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Coaching, caring and the politics of touch: A visual exploration

Abstract

This paper has three principal purposes. The first involves locating the 'politics of touch' as related to coaching within Noddings's (1984) theory of pedagogical caring. Noddings's (1984) framework is presented not so much as a prescription to 'good practice', but as a potential way to raise the profile and somewhat problematise the debate about touching as a part of coaching. The second objective of the paper is to further the case for visual methods, and in particular photography, as a means to address and explore the complexities and nuance of touch in pedagogical, and more precisely coaching, settings. The focus here draws attention to the constrained and spontaneous nature of existence. Here, a debate is also presented both about the often assumed 'realist' nature of the data, and on the use of precise theoretical explanations to clarify and rationalize them. The final goal relates to presenting some images of coaches' practice as related to both caring and touching.

Key words; coaching; touching; caring; photography; visual methods

<u>Introduction</u>

The aim of this paper is three-fold. Firstly, it is to locate the 'politics of touch' in relation to Noddings's (1984) theory of caring. This is particularly with regard to Noddings's claim that our pedagogical practice (which could well involve touching) should depend on a sensitivity to a constellation of situational conditions interpreted from both the perspective of the 'one caring' and the 'cared for'. Such a view appears to conflict with recent defensive policy discourse where touching children and young sports participants in both educational and coaching contexts has been redefined as dubious and dangerous.

The second objective of the paper is to further the case for visual methods, and in particular photography, as a means to record, deconstruct and better understand human interaction, and specifically the issue of touch, in coaching settings. The focus here draws attention to the negotiated, constrained and spontaneous nature of existence; the largely taken-for-granted world which nevertheless forms the connective tissue of human activities (Gardiner, 2000; Lefebvre, 1987). The final goal relates to presenting some images of coaching proximity, including 'touching', in practice.

In terms of structure, following this brief introduction, we outline the general context of, and rationale for, this article. We then present Noddings's (1984) framework of caring, not so much from a perspective of prescribing 'good practice' guidelines, but as a potential way to progress the debate about touching as a part of coaching pedagogy. Building on previous work, we go on to make the continuing case for photography as an insightful means to address and explore the complexities and nuance of touch in pedagogical, and particularly coaching settings. Finally, we present some images which illustrate some of these complexities in coaches' everyday practice.

A principal value of this paper lies in articulating the tensions evident regarding touching behaviours in coaching contexts; a tendency which appears to be intensifying as part

of spiralling broader concerns around child protection. Such tensions, within an increasingly risk-averse society, are both created by and further create anxieties about the care and protection of children where every related adult (be they a teacher, coach, parent or neighbour) may be imagined as a potential threat (Singh, 2004). The result is a climate of suspicion in which the risks of engaging in close physical proximity and touching children have largely become untenable, particularly for men (Johnson, 2000).

According to McWilliam (in Johnson, 2000: xi), "the caring relationship, like the pedagogical relationship, is ambiguous and duplicitous". Seeing as both are often considered inter-related (e.g., Noddings, 1984), the issue of touching those we coach and teach, be they children, athletes or other adults, has become a central policy theme in terms of 'good' ethical practice. In this respect, practitioners have become the targets of a mushrooming of safety rules and regulations aimed at minimising risk (Scott, Jackson, & Backett-Milburn, 2001). However, Piper and Smith (2003) argue that much literature regarding touching has not adequately dealt with the subject's related confusions and contradictions, more concerning itself with the promotion of a particular viewpoint. In highlighting some of the existing complexity, they cite Johnson (2000: 15) in stating that "alongside every 'no-touch' story exists a multiplicity of (an)other 'touch' story". Indeed, considerable research exists supporting the value of touching for 'proper' development in both early and school age children (Caulfield, 2000). McWilliam (1996) has even gone as far as suggesting that powerful pedagogical events are necessarily ambiguous as physical, "mutually seductive encounters" (p.305). Despite such sentiments, many pedagogical contexts have increasingly become no-touch zones (Johnson, 2000; Piper & Stronach, 2008), where a new regime of truth in relation to 'moral panic' and child protection have heightened teacher vulnerability to allegations of abusive touch (McWilliam & Jones, 2005; Sikes & Piper, 2010). Confusion and fear of accusation related to inappropriate contact have subsequently fed a moral panic

which has itself generated a 'no touching' policy discourse. A result has been the professionalisation of touch, which has moved it from the world of the natural into that of the technical (Piper & Smith, 2003); supporting a process of social control through stereotyping and dulling individual experience (Jones, 2011). According to Pearce, such a discourse has extended into ways of teaching that, in turn, have "become conceptually and performatively unchallenged and [begun] to affect our capacities to think, act, feel and connect" (Pearce, 2010: 905). No doubt then, contexts and actions in relation to touching children have become areas of suspicion, uncertainty and perpetual scrutiny, where care-full and supportive contact can become interpreted as extraordinary, sexual and abusive (Piper & Smith, 2003). This is so much so that pastoral 'caring' and physical touch now occurs in a pedagogical climate that is very much focused on the "potential of a care-giving adult to harm children sexually and psychologically" (McWilliam & Jones, 2005, 2001). In many ways, this has resulted in coaches engaging in 'emotional (hard) labour', where emotions must be continuously suppressed and appearances controlled (Hochschild, 2000; Potrac & Marshall, 2011). Hochschild (2000: 7) termed such action as the "management of feeling to create a publicly observable display" in relation to how we think we ought to appear to others. Here, one's own feelings are denied as they are not considered organizationally or contextually appropriate (Potrac & Marshall, 2011). This was highlighted in a recent paper by Piper, Taylor and Garratt (2012) who argued that irrational defensiveness stemming from a fear of touch has tended to reduce much coaching input to emotionally anorexic instruction.

Despite such situational developments, evidence exists that pedagogical practitioners sometimes feel compelled to 'break away' from policy and act in what they perceive to be the best interests of those they teach (Piper & Stronach, 2008). Here, although no doubt many coaches are fearful of utilising touching behaviours because of the discourse of risk, not all experience such contextual trepidation resulting in defensive practice. Such professionals

appear concerned and able to dismantle barriers between themselves and their charges (in Noddings's terminology between the 'one caring' and the 'cared for'), being aware that spaces between bodies are representative of constructed hierarchies (Witz et al., 1996). Although to a degree instinctive, for such practitioners, the benefits derived from demonstrative physical support outweigh the risk of emotive sterility or perceived inappropriate practice through rigid adherence to a no-touch imperative (Tobin, 1997). Supporters of such a position argue that by dogmatically sticking to a no-touch policy, not only do we delude ourselves regarding being in control of complex affective relations, but also (and more importantly) of abdicating our responsibilities as carers; of hiding behind policy when the need exists to care not only about those who we work with, but also about what we do (Jones, 2011). This, of course, as Piper and Smith (2003) argue, is not to assume or suggest that all touching is good; a position that raises further issues related to both the appropriateness of professional touch, and of its purpose and nature.

This article builds on work of Piper and Smith (2003) among others, in further problematising the realm of touching, or rather not touching, in coaching contexts. Hence, although inherently advocating a more considered caring approach than perhaps currently evidenced, we shy away from arguing a definitive 'good practice' line; developing learning in others can never be so linear and frictionless. Indeed, as Piper and Stronbach (2008) remind us, touch is not really the point, as what we should be concerned with are motives, context and values. Alternatively, what we seek is to further the debate about the nature and spirit of touching within pedagogical settings; to engage coaches in critical thought about their practice in developing a quality of encounter that allows respectful learning relationships to flourish (Jones, 2011; Noddings, 1984).

Noddings's framework of care

Why did we pick Noddings's (2003) work as a framework for conceptualising the role of touching within coaching? Primarily, because touching constitutes one means through which coaches can demonstrate care for athletes. This is not to say that we cannot care without touching, or that all touching constitutes caring. Rather, that touch is one way through which caring can be manifest in the coaching context. Secondly, Noddings (ibid) argues that caring is not learned by the prescription and application of rules and principles. In doing so, she opens a space for individual interpretation, which is essential in order to raise awareness and debate amongst practitioners and policy makers about child development. It is a perspective which contrasts with any tendency of leaving such action up to others, hence removing oneself from any associated personal responsibility (Owens & Ennis 2005). In this regard, the attempt to understand the complex, intricate and subjective nature of caring and touching offers the potential to sensitise care-givers to the challenges they face in practice. Finally, Noddings's (ibid) work deals explicitly with the relations between the carer (or the one-caring) and the cared for. Consequently, it provides a lens through which the relational aspects of touching can be conceptualised, whilst also paying attention to the context in which it takes place.

Early in her seminal text 'Caring', Noddings asks 'what does it mean to care?' For Noddings herself, it involves a state of engrossment, "a regard for or inclination toward that something or someone" (Noddings, 2003: 9). Similarly, Mayeroff (1971: 1) stated "that to care for another person...is to help him (sic.) grow and actualise himself". A vital construct here is that caring occurs within connections and relationships. Although a slippery concept, such a sentiment gives us a platform from which to explore the notion of caring and how it is manifest in touching or other physical behaviours.

Despite its seemingly abstract nature, Noddings asserts that we expect to evidence some qualitative actions from those who claim to care. However, she cautions against the

need to directly observe an external act to classify it as one of care. For example, consciously staying silent, away from the 'action' in the interest of others, could well be termed as much a caring or care-full act as more explicit, physical involvement. Difficulties then, are inherent in trying to ascertain observable criteria for caring. Indeed, caring would appear complex, intricate and highly subjective. Still, what we are searching for here is something akin to a deep relational sense of commitment, not based on given rules but on a constellation of conditions where the carer tries to apprehend the reality of the other (i.e., the cared for) (Noddings, 2003).

Kierkegaard (1941) had earlier problematised this notion of taking the perspective of the other, suggesting that we can only apprehend another's reality as a *possibility;* as a possibility for our own reality: that is, as something that evokes emotion in us and touches our own sense of self. The development of such empathy or care, however, is based on the assumption that we are able to read the signs of the social landscape in terms of such possibilities in the first place. It is a position which was recently advocated by Jones and colleagues (Jones, 2009; Jones, Bailey & Thompson; in press) as necessary for productive coaching practice. That is, to be able to see and subsequently engage in the world of small realities; what Lefebvre (1987) described as the 'connective tissues' of human activity. This was a message highlighted and developed by John Mason (2002) who begins his book, the 'Discipline of noticing', with the premise that "at the heart of all practice lies noticing; noticing an opportunity to act appropriately" (p.1). He further stated that pedagogues need to "increase the range and decrease the grain size" (p.xi) of what they notice as fundamental precursors to developing good professional practice. Without such attention to perception, the ability to act in a care-full, considered way is severely diminished.

Whilst caring for others is predicated on being able to sense the possibility of their reality, even the most considerate will fail to sometimes recognise the needs of others and, in

doing so, engage in care-less action. One reason (among many) for such oversights might be that the mode of the times, burdened with dogmatic and fear-based policy, 'pushes us in its own direction' (Noddings, 2003: 15). Piper and Smith (2003) provide a compelling account of the way policy can be a source of confusion regarding the role of touch within educational settings. One way the consequences of this climate can be explained is through the concept of cares and burdens (Noddings, ibid). This occurs when the carer, in this case the coach or teacher, becomes overwhelmed by the responsibilities and duties of caring. In doing so, he or she loses the capacity to care for the other, because the act of caring is turned inward towards the self. The suggestion here, is that confusion and worry about what is acceptable for coaches in terms of care or touch, and the fear of possible consequences if they overstep the 'boundaries', become of greater importance than the very act of caring itself. For this reason, coaches need to increase their understanding and confidence about how they care, in order that they can maintain their focus on the other, engaging the latter in sensitive and meaningful interactions.

Earlier work by Jones, Armour and Potrac (2004) hinted that elite coaches' practice was characterised by giving; by giving of themselves to their role. Jones et al. (ibid.), borrowing from the work of Blum (1994), interpreted such practice as immersion of self-in-role, where the role becomes something intrinsically worth doing for the individual; an activity which is 'endowed in rightness' for him or her (Raffel, 1998). Noddings (2003: 14) extended this notion by relocating it away from assumed simple altruism. Rather, she suggested that it is only through caring for others that a true caring of the self can emerge. Consequently, meeting the other as one-caring should be our unending obligation as pedagogues. This is a point supported by the earlier work of Agne (1999) who similarly argued that to consciously better serve their pupils, teachers must also strive for self-actualization; to what she termed 'graciousness'. It is what Noddings (2003: 19) (in

borrowing from Gabriel Marcel) defined as 'disposability; the readiness to bestow and spend oneself'. Hence, for some of the coaches cited in Jones et al.'s work (ibid.; Jones, 2009), and the teachers' in Agne's (1999) study, formal constraints on duty such as policy and procedure appeared not to weaken or replace a fundamental desire to 'dispose themselves' to, and consequently care for, their charges.

To further understand caring, there is a need to analyse the inherent complexity involved both for the one-caring and the cared-for. Whilst acknowledging that caring is relational, because the focus of this paper lies with the coach or teacher, it is with the one-caring that we concentrate our attention in this instance. In recognising the personal, constructed nature of coaching (Jones, 2009: Cushion & Jones, 2006), every pedagogical act within it must be, to various extents, unique. For example, each context comprises a differing set of athletes, administrators, other coaches, parents and so forth at a different point in time, which has discrete demands of its own. Additionally, it is likely that coaches will be closer to some athletes than to others, while the intensity of their care for those closest to them will inevitably vary over time. Even through such a basic analysis as this, dilemmas of caring can be immediately uncovered: for instance, questions arise related to how do coaches distribute their care among all of the people who may want or need it? How do they react to those whom they dislike? How can or should they respond to those who are beyond the reach of their caring? Agne (1999), in trying to address such conundrums, suggested the caring teacher assumes that such difficult pupils act out of fear; 'the normal fear states that occur within us all'(p.179). To counter such anxiety, the caring teacher responds with 'acceptance, trust and patience' (ibid.). Noddings (2003) meanwhile found it necessary to draw a distinction between 'caring-about' (we may care about everyone, including people and things we have never met or seen) and 'caring-for' (the manifestation of caring acts towards

another). Caring-about refers to a verbal commitment to the possibility of caring, while caring-for refers to its actuality (Noddings, 2003).

The degree of engrossment required when caring-for is a cause of many problems. Perhaps, the most simple and important of these is; how can a pedagogue meet the endless demands, or burdens, of caring? One way forward is that coaches may need to make difficult and conscious decisions about where to direct their efforts of care. For example, whilst the administrative and support structures of sports clubs are important, coaches may be better advised to merely reach a level of 'satisficing' (March & Simon, 1958) in this regard; that is, to reach an acceptable rather than an unrealistic optimal course of action. This would allow them the time to focus on the relational aspects of their job where they can maximise the impact of their caring.

For Noddings (2003: 99) an 'ethic of caring is a tough ethic', acknowledging and opening space for the difficult decisions that must be made by the one-caring as an everyday part of practice. It may even be that in some instances there can be no resolution to conflicts of caring. For example, how might a pedagogue act where two students for whom he or she cares have incompatible interests or needs? In such situations, Noddings (2003) believes that conflict must simply be lived. It is a position which advocates that rules cannot guide us infallibly through such situations of divergence. Rather, that personal responsibility lies at the heart of decisions and actions made in relation to care. By extension, it is contended that no ethical responsibility exists to cooperate with law, or government, when it attempts to involve us in unethical procedures. This raises the question; to what extent is a policy that precludes touch unethical? If it is perceived as such by the pedagogue, Noddings' position is that the policy becomes of secondary importance to the needs to the student(s) to be cared-for. The perspective then, provides a framework that illustrates the tensions and conflicts generated through policy designed to protect, rather than care.

Part of the toughness of caring relates to the requirement for the one-caring's self-care. Because Noddings' (2003) ethic of care is relational, it both allows and promotes a deep sense of caring (within the one-caring) for the self. In this regard, Noddings (2003: 100) discusses how, in situations where the cares and burdens make it increasingly difficult to care, the one-caring may need to free himself or herself to whatever degree is necessary to 'remain minimally but actually caring'. There is an acceptance here that in acknowledging the enablers and constraints to our caring, we gain information to develop ideals to work towards and those we must prevent, in order to allow ourselves to remain as ones-caring. These constraints may include policy (or fear of it) and the perception that touching, or other manifestations of caring, may somehow be linked to concerns that society has towards adults who work with vulnerable (child) populations. Caring, then, 'demands impassioned and realistic commitment', often in the face of adverse social and political conditions (Noddings, 2003: 100).

In contrast to some of the arguments presented about the difficulties caused by policy, Noddings (2005) also suggested that in some instances following the rules for appropriate interpersonal relations can actually be of help. Such guidelines allow pedagogues to function in socially acceptable ways, conserving their time and energy for occasions when there is a greater requirement for care. Whilst this strategy may be practically useful, it is essential that coaches and teachers are aware when the rules must be abandoned in favour of meeting the cared-for directly. Another factor that may help with the burden of caring is found in the responses of the cared-for. It is much easier to care for those who accept care appreciatively; raising the point that it is actually the cared-for that completes the act of caring. After all, it is at best problematic and may be impossible to care for somebody if they do not want to be cared for, and choose, for whatever reason, to reject attempts to care.

To create a climate where it is likely that attempts at caring will be well received, the cared-for must feel that the one-caring has regard for him or her, 'that he (sic.) is not being treated perfunctorily' (Noddings, 2003: 19). For this to occur, the one-caring must be *present*, willing to listen and become engrossed, whilst holding an attitude that warms and comforts the cared-for through both verbal and body language. This could involve a coach or teacher "taking the time to interact with the student or athlete which conveys the message that 'I am interested in you'" (Jones, 2009: 383; Noddings, 1984). Of principal importance here, of course, is the attitude of the one-caring: A small act performed generously may be more powerful (and better accepted) than a major act undertaken grudgingly. An eye contact held with the flicker of a smile at the right moment will mean more than a hug given (but not wanted). The difficulty alluded to here, is that 'much of what is most valuable in the teaching-learning relationship cannot be specified and certainly not prespecified' (Noddings, 2003). Perhaps, in trying to do so, we have made it even more elusive.

The complexity of caring, as highlighted above, means that 'conflict and guilt are inescapable risks of caring' (Noddings, 2003: 18). For example, we may feel guilty when our caring actions bring about a result that we did not intend, or we may come into conflict when what we perceive as best for the cared-for is at odds with what he or she wants. This point echoes the thoughts of Jones and Wallace (2005), who suggested that there is an inevitable and endemic pathos associated with coaching, because the complexity of the endeavour means that coaches can often only manage, and not solve, the many dilemmas that they face in practice. Hope is not lost, however, as it is further suggested that increased sensitivity to actions and their consequences may help in better managing the many tensions that arise (Jones et al., in press). Building on this work, discerning and care-full action based on the needs of individuals in concrete situations should be a central tenet of 'good' practice

(Noddings, 2003). However, how this is manifest in relations between pedagogues and their charges is a matter for thoughtful consideration, requiring a great deal of courage.

Noddings (2003: 104) introduced the notion of the ethical ideal, which, she contended, derives both from the natural sympathy human beings feel for each other and the longing to maintain (or recapture) our most caring and tender moments'. It is the second of these that resonates here, for the depersonalisation and objectification of students and the teaching process have the capacity to stifle care and tenderness as an integral part of practice. The related questions that arise here are two fold. Firstly, for pedagogues in terms of how their practice, and the satisfaction and joy they might gain from it, is reduced through a policy climate that limits the degree of tenderness they can experience with students. Secondly, for students, in relation to the extent their ethical ideals are potentially diminished because of reduced tenderness from teachers and coaches. The result is a deteriorated quality of the learning and teaching experience for both the one-caring and the cared-for. This is problematic for both parties, but may be more significant for the cared-for, as the implied 'hurt' caused to his or her ethical ideal may decrease future capacity to care for others.

When examined through such a theoretical lens, it becomes obvious that to deconstruct and better understand caring we need to look beyond observable behaviours "to acts of commitment, to those acts that are only seen by the individual performing them" (Noddings, 2003: 10). Similarly, we believe that touching needs to be analysed within such sensitive terms, as the practice cannot be reduced to a linearity of process. And it is precisely to the uncovering of such acts that we now turn.

Photography as a research method

In order to further explore the complexities of touch in the coaching context, we resorted to visual methods, and photography in particular, as a means of investigation. Photographs are,

however, by no means the only form of visual method as such a term, according to Harrison (2004), pertains to any research design that uses visual evidence; for example, maps, videos, sketches, posters, and signs and symbols, among others (Phoenix, 2010). Despite relatively humble beginnings, recent years have witnessed a considerable growth of visual means of research inquiry in many areas; for example, within sociology, education, cultural studies, anthropology, history, American studies, and communications, to name but a few. It is an expansion which has brought into question the privileged position of written sources. This is not to say that visual research methods are more relevant than other forms of investigation, but rather that they hold considerable promise for elucidating, clarifying and even redefining established concepts from an alternative perspective.

The general purpose of visual methods of inquiry relate to further developing our understanding of the social world through studying the images produced by it. Consequently, according to Stanczak (2007: 3) such images should not be viewed as mere illustrations (as some critics have argued [see Grady, 2008]) but as "vital components to learning" about where and how we live. This has led advocates to claim such methods' particular suitability for uncovering the interactions, mechanisms and contexts that lie on the fringes of well-visited areas of inquiry; of bringing to light obscure operations of social power (Jones, Santos, Mesquita & Gilbourne, 2012). Additionally, it has been argued that photography appears a particularly good research method to explore and present human relations and emotion; that is, the everyday incidents where people share, feel, communicate and generally try to 'get on' with each other (Harper, 1988; Jones, 2008). Others have even lauded its ability to provide "insight about the human condition" leading to a richer "understanding of social cultural and contextual factors" (Keller et al., 2008: 429). Having said that, we present photography here not to trump other research means but as a method which has the potential to shed another light into, or highlight different aspects of, the often problematic (darker?)

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corners of social practice. Similar to others then, the case made is in relation to visual methods working well in combination with others; in adding another layer of data to help interpret experience and practice (Stanczak, 2007). Such data, it has also been argued, are relatively precise, with the images not susceptible to fading memory associated with a few field notes. Despite such supporting arguments, debate still (rightly) exists about the nature of photographic data, in terms of are they realist or constructed? Do such images act as proof of something that actually happened? Or are viewers bound by the necessity of background information to construct a more truthful interpretation? (Banks, 2001). In response, Stanczak (2007) stated that such images tend to ask us to hold both positions simultaneously. In this respect, they demand that 'this has been', while also questioning subjectivities which can be further scrutinized (Jones, 2008). In line with the post-modern turn, more recent analysis has tended towards this latter view, as encapsulated in Goldstein's (2007) provocatively titled chapter 'All photo's lie'. Within it, he claimed that "every image is manipulated, with the content dependent on a large number of (technical and aesthetic) choices made by the photographer based on intent" (Jones et al., 2012). For Goldstein then, the *decisive* moment is really the *decided* moment. Stanczak (2007), however, although not in total disagreement, steers a more middle path. Here, he argues that although "the camera is susceptible to the selectivity of the operator, it is not selective once the shutter is opened" (p.7). Consequently, for him, the moment is both *decisive* and *decided*. The debate, naturally, remains unresolved.

Wherever one sits in relation to the content related realist-constructivist conundrum, agreement seems to exist about the potential of photographs to capture well the social complexity of context; the banality and spontaneity of daily life, what Law (2006) described as 'the politics of mess' and Gardiner (2000) the 'non-logical logics' of social action. Such research of the everyday tends to lean heavily on phenomenology and agency, on the practical accomplishments of social actors in context. This is not to say that such a method

captures images in isolation. Rather, echoing Wright Mills's *sociological imagination*, the photographs taken should be located and understood within their socio-cultural context. Such a perspective then, although micro in orientation, is to do with wider social issues; for example, the various power relations and discourse that pervade society, inclusive of resistance against them. In this respect, the 'dance of agency' often driven by affect and emotion, takes place within an established social choreography (Jones, 2009).

The pictures which follow comprise an attempt to capture such nuance between agency and structure in practice. The broader aim here relates to exploring the social complexities of coaches' work; how they deal with the enduring dilemmas and limitations of their daily experiences; how they obtain athletes' and other stakeholders' compliance; and the types of interactions and social strategies they adopt to attain desired ends. What became apparent as this particular project unfolded was the depth of emotional engagement displayed by the coaches as they constantly tugged, proposed, judged, patted, scowled at, comforted and occasionally hugged their charges. Through such actions, indicative of notions as 'caring for' as well as 'caring about', issues of touching and general physical proximity became noticeable. The pictures selected here aim to depict some of the many tensions evidenced in relation to touching within coaching settings. More specifically, between what many coaches would perhaps like to do in terms of expressing emotion and care through touching, and how they may be constrained by the ever increasing climate of moral 'righteousness' not to do so. Also, how some coaches defy (perhaps instinctively) given guidelines regarding contact in openly hugging, touching and physically supporting their athletes. Of course, as discussed, maintaining social space in itself can also be indicative of many things not only of an aversion to touch; a list that includes a call to care. The purpose of the pictures then, is to draw attention to the complexities and micro-realities of learning contexts; of the seating or standing arrangements evident, of the proximity or distance between those featured, of the

confidence and cautiousness, the palpable facial emotions, the smiles, the concerns, the sideways glances and, of course, the (non) touching behaviours.

During the writing, reviewing, re-writing and publication process of this article, we periodically engaged with the issue of how much reader 'engagement' could or should we expect when using visual methods; the debate between *showing* and *telling*. This circled around the question of increasing the specificity of analysis between the theory and the pictures; in essence, to clearly point to instances where 'touching' (and related issues) could be evidenced in the images. Rejecting the case for such detailed analysis, we believe that the purpose of the pictures is not to validate points already made, or to neatly fit existing theory. Rather, it is to provide an empirical way forward to further explore touching and caring in coaching; an attempt at what Hillyard (2010) termed "empirical theoretical accumulation" (p.423); that is, to develop existing thinking through alternative or new data. It is to create a relationship between the knowledge represented in the photographs and in the text. Alternatively, to directly 'tell' what appears in each picture becomes less to do with the actual image and more with that of the accompanying narration; simply visual 'evidence' of examples described or discussed in written text. Here, any meaning is subsequently definitively constructed for and not by the reader (Atkinson 1992). This was not our intention.

Having said that, although the pictures could be seen as engaging in themselves, the task here is to do with "cultural themes, identity issues and social processes" (Richardson & Lockridge, 2004: 2). Consequently, as opposed to others who consider that we should overcome insecurities related to 'tooling up' our work with 'intellectual muscle' (Sparkes, 1996), we believe that an element of theory *should* be included within our post-modern investigative practice (Jones, 2009, 2011). This is because, in agreement with Schwartz (1989), the lack of a conscious awareness of the presence of a message, can lead 'untrained'

viewers unable to grasp or even consider the intended critique. The recourse to theory, however, should not be seen as some kind of ritual reference to add a perceived legitimacy to the data (Silverman 1998). Rather, it should be viewed as a means to make ambiguous experiences more visible and apparent; to bring into focus a potential blurred stream of perception (Ely et al., 1997), thus explicitly maintaining the primary purpose of social critique (Jones, 2009). We understand that this can prove troublesome knowledge for some. However, what we did not want to do here was to use theory in an overly selective way to tailor extracts in efforts to generate some kind of academic integrity. After all, what is important is not a recounting or reproduction of Noddings' narrative on caring, but how that can help inform and unravel coaches' actions as related to touch.

Consequently, whilst not wanting to risk a single reading or grand theorising of the pictures presented, it may be worth considering a number of questions posed by Noddings' framework of care when interpreting them. For example, how the coaches featured expressed emotion and care through (non) touching. How, or if, the coaches were constrained by the ever increasing climate of moral 'righteousness'; and how some of the coaches defied (perhaps instinctively) the given guidelines regarding physical contact with their athletes. No doubt the coaches featured below can be said to care about the athletes in their charge, echoing Noddings' call for impassioned and realistic pedagogical commitment (Noddings, 1998.) The precise nature of that care, however, varies; a variation mediated by many factors including gender, age, notions of trust, adherence (or not) to given policy and the perceived gaze of others. Notwithstanding such engagement, the enduring question remains; would coaching have the same significance without the physical manifestations of caring? We very much doubt it.

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