**Coaching Fitting In: Coaches, Soccer, and Education in Professional Sports Clubs in Low Socioeconomic Class Cities in Israel**

**Abstract**

This article discusses the ways soccer coaches who coach high schoolers in professional sports clubs in low socioeconomic class cities in Israel define their roles. The article exposes five main findings that represent their descriptions and accounts: a description of the student-players’ life spaces; the coaches’ views of their roles; the central values important to the coaches; the relations between the coaches and the student-players’ parents; and a description of the student-players’ future orientation. These findings encourage a discussion of the connection between education and class, or the way class works in informal education spaces.

**Keywords:** Coaches; soccer/football; habitus; cultural capital; class

**Introduction**

One of the strongest cultural scripts in many Western countries is that education is the great equalizer or a panacea that can resolve socioeconomic and personal ills caused by structural inequality. At the same time, the reports about the stability of disparities between rich and poor, the increase in the Gini Index in many “democratic” countries, low socioeconomic mobility rates (Rivera & Tilcsik, 2016), and differences in the academic achievements of groups from different ethnic, racial, and class groups (Author, 2017) indicate the durability of inequality (Tilly 1998). In the context of this decrease in the credibility of the (neo)liberal assumptions about equal educational opportunity, educational anthropologists and sociologists have addressed at length the question of how to resolve the promise of formal equity in schools with the stubbornness of class inequality. In this context, many educational studies have exposed how formal education in schools fills a central role in the transmission of social inequality and privileges, through, among other aspects, specific discourse arrangements, structural practices (such as tracking), pedagogies, and relations between teachers and students (Calarco, 2018; Tyson, 2013). Some studies—a relatively small number few compared to the number of studies of formal educational spaces—have examined how these stratificational dynamics are present in informal spaces (Levy Friedman, 2013). For example, some studies describe, in this context, how enrichment programs and competitive after-school activities, as well as organized sports, are tied closely with children’s and parents’ socioeconomic background (Andersen & Bakken, 2019). This article proposes examining the connection between class and informal education through in-depth interviews with professional soccer coaches who coach high school students living in low socioeconomic class cities in Israel. The two main questions offered in the article are: How do coaches who work in professional soccer clubs with low socioeconomic class youth define their role (in terms of the identity of their role, values, relations with parents, and the imagined future orientation for their students)? Do the coaches’ definitions of their roles fill the function of reproduction of social inequality, and if so, how?

These research investigations offer contributions to several fields of knowledge: the study of class and inequality in informal educational spaces (Levy Friedman, 2013), the study of sports and class (Bourdieu, 1978), the professional identity of youth coaches (Power, 2021), and the study of disadvantaged identities (Author, 2020).

**Education, Class, and Habitus**

Many studies of socioeconomic class and lifestyle, which were based on the intellectual heritage of Bourdieu (1977, 1984), have described how cultural capital (resources such as educational degrees, aesthetic tastes, and dispositions the individual can use to produce prestige, high income, and privileges) and habitus (internalized cognitive-social structures through which people navigate the social world), connect explicitly and implicitly between emotional-psychological life and structural-social structures (Lareau, 2015; Reay, 2005). In this context, various studies have exposed how cultural capital, habitus, and class socialization differences in various educational institutions contribute to educational stratification not only through cognitive-academic skills (mathematics, languages, and reading comprehension, for example) but also through cultivating social and behavioral skills, “soft” skills, or “banal assets” (Jennings and DiPrete 2010) such as comfort with authority figures, negotiation, assertiveness, and a sense of entitlement. These skills are described as primarily advantaging students from high socioeconomic class because these skills match the values and sense of self generally present in their families (Bourdieu, 1984; Lareau, 2015). In fact, these skills are described as cultural capital and valuable resources. These capital and cultural resources have been found to be connected not only to academic achievement but also to professional achievement. They are seen as markers of high status that transmit to gatekeepers a message of cultural similarity or being *one of us* (Kaufman & Gabler 2004), which are critical for receiving senior positions (Rivera 2015).

Lauro (2003) in a groundbreaking study of parenting styles, class, and daily life, described how children from middle and high class attain ease in communication with authority figures. For example, they feel comfortable asking for more help from teachers, even in other fields (see also Calarco 2011) and in practice use them for their own benefit. Lauro described how as a result of parents from middle and high class cultivating and training them in verbality and entitlement, children even receive greater attention from their teachers in schools, and their transition to elite postsecondary institutions is easier (see also Jack 2016).

Streib (2011) described how four-year-olds are class actors: middle- and upper-class four-year-olds “take the floor”: they talk more, have larger vocabularies, silence lower-class children, interrupt teachers with questions, complain that other children are keeping them from expressing themselves, create more interactions with adults, and demand their attention; and they “take a stand”: they defend their positions fluently and confidently, conduct negotiations, and win disputes over toys. Note that their interruptions are rewarded: teachers respond to their requests more, their interruptions are labeled a sign of interest in the topic; they are defined as more intelligent, feel that the teacher speaks to them directly, and experience triumph (see also Nelson & Schutz, 2007).

Several ethnographic studies at elite schools (Demerath 2009; Gaztambide-Fernandez 2009; Howard 2008; Khan 2011) have described how cultural capital is attained through various practices such as training students in a sense of ease (including the message that cultural hierarchies are “natural”); the establishment of distinction regarding their unique subjectivity; experience in imagining a privileged (academic and professional) future, or in colonizing the future; massive use of the psychological capital and discourse that encourages students to prefer solipsism to structural attributions (see also Kraus et al. 2012 in this context); and use of technologies of recognition (“student of the month”; “stellar senior”) that encourage a discourse of meritocracy.

Other studies have exposed how children from a low economic class, in contrast, express respect and distance towards authority figures. As a result, they avoid asking for help and express a “logic of appeasement” (Calarco, 2014). Studies have also reported that teachers employ fewer practices of choice and negotiation in interactions with their disadvantaged students compared to advantaged students, employ authoritarian discipline (Kerstetter 2016)2 and a style of straightforward directives (“Zach, get in here!”), and include many more prohibitions (“Stop it now”) (Nelson & Schutz, 2007) than teachers include towards advantaged students. These practices serve, in practice, as a *hidden curriculum* (Anyon, 1980) that constructs a subjectivity of obedience that, in turn, makes it difficult to achieve rewards in elite spaces in the future.

It is important to note that these class differences in the acquisition of cultural capital were found not only in formal education spaces but also in informal education spaces. Levey Friedman (2013) proposed the concept of “competitive kid capital” to describe how social reproduction is created and maintained. Parents of high socioeconomic class sign their children up for after-school activities (such as chess, dance, and soccer) in order to expand their opportunities and train them in cultural capital that will assist them in occupying privileged locations in the future:

“(1) internalizing the importance of winning, (2) learning how to recover from a loss to win in the future, (3) managing time pressure, (4) performing in stressful environments, and (5) feeling comfortable being judged by others in public” (Levey Friedman, 2013, p. 92).

Aurini et. al. (2020) described how parents of a high socioeconomic class in Canada, who sign up their children for after-school activities or extracurricular activities (such as sports, drama, and music) are aware their children will not become professionals in those fields but seek to encourage the acquisition of specific skills such as social and life skills and leadership (cultural capital in the terminology of Bourdieu, 194), that will enable them to acquire rewards in the future as adults.

**Education, Class, and Sports**

“[I]n addition to its strictly health-giving functions," asserts Bourdieu (1978, p. 836), “golf, like caviar, *foie gras* or whisky, has a *distributional significance* (the meaning which practices derive from their distribution among agents distributed in social classes), which, unanimously recognized and acknowledged on the basis of practical mastery of the probability of the various classes practicing the various sports."

This description by Bourdieu, and additional scholars following him (DeLuca & Andrew, 2016; Eriksen & Stefansen, 2021), points at the stratificational qualities of sports and the way various types of sports in turn establish a sporting habitus (Stuij, 2015) that maintains privileges and inequality. In this context, various scholars have described how types of sports such as golf, tennis, and sailing are connected with the cultural and psychological ideals of the high class or the “right Kind of Selves” (Gillies, 2005, p. 838). Other types of sports, such as soccer, weightlifting, and boxing, are described as widespread among the disadvantaged classes. Whereas the first group of sports are socially constructed by members of the hegemony as aesthetic, delicate, and sophisticated, the latter are characterized as vulgar, violent, and involving excess physical pain, suffering, and “intellectual poverty” (Bourdieu, 1978, p. 836).

Contemporary studies describe how despite the formal openness of various sports to members of different classes, there is a connection between organized sports and participation by members of bourgeois classes (Andersen & Bakken, 2019; Wheeler & Green, 2019). Parents of high socioeconomic class described how one of the expressions of “good parenting” or “responsible parenting” is signing up their children for sports clubs (Vincent & Ball, 2007; Wheeler & Green, 2019). Participation in these sports clubs, and in specific sports (such as swimming and tennis) is described by these parents as encouraging specific cultural capital (such as competitiveness, self-confidence, and experience winning) which is expected to assist their children in the future. In other words, parents of high socioeconomic class see their children’s participation in sports as a means of creating an ethos of *standing out* that is connected to the project of their children’s development (Gillies, 2005). In a recently published study that examined Norwegian working-class parents’ explanations for their children’s participation in sports, Eriksen and Stefansen (2021) exposed the rationale of fitting in, contrasted with the rationale of standing out expressed by high socioeconomic class parents. Working-class parents explained the importance of their children’s participation in sports for the purpose of creating a sense of belonging to a community, establishing defenses against risky behavior, and educating their children to be respectable citizens.

This rationale, asserted Eriksen and Stefansen (2021), does not serve as a project of distinction expected to provide their children with the cultural capital valued in elite spaces. The stratificational characteristics of sports were examined further in studies with parents (Wheeler & Green, 2019) and children (Stuij, 2015) and through various ethnographies that studied a variety of sports (DeLuca, 2016; Schmitt et al., 2020; Swanson, 2009). Less research has been conducted on the ways these stratificational characteristics are described, constructed, and maintained by coaches in various class spaces, as this article shall now describe.

**Research Process**

**Sample Population**

The Central Bureau of Statistics in Israel ranks all localities by socioeconomic cluster from 1 (lowest socioeconomic status) to 10 (highest socioeconomic status). The cluster ranking is based on variables such as average number of persons per household, percentage of guaranteed minimal income recipients, and percentage of Bagrut (matriculation) certificate recipients. This study is based on interviews with fifteen male soccer coaches who coach in localities of low socioeconomic status (clusters 3 and 4). All the coaches work with high-school aged youth.

Footnote: Clusters 1 and 2 include Arab and Jewish Ultraorthodox localities not covered in our study.

The coaches interviewed were aged 24–50. All the coaches studied at the official training institutions for trainers and coaches in Israel and hold at least a certificate of soccer counselor (the first level of coaching certification in Israel), which enables them to coach children and youth. Half of the coaches hold a coach certificate (the second level in Israel), which enables them to coach youth and adult teams up to the level of amateur leagues. Most of the coaches are not employed full-time as soccer coaches and work in at least one additional job during the workday that is their primary income source. They coach soccer as a part-time job in the afternoon and evening.

The participants were chosen through purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). The main criterion was their being coaches in competitive clubs who coach teams of players aged 12–16. Appropriate interviewees were located through acquaintances in various clubs (team managers, coaches, directors). The first author of this study was a soccer player in the past and now works as a field activity manager for an educational organization that deals with sports. These connections helped greatly in developing conversation with the coaches through concepts from their world and in thus gaining their trust.

**Research Method**

The research method used in this study is semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interviews, which lasted about an hour, consisted of several parts: background details (sports training, routine); view of the coach’s role (“Do you view yourself more as a coach or as an educator?”; “What would be considered success in your view?”); important social skills and values (“What are the main values that are important for you to transmit to the players?”); parents’ expectations (“What are the parents’ expectations of you as a coach?”); work in various life spaces (“What makes work with children in this region unique?”); and future orientation (“How do you imagine their future?”). The interviews were recorded using a portable voice recorder, with the interviewees’ consent, and transcribed. The six final interviews were conducted on Zoom because of the start of the COVID-19 crisis (March 2020). The coaches’ names were changed to maintain their anonymity. The study was approved by the ethics committee of the department to which the two authors belong.

**Processing of Findings**

All the interviews were analyzed through the methodologies proposed by grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). First, transcripts were read openly with the aim of identifying various themes mentioned by the coaches freely without connection to the research questions. In the next stage focused reading was conducted in accordance with the research questions: the view of the coach’s role; the main values the coaches transmit to the players through coaching and play; parents’ expectations; and the youths’ future orientation. In the last stage, the transcripts were read with the aim of examining whether the coaches addressed various themes and issues we did not identify in the previous readings.

**Findings**

**Descriptions of the Youths and Their Class Life Spaces:**

The coaches described the low socioeconomic class cities as peripheral spaces (geographically and socially) and as spaces of risks and limitations, in which deficits both economic and cultural are very salient. In other words, the coaches used descriptions of deficit (Atkins, 2010) frequently. The coaches emphasized how much the economic situation in the periphery is not good, how much the children’s opportunities for development in the region are “limited,” how much the enrichment (after-school) programs are not varied, while soccer is described as almost the *only* leisure activity that attracts children in the afternoon. Amir described this as follows: “They don’t have anything here [in the periphery] other than soccer, and there [in the more privileged Israeli geographic center] they have everything, meaning whatever they want, all sorts of enrichment programs and activities, and swimming, and the sea, and everything.” This attention to the work of the symbolic boundaries (Lamont, 2000) between the center and the periphery or between low socioeconomic class cities and high socioeconomic class cities makes present, in turn, the experience of deficit suggested regarding disadvantaged spaces and individuals (Atkins, 2010). Eli also addressed the work of symbolic boundaries between center and periphery in reference to parents’ payments:

The region is problematic economically. [I] survive thanks to parents’ payments, and it is very hard to work like this without additional funding from surrounding entities…In the central region, players come who don’t have an economic problem, every parent knows the amounts [to be paid] and the parents invest a great deal of money to give the child the greatest opportunity to become a soccer player…here [in the periphery] it is very different, like family, everyone knows each other and knows the economic situation, who can pay and who cannot…here we work with a tweezers regarding payments.

Doron mentioned a different deficit in the geographic-social periphery where he works, in terms of “cultural poverty” expressed by the lack and/or limited diversity of leisure activities as a source of children’s development:

The approach used towards children from the periphery and that used towards children from the center are completely different…there [in the center] they are open to many leisure activities [afterschool programs] and here [in the periphery] the activities are very limited…The development of children in the periphery is different from the development of children in the center.

Regarding the description of the youth, coaches frequently used collective values (Tse & Ng, 2014) that characterize the spaces of low socioeconoimc class, which pertain to family, honor, discipline, order, and organization. Yaron expressed this as follows:

When I make decisions, sometimes I also think about the children’s families…if I won’t let them play they will be sad and I know their parents…in the periphery it is family unequivocally…familiaility comes at the expense of learning and professionalism.

Eran described the characteristics of children living in low socioeconomic class localities by describing the characteristics of children in the “center” (localities of high socioeconomic class):

The children there [in the center] are more spoiled and they have more opportunities, here [in the periphery] there is warmth and familiality and everything on behalf of the children…here [in the periphery] we know everyone, and this strongly influences decision-making and the way we relate to the children.

The coaches also described the youths in the periphery through negative characteristics and negative circumstances liable to befall them, and the reason for educating them as “educated” and “disciplined” subjects. It is important to note the interviews indicated that none of the coaches spoke of the young men they coach and educate in a positive manner. For example, Noam stated the following:

Major talents, for example from the Ethiopian community [which is considered especially poor] do not come close to here because they are afraid their parents will not have money to pay and then these children will be in the street, [with] alcohol and drugs…I do everything so that these children will be in a framework and we hold them strongly here.

Idan added:

Our children here are *shlukhim* [a derogatory term originally used in reference to Moroccan Berber Jews from isolated Atlas Mountains villages that means abandoned, not cultivated, and also primitive, lacking culture and education] [who] always seek action and getting in trouble; even in [soccer] games you see this *shlukhism* expressed.

Yotam summarized the difference between the youths from different socioeconomic classes (center and periphery) through a metaphor of car factories:

Think of us like a car factory, they [the center] are a Mercedes factory and we [periphery] are a small factory, Fiat, not in the [same] speed and quality…the children there [in the center] have more opportunities and great talent, but if a child here does not have money, the child will stay with us and receive what we can provide him…here [in the periphery] we are seeking something smaller, more familial, that the children have a supportive framework so that in the end of the day they won’t go to the parks, smoke, or be criminals.

**How Do Coaches View Their Role? “He is the biological father, and I am the soccer father”; “The most important thing is that they end up as [responsible and mature] people.”**

When the coaches who work in low socioeconomic class cities were asked about their role, they responded using descriptions such as “father figure” and “family.” Uri described it as follows: “For me, to be a coach is like [being] a father, like [being] a father to the children. [I] concern myself with them socially and to ensure they study as necessary, and if there are problems at home, I enter the picture.”

Uri, like additional coaches, gave meaning to the importance of his role in the children’s lives through the emotional and social emphasis that in his view is missing from their lives. Danny also emphasized the value of familiality in the coaches’ role: “I am raising these children and then I want to see the improvement in discipline and education.”

An additional and meaningful role of coaches in low socioeconomic class cities, as they described it, is to educate the youths to discipline and the “straight path” in order to avoid “mix-ups” such as criminality, theft, alcohol, and smoking. Dror describes this as follows: “First of all I come to educate the guys, and my dream is that all the children I [coach] have a permanent educational seminar throughout the year at the [soccer] club.” When Dror was asked “What is the importance of an educational seminar?” He replied, “That I see the players succeeding not to get mixed up and they stay on the straight path.” When Dror was asked how important it was for the players to become professionals and advance to higher leagues, he replied in short “it is most important that they end up as [mature and responsible] people and don’t get mixed up in nonsense.”

Because the topic of “mix-ups” was also mentioned by Amir, we asked him to expand on the topic. Amir offered a description that characterized the other coaches: [It is] “like [being] a father, like [being] a father to the children. [I] concern myself with them socially and to ensure they study as necessary, and if there are problems at home I enter the picture. I see this as a sort of paternal mission.”

He added, “I know all the families here, I am the father figure in the stadium…No one messes with me, neither parents nor children.” Yaron offered a similar description: “The child should understand that I am [his] father just like his father at home. He is the biological father and I am the soccer father, but I give a great deal and am even more meaningful in many cases.” The connection between the role of coach and discipline among the coaches from low socioeconomic class localities was made through use of the explanation that the youths lack a father figure. These descriptions by the coaches in low socioeconomic class localities indicate views of the students’ deficit; an emphasis on a habitus that includes discipline and obedience (or a lack of cultural capital in the terms of Bourdieu, 1984), which characterizes a habitus of the working class and working-class jobs; and a pedagogy of informal education of low expectations (“It is most important they end up [responsible and mature] people”). A similar pedagogy of low expectations among low economic class was revealed in public schools in the United States (Golann, 2021), in Britain (Reay, 2021), and in Israel (Author, 2018). This pedagogy was also found among teachers in trade schools, which are also known as “last chance schools” (Author, 2020), and which are primarily attended by students from low socioeconomic class and stigmatized ethnic groups in Belgium (Van Houtte & Stevens, 2010), Greece (Giannakaki & Batziakas, 2016), Israel (Ben-Peretz et al., 2003), China (Woronov, 2016), Denmark (Kopsen, 2014), Sweden, and Finland (Rosvall et al., 2017).

**Central Values Important to the Coach: “First of they should be disciplined, proper conduct is before everything.”**

In interviews, the coaches were asked to describe the values most important to them and to rank them from most to least important. The central value that arose in low socioeconomic class cities was “discipline.” The definition and description of this value were expressed through several specific characteristics: “good behavior,” “being a person,” and “being educated.” Doron described it as follows: “First of they should be disciplined, proper conduct is before everything.” Several scholars have described how values of discipline and conformity are commonplace in schools attended by students from low socioeconomic classes (Bourdieu 1977). In this context, these scholars also emphasized how these values serve as a hidden curriculum that prepares the students for jobs in the future labor market (Anyon, 1980).

The coaches’ discourse pertaining to discipline made frequent use of words that indicate avoidance, distance, and distancing, such as “without,” “not,” and “don’t,” which in turn indicates a coaching directive. Yaron, who coaches many children in his locality, told how he always makes sure to remind the children: “without curse words and without unnecessary words.” He adds that if the children he coaches do not follow those values he will “give them a sort of punishment that they sit at home and think about it.” These descriptions regarding the low-class youths tag them as youths “in life-threatening situations” (Dolev, 2001) with characteristics such as: parents’ difficulty with their children’s behavior; problems learning and attaining skills; and risky behaviors (violence, drugs, and alcohol).

Most of the coaches also emphasized the value of “respect” as meaningful for them. In this context they described the importance that the youths whom they coach respect them and their surroundings. These values echo the values commonplace in collectivist cultures (Tse & Ng, 2014) and in cultures of low socioeconomic classes (Lamont, 2000). In this context, Amos described the following: “Before you play soccer you must be a person, respect your parents, respect people who are older than you, be a good son at home, and be a good student.”

**Parents’ Expectations of the Coach: “My word to the children is much stronger [than the word] of the parents]”**

The parents’ expectations of the coaches were described by the coaches as spanning from “no expectations” and “they are not interested in what happens” to “addressing behavior and minutes played.” The coaches reported that the parents expect them to educate their children and threaten them that if they do not behave, the coach will not let them play. In this context Noam described the following:

“They [the parents] also address [me] about studies, ‘the child is making problems at home,’ ‘the child is making problems at school,’ so that I will intervene, and I do intervene…my word to the children is much stronger than [that of their parents] and they straighten out.”

The coaches emphasized that they invest a great amount in addressing complex behavioral issues that the parents are unsuccessful in addressing at home such as the use of disrespectful language or problems at school. In this context, Yotam described the following:

At the school they call me Angel Yotam. Every time a parent or teacher faces problems with a player of mine, they immediately call me to the school to address the issue…I visit the school once or twice a week and simply solve problems that they don’t understand how easily I solve…the children know not to mess with me.

The expectations of many parents, as the coaches described, pertain to the topic of their children’s minutes played. Eran stated that “most of the parents want to see the child play…the parents think that only [the children] who play [in games] are part of the team.” The coaches explained that the parents’ message is that it is not important what happens during the entire training week and whether the child enjoys himself, develops, learns, and attains life skills; this creates a great deal of pressure among the children in which the minutes played are what is important and if they do not play in a game then they are worthless. Moreover, according to the coaches this approach causes a negative atmosphere surrounding the games, as parents prefer their child’s team lose if he doesn’t play. Eli described this as follows: “Even if the team wins and their child does not play, it bothers them.” He added:

In addition, there are parents who see the big players, the money, and the glory that soccer can bring, who think their child will one day be like that. Other than the dimension of pressure these children experience, their parents’ expectations of the coaches are very extreme and often cause both the child and the coaches major distress and a lack of enjoyment of soccer.

An additional issue, described by the coaches as harming their professionalism, is connected to the way they make their professional decisions. Uri described a situation in a small, familial locality in which everyone knows each other, where every decision he makes on the pitch can influence life outside the pitch:

“When I make decisions, sometimes I also think about the children’s families…If I don’t let them play, they will be sad; I know the parents…it is family, unequivocally in places like ours, and it certainly affects the professional decisions.”

The coaches described this situation as an attempt to maintain “family harmony” in the locality, even if it was at the cost of their professional decisions.

**Future Orientation—Limitations and a Lack of Success**

The coaches were also asked how they imagine the future of the youths they coach. Future orientation is defined as the descriptions and images individuals have about their future. Many scholars describe the therapeutic properties of a positive future orientation among children and adolescents and its practice (which Appadurai 2004 calls “the capacity to aspire”), by the adults in their lives (primarily parents and teaches), as cultural capital that maintains privileges and improves life changes (for a review see Author, 2020).

The coaches’ descriptions of the future of the youths they coach included three main objectives: a Bagrut (high school matriculation) certificate, military service (which is compulsory in Israel for Jewish citizens), and work. Idan stated as follows: “There will be a few who succeed greatly, and there will some who simply connect to jobs here…factory jobs, as there are not too many choices here.” Dror added on this topic: “Maybe five percent will succeed and complete their military service and maybe learn something; the rest will simply work in what there is here in the city, you know, get by.”

The coaches did not report extraordinary successes or higher education. They described higher education as a distant achievement not dependent on the children’s actions. Amir described this as follows: “I wish some of them would also reach higher education.”

It is also important to mention that the coaches connected the youths’ expected future to the life conditions characterizing spaces of social exclusion (Baillergeau & Duyvendak, 2020). Uri described this as follows:

It is also very important what the children see in the periphery, and the facilities in the periphery are problematic, without restrooms and bleachers; sometimes I feel they are coming to a cage…You want to teach the children equality and professionalism but are dealing with shoddy facilities and this is what the children see and learn.

**Discussion: Coaching Fitting In**

This article deals with the ways soccer coaches who work with adolescent boys living in low socioeconomic class cities define their role, the educational values important to them, the future orientation they imagine for their students, and their relations with their students’ parents. These research investigations are important considering that the students spend many hours during the week in practice and interacting with the coaches. Moreover, studies indicate that only a very small percentage of these youths will become professional soccer players (Farmer, 2019). In this context, soccer coaching, like other extracurricular activities, is a critical space for coaches and parents to conduct socialization (Aurini et al., 2020), establishment of habitus and attainment of cultural capital (Schmitt et al., 2020), or the creation of classed individuals (O'Flynn & Lee, 2010).

The findings of this study reveal a connection between position and disposition and that sports activities (or informal education) are part and parcel of the stability of inequality and intergenerational class replication (Bourdieu, 1978). The study’s findings describe how the coaches expressed the identity of a role based on familial metaphors such as “father figure,” “father replacement,” or providing education not given to the students by their parents. The coach-educators also emphasized emotional-parental aspects (“to raise them”) of their work that are connected to their aspiration to assist in educating and raising their students. In this context, the coach-educators expressed their students’ need for discipline (“a permanent educational seminar”). Moreover, they frequently used the perspective of deficit (Atkins, 2010), which is based on the numerous deficits affecting their students (“economic poverty”; “cultural poverty”), their view of their students as “at-risk youth” who should be prevented from “getting mixed up” and “criminality” through guiding them to “the straight path” (for a description of the role of sports among working-class parents as protecting from danger see Eriksen & Stefansen, 2021). This role identity also echoes the values the educator-coaches emphasized for their low socioeconomic class students: discipline, mannerly conduct, respect, and “being a person” (“before being a soccer player”).

The future orientation the coach-educators imagined for their students also expressed a pedagogy of low expectations (“few of them will succeed”). The educator-coaches described the “regular” future path awaiting their students, which includes military service (which is compulsory for Jewish citizens in Israel), work, and family. This description did not include extraordinary success or higher education. Finally, the coach-educators described their interactions with the students’ parents as characterized by the parents’ requests of the coach-educators to assist them in “educating” their children (in the sense of discipline) and dealing with the number of minutes played. The coach-educators described the issue of minutes played as a “simple” or “inappropriate” issue (educationally or parentally). The descriptions and accounts expressed by the coach-educators in low socioeconomic cities were characterized by symbolic boundary work (Lamont, 2000) between their students and students or young soccer players from high socioeconomic classes. This boundary work in turn makes present, we assert, the missing habitus of the low socioeconomic status youths, according to the descriptions of the coaches-educators, and the *comme il faut* habitus of high socioeconomic class youths.

Following studies of the connection between education and class (Calarco, 2018; Lareau, 2015; Tyson, 2011), we assert that these findings have consequences for the transmission of privilege and the maintenance of an educational layer or of the way class works in educational spaces. The coach-educators’ engagement with instilling discipline and obedience to the ideal norms, which is a product of a specific social construction, serves as a hidden curriculum (Perry-Hazan & Birnhack, 2018). As several scholars have described in this context, educating towards these values tracks youths from low socioeconomic class to working-class jobs (Anyon 1980; Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Moreover, the pedagogy of low expectations (“that he be a person”), also expressed by a limited or “regular” imagined future (regarding a “regular” imagined future for students from other socioeconomic classes see Klein & Shoshana, 2020), does not provide them the cultural capital necessary for upward mobility (Friedman, 2014).

The work of the coach-educators with low socioeconomic status youths exposes the lack of educational effort to cultivate cultural capital (Golann, 2021) or skills defined as soft skills or banal assets (Jennins & DiPrete, 2010) such as positive future orientations that include many possibilities, “a winner mentality,” and a sense of comfort with authority figures. These soft skills and cultural capital have been described by many scholars as connected to the maintenance of educational stratification and social inequality, primarily because they serve as markers of high status that transmit to gatekeepers a message of similarity or being “one of us” (Kaufman & Gabler, 2004) is critical for attaining senior positions (Rivera, 2015). In this context, and following Eriksen and Stefansen (2021) and Gillies (2005), we propose that the coaches in our study are training the youths in ideals of fitting in rather than standing out.

In her study of childrearing practices among parents from various socioeconomic classes, Gillies (2005) exposed how high socioeconomic class parents, who invest significant resources to cultivating their children, express a logic of standing out. This logic expresses the parents’ desire of “constructing their children as ‘unique’ and distinct from others” (p. 845) or “being singled out as special” (p. 846). In other words, the parents seek to raise their children as “ the right kind of selves” (p.842) (which include, among other elements, values of individuality, competitiveness, uniqueness, and confidence) and a discourse of entitlement (p. 842) as cultural capital that, in turn, assists in their children’s standing out and thus achieving future successes.

In a recently published article, Eriksen and Stefansen (2021) examined youth sports parenting in working class communities in Norway, primarily their beliefs about the goals of youth sports. The scholars found that the parents expressed aspirations of fitting in that emphasize how sport is expected to ensure protection from the risks that their children do not become decent citizens and respectable lifestyles.

Eriksen and Stefansen (2021) assert in their article, and we assert here as well in reference to our findings in this article, that fitting in does not preclude distinction. In other words, the characteristics and skills attained through encouraging fitting in (like conformity and obedience) are not cultural capital, in Bourdieu’s (1984) terms, that will assist working-class children in attaining advantages and privileges or economic and symbolic capital in the future. As Rivera (2015) revealed in her study on hiring interviews at elite business firms in New York, interviewers identify, and more frequently accept to senior positions, candidates who express the cultural capital and habitus of standing out.

These descriptions and assertions echo our study’s findings. The coaches’ identity is based on a view of the students as lacking in many emotional qualities, “excessively needy” (James 2012, p. 165), and needing “special” training-education. Moreover, the coaches emphasized that the youths’ responsiveness and obedience to ideals of hegemonic oversight are viewed as a professional achievement. This is a role identity based on the good intentions of CARE and not on its unintended *consequences*. The coaches did not cultivate among their students cultural capital, as was described, for example, at elite schools (Howard, 2008; Taylor, 2021), which strategically encourage skills of standing out that in turn assist high socioeconomic class students to “bend rules to their advantage” (Golann, 2021, p. 8).

In this context the question, recently proposed by Golann (2021) following her ethnographic study of “no-excuses” charter schools with predominantly low-income Black and Latino students, should be asked: Capital or control? Golann (2021) exposed how “no-excuses” charter schools, which were founded to improve the academic achievements of disadvantaged students and increasing their chances of being accepted to college, perform *scripts* or *tools of interaction* based on rigid discipline and surveillance: the use of these scripts and tools, Golann emphasized (2021, p.8) continue to teach the students “obedience, punctuality, and deference—all in the name of social mobility.”

Golann (2021, p. 7) asserted that these schools “are *not* teaching what sociologists consider to be advantageous middle-class skills and strategies, nor do rigid behavioral scripts afford students the flexibility to learn to deploy cultural capital effectively.”

In this context, we assert that the professional identity of the soccer coaches we interviewed in this study, who work with high school students at professional soccer clubs in low socioeconomic class cities in Israel, is characterized by good intentions, benevolence, and caring, yet is liable to replicate social inequality. It is therefore important to pay attention to the various consequences (including negative consequences) of good intentions on the processes connected to making the students class individuals: we recommend continuing to study the role of the coach (Power, 2021) in other life spaces such as religious and secular schools and schools in other countries and in other sports connected to various socioeconomic classes. For a complex understanding of the connection among education, sports, and class, it is also important to interview students and parents. In addition, ethnographic studies of the interactions between coaches and students-players are likely to teach us about the attainment of sporting habitus in action. It is also important to conduct longitudinal studies that follow the career path of students who play professional sports. These studies can propose an understanding of the nuances of the long shadow of class at birth, and class socialization, through participation in various sports, on life achievements.