

Exploring Verbal and Mental Abuse Within the Context of Coaching Elite Female

Volleyball in Manitoba

By

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## **Abstract**

Athletes can be exposed to verbal and mental abuse from their coaches, which can include behaviours such as belittling, humiliation, and psychological stress. This issue is exacerbated by the contention that exists within the literature on how to define verbally and mentally abusive coaching behaviours. The goal of this research is to explore coaches' personal definitions and views on verbal and mental abuse and ways to address it within the community of elite female volleyball in Manitoba. This qualitative research study triangulates auto-ethnography, semi-structured interviews, and content analysis of both coaching education and policy text sources in force in Manitoba to explore the complexities of verbal and mental abuse in elite sport. This study analyzes consistencies and inconsistencies between the views of elite coaches, coach education text sources and coaching policies, and provides recommendations for addressing verbal and mental abuse in the context of elite female volleyball in Manitoba.

*Keywords:* Abuse, verbal abuse, mental abuse, elite sport, volleyball, Manitoba, coaches, education, policy, qualitative, interviews

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to anyone and everyone who has been a part of my life. Whether it be a family member, a friend, a teacher, a coach, an athlete, or a mere acquaintance I can honestly say that everyone has had an impact on me for the better. The experiences both good and bad shared with the people that I have encountered are without question the life force that has enabled me to battle the challenges of everyday life. I am forever grateful.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

Many studies indicate that the coach-athlete relationship is one of high interdependence, but with the coach playing the more dominant role and the athlete the more submissive role (Baker, Côté, & Hawes, 2000; Brackenridge & Fasting, 2005; Brackenridge & Fasting, 2002; Kirby, Greaves, & Hankivsky, 2000; Parent & Bannon, 2011; Stirling & Kerr, 2014; Stirling & Kerr, 2009; Tomlinson & Yorganci, 1997). The coach has a profound ability to impact the athlete's life both short and long term. It can be the case that bad sporting experiences are a direct cause of a breakdown in the coach-athlete relationship. This is typically the result of some form of abusive coaching behaviour, which is almost always linked to the undermining of the athlete's autonomy by the coach (Brackenridge & Fasting, 2002). Recent studies by Stirling and Kerr (2009; 2014) suggest that verbally and mentally abusive coaching patterns are more tolerated within the context of elite sport. A recent example of verbal abuse includes the outwardly aggressive coaching style of Clemson University football coach Dabo Swinney who was filmed verbally berating punter Andy Teasdall for a poor play in a game against UNC in December 2015. A class example of verbal abuse are the remarks of basketball coach Bobby Knight who was known for hurling insults and profanities at his players. However, athletes can experience verbal and mental abuse in many less overt forms, and the athlete might not recognize abusive coaching styles as a form of abuse.

This thesis seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) how are verbally and mentally abusive coaching behaviours recognized within the context of elite female volleyball in Manitoba and distinguished from behaviours that motivate and develop mental toughness in athletes, and (2) what can be done to decrease verbal and mental abuse. In answering these research questions, this thesis seeks to gain insight into how one population of coaches, elite

volleyball coaches who coach female athletes in Manitoba, define and understand verbal and mental abuse in order to use their insights to distinguish when verbal remarks from coaches cross the line from being motivating or effective in developing mental toughness in their athletes to becoming manipulative or abusive.

Defining verbal and mental abuse in sport has been recognized as a struggle in the coaching and sport psychology literature for a number of years, and as a result there is not a consistent definition of either verbal or mental abuse applied in the research literature, in coaching education resources, in coaching policies, or in practice. Brassard and Donovan (2006) speculate that this inconsistency is because of a variety of societal factors. The absence of a consistent definition for mentally abusive behaviour has made identifying specific abusive coaching behaviours difficult, which in turn has impacted interventions (Iwaniec, 2003). Throughout this thesis I will distinguish verbal and mental abuse by using the term 'verbal abuse' in reference to an action(s) and 'mental abuse' in reference to the outcome(s) of verbal abuse. From this standpoint, and drawing on the work of several researchers, the working definition of verbal and mental abuse that I use in this thesis characterizes verbal and mental abuse as harmful, non-physical, repetitive patterns of coaching behaviour causing undue stress on athletes' emotional wellbeing (Stirling & Kerr, 2008; Iwaniec, Larkin, & Higgins, 2006; Glaser, 2002; O'Hagan, 1995).

Verbal and mental abuse examples in sport can generate a plethora of questions surrounding the coach-athlete relationship, such as: (1) why do verbally and mentally abusive coaching behaviours continue to happen, (2) what informs these specific coaching behaviours, (3) what constitutes abusive coaching behaviours, (4) from where or whom do these behaviours originate, and (5) how are the potential negative effects of these behaviours being limited.

Analyzing the causes of maladaptive coaching behaviours is crucial because coaches may not be aware of their effects, athletes need to become more aware of their effects and how to avoid them, and the larger context of elite sport needs to be held accountable if the current culture accepts verbally and mentally abusive coaching.

Not only has abusive coaching impacted past athletes' experiences, but it also continues to perpetuate a culture of tolerance or acceptance in sport (Stirling & Kerr, 2014; Stirling & Kerr, 2009). Verbally and mentally abusive coaching remains a contentious topic, which is likely because of the inconsistent views on what constitutes verbally and mentally abusive behaviours (APA, 1995; Brassard & Donovan, 2006; Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Glaser, 2002; Iwaneic, Larkin, & Higgins, 2006; Iwaneic, 2003; O'Hagan, 1995; Stirling & Kerr, 2012; Stirling & Kerr, 2008; Stirling, 2008). On this basis it is important to question how education is addressing the issue of abuse and how coach education is contributing to fostering healthy coach practices. Furthermore, these questions warrant consideration in order to not only gain an understanding of what verbally and mentally abusive coaching behaviours are, but more importantly how these behaviours might impact the wellbeing of the athlete and coach.

With an overall power advantage, and an environment accepting of verbal and mental abuse, athletes are placed at a disadvantage compared to their coach. Not only does mental abuse impact the athletes' emotional wellbeing, but also these behaviours may depreciate the value of the athlete as a human being (Stirling & Kerr, 2008). The devaluing of an athlete could have an impact on his/her performance and may extend beyond the boundaries of the elite sport environment into the athlete's personal life. If the effects of verbal and mental abuse go unrecognized, the acceptance of verbally and mentally abusive coaching behaviours will likely continue in elite sport (Stirling & Kerr, 2008).

This thesis seeks to draw on the experiences of a sample of elite volleyball coaches in Manitoba in order to gain insight into what constitutes verbal and mental abuse in the sport of women's volleyball. As will be explained in detail in Chapter III, the participants, who coach elite female volleyball in the province of Manitoba, will take part in an in-depth semi-structured interviews. Data collected directly from elite volleyball coaches will be triangulated with my auto-ethnographic reflections on verbal and mental abuse, and an analysis of all coaching policies that apply to coaches coaching in Manitoba. Using these sources of information, I will craft recommendations for addressing verbally and mentally abusive behaviours in elite women's volleyball in Manitoba.

As this thesis focuses on coaches' perceptions of verbal and mental abuse in elite women's volleyball, conceptual clarification of the terms 'elite,' 'sport,' and 'elite sports coaches' is needed (Côté, Young, North, & Duffy, 2007). I prefer the term 'elite' to 'high performance' and therefore, for consistency, and in line with most of the literature in this area, I will use the term 'elite' when referring to higher levels of sport despite the potential for associating this term with historically classist attitudes. Furthermore, it is important to define elite sports coaches. For this study, the term 'elite sport coaches' refers to coaches who have obtained level two or higher coaching certification from their provincial and national sport bodies, currently coach at the 17U/18U club volleyball, university levels, or higher, or have at least ten years' experience in coaching elite volleyball athletes. The levels of 17U/18U club volleyball and university volleyball are considered elite on the basis of time commitment, participation, and status within the context of volleyball.<sup>1</sup> Broadly, this thesis seeks to address

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<sup>1</sup> As Chapter III will explain, participants' current active status as a coach or experience of at least ten years will aid in the collection of rich data. The rules with respect to certification of coaches have changed, and a coach who completed his/her coaching education ten years ago may

why abusive coaching continues in women's elite volleyball in Manitoba. Additionally, the study highlights the consistencies and inconsistencies within coaches' views, coaching education resources, and sport policies. Specifically, the main focus of this thesis is to explore and answer how coaches define verbally and mentally abusive coaching, how the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) and the National Coaching Institute (NCI) (i.e., coach education) address verbally and mentally abusive coaching, and how the current policies adopted by Volleyball Canada, Volleyball Manitoba, Canadian Interuniversity Sport, the Coaching Association of Canada, and Sport Information Resource Centre define verbally and mentally abusive coaching.

Through interviews with elite volleyball coaches, auto-ethnographic reflections on what constitutes verbal and mental abuse in sport, analysis of coach policies addressing abuse created by Volleyball Canada, Volleyball Manitoba, Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS), and other coaching affiliates, this thesis examines how elite volleyball coaches in Manitoba define and understand what constitutes mentally and verbally abusive coaching practices. The overall objective of the project is to make recommendations for addressing verbal and mental abuse in the context of elite female volleyball in Manitoba.

This research is particularly relevant in Manitoba, as Manitoba has been a leading province at national level volleyball competitions and Volleyball Manitoba has created an environment where many elite female volleyball athletes excel. Over the past century, while Manitoba has not witnessed a significant decline in national titles (Volleyball Canada, 2015), it is my perception that the nature of a supportive athletic environment has diminished. Although

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not have the same type or level of certification as a current volleyball coach. The ten years of experience will ensure coaches participating in this study have attained a level of certification considered to be elite at the time they completed their education.

there is no formal statistical documentation of the declining trend in the supportive athletic environment, it is both my observation and understanding through conversations with key stakeholders within the community of elite female volleyball (e.g. veteran club coaches, university coaches, university athletes, and sport administrators), that verbal and mental abuse in coaching needs to be studied in Manitoba. I am concerned that a sport culture that emphasizes “winning at all costs” and “the end being justified by the means” (Gervis & Dunn, 2004, p. 216) might tolerate mental and verbal abuse. Having been both an athlete and a coach in Manitoba allows me to have firsthand experience in a variety of sport contexts, specific to the elite level, the sport of volleyball, and the province of Manitoba. Secondly, what could be deemed “insider status” will likely aid in recruitment and access to the population of elite volleyball coaches I seek to interview. Thirdly, my direct experience and engagement in coach education sessions at the Sport for Life building in Winnipeg, Manitoba will also help to inform my overview of coach education in Manitoba.

## **Chapter II: Review of Literature**

Several bodies of research literature address verbal and mental abuse, generally, and the harmful effects of abuse on the athletes' wellbeing, specifically. This chapter provides a summary of the existing scholarly literature focused on: (1) studying abuse in Canadian sport, (2) the coach-athlete relationship, (3) ethical coaching considerations, (4) mental abuse and elite sports coaches, (5) coaching education, and (6) coaching policy. This review of literature will summarize and analyze the research focused on verbally and mentally abusive coaching practices, how coach education addresses verbally and mentally abusive coaching behaviours, and how policies address verbal and mental abuse in sport. This information will demonstrate what is already known about how verbally and mentally abusive coaching behaviours are recognized within the context of elite female volleyball in Manitoba, and what remains unknown or unexplored.

In creating this review of literature, I located a variety of English language sources focused specifically on coaches, athletes, elite sport, power, abuse, vulnerability, gender, education, and policy. Many of the sources appear in the databases SAGE online journals, SPORTDiscus, Taylor and Francis online journals, and Science Direct. A number of the keywords listed above were used in the literature search along with others such as Canada, youth, volleyball, ethical coaching, leadership, behaviour, motivation, and verbal abuse. The sources cited in this review of literature span roughly thirty years, with dates ranging from 1985 to 2015.

### **2.1 Verbal/Mental Abuse in Sport in Canada**

Canadian sources analyzing verbal and mental abuse of athletes by coaches date back to the mid-1990s when athlete abuse was brought to the forefront of elite sport as a major concern.

Specifically, within Canada, this began with the release of a *Fifth Estate* program in 1993 called “Crossing the Line,” which explored examples of sexual abuse of female athletes by male coaches on two university volleyball teams, a swim team, and a rowing team. Following this investigative report, in 1996 Graham James was convicted of repeated accounts of sexual abuse against Sheldon Kennedy, a player in the National Hockey League he had coached (Donnelly, Kerr, Heron, & DiCarlo, 2014). Cases like these led to the realization that abuse in sport is a serious reality (Brackenridge, 1995) which highlighted the need for policies and research studies focused on sexual and emotional abuse in sport (Donnelly, Kerr, Heron, & DiCarlo, 2014; Kirby & Greaves, 1996; MacGregor, 1998).

In response to these high-profile cases and the sudden recognition of the reality of abuse in elite sport, several policies were created and adopted in Canada. In the early 1990s, the Assistant Deputy Minister of Sport, the honourable Pierre Cadieux, formed a ‘harassment in sport’ working group, composed of members from a variety of sport governing bodies (Donnelly, Kerr, Heron, & DiCarlo, 2014). The most immediate policy response from this group was the 1994 position statement, *Harassment in Sport: A Guide to Policies, Procedures and Resources*, published by the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women in Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS), and the requirement that Provincial Sport Organizations (PSOs) and National Sport Organizations (NSOs) appoint harassment officers (Donnelly, Kerr, Heron, & DiCarlo, 2014). Kirby and Greaves (1996) conducted a study that analyzed the rates of abuse and harassment of Olympic athletes. In addition to the alarming statistics they uncovered regarding sexual abuse and intercourse with authority figures, 25% of the athlete respondents admitted to being verbally or emotionally abused (Kirby & Greaves, 1996). Earlier, Holman (1995) conducted a survey on the abuse of Canada Winter Games athletes, which showed that 50% of

both male and female athletes experienced some form of abuse, 18% of which involved verbal abuse. An additional study by Parks and Recreation Ontario (1995) demonstrated that of 138 respondents aged 11 to 25, 47% had experienced some form of abuse, including jokes and gestures that were humiliating (MacGregor, 1998).

These initial studies on the prevalence of verbal and mental abuse in the context of Canadian sport establish that mental and verbal abuse is an ongoing issue in Canadian elite sport, and that verbal and mental abuse of athletes by coaches requires investigation. Donnelly, Kerr, Heron and DiCarlo (2014) note, “almost 20 years after harassment policies and harassment officers were mandated in provincial and NSOs in Canada, many are failing to meet policy requirements” (p. 12). Where policies have been adopted by sports organizations, it is not always the case that clear definitions and examples of athlete abuse are included, which makes comprehension of the current policies difficult. Furthermore, many organizations, including both PSOs and NSOs, have neglected to appoint harassment officers as mandated by Sport Canada (Donnelly, Kerr, Heron, & DiCarlo, 2014). Not only have these omissions contributed to the decreased report rate of athlete abuse, but Kirby, Greaves, and Hankivsky (2000) suggest a result has likely been a decrease in the investigation rate of athlete abuse.

The literature addressing verbal and mental abuse, and the potential long-term effects on athletes, is sparse and needs to be expanded. In addressing the issue of verbal and mental abuse in sport, it is important to first consider the key relationship where abuse is often experienced: the coach-athlete relationship (Stirling & Kerr, 2009).

## **2.2 Coach-Athlete Relationship**

The coach-athlete relationship is a substantial part of the athletic experience. Coaches may exert great influence on their athletes, which can extend beyond the boundary of sport and

into the athletes' personal lives. Research has begun to focus on the coach-athlete relationship, which is at the heart of every athlete's experience (Stirling & Kerr, 2009). Not only does this relationship begin to take precedence as a young athlete grows and develops into an elite athlete, but it is often thought of as one of the key determinants for success in elite sport. The importance of this relationship to the athlete, coach, and broader context of sport has resulted in extensive research focused on exploring and extrapolating its many facets (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003).

Coaching can be described as a form of leadership through which most coaches demonstrate and model exemplary behaviours and effective sport skills execution (Horn, 2002). A plethora of leadership models exist. Three commonly applied models of leadership in the coaching literature include: (1) the Multidimensional Model of Leadership, (2) the Mediation Model of Leadership, and (3) the Motivational Model of Leadership (Horn, 2002). However, Horn combines these models into a single organizing framework focused on coaching effectiveness, which assumes that antecedent factors play a major role in coaching effectiveness, the behaviour of the coach impacts the players' perception of the coach, and overall team performance and coaching effectiveness are often influenced by both individual and situational factors. The models utilized by Horn to compose the multifaceted framework of coaching effectiveness collectively highlight the multiple components and influences that impact the practice of coaching. This framework can be used to highlight the complexity inherent in coaching, and why coaching is not something coaches just "do;" rather it is a practice that coaches must embody (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003, p. 314).

Integral to personifying the practice of coaching and providing effective leadership is the coach's perceived coaching efficacy. Feltz, Chase, Mortiz and Sullivan (1999) define coaching efficacy as a coach's perceived ability to impact his/her athletes. A study conducted by Myers,

Vargas-Tonsing, and Feltz (2005) showed that coaching efficacy has been linked to the coach's past experience, the level of sport being coached, and the gender of the coach. Overall, coaches at the high school level found social support to be the strongest source of enhancing efficacy, while collegiate coaches found perceived team ability to be most important. While coaching efficacy can improve through education (Malete & Feltz, 2000; Myers et al., 2005), a coach's characteristics are also an important part of effective coaching styles and leadership. A study focused on specific coach characteristics conducted by Lafrenière, Jowett, Vallerand, and Carbonneau (2011) highlighted the role of passion as a part of the characteristics of great coaches. This study differentiated between two types of passion: (1) harmonious passion and (2) obsessive passion. Harmonious passion is the kind of passion that exists when coaching is a commitment at peace with all or most other aspects of the coach's personal life. Alternatively, obsessive passion causes a coach to engage in activity in a very rigid, narrow-minded manner; it is often not controlled by the individual as he/she feels a constant urge to participate in this activity despite having other priorities. Passion is important with respect to the coach athlete-relationship, but needs to be harmonious to produce better relationships with athletes. Beyond technical and tactical skills, it is clear that passion and personality are important with respect to the quality of the coach-athlete relationship (Lafrenière et al., 2011).

Aside from a coach's specific tactics, passion, and personality traits, the athlete's perception of the coach plays an influential role in a healthy coach-athlete relationship (Kenow & Williams, 1999). Coaches often perceive themselves as working hard to incorporate new and exciting tactics, but if these tactics are not well received by the athletes, the purpose of these tactics may be extraneous. More specifically, if coaches do not have a good relationship with their athletes, or lack the ability to properly communicate with their athletes, working hard to

learn new skills may not be helpful. Additionally, coaches may feel that their personalities are suited for coaching and contribute to their success; however, this may not be the reality experienced by the athletes. Therefore, research is needed to understand athletes' perceptions of their coaches (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Macquet & Stanton, 2014; Kenow & Williams, 1999; Lorimer & Jowett, 2009a; Lorimer & Jowett, 2009b; Lorimer & Jowett, 2010; Yang & Jowett, 2013; Macquet, 2013).

Kenow and Williams (1999) suggest that styles of coaching (i.e., authoritative or democratic) and adopted behaviours of the coach are given meaning by the athlete, which results in both an attitude towards the coach and the sport experience. There is limited research on how coaches' behaviours are perceived by their athletes, despite many studies confirming the importance of coach behaviour and the effect coaches have on young aspiring athletes (Kenow & Williams, 1999). In order to address the limited knowledge of athlete perceptions of coach behaviours, Kenow and Williams (1999) developed the Coaching Behavioural Questionnaire (CBQ), based on a leadership model identified by Smoll and Smith (1989). Using the CBQ alongside other studies focused on the effect of sport performance anxiety, Kenow and Williams (1999) explored athlete perceptions of coaches and how these perceptions impacted athlete performance. The results noted a significant relationship between athletes' perception and their evaluations of coaching behaviours (Kenow & Williams, 1999). Specifically, athletes who felt more compatible with their coaches experienced fewer negative cognitive and somatic effects, felt more supported by their coaches, and evaluated the coaches' communication ability more favourably.

On the other hand, athletes who were incompatible with their coaches perceived their psychological needs as not being met, which led to frustration and loss of self-confidence

(Kenow & Williams, 1999). From their findings, Kenow and Williams (1999) suggest that coach-athlete compatibility and athlete cognitive anxiety appear to be the best predictors of the ways in which an athlete perceives and evaluates a coach's behaviour. Based on these results it appears that a coach's ability to create and sustain a meaningful interpersonal relationship with his/her athletes may be the most important factor in increasing coach-athlete compatibility as a means to increase performance. The authors suggest that coaches who strive to understand their athletes from a holistic approach appear to be better equipped for achieving success not only in relating to their athlete(s), but are likely to extend this success beyond the boundaries of the relationship and into the sporting arena (Kenow & Williams, 1999).

Although Kenow and Williams (1999) demonstrate it is important for coaches to understand their athletes in order to improve both their relationship and performance outcomes, other research suggests that coaches and athletes have more compatibility than previously suggested (Macquet & Stanton, 2014). Coaches and athletes in elite sport are prone to have a similar knowledge base with respect to the movement patterns of sport, rules and regulations within sport, and the tendencies of the athlete. However, differences that exist are revealed by what Macquet and Stanton (2014) call situation awareness. Within the context of sport, interpretations made on behalf of the coach and athletes are important. These interpretations allow both the coach and the athlete to understand a given circumstance from the standpoint of what went well and what did not go well. Situation awareness allows the coach and the athlete to interact in the sporting environment, as situation awareness is a conscious, dynamic reflection of a situation that is projected outwards. Despite the importance of situation awareness in task improvement, little attention has been paid to situation awareness in sport. Macquet and Stanton's (2014) analysis of situation awareness in sport revealed that coaches and athletes have

some similar views, but also important differences. While the coaches' and athletes' schemata or internal representations used to carry out and interpret behaviours were used differently to frame information, overall they were compatible (Macquet & Stanton, 2014).

Similar to the research on situation awareness, Macquet (2013) focused on the distributed situation awareness model, which can be applied to the coach-athlete relationship as a method of analyzing coaches' and athletes' situational understanding. The results varied from technical components to psychological and physical aspects of athlete performance (Macquet, 2013). The study found that coaches most often initiated communication, while athletes were less likely to initiate communication and that, overall, communication allowed the athlete to understand the coach more, as the coach shared openly with the athlete his/her perception of the situation. The same study found that while there was a deficit in athlete feedback, increasing athletes' feedback may lead to improving compatibility between coach and athlete.

Interaction and communication are integral parts of any relationship, particularly in the coach-athlete relationship where coaches instruct their athletes in pursuit of positive performance outcomes. The way in which coaches and athletes interact has the potential to have a profound impact on the effectiveness of training sessions. Not only does good communication have the potential to effect performance, but it may impact other factors such as enjoyment, motivation, and satisfaction (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009a). The potential for mutual understanding, defined as the ability to perceive, recognize, and appreciate another's feelings, behaviours, attitudes, and intentions (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009a), appears to be important to the coach-athlete relationship.

Jowett and Cockerill (2003) combined the constructs of closeness, complementarity, and commitment, with the perceptions of 12 former Olympic athletes to show: (1) the importance of the coach influence with respect to closeness, complementarity, and co-orientation (which the

authors refer to as “the three C’s), (2) the associations between constructs within the coach-athlete relationship, and (3) the importance of the coach in achieving top level (i.e., Olympic level) performance. The study found that the majority of the athletes described feelings of trust, respect, belief in one another, and commitment as important factors contributing to their relationships with their coaches. Additional findings suggested that athletes wanted to be under the care and protection of a strong, considerate coach who knew how to push them, but care for them simultaneously. Jowett and Cockerill (2003) recommend that education programs should incorporate proper training of these necessary social skills, as they are integral to a healthy, successful coach-athlete relationship.

A fundamental aspect to both Lorimer and Jowett (2009a) and Jowett and Cockerill’s (2003) studies is co-orientation, which refers to the coach and the athlete having a similar frame of reference or vantage point with respect to “goals, beliefs, values, and expectations” (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003, p. 315). During interviews with the former Olympic athletes, Jowett and Cockerill (2003) noted that only a small portion of the data collected represented co-orientation and that the positive representation of co-orientation, in most cases, was linked to communication. More specifically, athletes perceived that being on the same page as their coach was vital to a successful performance (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). Co-orientation can be described as two distinct inter-perceptions from two vantage points (i.e., direct-perceptive and meta-perspective) from which the coach and athlete view their relationship (Laing, Phillipson, & Lee, 1966). These perspectives yield three dimensions of co-orientation: (1) assumed similarity, (2) actual similarity, and (3) empathic accuracy (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009a). Empathic accuracy refers to the ability of one’s meta-perspective to match that of another’s direct perspective and, in the case of the coach-athlete relationship, the extent to which the athlete and coach can infer

accurately the other's perspective (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009a). On average, coaches and athletes reflected less than 40 percent accuracy when inferring about what the other member was thinking or feeling, suggesting a very low empathic accuracy (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009a). Moreover, Lorimer and Jowett (2009a) reported that less than 30 percent of the time coaches and athletes were able to match their meta-perspective with the other's direct-perspective. Additionally, results indicated that empathic accuracy decreased as the duration of the relationship increased (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009a). Overall, the study reveals some important considerations for coaches to be aware of, namely, that athletes are not always aware of a coach's intentions (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009a). This finding suggests that coaches need to focus on communicating their intentions when working with their athletes, and they need to encourage open dialogue with their athletes, to allow themselves a window into the athletes' minds.

An additional study conducted by Lorimer and Jowett (2009b) looked at the importance empathic accuracy and meta-perspective play in the quality of the coach-athlete relationship. The results in this study indicate that athletes and coaches are likely to alter their behaviour based on how they believe their partners perceive them. Furthermore, coaches and athletes' meta-perspectives were positively associated with reported satisfaction. Therefore, athletes who felt that their coach trusted, liked, and respected them were more committed to, eager to work with, and satisfied with the relationship. The same was true for coaches (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009b). Overall, Lorimer and Jowett (2009b) stress the importance of developing strong bonds between athletes and coaches, and of achieving this through clear, consistent communication.

A final study on empathic accuracy done by Lorimer and Jowett (2010) looked at the role of gender in the coach-athlete relationship. Although their previous research suggests that achieving and maintaining a high level of empathic accuracy in the form of a positive coach-

athlete relationship is important (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009a; Lorimer & Jowett, 2009b), they acknowledge that there are barriers to obtaining this outcome. One such barrier is explained by the Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987), which states that individuals will behave and react to different social pressures based on the expectations that society has placed on them. Applying Social Role Theory, Lorimer and Jowett (2010) note that female coaches tend to show improved levels of understanding, and hence empathic accuracy, while male coaches tend to be more assertive and controlling. Lorimer and Jowett (2010) note that a key component of coaching is reflected in the coaches' and the athletes' abilities to accurately perceive each other's thoughts and feelings. In accordance with Social Role Theory, a coach's ability to perceive and understand his/her athletes will, in part, be based on the role and gender expectations of coaches and athletes (Lorimer & Jowett, 2010).

Coaching practices can aid in the personal and psychological growth of athletes, such as when coaches support athlete autonomy regardless of the athlete's gender. Autonomy supportive coaching styles have been shown to improve the internalization of coaching behaviours by athletes and therefore may be useful to enhance coach-training programs (Conroy & Coatsworth, 2007). A study exploring autonomy, self-regulation, and persistence showed that athletes become more self-determined throughout their careers, which enables them to see why they train and learn as they do. The acceptance or rejection of certain learning abilities is determined based on the athletes' perception of support from coaches and in some cases parents (Pelletier et al., 2002).

Autonomy is essential to an athlete's career because it means athletes have contributed and been a part of the decision making process during their athletic career. Autonomy supportive coaching behaviour has proven to be both crucial in performance outcome and over all self-

efficacy (Rocchi, Pelletier, & Couture, 2013). When coaches support athletes as autonomous individuals, they show appreciation for the athletes' own interests and values. Doing so allows athletes to offer meaningful input regarding their careers, helps minimize the pressure they may feel from coaches, and aids in the avoidance of controlling coach behaviour (Rocchi et al., 2013). Therefore the research literature demonstrates that within the coach-athlete relationship, the coach and the athlete need to be treated as individuals with their own unique perspectives, characteristics, and behaviours.

Beyond empathic accuracy, gender roles, and autonomy supportive behaviours, cooperation, which in this context refers to the extent that the coach and athlete function as a partnership, can impact the coach-athlete relationship. Yang and Jowett (2013) describe how the coach is often viewed as the sole decision maker in an athlete's career and hence in control of the athlete. Focusing on reciprocal complementarity, which in this context refers to the extent that the coach's role is directing, and teaching, and the athlete's role is willing to follow the guidance of the coach, Yang and Jowett (2013) note how the view of a dominant coach in a coach-athlete relationship marked by reciprocal complementarity is distinct from a coach-athlete relationship marked by coach-controlling behaviour. Coach-controlling behaviours are negative, controlling, and punishing; reciprocal complementarity reflects situations where "expectations are clear, support and feedback are provided, and a well-defined engagement to the task at hand is outlined" (Yang & Jowett, 2013, p. 831). Yang and Jowett (2013) recognize that there is an inherent power imbalance between the coach and athlete, but that this power imbalance can accompany a positive coach-athlete relationship when reciprocal complementarity exists. Understanding the coach-athlete relationship and the behaviours exhibited by both the coach and the athlete can assist in developing coach education (Yang & Jowett, 2013). Understanding the

role of the coach and the athlete within the coach-athlete relationship can aid in enhancing education, as it helps to more clearly carve out roles for both the coach and the athlete, which facilitates learning how those roles may be fulfilled. Enhancing the clarity of the roles of both the coach and athlete may further serve to aid in evaluation and management of certain coach behaviours and may enable coaches to understand athletes better.

In summary, research on the coach-athlete relationship suggests that complementarity, communication, and effort on the part of both the coach and the athlete contribute to the building of a strong relationship, which is essential to successful athletic outcomes (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009a; Lorimer & Jowett, 2009b; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Yang & Jowett, 2013). Effective communication allows the coach and the athlete a window into the other's thoughts, feelings and perceptions, which aids them in relating to one another in the highly competitive, and at times emotional, context of sport (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009a). Coaches and athletes with clear and consistent communication are more likely to have a strong bond, as information can flow more freely back and forth between them, leaving less room for ambiguity about the other's behaviour (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Lorimer & Jowett, 2009a; Lorimer & Jowett, 2009b; Lorimer & Jowett, 2010; Yang & Jowett, 2013).

This section of the review of literature has highlighted a plethora of models that researchers have developed in attempt to explain the complexity of the coach-athlete relationship. These models are used in the field of sport psychology and coaching to try to explain the behaviour of the coach and, in some cases, the athlete. Considering how influential a coach is in an athlete's life and the importance of the coach-athlete relationship in sport, gaining knowledge on the behavioural manifestations of the coach and the athlete within the coach-athlete relationship is integral, as it may provide guidance on how adopted behaviours shape the

coach's style of coaching and hence, directly impact the athlete. Among many other things, respect, trust, support of athletes as autonomous beings, and good communication appear to be essential to a good coach-athlete relationship, which can often lead to a better sport experience for both coaches and athletes.

### **2.3 Effective Coaching Styles**

While the previous section demonstrated that the research literature shows communication can improve the quality of the coach-athlete relationship, it is important to reiterate the clear power imbalance that exists between coaches and athletes. As athletes rise through the ranks of the sporting world they spend a considerable amount of time with their coaches, which often results in the formation of an intimate bond where athletes depend heavily on their coaches. The increase in time that athletes spend with coaches can serve to further increase athletes' vulnerability to abuse (Stirling & Kerr, 2009; Tomlinson & Strachan, 1996). Stirling and Kerr (2009) refer to abuse experienced in a relationship based on trust as relational abuse. They note that in sport emotional and physical abuse is likely a direct result of the power that coaches are given over their athletes, and they suggest that the culture of sport lends itself to abuse by placing athletic performance above all else. This emphasis leads to increasing the power of the coach, as athletes rely heavily on the expertise of the coach to contribute to a successful performance (Stirling & Kerr, 2009; Tofler, Stryer, Micheli, & Herman, 1996). Furthermore, the perceived normalization of abusive coaching tactics may contribute to athletes' diminishing awareness of abuse, as they may be more accepting of maltreatment as a part of the road to success (Stirling & Kerr, 2009).

As Stirling and Kerr (2009) argue, when success follows performance, coaches are able to exert and sustain their power even more. Athletes have acknowledged having a very close

relationship with their coaches and, in some cases, a closer relationship with their coach than with their own parents. Coaches have a high degree of control over the athletes' schedules allowing them to schedule more time with athletes, often without supervision. Given the amount of time spent with athletes, it is no surprise why coaches have the kind of power they do over their athletes. Over time, some athletes may learn to fear their coach and the control their coaches have over their lives. The presence of fear can disable athletes from being able to question certain behaviours demonstrated by their coaches, including both verbal and mental abuse. This fear is manipulated by coaches who threaten to limit playing time and withdraw privileges of the athletes (Stirling & Kerr, 2009).

Not only does coaching impact the psychological state of the athlete, but there has been a direct impact shown between coaching behaviours and sport-related anxiety. Baker, Côté, and Hawes (2000) explored the relationship between sport anxiety and coach-athlete relationships, and found a correlation between negative personal rapport behaviours and anxiety levels in athletes. Specifically, they note that athletes who experience feelings of shame or guilt in relation to intimidation by their coach are more likely to experience sport anxiety. This anxiety, in turn, is likely to impact performance and, in the case of an abusive coach, is likely to continue the cycle of anxiety (Baker et al., 2000). Additional findings were linked to the context of competition and the important role a coach plays during competition. In competition, emotions are heightened and verbal abuse can occur. In this case, the accompanying effects of verbal abuse may impact the athlete without the awareness of the coach (Baker et al., 2000).

Often the motivations of a coach are misinterpreted or difficult to decipher. The exceeding amount of pressure on coaches from above (i.e., coach management) and below (i.e., athletes/parents) can constrain coaches. Rocchi et al. (2013) demonstrate that there is a direct

relationship between pressure and engaging in autonomy supportive behaviours. Coaches experiencing less pressure were likely to support more autonomous behaviour of their athletes. Therefore, a coach's adoption of this way of thinking is a direct link to his/her environment and context (Rocchi et al., 2013). From this perspective it is important to consider the context of elite sport as a context within which high levels of pressure exist and may influence coaches. It is important to consider the context of elite sport as coaches interviewed in this thesis are elite sport coaches.

A good coach-athlete relationship, like any good relationship, takes into account factors of mutual understanding and respect for one another. In the case of the coach-athlete relationship there is an inherent form of interdependence. The coach must operate as the facilitator by guiding, teaching, and imparting knowledge, and the athlete must operate as the student by listening, following, and translating the guidance of the coach (Lorimer & Jowett, 2010). Mutual understanding, explored by Lorimer and Jowett (2010) alongside empathic accuracy, requires both coach and athlete to view the beliefs, opinions, ideas and values of the other as important. Furthermore, the importance of interaction between the coach and athlete is essential to an overall positive experience (Lorimer & Jowett, 2010). In this case empathy is the ability of the coach to "perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the person" (Rogers, 1959, pp. 210-211). The use of empathy translates into a positive athlete experience marked by enjoyment, achievement, and satisfaction (Lormier & Jowett, 2010). Differences will be subject to the specific sport context (specifically individual versus team sports) and the length of time a coach spends with the athlete(s). Empathy requires the coach to be aware of the athlete as a human being with multiple psychological states, each requiring specific attention (Lormier &

Jowett, 2010). If the two can reach a mutual understanding of one another, a healthy coach-athlete relationship is likely to form and they are both likely to experience success, in one form or another (Lormier & Jowett, 2010).

Additionally, leadership is of the utmost importance in the sporting context. Leadership in sport can include a team captain, but always includes the coach. The role of leaders, as identified by Loughhead and Hardy (2005), is to exert influence over others within a group and guide the group toward a common goal. Training and instruction is reported to be less important for athletes aged 14-18 years old, but becomes more important for athletes at the university or college level (Loughhead & Hardy, 2005). This finding highlights the complexity involved in being a leader and it reinforces the need for coaches to understand their athletes and their needs better in order to enhance the sport experience. When athletes were asked what leadership qualities were most important for them to see in a coach, they preferred an autocratic style, training and instruction, and social support, which was different from team captains (Loughhead & Hardy, 2005). This distinction is because a coach and a captain fulfill different roles for the team. Often times in a team context it may be hard for coaches to give one-on-one feedback, in which case the captain can provide this support. Overall, coaches who display certain leadership skills (i.e., autonomy supportive behaviours and good communication) and identify a captain with the support of the team benefited both themselves and the athletes (Loughhead & Hardy, 2005).

#### **2.4 Ethical Coaching Considerations**

An additional role associated with coaching is acting as a “moral exemplar” (Boxill, 2013, p. 9). According to Boxill (2013), the role sport plays in society is significant in providing a distinct experience through which individuals can come to a better understanding of

themselves, their values, and their ethical viewpoints. It is a popular belief in society that sport can teach lessons, build character, and provide moments of personal growth. In sport, not only are coaches entrusted to teach technical and tactical skills, but coaches can teach life skills (i.e., morals, values, and ethics), and therefore must be “good teachers as well as good role models” (Boxill, 2013, p. 10).

The opportunity for sport to develop the athlete morally and ethically means that a coach must embody “character and integrity” (Boxill, 2013, p. 10). This creates an enormous challenge for coaches who have the potential to transform athletes’ lives. Loland (2011) suggests, “[a] good coach creates a moral climate in which aggression, cheating and excessive psychological warfare are considered unacceptable forms of conduct as they undermines athlete’s status as free and responsible moral agents” (p. 21). In order to create this environment it is essential for coaches to adopt and maintain a coaching philosophy rooted in their ethos or views of what is morally acceptable or unacceptable (Loland, 2011). If a coach develops, follows, and models what it means to be a moral agent on a consistent basis, this is likely to have a great impact on his/her athletes (Simon, 2013).

Acting as a moral agent in demonstrating proper behavioural management in difficult situations and ethical dilemmas can help athletes develop a sport ethos. Additionally, in acting as a moral exemplar, coaches help athletes to understand the true competitive nature of sport as a part of achieving athletic excellence (Simon, 2013). From this standpoint, coaches demonstrate the view of competition as both a process and a product, where both the process of hard work and the product of excelling are rewarding. Living by a set of moral rules is important, and when a coach models and values morality in his/her interactions with athletes and others, this acts as a window for the athlete into the coach’s soul, which clearly depicts who the coach is and what

they value (Simon, 2013). This is particularly important as coaches are actively guiding athletes to become excellent people both inside and outside the context of sport (Simon, 2013).

As a part of a coach's guiding ethos, coaches should also look to develop a set of goals that help to direct their efforts towards what they wish to achieve in coaching, as well as provide a foundation from which people can begin to understand their intentions (Simon, 2013). This can be reflected in adopting a coaching philosophy or philosophical statement to guide coaches when ethical decisions need to be made (Douglas & Carless, 2008; Simon, 2013). Particularly for coaches who work with youth athletes, the coaches' roles are viewed as of "paramount importance as they are not simply technicians who facilitate skill acquisition and mastery, but rather individuals who introduce and mentor young athletes into a social practice with internal goods and standards of excellence" (Torres & Hagar, 2013, p. 179).

It is clear that there are many pieces to the coach-athlete relationship puzzle. Taken together the literature offers a variety of considerations for exploring and navigating the intricacies of this bond. As outlined in the literature above, the considerable power imbalance inherent to this relationship poses a potential risk for athletes, as it makes them vulnerable to abuse. To date there has been a trend in research to focus on sexual and physical abuse (e.g., Brackenridge & Fasting, 2002; Parent & Bannon, 2011; Kirby, Greaves, & Hankivsky, 2000; Stirling & Kerr, 2009; Tomlinson & Yorganci, 1997); however, the impact of the coach on an athlete's mental wellbeing requires exploration.

## **2.5 Verbal and Mental Abuse and Elite Sport Coaches**

It is well documented in the literature that some elite level sports coaches adopt abusive coaching practices (e.g., Brackenridge & Fasting, 2002; Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Kirby, Greaves, & Hankivsky, 2000; Parent & Bannon, 2011; Stirling & Kerr, 2009; Stirling & Kerr, 2008a;

Stirling & Kerr, 2012; Stirling, 2008; Tomlinson & Yorganci, 1997). Considerable research focuses on the more overt forms of abusive coaching, such as sexual and physical abuse. However, less attention is paid to more covert forms of abuse, including verbal abuse (Stirling, 2008). Literature that defines or includes verbal abuse, specifically, was not located in my search. Rather, verbal abuse is referred to as a part of mental or emotional abuse in the literature presented here. Furthermore, as noted in Chapter I, this thesis designates verbal abuse as the action and mental abuse as the lasting result of the verbal actions.

Brassard and Donovan (2006) indicate that the lack of clear literature on verbal and mental abuse is a result of: (1) societal acceptance of mental abuse, (2) the unclear intent of the perpetrator, and (3) a limited perceived view of potential interventions. Furthermore, Iwaniec (2003) identifies the lack of focus on mental abuse as a result of contention in defining mental abuse. Difficulty in defining mental abuse has impacted the identification of mentally abusive coaching behaviours and thus prevention and intervention of verbal and mental abuse in elite sport (Iwaniec, 2003). In addition, researchers' understanding of mental abuse from a coach's perspective is preliminary in nature; most studies attempting to define mental abuse report on athletes' perceptions of mental abuse, rather than coaches' (Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Stirling & Kerr, 2014; Stirling & Kerr, 2008a).

There are a plethora of definitions noted in the literature addressing mental abuse. Stirling and Kerr (2008a) define mental abuse as "a pattern of deliberate non-contact behaviors by a person within a critical relationship role that have the potential to be harmful to an individual's emotional well-being" (p. 178). Furthermore, Iwaniec, Larkin and Higgins (2006) state that mental abuse is composed of "[i]nstances whereby adults hold excessive power over children and fail to take children's rights into consideration in a meaningful way" (p. 74). Moreover,

O'Hagan (1995) refers to mental abuse as, “[t]he sustained, repetitive, inappropriate emotional response to the child’s experience of emotion and its accompanying expressive behaviour” (p. 456). In addition, Glaser (2002) characterizes mental abuse as a relationship between a child and a caregiver that is marked by patterns of non-physical damaging exchanges. Finally, Glaser (2002) notes that the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC) explains psychological maltreatment, which often accompanies mental abuse, as “[a] repeated pattern of caregiver behaviour or extreme incident(s) that convey to children that they are worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted, endangered, or of value only in meeting another’s needs” (p. 702). Outside of sport, the Canadian Department of Justice (2015) defines emotional abuse as occurring when an individual uses verbal or physical means to “control, frighten or isolate someone or take away their self-respect” (para. 11). It may also be termed psychological abuse and includes behaviours such as threats, put downs, name calling, insults, constant yelling or criticism, controlling behaviours and bullying to name a few.

The inconsistency that exists in the literature on the current definitions of both verbal and mental abuse in sport is likely a cause of the variable factors that mark an athlete’s unique experience as being verbally and mentally abusive (APSAC, 1995; Glaser, 2002; Iwaniec, Larkin, & Higgins, 2006; O’Hagan, 1995; Stirling & Kerr, 2008b). More specifically, what one athlete or coach views as abusive will vary depending on the individuals and the context involved. For example, some athletes may find being yelled at motivating and contributing to their performance, while others may find it unhelpful and negatively impacting their performances. It is important to acknowledge the variable experiences of verbal and mental abuse and how this variability has likely contributed to poor identification of verbally and mentally abusive behaviours. This serves to further highlight the need to explore the roles and

impacts of verbal and mental abuse in the elite sport environment.

One consistency among these definitions is the link to non-physical behaviour, including verbal interactions that result in belittling, yelling, criticizing, humiliation, and threats (Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Stirling & Kerr, 2012; Stirling & Kerr, 2008a; Stirling, 2008b;). However, the pervasive lack of consistency in defining verbal and mental abuse is clear in the different definitions presented here. As indicated previously, the lack of research, which takes into consideration the views of the key figures within the context of elite sport on verbal and mental abuse, might also be indicative of confusion within this setting. This is likely a contributing factor in the acceptance of verbal and mental abuse within the environment of elite sport. Addressing this gap in the literature is one of the main objectives of this thesis.

There is a considerable amount of pressure on both athletes and coaches to win in elite sport. The pervasive focus on winning has often been used as justification for certain abusive coaching behaviours. Gervis and Dunn (2004) explored verbally and mentally abusive coaching as a function of a 'win at all costs' mentality adopted by the coach. They state, "[i]n sport, the end namely winning, often justifies the means" (Gervis & Dunn, 2004, p. 216). This mentality, that winning is all that matters, aligns with Ryan's (1995) study that reported winning as all that is recognized in the athletic arena. Gervis and Dunn (2004) specifically explored coaches' mental abuse of athletes, which they defined as bouts of frequent shouting. The verbal expression of shouting resulted in negative impacts for the athletes, and resulted in athletes feeling emotions of stupidity, fear and humiliation, among others. These feelings resulted in lowered performance, which led to increased verbal abuse from the coach. This cycle predisposed many of the 12 athletes interviewed in the study to feel depressed and anxious throughout their careers. The supports made available to these athletes were relatively minimal and unhelpful, leading to long

term, unresolved mental and emotional pain (Gervis & Dunn, 2004). It is clear from Gervis and Dunn's (2004) study that not only are some athletes experiencing mental abuse at a young age (8-16 years of age), but abuse continues to impact them long term. The result of verbal and mental abuse, minimal support, and long term mental health implications for young athletes involved in elite sport demands further investigation, as this trifecta is likely to have a profound impact on an athlete's quality of life.

An additional contributing factor to the exposure of elite athletes to verbally and mentally abusive coaching behaviours is the amount of time spent with the coach. As discussed previously, Stirling and Kerr (2008b) point out that the frequency and prevalence of abuse increased as athletes spent more time with their coaches. As athletes work their way through the ranks of sport they spend an increasing amount of time with their coaches, to the point that it is often more than with their own family (MacAuley, 1996; Stirling & Kerr, 2012; Stirling & Kerr, 2009). A study by Crosset (1986) identified the high degree of interdependence of the athlete on the expertise of the coach as a factor in predisposing athletes to abuse. This finding suggests that in the context of elite sport, where parents are not always present, verbal and mental abuse may be more tolerable. The athlete's high degree of dependence on the coach for guidance may be indicative of an autocratic coaching style. This style of coaching is a top-down approach, where the coach maintains a high degree of dominance over the athlete. This high degree of dominance associated with an autocratic style of coaching may accompany verbal and mental abuse because athletes might be less likely to question a coach's adopted coaching behaviours (Stirling & Kerr, 2012).

Male coaches have a tendency to present an authoritative or autocratic style of coaching, where they dictate what to do and the athlete does what they are told to do, making the

relationship seem unidirectional (Tomlinson & Yoganci, 1997). The number of male coaches currently coaching elite sport in Canada vastly outnumbers the number of female coaches. Statistics from the 2012-2013 season show that at the Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS) level, a mere 15 percent of the head coaches were female. Additionally, only 20 percent of assistant coaches were female (Centre for Sport Policy Studies, 2013). These ratios continue to support Nancy Theberge's (1993) description of female coaches as "tokens" within the population of CIS head coaches. The concept of a token population refers to a population within which the majority-minority ratio is skewed (Theberge, 1993). As males tend to adopt a more authoritative approach, the presence of more male coaches within the context of elite sport might suggest a more commonplace authoritative coaching style. The high number of elite male coaches adopting an authoritative coaching style might suggest to other coaches that this style is preferable when coaching elite sports. Therefore, if more elite coaches assume an authoritative approach to coaching, their authoritative style might be a key contributing factor to the acceptance of verbal and mental abuse in elite sport settings.

The lack of female coaches is a result of barriers women face in attaining coaching positions, including coaching styles, family conflicts, informal networking, equity policies, performance outcome focus, and positions of power (Stirling & Kerr, 2007). Women's coaching styles have been identified as more empathic, communicative, and cooperative than men's coaching styles (Stirling & Kerr, 2007). None of these characteristics fit into the authoritative coaching style associated with male coaches. Stirling and Kerr (2007) note that young female athletes appear to be more responsive to an aggressive, authoritative coaching style and are less likely to be appreciative of an open, communicative, more democratic approach to coaching. These athletes might believe that authoritative coaching styles are more successful. However,

this might be more indicative of invisible patriarchal and hegemonic forces that impact societal attitudes.

Tomlinson and Yorganci (1997) report that first year university female athletes prefer male coaches to female coaches, largely because of the preferred authoritative style of coaching. This style of coaching is conducive to abusive male coach practices, as the athletes are made very vulnerable to their coaches. Tomlinson and Yorganci (1997) showed that several athletes were treated in various inappropriate ways by coaches, with behaviour ranging from suggestive verbal comments, to prolonged periods of eye contact, and in some cases inappropriate touching. Overall, behaviours like these contribute to the pervasive normalcy of dominant authoritative coaches who often adopt yelling as a way of “toughening up or enhancing the resilience of the athletes” (Stirling & Kerr, 2012, p. 191).

It is clear in the literature that many coaches adopt an authoritative coaching style, despite the harm it might be causing (Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Stirling & Kerr, 2012; Stirling & Kerr, 2008a; Stirling, 2008b; Stirling & Kerr, 2007; Tomlinson & Yorganci, 1997). The link between male coaches and authoritative styles of coaching might be contributing to the popularity of coaching authoritatively, as the majority of head coaching positions in CIS sport are held by males. It is important to clarify the connection between authoritative coaching and abuse. Abuse does not occur because of the gender of a coach, but rather is connected to the coaching style adopted by the coach, with authoritative coaching styles being connected to verbal and mental abuse (Stirling & Kerr, 2012; Tomlinson & Yorganci, 1997).

Both positive and negative experiences are inevitable in the context of sport. Positive experiences have been defined through friendship building with coaches, while negative experiences linked to coaching styles and coach-athlete interactions have been outlined as having

detrimental effects on the athlete (Greenleaf, Gould, & Dieffenbach, 2001; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett, 2003; Stirling & Kerr, 2009). The potential for negative experiences impacting an athlete's career can often lend itself to questioning the role of coach within the sporting context. Stirling and Kerr (2012) highlight that adults, as coaches and teachers, play a crucial role in guiding young individuals with limited life experience and knowledge towards achievement. It is clear that an autocratic style of coaching is typically employed in elite sport (Stirling & Kerr, 2012). This style of coaching is a direct result of the power differential in the coach-athlete relationship. It is further reinforced by coaches adopting strategies, such as yelling, which are employed to control athlete behaviours (Stirling & Kerr, 2012). Moreover, the tactic of yelling is held in place by justification of such expressions as developing a "thicker" ski in athletes (Palframan, 1994).

A considerable amount of literature explores the experience of abusive coaching through the perceptions of athletes (e.g. Dieffenbach, 2001; Greenleaf, Gould, & Jowett, 2003; Stirling & Kerr, 2012; Thomlinson & Strachan, 1996). However, fewer studies examine the perceptions of coaches' own and other coaches' styles. Not only might coaches' personal perceptions of abusive coaching contribute to the literature, but the exploration of current coach education in Canada may be foundational to exploring why abusive coaching practices are implemented or avoided.

## **2.6 Coaching Education**

A holistic approach to sport, where coaches place the athlete at the centre of the sporting experience, may be a way in which to avoid abusive experiences (Stirling & Kerr, 2009). Stirling and Kerr (2009) recommend that the athlete-centered approach would act as a way to increase the athlete's participation in decision-making and other aspects of the sporting experience, thus decreasing the amount of power given to the coach. This form of coach education is widely

accepted and taught in the Canadian context as the Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) Model (Canadian Sport for Life, 2005).

### **2.6.1 The Long Term Athlete Development Model**

The LTAD model is recommended in Manitoba as the gold standard for athlete development. It has been recognized as an educational tool through which to develop athletes, including volleyball athletes, in a way that is both pragmatic and scientific (Volleyball Manitoba, para. 1). Originally adopted in 2004 by Volleyball Manitoba, the LTAD model continues to influence coach education and is intended to influence coach practices and behaviours. As part of this thesis focuses on coaching education in Manitoba, the LTAD will be reviewed in this section.

The LTAD is a seven-stage model that focuses on training, competition, and recovery of athletes during the course of their athletic seasons (Canadian Sport for Life, 2005). The seven stages include: (1) active start, (2) FUNdamentals, (3) learning to train, (4) training to train, (5) training to compete, (6) training to win, and (7) active for life (Canadian Sport for Life, 2005). A leadership group working for the Canadian Sport for Life Organization designed and helped develop the LTAD model over a number of years. It is designed for athletes as they mature and develop athletically and biologically, rather than based on their age. The model is intended to take into account the needs of the athlete in light of a number of important considerations.

First, the physical, mental, emotional, and cognitive development of the athlete is taken into consideration (Canadian Sport for Life, 2005). Each of the stages marks a different place along the developmental journey of the athlete. Furthermore, the LTAD model “ensures the physical literacy upon which excellence can be built” (Canadian Sport for Life, 2005, p. 7). It achieves this through the development of optimal programs for training, competition, and

recovery periods. This process enables an “ideal competition structure” (Canadian Sport for Life, 2005, p. 7) to be formed, which takes into consideration the athlete’s development. Moreover, the model is described as incorporating the “entire sport continuum including participants, parents, coaches, schools, clubs, community recreation programs, provincial sport organizations (PSOs) and national sport organizations (NSOs), sport science specialists, municipalities and several government ministries and departments” (Canadian Sport for Life, 2005, p. 7).

Additionally, the LTAD model promotes integration at all levels of sport, ranging from elite to basic physical education in schools. It is a model that was developed in Canada, but recognizes international terms of best practices (Canadian Sport for Life, 2005). Overall, the LTAD seeks to contribute to a “healthy, physically literate nation, whose citizens participate in lifelong physical activity” (Canadian Sport for Life, 2005, p. 7). Finally, the LTAD takes into consideration the four goals of the *Canadian Sport Policy* (SIRC, 2012): (1) enhanced participation, (2) enhanced excellence, (3) enhanced capacity, and (4) enhanced interaction.

The primary goal of the LTAD is to place the needs of the athlete at the centre of the sporting experience, in an attempt to ensure that the athlete’s overall needs are being met. More specifically, the model attempts to balance training and competition for young athletes in pursuit of elite athletic careers (Ford et al., 2011). The LTAD was developed in order to remove the heavy pressure placed on young athletes to attain results and refocus the attention on the “optimal development processes” (Ford et al., 2011, p. 390). These developmental processes are based on objective physiological assessment tools (e.g., peak height or peak weight velocity) which coaches are encouraged to adopt, as each athlete matures at a different rate (Ford et al., 2011).

Although the LTAD model seeks to place the athlete at the centre of the sporting experience, it appears to do this almost solely from a physiological or scientific standpoint. The overview of the model published by Canadian Sport for Life (2005) does not address abusive practices in sport. Specifically, the short paragraph on the psychological wellbeing of the athlete refers the reader to appendix one (Canadian Sport for Life, 2005). Appendix one offers several detailed charts with information on basic characteristics, general impact on performance, and implications for the coach; however, the appendix does not mention or explicitly discourage abusive coaching practices (Canadian Sport for Life, 2005). This leaves the door open for coaches to follow the LTAD yet adopt any style of coaching and any potentially unhealthy coaching practices. Building and maintaining a healthy, bidirectional relationship is not emphasized. Although the implications for coaches include ways to keep the relationship healthy, healthy relationships are not highlighted.

The development of a strong and healthy coach-athlete relationship in part depends on the education of future and current coaches. There is a variety of literature and research available on coach education, which suggests that certain elements for coach education are important (De Backer, Boen, Ceux, De Cuyper, Høigaard, Callens, Fransen, & Vande Broek, 2011; Douglas & Carless, 2008; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Reynolds, 2000). Among these elements is a coach's attention to the intense environment of elite sport and its potential harmful impact on athletes (Reynolds, 2000). Athletes' pursuit of excellence in sport can occasionally push them to adopt harmful behaviours. Athletes may display underconforming behaviours causing them to cheat. Opting to cheat is typically associated with possessing less athletic talent (Reynolds, 2000). Secondly, athletes may adopt overconforming behaviours, including forcing themselves to over train and under eat. These practices are typically associated with a higher level of athletic talent

(Reynolds, 2000). Reynolds (2000) urges coaches to place the interest of the athletes above the success of the team, as it is likely to help the athlete avoid adopting over or underconforming behaviours. Like in the LTAD model, the athlete is at the centre of the decision making.

In placing the athlete at the centre of decision-making, coaches are not only able to see the athletes for their athletic capabilities and personal characteristics, but recognize that athletes are contributing members of society. It is important for coaches to consider the athletes' lives outside of sport, as experiences within the sport context can and often impacts life experience outside of sport (Miller & Kerr, 2002). In order for athletes to recognize their roles inside and outside of sport, the coach must adopt an athlete-centered approach to coaching, which views the attainment of excellence in sport as occurring alongside the attainment of excellence outside of sport (Miller & Kerr, 2002). This approach focuses on developing the athlete as a whole with respect to physical, mental, and social aspects (Miller & Kerr, 2002). This approach also puts responsibility on others: athletes, parents, and administrators. Not only does distributing responsibility aid in the development of athletes as a whole, but it allows athletes to continue on from sport with a sense of meaning and purpose (Miller & Kerr, 2002; Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, 2011). An athlete centered model of coaching, that supports both personal and athletic excellence should be used in future education of sport coaches (Miller & Kerr, 2002; Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, 2011).

Stories can also be used as a part of coaching professional development (CPD) programs (Douglas & Carless, 2008). Storytelling in sport education can give athletes a voice. Individual athletes' stories can be assembled into a collective voice and provide coaches with insight into their effect on athletes. Even more empowering is the potential that storytelling could give certain quieted voices in sport, like women, a chance to speak up (Douglas & Carless, 2008).

Through the use of stories, coaches may enhance their acceptance of an athlete-centered approach, which will contribute to total athlete development. According to Douglas and Carless (2008) coach education programs should include this narrative style of education to help new coaches think reflexively about their own ethical viewpoints, ways of thinking, and how these may impact their career as a coach. By clarifying some of the deeper meanings of why people want to coach and what their coaching goals might be, coaches may be able to decide if a coaching position is the right fit for them. Thinking critically about the reality of coaching may deter some potential coaches from coaching, which may spare some athletes from having a bad or potentially damaging experience. Moreover, if coaching seems to be the right fit for a coach in training, this may enable them to provide a profoundly positive athlete experience (Douglas & Carless, 2008). Developing a well-rounded, holistic approach to coach education, which places the athlete at the centre and draws on the experience of both athletes and coaches alike, may be necessary in order to enhance the coach education experience and better prepare coaches for the pressure and stress of coaching elite sport.

The LTAD philosophy claims to be a more balanced, all-encompassing approach to coach education. However, it is clear that there are aspects of the LTAD that require improvement. For example, the section on the psychological states of the athletes could be revamped. The mental-emotional component of the athlete's psyche is critical in elite sport, yet the LTAD dedicates less than half a page to the importance of athlete psychology. Furthermore, the LTAD does not discuss mental or emotional abuse that can and often does occur in the coach-athlete relationship in elite sport. More of an emphasis on the development of a healthy coach-athlete relationship is necessary as the impact of a coach often extends beyond the boundary of sport. In order to enhance the athlete voice in coach education story telling may be

an effective tool (Douglas & Carless, 2008). The LTAD is an important part of developing a well-rounded, athlete centred approach to coach education. However, taken on its own this model may not be addressing all of the important facets of the athlete and the overall sport experience.

### **2.6.2 National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP)**

Currently, coaching education is made available to prospective coaches in Canada through the National Certified Coaching Program (NCCP) and the National Coaching Institute (NCI). The NCCP program provides education to coaches at all levels of sport. It is a program geared towards developing competent sports coaches that is founded on five core competencies: (1) valuing, (2) interacting, (3) leading, (4) problem-solving, and (5) critical thinking (Coaching Association of Canada, 2014). These competencies are specifically chosen in order to lead to the specific coaching outcomes of making ethical decisions, providing support for athletes in training, planning a practice, supporting the competitive experience, analyzing performance, designing a sport program, and managing a program. The program is further divided into streams three streams: (1) community stream, (2) competition stream, and (3) instruction stream (Coaching Association of Canada, 2014).

The community stream has two contexts; the first involves the initiation context where athletes are typically children beginning to explore sport. The goal of this context is to introduce the athletes to the basic skills and joys of sport. The ongoing participation context is intended for people coaching youth or master's (adult) level athletes competing for fun or recreation. Here the role of the coach is to encourage continued involvement in the sport. The competition stream is divided into three contexts: introduction, development, and high performance. These different levels are based on the stages of athlete development as outlined by the LTAD model. The final

stream is the instruction stream, which is usually directed at more specialized coaches. The beginner stage is dedicated to skill development, with limited to no competition and minimal time spent with athletes. Both the intermediate and advanced performers contexts are highly sport specific in terms of tactical and technical skills acquired (Coaching Association of Canada, 2014).

Coaching levels are recognized through the issuing of coaching licenses, which reflect the training status within a given sport, stream, and context. When first completing the NCCP program, training status on a coaching card is recognized as 'in training.' Following this designation is the 'trained' status (Coaching Association of Canada, 2014). The 'trained' status is given to coaches indefinitely whereas the next status, also known as 'certified,' must be maintained throughout professional development. The NCCP believes that coaches can always be improving on their abilities through the acquisition of new knowledge, skills, and attitudes. In order for a coach to obtain a master's level certification, coaches must be contributing to the development of their sport and other coaches within their sport (Coaching Association of Canada, 2014). Furthermore, coaches may obtain training in multiple sports, streams, and contexts. Coaches wishing to gain certification in other sports may be allowed to challenge certain stages of the sport education, allowing them to advance without necessarily completing all of the coaching education levels (Coaching Association of Canada, 2014).

The educational documents reviewed in the next three sections include some of the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) documents that coaches must complete in acquiring coach certification. Specifically, the documents explored here address education on harassment or abuse in sport and include: (1) Make Ethical Decisions (MED), (2) Empower+: Creating Positive and Healthy Sport Experiences, and (3) Managing Conflict. The MED module

was first created in 2004 and underwent revisions to include concussion information in 2011. The most recent revisions to the MED module occurred in 2013. The Empower+ professional development module was created in 2011 and underwent minor revisions in 2012. Finally, the Managing Conflict module was developed in 2009 and minor revisions were made in 2013 (Reynolds, 2015).

All of these coach education documents are used by coaches who are pursuing their coach certification through the NCCP program. Coaches pursuing their certification are required to study this material and complete the assignments in the respective coach workbooks in order to complete each stage of the NCCP model of coach certification.

#### *2.6.2.1 NCCP: Make Ethical Decisions*

At first glance the most applicable section of the NCCP course materials for this study appears to be the Make Ethical Decisions (MED) module. This module is a part of the *Competition Introduction* workbook and reference materials written by the Coaching Association of Canada most recently updated in 2013. Prospective coaches completing the theoretical component of the different coaching certification levels must review the MED material. In addition to the written education materials on MED, an online tutorial is available that coaches are required to complete. As noted on the Coaching Association of Canada website, coaches may choose to forgo the MED training and simply take the online MED evaluation (Coaching Association of Canada, 2015, para. 1). However, in the event that a coach fails more than once with a grade lower than 75% they may be required to take MED training either through home study or in a coach education workshop (Coaching Association of Canada, 2015, para. 3). If a coach does choose to undergo MED training (i.e., attend a coach education workshop) they are then afforded an unlimited number of opportunities to pass the online evaluation (Coaching

Association of Canada, 2015, Para. 2). This seems incongruous given the fact that ethical issues, such as verbal and mental abuse or sexual abuse, continue to be an issue in sport. Currently, MED training is not a mandatory section of coach education, and only 75% on an online quiz is needed to pass.

The MED reference materials cover pages 1 to 18 in the *Competition Introduction Workbook* and include a 7 page appendix with additional reference materials. This section includes an introduction to ethical situations in sport (Coaching Association of Canada, 2013a). The remainder of the introduction is dedicated to the Coaching Association of Canada's approved *Ethical Decision-Making Process*, which is composed of six steps that are intended to take the coach through the entire process of understanding the ethical implications of a situation in sport in order to make a final decision. A number of visual aids are utilized, such as tables, charts, and continuums, in order to provide a more clear explanation of the *Ethical Decision Making Process* (Coaching Association of Canada, 2013a). Overall, the document includes information regarding ethical situations in sport; however, I have some concerns with respect to practicality, transparency, and organization.

Frequently throughout this document it is mentioned that ethical situations are difficult to address. The provided solution is a list of 18 items that coaches are to run through in establishing the ethical implications of a situation (Coaching Association of Canada, 2013a). While this list is excellent in theory, it may be less helpful when decisions need to be made immediately. In most sport situations, decisions need to be made in a matter of seconds, and in the event that a quick decision needs to be made there may not be time to run through an itemized list.

Issues with clarity are consistent throughout the document. Coaches are instructed to ask themselves questions in the event of making a decision that has potential ethical ramifications. In

most cases it is difficult to gauge whether or not a coach is able to answer these questions in an unbiased way that allows them to get a handle on a specific situation. In a number of cases, individuals are making decisions from their own perspective that takes into account their own values and beliefs. This means that there is variation in what constitutes ethical behaviours or making an ethical decision. In the case of a coach who is responsible for making decisions, and in some cases decisions on behalf of their athletes, one would hope that they are taking into consideration the views of others within their environment, but as the research on verbal and mental abuse demonstrates this is not always the case.

The MED module refers to the *NCCP Code of Ethics* at several points in the workbook. There is a table provided alongside the code including corresponding behaviours and expectations. Under the section on *Integrity in relations with others* it is listed that coaches should “[a]bstain from all behaviours considered to be harassment or inappropriate relations with an athlete” (Coaching Association of Canada, 2013a, p. 12). This is a very vague, general statement that does not include verbal or mental abuse. Additionally, there are no examples given leaving the interpretation of ‘inappropriate relations’ up to the individual. Further down in the same table under *Respect* coaches are instructed to “[p]reserve the dignity of each person in interacting with others” (Coaching Association of Canada, 2013a, p. 12). This is more specific to interaction, but does not indicate verbal interactions, nor does it specify the relationship between the coach and the athlete. This table lacks concrete, clear examples in order to enhance comprehension and limit any misunderstandings.

The appendices attached to the MED section are not directly referred to throughout the MED sections. While their application may be straightforward without in text reference to the appendices, it appears that the Coaching Association of Canada has simply gathered information

and placed it at the end of this section in hopes that coaches might find these resources useful. However, it should not be assumed that coaches will know how to or will in fact utilize this important information. For example, the LTAD overview is provided as the final appendix. Without some sort of explanation as to how the LTAD impacts ethical decisions, coaches may be confused as to why it is an attached appendix. In order for the appendices to be useful and have practical implications, the document needs to incorporate examples of references to the appendix throughout the MED section.

The coach education MED information includes a number of sources to enable coaches to better understand ethical decisions and the ramifications of making certain decisions. However, the MED training is optional and coaches taking the online MED module only require a passing grade of 75%. A coaching education system that takes seriously the importance of helping coaches makes ethical decisions would not make this material optional or only require 75% to pass. The decision making process needs to be revamped in order to include instances when coaches are to make quick decisions in various sports contexts that may be considered to have ethical implications. The *NCCP Code of Ethics* currently lacks information on potential verbally and mentally abusive behaviours. Thus, the Coaching Association of Canada would benefit from revamping the MED module to include explicit references to the appendices that accompany this section in attempt to enhance knowledge acquisition.

#### *2.6.2.2 NCCP: Empower+: Creating positive and health sport experiences*

The NCCP's Empower+ document covers the important topics of: (1) recognizing maltreatment in sport, (2) deciding when and how to intervene, (3) having difficult conversations, and (4) creating positive and healthy sport experiences for athletes. This coach educational module is included as a part of the coaching development possibilities. This means

that this material is optional for coaches. However, it may be the case that coaches complete this educational training as a part of earning professional development points, which enables them to maintain their coach certification (Koskie, 2015).

Recognizing maltreatment in sport begins with a discussion of self-reflection. This section on recognizing maltreatment in sport addresses how difficult it can be to discuss maltreatment in sport, especially for coaches who exhibit coach behaviours that may be considered as maltreatment. Self-reflection is suggested as a tool to help coaches monitor their behaviours. A list of self-reflective questions is provided for coaches to ask themselves during a practice or competition and after a practice or competition.

Both the context of practice and competition can be intense and often coaches are responsible for managing a variety of factors, such as maintaining players' attention, time-management, emotional states of athletes, and teaching. It may be the case that coaches reading these lists do not see how they could manage to find the time to ask themselves these questions. Furthermore, self-reflection as noted in this manual is "a skill acquired over time and with experience" (Coaching Association of Canada, 2012, p. 1). To some coaches this may mean effort and more commitment to coaching, which they are not willing to make or do not have the time to make. Finally, a close examination of the questions on these lists raises a concern as to whether or not coaches may be able to answer these questions honestly. As the document points out, being self aware of coaching behaviours is difficult for most coaches (Coaching Association of Canada, 2012, p. 1), therefore, their ability to accurately answer such questions may be limited.

Maltreatment is explained as an umbrella term for abuse, harassment, and bullying. It is further split into two categories: (1) relational maltreatment and (2) non-relational maltreatment.

In the case of the coach athlete relationship, relational maltreatment appears to be most applicable as the relationship is considered to be critical or have significant influence for both athletes and coaches. A table is included with clear examples of what relational maltreatment may look like in sport (Coaching Association of Canada, 2012, p. 3). The section on emotional abuse includes the example of demeaning comments, which is the only example of verbal actions taken against an athlete in a situation of relational maltreatment. In this case, the coach education booklet would be more helpful if it provided examples of what some of those ‘demeaning comments’ might include and whether other verbal actions, such as yelling in a hostile or angry tone, verbal threats, and repetitive insults are included in this category.

The next section on understanding maltreatment in the coach-athlete relationship, seeks to categorize abusive coaches as being a predator coach, an expressive coach, or an instrumental coach. Under the table outlining the various behaviours and traits embodied by these coaches is the statement, “emotional abuse, which is typically perpetuated by the expressive or instrumental coach (Stirling, 2011), is recognized as the most common form of relational child maltreatment” (Coaching Association of Canada, 2012, pp. 7-8). Despite this recognition, additional information is not provided.

The onus in addressing maltreatment is placed on the multiple entities that make up athletes’ immediate surroundings as depicted in a visual web model entitled *Stakeholders in Maltreatment*. This model lists stakeholders such as athletes, coaches, parents, media, and the police to name a few. A table of risk factors associated with sexual and emotional abuse in sport is provided (Coaching Association of Canada, 2012, p. 9). The content of these tables is visually overwhelming and potentially confusing. With no follow up summary statements accompanying

each table, it may be the case that a coach viewing these tables may not be sure about what to do in a situation where these risk factors are present and visible.

The final pages of the section on understanding maltreatment in the coach-athlete relationship discuss signs and symptoms of maltreatment, negative outcomes of maltreatment, and the power of the coach within sport (Coaching Association of Canada, 2012). However, this section does not address informed consent or the complexities of negotiating consent when individuals hold different levels of power in the relationship, as is the case between athletes and coaches.

The final sections of the Empower + coaching education reference material cover the topics of deciding when and how to intervene, options for intervention, having difficult conversations, protecting yourself, and creating positive and healthy sport experiences for athletes. In the deciding how to intervene section, the coach is encouraged to use the *NCCP decision making model* referred to in the MED materials (Coaching Association of Canada, 2012). The document reinforces that “anyone who has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is or may be in need of protection from physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, or neglect must promptly report the situation to the local children’s welfare organization” (Coaching Association of Canada, 2012, p. 15). Information on proper communication skills, such as active listening, understanding, and self-reflection, is also provided (Coaching Association of Canada, 2012).

Additional sources on important contact information, the *NCCP code of ethics*, and national based policies on athlete protection and prohibited conduct in sport are provided at the end of the coach workbook as appendices. However, without clear and direct references to these

additional sources, coaches may view this information as an optional read when the review of these policies should be required.

The Empower + coach education resources are a positive part of coach education. Not only does this section provide a clear outline of recognizing maltreatment in sport, but it also does a good job of identifying the role of the coach and athlete within the context of maltreatment in sport. Despite the need for clarity on some of the concepts, overall this NCCP coach module is well laid out and informative. However, it is concerning why this material is not integrated into a mandatory coach education module. This information, like the MED module information, would be more effective if coaches were required to learn and comprehend it.

#### *2.6.2.3 Managing Conflict*

The Managing Conflict coach education module is a relatively new module that is required for coaches in the competition stream of NCCP coach certification. Therefore, only coaches that are in the competition stream are required to learn the managing conflict coach education information, while other coaches in other streams are not required to take this coach education module.

The introduction covers the topics of thinking about conflict differently, defining conflict, sources of conflict in sport, levels of conflict and multipliers of conflict. This nine-page introduction informs the reader about what conflict is, explains the different components that make up most conflicts in sport, and debunks myths that currently exist about conflict (Coaching Association of Canada, 2013b). It also lists sources of conflict, including parents, playing time, roles of team members, training methods, and team philosophy to name a few. The section on levels of conflict includes information about facts (i.e., as most conflicts are based on facts), goals (i.e., conflict may arise because people's goals do not align), methods (i.e., how to deal

with conflict), and values (i.e., taking into account the values of the people involved in conflict). It ends with a discussion of the multipliers of conflict, which increase the difficulty in resolving conflict. These multipliers include emotional multipliers and organizational multipliers (Coaching Association of Canada, 2013b).

The second section, Approaches to Managing Conflict, includes a managing conflict scale. This scale ranges from a 0-12 and is to be used to determine how effective a coach's approach to managing conflict is. Additionally, this section acknowledges that there is a bigger picture to consider when managing conflict (Coaching Association of Canada, 2013b). Assertive and cooperative behaviours in managing conflict are reviewed. Here, the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, which offers five different approaches to managing conflict (competing, collaborating, avoiding, compromising, and accommodating), is presented (Coaching Association of Canada, 2013b). The subsequent section covers a review of personal balance in conflict. Maintaining balance requires that coaches stay engaged in a healthy way. Ways that tip the balance include when a coach withdraws (i.e., when coaches chooses to avoid sources of conflict) or when a coach 'loses it' (i.e., winning becomes the sole focus). The remainder of this section discusses communication in conflict by addressing assertive communication, listening effectively in conflict, speaking effectively in conflict and guidelines for speaking for yourself, dealing with difficult people, inventing options for managing conflict, and strategies for preventing conflict (Coaching Association of Canada, 2013b).

Finally, section three covers the *NCCP code of ethics* and Fair Play. The overview of this section discusses what the code of ethics is, why coaching needs a code of ethics, and the values underpinning the *NCCP code of ethics*. Within this section a copy of the *NCCP code of ethics* is

included. This section finishes with a very short description on fair play principles (Coaching Association of Canada, 2013b).

Overall, the managing conflict education module covers a range of important issues that coaches need to consider when there is a conflict between two figures within the context of sport. This information is essential as coaches may not always be equipped with the understanding of how to manage conflicts with their athletes as they arise. While the information is clearly outlined and thorough, the fact that this written information exists does not mean that this information is indeed taught during the in-class coaching workshops. To help address verbal and mental abuse in sport, information of this nature might need to become part of mandatory in-class discussions. This point will be addressed further later in this thesis.

### **2.6.3 Respect in Sport**

Coaches in Manitoba must complete the online Respect in Sport tutorial. Respect in Sport is an education tool created by Coaching Manitoba in order to ensure that leaders and coaches in the community are equipped with the resources to handle situations of “abuse, neglect, harassment and bullying in sport” (Coaching Manitoba, 2015, para. 1). All coaches in Manitoba are required to complete the online training session in order to coach at any level in Manitoba. The course was created in 2009 and no apparent revisions have been made to the course content. Completing the course requires viewing a short series of online videos followed by a quiz at the end of each section. Once coaches complete the program, they are awarded a certificate and a certificate number to confirm their completion of the course. No research has been conducted to evaluate if the Respect in Sport module is effective or sufficient to educate coaches about ethical issues in sport.

A concern with the Respect in Sport online training is that online training does not confirm that the coach receiving the certificate in fact completed the module. Coaches could have someone else complete the module, for example another coach who has already completed the module. Not only is a coach missing out on an opportunity to engage with others in the classroom about serious issues with the Respect in Sport online module, but coaches are also afforded an unlimited amount of opportunities to complete the online course. This means that coaches could be watching the videos and failing the quizzes repeatedly. These unlimited opportunities undermine the purpose of the Respect in Sport online module as an effective education tool, which intends to equip coaches with the knowledge to handle situations of abuse and harassment.

Requiring that coaches complete the materials online means that coaches miss out on the opportunity to engage in meaningful and relevant discussions with other coaches in the province. The classroom environment is a form of community and it is within communities that individuals learn to distinguish and gain knowledge about who they are as members of that community and the larger global community (Morgan, 2007). This kind of relationship allows coaches to share openly and honestly with others and both receive and give constructive criticism. It creates a sense of belonging and allows people to attain knowledge on different views, as each member is integral to the community. It allows people to think about the world from a different perspective, that of another within in the group (Morgan, 2007). From the perspective of a community approach, an online program might not be the most effective way to communicate information on respect in sport. This possibility will be addressed in the conclusions chapter of this thesis.

#### **2.6.4 National Coaching Institute**

The NCI offers the advanced coaching diploma (ACD), which is typically designated for the top or most qualified coaches provincially, nationally, and even internationally (Coaching Association of Canada, 2014). This diploma is composed of four key components: (1) coaching leadership, (2) coaching effectiveness, (3) performance planning, and (4) training and competition readiness. Each of these themes requires completing modules that are typically three-hour units of in class sessions, workshops, and labs (Coaching Association of Canada, 2014). Coaches in pursuit of the ACD are permitted entry into the program on a case-by-case basis and evaluated based on their level of competency in coaching and developing athletes. This evaluation is an established part of the ACD by the NCCP; however it is left up to the discretion of each National Sport Organization (NSO) to decide how they want to evaluate and test the coach's competency (Telles-Langdon, 2015). Additionally, coaches are assigned a mentor or master level coach to aid in their completion of the requirements. Coaches wishing to complete the diploma are required to contact their respective NSO in order to apply for sport-specific evaluation (Coaching Association of Canada, 2014).

There are many considerations when evaluating and designing coach education for the highest level of coaches in Canada. Among the recommendations for successful and effective coach education programs include an athlete centered approach, story telling, developing the athlete as a contributing member to society outside of sport, emphasis on coaching needs (i.e., coaching efficacy), and autonomy supportive coaching. The LTAD model has attempted to document the clear gradation of athlete development through physiological processes and has been adopted by both the NCCP and NCI coaching programs. Researchers are only beginning to thoroughly evaluate the current coach education programs used to educate coaches (Williams,

2014; Ford et al., 2011). Although sport-governing bodies may have adopted these programs, it may not be the case that these programs are being taught or implemented effectively. This may have a profound impact on the acceptance and perpetuation of abuse in elite sport.

## **2.7 Coaching Policy**

In addition to the important role that education plays in the development of healthy coach practices and behaviours, which will inevitably impact the experience of all athletes involved, it is necessary to consider the role of governance (i.e., policy) in the elite sport context. Rules and regulations are place in order to aid in protection of both athletes and coaches. However, as noted previously, policies in Canada have not fulfilled their role overall (Donnelly, Kerr, Heron, & DiCarlo, 2014). Therefore, on this premise, it is important to explore the current role and nature of policies addressing abuse in sport.

Abuse continues in sport because of a number of contributing factors, the most prominent being what Stirling and Kerr (2009) refer to as a culture of acceptance in elite sport. The studies outlined throughout this review of literature demonstrate awareness of abusive coaching styles and the acceptance of these coaching practices in the context of elite sport. Furthermore, Donnelly, Kerr, Heron, and DiCarlo (2014) point out that there is a lack of distinct policy in sport that protects athletes. While the creation of policies across Canada surged during the 1990s in response to emerging cases of abuse in elite sport, reports of abuse still occur suggesting that current policies may not be functioning optimally, or there may be a lack of awareness of these policies. Although there was an immediate response to the increase in awareness of abuse in Canada throughout the 1990s and into the millennium, the drastic rise in and creation of policies appears only to have heightened this awareness and has not necessarily led to change or

prevention of abuse (Donnelly, Kerr, Heron, & DiCarlo, 2014; Demers, Greaves, Kirby, & Lay, 2013).

As noted earlier, the Canadian Department of Justice's (2015) definition of emotional and psychological abuse has been used in some sport governing bodies' policies on abuse. Currently the Coaching Association of Canada endorses a policy on abuse and harassment. The policy defines abuse and harassment as:

Behaviour including comments, conduct, or gestures, which is insulting, intimidating, humiliating, hurtful, malicious, degrading, or otherwise offensive to an individual or group of individuals or which creates an uncomfortable environment, or which might reasonably be expected to cause embarrassment, insecurity, discomfort, offence, or humiliation to another person or group. (Coaching Association of Canada, 2014, para. 2)

The policy is two pages and outlines the definition, extenuating circumstances of abuse, and procedures for lodging both informal and formal complaints.

An issue with the Coaching Association of Canada's abuse and harassment policy is that it is not specific to any one person, so it may be confusing to people wishing to file a complaint. For example, if parents seek to file a complaint against a coach, it may not be clear to them that this policy applies to them. I did not find any evidence indicating where this policy applies or if it is applicable Canada wide. It is likely the case that each respective province will have adopted its own unique policies on abuse and complaint procedures. Therefore, this policy may not be the only policy in force, which would then require parents or other third party members to locate the appropriate policy. Finally, it appears that this document was last update in 2005. As research on abuse in sport has increased in the last decade (e.g., Stirling & Kerr, 2014), an update may be appropriate.

Changing the current context of elite sport, which often appears to be accepting of verbal and mental abuse, is a difficult process that policies have been created to attempt to address. Despite the creation and advancement of policy actions since the 1990s, it appears that the acceptance of abuse in elite sport remains an ongoing issue (Demers, Greaves, Kirby, & Lay, 2014). This brief overview of policy in sport demonstrates that policies may not always function to curtail abuse. Although the Coaching Association of Canada (2014) has adopted a policy on abuse and harassment in sport, this does not guarantee that all provinces have created their own policies. Policies created by Volleyball Canada, Canadian Interuniversity Sport, Coaching Association of Canada, Volleyball Manitoba, and the Sport Information Resource Centre will be explored in depth and analyzed in Chapter V, which is dedicated to policy analysis.

## **2.8 Summary**

In reviewing the literature on the coach-athlete relationship, mental abuse in elite sport by coaches, coaching education, and coaching policy, it is clear that a number of issues remain unaddressed. Amongst these issues is the lack of consistency in defining verbal and mental abuse, which makes addressing and studying verbally and mentally abusive coaching practices difficult within the context of elite sport.

The crucial role of coach education appears to require more information on verbal and mental abuse in elite sport, clarity on the important role of the coach within the coach-athlete relationship, and the importance of coaches' knowledge of athletes' perceptions. In order to promote a more holistic approach to coaching, the research literature indicates that education modules need to be more effective at holding coaches accountable for their knowledge, which inevitably impacts their coaching behaviours and practices. Coaching policy is necessary in order to protect both athletes and coaches alike from situations where verbal and mental abuse may be

present. It is clear that over the past decade policies have failed largely at addressing verbal and mental abuse in sport and, therefore, may require improvement (Donnelly, Kerr, Heron, & DiCarlo, 2014).

Although coach education documents and policies have been developed in attempts to address the issues of verbal and mental abuse, it is apparent in the literature that verbal and mental abuse continues to be present in elite level sports (Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Stirling & Kerr, 2012; Stirling & Kerr, 2008; Stirling, 2008). Using the methods outlined in the next chapter, this thesis will attempt to address this gap in the literature by gaining insight into how verbally and mentally abusive coaching behaviours are recognized within the context of elite female volleyball in Manitoba, and what can be done to minimize these forms of abuse.

### **Chapter III: Methods and Methodology**

The goal of this thesis is to gain insight into the current views of verbal and mental abuse from the perspective of elite sport coaches, coach education, and policy in Manitoba, and to develop ways to address it within the community of elite women's volleyball in the province of Manitoba. This chapter discusses the research questions, methodology, and methods used to help address these problems. The following sections describe how data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews, auto-ethnography, and policy analysis. Participant details are highlighted and the recruitment strategies utilized in order to gain access to participants are explained. After acknowledging the limitations and delimitations of this study, my plan for analyzing the collected data and crafting recommendations for addressing verbal and mental abuse in elite women's volleyball in Manitoba is explained.

#### **3.1 Research Questions**

The research questions that I seek to answer in completing this Master's thesis are: (1) how are verbally and mentally abusive coaching behaviours recognized within the context of elite female volleyball in Manitoba and distinguished from behaviours that motivate and develop mental toughness in athletes, and (2) what can be done to decrease verbal and mental abuse in women's volleyball in Manitoba.

#### **3.2 Methodology**

To address my research questions I have adopted a qualitative research design, stemming directly from my constructionist epistemological perspective, which views the world as co-created by individuals and their interaction with other people or objects in the world (Crotty, 1998). I believe that because the world comes into existence through individual truths, it is appropriate to adopt a qualitative research design focused on the individual's experience of truth.

In this case the individual truths are those of elite volleyball coaches in Manitoba, which I explore through the use of semi-structured interviews.

My constructionist epistemological perspective is rooted in an interpretivist theoretical perspective. Constructionism views reality as incorporating multiple perspectives, which considers reality as socially and discursively constructed (Crotty, 1998). This perspective lends itself to interpretivism, which views reality as socially constructed. From an interpretivist perspective, a social scientist grapples with the subjectivity of an individual's responses in the construction of meaning (Crotty, 1998). Moreover, this perspective views human beings as complex entities that are changing and unpredictable. The goal of research conducted from a constructivist, interpretivist viewpoint is to understand individuals' experiences as a part of reality. From this perspective I opted to utilize a semi-structured interview method (described below in section 3.2), as doing so allows me to explore the individual lived experiences of the participants (Todres & Holloway, 2004).

The main objective of this research is to gain a richer understanding of verbal and mental abuse within high-performance women's volleyball in Manitoba and to find solutions applicable to this specific coaching population. This research acknowledges that other elite volleyball communities within Canada and other parts of the world will have had and may be having different experiences. While Chapter II demonstrates that verbal and mental abuse in elite sport appears to be a widespread concern, the goal of this project is not to create recommendations that will apply globally. Using a qualitative research design, I seek to gain insight into the perspectives and lived experiences of how coaches of elite female volleyball in Manitoba draw the line between abusive, motivating, and manipulating verbal exchanges within the sport of volleyball. This insight will be triangulated with my auto-ethnographic accounts (i.e., athlete

perspective and coach perspective) and an analysis of written coach policy in order to highlight important consistencies and inconsistencies.

### **3.3 Methods**

This section describes how data was collected through semi-structured interviews with coaches that participated in the study, as well as the adopted recruitment strategy, and ethical considerations. Details on the interview guide (Appendix A) used in the completion of the semi-structured interviews, steps taken to recruit participants (Appendix B), and other considerations with respect to informed consent (Appendix C) are also explained. Finally, I discuss my plan for analyzing the data obtained throughout the course of the research process. This section also includes details on data transcription, storage, and additional member checking considerations.

As part of a qualitative research design, this research made use of three different qualitative research methods. The methods include: (1) auto-ethnographic accounts of verbal and mental abuse in volleyball (Chapter IV), (2) analysis of coaching policies applicable to coaches in Manitoba (Chapter V), and (3) semi-structured interviews with volleyball coaches of elite female volleyball in Manitoba (Chapter VI). In triangulating these three methods in Chapter VII, I analyze the consistencies and inconsistencies between my experiences, elite coaches' perspectives, and coaching policy in Manitoba.

#### **3.3.1 Auto-ethnography**

Auto-ethnography involves a form of ethnographic writing that incorporates into the research the self-observation of the researcher who is viewed as an active part of the social world under study (Anderson & Austin, 2012). Two emerging paradigmatic approaches to auto-ethnography research include evocative auto-ethnography and analytical auto-ethnography (Anderson & Austin, 2012; Denshire, 2014). Evocative auto-ethnography focuses on emotional

communication in order to provoke the reader to adopt an epistemology of emotion, which rejects traditional epistemological underpinnings. On the other hand, analytical auto-ethnography is a self-based study on social roles where the researcher utilizes a social science epistemology. While distinct from one another, both evocative and analytical auto-ethnography emphasize the researcher's use of reflexivity (Anderson & Austin, 2012).

Auto-ethnography may also be viewed as a form of 'storytelling' which, as Douglas and Careless (2008) suggest, is important in coach education. Auto-ethnographic accounts are highly personal texts centred on an individual's life experiences. The researcher must reflect extensively on the intimacies, emotions, events, and other aspects of his/her experiences (Ettore, 2005; Popovic, 2010; Anderson & Austin, 2012; Popovic, 2013; McParland, 2013; Denshire, 2014). Researchers use these personal experiences in conjunction with social theories and ideologies in order to aid in the exploration of the phenomena under investigation. In this case, my own experience is used to bring to the surface important social forces at play, with the goal of enlightening and provoking the emotions of the reader.

In Chapter IV of this thesis I utilize auto-ethnography in order to embrace my position and acknowledge my biases within the context of elite female volleyball in Manitoba, as both a former player and a current coach. This chapter provides concrete examples of the blurring of the lines between motivation, manipulation, and abuse in order to illustrate the difficult decisions coaches need to make. I adopt an evocative auto-ethnographic approach with the goal of highlighting key components of the elite sport experience in conjunction with my own experiences. Furthermore, these accounts serve to highlight how I have experienced certain situations prevalent in the elite sporting context, from both an athlete and coach perspective. This is indicative of the bias I bring to this research in assuming that neither coaches nor athletes have

a clear understanding of what verbal and mental abuse is or how to properly manage instances of verbal and mental abuse in the intense athletic environment. Additionally, I believe that coach education is in need of some serious adjustments and that these adjustments need to be further accounted for in the policy documents adopted by Volleyball Canada, Volleyball Manitoba, and other sport governing bodies that may impact coach behaviour in Manitoba.

### **3.3.2 Policy Analysis**

As Chapter II demonstrates, the lack of consistency in coaches' views of what constitutes verbal and mental abuse makes addressing this issue difficult. The analysis of coach policy in Chapter V specifically focuses on the policies that Volleyball Canada and Volleyball Manitoba endorse, which specifically address abuse in sport. Other policies included in the analysis come from Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS), the Coaching Association of Canada (CAC), and the Sport Information Resource Centre (SIRC). Taken together these secondary sources can be triangulated with the primary or participant generated sources of information and my auto-ethnographic accounts. The overall goal of triangulation in this study is to highlight similarities and differences of information in order to obtain a more complete view or understanding of verbal and mental abuse in volleyball in Manitoba.

### **3.3.3 Interviews**

As a method of inquiry, semi-structured interviews seek to help the researcher understand the issue under investigation through the lived experiences of the individual (Todres & Holloway, 2004; Salada & Adorno, 2002; Giorgi, 1997). This thesis seeks to explore the meaning of coaches' experiences and perceptions of how coaches view verbal and mental abuse within the context of elite female volleyball in Manitoba and what constitutes abusive, motivating, or manipulating coaching practices. Using semi-structured interviews with coaches

who coach elite female volleyball, I was able to gain thick descriptions of what the coaches believe verbal and mental abuse is and how they have been educated on verbal and mental abuse. Throughout the course of the interviews, I gained a lot of insight into the experience of each coach I interviewed. This was achieved by asking questions from the interview guide that were designed to be open ended and non-assumptive. These kinds of questions allowed coaches to share about their experiences freely and with as much detail as they felt necessary (see Appendix A).

The interviews were semi-structured in order to allow for flexibility in the interview process, while providing some guidance in order to encourage authentic responses. Interviews were a suitable method in the case of this research because capturing the lived experiences of elite female volleyball coaches is one of the key objectives. This is based on the knowledge that interviews are well suited for construction-like research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2013), which in the case of this thesis are constructions of verbal and mental abuse in elite sport coaches. Furthermore, interviews are best suited for gaining insight into constructions or perceptions that people are personally invested in (Braun & Clarke, 2013). As an invested researcher, my goal was to conduct interviews in order to gain rich and meaningful results. Additional strengths of the interview method include sampling a smaller population (i.e., elite volleyball coaches in Manitoba), having more control over the data (which generates more useful data), and being better attuned to sensitive issues like abuse (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

### *3.3.3.1 Participant Details*

Eight coaches (five male and three female) participated in a semi-structured, in-depth interview. Seven of the eight participants currently coach women's elite volleyball in Manitoba and met the following inclusion parameters: (1) have level two or higher coach certification as

recognized by their provincial and national sport bodies, and (2) currently coach at the 17U/18U club volleyball or university level, or have at least ten years' experience in coaching elite female volleyball. One coach (participant 8) is not currently coaching in Manitoba, but is originally from Manitoba and completed coaching education in Manitoba. This participant now coaches elite female volleyball in another province in Canada.

The original intent was to interview between seven and ten participants to collect enough people's experiences to analyze in this master's thesis. After recruiting eight participants (using the recruitment methods described in the next section), I felt I had exhausted all potential sources of recruitment and would not find any more participants. I was comfortable with this decision because after reviewing the transcripts of the eight participants several times, I felt that I had reached a point of data saturation. Social science literature explains that data saturation can be a difficult construct to define in qualitative research (Francis et al., 2010; Guest, Brunce, & Johnson, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Data saturation, as defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967), is the point when no new themes are being generated from the data. Having too large of a sample size can pose problems with respect to wasted resources, while not having enough participants may lead to idiosyncratic data that is not transferable and may be less rigorous (Francis et al., 2010). The concept of data saturation is a relatively difficult term to define because there are minimal descriptions on the term and guidelines as to how many interviews are required in order to reach the point of data saturation (Guest, Brunce, & Johnson, 2006). Eight participants appears to be sufficient in achieving data saturation when utilizing certain semi-structured methods of inquiry (Morse, 1994; Creswell, 1998).

Both male and female participants have been included to ascertain any differences based on the gender of the coach and the impact of gender on the adopted coaching style. Of the eight

coaches who participated in this study, three are female and five are male. This is likely indicative of the lower number of females coaching elite female volleyball in Manitoba, and elsewhere across Canada, and highlights the relevance of the discussion of females still being a marginalized and under-represented population in elite sports coaching.

### *3.3.3.2 Recruitment Strategy*

Recruitment of participants took place following the receipt of research ethics approval from the University of Manitoba's Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). I contacted the technical director of Volleyball Manitoba and asked to have my research study poster displayed on Volleyball Manitoba's website (Appendix B). I located other institutions in Manitoba (i.e., universities, colleges, Sport Manitoba) where coaches of female volleyball teams might see a recruitment poster, and then asked in writing for permission to display the recruitment poster in those locations. Finally, I utilized a third recruitment strategy known as snowball sampling (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Noy, 2008). Snowball sampling involves using initially recruited participants' resources in order to recruit additional participants (Noy, 2008). In this case I asked initial participants to pass along my study poster to people in their networks they felt might also be interested in participating. The majority of the participants that participated in the interviews were recruited through the use of snowball sampling.

I began scheduling interviews with participants as soon as I received approval from ENREB. As potential participants contacted me about participating in my study, I sent them an informed consent form (Appendix C) through email to review prior to the interview, at which time they were required to sign a physical copy of the informed consent form in order to participate. The informed consent form states clearly that participants can withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

Interview lengths ranged from one hour and seven minutes to one hour and fifty-five minutes. Participants were asked to select a pseudonym in order to help ensure anonymity and confidentiality (Appendix D). I provided the participant with a copy of the interview guide prior to the interview in order to allow them the opportunity to review the questions they would be asked during the interview. The interview guide helped direct each interview, but was not adhered to strictly in order to allow emerging ideas to be explored (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Galleta, 2012; Wengraf, 2001). After asking introductory questions in order to establish rapport with the interviewee, I proceeded with the interview guide questions found in Appendix A.

Locations of interviews ranged from local coffee shops, to the University of Manitoba campus, and one interview was conducted by phone (participant 8). Interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. Immediately following the interview participants received a thank you card including a \$10.00 gift card as a token of appreciation for participating in the study. One day after the interview, I sent a follow up email to the participant thanking them again for their participation and informing them that a transcribed copy of the interview would be sent to them, as indicated in the informed consent form (Appendix C) within one week. Once interviews were transcribed, I sent another follow up email to the participants with the transcript attached and asked them to return the transcript with any changes they wished to make, within a two-week time period. Interviewees were encouraged to add, delete or reword sections of the interviews; however, none of the participants made changes to their transcripts. Once the transcripts were returned, I reviewed and coded them in order to begin data analysis.

#### *3.3.3.3 Data Analysis*

To analyze the data from the semi-structured interviews with the participants, I began by transcribing the interviews verbatim from the audio recordings. Transcription includes recording

all utterances from both the interviewer and the participant (Braun & Clarke, 2013). As Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest, good transcription includes paying attention to sentence structure, quotation mark errors, omission errors, and phase errors. It is a very meticulous process that requires careful recording, listening, writing, and overall focus on making sure the transcript is as accurate as possible (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The audio recordings, once transcribed, were stored on a password-protected computer and up until the time I began the transcription were kept on a USB flash drive locked in a filing cabinet at the University of Manitoba. A complete transcript of the interview was emailed to each participant in order for him/her to review and validate the content of the interview as stated above.

This process of validation is known as member checking (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each participant was offered the option to add, reword, or delete any information from his/her transcript. Following the member-checking process, coding was employed in order to extrapolate key themes, subthemes, and terms in order to assist in the writing of the results. Coding transcribed data is a task that requires attention to detail, and when done properly reflects the purpose and outcome of the interview (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Coding assisted in gaining insights and knowledge from the view of the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Flick, 2009).

The process of coding designed by Strauss and Corbin (1998) includes three steps: (1) open coding, (2) axial coding, and (3) selective coding (Flick, 2009; Creswell, 1998). Open coding involves “expressing the data and phenomena in the form of concepts” (Flick, 2009, p. 307). Here the data is segmented into short phrases or words in order to assign a concept or code to them. Codes must then be grouped around a phenomenon that is relevant to the research question (i.e., mental abuse) (Flick, 2009). The overall goals of open coding are to breakdown

and understand the text by developing categories and organizing these categories in time, resulting in a list of categories with associated text (Flick, 2009; Creswell, 1998). The progression to axial coding involves identifying the relations between categories. Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest a coding paradigm model that involves clarifying the relations between “a phenomena, its causes and consequences, its context and the strategies of those who are involved” (Flick, 2009, p. 311). The development of linking subcategories to categories is a complex process that involves a series of inductive and deductive thinking, causing the researcher to make comparisons and ask further questions in the comprehension of the data (Flick, 2009; Creswell, 1998). Finally, selective coding takes the data and makes comparisons to all groups of data. This process results in the development of a short, descriptive overview of the central phenomenon being studied (Flick, 2009). The final goal is to generate one central category with a few sub categories. This typically results in a theory or idea that is then checked against all of the data. This process ends once theoretical or data saturation has been reached (Flick, 2009; Creswell, 1998).

The final piece in the research design was triangulating the information from analyzing the auto-ethnographic accounts, and coaching education and coaching policies in Manitoba, with the participant generated data. The process of triangulation requires the analysis of three sources of information or methods on the same phenomena in order to add validity to the collected data (Olsen, 2004). After coding the interviews, I used triangulation to extrapolate the key differences and similarities in the primary and secondary findings. This is important because of the ambiguity that exists amongst researchers, as described in Chapter II, on what constitutes both verbal and mental abuse in sport.

### 3.4 Limitations and Delimitations

This section outlines the limitations that have impacted this research. With respect to general barriers present in conducting this research study, it is clear that the nature of studying controversial topics, such as abuse, may be an issue. Conversations about contentious topics like abuse can be difficult for researchers to address with participants. Engaging in a conversation about abuse in sport means that participants must acknowledge it as an issue, and further as an issue that they think deserves attention. The sensitive topic of verbal and mental abuse may have deterred some elite coaches from participating. Although acknowledging verbal and mental abuse as issues may cause elite coaches to be viewed as ‘soft’ or ‘weak,’ which contradicts the ‘strong,’ ‘intense,’ ‘competitive’ characteristics associated with the leadership of an ‘ideal’ elite coach (Stirling & Kerr, 2007; Tomlinson & Yorganci, 1997), none of the coaches in this study had an issue with discussing the topic.

Another limitation of this study is the nature of the elite female volleyball community in Manitoba. This community is relatively tightknit, meaning that most coaches are well known. The participants I interviewed for this research are well known, key stakeholders within the volleyball community. This in turn may be indicative of a limitation linked to participant generated responses. If participants are aware that their presence is well known and they have previously said certain things to certain people within the community that may be able to identify their responses, they may be likely to respond in a certain way that conceals their identity and is less authentic. However, inauthentic responses were not an issue in this study, as most coaches were open to sharing about verbal and mental abuse and many provided bold statements about the issue of verbal and mental abuse in the community of elite female volleyball in Manitoba. Furthermore, coaches shared openly about their own personal experiences.

I did not view my experience in being coached by some of the potential participants as a limitation. In line with my perspective, it was clear that I have harboured no bad relationships with any of the coaches that were eligible to choose to participate in this study, despite not knowing how the other person views the relationship. Therefore, participants took the time to make it clear they were inclined to speak with me and felt that this was an important research topic.

The previously identified limitations to this study include the topic of abuse, the nature of the elite female volleyball community in Manitoba, and my dual-role within the community as a researcher and active coach. The acknowledgement of potential limitations upfront allows the reader and the researcher to be more informed of the challenges associated with the research.

In addition, the scope of this study was deliberately delimited in specific ways. Delimitations in this study include choosing to study the specific population of male and female elite women's volleyball coaches within Manitoba. This is a very distinct population that covers a tiny fraction of all elite sports coaches. In conjunction with this delimitation is choosing the sport of volleyball. Also in line with both of the previous delimitations is focusing on women's volleyball coaches specifically. There could be differences in coaching styles and tactics based on the gender of the athlete being coached, as indicated in the literature in Chapter II. In addition, focusing on elite sport instead of other levels of sport, and choosing to interview coaches and not athletes, leaves out the opinions of athletes and other sport's coaches. Choosing to study sport within the province of Manitoba is very specific, meaning that conclusions and generalizability will be limited. Finally, although this thesis analyzes and critiques the coach education course material, I did not attend actual workshops on the materials. This poses a barrier because

although the workshop books may address the material it does not guarantee that the material will be covered in the classroom setting.

### **3.5 Chapter Layout**

Chapter IV includes an auto-ethnographic account of verbal and mental abuse in elite volleyball from the perspectives of an athlete and a coach in Manitoba. This chapter seeks to acknowledge my bias in the research and provide the reader with a personal example of verbal and mental abuse experienced from the athlete perspective and struggles that coaches often face. Furthermore, this section helps establish for the reader my experience in the world of female elite volleyball in Manitoba. Acknowledgment of my experience up front will enable the reader to understand my interests in this study. The auto-ethnographic piece addresses issues with respect to concerned engagement, as I have a dual role both as a researcher and a coach in Manitoba.

Chapter V focuses on coaching policy analysis, which provides an additional source of secondary information to be triangulated with my auto-ethnographic reflections from Chapter IV and the interview analysis in Chapter VI. The analysis of coaching policy helps provide a more comprehensive understanding of the coach perspective and highlights supplementary written documents that may impact coach behaviours. Additionally, if coaches are aware or unaware of certain coaching policies, it could impact their responses.

Chapter VI discusses the interview findings. In this chapter I outline the major findings from the transcribed and coded interviews. Results in this section are discussed under the major themes identified during the coding process. Subthemes and key sections of text related to the subthemes identified are extrapolated in order to highlight findings related to the major themes. These findings are then used to provide content for further analysis, which allows for concrete suggestions and conclusions to be made in the final chapter.

Chapter VII highlights the research findings and includes recommendations and conclusions. This chapter uses triangulation in order to highlight key consistencies and inconsistencies between the auto-ethnographic reflections, coaching policies on verbal and mental abuse, and the data generated during the semi-structured interviews. This chapter gives meaning to the research conducted throughout the process of writing this thesis.

### **3.6 Summary**

Exposure to verbal and mental abuse as a part of the sporting experience creates a culture of acceptance in sport (Stirling & Kerr, 2014). This study will triangulate my auto-ethnographical reflections with semi-structured interviews and an analysis of coaching policy within Manitoba in order to gain insight into how coaches distinguish between coaching behaviours marked by motivation, manipulation or mental toughness.

This design is necessary in order to explore the complexities of verbal and mental abuse in elite sport and will aid in exposing the consistencies or inconsistencies between the views of elite coaches, coach education sources, and coaching policies. The findings from these methods are used to create suggestions for a way forward in addressing verbal and mental abuse in the context of elite volleyball in Manitoba.

The methods described in this chapter include: auto-ethnography, policy analysis, and semi-structured interviews. The auto-ethnographic accounts were written in order to provide examples of the blurred lines that exist on verbal and mental abuse in elite female volleyball and to acknowledge my biases as a researcher. Policy analysis was utilized in order to account for written coaching documents that exist outside of coach education, which may impact a coach's behaviour. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to explore the lived experiences of elite coaches of female volleyball in Manitoba.

## **Chapter IV: Auto-ethnographic Reflections**

This chapter seeks to provide examples of verbal and mental abuse in elite sport through my personal experiences as a young athlete and coach. Auto-ethnography, also referred to as a personal narrative, is a form of writing that allows the reader a window into the researcher's experience. Where 'auto' is referring to the self and 'ethnography' to culture, auto-ethnography allows the researcher to tell an important story about themselves in relation to larger cultural experiences (Ellis, 2004). In the case that readers are not informed of the kind of verbal and mental abuse that can occur in elite sport, these reflections serve as a model of how mental and verbal abuse may be experienced from an athlete perspective and a coach perspective.

Reflexivity is central to auto-ethnography, and it is an important research tool that refers to a researcher's process of reflecting on one's experience in order to utilize the knowledge gained from that process to enhance subsequent experiences (Ellis, 2004). The experiences shared in this section are used to highlight how athletes may experience verbal and mental abuse, and the struggle for coaches with the blurred lines of what coach behaviours may be motivating or enhancing mental toughness, and what behaviours are manipulating or abusive. This chapter also serves to acknowledge my dual role in this research as both a researcher and a current coach in Manitoba.

### **4.1 Athlete Perspective**

The story shared here occurred when I was seventeen years old and heading into my final year of high school. At the time I was attending a private school that was coached by a well-known male coach in the world of female elite volleyball in Manitoba. This experience not only affected me in my last year of high school and club volleyball, it changed the course of my career as an elite female volleyball player at the university level.

#### 4.1.1 Verbal and Mental Abuse: A Young Female Athlete's Experience

*“An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind”*

*-Mahatma Gandhi*

The school bell rang shrill over the intercom. Never a pleasant sound, but then again always a welcome one as it marked the end of another day. I made my way through the packed hallways of kids, down the four flights of stairs to the basement where my locker was located. My locker was at the opposite end of the hallway right in the middle of the wall and its bright yellow colour made always me feel as though I was walking into “the light.” Just as I reached the end of the hallway I heard a quiet voice, “Alix. Can I see you in my office for a moment?” I turned around to find one of my teachers, who was the varsity girls volleyball coach, behind me. He was dressed in his usual casual attire. A t-shirt, loose cargo pants – the kind that was meant for the outdoors – and active wear sandals. His face wore its usual expression of emptiness or maybe it was sadness, possibly boredom. I could never tell, but it was impossible to read at the best of times. This meant that I could never tell if he liked me or disliked me. Lately, he was not overly friendly and seemed to only take an interest in me when it came to volleyball. It was the kind of self-fulfilling interest that made me feel as if I was there only to serve a need he had. My mind flashed back to the first time I met him. His face was excited then. He gloated about my height and my potential in the sport of volleyball; all I had to do was fix my ballerinaesque spike approach. That was almost three years ago now and I had since moved on to play for another club. From that point forward I sensed he wanted nothing to do with me except when it came to high school volleyball. “Sure,” I said reluctantly. Surely he had heard the whisperings of my intentions to leave the school, so I assumed that this might be about that. *Maybe it was about club volleyball? Maybe it was about the university coach from B.C. that had contacted him about*

*me?* It could be anything, but as always my mind was racing through the options of what he could possibly want to say to me. I placed my books in my locker and shoved my homework in my bag, my heart rate picking up. I could feel my energy shift. I felt nervous. We had never talked alone at school, *why now?* The lines blurred between excitement and anxiety.

I made my way around the adjacent hallway towards the coach's office. The door was open; I walked in. He had positioned a chair in the middle of the room. As I came into his office he walked towards me saying, "This won't take a lot of time," before closing the door behind me. *I'm trapped.* "I just need to get a few things off my mind. You can sit down," he said. *I'm not prepared for this.* Like an obedient child, I do as I'm told and sit down "Ok," I respond. He walks around to his desk; I'm surprised he can even find his desk in all the clutter, and pulls his chair out, right up to where I'm sitting. *He knows I'm leaving.* I can feel my heart pounding, the butterflies of excitement turning into bats of anxiety. I'm not prepared for this.

"So I hear you have been checking out other high schools," he says. *It was only a matter of time before he found out.* Going to a private school meant there were limited spaces for students, so at the end of the year we always had to indicate if we were coming back or not. What was more likely was that his intel came from someone in the small world of female volleyball in Manitoba, which mimicked the tight-knit community of Winnipeg. Only Winnipeggers can travel several thousands of miles away from their home and seemingly make a connection with someone to Winnipeg. The world of female volleyball felt the same way only with more of a George Orwell 1984 effect, where the higher ups constituted the Party and everyone else felt like a Winston Smith carefully watching their every move. "Ya," I say, "I have not always felt at home here." The truth is I had not. I felt smothered at the school. I did not like everyone knowing my business. I did not like how cliquy the kids at the school were. I was

convinced most teachers hated my constant stream of questions or what's more likely my interest in my own conversations during class. I wanted the chance to play for a quad. A school and make it to the final four. I wanted to play for the high school that my older cousin, who I adored, had played for. I wanted to go to school with my good friend, who was also planning on switching schools as well. I wanted a change. It had nothing to do with him. *Did he know that?*

“Well let me ask you another question,” he continued. *I'm not prepared for this.* I felt like an ant underneath a magnifying glass. Every question he would ask would yield an answer he would use to increase the intensity of the burning sunlight. It felt like his agenda was to leave me raw and open on the concrete, exposed for the next pedestrian to finish me off. I didn't get it. It was like having your favourite teacher hold the magnifying glass, only he was a coach that I had looked up to and wanted to play for since I was 13. I had been an asset to the school's team, but he never made me feel as though I was integral to the team. *Why was he pressing this issue?* “What is it you want from volleyball? Where are you headed with this?” It was a good question. I flashed back through my head the years I had put into this sport and all that I had achieved. I remember making it a goal to play for him and I had achieved that. I remember wanting to win a national medal and I had achieved that. Now I wanted to play university volleyball. “Well I think I would like to play university volleyball, provided I can earn it,” I finally responded. I was always aware that I was not a superstar athlete. I never jumped super high. I was not lightning fast. I struggled with some of the technique. But I did work hard.

He pulled out pictures of our previous school season, and flipped through them slowly making sure I could see each one. The pictures brought forth memories from one tournament in particular where our team had over-achieved for a triple A school. It was a real underdog moment when our team had defeated the current number one quad. A school team in the

province. It was quite the accomplishment and he was well aware of that. At the time I was not thinking about the fact that he could have shown me any other sequence of pictures from our year. We had many other great moments including our division finals. Reflecting on it now it was obvious that the magnifying glass of questions was only part of the plan. He used imagery as an attempt to manipulate the burn like adding salt to the open wound. He stopped at a picture of the team hugging in the huddle all wearing big smiles. You could see the excited expressions on our faces and for a moment I remember what that moment felt like. How hard we battled. How we stuck together as a team. How good it felt to win. "I want more of this," he said, pushing the picture in my direction, a final shake of the salt shaker. *Did he mean a great team? Did he mean winning?* I was not sure. Confused by the mix emotions I felt, I said the first thing that came to mind, "This was a great tournament." *What else could I say? Was he saying that he wanted more of me? Was he indicating that I was an integral part of that team? Or did he just want more moments of success for himself? Was this meeting about me or him?* The hamster wheel kept turning obliterating any self-perception of what was actually happening.

He leaned back in his chair and looked at me over his glasses again. "Well obviously not that much because you are leaving us," he responded with contempt. I did not get it. Why did he care about me now? This was hardly the reaction I expected from a man that had all together ignored me on a regular basis. Then again he was thinking about the next school season, which seemed to be the only time he cared to speak to me. Yet still the questions kept feeding my answer-hungry brain: *why was he pushing this? Why was he cornering me like this? What was he hoping achieve?* He crossed his legs and asked, "What does Holly think about this?" He was referring to my basketball coach. She had put a lot of time and energy into coaching me. She was very positive about my game and I was appreciative of that. I loved playing basketball for her.

She knew exactly how to handle my intensity in a way that did not make me feel as though the fire burning inside was a bad thing, which was a rare occurrence up until this point. “Well I don’t know, but I think she will be alright with my decision,” I answered. He looked unimpressed as if to suggest she felt otherwise. The feeling of discomfort coursed through my body in a whole new way. Up until this point the conversation had focused on what I thought it would, volleyball.

*What did basketball have to do with this? What did Holly have to do with this?* He continued, “I think you need to think long and hard about this. Especially about leaving a basketball coach like Holly. After all you don’t really have a volleyball player’s body type. You should be focusing more on basketball anyways.” I nodded. *Wait, what did he just say? I don’t have a volleyball player’s body type?*

I felt heavy. My eyes welled with tears as I left his office. The all too familiar feeling of “you’re not good enough” coursing through my body, crushing any confidence I had. What just happened?

#### **4.1.2 Afterthought**

Although I did not understand it at the time, what was happening was a form of both verbal and mental abuse with what felt like the goal of second guessing my decision of where to attend my last year of high school. In this case, when it became clear that I was not answering the coach’s questions in a way that he wanted, he took it upon himself to make comments that were degrading and shaming. There is no doubt in my mind that this scenario was at least in part pre-meditated. He began the meeting discussing volleyball, but when it became apparent that the meeting was not going as planned, he switched his tactics and commented on something unrelated to the skills involved in the sport of volleyball. My body became the focus of the discussion, something extremely personal and relatively out of my control. Standing tall at just

over six feet and weighing roughly one hundred and sixty pounds, I was a solid kid; one might even go as far to say the exact body type I needed to be for my sport.

In the end, I left the high school this coach taught at with even more conviction than before our meeting. As a result the coach made it his mission to ensure that I would not attend the university I was hoping to in British Columbia, the one that had been speaking to him about me the previous year. I was afforded the opportunity to visit the university on a recruiting trip, which at the time went very well. It was not until the end of the trip that the head coach informed me of my high school coach's phone call telling him to not take me on as a middle blocker for the upcoming season. It was odd to the head coach as he reported a change of heart on behalf of the coach compared to previous reports. This came as no surprise to me, but it was nonetheless shocking to hear and inflicted a devastating blow that would take years to heal. In the end, this phone call inevitably swayed the decision of the head coach ending my dreams of playing out West.

#### **4.2 Coach Perspective**

In the auto-ethnographic account below, I describe my experience as a young female coach grappling with the struggles of leading a team. In doing so I utilize the lens of Abraham Maslow's four stages of learning: (1) unconscious incompetence, (2) conscious incompetence, (3) conscious competence and (4) unconscious competence (Gergen, 2010). These stages allow me to highlight my experience as a young coach who was and still is learning how to lead a team of young female athletes. The unconscious incompetence phase describes my not knowing what I needed to do. Following this, the conscious incompetence phase was where I knew what I needed to do, but lacked the ability to do what I needed to achieve my coaching goals. Finally, I

shift into the conscious competence phase, or the light bulb phase, where I finally realized what I needed to do and how to do it.

I leave this reflection with myself in the unconscious competence phase, as I'm still defining myself as a young female coach. While I believe I have acquired some coaching skills that are second nature to my style of coaching, I still maintain the outlook that I'm continually learning from the context of elite sport and the athletes that I have the privilege of coaching.

#### **4.2.1 A Lesson Learned: A Young Female Coach Finding Her Way**

*“The capacity to learn is a gift; The ability to learn is a skill; The willingness to learn is a choice ”*

*-Brain Herbert*

##### *Unconscious Incompetence*

I could feel the tight knot of excitement and nerves of another club season beginning to form in my stomach as I prepared for my first club tryout. *Who would come to the tryout? What new kids was I going to get the opportunity to work with? Would all the girls from the previous year make the team? What would this year hold?* As a young female coach in the community of elite female volleyball in Manitoba, I was looking forward to learning more in my third season of coaching club volleyball. My inexperience in coaching club volleyball meant that I was still getting to know the system. Part of that system included a rule that club tryouts were not to be held until after a blackout period, which was a chunk of time typically spanning a couple of months. This black out period was created to allow athletes distance from coaches who had approached them about playing for their affiliated club team. It was meant to alleviate any pressure that athletes felt to play for certain coaches.

This new black out period confirmed for me just how out of control the female club volleyball scene in Manitoba had become. When I played, kids were not being made to sign formal contracts. Sure, club coaches expressed interest in coaching certain athletes during the school season, but it was never my perception that coaches were chasing after kids in desperation. Entire club teams were not formed by the end of the summer. Young women were still free to make their decisions based on what they wanted rather than on what another person wanted. Coaches in Manitoba had begun to recruit players as young as fourteen to play for their club teams. I could not believe what the world of female club volleyball in Manitoba had come to be. Where club volleyball used to be a fun program for athletes to participate in outside of school volleyball, it seemed to have become the soul focus of some coaches' lives. The more upsetting piece is that I'm convinced this had nothing to do with the athletes and everything to do with club coaches' egos (Gearity & Murray, 2011; Lafrenière et al., 2011). Determined to have the best team with the best athletes, coaches have begun to chase after young kids in hopes of building the most competitive team in order to fulfill, what I view as, their own unresolved needs.

This confirmed for me how fragile the characters in the world of elite female volleyball are. *Is elite sport not supposed to build and reveal character? Are we not supposed to be instilling confidence in the young women we coach and hope they carry that into their everyday lives?* Maybe that's just a personal viewpoint, but I could not shrug the feeling that the not too distant future of female volleyball in Manitoba was spiraling out of control, and if I was not careful the gravitational force might suck me in.

*Conscious Incompetence*

With the team selected, I was excited to see that some of the girls I had coached now for three years had made it this far. Three years had gone by so fast. The returning players were coming off a tough previous club season that was filled with ups and downs, but, no doubt, exponential growth for most. I felt encouraged by this growth and was hopeful that most would continue to climb the ladder of talent. I also felt that if this team was going to succeed I was going to have to push them harder. With so many 16U girls' club teams in Manitoba, competition was fierce, and with all the recruiting and contract signing that had gone on 'behind the scenes,' there were going to be some really talented teams.

I was determined to make this year a more competitive, tough year. Surely, my being tough on the girls as a coach would help us to achieve more (Stirling & Kerr, 2007; Tomlinson & Yorganci, 1997). I felt that they were all there to prove that they did not need to play for the best club team on paper in order to be a winning team, and, as the coach, I needed to help them achieve that goal. I wanted these girls to see how successful they could be, and I wanted them to believe in themselves the way I did. They were all winners in my heart already, but I thought they needed to work harder. It was, and always will be, my belief that if you work hard, in the right ways, success will follow as a natural by-product. More importantly, by working hard in the gym these young women would learn the value of hard work in life. In retrospect I wonder if this team knew that's how I felt.

In order for us to achieve outward success I was going to have to set the tone of success right from the beginning of the season, which meant practice had to become more competitive, drills needed to be made tougher, and I had to enforce more discipline. By raising the level of competition I hoped the girls would learn to compete more aggressively against their opponents.

If we could compete against one another in practice, then we could learn from one another. If we could push one another in the right way, then we could accomplish more together as a group. Drills needed to be tougher by setting goals in practice and meeting those goals before we moved on to other drills. If we could not get through a basic drill as a team, then why would we move on to another drill where more skill was required? We needed to be good at the fundamentals. We needed to have a solid foundation on which to grow as a team. Discipline needed to be enforced in order for me to be taken seriously as a coach (Stirling & Kerr, 2007; Tomlinson & Yorganci, 1997). The girls needed to know that I was going to challenge them to be the very best they could be always.

It was immediately evident to me who had a strong school season and who did not. In volleyball, when I played, the school season went from September to late November and the club season from January until May. Another change that had happened was now some school teams were formed before the summer and practices started before the beginning of fall and the new school year. Most club teams were also selected during the summer and practices began almost the moment school season ended, if not during the school season. It was clear that some of the girls had improved and others had tapered off or even declined in skill level. There was a lot of work to be done and it was time to get at it. This confirmed for me that more competition, better drills, and discipline were definitely the tools I needed in my belt as we went to work on building our upcoming season.

With our first tournament a couple weeks away, I felt that the team needed to be 'more.' We needed to be prepared. More than prepared! I wanted our team be taken seriously. I wanted the girls to believe in our team. I wanted them to see how great of a year we were going to have. At that moment in time my young coach brain told me that meant we had to win. The girls on the

team had to see how we had improved from last year and the only way we were going to do that was by winning more. In my head this also fit with their goal of wanting other teams to take us seriously. We needed to set higher expectations for the team so that we knew what we could achieve, and that in achieving those high standards the team could be pushed to be 'more' every day. At this point I felt like I needed to recalculate my approach. I could be tougher. They needed their leader to push them. That had to be the answer.

As the initial weeks of practice came to an end, I felt drained and frustrated. Where we had taken strides in some areas we had taken steps back in others. We still struggled with serve receive and basic court movement. If we could not do those two things, then forget winning a tournament, we would not win a set! If we could not pass well we could not set up an offensive play. Without an offensive play teams would pick us apart. Despite feeling low on energy my brain was burning the midnight oil with questions: *why weren't they getting it? What had changed? How can I make them be more? Why aren't we progressing at a faster rate? Were we taking steps back?* As a young coach my head constantly filled with questions about the team. I often lost sleep over the issues of the team and what was and was not happening (Lafrenière et al., 2011). However, I did not take enough time to sit with the questions and reflect on how I felt when I was their age and just learning. What I did know was that when I was 16 I was coached by a very intense coach who was way harder on us than I had ever been on these girls. I did not want to act like that with these girls. I did not want to believe that I needed to behave in that way in order to motivate the girls to play better volleyball, but then again that coach got us to compete (Stirling & Kerr, 2007; Tomlinson & Yorganci, 1997). Like so many athletes before these girls, club volleyball was the centre of their world. How could it not be when we practiced three times a week, weight trained once a week, and played in tournaments on the weekends?

The amount of time dedicated to volleyball alone meant that it was the centre of their attention, never mind the stereotypes of ‘elite’ and ‘top athlete’ that came with being on a club team. Whether I agreed with it or not right now, for these girls, nothing was more important than volleyball and I felt a tremendous amount of responsibility and pressure to make sure they got the experience they wanted.

The week leading up to our first tournament was even more frustrating. The girls were not talking on the court. They struggled to get in defensive position. We did things well at times, but there was no consistency to our game. Up and down we rode the loops of the giant emotional roller coaster of female volleyball. I wanted more from them. I had been aggravated for the past three weeks. I called them into the huddle “We need to be more. Everyone has something they can be better at. We need to start doing that. I want you all to go home and write out what you are going to do this week to prepare us for our tournament,” I encouraged. As most young girls do when instructed, they looked at their leader and nodded without making a peep. At the end of practice I pulled the captain aside something I often did when I needed additional athlete input and asked, “Am I being too hard on the girls?” Her answer was not helpful; she said that she did not know. She was an exceptionally hard working young woman that had maturity beyond her years. Her answer was enough for me to know that the team was likely equally as frustrated as I was.

### *Unconscious Competence*

I got into my office the next morning and began the usual trudge through documents for that week’s graduate student research assignment. My brain was on overdrive filling with questions that led to more and more questions, pushing me deeper into the abyss of frustration. *Why was the team struggling? Did they think I was being hard on them? Why did they think I*

*was being hard on them? Could they not tell I was pushing them because I wanted them to be better? What about me? What was I doing to help our team achieve? What were my goals for the tournament this weekend? Was it even about being tougher on them? What am I missing?* As the answer came into focus the questions slowly disappeared. It was me! I was doing what I thought I needed to do instead of being and doing what the team needed. I was acting based on how I had been coached, something I vowed never to do. My past experience had no doubt unintentionally become my automatic coach response (Erickson, Côté, & Fraser-Thomas, 2007). I was focusing on the wrong thing. I was so focused on what I thought the team needed, but had not once asked them what they needed! I had committed a cardinal sin in my book. I had undermined these athletes' autonomy. A wave of panic settled over me. I had to make this right. I could not believe I acted this way. I could not take back the weeks of practice, but I could address my behaviour moving forward for the rest of the season. I could be an example of what not to be. I could help them process this change. My graduate school research could wait; I shifted gears as I now knew what I need to do to make this right.

That night the team arrived at practice fifteen minutes earlier than usual. I'm sure at the time the girls thought we would be doing our usual goal setting for the upcoming tournament, but much to their surprise I had a different plan in mind. We gathered in the hallway and I began my speech with an apology. Everyone looked confused. It was as if they had seen a ghost and were looking around the around the room to confirm that the others had seen it too. I could not blame them. Not once in my athletic career had a coach apologized to me. I felt my internal temperature rise. *Am I completely undermining myself here? Are they ever going to listen to me again? Will they take me seriously?* I continued.

“I have not been myself these past few weeks. I was so consumed with thinking about what I thought this team wanted to be and not once did I ask you all what you wanted form this year,” I explained. Confusion changed to confirmation. I could see on some of the girls’ faces their agreement with my previous statement. “Again, I want to apologize. I let you all down these first few weeks. I know I can be more for the team and from here on out I promise to do that, but I’m going to need your help. I’m going to need you to communicate with me when you feel things are not going right. You all know you can say whatever you want to me, right?” I was nervous as I asked that question. *Had I made it clear to all of them that they could communicate with me whenever and whatever they needed?* It made me sad to think that the first few weeks of this season may not have confirmed that openness I sought to offer. Surprisingly, all of their heads nodded. I felt a twinge of relief and asked, “Do you think you can all accept my apology?” Much to my relief they all nodded. “Can we move on from this and start being the team we all know we can be, including me being the coach I know I can be?” “Ya!” yelled out one of the more vocal girls on the team. It was clear she agreed with me. The girls started to giggle. I thanked the young girl for that moment in my head; a laugh was exactly what we all needed.

We went on to practice that week in a much more focused, but relaxed, way. I could tell the tension was released. Everyone had been frustrated and my address at the start of the week had allowed for all of us to get the relief we were looking for. That weekend we went on to win our very first tournament. After the tournament I let the girls know how proud of them I felt. As I left the gym I kept repeating the words ‘thank you’ in my head. *Thank you that I was able to address the team the way I needed to that night before practice. Thank you that they had put their trust in me again as a coach. Thank you that my willingness to address my poor behaviour in front of my team had been rewarded with a positive outcome.* At the time it did not occur to

me, but I often wonder how many coaches are rewarded for doing what they know is right versus what they are told is right?

### *Conscious Competence*

Thinking back and reflecting on the start of that club season, it is abundantly clear to me that I was operating in a way I thought I needed to instead of allowing the group of young women I had to help guide that process. I thought I knew what was best and in doing that I acted like the less experienced. I felt as though I was operating from a blueprint that I had buried deep in my brain somewhere. It was telling me these girls needed to win in order to see their improvement, despite knowing deep down that this is not the case. Wins and losses do not matter. Were we winning at life? At that moment in time no one was.

As a coach it can be downright difficult to stop, take a second, and evaluate yourself. Your world is constantly spinning with practice plans, athletes' other commitments, the weekend tournament coming up, that girl on your team who just broke up with her boyfriend, and your own personal life outside of sport. This experience taught me as a young coach that I am never too busy to take a few moments to reflect after encounters with the athletes I coach. Inadvertently in the case of this reflection, my brain brought me around to this conclusion once emotion was at its peak. After this initial meeting I used reflections to take stock of myself and my behaviour and used these reflections as discussion points with the assistant coach and captain to ensure we were all on the same page. Not only does this drastically impact the direction of the team, but it also helps to keep a coach level headed in a world where people often become big headed. In essence I had let the out-of-control spiral that female club volleyball has become suck me in. I have since found myself trying to work with these forces in new and positive ways in hopes of creating change in a world where most coaches are judged on performance outcomes.

Moving forward from this experience, I feel much more at peace with my coaching role, style, and philosophies. As a young female coach this can be difficult to determine in a world where you are constantly being judged and being bombarded with information on the ‘right thing’ to do. Staying true to myself has not only allowed me to be the coach I can be, but to understand the athletes around me better. The daily grind of life can eat away at the mind of any person, but in the stillness of quiet moments I have to myself comes the confidence to embrace and love that grind.

### **4.3 Auto-ethnography Conclusions**

The athlete experience shared here had a major impact on me as a young female athlete. This kind of occurrence is an example of some the control that coaches may exert over young players. In this case never would I have thought that a coach would go to the extent that the coach from this experience did to ensure I did not attend the university that I had been hoping to at the time. While it is my strong belief that everything worked out exactly the way it needed to in the end, this reflection serves as an example for what young elite female athletes can face. Comments about physical appearance and remarks about athleticism can be coaching tactics used to demean, shame, or scare young female athletes. These comments are not that uncommon in the world of elite sport. Although this is my personal reflection, I have had several conversations with other former and current elite female volleyball players that have had similar experiences and in some cases worse than mine. In many regards I’m fortunate that the comments were not much worse and that I was not placed in a situation of sexual or physical abuse. Overall, the mental and emotional scars from this experience were a part of maladaptive behaviours that I adopted in response to my physical appearance and my story is one of many that have remained untold.

The coach experience shared here was an experience where the lines between motivating the athletes and pushing them in a way that was unnecessary and possibly too demanding were blurry. Although the coach mentality and the coaching practices I had adopted during this time were far from abusive, this scenario represents the difficulty that can occur when trying to motivate athletes. It can often be the case that coaches think what they are doing is motivating when in fact it can be debilitating. It was clear to me that the intensity with which I was coaching these athletes was too much for this given group of athletes, despite knowing that the high expectations I had for the group were coming from a place of respect for the athletes. I did not receive any formal or informal complaints from any of the athletes at this time or since this time, but my own ability to attune to my emotional state clued me into the reality that how I was coaching was not working for the particular group of athletes on this team. Nonetheless, this experience highlights how easy it can be for a coach to blur the lines between motivation, manipulation, and mental toughness. The learning process involved in knowing how to distinguish between these lines is likely a continual process throughout a coaches' career, where athletes are a constant source of information.

## **Chapter V: Coaching Policy Analysis**

This chapter begins with a description of the coaching policy materials made available to coaches of female volleyball in Manitoba. After reviewing policy resources available to coaches in Manitoba, I assess the extent to which these resources provide knowledge, guidance, and/or recommendations that might help coaches determine what constitutes verbal and mental abuse and how to handle situations of abuse if they arise. To do so, sources from coaching policies implemented and/or provided by the following organizations are summarized: (1) Volleyball Canada, (2) Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS), (3) Volleyball Manitoba, (4) the Coaching Association of Canada (CAC) and (5) the Sport Information Resource Centre (SIRC). From these descriptions, I establish the extent that policies on verbal and mental abuse in sport are available to coaches of elite female volleyball in Manitoba. The findings from this chapter will be triangulated with my reflections on understanding verbal and mental abuse in sport (Chapter IV), and my analysis of information shared by coaches who participated in a semi-structured interview (Chapter VI) in order to draw conclusions about verbal and mental abuse in women's volleyball in Manitoba (Chapter VII).

This chapter examines the current policies on verbal and mental abuse in Manitoba to compile and analyze what policies coaches in Manitoba are required to adhere to as well as what guidance these policies provide regarding the appropriate course of action coaches and athletes should take in the case that a verbal or mental abuse complaint is made. All of the policies were located using an Internet search of the respective sport governing bodies' websites. Each policy was implemented between 2003 and 2015.

## 5.1 Volleyball Canada

Volleyball Canada's website includes the policy *Workplace Violence and Harassment Policy* (2011a). The policy is specific to the workplace, as stated in the title, it is the only policy available from Volleyball Canada that includes the term 'harassment' in its title, which is a term that may be used interchangeably with abuse in the context of sport, although this is not made clear. This policy was endorsed by the Board of Directors at Volleyball Canada and seeks to address any potential incidents of violence or harassment in the workplace. It was approved on November 8, 2011, and has not been revised since. The policy is directed towards all employees of Volleyball Canada or anyone else accessing Volleyball Canada's premises for services (Volleyball Canada, 2011a, p. 1).

At first glance the policy is well organized and easy to read. However, a close examination reveals some issues with clarity, consistency, and overall readability. Issues with clarity include: (1) confusion about what the term "workplace" means, (2) applicability to coaches and athletes, (3) description of various positions or roles within the organization, and (4) inaccessible reference materials.

This policy states that the 'workplace' context includes, "[a]ny place where business or work-related activities are conducted. In [sic] includes but is not limited to, Volleyball Canada Offices, work-related social functions, work assignments outside Volleyball Canada Offices, work related travel, and work-related conferences or training sessions" (Volleyball Canada, 2011a, p. 1). Nowhere in this list is the context of practice or game play mentioned. Although the policy states clearly that it is specific to any and all contexts where work-related activities occur, the omission of practice and game contexts make the workplace setting unclear; thus the policy's applicability to both coaches and athletes is unclear. For example, a coach who is hired by

Volleyball Canada may have more clarity on his/her role as an employee, but the role of the athlete is less clear. Technically, Volleyball Canada pays national team athletes to represent Canada and, therefore, strictly based on that criterion, the athletes may view themselves as employees. The lack of clarity in defining the role of both the coach and the athlete, particularly at lower levels of volleyball, combined with the omission of both parties from the list of persons engaging in harassment located on page 2 under sub point 10 (Volleyball Canada, 2011a), can create uncertainty for both coaches and athletes when reading this policy.

Throughout the policy Volleyball Canada refers the reader to several different people for assistance within the organization, including supervisors, harassment officers, health and safety representatives and the board. The Volleyball Canada website lists the names of the people who are on the Board of Directors, the provincial and territorial presidents, the executive directors or Provincial and Territorial Association representatives, the domestic development committee (DDC), the national championships committee (NCC), the national championships sub-committee (VNCC), the beach national championships sub-committee (BNCC), the sitting-volleyball committee, the high performance management committee, the high performance beach sub-committee, the high performance men's indoor sub-committee, the high performance women's indoor sub-committee, the national team athlete representatives, the national referee committee, the alumni and awards committee, the national registration system management, the standing committee chairs, the Volleyball Canada representatives, the NORCEA representatives and the FIVB representatives. However, this list does not include the names of the harassment officers or health and safety representatives referred to in its harassment policy, making it difficult for an athlete reading the policy to know who, specifically, to contact.

The exclusion of the names of appointed harassment officers and health and safety representatives makes applying the policy difficult. Several times throughout the policy people in these positions are referred to as the main source of support and information for potentially abused or harassed employees. Furthermore, these people are appointed the task of properly addressing and resolving any incidents of harassment. It may be the case that these individuals are appointed and made known to the employers and employees directly, but the lack of clarity about who fills these roles, and whom to contact with questions, makes it difficult for all coaches and athletes to make use of the policy. This may cause confusion for individuals seeking the counsel and advice of such an officer or representative. While the policy mentions that the nature of harassment cases is to be kept confidential (p. 6), keeping the names of primary sources of support in the case of harassment or abuse from potential complainants seems incongruous and counterproductive.

Another issue with clarity is that several times throughout the policy Volleyball Canada references external sources, policies, and systems of governance. These include the *Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act*, the Provincial or Territorial Human Rights Commissions, the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, and the *Volleyball Canada Discipline and Complaints Policy*. The *Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act* is a policy issued by the Ministry of Ontario that states that all people are entitled to a “safe and healthy workplace” (Ontario Ministry of Labour, 2014, para. 1). This policy is available on the Ontario Ministry of Labour’s website where a number of resource links are provided including video descriptions. Despite the reference in Volleyball Canada’s workplace violence and harassment policy to the *Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act*, there is no thorough explanation provided as to which parts of the Act are to be applied to Volleyball Canada employees. Moreover, there is no direct link

provided on Volleyball Canada's website to the Act. These omissions contribute to the confusion surrounding the purpose of the Act within the policy.

The *Ontario Human Rights Code* (2015) is referenced in the Volleyball Canada policy on *Workplace Violence and Harassment* (2011a, p. 2). Specifically, it is referred to when describing *Authority Reference*. Sections 5.(1), 5.(2), 7.(2), 7.(3), 8, and 9 are cited directly in the *Workplace Violence and Harassment Policy*, which states, “[t]his policy will comply with the relevant article of the *Ontario Human Rights Code* as they are updated” (Volleyball Canada, 2011a, p. 3). While the clauses outlined are clear, the note below may be confusing to some readers who may need to locate the *Ontario Human Rights Code* in order to ensure the clauses are up to date. Without a direct link to the *Ontario Human Rights Code* the reader must locate the website and sift through the contents in order to locate the appropriate information.

Provincial and Territorial Human Rights Commissions are specific to each province and territory. Since this thesis is focused on volleyball in Manitoba, information from the Manitoba Human Rights Commission is most relevant. Upon visiting the Manitoba Human Rights Commission's website, users are able to access information on their rights within Manitoba, including a clear definition of harassment, information on the complaint processes, other important policies (i.e., *The Code*), and a multitude of easy to understand information specific to the needs of people within Manitoba. Because Human Rights Commissions are specific to provinces, and Volleyball Canada is a national governing body whose application is broad, the applicability and jurisdiction of the *Manitoba Human Rights Code* (2010) could be confusing for readers. Having embedded links to the different provinces and territories' human rights commission acts may aid readers in accessing what their provincial or territorial human rights include, which may enhance the clarity of this section of the policy.

In addition to references to the provincial/territorial human rights codes, the *Volleyball Canada Workplace Violence and Harassment Policy* (2011a) also mentions a policy known as the *Volleyball Canada Complaints and Discipline Policy* (2011b). The *Discipline and Complaints Policy* (2011b) is located on the Volleyball Canada website and outlines the proper procedure to follow in the case of discipline or complaints made on behalf of Volleyball Canada employees. This policy was approved by the Volleyball Canada Board of Directors in 2011 and remains in force in 2015.

Unlike the *Workplace Violence and Harassment Policy* (2011a), the *Discipline and Complaints Policy* (2011b) references both athletes and coaches, and mentions the context of games and practices. Within the *Discipline and Complaints Policy* (2011b) verbal and/or mental abuse is not included on the policy's list of minor or major infractions. Without including these examples people may assume that this kind of treatment is appropriate or not recognized as a legitimate concern. The *Discipline and Complaints Policy* (2011b) includes a section labeled *Case Manager*, which describes the role of an individual appointed by Volleyball Canada to manage the complaint procedure once a formal complaint has been made. The omission of clear guidelines as to what verbal and mental abuse is may confuse readers about whether or not a case manager is needed. The policy mentions verbal interactions under "Penalty Guidelines" (Volleyball Canada, 2011b, p. 7), but in the context of poor attitudes, "swearing" and "obscene language" (Volleyball Canada, 2011b, p. 7). The policy does not explicitly address verbal interactions between the coach and athlete that may be deemed to be verbally or mentally abusive.

Secondly, while the role of the case manager is outlined thoroughly and highlighted as important to any formal complaint process, there is little clarity regarding the people fulfilling

this role or how to contact them. Rather, the policy mentions that case managers are appointed by Volleyball Canada with no further clarification on the processes by which they are appointed. This may be vital information as the policy states clearly that the case manager need not be an employee of Volleyball Canada. If Volleyball Canada chooses to appoint a case manager outside of the organization of Volleyball Canada, it should be made clear why and how this exterior party is to be appointed.

The *Discipline and Complaints Policy* (2011b) outlines the procedures for carrying out minor or major infraction hearings, but the information provided appears to be inconsistent. The policy states that each individual hearing is subject to change based on what the case manager views as acceptable. This may be confusing as different people might manage cases differently depending on their experience. Therefore, if a case manager is external to Volleyball Canada his/her approach could have a drastic impact on the course of action taken. These issues may leave readers more confused than informed of their rights in an altercation considered to be a minor or major infraction. Overall, it is clear that there may be more confusion than necessary for coaches and athletes reading *Volleyball Canada's Workplace Violence and Harassment Policy* (2011a). To summarize, the policy lacks clarity with respect to the context of the workplace, the application of the policy to coaches and athletes, the roles of informants within Volleyball Canada, and how to access supporting documents. Issues with clarity, application, clearly defined roles and accessibility are carried forward and present in the *Volleyball Canada Discipline and Complaints Policy* (2011b).

Taken together both the issues of clarity and consistency have a major impact on the readability of this policy. The omission of the coach and athlete roles from the *Workplace Violence and Harassment Policy* (2011a) makes it tough for readers to know to whom this policy

applies. Additionally, the third party policy sources and lack of direct access to these policies may confuse readers and add additional work for them. Without clear and consistent policies it is tough for coaches to understand what they need to be aware of first and foremost when dealing with athletes. The policy that may address the coach more directly is the *Volleyball Canada Code of Conduct and Ethics* (2011c).

The Volleyball Canada Board of Directors approved the *Volleyball Canada Code of Conduct and Ethics* (2011c) in November of 2011 and have not revised it since. The policy makes it clear right from the start that it applies to both coaches and athletes and that it is to be considered in the contexts of practices, training camps, tournaments and competitions. Under *Responsibility* this policy lists: “[f]ocusing comments or criticism appropriately and avoiding public criticism of athletes, coaches, officials, organizers, volunteers, employees and members” (Volleyball Canada, 2011c, p. 1). The list covers a range of verbal behaviours that may be considered verbal abuse. The next page reveals a section discussing refraining from behaviour that may be considered harassment, including behaviours such as: “verbal abuse, threats, outburst, unwelcome remarks, jokes, comments, innuendos, taunts and practical jokes, potentially causing embarrassment, endangering someone’s safety, or having a negative influence on an individual’s performance“ (Volleyball Canada, 2011c, p. 2).

In addition to these behaviours the policy has a separate section for coaches. Under the subheading *Coaches*, the policy addresses the position of power that a coach has over the athletes. It states that coaches are required to understand the unique nature of this relationship and ensure that they are not taking advantage of their athletes (Volleyball Canada, 2011c, p. 3). Although it may not be the purpose of the policy to address proper education of coaches about the inherent power imbalance found in the coach-athlete relationship and how to conduct

themselves, this statement may seem superfluous; however, it cannot be assumed that all coaches understand the importance of the coach-athlete relationship and their privileged role within that relationship. Additionally the policy states that coaches should refrain “from using training methods or techniques that may [sic] harm athletes” (Volleyball Canada, 2011c, p. 3). In this case no examples are provided for clarification. Depending on how and where a coach was educated, and depending on a coach’s experience within the sport, there is ambiguity around what counts as ‘harmful’ training methods. The policy would be more informative and helpful for coaches if it included a list of circumstances, situations, and techniques that are considered harmful.

Athletes, officials, parents/guardians, and spectators are addressed next in the policy. Information for athletes who wish to report an incident of abuse is lacking. Referring back to the *Workplace Violence and Harassment Policy* (2011a), according to Volleyball Canada, reporting abuse may be the responsibility of the athlete(s). Athletes may also be inclined to report any incidents of abuse going on around them regardless of whether they are the victim. In this case it seems plausible that these two points made in the *Workplace Violence and Harassment Policy* would be added to the list of athlete responsibilities in this policy. This would serve to reinforce that athletes should be making formal complaints in the case that they fall victim to abuse. This is important, as it appears to be a trend not to report instances of abuse in elite sport for fear of being ostracized by third parties.

Although Volleyball Canada has a policy addressing a code of conduct and ethics in place, it is clear that consistency amongst the policy documents needs to be sharpened. Readers, in this case athletes, need to be well informed in a straightforward and consistent manner of their rights and their course of action in the case that they are verbally and mentally abused. Volleyball Canada’s policies are currently not providing this information adequately.

## 5.2 Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS) Policies

The CIS is the national governing body of university sport in Canada with far reaching policies that may be referred to within the context of elite female volleyball in Manitoba. The *Harassment and Discrimination Policy* (CIS, 2008) addresses incidents of harassment or discrimination in the CIS context (CIS, 2008). The CIS Equity and Equality Committee endorsed the *Harassment and Discrimination Policy* in 1998, and revised it in 2008. Its intended audience is “all CIS member institutions, as well as all employees, directors, officers, volunteers, coaches, student-athletes, officials and any other persons involved in activities of the member institutions and CIS” (CIS, 2008, p. 1).

The policy states that the “CIS recognizes that harassment is prohibited by the Canadian Human Rights Code and by human rights legislation in every province and territory of Canada. Harassment can also be an offense under Canada’s Criminal Code” (CIS, 2008, p. 1). The acknowledgement of human rights up front seems to be an appropriate way to preface any policy on harassment or discrimination, as it reminds readers of their rights outside of this policy. Next, the policy addresses its application to both coaches and student-athletes. However, amongst the contexts where the policy may apply, games and practices are not listed. Although these may fall within the category of “activities and sanctioned events” (CIS, 2008, p. 1) clarification on both game and practice situations seems necessary.

The description for harassment provided in this policy states “‘Harassment’ is comment(s), conduct, or gesture(s) directed towards an individual or group, which is insulting, intimidating, humiliating, hurtful, malicious, degrading, or otherwise offensive and which a reasonable person would know, or, ought reasonably to know to have this effect” (CIS, 2008, p. 2). This excerpt is similar, but not identical, to the definition for abuse provided in the Coaching

Association of Canada's (CAC) policy on harassment. The CIS definition provides clear examples of verbal behaviours (i.e., comments) that may lead to mental responses such as intimidation, humiliation, or harm. In the case of this policy verbal and mental abuse are clear and well defined. The policy states that any complaint of harassment that falls under this policy is to be dealt with by a harassment advisor. These people are to be designated by the CIS; however, there is no indication of how these people are appointed, who these people are, or how to contact them. In addition to the harassment advisor, each case is also assigned a harassment investigator. Finally, the policy mentions a disciplinary committee, which is a grouping of three Board of Director members appointed by the president of the CIS. These members will be representative of both the female and male sex and are to be from different institutions than both the complainant and respondent (CIS, 2008, p. 2). The coach or athlete is left with no contact information for the harassment advisor or harassment investigator, which may complicate or potentially dissuade viewers from making formal complaints. This may complicate the complaint procedure as it involves extra work for the complainant. Additionally, without a clearly defined contact protocol complainants may feel less support in an already emotionally charged situation.

The final section discusses time management of complaints and the overall complaint process. It states that "timely manner" means such length of time as may fairly, properly or reasonably be required to execute an action or responsibility under this policy and where a specific time provision for doing so is not found" (CIS, 2008, p. 2). Without a clear indication of an approximate timeline, coaches or athletes may feel less confident in the outcome and process of filing a formal complaint. The policy states:

Complaints under this policy should normally be made within six (6) months of the incident(s). When the Complainant is under a direct supervisory relationship with the

Respondent at the time of the incident(s) giving rise to a complaint, the six (6) month limitation period starts from the date the direct supervisory relationship ends. (CIS, 2008, p. 3)

The policy does not address this timeline under the initial clause about time. The policy appears to be placing a time restriction on complaints being made, but it does not provide an approximate timeline for managing the outcome of a complaint. Furthermore, in the event that the abuse is continuous and has become an internalized normal pattern of behaviour, six months may not be enough time for a complainant to gather his/her resources or build the courage to make such a complaint. The lack of clarity concerning a defined timeline is also problematic in the event that a formal investigation has been launched, as the policy only indicates that it will be handled in a “timely manner” (CIS, 2008, p. 2). ‘Timely manner’ is not defined.

The policy includes statements about conflict of interests, stating: “[w]here a complaint has been made under this policy, and where this gives rise to a conflict of interest for one or more parties in the complaint, CIS may make arrangements to separate the interests that are in conflict pending disposition of the complaint” (CIS, 2008, p. 3). The main concern with this statement is that there is no context given for what a ‘conflict of interest’ involves. A conflict of interest could refer to different situations. Additionally, in situations of stress, such as making an abuse complaint, the circumstances are not clear. In this case adding a list of potential ‘conflicts of interests’ that have been a part of past claims would be helpful.

Some of the issues surrounding clarity and consistency within the *Harassment and Discrimination Policy* (CIS, 2008) are carried over into the *CIS Code of Ethics* (2010). This policy provides a code of ethical conduct with which all CIS members must adhere. It was written by the General Assembly first in 2005 and has since been revised in 2008, 2009, and

2010. The target audience of this policy includes “all Canadian Interuniversity Sport members: coaches, athletes, and administrators” (CIS, 2010, p. 1). While the start of the policy makes it clear that it applies to both athletes and coaches as sport members and addresses verbal behaviours such as “[p]rovide feedback to others in a caring manner that is sensitive to their needs” and “[u]se appropriate, respectful and gender neutral language for individuals in all situations” (CIS, 2010, p. 1) the remainder of the policy is less clear. For example, multiple times throughout the document the word ‘Guidelines’ is written. However, it is unclear which guidelines the document refers to in several places. Similarly, the document indicates that individuals are responsible to “[b]ring incompetent or unethical behaviour to the attention of the appropriate authority in a manner consistent with these guidelines, if informal resolution or correction of the situation is not appropriate or possible” (CIS, 2010, p. 2). There is no reference to a supporting document describing how individuals are to go about reporting such incidents. The document also states that, “all differences are settled through the procedures provided” (CIS, 2010, p. 3). However, there is no reference to any other procedures or supporting documents. This is a major concern, as persons wishing to review the policy and follow a complaint protocol are not being adequately set up to do so. This further reinforces the need for policy review and analysis in order to highlight how the needs of potential policy readers are being or not being met.

The scope of the policy is unclear. It lists the events at which the protocol described applies, including: “World University Championships, a World University Games or a CIS Championship” (CIS, 2010, p. 3). These are exclusive events that do not include normal, everyday contact, such as practice or regular CIS competition settings. In this case references to a formal protocol or procedure for managing a potential complaint outside of these events listed

here seems fair, especially if the CIS seeks to sanction or discipline individuals for handling complaints in a manner that is not approved by the CIS. The CIS has a *Complaints, Investigation and Discipline Policy* (1999), but it is only included under the section for handling misconduct at an event. Again, there needs to be a very clear section of this policy that outlines and refers complainants to the *Complaints, Investigation and Discipline Policy* (1999) if this is the policy to be adhered to when filing a complaint. If this is not the case, then a separate clause needs to be created and placed under the section *Public Image of University Sport*.

The *Code of Ethics* includes a section entitled *Relief from CIS Policies*. The purpose of this addition is to allow discretion to be used: “[a]t times if [sic] may be more appropriate to use good judgment, and to focus on learning and improvement, rather than simply rigidly applying a policy and imposing a punishment” (CIS, 2010, p. 5). Although the underlying intent here is to say that not every situation will necessarily need to be resolved through a formal complaint process, it is not clarified how the need for a formal hearing is determined. The complainant is to write a formal letter, email, or formally speak to the CIS; however, there is no contact information given regarding whom to contact. Based on the *Harassment and Discrimination Policy* (CIS, 2010) this person may be the harassment advisor or an investigator. However, that is a different policy that refers to different circumstances and therefore it is uncertain if these are the correct contacts. In addition, the policy includes a Fast Track Model that is to be used in circumstances where “the nature of the issue is not significant or substantial or controversial in nature” (CIS, 2010, p. 5). It is unclear how the CIS will determine whether or not a situation is significant, substantial or controversial.

Finally, the policy states: “[t]his process does not replace the compassionate appeals or the notwithstanding processes” (CIS, 2010, p. 5). This note includes more legal rhetoric that

might not be understood by readers. Rewording this note would be advised so that potential readers are more likely to understand how to move forward in an appropriate and efficient manner. Despite the issues identified with this policy, its existence is positive, and despite not referring to the *Complaints, Investigation and Discipline Policy* (CIS, 1999) this policy could be useful in the event that a complainant is seeking information on how to submit a complaint.

The Board of Directors endorsed the *Complaints, Investigation and Discipline Policy* (1999), which outlines the proper procedure to follow in the event that a complaint is made, and it has not been revised since its implementation. The major concern with the *Complaints, Investigation and Discipline Policy* (CIS, 1999) is that this policy does not explicitly apply to the coach-athlete relationship. While the policy indicates that it “applies to all (i) CIS member institutions, (ii) all individuals who are formally engaged in CIS activities on behalf of the CIS” (CIS, 1999, p. 2) there is no mention of coach and student-athlete as is the case in the previous two policies. It is also the case that there are no specific clauses or examples of violations in this document that constitute verbal or mental abuse. The situations listed under violations (90.30.4.11) do not include any incidents linked to verbally or mentally abusive behaviours. Overall, the policy is lengthy and confusing for readers who do not have a background in policy or governance.

The CIS policies analyzed in this section have similar issues to the issues identified above with Volleyball Canada’s policies surrounding consistency and clarity. It is apparent that work needs to be done in order to make these policies more coherent, inclusive, and straightforward. Furthermore, there are key aspects of the policies missing (i.e., referenced complaint protocols), which may be withholding potential complainants from making a formal complaint. Not only is it important to review these policy in order to ensure their content is up to date and relevant, but

it is critical to review broad based, nationally-applying policies, as these policies likely inform other more provincially-based policies.

### **5.3 Volleyball Manitoba**

Volleyball Manitoba's website does not include clear links to policies or the organization's governance structure. The website provides information on volleyball in Manitoba, adult programs, youth programs, age class club programs, team Manitoba programs, coaches, referees, media, resources and contact information. The only policy included online is the *Volleyball Canada 2014/15: Rules, Policies, & LTAD Updates* (Volleyball Canada, 2014). This update is a two-page summary of some of the changes made recently to the Volleyball Canada Centre of Excellence (VCCE), club accreditation, uniform number policy, 2015 National Championships age categories, coach certification, NCCP, age categories for Canada games teams, and also includes a discussion about the Volleyball Canada Development Model (VCDM). A link to the *Volleyball Manitoba 2014-2015 Age Class Club Volleyball Handbook* directs the viewer to information intended for coaches, athletes, and parents in Manitoba. The *Volleyball Manitoba 2014-2015 Age Class Volleyball Handbook* is vague, devoid of important information, and missing its associated appendices. The handbook includes information that pertains to appropriate coach behaviour, and functions as a resource for coaches, athletes, and parents alike. Information on Ethical Standards is included. Under this heading the document states:

As a member of the VM we expect that all of our members, especially coaches, adhere to and fully understand the *Coaches Ethical Standard Manual*. Failure to abide by these standards may result to penalties and/or sanctions. For more details on our *Coaches*

*Ethical Standard Manual* please visit our website at [www.volleyballmanitoba.com](http://www.volleyballmanitoba.com) or see the copy in the Appendix of this Document. (Volleyball Manitoba, 2014, p. 19)

Readers are referred to the appendix for the *Coaches Ethical Standard Manual*; however, no such appendix is offered in the document. Furthermore, the link that is listed returns the reader to Volleyball Manitoba's home page where there is no link to the *Coaches Ethical Standard Manual* or the appendices. This is a concern because if it is the case that readers cannot access the information referenced in the manual they may be confused as to why it is referenced, whether or not the information exists, and how much emphasis is placed on the missing material. This places more responsibility on the reader to locate the extra referenced sources, which is inconvenient when dealing with an already stressful situation (i.e., making a complaint).

The handbook includes information on dispute resolution and suggests self-management as the primary way of handling most conflicts. More specifically, the documents states:

While keenly interested in all facets and issues of our volleyball community VM staff, board and committee members simply do not have the resources to become involved in the concerns and issues that may arise and therefore the Board and Staff appeal to all the stakeholders of Club Volleyball to use best and reasonable efforts to self-manage the issues that may arise over the Club Volleyball season. (Volleyball Manitoba, 2014, p. 25)

As the statement suggests, coaches, athletes, and parents are left to their discretion to handle situations. Without any clear policies or procedures to guide the respective parties it may be the case that situations are rife with tension, confusion, and unnecessary stress for coaches, athletes, and parents. Furthermore, this statement appears contradictory to the "tight-knit community" (Volleyball Manitoba, 2014, p. 25) mentions in the handbook.

Immediately following this statement is a brief description of what is to occur if and when there is a serious dispute. Here the handbook refers to *The Dispute Resolution Policy* (Volleyball Manitoba, 2009), which the Manitoba Volleyball Board of Directors approved in June of 2009 and have had not revised since. The intended audience of this policy includes, but is not limited to, athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers, directors, officers, team managers, team captains, medical and paramedical personnel, administrators and employees that find themselves in a dispute situation. The handbook explains, “[f]or circumstances where despite extensive and best efforts, an issue warrants the participation of VM staff and/or Board, then the Dispute Resolution Policy shall be used. It is available on the VM website and is attached to this handbook as an appendix” (Volleyball Manitoba, 2014, p. 25). As was the case with the *Coaches Ethical Standard Manual* there is no appendix provided as a part of the handbook or on the website, which makes it impossible to locate the manual or take the necessary actions as suggested in the handbook. However, it is possible to locate the *Dispute Resolution Policy* (2009) via an Internet search. Volleyball Manitoba would do well to include this link on their website homepage under the quick links section.

Finally, the *Volleyball Manitoba 2014-2015 Age Class Club Volleyball Handbook* discusses appeals by stating that “In the rare event that a decision is made that warrants an appeal, the MVA Appeal Policy can be utilized. It is available on the VM website and is attached to this Handbook as an appendix” (Volleyball Manitoba, 2014, p. 25). Again, the major concern here is that if readers do not have the necessary sources of information or supportive documents they will not know how to handle a situation appropriately, which may lead to more effort on behalf of them and Volleyball Manitoba. The omission of these important appendices is a major concern that needs to be rectified as soon as possible.

Volleyball Manitoba applies a screening policy that requires all coaches coaching in Manitoba to undergo a Criminal Record Search Certificate (CRSC) and a Child Abuse Registry Check (CARC) (Volleyball Manitoba, 2012). The main purpose is keeping people with criminal convictions out of coaching situations where they are put in a position of trust and authority. However, simply having a clear CRSC and CARC does not address the intentions of a coach, potential abusive behaviours exhibited by a coach, or situations where a coach may have been involved in illegal activity. What a CRSC or CARC does inform Volleyball Manitoba of is whether or not a coach has been caught and criminally convicted, so the policy is not perfect. For example, Graham James was not criminally convicted until well into his coaching career and, in the end, it was revealed that he was guilty of roughly three hundred accounts of sexual abuse (Kennedy & Grainger, 2006). Therefore, his CRSC or CARC would not have revealed this information, which demonstrates the limitations of a CRSC and a CARC.

The *MVA Dispute Policy* (2003a) and *Appeal Policy* (2003b) are accessible online. Although it is not tedious to find these policies online, both could be included on the list of quick links located on Volleyball Manitoba's website homepage. The purpose of the *Dispute Policy* is to support alternative methods of managing disputes in the most effective and fair way without necessarily involving litigation. The policy applies to all members of the MVA including coaches and athletes (Manitoba Volleyball, 2003a). This policy was approved in 2003 and has not been updated since.

The *Dispute Policy* strongly encourages its members to “communicate openly and to collaborate in using problem-solving and negotiation techniques to resolve their differences” (Manitoba Volleyball, 2003a, p. 1). The policy provides the appropriate steps in the event that arbitration or no legal action occurs. Nowhere in this policy is it mentioned what may qualify as

being outside of member's capabilities of problem solving (i.e., situations of verbal and mental abuse). Rather the policy outlines the cases where this policy does not apply. There is no indication of to whom the potential complainant is to approach in the case of a dispute. This policy is not clear on what constitutes a dispute and how disputes are to be managed. While this policy is necessary to have in place in the event that a dispute occurs, overall it requires more information about the nature of disputes, clarification on situations where disputes may arise, and when this policy should be implemented.

The *Appeal Policy* applies to situations where conflict has arisen that is outside the scope of self-management and may require legal aid (Manitoba Volleyball, 2003b). The appeal policy was approved by the Board of Directors of MVA in 2003 and like the dispute policy has not been updated since. This policy applies to “any member of the Manitoba Volleyball Association who is affected by a decision of the Board of Directors, of any Committee of the Board of Directors, or of any body or individual who has been delegated authority to makes decision on behalf of the Board of Directors” (Volleyball Manitoba, 2003b, p. 1). This policy states, “[e]xamples of decisions that may be appealed include but are not limited to those relating to eligibility, carding, harassment, team selection, discipline and entitlements and obligations under an athlete agreement or national team agreement” (Volleyball Manitoba, 2003b, p. 1). In this case incidents of harassment are addressed and although specifics are not provided the mere mention of harassment is essential. The remainder of the policy describes the process of submitting an appeal, which includes screening of the appeal, different meetings, timelines and decisions to be made. The language in this document is more easily understood in comparison to other reviewed policy documents, which is helpful. The absence of the *Appeal Policy* (2003b) from the Volleyball Manitoba website along with other important policies is a major concern.

Volleyball Manitoba needs to explore the reorganization and availability of the policies that are currently available on its website. The website needs to become more user-friendly, as viewers need to be able to access important information pertaining to their legal rights in situations of abuse or harassment within the volleyball context. Furthermore, coaches, athletes, and parents need to be able to access information including the *Coaches Ethical Standard Manual* (Volleyball Manitoba, 2014) and other important information mentioned as a part of the handbook appendices. I was able to track down a copy of the *Coaches Ethical Standard Manual* (Volleyball Manitoba, 2014), but only after email communication with the executive director of Volleyball Manitoba. Without easy and readily available access to this information members of the Volleyball Manitoba community may be left feeling confused and unprotected.

The first page of the *Coaches Ethical Standard Manual* includes a brief introduction addressing the privilege that coaches have in the lives of young athletes and the huge responsibility that coaches have in providing care for the athletes they coach. In addition it addresses that the “Manitoba Volleyball Association Anti-Harassment and Anti-Abuse Policy states that all members taking part in sport have the right to an environment that is free of harassment and abuse” (Volleyball Manitoba, 2011, p. 1). Here it outlines the three sections of the *Coaches Ethical Standard Manual* as: (1) Volleyball Canada Code of Conduct, (2) MVA Coaches Code of Ethics, and (3) MVA Anti-Harassment/Anti-Abuse Policy.

Although the Volleyball Canada Code of Conduct and Ethics is analyzed in the earlier section of this chapter, the two page code of conduct in this document is quite different than the one previously reviewed. This may be due to the fact that Volleyball Manitoba selected and rearranged the information that is most applicable to volleyball in Manitoba. The code mentions that members of Volleyball Canada “must avoid all unsportsmanlike conduct, acts or practices

which are, in the opinion of Volleyball Canada, detrimental to the sport” and that members caught committing certain acts will be penalized (Volleyball Manitoba, 2011, p. 2). Under the acts listed in this section the most applicable to verbal and mental abuse is sub point g) also known as “poor attitude” (Volleyball Manitoba, 2011, p. 2). Under this section the inappropriate behaviours include “swearing at an official, linesjudge, scorekeeper, spectator or opponent” and “Using profanity or obscene language or gestures” (Volleyball Manitoba, 2011, p.3). This list does not include the athlete as a recipient of either swearing, using profanity, or obscene language. This is interesting given the fact that coaches principally deal with athletes within the context of elite sport. The final section of this Volleyball Canada Code of Conduct includes a blurb on doping and doping violations.

The next seven pages are dedicated to the MVA Coaches Code of Ethics. The introduction to this section states that this code of ethics is adopted from the CAC and the Canadian Professional Coaches Association (CPCA), which provides documents on the ethical standards that coaches should develop as a part of coaching (Volleyball Manitoba, 2011). This particular code of ethics is based on four ethical principals: (1) Respect for Participants, (2) Responsible Coaching, (3) Integrity in Relationships and (4) Honouring Sport.

The first principal centers on the coaches’ behaviours and actions in treating everyone with the dignity and respect that humans deserve. The information that follows includes resources for coaches on how to treat everyone in this way. Following this is a list of ethical standards that coaches are to follow as a part of demonstrating respect for all. This list of ethical standards is split up into sub headings: respect, rights, equity, empowerment, informed participation, confidentiality, mutual support and extended responsibility. It is refreshing to see that addressing the athlete in a ‘caring manner’ (Volleyball Manitoba, 2011, p. 4) is the second

standard listed. Furthermore, a number of other standards address interaction within the coach-athlete relationship.

The second principal is dedicated to the topic of responsible coaching and addresses coaches acting in a way that is beneficial to society and does no harm to anyone a coach may be in contact with (Volleyball Manitoba, 2011). A list is provided on what responsible coaching means, and the list of ethical standards that coaches are to adhere to is provided. Other important points made with respect to the athlete include the athletes' future, being aware of the other pressures present in an athlete's life, and refraining from using coach practices that may be harmful to athletes (Volleyball Manitoba, 2011). Of particular interest was the section on self-knowledge where coaches are encouraged to engage in self-reflection and be aware of how their characteristics and life experiences may influence their treatment of people.

The third principal on Integrity in Relationships holds coaches accountable to being "honest, sincere, and honourable" (Volleyball Manitoba, 2011, p. 8). This principal also brings up self-awareness and the ability of coaches to reflect critically about themselves and their adopted coaching behaviours. The ethical standards listed here are organized into the categories of honesty, sincerity, honour, conflict of interest, self-awareness and extended responsibility. The information provided centres on encouraging the coach to act in a way that not only upholds integrity for themselves, but also for the people that they are in contact with.

The final principal, honouring sport, looks to involve coaches in a way that promotes the value of sport for individuals, teams, and society. The achievement of honouring sport is described as acting on and promoting values of sport, encouraging honourable intentions in coaching, and showing high regard for the value of sport within Canadian society (Volleyball Manitoba, 2011). This section of the *Coaches Ethical Standard Manual* highlights the

consequences to be enacted in the event that a coach does not adhere to the ethical standards.

The final section of the manual is entitled the Manitoba Volleyball Association Anti-Harassment/Anti-Abuse Policy. This policy includes fourteen pages of material dedicated to preventing abuse within the MVA. The preamble of the policy addresses that this policy applies to all members of Volleyball Canada and discusses that there is a “zero tolerance for harassment or abuse” (Volleyball Canada, 2011, p. 11). Additional information covers addressing not accepting an environment that is “hostile” or “poisoned,” and references to the *Human Rights Code of Manitoba* and the *Canadian Human Rights Act* are included.

Following the preamble the purpose of the policy is outlined and the responsibility of sport administrators, parents, coaches, trainers, sports therapists, referees, and teachers are clarified. These are the figures identified as potentially being in a position of authority and therefore requiring special attention. The complaint process is addressed through the role of the “officer” (Volleyball Manitoba, 2011, p. 12), however the description of the officer is not mentioned, which is confusing. In this case one might assume that the officer is the person designated to oversee the case. Next, informal complaints are addressed, followed by formal complaints. The subsequent section discusses the removal of the complainant or the respondent in a situation that requires the removal of either entity. In this case, the respondent is the first choice should removal be necessary. The investigation report section covers the information that should be included in the investigation report. Under this point considerations in the event of disciplinary action are included. Next, the appeal process is outlined, which reviews the steps to be taken in the event that a formal investigation is launched and an appeal is necessary. Frivolous and/or malicious complaints are addressed as harassment and in the event that a frivolous complaint is made the complainant will be disciplined. Circumstances marked by

misunderstandings or unfounded complaints are addressed.

The remainder of the policy addresses: consensual relations, keeping records, disciplinary action, confidentiality, protection against retaliation, harassment by persons who are not members or employees of the MVA, and time limitation. Finally, there is a five page addendum attached with definitions covering the following terms: Complainant, respondent, officer, external consultants, investigation report, discrimination, discriminatory harassment, abuse of authority, personal harassment, sexual harassment, off-premises harassment and abuse, child abuse, neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and child abuse registry. While the addendum contains valuable information, this policy would serve well to include references to the addendum so that viewers could locate information that they may not understand sooner before struggling to comprehend roles of people, or terms that may be confusing.

Volleyball Canada's *Coaches Ethical Standard Manual* is a thorough document that covers information with respect to moral and ethical coach conduct. The major concern with this document is the lack of inclusion of necessary references to the addendum, which may enhance comprehension and the accessibility of this document. As previously mentioned, until contact was made with the executive director of Volleyball Manitoba, I was unable to obtain a copy of this policy. If coaches, athletes, parents and sports administrators alike are not able to access this information through the Volleyball Manitoba website, this is an issue. The policy can be accessed by searching *Coaches Ethical Standard Manual* through Google, but one must first know the policy's title in order to locate it online.

#### 5.4 The Coaching Association of Canada (CAC)

Several policies produced by the Coaching Association of Canada (CAC) have been adopted by sport governing bodies, such as Volleyball Manitoba and Coaching Manitoba. The CAC's *Harassment and Abuse Policy* (2005) is a one page policy that addresses its commitment to provide a safe environment that is free of harassment and abuse (CAC, 2005). This policy was approved by the CAC in 2005, it has not been revised since, and it applies to any members involved in the organization. It defines abuse clearly by giving a definition, which includes examples of abuse. The policy concludes noting the importance of the context within which abuse may occur:

It is not just the conduct itself that makes certain behavior inappropriate, but the context or way in which it is delivered or its repetitive nature. This conduct makes the environment around the individual cold, hostile or alienating or as some human rights legislation and case law state, the environment is 'chilly' or 'poisoned'. Any behavior, which contributes to, supports or condones such an environment is harassing. (CAC, 2005, p. 1)

This paragraph describes some of the additional aspects of abuse, in particular the aspect of environment, that other policies lack. Although the policy is short, it is concise, clear, and thorough.

The second part of this policy is made up of the *Informal Complaint Procedure* and the *Formal Complaint Procedure* (CAC, 2005). In both an informal and a formal complaint procedure the policy outlines the process to be followed in the case that harassment arises. For an informal complaint, the document suggests that the complainant discuss the matter with the respondent in order to ensure that he/she is aware. Although it is unclear whether or not this

would be an appropriate way of handling a situation where abuse is imminent or occurring, it does seem like a reasonable conversation in most circumstances. However, the policy states that if a child is the complainant, this is not the appropriate option. In that case it is likely that the CAC would refer athletes or guardians of athletes to the Formal Complaint Procedure.

In the event that a formal complaint is made, the complainant will provide the formal complaint to the chief operations officer, president, or chair of the Board of Directors. From this point forward the CAC Board of Directors will contract legal counsel to investigate the claim and report back to the board. Following this step the CAC will then consult “Canadian law and take the appropriate recommended actions, as required” (CAC, 2005, p. 3). This procedure is clear and to the point. In this case the CAC is opting to involve the expertise of legal counsel. Not only may this negate any potential conflict of interests, but also the CAC is utilizing the expertise of the appropriate authorities.

This policy clearly outlines the important contexts and behaviours that athletes or coaches need to consider when filing a complaint, and it outlines the appropriate next steps in the case of an informal or formal complaint. The reference to appropriate legal authorities is necessary as a breach of human rights, as is the case with verbal and mental abuse of individuals, is against the Canadian law as stated in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (2014) and the *Canadian Criminal Code* (2015). Consequently, it is very important that coaches review this CAC policy, as it impacts coaches and athletes alike in Canada.

### **5.5 The Sport Information Resource Centre (SIRC)**

Another source that is often referred to in the case of discrimination, harassment, or abuse by provincial sport organizations is the Sport Information Resource Centre (SIRC)’s *Discrimination, Harassment and Abuse Policy* (SIRC, 2014), which addresses incidents of

discrimination, harassment or abuse in a sport context. The policy states its applicability to “all employees as well as all directors and others affiliated with SIRC” and that it “encourages the reporting all incidents of harassment, regardless of who the offender may be” (SIRC, 2014, p.1). It was published in October of 2014 and has not yet been revised.

This policy addresses the importance of the environment as integral to an individual feeling safe and respected. It also addresses up front both the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and *Canada's Criminal Code*. This policy applies to harassment, which may occur during the course of all SIRC business, activities, and events (SIRC, 2014, p. 1.). This states clearly to whom the policy applies and the circumstances of its application. Although examples could be used to clarify what ‘SIRC events’ are consider to be, it appears to be clear that whenever operating in a sport context, as a member or affiliate of SIRC, one is responsible to uphold this policy.

The policy explains harassment as, “comment or conduct, directed toward an individual or group of individuals, which is insulting, intimidating, humiliating, malicious, degrading or offensive” (SIRC, 2014, p. 1.). Additional information is included on sexual abuse and behaviours that are considered to be harassment or abuse (i.e., verbal abuse or threats, remarks, jokes, comments). This additional information is relevant to verbal and mental abuse as it notes that, “practical jokes which cause awkwardness or embarrassment, endanger a person’s safety or negatively affect performance” (SIRC, 2014, p. 2.). This indicates that verbal abuse as an action (i.e., speaking or yelling) and mental abuse as the psychological outcome (i.e., lowered performance) of the verbal actions taken against the athlete. For example, a practical joke may evoke certain emotions that resulting in lowered athletic performance the next time an athlete is performing in a similar situation. This highlights the serious impact words can have on an

athlete's psyche. The policy addresses confidentiality as an important clause of any potential abuse complaint situation and outlines the steps to be taken in the event that a complaint is made.

The complaint procedure begins by placing the onus of addressing harassment on the complainant and suggests that the complainant makes the harasser aware of the behaviour they perceive to be harassing. From this point forward the complainant is to keep a "written record" (SIRC, 2014, p. 2) of any harassment experienced. The complainant is then encouraged to discuss the matter with the president or a designated SIRC official. This is confusing for a couple of reasons. First, if officials (i.e., the president or SIRC official) become informed of a situation informally it may be the case that they try to handle the situation on their own without following the appropriate protocols. Second, without a clear indication of who to contact (i.e., the president or the designated SIRC official) readers are left confused about to whom they are to speak. Next, complainants are to:

make a complaint to the President (or designate) in writing within a reasonable period of time. The President (or designate) shall conduct a neutral, unbiased investigation and take all possible steps to resolve the complaint. If the President (or designate) considers that he or she is unable to act in this capacity, the complainant shall be referred to another official. (SIRC, 2014, p. 2)

Issues with this statement include ambiguity related to: (1) the reasonable time line, (2) the nature of the investigation, and (3) potential referral to another official.

The reasonable time line is confusing because in the case of abuse or harassment a specific timeline should not be the main concern. If a human's rights were infringed in association with SIRC then a timeline is not necessarily important. Rather, SIRC's focus should be on rectifying any case or situation of abuse that has taken place under membership with SIRC

or during any SIRC events. The nature of the investigation is noted as being ‘neutral’ and ‘unbiased.’ In the case of an investigation, the involvement of the president could be contradictory to an investigation being ‘neutral’ or ‘unbiased.’ This raises an issue with concerned engagement, as the president is the head of the organization and may feel pressured to report findings that make the organization appear as if nothing detrimental has occurred. Finally, the potential passing of the issue to an unidentified official may be a concern. In the case of a formal investigation it seems appropriate that the president be made aware of the circumstance, but that an identified SIRC official conducts the investigation to negate issues of bias. SIRC should look to identify key figures in the complaint process, provide a clear discussion on a ‘timeline’, and smooth out the investigation process. These details will likely increase the clarity and application of this policy in the case of abuse or harassment.

## **5.6 Summary of Coach Policies**

In reviewing the abuse and harassment policies pertaining to coaches of female volleyball in Manitoba, it is evident that there is a need for improvement. The major issues concerning the policies reviewed in this thesis include availability, organization, clarity, consistency, and language. More specifically, it is clear that the majority of these policies require some reworking in order to facilitate the education, and hence understanding, of the readers. While the existence of these policies is necessary and pertinent, if it is the case that individuals cannot understand or easily access the respective policy, then their purpose becomes irrelevant.

In completing the analysis of policies in this section, it was clear that not all policies are made readily available to coaches and athletes at all times. Where most of the National Sport Organization (NSO) policies (i.e., Volleyball Canada, CIS, CAC) are easy to access through an internet search, of particular concern was the inability to access important information and

policies from the Provincial Sport Organization (PSO) Volleyball Manitoba. I could not locate a copy of the *Coaches Ethical Standard Manual* without contacting the executive director of Volleyball Manitoba. This is important information as this policy clarifies what is and is not appropriate coach conduct. Without easy access to this important information, coaches and athletes might feel less supported when making claims surrounding unethical behaviour in sport.

Overall, the accessibility of policies addressing verbal and mental abuse in sport was not great, and the policies that were easy to locate contained ambiguities and were not all that easy to understand. This is a concern as policy is a major resource and source of support in the case of situations that are deemed unethical and may require support from governance. It is not clear which policies coaches consider essential to read and which ones they remain unaware of despite completing the education required to be considered elite volleyball coaches. The extent that a sample of coaches were aware of, understood, and applied these policies in their coaching practices will be discussed in Chapters VI and VII.

## Chapter VI: Interviews with Elite Volleyball Coaches

Eight participants (three women and five men) took part in a semi-structured interview. All eight participants are elite sport coaches who meet the following criteria: (1) obtained level two or higher coaching certification from their provincial and national sport bodies, and (2) currently coach at the 17U/18U club volleyball, university levels, or higher, or have at least ten years' experience in coaching elite volleyball athletes. Prior to the start of the interview, each coach selected a pseudonym to be used in this study (Appendix D). The three female participants selected the names: Denise, Erin, and Hazel, and the five men chose to be referred to as: Dennis, Marcus, Richard, Todd, and Dave. The age of the participants ranged from twenty-five to sixty years of age and the coaching experience range was five to thirty-five years of coaching. All of the coaches interviewed for this thesis had experience coaching at the 17U/18U club levels, some had university-level experience, and others had national-level experience.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter discusses the major themes and subthemes that emerged from the data collected in carrying out the semi-structured interviews. Quotes from the participants help illustrate the different findings linked to each major theme and subtheme. These quotes are used further to exemplify the coach voice. The major themes that emerged from the data include: (1) The Nature of Elite Sport, (2) The Role of the Coach, (3) Factors Influencing the Coach-Athlete Relationship, (4) The Impact of the Environment on the Elite Sport Experience, (5) The Role of Abuse in Elite Sport, (6) Coaching Education, and (7) Policy on Verbal and Mental Abuse in Manitoba. Within each key theme a range of subthemes were identified, with some major themes

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<sup>2</sup> Approximate ranges are used to protect participants' identities. Exact ages and number of years coaching may serve to identify specific coaches within the population of Manitoba coaches who are coaching elite female volleyball.

having many subthemes and others having only a few subthemes. Each subtheme will be discussed below in the context of its associated major theme.

At the beginning of each interview the participants were asked to comment generally on their experiences in sport. All of the coaches interviewed had extensive histories in sport. All of the coaches were athletes at one point in their life and as a result of their interest in sports became coaches as young adults. Most of the coaches have varied experiences in coaching a wide range of ages, gender of athletes, and levels of sport. While most of the coaches were intentional in their pursuit of coaching female sports, others happened into coaching girls and women based on opportunities that presented themselves:

all the girls were sitting on the side and he was running a boys practice... for his boys volleyball team and I thought that was pretty unfair. So I was there to coach the boys and I chose to coach the girls and... and have been ever since. (Richard)

It basically just fell into my lap that way. [um] So it wasn't necessarily planned. Part of it was as a male I just finished coaching it was easier actually to start helping out with women's teams than with my former teammates. (Dave)

Overall, the participants were a group of very experienced coaches. Of the eight participants, six were considered elite athletes at one point in their career (i.e., played at a university level or higher) and they spoke to how their experiences as an elite athlete helped them as a coach:

I think having the actual physical experience at higher levels helps you to understand what is necessary from the coach perspective. I absolutely can confidently say I understand what the athlete is going through and I understand what the coach needs from that athlete. And I can bridge it back with forth now better. (Denise)

...not everybody has those experiences to draw on, but you know I'm able to you know to...to empathize right just quickly flip over to the other side you know and then... then

come back. Ya and another little you know I'll always try to listen... kinda listen to understand first you know and then decide what I'm going to do. (Todd)

having the athlete experience I thought you know I can do this, I have the experience and I think being a teacher [ah] that it was a natural progression even though I know a lot...(Erin)

As a part of discussing their experience in sport, participants were asked to elaborate on their experience in coach certification seminars. While some coaches had positive things to say, overall the response to the coach certification seminar experience was negative:

Quite honestly it was... it was frustrating. (Erin)

...when I first started it was a lot more of somebody explaining how things were done and then you went and tried it yourself... the ethics in sport part of the program is really just kind of pushed over really fast the first day you know. (Marcus)

I remember really appreciating [um] the level that the level 1 course was at. [um] but I didn't find a whole lot of value in the level 2 course. I thought that by the time that people are certifying at level 2 I thought that it should be a little bit more advanced than it was. (Hazel)

It was a gong show it was terrible. (Richard)

...in all honesty redundant and boring. (Denise)

It was clear that each coach interviewed for this thesis was an experienced coach and, in most cases, also a retired athlete. Overall, the experience that each coach spoke about in relation to coach certification seminars was not positive.

### 6.1. Coaches' Assessment of Women's Volleyball in Manitoba

Frequently during the course of the interviews, volleyball coaches referenced the context of female volleyball in Manitoba. Todd specifically addressed the nature of club volleyball in Manitoba noting:

It's all... you know like it's all over the map right?... Calling all summer long and "are you going to play here?" and "are you going to play there?" and "what are you going to do with this?" and "if you come here"... and like the balance ... of power and everything...(Todd)

In this quote Todd addresses the intensity with which coaches appear to be recruiting young female volleyball athletes. This quote also highlights the pressure that young female athletes face throughout the course of the summer and months leading up to the club season. In line with Todd's comment, Erin also reflected on club volleyball:

...at the highest level you should have accountability and there isn't cause now I can run a club program as a university coach and I don't have to be, I don't have to be ethical at all. Cause who's gonna... what are you going to do about it? At the end of the day I have the prize. ... you want your kid to play university at home? Looks like this is the way to go. (Erin)

Erin's point not only identifies the role of the coach, but also highlights the extra pressure put on athletes, and in some cases parents, when it comes to pursuing university athletics in a small province. If and when it is the case that university coaches decide to run club programs there can often be extra pressure placed on parents and athletes to play for a certain club program as this might increase their chances of pursuing athletics at the university level.

Dennis discussed the environment of female sport from a more positive perspective in stating:

we have some very good people guys especially, girls as well that coach in high school.  
(Dennis)

This is particularly important because he identifies a positive perspective on coaching in Manitoba. However, this comment is made in relation to high school volleyball, which may not be indicative of elite level volleyball. Alongside this comment he mentions:

if you live in Winnipeg you're you know your chances are way... of you know being seen, getting better coaching you know, going to camps, going to clinics... (Dennis)

Therefore, while it may be true that kids in Winnipeg may have good coaching in high school, this may not be the case for all athletes in rural areas of Manitoba. Marcus spoke about female volleyball in Manitoba as being:

...still a little still old school for the majority of the coaching styles and stuff... like motor learning, science module stuff is just starting to creep in and I think [ah] BC and Alberta are a little bit ahead on that. (Marcus)

Not only does Marcus highlight the “old school” nature of coaching styles in Manitoba, but he takes it one step further to compare Manitoba to other provinces. Finally, Richard had some very interesting and strong opinions about female sport in Manitoba, commenting that:

...one of the other issues is today's world of club volleyball... club sport in general has become quite a money maker! Right? So I can run my own club... make a lot of money no body's overseeing how well I coach or treat kids. (Richard)

He also discussed sport-governing bodies saying:

...But as a sport governing body I want to make sure everybody that's operating is operating above the board and properly. ... As a sport governing body... I would want to be identifying those who aren't that way and get to them. ... Because these that are

getting it yes let's have a string for them. How do we get to the ones who aren't getting it? We need to train people we need to educate people to do these things right. (Richard)

From this perspective Richard indicates that more could be done in the world of female club volleyball in Manitoba. In this sense Richard is placing the onus on the sport governing body in order to manage the coach population. The only subtheme for this major theme was accepted sport behaviours.

### **6.1.1 Accepted Sport Behaviours**

In elite level sports there is often a tendency to accept verbatim a coach's style and associated coach behaviours, as many athletes are dependent on coaches for guidance (Stirling & Kerr, 2012). Furthermore, the 'win at all costs' attitude that continues to persevere in elite level sport is also indicative of athletes' overall acceptance of coach behaviours (Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Ryan, 1995). Todd illustrates these ideas in explaining:

...it kinda troubles me a little bit that that's the norm in the sport! You know like you make a mistake and then someone yells at you. (Todd)

Todd explains what he believes is a common defense mechanism in sport:

I mean you develop a whatever it is a reaction or protection mechanisms you know. Shank, yell, weather the storm, carry on. (Todd)

This adoption of a 'defense mechanism' as Todd calls it appears to also be a key part of athletes' acceptance of abusive coach behaviours. Denise takes this one step further in saying that:

what I see over and over again are the same age groups accepting it because they think that's what they're supposed to accept and their parents accepting it because the parents have been convinced that that is what they need to do and experience because that particular coach is the answer to all of their dreams because that particular coach told them that. And all for the sake of winning. (Denise)

Here Denise highlights that the ‘win at all costs’ mentality is present within the community of elite female volleyball in Manitoba. She feels that as long as athletes, and in some cases parents, are willing to accept certain coaching styles and behaviours, these behaviours will continue to dominate the world of elite sport coaching. In line with the acknowledgment of an abusive environment here in Manitoba, Hazel comments on the difficulty in holding coaches accountable within Manitoba. Her insight portrays the deep seeded roots of accepted coaching behaviours with an example of what type of behaviours are awarded:

...the awards ceremony that's in Manitoba all of the awards are named after old men who were abusive of their athletes... for example at the graduating allstar banquet the male athlete of the year is given the [name of coach] award who happened to date and mess around with his young female athletes back in the day and he's an old school bordering on like a... kind of known as a mentally abusive coach... Then the female award is named after [name of coach] [um] who we both know has a history of similar... married his athletes, married two of his athletes, abusive... how many more times do we have to award that exact demographic for poor behaviour. Not only punish them and hold them accountable, but actively reward them! So I said... given that history and context that we're continuously rewarding these abusive whatever... older men in authority figures [um] however are we supposed to call out the middle of the ranks coach... (Hazel)

Hazel identifies the acceptance of certain coaching styles and behaviours in Manitoba, while highlighting the resistance and struggle for change in the world of elite female volleyball within Manitoba. Furthermore, these comments establish verbal and mental abuse within the sport of female volleyball as an ongoing issue with a distinct history in Manitoba.

## 6.2 The Role of the Coach

In discussing coaching demographics, participants commented on a number of important aspects that are a part of their role as a coach. Most coaches commented on the impact they have on the athletes they coach:

I think my coaching model is developing basic technical skills and whether that creates a winning team or not just to kind of allow each individual athlete to be able to succeed and you know play the game...I guess I try to convey that winning isn't the most important and [um] I never sacrifice... I do like winning but I never... I try not to sacrifice people's self esteem or you know sense of self for that win. (Hazel)

Well I think my role as a coach is to try and... is [pause]... to assist them in I would... well it might be overused, but just to try and achieve excellence and so excellence in their life. Principally in [ah] athletic excellence. (Dave)

My role as a coach would be to help people get to be and do the absolute best they can be at every minute of every day. And that's it. (Richard)

There's certainly a moral aspect to it, a sportsmanship aspect, but for the actual volleyball part if they don't improve I have failed. Bottom line. As a team and individually... From player number 1 to player number 12. (Erin)

Not only did coaches talk about their overall role as a coach from the standpoint of what they wish to achieve with each individual athlete, but most also discussed the importance of challenging their athletes in a healthy way that encouraged the athlete to work harder:

There are times where we need to kinda push them a little bit past their comfort zone so that will get to a little bit more of a level. (Marcus)

...try to get the most out of each of them you also have to be able to find a way to

not just accept average or sub par performance and that's one of the really hard things.  
(Dennis)

While most of the participants' responses centered on development of the athlete from a sport perspective, several participants, including Dennis, Marcus, and Erin, mentioned their role beyond sport as a part of developing the athlete as a whole. This style of coaching acknowledges the athletes' lives outside of the elite sport environment as important (Miller & Kerr, 2002; Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, 2011). Within the theme of the Role of the Coach, participants discussed coach practices, coaching style, coach philosophy, and expectations in coaching, each of which will be discussed in turn.

### **6.2.1 Coach Practices**

After engaging in a discussion on coach experience and coach's views on their role as a coach, participants were asked to expand on what coaching practices they embodied in order to achieve their role as a coach. The concept of coaching practices was left open to interpretation, allowing participants to expand on the aspects they felt were most relevant to their role as a coach. The majority of the coaches discussed specific practices they employed as a coach, such as:

...having a two minute conversation and telling them they're doing a great job and how happy you are with how hard they're working and you know all those little kinds of things have a real benefit and that helps when you're involved. (Denis)

I meet with the athletes quite a bit. (Marcus)

I tend to have individual meetings preferably twice in a season [um] with no agenda necessarily, but just to give each athlete the floor and allow them to vent or [um] express whatever might be in their minds if they don't feel comfortable saying otherwise. (Hazel)

I'll bring athletes in and say hey what's your perspective? How do you feel? (Richard)

Denise spoke more generally about her role as a coach, explaining:

I establish the plan and the goal and the vision for what the team is doing on a day to day basis. (Denise)

Finally, both Dave and Todd made comments that were more focused on the environment, which was ultimately responsible for creating the team's culture:

a lot of the time it is about you know sort of trying to model the way... So in terms of reactions to situations how your [um] your communication, your [um] you know the culture that you bring to the group. (Dave)

I'll initially say this is what I'd like you to do... and I'll have them do it and [ah] you know then we'll engage in a bit of a conversation about you know why... why do you suppose we did that?... Right? So to have them experience it and then understand why... (Todd)

As noted in the above quotes, most of the coaches appear to be actively involving the athletes in the process of learning, which aligns with the recommended autonomy-supportive coach practices described in Chapter II (Rocchi et al., 2013; Conroy & Coatsworth, 2007).

In discussing coaching practices, coaches were also asked to comment on whether or not they believed the level of sport was an influence on the coaching strategies they adopted. Most commented that there were some differences based on the level of sport and that these differences were more based on the group of athletes that they were working with:

every particular group and every age will have their strengths and their weaknesses and their desires for their team or not and... [um] just planning around their expectations and their strengths I guess and every sense of that. (Hazel)

I think that you know the age and the caliber and the... you know quality of the athlete and the amount of time as a coach you're willing to put in along with them sure has to vary based on you know kinda what you have out there and you know I think you can't just go in there and coach the same group the same way the same expectations every year because they're all different. (Dennis)

If you're trying to coach them on the wrong level or in the wrong way, based on what you have, you won't have success. (Denise)

you need to figure out a different way to motivate a 13, 14 year old compared to a 16,17 year old compared to a 22, 23 year old. (Marcus)

as they age too and I think as they get older you can have more expectations and... and it's also safer to show more disappointment. (Erin)

While most coaches interviewed focused on some of the differences that exist from group to group Dave, Richard, and Todd choose to discuss the differences in light of the similarities that exist in coaching at different levels of sport:

But anytime I'm coaching team I think much of the same...so the mechanisms that get done, the intensity that they might get done at, the performance expectations might be different, but the overall beliefs on.... this is how... things will be done... I don't think would change that much. (Dave)

It doesn't matter what level you're at I'm still asking for greatness that's all I ask for. (Richard)

...like when I coach an 8 year old I coach the same way and the same principles I would coach a 30 year old. You know they can't do the same things, but and you know they can't understand the same things, but I can use the same process. (Todd)

Further to these comments, Dave discussed that having awareness as a coach is vital. He strongly recommended that coaches practice self awareness in order to understand themselves better and therefore be a better leader that embodies better coach practices for the athletes they coach:

I think coaches need to kind of follow your... your personality and then the background that you would have had both in and out of sport will effect that... that awareness is critical, so that awareness for players is something you want to promote it needs to be there as well. So once you can understand how you're going to respond to certain situations.... that's gonna impact the environment that you set...set up(.) So you gotta be true to who you are and know thy self. (Dave)

As noted above, the level of sport being played often dictates the adopted coaching practices.

Perhaps more important is the group of athletes coaches are working with, as all of the participants noted that the their coaching practices, and changes to these coaching practices, were highly linked to the group of athletes each coach was working with at a specific time in her or his career. The ability to tailor their focus in attempt to meet the needs of the group was an overall indication of the varied forms of leadership that a coach must embody in a variety of situations, where athletes are one of many influencing factors (Horn, 2002). Furthermore, many of the coaches also had first hand experience in sport as athletes, which often served to help their coaching practices, as they had experience in the sport they coached. Whether through the role of another supportive role model coach or based on their own life experiences, the coaches that were interviewed for this thesis are all involved and invested in coaching elite level volleyball for personal reasons, some of which are linked to their style of coaching.

### 6.2.2 Coaching Style

Learning about the coaches' reasons for getting involved in coaching was an insightful topic that allowed for a more personal look into why coaches chose to coach. When asked about their coaching style, most of the interviewed coaches described their style of coaching as placing the athlete at the center of the experience, while still being established as the leader making the ultimate decisions:

I would classify it as democratic. With democratic being [um].... Defined in the following way. Open to involvement and input from players [ah] especially senior players and other staff, but then final decision making rests with the head coach (Dave)

I would say try at least you know to be a players coach kinda thing and you know be there for them and you know kinda try and make the best team out of you know each of those individuals. (Dennis)

I'm very much a coach that [pause] really wants collaboration... I like to believe that I put the player's needs first within a team's concept and I have to also take care of the team... (Marcus)

Of interest were the responses from Denise and Hazel. Specifically, both of these female coaches prefaced their responses by discussing confidence as a component to developing their coaching style:

I think I'm pretty laid back [um]... and I wouldn't have always said this about myself, but in more recent years where I've become more confident in myself and I've [um] [pause] just learnt more about to myself I'm also able to... to demand more of my athletes [pause] in... call it a harsh tone without being aggressive or without being condescending. (Hazel)

It certainly has changed over the years, as I've become more comfortable and confident in my own skin...I believe that my style could be defined as business. [um] That when we are in the gym and we are talking about volleyball and sport that it's business. And then I can also have a personal [um] connection when necessary and that's outside the court...(Denise)

Both of these female coaches mentioned confidence as key to their personal coaching styles.

This might be indicative of some of the barriers females face in coaching that are described in the research literature (Stirling & Kerr, 2007).

### **6.2.3 Coaching Philosophy**

After exploring coaches styles the coaches were asked to comment on how personal philosophies may influence their style of coaching. Some of the coaches have very specific philosophies, for example:

my philosophy it would... would probably be to be firm and fair. (Erin)

Ya I do I call it the RACK theory... So respect deals with respect for yourself, respect for your teammates, the coach, the institution, the city you're playing for you know acting that way. Your attitude is positive, what can I do to benefit our team. A commitment to each other, commitment to learning, commitment to the program. And then knowledge. (Marcus)

I think my philosophy for sure would be you know you have to work harder if you want to be successful. (Dennis)

Treat other people with respect you know you earn respect by giving respect. (Todd)

Other coaches did not specify a philosophy, but acknowledged the importance of philosophy as a part of their coaching in a less concrete way:

I've never defined it as a philosophy, but I'm always about it... I wouldn't want it put into a bag that says 'this is my philosophy', but everything I do is philosophical. (Richard)

I do think it's broad. I think it's very much [ah] up into you know... and I ... I also think that it's something that's evolving cause this is... should be how you're looking at life and at sport. So [um] you know for better and for worse my coaching philosophy would be different then when I started or at various different junctures of my career. (Dave)

aim to you know just develop female self esteem like I really just want to build females up around me... I don't communicate with parents at all. Like I tell parents day one that I want to be your friends, but I will not communicate with you about volleyball because I think part of developing confidence in the young girls... the more difficult side which is I don't promise equal playing time, or fair playing time or whatever you want to call it, but I challenge athletes and parents to ... embrace difficult situations... (Hazel)

Denise spoke of her philosophy as a personal goal:

my overall philosophy is that any of the athletes that come through my program [um] through the vehicle of sport and my...my privilege of guidance that [ah] my ultimate goal is that they will [um] leave the program more confident and capable and courageous then they entered and that through...through the experience of... they will learn to deal with adversity, they will learn to adapt, they will learn [um] socialization, they will learn accountability, responsibility, ambassadorship, friendship and [um] and that they are physically stronger [um] emotionally, spiritually as well. (Denise)

Coaches spoke about their views on winning, which are highly linked to their philosophies as well:

Winning as a coach is getting the athletes to do their best. (Richard)

Winning allows each individual athlete to be able to succeed and you know play the game. (Hazel)

I have experience of this with very little [um] help or support [um] in comparison to how many support a negative entity for the sake of winning. When... for me winning life is way more important. (Denise)

While the coaching philosophies represented here range from very specific to general, most of the coaches discussed their coaching philosophy as being an important part of their identity as a coach.

Another key aspect of coach philosophy centers on how coaches support the athletes they are coaching. Hazel's commented on creating a wholesome environment for athletes:

my focus is primarily mentoring or life skills or just kind of creating a holistic or wholesome environment. (Hazel)

Other coaches commented on the importance of supporting the athletes:

I think sharing that with them you know making sure they understand that that I'm there to... to support and... and... and help them discover and not judge. (Todd)

...she wanted to quit and I wouldn't let her. I said "well red shirt, you come practice, stay good. And I'll help you go somewhere! (Marcus)

How do I make you feel great. Because I know when you go here or there you feel great. So when you're here I'm going to make you feel great, so when you go there you remember this. (Richard)

...you got to look out for them... especially females in sport for sure. (Erin)

Another important form of support that may be linked to coaching philosophy is how coaches integrate the athlete's perspectives into the sport experience. This topic is addressed in more detail in the section on communication in the coach-athlete relationship.

#### **6.2.4 Expectations in Coaching**

Throughout the interviews, coaches mentioned their expectations both for themselves as professionals and the expectations that they had for the athletes they coached. Expectations and the pressure of meeting those expectations placed on coaches and athletes alike may help explain why coaches adopt certain behaviours. Comments that surrounded expectations of athletes included:

I'm not opposed to people being individuals, but I said if you want to be on the team that I'm coaching there's a certain expectation. (Dennis)

I'll apply my expectations consistently to...to everybody you know and that there's a... there's a standard and that's one of the things that we do [ah] that I refer to a lot, whatever level that you know that we're coaching at. That we're trying to perform to a standard. (Todd)

Comments that centered around expectations of the coach included:

I think the expectations... like when I coached in the [era] like even when I started you know coaching high school you know people had teams, but winning was never a big priority you know there's the nice you know business ed. teacher that volunteered to coach the JV team you knew nothing, but was just kind of there... (Dennis)

But everyone knows what the expectations are and I think too .. I mean as a coach I have to do what allows me to sleep at night. I have... I have to ... I have to do what I say I'm going to do. I've told 12 families that I'm going to provide this service for them and I don't like not doing my job. (Erin)

...if the athlete changes the expectations of the coach(,) the coach will never be able to fulfill it... (Denise)

While the expectations for coaches and athletes are overall different, in the context of elite sport some of them are the same. For example, the expectation of certain results is common among both groups. In elite sport there is an expectation that the level of sport is higher, therefore the caliber of both coach and athlete is expected to be higher, which can lead to expectations that are based on positive results, namely winning.

It is often the case in elite sport that winning is the sole focus rather than athlete development (Gervis & Dunn, 2004). Not only is this a concern from the athlete development standpoint, but it also places further pressure on coaches, which may contribute to adopting abusive coach behaviours, which in turn become justified and hence normalized based on the desired outcome. Several of the interviewed coaches commented on the impact that the focus on winning has:

...we tend to turn a blind eye because that winning reputation always trumps the other stuff. (Denise)

...so you know I think the more demands there are on winning the more pressure it puts on the coach, which often you know results in more of that you know potentially abusive behaviour. (Dennis)

Coaches have a major responsibility to the athletes they work with, as athletes are trusting coaches to help lead and develop them in their athletic endeavours that will likely also impact their life outside of sport. Given the high degree of responsibility a coach has to the athletes and the major impact of the coach-athlete relationship, coaches were engaged in dialogue about their role within the coach-athlete relationship in the subsequent section.

### 6.3 Factors Influencing the Coach-Athlete Relationship

As discussed throughout this thesis, the coach-athlete relationship is a large part of the elite sport experience. The theme of the coach-athlete relationship was present throughout all eight interviews. When coaches were asked to comment on the kind of relationship they thought they should have with their athletes, some responded with a focus on mutual respect for one another:

...Respect that [um] you know should be kind of in both directions [ah] for it to be effective. But in other words... respect and trust that the coach, if I'm thinking as an athlete, the... the coach is knowledgeable you know prepared has the best interest of a team as a whole at heart. (Dave)

You know in terms of relationship I think it should be you know very much of a mutual respect, you know where people are free to... you know bring their concerns...(Dennis)

when you have that mutual respect for a coach or an athlete in either direction you'll work harder and [um] behave better and just... you just become an all around better person when someone expects things of you in a respectful way I think. (Hazel)

These findings are concurrent with the literature that describes the importance of mutual-respect and understanding within the coach-athlete relationship (Yang & Jowett, 2013; Lorimer & Jowett, 2009b; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Kenow & Williams, 1999).

Both Erin and Hazel discussed how being women impacted the kind of relationship they had with their athletes:

Well it is different as a female coaching females... Cause there's sort of ... of a... a mothering, tendering, nurturing expectation.... so if you're tough it's shocking. (Erin)

... especially given my age and it may be even my gender I think it's important that I establish kind of a professional and... authoritative position and maintain it. [um] That said when I've had an athlete or a group or a group of athletes more than one season it just kind of automatically breaks down a little bit and there's that certainly more of a friendship that exists, but then it's just a matter of balancing when are we friends and when do we turn on the coach-athlete relationship. (Hazel)

Both of these female coaches are alluding to aspects of the Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987), which views members of society as fulfilling certain roles based on their gender. In coaching it can be difficult for women to be themselves and adopt a style of coaching that suits their personality, particularly when the world around them is supportive of other coaching styles (Stirling & Kerr, 2007). As illustrated above, Hazel distinguishes the coach-athlete relationship from a friendship between the coach and the athlete. This also serves to reinforce how female coaches may be caught in a tug-of-war between being themselves and playing the role society views they need to for the athletes they are coaching.

There are many facets to the coach-athlete relationship and many factors that influence this relationship. As a part of the major theme of factors influencing the coach-athlete relationship the following sub themes emerged: 1) view of the coach within the coach-athlete relationship, 2) view of the athlete within the coach athlete relationship, 3) coach-athlete communication, 4) blurred lines in the coach-athlete relationship, 5) gender related issues in the coach-athlete relationship, and 6) the power position of the coach.

### **6.3.1 Coaches' Views of the Coach Within the Coach-Athlete Relationship**

It is important to consider the individual entities of both the coach and the athlete when looking at the coach-athlete relationship. Throughout the course of the interviews, coaches provided insights about how coaches are viewed within the context of elite sport, and more

specifically when relating to the athletes they were coaching. Some of the coaches' views coaches were negative:

you're trying to get our respect by being mean to your players and not knowing what you're doing and... you don't get my respect... I mean I feel sorry for those kids like there's just not enough good coaches. (Erin)

Like I'm seeing people [um] continue further down the path you know and you know it's again it's cliché, but you coach how you were coached. You know and I'm seeing...I'm seeing the behaviours and I'm...I'm and it's from people that I know... know full well that it's not... not the... the proper way to do it. (Todd)

When I'm mentoring coaches there's times I'm like "wow they are negative". Just their overall tone is negative. (Dave)

However, Marcus provided a more positive view of higher level coaches:

I know that the higher level coaches really care about all their players like we have these reputations, but you know everybody genuinely cares about their athletes we want to see them succeed all of us coaches you know have a different way of going about it, but in my conversation with them all they honestly do care about athletes and how they want to succeed. (Marcus)

It is important to consider the views of coaches that exist within the community of elite female volleyball in Manitoba, as these key figures are interacting with elite female athletes daily.

Examples of both positive and negative views of coaches are important to consider in acknowledging the different coaching styles and practices that exist within this community.

### **6.3.2 Coaches' Views of the Athlete within the Coach-Athlete Relationship**

Although the views of coaches within the context of elite female volleyball in Manitoba are critical, how the coach views the athletes is also important. Frequently throughout the course

of the interviews, coaches shared their views of athletes that they had worked with during their career:

the generations as we go need more explanation, they need to know why. (Denise)

Ya I think that self-motivation is usually the best like if they're intrinsically motivated you get more out of them. (Marcus)

more enabled kids nowadays and more you know generation X kids and more connected and more parents protecting their kids you know there's I would say most athletes now a days have a little thinner skin they take things a little harder a little more personally. (Dennis)

In commenting on their views of the athletes, a few of the coaches also mentioned the importance of the athletes questioning them as the authority figure:

Because if everyone is just falling in line, status quo then there is no growth. You need to have ones and input and [ah] challenge to grow and keep adapting because as athletes gain their experience they're going to change their perspective. (Denise)

... it's ok to talk back to me too like in practice. If a kid... if a kid gets frustrated and they raise their voice to me I get that. (Erin)

it's ok like they're supposed to question what's happening and if they don't like what's going on then they need to say stuff and then you know we go from there... (Marcus)

Most of the interviewed coaches noted that they found the athletes questioning them as a normal, natural part of the sport experience. This demonstrates that some coaches are open to athlete input, which may serve to enhance communication between the athlete and the coach (Marcquet, 2013; Lorimer & Jowett, 2009a; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). Enhanced communication between

the coach and the athlete may serve to enhance the overall sport experience, as both the coach and athlete feel their voice is being heard. The conversations about athlete input and questioning of the coach at times seem to suggest that some coaches in Manitoba are open to feedback and engaging in two way communication with their athletes.

### **6.3.3 Coach-Athlete Communication**

As mentioned previously, coach-athlete communication is an important aspect of the elite sport experience as a part of the coach-athlete relationship. Not only is this discussed in the literature on communication within the coach-athlete relationship (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009a; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003), but some of the coaches interviewed for this thesis also commented on the need for improved communication skills between the coach and the athlete:

We don't teach that. We don't teach how to communicate. We don't teach how to hear. Right everybody listens... People don't hear. (Richard)

just the ability to have conversation with the athlete and teach them to think for themselves you know... like situation where they're going to problem solve as a group rather than just being told this is how we do it. (Marcus)

I remember coaching a girl on the provincial team that you know I asked her a question and she just like almost like looked at me like I had just insulted her or something she... and I said like 'What's wrong?' and she was like 'no coach as ever asked me a question. I don't know why I did that'. I said 'well that's.. I want to know why did you go over there to block'... 'well I don't know why usually people just tell me what I should have done'... (Dennis)

These perspectives indicate that there is a need to enhance communication between the coach and the athlete, and this kind of communication requires more emphasis when educating young coaches.

Other coaches commented on the how communication should be facilitated between the coach and the athlete:

And we try and meet and that... therefore it's a smaller group that maybe can... and a more experienced group that can speak a little bit more openly. I like that form of communication... (Dave)

one of the things he learned with coaching women was that you always had to close the communication loops. Like when we had a communication circle or whatever you want to call it when we had a conversation we had to...I had to make sure... it's my responsibility to make sure that it was closed. That the point of the interaction they... you understood what I was saying. (Todd)

...I will ask them all what do you think about this? Or why do you think that didn't work? Or.. you know some of those sort of self... self discovery questions. (Erin)

Hazel described how the quality of the coach-athlete relationship can often impact the kind of communication that goes on between the coach and the athlete:

This mutual respect that I've been speaking about like I think that my perspective is only as important to... to... only important to and athlete if they respect what I have to say and respect me as a person and that goes right back. I... if I have a disrespectful athlete or [um] an athlete that is unkind to her team mates or you know doesn't work hard when it's necessary if... I will value what they think or have to say far less than if they've earned my attention. (Hazel)

There are many considerations of communication between the coach and the athlete; the ones analyzed here describe the importance of verbal interactions with athletes, the context of communication (i.e., group setting or individual meeting), and how the quality of the coach-athlete relationship impacts coach-athlete communication. Overall, communication is a critical

aspect of the coach-athlete relationship that, when done effectively, often leads to an enhanced sport experience for both the coach and the athlete (Marcquet, 2013; Lorimer & Jowett, 2009a; Yang & Jowett, 2013).

It is well documented in the literature that many athletes are not given a voice or opinion during their sport experiences (Marcquet, 2013; Marcquet & Stanton, 2014). However, when coaches in this study were asked during the interviews if they valued the athlete's perspective, all of the coaches acknowledged that the athlete's perspective was important, as it was an indication of each athlete's unique reality. Comments about the importance of the athlete perspective included:

if there's a stumbling block in training you may have one analysis as to why that's occurring and it may actually... you ... you can't read minds as a coach so...it may be entire... for an entirely different thing and therefore [um] that kind of communication could save you on going too far down a certain path that actually isn't relevant for an individual or a group. So you need that feedback. You need to try and find that sort of feedback and secondly, I would say if you coach then the athletes are a very good source of your continued learning. (Dave)

I mean like it's virtually the only thing that really matters within reason (Dennis)

while it's important to know what their perspective is, I can't... I can't [ah] cater to 122 different perspectives. You sorta have to go with the majority. Majority rules kinda thing. (Erin)

When the participants were asked if they looked for ways to incorporate the athlete's voice, all of them responded in the affirmative saying that they did. When they were asked to elaborate on how they incorporated the athlete voice their responses were varied:

I would ask the athlete's to share their...their experiences .. you know that they've had up to the... up to the point that I'm coaching them. You know where they... where they've come from, how they got started you know... [um] you know I like to ask... I like to ask them often why. You know why... why they're doing things. (Todd)

I think then some of it is just then trying to... through those things is assess not... [um] [pause] micro-management it, but just you know 'hey how's it going. How you doing'?... and like an extra check in with younger players you know. So just trying to find multiple I would say sort of touch points. (Dave)

Almost everyday they get... they get a drill they like or whatever and... and often time it's a warm up drill. (Erin)

It was encouraging that all of the coaches viewed the athlete's perspective as important. The acknowledgment of the athlete's perspective is essential in providing the athlete with a holistic sport experience where they feel valued and a part of their sport experience.

### **6.3.4 Blurred Lines in the Coach-Athlete Relationship**

It is often the case that coaches find themselves in a position to provide care for the athletes that they coach. This theme discusses the hesitation coaches voiced with respect to providing support for the athletes in their program. Coaches were open in sharing the not so clearly defined lines between coaches and athletes in providing support for athletes. Some of the general comments surrounding these blurred lines include:

you know if there was a line you know I'm always sorta making sure that I'm you know... on the...on the you know the objective, subjective you know you kind of sort of go back and forth. You can go into the emotional side to you know show that you're you know you're... you care about them as a person, you build a little bit of a relationship, but then it's kinda like a step in and step out sorta thing. (Todd)

Outside of practices they're girls. If they have problems with boyfriends or whatever and they want to talk about it not a problem. But when we're in the gym and we're doing our sport there's no room for that. (Erin)

I let 'em know I'm here for them I talk to them about little things. [um] If something big's going on in their life I tell them 'if you need me I'm here'. If you don't I just want you to know 'I'm there'. (Marcus)

Most of the coaches felt that they needed to designate a clear boundary with respect to their position as a coach and the leader of the group. Erin points out how providing care for athletes can be a major issue for both the coach and the athlete:

coaches should not be trying to help kids with personal problems... they can help you find someone to help them with personal problems, but that's another way to get attached or potentially be part of another abuse cycle. (Erin)

Richard also makes a very direct comment in discussing blurred lines with respect to the gender of the coach and the athlete. Specifically, he commented that:

...one of the biggest issues of males coaching females especially is the lines they blur, people blur those lines and you can't blur those lines. And if you have the wiring to blur those lines then get out of the profession. You can't keep doing it cause that is troublesome. (Richard)

The point that Richard is making in this case is appropriate given the number of males coaching in female sport. Furthermore, the multitude of existent research that supports the reality of physical relationships that have occurred, and continue to occur, between coaches and athletes within the elite sport context suggests that this requires more attention (Kirby, Greaves, &

Hankivsky, 2000). Thus, the participants were cognizant of the line between providing support for athletes and getting overinvolved.

### 6.3.5 Gender Issues in the Coach-Athlete Relationship

Most of the participants acknowledged challenges that females specifically faced in sport:

I think a lot of times girls in sport always feel like second class citizens and phys. ed. teachers ‘Oh some of the girls don’t want to play’ or whatever so being an athletic girl you grow up being treated like a boy if you want to play with the best. (Erin)

If we teach them it’s ok to excel and achieve and they all...they all understand it, but a lot of times we don’t teach women that way... Like a a guy, we teach them to go after it go for the kill and women it’s kinda like take care of the person beside you. Don’t let them be alone. You know that’s kinda the message we’re always teaching. (Marcus)

I have a theory that boys are raised a little bit more [um] forced into sport and into competing and...and into just figuring out their bodies abilities whereas girls have to learn how to learn these things. (Hazel)

With respect to men coaching girls or women, coaches in this study noted: girls or young women will [ah] take different things differently from an opposite gender then the same gender. (Denise)

I take the same approach towards it and you know I think you have to get a... you have to really recognize that it’s not you know that you don’t classify guys over here and girls over here. Like they’ll respond... they can do the same things you just have to structure it a little bit differently. (Todd)

Overall gender was a major part of this thesis, as the topic was directly related to elite female volleyball.

While coaches made a number of comments about the gender of the athletes, only the female coaches made comments about the impact of their own gender on coaching:

junior high or high school level because I was a female they were one, they were going to listen to me because they respected what I did..(Denise)

you know just develop female self esteem like I really just want to build females up around me because I think that the world community, sport, everywhere would be a better place if more females knew exactly what they're capable of and knew how great they are so that's kind of my number one. (Hazel)

This is particularly of interest, as gender might be expected to be more of an issue for males who are coaching females rather than the other way around. It may be the case that women are thinking more about gender and the influence of gender given the nature of patriarchy in North American culture. Patriarchy was commented on by two of the coaches:

Canada is very heavily based on this colonial or English model of being, which is individual accolades and individually motivated, which is patriarchal... (Hazel)

why are boys treated this way and you know why.. such a patriarchal society... when our indigenous belief in this country is matriarchal right... (Richard)

One of the participants that mentioned patriarchy is male; however, the remark was not in relation to himself. The construction of gender is important when looking at the coach-athlete relationship and the considerable amount of time that coaches and athletes spend together (Stirling & Kerr, 2009). The time that athletes and coaches spend can lead to the formation of a close bond. Due to the inherent power imbalance that exists in the coach-athlete relationship

coaches need to ensure that appropriate boundaries are set and adhered to (Greenleaf, Gould, & Dieffenbach, 2001; Jowett, 2003).

### **6.3.6 Power Position of the Coach**

While the gender of the coach has an impact on the coach-athlete relationship, one of the unique characteristics inherent to the coach-athlete relationship is the power imbalance that exists between the coach and the athlete. This power imbalance is present as a result of the coach's ability to control the flow of certain athlete privileges (i.e., playing time, coach feedback, support, and schedule). The coaches interviewed for this thesis made a number of comments about the power that they had over the athletes they coached, thereby acknowledging their position within this relationship. Some of the comments made were:

As an example if I'm not happy with the performance because I can justify that a sport is physical then I can use things to physically challenge and in turn, I can call it challenging where others deem it as punishment. (Denise)

there's a power ineq... inequality there and the kids are vulnerable and I think you should you know you need to respect that right and you need to act accordingly. (Todd)

That kind of language, we need to structure that and then have a component of the role of the coach as a power... in terms of there power over individuals. (Dave)

Athlete's don't have any recourse most of the time. (Erin)

Like your positional power over a 12 or 13 year old is way higher than your positional power over a 25 year old who's learned to problem solve for themselves and can speak for themselves. (Marcus)

In line with the discussion on power, both Marcus and Richard discussed how it was important for them to empower the athletes that they had the privilege of coaching. In this case power took on an entire different meaning:

the most important part of the coaching is actually teaching athlete to believe in themselves and to [um] empower them to be better. (Marcus)

they should figure it out because that's empowerment. Let's let them figure it out and too many coaches are too quick to jump in ok. (Richard)

Additionally, both comments made by Todd and Dave below sum up the need for making both coaches and athletes aware of the positional power coaches hold within the coach-athlete relationship:

Like who's... who's the adult in the... in the [laughs] you know where's the power structure you know why do we have to wait for you know someone who is in the you know the... the person with experience needs to be corrected by you know someone who's with less experience has to go somewhere else to correct that behaviour .(Todd)

... why this is important is the understanding of the power relationship that you have over individuals and the role modeling as a coach that you're doing you know in creating future generations of [ah] coaches, parents, people. (Dave)

It is clear that the interviewed coaches understood that there is a power imbalance present in the coach-athlete relationship, placing the coach in a position of power over the athlete. However, the coaches' acknowledgment of power does not mean that coaches necessarily act in morally sound ways. Coaches need to be prepared and equipped with the tools necessary for exercising caution and discernment given their position within the coach-athlete relationship. As noted by the coaches in this section, there is a need for more education on the coach's position of power.

#### 6.4 The Impact of the Environment on the Elite Sport Experience

Acknowledging different cultures is important when considering the environment or context of elite sport, as often culture has a serious impact on what is and is not considered appropriate coach etiquette. As pointed out by both Dave and Marcus, some coach behaviours that are deemed inappropriate in Canada may be accepted as common practice in other parts of the world:

and the... the coach called the setter off the court and slapped her. And we were like what do we do? Like you can't do that! So we had the interpreter explain you can't hit a kid in Canada. (Marcus)

So we look at the Russian coaches yelling at Russian players and we're horrified ...within the culture there that's often just how things are done. (Dave)

Comments made by Erin and Dennis in relation to the context of female volleyball in Manitoba provide insight into the local culture:

Because in sport... in sport in Manitoba too many people know too many people... two degrees of separation. Who's gonna get this coaching job well it depends on who you know. Who's in charge, who's making that decision? Oh well I'm buddies with him or her. (Erin)

there was a there was a thinking when I kinda got into coaching at Volleyball Manitoba that the key was to break people down to knock them down and that leaves them stronger when they build back up. (Dennis)

This kind of small, tight knit community has consequences. A major concern with a particularly small community is that when it comes to policing potential perpetrators for unethical coach behaviour, administrators may not be neutral towards these people if they have a friendship with

them. This may allow behaviours to continue in the community of elite female volleyball in Manitoba. The historical context provided by Dennis makes the tight knit community appear to have been accepting of abusive coaching behaviours.

A couple of coaches commented on the network of coaches or support within Manitoba, noting it can be a challenge for coaches who were often competing against one another:

we're always competing against each other we don't want to support each other very well because there... we all want to beat them ...So it... unfortunately we don't support each other and then coaches are even often bad mouthing each other because I want to be better than them. (Dennis)

...a fairly wide network of coaches and whether or not we talk on a regular basis but you know we are... when we do talk we're not [ah] hesitant to share ideas and you know make yourself a little [um] I mean it takes some... a certain mindset I guess you know as you're making yourself a little vulnerable if you put your idea out there. (Todd)

The environment is important to the athletes and coaches, and as commented on by Erin, there is a need to provide a safe and supportive environment for young, developing coaches in Manitoba:

Ya I think that there should be a safe environment... for people to learn how to coach, maybe in a camp setting and [ah]...I want to say specifically girls. (Erin)

Furthermore, Erin acknowledged the history of abuse of female athletes in Manitoba:

that used to be commonplace and as a player I remember those times and they can't be repeated they were awful. It was... you know... female athletes were definitely at... at a disadvantage there was a lot of abusive authority...back in the day. (Erin)

Erin's comments suggest that the environment of elite female volleyball in Manitoba requires attention. Comments made about the specific context of elite sport indicate that the competitive

nature of elite sport often means that coaches are not supportive of one another. Most coaches themselves discussed trying to create the most positive atmosphere they can for their athletes; however, the larger context of female volleyball in Manitoba outside of the immediate team environment of each coach may require attention.

## **6.5 The Role of Abuse in Elite Sport**

In each interview, questions circled around defining verbal and mental abuse and how both forms of abuse are present within the context of elite female volleyball. In addition to answering the specific questions that guided the interview, all of the coaches used a number of terms and short phrases to describe abuse in general. Some of those terms and phrases included: hurtful, being played around with, continuous, exert control over, bullying, being made vulnerable and being made to play through injuries.

The conversation surrounding abuse was thick with description. Many coaches acknowledged the need for more conversation around the topics of verbal and mental abuse as they indicated that these definitions were unclear. Due to the large amount of data generated during this part of the interview, there are a number of subthemes within the role of abuse in elite sport. These subthemes include: 1) verbal abuse in elite sport, 2) mental abuse in elite sport, 3) the athlete perspective of verbal and mental abuse, 4) the role of emotion in influencing verbal and mental abuse in elite sport, 5) prevalence of verbal and mental abuse in elite sport, 6) the intent of verbally and mentally abusive behaviours, 7) witnessing and managing verbal and mental abuse in elite sport and 8) coaches' personal experiences of verbal and mental abuse.

### **6.5.1 Verbal Abuse in Elite Sport**

When participants were asked to discuss their definitions of verbal abuse, most took a while to respond with an answer. All of the coaches acknowledged the personal attacking of an

athlete as a part of verbal abuse. The definitions generated by elite coaches of female volleyball included:

it would be when you are... specifically belittling or going after an individual player about something that's personal not about an action or something revolving around the sport that you are playing. (Marcus)

Verbal abuse is a... it... when it gets personal and it's about something that can't be changed and it's not relevant to what you are doing. (Erin)

Well I think you know for sure that's the you know the million dollar question. I think for sure verbal abuse would be when someone is attacking a person as a person. (Dennis)

When a coach specifically tells you... so it's personal attacking in verbal abuse [ah]... there's different forms... repeatedly... let along some of those things one time is bad enough, but when it's happened repeatedly and when it happens in a public forum. (Denise)

I would say verbal abuse is any time we make people feel [pause] they've been attacked, compromised, embarrassed... (Richard)

anything that would [pause] ... the first thing that popped into my mind would... would you know come to anything that would make somebody feel [ah] that would devalue someone. (Todd)

I suppose regardless of the intentions of the messenger is when words effect a person negatively. (Hazel)

Probably [um] anything that attacks [um] the character and... of the individual. (Dave)

Coaches were asked to further elaborate on their definitions with examples or behaviours that may be verbally abusive. These responses included the following examples:

When a coach is telling you ‘you are a waste of space’, ‘You are stupid’, ‘You’ll never be anything’, ‘You don’t have a sniff’, ‘You’re a fucking bitch’ or that ‘I just can’t waste anymore time with you’... (Denise)

‘Are you stupid’. ‘Are you a fucking retard’... Or ‘you could jump higher if you weren’t so heavy’... (Erin)

directed at specific or individuals is also an important aspect of it. I.e., picking on people. (Dave)

well I think you know raising... like yelling at somebody you know raising your voice. [um] you know making a comment or making a judgment on the person...you know like ‘well that was dumb’. (Todd)

...calling an athlete a name or [um] raising your voice at an athlete regardless of what you’re saying. (Hazel)

Based on the responses given it was clear that coaches of elite female volleyball in Manitoba view verbal abuse as being actions or words spoken directly to an athlete that is personal and unrelated to sport. These words spoken may be abusive based on the content of information delivered or the delivery of this verbal information within a particular sport situation.

### **6.5.2 Mental Abuse in Elite Sport**

While keeping their personal definition of verbal abuse in mind, coaches were then asked to define mental abuse. Again, most of the coaches hesitated in answering this question and many acknowledged that it was hard to define. Participants’ attempts to define mental abuse included:

You know repetitive... repetitively devaluing somebody or...or [ah] pointing out faults or flaws or mistakes...Something that would be you know deliberate, hurtful, doing something for a purpose, you know doing something to make a point that the person would not be able to you know... putting them in a situation where they are highly unlikely to be successful [ah] and that's the... that's your intended outcome. (Todd)

There's [ah] a mental [ah] tug of war that happens there because when it happens at first and only a little bit at a time or it only feels like a little bit you can get through it, but over the course of time as it builds up and you can't shed it then it becomes...it changes your... it becomes more mentally abusive because if you don't have the where-with-all to step away, you can't avoid it because if you're... if you're attitude or strength is 'I want to do this' because you want to be a part of this team and 'I want to win' and 'I want to achieve this'... (Denise)

Mental abuse then would be knowing [pause] that person doesn't like something and then putting them in the situation on purpose to try and enact change or controlling a person saying one thing to them and then showing a different behaviour to them. (Coach 20)

Like playing head games with a kid. (Erin)

Mental abuse would be you know consistent behaviours that belittle [um] that individual either directly or within the group and therefore it could extend beyond [ah] verbal you know comments to including [ah] you know sort treatment or exclusion of a player from activity. (Dave)

but I guess mental abuse is just when [um] someone feels effected negatively by a sit... a situation and it [um] the abuse part I think brings it beyond that threshold where it's either consistent or it's [um] steps aren't being taken to prevent it from happening again or [um] or foundations aren't in place to build that person up or you know things like that. (Hazel)

mental abuse would be you know like I would kind of use mind games. (Dennis)

When we actually make people em... emotionally feel that way. (Richard)

It is clear that coaches saw the emotional piece of mental abuse occurring as a result of the verbal actions taken against the individual athlete. Examples of mental abuse and associated behaviours generated by the participant coaches include:

That could be... that could be looks. That could be you know [um] sort of [ah] [pause] direct you know... could be exp... you know I think... I think inclusion could be one way and whether that's you know not included you know things that ok not prohibited to have water (Dave)

...mind games about 'you'll start if you this', 'you'll start if you do that'... Or saying [um][pause] 'if you... if you don't [ah] if you don't do a 100 reps in the weight room you'll lose your scholarship'... I think [ah] manipulating situations where a person can't win. Sort of spirit breaking... (Erin)

...saying one thing to you, saying something to another person and expecting it to get back to you. (Marcus)

I think you know miss leading people. You know telling someone 'Oh ya you're going to start tomorrow' and then not doing that I think is a form of mental abuse cause we set people up. (Dennis)

I guess maybe even ignoring a person could amount to mental abuse that's kind of on one side of the... or [um] kind of consistently pushing a person beyond where they feel or you think they're capable of going whether it's in a phys... you know in a physical way like putting them into a drill that they can't succeed at and you know embarrassing them. (Hazel)

Participants also commented on whether or not mental abuse could be non-verbal. All of the coaches acknowledged that it could be. The participants' acknowledged the difficulty in defining mental abuse because it is linked to the athletes' individual perception of the circumstance or exhibited coach behaviour. As highlighted in previous sections, this may be linked to the immediate environment that different athletes were raised in (i.e., home life) or the nationality of the athlete. Overall, it was clear that there was consensus on mental abuse being a result of actions taken against certain individuals, which elicited certain emotional responses in each individual athlete.

After defining both verbal and mental abuse, interviewed coaches were asked to engage in a discussion on whether or not verbal and mental abuse were the same form of abuse. Most of the participants considered verbal and mental abuse to be similar but separate forms of abuse:

they're the same because they're abuse... but they're independent because [ah]  
verbal is the action put on you [um] mental is [ah] what we independently create (Denise)

I think they're different, but they're often kind of interconnected and I think the verbal abuse is more recognizable especially in an anger kind of mode... I think that the mental abuse is you know is hard. (Dennis)

when you're verbally abusive that's effecting the mental you know performance and the feelings of that player. So verbal and mental abuse are... verbal abuse is something that you can easily... you can easily identify and you can go 'no that's wrong'. You can't call a kid stupid. You can't call a kid fat. (Erin)

...if I slap you or if I swear at you or if I ignore you I'm still abusing you. So they are the same thing. I don't see them being that different other than one's an action one's a... one's you know like ya... I... I... I guess if you're trying to [pause] ya I... I don't know I guess it's all in the perception of the athlete. (Marcus)

Not by definition, but can they be? Yes... Well I can... you know I... I can easily say to you things that verbally impact you... but I can mentally do the same thing... So I don't need words to abuse you. (Richard)

Ya I think that... I think you could... I think I would say they [pause] I don't think they're the same thing [pause] but I would say that they are [pause] [ah] very closely connected. Like I think that the verbal and the mental are linked. But I think you could have mental without verbal. If that makes sense. (Todd)

Ya I guess there are probably examples where that can fall under both categories. [um] I think they are different because verbal abuse... I think you can verbally abuse someone and them actually not be affected by it, but mental abuse just the title [pause] you know notes that [pause] there was something experienced by that person. (Hazel)

Well I would say they're pretty... they can be pretty high... they're gonna be pretty highly correlated... Somebody could be yelling at a bunch of 8 year olds and I would classify that as verbal abuse. I'm not sure Depending on the content and how it was directed... I think that's verbal abuse, but I'm not sure that's mental abuse. (Dave)

In noting the high degree of connectedness between verbal and mental abuse, coaches in this study acknowledged that one could be present without the other necessarily being present. For example, some coaches thought that coaches could verbally abuse athletes without mentally abusing athletes, while other coaches thought that coaches could verbally abuse athletes without being mentally abusive. These examples highlight the degree of difficulty that exists in defining verbal and mental abuse.

### 6.5.3 The Athlete Perspective of Verbal and Mental Abuse

According to the coaches in this study, the impact of verbal and mental abuse is heavily dependent upon the recipient and context within which abusive behaviours manifest. Most of the coaches interviewed acknowledged the importance of the athlete perspective in potentially abusive situations, commenting:

I mean I've [pause] there will.. there have been moments...I'm sure there have been moments where athletes believed they've been verbally abused and they haven't! Or mentally abused and they haven't! (Hazel)

...there's always the perception like where someone feels that feeling result, but you're not in any way meaning for it to be that... (Erin)

I guess it's all in the perception of the athlete. (Marcus)

So that one player's take on it was that coach was abusing me. He picked on me... That's not abuse. But you feel it's abuse so then it's abuse to you. (Richard)

The coaches in this study suggest that athletes' reaction to statements made impacts whether or not comments are perceived as mentally or verbally abusive. The high degree of subjectivity in this case is yet another factor contributing to the difficulty of defining verbal and mental abuse.

### 6.5.4 The Role of Emotion in Verbal and Mental Abuse in Elite Sport

In discussing how verbal and mental abuse may be a part of the elite sport experience, many of the coaches mentioned the role that emotions, specifically frustration, played in coaches' adoption of potentially verbally and mentally abusive coaching behaviours. Comments surrounding the role of emotion as an influence on adopted coach behaviours included:

you know but I mean repetitive errors that you think a player.. that's what I probably find most frustrating as a coach when you believe a kid you know can stay down low to pass the ball... (Dennis)

If you're frustrated and you're the coach you have to be the adult walk away. Walk away and find another way... (Erin)

So it must have been the tone of my voice or the way... the frustration I was showing that put it in a different context cause just saying it out loud every... you know everybody would say 'well that's not that bad'... (Marcus)

Like you can be frustrated or disappointed with the you know with the action, but not with the person. (Todd)

Coaches in this study clearly acknowledged the role that frustration often plays in adopting behaviours that may be deemed abusive. In this case, coaches may be required to exercise emotional self management, which is related to Dave's comments earlier about coach self awareness. Although self-reflection is mentioned in some of the coaching education documents (e.g. Coaching Association of Canada, 2013a; Coaching Association of Canada, 2012) there is a need for more content and direction on the topics of emotional intelligence and self-awareness in coach education.

### **6.5.5 Prevalence of Verbal and Mental Abuse in Elite Sport**

Coaches discussed how prevalent they thought verbal and mental abuse was in elite sport. Comments about the prevalence of verbal and mental abuse ranged from "very" to "not as much as some may think." Specifically, coaches in this study remarked that:

It... it's there like I don't...coaches are trying to make players better and enact change, make their program better so they have to somehow find a way to move an athlete

through a different level and sometimes you... you use shock to drag them through a passive thing or bring em back into a moment. (Marcus)

Very, very, very! Like in real high forms very! (Richard)

I don't see them ...I don't see them very often like at the highest level.

The highest international level. You know at like the you know.. the kind of the club, provincial level you know I..I would say [pause] I would say you know those abusive things that would kinda tend to be you know abusive behaviours ...you know I...you know I would see them [ah] I couldn't give you a percentage, but I would say that you know it's there more then it should be. (Todd)

Very! [um] Maybe entirely and always. (Hazel)

I think it's probably less prevalent in Canada then in a majority of other countries in the world. But I think it's... it exists.... I see numerous examples of it. (Dave)

I think it's more prevalent then people want to admit. I don't think they're naïve, but I don't think they want to admit to it and I think that [pause] [um] generally [ah] individuals can get away with more if they're winning. (Denise)

I think the more demands there are on winning the more pressure it puts on the coach, which often you know results in more of that you know potentially abusive behaviour... (Dennis)

ya more so and then... and then there's other... other things that come in after... after kids are 18 there's other a....there's other things that you know you... you got to look out for. (Erin)

Todd and Dennis feel that verbal and mental abuse does not occur often at the elite level of sport, but the other six participants believe it is prevalent. The responses provided by the participants

indicate that verbal and mental abuse is present within the community of elite female volleyball in Manitoba. This is concerning and requires attention in order to address verbal and mental abuse within this sport community.

Why participants felt verbal and mental abuse was still prevalent in elite female volleyball varied. Responses ranged from deep seeded historical roots of abusive coaching in Manitoba, to more general comments of poor management, to simple rationales for why abusive coaching practices continue. Responses specific to history included:

I think it exists because [um] traditionally some of the strongest [um] you know [ah] even role models in terms of what makes coaching...or what leads to success either directly boarders on that so some of the coaching you know heroes or people looked up to is they were tough and they were hard. (Dave)

You know certain coaches that've gotten away with it forever why would they change One they've been successful. Two they've been supported. Three no one's asked them to change [laughs] why would they change? (Richard)

I can't even name one example of when I... when someone's been [long pause] called out and punished or even just investigated in an appropriate way for mental or verbal abuse in the coaching community. I can't even think of one example. (Hazel)

Examples of responses related to poor management in general included:

I'll use this analogy [pause] when a dog goes into a playground and bites a child we put the dog down. We don't ask questions, we don't give the dog a second chance. We don't put the dog into another playground. We... we have coaches that abuse, degrade, [ah]... whether it's emotionally, sexually, verbally... we give them another chance. We get them another team, another set of athletes. We put them in another gym! (Denise)

I don't think we've done a lot to kind of try to address it you know as a kind of volleyball community. I think that's something that would be good to see. If we just keep not doing anything it doesn't really get any better. (Dennis)

Finally, examples of why participants felt verbally and mentally abusive coaching practices exist include:

I think it happens at every level because some people think that's how you... you know that's how you're going to get the toughest kids... Be really tough on them when they're playing 8 and under soccer and then when you're coaching the team when they're 10 you'll have only the tough one's left... (Erin)

Cause everyone wants their kid to succeed and so we raise our kids in that environment that we make excuses for happening... So by the time I'm say an elite athlete at 21, 22 say it's been a part o my life and I accept it... that's why certain coaches especially that are still in our province and in our sport. (Richard)

..it's all about permission like you need to have permission from athletes, coaches, assistant coaches the whole bit and if the conversations aren't had then you don't know and then people just continue the cycle so. (Marcus)

Regardless of the reasons given for why coaches believe mental and verbal abuse exists within the context of elite female volleyball in Manitoba, the more concerning finding is that verbal and mental abuse are present and continue to be present.

Additional remarks about the prevalence of abuse in elite female volleyball include comments made by Erin and Denise on gender and verbal and mental abuse:

And specifically I will say female athletes... then female coaches.. cause you're in a 'man's world'. (Erin)

more prevalent in... in female environments or female sport... Very rarely [ah] an individual female will step out and ... and expose such an experience that [ah] because they will be [ah] ridiculed in a different way. They won't be put on a pedestal they will shut down or stifled, that women [ah] need to do it in supportive experiences, which means multiples. It's very hard for females to be independent and... and be strong when they've been in an abusive situation and be strong enough to get out on their own. They need to reach out and have support. (Denise)

In the case of females experiencing verbal and mental abuse, Denise and Erin both highlighted that it is more prevalent in female sport, where females will tolerate abuse. This again may be linked back to the history of patriarchy in Canada and North America.

#### **6.5.6 The Intent of Verbally and Mentally Abusive Behaviours**

Throughout the course of the interviews, many of the coaches commented on the intent of abuse. None of the questions in the interview guide specifically directed the conversation toward intent; rather coaches took it upon themselves to mention the intent of verbal and mental abuse.

As Marcus explained,

I think intent [um][pause] I think intent is important, but also you could be abusive without understanding that you're doing it. So I think for the coach not having intent... intending to hurt anybody [ah] is important, but if you're still doing it you need to understand that you're still doing it and you can't say 'well I didn't intend to hurt her' well she's hurt or he's hurt now you gotta deal with it... you gotta you know figure it out. (Marcus)

I don't think was... it was malicious. He thought he was motivating people whereas for example [um] some of the game playing [name of coach] does she know's she's doing it. (Erin)

I think just kind of you know the intent of what you're saying although you know

the intent often gets kind of mistaken a little bit and you know I think as long as we as coaches keep in mind that it's really about the athlete and the kids it's not really about me... (Dennis)

It could be the interpretation of that individual. 'He or she hates me' cause... and the coach would say 'No. No. No. I'm trying to get that athlete to understand that behaviour or that... isn't you know being critical. I'm actually trying... I'm pushing that athlete because I know they have more potential to do it'.... it comes back to what I said about the interpretation of feedback. (Dave)

The quotes provided above indicate that intent of the coach is a part of the internalization of verbal and mental abuse. Some of the coaches provided examples of where their intentions were misinterpreted:

I myself think that probably in... on certain occasions I... an athlete of mine may have felt moments of... of mental turmoil under my coaching where it wasn't intended and I didn't realize an athlete would react the way they did to this certain... a phrase or a moment or an action of mine. (Hazel)

I had [ah] two fifth year players come in and just ream me out because I singled her out and I embarrassed her and she was in the team room crying at the end of it. And I went 'whoa that was not my intent at all'... You know I...sorry that happened. (Marcus)

These quotes demonstrate the delicate nature of verbal and mental abuse. Despite the observation of certain coach behaviours, these behaviours may not in fact be abusive. Furthermore, because the intent of certain comments is not always clear, athletes can feel abused when coaches have no abusive intentions. This reiterates the importance of good coach-athlete communication.

### **6.5.7 Witnessing and Managing Verbal and Mental Abuse in Elite Sport**

Coaches in this study discussed who they saw experiencing verbal and mental abuse within the context of elite female volleyball. All of the coaches identified people and most

provided contexts within which they had witnessed verbal and mental abuse. For example, participants noted:

the athletes for sure, assistant coaches quite a bit will get it, referees will get it yup for sure referees will get it. [ah] assistants...like people working around the... the building they get kinda back bottled a little bit too. Like whenever ya... I... you see it all over the place. You know athletes do it to other athletes you know teams do it to other teams.  
(Marcus)

Everyone. Everyone. (Richard)

I'm aware of situations that [ah] that have been brought back to my attention you know of [ah] you know athletes who were what I would term as you know mental abused. (Todd)

...athletes of both or all genders [um] probably coaches as well... Managers, physiotherapists, sport psychologists, parents, refs... like it... it's just kind of the environment. (Hazel)

Well I see it [um]... in some high school situations... And club volleyball situations.  
(Dave)

I... I often witness [um] and it's... it's the same... it's the usual suspects doing the usual stuff. Saying the usual things and I see it over and over again. (Denise)

You know the under confident, maybe not real strong player [um] you know typically the girl that you know maybe doesn't feel real good about herself...I think often you know those kinds of people seem to take you know more of the heat often than the 11 and 12 players know they're undersized or under skilled or under athletic kind of thing. (Dennis)

well females... Ya well I think I would say coaches experience abuse from parents. [ah] Refs experience abuse from parents... And specifically I will say female athletes...then female coaches. (Erin)

Denise and Todd addresses the need for people who are witnessing verbal and mental abuse to speak up about those instances, as proper management of verbal and mental abuse within the context of elite female volleyball in Manitoba appears to be an ongoing concern.

If you are a witness then you are responsible. In my opinion you're responsible if you have witnessed it, you voice it. (Denise)

...absolutely I've seen you know behaviour in practices and games at you know 16... 16U, 71U, university level you know that I would... that I would call abusive based on my perception of it. (Todd)

Coaches in this study reflected on ways they felt verbal and mental abuse could be managed.

Some of the suggestions included:

How do you change it? Well you change it with education like everything else. (Richard)

Who's job is it is it the principal's job? The principal is just happy somebody is volunteering to coach his team because his parents expect there to be a team you know and the club you know.. if the parents are paying money who's in charge of the club? Typically the coach is in charge of the club so who disciplines the person when they run the club...so unfortunately I think there is a lot of it going on because we don't have a kind of education or mentorship or ways to deal with it. (Dennis)

If you're gonna blow up you know... then you have to let them... then you got to help them understand 'listen my bad I blew up right. This is how I was feeling you know I'm a human being. This is how I release my emotions you know this is why. It's the situation I was frustrated K now let's... let's move on'. Like I think you can do it, I think it's just

kind of lazy if you just do it and then don't talk about it afterwards or don't explain why.  
(Todd)

I guess there are a lot of kind of [pause] psychological ways that you can prevent people from miss treating others and one of them is education... But another way of [pause] controlling or kind of prohibiting negative behaviour is [pause] deterrents. Like deterring people from those behaviours and I that requires some sort of ...punishment is the wrong word, but that requires some sort of repercussions for behaviour. So just education as one route, deterrents as another, punishments another. (Hazel)

but I did and so then I had to deal with it you know I had to explain what was going on, and what my thought process was and once they understand that then they get better and because of that whenever we... I meet with people formally I always ask them what did you hear? So that I understand we're on the same page when they walk out. Ya I... I think it's got to be through conversations, right? (Marcus)

It is clear that coaches acknowledge the presence of verbal and mental abuse within the context of elite female volleyball in Manitoba. Additionally, most of the coaches in this study acknowledge that there is not enough done to address verbally and mentally abusive coaching practices within Manitoba. Given the history of verbal and mental abuse within the province of Manitoba, more rigorous forms of management (i.e., policing of verbal and mental abuse) need to be undertaken if Manitoba is to actively combat abusive coaching tactics.

### **6.5.8 Coaches' Personal Experiences of Verbal and Mental Abuse**

All of the coaches provided stories of verbal and mental abuse both within sport and in everyday life. As Dave explained:

...you know hot gym...is probably to give context and maybe the same group is in this drill for 20 minutes straight. Right. 25 minutes straight I don't...I don't know the time. But I remember being involved, that I could make it through it... I personally didn't [ah] I

don't feel I suffered ... one of the other players semi-collapsed you know. Collapsed on the court kind of thing. But I remember... I mean that instant, that involvement with that coach highly effected my coaching philosophy in the sense that I'm like... I'm not... I'm not talking to people that way I'm not putting people through things in that way. (Dave)

Dave's experience of abuse had a physical component to it, although working athletes out at the rate and intensity he described may have also been mentally abusive. Furthermore, he discussed how the coach addressed some of the athletes and how he did not want that to be a part of how he coached.

Richard's story highlights how verbal and mental abuse within the context of a group can be experienced:

Here's a form of it sure when I was in grade we moved out to St. Vital so from the core to St. Vital... so [um] the coach asked me to come out for the grade 9 basketball team and I was in grade 8. And he had... and he was a very famous coach in the city... he had his team picked. Like he had the team, but he said 'Oh I want you to come out like I saw you in my gym class and you looked great ya come out to it'. Ok, I will. I don't know anyone here really. I've only been here say two weeks. So you know we go through the... you know the whole 3 or 4 weeks of practice everything's great and then at one practice he says 'ok congratulations everyone here except [name of person] made the team'.  
(Richard)

Denise's experience includes multiple forms of abuse, both verbal and mental:

...I also experienced also exceptional negative or abusive experiences. They were [ah] primarily [ah] [cough] physical controlling or physical [ah] exertion negativity [cough] [um] I ideally we were encouraged and...and demanded to play through injuries and [ah] and we were trained in excess in terms of numbers of hours in the gym and [ah] under the guise of [ah] punishment or [ah] things unattained or things perceived to be unattained [ah] on a... on a personal level there was [ah] tons of verbal and personal abuse [ah]

demeaning and [ah] gender demeaning and [um] personally demeaning. That was my experience... (Denise)

Although Hazel describes her experience as not necessarily abusive, she highlights the impact that this kind of situation can have on an athlete long term. In her case, she felt pressured into playing for a certain coach because his club team was the best, despite her previous experience with him:

...in grade 8 [um] when I decided to go to [name of school] [um] I was cut from [name of coach] club volleyball team...And [name of coach] just kind of gave me the reason that 'Oh you chose to go to [name of school] and I don't want to develop [name of school] kids cause I'm...' he was a teacher at [name of school] at the time. So that in... in the moment didn't feel real... didn't feel abusive, but just felt kind of irksome and then later come grade 12 I've hit puberty, I've gotten stronger, I'm in shape, I'm a good athlete, people now kind of see that I'm capable in the sport and [name of coach] approaches me and asks me to come back and play for his club team and when you're a grade... 16 year old girl [clears throat] you know I'm not gonna... he's got all the power. He has all the cards in his hand, He has the club team and the decision making power. (Hazel)

Finally, Todd's experience highlights verbal abuse very clearly:

in this match and we were kinda struggling you know and I... you know I knew that I didn't have you know whatever we were in a bad run so the coach ... so he.. he... we whatever he called the time out and he was... I was sitting on the bench and he was really... he was just right in front of me and he was just... just screaming at me you know like about... you know this and that and like I was running... I was running a play and it wasn't scoring you know and he's just telling me what I already knew. Right like [laughs] he's just recapping what the situation was, but really loud and really animated you know cause I guess that's what he thought was the... you know the right thing to do and... at that timeout. So I remember cause usually I'm like... I'm fairly you know I

don't really say much, but I...I remember at this point like he was just going on and on so then I looked up and I yelled back at him and I said well 'what do you want me to do'.

(Todd)

The personal stories shared by the coaches in this study about their own experiences with verbal and mental abuse give the coaches' a voice in the research. Since all of the participants were either originally from Manitoba or spent the majority of their lives in Manitoba, these stories further highlight the history of abusive coaching in Manitoba.

Finally, it is important to highlight the following comments made by Dennis and Denise: I think now the biggest issue we have in sport is verbal and mental abuse, but we're not doing much about it (Dennis)

I'm talking about here in Manitoba and I'm talking that yes it happens and anyone who says it's not happening or saying that those people have changed they're not telling the truth. And they... therefore, they are not experiencing them. Those... the one's that have supposedly changed have just gotten better at hiding it in the right moments. (Denise)

These comments demonstrate both the major issue of abuse in elite female volleyball and the context of this issue here in Manitoba.

## **6.6 Coaching Education**

Coach education is an important aspect of addressing and dealing effectively with coaching behaviours and practices that may be deemed verbally or mentally abusive. Many of the coaches throughout the duration of the interview mentioned the need for improved quality of coach education. When participants were asked what they felt the overall goal of coach education should be, there were a number of responses provided. Some coaches focused on the development of the person:

I think one they should learn [pause] the first thing they should learn is that the most important part of the coaching is actually teaching athlete to believe in themselves and to

[um] empower them to be better. And then the second part would be to teach athletes to think for themselves. That it's not about what the coach wants and needs and then the third part would be the x's and o's and things along those lines. Like I think we do it backwards we learn too much about the technical, tactical and the rest will come...

(Marcus)

Well to educate coaches to coach. To educate coaches to coach [pause] in a positive to coach. Right like the goal should always be to help us get coaches that understand what they're doing and the impact it has on people. And I think we've gone away from that.

(Richard)

In my opinion, coach education [ah] has to be based on the fundamentals of developing the person through sport. Through whatever sport that is and through that is your secondary things for teaching the.. the fundamental skills, the fundamental [ah] awareness of how the.. that sport is played. (Denise)

Erin's answer was more focused on the technical training of coach in the fundamental skills of the sport:

but I think the goal of coaching education is for coaches to be technically consistent you can't just go out there and wing it how you think it 'well it looks to me like it's done this way' ... like it should be... there are some basics that everyone should be following from like you know the stages of LTAD. (Erin)

Dave, Dennis, and Hazel all acknowledged that there were multiple components to coach education:

I really do think it's [pause] [ah] it's almost two fold, it's probably more than that. But number one is athletes have a right to an educated coach. A knowledgeable coach that's able to communicate that to make them better. But secondly, so there is a competence component and I'd say there's a character component. (Dave)

The goal of coaching education... well I think you know it needs to be... you know the... you know the obviously the two components kind of the theory side of it... versus the technical side and you know I think the you know the technical side you know the.. the theory or the technical courses I've taught always delve into how we treat kids and what's important. (Dennis)

I think there should be more than one thread and more than one option. One thread being [um]... I'm a parent and my kids school team can't find a coach so I need to A learn about how not to... be mentally abusive, how to plan a season, and some drills you know? Just like very base line [um]... I do think there's a time and a place though to develop elite coaching and I think there should be you know beyond that immediate level [ah] thread that's [pause] I guess what I think is that [um] [pause] our province and our country is trying to develop high level volleyball and elite players and stuff [um] but often I think that an ability to play or an ability to develop athletes that can play is confused with the ability to recruit or the ability to motivate people... (Hazel)

Todd's response focused on the long term goal of coach education:

Well I think the overall goal of coach education you know should be you know to... to [pause] [ah] to challenge people to continue to learn and get better. You know to... to understand that you know coach education and ... and coach certification isn't a... like it's a ongoing process. Right. Like it has to be related to athlete development right. Like you would... you want your athlete's to always get better, well I think as a coach you should always want to get better. (Todd)

Responses to the overarching goal of coach education varied based on each coach's experiences. Some of goals mentioned here were effective communication, a solid technical foundation, continued coach education throughout the course of a coach's career and basic teaching skills for coaches to name a few. This section serves to highlight the different needs of coaches and the

extent to which coach education is needed to prepare coaches. This is not a simple task and it likely requires effort and commitment to ensuring that coaches are being properly educated.

Coaches in this study addressed whether or not they believed those goals were being met. Of the eight participants, seven responded negatively, noting Manitoba was not achieving the goals of coach education. While the participants responded with an overwhelming negative response, most mentioned that things had improved and Manitoba was slowly moving in a more positive direction. The coaches in this study acknowledge a number of important things to consider in the education of sport coaches at various levels. However, there are multiple components to coach education that must be considered, both within national coach education and provincial based education. These components are split into the subthemes of Respect in Sport online coach education, coach education on verbal and mental abuse, problems in coach education and solutions for coach education.

### **6.6.1 Respect in Sport Online Coach Education**

The coach education material that is most specific to Manitoba is the online coach education module Respect in Sport. This form of education is required of any coach wishing to coach in Manitoba. All of the coaches who were Respect in Sport certified noted that this form of education, despite having good intentions, was not effective in addressing the issue of abuse (i.e., physical, verbal, mental, sexual) in the coach-athlete relationship.

A number of the coaches referred to the Respect in Sport module as being a hoop to jump through or a means to an end where coaches or organizations can say they are “Respect in Sport certified” in order to protect themselves, rather than being an effective coaching education module:

Because they can do that thing and jump through that hoop and they can laugh in your face. (Denise)

It's like... it's another hoop. (Erin)

It's just more like a hoop to jump through. (Marcus)

it also makes it safe for organizations... Every coach in my club has taken Respect in Sport so 'hey man the fact that their abusing them, I did all that I could'... It... it's just it's almost a green card for organizations to not get tagged ... When something goes wrong right? (Richard)

Coaches were asked to provide examples of what they found effective and ineffective with the Respect in Sport module. Their responses included several suggestions:

Don't allow for someone who can't answer the question honestly to pass! And have it noted that they didn't pass their respect in sport. (Denise)

I think it is a really good kind of entry level tool and I would like to see you know more follow up...you know I think that you know we need just some way to be able to find ways to follow up you know and like I said I would love to see you know some people in Manitoba that just walk into people's gym and just watch somebody's practice for 15 or 20 minutes. (Dennis)

I think it has to be [ah].... It has to be delivered by counselors. (Erin)

Spend more time educating your coaches. So we have [pause] how many high school coaches? How many club coaches? Why are there not ongoing monthly sessions that people have to attend? (Richard)

I don't I was... trying to think of how we could make it better...like [ah] it's so hard to certify people and get coaches as it is and now they have so many extra hours they need to put in just to be able to coach a team that's well I find it a little frustrating. (Marcus)

Almost all of the coaches acknowledged the need to make coaches more accountable for their actions. In general, coaches in this study found Respect in Sport Education to be ineffective in its purpose of educating coaches on contentious sport situations and ways in which to act morally in these situations. It is encouraging to note that the Respect in Sport module is currently being revised and a new version of the online training is likely to be released in 2016.

### **6.6.2 Coach Education on Verbal and Mental Abuse**

Coaches were asked to comment specifically on any coach education they had received on verbal and mental abuse. The comments made in response to this question were vague and disappointing:

Nope... I don't remember... it might have happened... Ya I don't remember it. (Erin)

there's not a lot like really I... I don't think there's a lot, but there... you know after getting prepped for this I started thinking we need to do it more. We need to talk about it more with our club coaches when we do a coaches meeting... (Marcus)

...not specifically. No, I mean [um] the [um] the module that I took in level 3 coaching and leading effectively you know I think it's called... has some reference to more of an ethical behaviours or effected behaviours you know. Making at the... making ethical decisions module you know refers to it a little bit, but not specifically like that. (Todd)

I'm sure it was mentioned, but [ah] because I have a very...honestly I have a very jaded opinion about that because... you can mention it, but you don't obviously follow the policy. So ya ok ya it exists, so it doesn't matter what they say...clearly it matters, but it doesn't matter! (Denise)

Not really. And... my... my you know... common sense tells me it was in there, but it must have been such a small part if I don't remember it. (Hazel)

I do not. I honestly do not... but that could have a lot to do with me at the time too right... I may not have been paying attention. Could have had a bad attitude, which just speaks volumes about why those course aren't great. (Richard)

Further illustrating the lack of education on abuse in sport, Dave noted, "I would say that was addressed" while Dennis just said "No" to verbal and mental abuse education being provided. Based on the responses provided here, coaches in Manitoba are not being adequately educated on verbal and mental abuse.

Of concern was Todd's comment about not being educated on verbal and mental abuse until level 3 coach education. By the time a coach is taking level 3 education, coach behaviours may already be well ingrained, and reversing the learning process may be more difficult. Furthermore, in the case of a verbally and mentally abusive coach, waiting until level three to be educated on verbal and mental abuse may mean that several of the athletes coached by that particular individual may have had several negative experiences and potentially ended their athletic career as a result of poor treatment.

Coaches in this study agreed that not much emphasis was placed on education addressing verbal and mental abuse in elite sport. Their negative assessments, in combination with the comments made above about not being educated on verbal and mental abuse, suggest that the current coach education provided on verbal and mental abuse in elite sport is inadequate. Therefore, it is possible that the lack of education is a contributing factor to the prevalence of verbally and mentally abusive coaching practices coaches in this study believe exist in Manitoba.

### **6.6.3 Problems in Coach Education**

Coach education in Manitoba would benefit from reconsidering the coaching education materials made available presently on verbal and mental abuse in elite sport. Not only did

participants in this study comment on the issues that exist with the education materials on verbal and mental abuse, but they made other more general comments with respect to issues with the current coach certification and education made available to coaches through the NCCP. Some of the other problems identified in coach education were the nature of teaching coaches with different values:

You know working on this little pocket of coaches doesn't help, it has to be everybody that is... you know being educated so and you're gonna there's too many people that have been coaching for too long and aren't going to change their way's I think the ethics part of it should be taken a lot more seriously and by an independent body. (Erin)

you know you only you only learn something if you want to learn. If you don't really [pause] you know some people are there just... everybody's different and you know you can't make everybody conform... but you know if you don't have the desire to learn something you're not really gonna learn it. (Todd)

Other comments were made in direct reference to specific coach education modules or seminars: the ethics in sport part of the program is really just kind of pushed over really fast the first day you know. If you think it's... the basic understanding is if you thinks it's wrong it's wrong. (Marcus)

Well [long pause] I guess everyone learns differently, but I don't really see sitting online and clicking through a whatever a power point or whatever you want to call it a very interactive or effective way of teaching. (Hazel)

Both Dennis and Dave discuss the nature of the coach education seminars as being devoid of interaction and engagement in meaningful conversation:

You know we have no feedback, we have no interaction, we have no way to you know get involved... we don't really have in place anyone to do that and I think that is where

coaching education really kinda falls you know short... is the follow up after the kinda weekend session so to speak...I would say no and I would say it's really hard. (Dennis)

I would say it does not do a good job that... that...the.... that is the majority of stress, that the majority of coaches would face...how to effectively deal... with [um] [pause] individuals and athletes. Ya the role of the individual within a team environment... Needs to be... ya a greater awareness. (Dave)

Denise discussed the focus of coach education in elite sport as being winning:

I think [ah] our number one emphasis or....or the under... the overlying [um] thing with sport is about winning (Denise)

Finally, Richard commented on the certification process, as a whole:

And so certification...how do you certify me in a weekend?... Right it should be a year long process. It really should be... I'm embarrassed to say that I get certified in a weekend. (Richard)

Based on these coaches' comments, it is clear that there are a number of issues with the current NCCP coach education materials. This need for improved education may require attention beyond the boundaries of the province of Manitoba, as most of the coach education training materials are nationally based documents created by the CAC. However, within Manitoba, additional coach education workshops could be made available to coaches through Sport Manitoba.

#### **6.6.4 Solutions for Coach Education**

While coaches identified problems, they were also quick to mention ideas or solutions for fixing the problems they had identified. This feedback highlighted their concerned interest in

forging a way forward for future generations of coaches and athletes in the context of elite female volleyball in Manitoba. As Marcus noted:

Again I think we need to bring in athletes. I think it would be an interesting thing in there that bring in some athletes at... you know like whatever level that... that coach education and have them be able to explain what they want in a coach and how they want to be treated and what they need... Like have a question and answer with a bunch of athletes.  
(Marcus)

Other participants thought that informal observation of fellow coaches, followed by a discussion of what they saw, would be helpful:

let's go to your practice and hang with all these young coaches and we're coming to come watch your practice. We're not going to ask any questions yet, we're just going to sit there and watch you... And then we discuss in a safe environment, not offending the coach... saying what could be better. (Erin)

I think that you know we need just some way to be able to find ways to follow up you know and like I said I would love to see you know some people in Manitoba that just walk into people's gym and just watch somebody's practice for 15 or 20 minutes... you get a real sense of what's happening. (Dennis)

According to some participants, coaches need to be more vocal at pointing out verbal abuse when they hear it. For example, Todd suggests:

I think as a coach right you need to... to know like I think it would be interesting if somebody said to you 'well let's you know that's abusive behaviour?'. (Todd)

there has to be [ah] some form of testing, same thing that I know that I did it and you didn't do it for me... has to be a hands on practicum that [ah] is more telling of your strengths as a coach then not. (Denise)

Like a profiling thing would be helpful because let's see why you're coaching... Like what are your reasons for coaching? Is it to have friends? Is it to have... to get access to kids? Is it because you're a teacher and it's a natural progression? (Erin)

If we're going to put coaches through this we should at least have some sort of way to [um] police it as you said or... ya we should follow through anyway. (Hazel)

Here's a practical then when.. whatever there's interpersonal conflict... Between players or player and coach. Example A could be done this way. Example B here's the leadership model...role. Here's how I would diffuse this situation you know...Cause that would have more impact on coach education than just speaking broadly. (Dave)

Despite the discussion that focused on the need for improvement in coaching, it is important to acknowledge the comment made by Todd addressing coaches' unwillingness to improve their own education:

...continuing education. That's going to be a component now of the NCCP in doing coach education... ya and it's crazy how many people get pissed off about that... Livid! You know 'What do you mean I gotta take...what do you mean I gotta have to...' K well you get a point for... you get a point for coaching...you know 'I can never go back!' You know and that's where we are right now... (Todd)

Todd's comment addresses commitment to quality coaching in sport. Coaches are often overworked and underpaid for their efforts, and if it is the case that a coach is not intrinsically motivated, or is ego driven, then this has potential to have serious negative effects on the athletes that come into contact with these coaches. While the issue of revamping coach education is far from simple, it is clear that steps towards change need to be taken in the near future in order to address certain abusive coaching styles.

## 6.7 Policy on Verbal and Mental Abuse in Manitoba

The final major theme discussed by the participants in this study focused on policies addressing mental and verbal abuse in volleyball. Five of the eight participants were unaware of any policies covering verbal and mental abuse in sport in Manitoba. Two of the coaches interviewed mentioned that they were aware of CIS policies covering verbal and mental abuse. One participant commented that:

when there's policy in place that is just [um] fluff and... and [ah][pause] 'the curtain over the rabbit in the hat' it doesn't matter. (Denise)

While Denise may have some knowledge about a policy on verbal and mental abuse, these policies did not appear to matter as they were not taken seriously in preventing harmful coach behaviours.

Nonetheless, participants thought there should be a policy on verbal and mental abuse in elite sport. Expressing their support for more information on verbal and mental abuse in sport, participants explained:

mental and verbal abuse deserves probably a higher place in a general harassment ...section. Cause you need to talk about... verbal and mental abuse in the context of the topics that... you know.. [um] in terms of gender, sexual orientation, racial, [ah] physical you know... disability. That kind of language, we need to structure that and then have a component of the role of the coach as a power... in terms of there power over individuals. (Dave)

well I think common sense is just not so common because I know when I've crossed the line.... I know when I've come close to the line and again my lines are way different than most right? [um] and it makes me feel ill right?... But some people don't have that so I think that's where policies need to be in place. (Richard)

Ya, absolutely I do. Absolutely! Yup [um] and I think that the attempt is there, but it's.. like I said it's not detailed enough. (Hazel)

Despite being in favour of policies on mental and verbal abuse, skepticism toward the effectiveness of sport policies in general was voiced. According to Marcus, having a policy does not mean it will be followed:

Well policies just cover your butt right? And so... so it's important I think it's important to have a policy because if something happens then we have... we have a rule that we can look back on and... and view it especially if in [ah] sport, but ya there's no question. Ya I think you need a... a policy. (Marcus)

I think our associations need to create that [um] there is an awareness at a high school, club volleyball level, a university level, national team level, [ah] that if this is what you think your experience is these are... this is the formal process of what you do. (Denise)

Oh for sure...and I think it should not be... [ah] it should not be sport specific. I think there should be a... a whole division like athlete...[ah] [ah] you know athlete, parent complaints or whatever's suitable and then have a committee of non-sport related people... counselors and you know professionals... who are investigating that situation because right now Volleyball Manitoba... we have a great ethics committee with [name of person] and [name of person] they can't do all that. (Erin)

Erin was the only coach to mention the ethics committee at Volleyball Manitoba. This ethics committee needs to be better advertised amongst the coach and athlete population in Manitoba, as seven of the eight coaches in this study seem unaware that it exists.

While coaches overall are not fully aware of policies on verbal and mental abuse that are specific to volleyball in Manitoba, all of the coaches agreed that a clear policy on verbal and mental abuse in volleyball needs to be established to protect people from verbal and mental

abuse in elite sport. Participants noted that a governing body can create policy, but without education coaches might not be equipped with the skills to understand and implement policy effectively:

you can see all that stuff...nobody can understand it and nobody can find it. So you have to write so everybody can understand. It has to be clear and concrete so we have guideline. (Richard)

Ya I think the I think there should be [um] I think there should be a bigger [um] like I think it should play a more prominent role in education I would like to have some awareness, education, some guidelines, some... just you know kind of you know awareness that it is an issue. (Dennis)

So and... and this is a you know to do... use these abusive methods or whatever yelling or... or demeaning [ah] behaviour or words you know it's not... it's not effective. So [ah] I think it needs to be put in there a little bit more. Identified more and then I think you know following that you would benefit from you know some kind of policy. (Todd)

Participants pointed out that the implementation and understanding of policy is necessary.

In line with educating athletes and parents on policies already in effect, coaches also discussed their fears about making a formal complaint within a tight knit sport community like the elite female volleyball community in Manitoba:

Like the majority of coaches who are like 'now that's trouble' if you're like a kid or parent caused trouble for that coach... no one wants the kid. You know so no one is willing to risk that unless it's a serious, serious allegation. Because then my kid's going to get black balled. And it's true. There's still too much of a connection with some of these coaches that's not healthy. (Erin)

But at young age groups [um] we need to have an advocate for them because young age groups or young girls or boys or parents of girls, rarely will come forward because they

don't want to be ostracized. They don't want to be seen as the ones who wreck it for everyone else. (Denise)

if someone wants to appeal a decision there's not really that put in place, like it's just not... I mean it's a volunteer organization so...I don't think that's enough. (Hazel)

These are legitimate fears that must be acknowledged as playing a potential role in normalized abusive behaviours. If it is the case that athletes do not feel support from their community, then making a complaint about verbal or mental abuse is highly unlikely. As Erin pointed out above, the fear of being labeled a 'trouble kid' may deter athletes from making claims against abusive coaches. In this case additional support seems necessary.

## 6.8 Summary

This chapter highlighted the key findings that were extrapolated from the data collected during the semi-structured interviews with eight elite coaches of female volleyball in Manitoba. Overall, eight major themes were discussed, all of which had several subthemes.

Important results obtained from the major theme on *The Nature of Elite Sport* circle around the intense nature of elite sport, which places high demands on athletes and coaches, factors that were specific to the nature of elite female volleyball in Manitoba, and normalized coach behaviours specifically within elite female volleyball in Manitoba. In looking at the major theme of the *Role of the Coach*, results were linked to how coaches worked with the athletes they coached, the coaching practices they embodied, and the impact that the group of athletes they were working with at a given time on those coach practices. In addition, coaches discussed their style of coaching, which in the case of female coaches was linked in part to their gender.

The major theme of the *Factors Influencing the Coach-Athlete Relationship* explored the importance of the coach-athlete relationship being marked by mutual respect. Positive and negative views of the coach's role within this relationship were explored, alongside the view of

the athlete within this relationship. Results focused on communication within the coach-athlete relationship centered on the importance of incorporating the athlete's perspective. Finally, blurred lines within the coach-athlete relationship, the role of gender within the coach athlete relationship, and the coach's position of power over the athlete were summarized. Following this theme, the major theme of *The Impact of the Environment on the Elite Sport Experience* was discussed in order to provide context of different world cultures, the culture specific to the elite female volleyball within Manitoba, and how these contexts impacted the elite sport experience.

The fifth major theme was centered on *The Role of Abuse in Elite Sport*, which brought forward results linked to defining verbal and mental abuse, the perceived existence and prevalence of verbal and mental abuse, and coaches' personal experience of verbal and mental abuse. The results from this section included definitions for both verbal and mental abuse and distinguishing these forms of abuse as different but highly linked. Specific examples of behaviours were given for both verbal and mental abuse. Coaches acknowledged the presence of verbal and mental abuse within the context of elite female volleyball in Manitoba, and all coaches agreed that verbal and mental abuse in elite female sport is a common occurrence. Finally, coaches discussed their own experiences of verbal and mental abuse, many of which were from their experiences as elite athletes.

The last two major themes of the results section were dedicated to coach education and coaching policy. The major theme of *Coaching Education* explored coaches' views on the current system of coach education, the Manitoba specific Respect in Sport online training, the problem with these coach education resources, and solutions for these issues. Coaches felt that the education on verbal and mental abuse was lacking and the Respect in sport online training was not effective. Coaches were able to identify many issues within coach education and along

with those problems coaches identified potential solutions. The major theme of *Policy on Verbal and Mental Abuse in Manitoba* discussed the lack of policy available to coaches within Manitoba. While some coaches were able to identify specific policies on verbal and mental abuse, many were not, and many coaches found these policies to be ineffective in addressing verbal and mental abuse. Some coaches identified that fear may inhibit people from making a formal complaint of verbal and mental abuse, which should be a major consideration for sport governing bodies. In closing, the participants' suggestions to improve future and current policies were summarized.

## **Chapter VII: Conclusions and Implications for Future Research**

The previous chapter discussed the participant generated data from eight semi-structured interviews with volleyball coaches who coach elite female volleyball in Manitoba. In this chapter conclusions from the results discussed in Chapter VI are triangulated with auto-ethnographic reflections presented in Chapter IV and the policy analysis discussed in Chapter V. Together, the previous three chapters advance the discussion on how verbally and mentally abusive coaching behaviours are recognized, understood, and addressed within the context of elite female volleyball in Manitoba. In addition, insight into how coaches distinguish verbal and mental abuse from behaviours that motivate and develop mental toughness in athletes is provided. Recommendations regarding what can be done to decrease verbal and mental abuse in the future are discussed. To conclude this thesis, implications for future research are suggested.

### **7.1 Conclusions**

This thesis project demonstrates that elite female volleyball coaches in Manitoba believe that both verbally and mentally abusive coaching practices are present in elite female volleyball in Manitoba. The coaches participating in this study shared experiences of mental and verbal abuse that align with my own experiences of verbal and mental abuse described in Chapter IV, and confirm that drawing a line between motivation and mental abuse can be fraught with difficulty. A history of verbal and mental abuse was also noted frequently during the interview process by a number of the participants. Some coaches in this study began coaching prior to the implementation of some of the policies now in effect. In reviewing the policies constructed on verbal and mental abuse by Volleyball Manitoba, specifically, it is clear that these policies were only created in the early part of the twenty-first century.

Participants in this study confirmed that elite female volleyball in Manitoba, at times, is an environment that condones verbal and mental abuse. As Denise reflected:

And I think it's... it's.. it's an... awful the... the number of abused woman that have come out of this province over the last forty years that we know about. It's awful and we continue to allow that to happen. Maybe not in the same [ah] quantities, but it's happening. It absolutely is! (Denise)

It is important to acknowledge the existence of verbal and mental abuse as not only an act committed by some coaches who exhibit verbally and mentally abusive behaviours, but also as a result of the context of elite sport.

The elite sport context over time has created a culture that accepts verbal and mental abuse as normal coach behaviour (Brackenridge & Fasting, 2002; Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Kirby, Greaves, & Hankivsky, 2000; Parent & Bannon, 2011; Stirling & Kerr, 2008; Stirling & Kerr, 2009; Stirling & Kerr, 2012; Stirling, 2008; Tomlinson & Yorganci, 1997). Some of the comments made in my coach reflection demonstrate the struggle I had at times in knowing what to do as a young female coach. As a product of the elite female volleyball environment in Manitoba, my coaching practices were partly influenced by my own experiences in sport as an athlete. Despite trying to adopt democratic coaching tactics as a coach, I still struggle with the confusion, and therefore tension, that exists around knowing what to do in certain situations.

Not only has verbal and mental abuse been present in the context of elite female volleyball in Manitoba, but it continues to be present, and it appears that the monitoring of these behaviours has largely been neglected. The lack of clearly identified verbally and mentally abusive coaching practices in the policy documents made available to coaches has likely contributed to the continued presence of verbally and mentally abusive coach behaviours. If

policies do not outline sufficiently what these behaviours involve, then it becomes difficult to hold people accountable for certain behaviours.

As Hazel pointed out with respect to improper control of these behaviours, Manitoba actively condones these behaviours in the presenting of awards to young athletes named after coaches who some participants in this study believe engaged in verbally and mentally abusive coaching practices when they were active as coaches. Therefore, it is clear that Manitoba has left some room for improvement when it comes to controlling verbal and mental abuse within elite female volleyball. The complaints and appeal procedures that Volleyball Manitoba currently has in place for its members leave the resolution of contentious scenarios up to open communication and collaboration in problem solving on behalf of the parties involved (Manitoba Volleyball, 2003a). If authority figures and policies continue to leave inappropriate behaviour unaddressed, or up to the discretion of individuals on their own, then verbal and mental abuse are likely to continue within the context of elite female volleyball in Manitoba.

It has been reinforced for sport participants that in order to achieve 'elite' level status, coaches must adopt an authoritative coaching style that often predisposes them to verbally and mentally abusive coaching tactics (Stirling & Kerr, 2012). In turn, this emphasis has caused some athletes to view an authoritative style of coaching as more effective than a democratic approach (Stirling & Kerr, 2007; Tomlinson & Yorganci, 1997). The widespread acceptance of authoritative coaching styles in female sports was echoed by a coach in this study who reflected on his experience coaching an elite women's volleyball team:

this was last year they came to me and they said [ah] 'You know we're having a hard time with your coaching style' and I said 'Ok. Go on.' They said 'well you don't ever yell!' and I said 'Ok.' You know they said 'well we're used to you know like stimulus

response you know I make a mistake I get yelled at you know!’ Like they said ‘and this is really different for us!’ (Todd)

Todd’s experience demonstrates that elite athletes continue to expect to be yelled at throughout their training. While yelling at the athletes may be deemed abusive in some situations and non-abusive in other scenarios, yelling as described above infers a kind of unidirectional communication usually adopted in criticizing the athlete. This relates to the idea of athletes adopting a defense mechanism to manage coach criticism that was highlighted in Chapter VI. In expecting these aggressive coach behaviours, if a coach such as Todd does not exhibit these behaviours, the athletes can be confused. This suggests that the normalization of abusive behaviours in female volleyball within the province of Manitoba may be exceedingly difficult to counteract. Change needs to occur and will require effort on behalf of all members of the elite sport community. Specifically, if change is to occur and persist, coaches, athletes, and Volleyball Manitoba alike need to lead the way and be held accountable in making verbal and mental abuse unacceptable within elite female volleyball.

Coaches identified a number of reasons why verbal and mental abuse has been and continues to be an issue within elite female volleyball in Manitoba. Some of the reasons that coaches identified were indicative of the nature of elite sport (i.e., focus on results, history of sport), the role of the coach (i.e., expectations of the coach), the context of elite sport (i.e., culture), coaching education (i.e., not adequate amounts) and coaching policy (i.e., policies are not readily available). Another important consideration for why some coaches are verbally and mentally abusive includes the character of the coach. The personality of a coach, which is a part of their character, is an important consideration. This is based on the notion that coaches’ choices and decisions are often a reflection of their personal experiences. Dave makes this point

clear in saying that “coaches are often hired on the basis of their competence and fired on the basis of their character.” While most coaches are dedicated to making sport a positive experience, Dave’s experience demonstrates that despite good intentions a coach’s true character may ultimately be revealed within the intense context of elite sport. This is an important consideration that is linked to coaches’ perceived coaching efficacy discussed in Chapter II (Myers et al., 2005; Malete & Feltz, 2000). In the event that a coach does not have a good character it could lead to negative sport outcomes for the athletes that particular coach is in contact with and therefore result in a lowered perceived coaching efficacy (Myers et al., 2005; Malete & Feltz, 2000). Moreover, a coach’s passion for coaching is an important consideration when looking at the character of the coach. Although coaches were not asked specifically about passion, the active status of the coaches and their long careers suggest that their passion is more harmonious and less obsessive (Lafrenière et al., 2011).

Aside from the importance of coach character, Todd pointed out that often when faced with frustrating situations in sport, such as repetitive errors made by athletes, verbally and mentally abusive coaching tactics can be the easier response for coaches rather than managing their frustration:

there’s an expectation there right? Of... of anger or.... you know, but [ah] so... [um] like I...I think it’s just... you know it’s an easy way to try to I... you’re...you’re not teaching anything. You’re not changing anything... It’s easy to say ‘you didn’t get that cause you [ah] you know you didn’t... you didn’t want it’. (Todd)

Certainly in the case of the mental abuse I experienced as an athlete, the coach’s frustration with my decision to leave the school that he coached at led to a negative verbal exchange where I perceived he found it necessary to take his frustration out on me for my decision, which had nothing to do with him or his program. This hinges on Dave’s comments about coach self-

awareness. In this sense it seems that more education on emotional intelligence and self-awareness may be beneficial for coaches who are often placed in difficult situations where decisions need to be made quickly.

In answering the research questions, it is first important to acknowledge the context of verbal and mental abuse within Manitoba and the main contributors to the acceptance of these abusive behaviours. Having established that verbal and mental abuse has been and continues to be present in women's elite volleyball in Manitoba, and that the main reasons surrounding its existence are varied, coaches interviewed for this study acknowledged verbally abusive behaviours as comments including jokes, insults, and verbal remarks that were directed at the athlete's personality or appearance. Some of the quotes that highlight this definition include:

specifically belittling or going after an individual player about something that's personal not about an action or something revolving around the sport that you are playing.

(Marcus)

for sure verbal abuse would be when someone is attacking a person as a person. (Dennis)

when it gets personal and it's about something that can't be changed and it's not relevant to what you are doing. (Erin)

These comments and the overall recognition of verbal abuse as a personal attack fit with my athlete experience reflected in Chapter IV. The comments made in regards to my physical appearance were not a reflection of my skills as an athlete; rather they were an attack on my biological make up, which was largely out of my control.

The coach policies that were reviewed contained several definitions of verbal abuse. Volleyball Canada describes behaviours that may be considered harassment as:

verbal abuse, threats, outburst, unwelcome remarks, jokes, comments, innuendos, taunts and practical jokes, potentially causing embarrassment, endangering someone's safety, or having a negative influence on an individual's performance. (Volleyball Canada, 2011c, p.2)

The description for harassment applied in the Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS) *Harassment and Discrimination Policy* states:

'Harassment' is comment(s), conduct, or gesture(s) directed towards an individual or group, which is insulting, intimidating, humiliating, hurtful, malicious, degrading, or otherwise offensive and which a reasonable person would know, or, ought reasonably to know to have this effect. (CIS, 2008, p. 2)

In addition, SIRC defines verbal abuse as: "Comment or conduct, directed towards an individual or group of individuals, which is insulting, intimidating, humiliating, malicious, degrading or offensive" (SIRC, 2014, p. 1). As demonstrated by the comments from coaches, my personal experience with verbal abuse, and these definitions from coaching policies, compatible definitions of verbal abuse emerge. Verbal abuse in sport often involves actions on behalf of the coach taken against the athletes under the care of the coach.

In addition to identifying what verbal abuse involves, coaches also provided insight into the process whereby yelling or verbal abuse can become mental abuse. According to participants, mental abuse causes athletes mental and emotional turmoil, and it occurs when comments or actions toward athletes cause feelings of emotional distress. Some of the coaches' comments that highlight this kind of emotional distress include:

When we actually make people em... emotionally feel that way (Richard)

You know repetitive... repetitively devaluing somebody or...or [ah] pointing out faults or flaws or mistakes...Something that would be you know deliberate, hurtful, doing something for a purpose, you know doing something to make a point that the person would not be able to you know... putting them in a situation where they are highly unlikely to be successful [ah] and that's the... that's your intended outcome (Todd)

mental abuse would be you know like I would kind of use the mind games. (Dennis)

The female and the male coaches' definitions of mental abuse did not vary significantly. It was clear that both male and female coaches identified similar qualities of mental abuse (i.e., playing head games, causing the athlete emotional distress, and the continuous nature of mental abuse). In line with these descriptors of mental abuse, my own experiences of verbal abuse by a coach impacted me mentally and emotionally. First and foremost the comments about my body caused years of self-deprecation and lowered self-esteem particularly in regard to my body, which led to the development of maladaptive behaviours. Additionally, this interaction caused me to question my abilities as a young volleyball player. If it had not been for the support system in my life, this experience could have been much more damaging.

None of the policies about harassment or coaching codes of ethics that are in force in elite women's volleyball in Manitoba define mental abuse specifically, which is likely due to the highly subjective nature of this form of abuse. However, there were comments throughout the policy documents that mentioned the impact of coaches' verbal remarks on athlete performance. In light of the lack of attention to mental abuse in the policies and guidelines for women's volleyball, and the coaching education sources coaches reviewed as part of their training, it is not surprising that coaches in this study found it difficult to define mental abuse, but could readily come up with examples of it occurring. One reason why is that mental abuse is highly linked to

the individual athlete. For example, when a coach yells at a group of athletes some may feel motivated or encourages where others may be intimidated and shut down mentally.

Therefore, mental abuse is an area that could afford to be more clearly outlined or defined for coaches and athletes alike. Coaches in this study explained how they attempted to motivate their athletes, which mostly involved ‘pushing athletes’ physically. Based on the data collected about verbal and mental abuse, it is clear that coaches are able to distinguish between coach behaviours that are considered abusive and behaviours that are motivating or serve to increase mental toughness. Some of the coaches specifically commented on what they believe verbal and mental abuse are not:

Like you can be frustrated or disappointed with the you know with the action, but not with the person. (Todd)

Like I’m not sure that you know putting time in would be what I see a form of mental abuse because we’re all pretty time rich...like if we practice every day it’s like ‘Oh we’re overloading those kids’ and that’s two hours. (Dennis)

...yes as a student-athlete you can say ‘here’s where your marks are they got to come up’... but you can’t bring it into practice...(Erin)

Coaches further distinguished abusive behaviours in suggesting definitions for both verbal and mental abuse. Where verbal abuse is the personal attack on individuals, mental abuse is causing undue stress on the emotional wellbeing of the athlete. Based on these definitions and the examples provided by the participant, it is clear that coaches have an understanding of what verbal and mental abuse are while at the same time acknowledge that this kind of abuse is often

subjective. Finally, it was clear throughout the interviews that the coaches had experienced verbal and mental abuse as a part of their athletic or coaching careers.

Although coaches were not asked a direct question on how they motivate the athletes they coach, many commented that motivating their athletes was a challenge. The challenge of motivating athletes or teaching athletes mental toughness can often lead to frustration, and in the event that a coach is not practicing self-awareness and proper emotional management, the line between motivating and being abusive can blur. While the lists of reflective questions provided in the coach education materials (i.e., in MED, Empower +, and Managing Conflict) are practical from an education standpoint, they may not be practical in an intense context such as elite sport, where situations of high emotions arise and decisions need to be made instantly. Coaches need to be better equipped to handle these situations.

Based on the findings in this study, coach education needs to educate coaches better on how to motivate their athletes, and attention to the importance of their role within the coach-athlete relationship could be expanded. Several of the coaches interviewed acknowledged that their coach education did not do a thorough enough job of explaining the role of the coach within the coach-athlete relationship, and stated they find that there are no concrete ways to hold coaches accountable to their role. This aligns with Yang and Jowett's (2013) claim that coach education needs to stress the importance of reciprocal complementarity. Reciprocal complementarity acknowledges the unique position of power that the coach has within the coach-athlete relationship. Clear communication is important to reciprocal complementarity, and it also encourages empathic accuracy (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009a; Lorimer & Jowett, 2009b), which means that communication is consistent and clear. This facilitates coaches and athletes being on the same page, which can increase the bond between a coach and an athlete (Lorimer &

Jowett, 2009a; Lorimer & Jowett, 2009b). Finally, the participants in this study recommend that coach education needs to address abuse within the coach-athlete relationship, which Stirling and Kerr (2009) refer to as relational abuse. This kind of abuse is often a direct result of a coach abusing his/her position of power over an athlete, and it is further reinforced by the 'win at all costs' mentality alive at large in society, which the participants described.

Returning to the question of what can be done to combat verbal and mental abuse in elite volleyball in Manitoba, education was the clearest recommendation. All of the coaches interviewed for this thesis acknowledged that the coach education they received did not thoroughly address verbal and mental abuse, and that when there was mention of these forms of abuse the content was brief. They shared their beliefs that not enough emphasis is placed on abuse in sport. Furthermore, coaches acknowledged that education is necessary in order for coach policies on verbal and mental abuse that are in force to be understood and used. Education on where to find these policies is a necessary first step as most coaches in this study did not know that there were policies addressing verbal and mental abuse in elite sport.

Elite coaches understand that education is an on-going process (Côté, Young, North, & Duffy, 2007). To offer more coach education, Dennis suggested club meetings as a context for formally addressing verbal and mental abuse. Specifically, he recommended that educators:

bring in some people like whether a referee to talk about new rules, whether it's you know a coach to talk about some technical thing, and you know maybe Manitoba Volleyball talk about or just you know the, issues of you know verbal and mental abuse are you know, becoming more you know in the public eye. Here are some, examples that we you know can identify are you know verbal and kinda...mental abuse. (Dennis)

In the case of club meetings, coaches can require that players and parents attend, which represents an opportunity for education to take place, in line with what Dennis pointed out.

However, this does not address education on verbal and mental abuse at the university, national, and international levels, or for the elite coaches themselves. Therefore, enhanced coach education on verbal and mental abuse requires more attention from PSOs and NSOs. Despite policy being identified as a part of the solution, a major concern arising from this study is the participants' lack of awareness and comprehension of sport policies addressing abuse in sport. Many of the coaches acknowledged education as the first step, and then policy to reinforce this education as a logical second step.

Coaches in this study desire to see their fellow coaches held accountable for their actions and the education they receive. This stems primarily from the lack of accountability built into the design of the online coach education Respect in Sport module. Coaches did not find this kind of education to be effective, and several mentioned that more accountable forms of coach education need to be devised. In line with this idea, recently Volleyball Manitoba has implemented a points system whereby coaches are required to accumulate points throughout the course of their coaching careers in order to show their continued coach education. This serves to identify them as coaches who are engaged in their sport and knowledgeable of the changes within their sport that may be occurring. Although this is a positive step in the right direction, there has been some resistance from current coaches, as this requires more time and effort on their behalf. This may be an effective way of highlighting coaches who are committed to their sport and continued coach education from coaches who might be coaching for more ego-centered reasons. Overall, the coach certification process requires some additional attention, as identified by the coaches interviewed for this thesis.

Some of the notable differences between the perspectives of male and female participants were awareness of gender and the impact of their gender on their role as a coach. The female

coaches mentioned their gender more throughout the duration of the interviews, which may reinforce the literature on Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987). Therefore, female coaches may be more aware of the impact their gender has on their role as a coach, as female head coaches are still a marginalized population in elite sport (CSPS, 2013; Lorimer & Jowett, 2010). This is not to say that the male participants were unaware of the impact of their gender, as a few of them commented on the male coach female athlete dynamic, but overall the female coaches mentioned gender more. Another difference was the attention that the female coaches placed on advocating for more support of female athletes. However, the male coaches interviewed for this study also supported this finding along with the need for more female coaches overall. It is important that Volleyball Manitoba continues to encourage and support young female coaches because there is a need for them in elite female volleyball. This is important as these female coaches serve as role models not only for young aspiring athletes, but also females who aspire to coach (Fasting & Pfister, 2000).

The conclusions from this study are specific to elite female volleyball in Manitoba and the sample of coaches who participated. The coaches interviewed for this thesis were able to identify verbal and mental abuse and how these behaviours were different from positive coaching behaviours. Furthermore, coaches suggested ways in which to address the current existence of verbal and mental abuse within elite female volleyball in Manitoba. These solutions focus on improved education, awareness of policy, and accountability for coaches. While these suggestions can help start a dialogue in the coaching community about how to address and eliminate verbally and mentally abusive coaching practices, and are a positive step forward, further study and work remains to be done. Finally, it is important to note that the CAC held a summit on responsible coaching this past year that focuses on taking responsible coaching more

seriously as a nation. This shows the CAC's commitment to engaging in difficult conversations surrounding inappropriate coach conduct and it is an example of a positive step in the right direction.

## **7.2 Future Directions**

The conclusions from this study add knowledge regarding the acceptance of verbal and mental abuse within elite sport, and reinforce the need for more direct future research on relational abuse within the coach-athlete relationship. The importance of exploring the athlete perspective on verbal and mental abuse is an integral piece to understanding verbal and mental abuse. Future studies could expand the scope of this research by including the voices of elite volleyball players, male volleyball players, and/or coaches specialized in sports other than volleyball, both in Manitoba and throughout the rest of Canada. While time limitations delimited this study to elite women's volleyball coaches in Manitoba, other voices are also needed to address verbal and mental abuse in sport.

The coaches interviewed for this study were elite level coaches as defined by their coach certification, the level at which they coached, and the number of years they had been coaching. All of the participants in this study had coached for over five years, but all except one had over twenty years of experience in elite sport. It would be interesting to consider the views of less experienced coaches because these coaches can speak more to the current coach education and certification process. In addition, they can provide insight into what coaches educated in 2015 think about mental toughness, manipulation, and mental abuse. The coaches who participated in this study were vocal about the inadequacy of the coach education they received throughout their coaching careers addressing the topic of verbal and mental abuse in elite sport. However, most of the participants had completed their coach education between ten and thirty years ago.

Exploring the views of newly certified coaches may provide additional insight on coach education seminars and materials alike.

Another area that requires attention is the impact of gender, race, sexuality, nationality, and ability on coaches' coaching styles and views of the line between mental toughness, motivation, and mental abuse. As coaches in this study indicated, there are differences between coaching male and female athletes. Coaches highlighted the differences in how time and skills needed to be structured for male and female athletes. Comments made about female athletes, specifically, indicated that girls and women internalize coach behaviours differently and may be deterred from speaking their minds about verbal and mental abuse for fear of being ostracized. It would be interesting to learn how coaches of male elite volleyball view verbal and mental abuse in working with elite male volleyball players, and to then use this data as a comparison.

Additionally, looking into sports other than volleyball may provide insight into different cultures that exist within the larger context of elite sport. For example, the comparison between teams sports and individual sports may reveal some awareness on the differences between how verbal and mental abuse is demonstrated and internalized. It may be the case in team sports that additional support can be provided through the intimate bond that teammates often share. Volleyball is one sport of many team sports, but it is not clear if findings from this study apply in the context of other team sports such as basketball, soccer, and hockey, to name a few.

Overall, triangulating the education that coaches receive on verbal and mental abuse in sport (Chapter II), with my personal experiences with verbal and mental abuse in sport (Chapter IV), and my assessment of what guidance policy documents in sport provide coaches (Chapter V), with the perspectives of eight elite sport coaches (Chapter VI) reveals that verbal and mental abuse has an ongoing history within the context of elite female volleyball in Manitoba. Elite

volleyball continues to be a context where verbally and mentally abusive behaviours are normalized, often for the sake of winning or obtaining desired results. The exposure of verbal and mental abuse as commonplace in elite women's volleyball in Manitoba, and the lack of coach education and coach policy materials made available to coaches in Manitoba, will hopefully draw attention to a need for change, including more support within this context. This research reveals the current acceptance of verbal and mental abuse within Manitoba, and it has provided feedback on coach education and coach policy within Manitoba as expressed through the views of a sample of coaches and the content analysis of coaching policy.

Reflecting on mental toughness, manipulation and motivation, it is clear that distinguishing these behaviours requires knowledge of the intent of the coach and the ways in which athletes internalize remarks made by the coach. Through conducting this research it is clear that verbally and mentally abusive tactics are common in female elite volleyball in Manitoba and are related to the sport's history of producing desired results. It is my hope that future generations of female athletes will be able to be motivated and pushed without believing or perceiving verbally and mentally abusive coach behaviours to be effective coaching methods.

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## Appendix A: Interview Guide

### *Coaching Demographics*

1. Explain your experience in sport. Feel free to include as much detail as possible. (Prompts: Which sports did you play or coach? Individual versus team sports? How many years have you coached?)
2. What level of coaching certification do you have? Where were you trained? (Prompts: Can you provide me with a brief description of what the seminar was like?)
3. Can you describe for me what were/are your biggest influences in coaching? (Prompts: How did you get involved in coaching? Who are your biggest role models?)
4. How would you describe your role as a coach? (Prompts: How do your coaching practices embody that role?)
5. How would you define your coaching style? (Prompts: Do you have a coaching philosophy that you coach by?)
6. How important is your athlete/athletes perspective to you? (Prompts: Do you look for ways to incorporate athlete voice? If yes, how?)
7. What kind of relationship do you think you should have with your athletes? (Prompts: How do you achieve this kind of relationship?)
8. Do you think the level of sport being played impacts coaching strategies? (Prompts: How?)

### *Verbal/Mental Abuse*

9. How would you define verbal abuse? (Prompt: What behaviours do you think constitute verbal abuse? What are some examples of different forms of verbal and mental abuse?)
10. How would you define mental abuse? (Prompt: What behaviours do you think constitute mental abuse? Can this kind of abuse be non-verbal? Examples.)
11. Based on the responses you just gave, in your opinion is verbal abuse the same as mental abuse? (Prompts: How are they different?)
12. In your opinion do you think verbal and/or mental abuse occur at the level of sport you coach?

13. How prevalent are verbal and mental abuse at the elite sports level? (Prompt: Why do you think this is?)

14. Who do you see experiencing verbal and mental abuse in your environment?  
(Prompt: Have you ever experienced verbal or mental abuse? Would you be willing to share how you felt during this experience?)

#### *Coaching Education*

15. What do you think should be the goal of coach education? (Prompt: Is Manitoba coaching education achieving this goal?)
16. What is your understanding of the Long Term Athlete Development model? (If not explain). Do you feel this model is an affective model for coaching? (Prompt: What suggestions do you have for the Long Term Athlete Development model?)
17. In your opinion is the Respect in Sport (RIS) online coaching education module effective? What is effective or ineffective about RIS? (Prompt: What suggestions do you have for RIS?)
18. Do you recall learning about verbal and/or mental abuse during these education seminars? (Prompts: What section was this covered under? How much emphasis was placed on describing the topic of verbal and/or mental abuse?)
19. Does coach education address the importance of the coach-athlete relationship? (Prompts: Please describe the models described to achieve this?)

#### *Coaching Policy*

20. Are you aware of the policies available on verbal and/or mental abuse in sport in Manitoba? (Prompt: How does the policy explain verbal and/or mental abuse?)
21. Do you think that there should be policy on verbal and/or mental abuse in sport? Why or why not? (Prompt: Do you have suggestions for policy on how verbal and mental abuse can be addressed? If yes, at what level should a policy apply – provincially, nationally, sport-specific?)

## Appendix B: Recruitment Poster

# Motivation, Mental Toughness or Manipulation?: Exploring verbal and mental abuse within the context of elite female volleyball in Manitoba

MA Candidate Alix Krahn from the Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management at University of Manitoba (Advisor: Dr. Sarah Teetzel) is conducting a research study on **coaches' views on verbal and mental abuse in elite female volleyball.**

The study involves taking part in a one-on-one interview that will last approximately 1 hour, and then reviewing a typed transcript of your interview to verify its accuracy and alter any statements you would like to change. Total participation time is approximately 90 minutes.

### **Eligibility Criteria to Participate:**

**(1) Have obtained level two or higher coaching certification from their provincial and national sport bodies,**

**(2) Currently coach at the 17U/18U club volleyball, university levels, or higher,**

**\* If you do not meet the above criteria then you must have at least ten years experience in coaching elite volleyball athletes**

**(3) Are at least 18 years of age.**

For more information, please contact Alix Krahn (MA Candidate) at: 204-899-2389 or [krahna36@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:krahna36@myumanitoba.ca)

## Appendix C: Informed Consent Form



### Health, Leisure & Human Performance Research Institute

Alix Krahn, M.A. Candidate  
University of Manitoba  
Faculty of Kinesiology &  
Recreation Management  
315 Max Bell Centre  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3T 2N2  
(204) 899-2389  
krahna36@myumanitoba.ca

### Informed Consent Form

**Research Project Title:** Motivation, mental toughness or Manipulation?: Exploring verbal and mental abuse within the context of elite female volleyball in Manitoba

**Principal Investigator (PI):** Alix Krahn, M.A. Candidate

Please contact Alix Krahn if you have any questions:

E-mail: [krahna36@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:krahna36@myumanitoba.ca)

Phone: (204) 899-2389

Mailing address: 315 Max Bell Centre, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB, R3T 2N2

MA Advisor: Dr. Sarah Teetzel

E-mail: [sarah.teetzel@umanitoba.ca](mailto:sarah.teetzel@umanitoba.ca)

Phone: (204) 474-8762

Mailing address: 112 Frank Kennedy Centre, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB, R3T 2N2

**This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel welcome to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand the accompanying information.**

#### What is the study about?

This study is a Master's thesis that seeks to understand coaches' experience of verbal and mental abuse, which may include behaviours such as belittling, humiliation, and psychological manipulation. This issue is exacerbated by the contention that exists on how verbally and mentally abusive coaching behaviours are defined. The goal of this research is to explore coaches' views on verbal and mental abuse and ways to address it within the community of elite female volleyball in Manitoba. This qualitative research study will

triangulate auto-ethnography, with in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and content analysis of both coaching education and policy text sources within Manitoba, to explore the complexities of verbal and mental abuse in elite sport. This study will aid in exposing the consistencies or inconsistencies between the views of elite volleyball coaches, coach education text sources and coaching policies, and will aim to provide a suggested way forward in addressing verbal and mental abuse in the context of elite female volleyball in Manitoba.

### **What am I being asked to do?**

Participation in the study involves participating in a one-on-one interview with Alix Krahn at a location of your choice. During the interview, you will be asked to answer questions about your perceptions of verbal and mental abuse, the effectiveness of coaching education in Manitoba in addressing verbal and mental abuse, and your awareness of policies addressing verbal and mental abuse. You will **not** be asked to divulge any information about your own or other coaches' specific coaching practices or experiences of any form of abuse, inside or outside of sport

The interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes, and it will be recorded using a digital voice recorder and later transcribed verbatim by Alix Krahn. You will be sent a transcript of your interview by email or mail, based on your preference, and asked to verify the accuracy of it and remove any details that could serve to identify you; this process will take approximately 30 minutes of your time. You can choose to change or remove any information from the transcript. Once you have approved your transcript and returned it to me it will be coded using qualitative research techniques. The results of the analysis will be published on Mspace which is accessible through the University of Manitoba's library website, and a report summarizing the results will be sent to all participants. Results of the study might also be presented at academic conferences or published in edited collections or scholarly journals.

In December 2016, the audio recordings, electronic transcription files, and printed transcripts will be destroyed by shredding and the digital audio files will be erased and deleted.

During the interview you will be able to ask questions or choose not to answer any question(s). Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you will be given continuing opportunities to decide whether or not to continue participating. You can withdraw from the study or stop your interview at any point. If you do not want to answer a question you are asked, you may state so and choose not to answer without any negative consequences. Your answers supplied prior to the point of withdrawal will only be used if you provide permission to do so. You can request that the recording of the interview be stopped at any point by verbally indicating your decision. You can refuse to answer any questions without having to terminate your involvement in the interview or in the study. If you change your mind after the interview is over, you can contact me or my MA advisor by telephone, mail or email at the contact information above to declare you would like to withdraw from the study, and I will delete your interview recording and shred the

transcript, destroying any evidence or data that you participated in the study at any point in time.

This study seeks to utilize snowball sampling as a recruitment strategy. This means that the PI may ask you to connect with any contacts you have that might be interested and willing to participate in this study. It is not a qualification to provide contact information of other coaches. You may simply refuse to take part in this at the time of the interview by indicating that you do not wish to provide contact information of other coaches. If you agree to help facilitate recruitment of participants for this study, the PI will ask you to send a recruitment poster to the potential participants.

### **Will anyone know what I said?**

Every effort to protect your identity and maintain confidentiality will be implemented throughout the entire study; however, confidentiality can never be guaranteed. To mask your identity, you will choose a pseudonym at the beginning of the interview before the tape recorder is turned on, such as Chris or Carly, so that your name and identifying features will not be associated with your interview. No identifying information will be included in your transcript or any documents or communications resulting from this study. Your sports team affiliations will not be used either.

All files will be stored in locked filing cabinets in a locked office at the University of Manitoba or on a password-protected laptop that only the PI can access. During the interview you will be asked the same questions as other participants. No one other than the principal investigator, Alix Krahn, will know if you opt to participate in this research study or not, and no one else will be able to attribute your specific answers to you in any oral or written communication of results. The data collected during your interview will only be accessible to the PI (Alix Krahn) and her thesis advisory Dr. Sarah Teetzel. Direct quotes from the transcribed interviews might be used in presentations and publications stemming from this research, which can pose a risk of identification for participant quoted; however, only pseudonyms will be used, and identifying details will be removed in order to mask participants' identities.

### **Consenting to participate**

I understand that if I agree to participate in this study my participation will require roughly 90 minutes of my time, consisting of 60 minutes to answer the interview questions and 30 minutes to review a copy of my transcript. I understand that my interview will be recorded using a digital audio recorder and transcribed by a research assistant who has taken a pledge of confidentiality.

I understand that the nature of the questions I'm being asked to discuss are on the topic of what verbal and mental abusive coaching behaviours are and how/if they are addressed in education and policy in Manitoba. Specifically, I understand that I'm being asked to discuss details about my coaching career and involvement in elite sport. I understand that I will be asked to make comments on what constitutes verbal and mental abuse and will be asked to share indirect experiences of verbal and mental abuse within the context of elite volleyball. I understand that I will be asked to discuss the coach education curriculum in general and

how it addresses verbal and mental abuse in sport. Finally, I understand that I will be asked to comment on my knowledge of policies addressing verbal and mental abuse and the effectiveness with which these policies achieve this.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time by informing Alix Krahn or Dr Sarah Teetzel of my decision using the contact information at the top of this form. I recognize that if I feel uncomfortable with a question I can skip that question and choose to remain in the study or withdraw from the study completely by stating my preferences to Alix Krahn or Dr. Sarah Teetzel. I'm also aware that the gift card of \$10 and parking reimbursement will not be returned or refunded should I choose to not participate in this study.

I understand that to protect my anonymity I will pick a pseudonym to be referred to by in any analysis, publications, or presentations stemming from this research project. I will be asked to read my interview transcript, sent to me by email or mail based on my preference, which will allow me the opportunity to change any information I wish to remove or that I feel would serve to identify me. I understand that my name and all identifying features will not appear in any written or verbal report, document or presentation that may result from the study.

I understand the data for the project will be destroyed by shredding, deleting and reformatting 1 year following the completion of the research in December 2016.

I also understand that there is no anticipated benefit to me of participating and that risks of participating in this study are not expected to be greater than those experienced in the normal conduct of my everyday life.

I will keep a copy of this Informed Consent Form for my records.

Do not sign this consent form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have received satisfactory responses to all of your questions.

**Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.**

**The University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board(s) and a representative(s) of the University of Manitoba Research Quality Management/Assurance office may also require access to your research records for safety and quality assurance purposes.**

**This research has been approved by the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat, Maggie Bowman, at 204-474-7122 or [margaret.bowman@umanitoba.ca](mailto:margaret.bowman@umanitoba.ca). A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.**

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I wish to receive a copy of my transcript and a summary of the results of the study by:

✧ Email at: \_\_\_\_\_

or

✧ Mail at: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix D: Participant Information**

Participant #1

Participant Pseudonym: Denise

Gender: Female

NCCP Volleyball Coach Certification level: 2

Participant #2

Participant Pseudonym: Dennis

Gender: Male

NCCP Volleyball Coach Certification level: 3

Participant #3

Participant Pseudonym: Erin

Gender: Female

NCCP Volleyball Coach Certification level: 2

Participant #4

Participant Pseudonym: Coach 20<sup>3</sup>

Renamed: Marcus

Gender: Male

NCCP Volleyball Coach Certification level: 3

Participant #5

Participant Pseudonym: Participant 5<sup>4</sup>

Renamed: Richard

Gender: Male

NCCP Volleyball Coach Certification level: 3

Participant #6

Participant Pseudonym: Todd

Gender: Male

NCCP Volleyball Coach Certification level: 3

Participant #7

Participant Pseudonym: Hazel Gosling

Gender: Female

NCCP Volleyball Coach Certification level: 2

Participant #8

Participant Pseudonym: Dave

Gender: Male

NCCP Volleyball Coach Certification level: 4

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<sup>3</sup> Participant pseudonym was changed from Coach 20 to Marcus

<sup>4</sup> Participant pseudonym was changed from Participant 5 to Richard