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Abstract

It has been suggested by some authors that, given the relationship between dependence and vulnerability to exploitation, a shift in coaching away from surveillance and control and towards autonomy-supportive behaviours by coaches will be conducive to athlete welfare (Denison, Mills, and Konoval 2017; Mills and Denison 2013; Purdy and Jones 2011). This paper utilises an ethnographic approach, underpinned by the theoretical position of the later writings of Foucault, to understand the autonomous practices of athletes in a Japanese university rowing club. Of particular interest are the ways in which the relative absence of the coach contributes to athlete autonomy. The long-term sport-education of these Japanese university rowers results in an enduring subjectification that no longer requires the intervention of any coach. At the same time, these Japanese rowers still actively and autonomously engage in practices of the self, expressed in non-strategic, interactional ways.

Keywords

Japan, rowing, Foucault, *bukatsudo*, civic education

Introduction:

Over the past two decades several sociological investigations of Western sport have utilized a Foucauldian framework to investigate the effects of coaching practice on athletic subjectification and governmentality (for example, Avner et al. 2017; Barker-Ruchti and Tinning 2010; Burke and Hallinan 2008; Chapman 1997; Claringbould et al. 2015; Denison 2010; Denison and Mills 2014; Denison et al. 2017; Denison et al. 2013; Jones et al. 2016; Markula and Pringle 2006; Mills 2017; Mills and Denison 2013; Shogan 1999, 2007). However, with the exception of Miller's (2013) work on corporal punishment, there has been little engagement with Foucault in Japanese sport settings. In this paper we consider how coaching practices operate at a Japanese University Rowing Club in the relative absence of a coach (McDonald 2005), where the athletes largely and successfully self-coach (Purdy and Jones 2011).

In order to start to understand the effect of subjectification on, and the opportunities for autonomy for, the members of this rowing club it is necessary to recognize the unique characteristics of the *bukatsudo* [BURC]. *Bukatsudo* are extremely popular and operate in almost all Japanese education settings from Junior High School to University (Cave 2004).[1] As sites of apparently voluntary activities, they are characterized by a range of "disciplinary processes and concepts" (McHoul and Grace 1993, 3) that act on the bodies of members. A major difference between Western and Japanese sports settings is that whilst the former's goals are more geared to the enhancement of the sporting performances of student-athletes, the latter's goals in many, although not all, Japanese sport-education contexts are more inclined to 'civic' outcomes.

This is not to say Western sports aren't concerned with the character-building ethos of their origins, rather that scientization and rationalization in Western settings

has had a particular influence on the way that sports are done generally focusing on measurable efficiency related to performance. Similarly it would be incorrect to suggest that Japanese athletes were not interested in winning or that there aren't coaches who take a far more hands on role utilizing practices from the latest in sport science. However, the organization and structure of Japanese sport, being almost entirely located within the education system, has explicit connections with moral and social education (McDonald and Komuku 2008).

In the case of this rowing club, the importance of the technical efficiencies of rowing run a distant second to the civic efficiencies of becoming a Japanese citizen. The notion of citizenship here refers to the explicit understanding members had that once they graduate from university they will become *shakaijin* (a person in society). This is not to suggest a universally shared and homogeneous idea of citizenship, rather that membership of the *bukatsudo* in university indicates that students have actively chosen to commit to a process of socialization whose focus is very much geared to learning effective interpersonal and hierarchical social skills deemed necessary to become *shakaijin* (McDonald 2005). This sentiment is captured succinctly by one of the fourth year rowers:

> Most students at university don't want to do hard work or get up early or show commitment to something. I have chosen this option so that does make me different to most students. I am the type of person who can advise other people without making them uncomfortable. The type of person who has the right mentality and social skills to be effective. I'm the sort of person who has a strong will and determination to stick things out and finish the job. Rowing has taught me this (McDonald 2005, 183).

In the remainder of this paper we examine some of the previous sport research utilizing Foucault before expanding on the specific context of the *bukatsudo* and the Japanese university rowing club that we observed. Following this we apply Foucault to our data to highlight three insights into Japanese student-athlete rowing at this particular club; the importance of rank in the regulation of training and living time and space, the logic of selection based on collective harmony, and the production of civic education in the absence of a coach. In doing so, we consider this club as emblematic of what Fraser (2009, 237) suggests are the "three defining features… of Foucauldian discipline: totalization, social concentration within a national frame, and self-regulation." We consider how a coaching logic that focuses on civic education, rather than sporting results, opens up the potential outside of the Japanese context (Crocket 2017, 23) for forms of coach-athlete relationships that are productive of relatively "autonomous, self-regulating" (Fraser 2009, 240) athlete subjectivities. Whether the production of such self-governed graduates is possible or not in the national frame of a Western sport-education model, we leave for others to decide.

Foucault and Coaching Rowing

Gwen Chapman (1997) observed the effects of Foucauldian subjectification in terms of the weight-reducing techniques that were taken up by lightweight female rowers in relating to, understanding and transforming themselves as rowing subjects. The biomedical sports apparatus, supported by coaching practices, produced discourses about weight control that incited the rowers to engage in practices of self-surveillance and self-control over their food intake and body weight, as part of their successful subjectification as rowers. According to Chapman (1997, 211-212), the effects of these discourses were that the rowers were continually "judging their actions against

standards of shared norms. They… told stories of the guilt they felt when they ate foods they were not supposed to be eating," and this shame was often made public in a confession to teammates or coaches, and a redemptive action. The rowers, encouraged by this rhetoric of individual responsibility, accepted the discourses of, and exercised the strategies of, making weight on themselves, monitored mostly by themselves and their teammates. Yet at the same time, the coach remained present, able to publicly punish rowers as an expression of "the formidable rights of the sovereign" (Foucault 1991, 47). Western sporting contexts at almost all educational levels through to professional sport produces a "disciplinary framework that normalizes maximum coach control" (Denison et al. 2017, 772).

Shogan's (1999) research suggested an emphasis within the performance-based sporting discourse of constraint of the time, space and actions of the athlete. Many authors have taken up this idea in examinations of the position of the coach in enforcing this constraint (see for example: Barker-Ruchti and Tinning 2010; Claringbould et al. 2015; Denison 2010; Denison et al. 2017; Denison and Mills 2014; Jones et al. 2005; Manley et al. 2016; Mills 2017; Mills and Denison 2013; Purdy and Jones 2011). In contrast, the Japanese sport-educational process of athlete development, at least in the BURC, appears remarkably different to the process in Western sporting educational institutions. The formal figure of a coach is mostly absent from the context.[2] At the same time, the coaching pedagogy remains strong in the context, and the truth effects that are produced retain some similar characteristics to the Western models.

Foucauldian Autonomy

For many, it may seem odd to argue that a Foucauldian reading could suggest any sense of autonomous practice. Wisnewski presents the argument of others that the

"impotency of the subject" in many readings of Foucault's earlier work must call into question "the very idea of autonomy" (2000, 417). Foucault expanded on his earlier work concerning institutional forms of discipline, to investigate the non-institutional methods of subjectification. In a regularly cited quote from Foucault (1991, 25-26):

> [T]he body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs... the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body.

Foucault's positive notion of power deals with the issue of how time and labour can be 'extracted' from bodies who are not normally threatened, coerced, or in positions of exploitation, and who may be legislatively guaranteed freedom from these direct and sovereign forms of control (Mills and Denison 2013). For Foucault, this trick is achieved because the circulation and exercise of modern power produces ideas, concepts and disciplines of knowledge, which establish positions, promote subjectivities, institutions and societies, and produce normalised and preferential ways of behaviour in the everyday lives of people, as well as resistance towards these preferential ways (Mills 2017; Sailors and Weaving 2017; Pizzorno 1992).

However, the final writings of Foucault on governmentality explained an understanding of power as "action upon the action of others" (Foucault 1983, 221; also see Patton 2014, 14; Wisnewski 2000, 427) that allowed for the individual to actively exercise a degree of relative autonomy (Foucault 1988, 11; Olivier 2010, 292) in relation to themselves and others within the realm of possibilities in their existence, "even if this involves the smaller details of social life" (Wisnewski 2000, 427; also see Wong 2010, 282; Crocket 2017, 23). Hammersley and Traianou go so far as to state

that the later writings of Foucault are such that: “Autonomy is, in many ways, his central theme” (2014, 227).

In his final writings and lectures, Foucault moves away from a universally strategic model of power/resistance based on “the war-repression schema” of struggle against, and mastery over, others (Patton 2014, 20). Foucault suggests that his research fragments on various topics had become very repetitive, “always falling into the same rut, the same themes, the same concepts” (Foucault 2003, 3 cited by Patton 2014, 19). He (2003, 18 cited by Patton 2014, 19) continues:

> I would like to try to see the extent to which the binary schema of war and struggle, of the clash between forces, can really be identified as the basis of civil society, as both the principle and the motor of the exercise of political power. Are we really talking about war when we analyse the workings of power? ... Is power quite simply a continuation of war by means other than weapons and battles?

In his final works on governmentality, Foucault develops an understanding of power, such that power relations can be understood as “a mode of action that does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions; an action upon an action, on possible or actual future or present actions” (Foucault 2000, 340 cited by Patton 2014, 23). As Patton explains, in this understanding of power: “The parties to relations of power are now conceived as agents endowed with a degree of freedom” (2014, 23), who make sense of themselves from an “array of possibilities” (Golob 2015, 676; also see Wong 2010, 278; Sailors and Weaving 2017, 436-437). This negotiation of power relations is not necessarily a struggle between dominant and resistant forces, a characterisation of autonomy as self-sufficient oppositional activity that also binds

itself to the war-repression schema. Foucault (1988, 18) is explicit in contrasting the non- strategic interactions and relations of power from systems of domination:

> To exercise power over another, in a sort of open strategic game, where things could be reversed, that is not evil… I don't see where evil is in the practice of someone who, in a given game of truth, knowing more than another, tells him what he must do, teaches him, transmits knowledge to him, communicates skills to him. The problem is rather to know how you are to avoid in these practices- where power cannot not play and where it is not an evil in itself- the effects of domination which will… put a student under the power of an absolutely authoritarian professor.

Wisnewski argues that linking autonomy only to resistance is problematic precisely because both the degree and efficacy of resistance is mostly a contingent matter depending on the array of possibilities within the social institutions and discourses that autonomy emerges from (2000, 434). In other fields, autonomy could, just as often, produce a field of possibilities that include non-strategic interactions involving "communication, reciprocity and mutual recognition" (Patton 2014, 18) within a communal or shared social practice resulting in the "intensification of social relations" (Foucault 1986 cited by Wong 2010, 287). For Foucault, the technologies of the self:

> …permit individuals to effect by their own means, *or with the help of others*, a certain number of operations… to attain a certain state of perfection, or happiness, or purity, of supernatural power, and so on (2003d 146 cited by Wong 2010, 282. *Our emphasis*.)

It is this idea of autonomous, non-strategic interaction that the remainder of the paper will apply to the field of possibilities for autonomous action in the BURC.

Context and Methodology:

The *bukatsudo* has its origins in post Meiji restoration [1868] of Japan and the subsequent processes of rapid modernisation. Originally established as part of the educational experiences of Japanese elites, the *bukatsudo* was gradually instituted in all educational settings and from the outset encouraged apparent student autonomy. Imbued with the values of Buddhism and Confucian philosophy, the *bukatsudo* became a site for the delivery of "muscular spirituality" and a secondary curriculum focused on moral and civic education (Manzenreiter 2014, 40; McDonald and Komuku 2008). To understand the *bukatsudo* and the educative experiences of the bodies within, it is important to recognise that in a Japanese context, the project of physical education and sport becomes one of self-cultivation (McDonald 2005). Self-cultivation refers to the process by which individuals improve themselves through hardship, suffering and discipline, with the goal of becoming productive and harmonious members of society (Rohlen and Bjork 1998).

One of the features of the *bukatsudo* is the almost total commitment of self and time required in the process of being a member. This was the case at the BURC. From freshman to senior year, rowing is the central point of a student member's university life. Training runs for 10-11 months of the year, 6 days a week, and often twice a day. Members of the club spend a large part of their student life in residence at the boathouse. Indeed in relative terms training only occupies a small percentage of the total time members spend together. Being a member is a singular pursuit. There is little time or energy left at the end of each week to do other things. At the BURC, the training volume is easily equivalent to an international representative rower from a Western context,

though the rower is far from elite in a performative sense. Further, once they graduate from university, few of the rowers ever row again.[3]

Importantly, being a member of the BURC is the continuation of previous sport educational experiences. Whilst most had been members of rowing clubs at high school, all had belonged to some form of *bukatsudo* (McDonald 2005). This is significant as the core elements of civic efficiency, namely hierarchy and harmonious human relations, are at the centre of all *bukatsudo* (see McDonald and Hallinan 2005; McDonald 2009). Social relationships are grounded in a *kohai/sempai* (junior/senior) dynamic that gives meaning to group membership and hierarchy, and encourages individual acceptance of these hierarchies as productive (McDonald 2009). Significantly the boat club is a largely separate organisation with little direct involvement from the university in its day-to-day operations. This encourages students to run their own affairs and promotes relative autonomy, self-sacrifice and self-imposed discipline (Kelly 1998). The rowers are responsible for the organisational [budgeting and events] and operational [training programmes, crew selection, regattas] running of the club. Whilst there were coaches [a local veteran rower and a few graduates] engaged at the club, their presence was intermittent as opposed to regular or continuous, and their input was more consultative than directional (McDonald 2005). The coach at the BURC had no bearing on crew selection, training programme, dietary intake, or motivation of rowers (McDonald 2005; McDonald and Burke 2011).

In order to understand how this club becomes a site for self-cultivation, we utilised a multi-dimensional methodology drawing upon ethnographic techniques including participant observation, questionnaires, informal conversations, semi-structured interviews and extensive field notes. The BURC can be described as a medium sized programme established after the Second World War. It is in the Kansai

region on the banks of the Seta River an area that acts as a home to local high school clubs and university clubs from Shiga, Kyoto, and Osaka.[4]

As a rower and rowing coach with over fifteen years of experience, rowing provided the lead author a certain degree of symbolic and physical capital that held its currency in the field of Japanese university sport. Beginning in 1999 and developed further with visits in 2001, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2009 and 2013, it was the capacity to row in the boat that allowed access to the world of Japanese university rowing in the BURC.[5] For most of these periods, ranging from one week to two months, the lead author-rower lived at the boathouse with the other rowers and as much as possible adhered to their daily routines and rituals. The essential rapport required to gain full acceptance into the BURC took longer with some of the gate keepers than with others and it was opportunities such as attending drinking parties or completing hard training sessions with these members that confirmed the author's position at the BURC (McDonald 2009; McDonald and Sylvester 2014). The findings discussed in this paper draw upon this methodological framework and in order to protect the identity of informants we fictionalised identities and amalgamated data as recommended by Grenfell and Rinehart (2003).

Rank and the Production of Japanese Rowing Bodies:

According to Danaher, Schirato and Webb (2000, 51), "disciplinary power accords a person a space within an institution and a rank within a system." Hierarchy in Japanese rowing is based around the Confucian tenets of *jōge kankei* [literally up and down relationships]. *Jōge kankei* was important, not just at the rowing club, but was emphasised at all levels of interaction in Japan, from the use of honorific language to the individual awareness of one's position relative to another in terms of *kōhai* [junior],

sempai [senior] or *dōkyūsei* [same rank] (McDonald 2005; McDonald 2009; Nakamura 2005). The Confucian notions of hierarchy operated extremely well at the BURC because they were the continuation of an understanding developed from all rowers' earliest years, including high school, which members had clearly excelled in using. The embodiment of *jōge kankei* was a prerequisite for membership of any rowing club, not just at university, but also in high school. Those who have managed to arrive at the BURC on *suisen*[6] [special entry] were those who have excelled in their ability to master the dynamics of *jōge kankei* (McDonald 2005). For example the following field note captured the first minutes of the rowing day in relation to useful space and the importance of rank:

> Within minutes of the captain's rounds of the dorms, he goes past each room only once, the whole boathouse has mobilised. Five minutes after the wakeup call all the rowers are running along the river warming, and waking, up. On return to the boathouse every member begins their stretching rituals. Blankets are brought out of a large box and each rower places his on the ground in two lines starting at the front of the boat storage boathouse and working toward the back. The captain always positions himself at the front left hand side with a variety of 3rd and 4th year students taking the other side. With the exception of Taka [a very talented freshman who always is directly behind Hiro, the captain] the 1st year students are all positioned down the back (McDonald 2005, 123).

The meaning of seating arrangements in office meetings to designate a hierarchy of those involved in the meeting has been pointed out by Ogasawara (1998). The

stretching positioning acted similarly in designating the importance of rank at the university club.

The hierarchies, or relations of power, in the rowing experience were lived out in public. The architecture of the club meant that bodies were constantly on display, not only in training but also when in the shower block, changing for bed, sleeping, and semi-naked at meal times (McDonald 2005). At any time that one is being observed, the observer was more likely than not also a rower in a relationship understood within the disciplines of *jōge kankei*. All rowers were subject to the critical gaze of other higher or lower ranked members of the group (McDonald 2005), rather than the coach. Furthermore, "the powerful emotions of guilt and shame" (Jones et al. 2016, 45) exert an imposing force on all Japanese rowers, such that "non-conformity of any kind becomes a potentially punishable offence" (Denison et al. 2013, 395). Utilising another of Foucault's ideas, the Japanese rowing context is a panopticon without a central guard tower, a "perfection of power" (Foucault 1991, 201), where the rowers are capable of observing each other in a disciplinary gaze and the disciplinary coaching discourse did not need a specific speaker to "make useful individuals" (Foucault 1991 cited by Jones et al. 2016, 39).[7]

The important thing to note about this form of hierarchy for the primary thesis in this paper is that, based on its relational nature, it is not merely a top down application of power-dominance; rather it fosters and values consensus based decision-making and allows all members to "structure the field of other possible actions" (Foucault 1983, 222). In other words the fact that all members have at some stage been both *kohai* and *sempai*, either at university or at a previous *bukatsudo*, means that there is a mutual recognition of the various expectations of each rank. But it also allows for all members to reconfigure the "whole field of responses, reactions, and possible inventions [that]

may open up" (Foucault 1982, 789; our insertion). We will now focus on the process of rowing selections at the BURC to demonstrate the way different subjects were able to actively constitute themselves within practices and patterns that are found in the BURC, and broader Japanese culture that are "proposed, suggested and imposed" (Foucault 1988, 11) on these members by their culture, society and other members of the BURC.

Jōge Kankei, 'Coaching', Collective Harmony and Japanese Rowing Selection

In contrast to almost any other sport context where one of the major roles of a coach would be team selection, the role of the coach in selection at this Japanese University Rowing Club was unimportant. Examining the process of crew selection, one of the most significant events on any Japanese university rowing club's calendar, provides an insight into the various civic education practices of consensus making, collective responsibilities, and social relations that are central to meaning and the subjectivities of members, and that took place without the formal figure of a coach present.

McDonald (2005, 148-153) describes the process of crew selection at the BURC. Selection was an exhausting process at the BURC. It commenced with selection for the number one boat crew at the BURC, the coxed four. The BURC used the method of seat racing to select the members of each crew. Ordinarily in other rowing contexts, seat racing would be conducted over a straight course involving two or more crews so that individuals in each boat compete against one another via the subtle and informed manipulation of the crew combinations by the rowing coach. Seat racing utilizes the logic of the scientific method, with the goal being to prove which individual consistently makes the boat she/he is in go faster.

The BURC operated their seat racing differently. Three positions were already decided, based on consensus, hierarchy and ability, largely by the team captain and other experienced rowers [and not the coach]. Only one boat was used and three potential members were each given a chance to row in the crew. The test was a *sub-maximal* workout between two bridges. In effect, maximal contribution to boat speed could not be measured. Although this stretch of the river is not straight (meaning there is the added variable of the coxswain's steering), it is directly in full view of the boathouse, where the selectors can observe. As fourth year rower Ito espouses:

> This [method of crew selection] is the club way, its very important. We do it here [in front of the boathouse] because the water is much smoother. Feeling is very important. Hiro and the others will decide which one [rower] feels better and they will be selected (McDonald 2005, 149).

With 'feeling' being so important in the selection process, there was no way that a person external to the group of rowers, such as a coach, could be included in discussions about selection.

At no stage in the selection process at the BURC was the question of which rower makes the boat go faster mentioned (McDonald 2005), nor was it possible, based on the variability of the process, to verify. When asked later as to the selection of the first year, Taka, into the final position in the number one boat, one of the selectors explained that he was "very flexible at fitting into the dynamics of the crew, he adapted quickest of all the rowers" (McDonald 2005, 149) The captain, Hiro, who was Taka's *sempai*, was willing to go into more depth:

> At the time Taka had the basic skills and passion, plus he is improving all the time. His attitude is very good. He has the enthusiasm and is very keen

> to do well. I have seen Taka since he came to the university and he has improved most out of all the others (McDonald 2005, 149).

The apparent 'scientific objectivity' of seat racing was even further compromised by the unevenness in the selection process of the number two boat, the coxed quad scull (McDonald 2005). The process went all through Saturday and into Sunday morning using Tana as a constant rower whilst trialling a different partner in a double scull craft each time. Conditions changed during the day from good in the morning to difficult, in the afternoon, and understandably Tana was exhausted by the end of the day. Times recorded for the different members involved in the seat race became meaningless because of the variability of both the race conditions and Tana's capacity to row. The group of possible crew members was reduced from seven to five to three and then to two remaining candidates who competed for the final seat with a bridge-to-bridge selection row on Sunday afternoon. It is important to again emphasize that this seat racing process was for a position in the coxed quad scull boat, but the seat racing was done in a double scull. The final part of the selection process, the selection discussion, demonstrated the interactional nature of the power relations:

> The selected members, Tana, Ochi, Yama, as well as Hiro, Fuji and Yoshi, meet in the dining room and pour over the video of the two combinations. Hiro is in control of the process, however he allows Tana to run the discussion. Each person is expected to contribute some opinion, though the younger the member, the less they say. The comments all revolve around how it felt with the different combinations. *Seishin*, feeling, length, are the key areas of concern for the crew, though each person is careful not to mention only one of the candidates, and no one actually says anything

> negative about them, only that one was better than the other. Finally after 30 minutes of intense discussion, the members of the quad cover their eyes and raise their hands to vote for one or other of the candidates. The vote is unanimous for Takahiro. Hiro validates the decision. Both Musashi and Takahiro are called into the dining room where it is left to Tana to convey the decision. After almost two days of process the announcement takes less than a couple of minutes. No celebrating or weeping, just a nod of acceptance, and the meeting is over (McDonald 2005, 152-153).

In the case of this club, the process of seat selection had come to symbolize more than who rows in what crew. The individual's spirit and capacity to endure is apparently exposed to the scrutiny of the selectors in the exhaustive and inclusive nature of the seat-racing process. Further, the consultative selection process then allowed Hiro, the team captain, to demonstrate his/the Japanese leadership style. He encouraged discussion and allowed others, particularly Tana, to have an autonomous voice. This form of selection, though very time consuming, resulted in a sharing of influence in keeping with the concepts of human relations and consensus based decision-making, important concepts of civic education in Japan (McDonald 2005). The coaching pedagogy stands in sharp contrast to the top-down, ‘coach-in-charge’ orientation of Western coaching styles (Mills and Denison 2013, 144).

There were inevitably decisions that, regardless of how collective the process, could lead to the possibility of considerable disharmony at the club. An example from McDonald’s thesis (2005, 221-222) explains this. Musashi was overlooked in selection for the quad scull. As this was his final year, and he was a *sempai*, the communication of this decision left him agitated and disappointed. He immediately stormed out of the

boathouse. After a period of time, he returned. Following another hour of conciliation with Hiro, Musashi was in a far better frame of mind. He accepted the responsibility of acting as *sempai* to his double scull partner, Koichi. Explaining the event, McDonald (2005, 221) concludes that Musashi's initial angry response required harmonisation with the hierarchy within the club's rowing discourse and this was done by "re-affirming the concepts of *jōge kankei* and the club's values" as important to his Japanese subjectivity, and not only to his position in BURC as a rower. By taking a position as a *sempai* to his partner in the double scull, Musashi adopted a position of significance in the hierarchical structure of the BURC, rather than just a crewmember. Musashi made this choice with relative autonomy within a knowledge-power game where subjectification operated largely unquestioned within agreed upon hierarchies, but there still remained some space for "actions on the actions of others".[8]As Sailors and Weaving (2017, 437) explain, "one may act autonomously even when one does not overtly exhibit the signs of having transformed oneself."

The 'Absent' Coach and Rowing Education and Training

The absence of coaches was not accidental but intended to sustain the "autonomous utility of working players" (Jones et al. 2016, 44) to subjectify themselves to the discourses of the university sporting club and Japanese society. In contrast to the commonsense beliefs of Western sports that "leaving athletes unsupervised to make mistakes in their training is not an option if athletes are to be managed effectively" (Denison et al. 2013, 395), the civic educational goals of the Japanese context would be compromised *by* the presence of a coach. This Japanese rowing environment was largely self-regulatory (McDonald 2005). Knowledge and skill development was largely produced without explicit intervention by the coaches at the BURC (McDonald

2005). The reinforcement of hierarchy, discipline and subjectivity also occurred without the presence of the coach. As the female captain, Nana, explained in contrasting her university experience to her high school team, referred to as UHS:

> A big difference with UHS is since we don't have coaches at university, when we face difficulties, hit the wall, we need to find a way to improve. We have to think by ourselves how to solve this problem. We have to be very independent in our approach to achieve this. For example, when I wrote the programme I began by looking for the various members weaknesses. Some lacked endurance, others power, some skill. Then I ask *sempai* and other teams for ideas. Our club have had a traditional programme but I found that maybe it doesn't work. So I asked Chuo University and Meiji Life (rowing team whose membership comes from the Meiji Life Insurance company's employees) and some others about their programme, about training workload and technique. I then *created my own programme* based on a combination of different ideas (McDonald 2005, 116).

As stated previously, the pedagogical rowing action at the BURC "was usurped by a secondary curriculum that reinforced hierarchy, demonstration of bodily discipline, self-sacrifice, cultural conformity, and harmony" (McDonald 2005, 209). The underpinning morality inscribed in the action of a rowing race was the ability to endure and conquer pain (McDonald 2005), in order to affirm the rowers' mutual obligations to both the other working members of the crew and the collective responsibilities to past members of the BURC. The development of the ability to endure pain also translated into the non-periodization of Japanese rowing training. In contrast

to the suggestion by Avner et al (2017, 103; also see Mills and Denison 2013, 144) that Western coaching resources suggest that effective coaching sees that "the recommended approach to physical training was *always* a periodized approach," the BURC approach was to train as hard, as often and as long as the team could endure, as a public demonstration of their *seishin* capacity (McDonald and Hallinan, 2005; McDonald 2005).

Denison suggests that the strength of coaching discourses, traditions and hierarchies makes it difficult for any coach to create novel training methods with the result that "coaches can easily get locked into fixed ways of thinking about athlete development and preparation" (2010, 470). He further suggests that it is only with a critically reflective understanding of these traditions and relations of power within the field or culture of their sport, that coaches will be able to resist and produce "intelligent training (programs) as opposed to straightforward increases in volume or time on task" (2010, 472). Adding to the power of the disciplining and normalizing technologies in Japanese rowing is the reality that the training ritual is done in a very public fashion. All the rowing clubs in the area share the same river, so all aspects of rowing were subject to the external eye of every other club on the river. If clubs perceived that they were doing more or less training than others this would have created a sense of superiority or inferiority. In this shared setting, it becomes even more difficult for training innovation when sport is part of an overall coaching pedagogy that is part of Japanese civic education. The noticeably standardised drills and exercises of most rowing clubs in the area could be viewed as not wanting to stand out (McDonald 2005). The level of risk inherent in adopting other forms of training practice invited attention and scrutiny from other practitioners and therefore the potential of exposure and ostracism as a recalcitrant subjectivity. This risk was in keeping with the Buddhist

inspired Japanese adage that “the nail that stands out will be hammered in” (McDonald 2005, 218).[9] As a result of not wanting to ‘stand out’ most forms of training and practice were produced through observation and imitation (McDonald and Burke 2011), rather than advanced through some form of novel coaching.

Even in cases where over-training, training with injury or the rigidity of the training programme resulted in rowing crews posting substandard results in competition, the response from members was not to question their preparation, technique, training or the underpinning philosophy of the program/culture, as set by the leaders and consensually agreed to by the members of the group. Rather they would collectively recommit to these very processes, the acknowledgement being that failure occurred because they were not being disciplined enough, tough enough, or committed enough to the exhaustive use of time (Foucault 1991, 154). As a result, subjectification was actually strengthened during failure; disciplining and normalizing techniques and hierarchical ranking structures assumed greater importance and consensual and harmonious agreement within the BURC was gained with even less resistance (McDonald 2005). [10] Again, this renewal of commitment and motivation was done in the absence of the coach.

Conclusion

Why turn to the final works of Foucault, rather than focus on the more obvious practices of subjectification that produces the obedience of the rowers in this context.[11] We certainly acknowledge the many disciplining and normalizing aspects of Japanese rowing discourse and Japanese civic education, and have previously used the war-repression model of Foucauldian subjectification in an earlier paper to describe some specific technologies of discipline and normalization on rowers in this context

(McDonald and Burke, 2011). Subjectification of the body is central to understanding sport and education in Japan.

In contrast to Cassidy's (2010, 439 cited by Avner et al. 2017, 105) claim that "holistic coaching remains highly ambiguous," the Japanese model that we investigated has a coaching pedagogy that is focused on the holistic development of the athlete within a Japanese context. The coaching pedagogy in the BURC is "athlete-centred," because the Japanese rowers in this club apprehended themselves through the normalised discourses of BURC rowing and Japanese hierarchical relationships. A rower would have engaged in weight training to increase strength or would have run more to build endurance, practicing a "subjection that never reaches its limit" (Foucault, 1995, p.162 cited by Denison et al. 2013, 393). However, none of this extra training would be directed via the opinions of sports science experts or sport coaches, and none of it would pursue sport-specific subjectification, as with Western athletes. The willingness to train harder was brought on by the desire to demonstrate endurance of pain, capacity to contribute to the harmony of the boat, and understanding of rank to other members of the group. These were important qualities of Japanese subjectification at the BURC. It was the "self-regulated pedagogical machinery" operating at the club, the "indivisible system of material and symbolic relations" in time and space, which provides insights into many of the practices and discourses that subjectified members of this boat club within a broader Japanese culture (Wacquant 2004, 127). But this description did not provide significant insight into problematization of the coach-athlete model.

Some authors that were cited in the introduction of this paper have focused on the production of docile or resistant athlete subjectivities to coaching practices; that is, the analysis has stayed within the war-repression model to critically examine the

disciplining and normalizing nature of sport and sport coaching (Avner, Denison and Markula 2019). The recent work by Denison and others using the Foucauldian notion of problematization to inform coach education and practice suggest a destabilization of the disciplining model of coaching as an ideal to work towards (Avner, Denison and Markula 2019; Avner, Markula and Denison 2017; Claringbould, Knoppers and Jacobs 2015; Denison 2010; Denison and Mills 2014; Denison, Mills and Jones 2013; Denison, Mills and Konoval 2017; Mills and Denison 2013). But such programs have failed to find 'empirical examples' of the successful use of such a model (Crocket 2017, 32). Quite often, it appears to be the existence of the coach that gets in the way. Even autonomy-supportive actions by coaches (Konoval, Denison and Mills 2018) or the support of 'fun' in college sports by coaches (Avner, Denison and Markula 2019) have been employed instrumentally to discipline athletes' behaviours, orientations, relations and subjectification.

Is our current reading, that the absence of the coach promotes the opportunity for greater athlete autonomous action, closer to the truth than our previous one? Following the poststructuralist notion of truth suggested by Denison and others, we suggest that the model of the 'absent coach' in BURC rowing, may be 'a true' empirical example which problematizes coach-athlete hierarchies, and think that, whilst heavily context-dependent, it should not be dismissed out of hand for sport-education models in other countries.

These later works of Foucault fit well with the contrast in coaching pedagogy that we are emphasising as potentially problematizing and destabilising (Avner, Denison and Markula 2019; Denison and Mills 2014; Mills and Denison 2013; Konoval, Denison and Mills 2018) to the strong disciplinary nature of sports coaching in other contexts. To excessively overstate the influence of this paper in very early

Foucauldian terms from *The Order of Things* (1970, xv cited by McHoul and Grace, 1993, 118), we hope that the position taken will:

> [i]n the wonderment of this … the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking *that*.

We hope that our 'fable' of the BURC will suggest a "creative and subversive" (Golob 2015, 670) form of 'absent coaching' which may be a specific empirical example of problematizing coaching discourse to promote greater space for autonomous action for athletes on the actions of others.

In this respect, our Japanese rowing setting is the counterexample to Markula and Pringle's (2006, 47) position that:

> One should not assume that the employment of disciplinary technologies in sport would necessarily produce well-disciplined athletes… Likewise, we suggest that sporting disciplines that not only produce winners and 'characters' but also losers and the debauched, but more often subjects that are respectfully fragmented.

As the primary goal of this subjectification was not sporting victory, or of being a good varsity athlete and a good teammate (Avner, Denison and Markula 2019), but civic education, the Japanese rowers did not display the range of behaviours of Western student-athletes, and deliberately sought the 'non-fragmented' subject, workplace and community as products. It is not quite the same as Denison, Mills and Konoval's (2017, 781) call "to reframe sport as intrinsically *useless*," so as to produce coaching practices that encourage athlete autonomy. But it does reframe sporting results as intrinsically

useless and uses this valuation to "problematize the century-and-a-half legacy of the association between discipline and coaching" (Denison et al. 2017, 776) by investigating a context outside of Western sports.

Notes

[1] Over 65% of Japanese high-school students are involved in sports club activities at their school, and over 50% of Japanese university students are involved in sports club activities (Blackwood and Friedman 2015).

[2] This is not to say that coaches don't exist in Japanese educational sport. Their presence and influence are certainly more prominent in high school sports. Miller's (2013) extensive analysis of corporal punishment in Japanese school sports indicates the considerable influence on athlete behavior by coaches, however the model at a tertiary level is far more autonomous and less punitive.

[3] As with many sports in Japan there are some companies that have rowing teams (McDonald 2005). There are some rowers who graduate and gain employment at a company in part because of their rowing ability. The company sports model expects however that members complete a full day of work as well as training and competing for the company.

[4] The context and setting for the original ethnographic study by McDonald is reported in his doctoral thesis (2005, 82-85, 129-132).

[5] Much of the data used in this paper is from a published doctoral thesis of nearly fifteen years ago by McDonald (2005). However over the almost fifteen years since data collection, very little change was apparent in the way the club operated. McDonald continues to visit the site up to this day. The stories examined in this paper

remain apparent in the contemporary context of this, and other nearby, rowing clubs. Rather than homogenizing coaching practices in Japan we are utilizing this club model to demonstrate potential alternative models of coaching that produce opportunities for athlete autonomy.

[6] *Suisen* allows students to join a university without having to satisfy the requirements of the entrance examinations (McDonald 2005). In this way *suisen* students are similar to athletes who receive a scholarship in Western contexts.

[7] Denison and Mills (2014, 5) suggest the theoretical possibility of having "the athletes administer training" as a way of both coaches and athletes reversing the common control that coaches have over athletes' bodies and performances. Our viewpoint is that the BURC has achieved this possibility.

[8] Whilst such silent conformity by players in the face of disappointment, physical punishment, occupational uncertainty and verbal abuse, imposed by the coach, trainer or more experienced players, has been observed in other sport settings such as soccer (Manley et al. 2016, 226), the silence of Japanese rowers is part of a lifelong training in the observation of hierarchies.

[9] Spielvogel (2002, 201) notes a similar thing within the staff duties of cleaning in a Japanese fitness club where new staff members "soon learned… the all-important skill of pacing one's own clean-up speed to exactly match that of other staff."

[10] It would be simplistic to suggest that the club rower's were dominated, where relations of power "find themselves firmly set and congealed" (Foucault 1988, 3). First, McDonald has hosted a number of visits by club rowers to Melbourne, Australia. On these visits, and away from the context of the University Rowing Club, club members quickly lose their *seishin habitus* (McDonald and Hallinan 2005), and act differently within a different field of possibilities. Nakamura (2005) suggests a

similar ‘loss’ in the Major League Baseballer, Suzuki Ichiro. Second, even whilst in the BURC, rowers expressed resistant actions, such as refusing normalized drinking (McDonald 2005; McDonald 2009; McDonald and Sylvester 2014).

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