

Understanding Deselection in Competitive Female Youth Sport

by

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Abstract

The overall purpose of this dissertation research was to gain a better understanding of deselection in competitive female youth sport by examining coaches', athletes', and parents' experiences of deselection. Three studies were conducted, each focused on a different aspect of deselection. The first study examined coaches' views on deselecting athletes from competitive female adolescent sport teams. Interviews were conducted with 22 head coaches (16 male, 6 female) of Under 15-Under 18 age group provincial level female soccer, basketball, volleyball, and ice hockey teams. Interpretive description methodology (Thorne, 2008) was used. Results revealed deselection was a process that involved four phases: pre try-out meeting, evaluation and decision-making, communication of deselection, and post deselection reflections. Within the evaluation and decision-making phase coaches made programmed and non-programmed decisions under conditions of certainty and uncertainty. When faced with uncertainty coaches relied on intuition. The second study examined how athletes and their parents cope with deselection from provincial sport teams using a communal coping perspective. Interviews were conducted with 14 female adolescent athletes (M age = 15.0 years, SD = 1.4) and 14 of their parents (5 fathers, 9 mothers). Participants were deselected from provincial soccer, basketball, volleyball, and ice hockey teams. Data were analyzed using the descriptive phenomenological approach (Giorgi, 2009) guided by a framework of communal coping (Lyons, Mickelson, Sullivan, & Coyne, 1998). Participants appraised deselection from a shared perspective (i.e., athletes and parents viewed deselection as 'our problem') and the responsibility for coping with deselection changed as time progressed. Initially, parents protected their daughters from the negative emotions arising

from deselection (an ‘our problem, my responsibility’ orientation). Athletes and parents then engaged in cooperative actions to manage their reactions to the stressor (an ‘our problem, our responsibility’ orientation). Finally, athletes and parents engaged in individual coping strategies, again reflecting an ‘our problem, my responsibility’ orientation but with athletes taking more responsibility for coping. This study demonstrated the value of using a communal coping perspective to understand interpersonal dimensions of coping in sport, and revealed forms and processes of communal coping used by athletes and their parents. The third study examined female athletes’ experiences of positive growth following deselection. Interviews were conducted with 18 females (M age = 22.45 years, SD = 1.38) who were deselected from provincial sport teams as adolescents and continued to play their sport at a competitive level. Participants completed two interviews. Interpretative phenomenological analysis methodology (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) was used and analysis was guided by Tedeschi and Calhoun’s (2004) model of posttraumatic growth. Results showed that participants questioned their identity and ability as an athlete following deselection. Growth was a gradual process that unfolded over several years. It was experienced in the following domains: greater appreciation of the role of sport in their lives, enhanced sense of personal strength, closer social relationships, and recognition of new opportunities. These findings demonstrated the applicability of a model of posttraumatic growth in sport, and showed that cognitive processing and social relationships are critical components of positive growth as participants re-build their beliefs about themselves as athletes. This dissertation research demonstrates the complex and inherently stressful nature of deselection for coaches, athletes, and parents, and highlights procedures that

can inform and improve deselection procedures used by youth sport coaches, describes how athletes and parents can work together to cope with being deselected, and demonstrates positive growth as a potential positive outcome following deselection.

Preface

This dissertation is an original work by Kacey Neely. The three studies which form this dissertation each received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board. Study 1, project name “Coaches and Deselection” (Pro00031418), was approved on October 10, 2013. Study 2, project name “Athletes/Parents and Deselection” (Pro00046653), was approved on April 17, 2014. Study 3, project name “Positive Growth” (Pro00057229), was approved on June 29, 2015.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Deselection (or being cut) is the elimination of an athlete from a competitive sport team based on the decisions of the coach (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Youth sport is competitive and selective, and at the higher competitive levels athletes usually vie for a spot on the team through a tryout process, at which time they are either selected or deselected. Butt and Molnar (2009) pointed out that given the pyramidal structure of sport there are fewer places available the farther athletes work their way ‘up’ the competitive system. For the majority of adolescent athletes striving to make a more competitive team or move into provincial, national, or even international levels of sport, deselection is almost inevitable. For some athletes, deselection can lead to sport withdrawal or the termination of their athletic careers (Wylleman & Lavalley, 2004). Other athletes may continue to participate in sport after deselection, but must cope with a range of negative psychosocial and emotional consequences (Barnett, 2006, 2007; Munroe, Albinson & Hall, 1999).

Numerous media reports highlight that deselection is an important societal issue. Headlines such as “Parents sue GTHL [Greater Toronto Hockey League] after sons cut by team: In a \$25,000 claim, parents say being cut from team has damaged players’ self-esteem” (Kalchman, 2010), “Back then, getting cut from a team was a ‘growing experience.’ Turns out it’s grounds for litigation, too.” (Rock, 2013), “Teen volleyball player takes her dispute to another kind of court” (Jouvenal, 2015), and “Angry parents take school coaches to court” (ABC News, 2016) are unfortunately too common. These stories reflect the negative and often controversial issues surrounding deselection in

youth sport in North America, particularly with disgruntled parents suing coaches and leagues over their children not making a team.

Members of the public appear to have strong views about deselection in youth sport. For example, a recent opinion piece in the *Edmonton Journal* (Sulz, Gleddie, & Humbert, 2017) discussed an unpublished study reportedly based on interviews with 52 athletes and parents and a survey with 1,667 coaches and athletic directors. This column highlighted some issues coaches should consider when deselecting children and some of the negative psychosocial and emotional consequences arising from deselection. The ‘comments’ section in the online edition of the newspaper revealed some interesting perceptions of deselection among members of the public (see Appendix I for all comments). Some commenters suggested that, for example, “the kids that quit over being cut obviously lack the drive to continue to the next level anyways” and they should “learn the lesson early, let’s not bring up another generation of snowflakes” and “That’s part of life. Get over it.” Other commenters remarked that “[Deselection] also teaches them tough lessons about not everybody making it” and “Yes it’s important that everyone have fun but unless you learn those lessons no one will have fun.”

Yet, there are also articles in the media about efforts being made by schools, coaches, and parents to reduce the pain caused by deselection. For example, an article with the headline “The cruelest cuts: High schools seek to soften blow of not making sports teams” (Rhodes, 2011) described coaches’ efforts to communicate face-to-face with every athlete deselected from a high school team. Similarly, CTVNews featured a story titled ‘Getting cut from the team: Parents should encourage kids, not slam parents’ (La Rose, 2014) in which former NHL hockey player Chris Joseph, who is now a youth

hockey coach, explained parents' frustrations when teams are selected and how the process is done, and suggested that parents should encourage their children and help them get better for the next season rather than blaming coaches.

As media coverage suggests, deselection is a captivating societal issue. It is also an important issue for me personally because I was deselected myself. I played representative soccer growing up and competed in the highest provincial league. After being with the same club team for six years, I was cut halfway through the season. The coach called me and told me not to come to practice because I was no longer on the team. It was a devastating experience for me that impacted my identity, confidence, and continued sport involvement. Although I continued to play high school soccer, I was never fully committed to a competitive team again. I had the opportunity to play soccer at the varsity level during my undergraduate degree but two weeks into the season I chose not to play, perhaps because of a fear of being cut again. The majority of my friends were athletes and I watched some of them get cut from teams as well. I often wonder why some of them were motivated to continue playing their sport at a competitive level, while others, myself included, withdrew or dropped-out altogether. Deselection was a traumatic experience when I was younger but I often look back at the experience and think about how it has shaped my life and who I am today. For me, such a negative experience eventually became the springboard for a lot of positive things in my life, including this dissertation.

Deselection and Coaches

Youth sport coaches have reported that deselection decisions are one of the most challenging aspects of their job (Capstick & Trudel, 2010). Previous studies of

deselection involving coaches have focused on specific aspects of the deselection process, such as how coaches make and communicate decisions to athletes and parents (e.g., Bradbury & Forsyth, 2012; Capstick & Trudel, 2010; Seifried & Casey, 2012). For example, Capstick and Trudel (2010) found some coaches used indirect methods to communicate deselection (e.g., posting a list of players who made the team) to limit their contact with athletes and make the communication less burdensome, while other coaches used more direct and personable methods (e.g., phone calls, face-to-face conversations). Seifried and Casey (2012) also found coaches used both indirect and direct communication strategies and used different approaches to deselect players depending on the age of athletes and level of the team (e.g., junior varsity versus varsity). There is no doubt that coaches have a difficult task when it comes to negotiating how to inform athletes of their deselection. However, there are other decisions that must be made during the deselection process. There is a need for research examining deselection as an entire process to understand more about the different components of deselection and the ways coaches negotiate ‘tough’ decisions at various stages of this process. Understanding the deselection process was the focus of the first study in this dissertation.

Deselection and Athletes

It is ultimately athletes (and to some extent their parents) who have to cope with the consequences of coaches’ deselection decisions. Deselection has most often been viewed as a negative and potentially traumatic experience for adolescent athletes and has been associated with several negative psychosocial and emotional consequences (e.g., Barnett, 2006, 2007; Munroe et al., 1999). For example, following deselection adolescent athletes have reported feelings of depression, anxiety, anger, and humiliation, a loss of

self-esteem, friendships, and connectedness to school, as well as decreased academic performance (Barnett, 2006, 2007; Brown & Potrac, 2009; Munroe et al., 1999). Studies have also shown that athletes can experience a loss of athletic identity (i.e., the degree to which an individual identifies with an athletic role; Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993) and sense of self following deselection (Brown & Potrac, 2009; Grove, Fish, & Eklund, 2004). For instance, Grove et al. (2004) examined changes in athletic identity among female athletes (M age = 16.83 years, SD = 1.82) following deselection from state all-star teams and found that athletic identity significantly decreased among players who did not make the team and remained low at two weeks follow-up. Deselected youth athletes can also be 'at risk' of developing clinical levels of psychological distress (Blakelock, Chen, & Prescott, 2016). Ways in which athletes (and their parents) cope with deselection were addressed in the second study of this dissertation.

The studies reported above suggest deselection may be a traumatic experience for adolescent athletes. Just as other traumatic life events can cause both psychological distress *and* lead to positive growth (Baker, Kelly, Calhoun, Cann, & Tedeschi, 2008), there is an emerging body of literature in sport (e.g., Galli & Reel, 2012; Tamminen, Holt, & Neely, 2013; Wadey, Evans, Evans, & Mitchell, 2011) that shows athletes can experience psychological and emotional growth following negative experiences (e.g., coach conflicts, eating disorders, depression, sexual abuse, and injuries). Although positive growth has not been explicitly studied from a theoretical perspective in the context of deselection, some evidence indicates positive growth may be possible following deselection. For example, Alfermann (2007) found that some athletes can have positive reactions to deselection, such as experiencing a sense of relief from no longer

having to deal with the demands of training and competition. Munroe et al. (1999) found that, after a period of four months, female athletes who were deselected from university level teams were able to view deselection in a 'less negative' light. The findings of these studies showed that athletes can at least *begin* to re-interpret deselection in some positive ways. Further, retrospective studies with athletes who were deselected during their youth suggest that, while the negative memories of deselection remain long after adolescence, there may be ways in which they learn and grow from the experience (Greene, 1991; Neely, 2012). Examining athletes' experiences of positive growth could shed light on long-term and positive implications and may provide a balanced and more comprehensive understanding of deselection in youth sport. These issues were addressed in the third study in this dissertation.

Deselection and Parents

Parents fulfill a number of significant roles in youth sport (Holt & Knight, 2014). They also experience a range of competitive, organizational, and developmental stressors (Harwood & Knight, 2009). Thus parents must make a significant commitment to their children's sport and must be "willing to pay the price to reach the highest level of sport" (Côté & Hay, 2002, p. 496). Given their investment in their children's sport, the termination of a child's high-level athletic career can be an emotional experience for parents (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). For example, in a study of youth soccer players at professional club academies in the UK, parents reported stress related to the deselection process and the short- and long-term effects of deselection on their sons (Harwood, Drew, & Knight, 2010). However, how parents helped their children cope with deselection was not examined. Previous research has examined the role of parents in

helping adolescent athletes learn to cope with a range of stressors in youth sport. Tamminen and Holt (2012) found that parents helped female adolescent athletes learn about coping with stressors in sport by creating a supportive context for learning and using specific strategies, including questioning and reminding, providing perspective, sharing experiences, dosing stress experiences, and initiating informal conversations. An examination of how parents support adolescent athletes during deselection, as well as how parents cope themselves with the deselection process, could make a valuable contribution to the literature. These issues were addressed in the second study of this dissertation.

The Target Population

This dissertation focused on female adolescent athletes at the provincial level of sport. At a broad level, females are generally underrepresented in the sport psychology literature (Conroy, Kaye, & Schantz, 2008) and more pertinent to deselection, Alfermann (2007) stated “it is evident that more studies about career termination (in youth and adulthood) are directed to and concerned with male athletes” (p. 47). It is possible that females face different challenges than males when it comes to deselection and may differ in their responses. For example, females may have fewer coping resources than males (Lewis & Frydenberg, 2004), and may be particularly vulnerable to the stress of deselection because they tend to place high value on social relationships (Smith, 2007). Furthermore, some researchers have suggested females experience greater levels of growth following adversity than males due to their likelihood to seek social support (e.g., Kesimci, Göral, & Gencoz, 2005).

This dissertation focused on deselection during adolescence because there is a greater decline in participation in competitive sport among females than males during this developmental period (Canadian Fitness & Lifestyle Research Institute, 2016).

Furthermore, adolescent athletes have presumably made a significant investment in sport, and have likely committed to one sport with the desire of becoming elite athletes (Côté & Hay, 2002). They have also likely developed a strong athletic identity, which may make them particularly vulnerable to the negative consequences of deselection. Athletic identity begins to develop during late childhood and becomes stronger as individuals commit to an athletic role through adolescence (Houle, Brewer, & Kiluck, 2007). The process of identity formation is a central task during adolescence (Erikson, 1968) and it may be disrupted because of deselection, leaving athletes to deal with a loss of identity and the task of ‘rebuilding’ a sense of ‘who they are.’

Athletes involved at higher competitive levels (i.e., provincial teams) may have greater personal investment in an athletic identity and their sport than those who play at less competitive levels (cf. Brewer et al., 1993). Provincial level teams are representative teams of the ‘best’ players in a particular age group from an entire province. These teams are often an important step toward junior national team invitations and, in the longer term, gaining valuable and prestigious athletic scholarships to university/college programs in Canada and the United States. Deselection from provincial level teams may seriously threaten opportunities to compete at higher levels of sport and therefore be particularly challenging for the coaches of adolescent athletes, the athletes themselves, and the athletes’ parents.

Purpose and Overview of Studies

Evidently, deselection is an important issue for coaches, athletes, and parents. Indeed, in order to advance the literature, Capstick and Trudel (2010) argued that it is necessary to conduct research that examines “the perspectives of athletes who are eliminated, and those from parents whose children are eliminated, [and] ... the views of coaches...” (p. 5). Thus, this dissertation focused on the phenomenon of deselection from the perspectives of coaches, athletes, and athletes’ parents. This dissertation aimed to create knowledge that may be used to help all of those involved learn to cope with the process and consequences of deselection decisions. Deselection will never be removed from competitive youth sport because it is an inevitable part of striving to perform at higher levels. Ultimately, however, I hope my research will help to improve how deselection is done in competitive youth sport and provide guidance for ways to mitigate many of the potentially negative consequences of deselection. Hence, **the overall purpose of this dissertation was to gain a better understanding of deselection in competitive female youth sport.** Three studies focusing on different aspects of deselection were conducted.

Study 1. Deselection requires coaches to make judgments and decisions about the ability of athletes and their suitability for a team, and then communicate these decisions to the athletes. Therefore, research with coaches and their experiences with deselection was a logical starting point for gaining a better understanding of deselection in competitive female youth sport. The purpose of the first study was to examine coaches’ views on deselecting athletes from competitive female adolescent sport teams. An interpretive description approach (Thorne, 2008) was used to understand the process of

deselection and the complex relationships between the procedures coaches use for deselecting athletes, how coaches make deselection decisions, and why these decisions are made when deselecting athletes. Concepts from the judgement and decision making literature, such as programmed and non-programmed decisions (Simon, 1960) and intuition (Betsch, 2008), were used to advance the interpretive analysis. This study served as the ‘foundation’ for the dissertation by providing a thorough account of the common features of the process of deselection across several sports.

Study 2. Previous research has shown the negative psychosocial and emotional consequences associated with deselection (e.g., Barnett, 2007, 2007; Brown & Potrac, 2009; Munroe et al., 1999). Deselection is also challenging for parents of adolescent athletes who have been deselected (Harwood et al., 2010; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Given deselection is a stressor that may be shared by both athletes and parents, an understanding of how athletes and parents cope together may help reveal ways to reduce the psychological and emotional harm experienced following deselection. Therefore, the purpose of the second study was to examine how female adolescent athletes and their parents cope with deselection from provincial sport teams using a communal coping perspective. Communal coping (Lyons, Mickelson, Sullivan, & Coyne, 1998) is an interpersonal approach to coping whereby a stressor is perceived as ‘our problem’ and coping actions are perceived as ‘our responsibility.’ This study was a descriptive phenomenology (Giorgi, 2009) and revealed the forms and processes of communal coping athletes and parents used to cope with deselection.

Study 3. Although deselection is associated with negative consequences, as athletes begin to cope with deselection, they may be able to view it in a ‘less negative

light' (Munroe et al., 1999). Just as other traumatic life events can cause both psychological distress *and* lead to positive growth (Baker et al., 2008), there is some limited evidence to suggest that deselection may precipitate positive growth among athletes (Greene, 1991; Neely, 2012). The purpose of the third study was to examine female athletes' experiences of positive growth following deselection. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) was used to make sense of athletes' experiences in relation to positive growth. The functional-descriptive model of posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, 2004) was used to inform, interpret, and advance the analysis of this study.

Overview of Dissertation

This dissertation is presented in five chapters. Following this introduction (Chapter 1), the three studies that comprise this dissertation are presented in paper format. Study 1 (Chapter 2) examined coaches' views on deselection and has been published in *The Sport Psychologist*. Study 2 (Chapter 3) examined how athletes and parents coped with deselection from provincial level teams using a communal coping perspective and has been published in *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*. Study 3 (Chapter 4) examined female athletes' experiences of positive growth following deselection. Last, a general discussion (Chapter 5) summarizes the overall findings, identifies strengths and limitations to this dissertation, future research directions, and practical implications for deselection in youth sport.

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CHAPTER 2

Study 1

The Deselection Process in Competitive Female Youth Sport

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Deselection is the elimination of an athlete from a competitive sport team based on the decisions of the coach (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). It requires coaches to make judgments and decisions about the ability of athletes and their suitability for a team. Coaches consider deselection decisions to be one of the most challenging aspects of their job (Capstick & Trudel, 2010). Deselected athletes frequently report a loss in athletic identity and sense of self, along with feelings of anxiety, humiliation, anger, loss of connectedness to school, and decreased academic performance (Barnett, 2007; Brown & Potrac, 2009; Grove, Fish, & Eklund, 2004; Munroe, Albinson, & Hall, 1999). Deselection may also lead to the termination of potential careers in sport (Alfermann, 2007). Given the challenges associated with deselection, it is important to understand more about how coaches make decisions about eliminating athletes from sport teams.

Although it is unlikely that sport psychology consultants make deselection decisions, they may be asked to advise coaches and sport organizations about deselection policies. For instance, Roberts and Faull (2013) recently discussed some of the ethical dilemmas a sport psychology consultant faced when asked to advise on an Olympic team selection protocol. The consultant (Roberts) used reflective practice to inform the advice she gave about how to best design and execute team selection processes. In this case, reflective practice was crucial because, as the authors noted, there is an “absence of empirical research in this area that may otherwise provide the required support” (p. 657). By revealing coaches’ views on deselection the current study was intended to provide information that may aid sport psychology consultants who are asked to advise on deselection policies and to inform coaching practices research.

In apparent support of Roberts and Faull's (2013) view that there is little research to guide the practice of deselection, only a very small number of studies have examined deselection from coaches' perspectives. These studies have focused on specific aspects of deselection (e.g., communication strategies) rather than the overall deselection process. For example, Capstick and Trudel (2010) interviewed five community and club level youth sport coaches to discuss the methods they used to communicate deselection decisions to athletes. In addition, five athletes and five unrelated parents were interviewed about their experiences with deselection. Some coaches used indirect methods to communicate deselection (i.e., posting or reading aloud a list of players who made the team) to limit their contact with athletes and make the communication less burdensome. Other coaches used more direct and personable methods (i.e., phone calls, face-to-face conversations, and written communication through a letter or e-mail). Coaches described how direct methods could be stressful, but they afforded opportunities for them to provide feedback to athletes. Coaches made choices about how to communicate deselection decisions based on what they thought had worked in the past.

Seifried and Casey (2012) interviewed 15 coaches of competitive high school boys' basketball programs in the US to identify how they deselected athletes. Similar to the coaches in Capstick and Trudel's (2010) study, these coaches used both indirect and direct communication strategies. Coaches also reported using different approaches to deselect players depending on the age of athletes and level of the team. Some coaches attempted to minimize the number of athletes trying out for their team (so they had fewer players to deselect) by, for example, not advertising try-outs (i.e., when team selection trials were being held). These strategies may be permitted in high school settings, but it

does not seem plausible they could be used at higher levels of competition, and they certainly do not reflect an approach that places the needs of athletes before the needs of coaches.

Another limitation is that the literature examining coaches' perceptions of deselection has rarely involved the use of theory. However, there are theories that may be beneficial in helping to explain deselection. For example, a study of deselection conducted with 25 amateur coaches in New Zealand adapted a model from the human resource management (HRM) literature (Bradbury & Forsyth, 2012). The adapted HRM model had the following steps: athlete/position analysis, position description, athlete profile, athlete selection, and athlete debrief. Twenty-three of 25 coaches interviewed supported the application of some version of this HRM model in sport.

As the Bradbury and Forsyth (2012) study suggests, models and concepts from other domains may help inform the study of deselection. For instance, the judgement and decision-making (JDM) literature focuses on how individuals make decisions, yet it has not been used to study how coaches make decisions about deselection. Several concepts from the JDM literature may be relevant. Simon (1960) distinguished between programmed and non-programmed decisions. Programmed decisions are relatively simple and based on repetitive problems that arise frequently and can be addressed through standard and clearly defined procedures and policies. Responses to programmed decisions are guided by past experiences for problems that are relatively well-structured, present clear alternatives, and when decision-makers have adequate information available (Bar-Eli, Plessner, & Raab, 2011). Non-programmed decisions are made about non-routine, complex, and relatively novel problems where there are no pre-established

courses of action, established procedures in place, or clear set of alternatives from which to select (Slack & Parent, 2006). As such, they require decision-makers to make new and often creative decisions for each unique specific situation.

Systematic approaches to decision-making are most appropriate for programmed types of problems (Bar-Eli et al., 2011). For instance, in the sport organization literature, Slack and Parent (2006) described a decision-making model based on the premise that sport managers act analytically in an economically rational way. They suggested a 'rational model' where decisions be made using the following steps: monitor the decision environment, define the problem, diagnose the problem, identify decision alternatives, analyze alternatives, select the best alternative, implement the chosen alternative, and evaluate the decision made. However, Bar-Eli et al. (2011) argued that in sport settings, leaders (e.g., head coaches) are rarely this thorough, informed, or precise in their decision-making. One alternative to the 'rational model' is the 'administrative model' (Simon, 1955). Simon argued that decision-making is bounded by the limited cognitive ability of decision-makers to process information, their emotions, the availability of imperfect information, and time constraints. Hence, decision-makers operate in a state of 'bounded rationality' meaning that in any given context a decision-maker has only a limited perception, cannot understand all the available alternatives, and the limits of the human mind do not allow for all available information to be processed. Within this model, decision-makers identify a few criteria to form simplified models to evaluate complex problems, and the decision alternatives or outcomes often reflect the decision-makers' personal preferences. Both the rational and administrative models of decision-

making may be relevant for understanding how coaches make decisions during deselection.

Whereas programmed decisions involve deliberate thinking and are made under conditions of certainty, intuition is a main element of non-programmed decision-making, particularly under conditions of risk and uncertainty (Bar-Eli et al., 2011; Plessner, Betsch, & Betsch, 2008). Betsch (2008) described intuition as a process of thinking where the input is mostly provided by knowledge stored in long-term memory that has been gained through associative learning. This knowledge is processed automatically without conscious awareness, and the output is a feeling that can serve as a basis of judgements and decisions. It is likely that coaches make deselection decisions under conditions of certainty, risk, and uncertainty. Conditions of certainty are when complete information is available and all of the outcomes (risks and benefits) are understood, thus coaches are reasonably sure about what will happen when they make a decision (e.g., a coach knows a player very well and is certain the player has the ability to perform at the required performance standard in the future). Under conditions of risk, coaches have adequate information available but the outcome of a decision is not certain, thus they lack complete certainty when making a decision (e.g., a coach knows a player well, but is uncertain the player will perform at the required performance standard in the future because she has been recovering from injury). Decisions under conditions of risk are often made with a great deal of subjectivity based on coaches' past experiences. Under conditions of uncertainty, coaches have incomplete information, and decision alternatives and outcomes are relatively unknown (e.g., the coach does not know a player very well, does not know much about her past performances, and is uncertain how she will perform

at a higher level). As a result, decisions made under conditions of uncertainty may be influenced by a decision-maker's intuition, emotions, and gut feelings (Plessner et al., 2008).

At the current time, it is not known the extent to which deselection decisions are programmed and/or non-programmed. It is not clear if and when coaches use more systematic forms of decision-making or rely on intuition. In framing the current study, we were interested in how concepts such as programmed and non-programmed decisions, systematic decision-making processes, and intuition may play a role in the ways in which coaches carry out deselection and make their deselection decisions. We did not explicitly test these concepts in a hypo-deductive manner. Rather, we used these concepts to inform the study conceptualization and design, and as tools to analyze and interpret the data (Sandelowski, 1993).

In the current study we focused on the experiences of coaches who work with female adolescent athletes. This decision was made on the basis of the following rationale. First, females are generally underrepresented in the sport psychology literature (Conroy, Kaye, & Schantz, 2008). Second, and more related to the current study, as Alfermann (2007) noted, "it is evident that more studies about career termination (in youth and adulthood) are directed to and concerned with male athletes" (p. 47). Third, it is possible that females may face different challenges than males when it comes to deselection. For instance, it has previously been reported that females place more importance on social relationships than males (Smith, 2007), therefore deselection may 'rob' female athletes of important social relationships by removing them from friends on the team. Finally, from a purely anecdotal perspective, it has been suggested to us that

coaches must approach deselection differently when dealing with female versus male teams. For these reasons we focused on female athletes in the current study, while understanding that this does not discount the need for research examining deselection among male athletes.

The overall purpose of this study was to examine coaches' views on deselecting athletes from competitive female adolescent sport teams. Given that there is limited research in this area we initially posed three exploratory research questions to guide our study. Specifically, the research questions were: (1) What procedures do coaches use for deselecting athletes? (2) How do coaches make deselection decisions? and (3) Why are these decisions made when deselecting athletes? As the study progressed our interpretive analysis moved beyond these questions and enabled us to create results that illustrated the process of deselection.

Method

Methodological Approach

Interpretive description (ID) methodology was used (Thorne, 2008; Thorne, Reimer Kirkham, & O'Flynn-Magee, 2004). ID is particularly useful when researchers seek to understand complex disciplinary problems and want to "generate credible and defensible new knowledge in a form that will be meaningful and relevant to the applied practice context" (Thorne, 2008, p. 51). ID was therefore an appropriate methodology for this study because it could yield findings that have the potential to inform sport psychology and youth sport coaching practices.

This study was approached from an interpretivist paradigm, which is consistent with ID methodology. Within the interpretivist paradigm the social world is understood at the level of subjective experiences. ID acknowledges the constructed and contextual

nature of human experience that at the same time allows for shared realities (Thorne, 2008). That is, individuals construct their own perceptions of reality through their experiences and social interactions, but there are commonalities between people. It is possible that shared aspects of these perceptions and experiences can be identified and described. Following this philosophical orientation, we explored the varying perspectives coaches provided and focused on identifying the shared aspects of their views on deselection.

ID recognizes the prior knowledge and experiences the researcher brings to a study as a useful starting place for developing research (Thorne, 2008). Given that a researcher is the research ‘instrument’ in qualitative research, it is important to provide pertinent information about the researcher to give a sense of how knowledge was co-constructed. The lead researcher was a 28 year-old female PhD student who had experienced deselection during her adolescent soccer career. She has also been an assistant coach involved in deselecting female adolescent athletes, albeit at a lower competitive level (i.e., junior high) than the coaches in this study, and never as a head coach. Given these past experiences, she tried to identify her preconceptions about deselection (via reflexive journaling), taking care to not unduly impose her opinions and beliefs about deselection on coaches during interviews, and monitored her assumptions via regular discussions with a ‘critical friend’ who was a co-researcher and supervisor.

Recruitment

Participants were purposefully sampled in order to identify and select individuals who could provide the ‘most’ and the ‘best’ information to address the purpose of the study (Mayan, 2009). We sought head coaches of female adolescent provincial teams

who had experience with deselection. To be eligible for this study participants had to (a) be current or previous head coaches of provincial level teams, (b) coach teams of competitive female adolescent athletes (aged 14-17 years old), and (c) have at least three years of coaching experience at the provincial level. Head coaches (rather than assistant coaches) were recruited because although all members of a coaching staff may be involved in deselection to some extent, the head coaches are responsible for making the final decisions.

Participants were recruited through four provincial sport organizations (the provincial level being similar to a state, county, or regional representative level). The sports of soccer, basketball, volleyball, and ice hockey were selected because they are among the most popular and competitive team sports for adolescent females in the province. Administrators from the sport organizations emailed an information letter to current and previous head coaches who had coached within their provincial program. Coaches who wished to participate in the study contacted the lead researcher through email or telephone. Their eligibility to participate in the study was determined (all coaches who expressed interest in the study met the sampling criteria and were eligible to participate) and an interview was arranged. One week before the interview coaches were emailed a copy of the interview guide and asked to think about their previous experiences with deselection to help stimulate recall and enable them to provide detailed examples during the interview. Institutional research ethics board approval was obtained and coaches provided written informed consent prior to their interview.

Participants

A total of 22 head coaches (16 male, 6 female, M age = 41.9 years, SD = 11.6 years, range = 26-71 years) of Under 15-Under 18 age group provincial female soccer (n = 5), basketball (n = 6), volleyball (n = 6), and ice hockey (n = 5) teams participated in this study. Coaches had an average of 18 years of overall coaching experience (SD = 17.3 years, range = 8-40 years), and an average of 11.6 years as a head coach (SD = 7.6 years, range = 3-32 years). Coaches had at least the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) Level 2 coaching qualification. All coaches had completed post-secondary education (one with a college diploma, 21 with a bachelor's degree), and eight also had a master's degree. Ten coaches had full-time employment as a head coach at a college/university or within a sport organization, and the remainder had full-time employment in a range of other jobs outside of the sport sector. Fifteen coaches had experienced deselection as youth athletes.

We sampled coaches of female adolescent teams in one Canadian province. We focused on the provincial level because these teams are the highest level of youth sport in the province and a pathway to junior national teams and university/college programs both in Canada and the US. Coaches of athletes aged 14-17 years were selected because this is when athletes are likely to be striving for places on national and university/college teams and the developmental stage when individuals may be acquiring a strong sense of athletic identity, which renders them particularly vulnerable to the negative consequences of deselection (Barnett, 2007; Brown & Potrac, 2009; Grove et al., 2004; Munroe et al., 1999). As noted previously, we also focused on coaches of female teams because females have been relatively understudied in the career termination literature (Alfermann, 2007).

Data Collection

Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews. Informed by guidelines from Rubin and Rubin (2012), the interview guide (see Appendix II) was comprised of a demographics section followed by introductory questions, main questions, and a summary question. Following a conversational semi-structured approach, interviews were conducted in a flexible manner during which the researcher and participants were free to pick up and explore various threads of conversation that may not have been explicitly identified in the interview guide. Within this conversational format, probes and follow-up questions were also used to seek additional depth, clarification, and to explore the details of specific examples of deselection (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Interviews were scheduled at a location and time that were convenient for the participants. Eleven interviews took place in a private office at the coach's place of employment, six interviews were conducted in a research office located at the university, and the remaining five interviews occurred in a quiet space at different sport facilities. Interviews lasted, on average, 55 minutes ($SD = 13.8$ minutes).

Data Analysis

Audio files were transcribed verbatim by a transcribing service, which produced a rich data set of 403 pages of single spaced text (196,025 words). Transcripts were checked with original recordings by the lead author to ensure accuracy. Coaches were assigned a number (i.e., C1, C2, C3) and any identifying information (e.g., names of teams, athletes) was removed from the transcript to ensure anonymity. Data analysis began as soon as the first data were collected and transcribed, and continued in an iterative process throughout the study. The first step involved an inductive descriptive thematic analysis (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Transcripts were read and re-read and

meaningful segments of information (i.e., ‘meaning units’) were identified and assigned codes. A list of codes was produced and these meaning units were then grouped by content into themes. Two researchers (Neely and Holt) independently coded the first three transcripts and initial thoughts about the findings and emerging themes were discussed. A coding scheme and organizing structure was established, and rules of inclusion were created for each theme, which is a description of the meaning of the theme and the data contained therein. Initially the coding scheme was directed by the three exploratory questions that provided the starting point for this study.

As analysis progressed, the coding structure was modified as some themes were collapsed together and additional themes identified. A data matrix (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was created to illustrate which coaches reported which themes and to examine potential patterns that differed by sport (Table 2.1). No major patterns by sport were apparent (other than documentation was not widely used by soccer coaches), so consistent with our philosophical approach, we focused on the shared and common features of the coaches’ perspectives.

The next step involved a more ‘interpretive turn’ by identifying patterns and relationships within the data (Thorne, 2008). At this point we decided that organizing the themes by the three exploratory research questions that initially guided this study was not appropriate because the data could be best represented by depicting deselection as a process. Accordingly, themes were grouped into a linear process of deselection ‘phases’ that accounted for the shared practices among the coaches. The final stage of analysis was writing (Richardson, 1994) with the intention of presenting a “coherent conceptual description that taps thematic patterns and commonalities believed to characterize the

phenomenon that is being studied” (Thorne et al., 2004, p. 4). During the writing process, how coaches’ responses fit with concepts from the JDM literature were considered, paying particular attention to how different concepts were relevant at different phases of the deselection process.

Methodological Rigour

Methodological rigour was addressed during and following analysis using several techniques (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olsen, & Spiers, 2002). Concurrent data collection and analysis helped to establish when themes were adequately saturated and therefore when data collection could end (Morse, 1995). Specifically, after 15 interviews were analyzed we wrote the first summary of the findings and then decided additional interviews were needed to saturate certain themes (hence another seven interviews were conducted to reach saturation). The coding scheme was initially created through independent analysis completed by two researchers, and both researchers engaged in regular discussions about the emerging themes, categories, and temporal structure of the deselection process, which provided a sense of analytic balance (Mayan, 2009).

A member-checking protocol was completed. Coaches were e-mailed a summary of the results and practical implications drawn from the findings. They were asked to provide feedback by answering the following questions: (1) Do you think the deselection process described is similar/fairly representative of the process you use to cut [deselect] athletes? Do you agree with the process described? (2) How relevant do you think the implications for coaches are and will you modify your deselection process based on any of the study findings? (3) Do you have any other comments or feedback based on the summary (results and academic literature) provided?

Nineteen coaches responded to the e-mail and agreed that the deselection process described was a fair representation of the process they used. Seventeen coaches commented on the implications provided, stating they were both pertinent and straightforward. Thirteen coaches said they would modify their deselection process based on the findings, six specifically indicating that more thorough documentation on their part was necessary. One volleyball coach stated, “I think the implications are very relevant. I will try to incorporate more documentation or statistics in my try-outs so that I have something in writing to back up my decisions. All five of the implications described appear accurate and relevant” (C20). Although agreeing the implications were relevant, four coaches specifically said they were unlikely to make any changes to their deselection process. For instance, one basketball coach replied, “I think the implications are relevant to coaches, however, I won’t have to modify my deselection process based on the findings” (C16). In response to the third question, eleven coaches had no further comments, four coaches provided positive general comments about the research, and four coaches commented on non-programmed decision making within the deselection process.

Results

Deselection was identified as a process that involves four phases: pre try-out meeting, evaluation and decision-making, communication of deselection, and post deselection reflections. Within the four phases of the deselection process, coaches described the procedures they used for deselecting athletes, and explained how and why they made certain decisions about the process as well as their actual deselection decisions. Each phase of the deselection process and decisions made therein is explained below and supported by direct quotes from the coaches.

Pre Try-Out Meeting

Explaining expectations. Coaches held meetings prior to the try-out (or ‘trials’ that involved training sessions, practices, and/or games during which athletes’ performances were evaluated) as a matter of routine practice. During these meetings coaches explained the logistics of the try-out along with their selection criteria (e.g., size, speed, attitude) and expectations (e.g., effort, costs/team fees, parental involvement). Although coaches met with athletes, the primary audience for these meetings was the *parents*. As one ice hockey coach explained, “the communication aspect with parents is very valuable so that there is no confusion about what the process is going to be. And after the releases are made [there have been] minimal times we have conflicts with the parent” (C3). C22 (basketball) explained he held meetings to explain his expectations to parents “so it doesn’t cause a big fiasco [later].”

Coaches also tried to convey the criteria by which they would evaluate athletes. As one soccer coach said, “it needs to be clear what you’re lookin’ for. Okay, so whatever criteria you’re using to evaluate the players, that needs to be clear” (C5). Again, there was a strong emphasis on communicating the evaluation criteria to parents. C16 (basketball) said:

I also always tell the parents something to the extent of ‘there are different ways to coach basketball and different coaches see things differently...I’m not telling you that we’re gonna definitely choose the 12 best players. I’m telling you that we are gonna choose the 12 players that we think will best fit into what we’re trying to do this summer.’

This was also echoed by a soccer coach who said:

The best players are not always the most skillful but the best players for the team. They'll [parents] tell us that they [their children] were the top goal scorer in the league, they should be on the team and they don't understand that we're not looking for the best players always... They see their kid is a fast runner and strong. But that's not what we look for. So it's do they understand what we're looking for? (C11)

Hence, while coaches addressed athletes during these meetings their messages were actually targeted at parents in an attempt to reduce conflicts and disagreements later.

Evaluation and Decision-Making

Evaluating athletes. All coaches in this study wanted to have a thorough, fair, and what they typically described as an 'objective' evaluation of athletes. Coaches wanted to ensure the try-outs they ran provided opportunities to evaluate athletes based on the criteria they had laid out during the pre try-out meetings. C21 (basketball) said:

So how are you going to evaluate these things? Here's your criteria... Then make sure that in your selection process that you have set up situations that you can observe those things. So you wanna make sure that there's congruency between the criteria and the training session to see those things as best you can.

Coaches wanted to ensure that all athletes in the try-out had the sense they had been closely observed and given sufficient opportunities to demonstrate their ability. C19 (volleyball) said it was important to "make yourself visible, make yourself active in the selection process so that all athletes that are involved know that you're there observing them and spending time working with them. Don't let any athlete feel like they're being

left out.” To achieve this, head coaches tried to ensure that several other coaches were involved in the try-out sessions. In fact, in addition to involving their assistant coaches, many head coaches brought in other coaches they trusted and felt had sufficient expertise to evaluate players. For example, C17 explained that in ice hockey, “we have about five to seven other evaluators and they all have a say and then obviously the head coach has the final say, but you take all the information from everyone.” It seemed that, to some extent at least, involving multiple coaches in the evaluation of players was reassuring for the head coach.

Documentation. Most coaches (with the exception of soccer coaches) paid a great deal of attention to documenting their decisions. This meant making a ‘paper trail’ that included notes on strengths and weaknesses of athletes, ranking players, and evaluation decisions. Coaches explained that written documentation provided ‘evidence’ for how decisions were made. A volleyball coach said it was important to:

Take time taking notes and if you feel it’s difficult to do when you’re walking around doing the drills and that kinda stuff, make sure that you’re taking time after the session is done because there is time to pull out the list and write down one or two key words about that athlete because the paper trail will save you in the end (C19).

C19’s comment that the paper trail will “save you in the end” was telling, because the documentation appeared to be a way coaches protected themselves from potential problems later. C16 (basketball) explained she kept a paper trail “obviously to protect the coaches ... definitely it could be a situation where the parent is now calling and saying ‘[coach] told my kid that she sucks and she’s terrible’ and if it’s either written down or

recorded, then you have that kind of information.” So, while documentation may have helped coaches to make decisions about players, it mainly provided a paper trail to protect coaches against complaints they may receive.

Dealing with certainty. Coaches made some deselection decisions that reflected a great deal of certainty. For instance, coaches said it was relatively easy to pick the very ‘best’ (i.e., most skilled) players on any given team. C16 (basketball) explained that, “everybody in the gym should be choosing the same top seven [players].” Likewise, coaches showed a great deal of certainty in their ability to identify the ‘worst’ (i.e., least skilled) players. For example, a basketball coach explained, “when the athlete hasn’t met the criteria you’re looking for, she doesn’t shoot the ball well enough, or she’s not a good ball handler” (C6), it was an obvious decision that he could make with certainty. Similarly, C21 said, “obviously insufficient skill would be quite easy in terms of either technical skills or physical skills ... Those are easy decisions to make. It’s just more clear cut, not as contentious as some other ones might be.”

In addition to judgements about skill level, coaches were also quite certain in their decisions based on athletes’ attitudes. C10 said an easier cut is “attitude right off the bat. So if you see someone obviously being negative to teammates, or not taking instruction, or not listening to instruction, that type of thing, not taking feedback, that’s gonna be easy obviously.” Finally, coaches were confident and “a lot more sound with my [deselection] decisions” (C22) when they had support from other coaches. For example, C6 explained, “it’s easy when there’s consensus on the staff, so when everyone’s seeing the same things, when you don’t have arguments about who to pick.”

Dealing with uncertainty. Coaches also faced uncertainty in making their deselection decisions. C21 (basketball) said: “We try to make the decisions that are best on that day. Do we always hit a home run [make the correct decision] and get it right? Not always, but we’re trying to... So we’re trying under restrictions of the amount of evaluation periods to make a very difficult decision.” Coaches faced the greatest uncertainty when dealing with fringe players who were among the last to be deselected for a team. For instance, C17 (ice hockey) said, “the last cuts and last players you choose to the team, you always have those doubts, that ‘what if?’ ‘What if we would have taken that player instead?’”

Coaches made their judgements about fringe players based on ‘intangible’ characteristics. C14 (ice hockey) stated, “the personality stuff really becomes important and their mental toughness, their drive, and their determination, and how they get along with others. [They] tend to be the determining factors.” Coaches also considered how these players would accept their role on the team if they were selected. As C2 (basketball) explained, “You have to try and get a read on whether the player will be accepting if they have less playing time because presumably if they’re your last two or three choices they might not get as much playing time.”

Given the uncertainty around these final decisions, coaches often went with their ‘instincts’ or ‘intuition.’ When asked how he makes his final decisions on fringe players, C5 (soccer) replied, “I don’t know, is it a hunch? If you have two players that are pretty well equal I guess you go on a hunch.” Similarly, C14 (ice hockey) said:

We’re gonna go with our gut and take the 20 players that we think are gonna ice [be] the best team... You have all the information in front of you

and you make a decision and sometimes the decision isn't black and white...I think there's always an element of "am I making the right decision?" I think for the most part you feel it's the right decision, but I think there's always an element of uncertainty, which makes it tough.

Communication of Deselection

Informing players. Coaches said informing athletes of their decision to deselect them was "the tough part of communication, I think the toughest part for me... is communicating that they're not gonna make the team and seeing the tears and emotion" (C22). Most coaches believed the most appropriate and respectful way to communicate their deselection decisions was through an individual face-to-face meeting. An ice hockey coach explained, "I've done everything from email, depending on the level, email to telephone calls to letters in the mail. Yeah, but I think the best way is to be able to talk to somebody directly" (C13). C16 (basketball) thought a face-to-face meeting:

...allows both parties to be involved. For the girl that's being cut to be able to ask questions and get some kind of feedback, plus I feel like it's the most respectful way to acknowledge the courage that it took for that girl to actually come to try-out and to put herself on the line that the least the coaches can do is actually talk to her face-to-face.

However, some coaches were mandated by their sport organizations to follow a specific protocol. C4 (soccer) explained that, "the way that the provincial program wants it [deselection] done is by letter, by email. And I'm not 100% onboard with that...I think you should be tough enough to face somebody to cut them." Within a different sport organization, C17 (ice hockey) said when making cuts "the process works that you do

that over the phone. You don't do it face-to-face. I would like to do it face-to-face but the process doesn't work that way."

Coaches emphasized the importance of informing athletes of their deselection in a private space. They also ensured an exit route for athletes that would eliminate the athletes from having to go back into the try-out space (i.e., gym, field, or rink) and be seen by other athletes. C2 (basketball) explained, "we always set it up so that it's somewhere where you can walk out of the gym, go through your meeting, and then leave, you don't have to go back into the gym because some people are pretty emotional, and you don't wanna have all the girls see you crying."

Providing feedback. Coaches tended to prefer meeting athletes face-to-face because it gave them a chance to provide feedback. This was important because coaches wanted athletes "to go away with something to focus on other than just being cut" (C12, soccer). When providing feedback, C14 (ice hockey) said, "You have to let them know why you made the decision." And as C11 (soccer) expressed, "You can't just leave someone hanging, for me that's wrong. Tell me what I did wrong. Explain your rationale."

One issue that coaches deliberated was whether to let athletes know the decision first and then provide feedback, or provide athletes with feedback first and then communicate the decision. Coaches agreed that, "because of stress levels, I'm not even sure if in advance of telling them if they're hearing what we're saying ... they probably aren't processing a lot of what we're saying. It's just am I cut? Did I make it?" (C1, volleyball). C15 expressed the same concern about volleyball players not hearing any of the coaches' feedback. "They're coming in the room, they sit down, they just wanna

know. If they didn't make the team, I don't know if they hear anything after that that you say. But I also don't know if they hear it prior because it's really hard." Despite the uncertainty around when to provide the feedback, coaches still felt it was necessary to give athletes justification for their decisions and thought it was an important aspect of demonstrating respect.

Coaches also tried to end deselection meetings on a positive note, recognizing the accomplishment of the athletes because they thought this would help them put deselection in perspective. For example, C5 (soccer) said his message to athletes after being deselected is:

You're a quality player, you have to throw that at them, you're one of the elite, you're one of the top girls in the province. If you think about it, how many girls are playing soccer, thousands, how many girls are here? Thirty, so you're among 30 of the top players in the province. So you always emphasize the positives.

Dealing with parents. In some respects coaches were more concerned about the backlash from parents rather than the emotional reaction of players. C21 (basketball) said:

... it's not the athlete that I have a difficulty with, it's the response from adults, the parents usually and how they handle it, sometimes not as good as they should or you think they would. Parents can sometimes make the process even more challenging.

Similarly C13 (ice hockey) said:

The parent interaction is one that definitely stresses me out. I don't often know the parents as well as I know the kid, and so I don't know what interaction they might want to have, and they're usually way less reasonable than the athlete is. The athlete often knows where they sit, they might be upset about the decision but they often know where they sit in the scenario, and the parent has jaded views.

C16 (basketball) said that after telling the athletes of her decision, she often wondered, "are parents going to be outside the door waiting to talk to me as soon as this is done, and screaming and yelling about it?" Some coaches even had a rule in place to deal with disgruntled parents. For instance, another basketball coach explained he and his coaching staff, "have a policy where we say we won't talk to you [parents] for 24-hours, and try the 24-hour rule, and try to bring down emotion" (C10). When coaches did interact with parents, they again explained the importance of having a fair evaluation process and documentation for their decisions:

We just make sure we got all our ducks in a row so that if they do come back and they challenge the decision then we can say here's the information. So we feel that based on this information we feel we made the best decision, you can choose to accept it or choose not to accept it but we're not gonna change our minds. So I think it's just ensuring you've prepared yourself effectively for that potential confrontation (C14, ice hockey).

Post Deselection Reflections

Reflecting on athlete development. Most coaches reported that their main goal after cutting athletes was that they stayed involved in the sport. Coaches explained that they tried to convey this at the end of deselection meetings with athletes. For C18 (volleyball), her goal was to “make them not want to give up is easily number one.” As another coach put it, “when girls get cut that they get so heartbroken that they then don’t want to try out for a provincial team again. So I would say my number one goal is probably to not end up discouraging players from discontinuing basketball” (C16). Particularly for coaches of some of the younger adolescent athletes, there was a stronger emphasis on continued involvement because they would have chances in the future to be selected and play for the provincial team. C3 (ice hockey) explained:

...we encourage [athletes] to retry in future events and making them understand that it’s not the be all end all, and we [coaches] really do that at the U16 level as well, helping them recognize that OK, just because you don’t move from the U16 camp to the U18 your very first time you get released, doesn’t mean it can’t happen the year after. So really trying to make sure that they don’t stop participating, don’t stop trying in subsequent years.

Coaches also hoped the athletes would improve as a result of the feedback they had been given. C10 (basketball) explained it was critical for coaches to provide feedback to athletes because “if they just say no you didn’t make the team you’re not really helping them try to get better, giving them a chance to get better.” Providing feedback could also

be seen as a way to motivate and challenge athletes, to almost prove to coaches they made the wrong decision.

Reflecting on the process. When coaches reflected on the process they were often unsure about the effectiveness and appropriateness of their approach. C10 (basketball) said, “maybe what I’m doing is completely wrong. If I knew that the vast majority of athletes just want a yes or no on a list, then, well that would make it a hell of a lot easier for me right.” Coaches largely based their reflections on the process on the responses of athletes and parents. One volleyball coach said, “if I don’t hear from them, I like to assume, okay, I didn’t make their life absolutely miserable. I’m not getting a phone call from the mom at all and saying you’ve damaged my daughter... no word, I assume is a good word” (C18). C21 (basketball) perceived his process was effective too because “if you’ve really messed it up, you’re gonna hear about it.” Another source of information coaches used for reflection was their later interactions with deselected athletes. C2 (basketball) thought that, “if you can cut a kid and have them thank you then you’ve gone through a process that’s good.” Similarly, C16 thought future encounters with athletes they had cut was suggestive of an effective deselection process. “I would also say having girls continually come back and try out even when they have been cut in the past by you... I think it’s definitely a good sign if the kids are still able to come back and do that.”

Discussion

The overall purpose of this study was to examine coaches’ views on deselecting athletes from competitive female adolescent sport teams. We identified deselection as a process that involved four phases and described the procedures coaches used for

deselecting athletes. In each phase of the process how coaches made and communicated decisions to athletes, and the reasoning behind their decisions, was explained.

Deselection was remarkably similar across all of the coaches and sports. By establishing distinct phases of the deselection process we were able to isolate specific details of coaches' responsibilities, concerns, and decisions at different times. This adds to the literature because previous research has largely focused on athletes' responses to deselection (Barnett, 2007; Brown & Potrac, 2009; Grove et al., 2004; Munroe et al., 1999) and ways in which coaches communicate deselection decisions (Capstick & Trudel, 2010; Seifried & Casey, 2012) rather than considering deselection as a process.

Three exploratory research questions initially drove this research project. Our interpretive analysis moved beyond merely reporting responses to each question, but it is nonetheless useful to identify which of the reported themes relate to each research question. For instance, the question 'what procedures do coaches use for deselecting athletes?' was addressed by the themes of explaining expectations, documentation, informing players, providing feedback, and dealing with parents. The question 'how do coaches make deselection decisions?' was addressed by the data contained in the themes of evaluating athletes and dealing with uncertainty. Lastly, for the question of 'why are these decisions made when deselecting athletes?' the themes of providing feedback, dealing with parents, reflecting on athlete development, and reflecting on the process provided some insights into the reasons why coaches made decisions.

Coaches wanted to create a thorough and fair deselection process. They were concerned about parents' reactions, which is consistent with concerns highlighted in the youth sport literature where parents are often cited as a stressor for youth sport coaches

(e.g., Knight & Harwood, 2009). Alternatively, parents report stressors arising from a lack of communication and poor organization from coaches (Harwood & Knight, 2009). To enhance communication and organization coaches in the current study held pre try-out meetings to explain their selection criteria and expectations to parents. They did so, in part, to avoid later conflicts. This is consistent with practical advice provided by Smoll, Cumming, and Smith (2011), who suggested a pre-season meeting is critical for reducing the chance of “unpleasant experiences” with parents (p. 21). Furthermore, the pre try-out meeting likely gives athletes and parents a sense of fairness if they know a comprehensive selection process is in place (Bradbury & Forsyth, 2012).

Most coaches documented their player evaluations and deselection decisions, which was another way of protecting themselves from disgruntled parents and even litigation. This is consistent with recommendations suggested by Seifried and Casey (2012). Similarly, the Sport Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada (SDRCC) highlights the need to have clear documented criteria so that athletes can learn and understand each step of the selection process. Whereas the SDRCC reports that team selection/deselection issues account for the majority of disputes it adjudicates, litigation that leads to legal action against a coach is rare. In fact, legal action from parents and athletes appealing being deselected from teams have been labelled ‘disappointment lawsuits’ and are most often dismissed because they are deemed frivolous (Epstein, 2005). Therefore, the *threat* of receiving complaints or being sued, rather than the cost per se, seemed to be a concern for coaches because complaints and claims can have a “devastating effect” on coaches and organizations (Greenfield, 2013, p. 120).

Many of the decisions coaches made fit within the rational model of decision-making (Slack & Parent, 2006), which is based on conditions of certainty and involves programmed decisions (i.e., decisions that are relatively simple, repetitive, and based on clearly defined procedures; Betsch, 2008) such as when coaches were certain about the skill level and attitude of the athlete. Similarly, coaches in other research have reported 'performance' and 'attitude' as the most important selection criteria when evaluating athletes (Bradbury & Forsyth, 2012). Yet, coaches also had to make non-programmed decisions (i.e., decisions that are relatively complex, unique, and with no pre-established procedures or guidelines; Betsch, 2008) such as decisions that involved fringe players. These non-programmed decisions are made with a considerable amount of uncertainty and are best represented by the administrative model, which is based on the concept of bounded rationality. Simon (1955) argued that managers (or coaches in this case) often identify a limited number of criteria to create a simplified model to help them make decisions about complex problems. Our findings indicate that coaches did this by narrowing their selection criteria to 'intangibles' to help them make difficult decisions. This strategy allowed coaches to limit the number of decision alternatives because they were focused on specific qualities and characteristics athletes may bring to a team. These athlete qualities and characteristics likely reflect the coaches' personal preferences, emotions, and past experiences (Slack & Parent, 2006).

Intuition was an important aspect of decision-making for many coaches, whereby their final decisions about fringe players came down to 'gut' feelings. Our findings contradict research from a study conducted in New Zealand, in which coaches were wary of acknowledging the use of intuition because they felt using it could threaten their

credibility (Bradbury & Forsyth, 2012). Yet, the importance of intuition in decision-making has been emphasized in the JDM literature. Betsch (2008) explained intuition “can yield highly accurate judgements and decisions if the prior sample of experiences is representative for the current task” (p. 6). Professional intuition is also a critical component of contextual intelligence, which is the tacit knowledge acquired through everyday activities and reflects the practical ability to learn from experience (Sternberg, 2000). Therefore, it appeared that the coaches in our study (who had, on average 11.6 years of head coaching experience) had high levels of contextual intelligence when it came to their intuitive feelings regarding deselection decisions. Furthermore, Phillips, Klein, and Sieck (2004) demonstrated that it is possible to train and develop expertise in intuitive decision skills. It may be worthwhile to incorporate intuitive decision skill training in coach education programs given that our findings highlight the importance of intuition for making non-programmed decisions. From a practical perspective, it is useful to consider deselection as a process that involves programmed and non-programmed decisions. We suggest coaches should use systematic decision-making procedures for programmed decisions but have confidence in using intuition for non-programmed decisions.

The sample of twenty-two experienced coaches in this study viewed intuition as a necessary aspect of their decision-making and relied on their intuition to make difficult deselection decisions. Although they were experienced coaches who had developed practices for deselection, whether intuition is the single ‘right’ or ‘best’ strategy for making deselection decisions about fringe players cannot be established from our study because we did not measure the effectiveness of their decisions (in fact, we did not even

establish how effective deselection should be defined). Future research may involve establishing a definition of effective deselection, which will facilitate the analysis of whether factors such as intuition and contextual intelligence are features of good decision-making in deselection. It would be useful to obtain organizational, coaches', and athletes' perspectives in such future research.

The communication of deselection decisions to athletes was a critical phase in the deselection process. Other studies have shown coaches prefer to use indirect forms of communication (e.g., posting a list, having athletes voluntarily cut themselves; Capstick & Trudel, 2010; Seifried & Casey, 2012). Alternatively, work with Olympic-level athletes shows they want to be informed of their deselection from the national team through individual, face-to-face meetings (Roberts & Faull, 2013). Whereas the coaches in the current study preferred to use face-to-face communication, they were constrained by the protocols mandated by the sport organizations. Our findings suggest that sport organizations should encourage coaches to conduct face-to-face meetings in a private location to inform athletes of deselection decisions.

Applied implications arising from this study may be useful for coaches and for sport psychology consultants who are asked to advise on deselection decisions (see Roberts & Faull, 2013). A highly structured process was useful for the coaches. Practically, it is important to hold pre try-out meetings with parents and athletes to explain selection criteria and expectations. It may also be worthwhile to identify the benefits of being part of a program and acknowledge the meaning of being the top athletes in the province to help put deselection in perspective. Coaches should involve additional coaches as evaluators in order to provide a sense of fairness but also provide

support for coaches' decisions. Our findings further suggest that sport organizations should also enable coaches to provide private face-to-face feedback to athletes. Given the emotional state of many athletes following deselection, we recommend coaches consider providing written feedback to athletes. Sport organizations may also want to consider having procedures in place to protect coaches when it comes to parent interactions to deal with parents once deselection has been communicated.

Findings regarding the use of intuition have some important applied implications that may be useful for sport psychologists. When faced with uncertainty, coaches relied on intuition, which is actually an important and valuable part of making decisions under conditions of uncertainty. Experience is important for developing intuitive decision skills, but how one learns from experience, rather than experience per se, is what results in increases in professional intuition. As such, sport psychologists may be able to play a role in helping coaches develop the skills needed to learn more effectively from their own experience. Reflective practice may be particularly important for the deselection process (Roberts & Faull, 2013). Interestingly, the coaches in this study reflected on their deselection procedures at a very superficial level (based on their interactions with parents and athletes). A more rigorous and systematic approach to reflective practice could improve coaching practice (Cushion & Nelson, 2013; Knowles, Gilbourne, Cropley, & Dugdill, 2014; Roberts & Faull, 2013). For example, sport psychology consultants could teach coaches to engage in immediate reflection-in-action during the deselection process and engage in delayed reflection-on-action after the deselection process took place (cf. Knowles, Gilbourne, Borrie, & Nevill, 2001).

Limitations of this study include that the sample size was small and relatively homogenous, and findings cannot easily be generalized to other youth sport populations at different competitive levels. The findings also only pertain to female adolescent athletes and the deselection process may differ if the study was conducted with coaches of male adolescent provincial teams. We used a retrospective approach, and in the future it may be possible to reveal more precise information about coaches' views at distinct phases in the deselection process by using longitudinal research designs (e.g., multiple interviews). Additionally, while the decision to sample coaches was appropriate for this study, it is necessary to gain better understandings of athletes' responses to deselection. It is critical to better understand athletes' perspectives on the deselection process in order to minimize the potential negative consequences they experience. Finally, given the extent to which coaches were concerned about parents, it is clearly important to generate more detailed understandings of parents' perspectives on the deselection process. Despite these limitations, the results of this study provide new insights into the deselection process and offer several applied implications for coaching practice and applied sport psychologists who may be required to assist in creating deselection procedures.

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Table 2.1

Data Matrix of Coaches' Responses

The Deselection Process										
Coach	Pre Try-out Meeting	Evaluation and Decision-Making				Communication of Deselection			Post Deselection Reflections	
	Explaining expectations	Evaluating athletes	Documentation	Dealing with certainty	Dealing with uncertainty	Informing players	Providing feedback	Dealing with parents	Reflecting on athlete development	Reflecting on the process
<u>Volleyball</u>										
1	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
9		X		X		X	X	X	X	X
15		X		X		X	X	X		X
18	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
19	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
20	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<u>Basketball</u>										
2	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
6	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
16	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
10	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
21	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
22	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<u>Hockey</u>										
3	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
7		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	
13	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
14	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
17		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<u>Soccer</u>										
4	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
5	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X
8	X	X		X	X	X	X			X
11	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	
12		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Total	17	22	15	22	18	22	22	20	20	19

Note. The X sign indicates the presence of a coach's response in the theme.

CHAPTER 3

Study 2

Athletes and Parents Coping with Deselection in Competitive Youth Sport: A Communal Coping Perspective

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Those who participate in youth sport (including athletes and their parents) have to cope with an array of stressors (Holt & Knight, 2014; Tamminen & Holt, 2012). One such stressor is deselection, which is the elimination of an athlete from a competitive sport team based on the decisions of a coach (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). For some athletes, deselection will lead to the termination of their athletic careers (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Other athletes may continue to participate in sport after deselection, but must often cope with a range of negative psychosocial and emotional consequences. For instance, deselected athletes have reported a loss of athletic identity, sense of self, friendships, connectedness to school, and decreased academic performance, along with feelings of anxiety, humiliation, and anger (Barnett, 2006, 2007; Brown & Potrac, 2009; Grove, Fish, & Eklund, 2004; Munroe, Albinson, & Hall, 1999). Deselected youth athletes can also be ‘at risk’ of developing clinical levels of psychological distress (Blakelock, Chen, & Prescott, 2016).

Some studies of deselection have focused on how coaches make and communicate decisions to athletes and parents (e.g., Capstick & Trudel, 2010; Seifried & Casey, 2012). In a recent study, Neely, Dunn, McHugh, and Holt (2016) examined coaches’ views on deselecting athletes from competitive female adolescent sport teams. They found that deselection was a process that involved four phases: pre-tryout meeting, evaluation and decision-making, communication of deselection, and post-deselection reflections. In communicating their decisions to athletes, coaches acknowledged that athletes often appeared to display high ‘stress levels.’ Coaches were also concerned about dealing with a ‘backlash’ from parents, and reported that parents’ negative reactions could make the deselection process even more difficult. However, Neely et al. noted that

a limitation of their study was that they did not explore the responses of athletes and their parents. Such research remains necessary in order to minimize the potential negative consequences athletes and parents may experience.

Parents make a significant commitment to their children's sport and must be "willing to pay the price to reach the highest level of sport" (Côté & Hay, 2002, p. 496). They experience a range of competitive, organizational, and developmental stressors (Harwood & Knight, 2009). In fact, the termination of a high-level athletic career may be a difficult emotional experience for athletes' parents (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). For example, in a study of male youth soccer players at professional club academies in the UK, Harwood, Drew, and Knight (2010) found that in addition to stress related to match-related factors, sport-family role conflict, and school support and education issues, parents reported stress related to the deselection process and the short- and long-term effects of deselection on their children. However, Harwood et al. did not examine how parents attempted to help their children cope with deselection and its consequences, or how parents and their children may have coped together.

The broader youth sport psychology literature has shown that parents can help their children cope with the demands of intensive participation in sport by providing support before, during, and after competitions (Knight, Neely, & Holt, 2011) and continually seeking to foster an environment in which children perceive parents understand their experience (Knight & Holt, 2014; Knight, Little, Harwood, & Goodger, 2016). Lafferty and Dorrell (2006) found athletes who perceived moderate and high levels of parental support used active coping and increased training to deal with stressors. Athletes who perceived low parental support also used fewer coping strategies overall

and may have been at risk of developing maladaptive patterns of coping. Tamminen and Holt (2012) found that parents helped female adolescent athletes learn about coping with stressors in sport by creating a supportive context for learning and using specific strategies, including questioning and reminding, providing perspective, sharing experiences, dosing stress experiences, and initiating informal conversations.

The majority of coping research in youth sport psychology has examined the individual (or intrapersonal) coping strategies used by youth athletes (for reviews see Holt, Hoar, & Fraser, 2005; Tamminen & Holt, 2010). Yet, as noted earlier, research shows that parents can play an important role in helping their children cope (e.g., Tamminen & Holt, 2012). Indeed, as Lyons, Mickelson, Sullivan, and Coyne (1998) argued, stressful circumstances in sport often involve “a cast of characters who confront the issue individually and together” (p. 580). Given that youth sport is an inherently social context involving a number of important interpersonal relationships (e.g., between athletes and parents), it is perhaps surprising there is a lack of understanding of coping from a social network (or interpersonal) perspective. In this study we used a model of *communal coping* (Lyons et al., 1998) to understand and interpret parents’ and their children’s experiences of coping with deselection. Although communal coping has yet to be used to study stressors in sport (Crocker, Tamminen, & Gaudreau, 2015; Lyons et al., 1998; Tamminen & Gaudreau, 2014), there is some evidence for its benefits in other contexts, such as among couples and families who go through divorce (Afifi, Hutchinson, & Krouse, 2006), and deal with illnesses such as breast cancer (Robbins, Mehl, Smith, & Weihs, 2013) and heart disease (Rohrbaugh, Mehl, Shoham, Reilly, & Ewy, 2008).

Communal coping is a process whereby stressful events are appraised and acted upon in the context of close relationships (Lyons et al., 1998). It is based on the pooling of resources to cope with a stressor that has direct and indirect effects on individuals in a social network. That is, the stressor may produce different consequences for all, but is viewed as a shared stressor and dealt with communally. Communal coping involves three components. First, at least one individual in a social network needs to hold a communal coping orientation (i.e., the belief that joining together to cope with a stressor is necessary and beneficial). Second, there must be some form of communication about the stressor and its meaning to those experiencing it. Third, there needs to be cooperative action to construct strategies that are aimed at reducing the negative impact of the stressor. It is important to note that communal coping differs from social support whereby a social network acts in response to an individual's request for help. Rather, from a communal coping perspective, a stressor is experienced by two or more people who share some of the responsibility for dealing with it (Lyons et al., 1998).

There are several theories or models of communal coping (e.g., Afifi et al., 2006; Berg, Meegan, & Deviney, 1998; Lyons et al., 1998). During the analysis phase of this study (described later) we decided to use the Lyons et al. (1998) framework to organize the analysis because it was the best 'fit' for the data. Lyons et al. presented a four-quadrant model with the two axes representing appraisal and action. On the vertical axis, the appraisal dimension represents variations in the extent to which a stressor is construed as shared (i.e., perceived as 'our problem') or individual (i.e., perceived as 'my problem'). On the horizontal axis, the action dimension represents variations in the degree to which coping strategies will be mobilized, moving from the individual (i.e.,

‘my responsibility’) to the network (i.e., ‘our responsibility’). The upper right quadrant of the model therefore represents a communal coping orientation of shared appraisal and shared action whereby a stressor and subsequent coping efforts are viewed as ‘our problem, our responsibility.’ The upper left quadrant represents individual efforts whereby a stressor and subsequent coping is viewed as ‘our problem, my responsibility.’ There are both *processes* of communal coping (i.e., how people in a social network may ‘move’ across different quadrants of the model over time) and *forms* of communal coping (i.e., the specific strategies used).

Lyons et al. (1998) asserted that communal coping is not a linear two-step process that involves moving from individual to shared coping (or vice versa), but rather “a crooked path involving successive appraisal-action processes” (p. 187). Hence, communal coping is likely a dynamic process. As events unfold appraisals may change, which necessitates different types of coping actions. When individuals within a social network (e.g., dyad, family, or community) are dealing with a shared stressor, the responsibility for coping actions may change. In this sense, people may ‘move’ across different quadrants of the model. For instance, it may be possible that people in a social network perceive a stressor as ‘our problem’ and initially take joint responsibility for actions to cope with it. As time progresses people in the social network may continue to take an ‘our responsibility’ perspective or they may shift to a ‘my responsibility’ perspective. Yet, whereas ‘movement’ between quadrants is plausible, such movement is not well understood (Afifi et al., 2006; Lyons et al., 1998). As such, there is a need for more research to understand how the *processes* of communal coping may unfold over time (Afifi et al., 2006)

Forms of communal coping (i.e., the specific coping strategies used) have been reported in the literature. In a recent study examining community members' responses to a hurricane, Richardson and Maninger (2016) showed that forms of communal coping included community members recognizing the shared problem, emoting feelings and concerns with each other, as well as problem-focused communal efforts such as material assistance from town leaders and first responders, and information sharing among community members. Similarly, regulated emotional expression, distraction, and seeking social support were specific forms of communal coping among survivors after an earthquake (Wlodarczyk et al., 2016). Communicating about emotions associated with a stressful event appears to be a requisite condition for organizing cooperative actions (Niven, Totterdell, & Holman, 2009).

As the studies reviewed above reflect, communal coping may be a useful approach to learn more about how people work together to manage shared stressors. However, researchers have highlighted the need for further study of how communal coping operates across different types of social groups (e.g., Afifi, Felix, & Afifi, 2012) and across various contexts because different settings will likely provide unique insight into the processes and forms of communal coping (Richardson & Maninger, 2016). Furthermore, sport psychology researchers have noted the potential value of using communal coping in sport given the inherently social nature of sport (Crocker et al., 2015; Tamminen & Gaudreau, 2014). Several studies with athletes have shown the benefits of social support in sport (e.g., Hassell, Sabiston, & Bloom, 2010; Holt & Hogg, 2002), but in these types of studies the social network is primarily viewed as a source of help for an individual rather than a network of people who work together in the face of

challenges (cf. Lyons et al., 1998). Researchers have emphasized the need to study coping in the context of “carefully selected” and “high-stress” problems (Somerfield, 1997, p. 136). Deselection is one such high-stress problem in youth sport. It is also a stressor that may be shared by both athletes and parents (Harwood et al., 2010; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine how female adolescent athletes and their parents cope with deselection from provincial sport teams using a communal coping perspective.

Method

Methodological Approach

Phenomenology is a methodological approach that can be used to explore, describe, and interpret the personal and social experiences of individuals (Ashworth, 2008). Specifically, descriptive phenomenology methodology aims to describe the psychological meanings that constitute the phenomenon and focuses on describing the invariant aspects that give structure and form to an experience (Giorgi, 2009). Hence, descriptive phenomenology was an appropriate methodology for addressing the research purpose because it provided a means of understanding the phenomenon of athletes and parents coping with deselection. This study was approached from an interpretivist paradigm. Within this paradigm, a subjectivist epistemology (whereby epistemology refers to the nature of knowledge) and relativist ontology (whereby ontology refers to the nature of reality) were assumed. From these perspectives, it is assumed that knowledge is co-constructed between researchers and participants and that individuals’ have unique perceptions of social reality (Sparkes, 1992). We sought to identify shared aspects of these individual perceptions of reality.

Participant Recruitment

Participants were purposefully sampled in order to identify and select individuals who could provide the ‘most’ and ‘best’ information to address the purpose of the study (Mayan, 2009). Female athletes (aged 13-17 years) who had been deselected from a provincial level team within the previous 12 weeks and their ‘most involved’ parent (cf. Tamminen & Holt, 2012) were eligible to participate in this study. Having obtained institutional research ethics board approval, participants were recruited from provincial level soccer, basketball, volleyball, and ice hockey programs in a western Canadian province. Female athletes were sampled because females may have fewer coping resources than males (Lewis & Frydenberg, 2004), and may be particularly vulnerable to the stress of deselection because they tend to place high value on social relationships (Smith, 2007), which are disrupted following deselection (Barnett, 2006, 2007). Females are also underrepresented in the career termination literature more generally (Alfermann, 2007). We focused on adolescent athletes because they have presumably made a significant investment in sport and have likely developed a strong athletic identity (see Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993), which places them at increased risk for negative consequences following deselection. We selected the provincial level because making provincial teams are often an important step toward junior national team invitations and, in the longer term, gaining valuable and prestigious athletic scholarships to university/college programs in Canada and the United States. Deselection from provincial teams may jeopardize potential opportunities in the future and be particularly stressful for athletes and their parents.

Two different recruitment strategies were used. In the first strategy, prior to provincial team tryouts (and with the permission of head coaches and provincial sport organizations) a meeting was held with all athletes trying out for a team. They were given a verbal explanation of the study and an information letter that included the lead researcher's contact information. The athletes were instructed that, if they were deselected, their parents could contact the researcher if they (athlete and parent) wished to participate in this study. In the second recruitment strategy, an administrator within the provincial sport organization emailed the information letter to parents of all athletes involved in the provincial team program. Again, those who were deselected were invited to contact the researcher if they wished to participate. Once email contact was made, participant eligibility was determined (all parents who expressed interest in the study, as well as their daughters, met the sampling criteria and were eligible to participate) and interviews were arranged. Athletes and parents provided written informed consent prior to their interview.

Participants

In total, 14 female adolescent athletes (M age = 15.0 years; SD = 1.4) and 14 of their parents (5 fathers, 9 mothers, M age = 45.2 years, SD = 5.4) participated in this study. Participants were deselected from provincial soccer (n = 4), basketball (n = 5), volleyball (n = 2), and ice hockey (n = 3) teams. Athletes were in high school (grades 9-12), competed for a club team, and had participated in their sport for an average of 7.5 years. Thirteen athlete-parent dyads were Caucasian-Canadian and one athlete-parent dyad was Asian-Canadian.

Data Collection

Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews with athletes and parents. These interviews were conducted 10-12 weeks following athletes' deselection from a provincial team to ensure that memories were still 'fresh' in the participants' minds while also allowing a sufficient time period for them to reflect upon their experience. We deemed 10-12 weeks post-deselection would be appropriate given Munroe et al. (1999) interviewed athletes one week and four months following deselection, and athletes could still readily recall their experiences of being deselected at the four-month follow up. More important, the time lag between deselection and the interviews also allowed participants opportunities to engage in coping attempts, which was useful for identifying changes in communal coping that may have occurred.

The athlete interview was conducted first followed by the parent interview. Given that athletes were deselected from a provincial team, they lived in various cities and towns throughout the province. Therefore, interviews were scheduled at a location and time that was convenient for the participants. Eight interviews were conducted in families' homes and 20 interviews were conducted on a university campus. Athlete interviews lasted, on average, 35 minutes ($SD = 5.7$ min), and parent interviews lasted, on average, 50 minutes ($SD = 15.1$ min).

Interviews

Separate interview guides for athletes and parents were created based on recommendations provided by Giorgi (2009) and Englander (2012). The interview guides had introductory, main, and summary questions (see Appendix II). Introductory questions were aimed at building rapport with the participants as well as gathering necessary

demographic information. The main questions were broad, open-ended questions related to different aspects of coping with deselection (e.g., tryouts, initial reactions, role of parents). For example, athletes were asked, ‘How did you react to getting cut?’, ‘What happened in the first few days after?’, and ‘How are you coping with it now?’, as well as, ‘Did you talk to anyone about being cut?’, and ‘Can you tell me how your parents may have supported you?’ Parents were asked similar questions including, ‘What was your immediate reaction to your daughter being cut?’, ‘How have your thoughts/feelings changed over the past few weeks?’ and ‘What have you done to support your daughter?’ Summary questions were aimed at gaining participants’ views on deselection practices used by coaches. Follow-up questions and probes were used to maintain the flow of conversation and gain additional depth, clarification, and details about specific aspects of coping with deselection (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

While we specifically asked about the roles of parents, we did not pose questions directly derived from Lyons et al.’s (1998) model of communal coping during the interviews. Rather, the questions were broad, open-ended, and wide-ranging, which is important for encouraging “people to talk about their experiences, perceptions, and understandings rather than providing a normative response or text-book type answer” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 135). We did not ‘rigidly impose’ theory onto the interviews and risk ‘missing’ important elements of the participants’ experiences. Instead, we asked broad questions to gain thorough descriptions of participants’ experiences and then used theory during the process of analysis to help ‘transform’ or ‘make sense’ of the data (Giorgi, 2009). This approach reflects what is known as theoretical sensitivity (Glaser & Holton, 2004).

Data Analysis

Audio-recordings were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcribing service, which produced a total of 456 pages of single-spaced data (168,853 words). All identifying information was removed, and athletes and parents were given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. Prior to beginning analysis, transcripts were checked with audio-recordings to ensure accuracy. Data analysis began as soon as the first data were collected and continued in an iterative process throughout the study.

The analysis involved four steps (Giorgi, 2009). Analysis began more inductively in order to identify the important aspects of the participants' experiences based on data obtained from the open-ended and wide-ranging questions they had been asked during the interviews. The first analytic step involved reading each transcript to gain a complete sense of the participant's experience. The second step involved an inductive thematic analysis whereby the data were broken down into smaller units of meaningful information (i.e., meaning units) and assigned codes (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The third step was transformation, which Giorgi (2009) described as "the heart of this method" (p. 130). It involved giving psychologically meaningful labels to each meaning unit to carefully represent what was happening.

The transformational step involved a more deductive analytic logic, and this is when, having considered the alternatives, we selected the Lyons et al. (1998) model and framework of communal coping because we decided it was the best 'fit' for making sense of the data. The inductively-derived themes were given psychologically meaningful labels (Giorgi, 2009) to reflect *forms* of coping. Then, we grouped the themes by categories that reflected a *process* of communal coping (and how it appeared to change

over time). Hence, we used an inductive-to-deductive analytic approach and used theory ‘sensitively’ to identify forms and processes of communal coping while ensuring we captured the essential components of the participants’ experiences. This inductive-to-deductive logical approach and sensitive use of theory has been used in other youth sport psychology studies (e.g., Holt, Tamminen, Black, Mandigo, & Fox, 2009). The fourth and final step in the analysis involved the presentation of the general structure of participants’ coping with deselection within this framework, while paying particular attention to the forms of communal coping used and the processes involved.

Methodological Rigour

Methodological rigour was addressed throughout the research process using multiple techniques (Mayan, 2009). The lead researcher was sensitive to participants during the interviews and was open to alternative interpretations of experiences by bracketing her personal experience of being deselected as an adolescent athlete (Yardley, 2008). During and following analysis, the lead researcher engaged in regular discussions with a co-author who acted as a ‘critical friend’. These meetings allowed the research team to constantly question emerging themes and patterns and provide explanations and justifications for interpretations of the data. Such discussions were especially useful during the third stage of analysis when applying communal coping concepts to the data. A reflexive journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mayan, 2009) was also maintained throughout the research process to bracket the researcher’s past knowledge and assumptions about deselection given her personal experience with deselection from soccer during adolescence.

A member-checking protocol was used (following Neely et al., 2016; Neely & Holt, 2014) whereby athletes and parents were emailed a summary of the results and asked to respond to questions about the accuracy of the analysis and their coping effectiveness. They were also asked to provide any other comments or feedback they wished to share. It was explained to participants that the summary described how female adolescent athletes and their parents coped together with being deselected from a provincial sport team. It was also stated that the summary may not be identical to how they coped with deselection but should resonate with them and they should be able to locate the ‘essential components’ of their experience within the results.

Twenty-two participants (11 athlete-parent dyads) responded to the e-mail and supported the analysis and interpretation. Eleven parents and ten athletes felt they coped effectively with deselection, while one athlete replied “yes and no.” She explained that being deselected still ‘bugs’ her and she gets mad when anything related to the provincial team comes up. Four parents and three athletes also provided positive general comments about the relevance of the research. Lastly, two parents and one athlete provided short anecdotes about current sport success. Five parents and seven athletes had no further comments.

Results

The results showed that participants consistently appraised deselection from a shared perspective (an ‘our problem’ orientation). At a general level, we depicted a process of communal coping. That is, the responsibility for coping with deselection and its consequences appeared to change as time progressed, moving from an ‘our problem, my (parents’) responsibility’ orientation to an ‘our problem, our responsibility’

orientation to an ‘our problem, my (athletes’) responsibility’ orientation. Parents attempted to protect their daughters from the negative emotions arising from deselection. Athletes and parents then engaged in cooperative actions to manage their reactions to the stressor. Finally, athletes and parents engaged in individual coping strategies, with athletes taking more responsibility for coping.

Our Problem, Parents’ Responsibility

The first category refers to athletes’ and parents’ immediate responses to the news of deselection, and the emotional reactions it caused. The forms of communal coping (appraisal of deselection and communication about deselection) reflect how deselection was a shared problem while parents primarily took responsibility for protecting their daughters from the negative emotional reactions.

Appraisal of deselection. Deselection was appraised by athletes and parents as a stressor that produced a range of negative psychosocial and emotional responses. Athletes typically received the news from a coach, and made comments such as “I was a wreck” (Kristen), “you just feel like you just totally lost everything you worked so hard for” (Lindsey), “I felt like everything was wrong” (Jordan), and “it was horrifying, it was the worst thing” (Meghan). Athletes described a variety of negative emotions including disappointment, frustration, anger, and sadness. For instance, Ali said:

After getting cut I was probably in a little bit of shock, not just like “oh my goodness I didn’t see this coming” but more of “that just happened.” Then it kind of went into the sad phase where I felt kind of sad about it and I felt really angry and mad about it and like “why did this happen?”

Parents also had emotional reactions when they heard the news (typically conveyed to them by their daughters). Stephen explained his initial reaction when he texted his daughter to ask if she had heard from the coach about deselection. He said, “[Shannon] sent me back an emoticon [emoji] of scissors and then right away I felt, I got that feeling in my chest where your heart just feels like it sinks.” Athletes corroborated and recognized that their deselection had a negative impact on their parents as well. Emily said, “I honestly think it was harder for them to get over it because they saw how I was and how down I was... They kind of feed off of us, if we’re sad, they’re gonna be even more sad.” Deselection therefore was perceived by all members of the social network as a stressful event and was viewed as ‘our problem’ within the athlete-parent dyads.

However, in the initial appraisal of deselection, parents assumed the primary responsibility (‘my responsibility’) for protecting their daughters against this stressor. For some parents, a communal coping ‘my responsibility’ orientation was evident even before deselection actually occurred. Theo (a father) said that during the tryout he remembered thinking “we don’t think this [making the team] is gonna happen. So I think going up before [Kassi] was actually called in to let her know the news, I think we kinda knew already.” Many parents also alluded to an innate responsibility to protect their daughter from the potential negative consequences of being deselected. For example, James explained that, “you see your kid being crushed and your first instinct as a parent is to defend your child.” There was a clear sense that parents felt that helping their daughters cope with deselection was the parents’ responsibility, although they were not always successful in doing so. Stephen said he thought a lot about what he could have

done to help his daughter feel better about being deselected. He said, “I mean you’re thinking about it the next day or the next week. You’re thinking about what you could have done different to help her prepare better.”

Communication about deselection. All athlete-parent dyads communicated about deselection in order to cope. Communication was primarily initiated by parents (again reflecting a ‘my responsibility’ orientation) and was a ‘delicate’ process. Parents tended to ‘console first’ and then ‘talk later.’ Theo explained “you have to give her [daughter] some space to let her grieve a bit, and then you can have a rational discussion with her.” Similarly, another father (Corey) said his daughter “was crushed. So you just console your child at that point and then talk to them after...It wasn’t a lot of words, no, just come hug your dad, she needed a hug, that’s it.” Athletes agreed that right after being cut was not a good time to try and talk it through. For example, Lindsey said she did not “want to talk about it right after. I just want to let it sit a bit.”

Typically, the ‘consoling’ period lasted about 48 hours before communication about the stressor began. Parents tended to begin these conversations tentatively. Scott said he and his wife “would gently nudge her [daughter] towards a conversation but we would pick up those vibes if she wasn’t ready.” In this sense, parents had to ‘read’ if their daughter was ready to talk. When these conversations occurred, athletes and parents were able to communicate about how they would move forward together. As Peggy (a mother) explained, “This [deselection] is a reality that’s happened and it’s unfortunate, but we have to get through it. That’s kind of how we dealt with it.... We collaborated about it...” Thus, after parents initially took responsibility, athletes and parents then began to share

responsibility by engaging in cooperative actions to cope with deselection together (see below).

Cooperative Actions: Our Problem, Our Responsibility

Following the more immediate emotional reaction to deselection, participants described several cooperative actions to construct strategies to reduce the negative impact of deselection. These actions (i.e., forms of communal coping) reflected an ‘our problem, our responsibility’ orientation as athletes and parents worked cooperatively (using rationalization and positive reframing) to deal with the consequences of deselection.

Rationalization. Rationalizing different reasons for being deselected was a coping strategy that athletes and parents used together. Athletes explained that most coaches did not provide specific feedback for why they were cut, so they talked with their parents about possible explanations for deselection. For example, Jordan rationalized her deselection when she said:

Well I was a year younger, I mean it makes sense, there was a lot of really good girls there...Then I talked to my Dad and he told me, he was like, “you were as good as the girls that got put forward. It’s just maybe they’re older, their size, they’re taller.”

Parents also tried to attribute their daughter’s deselection due to coaches wanting athletes with a certain skill set or there being limited space for specific positions (e.g., goalie) on the provincial team. Many parents also tried to explain coaches’ decisions were often related to politics within the various provincial sport organizations. For instance, Elinor said she told her daughter “it’s a coach from a different club, so he’s gonna pick who he

wants, and he's got his own agenda, and so I just think it doesn't fall just on skill, there's so many other factors."

Positive reframing. Parents and athletes spoke about developing a positive perspective on deselection. Parents particularly emphasized what an accomplishment it was to make it so far in a provincial team tryout. For instance, Kassi said her father told her "you should be proud of yourself for making it this far and stuff like that. It's amazing to be top 20 out of the people who were there." Parents encouraged their daughters to view deselection as a learning experience that could actually help them grow as an athlete. For instance, one mother, Keri, suggested that coping with deselection was an opportunity for her daughter to "develop those skills of resiliency" because "you can either let that [deselection] break you or use it to help make you stronger."

Athletes and parents were also able to reframe deselection in a more positive way through acknowledging there would be future opportunities to tryout again and play their sport at an elite level. Elinor explained how she communicated this message to her daughter. She said, "we just said to her, 'look you didn't make it, don't worry about it, you've got Summer Games to play for this year, and there's always next year' ... So she seemed to accept that and we worked through it." Together, athletes and parents were able to reframe deselection in a more positive way and move forward. As Scott articulately stated, "you bring out the positive in the whole experience and just keep reminding her of what she's accomplished and what she still has out there that she can accomplish, you know and that keeps pushing them."

Individual Coping: Our Problem, My Responsibility

Over the weeks following deselection participants still saw deselection as ‘our problem’ but started to take more individual responsibility for coping (‘my responsibility’). In terms of forms of communal coping, athletes and parents independently engaged a broader social network to help them cope. Athletes then appeared to take more personal responsibility as they used distraction and increased effort as individual coping strategies.

Engage a broader social network. Results revealed a different type of cooperative action that did not involve the athlete-parent dyad. That is, participants individually turned to other people in their respective social networks for support. For athletes, teammates and non-sport friends were an important source of support following deselection. Athletes vented to their friends about their disappointment and frustration over being deselected and, sometimes, their resentment towards players who made the team. This venting typically occurred through text messaging. For instance, Emily said, “I literally texted all my friends and I think I was like ‘o-m-g, you will not believe what just happened, I didn’t make the team and I’m freaking out.’ ” Teammates and non-sport friends also provided encouragement and reassurance which helped athletes maintain their confidence.

For parents, friends who were also sport parents were a valuable source of support. Parents vented to them about their frustration and sadness about their daughters’ deselection. Peggy spoke to one of her girlfriends and said she had to “debrief more about it than I expected. I had to grieve a bit myself too because I was really sorry, more for [Jaime]... I certainly felt a lot better afterwards to just be able to put it out there.”

Reassurance from others about their daughters' athletic abilities provided some comfort to parents and helped them cope with some of their emotions.

Distraction. Athletes distracted themselves by engaging in an alternate activity and focused on their club team. Jaime said that she “had a couple of practices [over] the next [few] days so I went right to them and just kinda had to throw myself back in the net” which helped distract her from being disappointed because it allowed her to “focus on my club team because that’s where I was needed at the moment.” Likewise, Steph explained that because her club team had a good chance of going to the provincial championships, “I think that kinda takes my focus away from whatever happened in the summer with the provincial team thing.” Similarly, several parents thought having a different team to distract their daughters was important because it minimized their opportunity to sulk about being cut. Bonnie thought “they were lucky because they had Summer Games this year. I think at 14, trying to deal with this and not having another team to go to might have been harder.” Another mother, Geri, said that if her daughter were to try-out for the provincial team the following year she would “make sure that there is something to look forward to in the summertime that can distract her if she doesn’t make it.”

Increased effort. Athletes were motivated to train harder and had a ‘prove coaches wrong’ attitude after being deselected. Rather than giving up, they increased their training efforts to demonstrate to the coaches who cut them that they deserved to be on the team. Cora provided a clear example when she said:

I kinda like went soccer mode, I just thought “I have to get better, I have to keep training.” So I went in my backyard constantly, once I got home from school I’d be out there and I’d just juggle and do my footwork.

Most athletes still had pent up anger towards the coaches who cut them and used this as motivation. Like Emily said, “it put a fire under my ass... so I used it to fuel me kinda thing.” Likewise, Shannon boldly explained “I got mad and was like ‘I’m going to workout every morning. I’m going to stick handle and I’m going to be so good next year when I go to the [university team] and I’m just going to prove them wrong.’”

Discussion

The overall purpose of this study was to examine how female adolescent athletes and their parents cope with deselection from provincial sport teams using a communal coping perspective. This appears to be the first sport psychology study to use a communal coping perspective (cf. Crocker et al., 2015; Tamminen & Gaudreau, 2014). Using the Lyons et al. (1998) model, our results showed that participants consistently appraised deselection from a shared perspective (‘our problem’). The responsibility for coping with deselection and its consequences appeared to change as time progressed, moving from an ‘our problem, my (parents’) responsibility’ orientation to an ‘our problem, our responsibility’ orientation to an ‘our problem, my responsibility’ orientation (with athletes taking more personal responsibility for coping). Thus, we revealed a *process* of communal coping with associated *forms* of communal coping.

At a general level, the results supported findings from previous research that have shown deselection is associated with negative psychosocial and emotional consequences for athletes (e.g., Barnett, 2006, 2007; Blakelock et al., 2016; Brown & Potrac, 2009;

Grove et al., 2004; Munroe et al., 1999). The results also demonstrated that deselection had negative emotional consequences for parents (Harwood et al., 2010). More specifically, the results showed that deselection was a shared stressor ‘co-owned’ by athletes and parents, and it resulted in some degree of shared action. These findings are consistent with previous sport psychology research showing that parents experience stressors in relation to their children’s participation in sport (Harwood & Knight, 2009; Harwood et al., 2010) and that they can play an important role in helping their children to cope (Tamminen & Holt, 2010; 2012). Interpreting the findings within Lyons et al. (1998) framework, deselection was consistently viewed as ‘our problem’ although the responsibility for coping shifted among members of the social network. These subtle, but important, changes in the way coping was approached represent a potentially important contribution to the literature by revealing information about the processes of communal coping (Afifi et al., 2012).

The notion of shifting responsibility for coping with a shared problem is logically consistent with research in other settings. For example, Afifi et al. (2006) found that family members engaged in communal coping behaviors to deal with stressors arising from divorce. There remained a shared problem, but the responsibility for action changed. Afifi et al. speculated that family members may reappraise a stressor and its consequences over time, and modify their coping strategies accordingly. This explanation plausibly applies to the current study. That is, in the initial aftermath of deselection parents primarily felt it was their responsibility to protect their daughters. Over time, as the intensity of the emotional reactions presumably declined, responsibilities for coping changed to shared responsibility and then to mostly athletes’ responsibility.

As noted, an ‘our problem, my responsibility’ perspective was evident in the immediate aftermath of deselection, in that parents saw it as their responsibility to help protect their daughters from the initial negative emotional response to deselection. Similarly, Harwood et al. (2010) found that parents wanted to protect their child from the potential negative consequences they may experience if they were deselected. This reflects Coyne and Fiske’s (1992) concept of *protective buffering* (i.e., when one group member attempts to shield another member from the stressor). Parents appeared to view their daughters’ emotional reactions as a parental type of concern, and consoled their children first and then talked about it. In this case, parents were likely assuming a responsibility to protect their children. These findings also reflect the importance of parents understanding the emotional demands their children face in relation to sport (Harwood & Knight, 2015).

Furthermore, there was initially (within approximately the first 48 hours) a period of ‘consoling’ prior to beginning the delicate process of communication. We found parents initiated verbal communication, which is important because Lyons et al. (1998) highlighted that understanding who initiates communal coping is an important concept from a practical perspective. These findings are consistent with a study of communal coping among post-divorce families that showed the central role of communication in formulating cooperative coping actions, such as organizing, structuring, and planning family life (Afifi et al., 2006). In a way, ‘reading’ the child and sensitive communication set a platform for engaging in cooperative actions. The ability for parents to ‘read’ and understand their child has previously been reported as an important feature of supportive parental involvement in youth sport (Holt et al., 2009; Knight & Holt, 2014).

Communication about emotions was also important as it enabled athletes and parents to respond to the significant event of deselection. It appears athletes and parents engaged in interpersonal emotion regulation to help manage the range of negative emotions they experienced. Particularly during the ‘consoling’ period, parents’ ability to ‘read’ their daughters’ body language and non-verbal communication (portrayed by withdrawal, silence) may have positively affected the interactions between athletes and their parents. At the dyadic level, Keltner and Haidt (1999) argued that emotional expression helps individuals know others’ emotions and coordinate social interactions, such as cooperative actions. Interpersonal emotion regulation was also evident later on in the coping process when athletes and parents engaged a wider social network to deal with emotions. This is similar to high-performance curlers who sought provision of support from friends and family outside of their team (Tamminen & Crocker, 2013). These findings provide support for the inherently social nature of emotional coping processes (Niven et al., 2009).

The current study makes another important contribution to the literature by showing that rationalization and positive reframing were specific coping strategies athletes and parents used together to cope with deselection. Rationalizing and positive reframing are coping strategies previously reported in the sport psychology literature (e.g., Devonport, Lane, & Biscomb, 2013; Munroe et al., 1999; Tamminen & Holt, 2010), but they have not been considered as cooperative actions because the focus of the majority of previous studies has been on individual coping (Crocker et al., 2015; Tamminen & Gaudreau, 2014). Our findings clearly demonstrate that through a shifting of responsibility for coping there is an integration of intrapersonal and interpersonal

coping strategies, thus increasing our knowledge of the ways athletes and parents actually cope with deselection and contributing to a more complete understanding of coping in sport (cf. Tamminen & Gaudreau, 2014).

Athletes and parents thought distraction (i.e., returning to club team) was an effective coping strategy for athletes. Returning to their club team may have provided opportunities for social validation (i.e., reaffirming one's sense of self through recognition from others; Allen, 2003), which helped athletes cope with deselection. Our findings about club teams providing coping resources provided an alternative perspective to that reported in a study of deselection from professional soccer teams in the UK. Brown and Potrac (2009) found that participants attempted to build new self-concepts and alternative identities after deselection, but were critical of the limited social support they received from the professional teams. In our study, the participants' club teams (as opposed to the provincial teams) provided an important coping resource.

Some participants' comments suggested cooperative actions (e.g., positive reframing) and athlete individual responses (e.g., increasing effort) may provide ways to view deselection as an opportunity for personal growth. First-year athletes who were deselected from university sport teams began to see deselection in a less negative light and recognized future opportunities four-months after deselection (Munroe et al., 1999). Combined, the findings of the current study and previous research suggest that female athletes may experience positive psychological and emotional growth following deselection. This is consistent with other sport psychology research that has shown female athletes can experience growth by processing negative events such as performance slumps, coach conflicts, bullying, eating disorders, sexual abuse, and

injuries (Tamminen, Holt, & Neely, 2013). Interestingly, some participants in the Tamminen et al. study reported changes in their social support networks during periods of adversity, such as gaining an appreciation for the people who supported them. It is possible that by coping with deselection female adolescent athletes and parents in the current study created and/or strengthened their emotional bonds.

A contribution of this study is it shows that communal coping a useful perspective for understanding interpersonal dimensions of coping in sport (Crocker et al., 2015; Tamminen & Gaudreau, 2014). A notable strength is the sampling strategy used. By contacting athletes/parents prior to the deselection process we were able to recruit participants soon after a specific deselection stressor. Furthermore, by interviewing participants 10-12 weeks after deselection they had adequate time to reflect upon their coping efforts while memories of deselection remained relatively 'fresh.' Nonetheless, the results should be viewed in light of certain limitations. The interviews were retrospective, and it may be possible to gain more precise information about the timing of 'shifts' in coping (e.g., from communal to individual) using repeated measures over the time period following deselection. The sample, while appropriate given the purpose of this study, was small and relatively homogenous. As a consequence, the results do not readily generalize to other groups (e.g., males, athletes at different levels of competition, or younger athletes) or other contexts (e.g., athletes deselected from club teams they have been involved with for extended periods of time). Lastly, self-selection bias may be present because participants were asked to contact the lead researcher. It is possible that only those athlete-parent dyads who thought they had coped with deselection volunteered

to participate, whereas other athlete-parent dyads who did not volunteer may have struggled to cope with deselection.

From an applied perspective the results of this study suggest that communal coping is beneficial for coping with a stressor in female adolescent youth sport. Sport psychology consultants may wish to include parents in their work with athletes, because parents may be a valuable coping resource, but must proceed with caution as parents can also be a source of stress for athletes. In particular, parents initiated communication about coping with deselection, which is an important practical point for working with families (Lyons et al., 1998). Furthermore, coaches/sport organizations could consider educating parents about the role they can play in supporting their children following deselection. This would be an important shift in the way deselection is approached by coaches/sport organizations, because previous research shows they are most concerned about dealing with parents' complaints (which coaches themselves report as a stressor) rather than explaining ways in which parents can help their children cope (Neely et al., 2016). At a practical level, coaches could explain (during the pre try-out meeting) that parents can play a crucial role in supporting their children post-deselection, and suggest coping strategies for parents (e.g., console first, communicate, positive reframing, engage a broader social network) and athletes (e.g., distraction, increased effort) that may lead to positive growth over time. Finally, it is important to emphasize that communal coping with deselection is a process that changes over time and – our results suggest – athletes eventually take more personal responsibility for coping.

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CHAPTER 4

Study 3

Female Athletes' Experiences of Positive Growth Following Deselection

Traumatic and adverse events cause people significant distress. However, individuals can also experience 'positive growth' from their struggle with these same events (Baker, Kelly, Calhoun, Cann, & Tedeschi, 2008). Positive growth following trauma can include changes in perceptions of self (e.g., enhanced self-efficacy, personal strength), relationships with others (e.g., appreciation of family and friends), and one's philosophy about life (e.g., seeing new possibilities in life; Joseph & Linley, 2005; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Studies have shown, for instance, that survivors of traumas such as natural disasters and serious illnesses often report positive life changes in the aftermath of their experiences (e.g., Cryder, Kilmer, Tedeschi, & Calhoun, 2004; Hefferon, Grealy, & Mutrie, 2009). The traumatic event itself does not lead to positive growth per se. Rather, the cognitive processing, coping, and affective engagement that occur in the aftermath of an event can lead to growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Conceptions of positive growth may be useful for understanding how athletes cope with traumatic events in sport (Tamminen & Neely, 2016). For example, studies with Olympic champions, high-performance athletes, and university/college level athletes have demonstrated coping with various adversities (e.g., performance issues, mental illness, physical and sexual abuse, injuries) led to superior sport performances, enhanced relationships, perceived personal strength, and increased spirituality (Galli & Reel, 2012; Howells & Fletcher, 2015; Sarkar, Fletcher, & Brown, 2015; Wadey, Evans, Evans, & Mitchell, 2011). Tamminen, Holt, and Neely (2013) explored experiences of adversity and perceptions of growth via interviews with five elite female athletes. Adverse experiences were performance slumps, coach conflicts, bullying, eating disorders, sexual abuse, and injuries. Shared features of participants' experiences of adversity were

isolation/withdrawal, emotional disruption, questioning identity as an athlete, and understanding experiences within a context of perceived expectations. Participants sought and found meaning in their experiences by identifying opportunities for growth, using social support, and realizing the important role of sport in their lives. Aspects of growth included realizing strength, gaining perspective on their problems, and gaining a desire to help others.

In a physical activity context, studies have examined posttraumatic growth among breast cancer survivors involved in dragon boat teams (McDonough, Sabiston, & Ullrich-French, 2011; Sabiston, McDonough, & Crocker, 2007). Dragon boating provided opportunities for participants to gain personal control, develop new identities as athletes, and overcome physical challenges. It also enabled participants to self-disclose, expand their social network, and give and receive valuable informational and emotional social support. These experiences contributed to closer and more meaningful relationships with other survivors, physical and mental strength, new opportunities to enjoy life again, and a renewed appreciation for their health and life in general (Sabiston et al., 2007). Importantly, findings demonstrated the prominence of positive social relationships and support through multiple pathways facilitated enhanced posttraumatic growth (McDonough et al., 2011).

The shift toward examining positive growth represents a new way to understanding traumatic and adverse experiences in sport. The vast majority of earlier work has focused on negative features of such sporting experiences and ways in which athletes learn to cope with them (e.g., Brackenridge, 1997; Evans, Mitchell, & Jones, 2006; Fasting, Brackenridge, & Walseth, 2002; Gould, Bridges, Udry, & Beck, 1997).

Whereas there are some promising findings with regard to positive growth in sport (e.g., Tamminen et al., 2013) and physical activity settings (e.g., McDonough et al., 2011; Sabiston et al., 2007), there remains a need to understand more about the cognitions and social interactions that may facilitate growth in sport (Tamminen & Neely, 2016). The current study was designed to add to the literature by examining athletes' experiences of positive growth following a traumatic experience in sport; namely, being deselected from important representative-level teams during adolescence.

Deselection (or being cut) is the elimination of an athlete from a competitive sport team based on the decisions of the coach (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). In highly competitive levels of youth sport, deselection typically occurs following a structured try-out process that can include a great deal of uncertainty among coaches who often rely on intuition to make difficult decisions (Neely, Dunn, McHugh, & Holt, 2016). Deselection has been associated with a range of negative psychosocial and emotional consequences among athletes, including depression, anxiety, anger, and humiliation, as well as a loss of self-esteem, friendships, and connectedness to school (Barnett, 2006, 2007; Brown & Potrac, 2009; Munroe, Albinson, & Hall, 1999), clinical levels of psychological distress (Blakelock, Chen, & Prescott, 2016), and loss of athletic identity and sense of self (Brown & Potrac, 2009; Grove, Fish, & Eklund, 2004). Deselection, therefore, may be a traumatic experience; but the ways in which individuals may learn to grow following deselection have not been adequately examined in the literature. This is an important issue to address because deselection is a widespread and prevalent feature of competitive youth sport.

Munroe et al. (1999) found that after a period of four months female varsity athletes were able to view deselection in a ‘less negative’ light. Furthermore, just as other traumatic life events can cause both psychological distress *and* lead to positive growth (Baker et al., 2008), there is some limited evidence to suggest that deselection may precipitate positive growth among athletes. For instance, Neely, McHugh, Dunn, and Holt (2017) examined how female adolescent athletes and their parents used communal coping to manage the consequences of deselection 10-12 weeks after they received the deselection decision. Results showed that athletes and parents shared the responsibility for coping and used both communal and individual coping strategies. Some cooperative actions (e.g., positive reframing) and individual coping strategies (e.g., athletes increasing effort) appeared to provide ways to view deselection as an opportunity for personal growth. However, the short time-frame of the Neely et al. (2017) study did not allow for analysis of how growth may occur. This is an important limitation to address because some research (in non-athlete populations) shows that the passing of time may be a necessary component that provides individuals with opportunities to increase their perceptions of posttraumatic growth by virtue of subsequent experiences and reflections they have following a traumatic event (Affleck, Tennen, Croog, & Levine, 1987; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995).

Several theories and models can be grouped under the umbrella of ‘positive growth.’ These include the functional-descriptive model of posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996; 2004), stress-related growth (Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996), organismic valuing theory (Linley & Joseph, 2004), thriving (O’Leary & Ickovics, 1995), and perceived benefits (McMillen & Fisher, 1998). Although these theories and models

have specific definitions and conceptualizations, they all propose that the process of struggling with adversity can result in positive changes that propel an individual to a higher level of functioning than that which existed prior to the adverse event (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). The functional-descriptive model of posttraumatic growth was used in the current study because it is useful for examining how positive change occurs in response to a traumatic event. Other models and theories of stress-related growth refer to a less radical change in response to a more commonly experienced life stressor (Park, 2009). As such, the functional-descriptive model of posttraumatic growth *may* be useful for understanding positive growth following experiences in sport that are perceived as traumatic, but it has not been widely used in the sport psychology literature to date.

In the functional-descriptive model of posttraumatic growth (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1998; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) it is posited that a traumatic event serves as a ‘seismic challenge’ by shattering an individual’s pre-existing schema about the self, their goals, and beliefs about the world. An individual’s struggle with the aftermath of trauma can result in five domains of growth: appreciation of life, personal strength, relating to others, new possibilities, and spiritual change (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, 2004). Greater appreciation of life includes an increased appreciation of what is important, recognition of the value of things formerly taken for granted, and a change in priorities. Personal strength refers to positive changes in perceptions of self and an enhanced sense of personal strength, especially in terms of ‘if I got through that, I can get through anything.’ Relating to others involves closer, more intimate, and more meaningful relationships, valuing family and friends more, and an increased sense of compassion towards others. New possibilities refers to recognition of other opportunities

or a taking new and different path in life. Spiritual change involves religious or spiritual growth, either through a deepening of faith or a significant change in beliefs. Cognitive processing is critical for growth as people deal with their emotional reactions to the trauma and try to make sense of what has happened. Although distressing, a rebuilding of views and beliefs occurs through rumination (i.e., repeated intrusive thinking) which often includes regret and counterfactual thinking (i.e., repeated consideration of how the trauma could have been avoided).

The current study specifically focused on positive growth among female athletes following deselection from provincial level sport teams. Female athletes were sampled because they may have fewer coping resources than males (Lewis & Frydenberg, 2004), and may be particularly vulnerable to the stress of deselection because they tend to place high value on social relationships (Neely et al., 2017; Smith, 2007). Furthermore, some researchers have suggested females experience greater levels of growth following adversity than males due to their greater likelihood to seek social support (Kesimci, Göral, & Gencoz, 2005). We focused on deselection from provincial level teams because this may be a particularly traumatic experience that occurs during adolescence (Neely et al., 2017). Provincial level teams are representative teams of the ‘best’ players in a particular age group from an entire province (similar to a state-level team or a team representing a large region). Selection for these teams is often an important step toward junior national teams or gaining valuable scholarships to university/collegiate programs in Canada or the United States. Deselection from provincial level teams can threaten future athletic careers. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine female

athletes' experiences of positive growth following deselection from provincial sport teams.

Method

Posttraumatic growth has been described as being primarily a phenomenological experience (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006). Accordingly, the study of posttraumatic growth is well-suited to the use of phenomenological research methodologies (cf. Tamminen et al., 2013). Specifically, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used in the current study. IPA is a qualitative methodology that seeks to understand how individuals make sense of significant life experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). It can be particularly useful “when one is concerned with complexity, process, or novelty” (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 53). Given deselection is likely to be a significant event in an adolescent athlete's life and growth is a process, IPA was a suitable methodological approach for understanding females' experiences of positive growth.

IPA research is underpinned by three main concepts: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography (Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenology is concerned with first-person accounts of lived experience. Hermeneutics deals with interpretation and IPA involves a double hermeneutic whereby participants make sense of their experience and the researcher is making sense of the participants' interpretations. Ideography refers to an in-depth analysis of single cases before producing any general statements. These principles align with the interpretivist paradigm, which focuses on understanding individuals' unique perceptions of their experiences and assumes knowledge is created through researcher-participant interactions.

Participant Recruitment

Participants were purposefully sampled to recruit female athletes who could provide the ‘most’ and ‘best’ information to address the purpose of the study (Mayan, 2009). The sampling criteria were that participants must (a) have been deselected from a provincial level sport team in the U15-U18 age categories, (b) be aged 21-25 years old at the time of data collection, and (c) responded to a call for athletes that have experienced positive growth from being deselected. As noted above, the provincial level is an important step in an athletic career. The U15-U18 range was selected because sports do not have uniform age categories for provincial teams (e.g., some sports have provincial teams at U15, others at U16, and so on). Participants aged 21-25 years at the time of data collection were recruited because it would provide a minimum of at least three years since deselection (if participants were deselected at U18), which provides a time-frame consistent with the literature that shows posttraumatic growth remains stable three years after a traumatic event (Linley & Joseph, 2004).

Participants were recruited through two main strategies. In the first strategy, head coaches of university and college female soccer, basketball, volleyball, and ice hockey teams in a western Canadian city were contacted via email and asked to forward the study information letter to the athletes on their teams. The information letter provided the purpose of the study, participant eligibility, and described what would be required of participants. It also included the instruction that athletes who fit the sample criteria were invited to contact the researcher if they wished to participate in the study. The second recruitment strategy was snowball sampling (Patton, 2015), whereby participants were asked to share the details of the study with friends they knew who fit the sample criteria.

Once email contact was made with the researcher, participant eligibility was determined. All but three participants who expressed interest in the study met the sampling criteria (two participants did not meet the age criterion, and one participant was not deselected from a provincial team) and interviews were arranged. Institutional research ethics board approval was obtained and participants provided written informed consent prior to the onset of their interview.

Participants

Eighteen females (M age = 22.45 years, SD = 1.38) who competed in competitive youth sport as adolescents and were deselected from a provincial soccer (n = 9), ice hockey (n = 8), or volleyball (n = 1) team between the ages of 14 and 18 years (M age = 16 years, SD = 1.14) participated in this study (there were no participants from basketball). Participants were completing or had completed a post-secondary degree at time of data collection. Participants began participating in their sport recreationally at, on average, seven years old and began playing more competitively on a club team at, on average, 10.5 years old. All participants continued to play their sport on a club team at the competitive level until the end of youth sport (i.e., U18 or high school). Fourteen of the participants competed in their sport at the college/university level, two participants competed in a different sport at the college/university level, and two participants played their sport at a recreational level while attending university. All participants self-identified as Caucasian-Canadian.

Data Collection

Data were collected through two individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews. All interviews were conducted by the first author and were audio-recorded.

Eighteen participants completed the first ‘main’ interview that lasted, on average, 42 minutes ($SD = 11.1$). Three days before the interview participants were emailed a copy of the interview guide and asked to think about their experience of deselection to help stimulate recall and enable them to provide detailed examples during the interview. The interview guide (see Appendix II) was developed based on IPA recommendations by Smith et al. (2009) and qualitative interviewing guidelines by Rubin and Rubin (2012). The interview guide included introductory, main, and summary questions, starting with general questions and becoming more specific as the interview progressed. Introductory questions were used to gain demographic information and develop rapport with participants. The main questions were broad and open-ended questions that encouraged participants to talk about their perceptions and understandings and facilitated the discussion of relevant topics (Smith et al., 2009). Main topics were deselection (e.g., Can you tell me about your experience of being cut?), coping (e.g., What did you do to try and deal with being cut?), identity (e.g., Can you tell me how you thought/felt about yourself after being cut?), and growth experiences.

The growth experiences questions were based on Tedeschi and Calhoun’s (2004) model of posttraumatic growth. Participants were asked questions related to each of the five domains of growth. For example, ‘In what ways did your priorities as an athlete or a person change after being cut?’, ‘How do you think being cut has personally impacted you?’, ‘In what ways did relationship with people change as a result of being cut?’, ‘What do you think influenced your decision to quit/continue to play?’, and ‘Can you tell me if/how religion or spirituality has changed because of your deselection experience?’ Summary questions were aimed at gaining participants’ views on the deselection process

and provided an opportunity to discuss any other aspects of their deselection experience not covered by the main questions. Follow-up questions and probes were used throughout the interview to maintain the flow of conversation and encourage participants to expand on their ideas which provided clarity, depth, and more detail about their experiences and their perceptions of growth (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Seventeen participants completed a follow-up second interview (one participant failed to respond to repeated attempts to organize a second interview). These second interviews lasted, on average, 22 minutes ($SD = 4.7$). They took place approximately two months after the first interviews, which provided sufficient time to analyze each participant's first interview. The second interviews focused on further understanding participants' experiences of growth following deselection. There was no formal interview guide for the second interviews because it was based on findings from the first interviews. Instead, participants were presented with the summary of results and asked to provide feedback and any additional information. As each theme was described, they were also asked to comment on the emerging themes (from all participants) and how they may have resonated with their own experiences. Participants were asked questions like, 'OK so other than your parents, were there any other relationships that changed for you after being cut?', 'How do these themes fit with your growth in terms of personal strength?' and 'Overall, how does this interpretation compare with your experience of deselection and growth?'

Data Analysis

Audio-recordings were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcribing service, which produced a total of 435 pages of single-spaced data (179 915 words).

Athletes were given a pseudonym to ensure anonymity and all other identifying information (e.g., coaches' names, names of teams) was removed. Prior to beginning analysis, transcripts were checked with audio-recordings to ensure accuracy. Data analysis began as soon as the first data were collected and transcribed and continued in an iterative process throughout the study, which allowed the researcher to be fully immersed in the data (Smith et al., 2009).

Data analysis followed IPA guidelines outlined by Smith et al. (2009). First, transcripts were read and re-read to gain an overall sense of the participant's experience. The second step involved recording notes about initial thoughts and impressions. The third step involved transforming notes into emergent themes within the data. Concise phrases or codes were given to pieces of text to capture the essential meaning. Langdrige (2007) noted that these themes "should reflect broader, perhaps more theoretically significant concerns" (p. 111). In the fourth step, connections and relationships across themes were established. During stages three and four, concepts from posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) were used to interpret and advance the analysis (these stages reflected the use of a more deductive logic). Step five involved moving to the next transcript and repeating the analytic process (i.e., Steps 1-4).

Once individual idiographic analysis was completed for each transcript, the sixth step was looking for patterns across cases. Similarities and differences between participants' experiences were examined in order to identify the shared commonalities of posttraumatic growth following deselection. Once steps one through six of data analysis were completed for the main interviews, the same steps were used to analyze the data from the second interviews (following de Beudrap, Dunn, & Holt, 2016; Tamminen et

al., 2013). The final step was writing which involved moving from final themes to a narrative account that described the participants' experiences of posttraumatic growth following deselection.

Validity

Smith and colleagues (2009) recommend the use of four principles identified by Yardley (2008) when assessing the quality of IPA research. The four principles are: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance. We demonstrated sensitivity to context throughout data collection and analysis. The first author maintained a reflexive journal about her preconceptions regarding deselection and positive growth. This monitoring of biases was particularly important given the researcher's personal experience of being deselected as an adolescent athlete. Commitment and rigour was reflected throughout the study through several steps. Smith et al. (2009) stated that "an IPA analysis is only as good as the data it is derived from and obtaining good data requires close awareness of the interview process" (p. 180). The interviewer's knowledge, training, and experience in qualitative interviewing helped ensure high quality interviews were conducted and rich data collected. The second interview also provided opportunities for the participants to provide more data and further saturate the themes. Emerging themes and interpretations were discussed among co-authors and initial results were presented to colleagues for feedback. Transparency and coherence was addressed herein by demonstrating congruency and providing a clear description of the research process. Lastly, the contribution the study makes to the literature suggests the impact and importance of this research.

Results

Deselection as a Traumatic Experience

All athletes experienced deselection as a traumatic event. Participants questioned their identity after being deselected from a provincial team. Kate said being deselected “was the end of the world when I was 16” (Interview 1). She went on to say, “I’d always identified as a soccer player and then after I got cut I just wasn’t” (Interview 1). Melissa also questioned her identity after being deselected from a provincial-level ice hockey team. She said:

My identity was completely wrapped around hockey... I wanted my identity to always be hockey, like when people thought of me I just wanted to be known for hockey, I just wanna be the hockey player.

Getting cut was so hard because I’m like if I’m not an elite hockey player, who am I? What am I? (Interview 1).

Being deselected from a provincial team also made athletes question their ability because they came into the provincial program as one of the top players on their club teams. As a result, they wondered if they had the skills to compete at a higher level. For instance, Harper stated, “getting cut really made you question yourself as an athlete. ‘Am I not gritty enough, do I not have the best leg?’” (Interview 1). Likewise, Quinn vividly recalled sitting in the dressing room and struggling after being deselected, asking herself, “like am I good enough? Do I even wanna play hockey? Can I even play hockey or am I just fooling myself out here?” (Interview 1).

Gradual Process of Growth

The process of realizing growth was gradual. As Olivia explained, “I don’t think it was like a boom, ‘I feel really great about this now,’ it was definitely a step-by-step process” (Interview 1). Although many participants began the process of ‘rebuilding’ in the aftermath of deselection, it took several years to perceive positive growth had occurred. Alexa explained that her perception of deselection “shifted as time went on from not viewing it as such a negative experience but as a learning experience. But that took a very long amount of time, it wasn’t instant, it was probably another year or two later” (Interview 1). Other participants said it was “probably like two years after, two to three [years]...it wasn’t an immediate thing, definitely not” (Kate, Interview 1) or “when I got to play university...so I guess maybe three or so years to deal with it” (Becky, Interview 2). Similarly, Harper said:

My perspective changed when I actually made the team [the provincial team the following year] and you kinda see wow, this is why I was working so hard...so I think I was able to reinterpret it in my university years and young adult years. I don’t think I really saw the true impact it had on me until I was able to succeed in soccer and go to a higher level (Interview 2).

Domains of Growth

Greater appreciation of role of sport. As a consequence of not being able to play at the provincial level participants reflected on the importance of sport in their lives. For Brittany, being deselected was meaningful because “it made me realize how much I wanted hockey and that I wanted to be good. It took me three times [of being deselected]

to realize it, but I realized it in the end” (Interview 1). Quinn said she “went back every year just because I loved it too much. I couldn’t let it go. It’s like the love of my life” (Interview 1). Similarly, Melissa said, “I think at the end of the day just my love of the game and my love to play just like that ‘no, I’m going further’” (Interview 1). It appeared that participants’ passion for their sport helped them gain a greater appreciation of the meaningfulness of sport in their lives.

Some participants harboured thoughts of quitting sport entirely (although all continued to play). For example, Lauren explained that “there was a short period right after getting cut of ‘this sucks, I don’t want to do this’... But I think one of my strengths as an athlete is to say ‘no I want this. I need this in my life’” (Interview 1). In fact, sport became a bigger priority in the participants’ lives. Harper explained:

When you get something taken away it’s a little humbling to your own mindset about how you are as an athlete, which kinda rings into the other thing, so that it’s a bigger priority, you set bigger goals, you train that much harder to get better to potentially next year make the team. So I would agree with that 100% that it became a higher priority. (Interview 2)

As sport became a bigger priority in participants’ lives, they gained a greater appreciation of ‘what it takes’ to compete at the elite level. As Brittany succinctly described, “I realized what it takes to do well and to improve, it takes work to be good at hockey, it takes time” (Interview 1). Elizabeth reflected on how it helped her realize the effort and work she needed to put into hockey, and how it lead to sport becoming her priority. She said:

It kinda was a wakeup call that you actually aren't the best, you know, like you need to do this, this, and this because if it never happened, I probably would've still been the lazy kid who just like showed up to hockey

(Interview 1).

For Elizabeth, deselection was the 'wakeup call' that was ultimately a turning point in her life as hockey became her top priority. She said, "I missed so much school for hockey stuff or because I'd been up late the night before with a game so school and friends kinda took a back burner and hockey took the forefront" (Interview 1). Participants also gave up other activities they had participated in to dedicate their time and energy to their sport. Melissa said, "I actually took out [i.e., quit] all other sports, so instead of playing school volleyball, school basketball and kinda diversifying, I quit all of that. I was strictly focused on hockey" (Interview 1).

Enhanced sense of personal strength. With time, deselection enabled participants to gain an enhanced sense of their personal strengths. For example, Sarah said that her "mentality was definitely stronger" (Interview 1) and Madison said she developed a "tougher skin" (Interview 1) as a result of experiencing deselection. Furthermore, Melissa stated:

A younger me probably wouldn't have listened to this but I just would tell myself, "this is gonna make you a stronger person later on in life." At the time, you definitely wouldn't understand why. Like this sucks, I don't get it but now being older and stuff, you're like, yeah, this has made me a stronger person and if I want something, I will work that much harder for it (Interview 1).

Being deselected from the provincial team was the first time in many participants' lives when they had experienced a significant personal failure. As a result, deselection gave participants a new understanding of the strengths they possessed. This was primarily manifested by a realization of their ability to persevere. Becky said:

Deselection was definitely the hardest thing in sport that I ever had to deal with... definitely the first time that I had to actually get through something in sport in a bigger way so it definitely taught me to not just give up and keep going and persevere through whatever was happening (Interview 2).

Similarly, Emma was able to persevere through other hardships in sport because of going through deselection the first time. She said, "I think that it's just that underlying strength, like mental strength I guess of knowing, 'OK I've gone through this shit before and I can do it even though I might not think I can'" (Interview 1).

The enhanced understanding of their personal strength that participants' developed after being deselected translated to other areas of their lives. Alexa explained that after being deselected from provincial level volleyball:

I just tried to push myself a little bit more every time because I'd already gotten a taste of validation by getting invited, so it's wanting to reprove yourself to be able to get invited back again... When you get that taste of someone thinks you're the best, you just want to push yourself to actually be it. And for me that was great because it helped me apply it to other aspects, like I wanted to push myself better at school, I wanted to teach myself to be better at other aspects of my life. I find in a way it

[deselection] actually helped me a lot 'cause it gave me that drive that I didn't have before (Interview 1)

Other participants realized that by coping with deselection from sport they had attributes that enabled them to cope with other life events. For instance, Olivia said, "I think that having that experience under my belt has let me or reminded me how to cope with things that maybe aren't getting cut but are still negative, traumatic things in my life" (Interview 1). In a similar sense, Lauren was able to reinterpret a valuable lesson from her experience of deselection when she said, "learning what to do at a young age to fix the kind of situation you're in, now, like being 21, I definitely have realized that failing actually makes you stronger and gives you more tools in your toolbox" (Interview 1).

Closer social relationships. Participants drew on other people (parents, siblings, teammates) to deal with deselection and this, in turn, enabled them to form stronger bonds with these people. For example, Lauren said:

My dad definitely helped a lot. He was the one that was there willing to go every step of the way with me to improve my game... I think it grew my bond with my dad a lot because he was there with me and he wanted to see me succeed so he was willing to learn with me and push me to do my best (Interview 1).

After Quinn was deselected her mother's support was invaluable:

I think having my mom to encourage me was probably the only thing that got me through... It was mostly just like, "let's get over it and move on," and that's what we did, and we became kinda best friends because of all that (Interview 1).

Lisa explained that her father, who had always been her soccer coach and a “mean coach guy” was very sympathetic. As a result of supporting her when she was deselected, their relationship grew “not stronger, just in a different sense. He wasn’t just my coach anymore, he was my dad” (Interview 1).

Madison explained that her relationship with her brother changed. She said, “him and I have always been close but that was kinda like OK, he has my back, no matter what.” Through his support, Madison realized “he actually really does care about me especially in this aspect of my life, and I didn’t really see that part of him before” (Interview 1). Participants were also able to connect with teammates on a new level that brought them closer together. Alexa said “I could relate to them [teammates] in another way that I couldn’t before” (Interview 1). In a similar sense, Madison said, “I have better understanding for other players that have been cut, like you’re able to help them cope with it too because you’re like, OK, I’ve been through the same thing and it’s shitty right now but it will get better” (Interview 1).

It appeared that these social relationships became closer through the process of sharing feelings. Emma explained that “when you go through something with someone, your relationship with them is stronger and it’s more binding because you’ve had that shared experience and you’ve talked about bad stuff and good stuff with it” (Interview 1). Similarly, Alexa explained how she was better able to talk to her mother:

I could talk to her more as Grade 11 and 12 happened, I felt fine if I was frustrated expressing that in front of her, because that was the first time I felt frustration and embarrassment in that sport. And after that had happened, yeah, I didn’t feel any of those things talking about anything in

front of her anymore. I felt fine, I just felt I could cry, I could scream, I could do whatever I wanted because she had been there for me during that first original time where I felt this really sucks (Interview 1).

Recognition of new opportunities. Participants eventually became optimistic about the future and realized they had other opportunities to play their sport at a competitive level. As Madison explained:

You might think it's the end of the road but not even. Being cut from [provincial team] I still had the opportunity to play club and for my school team... There's so many different options just because that one door was closed doesn't mean that I was gonna be cut from every other team that I tried out for (Interview 2).

It was important for athletes to recognize that these opportunities existed and to stay positive about reaching their goals. For Lisa, she explained that after being deselected, she “looked at it like I have next year like I have a whole year to get better and make sure to make that team... so I think I was always optimistic it could happen” (Interview 1). Many athletes shared the same view in that it was necessary to adopt an optimistic outlook for future sport opportunities.

Participants' parents often helped them recognize the opportunities they still had to play. Elizabeth said her parents constantly reinforced “you can't take one downfall as the end of a career. There's still 30 games [for club team] and there's other teams to make” (Interview 2). Emma also explained that her parents helped her to be positive and realize the opportunities she still had to compete. She said her mother told her, ““You've got [club team], you've got all these wonderful opportunities, you guys are gonna go to

Mac's [tournament] again', that sort of stuff. So turning it around so it's not focused on the bad" (Interview 1).

In fact, with time, some participants were able to see the benefits of deselection. Harper provided a good example of a new opportunity she had because she was deselected. She said playing on the provincial team:

It was definitely a missed opportunity to play at a very high level. Having said that, there were other opportunities to play soccer but in a different way. The Summer Games was one thing that came of not playing for the provincial soccer team (Interview 1).

Madison explained, "I think looking back on it just knowing that what had happened seemed not so great at the time actually ended up benefiting me in the future. I think that was kind of the silver lining of it all" (Interview 2). In addition, Jocelyn said that "when you're that young you always think that everything's the end of the world but then when the pieces kinda fall into place, you realize just everything happens for a reason type of deal" (Interview 1).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine female athletes' experiences of positive growth following deselection from provincial sport teams. Deselection caused participants to question their identity and ability as an athlete. Growth was a gradual process that unfolded over several years. It was experienced in the following domains: greater appreciation of the role of sport in their lives, enhanced sense of personal strength, closer social relationships, and recognition of new opportunities. These findings

show that cognitive processing and social relationships were critical components of growth as participants re-built their views and beliefs about themselves as athletes.

The traumatic nature of deselection was generally consistent with previous research depicting the negative consequences of deselection, particularly in terms of loss of athletic identity and sense of self (Brown & Potrac, 2009; Grove et al., 2004). It is difficult to establish whether the trauma of deselection is comparable to the trauma of experiencing a natural disaster (Cryder et al., 2006; Hefferon et al., 2009) or, in sport, issues such as bullying, eating disorders, or sexual abuse (Tamminen et al., 2013). Yet, trauma is defined as a 'seismic' event that causes physical or emotional harm and challenges assumptions about one's self and the world (Janoff-Bulman, 1992) and the degree of trauma is dependent on factors such as subjective appraisal, attribution of blame, and perception of meaning associated with the event. Therefore, based on athletes' devastation and the emotional damage caused by deselection, deselection may be in fact be comparable to other trauma because of the changes it can bring about in regards to perceptions of the self, relationships with others, and changes in priorities and perspectives on life. The degree of growth one experiences is not consistently related to the degree of trauma. Rather, there is a curvilinear relationship and posttraumatic growth appears to be highest when individuals report moderate levels of posttraumatic stress (Levine, Laufer, Hamama-Raz, Stein, & Solomon, 2008; Linley & Joseph, 2004). In a sense, an event must be 'traumatic enough' to disrupt an individuals' sense of self. Of course, individuals' perceptions of an event are crucial (i.e., the same event may be perceived as extremely traumatic by one person but less traumatic by another; Day, 2012). Nonetheless, the relationship between trauma and growth raises some interesting

issues about the degree of trauma caused by deselection (Blakelock et al., 2016; Wippert & Wippert, 2008). In the current study deselection caused participants to question their identity and athletic ability – presumably a sufficient level of trauma to change their view of themselves in such a way that they perceive themselves as fundamentally different ‘before’ and ‘after’ the event (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2004; Tamminen & Neely, 2016). It appears that deselection was sufficient for the participants to reconsider some basic assumptions about themselves and the future, which are conditions that can lead to growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

One important finding was the gradual process of growth. That is, growth typically took athletes several years to recognize. It has been established that posttraumatic growth is a process that unfolds gradually over a period of time following a traumatic event as time is needed for cognitive processing (Joseph & Linley, 2004). While some studies have found that perceptions of posttraumatic growth increase over time (Affleck et al., 1987; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995), more recent research shows posttraumatic growth does not significantly increase over time, particularly in young people (Meyerson, Grant, Smith, Carter, & Kilmer, 2011). Some longitudinal work in posttraumatic growth suggests growth remains stable at one and three years following trauma (Frazier, Conlon, & Glaser, 2001; McMillen, Smith, & Fisher, 1997). Although participants were deselected on average at 16 years, our findings show that it took two to three years after being deselected to realize that they had grown. A review of posttraumatic growth in children and adolescents (Meyerson et al., 2011) found that age at the time of trauma (as opposed to time of data collection) was positively correlated with posttraumatic growth such that the older youth were at the time of the traumatic

event (e.g., cancer diagnosis), the more posttraumatic growth they experienced. This finding provides support that a certain level of cognitive ability may be needed to find meaning after trauma (Milam, Ritt-Olson, & Unger, 2004). Further, the passing of time may allow for other success opportunities to occur in an athlete's life, and these experiences may help them reframe the deselection. Longitudinal research focused on understanding cognitive processes and perceptions of growth will make an important contribution to the temporal course of positive growth, which is still not well understood in sporting contexts.

Tedeschi and Calhoun's (2004) model of posttraumatic growth was used to guide the analysis. At a fundamental level, the findings contribute to the literature by showing that this is an appropriate model that can be used to study traumatic and adverse events in athletes' lives. Researchers have highlighted the need for further study of the social contexts that are likely to promote positive psychological changes following adversity (Lepore & Revenson, 2006). Sport is an inherently social environment that often promotes social cohesion (i.e., team cohesion) and in which athletes are "embedded in a supportive social context" (Lepore & Revenson, 2006, p. 32) The current study shows that sport is one such context where individuals can experience growth and suggests that the social nature of sport may promote positive growth.

According to the domains of growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, 2004), a changed sense of what is most important often coincides with a change in priorities. Whereas as we might expect sport to become less important following deselection, sport became a bigger priority for participants as they gained a greater appreciation of the role of sport in their lives as well as a greater appreciation of 'what it takes' to compete at an

elite level. Participants' passion may help explain this greater appreciation for sport. Vallerand et al. (2003) defined passion as a strong inclination and desire toward an activity that one likes, finds important, and in which one invests time and energy. Further, passion has been described as a powerful motivational trigger for athletes (Vallerand et al., 2008), especially in response to adversity (Howells & Fletcher, 2015). It may be worthwhile to examine passion and how it may be a mechanism for positive growth in athletes in the future.

Participants reported an enhanced sense of personal strength as a result of their experience of deselection. This is well documented in the positive growth literature (e.g., Linley & Joseph, 2004) and has been a salient finding among positive growth in sport research (e.g., Galli & Reel, 2012; Tamminen et al., 2013; Wadey et al., 2011). For example, athletes who have experienced severe injuries have reported becoming more dedicated, focused, and mentally tougher than they were before their injury (Galli & Reel, 2012). Importantly, participants felt mentally stronger when it came to coping with future adversities in and out of sport because they had developed a persevering mindset and coping skills. Tamminen and Holt (2012) found that direct experience facing stressful situations was a key component in the process of adolescent athletes learning about coping.

Similar to findings in previous studies in sport and physical activity (e.g., Galli & Reel, 2012; McDonough et al., 2011; Sabiston et al., 2007; Tamminen et al., 2013), our findings demonstrate that social support was critical in the process of growth. Both Day (2012) and Tamminen et al. (2016) wrote it was unclear what the most effective forms of social support might be for athletes facing adversity. Our findings suggest that tangible

support and emotional support from parents contributes to stronger relationships and positive growth following deselection. Results showed that being able to share their thoughts and feelings following deselection was particularly important in building closer relationships with others. In fact, a longitudinal study found that one of the best predictors of posttraumatic growth was emotional expression (Manne et al., 2004). Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) highlighted that engagement in self-disclosure about emotions and perspectives on the trauma, combined with how others respond to this self-disclosure, can play a critical role in the development of posttraumatic growth. Opportunities for self-disclosure also stimulate cognitive processing and can assist individuals to find positive meaning in their experiences (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). There could be value in further exploring the process of self-disclosure and specific cognitive processes (e.g., rumination) from athlete and parent perspectives, which could inform how social support is provided and the ways in which parents can positively contribute to posttraumatic growth among adolescent athletes.

Through optimism and gaining perspective, participants recognized new and other opportunities they still had to play their sport. It appears parents were important in helping athletes realize these opportunities. The finding supports results from Neely et al.'s (2017) study that suggested the cooperative coping action of positive reframing may provide opportunities for positive growth. Combined, these findings corroborate with what Galli and Reel (2012) offered in that "being able to find the 'good' in the 'bad' may be an important preliminary step in actually achieving growth" (p. 314). A positive outlook was also an important aspect of recognizing new possibilities reported by athletes. A review of optimism, social support, and posttraumatic growth reported that

positive reappraisal produced the most posttraumatic growth while social support and optimism were moderately related to posttraumatic growth (Prati & Pietrantonio, 2009). Although only a moderate association, the authors concluded that interventions aimed at increasing optimism may promote positive changes in the aftermath of trauma. Interestingly, a recent study found that female intercollegiate athletes attributed their development of optimism, in part, to having had to cope with negative experiences, but pointed out that it is unclear whether participants “became more optimistic by dealing with the negative experiences or were able to deal with negative experiences because they were optimistic” (de Beaudrap et al., 2016, p. 24). Further research examining the relationship between optimism and positive psychological and emotional growth following trauma or adversity in sport could help inform interventions for athletes aimed at promoting positive growth.

Participants in the current study experienced growth as they gained perspective and were able to view deselection in a more positive manner, and as sport became a bigger priority in their lives and they understood the effort required to succeed at higher levels of sport. Similarly, Neely et al. (2017) suggested that specific cooperative actions used by athletes and their parents (e.g., positive reframing) and individual strategies used by athletes (e.g., increased effort) to cope with deselection may provide athletes with opportunities to experience positive psychological and emotional growth. Therefore, our findings support the use of these coping strategies as mechanisms for athletes to experience positive growth. Communal coping in particular may be a beneficial approach to coping with deselection, especially early on in the coping process, which positively influences positive growth among athletes. Communal coping strategies such as

communal reappraisal, regulated emotional expression, and seeking social support after experiencing an earthquake were associated with survivors' well-being and posttraumatic growth (Włodarczyk et al., 2016). Further research exploring the connection between communal coping and positive growth following various traumatic or adverse events in sport will add to the coping and growth literature.

Spiritual change is a domain of growth within Tedeschi and Calhoun's (2004) model that was not reported in the results of the current study. All participants were asked if they experienced any religious or spiritual changes following deselection. No-one provided any details in response to this question (although some participants did make comments such as 'everything happens for a reason'). This was somewhat surprising because other studies of positive growth among athletes have revealed strengthened religious beliefs and increased spirituality (e.g., Galli & Reel, 2012; Howell & Fletcher, 2015). We did not probe this issue in detail because we did not want to make participants uncomfortable or appear to be judging their responses if they did not 'fit' with the model of posttraumatic growth. Therefore, the reasons why participants in the current study did not report spiritual change are unclear. It may be a reflection of the personal beliefs of the participants in this sample, which mirrors the general trend among the millennial generation (i.e., demographic cohort born after 1980 and began to come of age in the 2000s) who are generally less religious than the general population (Jones, Cox, & Banchoff, 2012). For instance, a report published by the Public Religion Research Institute and Georgetown University's Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs found religion was less central to college-aged millennials' (age 18-24) lives, they engage in less religious activity, and are less likely to embrace traditional religious views

(Jones et al., 2012). Nonetheless, questions about spiritual changes and growth, such as whether there is a spiritual element in the belief that everything happens for a reason, remain outstanding.

The present findings should be interpreted within the context of some limitations, including the reliance on recall over an extended time period. With the passage of time participants may forget important moments that influence growth. This is an issue to overcome in future studies because positive growth is likely a process that does not unfold uniformly across individuals (Joseph & Linley, 2004). Studies that use repeated measures over time will reveal more sophisticated information about the nature of positive growth processes and how they may vary between individuals. Additionally, it is clear that not all people are able to experience positive growth following traumatic events (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006; Wippert & Wippert, 2008). The sample in the current study was such that all of the participants continued to participate in their sport at a high level despite deselection. Of course, other athletes may experience deselection and dropout of their sport. Herein lies an interesting question for future research: Is it possible to dropout of sport and yet experience positive growth from deselection? A corollary is whether individuals can remain in a sport at a high level but not experience positive growth, continuing to compete with poor psychosocial adjustment.

Strengths of this study included the sampling strategy and the use of two interviews, which provided additional data saturation and opportunities for participants to comment on emerging interpretations of the data. The homogenous sample of similarly aged females who experienced deselection in late adolescence is also a strength of this study as other sport growth researchers have expressed the “difficulties inherent in

finding participants of the same age and background who are coping with the same life event at the same time” (Wippert & Wippert, 2008, p. 11). The findings provide further insights into the positive and long-term consequences of deselection. From an applied perspective, our findings are consistent with Tamminen and Neely’s (2016) proposition that growth can occur when individuals cognitively engage, ruminate, and process their emotions, and have supportive relationships that provide opportunities for self-disclosure. Individuals may experience growth through changing schemas, altering personal narratives, and developing a greater degree of ‘wisdom’ (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1998). Sport psychology consultants who deal with individuals following deselection may wish to focus on increasing their clients’ understanding of personal schemes and seek to change their personal narratives. To this end, the domains of growth revealed by this study, and the specific examples of growth recounted by participants, may provide useful information and ‘stories’ to help athletes realize there are new opportunities in the future.

Finally, there is an important caveat that must be considered when judging the implications of these findings. As Tamminen and Neely (2016) noted, there is somewhat of a paradox in that by studying concepts such as positive growth in relation to youth sport researchers may implicitly contribute to the legitimization of circumstances that could perpetuate damaging situations in youth sport. Some researchers have even argued that trauma should be a ‘development tool’ that can be used to develop high performance athletes (e.g., Collins & MacNamara, 2012). Whereas our findings show that growth can occur following negative experiences, it does not follow that traumatic experiences should be inflicted on athletes. Tamminen and Neely (2016) questioned whether the promotion of growth in sport is worth the distress associated with traumatic and adverse

experiences. To this end, and with specific reference to deselection, it remains important for coaches and sport organizations to approach deselection in a considerate and thoughtful way, taking into account the potentially disruptive consequences of their deselection decisions.

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CHAPTER 5

GENERAL DISSCUSSION

General Discussion

The overall purpose of this dissertation was to gain a better understanding of deselection in competitive female youth sport. Three studies focusing on different aspects of deselection were conducted. Study 1 examined coaches' views on deselecting athletes from competitive female adolescent sport teams. Study 2 examined how athletes and their parents coped with deselection from provincial sport teams using a communal coping perspective. Study 3 examined female athletes' experiences of positive growth following deselection.

The results of the first study revealed that deselection was a process that involved four phases: pre try-out meeting, evaluation and decision-making, communication of deselection, and post deselection reflection. In each phase of the process, how coaches made and communicated decisions to athletes, and the reasoning behind their decisions, was explained. Within the evaluation and decision-making phase, coaches made programmed and non-programmed decisions under conditions of certainty and uncertainty. When coaches were faced with uncertainty, they relied on intuition to make their decisions. By establishing distinct phases of the deselection process, specific details of coaches' responsibilities, concerns, and decisions at different times were identified. This study adds to the literature because previous research has largely focused on athletes' responses to deselection (Barnett, 2007; Brown & Potrac, 2009; Grove, Fish, & Eklund, 2004; Munroe, Albinson, & Hall, 1999) and ways in which coaches communicate deselection decisions (Capstick & Trudel, 2010; Seifried & Casey, 2012) rather than considering deselection as a process.

The findings from the second study described how athletes and parents coped together with deselection. Using Lyons, Mickelson, Sullivan, and Coyne's (1998) framework of communal coping, the results showed that athletes and parents consistently appraised deselection from a shared perspective ('our problem'). The responsibility for coping with deselection and its consequences appeared to change as time progressed, moving from an 'our problem, my (parents') responsibility' orientation to an 'our problem, our responsibility' orientation to an 'our problem, my responsibility' orientation (with athletes taking more personal responsibility for coping). Thus, this study demonstrated the value of using a communal coping perspective to understand interpersonal dimensions of coping in sport, and revealed forms and processes of communal coping used by athletes and their parents.

The results of the third study showed that deselection caused participants to question their identity and ability as an athlete. Growth was a gradual process that appeared to unfold over several years and was experienced in the following domains: greater appreciation of the role of sport in their lives, enhanced sense of personal strength, closer social relationships, and recognition of new opportunities. These findings demonstrated the applicability of a model of posttraumatic growth within a sport context (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), and showed that cognitive processing and social relationships are critical components of positive growth as participants re-build their beliefs about themselves as athletes.

Taken together, these three studies demonstrate the complex and inherently stressful nature of deselection for coaches, athletes, and parents. Importantly, the studies highlight procedures that can potentially be used by coaches to improve the deselection

process, how athletes and parents can work together to cope with being deselected, and demonstrate positive growth as a positive and long-term outcome that may occur as a result of deselection for female adolescent athletes.

One major contribution of this dissertation is the use of theory in enhancing our understanding of deselection in youth sport. Previous literature examining deselection among coaches (e.g., Capstick & Trudel, 2010; Seifried & Casey, 2012) and athletes (e.g., Brown & Potrac, 2009; Munroe et al., 1999) has rarely involved the use of theory. All three studies comprising this dissertation used relevant theories, albeit in different ways (cf. Sandelwoski, 1993), to advance our knowledge and understanding of deselection in competitive female adolescent sport. Concepts from the judgement and decision-making literature were used in Study 1 during interpretation in analysis to help understand how and under what conditions coaches make deselection decisions. This was valuable because it supported the importance of coaches' use of intuition in decision-making (Betsch, 2008). In Study 2, Lyons et al.'s (1998) framework of communal coping was useful in identifying deselection as a shared stressor for athletes and their parents and understanding coping efforts as cooperative actions. To my knowledge, this appears to be the first sport psychology study to use a communal coping perspective (cf. Crocker, Tamminen, & Gaudreau, 2015; Tamminen & Gaudreau, 2014) and further shows that communal coping is a suitable perspective for understanding interpersonal dimensions of coping in sport. Lastly, Study 3 was guided by Tedeschi and Calhoun's (2004) model of posttraumatic growth and demonstrated the applicability of this model in sport, while also showing the importance of cognitive processing and social relationships in the process of

growth. Thus, this dissertation provides theoretically-informed research which is necessary for building this body of knowledge about deselection.

Future Research

This dissertation also provides a platform for future research. One finding from Study 1 was that coaches were concerned about parents' reactions and responses in the immediate aftermath of deselection. This is consistent with the broader coaching literature, in which parents are often cited as a stressor for youth sport coaches (e.g., Knight & Harwood, 2009). Likewise, parents report stressors arising from a lack of communication and poor organization from coaches (Harwood & Knight, 2009). Communication is clearly a vital component of the deselection process, from coaches explaining expectations during a pre try-out meeting through to informing players of decisions and providing them with feedback. Whereas Study 1 depicted the deselection process, questions about what constitutes effective communication during this process remain. Research that examines communication, and communication effectiveness, associated with deselection could make important contributions to the literature and applied practice (e.g., informing ways in which deselection is conducted).

There is also a need for future research to evaluate the effectiveness of different types of deselection protocols (e.g., those used by different sports) and athlete, parent, and coach outcomes in order to establish 'best practices' for deselection in youth sport. In fact, a particularly fundamental question remains: What is effective deselection? The answer to this question may depend on the perspectives of different stakeholders. Coaches may view deselection as being effective if they are satisfied they picked the best players, or if players that were deselected develop a renewed enthusiasm for improving

their abilities as athletes. Parents may consider deselection effective if the procedures are clear, decisions are made fairly, and communication is open and transparent. Athletes may appreciate specific feedback on areas in which they need to improve. Of course, deselection procedures will not make people ‘happy’ – the results of this dissertation clearly showed that deselection is a negative and stressful experience – but a fundamental understanding of the goals of the deselection process, above and beyond picking the best players, is an important philosophical issue to consider.

The studies in this dissertation used a retrospective approach. This was necessary and appropriate, but nonetheless there is scope for the use of longitudinal research designs with repeated measures (e.g., interviews before, during, and after deselection) to shed more light on the changes in athletes’, coaches’ and parents’ thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Additionally, it is quite likely that the majority of participants across the three studies had generally been able to cope with deselection to some extent. However, not all people are able to experience positive growth following traumatic or adverse events (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006; Wippert & Wippert, 2008) nor does growth unfold uniformly across individuals (Joseph & Linley, 2006). Some deselected athletes may experience poor adjustment, or dropout of sport. Longitudinal studies conducted during the process of deselection may reveal more information about how and why individuals react to deselection in different ways.

Strengths and Limitations

The strengths and limitations of each study in the dissertation have been discussed in detail in each chapter. From a general perspective, the overall strengths of this dissertation included the inclusion of coaches’, athletes’, and parents’ perspectives on a

central aspect of youth sport. The entire dissertation focused on female adolescent athletes deselected from provincial sport teams. Each study was methodologically congruent and rigorous and the research was philosophically consistent as all three studies were approached from the interpretivist paradigm, which results in an overall coherent and sound dissertation. However, there are limitations that should be considered when interpreting the data and planning future research. A limitation of the research was the sample sizes. While appropriate given the overall purpose of the dissertation and the specific purposes of each study, they were small and relatively homogenous. As a consequence, the results do not readily generalize to other youth sport populations (e.g., males, athletes at different levels of competition, or younger athletes). This is a feature of qualitative research and not necessarily a weakness of the dissertation (as there was no intent to generalize to broader populations), but there is certainly scope for studies that have greater generalizability to deselection, and the different contexts in which deselection may occur (e.g., younger or older age groups, different levels of competition, different types of sports). Although not a limitation per se, this dissertation did not consider the role that personality might play in coaches', athletes' and parents' experiences of deselection. Exploring personality characteristics (e.g., perfectionism, trait optimism, resilience, hardiness) in relation to how individuals cope with deselection, and how individual-difference variables may influence experiences of positive growth are worthwhile endeavors for future research.

Practical Implications

Finally, this research offers a number of practical implications. These include (1) the deselection process (Study 1) may provide a framework that can be used by national

and provincial sport organizations, clubs, and coaches. (2) The results revealed the important roles parents can play. These findings may help inform the development of parent education initiatives (which could be delivered during pre try-out workshops) detailing the ways in which parents can help their child deal with the consequences of deselection. This would be an important shift in the way deselection is approached by sport organizations/coaches because previous research shows they are most concerned about dealing with parents' complaints (which coaches themselves report as a stressor) rather than explaining ways in which parents can help their children cope. (3) Deselection is an important area of training for coaches because it is a process they have to go through each and every season, and when done poorly, can have negative consequences for athletes and even deter them from continued sport participation. Given that athlete development and continued participation is a focus in youth sport, there are deselection strategies coaches can use that can potentially contribute to athlete development, but only if coaches are educated on how to implement them appropriately. Deselection is also a stressful experience for coaches, so proper training may alleviate some of the stress associated with this often disagreeable process.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this dissertation makes an important contribution to youth sport literature and youth sport practice by providing a better understanding of deselection in competitive female youth sport for coaches, athletes, and parents. This dissertation described the deselection process and coaches' decision-making within each phase, and identified the forms and processes of communal coping used by athletes and their parents. It also revealed the ways athletes experienced positive growth following the traumatic

event of deselection. Deselection is an event that will continue to exist season after season in competitive youth sport, but it is hoped that these findings will inform and improve deselection procedures used by sport organizations and youth sport coaches, help athletes and parents better cope with being deselected, and contribute to a more positive deselection experience for all of those involved. Finally, this dissertation provides a solid foundation for future research and applied work aimed at improving deselection practices in youth sport.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I

Comments in response to Sulz et al. (2017) opinion piece in the Edmonton Journal

Commenter	Comments (verbatim)
Pete Bauer	If u want ur kid to "just have fun" then keep them in house league. The kids that quit over being cut obviously lack the drive to continue to the next level anyways. Sports are about competition. Parents can choose what level of competition their kid is ready for
Tony Kennedy	Agreed but treating 9 year old hockey players like NHL players and shitting on them for mistakes drives them out.
Jenny Callan	I have 3 kids in hockey. None of them get treated like NHL players.
John Paterson	It also teaches them tough lessons about not everybody making it.
Dustin Walmsley	I thought organized sports were meant to be fun, not impart hard lessons.
John Paterson	I'd rather have tough lessons than fun.
Bryant Toker	Organized sports are supposed to teach you respect, determination, and teamwork. Which are all lessons we should all learn. Respect everyone, teammates, officials, coaches, parents, and peers. Determination to do better and learn more will give you a shot at the "Rep" or AA league. If you don't want to play competitive sports there are special leagues for that. When I was in Minor Hockey I played House league my entire career except bantams. I played for 2 months on the rep team and quit. I didn't like the extreme competitiveness. But I learned something else by moving back to house league.... Teamwork, being able to work together as a team to accomplish a goal is a skill every child should learn, as it translates into everyday life. Anyone who thinks that organized sports are "just for fun" has never played a proper competitive sport. Yes it's important that everyone have fun but unless you learn those lessons

no one will have fun.....

- Dina Flathers Prior to even making a team these organized sports need to be affordable to EVERY child. Many kids never even get the chance to see if it is something they like or would excel at. So start with the real issue here and quit gouging parents for sporting activities!!
- Reanne
Kronewitt-
Springer More importantly we need the choice of recreational and competitive in every sport. If your child is not athletic put them in recreational not competitive. Not everyone makes it to the Olympics, not everyone gets a medal, just like everyone does not get honours in school. Learn the lesson early, let's not bring up another generation of snowflakes. BUT, I agree, the more important issue here is price, and now with the elimination (or decrease) of the children's sports tax credit, this makes it even tougher for parents.
- Jenny Callan That's part of life. Get over it. Get rid of the participation awards and expectations that all kids abilities are equal. Each child and adult has different strength and weakness's.
- Emily Margaret I don't believe the authors are implying that getting cut is not "part of life", nor are they suggesting that all kids have equal abilities. They aren't saying that cutting shouldn't happen; they are simply stating their research findings: children who get cut are deterred from future participation in that sport, and their time spent being physically active is reduced. This has nothing to do with receiving participation awards or "getting over it", but it has everything to do with keeping Canadian kids active for as long as we can.

Appendix II

Coach Interview Guide (Study 1)

I am doing a study to find out about coaches' views on deselection in youth sport. Your participation is voluntary. If you do not want to answer a specific question, that is fine. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. I want to understand what it is like for you as a coach to cut athletes.

Before we start I just have a few quick demographic questions I need to ask.

- How old are you?
- What is your education background?
- What are your coaching qualifications?
- Is coaching your full-time job? If no, what do you do?
- How long have you been coaching?
- How long have you been head coach?

Introductory Questions

1. Please describe your involvement in sport as an athlete? Were you ever cut from a team? What was that like?
 - *Follow-up:* As a coach? How did you get involved in coaching? Where have you coached/what teams? What is your current coaching involvement?

Main Questions

2. In general, what criteria do you use when deciding which athletes to keep and which athletes to cut? *Probe for specific examples (e.g., specific factors, actual descriptions)*
3. What are your goals when you cut an athlete? *Probe for goals related to least harmful to athlete vs least stress for coach*
4. I would like to talk to you about the ways you actually communicate your decisions with athletes: What is your strategy for communicating deselection to athletes? What has worked for you? Have you used different strategies? How do you deal with the athletes' parents? What about their club coaches?
5. What is it like to cut an athlete? Tell me about an instance you remember when you had a particularly hard time cutting an athlete and it didn't go very well? (*What was your toughest cut?*). Can you tell me about an instance when you had a relatively simple time cutting an athlete? *Probe for specific details of these experiences (thoughts, emotions, behaviors).*
6. I am interested in how coaches handle any stress they might experience when having to cut athletes. So, could you first explain any instances of cutting athletes

that have been particularly stressful for you personally? *(If same example as before, go back and focus more specifically on stressful aspects for coach)*

7. Do you use any strategies to help manage the stressors you have experienced?
8. What would you tell new or less experienced coaches to help them deal with deselection?
9. I am also interested in trying to establish some 'best practices' for cutting athletes. Could you recap by telling me more about the strategies that seem to have worked the best for you? Why do you think they were effective? *Probe for specific examples*
10. Similarly, could you tell me about the strategies that did not seem to work for you? Why do you think these strategies were less effective? *Probe for specific examples*

Summary Question

11. Finally, is there anything else about deselection and cutting athletes that you want to tell me that we have not covered or you think I need to consider asking other coaches?

Athlete Interview Guide (Study 2)

I am doing a study to find out about athlete's experiences of being cut from a team. Your participation is voluntary. If you do not want to answer a specific question, that is fine. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. I want to understand what is it like for you as an athlete to be cut and how it influences you.

Demographics

Before we start I just have a few quick demographic questions I need to ask.

- How old are you?
- What grade are you in?
- How long have you been playing (sport)?
- When were you cut?
- What position do you play?

Introductory Questions

1. Please tell me about your sport involvement
Probe for teams played on, levels played at
2. Can you tell me more about the team you were just cut from?
Probe to get a 'feel' for the team

Main Questions

Being Cut

3. What was the try-out process like?
 - What were your thoughts about whether you would make it or not?
4. Can you describe what it was like when you found out you were cut?
 - How did your coach tell you?
 - What did you think/how did you feel?
5. How did you react to getting cut? (*Probe for details – thoughts, emotions, behaviors*)
 - What happened in the days after?
Probe for thoughts, feelings
 - It's been a few weeks now, what is it like now? How do you feel?
Probe for thoughts/feelings
 - What was the worst thing about being cut?

Coping

6. How are you coping with being cut?
Probe for coping strategies used
7. Can you tell me about how your parents may have supported you?

- Did you talk to your parents about being cut?
Probe for details about specific examples of how they helped.
- 8. Have other people helped you cope with being cut?
 - Ask about siblings, friends, teammates
Probe for specific examples of how they helped
- 9. Do you think you will still play (sport)?

Summary Questions

10. I am interested in trying to establish some of the 'best practices' for coaches when cutting athletes.
 - Do you think there is a better way to cut athletes?
 - How should coaches communicate deselection to athletes?
 - What do you think would have been easier for you?
11. Finally, is there anything else you want to tell me about getting cut from a team that we have not covered or anything else I should ask other athletes who were cut?

Parent Interview Guide (Study 2)

I am doing a study to find out about parents' experiences of the deselection process in youth sport. Your participation is voluntary. If you do not want to answer a specific question, that is fine. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. I want to understand what is it like for you as a parent to have your daughter cut and how you deal with it.

Demographics

Before we start I just have a few quick demographic questions I need to ask.

- How old are you?
- Education?
- Job?
- How many children do you have? (if other children, what sports are they involved in?)

Introductory Questions

1. Can you tell me a bit about your sport involvement? Do you have a role on your daughter's team?
2. Can you tell me about your daughter's involvement in sport?
 - How long had she been a part of the team she was just cut from?
 - What was the team like?

Main Questions

Deselection

3. What was it like when you found out your daughter was cut?
 - How did she find out? *Probe for description*
 - *Probe for specific details of the experience (thoughts, emotions, behaviors)*
4. What was your immediate reaction?
 - What were your thoughts?
 - What were your feelings?
 - Have your thoughts/feelings changed over the past few weeks?

Stress and Coping

5. What was stressful for you about your daughter being cut?
 - What did you worry about? (for yourself and for your daughter)?
6. If it was stressful for you, how did you or are you coping with it?
 - What has been successful for you?
 - What has not been successful?

Probe for specific examples of strategies for coping with thoughts/emotions

7. What have you done to support your daughter?
 - What has been helpful?
 - What may not have been helpful?
 - What was your daughter's reaction to these different strategies?

Probe for specific examples

Summary Questions

8. I am interested in trying to establish some of the 'best practices' for coaches when cutting athletes.
 - Do you think there is a better way for coaches to cut athletes?
 - What is the most appropriate way for coaches to communicate deselection?
9. Finally, is there anything else you want to tell me about the deselection process/getting cut that we have not covered or anything else I should ask other parents who have a daughter who was cut?

Athlete Interview Guide (Study 3)

I am doing a study to find out about positive growth from deselection. Your participation is voluntary. If you do not want to answer a specific question, that is fine. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. I want to understand what is it like for you to get cut from a team and how it has impacted you today. I want to know if you perceive growth after being cut.

Demographics

Before we start I just have a few quick demographic questions I need to ask.

- How old are you?
- Are you in school? Working?
- When were you cut (how old)?
- What team were you cut from?

Introductory Questions

1. Can you describe your sport involvement when you were younger?
 - What about your sport involvement now?

Main Questions

Deselection Experience

2. Can you tell me about your experience of being cut?
 - What do you remember about your experience?
3. How did you react/respond to being cut?
Probe for specific examples of thoughts, emotions, behaviors

Coping

4. What did you do to try and deal with being cut?
Probe for specific examples
5. Did you talk to anyone about it? *Parents? Friends?*
6. Do you think you coped effectively?

Identity

7. Can you tell me how you thought/felt about yourself before getting cut?
8. Can you tell me how you thought/felt about yourself after being cut?
9. At the time, what did being cut mean to you?
10. Looking back, what does getting cut mean to you now?

Domains of Growth

11. Do you still view your deselection experience as negative or when do you think you were able to re-interpret it?
12. How do you think being cut has personally impacted you?
Probe for specific examples
13. In what ways, if any, did your priorities as an athlete or a person change after being cut?
14. In what ways did your relationships with people change as a result of being cut?
15. How have other people helped you grow from your experience of being cut?
Probe for specific examples of who has helped and how
16. Can you tell me if/how religion or spirituality has changed because of your deselection experience?
17. What negative outcomes resulted from being cut?
18. What positive outcomes resulted from being cut?
19. What do you think influenced your decision to quit/continue to play?

Summary Questions

20. I am interested in trying to establish some of the 'best practices' for coaches when cutting athletes.
 - Reflecting back on your experience of being cut, do you think there is a better way for coaches to cut athletes?
 - What do you think is the most appropriate way for coaches to communicate deselection?
21. What would you tell an adolescent athlete who has just been cut from her team?
22. Finally, is there anything else you want to tell me about getting cut from a team and growth that we have not covered or anything else I should ask other athletes who were cut?

Appendix III

Study 1 Information Letter



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Principal Investigator	Supervisor
Kacey C. Neely, PhD Candidate Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation University of Alberta T: 780 964-8465 E: neely@ualberta.ca	Dr. Nicholas L. Holt, Professor Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation University of Alberta T: 780 492-7386 E: nick.holt@ualberta.ca

Coaches' Experiences of the Deselection Process in Competitive Youth Sport

Dear Coach,

I am a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Alberta. I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. **The purpose of the study is to learn more about coaches' perspectives and experiences of the deselection process in female competitive youth sport.** Specifically, I am looking to recruit ten coaches who are currently coaching a girls' provincial team. This study is being conducted by Kacey Neely (under the supervision of Dr. Nicholas Holt) and is part of Kacey's PhD dissertation examining deselection in competitive youth sport.

Deselection (cutting athletes) can be one of the toughest parts of being a coach. I understand that coaches have a difficult task when it comes to deciding how to inform athletes of their deselection and that is why I want to learn more about it. By talking to you and other coaches about how team cuts are made, I may be able to identify 'best practices' for communicating decisions to athletes. It is also important to recognize the challenges of the deselection process for coaches. A better understanding of these issues may have implications for helping coaches cope during the deselection process.

To be eligible to participate in this study you must:

- Be a head coach of a competitive girls' team (15-18 years).
- Currently coaching or have coached at the provincial level in a head coach position.
- Be responsible for making team cuts and communicating these decisions to athletes.

If you meet the eligibility criteria and are interested in participating, you will complete:

- One individual face-to-face interview (about 60 minutes).
- One follow-up phone interview (about 10 minutes).

The face-to-face interview will be audio-taped. I will e-mail you a summary of the findings and we will have a follow-up phone interview that will last no more than 10 minutes. The phone interview will not be recorded.

Benefits

Participating in this study may help you reflect on how you cope with the stresses of the deselection process and help you recognize your own best strategies for cutting athletes which may influence how you cut athletes in the future. The findings from this study will also help identify 'best practices' for communicating deselection decisions to athletes and coping with the stresses of the deselection process. This information may be helpful for coach education programs. You will receive a gift certificate for \$25 redeemable at a sporting goods store upon completion of the interview.

Risks

There are no known risks to taking part in this study.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

When the audio files from the interviews are typed up I will remove your name (and assign you a number) and remove any personal information. Any information that you provide remains confidential. I will keep all data private. Data will be kept locked in a locked office. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the data. I am required to keep the data for five years after the study has been completed. After five years data will be destroyed. Once I have finished the study I will present the results at conferences and in an academic journal.

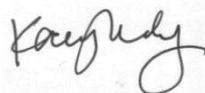
Freedom to Withdraw

This study is voluntary. There are no negative consequences for non-participation. You may withdraw from the study up to four weeks after the final phone interviews are conducted. I will remove your data upon request.

This study has been approved by the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board. Any questions you may have about this study may be directed to Kacey Neely at 780-964-8465. If you have concerns about this study or any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office at 780-492-2615. This office has no direct involvement with this project.

**If you would like to participate in this study,
please contact Kacey (neely@ualberta.ca)**

Many thanks,



Kacey Neely

Coach Informed Consent Form (Study 1)



UNIVERSITY OF
ALBERTA

Physical Education and Recreation
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Title of Project: Coaches' Experiences of the Deselection Process in Competitive Youth Sport		
Principal Investigator: Kacey C. Neely, PhD Candidate Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation University of Alberta Tel: 780 492-5644 E: neely@ualberta.ca	Supervisor: Dr. Nicholas L. Holt, Professor Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation University of Alberta T: 780 492-7386 E: nick.holt@ualberta.ca	
Do you understand that you have been asked to take part in a research study?	Yes	No
Have you read and received a copy of the attached information letter?	Yes	No
Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study?	Yes	No
Do you understand that you are free to contact the researcher to ask questions and discuss this study?	Yes	No
Do you understand that you are free to refuse participation, or to withdraw from the study up to four weeks after your interview, without consequence?	Yes	No
Do you understand the issues of confidentiality and do you understand who will have access to your information?	Yes	No

I would like to take part in this study:

Your Signature: _____

Printed Name: _____

Date: _____

Preferred contact number: _____

E-mail address: _____

Study 2 Information Letter



UNIVERSITY OF
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Athletes' and Parents' Experiences of the Deselection Process in Competitive Youth Sport

Dear Athlete and Parent,

My name is Kacey and I am a PhD candidate (under the supervision of Dr. Nicholas Holt) in the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Alberta. This study is a part of my PhD dissertation examining deselection in competitive youth sport.

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. **The purpose of the study is to learn more about athletes' and parents' perspectives and experiences of the deselection process in female competitive youth sport.** Specifically, I am looking to recruit 15 *athletes* who have recently been cut from a girls' provincial team. I would also like to recruit one *parent* of each athlete. By talking to athletes and parents about their experiences of the deselection process, I hope to be able to identify 'best practices' for coaches to use when communicating deselection decisions to female adolescent athletes.

Eligibility

For *athletes*, to be eligible to participate in this study you must:

- Be 14-18 years old.
- Have tried out and been cut from a 2014 Alberta provincial team.

For *parents*, to be eligible to participate in this study you must:

- Be the parent of a daughter who was recently cut from a 2014 Alberta provincial team.
- Self-identify as the 'most involved' parent in your daughter's sport participation.

Study Requirement

If you meet the eligibility criteria and are interested in participating, you both will complete:

- One individual face-to-face interview (about 60 minutes).
- One follow-up phone interview (about 10 minutes).

The face-to-face interview will be audio-taped. I will e-mail both of you a summary of the findings and we will have a follow-up phone interview that will last no more than 10 minutes. The phone interview will not be recorded.

Benefits

Participating in this study may help athletes identify ways they can cope with being cut and may help parents identify ways they can support their daughters after being cut from a team. By providing your thoughts on the deselection process, the findings from this study may also help identify 'best practices' for coaches to use when communicating deselection decisions to athletes in the future. This information may be helpful for coach education programs.

Upon completion of the interview, athletes will receive a gift certificate for \$25 to Lululemon, and parents will receive a gift certificate for \$25 redeemable at a grocery store.

Risks

Some of the questions I will ask you may make you feel emotionally uncomfortable. If you feel uncomfortable you do not have to answer the question. If at any time during the interview you want to stop, you can let me know and we will stop the interview. I can also provide you with contact information for a sport psychology consultant should you wish to speak with someone following the interview.

Freedom to Withdraw

This study is voluntary. There are no negative consequences for non-participation. You may withdraw from the study up to four weeks after the final phone interviews are conducted. I will remove your data upon request.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

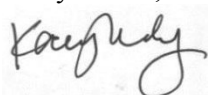
When the audio files from the interviews are typed up I will remove your name (and assign you a number i.e., Athlete 1 or Parent 1) and remove any personal information. Any information that you provide remains confidential. I will keep all data private. Data will be kept locked in a locked office. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the data. I am required to keep the data for five years after the study has been completed. After five years data will be destroyed. Once I have finished the study I will present the results at conferences and in an academic journal.

This study is being conducted independently and is not sponsored by any sport governing bodies. They have given their approval to conduct the study, but no personal information from any participants will be provided to the coaches or any other members of the governing body. They will only receive a general report of the findings across athletes from all the sports studied.

This study has been approved by the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board. Any questions you may have about this study may be directed to Kacey Neely at 780-964-8465. If you have concerns about this study or any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office at 780-492-2615. This office has no direct involvement with this project.

**If you would like to participate in this study,
please contact Kacey (neely@ualberta.ca)**

Many thanks,



Kacey Neely

Athlete Informed Consent (Study 2)



UNIVERSITY OF
ALBERTA

Physical Education and Recreation
Van Vilet Centre
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6G 2H9

Title of Project: Athletes' and Parents' Experiences of the Deselection Process in Competitive Youth Sport

Principal Investigator:

Kacey C. Neely, PhD Candidate
Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation
University of Alberta
T: 780 492-5644
E: neely@ualberta.ca

Supervisor:

Dr. Nicholas L. Holt, Professor
Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation
University of Alberta
T: 780 492-7386
E: nick.holt@ualberta.ca

Do you understand that you have been asked to take part in a research study?	Yes	No
Have you read and received a copy of the attached information letter?	Yes	No
Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study?	Yes	No
Do you understand that you are free to contact the researcher to ask questions and discuss this study?	Yes	No
Do you understand that you are free to refuse participation, or to withdraw from the study up to four weeks after your interview, without consequence?	Yes	No
Do you understand the issues of confidentiality and do you understand who will have access to your information?	Yes	No

I agree to take part in this study:

YES

NO

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Parent Informed Consent Form (Study 2)



**UNIVERSITY OF
ALBERTA**

Physical Education and Recreation
Van Vilet Centre
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6G 2H9

Title of Project: Athletes' and Parents' Experiences of the Deselection Process in Competitive Youth Sport		
Principal Investigator: Kacey C. Neely, PhD Candidate Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation University of Alberta T: 780 492-5644 E: neely@ualberta.ca	Supervisor: Dr. Nicholas L. Holt, Professor Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation University of Alberta T: 780 492-7386 E: nick.holt@ualberta.ca	
Do you understand that you and your daughter have been asked to take part in a research study?	Yes	No
Have you and your daughter read and received a copy of the attached information letter?	Yes	No
Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study?	Yes	No
Do you understand that you are free to contact the researcher to ask questions and discuss this study?	Yes	No
Do you understand that you are free to refuse participation, or to withdraw from the study up to four weeks after your interview, without consequence?	Yes	No
Do you understand the issues of confidentiality and do you understand who will have access to your information?	Yes	No

I agree to take part in this study:

YES

NO

Name: _____

Signature: _____

I agree for my daughter to take part in this study:

YES

NO

Daughter's Name: _____

Date: _____

Study 3 Recruitment Advertisement



Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation
E488 Van Vliet Centre
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6G 2H9



Growing Pains: Female Athletes' Experiences of Growth Following Deselection



Were you ever cut from an Alberta Provincial Team as a youth athlete? If yes, we would like to hear about how you coped with it.

- WHO:** Females who are:
 (a) 21-25 years old
 (b) cut from an Alberta Provincial team between 14-18 years
 (c) cut from soccer, basketball, volleyball, or hockey
- WHAT:** 2 individual interviews
 Interview 1 (main interview) will be approximately **60 minutes**
 Interview 2 (follow-up interview) will be approximately **30 minutes**.
- WHERE:** Child & Adolescent Sport & Activity Lab in University Hall
- WHY:** We want to learn more about how athletes cope with being cut from a sport team and what may contribute to athletes experiencing positive growth following deselection
- WHEN:** We will set up a time that works for you

You will receive a \$25 gift card for interview 1 and a \$15 gift card for interview 2 as a token of appreciation for your participation in this study.

Interested in participating? Questions?
 Please contact **Kacey Neely** (PhD Candidate):
neely@ualberta.ca

Study 3 Information Letter



UNIVERSITY OF
ALBERTA

Physical Education and Recreation
Van Vilet Centre
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6G 2H9

Principal Investigator	Supervisor
<p>Kacey C Neely, PhD Candidate Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation University of Alberta T: 780.492.5644 E: neely@ualberta.ca</p>	<p>Dr. Nicholas L. Holt, Professor Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation University of Alberta T: 780 492-7386 E: nick.holt@ualberta.ca</p>

Growing Pains: Female Athletes' Experiences of Growth Following Deselection

Dear Participant,

My name is Kacey and I am a PhD candidate (under the supervision of Dr. Nicholas Holt) in the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Alberta. This study is a part of my PhD dissertation examining deselection in competitive youth sport.

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. **The purpose of the study is to learn more about coping and positive growth among former competitive youth athletes who were cut from Alberta Provincial team sports.** Specifically, I am looking to recruit 20 former competitive youth athletes who were cut from a girls' provincial team in Alberta during their adolescence. I hope to be able to identify effective coping strategies and find out how athletes have experienced growth after being cut.

Eligibility

To be eligible to participate in this study you must:

- Be 21-25 years old
- Have been cut from an Alberta provincial team between the ages of 15-18 years
- Have been cut from a provincial soccer, basketball, volleyball, or hockey team

Study Requirements

If you meet the eligibility criteria and are interested in participating, you will complete:

- One individual face-to-face interview (about 60 minutes).
- One follow-up interview (about 30 minutes).

Benefits

Participating in this study will help me to identify information about how athletes cope and experience growth following deselection. By providing your thoughts on the experiences you have had as a former athlete, the findings from this study may also help identify coping strategies for sport psychologists to use when working with current and future athletes who may experience deselection.

Risks

There are no known risks. If any questions make you uncomfortable in any way, you do not have to answer it. If at any time during the interview you want to stop, you can let me know and we will stop the interview.

Freedom to Withdraw

This study is voluntary. There are no negative consequences for non-participation. You may withdraw from the study up to four weeks after the final interview is completed. I will remove your data upon request.

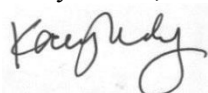
Anonymity and Confidentiality

When the audio files from the interviews are typed up I will remove your name (and assign you a number i.e., Athlete 1) and remove any personal information. Any information that you provide remains confidential. I will keep all data private. Data will be kept locked in a locked office. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the data. I am required to keep the data for five years after the study has been completed. After five years data will be destroyed. Once I have finished the study I will present the results at conferences and in an academic journal.

This study has been approved by the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board. Any questions you may have about this study may be directed to Kacey Neely by email neely@ualberta.ca. If you have concerns about this study or any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office at 780-492-2615. This office has no direct involvement with this project.

**If you would like to participate in this study,
please contact Kacey (neely@ualberta.ca)**

Many thanks,



Kacey Neely,

Athlete Informed Consent Form (Study 3)



**UNIVERSITY OF
ALBERTA**

Physical Education and Recreation
Van Vilet Centre
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6G 2H9

Title of Project: Growing Pains: Female Athletes' Experiences of Growth Following Deselection		
Principal Investigator: Kacey C Neely, PhD Candidate Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation University of Alberta T: 780.492.5644 E: neely@ualberta.ca	Supervisor: Dr. Nicholas L. Holt, Professor Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation University of Alberta T: 780.492.7386 E: nick.holt@ualberta.ca	
Do you understand that you have been asked to take part in a research study?	Yes	No
Have you read and received a copy of the attached information letter?	Yes	No
Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study?	Yes	No
Do you understand that you are free to contact the researcher to ask questions and discuss this study?	Yes	No
Do you understand that you are free to refuse participation, or to withdraw from the study up to four weeks after your interview, without consequence?	Yes	No
Do you understand the issues of confidentiality and do you understand who will have access to your information?	Yes	No

I agree to take part in this study:

YES

NO

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____