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“Good Athletes Have Fun”: a Foucauldian reading of university coaches’ uses of fun

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ABSTRACT

Fun is deeply ingrained in the ways we talk about and understand sport: Having fun is what makes sport positive and healthy. Drawing on a Foucauldian perspective, we problematize how fun, a psychological construct, informs coaches’ practices. Interviews with 10 varsity coaches from a Canadian university indicated that the coaches used fun to overcome the ‘grind’ of physical skill training. In addition, fun was used to develop and naturalize a need for athletes’ positive psychological traits and skills. In their training contexts, thus, the coaches clearly employed fun to reinforce their use of a number of dominant disciplinary training practices. As a result, instead of operating as a positive force for athlete engagement, the incorporation of fun further legitimized and perpetuated coaches’ ‘normal’ training practices.

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Introduction

Fun is deeply ingrained in the ways we talk about and understand sport. In his classic book *Homo Ludens*, Huizinga (1950) already took interest in theorizing fun/enjoyment in sport, play and physical activity. The overarching belief that guides this scholarly interest is that the essence of sport and play is enjoyment or more importantly perhaps, that it *should* be about fun/enjoyment (e.g. Bigelow, Moroney, & Hall, 2001; Mastrich, 2002; Small, 2002; Smoll, Magill, & Ash, 1988). Over the last few decades, a body of knowledge has constituted itself around the articulated concern to “bring the fun back in sport” by challenging the win at all cost mentality thought to be prevalent in professional sport and to have permeated and denatured youth sport (e.g. Smoll & Smith, 1987; Thompson, 1995, 2003).

The concept of fun seems a priori to stand in stark opposition to sport as hard, difficult and brutal as well as monotonous and over serious. As such, governmentally endorsed sporting and coaching frameworks have reactivated fun (e.g. the

Long Term Athlete Development plan in Canada). These frameworks present fun as a moral and logical reaction to the well-documented excesses of not only high-performance sport and professional sport but increasingly all levels of sport (e.g. Avner, Markula, & Denison, 2017; Cahill & Pearl, 1993; Clifford & Feezell, 2010; Hyman, 2009).

In these frameworks, fun in sport is generally understood as inherently desirable and necessary to make sport positive and healthy. In order to enhance positive experiences, scholars invested in the fields of sport, physical activity, and physical education have worked to define the meaning of fun to people in various sporting contexts (e.g. Allen, 2003; Griffin, Chandler, & Sariscsany, 1993; Jackson, 2000; Mandigo & Couture, 1996; McCarthy & Jones, 2007; Newton & Duda, 1993; Scanlan & Lethwaite, 1986; Wankel & Sefton, 1989). However, as poststructuralist coaching scholars it is not our intention to understand what fun *is*, or its “essence” as a positive state associated with such emotions as enjoyment (Allen, 2003; Bigelow et al., 2001; McCarthy & Jones, 2007). Rather, we seek to understand what fun *does* by problematizing its strategic uses and effects within sport.

Our interest in problematizing fun was spurred by our sporting experiences that did not always align with the commonly held view of fun as innocuous and unproblematic. For example, as a high-performance soccer player, the first author was repeatedly made to feel by her coaches that if she did not have fun she did not have the “right” mental makeup to play at the highest level of the game. Fun was, in this regard, used as a strategy to naturalise various sporting and coaching practices. Accordingly, the application of fun supported, rather than opposed, training as hard and monotonous. It was against this background that we became interested in examining how fun is understood and used by coaches. To help us in this regard, we drew on the work of Michel Foucault.

In what follows, we first review the coaching literature on fun and introduce our Foucauldian theoretical framework. We then outline our study’s methods. Following this, we discuss the results of our analysis and conclude with making some recommendations for the development of more ethical and effective coaching and sporting practices related to fun.

The coaching literature on fun

The concept of fun in sport and physical activity settings has mostly been theorized in the sport psychology literature concerning motivation (e.g. Allen, 2003; Griffin et al., 1993; Jackson, 2000; Mandigo & Couture, 1996; Newton & Duda, 1993; Scanlan & Lethwaite, 1986; Wankel & Sefton, 1989). These studies also emphasized the importance of fun as a key component of effective coaching—good coaches know how to keep sport fun. They pointed to such positive outcomes of fun as developing group cohesion, increasing individual hard work and team performance (e.g. Turman, 2003; Yukelson, 1997), enhancing coach-parent relationships

(e.g. Smoll, Cumming, & Smith, 2011) and reducing performance anxiety stress (e.g. Smith, Smoll, & Cumming, 2007). In this way, these studies have represented fun as a necessary component to improve athletes' performances.

As we wanted to problematize the idea that fun has primarily positive uses, we needed some specific theoretical tools that would enable us to analyse the effects of fun from a broader perspective. To do this, we drew from poststructuralist studies that have adopted a more critical perspective on sport and coaches' practices. For example, the concept of "pleasure" has been studied quite extensively within poststructuralist studies of sport and physical education (Gerdin & Pringle, 2015; Pringle, 2010; Tinning, 2002). These studies have rejected dominant physiological understandings of pleasure as a physical response to various stimuli in favour of a sociological understanding of pleasure "as constructed and understood through discourses circulating within a specific context or more specifically as embodied-discursive constructs" (Gerdin & Pringle, 2015, p. 5). Moreover, Gerdin and Pringle stressed the key role that "pleasure" plays in the reproduction of the dominant multi-activity sport physical education model, thus making it resistant to change even though this model has been the object of critique, particularly for promoting gendered inequalities (Flintoff & Scratton, 2001).

While pleasure, however, might seem closely related to fun, we believe they have different uses and effects, especially with respect to coaching. For one, fun, as a psychological construct, is more closely related to the production of coaching knowledge and the power/knowledge nexus of performance sport than the physiological concept of pleasure. Indeed, we believe that the idea of fun plays a key role as a rhetorical device and political technology that is put to specific use within different sporting contexts. For example, as our previous research (Avner et al., 2017) has shown, coaches' ability to "instil" fun into their daily training environment is strongly associated with being a positive and effective coach as represented by two dominant Canadian coaching frameworks: the National Coaching Certification program (NCCP) and the Long Term Athlete Development program (LTAD). In these frameworks, fun is defined as a desirable psychological state that is part of a larger set of psychological skills that coaches should strive to develop in their athletes (Sport for Life, 2017). More pointedly, what coach ever says to his or her athletes before practice or a game, "have pleasure today"? They do not. They always say, "have fun today." We, therefore, turned to other poststructuralist work, more specifically Foucauldian studies of coaching as disciplining, to inform our analysis of how coaches use fun within their practices.

Many coaching scholars have found Foucault's (1991) concept of "discipline" useful to critically examine sport (e.g. Barker-Ruchti & Tinning, 2010; Denison, 2007; Denison & Mills, 2014; Jones & Denison, 2016; Lang, 2010; Shogan, 1999, 2007). Foucault defined discipline as a technique, a form of power which operates primarily on the body in order to forge a "docile body that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" (p. 136). Most sport coaching contexts lend

themselves very well to a critical Foucauldian analysis of discipline that moulds and transforms individual bodies into highly productive and efficient sporting bodies through the control and organisation of time, space and movement. For example, Denison (2007) drew on his own experiences as a former high-performance cross-country running coach to discuss how, over time, the disciplinary techniques that he used to manage and control his athletes' performances led to athlete disengagement, underperformance and eventually to one of his athletes retiring from running. Denison, Mills, and Konoval (2017) further problematized modern coaching techniques and the disciplinary legacy of high-performance sport by emphasising the striking similarities between these techniques and those used in hospitals, workshops, prisons and army barracks to train, discipline and control individual bodies.

These Foucauldian scholars further observed that the modern disciplinary coaching techniques manifest in "best practices" which seek to optimise training time and effectively control and manage athletes' performances. These include periodized planning (e.g. Denison, 2010), the use of repetitive and monotonous drills for skill development and the spatial organisation and ranking of athletes on a track (e.g. Denison et al., 2017; Mills & Denison, 2013), a swimming pool (Lang, 2010), a weight room (Gearity & Mills, 2013) and a soccer field (e.g. Jones & Denison, 2016). As "evidenced" in these studies, such coaching practices can lead to problematic short term and long-term effects such as athletes' underperformance and disengagement, depression, eating and body-image disorders, and difficulties upon retirement from competitive sport.

However, as Foucault (1991) was careful to point out, discipline must not be understood as simply repressive and deductive. Rather, discipline is productive, "it 'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise" (p. 170). Thus, Foucauldian sports scholars (Markula & Pringle, 2006; Shogan, 1999, 2007) have also emphasized the relational and productive aspects of discipline and the active role that coaches, athletes, fitness experts and sport scientists can play in the widespread use of a range of disciplinary techniques.

Accordingly, we believe it is interesting to consider how fun can be promoted by coaches as a disciplinary tool that can be used to underpin a host of training practices that can make athletes docile but also productive. We, therefore, chose to interview 10 university coaches to better understand how fun might operate to support and endorse certain types of coaching practices. And in what follows we outline in more detail how we conducted our study.

Methods

To answer our research question, we interviewed varsity coaches about their understandings of the role of fun in their everyday coaching practices.

Sample

To select our participants, we used purposeful sampling (Markula & Silk, 2011; Patton, 2002). We further specified our sample by using convenience sampling (Patton, 2002) and approached coaches at a large Canadian University with a record of outstanding sport success to take part in our study. We then applied criterion based sampling technique “which involves selecting participants who meet some predetermined criterion of importance” (Patton, 2002, p. 94) to finalize our participants. Our criteria specified the following: coaches with National Coaching Certification of Canada (NCCP) Level 3, coaches from women’s and men’s sports, female and male head coaches and lastly coaches from both individual and team sports. We limited our sample size to 10 coaches from the following varsity sports:

Basketball (W)	Soccer (W)
Curling (M/W)	Swimming (M/W)
Football (M)	Volleyball (M)
Hockey (M)	Volleyball (W)
Soccer (M)	Wrestling (M/W)

The interviews

While there are benefits and drawbacks associated with all modes and forms of interviewing, we chose to conduct individual, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews (Markula & Silk, 2011) with our sample of coaches because these were most likely to produce rich, nuanced, contextualized and specific knowledge about how coaches think about fun as part of their understanding of how to coach and how they promote fun within their practices. Following Gibson and Brown (2009), we started with more general questions and progressed towards research specific questions pertaining to our sample of coaches’ understanding and use of fun in their coaching practices. We also organised our Foucauldian themed interview guide (Markula & Pringle, 2006) to answer our Foucauldian informed research question on how fun might act as an instrument of power in coaching. We specifically focused on how coaches think about fun as part of their understanding of how to coach and also how they incorporate fun within their practices within the dominant disciplinary framework of performance sport.

Data collection and analysis

All the interviews were conducted by the first author who audio-recorded and transcribed the interviews. She also offered research participants the opportunity to follow up and clarify some of their statements. The interviews were analysed using theory-based analysis technique following Markula and Pringle’s (2006) modified version of Foucault’s genealogical method. This modified version follows the following steps:

- Identification of themes based on our interview guide;
- Analysis of the themes (intersection of themes, discrepancies between themes and emergence of new themes);
- Connection with power relations, theory and previous literature (Markula & Silk, 2011, p. 109).

Validation

Along with criteria of researcher reflexivity and clarity and methodological consistency, we drew on Richardson's (2000) concept of "crystallization" as a judgement criterion for our qualitative Foucauldian study. Unlike triangulation, which seeks to combine various methods or data sources to insure or enhance the validity, reliability, and generalizability of research results, crystallization seeks to capture the multiple and the multidimensional aspects of research knowledge through various angles of approach. As Richardson explained:

Crystallization, without losing structure, deconstructs the traditional idea of "validity" (we feel how there is no single truth, we see how texts validate themselves), and crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know ... we know there is always more to know. (2000, p. 934)

Crystallization then as a validation criterion is not about insuring the defensibility and the legitimacy of a particular claim to "Truth". Aligned with a poststructuralist conception of truth as subjective and multiple, it encourages researchers to always consider their topic from multiple perspectives and to produce rich, nuanced, coherent, reflexive, and contextualized research knowledge. Consequently, we did not seek to know the "Truth" about the coaches' uses of fun, but rather approach our interviews guided by our specific research question regarding the productive role of fun in endorsing dominant coaching practices. Last, we received approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board for this study and followed their guidelines regarding the conduct of ethical research. In what follows, we elaborate on the themes that we identified through our semi-structured interviews with varsity coaches.

Results and discussion

In this section, we present the results of our semi-structured interviews with 10 varsity coaches at a Canadian University. Organised around the two most prominent themes in our interviews, we first discuss the instrumentalization of fun within effective physical training followed by the role of fun in relation to varsity athlete development and in the strategic reproduction of psychological constructs such as "the good athlete" and "the good teammate." We emphasize, however, that these themes are interrelated illuminating the complexity of using fun to enhance coaching effectiveness and varsity athletes' development. As Foucauldian scholars,

furthermore, we examine how these uses of fun reinforce and reproduce dominant understandings and practices of coaching in performance sporting contexts.

Coaches' instrumentalization of fun in physical training

With the exception of one coach, who argued that fun/enjoyment is not central to his coaching or something that he actively tried to promote, the nine other coaches in our sample claimed fun to be something critical that they actively pursued during training and competition. However, many of the coaches also stated the difficulties of including fun in training and competition because fun means different things to different people and because different people enjoy different things in sport. For example, some athletes have fun “doing silly games” (Sally, women’s team sport coach) or joking around, some athletes enjoy “the team bonding and socializing aspects” of varsity sport (Will, men and women’s individual sport coach), some athletes have fun “battling and competing and winning” (Harry, men’s team sport coach) and some athletes have fun “working hard in training to become highly skilled and successful athletes” (Viola, women’s team sport coach).

These different views on fun echo Jackson’s (2000) statement that fun is a term which lacks conceptual clarity. This does not, however, diminish its stated importance for coaches both in terms of performance and success in varsity sport and in terms of athlete development.

Overcoming the “grind” of physical training

Indeed, one of the reasons fun matters is because coaches correlate it to athletic performance and success. As Viola put it: “The happier we are, the more we enjoy what we are doing, often the better we are performing.” In addition, fun was seen by the coaches as critical in terms of long term athlete development in varsity sport and athlete motivation and commitment: “The fun element is really key I think around motivation and just keeping them enjoying what they are doing” (Viola, women’s team sport coach). Viola’s statement was echoed by many of the coaches including Victor who emphasized the importance of fun for athlete retention in the face of “the grind” of varsity sport training and competing. Fun was seen as an antidote to athlete burnout, and as a way of helping athletes achieve their full potential and reach the elite levels of sport. These statements and understandings of fun support previous research (e.g. Avner et al., 2017), which has highlighted and critiqued the strong rhetoric around fun as linked both to performance and positive long term athlete development in current key Canadian coach education websites such as the Sport for Life Website (S4L) and programs such as the LTAD that have been implemented worldwide.

While our sample of coaches recognised that there were many different types of fun in sport, their statements overlapped in what they considered to be the

grinding or “not fun” aspects of varsity sport. Some of these aspects were the “long gruelling seasons,” the physical demands and mental challenges of training and competing, as well as “monotonous repetitive” training: “Well, I think that what a lot of the athletes will complain about is boredom and doing the same drills over and over again” (Viola). However, while these might be seen as obstacles to fun, these varsity sport training and competing practices were also described as necessary to produce a winning performance. As Sally (women’s team sport coach) explained:

if you want to be really good, you don’t need the diversity because basically your formation is going to have you do a bunch of similar things quite frequently. So if you do it all the time, you are actually going to be better at it.

These non-fun yet effective practices of varsity sport were a source of tension and struggle which the coaches attempted to resolve or rationalise in various ways. One of the strategies the coaches resorted to was to use variations or progressions designed to avoid boredom, a state they saw as counterproductive both to performance and long term athlete development:

So I think the challenge for coaches is kind of tricking them [the athletes], to be honest, where they are doing the same things over and over again but you change a variation, you change something that just makes it feel different or come across as fun. (Viola)

This quote illustrates how Viola used fun to retain, not question, dominant skill development practices such as repetitive drills which she believed were the most effective way to train athletes. In that sense, the recognized importance of fun has not fundamentally altered dominant disciplinary ways of understanding and practicing “effective” training (see also Avner et al., 2017).

Reinforcing discipline and optimising training time

Aside from the use of progressions and modifications to avoid boredom and give the illusion of variety and change, the coaches we interviewed described drawing on “the carrot and stick” approach in order to manage the tension between fun and gruelling and/monotonous “effective” coaching practices. More specifically, coaches instrumentalized fun as an incentive or as a reward for hard work, discipline and excellence in training and competitions. These specific uses of fun have resulted from a dominant understanding of fun as the opposite of hard work and discipline promoted by a large and increasingly popular body of literature on positive youth development through sport (e.g. Sabock & Sabock, 2008; Smoll & Smith, 1987; Thompson, 1995, 2003). For example, many of the coaches chose to incorporate fun either in warm-ups for the purpose of getting their athletes motivated, energetic and focused for the serious hard work of training or at the end of practice as a reward for making it through the grind of training:

And in the training I think that if you are doing a functional session then it is not fun, it is never going to be fun and so what you have to do is balance it off with having some

kind of fun reward. That can be some kind of shooting competition or some kind of session that they can recognize as fun. (Sally, women's team sport coach)

These practices related to fun, athlete productivity and the optimal use of training time echo Foucault's (1991) concept of discipline as a technique for shaping, organising and controlling individual bodies. Here, Sally's strategic partitioning and balancing of "work" and "fun" training sequences and activities in the planning and delivery of training is designed for one sole purpose: to maximise and optimise the "serious" training time and ultimately to make her athletes more efficient (read docile).

Giving athletes' choice and ownership over their training

According to most coaches we interviewed, integrating fun in warm-ups or cool downs and occasionally in drills was also used as a way to give athletes a sense of freedom and ownership over their training to counteract coach led, highly structured hard work, which many coaches described as counterproductive to optimal training and performance. For example, Bruno (women's team sport) explained:

I plan everything else so trying to give them a little ownership over that piece of one day [...] Just to give them some ownership and break it up a little bit and also give them an insight into what we do as coaches and build a better connection between coach and athlete.

These manufactured and fairly tightly circumscribed player-led training times were also perceived as beneficial to the development of positive relationships between players and between the players and the coach, which most coaches highlighted as paramount to team performance and success in the long run. These specific statements about the importance and benefits of giving athletes a sense of ownership and independence also fit within a larger and increasingly popular psychological rhetoric around the positive benefits of athlete-centred teaching and coaching approaches (Becker, 2009; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Nelson, Cushion, Potrac, & Groom, 2012). Drawing on Foucauldian perspective, Denison et al. (2017) have shown that athlete-centred approaches, nevertheless, do very little to destabilise in any significant manner sports' strong disciplinary legacy.

Efforts by the coaches in our study to balance fun with highly structured serious hard work was omnipresent throughout our interviews and something that all the coaches wrestled with and handled in various ways. At the same time, however, there was actually little player input into the training. Furthermore, what little input players did have mostly concerned trivial components of training or team bonding activities outside of training. Thus, while there might be a powerful rhetoric in place around the importance of player involvement, ownership and decision-making, we did not hear from the coaches how this was being implemented into the aspect of coaching that is seen to matter the most: the design of training practices. With that said, while there is a clear disconnect between the

powerful rhetoric around holistic development and athlete-centred coaching and actual coaching practices, fun does seem to be one concept which encourages athletes' active involvement in training even if trivial and symbolic.

Denison et al. (2017) have demonstrated that the disconnect between athlete-centred coaching rhetoric and actual coaching practices can be a result of coaches lacking the critical tools to problematize the effects of a lifetime of sporting discipline. This was very evident in our interviews. For example, Steve discussed how much his players struggled with "letting loose" and "just having fun" when given free time in practice:

They struggle at the beginning. They get into it after a while but we find that they are just as driven as we are as coaches. They all go to work on some serious type things whether it is their finishing, whether it is their striking a ball over distance.

Steve's athletes struggle to "just have fun" and their choice to work on their technical skills during their free athlete led practice time, demonstrates the powerful effects of long term sporting discipline. Indeed, even when in theory his athletes were allowed to do what they wanted, Steve found that they continued to engage in sporting practices that fit within the logic of performance sport and the norms of what being a "good" varsity athlete entails (i.e. being driven, self-motivated, hardworking and disciplined).

Although many athletes do indeed enjoy working hard, Steve, as a coach, was concerned that his athletes seem incapable of ever thinking outside of this performance logic. From a Foucauldian perspective, it is not surprising that Steve's athletes understood having fun within the discursive boundaries of being a good athlete: that is someone who enjoys exhibiting attitudes and behaviours that align with being serious, focused, dedicated and disciplined. As a result, coaches find it difficult to implement practices that would indeed problematize discipline and the production of docile athletes.

Naturalising competitive practices and norms of masculinity

While fun is put to specific strategic uses in training and outside of training to naturalise dominant disciplinary sporting practices, it is also used in a similar way within competitive settings, albeit to a lesser extent. Indeed, for most of the coaches in our study, competitions are in and of themselves fun. Therefore, they felt less of a responsibility to incorporate fun into competitive setting since it happens "organically," at least for those athletes who are "true" competitors. As Harry (men's team sport) put it:

The guys at this level have been weeded out and the guys that don't have fun doing that usually have not made it this far or have been cut or released or not made teams or not progressed. So, for the most part our guys have fun when they are competing and winning.

Athletes' ability to have fun during competitions and in competitive settings was indeed important to most of coaches in our sample as they believed it was tied

to performance and success. However, it was particularly emphasized in sports that involved heavy contact and were highly competitive:

The foundation that you are building in training as a coach is around competition so you have to make sure that you have the right type of people, the type of young men who want to compete, who love competing and have fun. (Fred, men's team sport)

As these quotes from Harry and Fred show, athletes' ability to have fun during competition is strongly tied to dominant understandings of mental toughness and masculinity (Pringle, 2009; Shogan, 1999) and to the making of the "good" varsity athlete. Our interviews echoed Pringle's work where he showed the mutually supportive relationship between the ongoing production of norms of masculinity as competitive, driven and mentally and physically tough and the ongoing production of specific sporting pleasures tied to competition, overcoming bodily pain, rugged physicality and violence in rugby.

Having discussed some of the tensions and struggles that coaches face in their attempts to reconcile "the fun mandate" with current dominant disciplinary practices of performance sport, we next discuss how coaches work to overcome some of these tensions and struggles. We specifically elaborate on how coaches differentiate between what is just "silly fun" and the "fun" tied to performance and further to the development of the successful varsity athlete.

Fun and the psychological benefits of training: the making of the successful varsity athlete

The passionate athlete

The role of fun in athlete development and in the production of the "good" varsity athlete was one that really transpired in our interviews with varsity coaches. The coaches also recruited fun differently depending on whether they coached males or females or both and whether they coached team or individual sports. However, there were also significant overlaps. One of them was the need and desire to work with passionate athletes. This imperative was expressed in most of our interviews:

So you have to have that passion for the game, the program, your teammates, your team, the way the program is run, your coaches and coaching staff and everything else. It's very important if you look at it that way in terms of passion, enthusiasm. (Harry, men's team sport)

Passion and the imperative of being passionate about one's sport as a varsity athlete get mobilised in training to overcome the monotony of repetitive skill work, which as previously discussed, many coaches viewed as not fun but necessary to successful varsity athlete development:

So I always tell my girls, you have to love your sport unconditionally to do this [...] And so that means that they have to do all these things on a daily basis even if they hate it but it does get monotonous for sure. (Bruno, women's team sport coach)

Implicitly, if you have the “right” makeup to be a successful varsity athlete (i.e. you are passionate enough about your sport), you will be able to overcome or overlook the monotony of varsity sport skill training and have fun doing so.

The mentally tough athlete

Furthermore, some of the coaches we interviewed took the relationship between passion and fun and athletic success a step further. They linked athletes’ ability to enjoy characteristically “boring” aspects of varsity sport training to being a good varsity athlete and also being a good teammate. For example, Viola (women’s team sport) asserted:

So those restart periods, it just hurts, their bodies hurt and it is not particularly fun but it’s about that sharing of the community, they are all experiencing it. And my expectations of the veteran players are the role modelling of how to cope with those situations. You can feel sorry for yourself and whine about it or you can go jump in the ice bath together and find some enjoyment in that.

Here Viola is clearly implying that a good varsity athlete with the right mental makeup and a good teammate is not only able to overcome or push through the not fun aspects of varsity sport training such as gruelling preseason training, monotonous skill work, injuries and other similar challenges but that she needs to be able to enjoy this process as well.

Bruno and Viola’s quotes also demonstrate how fun/passion get mobilized to support the construction of specific ideas of being a good varsity athlete and a good teammate, which in turn normalizes everyday disciplinary sporting practices and therefore ignore some of the problematic effects from these practices (e.g. the production of uncritical, coach dependent docile bodies). Within these two powerful normalising ideas of the good teammate and the good athlete, one can readily imagine how difficult it can be for varsity athletes to voice any concerns or struggles they might be having with any aspects of varsity sport training and competing. Fun/passion, therefore, can be said to support the unproblematic reproduction of dominant disciplinary coaching practices in varsity sport.

The self-sacrificing and self-effacing athlete

While some of the coaches we interviewed took the powerful connections between fun/passion and being a good varsity athlete and teammate for granted, others actively worked to make these explicit to their athletes. These coaches viewed these connections as an integral part of successful varsity athlete development and of their role as a varsity coach. Fred (men’s team sport coach), for example, encouraged his athletes to think as follows: “My sacrifice is important and although I hurt right now, I take a lot of pride in that I hurt for this, for my teammates and for what we want to accomplish together.” Fred further emphasized: “So I think that if you can make that link [between fun/passion and being a good teammate]

for them it helps, it helps them have more fun and it helps them get through those hard times without getting down.”

This rhetoric of self-sacrifice was particularly emphasized in heavy contact sports such as football:

But to me, honestly, it is about that greater picture, the greater mission and you have to have a sense of personal satisfaction when you sacrifice for that mission. So if you are training to the point where you are puking and you are sick, if you believe that the mission is important then you can come to terms and rationalize the fact that you feel bad but that you have still helped our mission and the team. And it helps people have fun if they can adopt that mind-set. So much of this is having the right mind-set. (Fred)

Aside from being an important aspect in winning and skill development for varsity sport, passion and fun were also mobilized in the context of team sports to develop group cohesion and homogeneity. As a number of sport psychologists (Turman, 2003; Yukelson, 1997) have argued, there is a positive correlation between fun and group cohesion and homogeneity and team performance and productivity. The coaches we interviewed supported this view. For example, Viola (women's team sport coach) argued: “I think that one of the keys to our success has been finding like-minded athletes who can define fun in the same way.” Viola, then, harnessed fun to normalise a certain type of athlete as ideal for team performance and success. However, this quote also demonstrates how she, like many coaches, did not see fun as a part of an framework of disciplinary and normalising practices that erase difference and as such hinder possibilities for both conceptualising and being an athlete differently.

The competitive and aggressive athlete

Framed as the foundation and backbone of successful athlete and team development, the art and love of competition is naturalised through the making of the good varsity athlete and the good teammate. Reciprocally, the normalisation of competition as fun secures dominant disciplinary varsity training and competing practices as unproblematic. Indeed, if, as Fred put it, the simple fact of “putting more competition into practice makes fun go up,” then coaches can adopt a “laissez faire” attitude to fun since it will occur naturally through infusing more competition into training.

Additionally, the art and love of competition, something that should be natural for the right kind of athletes, was also an attitude that many coaches worked hard at developing in their athletes and viewed as the result of a process of development:

[Both in the] off season and in season training we just surround them with the fact that competition is fun. So then when we compete more and more and that competition becomes more physical and aggressive it is still fun. We keep working and working at [that connection] and it is progressive but then too much of that [competition and physical aggression] and people start getting beat up and nobody has fun when they are hurting and beat up and the coach is saying let's hit each other again. (Fred)

Fred described the love of competition as being on a spectrum. It is both something that people are born with (i.e. they are wired that way), but also something that can be developed through finding ways of infusing competition into training in innovative ways and over time. The final end goal is that varsity athletes will eventually learn to have fun in the specific type of aggressive and violent competition that is normalised in some sports and that will make the team more successful. This is a good example of how discipline can also be productive. Indeed, discipline is so effective precisely because it does not simply repress individuals. Rather, it is productive, it shapes and makes individuals and produces specific forms of normative pleasures which further “bind” people to their own identities (i.e. the pleasure of fitting in within the norm, of being recognized or lauded by one’s coach for being a “good teammate”).

As the various quotes from the coaches in our study show, the normalization of dominant understandings of what it means to be a good teammate are often connected to a very specific and strategic definition of fun linked to a sense of personal satisfaction and pride that comes from hard work and self-discipline (Smith-Maguire, 2008) and performing well as an athlete and as a teammate. This specific definition of fun is, therefore, not process oriented or linked to finding enjoyment in the sporting activity itself during actual training or competing as sport psychologists have promoted as fun’s true purpose (Jackson, 1996, 2000; Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Lloyd & Smith, 2006), but is linked more to a sense of purpose and achievement tied to the successful realisation of specific individual and team goals. It could be argued, therefore, that this specific definition of fun is linked to normative understandings of being a good teammate and athlete and, accordingly, is an additional technique deployed by coaches to make their athletes docile.

The gendering of fun

In addition to being tied to the successful development of the competitive athlete, fun was also highly gendered in nature. For example, fun in the physical battling and in pushing one’s body through pain to be successful was especially prominent in the sports of men’s ice hockey and football. As Fred described:

Football is a very high conflict, and violent sport. So you have to prepare your team for that, they have to compete all the time at a high level otherwise when they take the field against other people who are prepared for that, it’s not going to go well. You want to make sure that they mentally look forward to the competition, that they have fun thinking about the competition.

Fun was strategically instrumentalized by connecting it with physical battling and violence and overcoming pain characterising the very nature and demands of these heavy contact sports. Despite the fact that we did not interview the women’s ice-hockey coach, it is impossible to disregard how this specific instrumentalization of fun coincides with dominant discourses of masculinity as being

aggressive, risk taking and physically and mentally tough (Gerdin & Pringle, 2015; Laurendeau, 2008; Messner, 1990; Pringle, 2009; Pringle & Markula, 2005).

The coaches with both female and male athletes, particularly, gendered fun and thus, appeared to reproduce norms of masculinity and femininity:

Men are a little bit more cutthroat. Women it's more the fact that they feel that they belong to something. They want to be there because they are friends and so that keeps them motivated a little bit longer. However, at the higher levels it changes and it becomes very cutthroat for women as well. Although they still have that sense of wanting to belong whereas men are a little bit more like they would rip your head off to win. I wouldn't say that they don't enjoy fun the same way but it is hard, I am trying to figure out the proper words to use. (Will, men and women's individual sport coach)

As the above excerpt shows, fun and sporting motivation for male athletes is dominantly produced as purposeful, goal oriented, tied to winning and aggressively pursuing performance and success, whereas for female athletes, the production of fun is also largely tied to team bonding and social interactions. Will's perception of gendered differences in fun and motivation also impacted the way he coached his male athletes and female athletes in different ways. For example, while he had no qualms yelling at his male athletes across the room, he would take care not to do so with his female athletes because he perceived this way of correcting errors negatively affected his female athletes' performances. As he put it:

During practice if one of my male athletes is doing something wrong than I can easily just yell out and get them to correct quickly whereas for one of my female athletes yelling out just completely messes up the entire practice. So I have to go over and explain what's going on and why am asking her to do this. So it takes more time but actually once the females buy into what you are doing then they will actually be more loyal than the guys will.

These excerpts show how both male and female athletes are disciplined into performing gender appropriately through fun in varsity sport. "Gendered" fun thus plays a key role in upholding gendered power relations and inequalities both in sport and in wider society. These research findings echo the work of feminist researchers (Ahmed, 2004; Cruikshank, 1993; Fraser & Greco, 2005; Hopkins, Klenes, Flam, & Kuzmics, 2009) who highlighted the instrumental role that pleasures and emotions have historically played in the reproduction of dominant gender relations.

Conclusion

In this study, we sought to develop a better understanding of how coaches incorporate fun, as a psychological construct, into their practices. Our interviews showed that fun is largely instrumentalized by coaches to overcome the "grind" of physical skill training as well as to develop and naturalise such normative psychological qualities as becoming obedient, uncritical, self-sacrificing and self-effacing, mentally tough, competitive and aggressive in a successful athlete. These uses of fun operated to support dominant disciplinary training practices that previous

Foucauldian-informed coaching scholars have shown to be problematic (e.g. periodization, repetitive and monotonous drills, physically gruelling practices). In their everyday practices, the coaches left fun unproblematic following the coaching frameworks and coaching rhetoric that have treated fun as the panacea to any and all sport-related problems. As a result, “making sport fun” is doing very little to create different, more positive coaching practices.

Our study, therefore, supports the previous work of Foucauldian coaching scholars who have highlighted the problematic disciplinary legacy of high-performance sport and have also questioned the capacity of current coaching and coach education frameworks (e.g. LTAD) to address the problematic effects of this legacy for coaches, athletes and the coaching profession at large despite best intentions (Avner et al., 2017; Denison & Avner, 2011; Denison et al., 2017). Indeed, as our interviews showed, coaches did not seem to be able to problematize their use of fun and its role in the reproduction of dominant disciplinary and normalising training practices. This is largely due to the dominance of certain knowledges like sport psychology and the sport sciences in shaping coaches’ understandings and practices of effective training and athlete development (Avner et al., 2017). These knowledges, while useful and productive, do not equip coaches with the necessary critical tools to problematize such an everyday and taken-for-granted practice as the promotion of fun. How can Foucauldian informed coach researchers add to the coaches’ knowledge tool kit to effectively create change towards more ethical coaching practices?

Individual coaches, naturally, can effect positive change. Such change, however, requires that the coaches are able to problematize the current problematic disciplinary and normalising uses of fun to refrain from automatic and uncritical references to fun when they talk about training and competing with their athletes. We suggest, thus, that more Foucauldian coaching researchers, not only document and critique coaches’ current practices, but actively work with coaches to provide new type of knowledges with different coaching tool kits. Such research should include constructive ways of re-opening a space for reflection, critique, creativity and change including the researcher(s), coaches, as well as their athletes. Second, there needs to be more Foucauldian informed content at all levels of coach education geared towards developing “problematization” as a key coaching competency in coach education frameworks. As this means that coach educators be trained in Foucauldian thought, researchers should be involved in research projects with active interventions in changing coach education resources. Finally, coaching researchers need to further continue to explore how the power/knowledge nexus operates in the neoliberal context of national sporting success to privilege certain types of knowledges, unproblematically, as effective and true. Therefore, it is important that all coaching knowledges and “truths” be re-politicised and, thus, opened up for critical scrutiny and examination using Foucault’s key concepts of discourses (understood as ways of knowing) and power relations. Investigations using key Foucauldian concepts would allow for greater ethical transformative

possibilities both for the subjects of knowledge (the coaches and the athletes) and the object of knowledge (sport coaching). A future research direction, could, therefore, involve working closely with coach educators and coaches to devise and integrate less disciplinary training and coaching practices related to fun within coaching curricula and coaching practices.

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