

Negotiation and capital: Athletes' use of power in an elite men's rowing program

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to examine how power is given, acquired and used by athletes in the elite sporting context. It focuses on a top-level athlete's reactions to the behaviors of his coaches and how such actions contribute to the creation of a coaching climate, which both influences and 'houses' coaching (Cushion & Jones, 2006). The paper centres on Sean (a pseudonym), a top-level rower and his preparation for crew selection to the upcoming international regatta season. Specifically, it illustrates Sean's interaction with those responsible for a national rowing programme following his decision not to participate in an aspect of that programme. Sean's story, from both his own and the perspectives of his coaches, is presented using a variation of realist tales which draw upon excerpts from field-notes and interview transcripts. Bourdieu's (1989) notion of capital is primarily utilized to analyze the data. Findings demonstrate how the various aspects of capital are defined, used and negotiated by social actors within the context of elite sport. The significance of the work lies in generating a greater understanding of power dynamics within the coaching context.

## **Introduction**

Recent work reflects an increased recognition of coaching as a dynamic social process inextricably linked to the constraints and opportunities of human interaction (Cassidy, Jones & Potrac, 2004; Cushion, Armour & Jones, 2003; Jones & Wallace, 2005). Here, investigations have focused on the personal and collective experiences of coaches and athletes and the processes by which resultant knowledge is used to guide action (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2004; Saury & Durand, 1998). Such work has contributed towards the generation of theory that more accurately depicts the complex realities of coaching (Cushion et al., 2003). A particularly interesting aspect of this examination relates to the ways power is produced, negotiated and expressed within the coaching context. For example, Potrac, Jones and Armour (2002) and Jones et al. (2004), drawing on the work of French and Raven (1959), have suggested that for coaches to be respected and to exercise their influence effectively they must utilize a range of power choices (e.g., legitimate, informational, expert, reward, coercive and referent). Others meanwhile, borrowing predominantly from the work of Michel Foucault (e.g., 1977), have investigated power from the perspective of athletes; that is, those who are perceived to be usually subjected to power (Johns & Johns, 2000; Jones, Glintmeyer & McKenzie, 2005; Shogan, 1999). This includes an exploration into why athletes consent to coaches exercising power over them in the ways they do, paying particular attention to the privileged position held by coaches within the dominant performance discourse (Cassidy et al., 2004; Cushion & Jones, 2006).

Excepting such work however, an analysis of power and the consequences of its usage within the coaching setting remains under-developed. This appears somewhat

surprising given that power is an omnipresent feature of social life, which not only has an impact upon individual thoughts but also on any interaction with others (Kipnis, 2001; Tomlinson, 1998). Indeed, recent work by Purdy (2006) found that prevailing power relations and their manifestation through the subsequent interactions of principal actors, be they coaches, athletes or any significant others, were predominantly responsible for creating the 'social climate' within which coaching occurs. A coaching climate in this respect was considered the result of the interactions within the training environment driven by the competing agendas of individuals whilst, in turn, being influenced by various macro-structural and micro-agential considerations (Schneider, 1987).

The aim of this study was to examine how power is given, acquired, and used in the elite sporting context. It focuses on the case of an elite rower, Sean (a pseudonym), who rejected an invitation to train in a high performance training programme. The subsequent interactions that take place between Sean and his coaches are taken as being tied to issues of power, power difference and power maintenance (Snyder & Kiviniemi, 2001). The investigation extends to exploring how such actions and reactions contribute to the creation of the climate between Sean and his coaches, which both influences and 'houses' coaching (Cushion & Jones, 2006).

The significance of the study lies in generating a greater understanding of power within the coaching context. It thus builds upon earlier work (e.g., Johns & Johns, 2000; Jones et al., 2005) in seeking to develop a more sophisticated grasp of the complex dynamics that comprise coaching. This involves a recognition that power is more than simply something which is exercised *over* someone (Borrie, 1996). On the contrary, it is a multi-faceted, complex and interactive activity, with its legitimacy often rooted in the

perception of those subjected to it (Jones et al, 2004). Such a stance recognizes the individual as never being totally helpless or powerless in any given situation, which suggests that power can be seen as dialectical; “something in the hands of the person on whom power is being wielded, [as much as being] in the hands of the presumed power wielder” (Potrac et al., 2002: 7). The view that power is dialectical fits within the tenets of exchange theory (Powers, 2004), which places human relations as being founded on the “contractual expectations and evaluations people incur in relation to each other” (McDonagh, 1982: 550). Unsurprisingly, from its inception, exchange theory has been depicted as being intertwined with power and dependency (Emerson, 1962). The complexity of power is such however, that even the notion of exchange and consent must be problematized itself. For example, although athletes generally allow coaches to have power over them, they still often appear obliged to resist and subvert its exercise through a variety of means thus putting the agreement at risk (Cushion & Jones, 2006).

In order to maximize the potential of athletes, coaches need to be aware of concepts such as power, domination, resistance and group sub-cultures which form an integral part of the coaching environment in which they work (d’Arripe-Longueville, Fournier & Dubois, 1998; Jones et al., 2004). Recognizing such real-life coaching issues and constraints can help practitioners better develop competencies and strategies to deal with them, ultimately improving athlete learning. In this respect, and borrowing from the sentiment expressed by Jones and Wallace (2005), an insightful knowledge-for-understanding project such as this can, and perhaps should, lead to an improved knowledge-for-action professional preparation strategy.

## **Context and Method**

In keeping with recent recommendations for research in sports coaching to better capture the social complexity of the activity (e.g., Jones, 2000; Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2002; Potrac, Brewer, Jones, Armour & Hoff, 2000), this study represents an inquiry into that problematic world; particular into how each party within the coaching context understands, are affected by, and respond to the other's actions. Ethnographic research methods were decided upon as the most appropriate to use as they have the potential to explore, examine and uncover such interactions, perceptions and subsequent actions of social actors. In this respect, an effort was made to capture "episodes of nuance [and] sequentialities in context; the wholeness of individual(s)" (Stake, 1995: xii). Specifically, in-depth interviews, a reflective journal and participant observations were utilized to acquire a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of the actions and worlds of those under study. It was anticipated that the resultant triangulated data would serve as a secure foundation for subsequent analysis. It is worth noting here that what is presented is not a recall to universal truth but interpretations; a particular view of the field (Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul, 1997). Hence, being a part of a wider four-year long project, there is no claim to fully describe the world or even the case under study. Rather, the effort lies in making sense of defined key observations and utterances by watching and listening as closely as possible, and by thinking deeply about them (Stake, 1995).

## **Setting and sample**

The setting for the study was a national training camp to which only a select group of elite rowers were invited. The programme was established in response to fears

that the country was falling behind international rowing standards. Consequently, it was decided to intensively train those deemed to be the top rowers in the country (personal communication, date withheld). Athletes trained in the programme for five months with a minimum of two training sessions each weekday, and racing on Saturdays. At the end of the programme the final selection trials for the forthcoming international racing season would be held.

The principal participants within the study, who were chosen through purposive sampling techniques (Patton, 1990), comprised Sean, one of the athletes, and five 'coaches'; Dean, Robert, Ernie, Ted and Mark (pseudonyms). Funded by the sport governing body, this latter group consisted of a coordinator, two full-time coaches and two technical experts. These formally organized roles helped the group act in concert but at the same time fulfil separate roles. With a group of talented athletes, the coaches were aware that an opportunity existed to 'really do well at the [in the forthcoming season]'. On the other hand, this optimism was laced with anxiety that the athletes in their charge were underperforming which, in turn, placed their own positions and that of the programme under threat. The coaching group met formally on a weekly basis to review progress and strategy; meetings where issues of athletes' attitudes, performances and 'potential' were frequently the subject of detailed discussion.

Sean's story is unique because he declined the invitation to relocate and participate in the elite camp, citing a dislike for the concept and a preference to train at his home club instead. This was based on a prior negative experience with the coaches who remained in charge. Despite this decision, Sean was allowed to remain, albeit grudgingly, in the programme as a consequence of being generally acknowledged as the



fastest rower in the country. Sean thus was periodically flown from his home club to join the camp for short periods. In addition to Sean, ten other rowers were involved in the elite programme; JP, Raoul, Jake, James, Walter, Matiu, Tito, Chad, Ben and Hamish (pseudonyms). Ben, Matiu and Sean had been involved for over five years while Chad, Hamish, Jake, James, Tito and Walter were more recent additions. JP and Raoul were both the youngest and the latest arrivals to the training programme; their status often reflected in their treatment by the coaches and the other rowers (JP: 'I guess it's ok that we always get the oldest, slowest boat but it is frustrating sometimes').

### **Methods and procedure**

All the participants were asked to take part in a formal individual interview as the fieldwork commenced in order that some initial information could be obtained (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), as well as being a means for the principal researcher (the first author) to begin developing rapport. These interviews were semi-structured in nature, focusing on the participants' involvement in the sport to their current elevated position, and their future goals. The interviews were organized around the work's stated purpose while possessing the required flexibility to explore additional areas which arose in the conversation (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Each interview ranged in duration from 45 minutes to two hours. Interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, with participants being given copies to confirm accuracy.

As the study lasted for five months (i.e., from the programme's commencement until its completion), the predominant data gathering method was participant observation. Here, the principal researcher attended daily training sessions (on and off the water)

where she often sat in the coach-boat with the coaches. She was also granted access to off the water meetings between the coaches, between the coaches and athletes, and to all the regattas during the period under study. In addition to observing the sessions from the coach-boat which escorted the crew, the principal researcher also conducted observations from within the rowing boats as the coxswain (a person who, located in the boat, directs the rest of the crew). Being a coxswain for the squad increased her sense of integration as one of the crew, while also allowing her to attend all the athletes' sessions with the supporting sport psychologist, and many of the athletes' social gatherings outside the training environment. Here it was hoped that by immersing herself in the programme, the principal researcher could "subject [her]self ... to their life circumstances ...to be close to them while they respond[ed] to what life [did] to them" (Goffman, 1989; 125).

From within each of these settings, a comprehensive record of events was kept. In line with the interpretive nature of the work, however, as opposed to collecting 'facts', the field notes served to re-conceive and elaborate on what was being learned; a means to "rethink, undo, and shape the ongoing research process and products" (Ely et al., 1997: 18). As a consequence of the access gained into the context, daily informal interviews were often carried out with the participants (i.e., the coaches and athletes). The purpose of these was to confirm the accuracy of the information gathered in the introductory formal interviews, while further eliciting the participants' feelings about, and their experiences in, the elite training programme. While the formal interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim, the informal discussions, which were often more akin to conversations, were documented in a reflective journal as soon as practical after they occurred. Such journal entries were, in turn, supplemented by analytical notes which

served both as a means of concept clarification and as pegs to hang the subsequent analysis (Stake 1995).

### **Analysis**

Analysis of the data required systematic and rigorous organization, from which prominent themes were mined in line with the study's aims (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). In this respect, the data were firstly examined using a variation of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as developed by Rubin and Rubin (1995). This involved three progressive levels of analysis, namely preliminary, fine-grained and final. In the preliminary analysis, data were examined for initial concepts, themes and areas (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Consequently, following each interview, the transcripts and/or related notes and journal entries were carefully read to determine common features as well as identifying meaningful pieces of information. This procedure involved dividing the text into 'meaning units' or small portions of data containing a single idea relating to the topic in question (Tesch, 1990). Such topics included: coach-athlete communication, athlete-athlete communication, power, routines, expectations, and previous coaching experience. The content of the meaning units were then subject to a fine-grained search for commonalities and uniqueness, and organized into categories (Tesch, 1990). 'Core' categories which described the key concepts were identified and related to the research question. Such categories included: interaction, normative behavior and power. Finally, aided by the earlier made tentative analytical notes, the transcripts were re-read to acquire a detailed interpretation of the data (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

### **Theoretical Framework**

In addition to using the coding and categorizing techniques associated with grounded theory, in order to draw out the inter-play of power inherent within them, the data were principally examined in terms of Bourdieu's (1988) concept of capital. Bourdieu (1988) understood society, of which the sporting context is a part, to be structured along differences in the distribution of capital with individuals striving to maximize their own personal capital. The notion of capital refers to the goods or resources which are at stake in a given 'field' or social arena (Jenkins, 1992). Access to such goods determine positions of domination, equivalence and subordination in relation to each other within that arena. Of particular relevance in the sporting context is the notion of physical capital, which is embodied through social practice and any form of physical attribute such as athletic skill (Shilling, 1991). Physical capital can also be converted into other forms of capital; that is, economic (that which can be immediately and directly converted to money), cultural (e.g., educational credentials and legitimate knowledge of one kind or another), social (e.g., social position) and symbolic (e.g., honor and prestige) (Calhoun, 1995; Ritzer, 1996).

The amount of capital that can be accumulated by an individual makes a significant contribution to determining the range of available choices open to that individual (Bourdieu, 1989). Capital, then, is the capacity to exercise power over ones' own future and the future of others. Hence, the field is one of 'struggles' in which "agents' strategies are concerned with the preservation or improvement of their own positions with respect to the defining capital of the field" (Jenkins, 1992: 85).

Using such an analytical framework enables the 'field of power' within any context to be understood (Jenkins, 1992). This is because it takes account of 'social

topology'; that is, a "map of the positions which make up the field and the relationships between them in the competition for the field's specific form of capital" (Jenkins, 1992: 86). Such positions cannot be understood without recourse to another of Bourdieu's principal notions; habitus. Habitus is defined as the "product of internalization of the principles of a cultural arbitrary capable of perpetuating itself" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977: 31). The embodiment of habitus is seen in an individual's deportment; in manner, demeanor and generally how they see and "carry themselves" (Jenkins, 1992: 75). In this respect, habitus is viewed as the human embodiment of social schemes disposing actors to behave in certain ways (Bourdieu, 1989). The emphasis then is on explaining order and restraint in terms of indirect cultural mechanisms (Bourdieu, 1989).

### **Realist tales**

The realist tale is one of the more dominant forms of qualitative writing (Partington, 2001) where the author goes into the field, collects data and, in the finished written work, reports on what the members of the culture have said, thought and done (Van Maanen, 1988). According to Van Maanen (1988), there are four features expected in every realist tale. First, the researcher strives to demonstrate the 'typicality' of the persons interviewed and situations observed. Second, in writing up the data the researcher tries to present the 'native's' point of view (Malinowski, 1967). Third, in the presentation of the final analysis the author is absent; scenes and events being described 'as they are' (Van Maanen, 1988). Finally, realist tales take for granted that the interpretation of the situation observed is the correct one (Schofield Clark, 1999).

Although a realist tale generally requires the author to be evacuated, echoing

existing concerns (e.g., Sparkes, 2002) we question whether that is possible. Indeed, given qualitative researchers' basic assumptions regarding the nature of their work, the creation of absent author texts is a source of constant tension (Sparkes, 1995). Perhaps the notion should be considered a textual illusion because authors are ever present throughout articles and accounts as writers, and are inevitably responsible for selecting the quotations and shaping the story that is presented (Sparkes, 2002). Therefore, while there are a set of key conventions that frame realist tales, this frame need not be impermeable (Sparkes, 2002). Realist tales then, can be adapted to include different narrative styles and conventions including authors writing themselves into the text (Sparkes, 1995, 2002). Consequently, we acknowledge that it is not only the participants' story that the reader gets, but our interpretation of it. This brings to the fore issues of who's story is really being told (Richardson, 1999). Recognizing, and not wishing to diminish, this problematic issue we nevertheless take side with Richardson (1990) and Halstrup (1992) who believe in the unavoidable responsibility of the researcher(s) for the text, thus embracing the value of interpretation and sociological insight. In this respect, what is presented is a modified realist tale which is able to serve a critical agenda (Sparkes, 2002).

The issue of realism here, however, is bound up with ethical dilemmas. For example, as international rowing is a small community, it is difficult to ensure anonymity from within realist tales. Similarly, although we have attempted to protect the participants by providing pseudonyms, changing dates and being non-specific about certain events, such disguises could be penetrable (Boruch & Cecil, 1979; Lee, 1993). To protect identities then, we considered censoring the data (Adler & Adler, 1993). Here, the

researcher deletes elements that reveal personal or compromising information about those being studied (Jones, Potrac, Haleem & Cushion, 2006). Such an approach, however, holds disadvantages as well as advantages. Although censorship might protect the participants from harm, it can also compromise the sincerity and candour of the investigation (Jones et al., 2006). Indeed, a colorless, ‘watered down’ version of the experience could result in both the participants and readers being disenfranchised; ‘How can we know the nature [and] extent of behaviours...when they are not reported?’ (Jones et al., 2006; Adler & Adler, 1993).

One method used to somewhat deal with this dilemma is to fictionalize the accounts given by those being studied (Grenfell & Rinehart, 2003). In this respect, although based on actual events, the approach is more concerned with evocation as opposed to ‘true’ representation (Sparkes, 2002). A creative narrative also holds the potential to bring to light the ambiguities and contradictions of everyday life while also being more accessible to an audience who can, in turn, interact with the material in a different way (Tsang, 2000). Certainly such an approach has gained appreciation, as ethnographic work now appears in multiple venues and in a variety of forms, which further legitimates the genre (Richardson, 1999). Therefore, in this study, the data are presented through a fictionalized version of the events as experienced; a method akin to creative non-fiction (Sparkes, 2002). Supporting such a position, Coffey and Anderson (1996: 127) write that the “boundaries between facts and fiction are difficult to draw at the best of time”, and that even when we try to report accurately, we “necessarily construct the cultures we write about” (Bochner & Ellis, 1996: 20). This is not to pronounce such stories as false, but as fashioned; as somethings made from, and

grounded in, the data (Sparkes, 2002b).

Additionally, the narratives and events portrayed in this paper were based upon ‘critical incidents’ which occurred throughout the fieldwork. These ‘critical incidents’ were significant issues and/or key events in the individual or group’s life, and around which pivotal decisions revolved (Measor, 1985). The use of critical incidents was a pragmatic choice because they function as organizing devices for large amounts of data generated by interviews and fieldnotes. The fictionalized stories presented then, were created out of collapsing data around a series of critical incidents which, on reflection, gave explicit meaning to subsequent behavioural trends. The presented dialogues are composites of various interactions which represent the categories and themes uncovered in the fieldwork. It could be argued that there were many critical incidents over the duration of the project. We chose these particular incidents because we believe they provide a vehicle through which a detailed understanding of the experiences of the nature of interaction between coaches and athletes can be attained.

It is also important to note that, although the study details and highlights the tribulations of its participants, the aim is not to express outrage at perceived coaching injustices or athletes’ behavior. Rather, the purpose is to place the actions of those studied “within the constraints and possibilities of their social context” (Stones, 1998: 2). It is to tell about a culture through the characters that comprise it (Richardson, 2000), thus drawing attention to the often problematic relationship between athlete and coach. Similarly, the aim is not to criticise unproblematically an asymmetrical coaching structure, but to pose questions about the assumptions that underlie such an arrangement and how they are carried out.



## Results and Discussion

### The drive against Sean

The coaches (Dean, Robert, Ernie and Ted) are relaxing in a meeting room at the head office, drinking coffee and discussing the upcoming training programme. The phone rings. Ted picks up the receiver.

Ted: Hello?

Response: Hi, it's Sean.

Ted: (in a friendly tone) Sean, hi, Ted here. Have you had a good break? What can I do for you?

Sean: I just got the letter about the training programme and I thought I'd call and let you know that I'm not going.

Ted: (surprised) You've called it quits?

Sean: No. I still want to trial but I'd rather train at my home club.

Ted: Why would you do that?

Sean: I prefer training at my home club, besides I'm tired of not getting any coaching when training with you.

Ted: (a bit indignant and defensive) Wait a minute, that's not true. We provide all our crews with coaches.

Sean: (raising his voice) What? Think about it. Last season you named one coach for two crews. The coach prioritized the other crew and spent very little time with my boat. As an international competitor it is not good

enough to have part-time coaching.

Ted: (a little more calmly) This year we have more resources. The programme is different, for example, I've signed on four coaches to help out.

Sean: Yeah, but the coaches you've selected have a fixed opinion about the kind of rower and person I am, and they don't see me as someone who can go and do things that need to be done to become a world champion. It's not worth my while being in a system that is going to marginalize me.

Ted: The purpose of the program is to have the athletes ready for selection. You will miss valuable training in priority boats.

Sean: Maybe but all the training will be done in boats that you've prioritized regardless of whether they are good enough to compete. I want to compete in a fast boat and I don't think your priority boat is the fastest. If I train with you I'll waste my training in a boat that I'm not going to race.

Ted: (in a serious tone) If you don't participate in the programme, your funding will be revoked.

Sean: So, what's that going to achieve?

Ted: (raising his voice) You've been testing the system since day one. You are not in charge, I am. I'm not going to support you when you don't train here. If you are absent from the training programme, you will not be considered an elite athlete. Therefore, you will not receive any of the perks of being one.

Sean: Fine. Take my funding. I'm not going to train at the high performance centre. It's as simple as that. You can't make me.

Click (phone is replaced).

Ted puts the receiver down and turns to the other coaches.

Ted: Well, that changes everything.

Dean: What's that?

Ted: That was Sean. He called to tell me he's not going to train with the squad.

Dean: (surprised) What do you mean he's not?!

Ted: He said he wouldn't. I'm sure you heard me tell him he would lose his funding. He doesn't care.

Ernie: (concerned) Did he say why?

Ted: We don't pay enough attention to him!

Robert: Does he even want to go to the championships?

Ernie: If he does, he's certainly not acting like it.

Dean: (a little smugly) I told you coaching him was a waste of time.

Robert: (raising his voice) Who is he that he can dictate to us? He thinks he runs the place.

Ernie: I've coached him for two years and I never want to deal with him again.

There's no way I'm going to let Sean beat any of my boys.

Robert: It's time to get him out of the program.

Bourdieu's concepts of a 'field' refers to a social system "within which struggles or maneuvers take place over specific resources" or access to such resources (Jenkins, 2002: 84). A field is structured internally in terms of power relations with individuals'

positions depending on their access to the resources or capital which are valued within the field (Jenkins, 2002). A field by definition then is a field of power and politics whereby the strategies of agents are directly related to improving their positions within it (Jenkins, 2002). Accordingly, Bourdieu's vision of society is one of "endless and pitiless competition" (Wacquant, 1998: 218).

The coaching field under study was characterized by contention and struggle, which were clearly seen by the attitudes and actions of the coaches towards Sean once he had declared his intention not to participate in the training programme. By not attending, Sean was perceived to be undermining the whole value of, and rationale for, the programme, thus putting its very credibility (i.e., symbolic capital) at risk. Capital within the programme, therefore, became an object and a weapon in the struggle between the coaches and Sean. The coaches' conscious decision to subsequently try to alienate Sean, thus undermining his social and physical capital as a high quality athlete, while re-affirming their own positions of power, was clear (e.g., Ernie: 'There's no way I'm going to let Sean beat any of my boys').

Sean's position in the social topology of the field or context in question was under threat. It appeared that the coaches' desire to exercise a high degree of control and domination over the environment was in direct opposition to Sean's decision to opt out of the programme. Consequently, they consistently voiced a concern to 'do something about it'; to negate this perceived threat to their power and their own social capital. Such actions, however, should not be simplistically viewed as the actions of a vindictive few. Rather, Bourdieu urges us to take account of agents' (in this instance coaches' and administrators') habitus and the constraints inherent in the field when analyzing their

behaviors. Acknowledgement of a group's collective histories and roots, therefore, is required to generate an insightful explanation (Jenkins, 2002). Indeed, in examining the coaches' knowledge sources as described in their interviews, it became apparent that their views on coaching were grounded in notions of control and athlete obedience. This reflects much of the research evident in coaching, particularly at the elite level (d'Arippe-Longueville, Fournier, & Dubois, 1998; Potrac et al., 2002), where the perceived pressure on coaches to gain positive results negates against any willing relinquishment of control over the working context (e.g. Robert: "Who is he [Sean] that he can dictate to us? He thinks he runs the place.... It's time to get him out of the programme"). Similarly, Cushion and Jones (2006) found coaches' perceptions of how they should act formed the basis for their use of authoritarian discourses. Thus, the desire to control was considered a coaching norm by the coaches with the culture becoming embodied in their actions (Cushion & Jones, 2006).

The coaches' thoughts and actions also reflected how they assigned capital on the basis of athletes' acceptance of the perceived contextual norms. Hence, those athletes that consented to the coaches' wishes in terms of participating in the training programme were afforded greater respect, time and investment than Sean. They were given symbolic capital by the coaches in return for their willingness to be 'connected' to the field. Hence, they were accordingly defined as 'good' athletes (Hunter, 2004). The significance attached to such behavior by the coaches outweighed (initially at least) the physical capital possessed by Sean as perhaps the most accomplished rower in the group.

In an attempt to reduce what could be considered an overly deterministic explanation of behavior, Bourdieu's also included a conceptualization of agency

(Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This allowed for an internal diversity within habitus, which suggests the possibility of individual potentialities (Hunter, 2004). Although for Bourdieu, such subjectivities often existed beyond conscious realization, his concern with the actions of strategizing agents related to the ways such agents acted “to more or less reproduce existing structures of domination and privilege” (Schubert, 2002: 1093). The coaches then can be seen to be operating within a degree of bounded agency to protect their hierarchical status (and capital) within the rowing programme.

### Tolerating Sean

The coaches’ conversation continues...

Ted: Y’know, in thinking about this, we can’t count Sean out of the programme because we don’t have the numbers.

Robert: (concerned) So what do we do if Sean’s not in the programme? He’s the fastest oarsman in the country.

Ernie: (with relief) I don’t care if he’s the fastest rower in the world, he’s not coachable. He doesn’t listen.

Ted: But we need him so that we can see how fast our other crews are.

Dean: I don’t think we need him anymore. Our boys are getting faster.

However, as a way of keeping an eye on him let’s hold two one-week training camps. We’ll ask him along so that we can determine the fastest combinations, that way we know who the fastest athletes are when it comes to selection. Rowing at his home club won’t help him, our boys should be much faster by then, so we then can drop him without fuss.

One month later...

Ted: Sean's flight arrived this morning.

Ernie: Was he on the plane?

Laughter.

Ted: He's here.

Robert: He looks like he doesn't want to be here.

Ernie: He always looks like that.

Ted: So far he hasn't done very well. The results from his strength tests are a joke.

Robert: (laughing) He's playing right into our hands. He's eliminating himself.

Half way through the training week...

Robert: What does the data (sic.) say?

Ted: (frustrated) Well, after seven 2km races, Sean is still one of the fastest on the squad. Also, he and Tito's times show that they're the fastest combination we've got.

Robert: Great. Now what?

Ted: I've asked him to stay for the rest of the program.

Ernie: What?

Ted: He's still the fastest. We need him. With him here the rowing community will believe that what we're doing is working.

Dean: The programme is working. The boys are improving. They just don't have as much experience as Sean.

Ted: Sean can teach the others. We need him.

Robert: So is he going to train with us?

Ted: No....and... I also offered to return his funding.

Ernie: What? Typical. We could offer him the world and he'd still turn his back on us.

Robert: What are we going to do now?

Ted: We've got to work some magic and make our boys faster. We've got to show the rest of the country the benefits of training with us. We need to send a message that if you don't train with us, you won't be fast.

Ernie: Now we just have the small problem of trying to make Sean slower. For now though, he's got to stay.

Bourdieu believed that the existence and functioning of a field creates a belief in the participants about the value of the capital or the goods which are at stake within it. Holding a position in the social space, or the field, depends on the volume and composition of the capital possessed (Wacquant, 1998). Such capital, however, was not viewed as being infinite and available to all. In borrowing a marketing metaphor to further his analysis, Bourdieu believed that resources, and access to them, "were regulated by a relationship between supply and demand" (Jenkins, 2002: 87). This allows for the introduction of such notions as 'price' and 'cost' in an examination of the strategies of agents as they struggle for appropriate resources. A related notion here is the degree of autonomy each field possesses which is the capacity it has to resist external influences, thus holding to its own evaluative criteria (Wacquant, 1998). Some fields, or the actors which inhabit them, therefore, are more ready than others to compromise when



their capital is at stake.

Despite a desire by the coaches to drop Sean from the programme for his disinclination to take part in it, Sean's perceived capital as an athlete (i.e., symbolic and physical) was enough to secure his continued involvement (in the short term at least). Sean's physical capital as a top class rower, which was consistently demonstrated through achieving better times than the other rowers, was translated into social capital. This enabled him to wield a certain amount of power over other members of the field. A decision was thus taken by the coaches that the cost of keeping Sean involved was justified; it was a price worth paying. Here, the coaches' quest for further social, cultural and economic capital through coaching athletes to international medals and recognition, over-rode their desire to exclude Sean from the programme. Their potential capital was tied to Sean's existing capital.

Such a development can be linked to Bourdieu's notion of exchange (Moore, 2004). Here, the awarding of capital entails a reciprocal obligation, thus intrinsically connecting the exchange to social inequality and relations of power (Moore, 2004). In terms of the current study, the coaches appeared to strike a 'deal' with themselves; Sean would be included as long as they and the programme could be associated with his likely success. Again such action calls forth a degree of agency on behalf of the coaches who, like other social actors, do not "mechanically follow the norms and rules enjoined by a community" (Kim, 2004: 364). Rather, they interpret those norms in ways that are likely to bring them the greatest amount of capital (Kim, 2004).

Although the focus here is on Sean, other examples were also evident within the data that the rowers were perceived differently by the coaches. For example, JP and

Raoul as the youngest and (then) slowest members of the squad were confined to the oldest boat and associated equipment. They also felt that they received the least amount of feedback; (JP: 'we're only here to make up the numbers'). Their current capital apparently merited no better treatment. Although this could be interpreted as realistic (or even good) coaching practice following the mantra to individualize one's delivery (Côté & Sedgwick, 2003) it failed to take into account the collective mind which can often mistake flexibility for inconsistency or even favoritism if not executed with sensitivity and care (Cassidy et al. 2004).

#### The effect of tolerating Sean on the programme's coaching climate

Week two of the training programme, Matiu, Tito and Chad are talking in the gym as they warm down from an early morning session.

Matiu: (laughing) Have you heard the latest?

Tito: What?

Chad: Sean's decided not to train with the squad for the next few months.

Tito: (in disbelief) You mean we have a choice?

Matiu: No, only Sean does.

Chad: It must be nice to be the best athlete. Sean can do what he wants and they have to work around him.

Tito: I don't know if he's making too many friends along the way though. I heard he's on their bad side. One of the coaches said that they're trying to get Sean out of the programme.

Matiu: Why? Because he has too much attitude?

Tito: They think he's too demanding. I just think he's only asking for what he needs. Good for him for standing up to them.

Ben and Hamish enter the gym.

Ben: (frustrated) What the hell was that session about today?

Hamish: That was bullshit, that's what it was. First, Coach (Ernie) yells at us for half an hour and then just takes off.

Matiu: (calmly) Ah, it was my fault he left. I got sick of his yelling and I flipped him the fingers.

Chad: (with a smile) Nice! It's about time someone did something.

Matiu: I'm so tired of this. He (Ernie) tells us a bunch of different things that don't make sense and then yells at us if we don't do what he says. What a muppet. To top it off, I want to go back to my home rowing club to get some real coaching but Ted said if I do, my funding will get cut. I don't have a job, I can't afford to leave.

Tito: Watch out though, if you leave, you'll be in their bad books and you'll never make the squad.

Matiu: So unless you're Sean, you have to play by the rules. It pisses me off.

Hamish: In the meantime we have to deal with that muppet of a coach. Lucky us.

Chad: I just ignore him.

Matiu: He doesn't say anything to you anyway, it's easy to ignore him.

Ben: Meanwhile he's yelling right at me. I never thought I was such a terrible rower. How did I get here if I was so bad?

Matiu: Just flip the fingers at him. It'll sort him out.

Chad: What a muppet.

Bourdieu's understanding of power recognizes the role of resistance against it. Certainly this was evident in the actions and reactions of some of the other rowers. Once they realized Sean's choice to locate himself at his home club had been accepted by the coaches, in essence reversing an earlier decision, many felt empowered to assert a degree of independence themselves. This was most clearly seen through Matiu's obscene gesture to Ernie in addition to the many murmurings of discontent from the rowers that became increasingly evident as the five-month programme progressed. Such a response is in line with Bourdieu's assertion that those who occupy relegated positions in the field are more liable to adopt strategies of relative subversion (Wacquant, 1998).

In some ways, the tension and the athletes' actions can be explained by Bourdieu's notion of 'cultural goodwill' or, more specifically, the crumbling of it (Bourdieu, 1984). Cultural goodwill refers to the behavioral norms that people adopt to ensure the continuity of traditional power relations between groups. It often manifests itself in a form of cultural docility, in which the oppressed are complicit in their domination. What was evidenced in the current context, however, was the fraying and fragmentation of such goodwill. In allowing Sean to continue in the programme despite his decision not to participate fully in it, the 'rules of the game' had been substantially altered without the other athletes' consultation or consent. Consequently, they appeared impatient and confused with the perceived inconsistency of the coaches' decision.

**Conclusion: Closing thoughts**

Taking a Bourdieuan stance, we don't claim to have portrayed reality in Sean's story as given, or indeed that Bourdieu's thinking somehow has 'all the answers'. Rather, what is presented here is an account, or more importantly, our constructed account of events as interpreted. This is an important limitation to consider. However, we do contend that Bourdieu's theories are inherently 'good to think with' in the power-ridden context of sports coaching (Grenfell & James, 2004). Hence, we agree with Bourdieu's own assertion that what he gives us are weapons (i.e., capital, habitus, field), as opposed to lessons, in the quest to explore and understand social practice (Schubert, 2002). The effectiveness of such weapons lie in their recognition that the distinction between conscious thought and the unconscious mind is not a clear one (Jenkins, 2002). Not only does this position include a greater appreciation of how culture is encoded in the body, but also how competent social interaction could or maybe should be defined and accomplished (Jenkins, 2002).

The value of possessing capital was clearly highlighted in the data gathered within the study. While Sean's physical capital was important for him to get into in the squad, it became intertwined with the symbolic capital of the programme and those associated with it. Consequently, although he chose not to fully attend, and even openly expressed scepticism about the value of the programme and those responsible for it, he was continually selected ahead of other more compliant athletes. This, however, had an impact on the other rowers' attitude towards the programme which, in turn, prompted an authoritarian response from the coaches. Such findings build upon earlier work (Jones et al., 2005) in further examining the particular ebb and flow of power relations that occur within the coaching context. It also echoes findings from the work of Cushion and Jones

(2006) in professional youth soccer where authoritarian practices became even more pronounced when coaches perceived their power to be under threat. This is not to criticize authoritarian practices per se in sports coaching as, on the contrary, they are sometimes considered necessary even by athletes (e.g. d'Arrippe-Longueville et al., 1998). Rather, the point is to reflect on reasons for their (and other behaviors') use and their consequences in the creation of a social climate in which to house coaching in the quest for maximum results. Such a social analysis of coaching remains thin, not only surrounding the limits of knowledge within the field but also "what goes misrecognised in the knowledge we produce" (Grenfell & James, 2004: 508). The significance of this study then, lies in developing new lines of inquiry into coaching by examining the various layers of social interaction that occur within it. This is especially related to the fluid, dialectical and transient nature of power, thus providing a more realistic portrayal of coaching's problematic, contested nature.

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