Athletes and parents coping with deselection in competitive youth sport: A communal coping perspective

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ABSTRACT

Objective: 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: Individual semi-structured 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; *M* age = 45.2 years; *SD* = 5.4). Participants were deselected from provincial soccer (*n* = 4), basketball (*n* = 5), volleyball (*n* = 2), and ice hockey (*n* = 3) teams. Data were analyzed using a descriptive phenomenological approach (Giorgi, 2009) guided by a framework of communal coping (Lyons, Mickelson, Sullivan, & Coyne, 1998).
Results: 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.
Conclusion: 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.

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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 are also '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. (2016) 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' experience.

Parents make a significant commitment to their children's sport

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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 an emotional experience for athletes' parents (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). For example, in a study of 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 helped 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 framework. 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 such '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 survivors' engaged in 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.

1. Method

1.1. 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 or 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.

1.2. 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 is 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.

1.3. 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.

1.4. 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 min (SD = 5.7 min), and parent interviews lasted, on average, 50 min (SD = 15.1 min).

1.5. 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. 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).

1.6. 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.

1.7. 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.

2. 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.

2.1. 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.

2.1.1. 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."

2.1.2. 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 h 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).

2.2. 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.

2.2.1. 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."

2.2.2. 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."

2.3. 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.

2.3.1. 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.

2.3.2. 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."

2.3.3. 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.'"

3. 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 h) 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 of

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. (2013) 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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