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## **Trust and Distrust in Community Sports Work: Tales from the “Shop Floor”**

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1 **Abstract**

2 This study addressed the issue of interpersonal trust and distrust in the (sporting) workplace.  
3 Data were generated through cyclical, in-depth interviews with 12 community sports coaches.  
4 The interview transcripts were subjected to etic and emic readings, with Hardin and Cook's  
5 theorization of (dis)trust and Goffman's dramaturgical writings providing the primary  
6 heuristic devices. Our analysis produced three interconnected themes. These were a) how  
7 the participants' decision to (dis)trust contextual others was based on their perceptions of  
8 encapsulated interests, b) those strategies that the participants employed to judge the  
9 trustworthiness of colleagues, and c) how the participants' workplace bonds with coworkers  
10 differed according to their perceived trustworthiness. Importantly, this study revealed how  
11 interpersonal (dis)trust for these individuals was informed by the pursuit of various  
12 professional interests, uncertainty regarding continued employment and career progression,  
13 and was subject to ongoing strategic interaction and reflection. Based on these findings, we  
14 believe there is much to gain from the micro-level exploration of "how" and "why" sports  
15 workers seek to negotiate and manage workplace relationships.

16 **Key words:** Sports work, (dis)trust, organizational life, impression management

## 1           **Trust and Distrust in Community Sports Work: Tales from the “Shop Floor”**

2   Trust is a core ingredient of social life (Barbalet, 2011; Karp, Yoels, Vann, & Borer, 2016;  
3   Ward, 2019). It has been described as the “faithfulness” or glue “upon which all social  
4   relationships ultimately depend” (Ronglan, 2011, p. 155), as it not only holds them together,  
5   but it is also the helps them to flourish (Möllering, 2001, 2006; Ward, 2019). Indeed, without  
6   a norm of trust underpinning our engagements with other people, organizations and  
7   institutions, our everyday lives, both private and public, would become extremely  
8   complicated and uncertain (Karp et al., 2016).

9           In recognition of the above, sociologists have increasingly considered the issue of  
10   trust and trustworthiness as they are connected to the social dynamics and functioning of  
11   organizations (Luhman, 2017; Sztompka, 1999). In particular, researchers in this topic area  
12   have typically identified two inter-related forms of trust (Ward, 2019). These are institutional  
13   trust and interpersonal trust. While the former is understood as the “the expected utility of  
14   institutions performing satisfactorily” (Mishler & Rose, 2001, p. 31), the latter is concerned  
15   with the decisions (e.g., to trust or not trust) that individuals (and groups) make about their  
16   future engagements and relationships with others (Ward, 2019). To date, interpersonal trust  
17   has been subject to extensive examination in mainstream sociology. Here, scholars have  
18   focused their attention on a variety of connected topics as they relate to the lives and work of  
19   social actors. These have included a) how interpersonal trust is experienced cognitively and  
20   emotionally by individuals, b) the ways in which trust between individuals and groups is  
21   developed, maintained, and spread, and c) how it may be weakened, dissolved, or broken  
22   (e.g., Brown & Calnan, 2015; Cui, Vertinsky, & Robinson 2015; Douglass & Calnan, 2016;  
23   Skinner, Dietz, & Weibel, 2013, among others). Within this growing corpus of research, trust  
24   is positioned as an inherently relational expression of confidence; one where an individual  
25   believes that another person will consider his or her interests when making a decision and,

1 importantly, will not seek to violate the moral standards of the relationship (e.g., Crossley,  
2 2011; Giddens, 1991; Luhman, 2017; Simmel, 1978; Sztompka, 1999). Similarly, distrust is  
3 linked to an incongruence between the values and motivations of individuals and (or) the  
4 negative expectations that one individual has of another person within a particular social  
5 setting (Jones & George, 1998; Luhman, 2017; Sztompka, 1999). Importantly, scholars have  
6 increasingly attempted to locate these lines of inquiry in relation to the increasingly dominant  
7 neoliberal discourses regarding individualization, flexibilization, organizational loyalty, and  
8 the instrumental treatment of others in the workplace (and society in general) (Bauman, 2008;  
9 Ezzy, 2001; Ebert, 2016; Siebert, Martin, Bozic, & Docherty, 2015).

10 In contrast to the developments made in the wider sociological literature, the topic of  
11 interpersonal trust has received little explicit examination in the sociology of sport sub-  
12 discipline. While research has increasingly highlighted the political, relational, and  
13 emotional dimensions of social actors' everyday lives in sports organizations where  
14 employment is often characterized by short-term contracts (e.g., Nelson et al., 2013; Potrac,  
15 Jones, Gilbourne, & Nelson, 2013; Roderick, 2006, 2013), the issue of interpersonal trust has  
16 been frequently alluded to, but not directly addressed (Purdy, Potrac & Nelson, 2013). In  
17 subscribing to the view that the exploration of trust "matters" (Robbins, 2016, p. 972) to our  
18 understanding of organizational life in sport, this paper considered the place of interpersonal  
19 trust in the everyday working lives of a sample of community sports coaches. These sports  
20 workers play an important role in facilitating various health and social policy priorities  
21 (Cronin & Armour, 2013; Ives, Gale, Nelson & Potrac, 2016). In the UK, for example,  
22 community sports coaches are often responsible for the delivery of sport and physical activity  
23 initiatives designed to contribute to the health, wellbeing, and development of individuals and  
24 communities (Sport England, 2016). This includes combating obesity, reducing crime and  
25 developing pro-social behavior, overcoming social isolation and exclusion, promoting

1 healthy lifestyles, and raising educational aspirations and attainment (Cronin & Armour,  
2 2013; Ives et al., 2016). Like all workers, community sports coaches have hopes, fears, and  
3 expectations that are bound up in a complex web of relationships influenced by social,  
4 economic, and institutional forces (cf. Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012). Indeed, community  
5 sports coaching, like other forms of work, has been progressively subject to neoliberal,  
6 market-oriented ideologies and practices (Ives et al., 2016). These not only include  
7 increasing intensification, individualization, and performativity, but also growing concerns  
8 regarding continued employment and career progression opportunities (Ezzy, 2001; Ives et  
9 al., 2016; Roderick, Smith, & Potrac, 2017). Surprisingly, however, there has been scant  
10 consideration of the everyday micro-level realities of “doing” this important form of work  
11 (Cronin & Armour, 2013; Ives, Gale, Nelson & Potrac, 2016).

12         In this study, in-depth, cyclic interviews were utilized to develop rich insights into  
13 participants’ understandings of a) the importance of interpersonal trust in organizational  
14 settings where fears regarding job security and career progression were prevalent among  
15 employees, b) the strategies they used to uncover the motivations and intentions of colleagues  
16 and, ultimately, determine the trustworthiness of those individuals, and c) how their decision  
17 to trust (or distrust) colleagues influenced the nature and substance of the participants’  
18 ongoing workplace interactions and relationships with them (Sandstrom, Lively, Martin, &  
19 Fine, 2014). At the heart of this study is the desire to contribute new knowledge to the  
20 sociology of sport, which a) illuminates some of the connections between interpersonal trust  
21 and joint action in sport organizations and b) charts how trust is inextricably tied to personal  
22 meaning making regarding the intentions, expressions, and actions of the self and the other  
23 (Sandstrom et al., 2014). We believe that such inquiry has much to offer if we are to develop  
24 accounts of social relations in sport that not only recognize the role of “cynicism, ritual, and

1 trust,” but which also generate rich insights into the organizational, cultural, and social  
2 reasons underpinning them (Manning, 2007, p. 72).

### 3 **Methods**

#### 4 **Sampling**

5 Criterion-based and snowball sampling techniques were utilized to recruit participants for this  
6 study (Gray, 2018; Patton, 2002). Individuals were deemed eligible to participate in this  
7 study if they were a) aged 18 years or older, b) worked as part of a community sports  
8 coaching team for a minimum of 2 years, and c) were currently active as a community sports  
9 coach. For the purpose of this study, a community sports coach was defined as an individual  
10 who had a paid (part-time or full-time) or voluntary role in delivering initiatives where sport  
11 is used to achieve a variety of health, education, and social policy outcomes.

12 Following the receipt of institutional ethical approval, the first author began the  
13 process of participant recruitment. Initially, this entailed making contact with a number of  
14 regional community sports coaching leads, who were presented with a brief overview of the  
15 study (e.g., aims, methods, ethical arrangements, and the extent of participant involvement).  
16 Having secured their support, the first author was provided contact details of those  
17 individuals within their coaching teams that had shown an initial interest in this study. These  
18 community sports coaches were subsequently contacted and formally invited to participate in  
19 the study. These individuals also directed us towards other community sports coaches, who  
20 met the study’s inclusion criteria and who might provide rich information cases (Shea-  
21 Schwartz & Yanow, 2012; Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

22 The final sample comprised 12 community sports coaches (11 male and 1 female)  
23 who were recruited across six local authorities and five private coaching providers in the  
24 North West of England. All of the participants were involved in the front-line delivery of  
25 various community sport initiatives. Nine held the role of a community sports coach and

1 three also had additional management responsibilities within their organizations. Eleven of  
2 the participants were full-time employees and one was employed on a part-time basis. The  
3 participants' experiences of community sports coaching work ranged from 2 to 10 years, and  
4 each held a United Kingdom Coaching Certificate (UKCC) Level Two coaching  
5 qualification. In the initial meetings with the participants, the purpose of the study, the nature  
6 of their participation, and the associated ethical implications were discussed in line with the  
7 host University's ethical guidelines. All participants provided written and verbal informed  
8 consent. Pseudonyms were used protect the anonymity of the participants and, indeed, those  
9 other individuals and organizations that the participants mentioned during the interview  
10 process (Kaiser, 2012; Purdy, 2014).

### 11 **Data Generation**

12 Given our focus on the participants' meaning making, and that the concepts of trust,  
13 trustworthiness, and distrust cannot be easily observed (Lyon, Möllering, & Saunders, 2012),  
14 in-depth interviews were chosen as the method for generating data. Our decision to utilize  
15 interviews is in keeping with previous published work, which has produced rich insights into  
16 the ways in which trust and distrust are understood and experienced in a range of  
17 organizational settings and contexts (e.g., Cook et al., 2004; Kelly & Harris, 2010). Based on  
18 the outcomes of initial pilot work, the interview guide utilized in this study focused on a) who  
19 the participants trusted or distrusted and why, b) how they sought to gain an understanding of  
20 an individual's trustworthiness (e.g., line-manager, other coaches), and c) how their trust or  
21 distrust of these people influenced their workplace interactions and relationships.

22 The main interviews for this study were conducted by the first author. The interviews  
23 took place at times and locations that suited the participants, especially in terms of them  
24 feeling comfortable and relaxed in their surroundings (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).  
25 Throughout the interview process, "probing questions" were incorporated to help enrich the



1 dataset generated for this study (Seale, 2018, p. 180). For example, clarification probes were  
2 used to further explore any points that were unclear or open to misunderstanding (Patton,  
3 2015). These included questions such as “I want to make sure I understand what you mean”  
4 or “Would you describe it for me again?” Similarly, elaboration probes were employed to  
5 elicit more in-depth responses about a particular point raised in an interview (Merriam,  
6 2014). This involved using phrases such as “Why is that?” “Could you expand on that?” or  
7 “Could you tell me more about that?” Finally, detailed orientated probes were utilized to  
8 enhance the descriptions and insights shared by the participants (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).  
9 These included questions such as “When did that happen?” “Who was with you?” “How did  
10 you feel about that?” or “Where did you go then?” Each interview was audio taped and  
11 transcribed verbatim to ensure a complete and accurate record of the data (Merriam, 2014).  
12 The second cycle of interviews adopted a similar approach to questioning but was used to  
13 further explore, probe, and refine those experiences, insights, and interpretations shared in the  
14 first round of interviews (Nelson, Potrac, & Groom, 2014).

15 In total, 24 interviews were conducted. Each interview lasted between 90-120  
16 minutes, with 3-4 hours of audible interview data being generated for each participant. A  
17 total of 42 hours of interview data were produced and transcribed verbatim. The participants  
18 were provided with a copy of their respective interview transcripts so that they could confirm  
19 its accuracy in terms of the words spoken, the information shared, and, importantly, the  
20 meanings that they attached to their respective accounts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Smith &  
21 McGannon, 2017; Stake, 1995). Only one of the participants responded with additional  
22 contextual information. This related to a) clarifying their understanding of a specific set of  
23 workplace relationships and b) further elaborating on a strategy they implemented when  
24 determining a colleague’s trustworthiness.

## 25 **Iterative Analysis**

1 The collection and analysis of data were iterative and recursive activities that occurred  
2 concurrently (Kelchtermans, 1993; Taylor, 2014; Tracy, 2013). Our analysis of data  
3 comprised two contrasting cycles of interpretation that were employed throughout the study  
4 (Tracy, 2013). The first entailed an *emic analysis* or emergent reading of the data. This  
5 process of analysis included three phases, namely, data immersion, primary cycle coding, and  
6 hierarchical coding and writing (Tracy, 2013). Here, we considered the richness of the data  
7 generated and sought to establish tentative ideas about, and descriptions of, the social  
8 processes evidenced within them (Kelchtermans, 2009). We then engaged in the process of  
9 analytical coding, which entailed grouping the developed codes into a hierarchical umbrella  
10 that sought to make conceptual connections between them (Richards, 2005). Such coding  
11 was grounded in the interpretation of, as well as reflection upon, meaning making related to  
12 the research questions driving this study (Merriam, 2009). This identification of meaningful  
13 data raised additional questions that were explored in the second round of interviewing.

14 The emic reading of the data was accompanied by a cycle of *etic analysis*. This  
15 comprised critical examination of those codes identified in the primary cycle of analysis, and  
16 organizing, synthesizing, and categorizing them into interpretive concepts. Within this  
17 secondary cycle of analysis, the principal aim was to interpret our initial analysis using  
18 relevant literature and theorizing (Tracy, 2013). Here, “analytical memos” were used to  
19 make preliminary links to theoretical concepts that might help to explain our data (Maykut &  
20 Morehouse, 1994). Establishing such tentative theoretical links raised further questions that  
21 were explored in detail during the second round of interviewing. During this analytical  
22 process, each author in this study acted as a “critical friend,” encouraging “reflection on and  
23 exploration of alternative explanations and interpretations” of the data (Sparkes & Smith,  
24 2002, p. 266). Indeed, such discussions and the concurrent drafting (and redrafting) of this

1 manuscript were integral to the development and refinement of the interpretations that are  
2 ultimately presented in this manuscript (Groom, Nelson, Potrac, & Smith, 2014).

3 While data analysis comprised emic and etic phases, it is perhaps important to  
4 acknowledge that we began the process of research carrying the baggage of our respective  
5 paradigmatic and theoretical allegiances (Denzin, 2016). This inevitably shaped the aims and  
6 purposes of our research, those topics explored during data collection, and our making sense  
7 of the participants life worlds (Denzin, 2016; Srivasta & Hopwood, 2009). We accept, then,  
8 that our qualitative work, which is represented in the form of a (modified) realist tale (Purdy,  
9 Jones, & Cassidy, 2009), is not definitive. Rather, we provide one possible theoretical  
10 reading and representation of what we considered to be important and interesting features of  
11 the participants experiences as community sports coaches (Huggan, Nelson, & Potrac, 2015;  
12 Nelson et al., 2014).

### 13 **Theoretical Framework**

14 For this investigation, the respective theorizing of Hardin (2002, 2006), Cook et al. (2005),  
15 and Goffman (1959, 1969, 1974) were combined to form the overarching heuristic device. In  
16 the *Russell Sage Foundation Series on Trust*, Hardin (2002) and Cook et al. (2005) explored  
17 the role of (dis)trust and trustworthiness in establishing and maintaining cooperative behavior  
18 in an array of social, economic, and political contexts. Central to this analysis was the  
19 reformulation of trust as an *encapsulated interest* grounded in ongoing interpersonal  
20 interactions between a truster and trusted. From this viewpoint, trust relations are developed  
21 reciprocally (Hardin, 2006). Basically, “I trust you because your interest encapsulates mine,  
22 which is to say that you have an interest in fulfilling my trust” (Hardin, 2002, p. 3).  
23 According to Hardin (2002) and Cook et al. (2005) there are three common reasons for why  
24 the trusted would encapsulate the truster’s interests as part of his or her own interests 1) we  
25 are in an ongoing relationship that I want to maintain because it’s valuable to me, 2) I

1 consider you my friend, or I love you, or 3) I value my general reputation, which could be  
2 harmed if I am untrustworthy in my dealings with you. Trust, therefore, exists when person  
3 A believes that person B has an incentive (e.g., financial interests, emotional ties, reputation)  
4 to maintain the ongoing relationship with them. Distrust, on the other hand, is the negative of  
5 trust (Cook et al., 2005). Person A is likely to distrust person B if they think that person B's  
6 interests oppose their own and that person B will not take person A's interests into account in  
7 their actions (Hardin, 2006). In sum, Hardin (2002, 2006) and Cook et al. (2005)  
8 conceptualized (dis)trust as a relational, fluid, and dynamic commodity that is grounded in  
9 one party's assessment of another's morality, reciprocity, and self-interest over time.

10         While this perspective provides a useful analytical lens for understanding why an  
11 individual may (dis)trust other actors, it does not provide a rich interpretation of those  
12 interpersonal strategies that a person may employ to determine whether or not someone else  
13 is trustworthy, or the impact of this decision for future engagements with others. Therefore,  
14 we chose to supplement the theoretical ideas of Hardin (2002, 2006) and Cook et al. (2005)  
15 with Goffman's (1959, 1969, 1974) dramaturgical theory. This decision was grounded in the  
16 idea that Goffman's dramaturgical thinking enabled us to critically examine how sports  
17 workers might adopt a calculative approach to determining the trustworthiness of others and,  
18 by extension, protect and advance their own vested interests (Baert & Silva, 2010; Jacobson  
19 & Kristiansen, 2015; Shulman, 2017). In particular, the dramaturgical perspective allowed us  
20 to probe how varying levels of (dis)trust may "affect how well people work with teammates  
21 and whether people judge performances as credible or not" (Manning, 2007; Shulman, 2017,  
22 p. 64). Significantly, it provided a lens that enabled us to examine how interpersonal trust is  
23 formed and reformed in the presentation, evaluation, negotiation, and management of identity  
24 in the sporting workplace (Scott, 2015; Schulman, 2017).

1           For us, Goffman’s work addressing *Strategic Interaction* (1969) has particular utility  
2 for analyzing how a social actor may judge the trustworthiness of others. In this classic text,  
3 Goffman (1969) adopted a game analogy to address the “calculative, gamelike aspects of  
4 mutual dealings” (p. x). At the heart of this analysis was the idea that people play *expression*  
5 *games* during face-to-face interaction. Expression games refers to “the ways in which the  
6 information ordinarily conveyed through speech or, often unconsciously, through expressive  
7 behavior may be manipulated, distorted or concealed, and of the ways in which it may  
8 nevertheless be uncovered or extracted and interpreted – or misinterpreted” (Burns, 1992, p.  
9 59). In other words, it is a game of trying to gather information about other people’s  
10 intentions and motives while concealing information yourself. This requires the use of what  
11 Goffman (1969) termed *interactional moves*. These include the *naïve move*, whereby the  
12 subject is unaware that they are being observed and the *unwitting move*, whereby the subject  
13 cares not for what impression they are giving off (Goffman, 1969). People can also make use  
14 of the *control move* to hide information from others, the *uncovering move* to find out  
15 information about others, and the *counter-uncovering* move to prevent the attempts others  
16 make to learn their information (Shulman, 2017). The objective of expression games,  
17 therefore, is to employ appropriate moves to “understand [another] person’s perspective, how  
18 they feel, think, and experience the world, so that you can exploit them or foil their efforts to  
19 exploit you” (Shulman, 2017, p. 230).

20           In *Frame Analysis*, Goffman (1974) further expanded on the way people may seek to  
21 acquire, reveal, and conceal information during everyday interactions. For us, this theorizing  
22 offers additional sense making tools for investigating interpersonal (dis)trust. Specifically,  
23 Goffman outlined the use of *fabrications* in everyday interaction, which refers to “the  
24 intentional effort of one or more individuals to manage activity so that a party of one or more  
25 will be induced to have false belief about what is going on” (Goffman, 1974, p.

1 83). Goffman (1974) identified two types of fabrication based on whose interests are served  
2 (i.e., the fabricators or the dupes). *Benign fabrications* are deceptions engineered for the  
3 benefit of those contained by them, or at least not carried out against the dupes interest (e.g.,  
4 hosting a surprise party or playful deceit). *Exploitative fabrications* are when one party  
5 contains others in a deception that is patently inimical to their private interests (e.g., a con job  
6 or planting evidence). Goffman (1974) also discussed how individuals may use *secret*  
7 *monitoring* to strategically gather information about others. This is where a person attempts  
8 to “bug” or gain access to social settings in which another actor’s “strategic or dark secrets  
9 are unguarded or their discrediting conduct is observable” (Goffman, 1974, p. 170). The  
10 basic premise of secret monitoring is that the actor under surveillance is secretly engaging in  
11 some malpractice, which covert monitoring will uncover, and render their performance  
12 discreditable (Burns, 1992).

13 Finally, we made use of Goffman’s works addressing *The Presentation of Self in*  
14 *Everyday Life* to explore how personal levels of trust and distrust between social actors may  
15 influence workplace interactions, engagements, and relationships. In this treatise of social  
16 life, Goffman (1959) examined how people present information about themselves to  
17 influence the impressions audiences will have of them. A key consideration was how people  
18 perform in different social spaces referred to as regions of performance, namely the  
19 *frontstage* and *backstage*. Central to these discussions were who is permitted access to each  
20 of these regions, the type of performance enacted in them, and the impact of such  
21 performance for future social relations. The frontstage region is where actors deliver public  
22 performances and where audiences scrutinize them. Here, the performer expressively  
23 accentuates some aspects of their activity in an effort to maintain and embody prevailing  
24 normative expectations, while at the same time, suppresses those aspects that may discredit  
25 the fostered impression (Goffman, 1959). The backstage region is where actors relax out of

1 character and (or) rehearse, dissect, and reflect upon one's frontstage performance (Scott,  
2 2015). It is a private area, away from the glare of social judgements, where one or more  
3 persons may contradict their public identities and engage in activities such as reciprocal first  
4 naming, cooperative decision making, profanity, and minor physical self-involvements  
5 (Goffman, 1959). In summary, then, we believe the amalgamation of the sense-making  
6 frameworks outlined above has much to offer to the critical examination of interpersonal  
7 (dis)trust in the sporting workplace.

### 8 **Findings and Analysis**

9 Our analysis of the interview data led to the production of three interrelated categories. The  
10 first was concerned with importance of interpersonal trust in the community sports coaching  
11 workplace, as well as those relational factors that our participants deemed necessary if they  
12 were to trust contextual stakeholders. The second category focused on the interactional  
13 strategies that our participants implemented in an effort to establish the trustworthiness of  
14 other individuals (and groups) within their respective organizational settings. The final  
15 category addressed how this (dis)trust manifested itself in the participants' engagements with  
16 coworkers. Each of these topics are explored below.

#### 17 **Want my Trust? Encapsulate my Interests**

18 The participants described the workplace as an arena that was characterized by competition  
19 and uncertainty as much as it was by collaboration and shared goals (Jones & Wallace, 2005).  
20 Specifically, they explained how their experiences of work were not immune from the effects  
21 of neoliberal policy, which among other things, have led to increases in short-term, insecure  
22 employment contracts and the increased measurement of workplace performance (Kalleberg  
23 2018; Roderick et al., 2017; Verhaeghe, 2014). Similar to embryonic research findings in  
24 this area (e.g., Gale, Potrac, Nelson, & Ives, 2017; Ives et al., 2016), the participants  
25 recognised that they were performing *precarious work*. By this, we mean "work that is

1 uncertain, unstable, and insecure and in which employees bear the risks of work (as opposed  
2 to business or the government) and receive limited social benefits and statutory protections”  
3 (Kalleberg & Vallas, 2018, p. 1). As Louie explained:

4       The austerity agenda has hit massively... I have worked on fixed, 12-month contracts  
5       for [the past] 8 years. As a result, I am nearly 40 years old and I still can't get a  
6       mortgage. Sometimes it just feels like my life is on hold. But, that is just community  
7       sports coaching now. There are hardly any full-time, permanent contracts these days.  
8       Posts are short-term and based on your ability to deliver against the funding... It is a  
9       really tough working environment. You are always worrying, always looking for pots  
10      of money; always thinking about who has the money and how you can fit your work  
11      to get the money. **(Louie)**

12      Given this interpretation of the workplace, it is perhaps unsurprising that the participants  
13      stressed the importance of interpersonal trust between coworkers. They described how  
14      “knowing who to trust and who to not” was crucial to them in terms fulfilling personal  
15      workplace ambitions, maintaining a positive reputation in the eyes of others, and, ultimately,  
16      for the ongoing security of their employment. For example, Ross and Jude respectively noted:

17      You need to identify the people that you can turn to. You look for those that support  
18      you, the team, and the programs. I have noticed, as our team has got smaller, these  
19      things have become easier to recognize in colleagues. You work out who is  
20      supportive, who wants to work together to reach our targets and goals, and who  
21      doesn't or is in it for themselves. The team's image and reputation is important, and I  
22      often have to work in different ways with different people to protect and advance it.  
23      **(Ross)**

24      At face value the relations in the office were harmonious and supportive, however,  
25      there was an undercurrent of competitiveness, which led to some staff members



1 always wanting to get “one up” on others in the office. This could have been to prove  
2 their worth given the short-term nature of their contracts, which were often funded by  
3 external bodies such as Sport England. Knowing who you can trust impacts your own  
4 ability to perform in your role; you need to know who’s on your side and who isn’t. I  
5 am quite a trusting person and have no issue sharing ideas and thoughts, but I struggle  
6 with the fact that some people will use my trust and openness to benefit themselves to  
7 my detriment. Identifying who you can trust can help you develop relationships  
8 within the workplace, and it can determine how productive you are within a team.

9 **(Jude)**

10 The participants’ beliefs regarding the nature of workplace relationships arguably reflects  
11 Goffman’s (1974) discussion of the *insider’s folly*. Rather than adopting a “rose tinted” view  
12 of the workplace where they believed everybody else was on their side, the participants had,  
13 through their interactions with others, generated an alternative meaning. Specifically, they  
14 recognized how “competition may be no less fierce between those who share a superficial  
15 loyalty” and that their personal success or failure at work could be influenced by disclosing  
16 too much information or imputing the wrong motives to another (Scott, 2015, p. 216).

17 Based on this reading of workplace relationships, the participants described how they  
18 had learned to take a cautious approach to trusting others within the workplace. In making  
19 the decision to trust others, the participants explained how they trusted colleagues and  
20 superiors who a) valued their ideas and supported their professional development and/or b)  
21 proved to be competent and reliable in terms of assisting the participants to achieve their  
22 respective workplace goals (Hardin, 2002, 2006). Consistent with Hardin’s writings on this  
23 topic, the participants bestowed trust to those colleagues whose decisions, actions, and  
24 behaviors not only demonstrated a desire to maintain positive relations, but, importantly,  
25 encapsulated enough of the participant’s interests in his or her own interests. That is, the

1 participant coaches trusted coworkers when their “own interests [were] encapsulated in the  
2 interests of the trusted” (Hardin, 2006, p. 19). As Billy and Benji explained:

3 From day one, my line-manager has shown an interest in what I wanted, which was to  
4 identify ways to make extra income for the department. Through this, we decided on  
5 creating a “Football & Golf” camp for young children, which she really did support  
6 and back me with, as it’s an interest to both of us. I get the impression she really  
7 wants to support me as she really put my idea forward to the management team. I saw  
8 her backing this idea, it was the first action that probably led me to trust her, as I felt  
9 my opinion/ ideas were valued. She showed how passionate she was about the  
10 interest we both had which showed to me that I could trust her. **(Billy)**

11 If I need cover, I would want this individual to be there in my replacement. I rely on  
12 schools to buy into what we do and that means that everything we do has to be high  
13 quality. If they have a negative experience, very quickly, it could be shared locally  
14 with other schools and negatively impact on us as a service. I can pretty much  
15 guarantee he will support me in what I do with the School Sports Partnership. It  
16 benefits me because I know things will still be achieved in my absence, and it benefits  
17 him as he gets to network and engage at the event. **(Benji)**

18 In addition to identifying people who they trusted and why they trusted them, the participants  
19 also identified colleagues whom they did not trust. The lack of trust afforded to these  
20 coworkers was grounded in the participants’ perceptions of these others as being unreliable,  
21 obstructive, selfish, or dishonest (Cook et al., 2005). In other words, the community sports  
22 coaches under study tended to distrust stakeholders whose encapsulated interests and actions  
23 were detrimental for, opposed to, or at least failed to align with, their own objectives,

1 aspirations, and preferences (Cook et al., 2005; Hardin, 2002, 2006). For example, Ryan  
2 noted:

3 I had only been at this school a couple of months, the previous teacher left and a new  
4 one took over. I tried to spend some time with the new teacher, whose class I would  
5 be going into. I wanted to discuss what I was there for, my visions, and how the  
6 children were already progressing. Despite trying with her, she just wasn't engaged  
7 when I communicated with her, she would be flying around in the classroom doing  
8 [other] things. I could tell she wasn't interested in what I was saying, and that I was  
9 an inconvenience. She never asks how the children are doing. This [negatively]  
10 affects me. If she is asked how I am doing in the school, I wouldn't trust her to make  
11 the proper judgement, as she doesn't care. Her interests are focused on her own work,  
12 not mine. **(Ryan)**

13 The participants were especially distrusting of those colleagues and other stakeholders who  
14 appeared to focus on furthering their own interests and welfare at the expense of others. In-  
15 keeping with Hardin's analysis (2002, p. 94), the participants explained how they did not  
16 trust, and were extremely suspicious of, those coworkers who they believed to have  
17 "strategically misrepresented themselves in order to gain an advantage" during previous  
18 interactional encounters. By way of example, Jude described how a colleague's failure to  
19 acknowledge Jude's scheme as a source of inspiration for his own violated the moral  
20 standards of the relationship (Crossley, 2011; Luhman, 2017; Sztompka, 1999) and, as a  
21 result, led to Jude distrusting this individual. In his own words:

22 We worked in the north of the district and the other two worked in the south. We  
23 tried something new with a group and it was going well and retaining the community  
24 participants. In a team meeting, we reported its success. Then about a month later, I

1 found out that it was rolled out in the south, but there was all this documentation,  
2 paperwork, and a booklet. It was very good, but at the same time, I was thinking  
3 that's what we were doing, and you've clearly just taken it... I realized they were  
4 more than happy to take ideas, not acknowledge us, and keep it to themselves. This  
5 impacted the level of trust I placed with this individual in a negative way. I felt let  
6 down and, in some ways, demotivated by this instance. The longer-term effect of this  
7 was that I held back on sharing future information and I became cautious in what I  
8 shared. **(Jude)**

### 9 **Playing Interactional “Games” to Judge the Trustworthiness of Coworkers**

10 The participants illuminated how they utilized various interactional strategies to acquire  
11 information about the motivations and intentions of their coworkers; knowledge that they  
12 ultimately used to assess and determine the trustworthiness of their coworkers. The first  
13 strategy employed by the participants entailed observing and critically evaluating the role  
14 performances of colleagues (Goffman, 1969). In particular, they described how they would  
15 scrutinize the embodied gestures, movements, and expressions of fellow employees during  
16 interpersonal encounters to make inferences about their credibility, sincerity, and  
17 (dis)honesty. As Louie and Billy noted:

18 I like listening to how people structure what they say. Is it all about them? Is it more  
19 about the topic at hand? I also observe the communications I have with people and if  
20 they speak to others about it, positively or negatively. I observe behavior probably on  
21 a sub-conscious level, often people won't even realize you're critiquing their  
22 comments. Are they telling the truth when speaking to others? Are their words kind?  
23 Are they respectful even in disagreement? I think the link is quite straightforward –  
24 someone who I observe as dishonest, disrespectful, and unkind is unlikely to gain my  
25 trust. **(Louie)**

1           This new person was equivalent level to me, therefore, I knew he would be required  
2           to work on the same schemes as me at some point. Part of my role is to sort cover for  
3           sessions. I wanted to find out what this person was like, a team player or more  
4           concerned with his own personal gain. During conversation, I decided to ask him if  
5           he would cover and help us out last minute. By asking him face-to-face, I was able to  
6           gauge his initial response, and decide if he is a person I could come to rely on or not.

7           **(Billy)**

8           Such extracts reveal how the participants were motivated to play *expression games*  
9           (Goffman, 1969) before making judgements about whether to (dis)trust  
10          coworkers. Specifically, the participants, or players, as Goffman (1969) would call them,  
11          appeared to make regular use of *uncovering moves* to determine colleagues' intentions,  
12          resources, and stockpile of information (Goffman, 1969; Jacobson & Kristiansen,  
13          2015). This often entailed the use of some form of examination, such as studying "the tracks  
14          the subject leaves, his [*sic*] spoor, as it were," to reveal the motives of these individuals  
15          (Goffman, 1969, p. 19). By making such interactional moves the participants were ultimately  
16          seeking to gain access to the "real," backstage self, of another coworker in an attempt to  
17          decide if they were trustworthy (or not) (Scott, 2015).

18          As demonstrated in Billy and Louie's interview extracts (presented above), the  
19          participants often sought to conceal their attempts to monitor the behaviors of coworkers in  
20          acknowledgement that "the arousal of suspicion in another so that he [*sic*] suspects he [*sic*] is  
21          being suspected can be a strategic loss" (Goffman, 1969, p. 52). This was especially so when  
22          they felt that the coworker in question might "secretly" be an untrustworthy performing  
23          character. For example, Craig and Mark described how they implemented the following  
24          investigative strategies:

1 One strand of strategy I use is to make a judgement on their delivery. Taking that  
2 time to drop down to sessions to see it from afar, without advanced warning, go down  
3 and have a look at them in that scenario, see how the participants relate to  
4 them. There are some sessions where parents go to watch and I have stood with  
5 parents and just listened to their feedback. It helps me understand if the coach is  
6 being trustworthy really, are they consistently meeting the standards and expectations  
7 we set as a business. This strategy works both ways, if I have my doubts about the  
8 trustworthiness of someone then it helps to confirm if my judgement is correct. This  
9 approach gives me a true picture of what is happening on the ground. **(Craig)**

10 Some of the school reports that we were led to believe were outstanding didn't come  
11 back as such. He was trying to pull the wool over our eyes. He would give us the  
12 updates from the school [and] we had no reason to question it, as we thought we could  
13 trust him. He did a good job at sustaining the impression he was the best thing since  
14 sliced bread. When we started to have problems with him in and around the office,  
15 with equipment going missing and staff coming to us saying he was the one gossiping  
16 and speaking about others, "we had a little dig around" [behind his back] and it turns  
17 out the schools were not happy with him. Ironically, the people that he mentioned in  
18 his conversations were the people that didn't back up what he was telling us; the  
19 sports coordinators and the head teacher. His actions negatively influenced the  
20 prospects of maintaining the big contract we held with the school, which was in our  
21 interest to keep as it generated money for the business. These actions collectively led  
22 to a complete breakdown of trust and the colleague no longer works for us. **(Mark)**

23 The examples presented above eloquently highlight the participants' use of *secret monitoring*  
24 as a strategy to make informed judgements about the trustworthiness of their colleagues  
25 (Goffman, 1974). They explained how they would spy on or, in Goffman's terminology,

1 secretly monitor the performances of these individuals to reveal instances of exploitative  
2 fabrication (Goffman, 1974). The premise behind these actions were that covert monitoring  
3 would uncover suspected deception by permitting the participants access to those “places,  
4 times, and audiences when he [or she] quite properly conducts himself [or herself] in a  
5 manner that would discredit this first performance” (Goffman, 1974, p. 168-169).

6 For some participants, attempts to establish the trustworthiness of colleagues went  
7 beyond the strategic interactional practices of uncovering moves and secret monitoring.  
8 These individuals explained how they also purposely laid “traps” to test the loyalty and  
9 character of coworkers (Goffman, 1974). This often involved sharing confidential and  
10 sensitive information with peers and superiors “and then waiting to see if indeed it comes to  
11 pass that the information has been divulged” (Goffman, 1974, p. 97). As Jamie and Louie  
12 shared with us:

13 Feed them something small to begin with, and see how it goes. If they can be trusted  
14 with the information, you may start giving them more. Or, if they can’t, you give  
15 them nothing ever again. I did this with a work colleague, slightly senior to me... I  
16 used it to gauge his trustworthiness, if the information leaked out I would know where  
17 it came from... When you give someone sensitive information it’s always a huge  
18 worry that it may get out as common knowledge. **(Jamie)**

19 I purposively gave a colleague some “confidential” council information concerning  
20 the council’s intention to buy a piece of land. After disclosing, I went to speak to this  
21 person’s coworker to see if this information was fed back to me. I soon learnt that my  
22 colleague was unwilling to be respectful of my wishes for it to remain a conversation  
23 between the two of us. **(Louie)**

1 The participants behaviors in such social situations arguably reflects Goffman's (1974)  
2 concept of *exploitative fabrication* because it involved deception and ulterior motives. The  
3 participants knew that they were deliberately disclosing this information to achieve a hidden  
4 agenda, namely, to uncover the trustworthiness of a coworker (Manning, 2007; Smith,  
5 2006). However, this version of reality was unbeknown to said coworker; they were simply  
6 unaware that the participants primary motive for divulging this information was to gauge if  
7 the coworker was trustworthy (or not) (Persson, 2019).

### 8 **Workplaces as Stages: The Impact of Interpersonal (Dis)Trust for Working Relations**

9 Based on their "pre-screening" and past experiences of similar interactions, the participants  
10 made a decision whether (or not) to trust coworkers in the future (Shulman, 2017; Ward,  
11 2019). As hinted across the previous two categories, the participants explained how the  
12 outcome of these interpersonal interactions inevitable influenced future engagements and  
13 relationships (Barbalet, 2011; Cook et al., 2005; Hardin, 2002; Sandstorm et al., 2014). The  
14 participants described their relations with those few coworkers that they trusted as being  
15 more cooperative, relaxed, and personable in nature (Hardin, 2002). They highlighted how  
16 they were able to talk openly (and honestly) about working processes, issues, and other  
17 colleagues with these individuals, as well as share aspects of their private lives that they did  
18 not disclose to the majority of organizational stakeholders with whom they were required to  
19 work. In Goffman's (1959) terms, then, the participants arguably permitted these trusted  
20 individuals to access to the backstage region. Indeed, they were willing to relax the persona  
21 and share personal information and entrusted secrets; secrets that if not kept by the trusted  
22 could have "spoiled" the participants' frontstage performances in the eyes of other  
23 coworkers:

24 I definitely notice a difference in the way that I speak to this person and the way I  
25 speak to "bad cop." Our conversations can range from work to personal things very



1 easily and I don't have this with other colleagues. I have an honest conversation with  
2 him and get an honest answer. It's probably due to the amount of time we spend with  
3 each other. There's things that he has also said to me in confidence that he would not  
4 expect me to go and say to other people. We know through our regular interactions  
5 we have common ground and are working towards the same goal, successful schemes.

6 **(Ryan)**

7 Jim and I clicked in a way that I did not do with many of my other colleagues... I  
8 would, and did, go out for a pint with Jim after work whilst I would not even consider  
9 doing that with others... We both held each other in high regard and there was an  
10 almost unwritten agreement between us that any conversations that we had would stay  
11 between us. We both knew that, if one of us said something controversial for  
12 example, that the other would not throw them "under the bus" by disclosing  
13 something in order to have some personal gain... I think that it helped to build a  
14 stronger and more trusting relationship. I think that everyone has two faces, the one  
15 that we present to colleagues and the people we meet, and our true selves. The former  
16 tends to be a façade, we behave and act how society expects us to and we paint  
17 ourselves as strong individuals with no weaknesses. The latter is our real  
18 personalities and it requires an element of trust to allow someone to see that side of  
19 you. One of the things that helped to develop our relationship was the fact that we  
20 both shared elements of ourselves that we would keep hidden from others. **(Ollie)**

21 In comparison to those whom they trusted, the participants outlined how a "degree of  
22 wariness" characterized interpersonal interactions with colleagues that they did not trust  
23 (Hardin, 2002, p. 90). They explained how this "air of caution" or "protective guard"  
24 resulted in them trying to reduce the relative frequency of their (direct) interactions with these

1 distrusted individuals (Hardin, 2002), as well as refraining from discussing sensitive and  
2 potentially problematic matters relating to both work and non-work life:

3 I don't necessarily discuss many matters with him and I restrict disclosing my  
4 thoughts with him, as I'm not sure where it would go. If I had a new idea for  
5 developing our service, past experience shows me he's happy to make open, negative  
6 comments to others. I also choose not to do certain things around him until he's out  
7 of the office such as make phone calls to schools, so he cannot sit there and judge  
8 what I might be saying. We discuss things when we need to and it's usually only  
9 around some of the joint role / delivery aspects, where we should communicate, but  
10 that's it. **(Shaun)**

11 I didn't openly admit to him that I distrust him. It's just better to restrict the  
12 information I give and just be amicable. After I had recognized that I needed to be  
13 careful what I disclosed, that for me was enough. We have quite a large funding bid  
14 from the FA. He always asks me how many people are attending, what groups we are  
15 working with, what schools we are working with, and what discussions we are having.  
16 But, I keep my feedback quite limited. I never tell him who we are specifically  
17 working with. There is always a side of me that thinks, "if I tell him too much, he  
18 could use of all this to his advantage in an attempt to access the same money in the  
19 future." **(Ollie)**

20 Consistent with Hardin's (2002) analysis, it could be argued that, while distrust served to  
21 protect the participants "against losses that would follow from taking the risk of cooperating  
22 with [certain] others," it can also be problematic in terms of blocking "even the attempt at  
23 cooperation" (p. 94). In contrast to the previous discussion of trusting relationships, the  
24 participants purposefully limited their interactions with those they distrusted to frontstage

1 performances only (Goffman, 1959). They feared that their sharing of backstage secrets and  
2 their relaxation out of character, might be used by these individuals to compromise the image  
3 that the participants wished to give off to others in the front region (Goffman, 1959).  
4 Consequently, the participants exercised *dramaturgical discipline* in their dealings with these  
5 individuals, which meant “being in control of all facets of performance possible during the  
6 show. That discipline extends, for example, to expressing no unmeant gestures, being poised,  
7 composed, and ready” (Shulman, 2017, p. 85). For the participants, this also entailed the  
8 feigning of breezy nonchalance, while remaining cautious and vigilant in their interactions  
9 with distrusted others (Goffman, 1959; Scott, 2015; Shulman, 2017), as well as concealing  
10 their true feelings “and personal opinions beneath a façade of team solidarity” (Scott, 2015, p.  
11 216).

## 12 **Conclusion**

13 In seeking to contribute to the evolving literature base examining the everyday, micro-  
14 dynamics of sports work (e.g., Nelson et al., 2013; Potrac et al., 2013; Roderick, 2006;  
15 Thompson, Potrac, & Jones, 2015), this paper sought to explore the participants’ sense  
16 making regarding their choice to trust or distrust their colleagues. Rather than  
17 unproblematically trusting the various individuals with whom they worked, the participants,  
18 instead, largely adopted a circumspect and instrumental stance to their relationships with  
19 others. This approach arguably reflected their readings of the organizational situation in  
20 which they found themselves and, relatedly, the motives of their situational counterparts  
21 (Cook et al., 2005; Goffman, 1967; Hardin, 2002). Specifically, the participants were acutely  
22 aware of the competitive and uncertain nature of their employment and that, in these  
23 conditions, others could not be relied upon to always act in benign or supportive ways  
24 (Goffman, 1959, 1967; Hardin, 2002, 2006). This sense making underpinned their choices to  
25 engage in various expression games, namely, uncovering moves, secret monitoring, and

1 exploitative fabrications to assess the intentions, motives, and actions of others (Goffman,  
2 1969). The information gleaned through these interactional strategies was ultimately used to  
3 determine if particular individuals could be relied upon (or not) to protect, advance, or  
4 maximize the participants own position or gains within an organization (Cook et al., 2005;  
5 Goffman, 1967; Hardin, 2002). While the participants trusted those who acted in supportive  
6 ways, they distrusted those whose interests, motives, and actions were believed to be in  
7 conflict with, or at the expense of, their own (Cook et al., 2005; Goffman, 1967; Hardin,  
8 2002). Overall, the decision to trust or distrust a colleague not only influenced the  
9 willingness and frequency of the participants engagements with these others, but also the  
10 substance of these interactions (Goffman, 1967).

11 Our central motivation for doing this research was to make a significant contribution  
12 to the sociological study of sports work (Roderick et al., 2017). By focusing our analyses on  
13 trust, distrust, and trustworthiness, we believe this paper provides important insights into the  
14 complex, strategic, and inherently relational experiences of community sports coaches, who  
15 work in insecure occupational environments. It is also hoped that this investigation can  
16 provide a stimulus for further examinations of interpersonal trust in the sporting workplace  
17 more generally. For example, while this study has provided novel insights into at least some  
18 of the interactional strategies that sports workers may utilize to judge if colleagues are  
19 trustworthy, we do not claim that the approaches outlined in this paper are the only ones used  
20 (Gale, Ives, Potrac, & Nelson, 2017). As such, we urge scholars to continue to not only  
21 explore those strategies that sports workers use to determine the trustworthiness of various  
22 contextual stakeholders, but also “when,” “how,” and “why” they use them. We also know  
23 very little about how and why (dis)trust between sports workers changes over time or, indeed,  
24 how sports workers seek to utilize the trust of others to achieve desired ends (Purdy et al.,  
25 2013). Equally, a further worthwhile line of inquiry would be to examine how sports workers

1 seek to cultivate, maintain, and, where necessary, repair their trustworthiness in the eyes of  
2 others (cf. Lewicki, Tomlinson, & Gillespie, 2006; Williams, 2007). Finally, and in  
3 responding to recent calls for more nuanced understandings of the emotional dimensions of  
4 sports work (e.g., Ives, Gale, Potrac, & Nelson, in press; Potrac, Smith, & Nelson, 2017;  
5 Roderick et al., 2017), we invite researchers to consider the specific emotions that feature in  
6 the development and maintenance of (dis)trust between individuals (cf. Lee & Selart, 2011;  
7 Niven, Holman, & Totterdell, 2012; Williams, 2007). The consideration of the  
8 interconnections between embodied experience, the management of specific emotions, and  
9 interpersonal trust has potentially much to offer in terms of better understanding important  
10 societal issues regarding job satisfaction and productivity, work related stress, and the  
11 wellbeing of workers (cf. Matzeler & Renzl, 2006; Guinot, Chiva, & Roca-Puig, 2014;  
12 Roderick et al., 2017). From our perspective, exploring these topic areas is important if we  
13 are to more adequately understand the connections between, as well as consequences of,  
14 increasingly market-oriented neoliberal policy making, changing (more insecure)  
15 employment conditions, and the relationally lived experiences of sports workers (Kalleberg,  
16 2018; Roderick et al., 2017).

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