal or compromising features and findings of those being studied (Adler & Adler, 1993). As such, individuals confirmed that although anonymity could not be guaranteed *per se*, they were comfortable in taking part in the study.. Therefore, all participants gave permission to be included in the thesis, thus, informed consent was obtained. In addition, and in line with the given guidelines, everything was done to ensure confidentiality within the confines of the project’s context. This protocol resonates with the work of McNamee, Oliver and Wainright (2007), who suggested that adequate assurances/promises regarding anonymity, storage and utilisation of the collected data should be adhered to at all times. As such, all field notes and ethnographic film footage were stored in a secure place away from the public domain.

Finally, in an attempt to provide a ‘[re]presentative’ account of the culture and individuals in context, I challenged my own epistemological lens. Here, I invited characters

from within the study to view my work. Although this can't be considered as the traditional 'member checking' procedure, I wanted the participants to comment on the representativeness of my descriptions and interpretations of the unfolding narratives (Schultze, 2000). As such, four 'key' characters within the context chose to read my work. John (head coach) and Jamie (team captain), were happy how they been portrayed within the tales told. Sam (reserve coach) however, felt somewhat aggrieved how he was described in one particular instance. This said, I set about explaining the nature of creative non-fiction so what had been written was rephrased in a manner that reflected Sam's character, whilst also maintaining the integrity of the research (Schultze, 2000). Following this discussion, Sam believed that what was presented suitably portrayed his own views and actions. Dan and Ewan on the other hand, read my interpretation of the episodes that occurred and agreed with the [re]presentation of the data. Here, they suggested that the analysis and narratives, although didn't happen as told, were in fact a fair and informative account[s] of how humour and the resulting interactions permeated in the complex coaching context. In adopting such a protocol, provided all participants the opportunity to check and agree whether an 'authentic' representation of the views, feelings, actions and experiences of those within the context studied was forthcoming (Creswell, 2007).

**CHAPTER IV**

**RESULTS**

## **4.1 Introduction**

In order to frame the intended nature of the thesis and meet the overall aims of the study, this chapter is divided into several themed sections. I begin by setting the scene providing an insight into a typical exchange between individuals within the group. The intention is to shed light on how humour and its transformative nature can readily move from an innocent jocular exchange to an avoidance of conflict. This brief 'framing' leads to subsequent sections that portray the content and context of my ethnographic fieldwork. In this respect, data from field notes and ethnographic film are presented under the respective subsections; 'inclusionary putdowns', 'shared humour', 'self-deprecating humour' and 'disciplinary humour'.

In order to make sense of, and illustrate, these distinct forms of humour, extracts from data explore the presence of humour and provide evidence of how, over time, humour was an embedded and interactive notion at the nexus of group interaction. Such an analysis provides an important step in illuminating how humour fulfilled various 'roles' within particular situations. Indeed, as the findings unfold, the on-going thread of the themes highlight how humour transcended hilarity and amusement, to act as a power mechanism by which individuals within a group were able to manage and negotiate relationships, establish local hierarchical positions, thus crafting and maintaining social control. In terms of prose, I avoid writing in a distant, third person that perpetuates a form of silencing. Rather, I present findings, inclusive of personal journal and ethnographic film entries that blend creative non-fiction and confessional tales. In adopting such scholarly style, I attempt to decipher the often messy and, at times, nebulous nature of my research and findings.

### 4.1.1 Setting the scene

*Field note extract [13<sup>th</sup> July, 2012]*

It's the first day of pre-season. The room fills with old and new players. It's quiet, just odd mutterings. The new lads sit, nervously, fiddling with boots and socks. The silence is broken by Ross, one of the reserve players. He pulls out a pair of bright green boots from his bag. "*Have a day off mate.... got to be a player to wear those*". The older lads laugh at Jamie's comment. The rest are unsure. They sit uncomfortably, trying to hide their own luminous boots. Ross sits red faced, pretending not to be bothered. His only reply is to tell Jamie "*piss off knob head*".

While the other senior players mingle in the dressing room, Ross attempts to 'save face'. He welcomes some of the new lads, shaking their hands. He tells them who to watch out for, what pre-season will be like, and not to listen to any "*fucking numpties*". They nod at his every word. Jamie shouts across the room "*don't listen to that clown, he's crap.... can't pass water, never mind a ball*". The older lads laugh again. The more Jamie keeps going, the more the others laugh. Ross becomes defensive. He slates [football slang for ridiculing] Jamie's hair, "*where'd ya get that cut.....B&Q?*" ..... "*Na mate, same place as your missus*" replies Jamie. The two continue their stand-off, becoming ever more abusive. Eventually Tim, the captain, tells them to "*wind your necks in*"...enough was enough. No effect, until I walk in. "*Oi,... what's going on?... you two, behave! ....sound like a pair of old fucking women. What's the matter with ya?*" I head over to the new players and offer some comforting words "*That was nothing, should see it when it really kicks off....and those two are mates*". Their eyes widen in disbelief, before my grin reassures them that all is ok.

### 4.2 Inclusionary Putdowns among Friends

The initial stages of my ethnographic field work began in the early weeks of the Club's pre-season. Like most at this level, some players had moved on while younger players had joined. With such change, it was obvious that the group would be initially disjointed. The divide between old and new was apparent. On the one side, fresh faced new-comers nervously awaited their fate. On the other, players greeted familiar faces with assurance, ignoring their new team mates in the process. Returning players soon traded verbal insults, re-igniting joking relationships. This friendly on-going rivalry was played out in front of new counterparts. These seemingly 'ritualised' games became a pervasive feature throughout the study. The following examples, taken from the field notes were typical of such interactions:

*[Field Note Extract: 15<sup>th</sup> July 2012]*

Alex (shouts as Liam walks through the door) “*Oi, Oi..Here she comes, got hands like feet. Do you know why you play for the 3rds? Cos ya too good for the 4ths*”

*[Field Note Extract: 19<sup>th</sup> July 2012]*

*[Mark is lying on the physio’s table having his ankle strapped, when Steve walks in].*  
Steve “*Hi mate, good summer?*”

Mark “*Yes, went away with the missus..... A week in Turkey*”

Steve “*You still with her?..... Thought she pied you off ages ago!*”

Andy (*the Physio*) “*You tell him Marco pal, she’s a proper WAG, only sleeps with the best*”

Such comments generally consisted of quick put-downs, but none were deliberately aimed to exclude team mates. Indeed, these interactions became common place between the players, myself and the other coaches within various locations around the Club. For instance, a popular setting for such inclusionary putdowns was at the beginning of each training session. Here, a game of ‘keep ball’ [*Football term for a technical football practice*] was customary used as part of the warm up. The idea was to test players ‘touch’ and ability to keep the ball away from those in the middle of a circle. It also provided an opportunity for the more skilful or senior players to ‘expose’ their team mates.

The youngest two players entered the circle first. In a tightly enclosed space and with the pressure of the game, they soon became targets of humorous remarks. The role of the audience was played out by the other players and coaches. The ‘put downs’ flowed as the players were struggling to win back the ball. As coaches, we did very little to stop such behaviours, rather, laughing *with* and *at* the players. Of particular interest here was Ewan, the team’s best player. Being an ex-professional, he would be constantly challenged (physically) by his team mates. Similarly, I would often try to target a response from Ewan. I would be eager to elicit a ‘bite’ [*football slang for a response*] by questioning his ability. Such a sarcastic

remark would be often met with exchanged hand slaps and roars of laughter between the players. For example,

*[Field Note Extract; 16<sup>th</sup> October 2012]*

*[Ewan has just given the ball away so it's his turn in the circle. As he walks in, I angle my putdown]*

Me: *"Bloody hell, the pro's aren't what they used to be are they lads...should have seen it in my day."*

Usually, Ewan would try and ignore my opening gambit; however, a third party would ensure a verbal response.

Harry: *"You going to let him say that to you?...he's done ya mate!"*

A 'come back' was provoked, *"Yes, but he's a fucking old man now"* Ewan's response was met by acts of comedic abilities from all players.

These mildly humorous exchanges were designed to elevate the status of the individual making the comment. Indeed, the players, coaches and I would regularly engage in these discursive practices in order to 'push' the boundaries of the social relationships between those within the group.

While most of the field work was conducted at the training ground, there were instances (e.g., the team bus) where players used humour to express criticism and praise indirectly. On one away trip, one of the older coaches, Mike, was driving the bus for the first time. This was new to the players, a sense of uncertainty existed amongst them.

*[Field Note Extract: September 16th 2012]*

The trip to Bristol was only short. I sat in the front with Mike; Radio 2 was playing in the background. *"Turn that off old men"* came the shout from the back. I did one last check. *"Is everybody on?"* There was a pause before Ben shouted from behind the back seat....*"I'm not"*. There was a wry smile from Mike as he lent forward to change channels. The back of the bus was in fits of laughter. I rolled my eyes, before opening my freshly packed sandwich. Mike started to talk about the game. *"It will be tough today, decent this lot, caused us problems at home"*. I nodded while wiping the sauce from my cheek. Before long, the hum of the motorway had silenced the bus. Mike was coasting along, his seat riding the contours of the road.

I catch the conversation between Dan and Karl directly behind me. *“Do ya think he drives this slowly all the time?” ‘He’s having a laugh”* Dan agrees. *“I’m busting for a piss. Wish he’d hurry up”*

*“O, Mike, you ok?”*

*“Yep,... you son?”*

*“Yeah, fine..... A bit worried though”*

*“Why?... you nervous... your arse twitching pal?”*

*“Na, it ‘aint that. I just looked out the window. There’s a dog pissing on the front wheel ya going that slow”*

*“Fuck off you, ya cheeky little shit”.*

The bus erupts. Mike looks across at me. I shy away, pretending to take a gulp from my drink, hoping the can hides my smile. The rest of the players join in. *“It’s alright Mike, Kick off aint til 7. We got plenty of time”*

*“C’mon old fella, you’ll be late for ya own funeral”*

Marco shouts over to the Physio, Andy. *“You got a spare needle.....gonna burst that blister on Mike’s foot”*

*“It’s alright mate, I didn’t want pre match anyway. Cheers Mike”*

Mike: *“You lot keeping taking the piss why don’t ya. You forget, I’ll be watching you play in a few hours.”*

*“Few hours,..... better put ya foot down then Mike”*

Through such examples, I witnessed how players amused themselves with funny anecdotes, which, if taken literally, appear demeaning. This playful teasing was a regular practice on away trips, as it relieved boredom. Indeed, the players would often participate in humours exchanges as a way of affirming relationships with each other. This was also the case when, we, as coaches, would abandon serious conversational goals to also engage in such exchanges. The following diary extract highlights the general feature of such interactions.

*[Field Note Extract: October 1<sup>st</sup> 2012]- The car on the way to training.*

I’m stuck in traffic. I glance at the clock in the car. Twenty past twelve. *Shit*, I’ve missed training. I call John. The phone rings. *“Hello, John?”*

*“Na, its Mike”*

Me: *“Hi mate, it’s me. All ok today... John about?”*

Mike: *“Yeah, all good... He’s still out there, I’ll get him now.”*

There’s a long pause. The wind crackles down the phone. I can hear John in the back ground. *“Tell him two minutes”*

The lights turn green. I quickly change gear so I can talk to John.

Me: *“John, you ok? “Sorry I missed today. Fucking doctors was a nightmare”.*

John: (in a friendly tone) *“No worries.... Its fine mate. Session was decent. Chaz looked good this morning, he really pushed the pace. His feet have improved so much”*

Me: *“Yeah, his touch is quality. What about the rest?”*

(John) *“They did well. (He giggles) always seem to train well when you’re not here”*

(In the background I can hear Mike) *“Tell him, I’ve noticed that too.... funny that, aint it?”*

John then shouts to Gaz, the goal keeping coach *“Gaz, what ya think....Decent that today without the Gaffer?”*

*“Well... now you mention it, yeah, boys were flying... said they were happy it was short and sharp”* replied Gaz.

Me: *“Alright, I get the message. Stop pissing about”*

John (in a more stern, yet smug voice) *“Na serious, even the Chairman thought so. He popped his head in about 11 ish. Asked where ya were. Said he aint seen you in a while....like trying to find rocking horse shit”*

Me: *“Shut up knob head, he never”*.

John: *“He did,.... Honest, on me dog’s life”*

Me: *“Now I know ya taking the piss”*

Mike: *“He mentioned something about you might as well resign. Results not the best, missing training”*

Me: (raising the tone) *“I, I bet he did. If anyone’s off then it’s you.”*

Mike (to John and Gaz): *“He’s biting fella’s, he must be hungry”*

Laughter breaks out in the background. I lose signal. I try to call back. The ‘bastards’ have ‘done me’ [*football slang for getting one over on somebody*]. I continue my journey to training. The welcoming committee is already in the car park. John’s triumphant smile greets me. *“Bit touchy then Boss weren’t ya?... Chairman said he’ll catch you later”*.

The existence of such humour was widespread amongst the coaches. It was often used as a way of playing on each other’s insecurities. Typical interactions were characterised by light, non-threatening putdowns which formed a shared understanding of what it’s like to be a coach. In this respect, these humorous ‘episodes’ allowed the coaches to gloss over and laugh together at the simultaneously negotiated challenges and experiences of the job.

Likewise, the players often used retaliatory ‘put downs’ as a way to establish and navigate their own relationships within the Club. Much like the coaches, their ‘acts’ of humour were grounded in their shared experiences of being group members. Club captain, Jamie for example, regularly used humour as a way to construct and shape the social norms and expectation of the group. His non-hostile, funny behaviour allowed the group to laugh at each other with no ill intent (or apparent consequence). For example, an interesting account emerged while waiting for the team bus. Deeply embedded in the social construction of the group, Jamie would often use acts of humour to create amusement from seemingly ordinary practices.

*[Field Note Extract: November 19th 2012]*

It's a cold day. The players are growing restless as the bus is late. While the others have huddled under the door way, Jamie has positioned himself away from the group. He has started to dance. He starts clapping and blowing kisses to himself while smiling and laughing out loud. He seems to be having fun, creating humour for its own sake. The other players soon notice, and start laughing. The younger lads seem uncomfortable and unsure, but Jamie doesn't care. His actions become more humorous; he pretends to cuddle and smooch alone. His mates within the group Dan and Karl egg him on "*B (Jamie's nick name) you're an idiot. Go on B, give it some, ya fucking clown*". Jamie begins singing while walking towards the door way. The more the group laughs the more Jamie 'plays up'. His performance was that of the 'class clown' but he gets away with it as these joking relations are 'inclusionary' among individuals within the group. Although not inclusionary per se, it's the neutrality of the humour that allows others to be included within the humorous exchange.

While the players would often engage in these humorous interactions, I would frequently use inclusionary remarks to lighten the mood. Knowing how to interpret the witty remarks and practices the players engaged in, I readily used mild sarcasm and light-hearted banter to defuse potentially awkward, embarrassing or sensitive encounters. In doing so, I used humour and the groups' understanding of it, to facilitate togetherness. For example, in one training session my deliberate use of humour, at the expense of a player's poor performance, enabled a productive interaction.

*[Field Note Extract: December 6th 2012]*

Training is mooted. The damp, cold air matches the mood. Yesterday's poor performance has affected the group. Max, in particular, is suffering. He stands alone stretching, this is unusual for him. He knows he cost us, but I need him for Saturday. As the session unfolds the obvious spark is missing. It's flat, I decide to call the group in.

Me: "*Ok, I know the problem, but it 'aint going to go away. Yesterday has gone. No point in worrying about it. If we carry on like this, forget Saturday, we can just give 'em three points* ".... (long pause) *is that what you want? There's a shaking of heads from the players...." I didn't think so... Let's sort this out, there wasn't too much wrong, defensively we looked strong, good shape, the line was nice and high. Midfield moved the ball quickly and we had decent movement up top..... (another long pause) Just a shame Max had a shitter in goal*". The players heads turn quickly across the circle. Max looks up, he smiles nervously, hopefully, need-fully. I look at him; he's unsure whether to hold the stare.

Me: "*Don't worry mate, even the best have a bad day*"

Momentarily, the silence invades the space between us. Some drop their heads to disguise their grins, others can't help themselves. "*Need to start calling you Dracula... he hated crosses too*" screams Stu. Max's wry smile acknowledges his poor display. My reassuring wink offers him some kind of acceptance. I walk away leaving the players to mimic Max's performance.

In this instance, such playful antagonism was non-threatening. It allowed Max to regain recognition. Indeed, the use of this inclusive humour permeated itself within the team's early morning conditioning sessions. An early morning start did little to bring the best out in the players. The usual grunts and groans were common place, particularly amongst the older lads. Here, Lee, the external fitness coach, did little to comfort the players. His usual target was Kenny, a quiet lad, yet one of the better, more respected players in the group. Kenny's physical appearance was Lee's 'ideal' shape. Nonetheless, he would always look to mock or tease Kenny about the way he looked.

*[Field Note Extract: December 10th 2012]*

*The music is loud in the cramped gym Lee Shouts: "Come on, push it out. Activate the glutes... not bad... keep it going.....drive, drive, feel those arse cheeks burning. Fuck me mate...that is class, take a bow young man (to Kenny) brilliant...(Long pause, Lee walks towards the door) nearly squatting as much me now....on one leg! (response from the players-Laughter).*

This 'putting down' of Kenny was Lee's way to increase the effort of the group. He knew Kenny was 'good lad' so pushed the limits with him. However, this use of 'inclusionary putdowns' within the gym setting was always a one way process. The players would never answer Lee back maybe due to Lee's sheer physical size. This, however, was not the case within the coaching staff. Within the actual training sessions there was a mutual respect for each other when we coached. Nonetheless, away from the pitch things were slightly different. After training sessions the coaches would meet to discuss team selection and players' fitness. This was always informal, with Sam, the young reserve team manager being the subject of the witty remarks, sarcasm and teasing, as the following extract highlights.

*[Field Note Extract: December 13th 2012]*

*After training me, Mike, John and Sam gather in the club bar. It's our usual Thursday routine. We discuss the night's session, team selection and player's fitness. With a few beers, packets of crisps we are in good humour.*

*Sam: Anyone for one more?*

*Jim: Go on then, just the one*

*Me: I'm ok, ta*

*Mike, Tell ya what... can ya get me a filter[coffee] instead.*

*As Sam walks to the bar John shouts loud above the music "good job you got long arms with those deep pockets. You robbed a bank?"*

*(Sam doesn't turn round but signals back with two fingers)*

*Response: Laughter*

### **4.3 Shared Humour**

Shared laughter became an on-going thread throughout the study. It implicitly acted as a social benchmark from which all members of the group had a common perspective. Such humorous exchanges highlighted how individuals recurrently laughed together and teased each other in everyday practices. It was common for players and coaches to mock each other's performances. The slightest error or faux pas was inextricably seized upon by group members. Much like the inclusionary humour, there was no real malice behind such exchanges. Rather, they were a way in which individuals could resist or challenge set boundaries or internal hierarchies within the culture. Jim, one of the reserve coaches, was usually the butt of the jokes, particularly from the players. It was common knowledge that John didn't act like the rest of the coaches; he often wanted to be 'one of the lads'. This, however, became a problem as players would often use it as a means of defying his authority.

*Field note extract [21<sup>st</sup> October 2012]*

*Down on the pitch it's hammering with rain, the wind is howling. Jim is taking the warm up for. The field is littered with cones "Jesus, looks like Heathrow... when's the plane landing Jim". "Nice one fellas....ya won't be laughing in a minute chopsy bollocks" came John's reply. The players carry on their run around the training ground. Jim, mutters to himself, "cheeky bastards... I'll 'av im". As the players stretch they chat. It's the usual funny anecdotes, insider stories or practical jokes where someone's shorts are pulled down to the shout of 'Ole'[football slang for humiliating someone]. Attention is soon drawn to Jim and the length of his shorts. Dave, the Goalie quickly pulls up his own shorts, high around his waist. (Dave's appearance in itself is funny. Floppy hair, shaven on the sides)."Oi Simon, short and sharp today or what?.. (The*

*players can't help but laugh, Dave is referring to Simon Cowell). "That you again Dave?.....(long pause) Thought you'd be with the stiffs [Football slang for the reserve team] after Saturday"* came Jim's reply.

Dave's muffled response was greeted by laughter from the players. Jim was oblivious. As the session unfolded Jim and Dave continued their light hearted attacks on one other. Each mistake by Dave was greeted by threats of the 'yellow' [*a bib awarded to a player for a poor performance*] from Jim. "*Shit session this, where's the gaffer?.....wait until I tell him*" was Dave's only shout. The usual shooting brought the session to end. Dave was playing well. He made save after save...."*any chance you lot?...couldn't hit a cow's arse with a banjo*" came his reply.. Jim reminded Dave of the 'yellow' "*Behave mate...I'm on fire*" This is met with raucous laughter from the rest of the group..

The constant teasing and ritualised behaviours were characteristic of many of the training sessions. Although the practices were conducted in a professional manner, humour and its playful nature were never far from away from the nexus of the group's interactions. Relatedly, some of the new lads would often fall victim to re-occurring practical jokes. A common style of 'game play' allowed the players to participate in elaborate forms of humorous 'banter'. This generally consisted of verbal and physical assaults, where the 'arena of struggle' enabled the players to taunt one another through language and physical 'sparring'. For instance, Alex, the team's youngest player, would always be teased or ridiculed by senior players in 'ceremonial' games. In order for the training session to end, the customary shooting practise required the players to score a goal or 'hit the target'. Such a practice would always elicit a moan from Alex as he knew he would always lose. Coming last became a regular occurrence for which he was required to stand, alone, on the goal line, with his shorts around his ankles. Each player then took it in turns to shoot at the target, which was Alex's backside. Each ball that hit the target was met with raucous laughter and jeers [aimed at Alex] of "*You're minging [Football slang for horrible].... You're shit,...got an arse like a dart board*". The game would only end when all players had finished taking their shot at Alex.

While such shared humour facilitated group 'togetherness', there were times when such exchanges were also used by the coaches as a mechanism to reduce the seriousness of the occasion. The day of a game is often intense where players behave in different ways. However,

a common feature within the group was the frivolous nature of humour and its manifestation on match day. Here, the players were constant in their use of slapstick comments and private jokes to incite each other. This was a place, however, where I could also use humour to ease tension and nerves. In this case, I tried to use a funny story[s] or deliberately pick on a player I knew would engage in some good natured teasing. Dan, for example, was a player who had recently broken into the first team. His new found success allowed him to feel like one of the 'boys'. He was Jamie's, the team captains, best mate and was using this as leverage. In knowing that Dan was feeling very comfortable within the culture and very sure of himself, I negotiated an encounter with him before a game in order to reduce his status.

*Field note extract [21<sup>st</sup> November 2012]*

The players sit in a cramped dressing room awaiting my pre match speech. It is the usual dressing room order, each sitting under expected shirt numbers. I can't help make reference to the smell. I point to Dan as the culprit, blaming his earlier trip to the toilet for the stench. I call him a "*smelly fucker.....(long pause) with that smell your arse must look like the Japanese flag*". He quickly tells me he hadn't "*mastered the art of shitting roses*". (*There is a supporting laugh from the rest of the players*). "*Roses....glad I don't buy my missus those, ya smelly twat*". I tell him not to 'worry' as the "*big boys*" will look after him. Some of the older players within the team seize on this and tease him about the opposition and their harsh tactics. Dan appears to brush aside such comments. However, he accidentally spills his drink over his kit. This is met with crude shouts "*Relax mate*".... "*He's shaking like a shitting dog*".... "*Fuck me, his arse has fallen out*" I try and offer some [sarcastic] comforting words to Dan "*You ok now mate? Don't worry about the game, you'll be fine, the boys will look out for you*". Dan was less than impressed; he mumbled a response to avoid any conversation. His look, however, said it all.

Like most of the humorous interactions witnessed, there was no real malice in my provoking of Dan, just joking intended to prompt amusement and alleviate the stress of pre-match routines. Such playful provocation was incessant amongst the group, particularly on match days where sparring, bluff and boasting were common place. Indeed, some of the players found the comical repartee as a way of negotiating the monotony of the occasion. For instance, after a long away trip, Alan, one of the team's more 'enigmatic' characters decided to use humour as way of relieving the tension of the day by mimicking the assistant coach,

John. Here, the very salient aspect of humour and the contextual nature of the discourse used gave rise to hilarity among the players.

*Field note extract [January 6<sup>th</sup> 2013]*

As I enter the long corridor to the changing rooms I hear an echo of laughter. The door is slightly ajar. I stand and listen. Our big defender, Alan, is mocking John, our assistant coach. He stands, centre of the room wearing John's coat. The subtle, effortless tone mimic's that of John. He reads from a scruffy piece of paper offering team shape and tactics. His witty, sarcastic manner offers the players some relief from the tension of the upcoming game. He uses 'small talk' as well as coded, football related language as a pragmatic tool to turn everyday interactions into jest.

*"Charlie. Charlie, look at me, what's the matter with ya? You're not on the half turn; ya gotta move the ball quicker. Much more of that and you'll be sat next to me. Come on, you're better than this, has your arse fallen out or what?"*

Alan is oblivious to my presence as he continues his 'act'. Every utterance, facial gesture and hand signal brings childish sniggers from the players. His projected routine is laden with ironic understatements as well as exaggerated punch lines of friendly relationships with players. There is, however, some uncertainty within the players' laughter. The older lads laugh loudly. They appear to force this 'triumph' over authority. The younger, less established players seem unsure; an air of doubt surrounds their giggles. Alan confidently plays out his actions. He looks down over his imaginary glasses. *"Macca, where are ya son? You can play anywhere you.... I fucking love ya". Baz, you're doing well, you're putting in some good crosses but lin 20 aint good enough son.* [Baz tells Alan to *"button it knob head"*]. This has little effect as Alan continues berating his team mates in John's style. Alan then pauses [in typical Jim fashion] and offers some lasting words. *[It was one of John's usual philosophical chats to the players where he asks the players to value what they have].... "I was thinking the other day, it's been a good season but it could be better. Then I thought if we were to win today how far would I walk...I'd walk miles I thought. That's how much I love you boys, I'd doing anything for ya!"* The players erupt into 'fits of laughter'. Some cheer, others offer congratulatory high five's.

Alan's quick-witted use of humour, and in particular his mocking of John, allowed him, momentarily, to contest the socially constructed norms of the group. Such derisive jocularitry gave him much credence with the players. In subsequently challenging Alan about his related act, I used context-bound utterances and shared views on humour not to alienate him *per se*, but to control his subversive manner and 'bring him back into line'. I made a timely entrance into the room.

*Field note extract [January 6<sup>th</sup> 2013]*

Alan races into the showers knowing he has been caught out. Some of the other players desperately busy themselves to avoid any interaction with me. I play it calm hanging my bag on one of the crooked pegs. I wait to seize my moment...[long pause]

Me: *"Quiet in here, somebody died fellas?"* The silence was deafening *"Alright Alan, what you doing pissing about in there?"* He appears from behind the shower room door.

Alan: *"Er [stuttering] nothing, just checking for my pads."*

I tell him that he looks 'sheepish', as if he's 'hiding something'.

Alan: *"Na, I'm fine, just tired"*.

Me: *"you didn't seem that tired then...taking the piss out of John"*

The rest of the players laugh, knowing that Alan's earlier actions have been over heard.

Alan: [nervously] *I wasn't, seriously I wouldn't do that to him.....[long pause] just having a laugh with lads"*

The room is quiet, Max tells Alan to *"behave, you were, ya fucking liar"*

Alan: [biting his nails] *"Piss off you, I wasn't, I wouldn't do that, not to John"*.

Some of the players sit on the floor unsure whether to support Alan in camouflaging his earlier actions. It's not long, however, before Jamie tells Alan to *"strap a pair on, and accept it"*. Alan looks embarrassed; he starts to rub his hair, biting his nails even quicker than before.

Me: *"Come on Berty Big Balls tell the truth. Would you have the bollocks to do it in front of him?"*.

Alan's earlier jovial behaviour seems to have diminished. He stands, arms folded, slightly back in the doorway, half hiding his body. The rest of players notice this and soon start to tease him telling him that his *"arse has gone"*. *"The old Al' would have. Now he got a missus, his head's gone"*. Alan bends down to rub his leg, before eventually sitting on a kit bag shaking his head.

In utilising humour, I poured scorn on Alan's deviant behaviour. This was conducted in a positive, subtle undertone, thus avoiding any conflict with the group. The closeness of the group, however, inevitably brought about many disputes that were often settled by one or more of the players using humour's 'double edged' nature, in non-threatening ways, to lessen interpersonal tensions. Such examples included funny stories about a player's ability [or lack of] to drink, sexual conquests, or playing practical jokes. On the other hand, one particular strategy used was that of an initiation ritual. Here, the older or more senior members would challenge their 'new' counterparts to demonstrate allegiance to the group. The intention was to exploit the so called 'weaknesses' or vulnerability of the younger players by asking them to sing a song on the team bus after an away fixture. Failure to do so, or a poor [singing] performance, was usually met by taunts and jeers. The consequences resulted in those players having to do 'the walk of shame' to the front of the bus naked. It was through this overt display

of mild 'aggressive' hilarity (e.g. teasing, mocking) that the senior members reinforced their authority over the group.

*Field note extract [September 19<sup>th</sup> 2012]*

*[The team bus is late leaving after the game, it's almost 7pm. We are heading back to the club house to celebrate a league win. It's a 40 minute journey to the city so the senior lads feel the need for some 'entertainment']*

*"Ok, which one of you little shits is singing first?" ... There is an empty silence before Jamie shouts again. "C'mon, who's getting it? If ya don't, ya getting fucking nailed!" Still, the younger lads refuse to put their hand[s] up. They sit, acting twitchy and unsettled, fiddling with mobiles, avoiding eye contact ... [There's a long pause] The older lads egg on their younger team mates. "Go on ya pussies, it's only a song". Jamie jumps over the back seat and lands on Rob. There's a little scuffle before he appears with Rob's head under his arm. "Right ya little twat, you're up first. Sing us a song, it won't hurt". "Fuck off, I don't know any" replies Rob. [There's a gasp of hesitation from older lads, they don't like this and remind him who the 'boss' is].*

*It's not long before Rob is standing in the centre of the aisle ready to sing. The contours of the road cause him to stagger. He loses his balance, this is met by boisterous laughter "He's twitching, he 'aint got it in him" He fumbles his opening words. It's a poor attempt and the players seize their moment. Even Rob's younger, less experienced mates join in with the verbal cussing. "You're shit.....that's minging" He looks around the bus for support, but he is met with an empty plastic bottle to the head. Rob weakly attempts to fend off the mocking insults. "Behave fella's I can't sing...this is shit by you lot". This is lost on the baying crowd. He nervously undoes the top bottom of his shirt. He tries again.....[Lyrics from Oasis]"Today is gonna be the day that they're gonna throw it back to you...." [The older players begin a countdown] "10...9...8, others just shout out "walk, walk, walk". Rob tries to negotiate the hostile crowd. The lads continue to hurl profanities and innuendos. The older players continue counting "5..4..3" It's no good, he's lost in the moment. Wild laughter ensues as the group know that Rob must do the 'walk of shame.*

#### **4.4 Self-deprecating humour**

Humour's ambiguous and paradoxical nature allows those within the culture to use its many functions in a variety of ways. The often barbed comments that were 'bantered' around the training ground were regularly used as a symbolic resource to avoid conflict, reaffirm social norms and maintain social control. The use of self-deprecating humour, however, was often used in a malleable manner when dealing with difficult relationships, awkward or embarrassing situations. Indeed, throughout the study, there were numerous occasions when the coaches and I would use humour's nonsensical and asymmetrical perspective to gain the 'upper hand' over the players. Such a risky form of jocular banter would, more often than not, be used to help

‘safe face’. For example, in an early pre-season fixture, I found himself the subject of a ‘difficult’ situation.

*Field note extract [August 21<sup>st</sup> 2012]*

*[We have arrived early to our opening away game of the season. The players sit, restless, in a cramped dressing room waiting for the team to be announced, so are sent out to inspect the pitch. John and I on the other hand, are busy putting the finishing touches to the kit].*

*“Gonna be a warm one today....[long pause] fucking roasting in here” said Jim. “Yes, must look after the ball or we will tire early”* Came my reply. We discuss the need to move the ball faster, highlighting systems and different zones. I head for the tunnel leaving John to talk alone. *“In ya come fella’s, time to move”* They amble in one by one. The chat is light hearted, the funnier the story, the more exaggerated the laughter becomes; it’s the usual dog-eat-dog banter! I notice Ray walk in *“Here he is, best forward in the league”*. John can’t wait to shoot Ray down. *“Where?... What his name?”* As the players settle, I make reference to a previous trip to the ground where the referee tackled one of our players. This brought an instant chuckle to those that played in the game. Still, there is an air of apprehension as John begins his speech. Some sit, anxious, staring at me while others nervously fiddle with their socks or boot laces. John reminds each player of their duties before announcing the team.

*[Now, I take centre stage to discuss the team shape]*

I head towards the tactic board in the far corner of the room. It’s an awkward walk with kit in my path. *“Ok, listen in please, today we must deny them space, the pitch is small so we must squeeze the line high.....[long pause] Macca where are ya? I scan the room “Ya got that son?” Macca nods. I place some cones onto the floor. “Ok, so this is us, our back four...[long pause], everyone understand? To inhibit the space we must squeeze like this...yes?”* The players seem slightly confused so I make a move back to the tactic board to explain further. In doing so, I catch the handle of a kit bag with my foot. I trip and spill my notes and pen on the floor. In trying to stop my fall I slip further, I hit the deck. I scramble quickly to avoid any further embarrassment. It’s too late, I find my feet again. *“Fucking hell.....that’s my best tackle in ages. Wish I could have done that when I was playing”... . . . “Oh! It’s funny is it Macca? If you could tackle like that you’d be worth millions ya little twat”*. He carries on laughing with the rest of his team mates.

In this instance, the spontaneous witty ‘banter’, where I poked fun at Macca’s playing ability, allowed me to somewhat successfully negotiate the awkward situation. Indeed, in ridiculing my own vulnerability, I was able to ‘skilfully’ direct a comment[s] so that my status within the group was maintained. While this particular situation enabled me to pour scorn on others laughing at my own bad experiences, there were times when I would look to use self-deprecating humour as a way of promoting my own modesty. Here, my intentions were not to

use humour in a ‘malicious’ or ‘negative’ way but to use humour and its diverse nature to elicit a ‘positive’ humorous response from those within the group. For example, during one of the training session’s one or two of the players would often struggle to perform a skill or didn’t understand a particular principle of play. In order to highlight the components of the drill, I would often step in and explain the practice myself. While executing the play, I would give a commentary of what was needed. In doing so, I knew that the older more senior players within the group would want to challenge my ability. This allowed me to enhance the effort within the group. The following extract highlights such an example.

*Field note extract [January 11th 2013]*

*[The session is coming to end and myself and John are running through team play. The attacking line up is finding it difficult to break through the defensive line]*

John’s whistle blows a halt to the session. The players stand to attention in the cold winter’s night. The yellow team are frustrated at the lack of space in behind the defenders. I ask Marco what he sees ahead of him. “*Fucking nothing...[long pause] jack shit. The line is killing us. How we meant to play through there?*” I try to calm Marco down “*C’mon surely you can see something mate. Get side on and open up, have a picture in ya mind. You ‘aint playing against the Arsenal back four*”. He continues to argue adding more excuses each time. “*It aint realistic, when do we play against that in our league?...Never!*” Rather than continue the debate I ask him to play the ball sideways. “Ok, now get it back and play it first time into Ross. His pass is foiled by Jamie. He screams in frustration “*Aghhh...this is fucking joke, the line is way too high*”.

The players can sense the frustration. They are getting agitated and cold. I hear Charlie mumble to Chris that he has “*had enough*” and for Ross to just agree with me. I tell the players to play this again from Bill the Goalkeeper. I decide to step in and play the role of Marco. The ball is played at high tempo between the lines; the crisp one touch passing is even tough for me. I seize the moment, in a split second I notice Macca has dropped deep. I play the ball first time into the path of Ross. I knew it was good and couldn’t wait to tell the players so “*That’s a great ball Gaffa...quality that*”. Ross’s instinctive finish past Bill made the moment even more satisfying [for me]. The players look back shaking their heads with a knowing grin. I remind them of my ability “*Don’t worry fella’s, you won’t get that every week, I’ll lose the touch ....one day*”.

Such actions were consistent with the behaviours of the other coaches when they found themselves having to laugh at their own shortcomings and make light of their own bad experiences. John, however, had a way of ‘framing’ such quirky, self-deprecating comments

so that he drew attention to himself at the expense of the players and the other coaches. His utterances were more often than not hiding his own humility through subtle undertones yet were pitched in such a way that made us all appreciate what he would say. Using past experiences of both football and his current profession he would offer hidden messages related to the game. It was his attempt to make the player's think differently about the way we played. As the season unfolded, the players continuously struggled to know what John was trying to say. Nonetheless, he would always have a way of making himself heard.

*Field note extract [February 2nd 2013]*

*[The players stand before me and John at the beginning of the training session. It's a cold night, so we are quick with our comments.]*

Tonight's session had more significance than any other of the season so far. We were one match from the cup final. The players were nervous. Our usual sharp session was slightly laboured, the ball wasn't sticking. The normal, sleek, passing game was missing. I let Jim take charge of the structured part of the session. He reminded the players of their roles, the messages we propose "*You happy with that Dan? Remember, start high and wide and then come in and find the pocket [technical football term]. Aaron will keep shape on the other wing*". "*Yes, got it*", came Dan's reply. John carried on instructing the players. They seemed to get it, but Jim wasn't convinced. He brought the players together. They huddled in a circle around us, the vapour and sweat from their bodies invaded the tiny, cramped circle. There was a seriousness to John's tone. He began with kind words but he then began to challenge the players asking them what did they want from this (our season). Knowing John, I could see where this was heading. "*Football is a thinking man's game. Ya must think, we don't play in straight lines, ya must move, side on, always thinking. Think, think and think again. Believe me, I know*". John points to his receding hairline "*Trust me fella's.....(long pause) grass don't grow on a busy road*". The player's smiled as they had heard John say this before and understood his message. While the players knowingly accepted John's sentiments he offered some final thoughts. A lasting comment, a wry smile. "*Before you leave.....[long pause] winning anything is hard, but to win this [the cup] it takes special people, special coaches.... and I should know [he raises his eye to me with a knowing glare]..... so please make sure I win this again*".

Further examples of this self-deprecating use of humour were also evident amongst the players. Rather than being portrayed through words and language, Jamie often used football related skills to highlight his own modesty with the ball. What was unusual here was the fact that Jamie would execute a skill that was not the usual practice. In fact, it was a technique that would

normally (outside the boundaries of the group) be frowned upon. Although Jamie was serious about what he was doing his actual 'shinning' of the ball was his own way of mocking himself amongst the rest of the group. From this, what tended to happen was a harmonious picture of jovial 'banter' where Jamie became the centre of attention. For example,

*Field note extract [February 9th 2013]*

*[The session has ended. The players are asked to collect the equipment in and bring it back to the shed]*

*"Marco, can you take yellow bibs and Stevie, the red ones... can the rest grab the balls... Cheers fella's" asks Jim.* The other players scurry to find the closest ball so they can lash it in to empty net. As the light is fading, I remind them, one last time of the arrangements for Saturdays game "Ok, 12.15 meet, 12.30 leave. Don't be late gentlemen it's a right trek up there".

Jamie meanwhile carries on juggling the ball. I tell him to hurry up "just head it and kick it" "Come on, I 'aint hurting.....bet you can't do this, can ya" came his reply. I smile with John, witnessing Jamie's comedic act. It's a tough skill, but he makes it look easy. To begin the players seem uninterested by Jamie's behaviour. It's not long however, before they notice and encourage his actions. "How do ya do that Jay?" Asks Matt. In an awkward, yet controlled manner, Jamie simultaneously brushes the loose hair that has fallen from his pony tail behind his ear and bouncing the ball off his shin[s]. At this point he nonchalantly shouts "Easy mate, ya got to be shit like me; only shit players can do this.....[long pause] see, easy!".

While the actions of Jamie and the coaches were used to camouflage such modest connotations, they were often utilised in certain, sensitive situations. In recognising the characteristics of the individuals within the group, I was able to use self-deprecating humour to reassure players in one to one meetings. As the coach, I would regularly speak with players about their performances and their wellbeing away from the club. Much of the time the response from the players were guarded, and I was met with the unusual "yes I am fine, honest". Yet, there were occasions when I could see some players struggling in their new environment. Ewan, for example coming from the professional game was finding it difficult to adapt to life as a semi-professional. Living away from home was hard for him so knowing that we shared a common experience I arranged a meeting to discuss his circumstances further.

*Field note extract [February 19th 2013]*

*[The café is busy, but Ewan and I find a table tucked away in the corner. I can tell he is nervous, he fiddles with his phone, avoiding eye contact.]*

*“I’m not sure this is working. I mean, I like the football it’s just...well, it’s not the same.”* It was what I was expecting from Ewan but I challenged him. *“Did you honestly think it would be the same?...really?”*. He pauses, while the waitress hands us our coffees. *“Well no, but I’m finding it hard. The lads are great...[long pause] but I’m not sure it’s what I want. I’m tired of this, I’ve no money...I need a job”* I remind him of the environment he is in. *“Will money really make you happy? Would you get this elsewhere, would you? Would you get the facilities, the coaching? Come on look what’s on offer, you haven’t given it 5 minutes...[long pause]my first marriage lasted longer!”*. He can’t help but smile, yet he still avoids eye contact, picking up his phone to look at his latest text. *“Tell her to wait...I’m more important for now”*.

We continue to talk about what he is doing, what he wants to do, what I did all those years ago. We share personal anecdotes about families and the insecurities of the professional game. He relaxes and seems comfortable talking about our pasts. I tell him what it was like for me after moving clubs, *“Serious, I used to shit myself pal, everyday going in I was nervous.....shaking like a shitting dog. You know, I was training with big names and then there was me, the fucking idiot from down the road. Could barely kick it, but could head it miles. I used to hate it, I really did.”*. He slowly sips from his cup; a smile of appreciation appears on his face. *“Come on mate, if I could go there and do that, you can do it here. It’s tough, I know, but things aren’t meant to be easy. We just have to make it work for you. I’ll help all I can, and you know John will, the boys too”*. Ewan nods, knowingly accepting that leaving now would be wrong.

Although this example highlighted the sensitive side of humour and its relationship between player and coach, there were times when we, as coaches, would also engage in forms of hilarity. More often than not these interactions were used as a counter balance to the seriousness of the job. Here, we would move away from the divisive nature of humour so that we could poke fun at our own insecurities and downfalls. For instance, after a team meeting, I was able to laugh at myself through my frustrations with the players. My sharp, quirky comments had John laughing.

*Field note extract [February 24th 2013]*

*[An analysis session has just finished, John and I are talking in the club’s bar. I am bemoaning some of the players’ performances while John sits patiently]*

*[Me] “Do you know what I don’t get? Why the lads switch off so early after half time. We’re like it every week, it’s gotta change”. I think an early sub may help, just to add some impact for us. Do you understand what I mean? [I take a long sip from my beer before answering my own question] But there again who do you put on?.....[long pause]* John could see I was annoyed so he let me carry on my rant. I take another gulp from my glass. Jim sits patiently; a wry smile adorns his face. He can see I’m losing my cool

but let's me carry on. [Me]" *It's like, Jesus Christ fella's wake up....[long pause] I should play myself sometimes, I could do better. What you reckon John? I mean I'm in shape, if you can call round a shape.* John laughs and replies "*I think you're right Jose [John's nickname for me] we need to switch on after the break. That starts with kick off, making sure we press the ball right*". "*Yep, I agree, but fuck me we should do it automatically, I could do it faster than Liam, and I'm nearly forty. Honestly, my legs may have gone but I'd read it better than him, lazy little shit*". Such cynicism has John laughing at his own comment. He tells me to relax and enjoy my pint.

#### **4.5 Disciplinary Humour**

During the course of the study, humour was consciously employed as a strategy to manage the relations and interactions of individuals within the group context. As such, the various forms of humour were often used with caution and consideration. The use of disciplinary humour however, required more attention due to the discursive and constructed nature of what is said. For instance, during one particular match I couldn't help but express my frustration at Rob, our striker. He was having a poor game and it was obvious to all. During half time he was unrepentant of his actions and rather than listen, he offered resistance to what was being said. Somewhat aggrieved, I asked him about his role in the team. "*To score goals*" came his cocky reply. This reaction drew a few chuckles from his team mates. While I initially avoided his subversive quip, I couldn't resist with a well-timed joke of my own. As he, Rob, was leaving the dressing room I reminded him to "*work the line, play on the shoulder...cos first half you looked as if you were born offside*".

The role of such humorous remarks was often used to mask or manage fragile negotiations amongst many of the individuals within the group. While the culture of the club was built on strong values and beliefs, there were times that some players would try and resist the 'unwritten rules'. Such defiance was regularly met with dissatisfaction from the coaches. Ewan, on one particular occasion, asked if he could he be excused from an important game due to a golf event. Rather than deliberately engage in an unwanted discussion, I waited for a chance to display my annoyance. On his return to training, I intentionally aimed a response that would

act as a micro-practice of control and a reminder to all. Cautious that I didn't want to fuel any tension amongst the group, my cutting comment reminded him (Ewan) of his recent absence.

*Field note extract [March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013]*

*[It's been a good session, the players have trained well. It's our final session ahead of Saturday's game]*

*"Dan, can you pull it back? Recycle possession through Ewan. That's a great ball lad... keep the ball moving Ewan, get side on, two touch.....two fucking touch! You gotta move it quicker son. Ok, yellow's in [middle of possession square]. Ewan, you go floater. Right, let's get this going. [Ewan hits a long, diagonal pass which goes out of play]. "Jesus Ewan, I hope you don't hit you're 3 iron like that.....[long pause] Leave the golf to Sevv mate!"*

A main feature of this repressive or disciplinary humour were the ways in which the coaches could be subtle in using it. It was well known that the players despised the early morning gym sessions and that individuals would often be absent. Rather than tackling these issues head on, I would often use less confrontational means of disciplining the players. For example, it was regular for Rob to miss a Monday morning session, without me or the other coaches 'apparently' knowing. At training one evening however, he was pushed off the ball by one of the defenders. *"Fucking hell, that's a foul, c'mon"* Rob shouted. I let the play go but he carried on *"Are we gonna do this properly, or what?"* I couldn't help but chuckle and told him to get on with it. *"This is a joke"* came his angry reply. He continued to protest against my decision before I shouted over to him *"I'd give free kicks as long as he went to gym sessions"*. This led to raucous laughter from the other players, Rob, meanwhile was left red faced and embarrassed.

While such subtle gestures were common however, there were times when a more direct approach was needed. For example, Tim one of the more senior players was asked by the club secretary to bring money for a fundraising event. As usual, he had forgotten, and when asked by Mike, he said it was inconvenient to go to the bank on the way. The players found this amusing, leaving Mike to give a thunderous response. *"I'll tell you what's inconvenient shall*

*I?" "Yes, what's that Mike?"* laughed Tim in a cocky, confident manner.....[long pause, Mike was raging]. *"When I have to pay to watch you play like a knob every week"*. The group hushed immediately, suppressing their sniggering under their breath. They had never seen Mike like that before.

The use of humour in this way was prevalent throughout the study. Most of the time humour was utilised by the coaches in a manner that quashed the player's disruptive behaviour. For instance, the nature of some of the training sessions required players to listen to instructions of team shape and how the opposition played. This allowed some the opportunity to talk over the coaches, lose their focus and or start their own discussions. During one particular session, I was discussing defensive shape when Ben started his own conversation with our left back, James. As I was standing at the far side of the pitch it was difficult to gain their attention. I initially let it go, but it soon became obvious that he was not going to stop. As such, I shouted across the field to gain their attention.

*Field note extract [March 21<sup>st</sup> 2013]*

*Me: "Ben, I realise that you doing well at the moment as you are getting on the pitch, and I'm glad that you know everything. But can you listen please"*

*Ben: "I was, Swan".*

*Me: "Funny that, 'cos from where I'm standing James knows more about that bird from last night than he needs to.....Just keep it quiet please and listen. You might learn something"*

*Ben: "Seriously I was!"*

*Me: "Ok, what did I say?"*

[Ben offers some description of attacking play but it wasn't what I had said.].

*Me: "Gentleman.....[long pause] Is that the way to do it? [There is a muffled murmur of a 'No' from some of the players] Ben, I suggest you put those big ears of yours to good use; listen and then you might start a game!"*

Humour in this instance served as a tool to embarrass Ben and make the others aware that such actions wouldn't be tolerated by the coaches. Relatedly, there was an occasion when such

sarcastic comments were used to alienate players at the expense of the coach. Alan, for example had an annoying habit of mocking the coaches and what they say or do. When returning from an away game I could hear him being derisive about me and what I had said during the half time team talk. Rather than engage in an argument with him, I just made him aware that I could hear what he was saying.

*Field note extract [April 2nd 2013]*

[I am sat at the front of the mini bus, Jamie the team captain is driving. I can see Alan through the driver's mirror; he is in full flow so I shout to the back of the bus]

*“Big man, I know it's tough when you play bad..... but just accept it. It's tough for me too. Coaching you makes me a better coach though, cos I have to work harder with you.....[long pause] Take that caravan off your back and maybe we might start winning things!”*

Alan's behaviour almost immediately became compliant, thus the journey back was less uncomfortable for all concerned (except him!).

While such strategic reference allowed the coaches within the group to maintain control, there were times when such approaches were utilised to warn the group against poor performances. Indeed, there were instances when team and individual performances merited a direct personal castigation. For instance, at an away game against our local rivals John made the players aware of his thoughts.

*Field note extract [April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013]*

*[The players sit, cold and wet, the game has finished. We've won, but the performance was poor. I've spoken with the team; the rest is left to John].*

*“This is about attitude, fucking attitude. I don't doubt we can play, I know you can play. But gentleman, it's about physical attitude [John raises his glasses onto his forehead]... mental attitude, the want, the desire to win. Ok, so you have won today but my question then is...can you get the ball down on the floor and fucking play? It takes more arsehole sometimes to get it down and play. More than winning headers or running the extra five yards. Can you, get it and play the way we should, the way we know we should. The game is analysed fella's, you saw the cameras. The PA doesn't lie. If you don't fancy it, we can't play. Today, the space was there, it was out wide but we didn't exploit that. The performance wasn't right some of you had your heads up your arse...and I can ask the question.....[long pause] Did you enjoy the view? Cos, from where I was standing it was shit, shit in every way!*

This deliberate use of repressive humour enabled John to vent his anger at the players. Other instances where the coaches used this type of humour to warn players about their performance was evident in a half time team talk given by myself. I was aiming my frustrations at Tom, one of our more elusive players. With natural talent Tom would often make the game look easy with his elegant playing manner. On this occasion however, I questioned Tom's attitude to the physical nature of the game we were playing.

*Field note extract [April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013]*

*[It's half time, we are discussing our first half performance. Initially, John spoke, giving players tactical advice and how to move the ball quicker around our bigger, more aggressive opponents. Then it was my turn.]*

*"Where do I start....tell me where do I fucking start. You, [I point to Tom] you having a day off?.....[long pause] you not fancy it today? The others are having a go but you...[again, long pause] what ya playing at? I could do what you're doing, even at my age.....but I'd do it quicker. Fuck the tippy tappy stuff Tom, ya gotta work harder, much harder. Now, you have five minutes.... five minutes to put a shift in..... let's see if you have an arsehole, see if you fancy it. If ya don't, you'll be sat next to me with splinters in your arse"*

Although such sarcastic comments were primarily employed by the coaches, there were instances when the players themselves used disciplinary humour as a way of maintaining control within the group. In order to establish 'the norm' senior players would often engage in practices and processes that attempted to self-regulate team members. Though these tended not to be physical encounters, the non-verbal gestures or, at times, the practical jokes served as a mechanism by which cultural habits and relations were made clear to all that were rebellious to them. Indeed, one act of humorous activity allowed the group to let their feelings be known to Ben, a young trialist, who recently joined the club. His poor punctuality and arrogant nature became an issue, as it contravened the social code of the group. Consequently, on returning from an early morning swimming session, Ben found that his clothes had been taped together

and a large clock [off the dressing room wall] had been hung over his peg. Ben became known as 'Big Time' Ben.

Players would also use disciplinary humour as means to mock each other's performance in training and games. While there was the usual humorous remark, the odd comments had a more subversive edge. Here, such verbal practices were intended to expose individual frailties while also serving as a reminder that continued poor performances would not be tolerated. Alan, for example, albeit a constant performer within the team, had endured a poor run in form. While this could be accepted, his lack of effort in recent games was called into question by some of the senior players. One instance involved a heated exchange of words between him and Bill, the goalkeeper. Having been beaten too easy in a 5-aside training game, Alan failed to chase the ball back. This was met by a roaring shout by Bill. "*Chase back you lazy twat*". Alan however, watched on as his team tried to defend the goal. Momentarily the ball went out of play which allowed Bill another go at Alan. "*If you 'aint gonna try Al, fuck off!.....[long pause] The way you're playing, I've seen milk turn quicker!*" Such a comment provoked a response from Alan. However, he was soon told by others to "*shut up and get on with it!*"

Such quirky, yet scathing comments were often used by the players as ways of embarrassing their team mates. There was however, one account of verbal sparring that almost led to physical violence. At the beginning of the session the players were in a possession circle. Suddenly, Marco, one of the senior players, called into question Gary's recent absence from training ahead of an important game. Knowing that he had been questioned before, by me, about his non-attendance at training, Gary was very much defensive when the players attempted to question him. "*I was ill, must have eaten something dodgy*" came Gary's response. "*Have a day off will ya.....heard that one before*" shouted Marco. Gary came at Marco again "*Hang on... how do ya know what I had.....ya don't, so shut it knob head*" Marco couldn't resist making a sarcastic comment about Gary's portly appearance when he suggested

that he “*could do with losing some weight.. Size of that arse!*”. The players laughed loudly at this, which Gary took exception to. As such, he ran towards Marco shouting expletives before he was stopped in his tracks by a couple of the other players.

Acts of such comedic value were normal within the group as rebelling against any of the ‘unwritten rules’ was not considered appropriate by the group. There were also instances when the coaching staff would employ disciplinary humour against other staff who were perceived to have ‘fallen out of line’. Jim, the reserve coach for example, had gone against the orders of team selection in a reserve game. Consequently, the team lost, yet he still looked for excuses to justify his actions. While we were sitting in the bar after training, I reminded him of the importance of each result for his team. He was still unrepentant in his comments highlighting that the team was unlucky. “*Honest now Swan (my nickname), it wasn’t as bad as it looks.....[long pause], the lad hit a worldy*”, Sam said in an animated voice. I couldn’t help remind him that he had lost to the bottom of the league. He continued to argue before John interrupted. [In a firm voice] “*Just stick to the principles Jim, this is not about you, this is about the boys, the club. You need to figure out three at the back, ...and quick.....[long pause]or you’ll be back scratching you’re arse at Ragarse Rangers before you know it*”. John’s less than impressive response told its own story.

Likewise, there was an opportunity for me to use disciplinary humour to alienate Sam, the reserve coach, regarding some of his unwanted comments. Knowing that he had a troubled relationship with Jim, there were times that I reminded him of his position within the club. Having recently taken his first game as a coach, he was quick to try and remind everybody of his coaching abilities. For instance, as John was away, Sam delivered part of a first team coaching session. To begin, it went well, but it soon became obvious that Sam was out of his depth with some of the senior players. This led Sam to become frustrated and question the players. In doing so, I decided to step in and explain my interpretation of what had unfolded.

As such, the players understood what was needed from the drill. Sam, however, began to criticise the players saying that they weren't able to perform the skill. This discussion continued when we were in the club bar after training. Sam argued that *"They don't respect me Swan, none of the lads do. They gotta realise I'm a coach now"*. It was difficult to remonstrate as Sam was adamant in his views. I reminded him that it would be difficult to make the step and he must be patient. His egotistical manner continued which required me to question his coaching once more. *"You may have your Billy 'B' badge mate, but Sam, ya gotta listen. Until you do, you're going to find it hard as the lads couldn't give shit if you had your TV Licence"*

**CHAPTER V**  
**DISCUSSION**

## **5.1 Introduction**

The aim of this section is to critically discuss the main findings of the study. In doing so, an attempt is made to tie the thesis together in light of the overall objectives highlighted in chapter one. Here, a discussion surrounding the coaches' and players' use of inclusionary putdowns, shared humour, self-deprecating humour and disciplinary humour is undertaken, resulting in a more meaningful understanding of context and practice. The purpose here, however, is not only to contextualise and make theoretical sense of the findings by linking them into the existing body of literature (e.g. Snyder, 1991; Eichberg, 2009; Ronglan & Havang, 2011; Ronglan & Aggerholm, 2012; 2013; 2014). Rather, it is to demonstrate where the findings deviate from such literature, thus actively contributing to the body of knowledge. This is particularly so in providing empirical evidence of how humour permeates the power exchanges between coaches and athletes, and the resulting consequences.

The chapter is organised in light of the themes presented in the previous chapter. Firstly then, a deconstruction of inclusionary humour and its less than hostile nature is undertaken. This is followed by a discussion of shared humour and how it was negotiated within the existing social context. The focus then shifts to self-deprecating humour, and how it was used to save 'face', in the often harsh, yet, (apparently) forgiving, environment of sport. Finally, a [de]contextualisation of disciplinary humour is presented and, in particular, how it was employed as a power strategy by both coaches and athletes to structure interaction and social positioning.

## **5.2 Inclusionary Humour: *'Putdowns' among friends***

Much of humour related research has viewed the phenomenon from a superiority, incongruous, or relief theory perspective. Relatedly, the equivocal nature of humour suggests that its uses are evidently culture bound. Indeed, research on sporting sub-cultures, such as ice hockey (Bloom & Smith, 1986), windsurfing (Wheaton, 2000), rugby (Light, 2008) and rowing (Purdy

et al., 2008) have argued that particular sports manifest certain cultural characteristics (Ronglan & Aggerholm, 2013). Within this study, moreover, it was the emergence of humour as a form of inclusion that dominated interactions, suggesting its use as a caring and friendly strategy.

Putdown humour within the literature (e.g. Terrion & Ashworth, 2002) tends to be portrayed as that to derive amusement at the expense of another. While this may be the case within certain organisations or cultures, the putdown humour witnessed in the current study was predominantly inclusionary in nature. In this respect, humour tended to be used in an affiliative manner, whereby funny, non-threatening comments or behaviour[s] were used to facilitate group interactions. Crucially, however, such humour was used from, and located within, an historical context. Here, the nature or meaning of the teasing and/or the sarcastic remarks evident only had value or impact as a consequence of a shared (cultural) understanding among the participants. The basis here then, relates to humorous references that become embedded within the group context. This shared meaning, allowed for a joking culture to serve as a means where individuals could further share joking interactions. Thus, the humour evident within the context had an historical characteristic (Fine & de Soucey, 2005).

An example of this was my relationship with Ewan. Having both been professionals in the game, only he would understand what it was like to be one. Consequently, in teasing him that he was never as good a player as I had been, the putdown (described on page 135) also reaffirmed his status as someone 'special' within the group; someone who had actually been a professional. This clear 'play frame' (Gruner, 1997) indicates that not all putdowns need to be offensive, as the meaning of the interaction related to Ewan being 'different' or special in relation to the rest of the group. This can also be understood in light of the earlier work of Radcliffe-Brown (1940), who suggested that if humour is consistent within certain boundaries, and is defined by context, then such interpersonal relations can facilitate integration.

The message here was not to predominantly use humour as a way of punishing or ridiculing Ewan. Rather, its intended purpose was to productively use humour as a secondary function to influence the coaching context. In this way, humour can be interpreted through recourse to the work of Goffman (1959) on impression management. Here, Goffman (1959) alluded to the point that ‘face work’ can be seen as an act that intends to leave the right impression in front of an audience. Thus, a coach’s humorous performance becomes integral to how power relations are established and contested within existing social structures (Ronglan & Aggerholm, 2013). In light of this interaction with Ewan, there is an argument to be made that the desired impression given was of a contradictory nature where friendliness and antagonism served as a mechanism to quash any conflict that may have appeared. Therefore, the important thing to consider here, is that the ambivalent and ‘double edged’ nature of humour allows a person in authority (e.g., a coach), to laugh with individuals and the group so that solidarity is reinforced (Terrion & Ashforth, 2002). In fact, a coach’s performance in this respect, allows those in power to briefly bridge the social space[s] so that interpersonal relationships can become, when needed, somewhat equal.

Such an incident did not operate in isolation as evidenced on the team bus with Mike and the players embroiled in similar inclusionary putdowns (discussed on page 135). With certain players attempting to ridicule Mike for his slow driving, Mike set about maintaining ‘face’. If the quirky, sarcastic comments made by the players were not understood in context, the unfolding interaction could have led to a ‘rupturing’ of the social bonds between Mike and the players. Yet, the historical context of such remarks led to the conversation being considered funny. Whilst the players attempted to negotiate and challenge the status order, Mike set about using satire to suppress and reaffirm messages of control, thus, attempting to re-establish the ‘said’ order. Such an interaction relates to the work of Goffman (1967), who implied that the mock joke or act of ‘joshing’ and their historical nature can help relieve the tension of

(another's) embarrassment. In this context, the already established relationships formed between the coach and players enabled such acts to be understood by both parties so that no offence or malice was intended. Here, then, inclusionary putdowns played a part in the contestation of the 'play of powers' within the existing order.

This historical, 'shared understanding' of the inclusionary putdowns evident allowed certain individuals to create their own identities, while also challenging the power differences within the group. Indeed, the paradoxical nature of humour enabled Jamie, through repetitive game-playing and acts of comedy (see page 138), to shape his own social identity. Linked to the work of Volosinov (1973), he manipulated verbal performances and the interplay of the waiting 'audience' to become the 'class clown'. Much of his performances were socially constructed through humorous references that the group shared and understood. It can be argued that the referential and collaborative features of his acts, did, in most cases, differentiate the group from outsiders. In this respect, it both secured the agreement of other players through shared association (Fine & de Soucey, 2005), whilst (rather paradoxically perhaps) contributing to the production of social hierarchies. In some ways, it was the surreptitious understanding of the humorous interactions that allowed the social constructs of the context to be fluid, discussed and changed (Kamler, 1999). Indeed, the actions of Jamie became the 'social glue' of the group; actions that reduced the social distance of team members so that a common ground was collective and implicit. Doing so, allowed the group to be [re]produced through its members' everyday usage of humour (Shardakova, 2013). On the other hand, it also reinforced Jamie as one of the 'group leaders', thus highlighting such actions' multifarious effects.

Here then, a case can be made that humour has 'no boundaries' due to its ambivalent nature. Such discursive, humorous practices (as outlined) allow for individuals not only to see humour beyond its amusing tendencies, but also in relation to how they could negotiate, construct, and deconstruct the structural boundaries of any given context (Hobday-Kusch &

McVittie, 2002). The point made here relates to how 'significant' individuals within a group setting will take on and play a 'role' so that they are able to negotiate power relations to [re]establish cultural boundaries. In fact, as the research unfolded, it became apparent that Jamie, as one of the study's 'key actors', would readily engage in humour as a means of challenging the boundaries between coach, athlete and context. In this respect, his behaviour outwardly played with humour's ambiguous nature in a manner that was unthreatening in its playfulness, yet, probing the underlying socio-cultural norms of the group (Duggan, 2002). A point of interest here relates to how 'others' within the group acknowledged such humorous practices so that the pattern[s] of interaction[s] became a valued form of play; acts that seldom moved to belligerent humour but rather served the identity of the group's dynamics (Terrion & Ashforth, 2002).

It was this use of inclusionary putdowns that formed the common dominant identity of the group. Much like the research of Terrion and Ashforth (2002), individuals within the study would often target personal qualities of other members as way of facilitating interaction and group togetherness. Understanding the context of each other's humorous references gave team members the confidence to engage in interpersonal putdowns in a manner that indicated trust and appreciation of group identity. This was evident in the interaction between Andy, the physio, Mark and Steve, two senior players (described on page 134). Here, such inclusionary exchanges echo the work of Smith and Berg (1987) where a 'paradox of identity' is portrayed as individuals display incongruous wishes both for immersion in a group identity and for an individual identity. Needless to say, the historical nature of such joking relations allowed individuals to share an 'unspoken' understanding of the egalitarian interactions that shape and construct group cultures.

Such humour relations served as a means by which those in power (e.g., coaches) would use inclusionary humour as a way of 'playing' on each other's weaknesses, while also

highlighting and establishing a collective understanding of what it is like to do the 'job'. Such exchanges regulated the implicit rules through the mutual understanding of the social context of joking. In many ways, it was a way of 'social survival' for the coaches as they looked to express solidarity while quashing the pressures of the everyday coaching context. This was particularly evident during the telephone conversation between myself and the other coaches (discussed on page 136). Here, the power dynamics changed as I became the one who was derided. Without the shared, historical context of the humorous anecdotes, however, such public criticism of me, the boss, could have been deemed rebellious. Yet, the tone of voice used and the nature of the joke telling allowed the other coaches to 'invert' the power relations through humour, without them fearing a lasting consequence to their actions (Crawford, 2003).

A further point of interest was that, although some of the literature considers the negative consequences of humour within the current of study it could be viewed as a positive. The argument made is to recognise that all actions have significance and that the current and future exchanges, of the coaches were 'framed' and 'shaped' by shared acceptance of the given humorous past. This, then, links to the notion of indexicality as prescribed by Garfinkel (1967); that is, for the humorous exchanges to make appropriate sense there must be some kind of contextual, shared knowledge. This, according to Garfinkel, can be engineered through prior interactions, the nature of the relationship between those in the resulting conversations and the biographies of those that operate in the given culture. It is this sense making and the grasping of a joint understanding (of the joke), that allow individuals a primordial reasoning of the social rules that help inform the ordinary experience of everyday life (Heritage, 2008).

Here, interaction through humour was considered a vital communicative strategy allowing individual actors within the context a sense of belonging and meaning through a shared identity. What is more, the incipient group structure was rarely static, as the humorous anecdotes and banter simultaneously both reinforced and challenged the status quo. Indeed,

group members would 'playfully' test and express the latent tensions in a relatively non-threatening manner (Hatch, 1997). Relatedly, acts of such 'shared[ness]' were regularly used as a way of reaffirming individuals' social positions within the 'said' order. The idiosyncratic nature of humour also allowed the coaches interactional moments when, as group members, they could frame and reframe humorous comments to defuse delicate situations.

Here, then, the inclusionary, conjunctive characteristics of humour were used by the coaches to alleviate the mood and smooth the daily interactions between themselves and the players. For instance, the interaction with Max (see page 138) allowed for a 'peculiar' phrase to be used, one that was socially accepted and understood by the players to allow me, the coach, to mock Max's performance. The point to be made here is that while this may be considered a derogatory comment by others, the discourse used in this particular context was one that had been locally constructed by the group and thus, deemed appropriate for use. Although some within the group were unsure whether to laugh at what was said, they did so to conform to the norm of the group's everyday cultural behaviours.

This so called veneer of consensus (Goffman, 1959) enabled an invitation to laughter from individuals without fearing that any social rules had been 'broken'. Much like the work of Terrion and Ashworth (2002), using the language that was a 'sanctioned' and an acknowledged 'code' of the culture, facilitated the development of a group identity whereby individuals shared a common, unspoken rule structure. Thus, the 'joint' understanding allowed the group to recognise an inclusionary comment from an exclusionary putdown remark. In sum, it was evident that through an implicit structure, individual group members collectively used humour as a cultural 'lubricant' (Trice & Beyer, 1993) to maintain a common shared identity. In light of such connotations, there is an argument to be made that through inclusionary humour, group members are able to draw on embedded, shared histories to work towards

mutual bonds by laughing together while mediating the various social networks to which they belong (Bednarek & Martin, 2010).

In drawing conclusions to such identity production, the affiliative, inclusionary lens of humour allowed the individuals within the context much more than just a developing peer group identity. Indeed, the external presence of humour was critical in maintaining the balance within a complex environment whereby the manifestation of confidence, vulnerability and trust were continually challenged on a daily basis. In this respect, as the study unfolded, the mutual respect for each coach and player became apparent through the use of humour. Indeed, the players and coaches would often negotiate the complex environment based upon their relational and interactional identities so that 'group membership' was ascribed to. This collective function of humour signalled friendship amongst the group whereby everyday interactions were played out in an inclusive manner that was symbolic to the beliefs, behaviours and values of the culture under study (Zijderveld, 1968).

### **5.3 Shared Humour: *The 'arena of struggle'***

As discussed, humour within this study was inextricably embedded within a shared, historical context. Whilst the meaning of certain humorous episodes may contradict an initial understanding of the term 'shared', a pattern of communal relations or conditions was evident that allowed individuals to laugh together through implicit rules that maintained group solidarity (Terrion & Ashworth, 2002). This was due to deep rooted nature of the culturally defined 'joke book' of the group. Indeed, players and coaches joked with and at each other about many things (e.g., clothes, appearance) to a degree that it was clear that they trusted one another in their joking relationships (Volger, 2011). In many ways, such behaviour was a form of access into the group in which each individual inherently displayed his own sense of individuality while also learning to accept and [re]negotiate the groups' socially defined rules.

Such 'acts' were not exclusively aimed at one person (although they did become increasingly funny when it became the same individual); rather they were a creation of humour that acted as a space for 'shared' humour that became the lubricant of group interaction[s]. For instance, whilst the 'arena for struggle' (see page 141) and the 'walk of shame' (see page 145) could be interpreted as acts of humiliation as opposed to shared humour, the context created dictated a different interpretation. Here, the joking interactions were mutually understood by the 'social actors' (e.g., players and coaches) who drew upon in-house rules and resources to re-enact practices that individuals were comfortable (or comfortable enough) to engage in through the communal, shared relations of the group context (Cassell, 1993). Therefore, this 'playful' bantering highlighted the latent dimensions of the group and the strong, masculine nature of the football dressing room.

With this in mind, it's important to highlight how shared humour allowed subordinates (players) and those in positions of power (coaches) to challenge the unstated rules and internal hierarchies by which interactions are governed (Goffman, 1974). Such actions, according to Critchley (2002) are the engagement with a 'social contract', whereby individuals place strong reliance on each other through trust and rapport despite the degree to which risqué humour is used. Indeed, the dynamic power relations within the group meant that humour was rarely used unilaterally but more commonly connected to consensus within the group. This tended to be the case in the team dressing room when shared humour was strategically encouraged by both coaches and players. The principal aim here was to reduce the tensions and pressure of the ever changing environment so that individuals could focus on the job in hand. In such instances, humour was instigated through a collegial, mutual understanding of a particular issue which invariably allowed those within the group to be inclusive with their joking relations by laughing 'with' rather than 'at' each other. In fact, the groups' own inherent characteristics served as a means by which in-house jokes and witticisms were developed and crafted over time, so that

team members enjoyed the constitutional identity of what it took to be part of the group (Snyder, 1991).

For instance, the interaction between myself and Dan (described on page 142) highlights humour's less than confrontational nature by illuminating how, as coach, I was able to attenuate or strengthen the power relationship between ourselves. While it can be said, that the opposite is true of the player who is attempting to challenge the salient power differences of the said interaction. The important message here is to consider what Goffman (1974) calls 'playful deceit', whereby the 'kidding' and 'leg pulling' of both parties are benign fabrications of what is actually meant. This, then, allows those in authority (coaches) to use humour as a repressive discursive tool to disguise what it takes to gain order within the existing social context. Likewise, humour's double edged characteristic enabled the subordinate (player) an acceptable avenue by which to challenge and question the innocuous utterance in a socially acceptable form (Holmes & Marra, 2002). Relatedly, such interactions serve as a reminder that the humour within this study was replete with structural inconsistencies that moved far beyond amusement. So much so, that the occurring humorous exchanges provided a fruitful lens through which to highlight the balancing act between ridicule and teasing which ensured compliance to the existing social order (Billig, 2001).

The frivolous nature of humour has already been highlighted, with the case being made that a situated understanding of humour is culturally bound. In such instances, the context specific forms of humour offer a nuanced insight into the dynamics implicit within any given setting. Within this study, many of the players considered the humorous repartee as a way of undermining the hierarchy harboured by the coaches. In this sense, the players' social space (the dressing room) in which the coaches were not always present, offered ways in which they could gain some kind of autonomy and control away from the management structures. Indeed,

it was often the case that by ‘flipping’ the normal taken-for-granted social order of the dressing room, the players were able to engage in joking relations as a process of subversion against the coaching staff (Linstead, 1985b).

Such was the case when Alan, one of the study’s main actors, mimicked the actions of the head coach, John. Due to his ‘enigmatic’ character, Alan was at times an isolated figure who found it difficult to integrate himself amongst many of his team mates. Nevertheless, by instigating such a rebellious form of humour, his utterances provoked hilarity among his team mates. Viewed in this light, the parodying of the coach was a cooperative attempt to lighten the tone and maintain collegial relations with his team mates (Holmes, 2000). Yet, from a different lens, it can be argued that the intention was not to deliberately mock John *per se* in a recalcitrant manner; it was more to negotiate and alleviate his own status and identity within the group. Such interaction reaffirms the notion of humour’s historical and retrospective context where protagonists use implicit set rules of the group and the culturally bound meaning of humour to gain acceptance by peers (Sobstad, 1990).

In many ways, this ‘sophisticated’ use of humour (Ronglan & Aggerholm, 2013) served as a means for many characters within the study to navigate the coaching context. Acknowledging that the relationship between the players and themselves was in a state of constant flux, the coaches would regularly *use* humour in response *to* humour, thus, skilfully reaffirming power over those that challenged it (Dynel, 2011). Careful that they did not ‘over step the mark’ when disciplining the players, the coaches used humour’s equivocal nature as a ‘balancing act’ (Ronglan & Aggerholm, 2013) to influence the social relations when dealing with certain individuals. In borrowing from the writings of Lemert (1997), the coaches used their ‘social competencies’ as a way of masking humour with subtle, refined undertones so that social order was maintained by keeping people ‘in their place’.

This was evident in the interaction between myself and Alan (described on page 144) after his mocking of John. Rather than being caustic with my comments, I used varying degrees of humour to exercise control over Alan's derisive behaviour. In doing so, there was a 'play of powers' where the coach used varying degrees of humour, *with* others and *through* others to repress the actions of those that challenged authority (Dyrel, 2011). It could be said that the resulting behaviours reflect the work of O'Brien and Kollock (1991), who purport that individuals use the social virtue of humour, in ever changing circumstances, to govern the dominant discourses inherent in social situations.

While the case has been made for the coaches' use of humour, the players themselves also exhibited particular forms of humorous play to establish a peer group social hierarchy. Relatedly, many instances existed within this study where power relations were dynamically [re]produced within the embedded cultural codes of the group. Through 'ritualised' humorous practices the older players would mutually enforce local 'in house' rules against the younger players through competitive 'game playing'. Here, the ribbing and teasing allowed group members to laugh at each other with no offence intended due to the communal relationship (Cosser, 1959). Indeed, these social, ritualised acts, could if not understood, be seen as a violation of the friendly culture of the group. Through such 'framing' (Gruner, 1997) however, individuals were able to use culturally distinct language (e.g., small cues, utterances) to 'get away with' actions that if not defined by context, would cause offence to those that sit 'outside' the play frame (Aggerholm & Ronglan, 2012). In fact, due to the intended nature of the humorous act, those that were singled out participated in the 'game', as they knew the constitutive rules and shared meaning of practice. As such, the habitual humorous practices enabled the players to share a common currency so they could make fun of one other in a socially accepted and collective manner that in other contexts would appear disdainful. In this respect, such actions relate to the work of Hobday-Kusch and McVittie (2002) where the targets

of the 'play frame' is able to laugh *at* and *with* the frame, thus colluding with their oppressors (team mates) in their own oppression.

Such abstract, organisational symbols like humour offered a way of socialisation within the given culture. For instance, as a communicative process, the social construct of humour enabled individuals to negotiate integral status within the group, giving them an identity but only if they are able to understand the meaning of the predominant discourse used. In the context of the study, the implicit use of humour by the existing members encouraged teasing and leg pulling so that new individuals were able to negotiate the rules, patterns and boundaries of the group culture. This strategy of socialisation established rapport amongst the players so that they were able to share and develop humorous, cultural knowledge. In doing so, the identities and behaviours of newcomers were shaped into normative ways of doing things (Mak & Deneen, 2012). In this case, those that recognised and made sense of the contextual knowledge of the sub-culture, gained an implicit acceptance into the group.

#### **5.4. Self-deprecating humour: *The role of the class clown***

As alluded to throughout the study, most, if not all of the humorous episodes are context sensitive, bound to shared histories (Marra & Holmes, 2007). This said, the use of self-deprecating humour was used cautiously within the current context due to its contradictory nature. Yet, it can be argued that its consequences are dependent on the identity dynamics of those using it. For instance, the coaches within the study tended to use such humour in a manner that alleviated the pressure or seriousness of potential awkward moments so that their position was upheld. The incident with Macca (described on page 146) highlighted, how, through my own gaffe, I was able to over-turn a social faux pas in order that I maintained my status within the group. In a swift, subversive quip I intended to avoid embarrassment by trying to 'repair' the interaction with the group (Goffman, 1967).

Although it can be argued that the remark was a ‘put down’ or ridicule of Macca, my use of humour in the context was two-fold. My initial, perhaps sub-conscious intention, was to ensure social discipline, by communicating a critical ‘face threatening’ message, explicitly to rebuke Macca as not being able to play football like me, thus deviating the players’ thoughts away from my mishap. My latter thought meanwhile, was to accept my ‘professional’ fallibility, and turn the act of embarrassment into a subject of humour (Holmes, 2000). A point of interest here is that although the onlookers found my actions inherently funny, my resulting comment was less than challenging than if it had been uttered without humour, therefore allowing me to skilfully deny the seriousness of the situation by ‘doing’ face work (Goffman, 1967). Moreover, it can be argued that such embarrassment led to a remedial strategy, where the rule of self-respect or the rule of considerateness (Goffman, 1967) was adhered to, so I, the leading actor (coach) did what was needed to preserve the existing social order of the context (Billig, 2001).

While such interactions used humour’s opaque characteristic to maintain the said order, there were instances where some individuals used self-deprecating humour as means of promoting their own modesty, while others did so to hide their humility. Jamie, for example, was someone who never took himself seriously. Much of his behaviour had neutralising tendencies where often difficult, sensitive or controversial topics were defused through his inclusive, yet, self-deprecating displays of humour. Although he was an influential player within the team, he often did weird and peculiar things. Throughout the study, he had an innate way with familiar meanings. For example, his ‘shinning’ of the ball (described on page 149) highlighted his unique ability to juggle the football. Whilst his actions may be considered unusual, the incongruity between what was *expected* and what was *witnessed* allowed him to mock his own ability; consequently setting him apart from the rest of the group. It is here that humour’s double edged nature can be seen as an act of disparagement while on the other hand

there is a suggestion that he was in fact being modest of one's own ability. In this case, it can be argued that through self-ridicule, group members are able to exacerbate the status difference between one another so that internal hierarchies are established and identities shaped.

In bringing a dramaturgical interpretation (e.g., impression management) to highlight Jamie's behaviour it's important to consider the lasting consequences of his actions. Through impression management and regional behaviour (e.g., front and back regions) he managed his own performance according to the expectations of his audience (coaches, players) so that he maintained an air of legitimacy about his status and the rights to his role (Goffman, 1959). This, then, in many ways also enabled some individuals within the social climate to seek and create their own identities as they could see that he too was wrestling with, and challenging, the power structures within which they operated. Indeed, whether at an implicit or explicit level, Jamie utilised humour's close connection with meaning and the taken for granted rules that guided members (e.g. coaches, players) behaviour to provide a hidden critical perspective into the social relationships with the culture (Zijderveld, 1995).

At times, the ostensible nature of Jamie's actions provided a dense veneer of meaning for the other players far beyond the open meaning[s] of its language (Paolucci & Richardson, 2006). Here, then, by adopting the dramaturgical lens, focus can shift to highlight how Jamie manipulated social settings through humour. In search of a distinct identity, he would regularly adopt the role of the 'fool' or 'class clown', and used the shared understanding of the group culture to make sense of his humorous actions. In this respect, he was able to convey meaning and secure compliance through the interrelationships between himself and other members (e.g. coaches and players) so that his unique identity was upheld. Such a socialising strategy, echoes the work of Brown (2007), where individuals were found to play with and or construct identities in relation to the rules and boundaries within the social world that they operate.

Relatedly, although Jamie's continued performance strengthened the social fabric of the group, in some ways, he 'restricted' others from developing their own personalities. Whilst such a comment is contradictory to earlier suggestions regarding self-deprecation and its ability to minimise the hierarchical differences between leaders and followers, it is a useful sign post to consider. Although not intentional, the legacy of his actions and the impression[s] that he portrayed, guided the behaviour and inhibited the agency of some individuals through his frequent manipulation of the rules of social interaction. In this respect, he 'disarmed' individuals to a degree that they feared they would not be considered as funny as him.

In contrast, coaches utilised self-deprecating humour as a softening device (Holmes, 2000) to convey football related messages to the players. The purpose here was the use of subtle undertones of speech to avoid direct criticism of the player[s] ability, yet, interpret a directive in a manner that was to the point and acceptable to the players. The interaction (described on page 147) between myself and the player[s] highlighted that tension was apparent. In order to maintain a positive relationship, I utilised an indirect route (e.g., taking part in the practice) to promote my own ability while also preserving the dignity of Marco and his failings within the drill. Such actions highlight how the nature of self-deprecation can, in one vein, promote self-modesty, while on the other act as a mechanism to remind subordinates of the power induced hierarchies that lie between those in position of authority (e.g. coaches) and the subordinates (e.g. players) that they work with.

In continuing to highlight the 'softer' side to self-deprecating humour, there is an argument to be made that such humour can be used as a performative act when dealing with the sensitive nature of circumstances and settings. Due to the nature of the multi-layered context under study, emotions were freely expressed on a day to day basis. Indeed, joy, anger, frustration and happiness were common place. This said, the coaches within regularly engaged in impression management, through humour, as a means to deal with the emotional interaction

that arose from the occupational norms of what it takes to manage others (Crawley, 2004). Here, we can argue that coaches have their own 'feeling rules' (Hochschild, 1983) about what kinds of emotions are appropriate to express. These are without doubt guided by the unwritten and largely invisible social structures that are embedded within their own culture. Due to the masculine nature of the male dominated environment, how the coaches 'showed' their emotions was vital in forging and maintain the relationships that they engage in. In this respect, through the social structures (e.g., cultural expectations) the coaches 'staged managed' their emotions through humour in ways which were appropriate to their role and setting (Goffman, 1959).

For instance my dealings with Ewan (as described on page 150) highlights how my understanding of the situation allowed me to engage in self-deprecating humour as a means to manage the emotional nature of what was being discussed. Knowing that we shared similar backgrounds and that Ewan was aware of my own personal history, I drew upon my previous marital breakdown and difficulties as a player to make light hearted sense of what was being said. Such 'emotional language' allowed me to convey meaning as a way of communication so that Ewan believed that I really 'felt' what it was like to be like him. Such 'emotional expression' (Gergen, 1999) was a relational performance that was only meaningful due to the shared knowledge of our own backgrounds and the context within which we operated. Here, my actions and behaviour resonate with the work of Hochschild (1983), where I managed my feelings, through humour, to create an open display that was appropriate to, and or consistent with, a situation or role in a socially accepted manner.

### **5.5 Disciplinary Humour: *Did you enjoy the view?***

Disciplinary humour meanwhile, acted as an important social communicative act in wielding or gaining control within the culture. Whilst certain group members used humour as a means

not to take themselves seriously, others used its disciplinary properties to [re]affirm social boundaries and shape existing relations within the group. Indeed, such humour was an authoritative maxim for those in positions of power to influence the context. Much like the work of Lockyer and Pickering (2008), the use of humour in this study allowed group members to use light-hearted, disciplinary banter to ‘de-stabilise’ others’ standing within the said order. For instance, the players’ practical joke on Ben (as described on page 156) underlined how individuals would use humour as a message to those who dared ‘rebel’ or ‘abuse’ the unwritten, sanctioned rules of the culture. The key point to consider here is that although humour has a dark side and that ridicule and mockery can, if used inappropriately, alienate group members, used in a less confrontational manner, ridicule ensures individual compliance with customs and habits of their social context. Thus, social discipline and social order can be maintained (Billig, 2005).

Relatedly, the coaches also used disciplinary humour against those who attempted to undermine the club’s philosophy of practice. Such behaviour lends itself to the empirical research of Thomson (2015), where the coaching staff used such humour as a resource to both implicitly and explicitly demonstrate [social] meaning and authoritative influence. In this respect, the suppression of the players’ actions within the current study highlighted how humour as a communicative resource quashed the jocularity of those rebelling and reinforced the power relations of those trying to control such rebellious behaviour. The interaction between Rob and myself (described on page 152) for instance, was evidence of the cultural discourse used by coaches and players within interaction. On this occasion my subversive quip was intended to make Rob aware that he was not complying with expectations. Here, then, the disciplinary functions of humour were used to deliver a message that Rob could interpret in language he understood. The intention of such a remark was to magnify the meaning of my message without engaging in conflict. Disciplinary practices in this sense resonate with the

work of Zelizer (2010), who argued that it is the underlying tone and delivery of such utterances that serve as a powerful impact on how humour is interpreted within a mutually, understood cultural context of joking.

In light of such discussion and through ‘gentle’ disciplinary humour, the coaches within the study skilfully constructed a humorous performance. Deliberate use of humour in specific situations is, according to Ronglan and Aggerholm (2013), a guise that allows individuals to increase their influence over people and processes. Relatedly, to have the desired effect over others, the coaches were adept in finding the balance between the timing of productive humour so that their position was not challenged, thus respect was maintained within the given social interaction. Such was the case with my interaction with Ewan (described on page 152), and his defiance of the cultural ‘rules’ of the club. Using humour’s disciplinary tendencies as an interactional strategy, I influenced the ‘closeness’ of our relationship to play on his insecurities and thus remind him of the standards needed to play for the club. Such an ‘act’ echoes the work of Jones (2011a), who argues that individuals (e.g., coaches) manipulate their contextual relationships to meet coveted outcomes.

While such actions highlight how disciplinary humour can be used in a more subtle manner, there were instances that a more direct and explicit use of the phenomenon was needed. More often than not, it was not the literal meaning of what was said, but the shock value of what was uttered that had effect. John for example, vented his anger through the deliberate use of such repressive humour. His personal castigation of the team’s performance (described on page 155) served as a timely reminder that such play or performance would not be tolerated. The point relates to the way that individuals use humorous metaphors to express annoyance and thus discipline others. Here, it was the importance of the exaggerated impact of what was said that enabled others to make sense of and convey meaning in a more explicit manner. Seen in this way, the paradoxical nature of humour allowed those in control (e.g., coaches) ways to

[re]inforce dominant values, assert control and maintaining power relationships within the group culture (Holmes, 2000).

Whilst the culture under study generally promoted an inclusive environment, there were instances when humour, particularly from a disciplinary perspective, served to negotiate and defuse tension. Like in all groups, conflict is an inherent trait that can cause much disdain. Relatedly, the players would often use disciplinary humour in a manner that did not intend to cause offence or harm. Rather, they would engage in verbal sparring, through culturally specific language (e.g., quirky comments related to poor performance or appearance), to berate or discipline individuals that did not conform to group norms or rules. For instance, the altercation between Marco and Gary (described on page 157) highlighted how the players would often develop their own manifestation of disciplinary humour in order to [re]negotiate the group to maintain high standards of excellence in all that they did (Lynch, 2010). The interesting point to be made here, relates to the seriousness of the message conveyed. If used outside the context, the belittling, disciplinary comment would not have had the desired effect as it would have been subject to other cultural perspectives which would have yielded differing interpretations (Zelizer, 2010). Hence, the 'unwritten' rule bound structure of context, creates conditions that allow for such disciplinary practices to be 'self-regulating' against the oppositional actions of its members. In this respect, the players made sense of their world by paying attention to the intricate politics and small rules of interaction. Here, such powerful symbolic actions of speech led to a [re]production 'micro' practices that maintained order and values within the context (Garfinkel, 1967; Goffman, 1959).

Disciplinary humour certainly existed within the context under study, particularly as related to the cultural problems of regulation, power and control. Such a thread, highlights how the culture and the individuals within it, constantly used disciplinary means, most notably ridicule, to uphold the social norms of conduct and the conventions of meaning that are

embedded within the group (Billig, 2005). Such was the case when Alan decided to mock me after a game (described on page 154). Due to his enigmatic character, he was an individual who would use humour as a disruptive influence. In this respect, he challenged the status quo by crossing the communicative boundary to deride the inherent power relations of the group. My deliberate disciplinary response was a calculated way to alienate Alan so that the resulting disparaging comment would go beyond amusement (Nielsen, 2011) and deter further tensions. Humour in this instance, served as a timely reminder to Alan and the group that the mocking of such unwritten rules affords those in power ways in which to respond with their own gestures. In doing so, they are able to define their status of hierarchy and gain behavioural compliance over subordinates (Dwyer, 1991).

**CHAPTER VI**

**CONCLUSION**

**&**

**FINAL THOUGHT**

## 6.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of humour as a critical component in the negotiation of coaching relationships. It was grounded in the challenges I faced and witnessed on a daily basis as a researcher, participant and coach working within the multi-layered culture of Senghenydd City Football Club. Through adopting an ethnographical lens, and the interpretive frameworks of Goffman (1959) and Garfinkel (1967), to name but a few, I have attempted to explore the interactive nature of coaching and shed light on how humour was expressed and contextualised within a given football culture.

In terms of structure, this concluding chapter initially offers an opportunity to recap the principle findings to have emerged from the research. It draws conclusions from the data presented while re-addressing the aims and objectives of the thesis highlighted in Chapter 1. In addition, I further consider the merits of the qualitative genre, in particular new, '*avant garde*' approaches that break away from the 'stifling' rationalistic methods that have long served the conventions of coaching. Furthermore, I offer a portrayal of how my position[s] as researcher, participant and coach enabled me to see beyond the boundaries of writing, and explain how crafting this thesis allowed me to 'trust myself' about what I write, in relation to how I feel (Denison, 2002). In closing, I provide recommendations for future research into sports coaching, whilst offering some final personal reflections. To begin, however, I draw attention to the research that provided the rationale for this study; that of the social world of coaching and, in particular, humour.

The opening chapter highlighted that the literature surrounding the traditional approaches used to explore sports coaching are simply not sophisticated enough to shed light on the contextual interactions inherent within the activity. It further cited the unfolding debate that draws attention to the emergence of a sociological lens through which to better understand the complex realities of coaching. The point made here, is that in order to delve deeper into the

murky waters so as to de-sensitise, the hidden, taken for granted practices, there is a need to explore the social act of sports coaching.

It might be fair to argue that while there has been a recent investigative upsurge into humour within coaching (e.g. Ronglan & Aggerholm, 2011; 2012; 2013; 2014) there is still a paucity of understanding in relation to it. This is where the thesis has added to the current social agenda of sports coaching, by offering a deconstruction of humour and its role in understanding the dynamics that underpin the complex coaching environment. Such exploratory work has allowed for an engagement with the collective nature of coaching, where multiple stakeholders (e.g., coaches, players, support staff) use various social practices, like humour, as a means to preserve their shared dignity. As such, the study builds upon the recent re-conceptualisation of coaching in allowing for a greater insight into how coaches and significant others manage contexts; a place where existing coaching discourse prevents us from going. Finally, the value of the thesis also extends into the potential to inform more realistic professional preparation programmes for coaches as they struggle with their daily relational dilemmas.

## **6.2 Recapping the aims and objectives of the study**

The aim of this thesis was to explore how humour represents a valuable component in the productive negotiations of coaching relationships. The focus was to investigate humour within the complex interaction of coaching, and make specific sense of what type of humour was used, why it is used and the effects of such humour on the context which it occurs. To do this, four mutually informing detailed objectives were addressed.

- To explore the ‘power exchanges’ between coach and athlete as expressed through humour.

- To examine what sort of humour is used within coaching, why it is used and what are its consequences?
- To examine how humour contributes to the production of social 'hierarchies' in a coaching context; and
- To highlight how humour plays a significant role in developing peer group identities and culture.

### **6.3 A summary of the main research findings**

The findings from this study contribute to the existing literature investigating the social agenda of sports coaching. In doing so, the work builds upon the tentative foundations (e.g. Snyder, 1991; Ronglan & Aggerholm, 2011; 2012; 2013; 2014) in making the case that humour represents a valuable strategy in the productive interactions of coaching relationships. This is not so in terms of superiority, integration or disparagement functions, but rather how humour directly contributes to the production, maintenance and challenge of the contextual social order.

Individuals within the study demonstrated similar behaviours already acknowledged within the previous literature. This however, was not always the case, as some new findings were also evident. Here, the use of *inclusionary humour* was of particular importance. As already stated, previous work regarding humour (e.g., Billig, 2005) suggested that in its sinister form, it tends to exclude individuals to a degree that they feel alienated or humiliated. Whilst this may be the case in other contexts, within this study humour was also an inclusionary force amongst 'friends'. Through its affiliative nature, and the shared, historical understanding of the group, individuals were comfortable and 'genuine' with their *use* and *acceptance of* so called disparaging comments. As such, those that were on the receiving end of 'barbed' utterances implicitly understood the use of the language, codes, rituals and 'story telling', so that a reaffirming of group values took place. This reproduction of humour in its inclusionary sense allowed members within the group to accept the 'rules' of their own culturally defined 'joke

book', so that internal cultural bonds were maintained (Charman, 2013). This use of inclusionary humour also allowed members to challenge the complexities associated with intra group relationships. The inclusionary putdowns evident were also ways in which individuals could fashion ways to challenge or defuse the power differences evident in context. In many ways then, humour in this sense was a 'tool kit' or social lubricant for the developed and developing cultural identity of the group.

Additionally, the use of *shared humour* was a constant thread throughout the study. Such humour was instigated by a mutual understanding of a particular issue that reaffirmed the inclusionary nature of group relations. This application of humour emphasised the shared values of the culture and its members. The 'in house', jovial banter led to a construction of 'insider' identity that enabled individuals to recognise what it took to be part of the group. Such findings reflect the current literature which highlights that the telling and re-telling of humorous jokes and stories define and shape cultural boundaries so that a 'collective sense of us' is established (Nielsen, 2011). A point of interest here was that shared humour allowed individuals to wrestle with the social order. In accepting the 'joking relationships' between one another, the coaches and players used their shared humour to somewhat 'flex' their social muscles so that the salient power differences of the said order could be challenged and or resisted. Relatedly, shared humour was also a key strategy for both coaches and players in terms of socialisation within the culture. An understanding of the shared, historical nature of humour and the predominant language used allowed both group acceptance and an opportunity to establish individual status within the group. In doing so, such engagement with humour allowed for greater contextual knowledge of the sub-culture so that social hierarchies were in a constant state of flux.

*Self-deprecating* humour was used cautiously by group members due its contradictory nature. Whilst this may be the case, the consequences of its use were dependant on the identity

of those that used it. For instance, the role of Jamie highlighted how those within positions' of power (e.g., coaches) or subordinates (e.g., players) used self-deprecating humour as a means of manipulating the context, and the rules that governed it, in order to create, shape and maintain their own cultural identity. In doing so, the case for humour's function as a 'lubricant' for social identity and belonging within a group culture was supported. Relatedly, such use of humour within the context of this study reflects previous research (e.g. Plester & Orms, 2008) by suggesting individuals fulfil a role of 'the joker' to offer respite from the serious nature of the job. Moreover, self-deprecating humour and its incongruous tendencies enabled certain group members to utilise the subtle undertones of speech to portray how careful consideration of self-deprecating humour can, when needed, manage or regulate tensions within the competitive environment of sport (Ronglan & Aggerholm, 2013).

The contribution of such humour goes beyond its function as tension regulator. Indeed, throughout the study there were instances where individuals were engaged in acts of 'face work' to avoid potentially awkward moments. Here, then, such impression management (Goffman, 1967) was used in various ways by group members to either avoid embarrassment, maintain social control or to promote modesty. For example, the shortcomings of my interaction with 'Macca' and my resulting actions relate to the work of Jones (2006). In this case, the fear of losing 'face' demanded that I use such humour in a manner that allowed me to cope with the ebb and flow of the power dynamics and its ambivalence within the coaching context.

The dark side of humour was evident with the use of *disciplinary humour*. It is here, that messages were expressed through such humour by both coaches and players as a reminder of the latent hierarchical structures that existed within the group. Indeed, the deployment of disciplinary humour in the context of this study, reflected the work of Franzen and Aronsson

(2013) where humour was a central strategy in maintaining or imposing order. In many cases, it was utilised by those in power (e.g. coaches) as a repressive mechanism for those that had moved away from the unwritten rules of the group culture or those that dared challenge the status order. This said, there were instances highlighted within the study where the players themselves deliberately used such oppressive humour to ‘self-regulate’ other team members. Although not always in an aggressive form (e.g. physical harm), subtle idiosyncratic measures were used, in a socially accepted manner (Holmes, 2000) to remind others of the cultural habits associated *with* and *expected* at the Club.

Likewise, the coaches adopted disciplinary humour as a corrective function amongst themselves. In this respect, they used the ‘seriousness’ of humour to approach delicate topics so that no offense would be taken. Such a ploy resonates with the work of Crawford (2003) who suggested that the constructs of such humour offer ways in which complaints or other sensitive matters can be discussed in a disguised and deniable form so that social expectancies are [re]established in an appropriate manner. Through such humour, the coaches within the study used humour as a performance (Ronglan & Aggerholm, 2014), so that the ridicule and teasing was hidden within the artfulness (Drew, 1987) of the act [of coaching].

#### **6.4 Recommendations for future research**

In light of the findings from this thesis, further exploratory work could seek a critical deconstruction and examination of humorous interaction and how it may serve as a means for understanding some of the dynamics that underpin the complex coaching environment; that is, how a group’s status-order is “played and displayed” (Schwartzman, 1986; 244). This is particularly relevant, considering that coaching is imbued with power imbalances. Consequently, there is a need to know how professionals (e.g. coaches) develop an ‘affective neutrality’ (Parsons, 1951), or what Coombes and Goldman (1973) call ‘detached concern’ in

order to reinforce professional power and distance through humour within the existing coaching milieu.

Whilst this may be one of many avenues that has the potential to shed light on the social dynamics that underpin sports coaching, there is still much left to ‘mine’ in our quest to fully understand the activity. In light of such investigation, and given that social interaction lies at the heart of the coaching process (Jones et al., 2004) and that emotions are never absent from the relationships within which we connect with those that we know (Crossely, 2011) then an insight into emotion, particularly through humour, would be a productive line of inquiry. Here, it can be argued that coaches engage in ‘emotion work’ through humour, to manage the micro-political climate in which they work. With this mind, there is case to be made that through humour relations, coaches use emotion work as a technique to make the difficult aspect of coaching more palatable. Consequently, it would be erroneous, perhaps even negligent, not to consider an investigative lens into ways in which humour as an ‘emotional act’ may be fashioned in, as well as through, the social relationships within the coaching context. From this perspective then, such an approach would resemble an attempt to widen the sociological analysis of sports coaching by suggesting humour as a micro-political deed must be considered as no laughing matter but an essential survival tactic in the most ruthless of industries (Sanders, 2004).

Relatedly, throughout this chapter I have argued the need for a more nuanced interpretation of the social nature of sports coaching. As such, and in light of the findings from this study, I believe that research into sports coaching should embrace both ‘new’ sociological ‘thinkers’ (e.g. Goffman 1967, 1983; Garfinkle, 1963, 1967) and ‘novel’ contemporary methods that have the potential to deepen and shape our knowledge in the quest to better understand such a complex activity. The point is not to radically change our view on coaching but to offer a more critical investigative lens into the serendipitous dynamics that for many lay

hidden in the often positivistic landscape of coaching. Such ways of providing a better understanding of the embedded practices of the activity is to seek alternative interpretive methodologies. This said and despite the upsurge in qualitative means and methods within sports coaching, there is an argument to suggest that such work is starved of contextual considerations (Jones, Edwards, & Viotto Filho, 2014). Therefore, the advent of visual representation (e.g. photography, ethnographic film) can provide a more novel and nuanced way in which to 'capture' the idiosyncrasies that are a ubiquitous feature of coaching life.

Finally, even though this is the end of this particular research project, it is hoped that foundations have been laid for future studies into the phenomena of humour. It is anticipated that the interpretation of how adopting an ethnographical lens and applying existing social theory can explicitly highlight the everyday complexities of humour and its various manifestations within social world of sports coaching, will draw many questions. Relatedly, there is a belief that the findings presented will also provide some insightful answers in making sense of how coaches and athletes behave in the multi-layered context of coaching (Strean, 1998). Indeed, different readers will inevitably draw different conclusions based upon what they have read, but in doing so it is hoped that they will have a more insightful understanding of providing new ways of conceptualising the power-ridden, political and inter-relational nature of sports coaching.

## **6.5 Final Thoughts: My Journey**

My interest in this research, as mentioned earlier (e.g., Chapter 1) stems from my experience as an academic and coach working with the everyday processes and operational mechanisms confined within coaching. That is, those that are bound by the unwritten rules, precedents, values and patterns of belief that exist within the culture. Hence, I have endured the endless

tugging and massaging of egos which has led to many battles when trying to influence and inspire players to improved performances. This has required constant engagement in ‘face work’, with humour being a central strategy in its application. Rather than being embroiled in retaliatory action when there was opposition to change, I frequently used humour as a communicative resource to productively manipulate the environment. Over time, I learnt that sarcastic comments and ridicule were not always the answer to [re]balancing the sometimes fragile atmosphere.

Whilst acknowledging the essence of Senghenydd City FC in helping making this research project possible, I feel the need to share some of the personal challenges faced in trying to shape and construct this thesis. Indeed, the task of undertaking an ethnographical study has been both challenging and liberating. Through my multiple role as husband, father, researcher, participant and coach it has, without doubt, been the hardest few years of my life. Like many other doctoral students who engage in this ‘brutal, mind blowing experience’ (Brause, 2000) ‘my journey’ has been demanding, yet rewarding. I say ‘demanding’, as the road hasn’t always been a straightforward one where my work would eloquently flow. The search for those “*Thousand words a day Christian*”, that my supervisor long cherished were always hard to come by. My young family and commitments to the football club (that I had built) always seem to come first. Relatedly, my initial, fractional lecturing contract, added to my list of responsibilities, ensuring that the thesis lay ‘pending’. Nonetheless, when I did sit down to write I found the moment to be redeeming. The dining table was my sanctuary in those midnight hours with only my dogs for company. Still, I would regularly question why I was doing this work; surely there was an easier way to get a job!

The development of my thesis has been shaped and crafted by many outside influences. Although I recognise that my supervisor[s] are in effect my ‘go to men’, I did speak with many significant others from the onset. As such, what I thought the thesis may look like to begin with

is different to what has materialised. This said, I arrived at my doctoral studies having completed my MSc. Buoyed by a new found thirst for academia, the initial weeks and months conducting my PhD were productive to say the least. Yet, it was not long before barriers stood in the way. My earlier Master's work had used an interpretive lens from an [auto] ethnographical perspective. Here, I could draw upon my own experiences to make sense of the unfolding narrative told. There wasn't any note taking, the constant scrutiny of loose field notes or the insecurities of what I may have missed. Such a genre offered me a comfortable and less tense pathway than the PhD was then providing.

Nevertheless, I 'dug deep' and worked hard (or so it seems) to grasp what was needed and try something 'new'. Regular meetings with my supervisor[s] were initially football laden, with a thread of 'what to do next' with my work. The ordered 'chats' with my critical friend[s] soon led me to seek a clear, and more insightful understanding of ethnographic practice. I began to read, page after page, chapter after chapter to make sense of this traditional qualitative technique. The more immersed I became in the literature surrounding ethnography, the more I realised it offered me a new way of getting closer to the 'front line' (Harris, 2010) and exploring something that I had long been submersed in.

Looking back, the original struggle with the literature brought me on a journey where my understanding of research and the intricacies it holds has developed significantly. I have, in time, evolved as an emerging researcher from a basic understanding of what is considered 'worthy' research, to a position where I feel that I have a more detailed and critical grasp of what constitutes good research practice. Relatedly, my own research lens is now more extensive, so much so that I have been able to transfer skills learnt to the supervision of my own students and the delivery of the indicative course content that I now teach. Needless to say, my PhD experience has been one of progression, where reflexivity has been rudimentary in my development.

Acknowledging my role as an aspiring academic, to begin, my writing lacked a critical voice. It tended to be distant and safe. In writing this thesis however, I believe that as my academic voice has unfolded, so too has my writing. What I have attempted to do in this chapter, is to illuminate how the process of writing and in particular how writing reflexively has enabled me to make sense out of the work that I have presented. More importantly, writing about these experiences in such a way has challenged me to question many aspects of my own academic and coaching practice. From a scholarly perspective, it has, in some way, allowed me to explore the balance between writing about 'self' and 'other', offering different perspectives on my subjectivity as a researcher and this research project in particular. Now, as I conclude this thesis, I still fight the critical inner thoughts that constantly ask whether my work is 'worthy' of the academic community (Ely et al., 1997). Yet, in adopting this interpretive lens, I feel comfortable in making sense of what is happening and what I feel while I write (or at least more comfortable). Through writing and re-writing my data, I have used the feedback from a critical fiends (my supervisors) to feel liberated and move forward with my writing practice. In doing so, I resonate with the work of Ely et al., (1997) and used the process of writing to unmask the blurred boundaries of the academic enterprise. I feel I have progressed as an academic; the experience has allowed me to dig deep into my thoughts and ask myself why I write, how I write, and more importantly what do I see as a write. Above all, the study has made me feel (more) confident about myself as a researcher.

Finally, from a coaching viewpoint, I have learnt not just to accept my data for what they are. At the outset of the study, I was a 'bundle of contradictions'; seeing one thing, saying the opposite and then acting differently in light of my interpretation of the findings. I have, however, over time, come to appreciate what lies in, and beneath my findings so that I have a more nuanced and critical understanding of humour within my coaching practice. In this respect, I sought meaning from my 'constructed' data; I began to look beyond the theoretical

aspects of superiority, incongruity and relief to develop and interpret what messages humour conveyed. Such reflection enabled me to 'hold a conversation' with my thoughts about the findings, thus, pave a way for me to read, judge and act in the context in a way that I had not previously done so. Now as I coach, the findings have allowed me to challenge and contextualise the humorous words, phrases and actions of those that I 'work' with, so that I can manage and balance the [in]stability of the often precarious contours of coaching.

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