

The Coach-Athlete Relationship in a Digital World

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Abstract:

Coach-athlete relationships exist at all levels of sport. Coach-athlete relationships in a digital environment, however, are under-researched. This study investigated athlete gender differences and how athletes responded differently to their coaches' Instagram posts. Through a content analysis of 40 coaches' Instagram posts and 238 athlete comments, results indicated that there are significant differences in how female athletes interact with their coaches on Instagram compared to their male counterparts regardless of the gender of the coach. Results also indicated that female athletes are more likely to comment and use emojis in their interactions far more frequently than male athletes. Results are discussed in terms of gender norms in sport and social media use for male and female athletes.

Introduction:

The coach-athlete relationship is a unique relationship that is formed over countless hours, practices, competitions, and time spent together. These relationships are created similarly at all levels of sport across all genders. You can see the importance of these relationships play in sport whether it be at your local little league game, between Phil Jackson and Kobe Bryant drawing up a last second shot, Tom Brady and Bill Belichick running a two minute offense, or Derek Drouin getting told to make a late adjustment by his coach before jumping for high jump gold at the Olympics.

Historically, coach-athlete relationships have been created and further developed through interpersonal relations and face-to-face time between by coaches and their athlete(s). Throughout an athlete's career they will form many relationships, but none as important as the

relationship they create with their coach (Jowett & Shaunmugam, 2016). Over the past decade or so, these relationships have started to be transformed in an entirely different way; social media has created a new avenue for the coach-athlete relationship to be developed. Social media allows coaches and athletes to develop a ubiquitous connection if they so choose through the use of social media technologies. As athletes become more immersed in the virtual world that is social media, it is important for coaches to understand how athletes use and perceive social media. By doing so, coaches can add their own social media use to their repertoire of achieving more cohesive and succinct coach-athlete relationships.

This paper will focus exclusively on Instagram to examine how social media effects the coach-athlete relationship. Instagram is a social networking site where anyone can post pictures. With over one billion users world-wide (Clement, 2020), the content posted by users is expansive. Users collect followers and follow other users of interest that include celebrities, athletes, friends, and family while collecting likes on photos and videos shared. Beyond likes and follows, Instagram allows users to connect with one another through content sharing, commenting on each other's posts, joining live broadcasts, and direct messaging each other privately.

Communication is a vitally important factor that affects the quality of the coach-athlete relationship (Davis, Jowett, & Tafvelin, 2019) and this paper looks to identify and further understand the coach-athlete relationship in a digital and gendered context. Through a content analysis of current coaches Instagram social media posts and the subsequent athlete responses (comments) to these posts, the role social media plays in communication of coach-athlete relationship is developed. Furthermore, this analysis specifically focuses on gender dynamics in

sports and coaching, identifying how and why female and male athletes respond differently to their coaches' Instagram posts.

A longitudinal research design was employed to gather the data for this research. This study explores digitized communication of the coach-athlete relationship while also exploring the relationship quality by analyzing coaches' Instagram posts created specifically about their athlete(s).

Research Questions

The aim of this paper is to answer the following research questions:

1. How do coaches use Instagram to foster coach-athlete relationships?
2. How do coaches represent themselves and their relationships with athletes through Instagram?
3. How does communication differ between female and male athletes with their coach in an online context?

Literature Review:

There have been very few papers published within the scholarly literature on media communications and sports coaching, in particular those that assess the role social media have within a coach-athlete relationship, and how athletes respond to their coach's posts.

Furthermore, research in this specific field is relatively new and uncharted which will require further research going forward to better understand this intricate and complex topic. In

particular, very few studies on coach-athlete relationships and social media use have been conducted in Canada.

The coach-athlete relationship has gained popularity as a topic of research in academia in recent years. This literature review illuminates recent research that has been conducted surrounding coach-athlete relationships and coach-athlete relationships in a digital environment.

“The technological revolution has reshaped notions of reality and behavior” (Kavanagh, Jones, & Sheppard-Marks, 2016, p.784) and the growth of social media in recent memory has been extensive and continues to change the way people and organizations communicate (Lachman, 2013). Furthermore, in advanced technological societies, the use of social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat are used in a habitual, constant manner (Kavanagh, Jones, & Sheppard-Marks, 2016; Sanderson & Weathers, 2019). The habitual nature of social media use and the ubiquity of platforms necessarily introduces a new factor in the coach-athlete relationship (Kavanagh, Jones, & Sheppard-Marks, 2016; Sanderson & Weathers, 2019). The gender differences in social media use are also addressed which furthers our understanding of why female and male athletes may use social media the way they do.

Coach-Athlete Relationships

The *3 Cs Conceptual Model* developed by Sophia Jowett studies the constructs of closeness, commitment and complimentary (Jowett, 2005). Jowett’s model is popular in previously conducted scholarly research on coach-athlete relationships. Jowett developed this

model to further understand the nuances of the emotional relationship coaches and athletes have with one another (Jowett, 2005). In sport, there are many different personal relationships such as coach-coach, parent-coach, and parent-athlete. But the coach-athlete relationship is considered the most crucial (Jowett, 2005). Scholars have described the coach-athlete relationship in terms that include commitment, cooperation, communication, bonds, respect, friendship, power, and dependence (Jowett, 2005; Lane, 2006), where coaches aim to create inclusive environments where athletes can acquire skills to succeed as individuals or a team through igniting a sense of groupness (Jowett, 2007; Dobrescu, 2014).

Over time as these unique relationships are formed, the inclusivity that is promoted is mutually empowering for both the coach and athlete (Davis, Jowett, & Tafvelin, 2019; Helm, 2017). In order for optimal performance to be achieved, social cohesion is significant. It is defined as the degree to which members of teams like each other; this includes coaches and fellow teammates (Chaundy & Jowett 2004). Strong coach-athlete relationships have also been identified as a key concept in athletic performance (Jowett, 2005), especially at the youth level and their athletes' experience with sport (Vargas-Tonsing, 2007). Furthermore, the coach-athlete relationship is recognized as the foundation of coaching and an influential force in developing athletes physical and psychological skills (Jowett, 2005). Previous research shows that the quality of the coach-athlete relationship had a direct impact of on the well being of the athlete, while a negative or dysfunctional relationships often lead to interpersonal conflict and athlete burnout (Davis, Jowett, & Tafvelin, 2019; Davis, Stenling, Gustafsson, Appleby, Davis, 2019).

Coach-Athlete Relationships in a Digital Age

Millions of children participate in sport throughout the globe each year (Sanderson & Weathers, 2019; Sage & Eitzen, 2013; Vargas-Tonsing, 2007). Social institutions such as sport are now intertwined with technology, which has altered our relationships and interactions with each other (Kavanagh, Jones, & Sheppard-Marks, 2016). Despite the benefits sport brings, one dark side of youth sport is the under-reporting or ignoring of sexual abuse (Sanderson & Weathers, 2019).

Sexual abuse in sport ranges from the youth levels through the Olympic and professional levels (Brackenridge, 1997; Lane, 2006). Often sexual abuse of athletes involves a coach perpetrator (Brackenridge, 1997; Kavanagh, Jones, & Sheppard-Marks, 2016). Increasingly abuse starts through the use of social networking sites (SNS) (Kavanagh, Jones, & Sheppard-Marks, 2016; Sanderson & Weathers, 2019; Van Royen, Vandebosch, & Poels, 2015). Research indicates that the majority of coach perpetrators do involve male coaches (Brackenridge, 1997; Sanderson & Weathers, 2019). Yet, virtual maltreatment of athletes is an ongoing social problem amongst coaches, parents, and even fans (Kavanagh, Jones, & Sheppard-Marks, 2016).

It is argued by some coaches and academics that the use of social networking sites and other social technologies such as text messaging are imperative in fostering cohesive and positive coach-athlete relationships (Sanderson & Weathers, 2019). As it pertains to youth athletes, it has been argued that social media creates opportunities to explore their sexual identity (Van Royen, Vandebosch, Poels, 2015), though others argue this puts these athletes at risk of harmful sexual 'grooming' in an online environment (Sanderson & Weathers, 2019).

Since athletes spend significant amounts of time with their coaches in physical spaces, “this may lead coaches to not fully understanding the boundaries of appropriate behaviour in addition to adopting a strict code of behaviour in their interactions with athletes” (Sanderson & Weathers, 2019, p. 83).

Due to the blending of virtual environments (social media) and physical worlds (practice or competition) additional routes for coaches to gain victims trust and enact deviant interaction (Kavanagh, Jones, & Sheppard-Marks, 2016). Maltreatment online, is also likely to occur within virtual coach-athlete relationships as this is “enabled by the instantaneous access and global reach the internet affords the perpetrator, in this case the coach”. (Kavanagh, Jones, & Sheppard-Marks, 2019, p.788). Even if the motivation for coaches to use social media platforms in abusive ways is not originally there, coaches should be aware that using media to communicate with student athletes may begin innocently, but, transform into areas of concern (Sanderson & Weathers, 2019).

Hegemonic Masculinity and Sport

Social media networks continue to be a predominant means of communication and interaction which can be linked to certain male behavior, such as toxic masculinity (Parent, Gobble, & Rochlen, 2019). Sport cultures have historically been created by men for men within western society and have emphasized a certain level of machismo and reinforced specific stereotypes of masculinity that go with it (English, 2017). Hegemonic masculinity defined by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) refers to the idea that a dominant form of masculinity is socially constructed and results in a world where men hold positions of power, while

subordinating women and marginalized societies (English, 2017). One aspect that leads to this hegemonic view is the way media markets female sport. Sports media market advertise women in sport as sexual objects and not athletes which aids in fueling hegemonic masculinity in male athletics (English, 2017). From here, a subset of hegemonic masculinity includes toxic masculinity (Parent, Gobble, & Rochlen, 2019).

Men who portray toxic masculinity traits are often characterized by having the drive to be a dominating force through the endorsement of misogynistic and homophobic views that include winning, “power over women, and heterosexual self-presentation” (Parent, Gobble, & Rochlen, 2019 p. 278). Furthermore, online interaction via social media use is a breeding ground for toxic masculinity in addition to face-to-face confrontation (Parent, Gobble, & Rochlen, 2019). Male athletes have also predominately been coached by male coaches, despite the rise of female coaches in sport (Weinberg, Reveles, & Jackson, 1985). Despite the growing number of female coaches in sport, male athletes still display more negative attitudes towards female coaches (Haselwood, et al., 2005; Weinberg, Reveles, & Jackson, 1985; Stirling & Kerr, 2009). However, one study suggested both male and female athletes felt indifferent when being coached by a male coach (Weinberg, Reveles, & Jackson, 1985). Though perhaps one study in the literature may suggest the continued imbalance of power and domination in the field.

Gaps in the literature

Online environments including sports and sport media related to student coaching create and subsequently provide outlets for hate to occur in many ways and to date these spaces have received limited scholarly attention (Kavanagh, Jones, & Sheppard-Marks, 2016).

One other main gap in the literature that is apparent is the positive use of social media in the coach-athlete relationship. Much scholarly work currently and in the past has looked at the misuse of social media platforms within the coach-athlete relationship. This is largely impacted by the media's response and coverage of maltreatment within these relationships.

Furthermore, intimate coach-athlete sexual relationships are rarely researched, with most research pertaining to the topic being framed in terms of sexual abuse/maltreatment (Johansson & Larsson, 2017). Finally, there is much literature that illuminates bad decision making in terms of coaches using social media platforms as tools for communication with athletes, but very little research about positive uses of social media platforms that coaches can employ to further foster the coach-athlete relationship online.

Methods:

Sample

This study investigates Instagram posts made by coaches that pertain to coach-athlete relationships through a content analysis. The sample used for this study includes different coaches' Instagram posts from coaches at the high-school, club, and university level in athletics throughout Canada and the United States. The Instagram posts used for this content analysis were made by coaches from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in the United States; the province of Ontario's Ontario University Athletics (OUA); Canada's national university sport governing body, USPORTS; and club coaches within Athletics Canada and Athletics Ontario, which are the national governing body of track and field in Canada, and the province of Ontario respectively.

The sample consists of posts by a) 21 different coaches and their 40 Instagram posts; and b:) 238 athlete comments made in response to those posts. Of the twenty-one coaches, eleven (52.4 %) were male and ten (47.6 %) female. Of the 238 comments made by athletes 195 (81.9 %) were female while 43 (18.1%) male.

This study purposely omitted the use of athletes Instagram posts as social media posts made within the coach-athlete relationship are typically created by coaches and not athletes. This study also wanted to focus on what the athletes were saying in response to their coaches.

Coding Categories

The units of analysis were 40 Instagram posts and their comments.

Coding Procedure & Rules

The author/researcher coded and analyzed all social media posts used for this study. The procedure and collection of data that was followed to ensure posts fit the criteria of this study were as follows:

- 1) All coaches had to have their Instagram account setting set to public in order to see to their posts and the comments attached to those posts. Each post made by the coaches used had to specifically reference their athlete(s) or team that they coach.
- 2) Posts that were made by coaches but were not relevant to their coaching despite comments by their athletes were not used for this study. There had to be a minimum of two comments made by athletes per post for that post to be valid for this study. There was no limit to the maximum amount of comments that could be on a post.

- 3) Each post's data was then transcribed into an excel file that formatted the data in categories such as coach and athlete data in addition to athlete comment data. The coach data included Initials to track who the coach was, gender, and three age ranges.
- 4) Athlete data was comprised of three age ranges, gender, and the level at which they competed.
- 5) The athletes' comments on each post were transcribed into two different boxes. The first box contained all the words used in the comments and the second box included the emojis used.

Findings:

Presented below, are the results of the content analysis on the coaches' Instagram posts.

The tables provide data on a number of different demographics from the analysis. These include age and gender demographics of both athletes and coaches as it pertains to comments.

Table 1 Coach Instagram Posts by Age/Gender

Gender of Coach	#	Percent
Male	11	52.3
Female	10	47.7
Gender of Athlete Comment	#	Percent
Male	43	18.1
Female	195	81.9
Gender Relationship (C-A)	#	Percent
Male-Female	100	42.1
Male-Male	26	10.9
Female-Male	17	7.1
Female-Female	95	39.9
Athlete Level	#	Percent
HS/Club	62	21.9
Collegiate	145	60.9
Post-Collegiate	31	13

Table 1 shows an overview of the data in relation to gender and age demographics of the coaches' Instagram posts analyzed for this paper. Despite using one more male coach than female (11 vs. 10) and six more male coaches posts than female (23 vs. 17) the data suggests that female athletes are more likely to comment on their coaches Instagram posts whether that post is about them, a teammate, or their team. Out of the 238 comments made on 40 Instagram posts made by North American track and field coaches at the high school/club level,

collegiate, and post-collegiate level, 195 of those comments were made by female athletes leaving only 43 to be made by male coaches.

The coaches' gender did not have any influence on the gender of the athlete commenting. Male coaches of female athletes received 42.1 percent of all comments while female coaches of female athletes received 39.9 percent of all comments made on their posts. The level of comments made by male athletes on either male or female coaches posts was extremely low. In fact, the most male comments made on a single post was four (with a female coach), while the most comments made by female athletes on a single post was thirteen which happened twice.

Figure 1 Athlete comments per age group

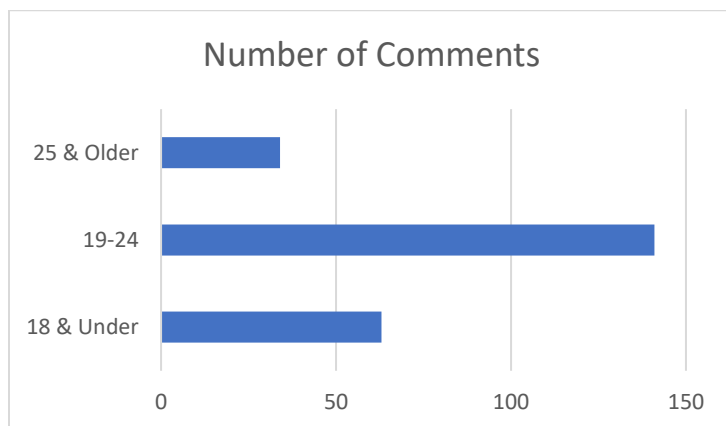
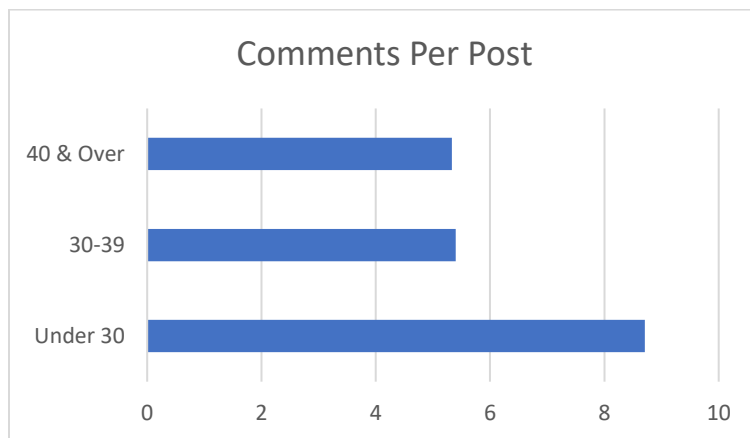


Figure 1 depicts the age breakdown for all 238 comments made by athletes on the 40 posts analyzed. These numbers match up relatively as expected based on the number of posts from coaches in relation to age the athletes they coach. 27 of 40 posts were made by collegiate coaches, while there were only ten posts analyzed made by high school/club coaches and only three posts analyzed by predominately post-collegiate coaches.

These results were also expected based on current Instagram demographics. Distribution of Instagram users worldwide by age and gender further supports these numbers. 13 percent of females and 16 percent of males use Instagram between the ages of 18-24, while those numbers increase for both sexes 25-34 and decrease for users between the ages of 13-17 (Clement, 2020), the majority of athlete comments made in this study were from collegiate athletes.

Figure 2 Comments per post of coaches age



Coaches under the age of 30 experienced a significantly higher number of comments per post than coaches 30-39 and 40 plus. Coaches under 30 averaged nearly nine comments per post while Coaches 30-39 only averaged closer to six comments per post. Coaches 40 and over received the least amount of comments per post from their athletes, averaging only 5.33.

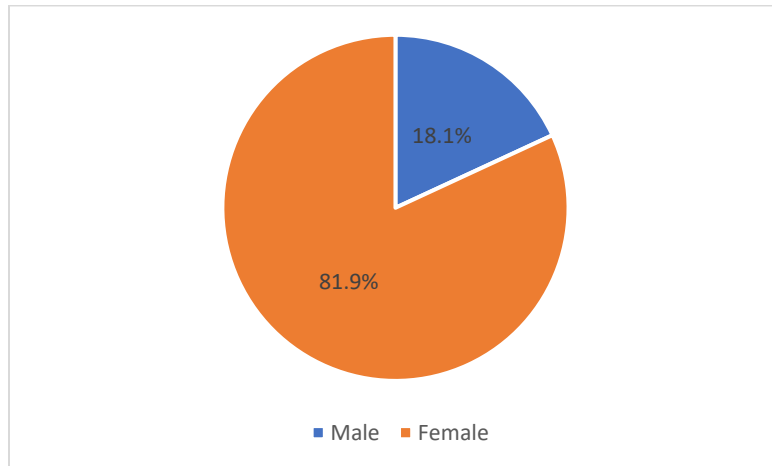
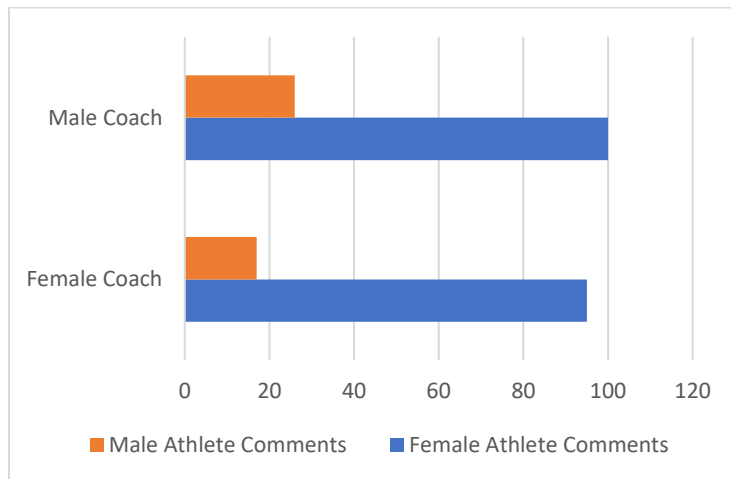
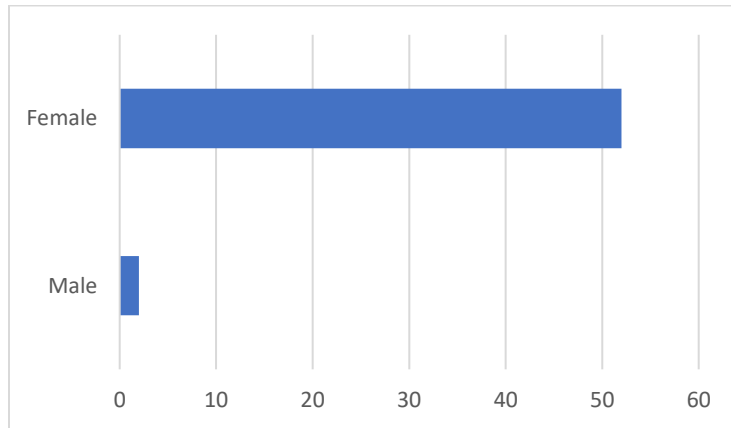
Figure 3 Percentage of comments per gender

Figure 3 reports the percentage of comments made by gender. Out of 238 comments, 82 percent (n=195) were made by female athletes, which is not necessarily surprising due the fact females start using Instagram accounts earlier and spend more time one the app per day than males do (Verrastro et al., 2020). Additionally, female users prefer social media for building relationships while their male peers do not (Muscanell & Guadagno, 2011). In a study that researched female athletes' perceptions of head coaches' communication competence, female athletes were perceived as more likely to disclose information as well as be more accepting and positive in times of despair or conflict (Haselwood et al., 2005). This same study also found female coaches more personable and effective communicator compared to their male colleagues (Haselwood et al., 2005).

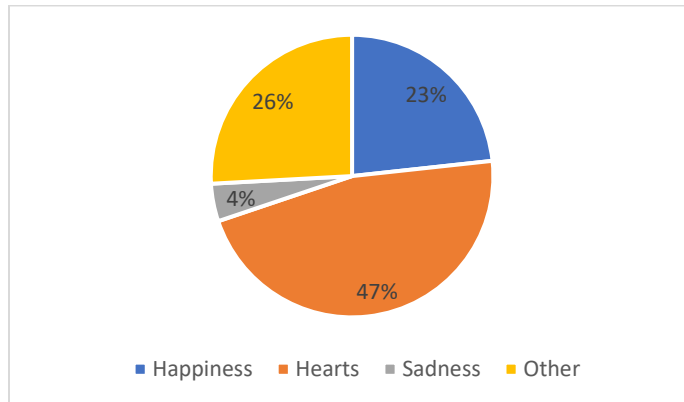
Figure 4 Number of female and male athlete comments to coach gender

The relationship of comments posted by athlete gender in relationship to the gender of their coach is demonstrated in Figure 4. It shows the large discrepancy of female to male comments made on their coaches' Instagram posts. Male athletes, no matter the gender of their coach is unlikely to communicate via Instagram with their coach in the way of commenting in response to a post being made about them or their team. They are even less likely to respond to posts created by female coaches. In relation to professional literature, research in this area supports the previous finding that male athletes have more negative attitudes towards female coaches (Weinberg, Reveles, & Jackson, 1985).

Figure 5 Heart emoji use by gender

Out of the 238 comments analyzed for this study, 54 includes the use a heart emoji. 52 of these heart emojis were used by female athletes with only two being used by their male counterparts.

A study out of Peking University in Beijing and The University of Michigan was the first to publish on gender differences in using emojis (Chen et al, 2018). Related to their work, Pohl, Domin, & Rohs, (2017) engaged in an investigation of different gender use amongst twitter users which found female users tweet using more emojis. The findings Chen et al (2018) reported were that men and women share 8 out their 10 most frequently used emojis and this includes two different uses of heart emojis. Research also shows that the main intention of using emojis is to show sentiment (Chen et al., 2017) and that due to the construct of gender norms women are more likely to show emotion compared to men (Muscanell & Guadagno, 2011).

Figure 6 Distribution of emojis used in comments

Out of the 238 total comments analysed, 116 used emojis within their comments. 47 percent (n=54) of the emojis used were hearts. 23 percent (n=27) of the emojis indicated “happiness”, with only four percent (n=5) emojis indicated sadness. 26 percent (n=30) emojis were categorized as other which included the use of “fire” and “body part” emojis for example. Both female and male emoji users use face-related emoji more than they do heart-related ones (Chen et al., 2017). However, Chen et al.’s. understanding of this is because of there are many more face-related emojis than heart-related emojis.

Discussion:

Previous research showed that there is no significant difference in internet/ social media use by gender (Fallows, 2005; Clement, 2020), however, there are gender differences and motivations for time spent online (Muscanell & Guadagno, 2011). Muscanell and Guadagno’s study in 2011 discussed and examined the influence of gender and personality of individuals social media use. They discovered that social media use amongst women was widely used as a means for social interaction while men used social media in more “task-focused activities”

(Muscanell & Guadagno, 2011). Following these previous results found, it is no surprise that that females or female athletes would comment more on posts than their male or male athlete counterparts. Additionally, women prefer on building and maintaining interpersonal relationships whether online or face-to-face while men maintain focus on tasks rather than relationships (Muscanell & Guadagno, 2011; Eagly, 1987).

Specific to their findings Muscanell and Guadagno (2011, p. 110) found that “women reported more frequently posting public messages (messages viewable by both the profile owner and other users), posting photographs, direct messages, and friend requests.” This further explains the disparity in number of comments between male and female.

This study presents some indications that social media platforms such as Instagram will be more frequently used as a tool for communication within sport. As society continues to progress towards a more digital and virtual world the way in which coaches can create or further develop rapport with their athletes in an online setting will likely prove to be just as important as the relationship they have in a face-to-face context. The findings of this study show empirical data and the correlation of who is saying what in the comments sections of Instagram posts. However, the findings of this study give us a clear breakdown of the gender and age differences in terms of numbers, they do not answer the why. Using these findings coupled with what we know from previous literature on gender norms in social media and sport, a greater more succinct understanding of the entirety of this study is recognizable.

This study is the first attempt in discovering the positive ways that coaches can use social media to create cohesiveness within a team or with their athletes. Up until this point, research

has mainly focused on the social media use and athlete abuse (Sanderson & Weathers, 2020; Kavanagh, Jones, Sheppard-Marks, 2016) and further research in this domain needs to focus on media literacy for coaches. We need to learn how social media can be used as a tool for positivity, not how it has been used as a tool for manipulation.

Fostering coach-athlete relationships through Instagram

Demonstrated through this study is an understanding of how coaches can foster their coach-athlete relationship through using Instagram. It is important to note that not all coaches will legally be allowed to use social media platforms as tool in this regard if they are for example teachers in addition to being coaches as many school boards have strict social media policies as it pertains student-teacher communication outside of the classroom. That said, collegiate and/or club coaches that are in the position to utilize social media platforms like Instagram should use it to their advantage.

As Figure 6 showed above there were 116 emoji used within the 238 total comments made by athletes on their coaches' Instagram posts that were created about them or their team. 48.7 percent off all comments included at least one emoji. Of the 116 emojis used 54 included the use of a heart emoji and 27 an emoji that means happiness such a smiley face. There were only five emojis used that indicated sadness and these five emojis were used by athletes to indicate their sadness of either their coach leaving or they themselves were graduating from a program. Finally, 30 of the emojis used were categorized as "other". These mostly included the fire emoji and of pumped arms and emojis that could once again be interpreted of having a positive connotation attached to them.

The way in which coaches further foster these relationships through Instagram posts is through the way of posting meaningful content that directly relates to their athletes. These posts often include sentiment about a team of athletes. Coaches will use words such as “proud”, “love”, “dedicated” and “thank-you” to express their appreciation. This has a domino effect that trickles down to their athletes in which many of the athletes respond by commenting using their own terms of sentiment that include key words like “best coach ever”, “love this team”, “thank-you”, “thanks coach”, “love”, “great job”, and so forth. These expressions of dialogue not only aid in fostering their relationship with athletes online, but this can also allow for a stronger relationship in a face-to-face context as well. Moreover, this gives both coaches and athletes who may be shy in person to express their feeling in another way that they are comfortable with.

Though this study’s main focus was to understand the utilization of Instagram in a positive manner, there were not any posts that seemed questionable in terms athlete abuse. As previous literature has noted (Kavanagh, Jones, & Sheppard-Marks, 2016; Van Royen, Vandebosch, & Poels, 2015; Johansson & Larsson, 2017; Sanderson & Weathers, 2019) social media use and athlete abuse or maltreatment usually happens within the social media app Snapchat. Snapchat’s photos/ messages disappear after a set time by the sender which eliminates the ability to trace content back to the user. Unlike Instagram for example, Snapchat users are much more likely to use pseudonyms to hide their identity (Sanderson & Weathers, 2019). Regarding athletes under the age of 18, parents might not fully understand how Snapchat works and the behaviours that occur (McMahon, Knight, & McGannon, 2018). Due to Instagram being a very public social media platform, the likelihood of it being used a tool for

coercion seems unlikely, however not impossible. Overall, Instagram can be used by coaches to engage in positive development of their interpersonal relationships with athletes in a way that is beneficial to both parties.

Coaches' self-representation through Instagram

Based on this study it is clear that coaches 1) represent themselves as proud, passionate coaches with the interests of their athletes as upmost importance, and 2) portray their coach-athlete relationships in a buddy-buddy context, much more often than a relationship where there is a clear power and authority divide. This was specifically seen with younger coaches at the high school/club level as well as the collegiate level. The coach-athlete relationships that most represented a friendship were those in which the coach and athlete age gap was smaller. Coaches and athletes with an age gap that was closer to which you would expect a parent-child relationship were less friendship based.

As is pertains to the coach-athlete relationship, it is no surprise that coaches want to represent themselves in a way that will create cohesiveness within their group of athletes (Jowett, 2005; Jowett, 2007; Chaundy & Jowett, 2004). Barnett, Smoll and Smith's research study on youth attrition in sport (1992) concluded that negative actions of adult leaders (coaches) increases the rate of discontinuation in sport. Furthermore, this study showed that athletes with "low self-esteem exhibited a significant increase in their feelings of self-worth over the course of season" (p. 121) and provided evidence that athlete attrition was directly correlated to their coaches' behaviour (Barnett, Smoll, & Smith, 1992). Therefore, coaches who

work at representing themselves in a manner that ensures they put their athletes first will reap the benefits of how their athletes act towards them.

Many of the posts analyzed in the study showed that coaches portrayed their relationships in a very buddy-buddy way. If portrayed online in this manner, there is a good chance that this is how many of their coach-athlete relationships are in person. From a legal point of view, it is recommended in the athletic world that there be a distinct power divide from the coaches' standpoint; that coaches should not be "friends" with their athletes. From a performance perspective, the opposite is expressed. Coaches that create relationships that are more friendly with an even power divide meaning the coach needs the athlete just as much as the athlete needs the coach (Johansson & Larsson, 2017) are able to create relationships that are holistic that emphasize positive growth and development (Jowett, 2005). Specifically, Jowett (2005) uses the word "friendliness" (p.1) when describing what makes an effective relationship.

Certainly, coaches can portray themselves in a multitude of different ways online. Some may choose to stick with the "old school" portrayal, however coaches that illicit traits of pride, passion, empathy, and friendliness coupled with more of a coach-athlete friendship instead of partnership will be able to identify themselves how well their athletes perceive them based on the comments and emojis used by their athletes in response to their posts.

Communication comparisons between genders online with their coach

The original outcome of this study was to understand how coaches can utilize Instagram to develop greater coach-athlete relationships. That said, as the findings showed there was a large discrepancy between female and male athletes who commented on their coaches' posts.

Looking at previous literature surrounding the topics of hegemonic masculinity in sport (English, 2017; Merrill, 1992; Duque-Cruz, 2019; Weinberg, Reveles, & Jackson, 1985), hegemonic masculinity online (Parent, Gobble, & Rochlen, 2019), in addition to gender differences in online use (Verrastro et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2018; Muscanell & Guadagno, 2012) some conclusions have been made.

Eighty-two percent of the 238 comments made by athletes in response to their coaches Instagram posts about them or their team were female. That is an alarming number. Figure 5 in the findings confirmed as well, that it did not matter the gender of the coach, male athletes were not interested in commenting compared to their female counterparts. We know that females start using Instagram earlier (Verrastro et al, 2020) but that has no correlation with the number of comments that are made. However, hegemonic masculinity can aid in explaining this discrepancy, especially within a sporting context. Hegemonic masculinity as defined by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) is male behaviour based on gender roles that reaffirms the purpose to act in ways that favours the dominance of men over marginalized and subordinated groups. Hegemonic masculinity and the act of machismo are often seen in sport, specifically sports of contact such hockey and football. To a degree, hegemonic masculinity will be seen in every male sport. As seen with in many of the comments made by athletes towards their coach, many were positive that included words of affection, appreciation, and strong sentiment. Very feminine per se. A subset of hegemonic masculinity is toxic masculinity which includes the need for “winning, power over women, and heterosexual self-presentation” (Parent, Gobble, & Rochlen, 2019, p. 278). Since these types of masculinity are often seen in sport; if a male

athlete were to comment similarly to their female teammates or counterparts this would open them up for ridicule amongst their other male peers.

Hegemonic masculinity as argued by English (2017) creates many of sport's problems. One problem that arises from hegemonic masculinity in sport includes poor relationships (English, 2017) which can alter how both the athlete and coach perceive each other. If hegemonic masculinity creates friction between an athlete and their coach which would lead to tension on the coach-athlete relationship it would be no surprise that this could be a cause as to why male athletes comment less than female. In the sporting world it would be fair to say that affection like comments go against the gender norms of male sport whereas female athletes do not need to nor are expected to act in similar ways to men.

Finally, the combination of gender norms in sport, coupled with the different purposes social media is used for depending on gender also gives insight into the lack of male comments. Chen et al. (2018) noted that out of the 10 most frequently used emojis by men and women that eight were the same. This included two different heart emojis. I would expect that the lack of emojis used within the comments of male athletes online compared to men in general is closely related to gender expectations within sport itself, that men are to act hegemonically. Furthermore, as Muscanell & Guadagno (2012) explain in their research on gender and personality difference in social networking use, the way in which female users use social media to develop and maintain relationships would explain the much higher frequency in the number of comments they make on Instagram as it relates to this study.

Men on the other hand tend to use social media for task-related ventures and commenting on their coaches' posts do not fit their typical use patterns. This suggests that in order for coaches to effectively use Instagram and other social media platforms to convey and foster coach-athlete relationships with male athletes, first there needs to be open dialogue about behavioural expectations which is something that English eludes to. English (2017) challenges the notion that there needs to be reform in sport in a way that reconceptualizes competition in a way that rids hegemonic masculinity. By doing so perhaps that will lead to change in how male athletes receive and respond to their coaches when content pertaining to them is posted. A win at all costs attitude has been implemented in male sport for decades. We see that female sport though extremely competitive often lacks disruptive or negative behaviour. Perhaps changing gender norms which allow for more open expressions of affection, appreciation, and strong sentiment will see male athletes start to use social media in a similar way to their female peers and teammates.

Limitations and directions for future research

This study was limited in that the only social media posts used of coaches were only those of track and field coaches in North America. Certainly, the data do not reflect all coaches across multiple different sports across the world. Furthermore, the data analysis was limited in so far only coaches who had their Instagram setting set to public were analyzed. Coaches who have private Instagram accounts were not used in this study. I recognize that by selecting media accounts also brings limitations. As previous literature suggests (Sanderson & Weathers, 2019) research on the positive application of social media platforms and coaching has rarely been

done and historically, research and the media have reported on sexual abuse and maltreatment of athletes.

There are multiple avenues for additional research on this topic. First, more research needs to be conducted on the positive implications social media can pose use as it relates to the coach-athlete relationship. It is surprising that this is not the case already. Secondly, more expansive research should be conducted that includes a variety of sports not just North America but in the rest of the world. It would be interesting see a more direct study that compares female dominated sports versus male dominated sport as well as a comparison between hyper-masculine sports and less hegemonic sports.

Finally, in addition to the content analysis methods used here, interviews, surveys, and focus groups would bring an entirely new scope to this type of research, including a more nuanced sense of participants' range of motivations and how these are expressed. Having both men and women explain why they comment as little or as much as they do on their coaches' posts could identify issues within coach-athlete relationships that could then be used to educate coaches on how to move forward in fostering those relationships in an online context.

Conclusion:

It is abundantly clear that there needs to be more scholarly research of what the implications of social media uses are as it pertains to coach-athlete relationships. This study provides an examination into what further research can certainly build on. For years now, there has been growing literature and research on coach-athlete relationships and how to foster those relationships. However, this research has omitted the role social media can play within

the coach-athlete relationship. Furthermore, when coach-athlete relationships are researched and subsequently published that include the use of social media it is in a negative illumination. This research almost solely surrounds the topic of abuse and maltreatment of athletes through social use by their coaches. It is time for serious academic research in the positive application social media can be used for in sport by coaches.

As technology rapidly changes so does social media use. It is imperative that coaches understand and move forward with this technology. Social media is there to be utilized in a professional yet fun manner; it remains underused or even poorly used to aid coaches create better group cohesion, foster the coach-athlete relationship, and increase athlete satisfaction and participation in sport.

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