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From the Sidelines: The Role of the Coach in Affecting Team Unity and Cohesion in Place of Hazing Traditions

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Abstract

This paper is derived from a qualitative study that examined the effects of orientation ceremonies as a replacement for traditional hazing in university sport. The study sought to explore the efficacy of alternative orientation activities that included cooperative games, purposeful team building activities, and informal interaction with the coach. Researchers concluded that, in many instances, the new orientation practice was found to be an effective replacement for traditional forms of entry rituals, as the former created a deeper sense of cohesion, forging a stronger bond among players and coaches who opted to participate.

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Introduction

In recent years, sport organizations have reviewed policies and introduced or strengthened clauses that address team hazing. This policy shift has emerged, in part, from an increased awareness of negative hazing experiences and related research on the problematic implications of hazing rituals in sport organizations (Allan & Madden, 2008; Bryshun, 1997; Bryshun & Young, 1999; Campo, Poulos & Sipple, 2005; Hoover & Pollard, 1999; Johnson, 2000; Johnson, 2007; Johnson & Donnelly, 2004; Johnson & Holman, 2004; Linhares de Albuquerque & Paes-Machado, 2004; Nuwer, 2004; Robinson, 2004; Winslow, 1999).

In years past, hazing practices were typically considered harmless pranks or comical antics associated with young men in college fraternities. However, hazing extends far beyond college fraternities and is experienced by boys/men and girls/women in school groups, university organizations, athletic teams, military, and other social and professional organizations, causing emotional and physical harm, and even death (Allan & Madden, 2008; Bryshun & Young, 1999; Campos, Poulos & Sipple, 2005; Hoover & Pollard, 1999; Johnson, 2000; Johnson, 2007; Linhares de Albuquerque, & Paes-Machado, 2004; Nuwer, 1999). Hazing activities are generally considered to be physically abusive, hazardous and/or sexually violating (Hoover & Pollard, 1999). The specific behaviors or activities within these categories vary widely among participants, groups and settings. Alcohol use is common in nearly all types of hazing. Examples of typical hazing practices include: personal servitude; sleep deprivation and restrictions on personal hygiene; yelling, swearing and insulting new members/rookies; being forced to wear embarrassing or humiliating attire in public; consumption of vile substances or smearing of such on one's skin; brandings; physical beatings; binge drinking and drinking games; sexual simulation; and sexual assault.

The most comprehensive study to date regarding initiation and hazing in American university sport was released on August 30, 1999 by Dr. Hoover and Dr. Pollard at Alfred University. The study was sponsored by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), and the final report consisted of survey data collected from respondents, including athletes, coaches, and athletic directors across the United States. A summary of the research findings is presented below:

Over 325,000 athletes at more than 1,000 NCAA universities participated in intercollegiate sports during 1998-1999. Of those athletes, more than 250,000 experienced some form of hazing

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to join a college athletic team. These projections are from a weighted sample size of 2,027 respondents by gender and division of athletics.

Of the group who experienced hazing, one in five was subjected to unacceptable and potentially illegal hazing; including being kidnapped, beaten, tied up or abandoned (Hoover & Pollard, 1999). Some of these individuals were forced to commit crimes, destroy property, make prank phone calls or harass others. Half were required to participate in drinking contests or alcohol-related games. Women were more likely to be involved in alcohol-related initiations than other forms of hazing. Two-thirds were subjected to humiliating hazing, such as being yelled at, sworn at, forced to wear embarrassing clothing, or forced to deprive themselves of sleep, food or personal hygiene (Hoover & Pollard, 1999). Of note is the fact that only one in five participated exclusively in positive initiations, such as camping trips or ropes courses. More recently, a national study which involved survey responses from 11,482 respondents from 53 campuses across the United States, and over 300 interviews of students and staff from multiple campus organizations and populations, confirmed many of the same findings from the Alfred University study, which indicated that over 55% of the population experienced hazing and, of note, 95% did not report their hazing experiences to campus officials. Most were only exposed to cursory "hazing is not to be tolerated" prevention efforts, while 9 out of 10 students who experienced hazing behaviors, did not consider themselves to be hazed (Allan & Madden, 2008).

A clear distinction must be drawn between orientation events and hazing practices. Orientation takes place in an atmosphere that fosters and nurtures an inclusive environment, free from discrimination, segregation and degradation. Hazing refers to humiliating and abusive activities which have been traditionally endured by non-members in order to gain member status in a community. The intent of most athletic programs and departments in establishing a new alternative transitional experience for these athletes is to eliminate abusive practices and create a more welcoming, democratized, inclusive and rewarding orientation experience.

There exists a dearth of research, particularly coaching research, which examines the cultures and traditions of hazing and initiation in team sport. This paper represents one of the few major research analyses which provides an assessment of the perceived effectiveness of alternative types of orientation activities by the participants, such as co-operative games, ropes courses and team building activities. These alternative types of orientations and team building activities are substitutes for more traditional forms of initiating first-year players onto varsity teams. While past practices have included hazing ceremonies involving degradation, humiliation and abuse, which candidates endure to secure a social place within their team community, a team-orientation approach offers an experience that runs in direct opposition to that offered by the degrading and oftentimes dangerous hazing practices. Another theme explored in this project involved the development of what Victor Turner (1969) described as *communitas*, or the

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membership and bonding of participants to their teams and teammates as a result of going through an alternative form of orientation. It focused on the need for groups to maintain entry rituals in a bid to address the tensions around belonging, identification and, in the case of male contingents, masculinity.

In this study involving male and female varsity athletes and coaches from hockey, volleyball, badminton, and basketball teams, the orientation ceremony was found to be an effective replacement for traditional forms of entry rituals (Johnson, 2007). The results suggested that this alternative model created a more egalitarian space which diminished veteran-rookie power imbalances, restructured the team hierarchy and allowed for a more democratic environment. Further, these orientation characteristics forged a deeper bond among players and coaches who opted to participate. While some traditional forms of hazing were still observed after their orientation event, the alternative initiation activity was effective in humanizing the first-year players and creating a kinship which lessened the extent to which they were later hazed by their teammates.

Within the context of increasing public scrutiny over the past decade of high profile hazing litigation in sport, researchers are starting to unpack the nuanced roles of the various actors; most notably, the hazers, hazees, veterans, rookies, alumni, spectators, fans, administrators and coaches that comprise the culture of the team. Researchers are beginning to define the role of the coach within the varsity hazing landscape, arguing that, as a central figure, he or she can affect how their players, particularly their first year contingent, are “initiated” onto the team (Campo, Poulos & Sipple, 2005; Hoover & Pollard, 1999; Johnson & Donnelly, 2004). As the gaze of athletic administrators, media and the public alike turned towards the hazing practices of teams, the responses of the coaches varied and separated into a few camps. Some coaches withdrew from the process completely, allowing their teams to continue their entry rituals unsupervised, and in most cases were ill-equipped to deal with the consequences; others advocated for change and reinserted themselves in the process (Johnson & Donnelly, 2004). In the wake of increasing awareness of the potential harm that can result from hazing, it has also become apparent that the role of the coaches needs to be that of an active and present leader in facilitating a positive, cohesive experience for their team. The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of the coach in affecting team unity and cohesion in the process of replacing traditional hazing practices with alternative orientation activities.

Methodology

This qualitative study consisted of one-on-one interviews conducted by the researcher. The in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted using the interview guide approach described by Patton (1990). The interview guide allowed the researcher to elicit systematic and

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comprehensive information from a subject or groups of subjects, while having the freedom to explore and probe topics addressed by the participant (Patton, 1990, 43).

The interviews focused on the subjective experiences of the respondents which allowed them to describe in detail situations that were relevant and meaningful to them. An interview guide is a list of general topics that the interviewer wants to explore during each interview. Preparing this list helps to ensure that the same topics of information are discussed with each person interviewed, and, given that there are no predetermined responses, with semi-structured interviews the interviewer is free to probe and explore within these predetermined inquiry areas (Lofland & Lofland, 1984). The interview guide approach is the most widely used format for qualitative interviewing, as it allows the interviewer the freedom to vary both the wording and the order of questions to some extent from the outline of topics or issues to be covered in all of the interviews (Sewell, 1997). This type of interview is predicated upon the knowledge that the interviewees have had a particular experience which they can share and upon which they can elaborate with the researcher (Nichols, 1991).

Subjects

Participants for the study were selected from among the teams that took part in the weekend orientation activity. On the final day of the orientations, athletes and coaches were identified for potential interviews using a technique described by McMillan and Schumacher (2005) as mixed purposeful sampling. This allowed for a selection of participants tailored to the specific needs of the researcher. The researcher used a non-random sampling method called purposive sampling; this type of sampling allowed the researcher to specify the characteristics of the population of interest and to identify individuals who match those characteristics. For the purposes of this study, participants were selected based on the criteria that they were a varsity student-athlete or coach and had taken part in the weekend orientation. Selection criteria also included making sure there was a balance of men and women and representation from various teams. This methodology also included the use of convenience sampling (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996) as the athletes and coaches were asked to participate just after the completion of the orientation event.

Sixteen athletes, eight males and eight females, along with two male and two female coaches participated in the study. The coaches selected for interview were the head coaches of four different teams that took part in the orientation. They ranged in age from 37 to 56 and had all been in their current positions for at least two years. All those interviewed took part in a weekend orientation at a camp in Northern Ontario. The group consisted of women's ice hockey, men's ice hockey, co-ed badminton, men's basketball, and women's volleyball teams. The athletes ranged in age from 19 to 26. Thirteen of the participants were at the undergraduate level and three were at the graduate level. All of the participants were at least in their second year with

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their respective teams. This ensured that they had experience as both a rookie and a veteran team member.

The study is comparative in that it examines not only different teams but those with differing roles: rookies versus senior team members; team members versus coaches; and sports with traditions of aggressive play (such as hockey) versus more genteel sports.

Orientation intervention

The activities offered during the orientation involved low rope activities such as the spider web; this challenge required the group to pass all its members through a matrix of suspended ropes from one side to the other, never using the same entry point. A multitude of icebreaker games were used to introduce the team members to each other as well as the larger group of athletes. The camp facilities had both a natural rock climbing area as well as a rappelling initiative stationed in a barn which all of the participants were able to access. War canoes, which seat up to 25 individuals, were operated with teams where they were engaged in open water tasks, such as switching places, conducting a scavenger hunt and canoeing blindfolded. Another rotation that the athletes were provided was a session with a sport psychology Ph.D. student, where the athletes were able to develop team goals and discuss pertinent team issues in a comfortable, mediated setting. Team time was built into the weekend to facilitate group time, free individual time, or time for informal activities (i.e., sauna, swimming, and games that included ultimate frisbee or capture the flag).

There was also an Inuit blanket toss whereby all the group members grabbed a side of a large canvas blanket and invited members of the team (one at a time) to be tossed in the air and caught on the blanket. The blanket toss, along with other cooperative games, were designed to engage the participants in controlled group initiatives for the development and enhancement of group cohesion and team function with an emphasis on cooperation and unity.

To be eligible for the study, participants had to have experienced a designated orientation weekend. Interviews were completed within six months of the conclusion of the participant's orientation. The data elicited from the interviews were analysed and one of the more predominant themes that emerged was the role of the coach in affecting team unity and cohesion.

Data Collection

The interview guide was developed based on the goals of the study and the existing literature, and was further refined from two practice interviews. The goal of the first questions was to put the participants at ease while slowly introducing the subject matter. These initial questions

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centered on the participants' duration, level, and type of experiences within their sport. Subsequent questions focused on specific initiation or hazing experiences they had had in sport and non-sport related contexts, either in high school, on club teams or at the university. This line of questioning was meant to elicit descriptions of the culture and the pervasiveness of initiation practices in a variety of settings. From the participants' responses, the researcher was able to assess each participant's prior history and familiarity with the topic.

The next set of questions asked how the participants felt prior to their initiation at the university, what they had heard about the initiation practices, and how they were being "socialized" onto their team via the veterans. Participants were then asked to describe their actual university initiation experience and to elaborate on their feelings about becoming initiators and being a member of their team. By asking participants to comment on their experiences as both initiates and initiators, the researcher aimed to better understand the cyclical, power-based structure of the process. Next, interviewees were asked to reflect on the purpose and function of the initiation ceremony, commenting on many of the perceived "social" functions of the event. A question pertaining to knowledge of their university policy regarding hazing was also posed to attain a description of current practice and any changes that had taken place as a result of the introduction of new policies. They were then asked to comment on the alternative orientation to which they were privy, contrasting that experience with past practices, noting cohesive factors, functionality, purpose and sustainability. Finally, participants were asked if they had recommendations for future practices, to understand whether their goals and objectives were being met, or whether, and how, from their perspective, the current practices needed to be reformed.

Interviews for the coaches were conducted in the same manner as those for the athletes. The coaches were all present with their teams during the orientation weekends. The only real variation or difference existed with their own prior histories of hazing (as athletes), which all predated the experiences of their athletes.

After receiving signed consent from the research participants, all interviews were tape recorded for future analysis. Interview times and locations were established at the convenience of the research participant. Interviews were thus conducted in a multitude of settings, including the participant's home, the researcher's office, closed staff rooms, and a classroom. The choice of location was always left to the participants so that they would be in a surrounding in which they were comfortable. The interviews varied in length from 35 to 130 minutes. The average time spent during most of the interviews was approximately 75 minutes.

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Data Analysis

Multiple coding was used which involves another researcher analyzing the same data set and then comparing and discussing findings. “This diminishes investigator bias and can be seen as a qualitative form of inter reliability” (Mays & Pope, 1995, p.110).

One of the final processes of the data analysis was selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), which involved the clustering of all categories around a central theme. Here a method termed “hurricane thinking” was employed, whereby categories are placed around the question, then compared, cross-referenced and analyzed for their proximity and relationship to the central theme. This allowed for the construction of major themes with subsections related to that theme. This also allowed for a comparative process to be used by the researcher to ‘triangulate’ data (Denzin, 1989). This comparative component to the design, coupled with the qualitative nature of the interview data, provides important research clues about what kinds of reactions and issues are likely to take place if one tries to generalize this model of team initiation to other collegiate varsity sports teams.

Results and Discussion

On a team, it is acknowledged by most that the coach can be the greatest catalyst for change (Burke, 2001; Drewe, 2002). However, within the climate of sport hazing, one of the repercussions of recent public exposure and reactive zero tolerance policies has been the “don’t see, don’t tell” approach of many coaches concerning their team’s initiation ceremonies. Too often coaches have adopted a distanced approach to both educating and monitoring their athletes’ conduct. The results of this study suggest that there are various stages at which the role of the coach is critical: pre-orientation; breaking the cycle of hazing; coach participation in orientation; and post-orientation impact on the coach-athlete relationship.

Pre-Orientation Role of the Coach

It is evident from the interviews with athletes and coaches in this study that communication, trust and respect are the cornerstones of purposeful team unity and functioning. Many coaches are both proactive and steadfast in their support and advocacy of an alternative orientation program. This was evident in the responses of the athletes here, as it was identified as integral in establishing a new and open directive for two-way exchange.

> “Our coach informed us that it was going to be a team-building weekend, so I automatically assumed that that meant a couple of uncomfortable situations that once you start you end up having a good time. I have been through a few of these

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> so that is what I expected. I relate it to going to the video store and my girlfriend will want to get Toy Story 2 and I think, oh no, I don't want to watch a cartoon, but then I watch it and end up having a great time with it and laughing, so in my head that is how I compare the two." (Dimitri)

> "Our coach had told us that it would be a good idea to go on this orientation; he was very supportive of the program and of the idea of what it could be for us. I knew that it was some sort of a camp and that we would be there with some other teams, I figured there would be some water activities and rock climbing." (Luis)

In most cases the coach informed the contingent beforehand as to what the orientation might entail. This effectively quelled any anxieties, contrary to how traditional initiations are structured. In the latter, fear and intimidation are used as weapons to render the rookies powerless and confused, dreading the worst case scenario (Holman, 2004).

> "I knew the coach beforehand; he spoke to me and to the other new people at the first practice and said that he didn't believe in hazing and that there would be nothing like that. It was a relief to have been given this information." (Luis)

> "Our coach supports the program. The senior players respect and support this program and that was conveyed to us, the rookies, how important this was for the integrity and the strength of the team." (Amy)

Amy equated the involvement of the coach with the trickle-down theory of effect. Support, enthusiasm and involvement of the coach quickly spreads to all of the players, who then become a part of the supportive matrix, sharing and promoting a common vision.

Although most coaches were proponents of the orientation and communicated that support effectively to their teams, two athletes implied that their coach did not adequately convey this message.

> "The coach told us we were going to camp […]. He didn't tell us that much, he didn't really seem to know what was going on, gave us the times and the day before he handed out the itinerary. There were some negative feelings towards the weekend mostly because we had to give up the weekend…we don't have any free time. It was a lot to ask to give up a weekend." (Ted)

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> "He told us what it was about and why we were going, but he is not really a sit down guy [communicative], who would hype something, he is pretty straight forward which for me is fine, but for a lot of guys he doesn't come across as much of a communicator. Most guys are 18 and need a lot more guidance; they are trying to absorb that." (Dimitri)

Both Dimitri and Ted felt that, given the mood, stature and dynamic of the team, enhanced communication from coach to athlete would be beneficial, especially concerning a vital program like an orientation weekend. In fact, the absence of this information caused resentment and some ill feelings amongst the participants prior to the activity.

Here, Simone, a coach, acknowledges the importance of being proactive by first denoting the importance of team dynamics and communication, and secondly incorporating it into her style of imparting information and communicating with her players.

> "I took an active role in making everyone feel equal and that they had value, not only to me, but to the team. It is also the team that makes new members feel this way and try to encourage people to feel a part of the team. We are fairly good at not judging other people. They are fairly good at realizing that you can't make judgments on people's decisions." (Simone, coach 3)

Given the importance of the coach in the team structure, the participants (both the coaches and athletes) recognized the value of mediating the anxiety associated with the introduction of an unfamiliar practice. Accordingly, it is imperative that the coach challenge the structure itself, which often recognizes and rewards inequalities based on a ranking system (Priest & Gass, 1997). Moreover, it seems crucial that the coach use the pre-orientation as an opportunity to set the tone for a new and ultimately (as will be explored below) rewarding team-building experience. These actions are necessary in order to promote a more inclusive, affirming and democratic approach to the team.

Role of the Coach in Breaking the Cycle of Hazing

All of the participants in this research study were cognizant of both the regulations against hazing and the potential consequences such as losing their season or funding if they did haze. This knowledge was communicated to the teams through coaches, administrators and other players or teammates.

> "We knew from the coach, who informed us that there was to be no hazing, he didn't believe in it and the administration had regulations against it." (Manny)

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Even with this understanding regarding the consequences of hazing, there still existed a strong yearning by senior players to continue the cycle of initiation which had been prohibited. Yet, in this study, Amy described the tempering effect of her coach and the team's desire to acquiesce and respect the coach's wishes that the hazing ceremonies be terminated. It is within the power of the coach to affect the welcoming ceremonies of their team. This effect can prove to be positive when coaches take an active role in promoting new strategies to create an atmosphere of inclusion, or it can be negative when either they ignore the behaviors and let them evolve unmonitored, or they clamp down with zero tolerance with no alternatives to fill the void left in the absence of tradition. Each of these extremes supports the traditions of hazing.

> "The senior players felt that desire to keep the ceremonies going but because our coach didn't want us to do anything degrading they stopped out of respect for her. She has this impact on us where she will respect us if we respect her. It is amazing." (Amy)

Accompanying this sense of wanting to continue the tradition of hazing on a team is the realization that within the present climate of "outlawed" behavior, there is the very real possibility of the death of the ritual itself. Once the last team members to have been hazed are gone from the community of the team, the tradition will have been lost.

> "We are no longer allowed to initiate. There is no way that we could go ahead and establish our list of grievances without the coach knowing. There is no way that we could tell the players what to wear without him knowing, we hardly have weekends off anymore, it wouldn't be feasible. Once I am gone from playing (sport) here, it is done, there is no more tradition of initiating, there would be no one left here who would know it anymore." (Ted)

While it seems clear that the cycle of violence, humiliation and degradation that typically accompanies hazing must end, the void left in its termination must be filled. It is the performance of a ritual which must not be lost, as the importance of the movement from that of outsider to insider must be recognized (Goffman, 1967; Turner, 1969; Van Der Meer, 2003). In addition, any of the potentially positive effects of an entry ritual, such as team cohesion, relationship building, and fun will be lost without a replacement activity. Ted was quite upset with the fact that this was the most likely scenario. It was obvious from his tone of voice and demeanor that he wanted the tradition to continue.

In all of these examples the student athletes saw the coach as the person who could effectively eliminate the more damaging and brutal hazings which their players orchestrate.

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> "If he knows about the party he should stand up in the dressing room and say to the rookies and veterans that nobody has to drink. You don't have to do what is told of you, you don't have to go. So that the first-year guys would know that they have the coach's backing, that he is not forcing them to do this and that it is a team function. He should be in a more supportive role so that the first year players can say if you are going to make me drink I am going to tell the coach and you can deal with the repercussions." (Ted)

In this example, the collective will of the first-year players effectively blocked the team's hazing ceremony when they felt comfortable enough with their coach, or uncomfortable enough with the demands put upon them for their initiation.

> "The one year I had rookies come to me and say that they didn't want to take part, I met with the captains and said 'if anything happens, you will be suspended,' and with that, nothing happened." (Paul, coach 2)

Even though the coaches themselves agreed that they needed to play an active part in the process of eliminating hazing, there was an acknowledgement that the process takes time, commitment and a proactive approach.

> "It took six years to happen. Sometimes I wonder if I recruit or select players that fit into our way of thinking, I am constantly analyzing this fact, whether I brought people that were open to change." (Jennifer, coach 1)

> "It takes a long time, and it takes threats…It took sitting down with the senior players and the captains to explain to them that they can't have these guys drinking so much that they are sick, there is such a thing as alcohol poisoning. To what extent they take it, I don't know. Knowing that I had some influence over the players' actions, I realized that I had an onus to be an active member of the process." (Raymond, coach 4)

Paul concurred with Jennifer's realization that perhaps the most effective way to counter the desire to haze was to rid the membership of those who supported continuing traditional hazing practices. This represents one of the ongoing commitments that team leaders and coaches must make to preserve both the team's integrity and the collective vision which is built upon the shared understanding of the team. It is quite possible that a few players within the team sharing a different vision could invert the system to its previous practices. In an honest assessment, the coaches acknowledged that perhaps they were responsible for pre-selecting players. In doing so, they were more inclined to select those who already share a common vision of the team, thus

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supporting the contention that they have significant control and power to establish a team viewpoint that challenges traditional hazing and initiation practices.

> "Part of the importance for creating a hazing-free environment is getting rid of the players that perpetuate this cycle of hazing. The person that perpetuates it wasn't the best player, so it wasn't as crucial to the team. It was also the belief that if they were going to perpetuate hazing they were going to perpetuate other things as well, negative factors, they were going to be locker room lawyers, disruptive to team goals." (Paul, coach 2)

As well, Simone recognizes the need for all participants including team captains to be a part of the process of change and that coaches need to work with team captains to enact real, meaningful change. This is reflected by the teams who changed their previous traditions once the captains established a new order of acceptance on the team.

> "I told them when we had an incident that they could no longer haze, and to my knowledge, we have not had any hazing in the last three years. But in order for that change to occur you also need strong team captains and leaders who will buy into the idea of change. They are the ones who need to be out there actively implementing it." (Simone, coach 3)

A constant balancing act is required of the coach when dealing with hazing according to Jennifer.

> "It is a combination of being a part of it and having them do it on their own, it is a constant balancing act." (Jennifer, coach 1)

Both athletes and coaches acknowledged that for the orientation to succeed and the cycle of harmful initiation practices to be eliminated, it was integral for the coach to take both an active and proactive stance for this to occur. The coaches felt that they selectively preempted hazing through education and selecting athletes who came into the fold of the team already sharing a common vision of acceptable decorum with regards to initiating new members. Likewise, athletes expressed that it was the coach through their active involvement in supporting, establishing and participating in their orientation that could effectively "turn the tide" of past practice and facilitated a new welcoming structure and tradition for the team.

Coaches' Participation in Orientation

Most of the coaches present for the weekend orientation took the opportunity to participate in most of the activities in which their players were involved. It was this participation, or the desire

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to take part, that was a catalyst for a change in the perceptions of the athlete-coach relationship. The athletes' observations of their respective coaches taking part or leading by example were the germination of a fresh relationship of trust, respect and comfort.

> "The coach is awesome, he brought his kids, which was good, we had a lot of fun with them… He participated enough so that it was fun, but not enough so that it was overbearing. His role as set out from the start of the year was that he cared
>
> only about us when we were on the court, that is when we were his, but over the weekend I got to see another side of him, as a father and family man, I thought it was fun. He is a big kid who likes to have fun and that translated to us, if you see (sport) as fun…. He realizes the priorities. We learned that weekend that he cares about us building as a team, but that it was really up to us." (Manny)

The coaches' involvement, not only in the planning of the weekend, but in the specific activities, spawned a closer team dynamic facilitated by the equalization and humanizing effect of the interactions.

> "He did the spider web with us. We put him through one of the holes on the low ropes course. He was there and supported us and was with us, it was good; we didn't want to drop him. My perception of him changed when he took part, he seemed more like us, no longer like a coach, and that was good." (Luis)
>
> "Our coach took part in the activities, which was good. It allowed us to see her as more than just the coach. The weekend was team building and getting to know each other, so to see her as more than just an authoritative figure was good. To see her as a friend and to see her doing the activities showed another side of her. Her role switched, when we did the games she was one of us, but at the team meetings she was the coach. They are people as well and they see the importance in these things." (Amy)

Here Amy is describing the deconstructive properties of the weekend's activities, which unravelled many of the layers in which both players and coaches wrap themselves. Most athletes described an image of the coach as one of separation; one where the coach maintains distance in a bid to create space to maintain their power and authority over their players. The weekend enabled not only an imagined but a realized, fresh connection. Likewise, there is a shared perspective from the other side of the dynamic in the role as coach. Many of the coaches felt as though they were drawn closer into a deeper relationship with their athletes, facilitating a deeper sense of bonding.

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> "It is still difficult for athletes to transfer skills outside of the gym, but with that being said, I think that playing with the athletes and being in a different role has helped to facilitate a better relationship. For most athletes it does make a difference and they do feel more comfortable talking and interacting with me afterwards." (Jennifer, coach 1)

> "I think that weekend he completely stepped away from the role of observer and became close to us and ever since the weekend he has been more jovial and more of a peer. It was important because he did it in a way that was sincere. He was actually more approachable after that, he wasn't just saying it. He pushed us and then it was like acceptance, congratulations, you made the team, you are all warriors. He did it without saying it; he made us feel comfortable." (Manny)

To institute and propagate a new team order which reflects democratic and egalitarian ideals, the coach also needs to surrender some authority and power so that they too can assume a new identity, closer to that of peer or equal (Drewe, 2002). The emphasis then becomes the commonalities that are shared rather than the differences, an element that was significant to establishing change.

> "For some, I think that it is easy for them to see me as a peer doing something. For others, it is not possible; they will always see me as the coach. I hope that it humanizes me to some extent that says that I am not much different than all of them. Maybe I have been around the block a few more times but I am not much different. I think it is important that they see that I make mistakes and that they know I am not invincible. If you are not involved in the orientation then they see you as the person that is removed, who doesn't make mistakes and isn't really human." (Jennifer, coach 1)

Here, Jennifer, a coach who participated during the weekend, saw the team as two groups of individuals: those who perceived her beyond the role of coach, and those who could not.

> "You don't really want to be friends with the person who is laying down the law. It is not the easier thing to deal with and that is probably why it is awkward. But if it works then it is better. But to get to that position, it is a little touch and go." (Stella)

Her observation is astute in that it would appear that for first-year players, those more prone to preconception did struggle to see beyond the façade of the coach and see it, at least initially, as a barrier to overcome as Sara, John and Kelly say. This is consistent with the roles and identities

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implicit during hazing events as it is the first-year players or neophytes seeking inclusion who are much less likely to question or withdraw from the ceremony perhaps because they are still trying to find and assume identity and confirmation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Donnelly & Young, 1988; Robidoux, 2001).

> "It was important for the coach to participate in some of the activities. It is important to see [the coach] in regular life… For example, if you miss a ball and [the coach] yells at you that she still likes you as a person, it is important to understand that [the coach] can be really frustrated at the time but at the same time like you as a person. I was scared of [the coach] in tryouts so it was important for me to talk to [the coach] and have some conversations as normal human beings and not as [the coach] way up here and me little rookie. I was afraid that I didn't meet [the coach's] expectations in the beginning, I had talked to [the coach] before and it was nerve wracking coming in. I wanted to know what [the coach] thought about my play but after talking to [the coach] understanding that it is not the only thing that matters, [the coach] understood that it was a crazy time for me." (Kelly)

> "It did change the relationship. I remember in my first year being intimidated because he is a big guy; I was always scared to speak with him. I always had a middle-man who was a veteran player. I would ask him what coach was saying or tell coach this. But in this atmosphere, he is out there and he is communicating with us and at the same time you see him smile and you see him at a level where he is very relaxed and more approachable, so definitely for the team it made the relationship much stronger seeing him in a setting that wasn't our sport." (John)

> "It is intimidating because here is someone who is in charge of your destiny in your sport, so anytime that I have been with our coach in a more relaxed setting, I have always learned something else about her or she has had the opportunity to learn something about me. It is the same with the players where you develop a different kind of respect and they develop a different kind of respect for you too, so it makes [the coach] a little more approachable." (Sara)

The participation of the coaches in the orientation activities was described as an integral and necessary element to dissipate initial discomfort of some of the athletes.

The benefits are apparently twofold: the first occurred over the course of the weekend when the image of the coach is transformed; the second was enhanced interpersonal relationships over the course of the season.

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> "It has happened as time has passed…People became more comfortable, relationships developed between everybody, the coaches included…. A couple of days seeing your coach in pyjamas changes your perception and attitude towards [the coach]. That is a good thing. You tend not to see anything other than their
>
> coach qualities. You understand that [the coach] is a person and that sometimes [the coach] is going to come to practice really pissed off because she had a bad meeting at work. [The coach] does have to work and has a job and another life and is at the top of the hierarchy in many ways, but [the coach] is always like us in a lot of ways. It is a little awkward, but ultimately it works." (Stella)

It is interesting to note the discernible struggle and the growing pains between the established hierarchy and the restructuring process throughout the course of the season. The elimination of the status hierarchy seemed to be the key to fostering an acceptance of the idea of alternative methods of welcoming new members. This realignment is one more integral component for a team to distance itself from past degrading traditions (Meyer, 1998). Stella acknowledged its presence but questioned its purpose as her team had apparently established a more egalitarian community in which to function. Matthew has also pinpointed the positive effect that the coach's participation in the team activities had on redefining the team and the membership's role and interactions.

> "He was not above us or below us. He was one of our companions and that immediately makes it a comfort level that is good. It gets rid of the stigma of a coach that is above you. Now we know he is willing to do stuff with and for us, we shouldn't be afraid of him. We saw him outside of the role of the coach, he was a part and a member of the team which we had spent the entire weekend building. By participating it included him into the fold of the team." (Matthew)

Matthew described the balancing effect, a redistribution of power that allowed the coach to move into a position of camaraderie and further acceptance into the team. This is essential as Priest and Gass (1997) emphasize, for bonding and success to be achieved during adventure-based events, one in which all participants must be involved and perceived as equals.

For the coaches, they too felt it was important that they take part in as many activities as they were physically comfortable with, expanding their observable role as both participant and supporter of the team's initiatives and undertakings. For Simone it is the perception of interest and support which is crucial, making an effort and being a part of the atmosphere. In order for the team to see the orientation as successful, the coach must see it as a worthwhile endeavour.

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Participating in any form sends a very clear message to the team that the event is important to all of them.

> "I was there for all of the activities although I didn't want to rappel out of the barn. I don't think that it made a difference whether I did that or not, but it was important to them that I was there and supporting them. Last year I did the rock
>
> climbing, this year I went canoeing and we talked about setting different goals. I feel that it is important so that they see and recognize that I feel it is worthwhile enough to put the time and effort into it, and that I am interested in them and their experiences. By being there, if you send them off and aren't there, it sends the wrong message." (Simone, coach 3)

However, not all of the teams had the participation of their coaches. In one case, an athlete expressed delight that the coach was not there. In contrast to a coach participating, not participating can convey the message to the players that the coach does not feel the event is worthy enough for his or her attendance, thus negating player support and buy-in.

> "Our coach was really only there in the role of observer and supervisor, he didn't really participate in anything, every time we went to do an activity, he was there. He was very much on the outside. I would have liked to see him participate, maybe rappelling or canoeing, I think that would have been valuable for our team. I think that he thought that it was strictly a team thing and that he did not want to get involved, it was just for the guys, he used it as time off, where he didn't have to have control of the guys, he wasn't responsible. Somebody else is babysitting. (Dimitri)

Here Dimitri expressed his yearning to have had his coach take part beyond the role of observer, and in fact described him as an outsider on the periphery looking in. As well, his non-participation was apparently linked to his inability to "control" the team during the activities, indicating an inability to shift into a new environment which confers power and responsibility to others. The coach's reaction to this was withdrawal, indicating his discomfort with the power shift and perhaps exposing himself in a different light to his players.

> "I don't need the coach involved, I don't know whether it is important or not, but we see him enough in practice and he tells us what to do enough during the year, you don't want to hear it anymore, I was glad when he wasn't there on Saturday, we weren't all that enthused about being there to begin with." (Ted)

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Ted, whose relationship with the coach is admittedly strained, was happy not to have his coach involved, although he expressed apprehension about being there himself, perhaps as a reflection of the non-leadership, non-supportive role displayed by his coach.

This sentiment was supported and echoed by Simone, who also felt that the only team that displayed a lacklustre desire to take part in the weekend was shadowing the actions and inactions of its coach, who was evidently not supportive of the program. The coach of this particular team did not really support the program and engaged in questionable activities.

> "They didn't participate because they didn't get it, even though the coach thought that they had a successful weekend, his and my outcomes are completely different. I wouldn't have defined it as a success if his team had done what they did." (Simone, coach 3)

As well, another athlete from a separate team perceived the inability of that team and its coach, apparent in their outward attitude and actions, to fully embrace and immerse themselves in the potentiality of the weekend. This effectively limited their ability to reap any benefits from the program.

> "I think that some of the teams didn't understand the importance of coming together as a team. They just assumed that it was a forced activity so they accepted that and adopted the attitude that they will do a couple of things and then they will leave, they didn't really absorb the whole idea as we did anyways. It came from their coach not really being into it either. He came up late and left at night to go out. What message does that send?" (Connie)

In this section, the participants and the coaches iterated the importance of the coach to participate in some form during the course of the orientation. This involvement precipitated an erosion of the some of the preconceptions and the identities assumed within the space of the team. This shifting of roles and melting of the preconceptions humanized the coach and the athletes to each other which facilitated a "restructuring" and eradication of the hierarchy of the team. This in turn, created a more egalitarian, democratized plane where all the members of the team, the coaches included, experienced the orientation together effectively creating a new communal identity rooted in membership.

Post-Orientation Impact on the Coach-Athlete Relationship

Varsity athletes' perceptions of the role of the coach prior to the initiation ceremony, which traditionally occurs within the first two weeks of the team's annual launch, are established in the

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gymnasium or practice area, or during team meetings with minimal interaction (Bryshun & Young, 1999). This produced a very distant, narrow definition of that relationship in the minds of first-year athletes.

The orientation weekend provided an opportunity for interpersonal contact that allowed both players and coaches to observe the others in a non-sport, non-traditional setting. As Paul notes,

varsity sport and indeed university life is marked by hectic schedules, overloaded course agendas and minimal time for personal contact. The weekend was seen as an opportunity to recapture and nurture that time.

> "This is a big institution and I am limited in the time that I see them, versus a smaller community, where I used to see players outside of practices. Here the team only saw me as a coach in the gym, it is important for them to see me in other roles outside of the sport. The weekend orientation facilitated them seeing me and me seeing them." (Paul, coach 2)

> "It was obvious that she was happy to be there and happy to meet people, trying the activities. The time that was best for that was talking in the sauna. She was really laid back there, so it was good: we got to meet her. We played a game in there, people had to say things about themselves and we had to figure out which thing wasn't true, we had to figure out what people are like, who they are. She became one of us, because the things that we were doing were not related to the sport." (Kelly)

According to Simone, it is this very space that all of the members were able to occupy. The informality facilitated the humanization and the decoding of prescribed roles and perceptions. The outcome of such a shift, which for most did occur, effectively broke down personal access and facilitated communication.

> "I am no longer the coach when I am taking part, you are still the coach in that they look to you as the coach, I think they see me as more human and interacting on that level as opposed to an authority figure. You get to know the athletes a little better." (Simone, coach 3)

For Paul, it was crucial to be incorporated into the fabric of his team and to be seen as a peer alongside his players, as opposed to separate from them. This enables the sharing of emotions which makes us human. Paul saw a link between fostering this cohesion and playing together as a unit during those crucial times, and saw a connection to success during those moments. Other

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researchers (Sugerman & Garvey, 1999; Widmeyer & Martens, 1993) describe how the perception of cohesion can enhance successful outcomes for performative groups.

> "They saw me as a part of the team as opposed to separate from the team, which I think is important. I think that it was apparent that it helps them to relate to me….Being at the orientation setting helps that. It helps them to see me as I am. As a person, not removed from them so much and that we share the same goals.
>
> They want to perform and play well and I want them to perform and to play well. They want to win a championship and I want them to win that. I am not a big egotist when it comes to winning and losing games. I want us to play well and to win when it matters most. I know that we won't win every game, it is a philosophy that doesn't work for some people, but this year we have won the most important games, this is directly connected to the orientation goals, and I believe that they will work harder for each other when it matters most." (Paul, coach 2)

For these coaches it is the belief in, and the cultivation of, the holistic experience for the athlete which goes beyond simply focusing on skill and sport development. For Simone it is the vision beyond winning that she saw as the fundamental understanding of the varsity athletic experience. This is linked to the deconstruction of the barriers separating players from the coach, creating a co-joined, shared experience.

> "It is important to get to know them in that light, as people, not just athletes…We are not just coaching them to be good…players. There is a lot more to university sport than that and that is not what you get out of it. Yes, you want them to get the most out of the sport experience. You want them to graduate, to learn to work in a group and to go on to many other things that are outcomes other than winning a championship. Which is really minor compared to the many other things that you could possibly get out of that experience." (Simone, coach 3)

The coach can be directly responsible for establishing team decorum in conjunction with an alternative to the traditional initiation such as the orientation weekend (Johnson & Donnelly, 2004). The danger is that in the absence of choice or directive from the coach, at least in this case, the team would be in danger of keeping their traditional hazing practices.

> "The coach mentioned that this would be something instead of what we had been doing, so guys figured that they didn't need to do anything. If we didn't have the weekend orientation we might have reverted back to a worse initiation, guys

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> might have felt that they didn't have the pressure anymore of having the team disbanded so they may want to resort back to where we go back out somewhere, a night on the town and announce the rookies to everybody." (John)

In effect the orientation, supported by the coach and a progressive administration, provides credibility the senior players need to lead team mates in a new direction.

It is the coach who can be the most influential factor in a team's welcoming ceremony. A proactive, progressive coach, who is respected and proves to be a strong leader, will be able to create an environment where the athletes buy into the belief of team building, effectively steering them away from hazing the novitiates. Unfortunately, some coaches have distanced themselves from the process altogether, which effectively leaves the event in the hands of the players and can thus lead to failure to change (Johnson & Donnelly, 2004). However, the orientation provided an opportunity for players and coaches to forge closer bonds among those who participated, grounded in a common experience. It facilitated the redefinition of the role of the coach, allowing the players to see their coach as a person.

The role of the coach is crucial at this juncture; a strong leadership role can change the problematic cycle of damaging initiations. Yet, for the most part, coaches seem opposed to placing themselves directly in the process. Both athletes and coaches indicated that the orientation weekend triggered a transformative relationship as it melted away the prescribed roles of athlete and coach which dominated their interactions up to that point. Sharing a weekend in this setting and going through the orientation together allowed coaches and athletes to see each others' humanness which they all described as facilitating a deeper level of cohesion on their teams (Meyer, 1998; Meyer & Wenger, 1998; Meyer, 2000).

Conclusions

Overwhelmingly, both athletes and coaches felt that their orientation experience facilitated the catalytic effect of bonding the team and fostering a sense of inclusion for all members. They felt that they were able to establish their goals and mission for the year while actively learning about each individual member of the team. They were able to forge an open, welcoming and sharing environment, free from competition. Athletes were viewed challenging themselves not only to set, but also to attain new limits. The orientation experience, through its menu of programming, also encouraged athletes and coaches to learn to trust one another. Many of the activities allowed teams to problem-solve as a unit, a skill that translates directly to their interaction on their playing fields, arenas and pools, as well as replacing competitive, individual goals with co-operative ones. Everyone's contribution was valued and allowed both players and coaches to realize the different types of leaders present within their folds.

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Many participants were able to see each other in a different way, apart from the sport and away from their prescribed roles within their respective sports, as human beings and not solely as student-athletes. A coach described one athlete who approached the weekend with negative energy, yet his attitude was not allowed to permeate the spirit and desire of the team to have a successful weekend, so they bonded as a unit to persuade him to see the possibilities and usefulness of the orientation. As well, the cohesiveness extended beyond the normal boundaries

of team interaction and enabled athletes of differing skill levels to work together, some meeting here at the retreat for the first time.

All of the various activities were non-sport-specific which provided a first time scenario for most athletes, an integral component to enhance a common, shared practice for all of the athletes. This is key to reducing the power imbalances and hierarchical structure found on most teams and effective in creating a democratized space which facilitates the potential for deeper levels of cohesion and a true sense of communitas between members on the team.

The role and image of the coach evolved during the weekend from that of authoritarian and distanced leader, to that of a sensitive, feeling person, willing to take part in a shared experience with the team, which in turn facilitated a deeper level of cohesion between players and their coaches.

The coaches who are strict in their expectation that the team not participate in any kind of initiation ceremony either due to pressures from the administration concerning university policy, or because of their own beliefs are also the coaches most likely to participate and involve themselves in an alternative type of orientation. This facilitates and conveys to the team the importance and strength of adopting a positive ritual, sanctioned by the coach's active involvement.

Those coaches who chose to leave the topic ambiguous either through lack of instruction one way or the other, or by administering obligatory university policy directives with a knowing wink and not fully immersing themselves in the process, leave their teams wandering the hazing landscape alone. This is a problematic non-response since the results of this study demonstrate the athletes' positive response to alternative welcoming ceremonies when the coach is involved, and a more positive effect when he or she actively participates, fostering greater cohesion and a better experience for the participants.

It is the coach who can be the most influential factor in a team's welcoming ceremony. A proactive, progressive coach who is respected and a strong leader will be able to create an environment where the athletes buy into the belief of team building, effectively steering them

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Sharing a weekend in this setting and going through the orientation together allowed coaches and athletes to see each others' humanness which they all described as facilitating a deeper level of cohesion on their teams.

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