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## Young athletes and their coaches: disciplinary processes and habitus development

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Sport scholars have paid relatively little attention to meanings that participants in recreational youth sport may give meanings to their participation and how those meanings are informed by coaching practices. In this study, we draw on Bourdieu's notions about the development of the habitus, symbolic capital and the positions youth take in the field of sport, and on Foucault's understanding of disciplinary power to explore meanings 29 children, aged 7–18 years, participating in tennis, soccer, swimming or hockey in Dutch sport clubs assigned to their experiences with their coaches. The data from the semi-structured interviews show how the dispositions these youth developed during their sport participation shifted as they gradually became involved in a disciplinary process directed towards improvement, success and winning. When these youths joined a sport club their goal was to learn how to play the game and have fun. As they participated in organised practices over time, they learned that in order to have fun they had to conform to informal rules about behaviour during the practices. Specifically, we show how the logic of discipline, as described by Foucault, shaped this learning process, and contributed to the development of the habitus of these young athletes.

**Keywords:** youth sport; coach; hierarchy; disciplinary power

### Introduction

Youth sport is assigned an increasingly important role in Dutch society. The Ministry of Public Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS, 2005) invests in the development of young talent in sport (elite sport) and stimulates youth to participate in sports and physical activity (sport for all). The significance assigned to youth sport lies in the assumption that sport is a place where youth learn needed social skills and dominant societal values (Coakley, 2006; VWS, 2005). This assumption means coaches are assigned an important role in stimulating youth and that they must have the skills and knowledge to guide youth in their development (Cushion et al., 2010; Light, 2010; Taylor & Garratt, 2010). Because they are assumed to possess technical knowledge about sport performance, coaches tend to be assigned the responsibility for what athletes do and need to know (Cassidy, Jones, & Potrac, 2009; Coakley & Pike, 2009; Givvin, 2001; Johns & Johns, 2000; Jones, 2007). The knowledge and responsibility of coaches tend to define general expectations of a good coach (see

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also Lyle, 2002). The coaching process itself, however, can be seen as a complex practice, wherein both athletes and coaches (re)construct their ideas about a good coach, (Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2006). Knowing what is assumed to be good coaching therefore does not contribute to an understanding of what a coach actually does with the athletes (Cushion, 2007). Young athletes depend on their coaches for both instruction and support. This dependency tends to create a hierarchical relationship between coaches and athletes (Keegan, Harwood, Spray, & Lavallee, 2009). In addition, the behaviours of coaches form an important context in which young athletes create ideas, values and norms about sport. These experiences may have consequences for youth participating in sport and outside the sport context (Coakley & Pike, 2009). In order to gain a better understanding of the values and dispositions, youth learn and create interaction with their coach, we explored how young athletes experience, challenge and adapt to coaches and their behaviours.

A sport club is a situation, similar to the family and school, dominated by perspectives of adults. Coaches for example, use their values and standards to create the context in which youth sport takes place (Cushion & Jones, 2006; McCallister, Blinde, & Weiss, 2000). For example, Barker-Ruchti and Tinning (2010) explored the process of corporeal discipline in women's artistic gymnastics at the elite level and concluded that the structural context and the hierarchical relationship between coach and athlete restricted the choices of athletes and prevented them from reflecting on and seeing themselves as individuals. Purdy and Jones (2011), who studied the relationship between elite rowers and their coaches, reported similar results. The athletes constructed their coach as an expert, who knows what to do, who gives plain and clear instructions and who explains the relevance of her or his instructions. These rowers rarely took a reflexive position and seldom expressed and negotiated the meanings coaches assigned to their experiences and expectations. They seemed to prefer to be disciplined by their coach. Purdy and Jones attributed this lack of self-reflection and negotiation to a training culture that stressed 'diligence and hard work through individual physical exertion' (p. 243) as the only way to become successful. They described this 'docility' as both active and passive. Athletes were active during practices but passive in terms of making decisions or reflecting on their improvement. These two studies focused on specific sports such as rowing and gymnastics and on elite athletes who may be highly motivated to improve and have a relatively long history of participation in sport. Not all youth participate in elite sport; however, most participate at the recreational level where they also develop a relationship with their coach who teaches them his or her values and norms. Relatively little available research has focused on how young athletes participating in recreational sports experience these processes. Yet, such investigations can add to understandings of how this disciplining shapes how youth draw on, reproduce and challenge various discourses concerning their participation in sport.

### Theoretical framework

According to Bourdieu (1990), 'position taking' or individual agency is the result of one's disposition or habitus, that is, her or his understanding of the world. This understanding contains conscious and unconscious ideological and normative assumptions. The habitus is inextricably bound to a person's history and informs future dispositions. In other words, the habitus of young athletes develops in interaction with others within the field of sport. The habitus represents a system of

individual dispositions that guides thoughts, perceptions and actions and that is related to positions and taking positions.

The construction of an athlete's habitus includes practices of positions and position taking (Bourdieu, 1990). Positions can be understood as symbols and practices that express meaning, while position taking corresponds to agency, actions and practices in the field. Within the field of sports, positions are taken by for example coaches, athletes, parents and referees. Processes of position taking are embedded in dominant organisational structures, wherein individuals may gain forms of social, cultural, economic and symbolic capital. Symbolic capital is that which results in prestige and status, while other forms of capital denote the social value of specific social actions. Young athletes may therefore gain forms of capital through their participation within the complex and contextualised field of sports. The concept of habitus does not give insight, however, into how the coach–athlete relationship may inform how athletes internalise dominant ideologies that become part of their habitus.

While Bourdieu's ideas about habitus, field, capital and position taking can be used to understand practices in the field, the use of Foucauldian perspectives can contribute to understandings of power relations and processes of normalisation and governmentality. Others scholars who have explored coaching practices such as Taylor and Garratt (2010) combined perspectives based on both Bourdieu's and Foucault's work in their study of the professionalisation of sports coaching. This combination of perspectives enabled them to capture the complexities of coaching practices. Similarly, we also drew on Foucauldian perspectives in addition to those of Bourdieu to enable us to understand processes of internalisation of ideologies that became part of the habitus of young athletes. Foucault (1980) contended that dominant discourses are constructed as 'truths' that enable individuals to identify themselves as 'normal', if they comply with and behave in accordance with these dominant discourses. If they show resistance or behave differently they may be labelled as 'not-normal'. Individuals transform themselves through practices of compliance and resistance within these discourses. A Foucauldian perspective assumes individuals are responsible for their actions and commit themselves to moral obligations within power relations. He argued that supervision is a regulatory technique used to teach individuals how to behave in what is perceived to be a normal manner. Coaches often act as gatekeepers who define normal behaviour during practices and competitions. They tend to control and discipline using instruments such as compliments, accusations, rewards or punishments so that athletes behave in a manner that coaches see as desirable and normal (Cushion & Jones, 2006).

These disciplinary processes are expressed in hegemonic discourses and include practices of differentiation with respect to gender, ethnicity and sexuality (Cassidy et al., 2009). Although youths may have little say in the creation of dominant ideologies, we assume they do not passively undergo these discursive practices but are actively involved in these disciplinary processes. For example, boys may resist hegemonic discourses when they express their dislike for football and girls may do so when they participate in what are seen as tough and rough sports such as boxing and wrestling. According to Connell (2009), these acts of resistance cannot just be defined as a 'failing to "internalise" gender patterns ... a young person may vehemently reject them ... and launch out on a search for something different' (p. 97). A sport club and representatives of institutions in general, tend to shape the effects and consequences of what young athletes do, however. These sites provide

the social structures and thus the embodied frames of reference of dispositions for young athletes.

The research question that guided this project is: How do young athletes experience, challenge and adapt to their coaches? To answer this question, we draw on Bourdieu's work to explore the habitus and position taking of young athletes in relation to their coach, as part of the field of club sports. We use Foucault's insights to understand the dynamics of compliance and resistance to disciplinary and normative processes in this relationship.

## Method

We limited our selection of participants to those involved in four of the most popular individual or team sports among youth in the Netherlands (NOC\*NSF, 2011). We chose the most popular club sports so that the results could possibly reflect the experiences of many youths. At the same time, the purpose of this study is based more on gaining insight into processes than to generalising across Dutch youth. Specifically, we purposively selected youth between the ages of 7 and 18, participating in youth soccer, swimming, tennis and hockey. We used our own network and the snowball method to find interviewees. Although looking for differences across demographics and sports was not part of our objective, we recruited a balanced and broad sample with respect to gender, age, education (type of high school), urban/rural and type of sport. In addition, we selected a maximum of only three athletes per sport club. We continued interviewing until we had a saturation of themes. The resulting sample consisted of 13 girls and 16 boys. They participated in swimming ( $n = 4$ ), tennis, ( $n = 6$ ), hockey ( $n = 7$ ), soccer ( $n = 10$ ), water polo ( $n = 1$ ) and volleyball ( $n = 1$ ). All but two of the current coaches of the selected athletes were men; only four of the athletes had ever been coached by a woman.

The interviews were conducted by the first author (woman, 49 years old) and a student-assistant (man, 23 years old). Both are experienced interviewers and interviewed both boys and girls. The interview topics focused on behaviours, expectations, values and norms of coaches and athletes. Specifically, we discussed the ideas these youth had about the expectations and behaviours of coaches and their training instructions and how athletes behaved when they did/did not agree with their coach. Throughout the interviews we consistently asked the athletes about changes they had experienced during their involvement. We assumed this recall would enhance our ability to capture the disciplinary process.

In addition to conducting semi-structured interviews, the first author conducted several observations of practices and matches of youth in different age groups and skill levels in the mentioned sports. The main goal of these observations was to get an impression of what was said and done by coaches and athletes during the matches and practices and to gain insight into the experiences described during the interviews. Four observations were conducted at hockey fields, three at soccer fields and two at tennis fields. The first author observed different age groups and skill levels during both matches and practices in each sport. Each observation took between 60 and 180 minutes. The observer engaged in informal talks with both parents and coaches during the observations. The observations resulted in written field notes, which described the contextual setting such as the time and date, spectators, the ages and playing level, interactions with coaches and interactions among athletes. The

interviewers used the observation data as cues for the interviews and as examples of points the youth made.

Although others, such as peers and parents, play an important role in the meaning constructions of young athletes in the field of sports, this research focuses on meanings youth assigned to their coach's behaviour and how they complied or resisted coaching practices. We analysed the data using the programme MAX-QDA2007. The results were generally consistent across gender, age, education and sport suggesting saturation was reached.

We situated our data analysis within the selected theoretical frameworks to enable us to describe the processes of meaning constructions of young athletes about their coaches. Initially, two themes emerged that described the development of dispositions and position taking of athletes with respect to their coach and unsurprisingly, reflected the list of interview topics and the theoretical frameworks. The data revealed how youth learned sport-related values and norms, and complied and resisted coaching practices and behaviours. When we searched for evidence and counter-evidence within both themes, we were struck by the number of quotes that referred to a process of differentiation between athletes. A subsequent analysis of the data therefore resulted in the differentiation theme. A native speaker of both languages translated illustrative quotes into English to ensure nuances were not lost.

## Results

### *The process of discipline: learning norms and values in sport*

These young athletes implicitly developed their dispositions by constructing values based on how they experienced their coaches. Once they began to participate in club sport, these young athletes rapidly developed a clear and rather uniform understanding of what their coaches valued. Charlotte (11, hockey) described this in the following way:

Good coaches usually create good practices and they stick to the [team] rules. If someone does not feel like doing an exercise, she has to do it anyhow. And if you arrive late at a practice, you have to run an extra lap. That's fair and that's how it should be.

The athletes realised that their coaches wanted them to take the practice sessions seriously and that these coaches used rules to teach them the main values in sports. John's (13, hockey) comment is illustrative: 'It is important to my coach that we have fun, but therefore we always have to listen to what he says. He wants us to be successful and feels bad if we fail'. The athletes understood they were expected to follow instructions, to work together as a team and behave in a disciplined way. They knew that their coach expected them to make progress in their development of skills and as an athlete, to perform well and to enjoy the practices and the matches. These youths were managed by coaches who rewarded, corrected, punished or temporarily excluded them or had a serious talk with them if they did not meet their coach's expectations. These athletes described how coaches tried to control what happened in practices and matches and how they were socialised as athletes to develop specific dispositions that enhanced their performance (Cushion & Jones, 2012). For example, Jane (12, tennis) said: 'My friend and I are quite good in tennis, but our coach pays attention to the position of her wrist, and with me he pays attention to where I hit the ball; he does those kinds of things'. Margaret (11, tennis)

said: 'We just started with a new coach; this [change] is very valuable, because he taught us a lot of new things'.

These athletes indicated they wanted to be corrected in a 'nice manner', they liked receiving compliments and they liked to learn new things. Jack's (12, hockey) reply to the question about the qualities of a good coach is illustrative. He described a good coach as someone who: '... pays personal attention to your skills, who sees things you are not good at, and who is able to contribute to the improvement of those skills'. These athletes longed for the attention and approval of their coach and wanted their coach to label them as talented:

Robert  
(12, soccer): I caught their [coaches'] eye and that's terrific. Now I sometimes may play at the D1 level, which is the second year of the selection team. It is more difficult however: you have to work harder, practice more, the coaches criticize more and they are more demanding, but it is a lot more challenging.

These coaches also used drills and instructions to discipline the athletes. During practices or friendly matches coaches constantly controlled the movements of their athletes. If, for example, in a team sport, athletes tried to show off by keeping the ball too long to themselves to show their technical skills, their coach corrected them and told them to play together.

Bert  
(11, water polo): I sometimes hold on to the ball too long; they call it ego-ing, I do it just to try to create more chances for myself. If I do so, my coach becomes angry, because she thinks that I need to pass to my teammates ...

These athletes also described how their coaches created an atmosphere that emphasised improvement more than fun. 'We must take it seriously. Our coach told us we are able to have fun when we sip water, in between games or drills. But that's only 10 seconds, and then we have to be serious again' (Marco, 16, tennis). Coaches and athletes seemed to differ in their definitions of fun in sports. These athletes constructed fun in terms of playing together and having a positive team culture, while their coaches tended to construct fun as improving skills and techniques.

Coaches also disciplined these athletes by using rewards and punishments to stimulate certain behaviours. Most of these young athletes tried to meet the expectations of their coach, primarily to avoid their coach's anger. The athletes mentioned examples of how coaches had punished them, or of when coaches became angry. Carla (14, swimming) gave an example:

I usually swim with a talkative girl, and our coach gets annoyed with her. She shouts things like 'use your arms properly' and I know the girl really tries, but still our coach is irritated. Our coach never behaves like that with me, because I'm a quiet person so she doesn't get annoyed with me.

The observations indicated that running extra laps and being excluded from playing in the next match were popular forms of punishment.

The data from the observations also showed various ways these coaches incorporated disciplinary techniques; if someone did not attend a practice, she or he was



only allowed to participate in half a match. A team that lost a match received an extra practice as punishment. Athletes who could or did not want to follow their coach's instructions, were sometimes pulled aside and talked to. The observations and also the interview data showed that at times coaches became impatient and lost their temper. 'My new coach is a nice guy, but he quickly loses his temper during practices or matches, since he wants us to succeed and win' (John, 13, hockey). The data suggested that these athletes wanted approval from their coach; this desire enabled the disciplinary process.

Only a few coaches gave material awards. For example, a soccer player described how his favourite part of the practice was shooting at the goal with the wrong leg. The boys had to take turns shooting; everyone who missed had to leave the field. The last boy on the field received an energy drink as an award. Stories about receiving material rewards were scarce, however.

The stories of the athletes and the demands made by their coaches were quite consistent. Only one athlete described a different process.

Bart  
(14, hockey): My coach always contends that you learn most from yourself. He tells me to try the things of which I think I cannot do them. So sometimes I discover something and I think 'hey, does it work like this?' and then I try to do the same thing in a match.

This coach encouraged his athletes to reflect on their own play and to practice what they learned from this. He was however, an exception. The athletes believed that their coaches looked after the interests of the players and protected them in conflicts. For example, a girl described how her coach jumped between two players of whom one was extremely angry because she felt she was severely attacked intentionally. The girl ended up hitting the coach instead of the opposing player. Generally, these athletes were grateful to their coaches when they interfered when athletes were in trouble. This appreciation may also have enhanced the disciplinary process.

By using various disciplinary methods these coaches created a relationship in which these young people were encouraged to accept coaching demands and practices (see also Stevenson, 2002; Tomlinson & Yorganci, 1997). Coaches tended to use drills, instruction, rewards and punishments, to correct deviations from what they saw as correct or normal behaviour for an athlete. Thus, these young athletes developed their habitus through their relationship with their coach and through practice. These athletes accepted the knowledge and power of coaches and learned which meanings and behaviours are normal and accepted in the sport setting and often tried to embody them (Markula & Pringle, 2006).

### *The process of discipline: creating differences between athletes*

As these athletes developed their skills and some were recognised as having talent, their coaches began to increase their emphasis on improvement and less on having fun and began to differentiate between athletes. Randall (13, soccer) described how he had to work harder when he became part of an elite team.

Randall: Our coaches became stricter and more critical, since I have been part of this [selection] team.  
Interviewer: What do you think of that?



- Randall: I do not like it, but it is the only way to improve my performance. Besides, being an elite athlete gives us privileges, we get preferential treatment. For example if the fields are too wet, we are allowed to play on the few available artificial grass fields, while others cannot play at all.

In this way, these youth learned how to differentiate between the talented and the less talented and which privileges belong to the talented. They also understood that being selected, meant being privileged and gaining a higher (status) position in the sport hierarchy. They learned to value those who gain symbolic capital, and in so doing contributed to that symbolic capital, and to differentiate within the positioning of athletes in the field of club sport. In addition, they learned that although their talent could be 'natural', they had to suffer to develop it. Sport participation becomes tougher and more challenging as the level of competence increases, especially for boys and especially in soccer. Don (12, soccer) explained how this works:

- Don: If we are just practicing and someone fouls another, our coach says 'well done'. But in a match it would be a penalty. Or if someone is in pain during a practice and lies crying on the ground, our coach just lets the others play on.
- Interviewer: Why would he do so?
- Don: I think he wants us to become tough, because when someone apologises for his own foul, the coach says 'don't say that. You wouldn't do that in a match either, would you?'

These boys seemed to be aware of how their coaches used signs of toughness to differentiate between athletes. Sometimes they even liked that. For example, Philip (12, hockey) said: 'I like everything he [the coach] does, he teaches us clever tricks. He is a very demanding coach. He becomes angry sometimes, for example, if our skills are sloppy or poorly executed'. These examples show how these athletes experienced and accepted their coach's values and norms. They felt they had to do the best they could to improve their skills. When their skill level increased they felt even more pressure to perform well and to become (mentally and physically) tough.

Athletes also described situations in which their coaches focused on behaviours that went beyond the physical aspects of practices and competitions. Don's (12, soccer) description of a situation is illustrative.

- There are two guys in my team, who do a lot of things together. We sometimes tease them as being gay, because one of the guys is quite girlish. Our coach does so too. He sometimes makes remarks like 'Did you bring you lipstick, Ben?'

Joking and ridiculing about 'girlish' or 'gay' behaviour is a way coaches create norms about what is seen as (in)appropriate behaviour for boys and/or to define someone as 'different' from the unmentioned and normalised 'others' (Cassidy, Jones, & Potrac, 2009). In addition, the coach in this example legitimised making a fool of boys he saw as behaving girlish. This practice reflects Cassidy et al.'s contention that when coaches use terms that refer to femininity or homosexuality in their devaluation of the capacities of male athletes, they create normative values for gender and sexuality by devaluing the capacities of male athletes when they use terms that refer to femininity or homosexuality. In contrast, remarks referring to desirable or heroic masculinity and heterosexuality are generally meant as

complimentary. Observations in our research supported this point of view. For example, during a pep talk a coach referred to the opposite team by saying ‘We’re gonna get those faggots’ (Field notes, 9 November 2010). We frequently heard the fag reference during matches or practices and generally among boys (see also Gregory, 2011). Such remarks may also shape how young athletes differentiate positions within the group, including their own, by defining each other as being (not) normal in terms of gendered behaviour.

### *The process of discipline: acts of acceptance and resistance*

The athletes, however, did not undergo these disciplinary processes of learning values and norms and differentiating from others passively as the foregoing may suggest. A Bourdieudian perspective suggests the reactions of these youths to such processes are shaped by individual dispositions. We looked at how these dispositions manifested themselves in the position taking of young athletes in the coach–athlete relationship. Generally, these athletes valued coaches who are patient, authoritarian, funny, fair, nice and young. They preferred coaches who were good instructors, who treated them with respect and who showed a sincere interest in them. In addition, when young people were asked why they appreciated their coach, they answered: ‘because he is a good soccer/hockey player’, or ‘because he played in the Olympics’. They seemed to assume a coach’s athletic history made them a good coach (see also Cushion & Jones, 2006); they therefore often accepted what coaches did and said as normal coach behaviour.

However, these athletes were not always satisfied with their coaches. They expressed a dislike of coaches who were too authoritarian or too strict, who became angry or grouchy and especially those they thought were unfair. Ironically, many of these athletes considered it to be their own fault if their coach was angry or grouchy. Carl (17, hockey) described how this works:

At a certain moment, we know when to expect an angry coach, we know when to expect his outbursts and as long as we do not cut corners, we know also he is not going to behave like that. Everyone in the team knows these are the conditions for playing on this team. So, everyone is committed to those conditions and has consciously chosen to be in this position.

By taking on this responsibility for the emotional behaviour of their coach, these athletes chose to comply with their coach’s behaviour. On the contrary, athletes were upset when they perceived that an angry coach was unfair. Susan (14, hockey) gave an example of this happening.

Our coach becomes angry if someone is late ... and everyone who is late has to run an extra lap around the field. That’s fair. But sometimes the whole team has to run an extra lap when only one or two players are late. That is very unfair.

These athletes complied with the coach’s demands; however, they did not speak up or refuse to run laps when such unfair situations occurred.

These athletes also did not like coaches who seemed to be too emotionally invested in the outcome. Dennis (12, soccer) explained how the emotional behaviour of his coach influenced play and how the athletes went along with his actions:

I do not like a coach who gets too involved if the referee takes a wrong decision. Our former coach used to call the referee names when that occurred. Not really bad ones, more like ‘bungler’, those kinds of things. But we copied his behavior and we all became angry too, and then it influenced our play. Our play was based on emotion and that’s not good. A coach should behave in a more neutral way.

Although these athletes voiced their thoughts about the coach to the interviewers, most of them hardly ever openly questioned the position of their coach. They complied with the coach’s demands even when they disagreed with her or his ideas. Bart (13, soccer) explained what he and his teammates did when their coach was unfair:

Bart: We chat about it with each other, but we do not let him know.  
 Interviewer: Not at all?  
 Bart: No, but we do this (he looks through his fingers to signify disapproval about the coaches behavior).

Similarly, Janet (14, tennis) said:

Janet: Sometimes we sigh and ask ‘do we have to do this again?’ but then our coach says ‘you have to do it’, so we do as he says.  
 Interviewer: Why do you do this when you disagree with him?  
 Janet: Of course I disagree, I find him unreasonable now and then, but if I’d say so, he would become angry, and as a result we have to run an extra lap around the field, which would make my friends angry at me too.

When the interviewer asked the athletes why it was difficult to question or oppose their coach, some of them shrugged their shoulders ‘It is just not appropriate, we’re not in the position [to question him]’ (Carla, 15, swimming). Bart (13, soccer) explained why he never ignored the demands of his coach. He said:

Understand me, we are dependent on our coach. He has discovered another boy and I have talent. If your coaches dislike you, they do not like to work with you and as a result your improvement slows down and your chances for being selected will decrease.

The power of coaches to differentiate between athletes and their dependency on him if they wished to improve their skills, seemed to prevent these athletes from engaging openly in resistance even when they disagreed with him. These athletes thought they could not influence their coach. For example, Charlotte (11, hockey), who indicated her team sometimes criticised the coach, concluded: ‘Although our coach will listen to us, he always ends with: “You may be right, however we continue to do it my way”, so our comments are useless’. David (16, tennis), explained how he implicitly tried to criticise his coach:

My coach thinks he is such a professional. I sometimes say something about it. Of course not in his face, but more as a joke. He once said to me ‘you should not try to draw so much attention’. Then I said ‘Listen to who is saying it’. But then he started to make a fool of me. I can handle that. I do not feel intimidated, but he does not like me, because he does not tolerate any critique.

- Interviewer: Do you discuss his behavior with other athletes?  
 David: Yes, we say he is a fake, we need to make him feel important to be able to stay together as a group.

David felt he could not argue openly with his coach, so he and his friends created strategies to cope with him.

A few athletes gave examples of coaches who listened to them. One athlete said her teammates did not argue with their coach, because they always had the opportunity to discuss matters with him. Beth (15, soccer) described how she sometimes asks her coach for an explanation: 'I hate to do some of the drills, so I often ask him (coach) about the reason for them. If his answers are convincing, I agree to do them'. Our observations showed that occasionally a coach asked for a vote about a drill. If many athletes disapproved, they did not have to do it. Similarly, now and then coaches asked athletes how they liked the practices and how he could become a better coach. Another boy described a situation in which his coach asked him what bothered him because the athlete looked as if he was demoralised. The boy admitted this, he found the practice schedules too demanding and therefore was tired all the time. The coach decided to discuss the practice schedule with the other boys in the team. These situations were exceptions, however. Although in general these athletes thought they could express their criticism of the coach, they had rarely done so. As Randall (13, soccer) said, 'At that moment I was not so much aware of my own criticism of our coach'.

When these athletes could not or were unwilling to meet the expectations of their coaches, they said little about it. They did not openly oppose their coach, but did oppose him passively. They moved more slowly, were uninterested and engaged in (often forbidden) behaviour that their coaches did not see. A few of the athletes described how they threw plastic cans, hid each other's clothes or had fun engaging in forbidden behaviour. Carla (14, swimming) said: 'Our coach wants us to listen carefully, she does not want us delay the practices. Some friends deliberately swim very slowly and then our coaches become grouchy'.

Since the resistance of these athletes was indirect and almost invisible, their position taking was generally subordinate to that of their coaches. The disciplinary power of the coach to organise the practices and to differentiate hierarchically between athletes made these youngsters dependent on their coaches and made it difficult for them to resist coaching behaviours with which they disagreed. In addition, sport participation, especially selection to a skilled team, could provide these athletes with what Bourdieu (1990) called symbolic capital (see also Purdue & Howe, 2012). Sport clubs tend to be structured so that the greater the athlete's (perceived) skill, the greater the prestige, privileges and status. Thus, these athletes 'sustained on-going relationships of power and inequality in a struggle for capital' (Cushion & Jones, 2012, p. 14).

## Discussion and conclusion

These results show how these young athletes experienced their relationship with their coach and how that relationship shifted as they became involved in a disciplinary process directed towards continual improvement and success defined by winning. When these athletes became members of a sports club, they became aware of the informal rules about 'normal' behaviours during practices and games.

Their coach expected them to take the practices seriously, to do the best they could, to be on time, to follow his or her instructions, to work together as a team and to behave in a coach-defined disciplined manner. These expectations may be seen as informal, implicit and 'logic' rules that emphasise improvement more than having fun. Although these informal rules may have created a workable situation for the coach, they shaped the development of dispositions of these athletes. When they began to play their sport, their idea of having fun was based on playing together. As they became more involved in a sport, however, status and improvement increased in importance for them. The more talented an athlete was considered to be, the more she or he realised that being successful could not be reached by just having 'fun', but required being tough and practicing hard. Their primary motive for sport participation shifted from having fun with their peers to having fun because they could differentiate themselves from others and could gain status and symbolic capital by becoming better than others. They developed a dominant orientation or disposition that valued differentiation based on performing well and success. These values are not unique to these Dutch athletes or to their coaches but have been incorporated into coaching education. For example, Green (2007) used its essence as a model that could be followed by coaches to lead young athletes through different stages of commitment from the 'Fun-damental' through the 'training to win' stage. Thus, the need to change the meaning of fun that athletes may bring to the sport setting may be an accepted norm for coaching behaviour. Since the focus of this study was on current athletes we do not know if this focus on winning has discouraged and/or alienated others to the extent that they have dropped out of sport once their improvement is no longer evident.

The process by which these youth developed their disposition reflects 'the logic of discipline' (Foucault, 1979). They learned (1) *values and norms* that belong to the field of youth sport, (2) to *differentiate* between positions as part of a struggle for symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1990) and (3) acts of *acceptance and resistance*. This process, or 'logic of discipline' had consequences for how these athletes perceived normal behaviour and constituted their dispositions. We will reflect on each of these three processes in the next paragraphs.

### ***Learning norms and values of status, achievement and performance***

The athletes in the current study who were judged to be skilful or to show promise, came to understand that improvement in performance needed to be supported by appropriate behaviour. They had internalised their coaches' expectations that they take the practices seriously. Their strong orientation towards improvement meant they had developed a common disposition in the field of these sports. They slowly became part of the disciplinary system with 'success' as the final goal (see also Stevenson, 2002). They were willing to adapt to this structure, because they longed for a higher status position and the accompanying symbolic capital. Similarly, Johns and Johns (2000) concluded: '... athletes are only willing to settle for a power structure as long as they can find reasons to accept and internalise explanations that justify such an arrangement (p. 232)'. The most desired reward for the athletes in our study was to be selected and/or recognised as a talented athlete. They could achieve this only if their coach judged them favourably.

### ***Creating difference between athletes through selection***

The process of differentiation by classification and selection was an important part of the disciplinary process that these athletes experienced. It was legitimised by the use of so-called objective criteria for certain positions, such as being selected as a talented athlete, within the system. The results suggest that the experiences of these young athletes depended a great deal on how they got along with their coaches. In other words, the process of differentiation they encountered was not only based on the quality of their physical skills but also on their coaches' perception of skills and behaviours of players (see also Roose, 1999; Tomlinson & Yorganci, 1997). Possibly then, the more the behaviours of young athletes differ from what are constructed as normal positions within the sport context, the more difficult it may become for them to successfully continue in sport. Yet, children who were not seen as skilful or did not conform to the expectations of their coach tended to be complicit with these expectations by taking responsibility for their own behaviours and by continuing to be committed to participation. The development of this disposition, however, sometimes contradicted their own sense of fairness. The characteristics of this disposition such as competitiveness, toughness, not being girlish, are part of practices associated with a dominant heterosexual masculinity in sport. A Bourdieudian perspective suggests that this habitus tends to generate 'common-sense' differentiations because the athletes have adapted to the 'logic' of a particular field. Changes in fields may be hard to realise, since the habitus tends to exclude incompatible practices (Bourdieu, 1990).

### ***Accepting and resisting within a context of hierarchical relationship***

Coaches used disciplinary methods to create hierarchical status differences between athletes. Coaches often took on the role of what Foucault calls the supervisor. In their interactions with their supervisor or coach, these athletes encountered and adapted to 'normal' behaviour and actively transformed themselves into becoming disciplined athletes. They did this by internalising the logic of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1979; Markula & Pringle, 2006). The resistance of athletes remained largely hidden from the supervisor-coach so that these moments did not challenge his/her power and the status quo was maintained.

Our finding that coaches tended to create seemingly docile athletes, who were often unable to make decisions about their involvement, is similar to that found by others (e.g. Cushion & Jones, 2006; Tomlinson & Yorganci, 1997). Our results, however, also suggest that these athletes were not passive but had thoughts about their coaches that they rarely expressed to their coaches. These athletes knew what they wanted but voiced this in a way so their coaches could not see or hear them. This invisibility of resistance by athletes gave these coaches the freedom to continue using their preferred coaching practices, while they seemed to ignore the needs and contributions of their young athletes. The athletes developed their habitus by accepting and internalising this as normal behaviour. Denison (2007) explains that the disciplinary power that coaches exert over athletes occurs 'subtly over time through numerous unquestioned everyday coaching practices' (p. 375). Consequently, their goal for success and the relationship with their coach became more important for the athletes participating in the current study than their moral judgments and their desire to speak up (see also Cassidy, Jones, & Potrac, 2009). They learned that these are

the rules that belong to the field of sport; they realised that implicit rules need to be followed to reach what was defined as a more important goal, that is, to improve significantly and to gain more status by being successful. In order to be successful, these athletes felt they had to position themselves as tough and had to refrain from showing feelings of compassion or empathy, especially during competition.

The results also showed that this field is not entirely homogenous, however. Olive and Thorpe (2011) used Bourdieu's concept of 'regulated liberties', to describe practices of resistance to normative power from within the field of surfing and snowboarding. They showed how these practices led to more reflection about complex processes of differentiation, domination and resistance, including sexist and homophobic behaviour. In our study, however, youth rarely articulated these forms of reflexivity to their coach. This lack of articulation may in part be explained by the ways in which sport in the Netherlands is formally organised as a voluntary activity. If children do not enjoy participation they are free to leave. Since these clubs are not part of a formal educational system, each club can constitute itself in terms of emphasis, levels of competition, gender, ethnic diversity, etc. More research is therefore needed that explores how the disciplinary power of coaches and the reflexivity of athletes may vary by context.

We used the work of Foucault to describe the disciplinary processes experienced by young athletes as they begin their sport participation trajectories. Additionally, we drew on Bourdieu's work to show how status, achievement and improved performance became forms of symbolic capital and dominated the field in these sport clubs. These forms of symbolic capital were inextricably bound to an organised system of differentiation and were practiced in the context of a hierarchical relationship between coach and athletes. The results revealed how these youth learned to visibly obey authority in that context, to accept sexist behaviour as part of the sport context and to engage in covert resistance. They also developed a disposition that valued status, competition and improved performance and that tended to silence and ignore reflexivity and the articulation of needs and preferences. As we indicated at the beginning of this paper, youth sport is assumed to develop prosocial behaviour of young athletes. It is questionable if the dispositions developed in this study are the benefits policy-makers have in mind when they encourage youth sport participation. Sport seems to be a strongly normative field that is associated with highly valued symbolic capital. Yet, little is known about how the development of this disposition adds to or detracts from the empowering of youth in and outside of sport. We argue that scholarly attention needs to be paid to the extent to which coaching methods used to develop such symbolic capital are actually in the short- and long-term interests of the young participants or primarily serve the needs of the club and its coaches.

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