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'It's just superstition I suppose ... I've always done something on game day': The construction of everyday life on a university basketball team'.

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'It's just superstition I suppose ... I've always done something on game day': The construction of everyday life on a university basketball team'

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Abstract

Research in sport has tended to focus on 'spectacular' or 'extra-ordinary' experiences, at the expense of discussing how particular phenomena are embedded in everyday life. Drawing on ethnographic research with a university basketball team in the North of England, this article considers the meanings that amateur players attach to basketball and how such meanings go beyond their participation in competitive games. Analysis reveals the rhythms and rituals which are hugely important in determining the players' sense of self. It also highlights the carnivalesque celebrations which allow the players to temporarily disrupt the status quo and experiment with alternative identities. In conclusion, it is argued that the meaning of sport should not be seen as rigid, determining and predictable, but rather a creative experience that is largely dependent on the subjective appropriation of time and place.

Keywords

basketball, carnivalesque, everyday life, habit, ritual

Introduction

According to Stone (2007), research in sport has tended to focus on the exceptional, exaggerated and spectacular instances of participation at the expense of what Percec (1973) has called a sociology of the 'endotic'. Crawford (2004), for example, notes that sport sociology has focussed almost exclusively on 'live' events, and has overlooked the ways in which sport is consumed away from these venues, in private and everyday spaces. Such critique has also been levelled at sociological accounts more broadly, which have a tendency to treat everyday life indiscriminately (Gardiner, 2000; Jacobsen, 2009). Grahame (1998), for example, contends that whilst sociology has routinely concerned itself with the formal organizations and objective constructs of society, more research is needed into the

expressions which originate in the actualities of the mundane. Whilst addressing this lacuna has been at the centre of a rich tradition of symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology, many have criticized these theories for relying on rational, homogenous models, which are insufficient when dealing with the complex, embodied, and often spontaneous nature of day to day life (Jenkins, 1996).

Everyday life, to adopt a popular NBA slogan, is where basketball 'happens'. It is where individuals make sense of dominant meta-narratives and incorporate them into their own sense of self. For those that play the game, it becomes an integral part of their day-to-day lives. They talk about it, they read about it, they adopt the languages and attire that are an accepted part of the basketball 'lifestyle', and they define themselves as players within the basketball community, which has its own set of values and beliefs (McLaughlin, 2008). In Pat Conroy's (2002) heartfelt auto-biographical novel *My Losing Season*, for example, he emotionally recounts his teenage years as a college basketball player; talking fondly of the smell of the court, the feel of a basketball, and the unmistakable sound of a basketball hitting the floor of the gym. He describes his love for his team mates, their sophisticated off court-camaraderie and the time and effort needed to learn, and conform to, certain attitudes, roles and identities. These reflections do not concern 'spectacular' or 'extra-ordinary' events, but are the result of mundane, embodied and sensuous interactions (Sparkes, 2009). They show how individual experience exists at the juncture between micro and macro influences (Highmore, 2002), and how aspects of self identity and belonging are initiated, reinforced and challenged through the activities of daily life.

This is not to say that the spectacular elements of basketball are not important. Indeed, issues such as the media representation of black and female athletes (McPherson, 2000), the commercialization of the game (Andrews, 1997; Andrews et al., 1996; McMasters, 2005), and the migration of professional players (Maguire, 1994; Maguire and Falcou, 2006) tell us much about how societal trends have shaped the face of contemporary sport. Andrews (2006) notes that such changes can only be understood in relation to broader social, political, economic and technological forces, and that basketball can never be isolated from the structural determinants that constitute its existence. However, such studies do not do justice to the complexity of individual experience, and tell us little about how participants make sense of, and interpret, their actions through their embodied participation in the culture of basketball.

Drawing on ethnographic research with a university basketball team in the North of England, this article considers the meanings that amateur players attach to the game of basketball

and how such meanings are incorporated into the fabric of their everyday lives. In doing this, the article captures the mundane aspects of identity that contextualize the players 'outside' of the team and beyond the 'spectacular' elements of playing sport. It represents interactions between players in personalized, private, spatial contexts and uses these interactions to analyse related processes of consumption, performativity and belonging. This encourages a pragmatic understanding of contemporary basketball culture(s), whilst contributing to the growing body of literature which engages *sociologically* with sport and everyday life.

What is everyday life?

Definitions of the everyday are fluid, confusing and complex, and therefore subject to continuous debate (Adler et al., 1987; Felski, 2000; Gardiner, 2000; Highmore, 2002). For Felski (2000), this is because everyday life is a 'fuzzy' term. On the one hand, as soon as it is mentioned, it is indisputable, taken for granted and esoteric, yet on the other, everyday life seems to be 'everywhere, yet nowhere' and is the ultimate 'given' reality which is the basis for all forms of human behaviour (Felski, 2000: 15). Sociologists are unavoidably biased in their own constructions, and interpretations, of daily life since the everyday is naturally a lived, subjective phenomenon (De Certeau, 1984). What one person does as a white, middle class, able bodied, heterosexual, basketball-playing undergraduate student will be completely different to someone who is positioned within another set of identities, and in this respect the difficulty facing sociologists is that everyday life is fundamentally idiosyncratic.

In a pragmatic attempt to engage with the everyday problematic, Sztompka (2008) prompts the idea of a 'third sociology', as neither a sociology of institutions and structures, nor a sociology of the agent, but one that meets in the middle. This 'third sociology', he elaborates:

. . . takes as its ultimate object of inquiry social events: human action in collective contexts, constrained on the one hand by the agential endowment of participants and on the other hand by structural and cultural environments of action. (2008: 25)

What Sztompka is suggesting is that studies of everyday life move the lens away from a complete focus on the macro elements of an individual's experience, towards an analysis of how certain institutions and structures affect the everyday lives of particular agents through the process of 'structuration' (Giddens, 1984). As such, the everyday denotes a particular 'structure of feeling' (Williams, 1977: 34), where actual lived experience encounters the structures of language and discourse. Through this framework, one's experience of everyday

life should not be thought of in the past tense, but as a mode of experiencing which is characterized by an open-ended generative process that is subject to 'contingencies, excess and indefinite answers' (Harrison, 2000: 499). Thus, one way of looking at everyday life is that it is the detailed analysis of what people do, say, and think in the actual flow of experience, whilst also considering how exploitative ideological structures are embedded in our habits and routines.

Everyday life is also a temporal term which conveys the idea of repetition (Benjamin, 1939/1982; Lefebvre, 1992/2004). On these terms, the everyday 'refers not to the singular and unique but to that which happens day after day' (Felski, 2000: 3). Most of us could identify certain activities which we undertake on a regular basis, and it is these activities which structure our day-to-day lives. For example, five days a week I wake up at roughly the same time, eat a specific combination of breakfast cereals and dress/groom myself in a particular way and in general I am subjected to these activities every time I go work. Although these routines may not happen in the exact same way and order every time they are executed, they are repetitive enough to be classed as everyday acts. Collins (1981) categorizes these everyday activities according to their spatial-temporal location. At one end of the spectrum are the most infinitesimal movements associated with the cognitive and embodied processes such as the pace with which I walk and the way I sweat when I'm walking, and at the other are the predictable patterns of behaviour which build up over a period of time. For Collins, everyone's life is a sequence of these micro-situations, and the sum of these experiences constitute the organized nature of everyday life.

A third way of describing everyday life is through the notion of habit (Bourdieu, 1990; Crossley, 2001). Habit and routine are closely connected, but where they differ is that habit is not simply an action but an attitude which is inscribed on our bodies through repetitive action. It is an unspoken, naturalized, 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1990: 66) that generates the positions and actions that agents adopt in given situations. For instance, when I am dressing myself, I do not have to think too much about the individual movements needed to put on my trousers, socks and shirt; these things simply happen in a 'semi-conscious, often dream like state' (1990: 26). Likewise, when I am cycling I do not have to give too much thought to moving my legs up and down and coordinating my hands on the handlebar because for the most part I am focussing my attention on the movement of the cars and buses or the tasks I need to undertake when I arrive. On this basis, habit implies an element of 'banality' (Morris, 1990; Seigworth, 2000), consisting of the residue that we are left with once all the spectacular elements have been accounted for. It is the 'natural attitude'

(Schutz and Luckmann, 1983: 15) we take towards daily activities and is epitomized by both the comfort and boredom of the ordinary.

The cost of the quotidian

Henri Lefebvre (1991) suggests that during modernity, everyday life has been 'colonised' by an alienating post-war capitalism, and that any imaginative or creative urges that we may have had are now used to promote the capitalist economy (Merrifield, 2006). With this, he also implies that whilst we once related to people through sensuous, emotional and affective means, we now only communicate with one another through an 'abstract, formal, metaphysical reason' (Lefebvre, 1991: 46). For Lefebvre (1992/2004), such changes can be demonstrated by looking at the changing nature of daily rhythms, of which there are two types. Cyclical rhythms are those that are defined primarily by their relationship to organic forms such as 'nights and days, seasons and harvests, activity and rest, hunger and satisfaction', growth and death' (Lefebvre, 1987: 10), and were vital to the way traditional societies were organized. However, during modernity these 'organic' repetitions have gradually merged with the 'dictates of technology, work and production' (Gardiner, 2000: 87) resulting in the development of rhythmic 'linearity', which is predictable and therefore controllable. According to Gardiner (2004), this linearity is associated more with the era of modernity because the rational organization of work structures time around economic priorities rather than, say, planetary movement or climatic changes, which increases the output of the workforce.

These arguments are reflected in critiques of sport and leisure which emphasize the de-humanizing effects of late capitalism (Clarke and Critcher, 1985; Critcher and Bramham, 2004). Brohm (1978) for instance, argues that sport is permeated by commodities, which stupefy the masses and reinforces the ideologies of the ruling class. Televised sports reduce the population to a 'servile mass' (1978: 114) who consume whatever and whenever the capitalist system tells them to, and the athletes we watch on our televisions are nothing more than 'cybernetic robots . . . imprisoned, indoctrinated, regimented and repressed' (1978: 112). With the emergence of professionalism in the late 19th century, sports have also developed sophisticated rules requiring the standardization and categorization of its competitors, which further encourage linear rhythms. Participants are timed, measured, weighed and examined, and elite sports are now organized around a 'discourse of performance' (Whitson and Macintosh, 1990: 1) which encourages disciplined, functional

and predictable bodies. As a result, the pursuit of success has overshadowed amateurism, and rationalized progress of athletic performance has become the overriding norm.

However, such commentaries tend to exaggerate the process of alienation and present an overly deterministic view of consumption (Felski, 2000; Gardiner, 2000; Merrifield, 2006). By contrast, Michel De Certeau (1984) stresses that consumer practices can be both emancipatory and creative, and that individuals are able to 'make do' with the products and experiences that capitalism sells them (Crawford, 2004). In explaining this process of creative interpretation, de Certeau distinguishes between two social processes; tactics and strategies. Strategies are only available to subjects of will and power, so defined because of their access to a spatial or institutional location that allows them to objectify the rest of the social environment. They are organized around powerful hierarchies which help determine how space and place should be interpreted, and are often tied to the money making efforts of powerful capitalist institutions. The tactic, on the other is the 'art of the weak' involving 'calculated action' played out on terrain controlled by a 'foreign power' (De Certeau, 1984: 37). Such tactics exist in a state of friction with the organizing discourses of modernity, refracting or subverting certain discourses in order to bring new meanings and practices into play (Rojek, 1999).

On some occasions, such tactics can manifest themselves in organized forms of resistance. Giulianotti (1995, 1991), for example, writes of the 'carnavalesque' activities of Scottish football fans during the 1992 European Championship in Sweden, which were characterized by 'an abandonment of hedonistic excess and the psycho-social jouissance of eating, drinking, singing, joking, swearing, wearing of stylised attire' (1995: 194). Through excessive alcohol consumption, ritualized chanting, fancy dress and public urination, the fans' bodies are distinguished by 'open orifices' which facilitate 'a merging with other people and the wider environment' (Shilling and Mellor, 1997: 42) and separates them from the imaginary 'other'. Moreover, it is the deviance associated with these carnivalesque spectacles that attracts and inspires these football fans. International football events allow people to engage in acts of 'playful deviance' (Redmon, 2003: 18), providing a space in which to do things that would be unacceptable at other times and in other spaces. Hence, the fans are able to create, albeit temporarily, new ways of ordering their social world that are represented by the deviant use of their bodies (Hetherington, 1998).

However, a longstanding contradiction exists which compromises these transgressive activities. On the one hand, contemporary culture encourages a 'carnival character'

(Langman and Ryan, 2009: 471), for whom public rituals of moral transgression express an explicit critique of global capitalist culture. The grotesque debauchery of football hooliganism explicitly resists dominant norms and expectations using materials provided by consumer capitalism, and it could therefore be argued that these individuals have found a way to manipulate the capitalist system from within. At the same time, the transformation of this critique into profitable commodities (through Hollywood films about football hooliganism for example) reproduces the very conditions which serve to illicit such critique. This position would suggest that the efficiency of late capitalism is such that it finds ways of incorporating activities such as football hooliganism and attributing them market value (Marcuse, 1968). Not only this, but having convinced such groups that their activities are meaningful, capitalist institutions are able to manipulate these populations from a distance with little effort or intervention. As such, it could be argued that the consumptive nature of these obscene, grotesque and vulgar activities are no more than simulated resistances that effectively neutralize real contestation (Blackshaw, 2003; Giulianotti, 1991; Ravenscroft and Gilchrist, 2009; Ravenscroft and Matteucci, 2003).

The relationship between tactics, strategies and everyday life, then, is a complex one. In contrast to the repetitions, habits and structures outlined in the previous section, tactics allow individuals to deliberately resist these processes through the debauched, humiliating and degrading activities associated with the 'carnavalesque' (Bakhtin, 1984), which, on the surface, appear to escape the mundane. At the same time, however, tactics and the everyday cannot exist without each other, and are caught in a play of 'differance' (Derrida, 1972) which is open to interpretation. Debauchery and excess, for instance, would be meaningless were it not for the relatively civilized nature of our daily habits and routines, and the spectacular would be nothing if it were not juxtaposed with the mundane. As such, one should avoid reducing these two concepts to an either/or binary, since the meaning or essence of each concept can only be understood through its relation to what it excludes (Helstein, 2005). By adopting this approach, it is hoped that this article can analyse the everyday as a fluid and diverse phenomenon rather than one which is static and homogenous.

Methods

This research involved nine months of ethnographic work with a university basketball team during the 2008–2009 BUCS (formerly BUSA) season. During this time I accompanied the players at nearly all of their team practices, the majority of their home and away games, the

annual first year trials and pre-season training camp. Other engagement with the team included the exchange of SMS text messages and emails, participation in their online community, taking part in numerous team social events including first year initiation and the yearly inter-city varsity and spending hours 'backstage'; travelling with the team, listening in on their changing room banter and sharing their game post-game socials. Following Grahame (1998), this method of observation enabled me to study this basketball team in their 'natural surroundings', establishing an empathetic rendering of the group as a whole, focusing on the meanings which events and relationships have for members of the group in their everyday lives. Crucially, this allowed me to view these understandings from within the group itself, producing 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973b) of certain phenomena as an active member of the community.

The research also invited 15 university basketball players to reflect upon their everyday lives within the basketball squad by recording a series of video diaries. Using a digital handheld camcorder with a substantial internal hard drive, the participants were asked to record a maximum of two recordings a day over a seven-day period and then return the recorder to me. Once the diaries had been collected, I interviewed 13 of the 15 diarists using semi-structured interviews. Questions asked had been pre-determined by the researcher and were largely orientated around elements of the players' day-to-day lives, but the nature of the response was left to the individual being interviewed (Amis, 2005). This supports claims that interviews can be conversational (Finch, 1984) as, when necessary, I was able to probe beyond the participants' initial response, gaining deeper insights into their everyday lives.

One of the most difficult challenges from the outset of the research was establishing relationships with the players. Although I had played basketball at this university in the past, I didn't know the majority of current players and felt out of touch with university basketball. The university league, for example, had long since changed its name, and the facilities used to accommodate the basketball club were in a different part of the city. These comments reflect researchers' concerns about engagement and acceptance amongst research participants (Long and Wray, 2003). Indeed, some of the first and potentially most important steps that researchers must take in the field are those related to developing rapport with participants (Pitts and Miller-Day, 2007). This was particularly important for this project as I had specifically chosen this research site because of the convenience and accessibility of its members. Making a good impression from the outset would determine whether or not the research would take place at this location, and rejection would have had significant implications for the quality and richness of the results.

However, having spent a considerable amount of time amongst the players, I began to develop rapport with the team. Having familiarized myself with the research context and the behaviour of the team, I was able to share tacit knowledge in the form of conversation and 'banter', and this resulted in increased levels of mutual respect between the researcher and the researched. This increase in rapport developed to such an extent that players began to invite me on team socials and weekly scrimmage sessions, and this was useful in granting me further access to the culture of university basketball. In this sense, this article should be seen as a collaborative project (Riessman, 1993), the meanings of which developed out of the on-going relations between the researcher and the researched. Trust, confidence and understanding are dependent on a continuing stream of interactions, and the result of these interactions, good or bad, has affected the data collected.

Repetition

The video diaries demonstrated the repetitive nature of daily activities; literally that which happened day after day (Benjamin, 1939/1982; Felski, 2000; Lefebvre, 1984). Large periods of time were spent washing, eating, sleeping, watching TV, working (paid), going to lectures, speaking to family members on the phone, browsing the internet, doing laundry and travelling. These patterns of behaviour were also evident in the participants' media consumption, which structured the players' everyday lives. For instance, many of the participants talked about dedicating large amounts of time to checking the NBA website:

I do my routine every morning, checking the NBA scores and sending a text to my girlfriend. (Kevin)

Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays I stay up and watch the NBA show on Channel Five. I'm always knackered when I wake up in the mornings but I like to know what's going on with my team. (Shaun)

Such patterns of consumption not only demonstrate the globalized, mass-mediated and commercially orientated nature of the NBA league (Andrews, 1997, 2006; Maguire, 1994), but show how the players' everyday lives have become 'routinised' by the invasive technologies of late capitalism (Gardiner, 2004). Listening to hip-hop music, watching American films and following the NBA league encourage inorganic bodily rhythms (Adam, 1990; Lefebvre, 1992/2004) that in Shaun's case can even jeopardize 'natural' patterns of sleep. In terms of the NBA, this process is enhanced by the existence of information technology, which gives the players unlimited access to 'systems of knowledge' (Lyotard,

1984) which would otherwise be unavailable to them. Individuals can log on at any time and access game scores, videos and pictures, and the pace with which this information changes means the players are forced to view these websites on a daily basis (and at all hours) if they are to keep up to date with the league.

Basketball and its associated activities (such as games, practice sessions and 'scrimmages') were central to these repetitive routines. The video diaries showed that every participant took part in these activities at least three times a week, and eight out of the 15 participants said they were participating five times a week or more. According to Ron, these experiences become so repetitive over the course of the year that the structure of every season is the same:

Well it's the same every year, you have your basketball season, you have like 6 months off where they split up for training, then there's loads of training . . . it's good because you know what you're doing from day to day. I'm guessing it's just there, you know what you're doing and you've just got to focus on that day every time it comes and you just get into a pattern. It also makes you feel as if you're doing your bit to justify your place on the team

In characterizing these everyday actions it is clear that basketball provides a sense of routine in a world of contingency and fragmentation (Rojek, 1999). Repetition is predictable and 'safe' (Cohen and Taylor, 1992), and executing these activities over and over again allows players to foresee, and potentially control, the consequences of their actions in a world of contingency and 'risk' (Beck, 1992). In this context, having a structured and predictable training regime allows Ron to minimize the potential risks associated with the performance orientated discourse of sport, which requires the players to be disciplined and regimented in their actions. This provides definitive evidence to suggest that engagement with basketball reflects the norms, rules and practices of everyday life, because although participation does seem to foster feelings of liminality and escape, it still takes place within a discourse which encourages repetitive, capitalist driven and performance orientated forms of behaviour.

Repetitive activities do not have to happen every single day for them to be of importance to the players. Throughout the diaries, for example, it was evident that individuals were involved in 'ritualistic' (Rappaport, 1999) forms of behaviour which, though irregular, were tremendously important to those who practised them. One such ritual was evident in one of Mike's diaries, in which he packs his bag, listens to hip hop music and chooses the kit he will

wear during the game. This pre-game ritual shows how seemingly mundane acts such as eating, packing his bag, watching films and listening to music pertain to 'a wider transcendental pattern over and above the details of the actions' (Couldry, 2003: 2). They are, to borrow Geertz' (1973a) phrase, a form of 'deep play', in which his social identities are validated through the everyday performance of seemingly innocuous behaviours. In this instance, it is not the meaning of each self-contained action that is important to Mike, but the comfort he takes from the successful completion of a range of interrelated activities. As he later explains when justifying the ritual in question:

It's just superstition I suppose. Y'know, I've always done something on game day ... It just comes down to like eating the right kind of food and like I said I watch a film that gets me in the mood to play sort of thing . . . I play crap when I'm not ready for it, and it's just my way of getting ready for the game.

Mike's 'superstition' about doing things in a particular way is the result of his embodiment of deeply internalized dispositions both mental and corporeal, that have developed throughout his time as a basketball player (Bourdieu, 1990). By following the same bodily routine week after week, his body provides him with 'a mode of praxis' (Giddens, 1991: 99) which he has cultivated to conform to a particular way of life. As such, basketball and its associated cultural practices are inherently 'ritualistic', as they encourage a set of habits which have a level of meaning that is above and beyond the duration of each individual activity (Birrell, 1981).

Habit

The continual enactment of these repetitive activities results in the development of particular habits (Bourdieu, 1990; Mauss, 1973), which lead the players to carry out certain actions in a 'semi-automatic, distracted or involuntary manner' (Sztompka, 2008: 32). For example, almost every day he had the video camera, Tashaun attended the gym, but never acknowledges this routine. The reason for this is reflected in the comments he makes about the difficulty of recording a video diary:

It was good to look at how everything was going, the bigger picture sort of thing . . . because you normally just turn up for practice day after day, year after year; you practice, you go the gym and you play . . . you don't really get time to think about yourself too much.

Tashaun's response shows how the intensity of certain repetitions can affect how habitual those acts become (Schutz and Luckmann, 1983). After years of going through the same routine, he has adopted a 'natural attitude' (Schutz and Luckmann, 1983: 15) towards the experience, which has been inscribed on his body through repetitive action. His training routine is simply 'there' (Felski, 2000), unworthy of critical reflection, and it is only when these habits are interrupted in some way that they come to his attention.

These habits are not just a way of thinking but are primarily embodied in nature (Bourdieu, 1990; Crossley, 2004; Merleau-Ponty, 1962), and illustrate how the taken-for-grantedness of everyday life is the result of an incorporated bodily 'know how' and a 'practical sense' (Bourdieu, 1990: 68) that are formed during the endless repetitions of human movement. For example, when asked why he enjoyed playing basketball at this university, Brad articulates this point well:

Sometimes you get so wrapped up in playing the game you forget to just sit back and enjoy it. It's like, we have one training session a week and one game, but we are constantly organizing scrimmage sessions and shoot arrounds in the sports hall so we can all get better as players, and when you play so often your body tends to just go into automatic mode. But every now and again I'll just stop and think to myself: I love being at uni and playing basketball!

Over time, Brad has acquired a series of 'corporeal schema' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) in the game of basketball which are rooted in pre-reflective habits and skills. Each week, he attends practice sessions, gym workouts and 'shoot arrounds' and these activities have become so habitual that he rarely stops to reflect upon them. In this sense, the habits adopted by these basketball players epitomize the 'mundane' (Morris, 1990; Seigworth, 2000) and the 'ordinary' (Felski, 2000; Miller and McHoul, 1998), which is evident when Dennis describes a 'normal day':

When I say normal I probably mean just ordinary like, almost like a boring day. Like a usual repetitive day like: I get up, go to uni and maybe play some basketball in the evening. Y'know that's kind of a normal day for me, nothing's happened, nothing's special . . . I think normal is just more ordinary, and just ordinary in my own personal sense. It's where: 'OK I would have preferred to do something a little more exciting'.

Dennis' response is interesting as it highlights the (un-)importance of banality in the experience of everyday life (Seigworth, 2000). For these players, the everyday, and by implication their experience of basketball, is that which recedes from view; the residue that is

left over after everything 'spectacular' has been accounted for (Stone, 2007). In many ways however, the perceived unimportance of such repetitive habits is problematic as it is these mundane, taken for granted activities that reinforce a discourse of performance (Tinning, 1991). Indeed for many of these players the doctrines of discipline, sacrifice and pain were so embedded in their everyday lives that they were no longer (if ever) perceived as an issue:

You learn to just get on with it. When I first started playing basketball I wasn't so big on fitness drills and stuff like that, but you get used to it and just end up accepting it for what it is: a way of getting better as a player. (Ron)

It's been a big part of my life since I was about eight years old, playing basketball and training hard . . . it's like I don't know much else. (Mike)

Ron and Mike's conformity to a performance pedagogy is formed through a repeated set of bodily acts which congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance; of a 'natural sort of being' (Butler, 1999: 40). Thus, although the players often reduce their habits to superstitious or mythical explanations, their behavioural patterns are actually governed by a highly efficient matrix of power which generates perceptions, expectations and practices that solidify the legitimacy of this discourse. This image is reinforced by a 'performance pedagogy' (Tinning, 1991) emanating from coaches, experts and officials, whose positions of power help produce, promote and sustain a body of scientific information which prioritizes a rational approach to success (Whitson and Macintosh, 1990).

Alcohol, debauchery and the 'carnavalesque'

The repetitive and mundane nature of the players' everyday lives was contradicted by spectacular, extra-ordinary activities such as annual ceremonies, the weekly night out and other important get-togethers such as initiation, varsity and post-game nights out. These kinds of activity have much in common with the medieval carnival, in which wasteful acts of consumption, and excess and mockery were commonplace (Bakhtin, 1984). According to Dennis and Paul, the purpose of these meetings is to allow the norms and prohibitions of everyday life to be suspended, and replaced instead with a friendly atmosphere that encourages them to communicate with one another:

I think the initiation, and especially teasing them and making fun is more like a welcoming because if you ever got a group of lads together everyone would take the mick out of everyone else all the time, so it's just like a rite of passage to get in and like make them feel comfortable . . . You're just suddenly thrown in at the deep end,

you're at uni, you managed to get in the basketball team so they think that you're great . . . but you tend to be shy . . . And obviously initiation comes and you're just . . . everyone's there and you're seeing that everyone's having a laugh and people just start chatting.

Paraphrasing Cohen (1993), initiation acts as an integrative force that helps to bring together people from a plethora of different social and cultural formations and binds them in the transgression of authorized boundaries. In the players' view, this is made possible through the existence of playful laughter, in the sense that 'no one ever feels excluded . . . everyone's always involved within the laughter and the jokes' (Brad). By constantly mocking one another, the players are able to incorporate a spirit of joyful negation (Bakhtin, 1984), relieving much of the anxiety associated with the influx of new faces and the beginning of the university basketball season.

The most salient attribute of these ventures is that they provide a sanctioned resistive space. In allowing an experience far removed from the banality of everyday life, the carnivalesque can effect a meaningful, if ephemeral, challenge to dominant power relations in the discourse of basketball (Giulianotti, 1995). For example, having lost one of their competitive league games during my time with the team, Marcus decided to have a night out on the town involving drinking, smoking and other forms of debauchery. Like many elite athletes, Marcus will have spent all season being exhausted, tested and 'functionalised' (Baudrillard, 2002) within a rational basketball discourse, but getting drunk allows players such as Marcus to temporarily transgress the repetitive nature of everyday sporting norms and send an explicit message to the coach:

I do it because sometimes you just need a break don't you, from all the shitty politics and boring practice sessions where we run three man weaves over and over again. Last night I just thought 'fuck it, I am going to get stupidly drunk and end up in a heap on the floor' (Marcus)

Such comments clearly signify the way in which the grotesque and transgressive aspects of the carnivalesque are most 'visible' in their embodied, physical form (Gardiner, 2000; Shilling and Mellor, 1997). Indeed, for Bakhtin (1984), the carnivalesque infuses bodies with grotesque imagery which encourages behaviour that reinforces the transcendence of the individual's bodily boundaries. The raucous behaviour of the carnivalesque and the 'grotesque' events of initiation are a far cry from the everyday habits of the basketball world, and the fact these two worlds are so vastly different makes the performativity of such excess

more exotic (Blackshaw and Crabbe, 2004). In this sense, the carnivalesque is distinctly lived (Morsden and Emerson, 1990), and the cohesive element with which this event is imbued is dependent upon the emotional and sensual experiences of its participants. It is clear for instance that alcohol and drunkenness are of central importance to the team, and this helps to accentuate the visual, aural and aesthetic elements of their embodied experience, which increases the players' sense of unity (Blackshaw, 2003).

The fluidity of everyday experience

The advantage of using video diaries alongside interview data was that they contained embodied visual clues as to how the participants felt about everyday activities (Cherrington and Watson, 2010). For instance, when Dennis is going back and forth to basketball practice, his voice is low and solemn and his movement is long and laboured. As he explains what he has done/is about to do, he scratches his head, sighs and tightens his mouth, showing how the everyday rhythms of basketball are predominantly mundane and ordinary. However, on other days he was noticeably up-beat about the prospect of attending a practice session and was clearly looking forward to participating. The latter of these examples explains why everyday life cannot be conceptualized as a homogenous and predictable phenomenon (Felski, 2000; Highmore, 2002; Inglis, 2005), because although the everyday is routinized, static and habitual, it is also capable of 'surprising dynamism and moments of penetrating insight and boundless creativity' (Gardiner, 2000: 6). As Dennis confidently elaborates:

No one thinks the same thing every day, y'know you don't actually do the same thing every day. You might do the same task everyday but each day is going to be different, so you want to get that contrast between doing the same tasks and the way you perceive them on a daily basis.

Dennis' response neatly illustrates the 'everydayness' (Lefebvre, 1987) of everyday life, and accounts for the complex disparity between context specific embodied spatial practices and the way in which these activities are perceived. For instance, although practice sessions take place up to three times a week for the players – and are therefore repeatedly enacted, their embodied experience of day-to-day activities differs depending on the subjective process of appropriation and the spatial acting of place (De Certeau, 1984). In this respect, everydayness implies a lived space of representation and shows that whilst individuals on this team may be subjected to the objectifying practices of a performance discourse, there

are differences in the way the players interpret and analyse these activities on a day-to-day basis.

The variety of these lived interpretations can be placed along a 'fluid continuum' (Blackshaw, 2003: 115) between the mundane and the spectacular, which is dependent upon how each player 'enunciates' (De Certeau, 1984) and interprets each context. This suggests that although certain acts have a tendency to be perceived as either 'mundane' or 'spectacular' (1984: 162) there is room for negotiation between one and the other, and even the most banal experiences can offer opportunities for thrills and excitement (Blackshaw, 2003). For example, in one of his diaries, Mike talks about having a 'tiring day' of basketball related activities. His puffy eyes, heavy sighs and the way he rests his head in his hand every so often give the impression that these errands are mundane and ordinary, and that given the choice he would rather be doing something else. However, when reflecting upon similar tasks at a time when they were of great importance, Mike is significantly more enthusiastic about doing them:

I go through stages to be honest. Sometimes I get bored with it and sometimes I love it. Its great organizing all this stuff at the minute though because we have varsity coming up and I get to make suggestions about particular things when I speak to the sports union. I think people think I'm doing a good job of it and it's nice to know!

Mike's comments show how his perception of his role as the team captain had changed throughout the season. They also show how seemingly mundane activities such as those associated with the team's administration had been transformed in anticipation of an important game. Having dedicated himself all year to the organization of games, practices and social events, these administrative duties were now perceived as exciting as they gave him the opportunity to contribute to something spectacular. In this sense, Mike and Dennis' participation with the university basketball team is dependent on a particular 'structure of feeling' (Williams, 1977: 34), which should not be thought of in the past tense but as a mode of experiencing which is characterized by an open-ended generative process which is informed by their lived experience of the sport.

Concluding remarks

Everyday life means many things to many people; it can be repetitive, mundane and habitual, but it can also be special, spectacular and exciting. It is the most self-evident and tangible of experiences, incorporating a range of identifiable activities, and yet the essence

of these experiences seems to disappear the minute we subject it to critical scrutiny (Highmore, 2002). However, as I hope to have shown in this article, this does not mean that the everyday should be treated with contempt, since it is the above attributes that remind us how powerful ideologies are embedded in everyday interaction. In the context of basketball, I have shown how players' participation in training and practice sessions, as well as their consumption of cultural 'texts', can result in the formation of particular habits. These habits are not just a way of thinking but the result of an embodied and corporeal 'know how' that is formed during the endless cycles of bodily movement and, more importantly, show how the values associated with capitalism and performance are normalized by each of the players. In addition, the material presented indicates that the meaning individuals give to everyday experience is not static, but the result of an open ended generative process which is informed by the players' lived experience. These experiences can be placed along a 'fluid continuum' (Blackshaw, 2003) which, depending on how the context is enunciated and interpreted, can represent the excitement and exhilaration of the spectacular or the banality of everyday life.

A key challenge that emerges from this discussion is what changing analyses of everyday life can contribute to a sociology of sport that goes beyond the persistent dichotomy of structure and agency. Everyday life may well be influenced by the overarching values of late capitalism (Lefebvre, 1984), and identity construction and bodily conformity are undoubtedly influenced by the norms and expectations associated with particular discourses (Foucault, 1978), but our experience of these processes is largely dependent on the subjective and embodied appropriation of day to day activities (DeCerteau, 1984; Foucault, 1986). For this reason, it is important to move beyond a dualistic either/or approach, and to acknowledge how the objective and subjective dimensions of experience are interrelated (Crossley, 2001). All too often we look at sport out of context and the everyday which, while fluid and contingent, provides a useful grounding mechanism in discussing the situated nature of people's embodied sporting identities. By deconstructing different and often varied experiences of what basketball means to those who play it, there are dynamic possibilities to explore the contradictions and complexities of how everyday life, identity, and the body are constructed, reproduced and contested.

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