An Ethnographic Case Study of Developing and Maintaining the Coach-Athlete Relationship in

Elite University Sport

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Abstract

Relationships and social interactions are crucial components in sport participation from adolescence through to elite and professional levels of competition. Recently, there has been growing interest in the study of the coach-athlete relationship as a result of an increase in the awareness of its implications and potential impact on performance success. The purposes of this research were to: (a) describe and interpret how one university sport coach develops and maintains relationships with athletes within one competitive season, and (b) describe and interpret the practices (including intentions and actions) used to facilitate social interactions that nurture the coach-athlete relationship. One male coach and twelve female elite university athletes from one sport team participated in the research. Data were generated from two main sources: observations of team practices and games, and two individual interviews with the coach and three athletes (one interview during the competitive season and one interview after the season had ended). Through a constructivist lens, I investigated the participants' unique perspectives of the ongoing processes within the coach-athlete relationship. I used Jowett's (2001) adaptation of interdependence theory, the 3+1Cs model (closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation), to examine the perspectives of both coach and athletes and subsequently create an interpretive representation of my findings. Findings highlighted the variety of ways participants understood and interpreted their coach-athlete relationship. Several potential influences of these relationships were uncovered during data analysis such as: vulnerability, gender, communication, and self-reflection. Implications for coaches, athletes, and coach educators are discussed.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my grandparents, Bert and Lorne, in loving memory. Thank you for

guiding me throughout this journey. I hope that my work has made you proud.

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I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to the many people who have helped this thesis become a reality. I am incredibly blessed to have the support I do, and I would not have made it to this point without their encouragement.

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Mom and Dad, my very best friends. Thank you for your unwavering love and support. I owe everything to you, for giving me the tools and ability to do this. No matter what I choose to do, you are always in my corner cheering me on. I love you both.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the coach and the athletes who agreed to participate in my study. By welcoming me into your space, you gave me the extraordinary opportunity to learn from you, and about the way you experience your sport relationships. I can only hope that this research will help make the world of sport a better place.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

Sports research has received considerable attention due to its economic impact and financial promotion from various levels of government. Much of the research conducted recently pertains to improving physical performance, with an aim being to find ways to strengthen national level teams. There has been growing interest in the study of the coach-athlete relationship as a result of an increase in the awareness of its implications and potential impact on performance success (Jowett, 2017). Relationships and social interactions are crucial components in sport participation from adolescence through to elite and professional levels of competition (Fraser-Thomas, Côté & Deakin, 2005; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). One of the most influential interpersonal relationships within the context of sport is that between a coach and an athlete (Jowett, 2003). The coach-athlete relationship concerns the reciprocal set of interactions of both the coach and the athlete(s) in order to achieve a common goal (Jowett, 2005). The development and maintenance of coach-athlete relationships involves social processes, which are influenced by the individual perspectives and behaviours of both the coach and the athlete (Jowett, 2017). Together, they each bring their personal experiences, feelings, and worldviews into the interactions which create the relationship. If choosing to intentionally foster positive coach-athlete relationships, there is a common aim to develop a genuine working relationship where there is trust, respect, belief, and commitment to working together to achieve a shared goal (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016). According to Jowett and Cockerill (2002), "…when the athlete and the coach are in perfect harmony great things can be achieved" (p. 16).

The relationship between coaches and athletes has the potential to impact performance and the overall well-being of both coaches and athletes (Davis, Appleby, Davis, Wetherell, & Gustafsson, 2018). Effective coach-athlete relationships are likely to include positive interpersonal qualities such as mutual trust, respect, commitment, and understanding (Greenleaf, Gould, & Dieffenbach, 2001; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002) Athletes who experience high quality relationships with their coach are more likely to experience higher levels of team cohesion, which translates into their ability to work efficiently with their coach and teammates to achieve common goals (Jowett & Chaundy, 2004). This degree of cooperation is a reflection of social togetherness which can lead to positive performance outcomes (Carron & Hausenblas, 1998).

While effective coach-athlete relationships could positively influence sports participation and performance, ineffective relationships could lead to negative outcomes. In a review of literature on youth dropout from sport participation, Crane and Temple (2014) demonstrated that a prominent reason for lack of enjoyment (and by consequence, eventual dropout) from youth sport participants was due to the dissatisfaction of the relationship they had with their coach. In a study of highly competitive athletes completed by Greenleaf et al. (2001), it was discovered that coach–athlete conflict and power struggles negatively affected team unity and the performance. These findings highlight the potential impact that the coach-athlete relationship can have on an athlete's experience of sport participation, influencing personal, team, and performance outcomes.

Much of the current research and literature devoted to coach-athlete relationships has utilized predominantly quantitative methods to support emerging theory and phenomena

(Cushion, Nelson, Armour, Lyle, Jones, Sandford, & O'Callaghan, 2015), and to identify the outcomes or products of coach-athlete relationships. In addition to the common use of quantitative methods, much of the current research conducted on coach-athlete relationships has focused on documenting and examining perceived and observable coaching behaviours. In contrast, much less attention has been given to the processes and reasoning, or the "how and why" of effective coach behaviours (Cushion et al., 2015).

Study Purpose and Research Questions

There is a need to consider and attempt to understand the process of the "whats, hows, and whys" of sport coaching. Given that the majority of research has been devoted to the products and outcomes of athletic relationships, for my research I chose to use a qualitative methodology with an aim to increase the understanding of the processes of the coach-athlete relationship. This allowed me to engage in a deep exploration of how one coach attempted to facilitate the coach-athlete relationships in one university sports team.

The purposes of my study were to: (a) describe and interpret how one university sport coach develops and maintains relationships with athletes within one competitive season, and (b) describe and interpret the practices (including intentions and actions) used to facilitate social interactions that nurture the coach-athlete relationship.

The research was guided by three general research questions:

1. How do the coach and athletes in one women's university sport team describe and interpret the ways coach-athlete relationships have been facilitated in their team?

2. What processes does one university sport coach engage in to develop and maintain coach-athlete relationships?

   a. What are the coach's perspectives of these processes?

   b. What are athletes' perspectives of these processes?

3. To what extent do a coach's beliefs about the coach-athlete relationship align with their actions?

Significance of Research

I believe that one of our greatest gifts is the ability to come together to play a game, regardless of ability and skill. Many of us have had the opportunity to participate in sport, whether this was in a grassroots league or perhaps at an elite level. There is ample research highlighting the social and psychological benefits of participation in youth sport. For example, positive outcomes of sport participation include higher self-esteem, competence, and confidence in many participants (Eime, Young, Harvey, Charity, & Payne, 2013). In addition, a quantitative study examining the psychological and social outcomes of sport participation for adults 50 years of age and older reported that participation in sport could lead to an increase in life satisfaction, social life, and personal psychological factors (e.g., higher self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-efficacy) (Kim, Park, Kim, Comber, 2019). The achievement of such positive outcomes is not, however, guaranteed for all participants. During participation in sport, there is risk of experiencing negative outcomes, including emotional and psychological stress or burnout, and

inappropriate social behaviours from other participants (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). This suggests that coaches who are responsible for facilitating the participants' experiences must understand how to effectively guide situations and develop relationships that lead to positive outcomes that were identified previously.

The coach-athlete relationship is defined by Jowett (2007) as all circumstances where the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of a coach and an athlete are interrelated. Both the coach and the athlete can influence the experience of the other, which suggests there is an importance in increasing our understanding of the processes of the coach-athlete relationship through further research. By increasing our understanding of these processes, there is the potential to enhance the physical and psychological outcomes for both the coach and the athletes (Nicholls, Earle, Earle, & Madigan, 2017).

Despite the importance of research devoted to social relationships in sport, historically coaching research and discourse is dominated by the physical, technical, and strategical skills involved in coaching. Consequently, much research conducted in the past has neglected the opportunity to investigate the humanistic and caring dimensions of coaching in sport (Cronin & Armour, 2018; Jowett, 2005). According to Cronin and Lowes (2019), sport coaching always involves caring relationships between coaches and athletes. Therefore, care has been identified as an essential aspect of coaching and deserves much more explicit attention (Cronin & Lowes, 2019). The process of the coach-athlete relationship is important to investigate in order to find appropriate ways for coaches to use intentional leadership behaviours to foster a caring environment which aids in nurturing healthy relationships between them and the athletes. For

example, focusing on the facilitation of positive interpersonal relationships and other skills beyond mere technical performance could strengthen such an environment. Working to increase the quality of the coach-athlete relationship has the potential to enhance the overall experience for both the coach and the athletes (Nicholls et al., 2017). Greater attention given to investigating and sharing the processes of coach-athlete relationships may allow coaches, coach educators, and coaching researchers to identify specific ways to promote the sense of enjoyment for participants and therefore increase continuous participation in sport (Crane & Temple, 2014).

The results of the present study may appeal to coaches and athletes of any team sport competing at the university level, as well as sport psychologists and other stakeholders who are hoping to further understand the relationship dynamics between coaches and athletes. Most research concerning the coach-athlete relationship has the objective of improving coaching practices from the leadership perspective. The concept of the dyadic relationship where both parties are of equal value is often neglected in current research (Jowett & Cockerill, 2002). Outside the context of sport, the research is applicable to a larger body of issues and concerns within the sporting world and even perhaps the management world. For example, while I am not aiming for generalizable findings, members of professions where leadership and the relationships leaders have with others may find these results relevant and applicable to their professional worlds.

Athlete-Centred Coaching

There has been an apparent shift from coach-centred to athlete-centred approaches to coaching, where coaches are creating a more relational and democratic environment for their athletes (Bowles & O'Dwyer, 2020). This may be a result of research supporting the importance of athletes taking ownership of the awareness and responsibility of their own learning. Bowles and O'Dwyer (2020) suggest that this environment is facilitated by the coach, but that it is a collaborative process that creates a relationship based on effective communication that promotes shared knowledge and understanding. This is an interesting concept as it required coaches to let go of some level of power and control, which can be a new experience for some coaches. In doing this, Bowles and O'Dwyer (2020) strongly advise that this could help promote the intellectual development of the athlete who can think for themselves in a variety of contexts. This approach to coaching is beneficial for the coach-athlete relationship, as athletes are able to experience autonomy and empowerment, encouraged by their coach.

Qualitative Research

As previously mentioned, much of the current research relating to coaching behaviours is predominantly quantitative and has involved the administration of questionnaires to many participants where there has been an aim to obtain a breadth of data for the purposes of practical application. For example, a study done to examine the differences between perceived coaching behaviours in individual and team sports at Serbian colleges involved athletes completing three questionnaires to generate objective analyses of the data (Aleksic-Veljkovic, Djurovic, Dimic,

Mujanovic, & Zivcic-Markovic, 2016). Results showed different patterns and trends found within the ratings given by each athlete. Yet, these questionnaires left no room for subjective information or multiple interpretations by the participants, and as such, I do not feel they provided deep understanding of the research phenomenon. In order to provide an opportunity for the various experiences and perspectives of the participants involved in sports teams, I have chosen to employ a qualitative research design. Participants may then share their unique experiences and perspectives using their own language and enabling wide interpretations of meaning. This will allow me to gain greater insight from the information, as I will be working with fewer participants and will employ data collection strategies that allow for depth of meaning to be generated and analyzed.

Positioning Myself

According to Cushion, Armour, and Jones (2003), as the primary researcher I have brought with me all of my previous experiences to the research setting, creating a filter through which I see the world. This can be done intentionally or unintentionally, and for the purpose of my project I have attempted to make this an intentional pursuit. I am unable to contend that the present study was completely dispassionate, as I am very connected to the world of sport and very much influenced by my overall positive experiences in sport. These experiences have influenced my interest in the present study, exploring the complex dynamics between a coach and an athlete.

I grew up playing competitive basketball until university, where I became a member of the varsity rowing team. I am a female athlete who has worked solely with male coaches. The gender dynamic I experienced was, at times, challenging when it came to communication and understanding. This has largely influenced my interest in the present study, because like me, the athletes are women working with a male coach.

During my time as a student athlete, I spent time refereeing, working on both basketball and rowing coaching levels while coaching house league and travel club teams. As a retired elite athlete, I have maintained a strong relationship with sport, which reflects my passion for it. I have always been eager to learn about ways to enhance elite level sport, and spend time testing out new techniques and systems.

I am a graduate of Brock University and acquired an undergraduate degree in physical education with a minor in philosophy. My background in physical education has provided me with theoretical and practical tools that could be used when in a leadership role, such as a coach of a sport team. In addition, my studies in philosophy have extended my interest to ethical considerations in sport. This is a component that is often neglected in national coach education programs, where more opportunities should offer specific behavioural objectives when faced with an ethical dilemma (Gilbert & Trudel, 1999). Learning about various theories in ethics has largely shaped the way I view sport and competition today, influencing how I structure environments and lead teams in sport and in the workplace.

I believe my previous experiences were an asset to my thesis research as I did not enter into the participants' world without any background or context. As mentioned earlier, I was a university student athlete, and this allowed me to relate to the athlete participants and connect to them as a university student and an elite athlete. My background in competing and coaching competitive sport allowed me to be well-versed in the sport-specific jargon which helped me connect to the participants during observations and interviews and develop rapport. The pedagogical theories I studied during my undergraduate degree supported my ability to understand and identify intentional coaching practices that went beyond the technical elements of the game and focused on social development and enhancing the coach's and the athletes' overall experience.

I have tried to be transparent with my previous experiences and my interest in the present study. As a result of conducting this research I was able to expand my understanding of coach-athlete relationships, specifically in university elite sport and learn from the participants. I acknowledged and valued my previous experiences, beliefs, values, and biases. I identified ways in which they create certain filters through which I see the world and how I generated and analysed the data throughout this project.

Definitions of terms

In this section, I highlight several specific terms that are used throughout this thesis. I define the terms: coach, university athlete, coach-athlete relationship, university sport, varsity

sport, elite university sport, 3+1Cs Model, as each term pertains to the context of the present study.

Coach: In sport, a coach is viewed as taking a leadership role. The coach is responsible for making decisions on behalf of the athletes, in terms of strategy, tactic, and performance. They are also required to have some level of expertise in their respective sport.

University Athlete: Athletes are expected to follow the direction and leadership of their coach. University athletes are registered students at a university and represent their university at intercollegiate competitions. University athletes may be thought of as performing at an elite level because they have a high degree of expectation in terms of skill, performance, and time management.

Coach-Athlete Relationship: The coach-athlete relationship is the reciprocal set of interactions of both a coach and the athlete(s) in order to achieve a common goal (Jowett, 2005). The development and maintenance of coach-athlete relationships involves social processes, which are influenced by the individual perspectives and behaviours of both the coach and the athlete (Jowett, 2017). Together, they each bring their personal experiences, feelings, and worldviews into the interactions which create the relationship.

University Sport: University sport is a general term that can be applied to recreational or competitive sport within the university. Considering this thesis, I focused on one university team (or varsity team; see below) that participates in inter-university competition. Members of the

university team were experienced in their sport, who had either been recruited to the university for their sport or made the team through selection at open tryouts.

Varsity Sport: The present study investigated one varsity sport team at one university. Each university has one varsity team (one for men and/or one for women, depending on the sport) for multiple sports and includes athletes who attend and are registered at their respective university. Once the athletes complete the selection process, they become members of the varsity team and go on to represent their university at intercollegiate competitions.

Elite University Sport: For the purpose of this study, the participating university sport team was considered elite as a result of their performance success. The team was a top team at the university, in their league, and they competed at the national championship. In this respect the team was an elite university team, which means it possessed unique characteristics such as: all members were student athletes, selected for their performance and skill level, and were unpaid.

3 + 1Cs Model: Jowett (2001) used the concepts of closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation, to create the "3 + 1Cs" model. Jowett (2001) suggests that by examining and assessing each concept allows researchers and practitioners to characterize the degree of interdependence within a coach-athlete relationship and therefore assess its overall quality. Refer to Chapter Two for further elaboration on the 3 + 1Cs model.

Organization of the thesis

In this first chapter I have identified the importance of studying coach-athlete relationships, highlighting ways these relationships can lead to both positive and negative outcomes for both coaches and athletes. I have also identified a gap in the literature, in that most studies of coach-athlete relationships have focused on outcomes, with less known about ways coaches go about intentionally facilitating relationships with athletes. I have also identified the purpose of my research and the questions that will guide the research design.

In Chapter Two, I review the literature and identify a theoretical framework to guide data collection and analysis. Specifically, as a guide I will use interdependence theory of social relationships generated by Kelley and Thibaut (1959). Jowett (2001) built on interdependence theory to examine the coach-athlete relationship, recognizing the reciprocal nature of the relationship, meaning that the coach's and athletes' thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are interconnected (Jowett, 2007). The theory includes four constructs (referred to as the three Cs + 1): closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation (Jowett, 2001). I chose this theory because of the practicality of looking for intentional or unintentional behaviours which reflect each of the four constructs. From there, I was able to use this framework to deductively analyze how the participants operate within these constructs.

In Chapter Three I outline the methodology and methods for the thesis research. Specifically, I employed an ethnographic case study design, examining one university sport team. I used observations and semi-structured interviews as my choice of methods.

  In Chapter Four I will present the results of my analysis and in Chapter Five I will summarize the main findings and situate these in the existing literature. I will also identify avenues for future research, and the practical implications of my work.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Introduction

In this Chapter, I review relevant existing literature concerning the coach-athlete relationship. I address the complex nature of attempting to define the relationship and further apply it to professional practice. From there, I highlight the significance of conflict management strategies and the impact conflict may have on the coach-athlete relationship. Within conflict, there are important factors that can influence management strategies such as communication, gender, power, and care. If conflict cannot be managed appropriately, members of the coach-athlete relationship risk experiencing negative outcomes such as emotional and psychological stress which may lead to dropout (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). There are several alarming cases of abusive coaching behaviours presented by the media, which represent a call for research to address the ways cases such as these can be prevented. The constructs with the interdependence theory of social relationships are defined and applied to coach-athlete relationships. There is a gap in how this theory is applied qualitative research, specifically looking at elite university team sports. My project aims to address this gap and build on the research of Jowett (2001).

The Complexity of Defining the Coach-Athlete Relationship

According to Cushion et al. (2006), there are often flawed assumptions about coaching, particularly the assumption that coaching expertise can be acquired exclusively through playing experience, observation of other coaches, and formal education. Coach education programs that are mandated and funded by various governing bodies such as the National Coaching

Certification Program (NCCP) in Canada, are in place to support the development of coaches so that their knowledge of coaching extends beyond the technical and tactical aspects of the sport to include things such as relationships, ethics and safety (Evans, McGuckin, Gainforth, Burner, & Côté, 2015). However, there remains a need for further research in order to rigorously conceptualize a broad range of coaching practices to improve the effectiveness of coach education programs. From there, coaches can use their knowledge and expertise to enhance the overall experience for all participants (Evans et al., 2015).

Almost twenty years ago, Jowett and Cockerill (2002) suggested that many national coach development programs were lacking in the promotion of facilitating healthy coach-athlete relationships, with the goal of enhancing the development and overall experience of both the coach and the athlete. The lack of promotion and education resulted in coaches viewing the development of this influential relationship as difficult to define and control (Jowett & Cockerill, 2002). The ongoing focus on the importance of coach-athlete relationships suggest this remains an important issue still in urgent need of attention. Indeed, it may be that one of the main challenges in providing education for coach-athlete relationships is that different teams possess different cultural characteristics and require the coach to adapt to the contextual influences (Ronglan, 2011). This means there may be no prescribed rules, strategies, or approaches for developing coach-athlete relationships because of the unique nature of every individual, team and context. For example, the social nature of a university sport team is complex, as the athletes will have different academic interests and diverse backgrounds. The group of athletes and the coach bring their unique personalities and behaviours together and attempt to work towards a shared

goal. Consequently, there may be conflicting perspectives and ideas on how the team should work, and the task of attempting to please all parties can appear to be daunting.

According to Docheff and Gerdes (2015), most of today's coaches are generally focused on winning at all cost and can often view athletes in a reductionist sense, seeing them as being a means to an end (i.e., victories and championships), rather than ends in themselves (i.e., personal development). In focusing solely on attempting to win, coaches tend to focus their attention on technical and administrative elements of development because these components are easier to define and control (Jowett & Cockerill, 2002). What is lacking in this approach is the development of the human side of coaching, which, if neglected, can lead to unenjoyment and dropout (Crane & Temple, 2014).

In the following sections I review literature on some key concepts that focus on the human side of coaching, particularly those concerning coach-athlete relationships. Specifically, I review a framework for focusing on holistic development of athletes, and the role of conflict and communication. Following a review of these concepts, I introduce interdependence theory as an appropriate theoretical framework for my research.

Focusing on the Human in Coaching

Cronin and Armour (2013) consider sport coaching as a relational activity that often involves social outcomes. Consistent with this idea, coaches have the responsibility to provide athletes with an environment that allows them to develop not only physical skills but personal and social skills (Cronin & Lowes, 2019). Docheff and Gerdes (2015) address coaches'

obligation to focus on the holistic development of athletes and suggest that this can be done through the facilitation of humility, encouragement, authenticity, relationships, and toughness. Taken together, they describe these as the HEART principles of coaching.

HEART Principles

Docheff and Gerdes (2015) present a framework for a coach who is willing to make an ever-lasting impact on the life of an athlete. Such a coach must be willing to adhere to what Docheff and Gerdes (2015) refer to as the HEART principles. This framework highlights five essential components of effective coaching to provide athletes with a balanced, holistic sport experience. These components include**:**

- **Humility** is an important component in sport as it encourages participants to acknowledge their ability to improve. Whether there has been victory or loss, being humble and gracious shows respect for all participants and the sport itself. Docheff and Gerdes (2015) emphasize that coaches are not perfect beings, and they have the opportunity to show players how to admit to making mistakes. Coaches can contribute to building stronger coach-athlete relationships by recognizing when they are wrong and being open. This behaviour builds trust between coaches and athletes and encourages athletes to acknowledge when they have made mistakes.

- **Encouragement** involves the coach willing to help others to learn, develop, and to perform at their best. When coaches rely on how they were coached, or how coaches are portrayed in the media, they can learn how to act in irrational and negative ways. Coaches

must spend the time they have with athletes with positive encouragement and should avoid dehumanizing verbal and physical feedback (Docheff & Gerdes, 2015). This can happen once coaches develop a relationship with their players and learn what words and phrases work best to encourage them. From there, the players become more willing to trust their coach and the relationship becomes stronger.

- **Authenticity** is an important component in sport and life. To act with honesty and integrity promotes consistency in following the rules and encourages predictable coaching behaviours (Docheff & Gerdes, 2015). Especially in the event of arising conflict, authenticity supports the coach-athlete relationship when both parties have worked to be honest and transparent in their actions and decision-making. This can make conflict resolution and simpler task without jeopardizing the quality of the coach-athlete relationship.

- **Relationships** refer to coaches putting their desire for power and status aside and focus on nurturing relationships and the development of their athletes. Building coach-athlete relationships of high quality, will surely make a difference in the athlete's life, and give them things that they will take with them once their athletic career has concluded. A simple practice for a coach is to show empathy to their athletes. Taking the time to ask about life outside of sport and showing care for them, gives them a sense of security and importance (Docheff & Gerdes, 2015).

- **Toughness** or resilience is defined by Docheff and Gerdes (2015) as the ability to overcome adversity during performance, whether it is mental, physical, emotional, or spiritual. It is the responsibility for coaches to teach their athletes how to positively

strengthen their coping mechanisms in appropriate ways. These skills will help athletes overcome conflict in sport and translates into a lifelong practice.

This framework highlighting the HEART principles provides coaches with a comprehensive and holistic set of skills, which focuses on athletes' physical, social-emotional, and cognitive development (Docheff and Gerdes, 2015). If coaches choose to bring these components into their practice, they can give themselves and athletes the opportunity to engage in a balanced experience of development. Holistic development is crucial as it translates beyond the sporting experience and into daily life. By teaching athletes these skills, they are able to use them in cases outside the sport context, especially skills surrounding conflict prevention and resolution and communication strategies. In the case of arising conflict, the coach and the player are able to use the skills presented in the HEART principles in which they have learned and work together to overcome the present challenges in a rational and appropriate way (Docheff and Gerdes, 2015). This will prevent a toxic environment from forming, which would be detrimental to the performance success and well-being of the team as a whole.

Humour

Humour can be found in relationships as a tool for conversation, with the intention of alleviating social pressure or to destabilize power dynamics (Kilger & Aronsson, 2020). This is useful component of communication when it comes to building athletic relationships (Ronglan & Aggerholm, 2014). Kilger and Aronsson (2020) suggest that humour can serve many purposes, such as: including people and producing a sense of belonging. However, it can also be detrimental to a social environment by excluding individuals or generating ridicule (Kilger &

Aronsson, 2020). It is important for coaches to know and understand the boundaries and motivations of their athletes, so they can appropriately integrate humour into their communication.

Conflict Management

Within any sports team, there are multiple relationships that need to be developed to enhance the success of the team. Social environments containing multiple relationships will result in the inevitable presence of conflict. The study of conflict management is important to discover the different ways coaches navigate problems arising within a sport season. Conflict may arise between athletes and coaches, coaches and coaches, and coaches and other stakeholders such as referees, parents, and spectators. In addressing conflict management within the coach-athlete relationship, LaVoi (2007) suggests that interpersonal communication is a vital influencing factor.

Interpersonal Communication

The interpersonal communication within a coach-athlete relationship has the potential to be a mechanism for yielding both positive interpersonal (relationship satisfaction) and intrapersonal outcomes (sport satisfaction) (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009). Gilbert (2017) suggests, "the most effective coaching strategy for building and sustaining quality coach-athlete relationships is communication." Effective communication is critical for success in any capacity because without it, coaches are unable to share their expertise with the athletes (Anshel, Petrie, Trent, Steinfeldt, & Jesse, 2019). Communication is linked to conflict management as it reflects the coach's and

athlete's ability to identify, discuss, resolve, and monitor areas of potential disagreement (Rhind, Jowett, & Yang, 2012). "The coach-athlete relationship has a unique nurturing role and any actions that exploit either member undermine the trust that is implicit in the relationship" (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). Negative conflict management or communication strategies can put both performance and well-being of both parties at risk and coaches' negative approaches to coaching can influence the development of poor and toxic relationships with their athletic (Jowett & Cockerill, 2002). For instance, if a coach uses language to belittle an athlete, they will likely construct a relationship that lacks trust and respect. It is suggested by Anshel et al. (2019) that there are multiple influences that are relevant to a coach's skills in effective communication. For example, the element of gender can play a significant role in the expression, reception, and interpretation of the interactions within the coach-athlete relationship (Anshel et al., 2019).

Gender. Within an elite sport team, there are multiple influences working together to create a highly complex and competitive environment. This requires participants to constantly negotiate with one another and problem solve in an attempt to, ultimately, achieve common goals. Gender is another influence that can present additional challenges within a team consisting of more than one gender (Norman, 2016). As the number of female sport participants increases, coaching positions are still dominated by male coaches, some who still appear to have a lack of understanding in terms of how to communicate effectively with female athletes (Norman, 2016). A study by Felton and Jowett (2013) reported that male coaches promote a winning mentality when working with male athletes, however, when working with female athletes, male coaches tend to promote a 'try your best' mentality. This suggests that in some cases female athletes are not giving the same expectation as their male counterparts.

According to a study that investigated the perspectives of national beach volleyball female athletes, Lau, Chung, and Chia (2020) found that because the communication styles of female athletes are more personal and relational, they prefer a democratic coach-athlete environment. It is suggested by MacKinnon (2011) that this may be because female athletes require a heightened sense of enjoyment than male athletes which they can get from a more democratic and personal coach-athlete relationship, rather than an autocratic relationship. Female athletes are concerned with feeling like they have a voice in the decision-making process and that they are understood as an athlete and a person (Lau et al., 2020). The study highlighted that the female athletes felt understood when their coach approached and communicated with each athlete as an individual, which helped to encourage motivation. The female athletes also felt that when their coach made an effort to establish a trusting environment, they were able to feel closer and more comfortable with their coach. They appreciated this because this allowed for open communication where the athletes could share reasons why they were under performing or feeling a certain way. The examples of the behaviours exhibited by male coaches present this ongoing and salient issue. Two decades ago, Stewart and Taylor (2000) stated that the most common reason for female athlete dropout was due to issues with their male coach. The female athletes in the study who shared anecdotes of positive coaching experiences and did not drop out of their sport described the relationships with their male coaches as being built on friendship, encouragement, knowledge of the sport, and fairness (Stewart & Taylor, 2000).

The information from these studies can help coaches work to better understand female athletes which can help enhance the social environment and overall enjoyment of participants. support their decisions when creating training plans (Lau et al. 2020). It is suggested by Jowett

and Poczwardowski (2007) that by studying coach-athlete relationships, researchers are given the opportunity to help coaches and athletes effectively manage their interpersonal exchanges. Wachsmuth, Jowett, and Harwood (2018) reported that when athletes did not feel a sense of democracy, often conflict arose between them and their coach because the athletes did not feel free to communicate to their coach about their feelings. Therefore, a coach who appeared to be more approachable was seen as critical for conflict prevention and management (Wachsmuth et al., 2018).

Inappropriate and Abusive Coaching Behaviours

There is limited research investigating power as a social construct, especially within the coach-athlete relationship (Jowett & Wachsmuth, 2020). This is because power within a relationship can be understood as the ability to influence the behaviour of another person (Jowett & Arthur, 2019) and there will always be unequal influence between a coach and an athlete due to the context of the relationship (Bergmann Drewe, 2002). In coach-athlete relationships, coaches display sources of power by using knowledge or the capacity to punish and reward the athletes (Jowett & Wachsmuth, 2020). According to Jowett and Wachsmuth (2020), coaches misuse their power by manipulating, abusing, and coercing athletes, when they are unaware or unwilling to understand the importance of their role in the relationship. Many past and present cases of abusive coaching behaviours are emerging in the media and thus support the call for further research. For example, the senior vice president of U.S.A. Gymnastics has been fired from the University of Michigan due to her contribution to a sexual abuse scandal, where she passed reports regarding the sexual abuse of gymnasts to her boss (Zaveri, 2019). Jenkins (2018)

reported the experience of American National team gymnast, Aly Raisman, one of the American gymnasts who experienced emotional, physical, and sexual abuse in that case. Another example of abusive coaching exists within Rutgers University's men's basketball team where the head coach was physical and emotionally abusing players behind closed doors which resulted in the termination of his contract (Eder, 2013).

Duty of Care

Following the alarming cases of coaches abusing their power and influence, Cronin and Armour (2018) contributed research pertaining to a coach's "duty of care" when it comes to protecting athletes. According to Cronin and Armour (2018), the concept of care is concerned with the ethic of non-malevolence (protecting from harm) and attempting to build affective, reciprocal and dialogical relationships with others. Due to their role, coaches are in positions of authority, and with that comes with the responsibility of supporting and guiding the athletes. The dominant theory used by coaching researchers regarding care was the work of Noddings (1984), which uses a feminist perspective to highlight the importance of placing a nurturing and caring relationship at the centre of pedagogies (teaching and coaching). It is suggested that sport programs have been characterized by competitive outcomes, winning at all costs, and the use of scientific measurements that dehumanize coach-athlete relationships (Cronin, Armour, & Gano-Overway, 2019). Coaches with a results-based focus often ignored their responsibility and duty to provide athletes with a caring climate where they feel safe, supported, valued, and respected (Cronin et al., 2018). Noddings (2005) provides two key concepts for coaches to nurture a caring climate: engrossment, which is when coaches attempt to fully understand the needs of the athlete;

and motivational displacement, which describes when the coach's behaviours respond to the athletes' needs, as opposed to the coach's needs. These two concepts remind coaches of their role and duty as the leader, to nurture and facilitate a caring environment for the athletes.

Jowett and Poczwardowski (2007) urge researchers to work to provide the public with practical knowledge that will lead to improvements in professional practices and development in coaching education. In order to do this, the research of coach-athlete relationships should be guided by a theoretical framework. A theory commonly used to study relationships is the interdependence theory.

Interdependence Theory

Interdependence theory was introduced to the study of social relationships by Kelley and Thibaut in 1959 in accordance with their social exchange theory. In their social exchange model, Thibaut and Kelley (1959) began with the assumption that human behaviour is dependent upon our desire to maximize positive experiences and minimize negative experiences (Guillet, Sarrazin, Carpenter, Trouilloud, & Cury, 2002). From this perspective, humans choose to engage in relationships and activities as long as the outcomes continue to be sufficiently favourable.

Since their research 62 years ago, interdependence theory has been used to study intimate relationships such as the coping strategies and adjustment used by expatriate spouses, where researchers used the model to assess the crossover of behaviours (Yu-Ping & Shaffer, 2018). This model has also been an asset when studying reasons for dropout or continuous participation in

sport. For example, a study conducted by Guillet et al. (2002) employed interdependence theory to predict the continuation in participation or dropout in female handballers.

For my research, I build on Jowett's (2001) interpretation of interdependence theory. Jowett (2001) has applied interdependence theory to examine the social dynamics of the coach-athlete relationship. Interdependence theory has been used to explore the interactions between individuals in a two-person coach-athlete relationship and analyze how these individuals influenced the experiences of the other (Jowett, 2001). As such, it has mainly been used to investigate the coach-athlete relationships found in individual sports such as swimming, track and field, and wrestling (Jowett, 2002). According to this theory, individuals who are mutually dependent on one another will, through the process of interaction, influence the outcomes of the other (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

Importance of Interdependence

According to Jowett (2001), interdependence is a vital part of any relationship and is imperative to the existence of basic processes within a social context. Jowett (2001) presents three considerations for highlighting the importance of interdependence. First, interdependence shapes the self, which suggests that an individual will behave in a certain way based on the behaviour of another (Jowett, 2001). For example, a young hockey player is working with a coach who portrays a more dominant leadership style. Depending on their personality, it is likely that the young athlete will behave in more submissive ways (or will at least be expected to), in response to the dominance of the coach. Second, interdependence shapes mental events, which

reflects how an individual may feel about themselves as a result of the words or actions from another person (Jowett, 2001). For instance, a coach may tell the player that they are not ready to learn a specific skill; therefore, the player may feel less confident in their abilities. Third, interdependence can shape the interactions concerning the personal needs, thoughts, and feelings of an individual, which they inevitably carry with them into the social environment (Jowett, 2001). An example specific to the performance of a basketball player, could be a player who feels that they need practice time to work on their three-point shot in a game-like situation (i.e., scrimmage). The player asks the coach to budget time for this in the next practice. The player feels that this is in their best interest, and this perceived need has therefore shaped the interaction between the player and the coach. Another example of the social-emotional influence could be if a player shares with the coach that they have experienced a traumatic event at home or school. In response, the coach is particularly caring toward this player and may be mindful not to overly express frustration or anger toward the player.

Rewards vs. Costs

With consideration of the potential influences of interdependence explained above, there are consequences that contribute to the evolution of the relationship between the coach and athlete. Jowett (2001) defines such consequences as rewards or costs, depending on the positive or negative nature of each. Rewards are the positive consequences of interaction such as satisfaction, motivation, and success (Jowett, 2001). For example, in the middle of a game, the coach calls the athlete to the sideline to praise their strong defence in a previous scenario. The player feels acknowledged for their work and is motivated to continue to do this in future game

situations. Conversely, costs are the negative consequences of interaction and can include feelings such as conflict, power struggles, and frustration (Jowett, 2001). In the same scenario, the coach may berate the player for poor defensive play. This may motivate some players while leaving others feeling embarrassed, humiliated and the lack the motivation to put forth effort in the game. It is suggested by Jowett (2001) that within the coach-athlete relationship, there are both individual and joint production of rewards and costs. Individuals can create outcomes for themselves such as personal satisfaction or dissatisfaction. They are also capable of working with others to produce outcomes which impact the relationship. An example of joint production is the creation of a conflict therefore placing tension on the relationship.

Favourability. A state of interdependence can be attained only if both parties are willing to consider the consequences as beneficial to their goals. Thibaut and Kelley (1959) identify this concept as favourability. Members of the relationship (e.g., athlete) will determine the degree of favourability by weighing the rewards and the costs of the relationship, and therefore decide if it is worth it to invest in this relationship. Enjoyment in a relationship occurs when rewards outweigh the costs, and dissatisfaction occurs when costs outweigh the benefits (Guillet et al., 2002).

Key constructs within the Coach-Athlete Relationship

Consistent with interdependence theory, Jowett (2001) characterizes the coach-athlete relationship as "…a situation in which coaches' and athletes' feelings, thoughts, and behaviours are interdependent" (p. 17). In order to examine interdependence more closely, Jowett (2001)

used the concepts of closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation. Described as the "3+1 Cs" model, Jowett (2001) suggests that examination and assessment of these concepts allows researchers to characterize the extent to which a coach-athlete relationship is more or less interdependent.

Closeness. Closeness is concerned with the affective components of the relationship, such as mutual trust and respect (Jowett, 2001). This is also the level in which an individual will decide whether they simply like the other or not. Closeness also refers to feeling familiar with the other member of the relationship. This construct consists of two themes: personal feelings and generic feelings (Jowett, Kanakoglou, & Passmore, 2012). Personal feelings are themes of intimacy and respect (Jowett et al., 2012). Themes concerned with generic feelings are interpersonal liking and trust (Jowett et al., 2012). Jowett (2002) suggests that high levels of closeness led to greater stability and satisfaction. A study by Jowett et al. (2012) suggests that trust is extremely important in interpersonal relationships and is required to increasing value and depth within a relationship.

Commitment. Commitment focusses on the cognitive dimension of the coach-athlete relationship. Commitment is the term used to signify the motivational force of persistence (Guillet et al., 2002). For instance, the reasons and motivations for coaches and athletes might remain in a particular long-term coach-athlete relationship. Kelley (1983) presents three major classes called "causal conditions" for commitment. The first class describes the degree of attractiveness of the relationship to the individual. For example, an athlete may find a relationship with their coach to be attractive if they enjoy the way in which they lead practice sessions. The

second class is concerned with the comparison of the current relationship with a potential alternative one, and therefore determining which relationship is more attractive. For instance, there are two representative teams in the same city for the same age group. A player chooses to play for the team they did not play for during the previous season, because they like the other coach more than they had in the previous season. The third class examines the challenges and barriers that come with terminating the current relationship. If the coach of the previous team is the uncle of the player choosing to switch teams, the player risks creating friction between them and their uncle, and potentially other members of their family.

Guillet et al. (2002) suggest that the strongest predictor of an athlete's persistence or dropout of sport is commitment to the activity, with low levels of commitment leading to higher levels of dropout. Research by Guillet et al. (2002) consisted of two studies that investigate the dropout experiences of French female handball players. Each study used the cost/benefit analysis of interdependence, which expresses the degree of satisfaction and enjoyment (Guillet et al., 2002). Results showed that the higher the level of benefits, the more enjoyment was experienced by participants. The players who dropped out of the activity perceived themselves to be less competent, less autonomous, less related to their team, lower in progress, and less supported by their coach (Guillet et al., 2002). These participants experienced less playing time than persistent players and reported lower overall enjoyment which inevitably resulted in the withdrawal from participation. Therefore, within the context of sport, if each member of the relationship is committed, he or she will have a high consideration for the other which can translate into behaviours dedicated to nurturing the relationship and overall experience in that activity.

Complementarity. Complementarity represents observations that indicate the degree of cooperation and teamwork between members of the relationship (Trzaskoma-Bicsérdy, József, Revesz, & Géczi, 2007). Kiesler (1996) proposed two types of complementarity: corresponding complementarity and reciprocal complementarity. Corresponding complementarity focuses on the affiliation dimension of the relationship and is observed as behaviours representing levels of friendliness and responsiveness (Felton, Jowett, Begg & Zhong, 2020). For example, a coach's positive attitude and behaviour is likely to evoke an athlete's positive attitude and behaviour (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). These behaviours are considered to be complementary, if they match.

Reciprocal complementarity focusses on control and power and can be observed during times of instruction or facilitation. It is how the coaches and athletes work together to negotiate with their words and actions, specifically, how the individual perceives his or her role in the relationship, as either dominant or submissive (Felton et al., 2020). A relationship that embodies reciprocal complementarity is one where the individuals express a mismatch or opposite behaviours. For example, the coach leads by explaining how to perform a drill and the athlete follows by performing the drill as instructed by the coach. Jowett et al. (2012) suggest that the athlete must have an intrinsic desire to change or improve and the coach must want to provide them with the proper support and resources in order for reciprocal complementarity to be effective. Jowett et al. (2012) suggest an additional supplementary theme of complementarity, known as helping transaction.

Helping transaction involves emotional or instructional support (Jowett et al., 2012). The coach can provide support or motivation to the athlete, depending on their needs. For instance, an athlete is feeling stressed about upcoming academic deadlines. Her coach extends his support by working with her to create a schedule for all of her assignments. With his support, he helped her realise that she has the ability to achieve her goals. The two dimensions and the supplementary theme of complementarity can work together to predict the likely outcomes of interactions between a coach and athlete (Felton et al., 2020; Jowett et al., 2012).

Co-orientation. The construct of co-orientation is the +1 component of the 3 + 1Cs model and concerns the common ideas, beliefs, values, and goals of both members (Jowett, 2003). Jowett et al. (2012) describes this construct as capturing coaches' and athletes' intersubjective experiences and perceptions of the other three constructs of closeness, commitment, and complementarity. In a qualitative study looking into ways to define effective coach-athlete relationships using the perspectives and experiences of successful Hungarian coaches and athletes through interviews, researchers used the 3 + 1Cs model to frame the understanding and analysis of interview transcriptions (Trzaskoma-Bicsérdy et al., 2007). Both the coach and athlete participants expressed that two-way communication is crucial in developing a healthy degree of components relating to co-orientation, such as shared knowledge and understanding (Jowett et al., 2012). Shared knowledge represents self-disclosure and open channels of communication with the relationships, whereas shared understanding is the acceptance and agreement of goals (Jowett et al., 2012). Therefore, communication that can be adapted to intrinsic and extrinsic changes which encourages the sharing of feelings and goals will enhance the degree of interdependence and therefore the quality of the coach-athlete relationship (Trzaskoma-Bicsérdy et al., 2007).

Based on the presence or absence of the 3 + 1Cs it is possible for researchers to identify the extent to which a coach-athlete relationship is interdependent. Specifically, using interdependence theory, the relationship may be identified as interdependent if both coach and athlete(s) are willing to trust and respect each other, commit to one another in the future, and behave in responsive and appropriate ways (Jowett, 2001). If both parties agree to this partnership, it is considered to be interdependent; however, the less each party engages with these elements, the less interdependent they will be. Such considerations reflect the affective, cognitive, and behavioural elements of interdependence theory.

Assessing the Constructs of Interdependence

According to Jowett (2001), there are ways to assess each of the three constructs, to gain an understanding of the degree of interdependence found within a given coach-athlete relationship. Assessment strategies require the exploration of the direct perspective and the meta-perspective of both the coach and the athlete (Jowett, 2007).

Direct Perspective. Jowett (2007) describes the direct perspective as how one member of the relationship gauges their level of each of the 3 + 1Cs in relation to the other member. Their perspective will express the level of interdependence they share with the other member. For instance, when exploring closeness, the affective construct, an athlete with a high level of interdependence may say, "I trust my coach" whereas an athlete with a lower level of interdependence may say "I do not trust my coach." Alternatively, a coach may say "I trust my athlete" or "I do not trust my athlete.".

Metaperspective. The meta-perspective is discussed by Jowett (2007) as an individual's ability to assess how the other member of a relationship gauges each of the four constructs of the interdependence theory. For instance, a coach may say "My athlete is committed to me and my system." In such a statement, however, the coach is only using her perspective to predict the perspective of the athlete, based on what she is perceiving from the actions of the athlete. While informative, it is clear that the meta-perspective is limited in helping determine the full extent of interdependence.

The inferences made using the direct perspective and meta-perspective may be accurate or inaccurate and depend upon the three dimensions of co-orientation (assumed similarity, actual similarity, and empathetic understanding). Co-orientation refers to the interpersonal perceptions of the coach and athletes and their ability to find common ground within their relationship (Jowett & Cockerill, 2002). Such perceptions are important when assessing the quality of the coach-athlete relationship, because it involves investigating the functioning qualities of the partnership and finding what works and what does not. The three dimensions of co-orientation within the coach-athlete relationship are: assumed similarity, actual similarity, and empathetic understanding. First, assumed similarity refers to how one member assumes or predicts how similar they think or act to how the other thinks or acts (Jowett, 2001). In soccer for instance, a player would say "I trust my coach so I will change the way I kick the ball to how they showed me, and they trust me to follow their instruction." This player is assuming the coach trusts that they will change the way they kick the ball; however, this assumption could be incorrect. The second dimension considers the actual similarity between the thoughts and actions of each member of the relationship. A football coach may say they like their athlete, and the athlete may

say they like their coach. These thoughts are real thoughts and not assumed, and if they match then they are *actually* similar. Finally, empathetic understanding represents the degree to which each individual accurately understands the thoughts and actions of the other individual. For example, a study by Jowett and Clark-Carter (2006) examined empathetic understanding and assumed similarity in coaches' and athletes' perceptions of their relationship. Participants completed self-report measures of their direct perspective and meta perspective for closeness, commitment, and complementarity. The study found that athletes experience a heightened understanding or accuracy in describing the coach's feelings of closeness. The researchers reported that this was because the athletes have a more vulnerable role in their relationship in terms of expert knowledge, power, and authority and therefore, when they experience higher levels of empathetic understanding, they are more likely to feel more comfortable and confident (Jowett & Clark-Carter, 2006). The three dimensions outlined by Jowett (2001) work together to employ the direct perspective with the metaperspective to further understand the level of interdependence within a coach-athlete relationship. Therefore, coaches and athletes who are able to accurately predict the other's degree of closeness, for example, often experience a higher level of interdependence and vice versa (Jowett, 2001).

Empirical Studies of Coach-Athlete Relationships Using Interdependence Theory

There are several studies which employ the interdependence theory through the 3 + 1Cs framework. For example, a qualitative study conducted by Jowett (2003) used the 3 + 1Cs model of interdependence theory in order to systematically investigate the coaches' and athletes' emotions, thoughts, and behaviours (Jowett, 2003). Within the study, researchers investigated one

relationship between a female athlete and a male coach competing at the international level for their individual sport. Through one-on-one interviews, this relationship reported both positive and negative experiences (Jowett, 2003). The researchers grouped the content of the transcribed interviews into categories highlighting both positive and negative relational aspects of the 3 + 1 Cs. Jowett (2002) suggests that the division between positive and negative closeness is significant as members of the relationship may experience both types of closeness. In the relationship from the study, there was a sense of mutual belief and respect, however, there were also perceived feelings of lack of trust and commitment which ultimately influenced the quality of the relationship (Jowett, 2003). The discussion section of this study presented specific phrases that related to each construct and provided verbatim passages from the participants to explain why these feelings, thoughts, or behaviours created conflict between the relationship members.

Jowett (2009) presented findings from a study which used previous qualitative work that has been guided by the interdependence theory to create an instrument that quantitatively measured the quality of the coach-athlete relationship (Jowett, 2009). Two versions of the instrument were created, where one focused on the direct perspective of each construct while the second focuses on the meta-perspective of each. The researchers focused on validating the two versions of the questionnaires (i.e., direct and meta-perspective). As mentioned above by Jowett (2001), the direct perspective is how the individual feels about his or her own perspective, whereas the metaperspective is the prediction of how the other member of the relationship perceives constructs of the relationship. Researchers of this study hypothesized that the 3 + 1Cs from both perspectives would positively affect the outcome variables of depth (relationship importance) and support (availability) and negatively affect the variable of conflict (Jowett,

2009). Working with samples of student-athletes, findings suggested that high levels of interdependence between coaches and athletes produce positive experiences (Jowett, 2009).

A recent study done by Davis et al. (2018) used physical and cognitive tests as well as questionnaires to examine the associations between the quality of the coach-athlete relationships and athlete exhaustion. Barcza-Renner, Eklund, Morin, and Habeeb (2016) suggest that an athlete's perception of his or her social environment can manifest psychophysiological implications. For instance, the behaviour of a coach may affect the social environment and potentially influence the development of stress and exhaustion. These interactions have the potential to enhance or hinder performance of these athletes (David et al., 2018). Researchers highlighted work done by Jowett (2007) to define the unique characteristics of a coach-athlete relationship. They presented components of the interdependence theory and suggest that the feelings, thoughts, and behaviours of both coaches and athletes are mutually and causally interconnected (David et al., 2018). The questionnaire included in this study included questions about the four constructs presented by Jowett (2007); closeness, commitment, complementarity, and coorientation. Through the series of tests completed, researchers found that perceived high-quality coach-athlete relationships seemed to decrease the stress responses arising during the tests. In summary, the study supports existing knowledge pertaining to the effect of coach-athlete relationship quality, on athlete's physical and cognitive performance (Davis et al., 2018).

The studies highlighted above use qualitative and quantitative methods to assess the perceived quality of coach-athlete relationships through questionnaires and interviews. With the support of theory and application, there is scope to use the 3 + 1Cs model to conduct research

involving the coaches' and athletes' perspectives combined with those of an observer providing and outside perspective of the processes at work. In the following chapter I explain how using a case study ethnography provides an opportunity to capture a deeper understanding of how this model works through observations and multiple interviews.

Chapter Summary

From this literature review, it is evident that there are multiple studies investigating coach-athlete relationships. For example, the significance of communication was clear, particularly in terms of how effective communication is related to conflict management and overall experience. There are various factors that play into the level of communication between a coach and an athlete, one being gender. Jowett's (2001) use of the theory of interdependence, specifically the 3 + 1Cs relationship model, has been applied to a number of investigations on the coach-athlete relationship, however, most have involved quantitative measures and a focus on the products or outcomes of these relationships rather than their processes. In the following chapter I outline and justify the methodology and methods used to conduct my research on the processes of coach-athlete relationships in one university sports team.

Chapter Three: Methodology & Methods

Introduction

In this chapter I present the research methodology and methods I used to collect, analyze, and represent data throughout my project. I justify the methodological choices I have made for the present study to best address the purpose research questions, as stated below.

As a reminder to readers (and as presented in Chapter One), the purposes of this research were to (a) describe and interpret how one university sport coach develops and maintains relationships with athletes within one competitive season, and (b) describe and interpret the practices (including intentions and actions) used to facilitate social interactions that nurture the coach-athlete relationship. The research was guided by three general research questions:

1. How do the coach and athletes in one women's university sport team describe and interpret the ways coach-athlete relationships have been facilitated in their team?

2. What processes does one university sport coach engage in to develop and maintain coach-athlete relationships?

   a. What are the coach's perspectives of these processes?

   b. What are athletes' perspectives of these processes?

3. To what extent do a coach's beliefs about the coach-athlete relationship align with their actions?

As discussed in Chapter Two, the four key properties of the definition of an interdependent relationship presented by Jowett and Shanmugam (2016), support the characteristics of the coach-athlete relationship including closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation. These constructs form the basis for interdependence theory (Jowett, 2001), which I used to guide the research design. As explained in Chapter One, the property of closeness describes the connection between the coach and the athlete, including mutual trust, care, and support. Commitment refers to the intent of both parties to commit to the long-term maintenance of the relationship. Complementarity highlights the behaviours of both the coach and the athletes, which are complementary or cooperative. Finally, co-orientation reflects the agreement between both parties that they are interdependent and share common goals (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016). These four properties (referred to as the 3 + 1Cs model) can work together to describe the quality of the relationship. As such, both parties must be mindful of these constructs and be willing to enhance the effectiveness of the relationship.

Constructivist Perspective and Case Study Research

Consistent with my personal worldview, I believe that everyone has their own unique interpretation of reality that is created by their diverse backgrounds and lived experiences. The term constructivism is derived from words used in building and construction processes, suggesting that by using the building blocks of our lived experience we actively build our own perspectives of the world (Denicolo, Long, & Bradley-Cole, 2016). Constructs are considered the units of our perspectives and are the building blocks of the way we make sense of reality.

In recent years, researchers have attempted to define the coach-athlete relationship to provide a clear and specific way to describe an effective relationship. Due to the complexity of different perspectives, which shape the development of the relationship, it is difficult to quantify or measure the quality of the relationship (Jowett, 2017). Constructivists infer that individuals construct knowledge, understanding and meaning from their various interactions with the people and world around them (Highfield & Bisman, 2012). It is believed that there is no objective reality that can be universally applied to interpretation, therefore, consistent with constructivist thought there are multiple realities. For the present study, I will be relying on the feedback from the participants as a way of discovering how they understand and experience their own realities. This approach offers a deep and rich understanding of the experiences of individuals inside their world in which I will be a guest (Denicolo et al., 2016).

Choosing a constructivist approach to frame a case study supports the intention to describe and understand the social entity rather than to assert generalizations (Denicolo et al., 2016). A case study is an intensive study about a single phenomenon (in this case, one university sports team) (Stake, 1995). According to Stake (2006), the researcher is required to experience and interpret the case while considering its context. This reflects Stake's (1995; 2003) characterization of a case as specific, complex and functioning. I chose to adopt the approach to a case study design from Stake (1995; 2003; 2006) because it allowed me to acknowledge myself as a source of knowledge production and is consistent with my constructivist lens. I chose an interpretive constructivist approach to the case study design because it allowed me to acknowledge the unique perspectives that both the participants and I bring to the research. According to Stake (2003), the role of the researcher in producing knowledge is imperative. Not

only was I aware of the multiple perspectives of the participants, I was also aware of my own perspective and assumptions and how they may have influenced my interpretation. I was able capture my interpretation of the case, while examining the case situationally within context which resulted in the integration of both my perspective as the researcher and the multiple perspectives of the participants (Stake, 2006). Stake (1995) reminds researchers that interpretation involves viewing reality as multiple and subjective and suggests that it is a result of meaning and understanding A post-positivist approach to case study, as endorsed by Yin (2014), would not have allowed me to embrace subjectivity and my own positionality throughout the research process. The present case study, however, may be used as the foundation for other post-positivist case studies aiming to determine causalities through objectivity in an attempt to discover one universal reality (Yin, 2014). For instance, the experiences of the participants of this study may evoke interest in quantitative researchers to look at how the quality of the coach-athlete relationship directly affects performance or other dependent variables.

As I am interested in understanding the coach-athlete relationship as a social entity, I focused on the coach as the primary respondent, while incorporating perspectives of three participating athletes. Through the process of triangulation, I elicited data from different sources to ensure I obtained varying perspectives of a given experience. For example, I first observed and interpreted situations in the team environment as it unfolded, during practices and games. I actively engaged in short informal follow-up interviews with the coach to investigate his experience and interpretation of the situation. During formal one-on-one interviews with the athletes, I asked them questions about their perspectives of the same instance to add rigour to my

interpretations. By exploring several unique perspectives, I was able to unearth examples of the same situation that might be viewed differently by the multiple participants involved.

Ethnographic Case Study

Ethnographic studies in qualitative research are used to explore the interactions and meanings present within a given culture (Fetterman, 1989). Researchers using this methodology wish to observe and understand cultural norms, values, and roles inside one group of people. Fields and Kafai (2009) suggest that ethnography allows the researcher to "…explore the feelings, beliefs, and meanings of relationships between people as they interact within their culture or as they react to others in response to a changing phenomenon" (p. 923). This quote best describes the constant social interaction and negotiation between athletes and coaches within the context of an elite university sport team. Typical ethnographic studies could take several months or years to complete in order to produce a justified account for the culture in the study (Fetterman, 1989). Due to my time and financial constraints, I spent four months with the team. I used ethnographic principles, such as prolonged engagement spending a considerable amount of time observing, analyzing, and interpreting the social interactions within the team, during practices and games.

As suggested by Fusch, Fusch, and Ness (2017), when blending ethnography with a case study approach, one can achieve data saturation sooner than if they use ethnography alone. This is because a case study is bound in time and space to accommodate for financial and time constraints. The present case was bound by the length of the competitive season and the

participants were the head coach and a sample of athletes who were officially on the team roster. As mentioned above, I employed the case study research strategies offered by Stake (1995; 2003; 2006), as he views qualitative researchers as interpreters of multiple interpretations or perspectives. Stake (1995) also believes that the interpretation of the researcher is largely dependent upon their understanding of their own knowledge and reality. This notion is aligned with the chosen constructivist theoretical framework and supports the pursuit in attempting to understand the various perspectives within the participating sports team. According to Stake (2003), there are three possible case studies used for research. I employed the first type, which he identifies as an intrinsic case study due to my interest in understanding the nature of the coach-athlete relationships. I did not attempt to produce theories or generalizations, which excludes my research from being categorized as an instrumental case study.

Consistent with Stake's (1995: 2003: 2006) characterization of a case study, the present case is specific, complex and functioning. It is specific as it is focusing on one element found within one elite sport team – the coach-athlete relationship. It is complex because complementary to constructivist principles, it acknowledges the multiple realities and constructions of knowledge found within one group of people (Denicolo et al., 2016). There is no universal understanding of the coach-athlete relationship; therefore, each perspective must willingly allow for interpretation. Finally, this case is functioning due to the nature of an elite sport team, filled with emotions, politics, and personal agendas. This study is an ethnographic case study, as I will be broadly observing an elite university sport team. I will pay particular attention to the social and behavioural interaction between the coaches and athletes.

The present case was chosen because of its practicality and potential to be representative (though not generalizable) of other similar cases (Stake, 1995). The primary motive was to explore and understand this case without focusing on others. I focused specifically on the unique features of the participating team and did not compare these features with those of other teams. It was important to acknowledge that as I focused on this specific case, there are other examples of elite university sport teams that share similar characteristics with the present case. This allowed me to set aside previous experiences and curiosities with other teams and allow the real experiences of the participants inside the case to be at the centre of my project.

As mentioned by Stake (1995), focusing on a single case can provide researchers with the opportunity to identify uncommon phenomena, which are neglected during the investigation of a typical case. Case studies offer readers information that could be relevant to their own practice. Coaches and athletes from other teams and organizations may find pieces of information from my study that is applicable to their teams which could improve their programs through a heightened understanding of social development. According to Stake (1995), reasons for conducting a case study are to maximize what we learn, and to find a case that provides us with the greatest opportunity to come to understand assertions and perhaps the ability to modify generalizations.

Research Site

Data collection took place during observations of practices and games, one-on-one semi-structured interviews, and casual informal interviews with the coach. The participants competed at the university sport level, and all players were unpaid. The coach was the head coach of the

team and an employee of university, earning a salary for fulfilling his responsibilities. As this is an ethnographic case study, I attempted to immerse myself in the culture of the team by observing them inside their element, but also setting aside time for in-depth interviews to expand on observed behaviours (Fusch et al., 2017). I also had to be mindful of respecting the team and its culture, recognizing moments that I may be potentially interfering with their processes. For this reason, I did not plan on collecting data through interviews from the coach or team members during games, as these moments may involve high pressure and anxiety. I did, however, observe games. These methods allowed me to better interpret their perceived realities, which guided me through my data analysis process.

Participant Recruitment

As suggested by Denicolo, et al. (2016), sampling procedures within a constructivist framework are purposive and depend greatly upon the purpose of the study. Strategies used in the present study include criterion sampling. Criterion sampling is purposive and is predetermined and influenced by my inclusion criteria (Denicolo et al.,2016). I examined the experiences of the members of one team, and the key criterion for participation in the research was team membership, as they possessed specific attributes and were bound by membership of the team (Denicolo et al., 2016).

Once I received ethical approval, I sent an email to the participating coach to organize a recruitment meeting with him. At the meeting in his office, I gave him a letter of invitation (See Appendix A) and informed him about the purpose of the study, requirements of participation, and

ethical considerations. I invited him to ask any questions about his role and responsibilities in the research process, as well as mine. He verbally agreed to participate and signed an informed consent form (See Appendix B). It is important to note that during the competitive season prior to the one in the present case, I spent a few months volunteering at practices and shadowing the participating coach. I did this to learn more about coaching for the sake of my own coaching practice. This meant that I had already built some level of rapport with the coach which I believe could have played a factor in his willingness to participate.

The coach was my gatekeeper for gaining access to the rest of the team (Fetterman, 1989). He was the one who introduced me to the team, and as a result, other potential participants (i.e., athletes). I was conscious of the fact that with him introducing me to the team it may have put implicit pressure on the athletes to participate, therefore, I asked him to leave the room. From there, I reminded potential participants that their participation in the research was entirely voluntary and participation/non-participation would not be attached to any penalties, rewards, or risk. As an outsider, I hoped to earn the trust of the coach so it would be easier to gain the trust of the athletes. Throughout the research process, I attempted to become close to the insiders by building trust and rapport with the coach and the athletes, to learn from them and the way they understand their realities. This required me to respect their rights to privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality (Fetterman, 1989; Stake, 1995, 2003, 2006).

The coach was recruited based on the following criteria: a) he was certified to coach university sport and b) is recognized as highly experienced by his sporting and local community

and c) has been identified by other informants that represent exemplary leadership and d) is at my university (in the interest of accessibility).

Once I received consent from the coach, I constructed letters of invitation and informed consent forms for the athletes. I attended a practice, where I gave a verbal invitation (See Appendix C) to all the athletes and handed them the letters of invitation (See Appendix D). I asked the coach to leave the room during my recruitment speech, to maintain anonymity for the potential athlete participants and reduce any power dynamics that may have been interpreted as coercion to participate. I invited them all to fill out the informed consent forms (See Appendix E) and those who are willing to participate to check the boxes for observations, semi-structure one-on-one interviews, or both. The athletes who did not consent to observations were not included in my field notes or data analysis. Athlete participants were recruited based on the following criteria: a) athletes must be at least 18 years of age, and b) they must be eligible players and on the roster of the team. Out of a possible 18 of total athlete participants, there were 14 athletes who elected to participate in the observations, and three athletes elected to participate in semi-structured one-on-one interviews. All participants were assigned pseudonyms, to maintain anonymity. In Table 1 I provide information about the participants, their pseudonyms, and their involvement in the research (e.g., interviews and/or observations).

During an interview with one of the athletes, it came to my attention that I recruited the athletes close to the time where there were heightened emotions amongst the team. When I was giving my recruitment speech, some of the athletes thought I was hired as an investigator to gather information about them, due to the events that caused this period of heightened emotion. I

believe that this played a role in some athletes not giving consent to participate in observations and interviews. At the time, I was unaware of the events that had transpired, so I was unable to frame my invitation in a way that reassured them that my project was my own, and I had no hidden agenda.

Table 1: Participant information

Pseudonym	Role	Data Sources	
		Field Observations	*One-on-one Interviews*
1. Phil	Head Coach	Yes	Yes
2. Amelia	3rd year starter	Yes	Yes
3. Sarah	2nd year	Yes	Yes
4. Zoey	1st year rookie	Yes	Yes
5. Hana	Team captain, 5th year	Yes	No
6. Avery	4th year starter	Yes	No
7. Millie	1st year	Yes	No
8. Emily	2nd year	Yes	No
9. Annie	1st year	Yes	No
10. Lisa	2nd year starter	Yes	No
11. Ellie	1st year	Yes	No
12. Ollie	1st year	Yes	No

13. Regan	1st Year	Yes	No

Data Collection

Consistent with data collection methods provided by Stake (1995) and Fetterman (1989), I used methods that can be used within a case study and ethnographic methodology (Fusch et al., 2017). Such qualitative data collection methods included direct observation, field notes, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, and reflective journaling.

Observation

During my time with the team, I employed direct field observation, a method that is frequently used during both ethnographies and case studies (Fusch et al., 2017). This required me to familiarize myself with the environment and relationship dynamics. While the observation process was open-ended, I actively looked closely for instances where components from the 3 + 1Cs model were present or absent (Jowett, 2001). To organize my observations, I recorded jottings on a piece of paper attached to a clip board with pre created charts for recording observed interactions and behaviours (See Appendix F). Each practice, the coach also gave me a practice schedule, which was printed out for each coach and manager on the team. Within 48 hours after each observation session, I expanded on my notes on my laptop, and engaged in journaling throughout. My field notes were especially useful as I noticed specific behaviours that I wanted to discuss during in-depth interviews with the participants. For example, often I recorded specific interactions that I had observed but I wasn't able to hear exactly what was said. I would use my

field notes as a reference during an interview with a participant when I would ask them to reflect on what happened during that interaction and how they experienced it. This allowed me to gain an understanding of their perspective of the behaviour and not be limited to my perspective.

I had hoped to begin the observation process during training camp in early September, and conclude after the last game, whether they moved on to playoffs or not. I was unable to begin recruitment and data collection until I had received ethical approval, therefore, I began data collection in November, around the time of the first in-season game. The team had been practicing together since September and participating in exhibition games. From the start of my data collection, following the team throughout the rest of the season gave me the opportunity to enhance the credibility of my project by providing data from when the season officially started until it finished. On the team, there were many new first year payers, and some veteran players who will not be returning the following season. Therefore, I believe I missed important moments in the development of new relationships within the team.

The primary context of observation was during team practices, typically once but sometimes twice per week. Each practice was 1.5 hours, and most of the athletes on the team were present unless they had conflicting class schedules. The practices were very much part of their daily routine and provided me with an opportunity to observe them during a regular day.

In addition to team practices, I attended 10 home games and 1 away game. These games were important settings for observation because they involved a higher degree of pressure than what was typically found inside the practice environment. There were spectators, referees, and

opponents which may have influenced the behaviours and interactions of the participants. Unfortunately, due to financial and accessibility constraints, I was unable to attend more away games. This presented a limitation to my study, as I did not observe travelling experiences which may have influenced the relationship (spending time together away from other people and pressures in their regular daily lives). In an attempt to uncover their travelling experiences, I incorporated questions specific to away games during one-on-one interviews.

Field Notes

Richardson and Adams St. Pierre (2005) demonstrate four types of notes ethnographers use while in the field. These notes included observation notes, methodological notes, theoretical notes, and personal notes. As mentioned above, observational notes were taken in the moment in the form of jottings and were further organized as theoretical notes to form concepts and identify themes. Methodological notes were taken down as memos to ensure that I maintained a focus on my research questions (Fusch et al., 2017). Personal notes consisted of my raw and personal thoughts and were organized into a reflective journal.

Interviews

Stake (1995) explains the constructivist nature of certain case studies, stating that "the interview is the main road to multiple realities" (p. 64). Interviews consisted of semi-structured one-on-one interviews and unstructured/informal interviews.

Semi-structured Formal Interviews

I had initially planned on conducting three time-point interviews per participant. One before the season began to build rapport and talk about their past experiences with coach-athlete relationships, a mid-point interview, and a follow-up interview after the season had finished. Unfortunately, as a result of a delay in ethical approval, I was only able to complete two interviews per participant. I felt that I was be able to retrieve more honest information during a one-on-one interview in a private context than if the interview was in front of teammates. This excluded the possibility of focus groups from the study. I conducted a one-on-one mid-point interview with the coach and one with each of the sample of 3-4 players, and one interview at the end of the season with the same sample group.

During the first one-on-one semi-structured interview with each participant halfway through the season, I structured these interview guides (See Appendix G & H) as a blend between attempting to build rapport with the participant as well as asking them questions that aligned with the 3 + 1Cs model (Jowett, 2001). Examples of questions I included in the athlete's interview guide were: Can you talk about a relationship you had with a coach that you felt was good and effective? Can you share some of the ways your relationship with your current coach is different than your relationship with the coach you just talked about? From there I asked them to provide me with an idea of how they felt about the relationship with their present coach, and perhaps places where improvements can be made. For the second and final interview, I structured the interview guides (See Appendix I & J) as a follow-up reflection interview. I asked all participants about how their relationships changed throughout the season and components they would like to change in future seasons.

The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for some degree of flexibility. The same interview guides were used for each athlete, however, the order of the questions and prompts varied depending on the unique conversation (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). This approach enhanced the flow of conversation in which participants appeared to feel more comfortable sharing their experiences with me.

Informal/Casual Conversations

Throughout my time with the team, I actively engaged in several informal and casual conversations with the coach. I chose not to include athletes in casual conversations, as I did not want to risk loss of anonymity. For example, if I approached an athlete during a water break to talk about an observed behaviour, her teammates would then know that she was a participant of my study. The same risk to anonymity was not present for the participating coach, because everyone already knew he was participating due to the fact that he was the only head coach on the team. The informal interviews with the coach occurred before practices, during water breaks (exclusively at practices) and after practices. These interviews proved to be a useful tool because during observation periods, I would observe specific instances where I was unable to hear what was going on and needed clarification so I would be able to ask the coach after practice or during water breaks. That way, I did not have to wait until a scheduled one-on-one interview.

Observations and questionnaires are helpful tools to use to catalogue coach behaviours or link them to athlete outcomes (Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004), however, these tools are lacking in expressing the reason for certain behavioural patterns. Informal interviews assisted in filling this

methodological gap, as it gave the coach the opportunity to give reason or intention to his choice of behaviour to add context to the observation. This process strengthened my interpretation by gaining a further understanding of the coach's intentions. Informal interviews are the most common interview technique in ethnographic research (Fetterman, 1989). They are more implicit in their research goals and often occur as casual conversation which in important in maintaining rapport (Fetterman, 1989). Due to the frequency of the interviews, they were not as long as a formal interview and typically lasted 5-15 minutes.

Data Analysis

I used data analysis strategies aligned with Stake's (1995) case study methodology and Fetterman's (1989) ethnography methodology. As suggested by Fetterman (1989), I engaged in the data analysis process throughout the entire study. I progressively built on information and ideas to guide me on which tools to use next. During analysis, I used the direct interpretation of an individual instance and through aggregation of instances until themes and categories emerged (Stake, 1995). From there, I interpreted the data as it was collected and worked to further categorize and aggregate. Stake (1995) suggests that analysis is the procedure of pulling your data apart and putting it back together in a more meaningful way. As such, it is a process of analysis and synthesis. One important instance may have occurred only once, whereas others occurred multiple times throughout observation and data collection. As suggested by Glesne (2015), I was actively listening and looking, and attempted to learn to know what to look out for in order to assist in the process of data analysis.

I recorded and transcribed all formal interviews verbatim. This provided me with a written account of the recording, so I could recall the language and emotion aiding in the perspective of the participant. I used both the recording and written version of the interview, to strengthen the representation of their unique perspective.

After each informal interview with the coach, I attempted to record as much of the dialogue in my journal as possible to be more rigorous in staying true to the words of the participant. After each informal encounter, I wrote in my reflection journal and attempted to capture the interaction between the participant and myself. I looked for emerging themes and ideas from the interviews and interactions, which I recorded in my journal.

Once all data were transcribed, compiled, and organized, I engaged in both deductive and inductive approaches to analysis. Specifically, I examined the entire data set and intentionally looked for the four constructs of interdependence theory (i.e., closeness, commitment, complementarity, and coorientation). By using the 3 + 1Cs framework, I was able to compare ways in which the coach and the athlete valued and perceived each principle of the theory. There were common themes that were evident in the data, that fit into one of the four constructs of interdependence. I chose to interpret and organize their language to fit into each of the four categories. This helped me to better assess the processes and the quality of their relationship and perhaps the degree of similarity or disconnect between answers, mentioned above as the direct and metaperspectives (Jowett, 2007).

Although my analytic process was largely deductive in that I used interdependence theory to guide the analysis, I also engaged in inductive data analysis, where I re-examined all data with an aim to identify new ideas, concepts, and/or themes not represented by interdependence theory such as: gender, humour, vulnerability, and self-reflection. Each of these new themes would fit appropriately within one of the four constructs of interdependence, as they all influenced the overall quality of the relationship. This enabled me to identify how data obtained in this study both supports and contributes new knowledge to interdependence theory and coach-athlete relationships.

Data Representation

Henrik von Wright (1971) urges researchers to distinguish the difference between explanation and understanding. It is much more meaningful to the reader if data can be represented in a way that promotes understanding and does not just present pages of explanations as the latter is much less meaningful. In terms of representing the data, I chose to present my data with separation of narrative and interpretation, which is an attempt to engage the reader with a narrative passage with descriptions and illustrative words (Glesne, 2015). Stake (1995) recommends vignettes – episodes of storytelling – to describe aspects of the case and thick descriptions to convey findings. I chose to include vignettes as a way to illustrate my constructivist and interpretivist approach to my project. I included direct quotes and narratives of the coach and the athlete, including, for example, personal experiences where an athlete felt there was miscommunication between her and the coach. Using direct quotes offers an authentic

representation of the participants, which could make it personal and more meaningful for readers who may have had similar experiences.

As data representation evolved, data representation became more thematic in style where themes and theories emerged and are organized from inductive analysis. To organize these themes, I provided subheadings to provide structure to my write-up.

Trustworthiness strategies

To ensure trustworthiness I was transparent in terms of my social identities as well as my assumptions of the study. I was actively reflexive so that I could acknowledge my role in the way that I am shaping the research outcome. To enhance reflexivity in this study, I reflected on my reactions and feelings as the data presents itself to me and recorded these reflections in my personal journal. I recognized myself as a means to the production of knowledge as I have my own construction of reality contributing to how I interpret the understanding of others (Stake, 2003).

My personal experiences were used to enhance the trustworthiness of this study. I have experiences as an elite university athlete and as a beginner coach. I was able to bring these experiences into the interpretation process when it came to understanding the perspectives of the coach and the athletes. In some cases, I was able to relate to certain experiences if I had shared a similar experience in my past. For example, I have experiences with conforming to my coach's instructions even though I may not agree with them. Similar scenarios to this emerged during

data collection, and I was be able to have a deeper understanding because of my similar experiences.

This is an ethnographic case study, and I chose to participate in prolonged engagement with the team. This is a relevant trustworthiness strategy encouraged by Sparkes and Smith (2014). I spent four months with the team, attending multiple practices and games. The time spent with participants provided me with ample opportunity to gather rich data and arrive at data saturation. Consistent with constructivism, I cannot assert any piece of data as valid or correct, however, I can provide readers with a detailed account of the perceptions of the participants in my study. As I spent a considerable amount of time observing participants within their context, I consider myself able to appropriately present my observations to readers. I use thick descriptions to ensure that readers feel as though they are experiencing the observation firsthand, providing them with the opportunity to reflect and make connections to their personal practices (Stake, 1995).

After each interview, I used the member checking strategy in order to achieve credibility or respondent validation (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). I did so by sending each participant a summary of my findings from the interview, and gave them the opportunity to correct, add, or remove anything from my list. During the final interviews with participants, I discussed the main findings with them to ensure I have produced a relatable interpretation of my field observations. Feedback from the respondent helped to authenticate my data and keep it true to their perspective while also acknowledging my owne interpretations. Carlson (2010) clarifies that during an ethnographic study, member checking is used to validate meaning, not word choice. Sparkes and Smith (2014) advise researchers to use precaution when presenting the data to participants, as it

could result in ethical challenges where they are unsatisfied with the data you have chosen to present. Due to this claim, I was mindful and sensitive to what information I chose to use as data, to protect the participant's rights and the athlete's anonymity.

I actively engaged in journal writing through my entire project and to keep track of my thoughts, feelings, and decision-making processes throughout the research journey. The journal was organized into three sections: analytical notes, descriptive notes, and personal notes. This allowed me to use my journal as data and include it in the write up to enhance the experience for the reader. In addition, I used the audit trail procedure highlighted by Sparkes and Smith (2014) to increase dependability and support my decision-making process through my research.

Ethical Considerations

In this section I outline the chosen ethical considerations for my project. My goal was to maintain respect for all participants and provide them with opportunities to grow as coaches and athletes. I was granted approval from Brock Research Ethics Board to pursue this research.

Once interest was confirmed, willing participants signed informed consent forms, indicating they were aware of the purpose of the study, their rights as participant, and my responsibilities as the researcher. Participants engaged in this research voluntarily and were informed they were able to withdraw their participation at any time through the study. As this was a case study of the coach and participating athletes, some athletes declined the invitation to participate. These athletes were excluded from observation and interviewing.

Confidentiality

All collected data was password protected, and only myself and my supervisor had access to it. During the data representation process, pseudonyms were attached to each participant and references to places or institutions to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

Benefits and Risks

As I began my study, I considered the social structure and power dynamics found within an elite university sport team. It was evident that the coach held a leadership position, and the players held a followership position. In addition, within the particular group of players there were power struggles between rookie players and returning players, for example competing for spots on the starting lineup. This supports the reason for not choosing to use focus groups as a method. I asked players to share personal experiences of how the behaviours of their coaches made them feel and therefore I considered privacy to be a priority. Glesne (2015) highlights the beneficence principle when regarding the privacy of participants. As such, it was imperative to value and protect the emotional well-being of any participant and to ensure the benefits of my research outweighed the risks. My study focused on one elite university sport team, which carried ethical implications concerning privacy. I intentionally chose to use the term "elite university sport team" rather than stating the specific sport. This choice was made to further protect the privacy of the participants. A consideration I had as a researcher is the size of the team and the university itself. The athletes were students and spent most of their time together on campus, and also had relationships outside of the team. There was risk to participants from those who knew them, who

may have picked up on cues to their identity, which could have affected how their peers and teammates felt about them. For this reason, I was very vague in terms of describing the athletes and the sport they were engaged in.

I operated under careful consideration of power relations within the team itself. Glesne (2015) suggests "If research deals with sensitive issues in which statements of participants conflict with perspective of people in positions of power, then careful attention must be paid to issues of privacy and anonymity" (p.164). I attempted to gather rich and authentic data from my participants and when an athlete expressed negative feelings towards the coach, they could have been be afraid to share them with me. As mentioned above, I used pseudonyms and carefully represented my data in a way that is more general rather than using specific quotes from participants. If I did not protect the identity of the athlete, the consequences may result in differential treatment from the coach, potentially changing the coach-athlete relationship dynamic. As such, this was a risk to the well-being of the athlete and their status on the team.

In sporting environments, it is easy to expect conflicting politics and unethical behaviour. It was best to take the proper steps in avoiding these conflicts and therefore protecting the privacy of the participants. Glesne (2015) discusses friendships and the potential of building relationships with your participants. As the researcher, I carefully assessed and determined which conversations and information were available to use as data. The participants and I shared a common space, as we are students at the same university. I was also a varsity athlete, so we commonly crossed paths. In these cases, we engaged in casual conversations, which were not used as data. During these informal encounters, participants may have shared information with

me, which was personal to them, and not necessarily contributing to the primary purpose of the study. I used my discretion to appropriately make the distinction of which pieces I used as data to best represent the data but to also maintain and protect the privacy of the respondent.

Limitations

There were three significant limitations of the present study. First, participants had to be members of the team, however, not all players were willing to participate. At times, this made the observation process more difficult. For example, I observed an instance of interaction between the coach and an athlete who declined the invitation to participate. Therefore, I was unable to include that instance in my final report. I do not believe this has affected the quality of the study; however, I do feel that valuable perspectives are missing.

An additional limitation of the research was that I did not explicitly ask the athletes about their own gender identity and expression. Athletes could have identified as gender fluid or non-binary; however, I did not include that in the interview guides. Future research may want to consider gender identity and expression, and how is plays a role in the process of the coach-athlete relationship.

Lastly, as I see myself as a research tool, the findings of the study may have been affected by my lack of experience and subjectivity. I formally interpreted the perspectives of others for the first time, and this may have affected the way I engaged with the data. I have previous experience in a similar case from the perspective of the athlete, and that shared experience definitely shaped

the way I interacted with the data. In order to negotiate with this subjectivity, I positioned myself as the researcher and acknowledged my biases.

Chapter Summary

The design of my project was meant to be flexible due to its qualitative nature. As such, the methods evolved and adapted as the research progressed to cater to the needs of participants and emerging ideas throughout data collection. I chose to employ an ethnographic case study as suggested by Fusch et al. (2017). By blending an ethnography with a case study approach, I was able to achieve data saturation sooner than if I used an ethnographic methodology alone. This is because a case study is bound in time and space to accommodate for financial and time constraints (Fusch et al., 2017). I was immersed with the team from the start of the season until the final round of interviews. This allowed me to observe and investigate the processes of new relationships and the process of how they develop and are maintained. At times, the coach and the athletes carried out different behaviours within their interactions depending on the context and social environment. For example, during game there were specific required behaviours that they didn't value during practices. For instance, during a game the coach was restricted to where he was allowed to stand, whereas in practice he could go wherever he chose to speak to the athletes.

I collected data during periods of observation including practices and games. During this time, I recorded field notes on a clip board which were used during formal semi-structured interviews when asking participants to reflect on observed behaviours. After conducting formal

interviews with each participant, the interviews were transcribed. Employing both deductive and inductive analysis strategies, I used the direct interpretation of an individual instance and through aggregation of instances themes and categories emerged (Stake, 1995). From there, I interpreted data as I observe them and further categorized and aggregated. These methods were effective in addressing my research questions which were concerned with attempting to understand the subjective experiences within the relationships of participants in this specific case. In the next chapter, I present the results of my analysis.

Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

In this chapter I present the results of the analyzed data generated from semi-structured interviews and observations. The results are structured according to the four themes that represent interdependence theory: closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation (Jowett, 2007). Through deductive analysis, both the coach's and athletes' perspectives are presented. I also employed an inductive analysis that led to the development of sub-themes that fell under each of the four constructs of interdependence theory. Most of the data were obtained from two rounds of individual interviews with the coach and three athlete participants. The first round of interviews was conducted during the middle of the playing season, and the second round took place after the playing season had ended. Data generated from non-participant observations provided supplementary data and were used to guide ongoing interview questions and to promote data saturation.

The chapter consists of four sections. In the first section I present the theme of closeness, which addressed how the participants experienced interpersonal feelings within their athletic relationship. In the second section I discuss an analysis of the theme of commitment. In the third section I review my understanding of complementarity. From there, I highlight my interpretation of how the three previous themes interact to create a degree of co-orientation. I was able to use this 3 + 1Cs framework to qualitatively explore the degree interdependence and therefore the overall quality of coach-athlete relationships in the present study.

Closeness

When applied to coach-athlete relationships in elite sport, a key construct of interdependence theory is closeness (Jowett, 2001). As explained in Chapter Two, this construct reflects the interpersonal feelings of coaches and athletes which are experienced through feelings of liking, trusting, and respecting each other (Jowett, 2017). These ideas were prevalent in my research and helped me understand the participant's experiences with and interpretations of closeness. In the following section I present the analysis of closeness from the coach's perspective. This is followed by an analysis of closeness from the athlete's perspective. I finish the section by highlighting similarities and discrepancies between the coach's and athletes' descriptions of closeness that were evident in the data.

Coach's Perspective

I want them to build relationships and I want a relationship with them. My idea when I go away, in 10 years, is we're not going to remember if we beat Team A or if we scored. What we are going to remember is the time we had together. (Phil)

As is clear from the quote above, Phil highly values his role in intentionally fostering the development and growth of relationships in the team. This includes both the coach-athlete relationship and the relationships he facilitates between athletes. He acknowledged that as the head coach, he has the ability to promote not only the athletes' skills required for performance success but also the athletes' skills in terms of personal and social development. For example, in

my final interview with Phil, I asked him about his role in fostering relationships with the athletes. He said:

> … at the end of the day, I want to develop some form of relationship with all my athletes. Some are better than others but, at the end of the day I'd like for them to know who I am and I want to get to know who they are. That's what [sport] does, it gives you that opportunity. (Phil)

Phil also shared that he believed the athletes won't see the reward of the relationships they develop until ten years after they graduate. One of his personal goals was to be invited to the athlete's weddings, after many years apart. At the weddings of past athletes, he has already been to, he said they always talk about how they don't remember who they beat or who beat them but remember the time they had together. The team in the current study was highly successful in terms of performance. Despite this success, Phil spoke of the team he coached last year which was not nearly as successful and how he holds them closer to his heart because of the bond they had. These are both examples of how Phil values relationships with the athletes and does not place winning and success above their well-being.

One of my aims in this research was not to focus on the outcomes or products of coach-athlete relationships as this has been the focus of much of the coach-athlete relationship literature to date (see Chapter Two). Instead, one of my main aims is to focus on the processes so that both others and I might learn about how to go about fostering these relationships. As such, I was interested in *how* Phil went about developing these relationships and feelings of closeness. There

were several main approaches in Phil's coaching practice that were vital to how he developed closeness. For example, from my observations, I noticed the central role that casual conversations and "banter" played in this process. Taking the time to ask about life outside of sport and showing care for them, gives them a sense of security and importance (Docheff & Gerdes, 2015).

During my observations at team practices, Phil often spent time talking to his athletes about non-sport related things. For example, in several observations I noted that Phil "asked them about how classes are going" (November 2) and even "what they had for lunch" (January 7). I observed that he tended to do this during the lower intensity moments in practices, typically at the beginning of and during individual drills. When I asked him in a follow-up conversation after one practice about why he engages in these conversations, he told me: "It's important to talk to them you know, get their mind off the game for a minute. They need to relax and give their mind a break so they're ready to go for the next big drill" (November 28). Phil expressed that it also gave him an opportunity to get to know them on a deeper level, as they are talking about light topics that have nothing to do with their sport. Bloom (1996) suggests that great coaches do not limit their discussions with athletes to topics pertaining to their sport, however, they spend time asking each athlete about their background and personal interests. Jowett et al. (2012) would suggest that by getting to know his athletes on a deeper level, he is enhancing their degree of *personal feelings,* because he is developing some level of intimacy with them. This allows coaches to learn about the athletes' communication and training preferences, which can be used as a tool for motivation.

These casual conversations helped Phil nurture his relationships with his athletes and were used to increase the overall feelings of closeness between coach and athletes. When I focused on the nature of these casual conversations, it was clear that humour played an important role. In the following section, I discuss how Phil used humour to the extent that is serves as a sub-theme of how he developed closeness with athletes he was coaching.

Humour. As explained in Chapter Two, humour can be an important contributor to establishing and maintaining a harmonious relationship between coach and athlete (Høigaard et al., 2017). Phil used humour as a tool to promote social relations between himself and athletes, as well as athlete-athlete. This team was highly competitive and focused but from my observations I noted that it was rare for them to go too long in a practice without sharing a laugh. At times, the laugh was at Phil's expense, and I suggest that this was something he did both intentionally and strategically to foster the relationships between his athletes. Ronglan and Aggerholm (2014) argue that such strategic use of humour by coaches can result in temporarily subverting power dynamics. For example, during a midseason interview, Phil referred to noticing two of his athletes who weren't getting along. In recounting the scenario, Phil said that he assigned them to be partners for a two-person drill. He described the situation as involving him walking around, standing beside them and beginning to ask silly questions like: "What are you so angry at her for? Did she hide your shoes or something?" He said the athletes told him to shut up and then engaged in a light-hearted and humorous conversation back and forth with him for a while. Together the two athletes ended up making fun of him for being crazy. Clearly Phil used humour in this situation purposefully, to defuse a tense situation that could have compromised relationships

amongst the athletes and to show them how insignificant their disagreement was. His use of humour then allowed the athletes to come together and focus on something else.

While humour was important, Phil was also careful about how he used humour with the athletes. Sometimes what is humourous for one person is not for another. Phil often made fun of himself, which could be interpreted as making himself vulnerable. However, I observed that with vulnerability came trust, and it is the issue of vulnerability and trust that I address as the next sub-theme of closeness.

Vulnerability and Trust. During the first interview, Phil felt that trust was the belief that the athletes would follow his lead and do what he instructs them to do during practices and games. However, he also identified several other factors that facilitated trust, such as vulnerability. For instance, when I asked him about his experiences being vulnerable to his athletes and his openness to being honest about his mistakes, he said:

> Sometimes I do it on purpose, sometimes I did not make a mistake, but I admit to it. It's simple, for me it's simple. I say: "Listen, the wins are yours and I take the loss". So, the losses are mine. So, the loss was mine and did I admit that? Of course, I'm part of this team too. I don't play, but I'm part of it, for sure. I make a ton of mistakes and I am who I am, that's it. I'm not a genius, I'm not anything. When I see something, I have to be open enough to know that when something goes wrong, I can't blame an athlete for missing a shot. I internalize it so the majority of the time it is me, and do I tell them that? Of course. (Phil).

From Phil's perspective, he does this intentionally to "alleviate some of the stress on them...I don't want them blaming themselves for a loss...What did I do? I'm steering the ship and we went off course" (Phil). After a loss, both Phil and the athletes on the team were vulnerable socially and emotionally. When he shared his own vulnerability in these moments with the athletes, it arguably gave them the confidence to also express their vulnerability with him. I interpreted this behaviour as helping Phil to balance power dynamics in a way that he hoped would strengthen his athlete's feelings of trust towards him. Perhaps in these moments, he was viewed more as an ally, rather than the leader. According to Jowett (2015), the development and growth of trust and respect is fundamental to the coach-athlete relationship.

Phil referred to the development of trust as crucial in order for the athletes to, for example, buy into his coaching philosophy and trust him to make decisions on their behalf during games and throughout the season. However, Phil did not seem to want his athletes to trust in him blindly, and he both expected and wanted the athletes to question his decisions in order to make good decisions for themselves. For example, in an interview I asked him how he reacts to athletes who question is coaching decisions:

> I better have an answer. And I do have an answer. I'll tell them one thing: "I like questions. I need you to ask me questions." If I don't have an answer, then I have to investigate myself. Why the hell am I doing it? If I don't have an answer, there's probably something wrong with the way I'm doing it and I have to reevaluate it. We have questions all the time because I tell them to ask them.
> (Phil)

This quote shows that Phil is a highly reflective coach and one who does not want give "orders" to athletes but rather consider them as informed suggestions. From some of my observations, Phil did not appear to use his power and authority to enforce his choices and decisions but rather he encouraged the athletes to inquire into and understand these decisions on their terms. He did not demand that they blindly trust him and do as he says. He gave them the opportunity to think, which is aligned with his coaching philosophy.

> I expect them to understand, when I say things, I don't say things specifically. I make them think about what I'm saying. Why? They ask me: "Why don't you just say it?" Because I need them to think about the game. I want a thinking athlete. (Phil)

The quote from Phil is an example of how he uses open communication to develop closeness, which, in turn, allows the athletes to learn and understand concepts and evaluate his decisions on their own terms. By using humour and inviting the athletes to question his decision, he displayed vulnerability and developed trust with the athletes, all of which contributed to the ways in which closeness were evident in my analysis of Phil's practice. Although Phil shared how and why he develops trust with the athletes and the intentions behind it (i.e., developing athletes' skills and confidence to trust themselves), as I show later there were often moments in my observations of Phil's coaching that seemed to contradict his intentions.

Athletes' Perspectives

During an interview with Amelia (one of the third-year leaders of the team), she talked about how her relationship with Phil changed since he became her coach. She shared that their relationship is now the best it has been since he first started coaching the team three years ago. At the time, the athletes were making the transition out of a negative coach-athlete relationship with the previous head coach. Amelia described that environment as being very "chaotic and negative" due to poor performances, lack of team success, and what she described as the unhealthy relationship she had with the previous head coach. Phil joined the team staff first as a supervisor and then as an assistant coach. From Amelia's perspective, Phil was initially very hard on the athletes to "make them a good team", which resulted in Amelia disliking him. What she felt was a negative environment did not allow her to feel emotionally safe and open to the new coaches, which greatly impacted her feelings of liking, trust, and respect for Phil. It took time and consistency with Phil, that allowed Amelia to open up to the possibility of a heathier and more effective relationship.

As I observed at several practices and in a similar way to that described in the previous section on the coach's perspective, the role of casual conversations was central to helping the athletes develop closeness with Phil. Several of the athletes also spoke of the ways casual conversations facilitated the relationships they developed with their coach. For example, Sarah said:

> Every time we come into the gym he will say: "Hi, how are you?" Especially me,
> I don't know why (haha) for me he always says: "Hey Sarah!" and other people
> will come through and he won't say anything and it's kind of like a joke now

because we will be somewhere and he will see me and he will know that I'm there

and he will be like: "Where's Sarah?" and everyone will be like "Oh, my God!

(haha) She is right there." (Sarah).

From my observations and interviews, Sarah seemed to me to be a shy athlete who did not

often speak up during practices. During several practices I noted that Phil engaged in some

playful sarcasm or teasing of Sarah, saying at one point: "[Scoring] is so easy. So, what's your

problem?" (January 21). When Phil took the time to engage in these light humorous moments and

give her individual attention, Sarah laughed at him, which appeared to make her more

comfortable in the team environment. This example demonstrates a playful dynamic that

developed between Sarah and Phil, and which I observed to exist between several other athletes

and Phil. These data support the value in a coach spending time engaging in non-sport related,

casual, and light-hearted conversations in order to develop relationships. For Phil, this was often

done by using humour, including the ways he allowed athletes to make fun of him or for them to

make him the subject of humour. For example, Sarah said: "He always has his toothpicks and

Amelia makes fun of him for bringing them so now he always offers her one and it's just a good

start to the day" (Sarah). Sarah also noted that Phil uses humour with other athletes as well, by

creating "inside jokes" with them, which she suggests made them feel included.

It was evident that the athletes appreciated much of Phil's humour and inside jokes. Many

times, the girls were laughing, and the atmosphere felt happy and light during practices. Initially,

I observed that the athletes who seemed to be shy and less involved in conversations during water

breaks at practices felt vulnerable and left out. However, when Phil used humour to engage with

them, it seemed to me that they felt less uncomfortable in sharing their vulnerability, which strengthened the trust they developed with Phil.

Vulnerability and Trust. During the first interview, the athletes understood trust as relating mostly to sport performance and believing that Phil would do what is best for the team. They described trust as believing that Phil would make the best decisions on behalf of the team which would give them the greatest opportunity for success. As the conversations progressed, the athletes spoke about trust as the belief that they could depend on their coach in moments of vulnerability. Jowett et al. (2012) would describe this belief as a *generic feeling*, because it conveys trust, which ultimately influenced the quality of the relationship.

In her first year on the team, Sarah shared that she "wasn't really that good" and "wasn't in the best shape." She described sensing that Phil knew she struggled with her confidence, so he told her that he is going to dress her for every game because he could see potential. Not all athletes dress for every game, only the athletes that the coach chooses to potentially play in that game. Sarah confirmed that he dressed her every game. This consistency helped her develop a greater sense of confidence and feelings of importance. Phil stayed true to his word and his behaviours increased the trust that Sarah felt towards him.

It was clear that a sense of trust required a lot of work from both Phil and the athletes. Early in their relationships, it was evident that the athletes experienced little trust towards Phil because of previous experiences with coaches and a lack of closeness between them. It took time and consistency for Phil to earn the players' trust. For example, Amelia said:

Our team was going through some things a couple of months ago and I definitely

spent a day in his office. It was just a lot going on and it was just kind of

emotional and I didn't want to go to class all day and I didn't want to be alone

really and I just sat in his office all day and I didn't need his help or anything I

was more just there for his support just so I could be with someone sort of thing.

(Amelia).

In the previous section I described how Phil made himself vulnerable in order to help

develop trust between his athletes and athletes. In the quote from Amelia, it is evident that she

trusted Phil enough to share her feelings of vulnerability with him, to the extent that she felt

emotionally safe being in his presence away from the practice or game environment. Amelia went

on to discuss the ways vulnerability and trust were made explicit by Phil in her experience of the

coach-athlete relationship:

[Phil] actually talks about trust a lot because obviously he is making the decisions

for the team, in games and stuff and when he tells people something and they

don't listen, he always leans towards trust and says: "Do you not trust me as a

coach?" That's his way of getting his point across because I think it is important

that we trust each other because even for him to trust his athletes because we are

the ones with the [ball] so he has to trust that we know what we are doing as well

we need to trust him in time outs and when he draws up plays. (Amelia)

Amelia described the importance of mutual trust between her and Phil. However, it is important to note that she described this as being a long process; it took time for them to develop and grow their trust for each other, and after three years of the relationship there were still times where Amelia experienced challenges with trust:

I think that it [trust] does waiver for sure because some girls, including myself, will do something in a game and then he says: "You shouldn't be doing that", but we think otherwise so we aren't trusting his opinion. (Amelia)

As described previously, the ways that trust was fostered within the team was not done blindly and there were moments when trust between athletes and between the coach and athletes was challenges. In situations where trust was challenged, Amelia described using open communication and asking questions to help her understand why Phil was making certain decisions. This claim was supported by my observations. For example, on November 28, I observed Amelia and Phil having a conversation beside the drill. I recorded the following:

Amelia finished a drill and goes to stand beside Phil. She asked him why he wanted her to stand in a certain spot and pointed out why she thought it wasn't a good idea. He explained his reasoning for telling her stand in that spot. They continue to have a conversation about where she should stand. During her next turn in the drill, she

stands in the spot Phil had instructed her to stand. In that given drill, Amelia was successful during this repetition of the drill. Phil praises her from the side. [1]

In a follow up interview with Amelia, I asked her how she felt when she did not agree with Phil in terms of coaching strategic decisions:

> He will say stuff where it doesn't seem right to me, but I will obviously do it anyways, because he is my coach and it always ends up working out. That's happened time and time again so obviously that's built my trust with him.
> (Amelia)

The quote from Amelia supports the importance of consistency of Phil's behaviour in terms of developing and strengthening trust with her coach. The topic of gender was also something that had to be considered when investigating the development of trust between Phil and the athletes. The process of building trust is said to be influenced by individual difference characteristics, such as gender (Jowett, 2015).

Gender. The significance of gender was not something that came up from my analysis of Phil's interview data, however, it was evident in the athletes' interview data. For example, Amelia stated:

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[1] I have paraphrased a passage from my observation notes here because a direct quote may compromise the anonymity of other athletes on the team who were not directly involved in the research.

I think it's different, just because he is an older coach and he is a guy rather than a

girl and we are a girls' team, so I think it took him a long time to get used to how

to coach girls because he always coached guys. I don't think he realized at first

that he does need closer relationships with us for it to work because with guys

they are more just focused on the game, but girls, subconsciously, it is more

emotional. (Amelia).

During the interviews several athletes described feeling that because this was the first time

Phil had coached a women's team, there was a period of time where he was learning how to

interact with them. During a practice observation on December 5 and a game observation on

January 8, I noted that when an athlete was injured in both environments, they walked to a female

member of the coaching staff while Phil continued to run practice. In trying to understand the role

of the female staff member or the position she occupied on the team, Sarah shared that there were

times where the female member of the coaching staff "Would clarify what he meant when he said

questionable things. We know he means well, and he is just an old man" (Sarah). Sarah went on

to further describe the gendered nature of her relationship with Phil, saying: "He is like a Dad to

us. He is a funny old man" (Sarah). In her past experiences, Sarah had not been coached by a

female, however, she described instances when she felt the presence of a female coach could be

useful:

Sometimes, I think that it is important to have a girl figure to look up to. I've

never really had a girl coach in my life so I don't have anything to compare it to,

but I do know having [the female assistant coach] with us, it's really nice to have

someone who can relate to us because there are times where he doesn't

understand. Like when school is being a lot and we have a lot of pressure on us

and sometimes we feel really tense and we bring it to practice, and he just, he

won't really understand that kind of stuff so having [the female assistant coach]

there. (Sarah)

The athlete participants all supported the importance of closeness within a relationship,

specifically with their coach. They were able to trust Phil during times where they felt vulnerable,

which helped support the closeness of their relationship. Relationships that are composed of

different genders may require more consideration when attempting to develop and nurture trust

within that relationship. Although Phil did not explicitly recognize gender as being influential to

his relationships, the athletes felt that this characteristic played a role in their interactions,

specifically during communication.

Summary of Closeness

From data generated in the analysis of interviews and observations, all participants – both

coach and athletes – supported the importance of closeness within a coach-athlete relationship.

All participants recognized communication (particularly the role of casual conversation and

humour) as being important to develop a sense of closeness. Showing vulnerability was also a

common idea of what enhanced closeness within a relationship, particularly in the ways it helped

to develop trust. Earning the trust of each other helped to establish a close relationship and

conversely, developing a close relationship supported the feelings of trust for one another.

I found many similar feelings of closeness in the data from both the coach and athletes, however, there was a distinction between their perspectives concerning gender. When I asked Phil about his experience with the differences between coaching men versus women, he said:

> You know what, I don't see the difference, to me, [sport] is [sport]. I still fall off the wagon a lot, because I still say, "Hey guys, come on in here", I always call them guys. But they never look back, they never say a word. So, I don't see gender, I don't see a lot of things and I think that has helped me. The only thing is you get is the odd crying. But I just treat it as frustration and I see guys frustrated, although they don't cry, it's still frustration. Which is very similar to the other gender. They break down because they are frustrated, except one cries and one pouts, like: "Give me a break"; it's the same thing. (Phil)

The quote from Phil is an example of the discrepancy between his perspective and the perspectives of the athletes, in terms of the significance of gender. Lau et al. (2020) state that female athletes thrive in a more democratic environment where coaches take on a more mentorship role. Female athletes look for understanding and validation for their feelings from significant others, such as their coach.

Research has highlighted the importance of establishing an emotional connection or a feeling of closeness in order to have effective open communication within a relationship (Philippe & Seiler, 2006). This is done by developing a mutual liking, respect, and trust with one another. One-way trust was facilitated in this coach-athlete relationship through the use of

humour. Open communication often facilitates further opportunities to experience the other three components of the interdependence theory: commitment, complementarity, and coorientation. Commitment is discussed in the next section.

Commitment

Commitment reflects the interpersonal thoughts and feelings of both the coach and athlete, towards wanting to maintain a relationship (Jowett, 2017). As mentioned in Chapter Two, coach-athlete relationships are intentionally developed, and members of these relationships are constantly deciding whether to stay in a relationship or leave in pursuit of a more appealing one. In Chapter Two, I discuss what Kelley (1983) presents as the three major classes which are referred to as "causal conditions" for commitment. The first class describes how the individual perceives the degree of attractiveness of the relationship, the second class is concerned with the comparison of the current relationship with a potential alternative one, and the third class examines the challenges and barriers that come with terminating the current relationship. It is important to note that because the participating team in the current study is the women's varsity team of the respective sport, it is the only option for the athletes when considering level of play at their chosen institution. If an athlete decided to change teams in pursuit of a different coach-athlete relationship at the same competitive level, they would have to change universities, which is not necessarily an accessible option. These barriers may result in their current coach-athlete relationship appearing to be more attractive, which could result in their continued commitment.

Guillet et al., (2002) suggest that if both the coach and the athlete actively choose to stay committed to the relationship, and consequently, their sport, it is more likely that they will be able to experience positive consequences such as, higher performance success and an increase in well-being. In this section I present findings from the analyzed data, where experiences with commitment were observed during practices and games or discussed during interviews. I highlight the unique perspectives of Phil and the athletes, in terms of their responsibility in cultivating a sense of commitment within their relationship.

Coach's Perspective

Based on my observations and interviews with Phil, it is my position that he believed in himself and his coaching philosophy. Phil frequently addressed the importance of trusting his players, however, he did not acknowledge the importance of committing to his players. It seemed that his goal in terms of commitment was to get the athletes to commit to him and follow his direction for the team. This was evident during an interview, when I asked Phil about how he experiences commitment with the athletes. He shared with me:

> For me, I always wanted to get effort out of players, not necessarily points. My
> approach is that I want you to be committed, I want you to buy in, I want you to
> be part of this and so that's what I continue to do. (Phil)

In the same interview, he explained why it is crucial for the players to commit to his leadership:

If she plays her way, and she's playing her way, and she's playing her way, then we have five different ways of playing. But instead, we will have her playing my way, she's playing my way, and she's playing my way. We've got five people playing the same way. That's [sport]. To me, that's [sport]. So, that's what I'm trying to accomplish. I need all five of them playing my way. Then, we are together. Then all of them, without knowing it, are playing one way. Could you imagine five people playing one way? How good they could be? (Phil)

The quote from Phil highlights the belief that although he will have unique relationships with each athlete, he felts it was crucial that they were committed and believed in what he was saying. It was his belief that when all players bought into his leadership, they were more likely to experience positive outcomes such as feelings of competence and performance success. This was a reflection of Phil's coach-centred philosophy, as he expected the athletes to commit to him, and not necessarily to the team or their university. It appeared that he wanted them to play for him, and that would be their way to success.

Role Responsibilities. Jowett (2015) suggests that there is a strong association between commitment and responsibility. It is the responsibility of both the coach and the athlete to both work through challenges and conflict, which can be done through open communication (Jowett 2015). The coach in a coach-athlete dyad possesses a status of power that the athlete does not have (Wachsmuth et al., 2018). The person with more power, as a result of their status, inevitably feels a greater sense of responsibility to facilitate good communication. As mentioned in the

section devoted to closeness, Phil encouraged his athletes to ask questions. His encouragement displays that he values his responsibility to facilitate open communication.

During an interview, I asked Phil about how he gets the athletes to commit to his philosophy. He shared with me that he felt he didn't have a "typical [sport] coach persona." He spoke about how he thought recruits and other coaches perceive him based on his physical appearance. I asked him, "Was that ever discouraging for you throughout your career, just not having that persona that other coaches might have?" He replied:

> How am I going to counter that coach that has played U sport, and has all the accolades behind him in U sport, and this and that? I had to (1): be open, and (2): I worked hard. I had to have answers. I had to win it over with my intelligence. How am I gonna win them over? How am I gonna do it? My knowledge of the game. (Phil)

The quote from Phil shows that although he did not compete at the same level in as the athletes, he has confidence in his cognitive abilities in relation to the sport and used his intelligence to encourage the athletes to commit to his philosophy and a relationship with him. He further explained his experience with the process of receiving questions while facilitating open communication.

> People have questions, people have concerns, and you keep going so hopefully they buy in and if they don't buy in, you're not going to do well. But, for the most part, I was very fortunate because the girls did buy in (Phil).

The quote from Phil addresses how important he feels it is for the athletes to commit to their coach and his or her philosophy. If Phil experienced considerable push-back from the athletes, he would not be able to facilitate growth in terms of performance and achieving team goals. He is aware that the athletes require opportunities to ask questions and the choice to commit to him or not. In addition to open communication, a way that Phil supported their desire to commit was through his responsibility to enhance motivation.

Motivation. Elite female athletes studied by Lau et al. (2020) experienced an increase in motivation when they received positive reinforcement and encouragement from their coach. This kind of encouragement can promote feelings of competence, especially in female athletes (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). During practice observations on November 20 and 28, I noted that there were many instances when Phil offered positive reinforcement. For example, on November 20 Phil said, "Good for you!" to a first-year athlete and on November 28 he said: "Atta girl!" to the team captain. When Phil gave the athletes praise for performing well, it is my interpretation that he supported one of their three basic needs for intrinsic motivation, that being competence (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). According to self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000), when the athletes feel an increase in competence, they are probably more likely to feel intrinsically motivated to perform well in their sport and in their relationship with Phil. In a follow-up interview, I asked Phil about how he gets athletes to buy into his leadership, he said: "Once they gain success, they follow you." The quote from Phil reinforces the belief that when the athletes perceive themselves as competent (through experiencing success), they are more likely to want to commit to relationships with people who helped them achieve that feeling.

On November 28, during practice I was paying close attention to Phil's behaviours in terms of his encouragement and motivation of the athletes. I observed Sarah performing an impressive sport-specific skill, and Phil praised her. He cheered and said, "Good [move]! Hey! Good [move]!" I highlighted this moment in my observation notes because Phil made sure that she heard what he said. When he said "Hey!" he waited until she looked right at him, and then repeated the positive reinforcement to ensure that she heard it. Phil's behaviour showed that he values positively reinforcing and encouraging his athletes.

It is possible that his positive feedback style encouraged the athletes to experience self-determined forms of motivation, and the psychological and behavioural outcomes were more positive (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Such outcomes include: a decreased chance of burning out, greater desire to continue playing or exert effort in their performance, performance success/skill development, and an increase in the quality of the relationship with their coach (DeFreese & Smith, 2014). Phil placed specific emphasis on the players showing effort, which to him meant that they were committed to his leadership. He acknowledged that each player shows effort in different ways depending on their personal goals. For example, for some players effort may mean they need to run faster between transitional plays. Phil further explained "that's what I put on the board every day, effort. That's all I put, effort. And we combine all things around effort" (Phil). Phil was responsible for supporting the potential of the athlete to experience this motivation, through his behaviours and how the athletes perceived and responded to them. Therefore, his ability to promote feelings of intrinsic motivation may have directly affected their intention to maintain their athletic relationship over time.

Athlete's Perspective

Coaches have a responsibility to support the athletes with their development, however, athletes have an additional responsibility in terms of how they perceive this support (Jowett, 2015). Data generated during observations and interviews supported the idea that athletes feel a greater sense of commitment when they receive positive encouragement and experience open communication Lau et al. (2020). In the previous section highlighting the coach's perspective, I described an observation where Phil observed Sarah performing a skill and his being very intentional about positively reinforcing her good performance. In a follow-up interview with Sarah, I asked her I asked her what this type of praise from Phil meant to her. She said "Everyone on the team needs a different kind of encouragement. For me, I don't need yelling. When I feel like [Phil] believes in me, it makes me believe in him." In an interview with Amelia, I asked her about how Phil's behaviours impact her feelings of competence. She described a time where she performed well in a game and his feedback showed that "he was super proud of me and encouraging and he just built up my confidence a lot" (Sarah).

The quote from Sarah is an example of what Lau et al. (2020) present in their research, that female athletes are more likely to feel committed to a relationship that they feel valued in. When Sarah received support through positive reinforcement from Phil, she felt more competent in her ability and associated that increase in competence with her coach. Overall, her experiences strengthened her feelings of commitment to the coach-athlete relationship. An increase in competence could impact her confidence to speak up and ask questions, which could influence the quality of communication with Phil.

Communication. As stated above, both the coach and athletes share the responsibility to facilitate open communication (Jowett, 2015). Athletes experience the responsibility differently than their coach, as they do not carry the same status of power. When some athletes experienced positive open communication, it seemed to have positively influenced the quality of their overall relationship with Phil. For example, Amelia shared that she has an overall good relationship with Phil, and describes her experience communicating with him:

> I have discussions with him to make sure I understand things. It's not that I try to fight with him, but I just like to ask questions and stuff and it doesn't always end up with him being right. (Amelia)

The quote from Amelia shows that she is committed to working through challenges in the relationship, rather than closing communication between herself and Phil. She displayed that she is invested and sees the relationship as rewarding and valuable.

There were many times where some athletes experienced challenges with communication with Phil. Zoey was a first-year player, and she describes her seemingly frustrating experience communicating with Phil in practice.

> One time during practice I had done something in transition where I didn't go to the right spot, but it was a complete miscommunication or something, because [Phil] is a terrible communicator. He doesn't know how to get his thoughts out, like, no one knows what you're saying! Everyone is confused here, not just me. (Zoey)

The quote from Zoey is an example of possible challenges with communication. Similarly, Sarah also expressed feelings of perceived miscommunication during an interview. She said:

> He has his one way he wants to do things and if you ask a question then he won't even kind of like, I don't even think he understands what we are trying to say. He just doesn't go through the question in his head that we are asking because he is so to the point to what he is trying to teach us so he is just like, no no no , this is what I'm trying to say. But we're like, what if…? Like, wouldn't this be better? Why? And he's like, no! This is what you have to do. (Sarah)

The quote from Sarah highlights the idea that Phil seems to present a coach-centred philosophy, when he is making decisions. As I mention above, Phil feels that the athletes must commit to him and show this by displaying effort in the way he has directed each of them, however, he does not address the process of him committing or buying into to his athletes. This creates a tension between Phil's coaching philosophy and his actions, especially in terms of how the athletes perceive his approach. This raises questions about the extent to which his actions align with his beliefs.

The athlete's perceived poor communication from Phil could be a result of him not understanding how the athletes feel because he did not play their sport at the level they were at. During an interview, he expressed that he knows he doesn't have the experience as a player on his side, but he has knowledge of the sport on his side. Lau et al. (2020) suggest that elite female athletes appreciate when their coach has experienced competing at the same level. The article

states that only people who participated in that level of sport can have an understanding of the

mental part of the game (Lau et al., 2020). This could be a reason why the athletes frequently feel

there is miscommunication between them and Phil. This potentially resulted in Phil not being

able to communicate thoughts and ideas in ways that were meaningful to the athletes, which

impacted their motivation to commit to the relationship.

An example of poor communication was observed during a practice on January 7. One of

the starters, Avery, a fourth-year athlete was upset with Phil. He instructed her to change her

technique for a specific skill. She appeared to be frustrated and walked out of the drill. As she

walked past me, she whispered under her breath, "That's not going to f***ing make me better."

Avery left the room and the practice carried on without her. Several minutes later, she returned to

the practice and the drill. Avery displayed that even though she experienced challenges with

communicating with Phil, she was committed to being there, and part of the relationship. This

reflected her willingness to work through conflict and challenges with Phil. I noted that at the

same practice (January 7), Avery and Phil were laughing together during the last water break.

Some athletes felt that if they did not perform according to what Phil deemed to be

acceptable, they could be pushed to the side. I asked Zoey in an interview if she had any

challenges with committing to Phil's leadership.

> I had like three really bad talks with him where it was just him telling me, not in
>
> an aggressive tone or anything but the words he was saying was, I will recruit
>
> over you next year if you don't get better. But I could feel myself getting better

and I couldn't understand where he was coming from, but the more talks we had

the more I realised that I need to go at his pace, speed things up, play with a sense

of urgency. I'm figuring it out, I just needed time. (Zoey).

It was Zoey's first season on the team, so her relationship with Phil was very new. The quote from Zoey is an example of poor communication directly affecting her commitment to Phil. It appeared that he was using threat as a communication tactic. She felt that there was a misunderstanding between what he was perceiving and how she was feeling. As a result of the misunderstanding from poor communication, Zoey turned to her female coach for support showing that she was not committed to working through these challenges with Phil. She relied on the support from her other coach throughout the season, and during an interview, she said: "I don't know where I would be without her." Zoey saw that pursuing a relationship with another coach was more rewarding than trying to work through conflict with Phil, showing that she feels little commitment to her relationship with him.

Summary of Commitment

The data analyzed from observations and interviews present a discrepancy between the coach and some athletes, in terms of how they experience commitment within their coach-athlete relationship. Due to the prevailing power structure of the coach-athlete dyad, it is the coach's responsibility to facilitate open communication that encourages athletes to feel comfortable addressing topics of concern (Wachsmuth et al., 2018). From my analysis it appeared that the athletes who felt confident in their communication with Phil showed a greater willingness to

work through incidents of conflict, which I interpret as demonstrating a higher degree of commitment. Phil was an advocate for his responsibility to support the athletes through positive communication. There were times where he made an effort to use positive reinforcement, which resulted in the athletes feeling an increase in competence. There seemed to be an association with his support and their sense of competence, which likely increased their intent to maintain their relationship with Phil.

Within the team in the present study, there were multiple levels of commitment observed. Some coach-athlete dyads showed a strong sense of mutual commitment, while others showed signs of poor commitment, such as: avoiding interaction with one another (e.g., Zoey). Coaches and athletes in low quality relationships may lack the commitment to work together in pursuit of their goals and ambitions. The presence of commitment within a coach-athlete relationship is essential for growth and development, while coaches and athletes are attempting to achieve these goals. Commitment in an athletic relationship can lead to enhanced cooperation, which is further addressed in complementarity.

Complementarity

Complementarity is the construct of interdependence that reflects the degree to which the members in the relationship cooperate. Within the coaching context, the interactions between coaches and athletes consist of their attempts to influence one another's behaviour (Jowett & Arthur, 2019). According to Jowett (2006; 2012), complementarity also looks closely at the roles each party takes within the relationship and their acceptance of those roles. Readers will recall

from Chapter Two that there are two dimensions of complementarity: corresponding and reciprocal Felton et al., 2020). In addition to these dimensions, in Chapter Two I further addressed a supplementary theme proposed by Jowett et al. (2012), referred to as helping transaction.

Compared with closeness and commitment, complementarity was a more difficult construct to understand, observe and explain. Based on analysis of the data I gathered, the coach-athlete relationships mostly reflected reciprocal complementarity and helping transaction. From my observations, Phil was very much a dominant leader, and the athletes tended to act in the role of submissive followers. To be sure, there were few exceptional circumstances during practices and games, where certain players took initiative and made suggestions, and these were welcomed by Phil. In most situations, however, he was set in his decisions and how he wanted the team to perform. There was one instance where I observed a lack of reciprocal behaviours during the present case. This further supports my claims of a tension or misalignment existing in Phil's coaching philosophy and his actions.

During my observations, I paid close attention to how the athletes received comments, opinions, and advice from Phil. In most cases, I observed typical reciprocal behaviours. For example, during a game on November 8, I noted that Phil moved to the middle of the bench to where Avery was sitting. I overheard him telling her he was going to put her in the game and then he gave her an instruction. She promptly nodded her head and said "ok!" and ran from the bench to enter the game. This was an example of Phil giving direction followed by the willing compliance of the athlete, resulting in the expression of opposite behaviours which could

translate into high levels of reciprocal complementarity (Felton et al., 2020). In Avery's

relationship with Phil, there was an instance where I observed a seemingly low degree of

reciprocal complementarity.

On January 7, I observed what I interpret as poor complementarity during a practice on

when Avery did not accept feedback from Phil. In my notes I wrote: "Phil instructed Avery to

change her technique for a specific skill, and in response she walked out of the gym, cursing his

instruction. She came back after some time and joined back into the drill." I presented this as an

example of Avery's commitment in the previous section of the chapter, however, the same

example also reflected a low degree of complementarity. Phil had established himself as the

leader in their relationship, but it seemed that Avery felt she had better judgment in that situation,

creating a power struggle. This resulted in both parties demonstrating matching control

behaviours, which is not reflective of reciprocal complementarity (Felton et al., 2020). When

considering control and power, there can only be one dominant party, which suggests that the

other must be in at least some ways submissive, creating a mismatch of behaviours, in order for

the relationship to achieve high levels of complementarity (Felton et al., 2020).

During my observations and interviews, there was one instance where I observed helping

transaction, the supplementary theme within complementarity (Jowett et al., 2012). Referring to

the section on closeness, I shared a quote from Amelia about a time when she experienced the

need for emotional support. Due to ethical reasons and to respect the rights of both the

participants and non-participants, I cannot disclose the details about what led to the heightened

emotions experienced by Amelia and other members of the team. What I am able to say is the

heightened emotions experienced by Phil and the athletes resulted in moments that I perceived as demonstrations of complementarity. During this time, Phil embodied a supportive role, which is consistent with behaviours reflecting helping transaction (Jowett et al., 2012). (Felton et al., 2020). The athletes required emotional support during this time, and sought out support from Phil. During an interview, Zoey expressed that during this time, "[Phil] was really supportive to us and he was like: 'Anyone who needs to talk to me, I'm here for you'" (Zoey). From the quote from Zoey, it can be inferred that Phil values his role and responsibility in his relationships to support the athletes.

Summary of Complementarity

The complexity of complementarity generated challenges when attempting to observe and interpret it during my analysis. This dimension of interdependence required me to gain an understanding of two perspectives in the interactions between Phil and the athletes. What I found during my analysis of the data is that the degree of complementarity within one relationship can change drastically throughout a period of time (i.e., a sports season). As mentioned above, during my interview with Zoey, she criticized Phil for some of his decisions and expressed that she experienced difficulty communicating with him at certain times. In the same interview, she shared how supportive he was during times of heightened emotion, and how important his role became in their relationship. Zoey's experience shows that there were times in their relationship when there was a high degree of cooperation and complementarity, and also times where there was what I perceive to be low complementarity. In this way, complementarity is likely not best described as a linear construct but one that fluctuates in coach-athlete relationships due to myriad

situations, events, and circumstances that arise in both the coach's and the athletes' lives on and off the playing field or court. This was an important construct to explore, as interpersonal complementary and collaborative behaviours can shape a positive social environment that is both healthy and psychologically safe for all participants (Jowett & Wachsmuth, 2020). There are many factors that can influence the cooperation between two people. These influences may include the other constructs of interdependence, which work together with complementarity to reflect coorientation.

Coorientation

Coorientation evaluates and tries to draw together the other constructs of interdependence (i.e., closeness, commitment, and complementarity); it reflects the coach's and athletes' similarity and mutual understanding of the quality of their relationship (Jowett, 2017). The more coaches and athletes align themselves with elements of the three constructs, the more likely they are to enhance the quality of their athletic relationship (Jowett et al., 2012). In addition, Jowett et al. (2012) suggest that coorientation can be observed from the shared knowledge and understanding of ideas, beliefs, values, and goals of both members in the relationship. Based on my analysis of data from the previous three sections, I feel there was some level of coorientation between Phil and the sample of athletes. When analyzing the data for the degree of coorientation within these relationships, I took note of the three dimensions of coorientation: assumed similarity, actual similarity, and empathetic understanding (See Chapter Two).

Lorimer and Jowett (2009) suggested that, in team sports, coaches are likely to show a lower level of empathetic understanding, and therefore a lower level of coorientation as a result of a larger group size. This could be because the coach occupies a larger leadership role that contains a higher degree of responsibility to facilitate the development of a relationship with each athlete. Coaches who are able to learn more about their athletes such as, but not limited to, personality, behaviours, strengths, weaknesses, and goals experience higher levels of coorientation and interdependence (Jowett, 2003). Phil stated in one interview: "I know every one of my players. That's my job. I know every one of my players. I don't tell them that, because I want them to get to know me" (Phil). Despite his claims about knowing all of his players and their needs, Phil displayed what I interpret as lower levels of perceived empathetic understanding. Throughout my analysis of the three previous constructs, there were times where Phil's perception of his athletes' thoughts and feelings did not align with their actual thoughts and feelings. For example, in an interview with Phil, I asked him to talk about his prediction of how the athletes feel about his performance decisions. He described his experience with the athletes buying into his leadership:

> I was fortunate because Hana [team captain] bought in and Emily bought in big
> and so the rest of the team followed. Like Amelia bought in. So those people kept
> everybody at bay and said listen to the guy and went on. So that was the approach.
> I didn't ask them to do it, they took it upon themselves to do it. They're born
> leaders, and everybody just followed because they respect their play. If you
> respect somebody's play you're going to listen. They just want to know what

we're going to do and how we are to do it and they are going to follow suit. They

trusted me, to a large degree. (Phil)

It is my belief that Phil relied heavily on the trust and support from the leaders on the team. He prioritized getting them to buy into his leadership, however, it did not appear that he valued gaining trust and support from the other players. When Phil said: "…those people kept everybody at bay and said listen to the guy…" meaning that it was the athletes who made a difference in how they followed his leadership. When he said: "They trusted me, to a large degree" this implied that he feels the athletes trust him to make performance decisions. It is my interpretation, however, that this reflects the level of trust the athletes have for one another, rather than the trust they feel towards Phil. Confident in his philosophy and decisions, Phil was often observed to be less willing to communicate with some players (who were not seen as leaders) who had questions or concerns about his decisions. An example from my interview with Zoey highlighted her feelings of a disconnection in her relationship with Phil.

He kind of gave me some attitude and I don't give attitude back to coaches ever

because I am not that kind of player. But I did need to say 'mhm' to him to get

through that moment and play with anger in me for a second so that I didn't yell at

him because he doesn't get it sometimes. But ya, that conflict was just like him

being angry at me and then me being angry at the fact that he was angry at me, a

complete miscommunication but I couldn't say anything. (Zoey)

From this quote it is apparent that Zoey did not feel free to address her concerns when she had experienced a miscommunication with Phil, which resulted in feelings of frustration and contempt. According to Jowett et al. (2012), open channels of communication are imperative in order to experience shared knowledge, which results in enhanced coorientation. It is my position that the coorientation or common ground in their relationship was somewhat limited. Sarah experienced similar feelings of a disconnection with Phil when she was injured during the season. In her interview she said:

> If you are injured, he will keep going and of course he cares about you, but he also needs to put you aside and say: "Ok. Well, who do we have that's coming up next?" So, for me I got injured and he was like: "Ok Annie, it's your turn, get ready. You're next". A lot of the time people feel scared to get injured because the coach is going to forget about them and they're going to be mad at them for missing the season. (Sarah)

The quote from Sarah appears to show that at some point in their relationship, there was a perceived disconnect and lack of shared understanding. She felt cast aside, as though her needs were not accommodated while she was injured. She required support and reassurance but instead she felt isolated and guilty. At this point in their relationship there was a low level of coorientation. In her relationship with Phil, Sarah didn't always feel disconnected and bitter. She also spoke of her how she valued her personal relationship with Phil:

I think he has such a big impact on everyone because every day, he's just

something new. He's the most interesting coach I've ever had! It's really

important because it makes it fun and you don't want to be like scared to say

something in practice. It's like a comfortable environment. (Sarah)

The quote from Sarah reflects the contrasting experiences of perceived coorientation between her and Phil. The quote appears to suggest that Sarah experienced open channels of communication and comfortability in her environment, which allowed her to feel an increase in coorientation with Phil. In a similar way to Sarah, Amelia also showed inconsistencies in her thoughts about her relationship with Phil. In an interview, I asked her to describe how she valued her relationship with Phil at that particular point in time:

Last year, when he became head coach, I was obviously skeptical about it.

Scared and not happy, but I realized what his intentions were. I think it's really

important to be on good terms with your coach just because you're with him or

her every day. If you don't like your coach, it's not fun for you and it's not fun

for them and you typically don't cooperate and so I think in terms of coach and

athlete relationships, it's important even if you're going to have a successful

team. (Amelia)

The quote from Amelia highlights the degree of shared understanding and therefore coorientation she felt in her relationship with Phil. She recognized the significance of acceptance and agreement of goals, which demonstrated a shared understanding between them (Jowett, et al.

2012). From their perspective, both Sarah and Amelia describe it as important to have a good relationship with their coach, one that reflects a high degree of interdependence.

Summary of Coorientation

Based on my analysis of coorientation, with support from closeness, commitment, and complementarity, it is my position that the degree of coorientation within an elite athletic relationship is dynamic in nature, due to constantly evolving extrinsic forces and multiple relationships within a team. Both Phil and the sample of athletes had similar performance goals, however, after my analysis of how each participant understood their relationship, there appeared to be some level of disconnection. At times, Phil attempted to lead the team by displaying confidence and authority in certain situations, which sometimes led to poor communication and feelings of frustration. In these moments, I found that there was a low degree of coorientation. There were other instances where there were high levels of cooperation and mutual understanding, which in my opinion, resulted in a high degree of coorientation.

Chapter Summary

As highlighted in Chapter Two, Jowett (2001) defines "metaperspective" as the ability to infer another person's feelings about the quality of the relationship via the assessment of the constructs of interdependence (i.e., closeness, complementarity, commitment and coorientation). When I asked Phil to tell me about his perspective on how he thinks his athletes generally feel about him, he said:

I don't figure they all say, 'Oh, I love Phil.' I'm not saying that. Some do and

some don't. That goes with the job. It's what I hate about the job and that's why

you won't see me here a long time. My shelf life is short, and I know that and

that's the way I want it. (Phil)

He acknowledges that not all the athletes are going to have the same relationship with him, and

he knows that each of them has diverse needs and motivations. This is an example of how Phil

values the relationship with each of his athletes, so that he can learn about and support them in

ways that are meaningful to them. Consistent with a constructivist lens, each athlete will

experience this relationship differently. As mentioned in the section on complementarity, their

experience will be affected by Phil's behaviours and other environmental factors (e.g., teammates,

degree of performance success, other personal stressors). Overall, findings from my analysis have

demonstrated the challenging, complex, and sometimes contradictory processes involved in

establishing and maintaining high quality coach-athlete relationships, particularly in an elite

sporting environment when performance matters to both coach and athletes. Both parties have to

manage a delicate balance between meeting performance targets and managing the many

variations of relationships that occur within the team. These findings therefore highlight the

usefulness of using the 3 + 1Cs framework to analyze the quality of coach-athlete relationships

(Jowett, 2001). And while there are no concrete solutions based on this case study to explain how

to foster positive coach-athlete relationships, the results point to the complexities coaches face in

supporting athletes' development on and off the playing field or court.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The purposes of my study were to: (a) describe and interpret how one university sport coach develops and maintains relationships with athletes within one competitive season, and (b) describe and interpret the practices (including intentions and actions) used to facilitate social interactions that nurture the coach-athlete relationship. In this chapter, I explain how the data analyzed in Chapter Four helped me to address my three research questions. From there, I present the significance of the research and discuss how findings from this case can support coaches in promoting and developing high quality coach-athlete relationships in elite sport. I offer implications for practicing coaches and coach educators who teach coaches both in universities and in sport organizations. I conclude the chapter and thesis by offering recommendations for future research opportunities, followed by a reflection highlighting my personal experience completing this project.

Addressing the Research Questions

The research questions allowed me to remain grounded to the intentions of my research and gave me a lens to analyze and attempt to understand the unique lived experiences of the participants. As mentioned in Chapter Three, I employed a constructivist theoretical framework to guide my analysis of these experiences. In the following section I re-present the three research questions and consider how the data allowed me to address these questions. I also ground these discussions in the relevant literature.

Research Question #1

> *How do the coach and athletes in one women's elite university sport team describe and*
> *interpret the ways coach-athlete relationships have been facilitated in their team?*

Both the coach and sample of athletes that I observed and interviewed during the data collection process expressed the value and importance of maintaining a quality coach-athlete relationship. To guide my analysis, I employed the 3 + 1Cs framework from Jowett (2001), to help me analyze how coach-athlete relationships were facilitated on this team. During data collection, I explored the personal feelings of participants, specifically how they experienced trust (and vulnerability), through the lens of closeness (Jowett, 2017). Next, I examined how each participant felt about their degree of commitment, another construct of the 3 + 1Cs model, within their coach-athlete relationship (Jowett & Arthur, 2019). Finally, I used the analysis of closeness, commitment, and complementarity to further understand the degree of coorientation and interdependence that existed within the coach-athlete relationships (Jowett, 2017). All constructs of the 3 + 1Cs framework from Jowett (2001) were apparent in my analysis, however, their presence was observed in varying degrees.

An important finding from my study was that it was largely the responsibility of the coach who facilitated the development of the coach-athlete relationship. From the few athletes who were interviewed, the data suggested that because of the coach's position of leadership and authority, his beliefs and behaviours were a main driver for how both he

and the athletes generally felt and acted in their relationship. For example, when examining closeness, all participants mentioned how Phil facilitated casual conversations, and used humour and "banter" during practices. I observed these casual conversations during data collection and noted that, in most instances, it was Phil who was initiating and directing these conversations. During my analysis of commitment, it was Phil who had to convince the athletes to buy in to his approach and his leadership, and not for Phil to commit to the athletes' desires, plans, or preferred playing styles. The athletes did not express that they felt the need to persuade Phil to commit to them.

As I considered the ways in which the participants experienced closeness within their relationships, I noted that *trust* was often a feeling they associated with closeness. When trust existed between Phil and an athlete, they appeared to have perceptions of higher quality relationships. In Chapter Four, Phil expressed that the development of trust was crucial for the team to be able to function and achieve things together. Elevated feelings of mutual trust had the potential to increase open communication and commitment and therefore increase the quality of the coach-athlete relationship (Jowett, 2015). The sample of athletes shared that Phil often spoke about trust and consistently reinforced its significance. As mentioned in Chapter Four, Amelia explained that her feelings of trust towards Phil had change drastically since the beginning of their athletic relationship. Phil had to be consistent and patient while Amelia became open to trusting him, and at times continued to experience challenges with trusting him. This reflects the dynamic nature of relationships and how delicate trust was between Phil and the athletes.

In the commitment section, I emphasized the importance of open communication and its possible impact on overall commitment (Lau et al., 2020). In Chapter Four, I addressed times during practice when I felt Phil exhibited poor communication with the athletes. For instance, both Sarah and Zoey shared similar stories about trying to ask a question or provide their personal input on a drill, and Phil acted in a dismissive way and became frustrated because he didn't seem to know what they were trying to say. Another instance was during the practice on January 7, when Avery disagreed with some feedback she had received from Phil and swore at him under her breath before she walked out of practice. She did not stay and try to work out their disagreement, rather she chose to dismiss the situation and leave the environment, and Phil did not attempt to pursue a further conversation. The examples of poor communication I provided painted Phil as the root cause of these situations. The athletes who shared experiences of poor communication expressed that Phil is a "terrible communicator" (Zoey). They did not, however, talk about the ways in which they could help improve communication with Phil, indicating that they did not feel responsible for these instances of poor communication. Perhaps the sense of unbalanced responsibility was a result of a prevailing and assumed power dynamic, causing Phil to assume the role as the leader and the athletes the followers. This seemed to occur whether Phil was trying to disrupt this dynamic or not. Phil's position of power came with the responsibility to oversee and establish structure in the social environment, which created a narrative where the athletes felt it was out of their control and therefore not part of their responsibility. In this way, coaches may need to be explicit in co-creating a shared understanding of both the coach's and athletes' responsibilities early on in the relationship.

It may appear that despite Phil's best intentions to create an athlete-centred environment, there were tensions in how both he and athletes perceived the nature and responsibilities of each party in the relationship.

Research Question #2

What processes does one university sport coach engage in to develop and maintain coach-athlete relationships?

> *a. What are the coach's perspectives of these processes?*

> *b. What are athletes' perspectives of these processes?*

Based on the data analyzed in Chapter Four, it is my interpretation that Phil feels he does not have any planned and intentional behaviours that are devoted to enhancing his relationships with his athletes. I feel that this may be a result of his many years of experience and he continues to employ similar social behaviours with each team he has because he has already experienced success with building coach-athlete relationships with past athletes. In sum, he approached the development of relationships with this team in much the same way as he would have with any other team he coached; there was not any approaches used or decisions made that were highly specific to this team and its athletes. Moreover, his plans and actions in terms of developing relationships with athletes were tacit or implicit rather than explicit. It may be that, like other teachers and practitioners, he struggled to articulate his beliefs and actions but was able to enact them (Loughran, 2006). In an interview that I presented in Chapter Four, Phil and I spoke about how he engages in casual conversations with the athletes. From Phil's response it is my understanding that he

purposely uses these conversations not to nurture relationships with his athletes but to give them a break from the high-intensity nature of the practice. That is, the conversations were framed as a valve to release pressure rather than as a productive mechanism to foster relationship building. Conversely, from the perspectives of Amelia, Sarah, and Zoey, they felt that these casual conversations allowed them to develop a deeper relationship with Phil. None of them mentioned that these conversations released any pressure from practice or game situations. The casual conversations made them feel like he took time to get to know the non-sport related aspects of their lives. For the athletes, this increased their feelings of closeness with Phil (through trust and vulnerability), especially for the players who were new to the team, who seemed to be shy and less likely to speak out. In this way there seems to be a divergent understanding of the purpose of casual conversations from the perspective of the coach and the athletes, however, from both perspectives the use of casual conversations, humour and banter represent meaningful strategies for the development of the specific coach-athlete relationships in the present study.

In Chapter Four, I highlighted the importance of coaches using positive reinforcement to motivate elite female athletes (Lau et al., 2020). I observed multiple instances during practices and games where Phil expressed positive reinforcement towards the athletes. It is my interpretation that he intentionally used this strategy to create a positive environment and interactions with athletes. For example, when he provided athletes with positive reinforcement, he typically made sure that they heard it (by making eye contact, repeating a statement), meaning his behaviours were used to achieve a greater goal and were intentional and specific. To support my interpretation, I emphasized

examples from athletes who appreciated the positive encouragement from Phil. For example, Sarah explained that this kind of reinforcement increased her feelings of competence and belief in herself. She associated feelings of increased competence as a result of Phil's intentional positive reinforcement, therefore heightening her feelings of overall quality of the relationship.

It is important to emphasize the strategies Phil used to nurture the one-way trust from the athletes (i.e., the athletes trusted him). It was clear that trust was extremely important to him, and there were various instances where he used deliberate behaviours to influence the athletes to trust him. As mentioned in Chapter Four, Sarah shared that in her first season she felt she was not a strong player who lacked confidence. In an attempt to strengthen her confidence, Phil told her that he was going to dress her for every game, and he did. His consistent support helped to reinforce Sarah's feelings of trust in Phil, and her confidence in herself. In addition, according to Zoey, when the team was experiencing a time of heightened emotions, Phil made himself openly available to all members of the team if they were looking for support during that time. In an interview with Amelia, she disclosed that she spent an entire day in his office, sharing her vulnerability with Phil. These examples demonstrate that the athletes interviewed trusted Phil to a large degree.

In summary, Phil used a variety of strategies to foster the coach-athlete relationship, including engaging in casual conversations, humour, and taking ownership of his mistakes. These strategies were both implicit and explicit in Phil's coaching practice in that some he

was aware of and expressed doing intentionally, others he used but without articulating

their purpose or seeming to know that he was enacting them with any intent.

Research Question #3

> *To what extent do a coach's beliefs about the coach-athlete relationship align*
>
> *with their actions?*

The goal of my final research question was to examine how Phil discussed his beliefs

and actions about the coach-athlete relationship during interviews and how closely his

actions that I observed related to his impression. As mentioned in Chapter Four,

vulnerability and trust were made explicit by Phil. For example, in an interview, he

suggested that trust is essential to developing quality coach-athlete relationships. Phil

identified the importance of trust and his beliefs were reflected in many of his actions. For

example, both Phil and Amelia shared that when the team loses a game, Phil openly took

responsibility for the loss. He owned his own mistakes and how he contributed to the

outcome because he doesn't want them to feel that kind of pressure. These actions

translated into the athletes feeling safe to share their vulnerability in their relationship with

Phil. For instance, Amelia described a time when she required emotional support and chose

to seek out and spend time with Phil. To me, this is an excellent example of how Phil had

indeed developed trust between him and his players, or at least that of Amelia.

While there appeared to strong alignment between Phil's beliefs and actions in relation to

trust, in Chapter Four, I highlighted a discrepancy between beliefs about gender and the degree of

influence it can have on the coach-athlete relationship. The female athletes' experiences of playing for a male coach were much different than that of Phil's experience coaching women. The athletes described gender as being significant while Phil did not. The athletes felt that there is a distinction between the communication used when working with women in sport and men in sport. The three athletes interviewed felt that when Phil started with the team, he was not equipped with the skills to talk to them as he was using communication tactics he had previously used with men's teams. According to data analyzed and presented in Chapter Four, Phil suggested that the only difference between male and female athletes is the way they show frustration. He believed female athletes show frustration by crying, whereas male athletes show frustration by pouting. Despite his feeling that there is no significant difference, both Phil and the athlete participants highlighted the importance of having a female on the coaching staff, who, as Phil described, could act as a "buffer". The female coach gave athletes a person to go to for support when they were struggling with things that they did not feel Phil could help them with (e.g., school stressors). Research presented by Jowett (2017), supports that gender can be associated with the quality of the coach-athlete relationship. This is because individuals are more likely to like and feel close to another individual if they have something in common with them, such as gender. Moreover, coach-athlete dyads of the same gender are more likely to have perceptions of a higher quality relationship (Jowett, 2017). It is my interpretation that Phil is trying to play down the potential impact of gender because if he "doesn't see gender" (Phil, Interview Two) then he can never be accused of treating women differently. However, research by Lau et al. (2020) and Norman (2016) suggests that female athletes *do* typically need to be treated differently, particularly in terms of communication and relatability.

During analysis, there were several examples of miscommunication between Phil and the athletes. Phil stated in an interview, that he encourages the athletes to ask questions and not to trust his decisions blindly without understanding for themselves. Phil believed that he fostered an open environment where athletes felt freely to ask questions and share opinions; however, it is my opinion that his behaviours did not always reflect his beliefs. For example, Zoey and Sarah both shared experiences of frustration when they were misunderstood by Phil when they were trying to communicate questions or ideas to him during practice. To them, he appeared to be unopen and confused, which created an increasingly frustrating environment for many participants in the coach-athlete relationship. To conclude, there were times where Phil's beliefs of the value of the coach-athlete relationship did align with his behaviours, and other times where there his belief and behaviour did not align. This could largely be a result of the complex social environment Phil found himself him. The social climate was subject to many influences such as, contrasting personalities, competition, and other environmental factors. The consistency between Phil's beliefs and behaviours may be enhanced through self-reflection practices, which are addressed later in this discussion (Cushion, 2015).

Summarizing the Results and Making Conclusions

The 3+1 Cs model provided a useful theoretical framework to help describe and interpret the processes of the coach-athlete relationship in an elite women's sports team. Both the coach and athletes demonstrated how ideas such as closeness and commitment were crucial to the functioning and performance of their team. Phil used casual conversations, humour, and banter to facilitate these processes. Moreover, trust was a key contributor to the development of the

strength of the coach-athlete relationship that was the focus of this research. Trust was made explicit by Phil, who spoke regularly and explicitly about its importance with players and during interviews. Several of the athletes also referred to the degree of trust they had with Phil, and how this developed trust amongst members of the team. At the same time, there was evidence of some discrepancies and misalignment between some of these issues from time to time. I cannot say that that there was complete alignment or misalignment between Phil's beliefs and his actions but rather these things fluctuated during the season and according to myriad situations that were unfolding within and between practices and games.

The ideas of complementarity and coorientation were not overly conspicuous in the analysis of data but were able to support the overall analysis of the quality certain coach-athlete relationships. Throughout the season, I observed fluctuating levels of cooperation between Phil and the athletes. This belief reinforces the idea of the dynamic nature of the coach-athlete relationship. Therefore, each element included in the 3 + 1Cs framework is subject to constant change in how they are experienced by members of the relationship and due to the many complex factors, situations, and occurrences that are at play in any sporting environment (Jowett, 2017).

Significance of Findings

This research builds on the extensive work on coach-athlete relationships by, in particular, Jowett (2001) by providing additional insight through a qualitative lens on the importance of understanding the constructs to make up the quality of the coach-athlete relationship. As my research focused on the processes of developing and maintaining coach-athlete relationships

rather than the products or outcomes (which have tended to be the focus of much other research), my research adds new insights into *the hows and whys* of coach-athlete relationships. Specifically, the results suggest a need for coaches and athletes to be given the opportunity to share and learn about the possible influence their athletic relationship has on their overall experience.

This research explored one specific case and it is not intended that the findings are suitable or appropriate for making generalizations. Rather, this research serves as an exemplar for others about how one elite sport coach goes about facilitating coach-athlete relationships and how the sample of athletes respond and experience those relationships. To gain broader understandings, the use of other case studies in both similar and different settings may enable connections and patterns to be drawn across contexts, while also offering perspectives on unique situations from team to team and coach to coach.

In Chapter Two, I addressed the inaccurate assumption that coaching expertise can be acquired exclusively through playing experience, observation of other coaches and formal education (Cushion, 2006). In Chapter Four, I shared that Phil never competed in the sport at the level he coaches. When speaking to him about this in an interview, he said that he doesn't feel this impacts the way athletes feel about him because he gets their commitment with his knowledge. However, in an interview with Sarah, she expressed that she felt he didn't understand what it is like to juggle elite athletics and other stressors (e.g., school), and that is when they go to the female coach for support and understanding. It was mentioned in Chapter Two, that according to the similarity-attraction hypothesis (Byrne, Clore, & Smeaton, 1986), individuals are more

likely to develop closer relationships with people who share similarities with them such as gender and playing experience (Jowett & Nezlek, 2012). This suggests that even though Phil expressed that he did not feel he was at a disadvantage by not sharing a similar athletic experience as the athletes, his lack of shared experience could possibly impact how the athletes perceive him and therefore have implications for their relationships.

In Chapter Four, I provided examples of times I observed Phil expressing positive reinforcement and encouragement. I addressed the importance of this type of feedback in Chapter Two, highlighting that positive encouragement and should avoid dehumanizing verbal and physical feedback (Docheff & Gerdes, 2015). It was suggested that coaches must develop a relationship with the athletes and learn what words and phrases are most meaningful to each athlete. From there, the athletes may be more willing to trust their coach and the relationship could become stronger. In Chapter Four, when Sarah received positive feedback from Phil, she experienced an increase in her feelings of competence and commitment to him. Lau et al. (2020) suggest that female athletes are more likely to feel committed to a relationship they feel valued in. Phil's behaviours and feedback encouraged Sarah in a way that was meaningful to her, and she described this experience as a time where Phil's belief in her caused her to believe in him. The data supports the great capacity for influence of positive reinforcement, especially for female elite athletes (Lau et al., 2020).

Implications

In this section I identify possible implications of this research. In the first section I discuss the implications of this research for elite coaches and athletes who are interested in enhancing the interpersonal exchanges within their coach-athlete relationship. In the second section I discuss potential implications for individuals and organizations who are responsible for creating coach education programs.

Implications for Coaches and Athletes

Interpersonal Development

The development of interpersonal skills is required by both coaches and athletes. First, both parties should engage in on-going self-reflection practices, where they actively evaluate themselves and how closely their behaviours align with their values and philosophy. From there, Richards, Duncan, Mascarenhas, and Collins (2009) suggest they have the potential to gain a better understanding of themselves which can translate into opening channels of communication.

Self-Reflection

Phil considers his coaching philosophy to be athlete-centred, however, after analyzing and discussing examples of his leadership, it is my position that his behaviours reflect a more coach-centred approach. He is confident in the decisions he makes on behalf of the team, and during my observations I did not see instances where he welcomed insight for changes from his athletes. This is not to criticize Phil's philosophy but findings from this case make it clear that coaching

philosophies are not always aligned with coaching behaviours. This sort of discrepancy has the potential to yield negative consequences, resulting in the breakdown of coach-athlete relationships. It is imperative for the coach and athletes to be consistent with their values and goals. Reflection and reflective practice are believed to improve professional practice by promoting critical thinking, empowerment, enhanced learning, and ultimately self-awareness (Cushion, 2015). This assertion supports the belief that coaches and athletes should actively engage in self-reflection, to ensure they understand their own feelings and how they play a part in the nature of their relationship. These skills will allow for better communication with one another, possibly impacting feelings of their overall relationship. It can also lead to revisions in one's philosophy so that beliefs and actions are better aligned.

Open Communication

From the results of this research, it is evident that communication greatly impacts the general quality of a relationship. As I highlighted in Chapter Two, Jowett and Poczwardowski (2007) and LaVoi (2007) suggest that two elements that may impact the quality of the coach-athlete relationship are conflict management and interpersonal communication. Communication is linked to interpersonal conflict because conflict can be created and reflected by communication, and communication is the tool used for conflict management (LaVoi, 2007). For both the coach and athletes, it is imperative to be aware of other possible negative relationship influences that cannot be controlled, and then work together to find strategies to overcome them. For example, student-athletes will likely experience school as a stressor, which could impact their psychology feelings inside their sport environment (LaVoi, 2007). In addition, as humans we are

social creatures who have multiple relationships which have the potential to create increased feelings of stress. Creating an open dialogue within a relationship about these additional stressors can help coaches and athletes better understand themselves and their relationship with each other.

In addition to stressors, there are various personality traits that influence the way a coach and an athlete values their athletic relationship. In this study, Phil indicated that each athlete requires a different method of feedback, and it was his job to recognize and deliver that. For example, Yang, Jowett, and Chan (2015) discuss the varying degrees of passion for sport among elite athletes. It is suggested that athletes who are more passionate about their sport are more likely to experience elevated feelings of a healthy coach-athlete relationship (Yang et al., 2015). In addition, coaches who receive positive behaviours are more likely to reciprocate those behaviours (Yang & Jowett, 2015). For example, being open about what would help an athlete feel less stressed about upcoming academic deadlines may lead to the coach expressing more supportive behaviours, therefore creating a more positive and healthy social interaction. Both elite coaches and athletes must prioritize their intrapersonal development which could influence their interpersonal exchanges.

Implications for Coach Educators

In response to the call for further research around the processes of coach-athlete relationships, I examined the social processes between the coach and athletes in one elite sport team. By using a case study approach, I was able to gain a heightened understanding of the coach-athlete relationship, through my interpretation of the development and maintenance of the

relationships within their unique environment. As Stake (1995) asserts, "Seldom is an entirely new understanding reached but refinement of understanding is" (p. 7). My hope was to build on earlier research, which could provide readers with lessons learned pertaining to their own personal practice. Although the current study contained unique qualities, readers who are engaged in coach education have the opportunity to find similarities in their practices and reflect on the events found within this case. In addition, readers may bring their own generalizations and assumptions with them, to shape how they interpret my findings. This study could also strengthen or urge them to question their generalizations and open their minds to improving their own skills. From the data I collected, I can only hope that other coaches will be able to find elements that are useful to further enhance their practice.

From this project, it is clear that coaches of elite teams hold a degree of power and responsibility because of the position they are in. This claim is justified by the narrative presented by the participants, which described that it was predominately the responsibility of the coach to find strategies that nurture the coach-athlete relationship. Jowett (2003) suggests that a coach is one of the most influential people in the life of an athlete. In addition, there seems to be an increase in cases displayed in the media and literature of abusive coach-athlete relationships.

Therefore, there is a call for increased scrutiny of current coach education programs. After analyzing and attempting to understand the perspective from the sample of athletes in the present study, it became more apparent that they felt Phil's behaviours greatly influenced their feelings of enjoyment and well-being while engaging in their sport. There were times when Phil lacked skills (e.g., communication) that created tensions in the relationships he had with the athletes. Through

coach education programs, coaches should be provided with some sort of road map to navigate various contextual circumstances, or at least ways to appropriately approach athletes when there is conflict. If Phil had these skills or had been aware of how he could have improved upon these skills, he may have avoided created an environment where some athletes felt apprehensive about asking questions or sharing feelings. Supporting coaches in articulating their beliefs and actions may allow them to become more aware of why and how they are doing what they are trying to do. As shown in this research, it is my view that the tacit and implicit nature of some of Phil's coaching decisions suggest at times he struggled to pinpoint the details of some parts of his coaching practice; particularly those details that concerned coach-athlete relationships.

Future Recommendations

The findings of this research indicate a need for coaches and athletes to acquire a heightened awareness of the social processes within an athletic environment. Specifically, more research is needed to understand the potential impact a coach-athlete relationship has on the enjoyment and success of a coach, athlete, and the whole team. As such, my first recommendation for future research is to employ a multiple case study methodology, which allows researchers to compare the social processes from case to case. Ideally, the primary researcher would conduct a longitudinal study of multiple elite sport teams. This research could provide insightful feedback on how different leadership styles play a role in how the coach-athlete relationship is facilitated and analysed using the 3 + 1Cs framework (Jowett, 2001).

Considering my aforementioned recommendation for coaches to engage in self-reflection, I would encourage additional research from coaches who use, for example, action research or self-study. In their research, they could document their own experiences of developing and maintaining the coach-athlete relationship with an aim to engage in rigorous self-critique rather than self-justification. Placing themselves under scrutiny could give attention to the benefits of evaluating current self-practices and would also give the practitioner an opportunity to develop their own professional skills and the overall functioning of their personal coach-athlete relationships.

Further research opportunities may look more closely at the role of gender within the coach-athlete relationship. The relationships within the present case represented athletic partnerships that included a male coach and a female athlete. Although gender was not at the forefront of the data, it was emerging throughout the project. Research devoted to investigating the component of gender with athletic relationships, could build on the work of Jowett (2017), which suggests that gender is associated with the quality of the coach-athlete relationship.

It was highlighted during an interview with Amelia, that the nature of her relationship with Phil changed over time. I mention that the coach-athlete relationships in the present study are dynamic in nature, however there is little research exploring the extent to which these relationships change over time (Nicholls et al., 2017). Longitudinal studies examining the coach-athlete relationships on one team for several consecutive competitive seasons may be able to examine the changes within coach-athlete relationships.

Finally, research focussing on developing relevant coach education programs which give coaches the opportunity to learn and develop new skills that could enhance their ability to facilitate relationships with athletes. This recommendation is significant, given the lack of research that has focused on the development or enhancement of current coach education programs. Current programs focus mostly on the development of technique, strategy, and performance outcomes, ignoring the significance of building healthy social relationships (Jowett & Cockerill, 2002). I suggest coach educators focus on providing a comprehensive education system containing practical implications for elite coaches and athletes.

Personal Reflection

Engaging in this research topic was incredibly important to me. I grew up with mostly positive experiences with my own coaches, and that is what inspired me to explore coach-athlete relationships. I wanted to explore if the quality of these relationships really mattered, and if they could influence how athletes feel. It was not until I was working through data collection, when I was navigating challenges within my own coach-athlete relationship. I had been an elite rower for five years, and this was the first time I felt the negative behaviours of my coach affecting how I felt emotionally and physically. The lack of control I had was extremely uncomfortable and scary. However, I felt that my personal experience was a driving force of motivation and helped to keep me grounded to my intentions. In hindsight, I am thankful to have experienced both positive and negative coach-athlete relationships, because it has provided me with my own insight and understanding of their potential consequences.

After reviewing the literature, learning about the perspectives of the participants, and reflecting on my own experiences, I am even more excited to continue learning and developing my own coaching practice. These findings have left me feeling more passionate about contributing to the evolving climate of elite sport. I believe that my strength will be in education, where I am eager to learn more about ethical coaching practices and help to share this knowledge. It is suggested by Cronin and Armour (2018), that there has been a slight increase in research pertaining to the existence of *care* in sport relationships. It is also suggested in the study by Cronin and Armour (2018) also claim that the caring dimension in relationships has been seen as more feminine, however, the slight increase in research in this area may address the need for examining the care coaches have for their athletes in both male and female sports. I acknowledge that there will always be coaches who exhibit negative coaching behaviours, but I am not afraid to speak up and advocate for athletes who are not willing to do so.

Reflecting on the process of developing rapport with my research participants, it took many awkward conversations to feel comfortable in the team's space. After my first interview with Phil, I wrote in my reflective journal:

> I'm so embarrassed at how intimidated I was before the interview. I spoke in a deeper voice and tried not to not show any lack of confidence because I was so worried, he would think I didn't know anything (January 7).

During the interview with Phil, he could sense that I was nervous and intimidated being in his office. He took time to encourage me to be myself and even spent about an hour after the

interview answering questions unrelated to my research, but specific to my own coaching practice. This conversation was significant to me, because it helped me to overcome some personal insecurities I had about my coaching practice. In a way, this conversation also gave me some personal experience into how Phil felt about those people with whom he worked. While I was not playing on his team, I sensed that he cared about me, my welfare, and education.

After my final interview with Phil, I wrote in my reflective journal:

> I feel so emotional because I really enjoyed being around Phil and the athletes. I learned so much from him about confidence and being myself. Speaking with him was really great for my personal and research development and I am so thankful that everything worked out the way it did, even as my plan B option. It could not have worked out better (April 7).

It is important to note that I had initially planned to conduct my study on another elite sports team. My initial plan fell through with another coach and Phil was more than willing to participate in the project. At the time when my initial plans fell through, I was terrified of what my project was going to look like. Just like what I learned about the coach-athlete relationships in this study, it was important for me to trust and communicate with those around me. I learned throughout this process is how important it is to know your own strengths and weaknesses, and what you need in order to feel safe and happy in your environment. I conclude this personal reflection with a thought that continues to spark my motivation to continue research in elite sport: sport holds a great power over those who

choose it, as it is capable of giving you so much good, but you also risk the unfavourable experiences. I believe that high quality coach-athlete relationships have the power to help achieve the greatest benefits that sport has to offer.

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Appendix A

Invitation and Information Letter for Coach

Dear Coach,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study entitled "An Ethnographic Case Study of Developing and Maintaining the Coach-Athlete Relationship in Elite Sport". The principal investigator of this research is Dr. Tim Fletcher, Associate Professor in the Department of Kinesiology at Brock University. The principal student investigator of the study is Erin Corkery, a masters student in the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences at Brock University.

The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences surrounding interpersonal relationships of the members of one elite sports team. I believe that the development and maintenance of the coach-athlete relationship is crucial to enhancing the overall experiences of participants in sport. The quality of the coach-athlete relationship can potentially influence with well-being and performance success of participants. I am trying to understand ways that we can foster these types of experiences through placing focus on the quality of the coach-athlete relationship.

As a participant, you will be asked to participate in observation periods and three semi-structured interviews throughout the entire season. The observations will occur only during practices, games, and film sessions. The primary student investigator will be present during these times and will be taking notes on a clipboard to write down what she sees and hears. Throughout the observation period, there will be informal interviews with the principal student researcher, before or after sessions. These will typically last 5 - 15 minutes and will be used to help her learn more about your experiences within that particular session. You will also be asked to engage in three one-on-one interviews with the principal student investigator. These interviews will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes. Participation will take approximately 60 minutes of your time (each interview) and will take place during the pre-season, season, and post-season.

All athletes on the roster of the team you are coaching will also be invited to participate, however, they are not obligated to consent to participation. You will not have access to information pertaining to who is and is not participating to protect the identities of these athlete participants.

Potential Benefits and Risks

There are few direct benefits from participating in the study (i.e., no financial gain or increase in qualifications). Coach participants will benefit from the study in that they are being offered an opportunity to receive feedback from their players in regard to the relationships they have with them, however, the identity of players will not be revealed to the coach at any point in time. The participants may choose to use this study to further develop their practice and use the results to reflect on their relationships and behaviours. Through these reflections, they can better understand their current coaching practice and look at ways to further enhance their practice and relationships in the future.

Athlete participants may benefit by having with the opportunity to share their own thoughts and perspectives regarding their experience with their coach and particular coaching style (which would be shared through the final report of the research). They are also given the opportunity to

learn more about the role they have on their team and strategies they currently use to nurture their coach-athlete relationship. Overall, the findings of this research can contribute to the better understanding of the processes within the coach-athlete relationship within the context of elite sports.

Confidentiality

All information you provide will be considered confidential. Your name and team name will be replaced with pseudonyms to protect your identity; access to the master list of pseudonyms will be restricted to the researcher (primary student investigator) and her research supervisor (primary investigator). Please note that with your permission, your anonymous quotations may be used in final reports of the research. Please note that no information will be reported that will render your quotations personally identifiable, however, you will be the only participating coach which means there is a limit to confidentiality.

Data collected during this study will be stored on password-protected computers in locked offices on Brock University's campus. Data will be kept only until the completion of the final report, after which time any hardcopy documents will be confidentially shredded and electronic files will be permanently erased.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. If you decline the invitation to participate, any interactions you are part of during the observation sessions will not be included in data collection. If you choose to participate, we will ask you throughout your involvement if you wish to continue and give consent to participating. You may decide at that time whether or not you wish to participate in that part of the study. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time and may do so without any penalty.

In the event that you choose to withdraw consent, you will be asked if you wish for your data to be destroyed or maintained (for example, a participant may withdraw due to lack of time to continue participation but may be happy to allow their data to remain) – and the investigators will do so. You may choose to withdraw at any point during the season, however, once the season is over and data collection is complete, you will be unable to withdraw from participation, unless your request is due to a special circumstance.

Publication of Results

Results of this study may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences to audiences of coaches and researchers. If you wish to receive a final report of this research, please contact Erin Corkery via email.

If you are interested in participating in any aspect of this research, or have any questions about this research, please contact a member of the research team using the information on the form to ask any questions and/or to indicate your interest in participating in the study. If you would like to participate, we will send you a Letter of Informed Consent that further outlines expectations and our responsibilities as researchers.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Tim Fletcher, PhD
Associate Professor
Department of Kinesiology
Brock University
E: tfletcher@brocku.ca
P: 905 688 5550 x 6358

Erin Corkery
Masters Student
Faculty of Applied Health Sciences
Brock University
E: ec12xq@brocku.ca

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University. REB File #: 19-045 – FLETCHER
Any further questions pertaining to the ethics of this project please contact the Office of Research Ethics at REB@brocku.ca or 905-688-5550 ext. 3035

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form - Coach

October 2019
Project Title: An Ethnographic Case Study of Developing and Maintaining the Coach-Athlete
Relationship in Elite Sports

Invitation
You are invited to participate in a study that involves research. The purpose of this research is to
explore the experiences surrounding interpersonal relationships of the members of one elite
sports team. I believe that the development and maintenance of the coach-athlete relationship is
crucial to enhancing the overall experiences of participants in sport. The quality of the coach-
athlete relationship can potentially influence with well-being and performance success of
participants. I am trying to understand ways that we can foster these types of experiences through
placing focus on the quality of the coach-athlete relationship.

What's Involved
As a participant, you will be asked to participate in observation periods and three semi-structured
interviews. If you wish to consent only to observation periods and not to interviews, you may do
so. The observations will occur only during practices, games, and film sessions. Specifically, the
researcher will observe one practice per week, and will attend all home games. She will also be
present at five film sessions. The primary student investigator will be present during these times
and will be taking notes on a clip board to write down what she sees and hears. I will be tracking
behaviours during interactions between you and your athletes who have agreed to participate in
the observation process. Throughout the observation period, you may consent to engaging in
informal interviews with the principal student researcher, before or after sessions. These will
typically last 5-15 minutes and will be used to help her learn more about your experiences within
that particular session. You will also be asked to engage in three one-on-one interviews with the
principal student investigator. These interviews will be audio-recorded for transcription
purposes. Participation will take approximately 60 minutes of your time (each interview) and will
take place during the pre-season, season, and post-season.

Potential Benefits and Risks
This research and its findings offer the following possible benefits. First, the findings of this
research will contribute to understanding of coach-athlete relationships in elite sports and help
others in the sport community reflect on their own practices and attempt to improve. Second, the
reflections you will be asked to engage in during the interview process will allow you to develop
your own coaching practice and learn from your own experiences.
Given the sensitive topic (i.e., the relationship between a coach and players from the same team)
there are potential psychological and social risks to both the coach and players. Given that
participants will all be from a single team, it may be possible for the coach to link comments to
particular players and players will be aware of the coach's comments about the team. Negative

comments could have a detrimental effect on relationships and reputation (social risk) both in the immediate and long-term (especially if this team is intact for future seasons).

You may decline to answer any questions you feel uncomfortable with or withdraw at any time. There is also a psychological risk (embarrassment, distress) if a participant feels they are the subject of negative assessments by others. The PSI will be required to make decisions about what data to include/omit from the final report, and that you are sensitive to and aware of implications of risks. At all times, decisions will be made that would not place coach or athlete in jeopardy of negatively affecting the relationship or functions of the team. This will require selectivity in the data that are reported.

Confidentiality

All information you provide will be considered confidential. Your name will be replaced with a pseudonym to protect your identity; access to the master list of pseudonyms will be restricted to the primary student investigator. Please note that with your permission, your anonymous quotations may be used in final reports of the research. Please note that no information will be reported that will render your quotations personally identifiable.

Data collected during this study will be stored on password-protected computers in locked offices on Brock University's campus. The primary student investigator and primary investigator are the only parties who will have access to this data. Data will be kept only until the completion of the final report, after which time any hardcopy documents will be confidentially shredded and electronic files will be permanently erased.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. If you decline the invitation to participate, any interactions you are part of during the observation sessions will not be included in data collection. If you choose to participate, we will ask you throughout your involvement if you wish to continue and give consent to participating. You may decide at that time whether or not you wish to participate in that part of the study. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time and may do so without any penalty.

In the event that you choose to withdraw consent, you will be asked if you wish for your data to be destroyed or maintained (for example, a participant may withdraw due to lack of time to continue participation but may be happy to allow their data to remain) – and the investigators will do so. You will not receive or be denied any benefits due to participation or lack of participation in the research or as a result of withdrawal.

Publication of Results

Results of this study will be published as the student Principal Student Investigator's MA thesis and may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences to audiences of teachers and researchers. If you wish to receive a final report of this research, please contact Erin Corkery via email within two months of the basketball season.

Contact Information and Ethics Clearance

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact Dr. Tim Fletcher, the principal investigator, or Erin Corkery, the principal student investigator for this study, using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University **(REB File #: 19-045 – FLETCHER)**. If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca.

Tim Fletcher, PhD
Associate Professor
Department of Kinesiology
Brock University
E: tfletcher@brocku.ca
P: 905 688 5550 x 6358

Erin Corkery
Masters Student
Faculty of Applied Health Sciences
Brock University
E: ec12xq@brocku.ca

Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

Informed Consent Form

I agree to participate in the study "An Ethnographic Case Study of Developing and Maintaining the Coach-Athlete Relationship in Elite Sports" as described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time. I also understand that I will be asked throughout my involvement if I wish to continue and give consent to participating, and I may decide at that time whether or not I wish to participate in that part of the study.

Please check which parts of the study you are willing to provide data for:

Observations ☐

Informal Interviews (occurring before or after observation, in the observation environment) ☐

Semi-structured One-on-one Interviews ☐

Name of Participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

REB File #: 19-045 – FLETCHER

Any further questions pertaining to the ethics of this project please contact the Office of Research Ethics at REB@brocku.ca or 905-688-5550 ext. 3035.

Appendix C

Verbal Recruitment Script

Hello everyone,

Thank you for being here today. Your coach has agreed to participate in my master's project, "An Ethnographic Case Study of Developing and Maintaining the Coach-Athlete Relationship in Elite Sports" and I would also like to invite you to participate. The purpose of my research is to learn more about your experiences of the relationships you have with your coach and how this may impact your well-being and athletic performance.

As a participant, you will be asked to participate in observation periods and three semi-structured interviews throughout the entire season. If you wish to consent only to observation periods and not to interviews, you may do so. The observations will occur only during practices, games, and film sessions. The primary student investigator will be present during these times and will be taking notes on a clipboard to write down what she sees and hears. Throughout the observation period, you may consent to engaging in informal interviews with the principal student researcher, before or after sessions. These will typically last 5 - 15 minutes and will be used to help her learn more about your experiences within that session. You will also be asked to engage in three one-on-one interviews with the principal student investigator. These interviews will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes. Participation will take approximately 60 minutes of your time (each interview) and will take place during the pre-season, season, and post-season. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. Your coach will not be informed of who is participating and who is not, and that is why he/she is not present at this meeting. If you decline the invitation to participate, any interactions you are part of during the observation sessions will not be included in data collection. If you choose to participate, we will ask you throughout your involvement if you wish to continue and give consent to participating. You may decide at that time whether or not you wish to participate in that part of the study. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time during the season and may do so without any penalty.

In the event that you choose to withdraw consent, you will be asked if you wish for your data to be destroyed or maintained (for example, a participant may withdraw due to lack of time to continue participation but may be happy to allow their data to remain) – and the investigators will do so. You may choose to withdraw at any point during the season, however, once the season is over and data collection is complete, you will be unable to withdraw from participation, unless your request is due to a special circumstance. I have brought with me today, *Informed Consent* forms and *Letters of Invitation* for each of you to read over. I encourage you to ask questions to learn more about the objectives and methods of this study.

If you are interested in participating in any part of this research, or if have any questions about this research, please take an Informed Consent form and do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns. Thank you for your time!

Appendix D

Invitation and Information Letter for Athlete

Dear Athlete,
I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study entitled "An Ethnographic Case Study of Developing and Maintaining the Coach-Athlete Relationship in Elite Sports". The principal investigator of this research is Dr. Tim Fletcher, Associate Professor in the Department of Kinesiology at Brock University. The principal student investigator of the study is Erin Corkery, a masters student in the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences at Brock University.

The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences surrounding interpersonal relationships of the members of one elite sports team. I believe that the development and maintenance of the coach-athlete relationship is crucial to enhancing the overall experiences of participants in sport. The quality of the coach-athlete relationship can potentially influence with well-being and performance success of participants. I am trying to understand ways that we can foster these types of experiences through placing focus on the quality of the coach-athlete relationship.

As a participant, you will be asked to participate in observation periods and three semi-structured interviews throughout the entire season. If you wish to consent only to observation periods and not to interviews, you may do so. The observations will occur during practices, games, and film sessions. The primary student investigator will be present during these times and will be taking notes on a clipboard to write down what she sees and hears. Throughout the observation period, you may consent to engaging in informal interviews with the principal student researcher, before or after sessions. These will typically last 5 -15 minutes and will be used to help her learn more about your experiences within that session. You will also be asked to engage in three one-on-one interviews with the principal student investigator. These interviews will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes. Participation will take approximately 60 minutes of your time (each interview) and will take place during the pre-season, season, and post-season.

Potential Benefits and Risks
There are few direct benefits from participating in the study (i.e., no financial gain or increase in qualifications). Coach participants will benefit from the study in that they are being offered an opportunity to receive feedback from their players regarding the relationships they have with them. The participants may choose to use this study to further develop their practice and use the results to reflect on their relationships and behaviours. Through these reflections, they can better understand their current coaching practice and look at ways to further enhance their practice and relationships in the future.

Athlete participants may benefit by having with the opportunity to share their own thoughts and perspectives regarding their experience with their coach and particular coaching style (these would be shared anonymously as part of the final research report). They are also given the opportunity to learn more about the role they have on their team and strategies they currently use to nurture their coach-athlete relationship. Overall, the findings of this research can contribute to

the better understanding of the processes within the coach-athlete relationship within the context of elite sports.

Confidentiality

All information you provide will be considered confidential. Your name and the team will be replaced with pseudonyms to protect your identity; access to the master list of pseudonyms will be restricted to the researcher and her research supervisor. Please note that with your permission, your anonymous quotations may be used in final reports of the research. Please note that no information will be reported that will render your quotations personally identifiable, however, there may be limits to confidentiality and it may be possible for the coach/other players to link comments to a particular individual.

Data collected during this study will be stored on password-protected computers in locked offices on Brock University's campus. Data will be kept only until the completion of the final report, after which time any hardcopy documents will be confidentially shredded and electronic files will be permanently erased.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. Your coach will not be informed of who is participating and who is not, and at no point during the project will that information be disclosed to him/her. If you choose to decline the invitation to participate, any interactions you are part of during the observation sessions will not be included in data collection. If you choose to participate, we will ask you throughout your involvement if you wish to continue and give consent to participating. You may decide at that time whether or not you wish to participate in that part of the study. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time and may do so without any penalty.

In the event that you choose to withdraw consent, you will be asked if you wish for your data to be destroyed or maintained (for example, a participant may withdraw due to lack of time to continue participation but may be happy to allow their data to remain) – and the investigators will do so.

Publication of Results

Results of this study may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences to audiences of coaches and researchers. If you wish to receive a final report of this research, please contact Erin Corkery via email.

If you are interested in participating in any aspect of this research, or have any questions about this research, please contact a member of the research team using the information on the form to ask any questions and/or to indicate your interest in participating in the study. If you would like to participate, we will send you a Letter of Informed Consent that further outlines expectations and our responsibilities as researchers.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely

Tim Fletcher, PhD
Associate Professor
Department of Kinesiology
Brock University
E: tfletcher@brocku.ca
P: 905 688 5550 x 6358

Erin Corkery
Masters Student
Faculty of Applied Health Sciences
Brock University
E: ec12xq@brocku.ca

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at
Brock University. REB File #: 19-045 – FLETCHER
Any further questions pertaining to the ethics of this project please contact the Office of Research
Ethics at REB@brocku.ca or 905-688-5550 ext. 3035.

Appendix E

Informed Consent Form - Athlete

October 2019
Project Title: An Ethnographic Case Study of Developing and Maintaining the Coach-Athlete
Relationship in Elite Sports

Tim Fletcher, PhD
Associate Professor
Department of Kinesiology
Brock University
E: tfletcher@brocku.ca
P: 905 688 5550 x 6358

Erin Corkery
Masters Student
Faculty of Applied Health Sciences
Brock University
E: ec12xq@brocku.ca

Invitation
You are invited to participate in a study that involves research. The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences surrounding interpersonal relationships of the members of one elite sports team. I believe that the development and maintenance of the coach-athlete relationship is crucial to enhancing the overall experiences of participants in sport. The quality of the coach-athlete relationship can potentially influence with well-being and performance success of participants. I am trying to understand ways that we can foster these types of experiences through placing focus on the quality of the coach-athlete relationship.

What's Involved
As a participant, you will be asked to participate in observation periods and three semi-structured interviews. If you wish to consent only to observation periods and not to interviews, you may do so. The observations will occur only during practices, games, and film sessions. Specifically, the researcher will observe one practice per week, and will attend all home games. She will also be present at five film sessions. The primary student investigator will be present during these times and will be taking notes on a clip board to write down what she sees and hears. I will be tracking behaviours during interactions between you and your coach. Throughout the observation period, you may consent to engaging in informal interviews with the principal student researcher, before or after sessions. These will typically last 5-15 minutes and will be used to help her learn more

about your experiences within that particular session. You will also be asked to engage in three one-on-one interviews with the principal student investigator. These interviews will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes. Participation will take approximately 60 minutes of your time (each interview) and will take place during the pre-season, season, and post-season.

Potential Benefits and Risks
This research and its findings offer the following possible benefits. First, the findings of this research will contribute to understanding of coach-athlete relationships in elite sports and help others in the sport community reflect on their own practices and attempt to improve. Second, the reflections you will be asked to engage in during the interview process will allow you to develop your own practice and learn from your own experiences.
Given the sensitive topic (i.e., the relationship between a coach and players from the same team) there are potential psychological and social risks to both the coach and players. Given that participants will all be from a single team, it may be possible for the coach to link comments to particular players and players will be aware of the coach's comments about the team. Negative comments could have a detrimental effect on relationships and reputation (social risk) both in the immediate and long-term (especially if this team is intact for future seasons).
You may decline to answer any questions you feel uncomfortable with or withdraw at anytime. There is also a psychological risk (embarrassment, distress) if a participant feels they are the subject of negative assessments by others. The PSI will be required to make decisions about what data to include/omit from the final report, and that you are sensitive to and aware of implications of risks. At all times, decisions will be made that would not place coach or athlete in jeopardy of negatively affecting the relationship or functions of the team. This will require selectivity in the data that are reported.

Confidentiality
All information you provide will be considered confidential. Your name will be replaced with a pseudonym to protect your identity; access to the master list of pseudonyms will be restricted to the primary student investigator. Please note that with your permission, your anonymous quotations may be used in final reports of the research. Please note that no information will be reported that will render your quotations personally identifiable.
Data collected during this study will be stored on password-protected computers in locked offices on Brock University's campus. The primary student investigator and primary investigator are the only parties who will have access to this data. Data will be kept only until the completion of the final report, after which time any hardcopy documents will be confidentially shredded and electronic files will be permanently erased.

Voluntary Participation
Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. Your coach will not be informed of who is participating and who is not, and at no point during the project will that information be disclosed to him/her. If you decline the invitation to participate, any interactions you are part of during the observation sessions will not be included in data collection. If you choose to participate, we will ask you throughout your involvement if you wish to continue and give

consent to participating. You may decide at that time whether or not you wish to participate in that part of the study. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time and may do so without any penalty.

In the event that you choose to withdraw consent, you will be asked if you wish for your data to be destroyed or maintained (for example, a participant may withdraw due to lack of time to continue participation but may be happy to allow their data to remain) – and the investigators will do so. You will not receive or be denied any benefits due to participation or lack of participation in the research or as a result of withdrawal.

Publication of Results

Results of this study will be published as the student Principal Student Investigator's MA thesis and may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences to audiences of teachers and researchers. If you wish to receive a final report of this research, please contact Erin Corkery via email within two months of the basketball season.

Contact Information and Ethics Clearance

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact Dr. Tim Fletcher, the principal investigator, or Erin Corkery, the principal student investigator for this study, using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University **(REB File #: 19-045 – FLETCHER)**. If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca.

Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

Informed Consent Form

I agree to participate in the study "An Ethnographic Case Study of Developing and Maintaining the Coach-Athlete Relationship in Elite Sports" as described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time. I also understand that I will be asked throughout my involvement if I wish to continue and give consent to participating, and I may decide at that time whether or not I wish to participate in that part of the study.

Please check which parts of the study you are willing to provide data for:

Observations ☐

Informal Interviews (occurring before or after observation, in the observation environment) ☐

Semi-structured One-on-one Interviews ☐

Name of Participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

REB File #: 19-045 – FLETCHER
Any further questions pertaining to the ethics of this project please contact the Office of Research Ethics at REB@brocku.ca or 905-688-5550 ext. 3035.

Appendix F

Template for Field Observations

Observer name:	Number of players:
Coaching staff present: (e.g., assistant coach, statistician)	
Date of observation:	**Practice duration:**

Pre-observation meeting/discussion with research team AND/OR coach

Note here any information you gathered from the Pre-observation discussion/ since the last observation

Example
Coach has expressed that the girls had weight training right before practice, so he is going to take it easier on them.

PHASE OF PRACTICE	ACTIVITY – WHAT IS THE TASK/ ACTIVITY	WHAT DO YOU HEAR/ SEE	MOMENTS RELATED TO RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT (Intentional/Accidental)
WARM UP	Example Players are going through their [sport specific drill] progression followed by [sport specific drill]	Example • Players • Some talking • Coach reminds them to get to bed early tonight • Lots of straight and tired faces • Player X does different warm-up because she is recovering from sprained ankle	Example • Coach asks each player about how their day is going and if they are doing anything fun for Halloween
OFFENSE			

DEFENSE			
SCRIMMAGE			
COOL DOWN			
ANY OTHER COMMENTS/ ACTIONS FROM THE PLAYERS Example: All players shook their head when coach made them run lines because of lazy defense			

Appendix G

Mid-Season Interview Guide – Coach

1. Can you talk about some of the goals you had for the team this season?

2. What are your general beliefs about your role as head coach?

3. What are your beliefs about your role in regard to the social development of your players?

   o How has this belief changed over time?

4. How do you feel about the importance of developing coach-athlete relationships?

   o Are there strategies you typically use to enhance the relationship?

5. Can you describe any specific instances where the benefits of developing a coach-athlete relationship have stood out to you in the past?

6. Can you give me some examples from this season of when players needed support on or off the court and how you helped them?]

7. Can you describe any specific instances where developing a coach-athlete relationship was particularly challenging for you in the past?

8. Can you give an example from this season of when you may have experienced conflict with an athlete and how that conflict was managed?

   o If you were going to have the same experience again, what might you change? What might stay the same? Why?

9. Are there specific things you are looking forward to for the rest of the season?

10. Are there specific things you feel will be challenging over the next couple of months?

Appendix H

Mid-Season Interview Guide – Athlete

Introduction

1. How do you feel about the season so far?

2. Can you talk about some of the individual goals you have for this season?

    a. And what about some of the team's goals?

3. What are your beliefs about your role on the team this year?

Relationships

1. How do you feel about the importance of developing coach-athlete relationships?

2. Can you talk about a relationship you had with a coach that you felt was healthy and effective?

    o How you think that relationship got to that place?

    o What did you do, or the coach do to foster that relationship?

3. Can you share some of the ways your relationship with your current coach is similar and/or different than your relationship with the coach you just talked about?

4. How do you feel about the relationship you have with your current head coach - Phil?

    o What did you do, or the coach do to foster that relationship?

5. How would you generally describe the relationship between you and Phil?

6. Specifically, can you talk about how you feel about the degree of mutual trust and respect between you and your coach?

    o Can you provide any specific examples of how trust and respect have been influenced in the relationship you have with your coach?

7. Can you share how you feel about your level of commitment to the team? How has this been demonstrated? (e.g., what did you do to show your commitment?)

8. Can you share how you feel about your coach's level of commitment to the team? How has this been demonstrated? (e.g., what did your coach do to show their commitment?)

9. Can you give me some examples of when you needed support from your coach on or off the court and how you were helped?

10. Can you give an example of when you may have experienced conflict with your coach or another athlete and how that conflict was managed?

    o If you were going to have the same experience again, what might you change? What might stay the same? Why?

11. Let's talk about that moment during practice when… Can you go back to that moment and explain your experience for me?

12. What are some specific things you are looking forward to this season?

13. What are some specific things you feel will be challenging this season?

Appendix I

Post-Season Interview Guide – Coach

Introduction

1. What was your overall experience of coaching the team this season?

2. Can you talk about your experience being named coach of year?

3. What was it like to win XXX and then compete at Nationals?

   o What were some new experiences you had while you were there?

Relationships

1. Since our last interview, how has your belief or philosophy about your overall role as head coach changed?

2. Since our last interview, how have any of your actions changed in how you foster the coach-athlete relationship?

   o Did any of your relationships with the athletes change since our last interview?

   o Can you talk about how you experience trust and honesty with your athletes?

3. Can you describe times where you experienced challenges or conflict with your athletes?

   o What about times where you experienced positive moments with your athletes?

4. Can you talk about your experience as a man coaching a team of women?

   o How might this be different than coaching a team of men?

5. Overall, did you learn anything from your players this season?

6. Moving forward, is there anything that you are eager to change for next season?

7. How was COVI-19 impact your plans for the team, now that the season is over?

   o In what ways are you keeping in touch with the athletes during quarantine?

Appendix J

Post-Season Interview Guide - Athlete

Introduction

1. What was your overall experience of playing on the team this season?

2. Since our last interview, has your belief about your role on the team changed?

3. What was it like to win XXX and then compete at Nationals?

4. What were some of the new things you experienced during your successful season?

Relationships

1. Can you describe how the relationship between you and Phil has changed over the course of the season?

2. Can you describe any positive experiences you had with Phil that stand out to you?

3. Can you give an example of when you may have experienced conflict or challenges with your coach or another athlete and how that conflict was managed?

4. Can you talk about the degree of mutual trust between you and your Phil?

   o Does he trust you? Do you trust him?

5. Thinking about the topic of gender, can you talk about how your experience as a woman playing for a coach who is a man?

6. If you were going to offer any advice to a coach about the importance of a coach-athlete relationship, what would you say?

COVID-19

1. How was COVID-19 impact your involvement with them team, now that the season is

   over?