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Title Sport officials' strategies for managing interactions with players: Face-work on the front-stage

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Abstract
Communication is central to managing perceptions of fairness and performance in sport officiating. Most of the few studies that focus on sport official communication have been limited to 'one-way' impressions and decision communication and tend to neglect more dynamic, dialogic interactions with players. This study explored sport officials' identity concerns and motivations and ways officials adapt and accommodate 'face' in interactions with players. Design: Qualitative methodology Method: Video elicitation interviews using an allo-confrontation approach were conducted with 8 male and 6 female sport officials from 7 different team sports representing novice to professional levels. Goffman's (1959; 1967) dramaturgical sociology of interaction was used to frame identity projections and context in officials' communication management strategies. Findings: Analysis of interview transcripts revealed three distinct ways officials' face concerns emerge and are managed in interactions with players including (1) anticipating players' reactions and modifying presentation of self, (2) asserting and preserving the officials' own face, and (3) giving and restoring players' face. When incompatible interactional exchanges occur in sport matches, officials use different defensive and corrective face-work strategies to assert, re-establish, or appropriate face statuses for themselves and players. Conclusions: The findings highlight the importance of dynamics and context in sport official communication. They also emphasise the need to maintain relationships, preserve and protect identities, whilst being strategic in interactions with players. We conclude that new conceptualisations are needed in sport official communication to build on current 'one-way' concepts that dominate officiating research and training.

Keywords Keywords: sport official, referee, communication, social interaction, alloconfrontation

Manuscript category Sport Performance

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53 Face-work on the front-stage
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72 Highlights
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74 - Official-player interactions are largely unspoken co-constructions
75 - Officials adapt and modify self-presentation according to context
76 - Officials assert and maintain face for themselves and players
77 - Officials have enduring styles to manage face protection for self and players

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Abstract

Communication is central to managing perceptions of fairness and performance in sport officiating. Most of the few studies that focus on sport official communication have been limited to 'one-way' impressions and decision communication and tend to neglect more dynamic, dialogic interactions with players. This study explored sport officials' identity concerns and motivations and ways officials adapt and accommodate 'face' in interactions with players.

Design: Qualitative methodology

Method: Video elicitation interviews using an allo-confrontation approach were conducted with 8 male and 6 female sport officials from 7 different team sports representing novice to professional levels. Goffman's (1959; 1967) dramaturgical sociology of interaction was used to frame identity projections and context in officials' communication management strategies.

Findings: Analysis of interview transcripts revealed three distinct ways officials' face concerns emerge and are managed in interactions with players including (1) anticipating players' reactions and modifying presentation of self, (2) asserting and preserving the officials' own face, and (3) giving and restoring players' face. When incompatible interactional exchanges occur in sport matches, officials use different defensive and corrective face-work strategies to assert, re-establish, or appropriate face statuses for themselves and players.

Conclusions: The findings highlight the importance of dynamics and context in sport official communication. They also emphasise the need to maintain relationships, preserve and protect identities, whilst being strategic in interactions with players. We conclude that new conceptualisations are needed in sport official communication to build on current 'one-way' concepts that dominate officiating research and training.

Keywords: sport official, referee, communication, social interaction, allo-confrontation

1. Introduction

Psychological and performance demands of sport officials (i.e., referees, umpires, judges) have received limited attention in sport science compared to topics such as athlete performance and coaching pedagogy (Dosseville & Laborde, 2015; MacMahon et al., 2014). The unique responsibilities and demands of officiating make it a dynamic performance role worthy of study. Sport officials deliver unpopular decisions in environments of high time and other pressures whilst being held to high expectations from others who desire accuracy and consistency. Much of officiating success is predicated on officials' ability to encourage perceptions of fairness and persuade compliance and cooperation from those who wish the decisions were different. A growing appreciation concerning these complexities has led scholars and practice communities to acknowledge the importance of communication to officiate effectively and deal with the constant accountabilty of being a sport official (Fruchart & Carton, 2012; Mellick, Bull, Laugharne, & Fleming, 2005; Simmons, 2011). Because officiating communication and skilled player interaction are intrinsic to officiating realities and perceptions in performance (MacMahon et al., 2014; Mascarenhas, Collins, & Mortimer, 2005), the current study sought to investigate attitudes and intersubjectivities in officials' interaction experiences with players.

Two trends generally emerge from most of the studies on sport official communication. One trend is that studies often aim to capture the experience of elite sport officials to isolate communication priorities and behaviours they use with players (e.g., Cunningham, Mellick, Mascarenhas, & Fleming, 2012; Mellick et al., 2005; Simmons, 2006; Slack, Maynard, Butt, & Olusoga, 2013). High-performance sport officials find self-presentational demands stress-inducing (Hill, Matthews, & Senior, 2016; Thatcher, 2005) and are motivated to accommodate a 'corporate theatre', an image of decisiveness and accountability to meet perceived expectations held by multiple audiences interlinked to match proceedings (Cunningham et al., 2012). Players

147 use fairness cues about officials as heuristics to formulate expectations about officials' decision
148 correctness (Mellick et al., 2005; Simmons, 2011), competence, and legitimacy (Dosseville,
149 Laborde, & Bernier, 2014). Respectfulness, dependability (Simmons, 2010), confidence,
150 composure (Furley & Schweizer, 2017), politeness, and honesty (Dosseville et al., 2014) are
151 more preferred officiating qualities, whilst decision communication behaviours such as eye
152 contact, posture, hand/body movements, and providing rule explanations can influence
153 acceptance of officials' decisions (Mellick et al., 2005). Fairness and organisational justice
154 principles are frequently used as an interpretive lens to explain officiating communication, thus
155 suggesting officials' procedural and interactional displays have a powerful influence on players'
156 attitudes and behaviours.

157 A second trend is most existing research on officiating communication is grounded in one
158 way concepts of communication, such as message transmission and impression management.
159 Such emphasis has translated to the analysis of communication in sport officials to focus on
160 observable behaviours or single communication variables concerning the official, or the match
161 situation (e.g., decision communication). These traditional conceptualisations of sport officiating
162 communication often assume officials to be the 'sender' of decisions or social information and
163 players, coaches, and the audience as communication 'receivers'. A cause-effect
164 conceptualisation of communication (or, transmission model; Shannon & Weaver, 1949)
165 ultimately separates communication from a more complex relational and interactive process,
166 therefore neglecting player participation in the communication process as a co-interactant.
167 Interactions between players and officials contribute to an alignment in expectations, behaviour,
168 and attitudes concerning contextual and technical aspects of the game (Rix-Lièvre, Boyer,
169 Terfous, Coutarel, & Lièvre, 2015). Better understanding of interpersonal factors in player-

170 official encounters would help build on current perspectives of officiating communication that
171 resemble a 'one-way' model of communication.
172 The study of officiating communication cannot be restricted to a cause-effect
173 conceptualisation because of the situated and naturalistic conditions under which communication
174 occurs. Officials communicate under time pressure in uncertain and changing circumstances that
175 demand spontaneous responses with players whilst appealing to different goal ends and role
176 contraints. This has direct implications on the ways officiating communication should be studied
177 and interpreted. Ecological dynamics suggest that human actions can be explained by the
178 expectations and goals that govern and guide them, which for sport officials can include safety,
179 fairness, accuracy, or spectacle (Russell, Renshaw, & Davids, 2018). Some sports characterise
180 these challenges for sport officials more than others, particularly team sports (or 'invasion'
181 games) such as soccer, rugby, and basketball (sport types that are often the focus of officiating
182 communication studies). MacMahon and Plessner (2008) term these type of sport officials as
183 'interactors', as opposed to 'monitors' (e.g., gymnastic judge) and 'reactors' (e.g., tennis line
184 judge) where more predictable decision cues are provided and less officiating interaction with
185 players is required. 'Interactor' officials are in close proximity to many players (Dosseville et al.,
186 2014), are viewed as more favourable to players when they are unobtrusive and allow game play
187 to 'flow' (Mascarenhas, O'Hare, Plessner, & Button, 2006), and benefit from having a
188 heightened emotional intelligence or 'feel' for players' actions, temperaments and personalities
189 (Nikbakhsh, Alam, & Monazami, 2013). A naturalistic and ecological dynamics view helps
190 account for the different goals and motivations of officiating communication and ways officials
191 adapt, accommodate, and attempt to manage their communication to context.
192 Officiating inherently demands some degree of socially situated identity that is to be
193 communicated and performed. The sports official's social role has been likened to an educator

who encourages players to develop more organised and socially desirable behaviours (Isidori, Müller, & Kaya, 2012) and moral arbitrator who deters players from attempting to correct moral conditions with aggressive actions (Jones & Fleming, 2010). Such metaphors about sport officials' social role has implications on their interactive plans and goals in light of the philosophical, institutional, and pedagogical relationships they fulfil. Some of the complexity of officiating communication motivations and interaction adaptations with players can be informed through sociological dramaturgy (Goffman, 1959; 1967). Goffman (1959) suggested that the presence of others motivate a person to mobilise their activity in such a way as to present an impression that the performer believes they 'ought' to convey. This socialised 'front' is part of a social mask we project to others that helps "*define the situation for those who observe the performance*" (Goffman, 1959, p. 13). Goffman's theatrical metaphor provided an account about how we navigate everyday social interactions through our activities on the 'front-stage', a term to describe the influence of setting through which interactants deliver their performance (or persona). 'Self' and 'identity' were critical concepts to Goffman's analysis of human communication that reveal unspoken dynamics in interpersonal encounters, particularly in social settings where people are ascribed social roles, position, and status, such as sport officials.

Goffman's (1967) ethnographic research later explored image management in social interactions developing concepts of 'face' and 'face-work' and the focus of this study concerning officiating interactions with players. Goffman (1967) pointed out individuals' frequent 'positioning' of themselves with respect to others' in the constant flow and progress of contained, social settings (Arundale, 2010). Face is defined as "*the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself [or herself] by the line others assume he [or she] has taken*" in interaction (Goffman, 1967, p.5). An individual's social 'face' is associated with self-esteem and personal rights or entitlements and "*something that is not lodged in or on his [or her] body, but*

218 *rather something that is diffusely located in the flow of events in an encounter*" (Goffman, 1967,
219 p.7). Loss of face in interactions can have instrumental effects on perceptions of credibility and
220 competence to others. Face threatening acts are mitigated through 'face-work' that involves
221 "*actions taken by a person to make whatever he [or she] is doing consistent with face*"
222 (Goffman, 1967, p. 12). Face-work is verbal and non-verbal actions that people use to diffuse,
223 manage, enhance or downgrade self or others (Huang, 2014). *Defensive face-work* are actions by
224 an individual to prevent the loss of face, like avoiding situations that might potentially discredit
225 the impression one is attempting to maintain. Rather, *protective face-work* refers to attempts
226 made by an individual to save or correct the loss of others' face (or to help someone to take up a
227 more favourable presentation) based on the assumption that others will return the same ritualistic
228 consideration (Goffman, 1967). Little is known about the face concerns and motivations of sport
229 officials (or ways officials perceive players' face concerns) and the usefulness of face-work
230 concepts to understand officials' modes of interaction with players.

231 The aims of this study were to explore sport officials' face concerns and motivations and
232 understand ways sport officials adapt or accommodate communication face-work in interactions
233 with players. Previous officiating research suggests that better negotiation of officiating
234 communication goals and social identities can help mitigate players' feelings of injustice and
235 influence game atmosphere (Faccenda, Pantaléon, & Reynes, 2009; Mellick et al., 2005;
236 Simmons, 2011). Goffmanian concepts of 'front-stage', 'face', and 'face-work' offer valuable
237 language for exploring ways officials perceive and are motivated by identity concerns in
238 interactions with players to become more accepted, effective and influencing. A constructivist
239 and dramaturgical sociological perspective of communication contributes a new understanding
240 about identity features in officiating, particularly ways officials act within interacting role
241 constraints and how expectation, context and role affect less visible and 'unspoken' dynamics in

242 player-official interaction. The study contributes new theoretical insights to the study of
243 officiating that emphasise a dialogic, co-constructive view of communication that has been
244 previously neglected in officiating research.

245 **2. Method**

246 *2.1 Participants*

247 Fourteen Australian sport officials participated in the study, two from each of field
248 hockey, soccer, rugby union, netball, Australian rules football, rugby league and basketball
249 ('interactor' sports; MacMahon & Plessner, 2008). The sample included male (n=8) and female
250 officials (n=6) with a mean age of 29.4 years (SD_{age}=9.8). All had a minimum of three years
251 experience as a sport official in their primary sport (with a maximum of 21 years; M_{exp}=8.6
252 years; SD_{exp}=5.2), and a minimum of two years at their current competitive level (max=10
253 years). MacMahon et al.'s (2014) officiating level definitions were used to recruit and classify
254 participants as novice, development, sub-elite, and elite levels. Half of the participants were
255 currently functioning at either novice (community, district club) or development (university,
256 state competition) level, and half were officiating at sub-elite (amateur, semi-professional) or
257 elite (national officiating panel with some international experience). Five of the seven sports
258 sampled had at least one official from both levels: a) novice & development and (b) sub-elite &
259 elite, with exception of field hockey and netball (Table 1 presents officiating participants'
260 demographic information).

261 Most officials had occupied other officiating roles prior to officiating (i.e., assistant
262 referee, technical staff) and 11 officials had playing experience in their primary sport. Six
263 officials said they had entered officiating as a volunteer. A diverse officiating sample was
264 purposively sought who represented different interactor sports, sex, age and experience-level,
265 and geographical locations in Australia. This was intended to help understand general

266 interpersonal demands of officiating work pervasive to different officiating experiences and sport
267 cultures.

268 **Table 1**
269 Participant demographics.
270

Interviewee	Age	Sex	Sport	Years of officiating experience	Level
I1	48	M	Soccer	12	Novice
I2	22	F	Soccer	5	Sub-elite
I3	21	M	Basketball	6	Development
I4	27	M	Field hockey	8	Elite
I5	26	F	Rugby union	5	Development
I6	24	F	Basketball	8	Elite
I7	50	F	Netball	21	Novice
I8	26	M	Rugby league	7	Elite
I9	32	M	Rugby union	18	Sub-elite
I10	41	M	Rugby league	10	Novice
I11	24	F	Netball	4	Development
I12	25	F	Field hockey	6	Sub-elite
I13	21	M	Australian rules football	3	Novice
I14	24	M	Australian rules football	6	Sub-elite

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272 Some officials were recruited based on their accessibility to the researcher's home
273 institution as a convenience sampling approach. These officials were mostly novice level
274 officials from soccer, rugby union, basketball and netball. In some cases, direct contact was
275 made with officials through participation requests forwarded within officiating associations,
276 whilst in other cases, participants assisted researchers by facilitating contact with other officials
277 through snowball sampling (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). Officials were contacted by email or
278 telephone to request participation and were forwarded a letter of information on the details of the
279 research. The remainder of officiating participants were recruited from a national officiating
280 training group of talent identified, advancing officials from different 'interactor' sports.
281 Participation was requested prior to their involvement in a program workshop at the Australian
282 Institute for Sport (Canberra, New South Wales) in November 2014. Program coordinators

283 provided access to officials, but ultimately it was the choice of the officiating scholars to
284 participate. All participants were advised that they could choose either to participate or not and
285 this would not influence their current status in the program or their sport organisation. All
286 measures were taken by the researcher to ensure confidentiality with a closely-engaged
287 officiating group (interviews were conducted privately at different times scholars were available
288 during the workshop).

289 *2.2 Data collection*

290 A video elicitation method (e.g., Heath, Luff, & Svensson, 2007; Henry & Fetters, 2012)
291 using an allo-confrontation interviewing approach (Mollo & Falzon, 2004) was used. Video
292 elicitation as a qualitative research technique has been used in training health practitioners, by
293 stimulating trainees' thoughts and facilitating discussion about practitioners' appraisals, beliefs,
294 and emotions attached to their consultation experience with patients (Henry & Fetters, 2012).
295 Video elicitation enabled investigation of social or interactional elements of clinical interactions
296 that might not be identified using direct observation or interviews alone. Officiating researchers
297 have employed similar strategies where sport officials reflect on recordings of other officials'
298 performance (see Hancock & Ste-Marie, 2014). A parallel approach can be found in allo-
299 confrontation that involves research participants verbalising their observations of video-
300 recordings showing another individual performing an activity they practice (Mollo & Falzon,
301 2004). Mollo and Falzon (2004) suggest that allo-confrontation can improve mental
302 representation of self and one's own practice. This is said to be a result of participants being kept
303 at a distance from their own activity and an increased awareness to other forms of knowledge
304 concerning one's practice in relation to another. A video elicitation method using an allo-
305 confrontation interviewing approach helped to provide a stimulus for officials' to reflect on the
306 perceived intentions of other officials' interaction practices and own previous officiating

307 experiences in interactions. Also, whilst conventional allo-confrontation studies use recordings
308 of non-participants performing the exact practice, this study presented recordings of player-
309 official interactions from their own sport and different 'interactor' sports in order to access
310 officials' opinions from a range of 'interactor' sports. It was acknowledged that officials' were
311 'familiar' with the sports shown in the video recordings, but perhaps not particularly
312 'knowledgeable' of the sport-specific dynamics predicting interactions.

313 This approach was chosen for several reasons. First, allo-confrontation helps to
314 counteract response bias that might come from first person reporting. That is, it can help prevent
315 officials from reporting only the thoughts they would prefer the researcher to hear. Using a third-
316 party approach, allo-confrontation is intended to reveal participants' interpretations and
317 representations as projections onto the interactions of others (to capture officials' perceived
318 intentions of other officials' interaction practices), but then it could also be personalised to
319 provide more richness to interview responses. Second, it allows for a larger sample of officials to
320 comment on game interactions, with consistency in the presentation of stimuli. Video vignettes
321 provide examples of game interactions that capture audio and video of verbal and non-verbal
322 cues and dialogue in different player-official encounters and exchanges. Finally, the use of non-
323 participant video examples in semi-structured interviews used a 'thin-slicing' approach to
324 explore communicative exchanges between players and officials. Thin-slicing is thought to
325 encourage study participants to evaluate stimuli in a more intuitive manner (Ambady &
326 Rosenthal, 1992).

327 *2.3 Video vignette selection*

328 One set of recordings of interaction situations (or episodes) between officials and players
329 was used with all participants. Recordings of vignettes included at least 2-3 situations from
330 soccer, field hockey, netball, basketball, rugby union, rugby league and ranged in length from 3

331 to 15 seconds. Vignettes were randomly arranged, but all participants watched the clips in the
332 same order. Video recordings of player-official interactions from novice
333 (community/club/district), development (state, amateur) and professional sport or sub-elite/elite
334 matches (e.g., Australian Netball League; Euro Hockey League, English Premiership Football,
335 Olympics, International Rugby Union, FIFA World Cup) were presented to participants during
336 interviews. Recordings were mostly collected from an online public video forum
337 (www.youtube.com) or edited from other retrieved game recordings provided by sport
338 associations. Twenty vignettes were used in all, with 15 shorter vignettes ranging from 3-15
339 seconds, and 5 vignettes ranging from 1-2 minutes (total approximate running time = 7 minutes).
340 Recordings (or vignettes) of player-sport official interactions were presented reflexively within
341 semi-structured interviews that addressed a range of question categories (discussed in next
342 section). All interviewees viewed interactions from their own sport and were generally familiar
343 with other sports used in the vignettes (i.e., they had watched or played the sport and were aware
344 of basic rule structures).

345 Selection criteria for the interactions used as video stimuli were informed by concepts
346 and communication topics from previous officiating research and literature. Examples of player-
347 official interpersonal exchanges included initial encounters and impression formation (e.g.,
348 players and officials shaking hands and other first meetings prior to the game; Dosseville et al.,
349 2014; Simmons, 2011; Thatcher, 2005); decision communication (e.g., officials conveying
350 decisions using whistle/hand signals/cards/flags, giving rule explanations; Mellick et al., 2005;
351 Simmons, 2010); impression cues and acts of officiating competence (e.g., displays of politeness
352 or empathy; anger and acclerated speech; calmness and paced speech; and self-confidence and
353 firmness with players; Dosseville et al., 2014; Simmons, 2011); preventive communication (e.g.,
354 brief, in-game official communication with players to direct play or deter rule infringement;

355 Mascarenhas et al., 2005); conflict directed towards officials or between players leading to
356 official intervention (MacMahon et al., 2014; Mascarenhas et al., 2006; Rix-Lièvre & Genebrier,
357 2011), and players arguing or questioning officials (e.g., players seeking decision interpretation,
358 repeatedly questioning officials, or infringing officials' personal space; Faccenda et al., 2009;
359 Simmons, 2006). Two researchers reflected on each video to reach consensus on a balance of
360 interactions. The research intentionally avoided any bias in the presentation of 'anti-social'
361 player behaviour by showing both positive and negative communication. This procedure aimed
362 to highlight most common occurrences of officiating interactions based on research evidence as a
363 means to provide a visual stimulus for discussion about relational and interactional
364 characteristics of officiating work.

365 *2.4 Interviews*

366 An interview schedule was developed, based on recommendations by Henry and Fetters
367 (2012) for conceptualising video elicitation interviews. Three progressive question categories
368 were established across all interviews. First, interview questioning aimed to elicit participants'
369 definitions about communication and interaction by using thin-slices of player-official
370 interaction recordings; second, questions were directed to elicit participants' own values and
371 attitudes about interacting (with players); and finally, probing perceptions of context and
372 behaviour, based on video examples and relating to participants' own experiences. This structure
373 to the interview schedule was kept consistent across all interviews. The researchers were
374 sensitive to bias, so video recordings used in stimulus portions of elicitation interviews were
375 presented by the interviewer in a neutral, non-leading manner. Questioning within interviews
376 were posed in ways that stimulated discussion about game interactions generally, officials'
377 communication motivations with players and ways they view officials and themselves and adjust
378 their communication to different situations. For example, whilst viewing the video the officials

379 would be asked "what is the official trying to achieve in this interaction, considering the
380 situation?", or "what are your impressions of the official's actions with this player to this
381 point?", or "how have the player and official in this situation adjusted their communication to
382 one another?". Example questioning without presentation of video recordings included "what are
383 officials seeking to accomplish in interactions around decisions with players?" and "what are
384 some common responses of players to different officiating styles?" and "are there certain types
385 of communication you think are more or less effective with certain players?". Interview
386 questioning shifted between video recordings as the source of questioning and the officials'
387 previous experiences in interactions with players.

388 *2.5 Data analysis*

389 Social constructionism and constructivist paradigms provided the overarching research
390 assumptions that guided the design and methods used here to understand player-sport official
391 interactions. The study's research questions were used to provide overall structure for the
392 organisation and categorisation of data (i.e., what are officials' face concerns and motivations
393 and face-work orientations?). Data analysis was achieved with a multiple-phase, data-verification
394 process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It involved, first, the lead researcher engaging in a process of
395 indwelling (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) by reading and re-reading each interview transcript to
396 enhance familiarity with the data. Next, a first-level, open coding of interview verbalisations was
397 conducted. This involved raw interview fragments (words, phrases, descriptions and examples)
398 concerning viewed recordings of player-official interactions and officials' personal experiences
399 in interactions with players being given units of abstract meaning. Next, dramaturgical theory
400 and other face concepts were used as the interpretive frame for analysing open coding of
401 officials' responses. This second level of data processing involved a theoretical analysis to
402 situate the data within Goffman's writings and other contemporary face theorists that enabled a

403 shift from concrete description to abstraction. The analytic framework used to interpret and guide
404 reporting of interview data was led by theoretical explanations for the concepts of *front-stage*
405 *communication* (represented by 'social presentation', 'impression management', 'role
406 performance', and interaction 'setting'; Goffman, 1959), *face needs and interests in interactions*
407 (represented by 'self-worth', 'self-image', respect', 'deference', and 'pride, dignity, and honour';
408 Goffman, 1967), *face-work orientations and negotiation* (represented by 'defensive' and
409 'protective' face-work orientations; Goffman, 1967) including other face concepts such as
410 'relational separateness and connectedness' (Arundale, 2010) and 'politeness' (Brown &
411 Livingston, 1987). Segmentation and charting of meaning units as answers to each research
412 question were then grouped, thematised, and discussed as narrative responses (Patton, 2015) and
413 supported by evidence from previous research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Quotes and examples
414 from interviews were used to help communicate the findings. This multi-level, theortically-based
415 inductive approach helped to reveal interaction subjectivities between players and officials (from
416 officials' viewpoint), and also conceptual structures of face concepts under study.

417 *2.6 Trustworthiness*

418 The researchers used established procedures for enhancing the trustworthiness of the
419 study and for gathering qualitative data (Patton, 2015). Given our philosophical underpinnings,
420 we were mindful that the findings, discussion, and conclusions provided in this research were co-
421 constructed (i.e., they stem from the relationship formed between the lead researcher and the
422 participants). Three pilot interviews were conducted with 'novice' and 'development' officials
423 (MacMahon et al., 2014) to help first refine the interview guide and gain familiarity with general
424 participant responses. Pilot and study interview recordings and transcriptions were checked and
425 verified for transcription accuracy. Care was taken to ensure that interviews were conducted and

426 analysed systematically, while attending to the application of theoretical concepts new to
427 officiating research.

428 The lead researcher conducted field interviews and was the most immersed in the
429 collected data. However, a systematic consensus analysis occurred with co-authors (established
430 experts in officiating communication and performance psychology) to improve the credibility
431 and trustworthiness of primary analysis. Co-authors were theoretically sensitised to officiating
432 interactions and field of officiating research, including qualitative processes. Co-authors met
433 collectively on fortnightly during data collection and analysis to a) reflect on transcripts and
434 refine interview questioning, b) reflect and organise first order meaning units generated by the
435 lead researcher's analysis and thematise meaning clusters and, c) review and manage
436 participants' reflections on the research's initial findings (Smith & McGannon, 2017) to finalise
437 data themes and synthesis of findings. Member-checking procedures (Patton, 2015) were
438 undertaken to help ensure the accuracy of the findings. Smith and McGannon (2017) note the
439 limitations of exclusively relying on member checking in sport and exercise psychology studies
440 as a benchmark for verification and rigour. In line with these critiques, the researchers ensured
441 an involved process of member reflection occurred as a 'practical opportunity to acknowledge
442 and/or explore with participants the existence of contradictions and differences in knowing'
443 (Smith & McGannon, 2017, p. 8). Officiating participants were emailed descriptions of
444 analytical themes along with example excerpts of officials' interview verbalisations and asked to
445 alter or add to the findings based on their sport experience. Five officials responded with
446 reflections which mainly concerned additional examples to the first theme 'anticipating players
447 reactions and modifying presentation of self' (see findings and discussion), while another five
448 officials confirmed the accuracy of interaction themes without reflections, and four officials did

449 not respond. Researchers ensured an involved process and dialogue with participants in order to
450 explore contradictions in knowledge between the officials and researchers' analysis.

451 **3. Findings and discussion**

452 The purpose of this study was to explore sport officials' identity concerns and
453 motivations and ways they adapt and accommodate 'face' in interactions with players. Within
454 the real world nature of interactions, the features of player-sport official exchanges that are
455 explained in the following sections occur contiguously and in ways that are imbricated.
456 However, for clarity of communication, the findings are divided into three sections based on the
457 distinct themes that emerged from this study concerning ways that officials manage face
458 communication in different 'interactor' sports by: (a) *anticipating players' reactions and*
459 *modifying presentation of self*; (b) *asserting and preserving officials' face,* and (c) *giving and*
460 *restoring players' face*. Each theme is discussed using sport officials' interview responses, face
461 theory provided by Goffman (1957; 1967) and other interactionist contemporaries (Arundale,
462 2012; Brown & Livingston, 1987; Ting-Toomey, 2009).

463 *3.1 Anticipating players' reactions and modifying presentation of self*

464 Most officials said it is important to enact diverse 'front-stage' self-presentation during
465 interactions with players to influence their perception of the officials' ability to manage game
466 activities, judge appropriately, and decide accurately. Officials actively anticipate and make
467 sense of situations (based on previous experience and game context) to inform self-presentational
468 needs and responses to players. This resembled a type of information seeking practice as some
469 officials expressed a motivation to appraise and understand players' circumstances and reactions
470 to choose appropriate communication with players:

471 It is often a much more difficult job to keep a player in the game – to empathise and
472 anticipate their complaint and show that you are on their side, not against them. (I3)

473 If they are coming at you, you have to understand why, why are they coming at you.
474 'Have I done the wrong thing?' and then 'How do I get out of it?' (I12)

475 Burleson (2007) suggests that more skilled communication involves attuning to others'
476 emotional states and thought patterns associated with certain contexts (akin to an '*emotional*
477 *intelligence*'; Nikbakhsh et al., 2013). As a consequence of interpreting context and player
478 behaviour, officials said they in turn manage the intensity of verbal tone, body language and
479 other emotional displays to signal warnings or safety concern ('just even showing
480 disappointment to them [the player] through your facial expressions if they are pushing the line';
481 I10), breaches of values/ethos of the game ('when they are disrespecting the game, that can't
482 happen, that's when you need to be direct and firm with them; I3), and awareness and
483 understanding of players' circumstances ('just even showing a bit of empathy to the player, like
484 'You're working hard, I saw what they [opposing players] are doing, I'm going to deal with it';
485 I7). Such personalised and contextual interactional displays express discreet messages tailored to
486 the situation, with some personal examples and reflections on intentions of officials viewed in
487 video vignettes that included speed of gestures (e.g., slow hand movements (I2); low hands/open
488 palms (I8); eye signaling (I5; I9); or facial expressions of feigned anger (I4, I10), and familiarity
489 or affiliation (I2, I9). Adaptive interactions used in conflict situations with players were said to
490 benefit from monitoring one's own emotional responses and speaking slowly (I4, I8); appearing
491 calm (I2, I10); being in-control of oneself (I2, I4); and use of concise and paced phrasing (I5).
492 One official explained underlying goals of subtle behaviour signals without verbalisations used
493 with players to help orientate expectation and congruency:

494 Even if it is just to make a point and go like [nodding movement] with your head or some
495 eye contact. Just little messages to let them know how they are playing and how they

496 could, potentially cause an injury, because you want that advantage and consistency, or
497 fluency to the game and people are happy. (I2)

498 Part of this enactment of front-stage interactions in social settings involves constructing a
499 certain discourse or stance that contributes to, as Goffman (1959) terms, 'working consensus' (an
500 implicit agreement between people to temporarily avoid conflict in order to carry out their
501 business). Sport coaches are found to negotiate a 'backstage' stance that is communicated
502 through 'front-stage' performative actions to influence ways leadership identities are constructed
503 and conveyed to sport team athletes (Wilson, 2013). Vine (2017) showed how rugby referees and
504 players jointly achieve cooperative and antagonistic interactions through contextually shared,
505 embodied practices. Some officials said they explicitly improvise and respond to personality
506 traits of players and interpretation of the needs of situations through strategic use of face
507 patterns. One field hockey umpire with international experience emphasised the importance of
508 adapting communication style in interactions to convey certain situated identity based on the
509 player and context:

510 I don't think you can always just rely on one style to referee. There are so many different
511 types of players and situations you have to deal with, it just doesn't make sense. Some
512 refs at our national competitions often have their 'go-to' way of refereeing that gets them
513 through most games, but not every game where they can get into problems. Sometimes
514 you have to be the firm police officer, the next the friendly and familiar guy, and in the
515 next situation the teacher to help the players understand what they did wrong. It is
516 different approaches for different situations. (I4)

517 Displaying awareness and vigilance to players is one social act that contributes to
518 players' 'interpretings' of face affiliation and certainty (Arundale, 2010) about officials because
519 it communicates reliability, role commitment and focus. Players can however develop

520 dysfunctional 'interpretations' from relational cues of face that can motivate players to interact
521 differently with officials. One official emphasised it is 'important to not appear overreactive or
522 flustered in front of players' (I7) as some players can use such information to choose different
523 interpersonal approaches with officials. Showing too much openness can cause players to
524 perceive opportunity to manipulate. For example, players are sometimes motivated to influence
525 decisions through strategic or manipulative approaches if officials are perceived as overly-
526 friendly (Cunningham, Simmons, Mascarenhas, & Redhead, 2015).

527 This first theme refers to situated, adaptive front-stage self-presentation by officials that
528 occur as a response to players' behaviours and officials' monitoring and anticipation practices.
529 Communicative displays with players in interactions aim to project context-appropriate identity
530 and messages that align with officiating goals and reactions to players' behaviours towards
531 officials. Officials' presentation of self thus derives from a deliberate activity of interpreting
532 player responses towards officials (and game values) and front-stage communications perceived
533 to affirm more context-specific function and purpose.

534 *3.2 Asserting and preserving officials' face*

535 Another way sport officials adapt or accommodate to players is through face-work
536 practices that protect or affirm the officials' face. Officials are motivated to avoid 'face loss' and
537 actively guard against compromising their authority, but similarly seek to avoid being seen in
538 interactions as over-authoritative (I6, I11) or over-controlling (I1, I4, I10). Many officials said
539 they are motivated to maintain preferred impressions in the minds of players and others and
540 appear approachable (I3, I10) and respectful (I2, I4, I8) in interactions. Identity negotiation
541 processes are inevitable features of social interactions and influenced by a tension between
542 behavioural confirmation and self-verification (Hargie, 2011). One official emphasised this

543 tension by explaining their interest to preserve their face during interactions with players whilst
544 projecting outward demonstrations of control of game activities to others:

545 Sometimes you need to stop everything. Slow it all down, and make sure others see you
546 are doing that. You might be just giving a regular yellow [card] out, but people see that
547 the player was provoked. Like, 'Okay, I've dealt with you and now I am dealing with this
548 guy'. The crowd needs to see that and the players need to go, 'Okay he didn't just send
549 our guy off because he punched him, he actually saw what happened and is stamping that
550 by making a point here.' (I1)

551 Players' disagreements with officials' interpretations or decisions can sometimes breed
552 conflict or questioning of officials. Goffman (1967) describes defensive face-work as actions
553 used by an individual to circumvent the loss of face that might potentially discredit the identity
554 one is attempting to maintain. Officials in this study said that face-testing interactions frequently
555 occur with players who are aggressive ('at times they're [players] right in your face, angry, and
556 in your personal bubble'; I3) or emotional ('can be the emotional signs, they are out of control,
557 just not thinking straight, constant outbursts to any decision you make; I5), while other players
558 are said to be more persistent ('that type of constant approaching you and asking questions'; I1)
559 and planned ('even just picking their moments when to appeal; I11) in their interactions with
560 officials. One type of defensive face-work is 'avoidance processes', such as avoiding situations
561 in which a person's face is likely to be threatened or wronged (Ting-Toomey, 2009). Whilst
562 officials should avoid not listening to players or addressing questions (MacMahon et al., 2014),
563 avoidance can be a subtle and less assertive communication style to influence players' attitudes
564 and behaviour in conflict situations (Mascarenhas et al., 2006). Officials often described using
565 avoidance tactics to help preserve their credibility in interactions and secure broader officiating

566 goals, particularly with players who seek out unnecessary interactions with officials to challenge
567 or question:

568 A tool I sometimes use is physically guiding players away from areas. Say you are in the
569 middle of the court and a player approaches you. If you walk towards their bench, they'll
570 follow, because they want to talk to you. Almost without them even knowing, you can
571 walk them back to the bench. Because they stand in the middle of the court and yell at
572 you while everyone sees it or follow you around because they want to have a
573 conversation. (I8)

574 When a feature of the 'working consensus' (Goffman, 1959) is disrupted on the front-
575 stage by an unexpected situation, an erroneous decision, player transgression, or perceived moral
576 imbalance, officials aim to restore the desired expressive order and flow of events through
577 deliberate face-work and self-supporting actions. One official said that while it is important to be
578 relaxed, flexible and composed with players, officials must also be forward and firm to convey
579 the message that 'This stops now' (I7). An 'approach' motivation involves asserting face
580 presentations with players to enhance a preferred image for the official:

581 There might be a player who is going off, or a player who is nattering just following you
582 around in your ear, and you know eventually you have to say, 'We need some distance
583 here. I need you to go play the game and not keep engaging me'. Ultimately, if they
584 continue, it starts to discredit what you are trying to do. (I4)

585 People can also engage in approach-based face-work as a means of affirming and
586 supporting individuals' relational needs of face (Rickheit, Strohner, & Vorwerg, 2008). Showing
587 accountability to players is one type of defensive face-work process that officials frequently
588 identified to have face restorative intentions. Examples given by officials included admission of
589 errors to less-impactful game decisions, admitting limited sight lines to make decisions, or lack

590 of critical information to make accurate judgements. In situations where people are reproached,
591 Goffman (1967) suggests 'accounting' is used that involves excuses or attempts to explain one's
592 behaviour to others (Goffman, 1967). Such face-work helps to avoid or reduce criticism that has
593 an impact on the face of others in response to accounts (Domenici & Littlejohn, 2006). One
594 official emphasised the importance of not covering up obvious errors as this can further
595 compromise perceived authenticity of officials, but knowing *when* to show accountability to send
596 subtle messages to players:

597 I notice a lot of players in our competitions attack other referees if they believe they
598 made a blatantly bad decision, but don't fess up to it. You obviously can't do it all the
599 time, although it does help build rapport with players if you are showing your cards a
600 little bit by letting them know when you've missed something or got it wrong' (I1).

601 Where the first theme related to officials' self-presentation adaptations to context, the
602 second theme concerns officials' self-presentation which is more enduring and consistent across
603 context and interactions. Officials aim to protect or assert the projection of their image to players
604 in interactions through face-work to order to maintain functional goals and general identity
605 concerns of officiating. Officials in this study generally said this is achieved through approach
606 and avoidance strategies.

607 *3.3 Giving and restoring players' face*

608 A third way sport officials adapt or accommodate interactions to players is through face-
609 work that gives and corrects players' face. This was indicated in officials' responses through a
610 variety of communication tactics and approaches they use such as emphasising player autonomy
611 (e.g., allowing players to express themselves to a point), being respectful, actively listening to
612 players, providing explanations, and showing favorable personality traits (e.g., avoid being
613 dismissive to players). Sometime face-work in social interactions can help to safeguard the

614 identities of others through protective orientations (Goffman, 1967). If a particular threat to
615 anothers' face cannot be avoided, the use of corrective processes by interactants can help restore
616 the expressive order and flow of events. Officials said ignoring players' face concerns is
617 unhelpful to relations with players (i.e., not respecting players' 'voice') and over-emphasises role
618 positions, making players feel subordinate to officials:

619 Somebody was suddenly looking out for her [player] interests, while the whole game she
620 perceived we weren't, that I was 'targeting' her. I spoke to her on the run and said I was
621 watching how they [the other players] were frustrating her, all of a sudden somebody had
622 actually said to her, 'I saw that, and I'm going to deal with it, or I am dealing with it'.
623 But, that is important; you've got to get the perception over those little things. (I4)

624 Face in interaction also makes salient the benefit of enhancing perceptions of respect for
625 players in communication. Teachers who initiate attentive face-work when giving instructional
626 feedback to students are found to reinforce students' feelings of approval and admiration that
627 contribute to their learning and academic performance (Kerssen-Griep, Trees, & Hess, 2008).
628 Many officials said showing respect to players is an instrumental part of managing game
629 atmosphere and acceptence in officials, and from participants' comments in this study about
630 officials' interaction intentions in video vignettes, other officials can sometimes limit their
631 outward expressions of respect to players:

632 Being polite with players goes a long way, at least I've found. Some players don't expect
633 it. Maybe because they've had an official who wasn't like that with them before and they
634 think we are all the same. Like the basketball referee there [referring to video vignette
635 example] who was talking over the player, when it seemed like all the guy wanted was a
636 few quick words to understand why his teammate had the call against him. (I8)

637 Providing rule and decision explanations were said to aid in emotional management of
638 players, but also help to build a shared understanding about the game events. Teachers use
639 explaining as a way to attempt to resolve conflict through compromising or integrating
640 viewpoints of students (Wragg & Brown, 2001) and explaining is used by managers to soften
641 employee complaints and feelings of unjust treatment (Trosborg & Shaw, 2017). Officials said
642 that giving explanations conveys accountability, transparency and builds player acceptance in
643 officials. One experienced basketball official said 'explanations can be ineffective with players if
644 officials have not built respect and trust early on with players' (I4), while other officials
645 described how explanations aid in enhancing attitudes of respect within interactions:

646 I like to talk to the players and make sure they understand my decisions, so that we are
647 both like, 'Yep right, we are both on the same page now.' You may disagree with it, I've
648 explained it to you, you've accepted that and it is fine. Now, we are moving away from
649 that'. To me, that is building that respect. (I11)

650 Listening to players and accommodating relational preferences of players in encounters
651 contributes to certainty and connectedness in face exchanges (Arundale, 2010) with officials.
652 Officials will listen to players (up to a point and where it seems reasonable to do so), believing
653 that players benefit from being heard and need opportunities for cathartic responses. Some
654 officials recognise that players can become increasingly frustrated and officials need to allow
655 players to 'get it off their chest' (I2, I14). The 'voice effect' proposes if people are given an
656 opportunity to share their opinion or perspective in decision-making processes, they feel more
657 motivated and become more satisfied and accepting of leadership (Van den Bos, Vermunt, &
658 Wilke, 1996). Some 'interactor' sports encourage a high frequency of interactions between team
659 captains and match officials and less between other players and the officials. Some captains were

660 said to collaborate with officials while others contribute to greater disruption to game
661 interactions based on the desirability of closedness or openness (Arundale, 2010):

662 A lot of communication should be channeled through the player captains. The captain
663 might approach to just get a particular point across. I am always making a point to be
664 receptive to what the player is trying to say because often it will be valid. (I7)

665 More experienced officials said greater familiarity with players improves understanding
666 and awareness of boundaries in interactions. This included a perceived freedom to experiment
667 with a greater range of emotions in exchanges, including humour, sarcasm and feigned anger.
668 Familiarity with players reduces the need to use impression management in interaction, while
669 less familiarity requires more procedural communication and other 'tool-box' skills:

670 There is the player you totally react to, you've never seen in your life, and you use the
671 tools available to you. It might be a calm demeanour. Use a talk on the run, a word here
672 or there to break the ice. I will definitely try and say some things here or there that often
673 get an interaction that breaks the ice really well, so to get their confidence in you. (I12)

674 Humour or repartee was said to convey favorable personal qualities and demonstrates
675 openness to players, which can help in circumventing negative emotional responses in situations
676 of conflict. Professional European football referees say they use humour and 'banter' with
677 players that suggests an approachability (Slack et al., 2013). Including the use of humor, many
678 officials said it is important to use collaborative approaches to build a progressive attitude of
679 acceptance toward officials that can have substantial impact on the quality of later game
680 activities:

681 If you sort of don't build these relationships, and build that rapport and 'chains of
682 agreement', then inevitably it is going to build up, the heat is going to build up, and once

683 it starts building with one or two players it spreads so quickly, and everyone else is going
684 to get heated and by that point there is not even much you can do. (I2)

685 While the first two themes concerned official-centered self-presentations and face
686 adaptations in interactions, the third theme concentrated on officials' motivations concerning
687 accommodation of perceived face concerns of players. Officials use a range of interaction tactics
688 to correct perceptions of unjust treatment, communicate respectfulness (through politeness and
689 explanation giving) or show favourable personality traits (i.e., approachability), and shift
690 interaction tone and focus (through humour or affiliative interaction behaviours). These
691 approaches accord with protective face-work orientations (Goffman, 1967) that emphasise
692 preservation and autonomy for others within interactive exchanges.

693 **4. Conclusions**

694 This study contributes new knowledge concerning ways that sport officials purposefully
695 manage their interactions with players. It shows that officials adapt and modify identity and
696 messages appropriately for different players and contexts, and that they also use enduring
697 strategies for both projecting and presenting themselves, and preserving the face of players
698 (Goffman, 1957; 1967). Officials from this study articulated three distinct, but inter-linked, ways
699 they manage face communication with players: through anticipating players reactions and
700 modifying presentation of self, asserting and preserving the officials' face, and giving and
701 restoring players' face. The complex micro-organising features of face (Goffman, 1967) in
702 player-official interactions are guided by officials' deliberate and subtle face-work orientations
703 used to manage perceptions of fairness, authority and control.

704 Constructivist viewpoints of skilled communication emphasise importance in ways
705 personal and social identities are presented and maintained (Burleson, 2007). Interactions with
706 players are simultaneously opportunities to contribute towards identity projections and to

707 manage multiple goal ends that characterise the ecological and dynamic nature of officiating.
708 The findings highlight the complexity and multi-functionality of officiating interactions and
709 communication messages that are needed to meet the nuanced and changing objectives of
710 officiating work in 'interactor' sports (MacMahon et al., 2014). This research improves
711 conceptualisations of officiating communication by integrating constructivist and dramaturgical
712 sociology concepts to account for context in communication and importance of adaptive
713 approaches to interactions.

714 Several study limitations should be acknowledged. The allo-controntation approach to
715 video elicitation used in this study consequently led to partcipants interpreting other sport
716 officials' communication intent and meaning. This approach was used as it is suggested to help
717 improve participants' awareness to other types of representations of a practice, however deeper
718 insights into cognitive processes in interaction might be achieved using auto-confrontation
719 (where participants study their own activity) (Mollo & Falzon, 2004). Another limitation was
720 that officials were not only presented video stimuli of officials interacting within their sport, but
721 also examples from other 'interactor' sports. This could potentially lead to participants
722 speculating on the underlying rationale or purpose of interactions in sports they are familiar with,
723 but may not have sufficent interaction knowledge about. Whilst this could potentially limit the
724 depth of officials' introspection about face exchange, the method allowed a diverse range of
725 sports officials to be involved and stimulate personal accounts of their own officiating
726 experiences to give initial evidence for the emergence of face concerns and orientations in
727 interactions.

728 There exist many future research opportunities to study interaction and face in officiating
729 communication. Further understanding about ways communication context are co-constructed
730 with players might consider investigating player and officials' social activity, concurrently (for

731 examples see Rix-Lièvre et al., 2015; Vine, 2017). Such an approach might study how negotiated
732 identities in interactions are linked to ways players and officials coordinate their activities to
733 achieve accordance or discordance. Also, conversational analysis is often used by linguistic and
734 pragmatic researchers to study face and holds promise as a way to explore dynamics in
735 interaction initiation and turn-taking. In some sports, player captains occupy a team role that
736 requires them to engage more frequently with officials where analysis of conversation meaning
737 and influence across the match could be attemped. Cultural norms can predict the dominance or
738 desire for particular types of face in player-official interactions. Eastern and Western cultures are
739 known to have different expectations of authority and preferences concerning harmony and
740 individualism (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003) and power-distance (Merkin, 2006). Cultural
741 competencies important to officiating situations where players from varying cultures are
742 involved could be another area of study. Similarly, future research could be designed to explore
743 differences in face exchange across *sport* cultures and types. Finally, exploring face-work
744 exchanges between coaches and officials can help to better understand how officials deal with
745 coaches to orientate more productive and cooperative discourse.

746 **5. Practical perspectives**

747 Sport bodies recognise the importance of interactions with players, but they have been
748 frustrated by their inability to design interaction training for sport officials (Simmons &
749 Cunningham, 2013). Officials need to understand players' perspectives in order to develop
750 effective working relationships. This comes from not only understanding what they are saying,
751 but also how they are saying it which will provide a more complete picture of their standpoint.
752 Therefore, officials need sophisticated social assessments of context and players in order to
753 effectively manage the game. A new approach that integrates the findings here with the current
754 evidence base might be to:

- Begin with a focus on presenting preferred personal qualities (e.g., approachability, openness, empathy) and refining 'one way' communication skills (e.g., confidence, account/explanation giving).
- Create exercises to help officials to read players emotions and unspoken communications (Cunningham et al., 2014).
- Develop a framework for structured discussions to help officials reflect upon their own interactions through self-review (auto-confrontation), and observation of other officials' interaction practices (allo-confrontation; Mollo & Falzon, 2004).

Interaction improvement exercises might encompass scenario building and role-play, with active listening and conflict management training. Low-cost technology, such as microphones and body-head cameras (POV) could be used to enhance reflection and also to review player interactions. Assessment should emphasise officials' abilities in self reflection, monitoring social cues in players, and adapting for interactions.

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