

Historic Context of Gymnastic Coaching

Gymnastics as a sport dates all the way back to the ancient Greeks (Caine, 2013: 13). In fact, the building we recognize today as a facility to practice all sports, the Gymnasium, derives its name sake from the gymnastics ancient Greek boys would practice within (Caine, 2013: 13). It was thought that gymnastics training would improve physical health, improve mental capacities, and instill discipline in children (Caine, 2013: 13).

It was not until late into the Industrial Revolution that activities like gymnastics gained value to improve a child's development and growth (Halpern, 1999: 179). Before and during the Industrial Revolution, children were perceived socially as members of the workforce, no different from their adult peers (Halpern, 1999: 179). With the introduction of mandatory school attendance throughout the British Common Wealth, children's role became that of dependants that would grow into more competent workers (Halpern, 1999: 184). Children then became subjects of care before, during, and after typical working hours (Halpern, 1999: 184). An economy of childcare services grew, becoming solidified and well rooted in the mid to late 20th century (Halpern, 1999: 200).



Research Focus

Gymnastics, especially in the Ottawa area, has become a popular after school activity due to many of the same reasons the Greeks valued it. Since the early 1980s, physical activity and personal capacities for growth and discipline became popularized in classes and activities (Halpern, 1999: 2000). Gymnastics took off due to its diversity in streams, such as trampolines or floor-based training, and its relatively low costs in comparison to other sports (Caine, 2013: 43).

Ottawa is one of the most saturated markets for gymnastics studios in Ontario, currently hosting twenty facilities in its 2,278 square kilometers. One of the most popular facilities that I will be calling Galaxy Studios, has been open since 2000 and is known throughout Ottawa as the most fun and best priced gym. Through Galaxy Studios I conducted my research into the question; how do gymnastics coaches manage their multiple identities as entertainer, athlete, teacher, and childcare professional?

How Do Gymnastics Coaches Manage Their Identities of Entertainer, Athlete, Teacher, and Childcare Professional?

Methods of Research

I conducted my research through fieldwork and interviews at the Galaxy Studios headquarters and inside the homes and social events of Galaxy staff. I took notes while observing classes and clean-up, while resorting to short jot-notes at parties and home events. Most of my interviews were casual at the out-of-work events and during clean-up, with one formal hour-long interview with a manager. My access to the studio was due to my personal friendships with management and staff, as well as my own experience as a coach and student at the facility in the past. I was able to ask follow-up questions from many of my informants and gain access to parent feedback that would otherwise not be available to me due to my connect to the staff. My findings then will reflect who I am to my informants, who I am in the context of gymnastics coaching, and how comfortable my informants were with me at the time. All names, even "Galaxy Names" the staff go by at work, have been changed to protect the identities of everyone involved as well as to maintain the studio's desired a-political branding.

Affective and Emotional Labour

At Galaxy Studios, as with many after school childcare facilities, the coaches are required to perform emotions and behaviours of care. The children's fun and learning must appear to be a coach's top priority as the children and parents need to feel cared for. These performances of care are appealing and mandatory if one desires returning clientele (Humphry et al, 2015: 750).

The performance of these emotions in themselves is an example of **emotional labour**, yet there is still more going on. The coaches are encouraged to feel the emotions they are portraying, embodying them and feeling what is appropriate of them. Coaches thusly go out onto the floor ready to feel or already feeling happy, playful, compassionate, and so on. This would be an example of **affective labour**.

Coaching combines these two forms of labour, influencing their identity management and how they relate to their work. Typically, though emotional labour is taxing, as I will discuss later, leaving work and being able to express one's self helps relieve stress. For affective labour, however, as emotions are genuinely being evoked and acted on, there is less of a separation from how one feels at work and home, leading to cases of more severe burnout. Also, one's relation to the work becomes more personal, as the performer of affective labour genuinely feels and identifies with what behaviours of care they portray.



Burnout, Stress, and How Coaches Cope Together

Due to the pay grade of most coaches and their odd hours in comparison to the nine-to-five work day, coaches often do low cost activities together in their leisure. These activities vary from playing video games, watching sports events, or just chatting together. I found this peer-to-peer activity to both be a means to socialize outside of work, and a way to manage stress and burnout.

Often the stresses of the day or the past few days are discussed, occasionally as a rant. At the end, however, fellow coaches affirm their feelings and may even give advice or encouragements to one another. These peer-to-peer friendships allow for the coaches to perform to the best of their ability at work and access some relief outside of it.

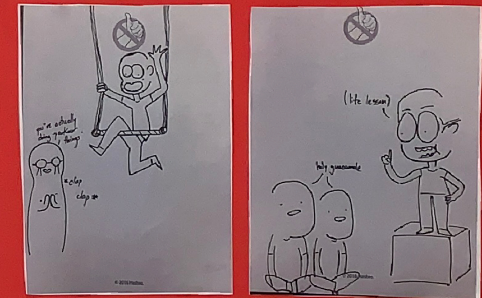
These peer-to-peer groups are limited however in the means of escape. Especially for the case of the management team who all live together, separating one's self from being a coach becomes very difficult and a solitary task.

Identity as a Brand Representative and the Market Value of Fun

At Galaxy Studios in particular, coaches must also be entertaining, fun, and relate to the kids in their classes. Coaches perform an identity of their most fun self, exemplified in their "Galaxy Name" choice. Often calling themselves something silly like Oreo or Batgirl, coaches become these personas at the gym and are placed in certain classes because of them. At Galaxy Studios, who you present yourself to be as a coach is what motivates consumers to spend money on Galaxy classes, especially if you are fun.

Fun was the brand Galaxy was selling, making coach/ studio relations resemble the dynamics of brand ambassadors and brands (Carah, 2014: 5). They are their own entertainers, with their own style that made them ideal for specific age groups and classes, allowing parents and kids a variety of fun that they could purchase at one location over several years.

This mentality of being a brand representative bleeds into the labour itself (Carah, 2014: 4), giving way for coaches to feel and act as individual performers under the Galaxy banner. What coaches do and say they do as unique bodies, leaving their failure on them and rarely on Galaxy Studios.



Conclusion

The gymnastics coaches of Galaxy Studios manage multiple identities to perform their jobs. This identity management means coaches perform affective and emotional labour, must manage stress and burnout, and form a brand to brand ambassador relationship with the studio. All of this is not unique to Galaxy Studios and is part of a larger trend in precariat work. Gymnastics coaches are prime examples of contemporary neoliberal subjects who exist within the Precariat class. These precariat neoliberal workers who perform emotional and affective labour within a framework of identity management will continue to thrive within new service economies. I hope that my research may add to further dialogue around these such themes.