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Commentary on Miller: “Arsène didn’t see it: Coaching, research and the promise of discursive psychology”.

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I read with interest the paper entitled “Arsène didn’t see it: Coaching, research and the promise of discursive psychology”. Miller, in this paper, sets out to describe the approach within social psychology known as discursive psychology. He takes the reader from an opening anecdote from Arsène Wenger and ‘clouded perceptions’/‘disavowals of memory’, to a wider discussion of the principles underlying discursive psychology, and an overview of a particular type of discursive psychology – from Harvey Sacks, the Discursive Action Model [1] and conversation analysis (CA).

Miller is correct in his assertion that discursive psychology (DP) has much to offer the study of sports coaching and his paper outlines the key assumptions behind a discursive approach. He notes that discursive psychology has been “actively applied to the broader study of sporting phenomena with instructive results”, drawing on some previous work by myself and others that has focused on topics that originated within social psychology such as emotion [2], memory [3] and attribution [4,5], applying key principles and concepts from social psychology to sports psychology. However, he touches on this work all too briefly, yet all of these published works can be viewed as offering examples of some of the claims specifically made about DP and sport. Indeed there are examples of more recent work that also demonstrate DP as applied to sport that seem to have been

overlooked here. Therefore I would suggest that a two-fold approach is needed in order to develop this area further.

Firstly, a stronger demonstration of data from specific coaching settings to illustrate and back up Miller's claims would be beneficial as it would locate some of the key concepts that are outlined within the paper, and, as such, would further Miller's introduction into the area. Secondly, a more thorough engagement with the research literature in this area would greatly benefit the claims made and strengthen the arguments around applying discursive psychology to sport. Miller notes that there is scant literature in the area. In some aspects, this is correct. However, the research work that has been conducted within sport psychology has been greatly informative to specific areas within sport and a more in-depth investigation of this literature and what it has to offer would be most useful. I will pick up this at a later point.

I felt that the paper demonstrated a certain lack of clarity for both the specificities of the method and the topic of investigation – i.e. sporting performance, comments on sporting performance or coaching interactions. The Arsène quote is a matter of accounting in a public sports interview, something that previous research has commented on [6]. For example, memory disavowals, whereby people claim not to remember, or, as in this case, clouded perceptions, where people claim events have not been seen, have been well documented as a means of accounting in discursive studies around memory, attributions and accountability [1,4, 7, 8]. They serve, as Edwards & Potter note [1], in their classic text to demonstrate 'plausible deniability'. That is, the actor, in this case Arsène, cannot be as easily held to account for something that he has not seen, or indeed, cannot remember.

Whilst Miller instructs us that the focus is on what discursive psychology can offer the study of coaching as a methodology, he only produces two extracts of data, and one of these is not directly relevant to coaching, instead it is from Harvey Sacks on telephone calls to an emergency helpline (to demonstrate a principle of CA). The other piece of data is drawn from a coaching interaction. It would be most useful to have more examples from specific cases of coaching interactions in order to see the discursive method tried and tested in this particular setting.

In essence, the type of discursive psychology that Miller is proposing for a study of coaching is second-wave discursive psychology [1], and whilst this particular method has not been applied directly to coaching interactions, it has been applied to sports performers accounts of performance more generally [9] with transferable claims. The 'second-wave' discursive psychology that is proposed in this article has now moved on in its focus. Some, including Edwards and Potter themselves, have moved away from the DAM model [1] and moved towards a more explicitly conversation analytic (CA) perspective, whilst others, myself included, have moved towards a hybrid of discursive approaches – utilising discourse analysis in all of its forms and considering Foucauldian readings of discourses. The hybrid discursive approach has been conducted in sport and exercise psychology by Kerry McGannon and colleagues [10, 11], but any of their claims could be transferred to the coaching setting. Conversation analysis as a method has much to offer the study of coaching interaction as it focuses on naturally occurring interactions. Indeed there are some studies already within the sporting realm that can offer transferable insight into this area. For example Jimmerson [12] offered a CA re-analysis of team-locker room

data (and see also Faulkner & Finlay [13]. The instructive work of Amanda LeCouteur within discursive sport psychology recently has begun to explore specifically what CA can offer to the actual real-time study of competitive sports performance with interesting results [14], thus demonstrating a strong applicability of the discursive and CA methodologies to the study of sports practice – both coaching and actual performance. In addition, recent work by Zuccheromaglio & Alby [15] used a discursive perspective to study identity in sports teams and, from doing an ethnographic study of a soccer team for a few months, recorded various interactions, including coaching sessions. Finally, Suzanne Cosh and others [16] have recently applied the actual study of CA inspired DP to athlete training interactions, in particular skin-fold testing for athletes.

A discursive approach to the sporting realm, including in-depth studies on coaching and performance interactions has much to offer. In the case of Miller's article here and plans for future work, I feel that a much fuller engagement with some of the existing discursive work in sport might be beneficial for considering more nuanced and specific future research directions in this area.

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