Understanding Attitudes, Knowledge, and Behaviours in the Parasport Coaching Context

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Abstract

Parasport coaches have the potential to foster physical, psychological, and social benefits for the athletes with whom they work. To date, there is a lack of available parasport coaching knowledge and resources for people who work in this specialized setting. The purpose of this dissertation was to explore attitudes, knowledge, and behaviours in the parasport coaching context. The first study explored how newspaper media portrayed dominant discourses of parasport coaches over a 20-year time span. Data were collected using the LexisNexis Academic database to search for full-text newspaper articles from January 1, 1999 to January 1, 2019. We identified three opposing subject positions within the media that emphasized societal perceptions of coaching parasport athletes compared to able-bodied athletes. This study provided insight into the complex and often divided discourses that are involved in parasport coaching that set this population apart from able-bodied coaching. The second study involved a partnership with a provincial coaching association to explore the effectiveness of a formal parasport coach mentorship program. In interviewing and conducting focus groups with mentor and mentee coaches throughout the year long program, we found that mentee coaches appreciated having support, knowledge, and guidance from a more experienced parasport coach. Both mentors and mentees highlighted the desire to engage with coaches outside their mentoring relationships to network, connect, and learn from, and recommended a greater sense of community within the program. Finally, the third study explored the role of the head coach in managing national parasport teams from three countries around the world. Conducting interviews and focus groups with a multitude of different people on each team (i.e., head coaches, assistant coaches, mental performance consultants, high-performance managers, strength and conditioning coaches), participants spoke about coaching practices and behaviours that were both facilitative and

debilitative in creating cohesiveness on their teams. In particular, coaches were successful in creating a strong environment when they were able to (1) understand and manage demographic variability on their teams (e.g., age, gender, disability, finances), (2) have strong team values (e.g., setting behavioural expectations), and (3) utilize their integrated support team to better serve their athletes. Together, this doctoral program of research contributes an in-depth comprehension of parasport coaching, including how coaching is understood (Study 1: Attitudes), desired parasport-specific coach learning (Study 2: Knowledge), and how coaches contribute to creating a strong team environment (Study 3: Behaviours). The theoretical and practical findings will contribute to improving the knowledge and skillset of parasport coaches, and ultimately, enhance the personal and professional sport experiences of parasport athletes from around the world.

Résumé

Les entraîneurs parasports ont le potentiel de favoriser les avantages physiques, psychologiques et sociaux des athlètes avec qui ils travaillent. À ce jour, il y a un manque de connaissances et de ressources spécifiques au parasport disponibles pour les personnes qui travaillent dans ce milieu spécialisé. L'objectif de cette dissertation était d'explorer les attitudes, les connaissances, et les comportements entourant les entraîneurs qui opèrent dans le contexte parasport. La première étude a exploré la façon dont les médias ont déteint les discours dominants des entraîneurs de parasport sur une période de 20 ans. Les données ont été collectées en utilisant la banque de données LexisNexis Academic afin de rechercher des articles de journaux en texte intégral datant du 1er janvier 1999 au 1er janvier 2019. Nous avons identifié trois positions de sujets opposés dans les médias qui mettaient l'accent sur les perceptions sociétales de l'entraînement d'athlètes parasportifs par rapport aux athlètes non-parasportifs. Cette étude a donné un aperçu des discours complexes et souvent divisés qui sont présents dans l'entraînement parasportif distinguant ainsi cette population des athlètes non-parasportifs. La deuxième étude a exploré l'efficacité d'un programme de mentorat formel développé pour les entraîneurs de parasport. En interrogeant et conduisant des discussions de groupe avec des mentors et des mentorés pendant un programme qui durait un an, nous avons découvert que les entraîneurs mentorés appréciaient le support, les connaissances, et les conseils reçus par des entraîneurs de parasport expérimentés. Les mentors et les mentorés ont souligné le désir d'interagir avec des entraîneurs en dehors de leurs relations de mentorat à des fins de réseautage, de connexions, et d'apprentissage. Les participants ont d'ailleurs recommandé un plus grand sens de communauté au sein du programme. En collectant les données dans trois différents pays, la troisième étude a exploré le rôle de l'entraîneur-chef en ce qui a trait à la gestion d'équipes parasportifs. À la suite d'entretiens et de groupes de

discussions avec une multitude de personnes différentes au sein des équipes (p. ex. entraîneurs-chefs, assistants-entraîneurs, consultants en performances mentales, gérants de haute performance, entraîneurs physiques), les participants ont révélé des comportements d'entraîneur-chef qui étaient facilitateurs et d'autres qui étaient débilitants dans la création de cohésion au sein de leur équipe. Précisément, les entraîneurs réussissaient à créer un environnement solide lorsqu'ils pouvaient 1) comprendre et gérer la variabilité démographique de leur équipe (par ex. l'âge, le sexe, le handicap, les finances), 2) avoir des valeurs d'équipes fortes (p. ex. : établir des attentes de comportements) et 3) utiliser leur équipe de support intégrée afin de mieux servir leurs athlètes. Ensemble, ce programme de recherche doctoral contribue à une compréhension approfondie de l'entraînement parasportif, incluant la façon dont l'entraînement est compris (étude 1 : attitudes), l'apprentissage souhaité par les entraîneurs concernant le parasport (étude 2 : connaissances) et la façon dont les entraîneurs contribuent à la création d'un environnement d'équipe solide (étude 3 : comportements). Les découvertes théoriques et pratiques de ce projet contribueront à améliorer les connaissances et les compétences des entraîneurs parasportifs et ultimement, à améliorer les expériences personnelles et professionnelles des athlètes parasportifs de divers pays.

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Chapter Two: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Dominant Discourses being used to Portray Parasport Coaches in the Newspaper Media

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Preface

This dissertation is composed of five chapters that include the manuscript format of three separate but interrelated studies on parasport coaching. Chapter one is a general introduction that provides an overview of empirical research on parasport coaching, including coach learning and development as well as effective and ineffective coaching practices, a rationale for this program of research, and overarching research objectives. Chapter two is an original manuscript published in *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* (Alexander et al., 2022). Chapter three is an original manuscript published in *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* (Alexander & Bloom, 2023). Chapter four is an original manuscript that is currently under review to a peer-reviewed journal. Chapter five is a general discussion that includes an overview of the dissertation, conceptual and methodological implications, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 1

General Introduction

According to the World Health Organization (2022), 1.3 billion people, or 16% of the global population, report living with a significant disability. This statistic is concerning when you consider that people with disabilities may experience physical or psychosocial challenges, such as comorbidities (e.g., depression, asthma, diabetes, and obesity), issues with travel and transportation, difficulty accessing health care, and risk of discrimination, stigma, and exclusion compared to able-bodied populations (World Health Organization, 2022). For many people with disabilities, participating in sport has the potential to minimize some of these challenges and provide a number of benefits to the individual physically (i.e., increased strength, reduced pain), and psychosocially (i.e., enhanced self-esteem, sense of belonging; Allan et al., 2018; Giacobbi et al., 2008; Goodwin & Compton, 2004; Stephens et al., 2012). Parasport coaches are often key players involved in influencing their athletes' experiences, satisfaction, and performance in sport, particularly when they display effective coaching strategies and behaviours (Allan et al., 2018; Banack et al., 2011). With the growing rise of sport opportunities available to people with disabilities at the grassroots and high-performance level, there has been an increased interest in better understanding the nuances of coaching athletes with a disability, including psychosocial factors involved in coaching within the parasport context, highly-specialized disability-specific coaching information, and behaviours that are considered effective or ineffective when coaching a team of parasport athletes (Alexander & Bloom, 2020; Bentzen et al., 2021). As such, the general aim of this dissertation is to advance our empirical knowledge and quality of coaching in the parasport context. A review of the literature will follow to provide an overview of coaching research and theory surrounding parasport coaching.

Literature Review

Parasport Coaching Research

Parasport has gained increasing attention over the past 40 years in an effort to provide high quality sporting opportunities for people with disabilities (Bentzen et al., 2021; Reid & Prupas, 1998). In 1985, the United States Olympic Committee developed the Committee on Sports for the Disabled composed of Karen DePauw, Claudine Sherrill, Sue Gavron, and Julian Stein, who identified seven research areas to progress the field of disability sport (DePauw, 1986; Reid & Prupas, 1998). Among the seven areas proposed, parasport coaching was highlighted to better understand topics, including coach training and selection, effective training methods, and coaching backgrounds. Following the recommendation for parasport coaching research from this committee, Reid and Prupas (1998) reviewed and analyzed 204 data-based academic journal articles related to the seven research priorities from 1986 to 1996 and found only five articles were related to coaching. The authors highlighted that 204 articles over the span of 10 years resulted in approximately 20 publications per year, which was considered insufficient to progress the development and growth of disability sport (Reid & Prupas, 1998). Further, the authors noted that among the seven priorities, "the coaching area is in dire need of data-based research" and the need remains for researchers to focus on the effectiveness of coaching principles in the parasport context (Reid & Prupas, 1998, p. 172). Fifteen years later, a follow up document analysis was conducted by Lee and Poretta (2013) who reviewed and categorized 281 data-driven journal articles from 2001 to 2011 using the same seven research priorities from the Committee on Sports for the Disabled. The analyses demonstrated an increase of 77 data-driven articles (+38%) from 2001-2011 compared to the time period studied by Reid and Prupas (1986 to 1996). However, the majority of articles focused on the biomechanical and

physiological components related to disability sport (e.g., technological advances, health profiles), with no increase in data-driven articles related to the selection and training of parasport coaches and a decrease in the number of review papers. Again, despite being identified as a research priority in 1985, both reviews reported little advancement in the field of parasport coaching, leading to a limited understanding of the psychosocial aspects of what it means to be an effective parasport coach.

More recently, a scoping review was conducted by Bentzen et al. (2021) to understand the parasport coaching literature. The authors extensively reviewed the literature on parasport coaching from a variety of data bases (e.g., PsycINFO, PubMed, ERIC, SPORTDiscus) and charted 44 peer-reviewed articles from 1991 to 2019. Of these 44 articles, 39 were data-driven empirical research and five were review papers. Seventy percent of the articles in the scoping review were published from 2014 onwards, indicating an emerging research interest in parasport coaching. Among the results, the authors identified three of the most common topics discussed within the parasport coaching literature, including (1) general coaching knowledge (e.g., roles and responsibilities of the coach; Cheon et al., 2015, Douglas et al., 2016, Falcão et al., 2015), (2) becoming a parasport coach (e.g., career evolution and learning opportunities; Cregan et al., 2007; Douglas et al., 2018; Wareham et al., 2018), and (3) being a parasport coach (e.g., experiences and perceptions of coaching athletes with disabilities; Tawse et al., 2012, Taylor et al., 2015, Wareham et al., 2017). Notably, Bentzen and colleagues identified that most articles were conducted in geographic silos and therefore recommended for future researchers to pursue cross-country collaborations with diverse methods to increase the quality of information known about effective coaching in the parasport context. Together, this study provided a synthesized understanding of the unique experiences and perceptions of parasport coaching.

Coach Learning and Development

Effective coaches, in a variety of sport contexts, have demonstrated a desire to continuously learn and strive to improve their craft (Donoso-Morales et al., 2017; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Urquhart et al., 2020, Vallée & Bloom, 2005; 2016). For example, Lara-Bercial and Mallett (2016) interviewed 17 professional and Olympic serial-winning coaches on their developmental pathways and found that they acquired academic degrees in sports-related fields and coaching certifications at the highest levels that were considered key to their development. Coaches also highlighted learning opportunities, such as coaching clinics, mentors and peers, books, DVDs, and self-reflection. Findings from this study highlight the three types of settings that coaches learn from: formal, nonformal, and informal.

Formal coach education refers to the structured, large scale learning opportunities, such as the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) in Canada or UK Coaching in the United Kingdom, designed to provide coaches with a foundation in teaching professional skills and strategy within sport (Nelson et al., 2006). Although parasport coaches have expressed value in formal education programs, they have often felt disappointed with the lack of parasport or disability-specific information within these programs (Cregan et al., 2007; Douglas et al., 2018; Fairhurst et al., 2017; McMaster, et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2014). There are currently only four coach education courses in the NCCP offered for parasport (goalball, wheelchair basketball, wheelchair rugby, boccia), and two courses designed for coaching athletes with intellectual disabilities offered through the Special Olympics. This is limiting considering there were six sports included in the most recent winter Paralympic Games in Beijing in 2022 (International Paralympic Committee, 2022) and 22 sports in the summer 2021 Paralympic Games in Tokyo (International Paralympic Committee, 2020). As such, there is a need for more formalized

parasport coach education programs to provide coaches with high quality disability and sport-specific information to all parasports within and outside of the Paralympic Games (e.g., Para Karate, a recognized parasport in Canada not yet included in the Paralympic Games).

Nonformal opportunities refer to alternative forms of learning outside of the formal context, such as clinics, workshops, seminars, training camps, and apprenticeships. These programs strive to provide coaches the opportunity to learn and apply theoretical knowledge on a practical level by working alongside other professionals in their domain (Nelson et al., 2006). For example, the Disability Sports Coach of the United Kingdom offers an *Inclusive Coaching Workshop* for coaches, teachers, and volunteers to participate in an interactive three-hour workshop in which participants learn how to plan, execute, and adapt physical activity and sport to people with varying disabilities (Disability Sports Coach, 2020). These nonformal settings have been suggested to be particularly valuable for parasport coaches as research has shown that coaches appreciate the opportunity to learn outside of the classroom, enjoy learning in a hands-on manner, and look forward to interacting with like-minded individuals in the field (McMaster et al., 2012). Despite their advantages, coaches have expressed that nonformal learning opportunities are difficult to access due to limited availability and are often expensive (Wareham et al., 2018). Further, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many if not all, in-person education programs were shut down or transferred to remote settings, making hands-on learning more difficult to acquire. Thus, due to the lack of formal and nonformal coaching programs available, parasport coaches have primarily relied on informal learning opportunities to acquire and develop their knowledge (Cregan et al., 2007; Fairhurst et al., 2017; McMaster et al., 2012).

Informal learning involves acquiring knowledge outside of a structured setting in which learning is self-directed and developed from experience, exposure, and interactions with their

environments (Nelson et al., 2006). Examples of informal coach learning includes experience as an athlete, coach observation, self-reflection, reading books, exploring the internet, and learning from experts or mentors in the field (Fairhurst et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2014). Mentorship has been considered and utilized as an informal learning opportunity where coaches seek out more experienced professionals in their field to shadow and learn from (Bloom, 2013; Kram, 1985; Ragins & Kram, 2007). One of the first studies on coach mentorship in parasport was conducted by Fairhurst and colleagues (2017) who interviewed six Canadian Paralympic coaches on their experiences with formal and informal learning opportunities. Four out of six coaches had a mentor, three of which were informal relationships and one from a formal mentorship program, and all coaches acted as mentors throughout their careers. Coaches described learning highly specialized parasport-specific skills from their mentors, such as information pertaining to the physiology of their athletes' disability and developing a parasport training program, and considered this relationship to be their most significant learning experience. Further, Paralympic coaches explained how they would often seek mentors or coaching networks internationally to expose themselves to specialized information beyond their own country. As a result, coaches recommended the creation and implementation of formalized mentoring programs for parasport coaches to acquire in-depth knowledge on fundamental skills related to coaching athletes with a disability (Fairhurst et al., 2017).

Apart from the absence of formalized mentoring programs in the parasport context, there have only been a small number of formalized programs designed and implemented for coaches in able-bodied sport (Grant et al., 2020; Koh et al., 2014; Lefebvre et al., 2020; Sawiuk et al., 2018). For example, Koh and colleagues (2014) created and examined a formal mentoring program for novice basketball coaches in Singapore and found that mentee coaches acquired

professional coaching skills from their mentors (e.g., better understanding athlete psychology, innovative thinking, time management). Additionally, Sawiuk et al. (2018) interviewed 15 coaches in a variety of elite sports in the UK to better understand their experiences as a formal coach mentor. The coaches highlighted the importance of having an individualized approach to mentoring to accommodate for the complexities and contextual differences in elite sport. Finally, Grant and colleagues (2020) explored the effectiveness of an online mentoring program for US lacrosse coaches and found that coaches acquired lacrosse-specific knowledge, confidence, and a sense of fulfillment from taking part in the program, yet also highlighted various challenges, such as scheduling conflicts and technological difficulties with the online platform. Taken together, there have been a small number of formalized mentoring programs designed for coaches of able-bodied athletes, but to our knowledge, none designed specifically for the parasport coaching context.

Overall, parasport coaches are often limited to the type and quality of coach education programs and learning opportunities available to them (Bentzen et al., 2021). A combination of formal, nonformal, and informal learning specific to parasport would allow coaches the opportunity to acquire highly specialized information, develop relationships with other professionals in the field, and ultimately, apply this knowledge within their coaching environments.

Effective Coaching Behaviours

In many ways, being an effective parasport coach is similar to an effective coach in able-bodied sport, and thus, many of the coaching strategies and behaviours are helpful in both contexts. For example, effective coaches strive to foster success for their athletes on a personal and professional level by instilling confidence, motivation, skill development, goal setting, and

proper communication regardless of their athletes' physical ability (Becker, 2009). However, based on the existing literature on coaching parasport athletes from the coaches' (e.g., Cregan et al., 2007) and athletes' (Alexander et al., 2020) perspectives, there are considerations that coaches are expected to be aware of specific to the parasport context (e.g., mechanics of equipment, accessibility constraints), related to the physical and psychological intersections of disability (e.g., athlete medication, recovery), and how this may translate into alternative coaching practices.

Many parasport coaches and athletes have highlighted the importance of coaches being creative and open to new ideas regarding their coaching practices (Alexander et al., 2020; Cregan et al., 2007; McMaster et al., 2012). Alexander and colleagues (2020) explored the coaching preferences of eight female Paralympic athletes who expressed their desire for coaches to be open to alternative strategies when dealing with equipment and to think outside of the box when determining the most effective performance-related strategy. In doing so, athletes discussed having frequent conversations with their coaches about what worked and what did not. Additionally, implementing autonomy-supportive behaviours (e.g., increased opportunities for athlete decision-making) may be particularly important in the parasport context for athletes who might have fewer choices in what they can participate in, and therefore make it a powerful coaching behaviour on a personal (Tawse et al., 2012) and professional (Banack et al., 2011; Cheon et al., 2015) level. In a similar manner, parasport coaches have a unique opportunity to enhance independence for many of their athletes. For example, Tawse et al. (2012) interviewed four wheelchair rugby coaches on their experiences coaching athletes with spinal cord injuries and found that they emphasized the role of fostering athlete independence within their coaching practices. Coaches took on the role of promoting personal care to their athletes, such as how to

empty a leg bag or how to go to the washroom without assistance, and believed these strategies were necessary to promote independence. Finally, research has identified the importance for coaches to be knowledgeable of their athletes' disabilities (Alexander et al., 2020; Cregan et al., 2007). For example, Cregan and colleagues (2007) found that learning about the varying types of disabilities and how to effectively communicate with the athletes' caregivers and support workers were important steps in their own learning process. As well, the importance of using the athlete as a source of knowledge in the coaching process was identified, especially since there were limited coaching resources for athletes with a disability (i.e., manuals, clinics, seminars) at that time (Cregan et al., 2007).

Although a large proportion of parasport literature has focused on individual sport environments (e.g., Alexander et al., 2020; Cheon et al., 2015; Cregan et al., 2007; Duarte & Culver, 2014), there is a growing body of empirical research on coaching in a team setting (e.g., Allan et al., 2020; Campbell & Jones, 2002; Caron et al., 2016; Falcão et al., 2015; Pomerleau-Fontaine et al., 2023; Tawse et al., 2012). For example, Allan et al. (2020) interviewed 21 male and female recreational to international level athletes with a congenital or acquired disability to explore athlete perceptions of coaching effectiveness in parasport. Among the findings, athletes desired team sport coaches who valued and promoted an inclusive environment, which often included a number of team bonding or social activities. Effective coaches were identified as those who supported their athletes by ensuring their level of functioning did not interfere with their participation in team functions and activities (Allan et al., 2020). Taken together, the research presented in this section revealed effective coaching behaviours in the parasport environment.

Ineffective Coaching Behaviours

Although coaching psychology research has predominantly focused on positive aspects of parasport coaching behaviours that facilitate athlete well-being and satisfaction, there is emerging research highlighting negative coaching behaviours from the perspective of parasport athletes (Alexander et al., 2020; Allan et al., 2020; Pomerleau-Fontaine et al., 2023; Townsend et al., 2020). Parasport athletes have described sport experiences where coaches held uneducated, oppressive, or harmful stereotypes of disability, which influenced their athletes' psychological well-being (Alexander et al., 2020; Allan et al., 2020). Notably, athletes from Allan and colleagues (2020) highlighted negative interactions they had with their coaches when they treated them with either pity (e.g., "poor [Tom] is in a wheelchair", p. 559) or a lack of sensitivity and empathy that made their athletes not want to train with their coaches. Athletes from Alexander and colleagues (2020) also spoke about negative experiences with their coaches, in which they held uneducated and insensitive attitudes towards their athletes' disabilities, including speaking to their adult athletes as if they were children, such as reminding them to shower or brush their teeth. In fact, one athlete talked about an experience with her coach who was upset and referred to able-bodied athletes as the *real* athletes, leaving an emotional scar on the Paralympic athlete who had to process their coaches' belief systems about parasport: "How are you supposed to feel as an athlete when your coach thinks that you are not real because you are disabled" (p. 54). Taken together, coaches' perceptions and attitudes towards disability play a role in shaping their coaching behaviours, which has the potential to impact their athletes' psychological well-being, identity, sense of self-worth, and ultimately their coaching relationships.

Another coaching behaviour that has been perceived to be harmful is when athletes perceive their coaches to be involved in parasport as a transition to the high-performance able-bodied context (Alexander et al., 2022; Allan et al., 2020; Townsend et al., 2020). When you consider that the parasport world is significantly smaller (e.g., fewer athletes, coaches, and teams) compared to mainstream sport, there is naturally a faster progression from recreational levels to high-performance environments (Alexander et al., 2022; Douglas et al., 2018; Pomerleau-Fontaine et al., 2023). As such, athletes have been wary when coaches display behaviours that align with a desire to use parasport as a "stepping stone" to a national ranking in able-bodied sport (Allan et al., 2020). For example, athletes described experiences with coaches who (1) did not treat athletes with and without disabilities as equal, (2) lowered expectations for their parasport athletes, or (3) displayed a lack of effort or enjoyment in their work (Allan et al., 2020), which they perceived was due to their lack of interest in remaining in the parasport context. With the understanding that coaches have outwardly admitted these intentions in the past (e.g., Townsend et al., 2020), it is not an unreasonable fear for parasport athletes to hold, which can limit the level of trust that athletes are willing to display within their coach-athlete relationships.

Overall, the literature has recently identified negative coaching experiences from the perspective of parasport athletes, including inappropriately conceptualizing or addressing disability and having disingenuous motives within the parasport environment. Notably, Allan et al. (2020) highlighted how these behaviours were often a result of a lack of knowledge and education surrounding disability and parasport. Fortunately, a number of effective coaching behaviours, such as open mindedness, autonomy-support, and independence promotion have been noted within the literature to positively influence athlete satisfaction within and outside of

sport (Alexander & Bloom, 2020), which aid in the conception and maintenance of a strong coach-athlete relationship and team environment.

Theoretical Frameworks

To situate research in the context of parasport coaching, it is pertinent to briefly overview two prominent theoretical perspectives in relation to these topics, including how effective coaching is defined and how perspectives of disability play a role in parasport coaching.

Coaching Effectiveness

Côté and Gilbert (2009) defined coaching effectiveness as "the consistent application of integrated professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge to improve athletes' competence, confidence, connection, and character in specific coaching contexts" (p. 316). Professional knowledge referred to tactical and technical sport-specific knowledge and skills, such as planning, problem solving, communication, and decision making. Interpersonal coaching knowledge referred to the personal and professional interaction between the coach and athlete. Intrapersonal knowledge referred to the coaches' ability to reflect on ones' own experiences and translate what was learned into appropriate knowledge and skills. The second component of the definition, athlete outcomes, involved four desirable outcomes that an athlete would hope to attain from an effective coach, including enhanced competence, confidence, connection, and character/caring in sport. The final component to the definition of coaching effectiveness was the coaching context, which referred to unique settings that the coach was required to adapt to in order to be successful, such as the competitive level or the athletes' ability. For instance, an effective coach would understand the goals and ability level of the athlete and create a coaching practice to foster success. Overall, Côté and Gilbert (2009) proposed that an integration of

coaching knowledge, athlete outcomes, and coaching context was necessary for a coach to be considered effective.

Models of Disability

Various models of disability have been used to understand disability over time (Berghs et al., 2016; Martin, 2013; Oliver, 2013). Perhaps the most historically prominent is the medical model (Berghs et al., 2016), which views disability as a limitation, condition, or impairment to be corrected and places the "problem of disability" on the individual person. Social theorists criticized the way the medical model categorized people with disabilities as deviating from the norm (Artiles, 2013), and instead argued that "the problem is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the 'problem' of the disabled person" (Davis, 2010, p. 9). Originating in the 1980s, the social model was created to challenge the medical outlook and viewed disability as a result of the social context, stating that disability is only a limitation based on the way society is designed – predominantly by and for able-bodied individuals (Oliver, 2013). In response to the medical and social models of disability, the social-relational model was presented to situate disability and society together. More specifically, the social-relational model stated that one's disability and the societal role cannot be examined in isolation, and instead acknowledged the role of disability in society as a factor that has the potential to pose a barrier to full participation (Martin, 2013). The social-relational model has been used as a theoretical framework in parasport coaching research from the perspective of coaches (Wareham et al., 2017) and athletes (e.g., Allan et al., 2020).

Rationale

Despite the growing nature of parasport coaching literature in the past 15 years and the increasing desire to better understand the nuances of coaching athletes with disabilities, the field

remains in its infancy (Alexander & Bloom, 2020; Bentzen et al., 2021). It is through empirical research that the quality of coach learning and development has the potential to be improved, and through this initiative, the satisfaction and performance of parasport coaches and athletes can ultimately be optimized. As the coach plays a critical role in influencing the sport experiences of his/her athletes, this dissertation will begin by understanding societal perceptions of parasport coaching (i.e., attitudes of coaching), followed by an exploration of their knowledge or competencies to effectively coach (i.e., learning opportunities to develop), and finally how coaches implement effective (or ineffective) behaviours in the team environment. Thus, the overall purpose of this dissertation was to explore attitudes, knowledge, and behaviours in the parasport coaching context from multiple perspectives and mediums of data collection to expand our knowledge on this topic. This knowledge has the potential to enhance the quality of coach training and development in the parasport setting and ultimately improve the sport experiences, satisfaction, and performance for their athletes in Canada and around the world.

Research Objectives

With the understanding that parasport is situated within a unique sporting context with individual, collective, and societal influences, this dissertation was guided by three main research objectives:

1. The first objective was to better understand the attitudes, perceptions, and portrayals of parasport coaches and parasport coaching around the world. Chapter two presents an exploration of the dominant discourses used to portray parasport coaching in the newspaper media across the globe.
2. The second objective is to further our understanding of coach education tailored to the parasport coaching context. Chapter three explores the effectiveness of a coach

mentorship program designed and implemented to enhance the knowledge and competencies of parasport coaches.

3. The third objective is to better understand effective or ineffective coaching behaviours, strategies, and practices in a high-performance team setting. Chapter four explores how three parasport head coaches from different countries managed their team environments.

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Chapter 2

A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Dominant Discourses being used to Portray Parasport Coaches in the Newspaper Media

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Abstract

The media is a powerful outlet capable of influencing our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours about a particular phenomenon, including parasport. Despite the limited empirical research, parasport coaches play an active role in raising awareness, education, and exposure for parasport, and thus it is important to study how they are portrayed in the media. The purpose was to examine how newspaper media portrayed dominant discourses surrounding parasport coaches. Data were collected using the LexisNexis Academic database to search for full-text newspaper articles from January 1, 1999 to January 1, 2019. Eighty-three articles were included for review from 66 print and online newspaper sources. We conducted a critical discourse analysis to examine the social, political, and/or cultural discourses surrounding parasport coaches in the media. Through an iterative analytical process, three discourses were revised over time. The first discourse offered contrasting views of what it meant to be an effective parasport coach. The second discourse encompassed the ways that parasport coaches were portrayed in terms of their personal characteristics and motives. The third discourse described the working environment for parasport coaches, including the challenges and facilitators for progressing the Paralympic movement. Overall, our media analysis provided an overarching view of how the media shapes our perception of parasport coaches. We believe our results will raise awareness to the underrepresented voices of parasport coaches, which ultimately has the potential to promote parasport participation at recreational and competitive levels around the world.

Word Count: 237/250

Keywords: *Disability sport, Coaching, Media analysis*, *Parasport movement, Print media*

A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Dominant Discourses being used to Portray Parasport Coaches in the Newspaper Media

Parasport is the term designated by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) to encompass sport for athletes with impairment (IPC, 2017), providing opportunities to participate in sport from grassroots to high-performance levels. At the grassroots level, initiatives have been designed to increase participation rates for people with impairments, including the Para Sport Jumpstart Fund in Canada (Jumpstart, 2021), the Activity Alliance in England (British Paralympic Association, 2019), and Disability Sports Australia (Disability Sports Australia, 2020). At the high-performance level, there are a number of competitions available to athletes with impairments including, but not limited to, the Asian Para Games, the Parapan American Games, the Deaflympics, the Invictus Games, and the Paralympic Games (Disability Sport, 2014). Originating in 1960, the Paralympic Games have grown exponentially to become the third largest sporting competition in the world with the most recent summer games held in Rio de Janeiro, hosting 4,328 athletes from 159 countries competing in 22 sports (IPC, n.d.). Additionally, the Invictus Games is an internationally renowned sport competition designed for injured service people embodying the fighting spirit of military personnel (i.e., the term Invictus meaning “unconquered”; Vitamin London, 2016). The first edition of the Games was held in London, England in 2012 with the most recent Games hosted by Sydney, Australia in 2018 featuring 491 athletes competing in 11 sports (Vitamin London, 2016). Taken together, there has been an increasing number of opportunities for athletes with impairments to participate in sport at varying competitive levels.

Parasport Coaching

Evolving from an era where parasport athletes were self-taught (Martin & Whalen, 2014), it has become increasingly common for athletes to work with coaches as they train and compete. In an effort to better understand the existing literature on parasport coaches, Bentzen and colleagues (2021) conducted a scoping review that revealed 44 peer-reviewed articles published between the years 1991 to 2019. Among the results, the authors identified three common topics discussed within the parasport coaching literature. First, *general coaching knowledge* involved topics related to the responsibilities of the coach (e.g., Douglas et al., 2016; Falcão et al., 2015), in which parasport coaches often took on additional roles with regards to assisting parasport athletes outside of sport (Tawse et al., 2012). Second, *becoming a parasport coach* referred to the career evolution of parasport coaches (Cregan et al., 2007; Douglas et al., 2018; Wareham et al., 2018). For example, Cregan and colleagues (2007) interviewed six coaches of swimmers with an impairment and found that although none of the coaches initially intended on coaching parasport, they adapted to the situation when an athlete with an impairment joined their swim program. Finally, *being a parasport coach* involved reflections from coaches on their experiences and perceptions of coaching athletes with impairments (e.g., Taylor et al., 2015, Wareham et al., 2017). For instance, Wareham and colleagues (2017) found that multiple parasport coaches felt a sense of stigmatization surrounding parasport with one coach stating that a Paralympic medal was often considered “a seventh of an Olympic medal” (p. 14). Taken together, parasport coaches are often at a disadvantage compared to coaches in able bodied sport due to the lack of opportunities, education, funding, and media attention (Alexander & Bloom, 2020; Cheong et al., in press). This limited attention may be related to societal perceptions of

impairment, mirroring the inequitable dichotomy between able and disabled in the sport environment (Wareham et al., 2017).

Media Attention

Historically, there has been a paucity of media attention provided to athletes and coaches of parasport, even at the level of the Paralympic Games (Cheong et al., in press). This is unfortunate given the considerable role the media plays in shaping our thoughts, attitudes, and behaviours (López-Guimerà et al., 2010). This lack of exposure has the potential to signify to audiences what they should perceive as valuable (or invaluable) in society (Buysse & Borcherding, 2010; Peers, 2009; Silva & Howes, 2012). In efforts to combat this disparity, the IPC developed a Strategic Plan from 2019 to 2022 with the aim of progressing the Paralympic movement through "increased worldwide audiences and media engagement" (IPC, 2019, p. 20). As such, international organizations, such as the IPC, recognise the powerful nature of the media and work towards improving exposure to the Games through increased media attention. However, it is important to still consider the types of messages being portrayed through this increased attention. For example, the media has been shown to be a powerful medium in shaping perceptions of parasport athletes, from being portrayed as passive members of sport (e.g., "The Olympics is where heroes are made. The Paralympics is where heroes come", Peers, 2009, p. 656) to being represented as heroes overcoming the limitations of their impairment (e.g., the "supercrip" narrative; Silva & Howes, 2012). Therefore, it is critical to reflect on the nature and types of language being used in the media to describe members of underrepresented populations and understand how this language can influence the way the parasport community is perceived.

Models of Disability

In line with critical disabilities studies, there are a number of models that have been used to shape our understanding of impairment across history. Among the most prominent is the medical model, viewing impairment as a limitation or condition in need of being corrected or fixed (Smith & Perrier, 2014). Although the medical model has been traditionally used as a means of understanding impairment from a wide range of disciplines, including parasport coaching (see discussion by Townsend et al., 2018), social theorists have criticized the appropriateness and acceptability of the way it reinforces the dichotomy between normal and abnormal (Artiles, 2013). Placing sole emphasis on the physicality of the person, the medical model fails to consider influencers outside of the physical body (e.g., societal structures, power dynamics) and how they work to impair one's ability to fully participate in society. Born out of these criticisms, the social model of disability was created to focus on the role that society plays in creating systemic barriers to participation for people with impairments (Thomas, 2014). Differentiating impairment and disability, the social model view of disability entails that the way we perceive "able versus disabled" is situated in the particular context of pre-existing societal norms. Failure to achieve these societal norms places people in categories of "other", labelled as deficient, lacking, or insufficient in their ability to fully participate. Finally, the social-relational model was created to state that neither the physical impairment of the individual nor the societal influence exists in isolation (Thomas, 1999; 2007). Although this model acknowledges the role that impairment plays in society, it does not view the impairment itself as a limitation or something to be corrected, but rather, a factor that may pose a barrier towards inclusion or participation. This model has recently been utilized as a theoretical framework in parasport coaching literature to explore the experiences of both coaches (Townsend et al., 2018; Wareham

et al., 2017) and athletes (e.g., Allan et al., 2020; Culver & Werthner, 2018). Considering the historical adoption of the medical perspective when representing parasport (e.g., supercrip narrative; Silva & Howes, 2012) and the recent adoption of the social-relational model (e.g., Culver & Werthner, 2018), it is important to consider how models of disability shape our understanding of impairment in sport and how these assumptions may be produced or reproduced in the media.

Parasport and the Media

There are a number of media sources capable of informing and influencing the attitudes, beliefs, and preconceptions of media consumers, such as television, radio, social media, textbooks, and newspapers - each with their own method of disseminating information. Although modern forms of social media (e.g., Twitter, Instagram, Tik Tok) are becoming more prominent, newspapers with print and online circulation remain capable of expressing bold headlines and opinionated discourses on a particular topic, often including a detailed sports section within each paper (Cheong et al., 2016). These sports sections provide journalists the opportunity to convey in-depth, and at times, opinionated or agenda-set messages that have the potential to influence the attitudes and beliefs of their readers. With the understanding that parasport has been largely underrepresented, marginalized, or trivialized in the media compared to able-bodied sport (Cheong et al. 2016), there may be some power in the smaller subset of articles that present parasport to media consumers. For instance, due to the fact that parasport articles are less common, they have the potential to attract attention, stimulate thinking, and alter/reinforce opinions as a result of their relative novelty. Further, the language used within the media has the potential to be grounded in varying models of disability (medical, social, social-relational), each with differing implications for defining or reinforcing societal perceptions and attitudes towards

the parasport community. Thus, we believe it is important to examine and understand the messages being portrayed in the newspaper media to fully grasp the influence or repercussions that the messages have on the parasport community.

Purpose and Research Questions

There is a growing body of literature focusing on in-depth, newspaper representations of the Paralympic Games (e.g., Cheong et al., in press) and parasport athletes (e.g., Maika & Danylchuk, 2016), but little attention has been designated to the way parasport coaches are perceived in this narrative. Considering the growing importance of coaches in parasport and the active role that coaches play in raising awareness, education, and exposure to parasport (Bentzen et al., 2021; Lepage et al., 2020; Wareham et al., 2017), it is surprising that media analyses have overlooked this important agent in the parasport movement. As such, the purpose of our study was to examine how newspaper media portrayed dominant discourses surrounding parasport coaches over a 20-year time span from 1999 to 2019. Our research was guided by the following research questions: (1) What is the size and scope of print and online news media articles involving the discussion or mention of parasport coaches? (2) What content and types of discourses are being portrayed in the media surrounding parasport coaches? (3) What are the implications of the dominant discourses in the media on parasport coaching?

Methods

Philosophical Assumptions

We adopted a constructionist paradigm to examine the social, cultural, and/or political dynamics involved in assessing how the media portrays and reproduces discourses about parasport coaches. The philosophical assumptions guiding this study were a relativist ontology and a subjectivist/transactional epistemology (Poucher et al., 2020). Taking a relativist

ontological position (i.e., reality is multiple and mind-dependent), we were not looking for a single "truth" of how the media portrayed parasport coaches. Instead, we were interested in the unique, individual perspectives being portrayed and how this may work to illustrate or reproduce discourses of parasport coaching. We define the term discourse to exemplify "all forms of naturally spoken talk, conversations, and texts of any kind" (McGannon & Butryn, 2020, p. 294). As newspaper articles depict lived experiences surrounding parasport coaches (e.g., coaches and athletes talking about their relationships, journalists or administrators referring to coaches), we acknowledge the multiple experiences and perspectives being portrayed. Additionally, two media consumers can read the same article and draw different conclusions based on their own lived experiences. As a result of our relativist ontology, we believe neither is right nor wrong, but dependent on the reader's experiences, values, and beliefs.

Within a subjectivist and transactional epistemology, we believe that knowledge is co-constructed between the researcher and participant – in this case, the interplay between the journalist, ourselves as researchers, and the readers of our research (Poucher et al., 2020). From this perspective, there is no form of theory-free knowledge (Smith & McGannon, 2018), as it is impossible to remove our lived experiences, biases, assumptions, and preconceptions of parasport coaching from our interpretations of articles. Therefore, it is important to outline who we are as researchers and how our experiences and perspectives may be involved in the analysis and presentation of findings. All of the authors involved in this study are able-bodied, Canadian, sport and exercise psychology researchers with experience as athletes and coaches. The first author has conducted research on parasport coaching and worked with children and adults with disabilities at the recreational and competitive level. The second author has 20 years of experience coaching able-bodied sport at recreational through national levels and conducts both

research and volunteer work related to issues of inclusivity and accessibility in sport. The third author has considerable experience conducting research on parasport coaching, has worked as a mental performance consultant for Paralympians, and has coached youth sport for over 15 years. We invite the reader to consider our backgrounds and experience in sport and exercise psychology when critically engaging with the findings of this paper.

Data Collection

Data were collected using the LexisNexis Academic database to search for full-text newspaper articles, such as detailed reports, editorials, opinion pieces, briefs, and commentaries, from January 1, 1999 to January 1, 2019. Three searches were carried out with the general search terms of *Coach, Disability,* and *Sport* and additional terms to narrow the focus, including (1) Paralympic, (2) Parasport, and (3) Invictus Games. These search terms were purposely selected to acquire data among various competitive levels (i.e., grassroot to high-performance) and diverse sporting experiences (i.e., people identifying as recreational players, high-performance athletes, military veterans). Articles were included for review if they: (a) were newspaper articles published in print and/or online, (b) published in English or had an English translation available, and (c) discussed parasport, Invictus Games, or Paralympic coaches (e.g., provided quotes from coaches, athlete perceptions of their coaches, administrator perceptions on coaching). Articles were not excluded based on country of origin. Articles were excluded from the review if they: (a) had no mention of coaching in the sporting context (e.g., academic coaching, other meanings of the word “coach”), (b) discussed coaching in the school sport or summer camp context, (c) were exclusively based on statistics (e.g., sports briefs, stats about Games, number of coaches in attendance), or (d) had minimal discussion.

The initial search resulted in 282 articles, in which 80 related to parasport coaches, 71 to Paralympic coaches, and 131 to Invictus Games coaches. The first and second author then independently screened the articles, met to discuss the nature and content of the articles, and used these discussions to further refine the eligibility criteria. For example, after the initial screening process we noticed a number of articles referred to sport in either the summer camp or school programming context. After discussing with the research team, we considered these contexts to be beyond the scope of our sport-based paper; therefore, summer camp and school programs were added as exclusion criteria. At this point, any discrepancies in eligibility were resolved through discussions between the first and second author. The third author was prepared to act as a critical friend to resolve discrepancies that could not be agreed upon, however third party intervention was not needed at this stage. In total, 83 articles were included in the analysis. For a visual representation of the data collection process, please see Figure 2.1.

Critical Discourse Analysis

To analyze the data, we followed procedures employed in previous media analyses (Alexander et al., 2019) including critical discourse analyses in sport-related contexts (e.g., McGannon et al., 2016; McGannon & Spence, 2012). A critical discourse analysis (CDA) was chosen to examine the social, cultural, and/or political discourses surrounding parasport coaches in the media. Specifically, we used a synthetic/eclectic approach that allowed us to focus on the implications, process, and outcomes of the language (McGannon, 2016). Central to CDA is the notion that media-based discourses have the potential to offer contrasting narratives about a phenomenon, leaving the reader to take on a *subject position* based on their values, beliefs, or experiences (McGannon, 2016). For example, a media consumer may believe that coaching para and able-bodied athletes is similar and may not understand the need to specialize training and

competitions specific to impairment. Alternatively, another consumer may relate to the unique advocacy role that parasport coaches often adopt to foster awareness of specialized parasport experiences. Further, the terminology used within these messages may be grounded in varying models of disability by adopting a medical, social, or social-relational perspective on impairment, with the potential to influence one's understanding of parasport. As such, critical engagement with the media offers a platform for society to develop particular worldviews, opinions, or beliefs about a topic. By focusing on nuanced wording, we have the opportunity to examine how dominant discourses in the media shape the portrayal of parasport coaches as well as the implications behind these representations on the parasport community.

Data Analysis

When conducting a CDA, there are no set rules or standards to follow (McGannon, 2016). As such, we adopted an analysis approach consistent with our research questions and in conjunction with steps outlined by McGannon and colleagues (McGannon et al., 2016; McGannon & Butryn, 2020; McGannon & Spence, 2012) in previous sport and exercise psychology media analyses.

Using a recursive method for analyzing data, the first two authors began by reading and re-reading the article transcripts to familiarize ourselves with the content of the data. We then highlighted key words, terms, or phrases that were consistent with our research questions and made reflexive notes of the social, cultural, and/or political implications associated with each statement. The first and second authors completed this step independently and then met to discuss interpretations, each acting as critical friends to the other with regards to ideas, associations, and potential biases or assumptions. The first author then returned to the literature on parasport coaching and critical disabilities studies and generated an initial list of categories

representing the data, which was further revised and refined by the research team. For example, we identified one category representing parasport-specific information with regards to how coaching athletes with impairments differed compared to coaching able-bodied athletes (e.g., instruction modifications, coach learning opportunities). Alternatively, another category was identified to represent the role of parasport coaches from various stakeholders implying the "right way" to coach athletes with and without impairments - in that there should be minimal differences. We found that these categories involved contrasting socio-cultural meanings and therefore chose to reflect them as subject positions that represented opposing views on parasport coaching (McGannon, 2016). These subject positions were then grouped to form one overarching discourse of how parasport coaching was perceived in the media. Through an iterative analytical process, we identified three interrelated discourses that were challenged, questioned, and revised over time to exemplify how parasport coaching, parasport coaches, and the parasport coaching environment were portrayed. Please see Table 2.1 for a summary of the final discourses and subject positions included within our paper.

Trustworthiness

Rather than adopting a standardized set of validity criteria, we chose to adhere to a flexible list of characterising traits that best suited the context, philosophical assumptions, and methods of our study (Smith & McGannon, 2018; Sparkes & Smith, 2009). First, we worked to be *transparent* in our research by outlining our backgrounds, assumptions, and experiences, conducting an audit trail, and including direct quotations from the media articles (Smith & Caddick, 2012). Second, we attempted to demonstrate *reflexivity* by having multiple authors engage in journal notes throughout the analytical phases of study and through the use of a critical friend to challenge, question, and critique the decisions and interpretations made throughout the

research process (Smith & McGannon, 2018). We worked to present *width* by not limiting the articles by geographic location or through any other features of the newspaper process, such as circulation or reach, to provide a diverse array of media sources (Smith & Caddick, 2012). Finally, we demonstrated *coherence* by presenting a complete and meaningful picture of parasport by including information related to parasport from various contexts, including recreational and high-performance programs, such as the Paralympic and Invictus Games (Smith & Caddick, 2012). We also strove to provide multiple perspectives from journalists, athletes, coaches, and members of the general community. We invite the reader to consider our characterising traits when evaluating the findings and interpretations of our media analysis.

Results

The purpose of our study was to examine how newspaper media portrayed dominant discourses surrounding parasport coaches over a 20-year time span from 1999 to 2019. The articles included for review were from 66 different sources, ranging from local newspapers, such as the *Ottawa Citizen* and *The San Diego Union Tribune*, to international newspapers including the *New York Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*. The majority of the newspaper articles were from England (25.3%), Canada (20.5%), and USA (14.5%), followed by Scotland (10.9), Australia (9.6%), and Wales (6.0%). Following our analyses, we identified three overarching discourses, each presented with (1) the title of the overarching discourse, (2) the pair of contrasting, yet related subject positions, and (3) direct excerpts from the media articles to describe, portray, or represent parasport coaching. These quotations reflected various perspectives, including coaches, athletes, administrators, and members of the general public, and although not all quotes directly highlight the role of coaches themselves, their implications are inferred and noted by us, as authors.

Discourse 1: The Same or Different? Perceptions of Coaching Parasport Athletes

The first discourse described contrasting perspectives of what it meant to be an effective parasport coach with regards to opinions on how coaches should perceive their own athletes. We presented this discourse using two subject positions labelled, “No different than their able-bodied counterparts” and “There are unique differences to consider”.

Subject Position 1: No Different than their Able-Bodied Counterparts

On one side of the story, the media reinforced the notion that parasport athletes and coaches are no different than their able-bodied counterparts. Within these articles, journalists, coaches, and community members crafted this subject position by highlighting similarities in the physical and psychological skillset of their athletes.

In an opinion piece with the *Guardian* (Canada), mayor Clifford Lee proclaimed that “Paralympic athletes and their coaches are no different than their ‘able-bodied’ counterparts as their training, time and commitment, level of physical fitness, mental preparation and dedication is the same” (*Guardian*, 2005). Multiple journalists also featured the voices of parasport coaches to reinforce the idea that the difference between coaching athletes with and without an impairment is negligible. For example, Dave Durepos, three-time Paralympic gold medalist and Canadian wheelchair basketball coach, emphasized this point by saying, “When he [athlete Alex Hayward] goes out on to the court, he’s going to war. The only difference, Durepos said, is the wheelchair. The competitive will and desire is the same” (*The Telegraph Journal*, 2015).

Additionally, the *North Norfolk News* (England) portrayed the perspective of Invictus Games athlete and Army Reserve trainer, Dan Majid, who highlighted the minimal adaptations necessary to coach athletes with impairments and those of varying ability levels:

> Our coaches are national and international level trainers. So the sessions they put on for us are inspiring and challenging but specific with great advice on techniques. I just repeat what they say and change the sessions slightly so they are applicable to the level I teach at (*North Norfolk News,* 2018).

Finally, in an article posted in the *Gazette Series* (England), the [unnamed] journalist described the experiences of Mark Lodge, a youth parasport coach, who was provided the opportunity to coach at the Invictus Games. Lodge recounted his time while highlighting the importance of getting to know his athletes on a personal level. In doing so, he emphasized the marginal differences involved with training and competing as an athlete with or without an impairment:

> [He particularly remembers] an athlete called Lammin who had lost both legs and an arm and who won a bronze medal in the discus competition. Mark was delighted to be introduced to Lammin's wife and five children once the competition was over. He says that Lammin, like most of these athletes, never spoke about how they gained their disabilities: they were just athletes, there to compete and represent their country. Mark has always emphasized that disabled athletes are simply athletes who run, jump and throw the same as able-bodied athletes (*Gazette Series,* 2016).

Taken together, the idea being sent to the readers of these media articles is that coaching athletes with and without impairments is more similar than different. In turn, this message works to bridge the gap between ability and disability. This was particularly apparent when Clifford Lee stated: “I remind everyone that we all have disabilities, some are just more noticeable than others” (*Guardian*, 2005). This, however, was not the only subject position being presented.

Subject Position 2: There are Unique Differences to Consider

Although a large proportion of articles highlighted the view that there is no difference between coaching athletes with and without an impairment, there was a smaller subset of articles that discussed unique considerations for parasport coaches. These nuances included the physical and psychological intersection of impairment, considerations for athletes with acquired impairments, and the process in which coaches sought out information to effectively coach in this context.

In an article posted in *The Star Phoenix* (Canada), journalist Andrea Hill described Paralympic swimming coach Eric Kramer's view on the physical and psychological pressures of being an elite Paralympic athlete. More specifically, Kramer discussed his situation with Paralympian Shelby Newkirk, who was juggling the expectation of being a medal hopeful for the 2020 [postponed to 2021] Games.

> He [Kramer] sees much of his job as helping her manage the pressure that comes with that knowledge. This is especially important because some days Newkirk's body won't allow her to have a good workout or a good race. If she gets upset about it, that can make her symptoms worse. "If she goes home and starts worrying about it, her nervous system starts reacting and then she makes it worse, it just hurts her more" Kramer said. "Just imagine: You're disappointed – it's a human thing we do - but then to her, it affects her physically" (*The Star Phoenix,* 2019).

A collection of media articles also emphasized the recovery process of rehabilitating from an acquired impairment and the coaches' role in enhancing physical and psychological well-being for their athletes. For example, in *The Daily Monitor* (Uganda), journalist Abdul-Nasser

Ssemugabi describes Ugandan Army Sergeant Ismail Rembe's experience recovering from injury and how his goalball coaches played a role in his recovery:

> "...Even after recovery, I still felt useless, only waiting to die," Rembe recalls. "But coming here in 1998, I saw people with worse deformities; some had lost both legs, arms; others demented. But they were carrying on. I felt a bit lucky. I found soldiers playing goalball and other physical exercises. But when UNAPD [Uganda National Action on Physical Disability] brought Danish coaches here, they gave us many skills and hope; we now feel like stars." Rembe says with a free smile (*The Daily Monitor,* 2017).

This media excerpt highlighted the skills that coaches used to enhance their players' physical and psychological well-being. Due to the context of working with athletes with varying impairments and individualized needs, coaches discussed their process of seeking out information to be more effective. For instance, Karen Williams, coach of the Canadian Para Storm Swim Club, stated that she "had never worked with an athlete with dystonia before. She tried to track down as much information on the condition as she could. It was very challenging, definitely for both of us, to learn about her disability" (*The Star Phoenix*, 2019).

In sum, the articles emphasized the individual differences that parasport coaches are required to consider in order to be effective. Thus, this subject position serves as a juxtaposition to the former, where consumers receive mixed messages on what it means to coach parasport.

Discourse 2: Saints or Competitors? Perceptions of Parasport Coaches

The second discourse encompassed the way parasport coaches were portrayed by the media in terms of who they were as a *person*, including the personality traits that journalists chose to represent the coaches' character. We presented this discourse using two opposing

subject positions entitled “Most are inspirational and saintly figures” and “They may not all be sweet, inspirational, and saintly figures”.

Subject Position 1: Most are Inspirational and Saintly Figures

A large proportion of the literature described parasport coaches in terms of the positivity, generosity, and humbleness they exuded within the parasport community. In an article posted in the *Gazette Series* (England), the [unnamed] journalist described wheelchair rugby coach Mike Spence’s experience receiving an award for the service he provided to the parasport community. Multiple times, the journalist made reference to how *wonderful* and *special* the day was, including Spence’s reaction to receiving the award:

> Mike, who said he had to re-read the letter several times after originally thinking it would be for jury service, said: I was amazed, completely in shock, and very humbled. It just came out of the blue and I couldn't believe what I was reading. (*Gazette Series,* 2017)

Similarly, journalist Josh Aldrich of the *Stony Plain Reporter* (Canada) described Paralympic sledge hockey coach Steve Arsenault’s experience receiving an Award of Excellence from the city of Spruce Grove, particularly highlighting his humbleness and appreciation for the honour:

> In parasport, it’s not often we get recognition outside of the Paralympic Games or the World Championships, so for me this is huge, said Arsenault, 30. I’m very proud to be from this area, it’s followed me throughout my career and I can’t thank them enough (*Stony Plain Reporter,* 2019).

In conjunction with the coaches’ humbled perspectives, members of the community shared their opinions on the attributes of parasport coaches. For example, Clifford Lee of the *Guardian* (Canada), described parasport coaches Contessa Scott and Frank MacIntyre as “most deserving” when discussing the awards they won at an athletic banquet in Canada (*Guardian*, 2005).

Although elusive in nature, the underlying message crafted by the journalists demonstrated the admirable qualities of parasport coaches. Interestingly, the journalists were subtle in their portrayal of parasport coaches within each individual article. However, when reading and analyzing the articles as a whole, it was evident that the overarching subject position being presented was that *nice people* coach athletes with impairments. Specifically, parasport coaches were portrayed as generous, deserving, and grateful during the rare times they were recognized for their service to the community. Again, this was only one side to the story.

Subject Position 2: They May Not All Be Sweet, Inspirational, and Saintly Figures

Although to a significantly smaller extent, the media addressed the generous narrative that surrounds the parasport community. Specifically, a handful of journalists expressed their discernments that parasport coaches and athletes will go to the same lengths as their able-bodied competitors to achieve success, even if that entails dishonesty or cheating.

One example comes from journalist Paul Forsyth of the *Scotsman* (Scotland) who described the controversial nature of the classification system in which athletes "have been known to exaggerate impairments so that they are given an easier classification, and with it, a better medal chance." For instance, athletes would fake "a withered arm or leg to classifiers" in pursuit "to demonstrate, with a little too much zeal, their physical limitations". When recounting a previous scandal of this nature in 2000, Forsyth explicates, "All of which is an indication of the lengths to which Paralympic athletes, as well as their coaches and officials, will go in pursuit of a medal" (*Scotsman*, 2012). As such, the presented view was that parasport coaches are not - and should not - be deemed above cheating or deception to win, simply because they work within an underrepresented community. Interestingly, this concept of intentional misrepresentation appeared to be more prominent in relation to the Paralympic Games over the Invictus Games.

A second example comes from *The Daily Telegraph* (London) in which journalist Leah Hardy presented an emotionally charged opinion piece on the personal characteristics of the parasport community in relation to investigations into intentional misrepresentation (i.e., cheating).

> Should we be shocked that disabled athletes and their coaches might be just as competitive, determined, and yes, sometimes as dishonest, as their non-disabled counterparts? That, in fact, they may not all be sweet, inspirational, and saintly figures? There have even been calls for the investigation itself to be shut down in case it upsets disabled athletes, as if all those medals had been won for therapeutic basketweaving instead of for blood and sweat. What nonsense (*The Daily Telegraph*, 2017).

Although Hardy focused her attention on parasport athletes within this article, she identified how athletes do not train and compete in isolation, and subsequently highlighted the role of the coach. Hardy continued by emphasizing the impact of adopting and reinforcing a generous narrative within the parasport community, which includes not only athletes but their coaches:

> The idea that disabled people are too “nice”, or perhaps even too inept, to cheat, or that they should be protected even from any discussion of cheating, reveals a darker side to the disabled athletes' national treasure status. This is that disabled people generally are all too often regarded with a grisly, cloying sentimentality (*The Daily Telegraph*, 2017).

Although there are few articles of this nature, they reflect an opinionated subject position that challenges our assumptions of impairment in society as well as our perceptions of how parasport coaches fit within that narrative. This provides a contrasting view to the larger proportion of articles that portrays the parasport community, and subsequently parasport coaches, as generous, kind-hearted people that provide a level of service to athletes with

impairments. As such, the media consumer is left to adopt a subject position on how to perceive parasport coaches based on their own beliefs, experiences, and assumptions.

Discourse 3: Barriers or Progression? Perceptions of the Parasport Coaching Environment

The final discourse described the landscape that parasport coaches work within, which included (1) challenges present for parasport coaches, such as lack of awareness, recognition, and funding, but also (2) positive and optimistic attitudes towards addressing these challenges and progressing the Paralympic movement. We chose to label these subject positions as "Limit your expectations" and "Sport has the power to transform lives".

Subject Position 1: Limit your Expectations

A number of articles portrayed the challenges and barriers that coaches of athletes with impairments have faced relating to a lack of awareness, exposure, and funding within the parasport community. Further, journalists highlight the coaches' extended role in recruiting to promote parasport, as well as their ability to manage negative societal perceptions of parasport.

Journalist Sheetal Banchariya of *The Times of India* (India) presented the perspective of Indian Para Badminton coach, Guarav Khanna, who described the challenges associated with lack of awareness surrounding youth parasport opportunities: "Many youngsters with physical, vision and intellectual disabilities who have a spark for sports do not know how to pursue their passion and the sole reason is lack of awareness" (*The Times of India*, 2018). Along the same lines, journalist S. Mathana Amaris Fiona of the *New Straits Times* (Malaysia) stated that "past and present Paralympians, including past silver and bronze winners, should be given recognition that is long overdue. Coaches and trainers need to be rewarded for having nurtured special talents without inhibitions" (*New Straits Times*, 2016).

Journalists also underscored the lack of funding that was often described alongside a lack of exposure or awareness. In one example, Rachel O'Connor of the *Warfedale Observer* (England) depicted the financial repercussions of athletes with intellectual impairments being excluded from competing after the Sydney Paralympic Games in 2000.

> Following what happened with the Spanish at the Sydney Paralympics, people with learning disabilities were prevented from competing at the Olympic level as the definition of their disability was not visual. This led to their funding being stopped and this had a knock-on effect which meant that there was no funding to even take them to compete at events in this country. It is sad because a number of those athletes no longer take part in the sport (*Warfedale Observer*, 2008).

One of the strategies to combat this lack of exposure was for the coaches to participate in greater recruiting roles to raise awareness and generate excitement for parasport as a whole. *Windsor Star* (Canada) journalist, Dan Barnes, highlighted the voice of Team Canada's Chef de Mission, Norm O'Reilly, who expressed that "athletes and coaches are constantly reaching out to the athletes among that number, at the behest of their national parasport organizations" (*Windsor Star*, 2016). Additionally, *The Telegraph-Journal* (Canada) featured the experiences of Canada Games coach, Dave Durepos, who recruited his athlete, Alex Hayward, through a wheelchair basketball demonstration. Durepos noticed the talent being demonstrated by Hayward and actively worked to get "him into a chair that day to try the sport for the first time. Hayward was immediately hooked" (*The Telegraph-Journal*, 2015). Among these articles, journalists described how coaches took on recruiting roles above and beyond what they would have for coaching able-bodied athletes in pursuit of increasing awareness and generating excitement for parasport.

Finally, there were also a collection of articles that discussed the harsher realities that parasport coaches faced with regards to the societal perceptions and expectations that existed surrounding parasport. For instance, journalist Brian Stensaas of the *Star Tribune* (United States) depicted the experience of Paralympic tennis coach Dan James leading into the Games:

> Before heading to Sydney for the 2000 Paralympic Games, his first, U.S. Paralympics tennis coach Dan James was given some caution. It wasn't about the jet lag, the food or the people. Rather, it was about limiting his expectations even before a single point was played. Because it was the Paralympics, held every four years at the same venues and cities as the Olympic Games but for those with physical disabilities, James was told not to get his hopes up about large crowds, or even interested fans (*Star Tribune*, 2008).

This perception was also exemplified within the *Spokesman Review* (United States) in which parasport coach Teresa Skinner contrasted the quality of the Parapan experience, and subsequent societal expectations, from Peru to the United States:

> Skinner called the Parapan experience “incredible”. The people in Peru are so happy, so generous, so giving. They’d stop athletes [on the street] just to get a picture; to take a selfie. There [the para athletes] are rock stars. Here they are invisible. The people here don’t know who they are or what they do (*Spokesman Review*, 2019).

Taken together, a large proportion of articles demonstrated various challenges associated with parasport coaching, including but not limited to raising awareness, receiving funding, taking on additional recruiting roles, and dealing with negative societal perceptions of parasport.

Subject Position 2: Sport has the Power to Transform Lives

Despite the challenges raised in the previous set of media articles, there were a smaller subset of articles that exuded a positive and optimistic attitude towards addressing the challenges

and progressing the Paralympic movement. For instance, an [unnamed] journalist from *The Times and Transcript* (Canada) highlighted the perspective of parasport and able-bodied coach, Earl Church, who recounted that "when he arrived in the province four years ago, the sport [para-athletics] was not on the radar whatsoever" (*The Times and Transcript*, 2013). Additionally, Josh Aldrich of the *Stony Plain Reporter* (Canada) highlights that for sledge hockey coach, Steve Arsenault, parasport success was more than athletic performance wins:

> It's cool because I think back to when I was an adolescent and coming into my early teens, we never had a sledge hockey team that was a high calibre other than the national team... The whole thing with us was creating a program to fill that gap and creating a program where guys can compete at the highest level and make it to the national level (*Stony Plain Reporter*, 2019).

Finally, Marc Weber of *The Vancouver Province* (Canada) featured the voice of Canadian Paralympic Committee's high-performance director, Rob Needham, who highlighted the need to raise awareness in order to continue the progression of the Paralympic movement:

> One of the biggest legacy opportunities of hosting the Paralympics is raising the awareness... and we need to sustain this momentum going forward. We need to make sure we're training a new generation of athletes and a new generation of coaches (*The Vancouver Province,* 2010).

Despite the fact that there were various challenges that parasport coaches faced, this selection of media articles represented the fight as one worth taking. As UK Army veteran, and aspiring parasport coach, Dave Wilkinson, stated: "I'm a firm believer that sport has the power to transform lives and prove to people they can achieve their life goals, regardless of their disability" (*Mansfield and Ashfield Chad*, 2019). Therefore, although some journalists focused

on the more challenging, uphill battle, including the physical and social barriers that parasport coaches may have to face, they were counterbalanced with journalists who took an optimistic yet practical view on how to progress parasport and highlighted the importance of doing so.

Discussion

The purpose of our study was to explore and critique how newspaper media portrays and reproduces discourses about parasport coaches. Based on our analysis, we identified three overarching discourses that represented (1) how parasport coaching was perceived, (2) how parasport coaches were perceived, and (3) how the parasport coaching environment was perceived. These discourses represented contrasting views of how members of society, including coaches, athletes, high-performance directors, and members of the public, came to understand parasport. In turn, these perceptions have implications on the way parasport athletes and coaches are situated in the sporting context and how impairment may influence their sporting experiences based on societal messages portrayed in the media. These implications will be further discussed below.

Discourse 1: The Same or Different? Perceptions of Coaching Parasport Athletes

Within the first subject position, "No different than their able-bodied counterparts", the media presented the idea that there were minimal differences in the training, dedication, and perseverance of coaches and athletes with and without impairments. This finding is consistent with parasport athletes asking to be treated as elite performers, equal in status to their able-bodied counterparts (Alexander et al., 2020; Cregan et al., 2007; Spencer-Cavaliere & Peers, 2011). For instance, wheelchair basketball athletes valued when parasport was simply called a "sport" rather than a sport *for athletes with disabilities* (Spencer-Cavaliere & Peers, 2011). Our findings extend these perspectives to display the congruence in perceptions from parasport

coaches (e.g., Dave Durepos), and members of the general community (e.g., Mayor Clifford Lee) in their desire to bridge the gap between able and disabled in society (Shildrick, 2012). This notion has also been highlighted within the coaching literature in which parasport coaches and researchers have advocated that coaching athletes with impairments is more similar to coaching able-bodied athletes than different (Cregan et al., 2007; Martin & Whalen, 2014). Although this view of "we're all the same" can be considered empowering, it also has the potential to dismiss the importance of the impairment for parasport athletes (Townsend et al., 2020). For example, Townsend et al., (2020) conducted an ethnographic study of high-performance disability sport in which one parasport coach stated, "What's my attitude towards disability? 'Disability?' It's just a f*cking label. It doesn't exist." (p. 353). As such, this subject position adopts a medical perspective in which the impairment is not considered integral to parasport athletes' identity and sporting experiences (Allan et al., 2020) leaving a limited view of parasport coaching.

Comparatively, the second subject position, "There are unique differences to consider", identified considerations for coaches working with athletes with impairments, particularly those with acquired impairments. This finding is consistent with parasport coaching literature in which (1) coaches have highlighted difficulties integrating athletes with varying abilities (Wareham et al., 2017), and (2) researchers have identified unique roles of coaching athletes with acquired impairments (Tawse et al., 2012). We saw unique findings in our study that appeared to be more relevant to the Invictus Games than other parasport opportunities, in which coaches discussed their experiences with war veterans who may encounter physical and psychological challenges upon return. As a result, parasport coaching researchers have highlighted the importance of clinical psychologists being present within the parasport environment to assist athletes transitioning into sport (Kenttä & Corban, 2014). In line with the social-relational model of

disability (and in contrast to the first subject position), this perspective acknowledges the impairment as a factor that may pose a barrier towards full inclusion or participation in sport, while suggesting practical solutions to enhance their sporting experiences. There is a growing body of literature adopting a social-relational perspective on parasport coaching (Allan et al., 2020; Townsend et al., 2020; Wareham et al., 2017) recommending for coaches to recognize the impairment as an integral component to parasport athletes' identities and experiences. Based on the literature conducted in critical disabilities studies, parasport coaching research, and the findings of our study, there are two contrasting ideas, grounded in different models of disability, being presented on how to coach athletes with impairments. In turn, this lack of conceptual and theoretical congruence leaves practitioners with an unclear vision of how to properly address impairment with their parasport athletes or teams and a blurred understanding of how to bridge the equity gap between impairment and ability in sport.

Discourse 2: Saints or Competitors? Perceptions of Parasport Coaches

Within the first subject position, "Most are inspirational and saintly figures", the journalists portrayed parasport coaches using overwhelmingly positive personality traits, such as generous, deserving, humble, and grateful. We interpreted this finding to indicate that many journalists represented parasport coaches using a *generosity lens* to exemplify their service to an underrepresented community. Although positive in nature, this lens has the potential for personal and professional implications in coaching high-performance sport in which coaches may not wish to be perceived this way. For example, in a qualitative study exploring the preconceptions and realities of elite parasport coaches, one participant stated: "... the way that it was presented was that only nice people would do that. So you know, hard-nosed, ambitious coaches weren't going to do coaching with disabilities, nice people do that" (Wareham et al., 2017, p. 7). In turn,

this portrayal has the potential to inhibit the recruitment and retention of coaches in parasport due to societal stigma that parasport is considered more therapeutic (i.e., coaches providing a service) than elite (Wareham et al., 2018). Generated from stereotypical "perceptions of physically disabled persons as weak or frail" (Lindemann & Cherney, 2008, p. 109), this view implies that coaches of athletes with impairments primarily take on a caregiving role; a notion that many coaches (Townsend et al., 2020) and athletes (Alexander et al., 2020) would reject. Thus, the way parasport coaches and athletes are portrayed in the media plays a large role in reinforcing the preconceptions or hesitations that coaches may have in joining parasport through the focal placement on stereotypical representations of impairment.

Alternatively, the journalists that contributed to the second subject position, "They may not all be sweet, inspirational, and saintly figures", emphasized that parasport athletes and coaches are just as competitive and determined as their able-bodied counterparts. This finding is consistent with previous literature in that parasport coaches may actively enhance their international status by taking advantage of the rapid pathway in Paralympic sport and use it as a stepping stone to coaching high-performance able-bodied sport (Townsend et al., 2020; Wareham et al., 2018). An Australian parasport administrator explained that "there is probably a little bit of a competition to get athletes with a disability into your programme because they're – how can I put it politely? They're a slightly easier ride to glorydom" (Wareham et al., 2018, p. 11). One parasport coach from a study by Townsend et al., (2020) outwardly admitted, "I don't want to pigeon-hole myself as a disability sport coach. I'm a coach. It doesn't interest me... this is just a stepping stone for me." (p. 351). In conjunction with findings within this subject position, these results demonstrate that not all parasport coaches are interested in the advocacy role often attached to their position and at times, concerned about the negative stereotypes

associated with impairment interfering with their ability to coach high-performance sport (Townsend et al., 2020; Wareham et al., 2017). This view relates to a medical model perspective of impairment as a limiting factor that needs to be resolved or corrected to minimize the gap between disability and able-bodied sport. Although parasport athletes have reported the desire to be treated as elite performers (e.g., Alexander et al., 2020), there are many athletes that highly resonate with their impairment as a critical part of their identity and sporting experience (e.g., Allan et al., 2020). Thus, the way coaches either address impairment as integral to their athletes' experiences (social-relational model) or minimize impairment to bridge the gap of ability (medical model) has important implications on athlete satisfaction in parasport.

Discourse 3: Barriers or Progression? Perceptions of the Parasport Coaching Environment

The first subject position of the final discourse, "Limit your expectations" illustrated the landscape of the parasport environment, including the societal and practical challenges coaches may face. Recent parasport coaching research has identified similar challenges and barriers that parasport coaches have navigated (Dehghansai et al., 2020; Duarte et al., in press, Lepage et al., 2020). For example, there appears to be greater challenges for parasport coaches at recreational levels where financial disbursement is often prioritized to national or international levels (Dehghansai et al., 2020). This emphasis on high-performance sport is not exclusive to parasport, as Olympic and professional sport continuously receive a larger proportion of attention in Western countries than recreational or novice levels (Green, 2007). This high-performance narrative has significant implications on the disability community, in that elite athletes with impairments who consider sport to be empowering and pursue "athlete-first" identities have the potential to distance themselves from the broader disability community who may not wish to adopt an elite sport identity (Purdue & Howe, 2012). As seen in the second subject position

"They may not all be sweet, inspirational, and saintly figures", many parasport coaches adopted this desire for elite status over disability (e.g., "It's not about disability, I want to win as many medals as possible", Townsend et al., 2020), with the potential to shape their athletes' sporting experiences based on their perceptions and understanding of impairment (Allan et al., 2020). Thus, we see that the media can play a large role in shaping the perceptions of parasport coaches by actively using language and terminology grounded in various models of disability that subsequently reinforce the dominance of the high-performance ethic in society.

The second subject position, "Sport has the power to transform lives" presented a more uplifting perspective of the parasport environment by highlighting the global expansion of parasport. In particular, our findings highlighted the recent, yet rapid growth of parasport coupled with practical recommendations to maintain this progression forward through increased awareness. Practically, the media has played a large role in promoting the awareness and caliber of the Paralympic Games leading up to the event (e.g., Netflix documentary "Rising Phoenix" released in anticipation for the 2020 Paralympic Games; IPC, 2020). In another example, the 2016 Paralympic Games trailer entitled, "Yes, I Can", was created and praised by IPC President, Sir Philip Craven, for promoting positive attitudes towards parasport and redefining "the boundaries of possibility in terms of how broadcasters cover the Paralympics" (Craven, 2016). Thus, the media's approach to empowering the parasport community, including athletes and coaches, has the potential to transform societal attitudes of impairment and dismantle negative stereotypes of parasport. Using a critical disabilities lens, however, there is a need to caution the *sole* portrayal of people with impairments within a medically focused, high-performance setting (i.e., potential perpetuation of the "supercrip" identity; Silva & Howes, 2012). This is also important when you consider the proportion of people with impairments who do not wish to

engage in elite sport or who participate in grassroots or recreational sport, yet are underrepresented in the media due to the lack of high-performance status. With the understanding of how the media can influence societal perceptions of parasport coaching, there is opportunity for media outlets to provide a voice to parasport coaches of varying competitive levels (i.e., grassroots to high-performance) in pursuit of advancing the diversity of representation of impairment in newspaper media.

Conclusions

Overall, our study provided an overarching view of how the media influences the perceptions of parasport coaches over a 20-year time span. Expanding on the newspaper media analyses conducted on the Paralympic Games (Cheong et al., in press) and parasport athletes (Maika & Danylchuk, 2016), we saw unique value in acquiring this information on parasport coaches given their increasing role in raising awareness and providing education on the parasport community. In line with our philosophical assumptions, we emphasise that these were *our* interpretations of the findings based on our experiences and backgrounds as researchers. With this in mind, our findings indicated that journalists played an important role in shaping the messages being portrayed by the coaches, often times presenting contradicting viewpoints on the same issue. Each discourse was interconnected in shaping the way parasport coaches were represented in the media and grounded in the perspectives of varying models of disability. As coaches play a large role in shaping their athletes' sporting experiences, media messaging around parasport coaching may work to reinforce stereotypes or empower the disability community at large. Thus, coaches need to be aware of and educated on parasport athlete perspectives and preferences of how impairment can influence the sporting experience (e.g., Allan et al., 2020), how models of disability influence our thoughts and perceptions of impairment in sport, and how

coaches' language and behaviours can work to marginalize or empower the disability population (i.e., choosing to address or minimize impairment). Listening to the few messages portrayed from parasport coaches themselves, it is imperative to provide the parasport community with a voice in the media to educate on the contrasting perceptions of coaching athletes with impairments, views on how parasport coaches are perceived themselves, as well as awareness on the barriers and facilitators involved in parasport progression. Due to the recent surge of social media and online accessibility, we also encourage future researchers to analyze "newer" media that have played a significant role in the IPC's media strategy to expand our understanding of how parasport coaching is portrayed in the broader media. We believe this increased awareness has the potential to further the development of parasport coaches and promote parasport participation at both recreational and competitive levels around the world.

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Tables

Table 2.1

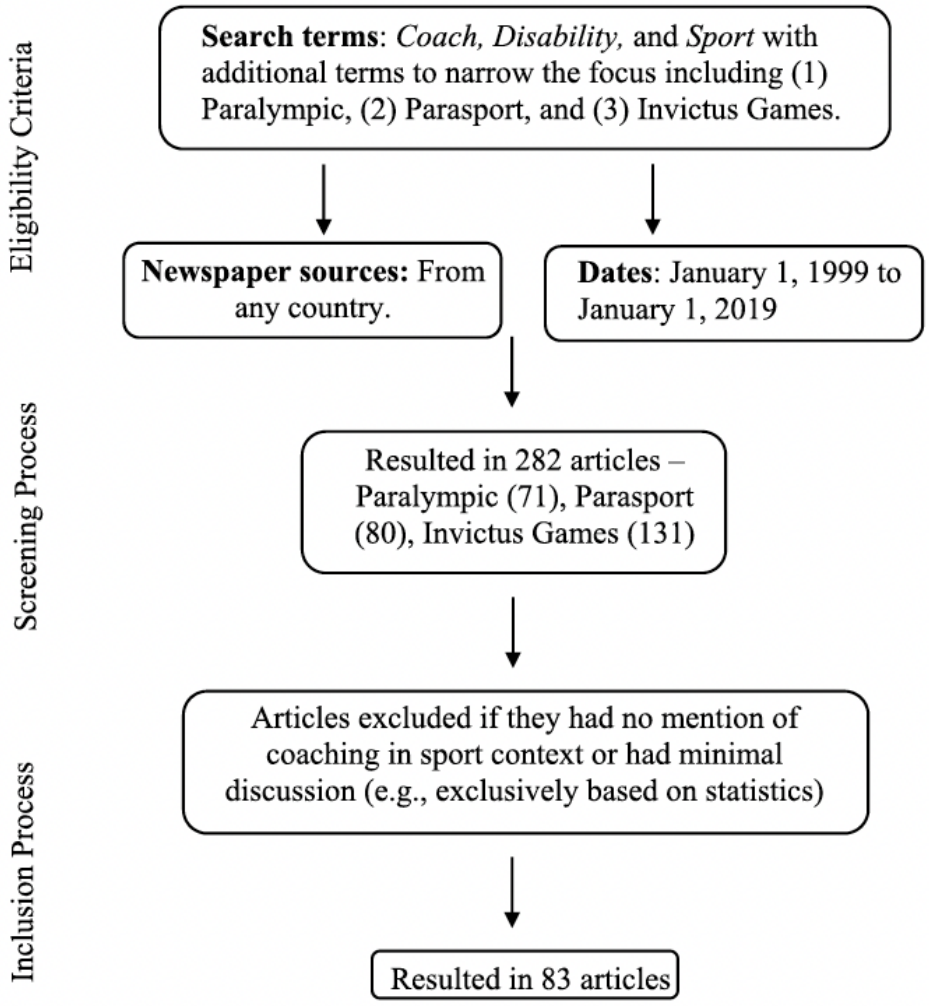
Summary of Discourses and Subject Positions

Discourse	Subject Positions	Definition
Discourse 1: The Same or Different? Perceptions of Coaching Parasport Athletes	No different than their able-bodied counterparts	Similarities in the physical and psychological skillset of their athletes.
	There are unique differences to consider	Physical and psychological intersection of impairment, coaching athletes with acquired impairments, and seeking out information to effectively coach in this context.
Discourse 2: Saints or Competitors? Perceptions of Parasport Coaches	Most are inspirational and saintly figures	Described parasport coaches in terms of the positivity, generosity, and humbleness they exuded within the parasport community.
	They may not all be sweet, inspirational, and saintly figures	Discernments that parasport coaches and athletes will go to the same lengths as their able-bodied competitors to achieve success.
Discourse 3: Barriers or Progression? Perceptions of the Parasport Coaching Environment	Limit your expectations	Challenges with parasport coaching, including awareness, funding, additional recruiting roles, and negative societal perceptions of parasport.
	Sport has the power to transform lives	Exuding a positive and optimistic attitude towards addressing the challenges and progressing the Paralympic movement.

Figures

Figure 2.1

Visual Representation of Data Collection



Bridging Text

Chapter two was an original manuscript that highlighted the varying, and often opposing, discourses surrounding parasport coaching, including perceptions or debates as to whether parasport coaching should be viewed as unique or integrated within mainstream sport. The results enhanced our comprehension of how parasport coaching is understood and the ways in which these portrayals may influence parasport coaches' philosophies, knowledge, or development as a coach. For instance, we saw that coaches who considered their athletes' disabilities as integral to the parasport experience sought out disability-specific knowledge, yet expressed difficulties accessing or acquiring this information. With an understanding of the repeated calls from parasport coaches for contextualized parasport coach education, chapter three explores the perceptions and experiences of parasport coaches who participated in a formalized parasport coach education mentorship program.

Chapter 3

Exploring Coaches' Experiences and Perceptions of a Virtual Parasport Coach Mentorship Program

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Abstract

Partnering with a provincial coaching association in Canada, we explored the experiences and perceptions of 15 mentor and 29 mentee coaches who participated in a formal virtual parasport coach mentorship program. Data were gathered via focus groups and individual interviews and analyzed using a reflexive thematic analysis. Mentor coaches built a virtual relationship through mutual trust and respect and were perceived by their mentees as supportive, motivating, and knowledgeable. Mentee coaches valued conversations with their mentors surrounding disability-specific knowledge that enhanced their coaching efficacy. Coaches highlighted the need for a greater sense of community within parasport and recommended keeping a virtual component of the program to foster accessibility and learning. Findings provide insight into effective mentorship in parasport for researchers, practitioners, and organizations overseeing this important initiative. Our results will contribute to higher quality experiences for Canadian parasport coaches and athletes and work to progress the growth of parasport worldwide.

Word Count: 150/150

Keywords: Disability sport, formal mentorship, e-learning, coaching

Highlights

- Mentor coaches were characterized as supportive, motivating, and knowledgeable.
- Mentee coaches desired and acquired disability-specific coaching knowledge.
- Mentors and mentees desired a greater sense of community between parasport coaches.
- Mentee coaches valued the option for virtual learning to foster accessibility.

Exploring Coaches' Experiences and Perceptions of a Virtual Parasport Coach Mentorship Program

Bentzen and colleagues (2021) conducted a scoping review of academic literature pertaining to parasport coaches. The authors reviewed the literature on parasport coaching from a variety of data bases (e.g., PsycINFO, PubMed) and charted 44 peer-reviewed articles from 1991 to 2019. Among the results, the authors noted that *becoming a parasport coach* was a commonly discussed topic within the literature (e.g., Cregan et al., 2007; Douglas et al., 2018; Lepage et al., 2020; Wareham et al., 2018). One of the first empirical studies in this domain belongs to Cregan and colleagues (2007), who interviewed six parasport swim coaches and found they all began their careers coaching in able-bodied sport and only began coaching parasport when an athlete with a disability began training at their pool. Douglas and colleagues (2018) also interviewed Paralympic head coaches on their career development. Notably, all of their participants identified as having a disability. Despite also having elite experience as parasport athletes, all the coaches had acquired additional coaching knowledge from other sources, including peers, mentors, and formal education opportunities. Taken together, the pathway to parasport coaching is not always intentional, leaving coaches to acquire disability-specific coaching information in various ways (e.g., informal or formal coach mentorship).

Sports coach mentorship has received increasing attention over the last 25 years in pursuit of enhancing coach learning and development (Bloom et al., 1998; Chambers, 2015; Jones et al., 2009; Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021; Lefebvre et al., 2020). Much of this research was conceptualized around Kram's (1985) mentor role theory which describes effective mentorship as those who provide career-related (e.g., sponsorship, challenging assignments) and psychosocial (e.g., enhanced competence and confidence) outcomes to their mentees in an

informal or formal context. Regarding formal settings, Koh and colleagues (2014) developed, implemented, and evaluated a formal mentoring program for novice basketball coaches in Singapore. Among the results, mentees discussed acquiring technical and psychological coaching skills from their mentors, such as athlete psychology, innovative thinking, and time management. Additionally, Banwell and colleagues (2019) explored the experiences and perceptions of mentor and mentee coaches who participated in the *Female Coach Mentorship Program* that was overseen by the Coaching Association of Canada (CAC). The results revealed that mentee coaches acquired professional (e.g., declarative and procedural knowledge) and personal benefits (e.g., psychosocial support) from their mentors that improved their learning and development.

Gagné (1984) categorized human performance and learning into five main outcomes that help to understand and conceptualize coach learning, development, and application: (1) Intellectual Skills, (2) Verbal Information, (3) Cognitive Strategies, (4) Motor Skills, and (5) Attitudes. More specifically, *intellectual skills*, or procedural knowledge, encompasses the acquisition of concepts, rules, and procedures. In a sport setting, this could reflect a coaches' ability to develop and implement technical drills within practice. *Verbal Information*, or declarative knowledge, refers to one's ability to organize, identify, and recall information and produce meaningful declarations or statements. As a coach, this represents his or her ability to retrieve pertinent coaching information (e.g., understanding the physiological and psychological intersection of cerebral palsy), and confidently state a plan of action (e.g., an athlete may need a certain amount of recovery time after an intensive practice). *Cognitive Strategies* reflect strategic knowledge and the ability to apply declarative and procedural knowledge to various problem-solving tasks. For example, a coach may need to develop "if-then" situations for a playoff period in which the team discusses their game plan when leading versus trailing in points. *Motor Skills*

refer to movements that can be learned and refined over time through deliberate repetition, such as a forehand versus backhand serve in table tennis, which can translate into being a sparring partner for their athletes. Finally, *attitudes* encompass internal states that influence our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. For instance, a coach may adopt a person-centered or autonomy-supportive coaching style, which has the potential to influence athlete motivation, satisfaction, and performance. Taken together, Gagné's (1984) five categories help us better understand desired learning outcomes for coaches participating in coach education opportunities, including mentorship.

With an expanded desire to provide mentorship opportunities to sport coaches around the globe, researchers have emphasized the importance for an individualized approach to mentoring to accommodate the complexities and contextual differences in various sport contexts (Jones et al., 2009; Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021; Sawiuk et al., 2018). Considering that parasport coaches have repeatedly called for coach education to provide contextually specific information (e.g., Lepage et al., 2020), there is a need for mentorship programs to present a unique learning opportunity for this population and avoid a "one size fits all" approach. This desire was echoed by one of the first studies on coach mentorship in parasport by Fairhurst and colleagues (2017) who interviewed six Canadian Paralympic coaches on their mentoring experiences. Coaches reported learning parasport-specific skills during their mentorship, such as highly specialized disability information and training plans, considered this relationship to be their most significant learning experience, and recommended the creation of formal mentoring programs for parasport coaches to acquire in-depth knowledge for coaching athletes with disabilities. Thus, there is theoretical and practical benefit to providing a contextually specific mentorship opportunity in the parasport context.

Due to the restraints of the COVID-19 pandemic, many - if not all - sport programs around the globe were restricted or shut down since March 2020, impacting the utility of in-person gatherings. The use of virtual mentorship programs has been increasing in popularity, both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, within various contexts including academia (Speer et al., 2021), mental health (Keeler et al., 2018), and sport (Grant et al., 2020). Within the sport context, Grant and colleagues (2020) interviewed 12 mentee and 12 mentor US lacrosse coaches who participated in an online mentoring program and found that coaches experienced a number of benefits, such as enhanced lacrosse-specific knowledge, confidence, and a sense of fulfillment. Coaches also discussed barriers from the e-mentoring program, including scheduling conflicts with their mentor/mentee or technological difficulties with the online platform. Thus, coaches recommended that future programs provide the participant coaches with flexibility in communication methods (e.g.., video chat, text message, email, telephone). Taken together, there have been a small number of formalized mentoring programs for coaches of able-bodied athletes, with the majority conducted in person, however it has yet to be determined how these findings relate to a parasport program.

With the aim of providing parasport coaches a formalized learning opportunity, a coaching association in Canada created and implemented a virtual parasport coach mentorship program to foster the acquisition of professional knowledge for parasport coaches. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the program was structured to a virtual format. Consequently, the purpose of our study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of mentor and mentee coaches who participated in this formal virtual mentorship program. More specifically, this study was guided by the following research questions: (1) In which ways (if any) did mentee coaches learn and develop on a professional level through their mentoring relationships and/or the mentorship

program? (2) How did participant coaches experience and perceive mentorship on a virtual platform? and (3) What recommendations do mentors and mentees have towards future installments of the mentorship program?

Methods

The Mentorship Program

A large provincial coaching association in Canada developed a year-long parasport coach mentorship program designed to provide mentor and mentee coaches with a formalized professional network to enhance their coaching practices. Mentor and mentee coach pairings were encouraged to meet for a minimum of 30-minutes per month. The mentorship program was developed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, therefore it had to be adapted to a virtual context from its original in-person purpose. Various adaptations to the program were implemented, such as hosting virtual webinars or workshops as opposed to in-person events. Additionally, based on previous research in e-mentoring and coaching (e.g., Grant et al., 2020), coaches were encouraged to use the communicative method of their choice (e.g., text message, email, video chat, telephone) to promote flexibility and personal choice within the relationship.

In line with the virtual context, the association implemented three assignments, three webinars, and three online workshops designed to provide coaches with structured learning opportunities throughout the program. Assignments were used to foster connection and commitment between mentors and mentees (e.g., developing a learning plan for the season, creating goals, and reflecting on progress). Webinars were provided as opportunities for coaches to network, connect, and learn about parasport-specific information from researchers, practitioners, and leaders in the field, including Canadian Paralympic athletes. Finally, coaches were provided various workshops throughout the program depending on their role as mentor or

mentee. Assignments, webinars, and workshops were provided throughout the program and acted as educational opportunities, as well as a chance for mentors and mentees to interact with other coaches in the program and develop a sense of community. For a more detailed description of the mentorship program, please see Table 3.1.

Philosophical Assumptions

Our research was guided from an interpretivist paradigm using a relativist ontology and a subjectivist/transactional epistemology (Poucher et al., 2020). We felt that a relativist ontology was appropriate for our study as we were not interested in a single truth for how a parasport mentorship program *should* be implemented or one answer for how it could be improved. Instead, we were interested in the multiple realities that existed based on the varying experiences, backgrounds, and perceptions that came from the individual participants. We also considered a subjectivist/transactional epistemology as an appropriate choice for the context of our study as we were interested in having conversational dialogue with coaches surrounding their experiences participating in this program. Thus, it was important to consider all parties involved in the co-creation of knowledge. The research team consisted of a PhD student and supervisor, both with experience conducting research on parasport coaching, as well as two stakeholders from the coaching association. These stakeholders led the creation and dissemination of the mentorship program, whereas the two researchers led the data collection and analysis.

Participants

Following ethical approval at the authors' university institution, 29 mentee and 15 mentor coaches voluntarily consented to participate in this program. Mentors were required to have a minimum of 10 years' experience as a head coach of a parasport team and mentees were required to have under five years of experience coaching in the parasport context. The

participants were asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire during the first month of the mentorship program. Forty-two out of 44 coach participants completed this questionnaire. Among the information provided, 25 coaches identified as female (59.5%) and 17 as male (42.9%), seven coaches reported having a disability themselves (16.7%), 24 coaches identified having a friend or family with a disability (57.1%), and all but five participants had completed the NCCP *Coaching Athletes with a Disability* e-learning module prior to starting the program (88.1%). Multiple mentee coaches reported having little to no experience coaching athletes with disabilities prior to the start of the program. Full participant demographic information can be found in Table 3.2.

Data Collection

We used focus group and individual semi-structured interviews to acquire participant experiences and perceptions throughout the program.

Focus Groups

Focus groups (Krueger, 2014; Smith & Sparkes, 2016) were conducted at the mid-point of the program with three purposes in mind: (a) for the *participants* to experience a sense of community with other mentor/mentee coaches in the parasport context, (b) for the *organization* to ensure that mentors and mentees were fulfilling their requirements and to identify any desired changes that could be implemented in the second half of the program, and (c) for us as *researchers* to utilize the information from the focus groups to develop and refine the content of the interview guide for the individual interviews at the end of the program.

Two 120-minute focus groups were conducted; one for the mentees and one for the mentors. Five mentors (five male) and six mentees (four female, two male) participated in their focus groups respectively. The focus groups were led by the lead researcher who worked

alongside the organizational team to develop semi-structured, open-ended questions to pose to the group. Major questions included: “Describe your experiences working with your apprentice/mentor, including your most memorable experience.”, “What are some of the key things that you learned from your mentor that you plan on implementing into your coaching practice?”, “Please describe an experience with your mentor/mentee that you considered to be positive or beneficial to your own professional development.”, and “In what ways (if any) have you experienced challenges or barriers within your mentee/mentor relationship so far?”. The focus groups averaged 123 minutes in length.

Semi-Structured Interviews

One-on-one, virtual interviews were conducted at the end of the mentorship program with eight mentors (two female, six male) and eight mentees (six female, two male). A semi-structured, open ended interview guide was created in collaboration with the research and organizational team to acquire information on the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the program, preferences regarding coach learning, as well as recommendations for improvement (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Major questions included: “Describe a typical meeting with your mentor.", “Describe the topics you typically discussed with your mentors.”, “Reflecting back to your goals and objectives for participating in this program, do you feel that you got the information you were looking for?”, and “What recommendations would you provide to the organizers in revising this mentorship program for the next iteration?”. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for the participants to receive a uniform set of questions yet provided the flexibility of discussing relevant topics outside of the guide (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The individual interviews averaged 53.71 minutes for mentees and 58.37 for mentors.

Data Analysis

Data collected from the focus groups and individual interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using a reflexive thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2016). Reflexive thematic analyses are commonly used in coaching psychology literature to interpret and understand the lived experiences of the participants and obtain a descriptive account of a particular phenomenon (e.g., Henderson et al., in press). The lead researcher began by reading over the interview transcripts multiple times while taking notes of data pertaining to the research questions. The lead author then engaged in complete coding of the data in which main ideas were identified and labelled with initial codes. The second author acted as a critical friend who challenged, supported, and questioned the lead researcher's initial thinking and labelling (see McGannon et al., 2021), which led to a richer and more comprehensive interpretation of the data. We further analyzed the data to identify larger patterns and themes within and across the transcripts and devised themes and sub-themes that represented our participant experiences. For example, mentee coaches discussed benefits derived from the program in which individual codes were labelled as "Provided Confidence", "Provided Knowledge", "Goal Setting", and "Varying Disabilities" and then grouped into "Mentee Outcomes" and finally into one of our main themes: "Coach Learning". After continuous reflection and revisions with the research team, we felt confident with our final set of three themes to portray the experiences and perceptions of our coaches: Building a Virtual Relationship, Coach Learning, and Coach Perceptions.

Trustworthiness

Supporting our relativist philosophical positioning, we chose a flexible set of characterizing traits (Smith & Caddick, 2012; Smith & McGannon, 2018). First, we made a concerted effort to be *transparent* in our research process by outlining our own experiences and

positions within the parasport context (Smith & Caddick, 2012). The organizers were responsible for the design and implementation of the program, whereas the researchers were responsible for understanding the perceptions of the participants involved. We felt it was important for the person leading the data collection to be removed from designing and implementing the program to minimize bias in conducting interviews and for participants to feel comfortable sharing their opinions with a more objective third party. Second, we strove to be *reflexive* throughout the research process by keeping an audit trail, taking journal notes after each interview and focus group, and by using a critical friend to challenge the interpretations and perspectives of the lead author (Smith & McGannon, 2018). These reflexive methods aimed to ensure that we, as authors, were aware of our personal experiences, assumptions, and biases that worked to co-create knowledge and contributed to a rich understanding of the participant experiences. Finally, we attempted to obtain *coherence* by collecting data from multiple perspectives, including both the mentor and mentee coaches, as well as using multiple methods of data collection at various time points throughout the year-long program (focus groups at mid-point, interviews at the end; Smith & Caddick, 2012).

Results

Our analysis led to the identification of three overarching themes describing (1) how the virtual mentoring relationship was developed, (2) the learning outcomes that mentees developed, and (3) perceptions of the program, including recommendations, advice, and final remarks. Mentee and mentor quotes from the focus groups and semi-structured interviews are included with a pseudonym to protect the anonymity of each participant. Identifiable information, including sport type and disability, has also been removed.

Building a Virtual Relationship

Mentor coaches were asked to reflect on how they actively developed rapport with their mentees. Many mentors noted the importance of building this relationship, which was a process that was developed over time and based on mutual trust and respect:

> I mean it's like dating – you can't just rush into something like that. Right, it's true (laughs). You have to take time to know her or him... Let's talk, let's chat it out, how's everything going, and then it got to the point where it was like "what do you do when you're not coaching? What do you do as a person?". How's your family, do you have kids, stuff like that. I think when I started bringing that up to them, they were like "Oh he cares about me, about what I'm doing" (Todd, Mentor, Interview).

> Any success I've had with coaching involves developing trust and rapport. You just can't come in and say I'm coach [name], trust me... you build trust in small steps. If you're honest and have some fun they're going to respect and trust you. I just approached them as I would with any human being who I respect (Jim, Mentor, Interview).

In most cases, at the beginning of the program, mentors and mentees decided on the frequency, length, and communication method of meetings, with many pairs meeting weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly for 30-60 minutes through a virtual platform (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams) or by telephone. Multiple mentor coaches highlighted the importance of being able to see their mentee's faces, almost simulating an in-person face-to-face conversation, to build a connection:

> I want to see their facial reactions because if I say to somebody "have you tried this", I want to see the reaction. The eyes tell the truth... They're going to tell you pretty quickly if I'm on the right track or not (Jim, Mentor, Focus Group).

Taken together, mentor coaches used varying methods to build a strong, relational connection with their mentees in hopes of developing trust and respect, which ultimately led to a number of learning outcomes for the mentee coaches over time.

Coach Learning

With the overarching aim of the program to develop and train incoming or inexperienced mentee parasport coaches, a significant amount of time was spent discussing learning outcomes derived from the program and their mentoring relationships. Thus, coach learning will be described in more detail below using three of Gagné's (1984) learning outcomes: attitudes, intellectual skills, and cognitive strategies.

Attitudes

Throughout the mentorship program, mentor coaches actively shaped the mentee's ability to stay motivated and positive throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Many coaches highlighted how interacting with their mentors worked to enhance their feelings of passion and excitement for when they could return to coaching:

> He's really helped point me in the right direction and get me really excited about the potential to coach in the future. I'm very grateful and he has offered himself to continue chatting with me, meeting with me, any questions. We've developed quite a relationship (Yvonne, Mentee, Interview).

Mentoring through the pandemic was a particularly unique and critical component of the relationship as providing mentees with motivation was challenging due to the government-imposed restrictions and lack of coaching opportunities. This often left mentee coaches feeling like they had no chances to apply what they were learning in the field. Mentee coach Eric explained:

> That's the piece that I've missed. It's one thing to watch a movie and it's another to appear in it. You don't get to fail and learn from those failures. I've got all this stuff written down but I haven't been able to actually kind of get out of the classroom.

To combat this challenge in motivation, mentors strove to provide support to their mentees, both on a psychosocial and tangible level. Psychosocially, it was clear that being a supportive mentor who was willing to listen and genuinely care for their mentees was valuable from the perspective of both mentors and mentees. Mentor coach Tom explained: "For me, [an effective mentor is] somebody who's willing to listen or to be there no matter what the question you're talking about is". A similar sentiment was shared by Mentee Eric:

> The nice thing about a good mentor is they're actually interested in helping you. They're not just doing it because they have community hours to fulfill, but they actually want to pass on some knowledge. They want to see you succeed in helping athletes.

Coaches also highlighted receiving or providing support on a practical level through tangible resources, such as training plans and parasport contacts:

> I think I would have had a lot of problems if I wanted to start [a parasport program prior to this mentorship program]. I wouldn't have known where to start. But going through this whole program, it's really helped me to understand "this is what I need to do" and get the resources needed. I've learned a lot, it's been so good! (Janet, Mentee, Interview).

As a result, the mentor's ability to motivate and provide support to their mentee coaches proved to be an important aspect of mentoring within the COVID-19 pandemic and allowed them to visualize a positive, efficacious future in coaching.

Intellectual Skills

Due to their lack of experience coaching in the parasport context, many mentees described feeling unsure or unprepared to coach athletes with disabilities. In conjunction with the learning opportunities offered through the program (e.g., disability-specific webinars and workshops, see Table 3.1), mentor coaches actively worked to enhance their mentee's parasport coaching efficacy. For example, one participant had in-depth conversations with his mentor about how to address disability with his athletes and explained:

> He told me three little tips. First, ask if the athletes need help before assuming it. Second, you generally would click heels when you meet an athlete with no arms. And third, be absolutely blunt with your athletes and ask them "how do you make this work for yourself?" I found those three things helped me understand how to connect (Eric, Mentee, Focus Group).

Other mentees described how they learned about appropriate disability terminology to use when discussing parasport or coaching athletes with disabilities:

> I always thought that it's so important for everyone to be treated equal, no matter if they have a disability or not. But now with everything, with all these webinars and courses I've done, I think so much differently now. So my word is now inclusive like "you're not being inclusive". And he also advised me [of] certain terms we should not be using, so we have to be more careful in the choice of word (Erin, Mentee, Interview).

Mentee coach Mackenzie described learning about functional ability and disability from her mentor who had a disability himself:

> I learned a little bit more about classifications of athletes. I figured if you broke your neck at the shoulder blades, from their downward you will be paralyzed – but that's not

> necessarily true. You could be paralyzed but still have function down your arms so it was a learning curve for me because [my mentor] jumps up and down on his chair like there's no problem, but he has no core body strength (Mackenzie, Mentee, Interview).

Thus, mentee coaches were interested in the disability side of coaching parasport, many with questions related to changing their coaching behaviours based on the needs of the athletes. Although mentees considered these conversations to be valuable towards an enhanced understanding of disability-specific knowledge, they still noted that more specialized and practical training was needed to fully feel confident and comfortable coaching athletes with disabilities. Mentee Cassidy reflected on this point:

> Researcher: How do you feel after one year now, how is your comfort level in coaching parasport?
>
> Cassidy: It's probably sixty percent.
>
> Researcher: What did it start with?
>
> Cassidy: Oh, probably about ten percent [laughing]. Yeah, so it's been a big improvement... The people were so enthusiastic [letting me] know that it's okay if you don't know everything, everybody's learning. I think that was really helpful.

As a result, mentee coaches described how the program played a role in enhancing their feelings of efficacy to coach athletes with disabilities, yet still desired a more hands-on and practical mentoring experience to fully acquire this confidence.

Cognitive Strategies

Finally, mentors discussed ways in which they set up their mentoring sessions to foster mentee coach learning. Some mentors took on a leadership role in which they developed

hypothetical scenarios for mentees to reflect upon, brainstorm, and discuss with their mentors to acquire practical or applied experience.

> I would impose open scenarios where I would give them 5 to 10 minutes to come back with their answers. I said you're an assistant coach and you have been assigned to Mary who's the head coach on an intellectually challenged team. One girl has joined the team who is being aggressive during the practice and she throws a basketball at one of the other players. So, how would you handle it? What three steps would you take to rectify this or do you think it needs to be rectified? (Jim, Mentor, Interview).
>
> The great thing about [mentor coach] is that every meeting was different. It first started with a regular discussion... and then we got into scenarios, and I think that really helped. Coming up with a scenario that would probably happen while you're coaching. What if an athlete gets injured, what would you do? (Karen, Mentee, Interview).

To foster autonomy-support, mentors also adopted case study approaches that placed the responsibility of topics and content in the hands of the mentee. For example, Mentor Janet explained:

> When we first were getting into it, [my mentee] chose a disability of the week. Each week, she would research a different disability and come with questions, "how would you adapt for this?" or "how would you approach that?". We also did some case studies, which was useful. She was really interested in leadership development skills and how you work your way up as a coach.

Thus, hypothetical case study approaches were an effective method of developing cognitive strategies for their mentee coaches, allowed for a more hands-on approach to coach learning despite the virtual restrictions, and in some cases, provided the mentees choice in their learning.

Coach Perceptions

The last theme represented mentee and mentor perceptions of the program, including recommendations for the organizational stakeholders, advice for incoming mentee and mentor coaches, as well as final remarks on the program.

Recommendations to the Organizational Stakeholders

Although many mentee and mentor coaches described a strong and meaningful connection within their mentoring relationships, one recommendation that was discussed among the participants was the desire for a stronger community between other participant coaches in the program: “I would have loved to hear from the other mentors. I don’t think I even know the names of everyone in the program and I definitely think there could have been more inclusivity with everyone in the program” (Karen, Mentee, Interview). In fact, participants highlighted enjoying the focus group sessions as a way to connect with and interact with other participant coaches. From our individual interviews, it appeared that many mentor coaches acquired a sense of confidence in their role as a mentor from the focus group session by acquiring validation from other coaches who were experiencing the program similarly to them. Mentor coach Bill explained:

> I know this gathering [the focus group] is very beneficial to me hearing about what the other coaches are doing. It validates some of the things I think I’m doing right... at least there’s that gauge to say, “oh okay I think I’m on the right track”. I think the mentees might need that as well. When they start to see other mentees gain the same, or have the same type of experiences, or some similarities, then I think it would also validate why they’re in that program.

Thus, coaches valued these meetings to connect, network, and share experiences, as well as acquire confidence and validation in their practices. Another recommendation discussed by mentee coaches in the focus groups was to continue providing an option for virtual connection and learning. For example, Mentee Nicole and Mentee Eric highlighted that participation in the program may not always be possible without the virtual component due to accessibility or geographic concerns:

> Mentee Nicole: I don't think the mentorship would have been possible without [the virtual component]. I'm from a small community and I don't drive. I have [insert disability] so my only transportation would have been on the train. Had it not been for the pandemic and [the] lockdown and this environment we have right now, I probably wouldn't have been included.
>
> Mentee Eric: I actually think the online piece is invaluable because it greatly opens up your capacity to meet with people who aren't geographically able to work with you.

Taken together, although the participants were desiring a human connection, they also highlighted the benefits of learning online to maximize the accessibility of the program.

Advice to Future Mentors/Mentees

As the final question of the individual interviews, each participant was asked to give advice to an incoming mentee or mentor (depending on their role) for the next iteration of the mentorship program. Based on their experiences with their own mentoring relationships, mentor coaches advised incoming mentors to follow their mentee's lead, know their own skillset, to research varying disabilities, and to understand their mentee's goals:

> Follow the lead of the mentee. That's what worked well for me. I found that it was successful when [mentee name] would bring something up and then I could say "well

> what about this" or "well why don't we look at a case study?" or "how would you approach this?" It's following their lead and knowing where you can slide yourself in to help (Janet, Mentor, Interview).
>
> I think the mentors need to make an effort to research some of the disabilities that they're not familiar with – in particular the congenital ones, the acquired ones are pretty standard, but the congenital ones, not so much (Sharon, Mentor, Interview).

Mentee coaches advised incoming mentees to ask questions, be adaptable, trust your mentor, be willing to learn, be patient, and have a concrete goal coming into the program:

> Don't be afraid to ask questions, you're there to learn as a coach, to improve your coaching, to educate yourself. Mentors are there to help you, to assist you, so you can further your coaching (Erin, Mentee, Interview).
>
> Have an open mind, listen, and hear what that person has to say. I'm that type of person, I am a digger, I dig for information. I think just be open minded with everything and feel the excitement and passion that your mentor has (Yvonne, Mentee, Interview).

Final Remarks

Overall, there was an overwhelming sense of positivity at the end of the mentorship program, with many asking to be involved in the following year's program. Mentees were particularly grateful for their mentor's knowledge and commitment to helping them grow as a coach and valued the process on a personal and professional level:

> The mentorship piece was absolutely critical for me because I had a fantastic mentor but other than that [pause], I was super grateful that I got the opportunity. I definitely am not walking away empty-handed. I've got way more tools now, way more experiences, way more thoughts. So yeah... super grateful (Eric, Mentee, Interview).

> Mentorship programs are so important and I don't understand why every coach doesn't take advantage. It's there to be had, it's valuable experience to go through and I think it adds so much more to you personally (Yvonne, Mentee, Interview).

Mentors echoed these sentiments highlighting the need to continue formal mentorship programs in parasport to continue the development and connection of parasport coaches over the years:

> I think [mentorship] is a gap in our system. I think this is where we need to grow the most... because what mentorship does is take the mentee from the science of coaching to the art of coaching... Part of the reason why I mentor is because I was taught to give back by my mentors. They freely gave to me and the only way I can thank them is to do that to somebody else. That builds a whole system where we save the knowledge that is being generated (Chris, Mentor, Interview).

> I have nothing but positive thoughts; everybody has been excellent.… it was wonderful. Just think a big thank you to all of you has to go out. I've learned a lot, gained confidence, and was able to hopefully enlighten others (Tom, Mentor, Interview).

Discussion

This study explored the experiences and perceptions of mentor and mentee coaches participating in a formal virtual parasport coach mentorship program. Mentor coaches were characterized as supportive, motivating, and knowledgeable. Mentee coaches particularly valued conversations with their mentors surrounding disability-specific coaching information that helped to enhance their coaching efficacy. Mentor and mentee coaches highlighted their desire for a greater sense of connection and community among members of the mentorship program and recommended that organizers continue offering a virtual component for coaches living in varying geographic locations as a way for coaches to connect with each other and continue

learning their craft. Our discussion will expand on unique aspects of parasport including how to: include disability-specific information in coach education, use mentorship and peer learning as a tool for enhancing confidence and validation for parasport coaches, and target and tailor mentorship programs to the specific needs of the population.

Mentee Learning and Parasport Coach Education

Our findings suggested that participation in the mentorship program led to mentee coach learning with regards to their attitudes, intellectual skills (procedural knowledge), and cognitive strategies (cf. Gagné 1984). For instance, to enhance cognitive strategies of mentees, some mentors implemented case study approaches to learning in which a hypothetical situation was presented, and mentee coaches were responsible for brainstorming or discussing methods of problem-solving (e.g., how to coach athletes with varying disabilities). Although case studies have been considered a valuable tool for coach learning (Eastman, 2016), parasport coach education researchers have cautioned the use of hypothetical learning scenarios focusing on a single disability type, such as intellectual disabilities, in fear of perpetuating categorical overrepresentations or stereotypes about athletes with disabilities (Townsend et al., 2018). For example, Townsend and colleagues (2018) examined the influence of a disability-specific education program for coaches of athletes with autism who used scenario-based learning and found that coaches adopted a "one size fits all" approach to coaching (e.g., "Autistic individuals hate noise", p. 357) that emphasized fixing the athlete or the problem of the disability. Thus, it is important for mentors to carefully craft their messages surrounding disability – in this case, provide their mentees with disability-specific information without relaying the message that every athlete with a disability will fit into a universal category of coaching. It is also important for coaches to critically consider the potential impact of using hypothetical scenarios for coach

learning and be cognizant of avoiding overgeneralizations of disability types. Instead, coaches are encouraged to shift their focus onto the knowledge, strategies, and behaviours of the coach and his or her role in creating an inclusive environment for all athletes (Thurston et al., in press). Taken together, it is undeniable that disability-specific information has been consistently valued and desired from the parasport community, both from the perspectives of coaches (Fairhurst et al., 2017) and athletes (Alexander et al., 2020). While we believe this information should be offered within parasport coach learning opportunities, including formal mentoring programs, it is equally important for coaches to understand how a focus on categorical disability types can limit their ability to individualize and innovate their approaches for each athlete.

Mentorship as a Source for Community and Validation

Our findings demonstrated that mentor coaches acquired a sense of validation from their peers in the focus groups with regards to how they were experiencing the program. Coaches appreciated hearing and speaking with other like-minded coaches in this small group meeting, and since it was only held at one time-point, coaches desired a greater sense of community among members of the program outside their mentoring relationship. This finding is consistent with previous coaching research in which coaches seek communities of practice to facilitate learning and development (Bloom, 2013; Culver & Trudel, 2008), which has recently been highlighted within the parasport coaching literature as a method of enhancing confidence and knowledge (Duarte et al., 2021; Lepage et al., 2020). For example, Duarte and colleagues (2021) assessed the value of a virtual social learning intervention in which 16 wheelchair curling coaches (with varying coaching experience), six wheelchair curling technical leaders (e.g., high-performance directors, team managers) and three researchers engaged in online group meetings to foster connection and knowledge sharing. Among their findings, coaches reported enhanced

feelings of inclusion despite their geographic distances, faster access to knowledgeable peers to answer questions, and greater confidence to join conversations with their more experienced peers. Consistent with our study and recent coach mentorship programs in able-bodied sport (Grant et al., 2020), the community of practice developed and implemented by Duarte and colleagues (2021) was built on a virtual platform. The virtual component of our program led to contrasting feelings of connection: on one hand, leading to enhanced feelings of isolation and lack of in-person connection as found by Callary et al. 2020, yet also leading to enhanced networking among coaches in varying geographic locations (Lepage et al., 2020). These contrasting feelings indicate that there is not one "best approach" to coach learning in the parasport context. Rather, we believe in supporting a diverse array of coach learning opportunities, including one-on-one mentorship in both the virtual and face-to-face context as well as group-based communities of practice to provide coaches with diverse and empirically supported learning initiatives.

Greater Attention on Marginalized Populations

Mentor coaches talked about the professional obligation and sense of stewardship they felt to grow parasport by disseminating knowledge to inexperienced coaches through mentorship. This sense of personal responsibility to disseminate knowledge appears to be indicative of the lack of formal education opportunities historically available for parasport coaches (Fairhurst et al., 2017). To date, there are four coach education courses in the NCCP designed specifically for parasport, including goalball, wheelchair basketball, wheelchair rugby, and boccia, and two courses for coaching athletes with intellectual disabilities through the Special Olympics (CAC, 2021a). This is concerning when you consider there are currently 22 summer and six winter Paralympic sports (International Paralympic Committee, 2021). As such, coach education

through the NCCP is currently unavailable for the large majority of parasports. Further, Konoval and colleagues (2020) reviewed the NCCP and found that only 7% of materials covered content on coaching athletes with disabilities and recommended a greater focus on interpersonal (e.g., communication and pedagogy) and intrapersonal (e.g., addressing biases and assumptions) coaching knowledge, as well as information specific to disability-inclusion, such as guidance on disability types, equipment, and considerations for accessibility. This discrepancy in parasport coach education is consistent across the globe, as countries such as the USA, Australia, and the UK offer diverse opportunities, such as one-time educational opportunities in a handful of disability sports (Culver et al., 2020). These inconsistencies limit the global progression of parasport and highlight how parasport may share similarities with other marginalized communities in sport, including, but not limited to racial, gender, and sexual minorities. With an understanding of the challenges that minority sport populations have faced compared to mainstream sport (Alexander et al., 2020; Joseph & McKenzie, in press; LaVoi et al., 2019), the CAC has recently implemented a variety of diverse mentorship resources for coaches and/or athletes identifying as LGTBQ, Indigenous, Black, and female to provide support and resources for marginalized communities within sport (CAC, 2021b). Although there remains work to be done, this increased attention to creating contextualized programs and resources is promising for advancing the development of sport and coach learning for minority populations, such as parasport.

Recommendations and Conclusions

The results of this study provide a number of practical recommendations that are significant to the parasport community. Even though almost all of our mentee coaches completed the *Coaching Athletes with a Disability* e-learning module prior to the onset of the program, they

still lacked confidence and knowledge to coach in this unique setting. Thus, parasport coaching federations are encouraged to provide novice coaches with foundational knowledge on disability and parasport, through structured learning opportunities (i.e., webinars delivered by parasport community members or disability specialists; Fairhurst et al., 2017), communities of practice, and formal or informal mentoring relationships. There is a need for mentor coaches to be trained on empirically based mentorship principles (e.g., Kram, 1985) to facilitate career and psychosocial outcomes for their mentees as well as *how* to engage in effective mentorship through interpersonal connection. Narrative-collaborative coaching (see Milistetd et al., 2018) is an interesting avenue in peer-to-peer coaching as it presents mentor coaches as co-constructors of knowledge, reflection, and understanding in the mentorship dialogue. Thus, parasport coach mentorship programs should consider implementing narrative-collaborative coaching principles within formal mentor training. With regards to the program itself, the virtual platform led some coaches to feel underwhelmed with the experience and desired an in-person connection, whereas other coaches appreciated the accessibility of online learning and recommended this to continue in future iterations of the mentorship program. On a practical level, mentorship programs can benefit from understanding these various viewpoints collected from coaches who participated in one of the first formal mentorship program designed for the parasport context. Continued implementation of formal mentoring programs will allow researchers and organizations the opportunity to better understand the diverse viewpoints that mentee and mentor coaches raised in our study (e.g., virtual versus in-person) to ultimately implement a coach learning opportunity that best serves the needs of this population.

Although this study has a number of strengths, including a partnership with a coaching association as well as multiple methods and time points for data collection, this research is not

without limitations. For example, the formal mentorship program was originally designed for an in-person environment, however due to COVID-19, had to be adapted to a virtual context and many coaches were unable to coach in-person at the time of the data acquisition. Thus, follow-up data from this cohort of participants would be ideal to understand how coaches have incorporated the information learned from this program into their own long-term coaching practices. Additional methods of data collection and research designs would also be valuable, such as quantitative measures of learning outcomes and designs targeting the perspectives of athletes or coach dyads to better understand how mentorship influences the personal and professional development of parasport athletes. Finally, this research was conducted in the Canadian context, a country with a strong parasport tradition, therefore future researchers should work to expand our understanding of parasport coach education to countries around the globe with different cultural or contextual factors to consider.

In conclusion, we believe our study was the first to explore the experiences and perceptions of mentee and mentor parasport coaches participating in a year-long formal mentorship program. The continued implementation of this program has the potential to influence parasport progression on an individual (i.e., enhancing coach knowledge and confidence), interpersonal (i.e., increasing coaching networks and community), organizational (i.e., coaches starting parasport programs within their sport organizations) and sociocultural level (i.e., dismantling stereotypes of disability and parasport through advocacy and awareness; see Banwell et al., 2021). It is also hoped that this initial program will encourage researchers and community partners to continue working together to create the ideal parasport environment.

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Tables

Table 3.1

Basic Content of the Parasport Coach Mentorship Program

Learning Opportunity	Description	Learning Goals	Organization
Assignment 1: Communication Agreement	Mentees and mentors were asked to develop an agreement on their meetings (frequency, cancellation policy, etc.)	The goal of this assignment was to minimize conflict within the relationship with regards to communication expectations (e.g., length and frequency of the sessions) and methods (e.g., telephone, email, virtual platform).	In line with previous research on formal mentorship (e.g., Banwell et al., 2019), assignments were formally structured and delivered, however informal conversations were encouraged between mentees and mentors to complete assignments together to foster learning and development within the relationship. Although not formally tracked by the coaching association, mentees and mentors were encouraged to reflect and debrief on the applicability of the material to their coaching practices after each learning opportunity. Coaches were also
Assignment 2: Learning Plan	Mentees and mentors were asked to complete a goal setting task and consider how to create effective goals to meet mentee needs.	The aim of this assignment was to ensure that mentees and mentors were on the same page with regards to coach learning and to set the partnership up for success with clear goals and action plans.	
Assignment 3: Reflective Assignment	Mentees and mentors were asked to reflect on the parasport coach mentorship program and document their thoughts and recommendations.	The goal of this assignment was to foster reflection of the mentees and mentors with regards to their own learning and development, as well as to acquire perceived strengths, limitations, and recommendations for the program.	

			encouraged to comment in a group discussion forum to stimulate reflection and community across participants.
Webinar 1: The Full Parasport Picture	60-minute interactive webinar led by leading Paralympians and parasport stakeholders to provide mentees and mentors information on participation and equipment.	With an understanding that the parasport context is unique in sport, the goal of this webinar was to provide coaches with a better understanding of participation and equipment considerations for coaches to be mindful of.	Webinars were presented on a live virtual platform. Coaches were strongly encouraged to attend webinars live, however webinars 2 and 3 were recorded for those who were unable to attend at the time of delivery.
Webinar 2: Quality Disability Sport Participation	60-minute interactive webinar led by a leading coaching researcher on quality participation in parasport.	The aim of this workshop was to provide coaches with an enhanced understanding of what quality participation means in the parasport context and to develop a personalized blueprint for creating quality experiences as a parasport coach.	
Webinar 3: Classification	60-minute moderated session with Canadian Paralympian about classification in parasport.	To goal of this webinar was to provide coaches with a better understanding and knowledge of the classification system in parasport.	
Workshop 1: NCCP Coaching	45-minute NCCP module designed to prepare and educate coaches on coaching	The aim of this workshop was to educate coaches with a foundation of principles to be	Workshops were provided on a live virtual platform or completed

Athletes with a Disability	athletes with a disability. This workshop was only for coaches who had not previously completed the CAWAD module.	aware of and implement when coaching athletes with disabilities (e.g., inclusive language).	through module-based learning.
Workshop 2: NCCP Mentorship	For mentors only: One day NCCP workshop designed to prepare individuals for their roles as mentors.	The goal of this workshop was to provide mentors with a formal training opportunity to learn effective mentoring principles through behavioural techniques, such as paraphrasing, pacing and leading, and active listening.	
Workshop 3: Transformational Coaching	In this 60-minute interactive workshop, coaches were educated on transformational coaching and association behaviours (Turnnidge & Côté, 2017).	Coaches learned about and reflected on transformational coaching behaviours and were given opportunities to reflect, practice, and receive feedback on their use of these behaviours in their own coaching practices.	

Note: Abbreviations: NCCP: National Coaching Certification Program, CAWAD: Coaching Athletes with a Disability. Apart from NCCP workshops/modules, learning opportunities were created by the stakeholders from the coaching organization, leading researchers, or parasport stakeholders. Topics and content for assignments, webinars, and workshops were derived from previous research in coaching and mentorship (e.g., Banwell et al., 2019; Turnnidge & Côté, 2017).

Table 3.2

Demographic Information

	Mentees		Mentors	
	N	%	*N*	%
Age				
18-24	5	17.9	1	7.1
25-34	5	17.9	2	14.3
35-44	7	25	3	21.4
45-54	5	17.9	4	28.6
55+	6	21.4	4	28.6
Gender				
Male	9	32.1	8	57.1
Female	19	67.9	6	42.9
Education				
High School	4	14.3	2	14.3
College	18	64.3	9	64.3
Postgraduate	5	17.9	3	21.4
Other/Do not wish to specify	1	3.6	0	0
Do you have a physical disability?				
Yes	5	17.9	2	14.3
No	22	82.1	12	85.7
Friend or family member with a physical disability				
Yes	14	50	10	71.4
No	14	50	3	21.4
Do not wish to specify	0	0	1	7.1
Competitive level of athletes they coach				
Grassroots/Community	2	7.1	2	14.3
Developmental/Competitive	22	78.6	10	71.4
High-Performance	3	10.7	2	14.3
Other	1	3.6	0	0
CAWAD completed?				
Yes	26	92.3	11	78.6
No	2	7.1	3	21.4

Note: N = 42 out of possible 44 participants.

Bridging Text

Chapter three was an original manuscript that explored the perceptions and experiences of parasport coaches engaging in one of the first formalized parasport coach mentorship programs in Canada. In their definition of coaching effectiveness, Côté and Gilbert (2009) stated that "it is well accepted that a coach's behaviours, dispositions, education, and experiences are determinants of coaching success" (p. 309) and that "coaches' knowledge and behaviors have a significant influence on athletes' psychological profile, affecting such characteristics as self-esteem, satisfaction, and perceived competence" (p. 313). Therefore, we felt it was important to shift our attention onto the behaviours of the coach and how they can effectively (or ineffectively) work to manage a collective group of parasport athletes. Chapter four explores the role of the Paralympic head coach in managing a team environment from the perspective of head coaches, support staff, and Paralympic athletes from three countries around the world.

Chapter 4

Exploring the Role of the Head Coach in Managing National Parasport Teams: Views from Head Coaches, Athletes, and Support Staff

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(Under review)

Alexander, D., Bloom, G. A., Bentzen, M., & Kenttä, G. (under review). Exploring the role of the head coach in managing national parasport teams: Views from head coaches, athletes, and support staff.

Abstract

This international study explored the role of the head coach in managing three national parasport teams from North America and Europe. Across the teams, six focus groups with athletes, three individual interviews with head coaches, and 10 individual interviews with support staff were conducted and analyzed using a reflexive thematic analysis. Among the results, coaches were responsible for managing a diverse athlete population with varying demographic and situational considerations, such as age, finances, gender, and disability. Coaches were deliberate about recruiting and managing staff members who aligned with team values and were engaged with the athletes. All team members discussed times when there was not a cohesive environment and identified coaching strategies for resolving challenges (e.g., utilizing assistant coaches and mental performance consultants). This study provides a rich understanding of the role of the coach in managing national parasport teams by incorporating multiple perspectives from three countries around the world.

Word Count: 150/150

Keywords: Disability sport, head coaches, high-performance, international collaboration

Highlights

- Among the first international collaborative studies in parasport coaching research.
- Acquired coach, athlete, and support staff perspectives from three national teams.
- Coaches carefully selected and managed their integrated support staff.
- Coaches used their support staff to help resolve team and coach-athlete conflict.

Exploring the Role of the Head Coach in Managing National Parasport Teams: Views from Head Coaches, Athletes, and Support Staff

In high-performance sport, head coaches are typically responsible for facilitating a supportive, safe, and challenging team environment for athletes and staff to succeed personally and professionally (Salcinovic et al., 2022; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). An effective or well-functioning team environment is difficult to define as multiple elements can be considered, including organizational climate, management or leadership style, behavioural norms that demonstrate team values, and personality characteristics of both the leaders and the followers (Armstrong et al., 2022; Chelladurai, 1984; Urquhart et al., 2020). For example, John Wooden, one of the winningest collegiate basketball coaches of all time, created and implemented his Pyramid of Success, in which he valued, educated, and modelled psychological characteristics, such as industriousness, enthusiasm, poise, and self-control, holding high standards on and off the court (Wooden & Tobin, 2003).

Coaching Strategies and Behaviours

There are several empirical examples of the coaching behaviours of individual coaches who have developed successful high-performance teams (e.g., Donoso-Morales et al., 2017; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Urquhart et al., 2020; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). For instance, Mallett and Lara-Bercial (2016) explored the qualities and practices of 14 serial winning coaches from around the world and found that coaches were adaptive, problem-focused, had an ongoing desire for knowledge, and strove to develop strong, emotionally intelligent relationships with their teams. In another study, Donoso-Morales and colleagues (2017) interviewed highly successful Canadian collegiate coaches and found they emphasized hard work, discipline, and determination with their athletes and coaching staff. Taken together, the coaches' personality,

values, and leadership styles have the potential to influence their athletes and lead them to success.

Compared to the coaching literature conducted in able-bodied sport on the development of successful teams (Donoso-Morales et al., 2017; Urquhart et al., 2020), high-performance parasport coaching has received significantly less attention (Bentzen et al., 2021). This is unfortunate considering the unique elements of the high-performance parasport environment, such as the integration of athletes with varying sport classifications and functional ability levels (Dehghansai et al., 2020), the two-way communication needed to understand athletes' physical capacities (Alexander et al., 2022), and contextual factors such as equipment, funding, and safety considerations (Pomerleau-Fontaine et al., 2023). As such, a subset of researchers has focused their attention on understanding effective coaching practices in the parasport context, such as adaptability to various coaching strategies or training principles (Alexander et al., 2020), open mindedness and a willingness to learn (Allan et al., 2020), as well as fostering mental health (Bentzen et al., 2022) for their athletes to develop on a personal and professional level. On a group level, Paralympic coaches identified team cohesion as a particularly important factor when creating a positive team environment as athletes may rely on their teammates to a greater extent for technical or emotional support due to their disabilities (Falcão et al., 2015). Together, these studies identified the high-performance parasport setting as a unique context for coaches to be effective and foster relationships with their athletes.

Integrated Support Staff

In addition to developing relationships with athletes, there is the need for high-performance coaches to manage and utilize members of their integrated support staff, such as, but not limited to, assistant coaches, physiotherapists, medical doctors, and strength and

conditioning coaches (Armstrong et al., 2022; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Meckbach et al., in press; Urquhart et al., 2020). For instance, Meckbach and colleagues (in press) conducted a 21-month case study on the 2018 Swedish FIFA World Cup team to understand the national head coaches' role in selecting and developing support staff. Interviews with various members of the team, including the head coach, team manager, assistant coaches, mentors, performance analysts, sport psychologists, and scouts, highlighted how the head coach carefully selected all members of his staff to ensure they were in line with his vision and values (e.g., candor, community, humility) to create a psychologically safe and collaborative team climate. Similarly, Armstrong et al. (2022) interviewed five Canadian hockey general managers who all noted the importance of finding a strong team of support staff (e.g., assistant general managers, scouting staff, coaching staff, family billets) that were aligned with the team's values. In the parasport setting, Lefebvre et al. (2021) used a social network analysis to examine the developmental networks of a wheelchair rugby team and found that peers, coaches, parents, romantic partners, and rehabilitation specialists all contributed to the athletes' development to varying degrees. There are also specialized parasport stakeholders involved in this setting that coaches may need to consider and/or manage as well, such as guides to assist athletes who are visually impaired (Bundon & Mannella, 2022), classifiers to provide athletes with classification levels to compete in parasport competitions (Patatas et al., 2020), or equipment managers to aid with knowledge of parasport-specific equipment (Lepage et al., 2020). Collectively, there are several individuals and contextual considerations that are unique to parasport that may be considered when facilitating a positive or successful team environment, and as Falcão et al. (2015) stated, "to our knowledge, no research has addressed the role of athlete support personnel in team functioning in Paralympic sport and how these individuals can affect cohesion" (p. 217).

Managing The Team Environment

When working with a group of individuals with varying roles, strong personalities, and opinions within a high stakes, performance-based environment, there is inevitable conflict for coaches to address and/or manage (Frøyen et al., 2020; Heelis et al., 2020; Jowett, 2003; Wachsmuth & Jowett, 2020). As noted by Mallett and Lara-Bercial (2016), "high performance coaching is a social activity in a highly pressurized context. Long hours, prolonged international trips, close yet hierarchical relationships with athletes and staff, within a highly contested and at times unpredictable setting" (p. 306), set the stage for interpersonal conflict to occur. With regards to identifying and addressing conflict, Heelis and colleagues (2020) interviewed high-performance Canadian hockey coaches to understand their experiences with perceived difficult athletes. Notably, coaches talked about the importance of valuing and modelling the behaviours they expected from their athletes as a critical element in forming strong coach-athlete relationships. Additionally, Wachsmuth and Jowett (2020) discussed interpersonal conflict in team sport settings amongst varying members of the teams (e.g., athlete-athlete, coach-athlete, coach-staff, athlete-staff). Among their findings, preventing or managing conflict happened when coaches facilitated open communication within their teams, engaged in autonomy-supportive coaching styles, and used third-party interventions, such as mental performance consultants, to aid in resolving issues. Taken together, managing conflict and challenging relationships are critical components of coaching team environments in the high-performance setting. However, to date, little information is known about how high-performance parasport coaches manage conflict within their team environments.

Rationale and Purpose of Study

A scoping review by Bentzen and colleagues (2021) identified that the majority of research on parasport coaches has been conducted in geographic silos. Further to this, Liu et al. (2022) noted that there is a need for international collaboration in disability sport research. With this in mind, the purpose of this study was to explore the role of the head coach in managing national parasport teams from three countries around the world. The research questions guiding this study were: (1) What behaviours or strategies do head coaches, athletes, and support staff perceive to be beneficial and/or detrimental towards the management of national parasport teams? (2) How do parasport head coaches select and/or manage their integrated support staff? and (3) In what ways do parasport head coaches effectively (or ineffectively) manage their team of athletes?

Methods

Philosophical Assumptions

Our study was conceptualized and implemented within an interpretivist paradigm and guided by a subjective and transactional epistemology (i.e., knowledge is co-constructed between researcher and participants within social interactions) and a relativist ontology (i.e., multiple realities exist and are understood; Poucher et al., 2020). Within this context, we sought to gain an understanding of national team environments within the parasport setting without seeking one "correct" or "best" answer to our research questions. Instead, we situated ourselves within the landscape of high-performance parasport, both in the physical space of the training environment as well as the literature on parasport coaching, to co-construct interpretations of the role of the head coach in managing team environments. In the same way, it was not our intention to contrast

results based on country of origin, as each of the three countries have unique sport structures as well as organizational and contextual considerations.

Participants and Procedures

Following ethical approval at the lead researcher's institution, we recruited three summer national Paralympic teams that were based in North America and Europe. We specifically chose an individual, co-acting sport from each country and ensured that each of the three teams had approximately the same number of athletes and support staff. We reached out to each head coach through personal contacts of the research team and scheduled a virtual meeting to explain the study. To protect anonymity, we will not share detailed lists of team/participant information. In addition to three head coaches, data were collected from 10 support staff that included assistant coaches, high-performance directors, strength and conditioning coaches, mental performance consultants, sport physiologists, and physiotherapists, as well as 19 athletes. In two of the teams, some members of the support staff had dual roles, such as acting as the strength and conditioning coach and the mental performance consultant, and therefore spoke about their experiences with both roles during the interviews. Of note, all head coaches were male, and all athletes and support staff included both men and women on the team. All coaches had experience being national team head coaches for their respective countries for at least two Paralympic Games.

Each coach had experience as an able-bodied athlete prior to their parasport coaching careers. As leaders, they prioritized the physical and psychological well-being of their athletes, considered humour an important component to creating an open and enjoyable training environment, and were interested in professionalizing their parasport to higher standards of excellence and continued success. One head coach had experience working with children with behavioural, neurodevelopmental, and learning disabilities, including cerebral palsy, Down

syndrome, and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder and described himself as a continuous self-learner. A second coach had experience working in economics and finance and described himself as competitive and driven to see his athletes succeed, while at the same time displaying a calm demeanor that was beneficial when managing conflict or problem solving. Finally, a third coach considered himself a passionate and emotional person whose main strength was his ability to connect with his players on a relational level. He also felt his own experience with a learning disability influenced his desire to communicate clearly with his team.

Data Collection

The lead researcher spent approximately one week in person gathering data from each team. At that time, the researcher purposefully spent the first half of the week taking time to build rapport with the athletes, coaches, and staff by having informal conversations and silently observing the group dynamics of each team (i.e., interactions, conversations, training structure, vocal tone). In a similar way to community-based qualitative research (e.g., Le Dantec & Fox, 2015), *establishing presence* was a critical step in developing rapport, "speaking the same language" with regards to terminology or common sayings, and to identify unique areas for exploration during the interviews. Although each of the teams were bilingual, all participants who participated in the study had a good understanding of English and their language ability did not appear to influence the quality of data collected.

The primary methods of data collection were individual semi-structured interviews with the support staff and head coaches (Smith & Sparkes, 2016), as well as two focus groups with athletes from each team (three to four athletes per session, total of six focus groups; Krueger, 2014). Separate interview guides were created for head coaches, members of the support staff,

and athletes to acquire unique aspects of the participant's perspectives and roles on the team[1]. Focus groups were chosen for the athletes to minimize feelings of intimidation, primarily for athletes speaking in their second language, and allow athletes to build off each other's common experiences and stories. At the beginning of our time with each team, we asked the head coach to identify members of the support staff that were part of their daily training environment and/or considered to be influential in creating their team environment. All athletes and staff were provided an overview of the project on the first day of the lead researcher situating herself in each training environment and provided contact information for those interested in participating. In total, we collected three interviews with head coaches, 10 interviews with support staff, and six focus groups (in total across teams) with athletes. Each team had 10 to 12 members of their team participate in either interviews or focus groups, and on average, the interviews were 58.10 minutes and the focus groups were 57.35 minutes. Data were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim yielding 292 single spaced pages of transcription.

Data Analysis

All transcript data were analyzed using a reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun et al., 2016). Raw interview data were imported to the qualitative data software, Nvivo, in which initial codes were generated to describe participant experiences and then grouped into larger patterns and themes to represent commonalities across interviews/focus groups. All three other members of the research team acted as critical friends by challenging, supporting, and questioning the themes generated by the lead researcher (Smith & McGannon, 2018). After multiple iterations of grouping themes, the research team felt confident with the final list of three themes to provide an accurate representation of the data.

[1] The interview guides for the interviews and focus groups can be accessed by contacting the corresponding author.

Trustworthiness

Our qualitative study was guided by a flexible list of characterizing traits that aided in trustworthiness and based on the unique context of our study (Smith & Caddick, 2012; Smith & McGannon, 2018). First, we set out to be *reflexive* in our work by keeping a detailed journal throughout the study, yielding seven pages of single-spaced notes that allowed the lead researcher to document her perceptions, feelings, and experiences within each parasport team. These notes included perceptions of the head coaches' behaviour when interacting with their athletes in practice: "Coach acting as a watchful eye without speaking excessively" and unique aspects of the training environments: "Athletes have handouts with individualized process goals for training". These notes aided in the development and refinement of the interview and focus group guides (e.g., upon learning about pre-competition meetings of behavioural expectations for one of the teams, a question in the interview was added to better understand this process), facilitated informal conversations amongst the participants and research team, and led to a deeper understanding of the material. In line with recommendations by Bentzen and colleagues (2021) and Liu and colleagues (2022), we strove for *width* and *coherence* in our study by collecting international data from three countries, multiple sports and genders, and a diverse array of individuals on each team, which allowed us to acquire an in-depth, meaningful picture of group environments in a collection of national parasport teams.

Results

Based on the data gathered from the head coaches, integrated support staff, and athletes, our reflexive thematic analysis yielded three overarching themes to represent the role of the head coach in managing team environments. These themes covered the coach's ability to consider the demographic and situational variability of their athletes, select and manage a team of experts as

their support staff, and facilitate their team environments as a whole. To protect the anonymity of the participants, we will not connect direct quotes with country locations or teams and we further deidentified the data by using pseudonyms and removing information about sport type, athlete backgrounds, and disability types.

Athlete Variability

Head coaches were responsible for managing a diverse group of athletes with varying demographic and situational considerations, such as age, finances, gender, and disability. All factors were important for coaches to consider when crafting their environment.

Age

In all countries, teams were made up of athletes of different ages and life stages, some who were young and single and others who were married with children, which posed a challenge for the coaches to manage team dynamics. For example, in one team, an older athlete who was married with children lived in a different city than the athletes training at the national training centre. This was challenging at times for the head coach to manage with regards to maintaining cohesion, particularly for some athletes at the training centre who felt this athlete may have "special privileges" by not having to train with the group. In addition to geographic location, older athletes explained difficulties relating to younger players with aspects such as social media, causing sub-cliques within the groups. As Athlete Kristina, one of the older athletes on her team, explained, when she felt there were sub-cliques on the team based on age, she would end up going to bed early and disengage at competitions.

Coaches also were aware of special considerations for younger athletes who may be living away from home for the first time, getting a post-secondary education, or in need of a role

model outside of sport. For younger ones, athletes described how their coaches encouraged them to reach out if they needed help:

> He told me that any time of the day, if you need something, pick up the phone. It doesn't have to be [sport] related. He made that very clear when I was moving to the city on my own. If something broke, pick up the phone and call. We'll figure it out. So that was very comforting knowing that, hey I'm moving 600 kilometers away from home, nobody is really nearby. Having an adult role model made it a lot more comforting (Athlete Hugh).

On another team, Coach Matteo reiterated how he is "available 24/7 for all [his athletes] if there is ever something they need. I think they know that." Taken together, there was variability within the team surrounding age that had the potential to influence team dynamics and coaches played a role in facilitating connection between athletes.

Financial situations

All members from each team, including coaches, athletes, and support staff, discussed the importance for coaches to recognize and understand their athletes' financial situations or competing commitments outside of sport. In many cases, athletes from all three countries were not able to fully support themselves through sport alone and were managing part-time jobs or scholarships from education to continue competing. Assistant Coach Leon explained how finances were a challenging part of maintaining a high-performance athlete lifestyle in his country, which has become more difficult with the increasing professionalism of parasport:

> [Finances are] a big problem. It's why we have some players that need to choose what to do because they don't earn any money in parasport. For example, if they win gold at the Paralympics, there's no money. In Rio, they got little toys, a bunny, or something. Especially when they get older and start having a family, they have to choose. So that's

> the problem. If you're taking gold in Turkey, for example, they win around $1,000,000. Also, in countries like China, the government will pay for their families, their education, their house, cars, and everything, so it's completely different. Now the level is getting much stronger too. It's very difficult to take a medal if you don't practice full time.

With an understanding of these financial challenges, multiple athletes expressed frustration when they felt their head coaches were not understanding or realistic of what was possible for their training commitments. For example, Athlete Todd explained:

> It's a challenge for all of us because we are supposed to live like professional athletes, but we aren't professional athletes. We don't get that much money to play, so for me, I have to work to be able to live, to buy food, to pay my rent. So on one end, coach wants us to practice 10 times a week and not work because you get tired from work, but on the other hand, you have to.

Thus, being involved in parasport where, at times, there was less funding and potential to create a financially secure career posed a challenge that parasport coaches faced.

Gender

Although discussed to a smaller degree, gender was a consideration described by some athletes and support staff as capable of influencing the team environment. For example, Athlete Katherine discussed her experience being the only female athlete at a competition in Las Vegas feeling surrounded by a male-dominated environment that included "macho talk", casinos, and strippers. She explained how her coach was aware she was feeling uncomfortable yet failed to rectify the situation or comfort her:

> That's the only time that I felt this is not a nice supportive environment. Not so long after that, a female coach and some other female athletes came in. For me, it felt much more comfortable. I like the atmosphere way more now that we have a female coach.

Thus, introducing a female coach on the team greatly enhanced this athlete's feeling of comfort and security. In another team, Assistant Coach Lara reiterated the importance of having women coaches on a co-acting team with both male and female athletes saying, "Sometimes it may be easier for the girls to talk to me. It can be like that just being another girl. There are some differences there." Together, coaches were encouraged to be aware of when athletes may feel more comfortable working with coaches or support staff who were the same gender. Notably, despite all head coaches identifying as men, each coach strategically chose to recruit women into their team of experts to provide a more inclusive team environment for their female athletes.

Disability

Finally, all teams identified disability as a factor that coaches needed to be aware of with regards to coaching a group of high-performing parasport athletes. Assistant Coach Chris, a former parasport athlete himself, described the physicality differences on his team compared to able-bodied sport:

> I think we need to be aware that we will encounter more diversity in the types of people [we have]. What I mean by that is in the Olympics, the different body types will pretty much look the same across the board. If some are different, they are the exception. Whereas, in parasport, there is not a given body type or disability that will assure you to win the gold medal.

Further, managing practices with athletes of varying ability levels was identified as a significant difference between coaching a team of Paralympic and Olympic athletes:

> [Coaching a group of parasport athletes is] where the adaptability comes in. You go from, okay we have one practice where everyone is doing the same thing to: We have four different practices and within those practices two people are doing the same thing but at different times so it's like 8 or 10 different sets of expectations and goals going on at once (Athlete Jeemin).

In two of the teams, coaches provided individual handouts to each athlete that outlined their training and process goals for their practice, and in the other team, spent the first five minutes of practice outlining each athletes' workouts. Due to this extensive preparation, coaches were able to take a back seat during the session itself, silently observe, discuss with support staff, and provide feedback to athletes when necessary. This allowed for a continuous flow of the session and for athletes to work towards their individualized goals despite variability in functionality. All coaches in the three countries were able to do this successfully, however athletes recounted times in previous sport clubs where their coaches were unable to manage various disabilities, leaving them excluded or isolated from the group:

> I was at my club for a while but every year it would be a new coach and a new training style. Sometimes what the coach wanted wouldn't work for you. Often in practice, I'd have to cut things down but then I would just end up sitting at the wall for five minutes waiting for them to finish. A lot of times it just didn't work (Athlete Daphne).

As a result, the coaches on the national teams in our study were successful working behind the scenes and preparing individualized sessions to support athlete satisfaction during training.

The Support Staff

Head coaches were responsible for selecting and managing their integrated support staff to create a team of experts that would help lead them to success.

Selection

Each team had a set group of integrated support staff that aided in areas of sport development, such as physical training, mental performance, high-performance management, nutrition, physiotherapy, sport physiology, and medical professionals, yet each team was also unique in which members of the support staff were involved in the daily training environment. For example, one team had the head coach, assistant coach, physiotherapist, and sport physiologist working with athletes multiple times a week whereas their mental performance consultant and nutritionist came in once a month. Alternatively, another team had the head coach, assistant coaches, mental performance consultant, and strength and conditioning coach within the daily training environment, and had medical professionals and physiotherapists come in when needed. When it came to support staff selection, coaches were deliberate (when possible) about who they wanted to join their teams and searched for intrapersonal and interpersonal qualities beyond certifications or qualifications alone, such as social skills, passion, and engagement. For example, coaches in all teams spoke about members of the support staff who went above and beyond their role to be engaged within the teams. Coach Jordan explained:

> When [our former physiologist] left, I had learned so much that I didn't think I needed another physiologist. But she said no, you'll probably want someone around to crunch numbers for you. I said okay, I'll hire this guy. He was in two hours a week or something like that but he came in wanting to be amazing and wanting to contribute. All of a sudden, he was incredibly valuable. He wasn't just there to crunch numbers; he was there to be part of this team. That's one of the advantages we have. We have people who are genuinely interested in what they're doing, they want to be here, and they want to help.

Athletes in all teams considered their support staff to be integral to team success. One issue raised from one of the focus groups was that athletes desired to be part of the decision-making process when support staff were to be removed from the team. For example, athletes from one team highlighted how they felt blindsided when they received an email about a member of the support staff, whom they trusted and developed a strong relationship with, was let go:

> Athlete Jeff: One thing I would say for the mental [performance consultant] is that they fired her without consulting us and that was a shock because, especially during COVID, I know the team really used her and developed a bond. It was easy to talk to her and then...
>
> Athlete Julia: They sent us an email about it and then we were like what? Just the way that they did it. It took us such a long time to build up trust.

However, these same athletes also deliberated on the context of high-performance sport and how the coaches might not always be the ones making the decisions about their support staff; instead, being in the hands of high-performance mangers or sport organization stakeholders.

Taken together, coaches may not have always been responsible for selecting or deselecting their support staff, however, when possible, coaches were deliberate about ensuring these individuals supported the values of their team (e.g., engagement) and were genuinely engaged with the athletes on a day-to-day level.

Management

Once the team of experts were established, one of the areas that was consistently discussed across all teams was the importance of the head coach in effectively managing and working with their integrated support staff. Assistant Coach Gabriel mentioned “I think [the coaches’] biggest strength is that he is open for us to work together with him, come with our

opinions, and not be the total chief. Of course, he is the boss, but in a good way." In another team, Assistant Coach Lara expressed:

> He never decides what everyone is going to do. Whether it's with me, with other coaches, everyone, he's good at making everybody feel ownership in what we are doing. He's there all the time but I think everyone working within the team feel that they can make a difference with what they're doing.

This openness and trust to their support staff allowed for an autonomous environment that was constantly growing and evolving. In one of the teams, a core value was innovation. In another team, curiosity. Thus, teams were constantly striving and seeking knowledge on how to improve their performance. Mental Performance Consultant Ambre described her coach's sense of curiosity to seek knowledge by incorporating members of the support staff to strive for excellence in saying:

> He's all about trying to understand what he can do and how he can create a team in order to achieve excellence. He is curious and seeks knowledge, which is great because I think in that way, he can reach the athletes better in terms of their needs. He's curious within nutrition, physical exercise, sports psychology, all different subjects of experts we have.

All the head coaches worked closely with their support staff which led to collaborative interactions, such as brainstorming exercises: "It's always brainstorming, it's always a process, we work together. It's a team collaboration" (Strength and Conditioning Coach Chrissy). Taken together, coaches were largely responsible for selecting and managing a team of experts to enhance the quality of coaching and support provided to their athletes.

Managing the Team Environment

The final theme brought up by all teams was the importance of the head coach in managing the team environment. Generally, there appeared to be a sense of uniformity between members of the teams about whether the group was cohesive. As Coach Liam described, his team was "more like a family" where individuals felt supported and comfortable with one another yet were pursuing individual and collective goals at the high-performance level, such as the World Championships or Paralympic Games. The coaches played a large role in fostering a team environment through behavioural expectations and norms, and when successful, the athletes benefited from feeling valued and supported. For instance, Athlete Katherine described having a late event during her first year on the team and felt valued when her teammates stayed to cheer her on: "The coaches told us that we leave together. All the team stayed and cheered for me and that really meant a lot especially because I was totally new". At the same time, all team members discussed times when there was not a cohesive, supportive, or open environment, and identified strategies for resolving challenges or issues within their teams.

Challenges within the Team Environment

Coaches described working with athletes who were more individualistic in their orientation towards the group, vocal or challenging about their opinions, or displayed jealousy between members of the group. Mental Performance Consultant Ambre explained her experience on the team and how athletes with strong personalities influenced the team dynamic:

> There are a few really strong personalities within the group, which is fine. You need the divas, you need the leaders of the pack, but sometimes those personalities can become too strong and overshadow the other personalities who aren't that strong, but still have a lot of knowledge and experiences to share.

It was noted that the high-performance context made the coaches' decision to remove these athletes complicated, especially when they were incredibly talented yet negatively influenced the team's cohesion:

> It's hard because as a [national training] centre, you are evaluated on how many medals you win. At the end of the day, if they don't fit in, it's going to be detrimental to the environment of the team. It is not always worth it to just add an extra medal to the group's count (Physiotherapist Mikaela).

Athletes also talked about difficulties in the team environment due to their head coaches' behaviours, such as inappropriately using humour to brush off conflict or yelling at them for asking questions, which led athletes to feel as though they were not respected by their coaches. For instance, in one team, multiple athletes did not feel comfortable bringing conflict to their head coach in fear of how he would react:

> I don't think it's an open environment. We can't talk about everything. It has become better I think but... if there's something really bad, then I hesitant to tell the coach. I may choose to tell [another teammate] instead and then we discuss it between us instead of telling the group (Athlete Cherokee).

As a result, the coach was not someone she trusted to handle conflict. Importantly, this lack of trust between the coach and his athletes flowed deeper into relationships between athletes on the team as they were unsure of who they could trust:

> It's difficult to talk to the coach about many things, and if that was easier, I think automatically the group would be more open. That's a big issue for many in the group. Then it's also difficult to talk to each other because you're afraid this one is saying it to the coach, this athlete is saying this, and then there can be conflicts in the group because

> of it. We've had meetings about this and it works for a while but then it goes back to what it was (Athlete David).

In many cases, however, coaches were actively involved in managing conflict and able to make a positive contribution to their team's dynamics.

Facilitating a Team Environment

Participants from each country described varying approaches that coaches used to improve the team environment. In some cases, coaches utilized their assistant coaches to manage coach-athlete relationships that were better suited for each other. For instance, Athlete Kristina stated, "I don't have him as a coach because we don't match each other. We know it doesn't work so we don't do it anymore". From another team, Coach Matteo said: "I have outsourced this athlete to my assistant coach so she has been taking care of her". In other cases, mental performance consultants were used as an objective third party to help resolve conflict:

> [They] gave [myself and my athlete] a bunch of different ways to look at what was going to happen and how we could get the best out of each other. That was eye opening. We had a great relationship literally from that meeting on (Coach Jordan).

Thus, coaches were aware when athletes were more suited to working with their assistant coaches on the team due to their personalities, styles, or demographics and utilized their integrated support staff to maintain cohesiveness and minimize conflict.

Another strategy that was discussed across all teams was the importance of fostering a values-based team environment through leadership and modelling. Leadership and modelling were identified as an issue for one team in particular as athletes felt the head coach was not living the values set by the team. In turn, this created tension and resistance from athletes when they were told what to do. For example, the coaches' use of social media caused issues for

female athletes who felt uncomfortable with pictures posted without their approval or permission. These athletes felt this was in opposition to the team value of "Respect" that they were all expected to follow. Athlete Emilia stated the consequence on an individual and team level: "I don't focus on the values because he doesn't follow them. So how can the group follow it?" As a result, proper leadership and modelling from the head coach was considered critical to regain cohesiveness and buy-in to the values-based team environment.

Finally, coaches described the need to have uncomfortable conversations as a team to understand and resolve problems. In one example, Assistant Coach Gabriel discussed a time when his athletes felt underappreciated or unsupported by other teammates at competitions. The coaches brought this issue to the entire group, including athletes, coaches, and staff, and had the players explain their viewpoints and why their actions were detrimental to their well-being. "That's very tough to hear for a team that has been together for 10 years". He further explained that these meetings could quickly become chaotic with heightened emotions in the room, however when controlled and contained by the coaches and the staff, this chaos could lead to conflicts being resolved and relationships better understood:

> Chaos is sometimes good. It can be these meetings when they are open to each other because it can create chaos when someone tells you that you are shit. It is very tough to hear that from somebody, or your friends, and they can be angry with each other for two weeks, two months, but in the end something good comes out of it.

Taken together, interpersonal challenges were an inevitable and unanimous topic discussed by all members, including coaches, support staff, and athletes, however the ability for coaches to develop strong relationships with their teams, utilize support staff, as well as enforce and live by

team values had the potential to contribute to a more cohesive and supportive group environment.

Discussion

This study explored the role of the head coach in managing national parasport teams in three countries from North America and Europe. This study is among the first to gather data from multiple parasport teams across the globe (Bentzen et al., 2021; Lui et al., 2022), in addition to acquiring underrepresented voices within the team, such as athletes (Allan et al., 2020) and support staff (Falcão et al., 2015). Based on our findings, we learned that coaches were responsible for managing diverse athletes with varying demographic and situational considerations and were deliberate about choosing and effectively utilizing their team of experts to enhance team functioning and performance. Participants discussed times when there was not a cohesive environment and identified coaching strategies for resolving challenges. Our discussion will focus on unique elements of our study that revolve around (1) the coach's ability to manage conflict and facilitate a team environment, (2) the unique role of the support staff and the coaches' responsibility to manage this team of experts, and (3) the coaches' ability to holistically support their athletes, particularly those involved in dual careers.

Conflict Resolution

Across all teams, conflict was an inevitable factor for coaches to manage. This finding relates to previous coaching research from Heelis et al. (2020) where coaches emphasized the importance of modelling appropriate behaviours and developing trust and respect with athletes to manage the relationship. Acquiring trust and respect is a critical element to the closeness component of the 3+1Cs model (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007) and influential in developing high quality coach-athlete relationships. Alternatively, low levels of trust and respect have been

associated with interpersonal conflict within the coach-athlete relationship, feelings of rejection, distress, dissatisfaction, and at times, relationship termination (Alexander et al., 2020; Wachsmuth et al., 2017; Wachsmuth et al., 2020). Literature on coaching athletes who are perceived as difficult has predominantly focused on the coaches' perspective, and although valuable, limits the dyadic understanding of interpersonal conflict and overlooks the athlete's perspective on negative coaching behaviours – an area that has recently garnered attention in parasport coaching research (e.g., Alexander et al., 2020; Allan et al., 2020; Pomerleau-Fontaine et al., 2023). Our study extends previous parasport coaching research by acquiring the coach-athlete dyad perspective of team conflict, as well as a third lens from the team's support staff. This triadic perspective illustrated different perspectives on how coaches utilized their support staff to resolve interpersonal conflict (e.g., assistant coaches working with athletes who challenged the coach, using mental performance consultants to help manage conflict). Although the findings were in line with research from Wachsmuth and Jowett (2020), our results are among the first to be explored within the parasport context. Future researchers are encouraged to dive deeper into exploring conflict within national Paralympic teams to expand our understanding of how coaches, athletes, and support staff can develop trusting and respectful relationships that lead to team cohesiveness and ultimately success and well-being for all parties involved.

Support Staff

Our findings demonstrated that national team coaches were deliberate about who was involved in their team of experts by searching for support staff who aligned with their core values and demonstrated engagement within the training environment. This finding is consistent with previous research on serial winning coaches who emphasized the importance of developing

and implementing a strong coaching philosophy, vision, and values, and subsequently selecting support staff who aligned with these principles (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Meckbach et al., in press; Urquhart et al., 2020). In high-performance sport, the support staff play a critical role in facilitating the coaches' vision of team success (e.g., Armstrong et al., 2022), however, their perspectives and interactions with head coaches are largely left out of the research narrative. Recently, the coaches' role in managing support staff has been explored in a case study on the Swedish FIFA World Cup soccer team in which coaches were deliberate about choosing staff that aligned with their values and vision (Meckbach et al., in press). While the importance of support staff regarding athlete development (Lefebvre et al., 2021) and team cohesion (Falcão et al., 2015) in the parasport setting have been noted, our study was the first to provide a voice to a large number of national team support staff to understand the head coaches' role in fostering a team environment. This perspective provided us with an in-depth understanding of the interconnectedness between the vision of the head coach (e.g., creating a team environment that is competitive yet feels like family) and the actions put forward by the staff to make this vision a reality (e.g., reinforcing the values in the daily training environment). With the understanding that parasport environments often have smaller communities of athletes, coaches, and teams (Lepage et al., 2020), there is a lack of clarity with respect to how or in what ways head coaches are able to recruit their own support staff (as opposed to being selected by high-performance managers) as well as how support staff may act in multiple roles (e.g., strength and conditioning coach and mental performance consultant) and how this influences the team setting. Further investigation is needed to better understand the involvement of support staff in national parasport teams, from selection to role assignment to management, and how they work in collaboration with coaches and athletes to facilitate a positive team environment.

Dual Careers and Parasport

All members of the teams outlined the coaches' responsibility to be aware of their athletes' lives outside of sport, including whether they required a full or part-time job, held educational scholarships, or relied on performance-based sponsorships for funding. When examining resources at the high-performance level for countries with successful summer Paralympic sport programs, Patatas et al. (2020) found that funding for Paralympic athletes was comparable to Olympic athletes, yet differences arose with regards to sponsorships for athletes in parasport. As noted by Assistant Coach Leon from our study, increased professionalization and standards of performance in conjunction with higher costs to participate in parasport due to equipment or staffing specializations often leave parasport athletes with no choice but to engage in dual careers (cf. Stambulova et al., 2015) while training and competing. This provides a particularly challenging environment for national parasport coaches, especially considering that ineffectively managing dual careers has been associated with athlete burnout in both school/work and sport (Sorkkila et al., 2017). This tension of holism versus performance was noted from the athlete perspective in which coaches were not always recognizing the conflicting (yet financially necessary) demands outside of sport, leaving athletes feeling frustrated and misunderstood. As a result, coaches have the potential to either enhance or detract from their players well-being (Kuokkanen et al., 2022), and in the case of high-performance parasport environments where athletes are already juggling multiple demands including potential co-morbidities of disability, such as fatigue or pain (Yorkston et al., 2010), this detrimental influence of the coach may be more impactful to mental health and well-being in a Paralympic setting. As recommended by Kegelaers et al. (in press), there is a need to focus on the perspectives of parasport populations when considering dual careers and mental health. Future research in this area will allow us to

better understand how head coaches can effectively support their Paralympic athletes in managing dual careers and work to enhance athlete well-being in an otherwise highly pressurized, performance-based setting.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite the many strengths of this study, there are limitations to address. First, due to the active nature of their sporting careers, it is possible that coaches, athletes, and support staff may have been hesitant in answering questions surrounding coaching behaviours they considered detrimental to the team environment in fear of their responses being identified. Second, despite our concerted efforts in recruiting participants who were comfortable speaking English, future researchers could have a co-author or translator who speaks the native language present to provide participants the opportunity to speak in their first language when conversing. Third, we chose to recruit co-acting, mixed-gendered, summer Paralympic sports for our study. It would be interesting to extend this study to obtain additional perspectives, such as single-gendered sports, reverse integration sports, teams with female head coaches, head coaches identifying with disabilities, team sports, or winter Paralympic sports. Finally, we were unable to make geographic comparisons or conduct cross-cultural analyses on the participant experiences to maintain confidentiality, however future researchers are encouraged to further our global understanding of parasport coaching.

Conclusions

Overall, this was the first study to explore the role of the head coach in managing national parasport teams by gathering data from multiple perspectives (three head coaches, 10 support staff, and 19 athletes) across North America and Europe. This study is the first step in promoting international collaboration within adapted sport research, and in doing so, provided us

with a larger participant pool, more culturally diverse sample of participants, and increased access to high-performance parasport organizations and resources. By conducting this research, a voice was provided to two underrepresented populations in parasport coaching research - the athletes and support staff. Together, this study offered a rich understanding of high-performance parasport team dynamics by incorporating multiple perspectives and methods of data collection from three countries around the world.

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Chapter 5

General Discussion

This doctoral dissertation worked to expand our understanding of coaching in the parasport setting with aims to enhance coach training and development, and ultimately, parasport athlete sport experiences. A scoping review by Bentzen and colleagues (2021) situated parasport coaching as a unique context where coaching principles from able-bodied sport are often adapted and implemented into parasport, which can lead to varying satisfaction from athletes as to whether these practices are effective. Despite being identified as a unique sporting context, there has been little empirical attention provided to understanding the nuances and complexities of coaching athletes with disabilities, including societal perceptions of parasport coaching, the knowledge and skillset parasport coaches desire or acquire, as well as strategies and behaviours that are considered effective to coach in this domain. To this end, the purpose of this dissertation was to explore attitudes, knowledge, and behaviours in the parasport coaching context.

Overview of the Dissertation

To explore the *attitudes* component of our overarching purpose, chapter two explored how journalists from newspaper media portrayed dominant discourses surrounding parasport coaches over a 20-year time span. From this study, we identified three opposing subject positions (e.g., opinions, attitudes) within the media that emphasized societal perceptions of coaching parasport athletes compared to able-bodied athletes (i.e., no difference versus unique considerations), personal qualities of the coaches themselves (i.e., saintly figures versus competitive and driven), and the landscape that parasport is situated in (i.e., barriers versus facilitators). This chapter provided insight on the complex and often divided discourses that are involved in parasport coaching that can influence a coaches' willingness to engage in parasport

coach education. For example, we saw that coaches who were interested in how their athletes' disability manifested and influenced their training performance were actively searching for disability-specific information, yet found it difficult to acquire. Thus, it is critical to make parasport-specific coach *knowledge* accessible to the parasport community. With a similar understanding that parasport coaches have consistently called for coach education opportunities that are parasport specific, chapter three explored the effectiveness of a formal mentorship program targeted for parasport coaches. Partnering with a provincial coaching association, qualitative data was obtained from both mentor and mentee coaches who participated in the year long program. We identified that mentee coaches appreciated having support, knowledge, and guidance from a more experienced parasport coach and particularly benefitted from understanding how to adapt their coaching practices to athletes with varying disabilities. Both mentors and mentees highlighted the desire to engage with coaches outside their mentoring relationships and recommended a greater sense of community within the program. The recommendations put forward by participants contribute to higher quality learning opportunities for Canadian parasport coaches. Finally, in addition to having the coaching knowledge, it is also important to be able to apply this knowledge into the coaching environment. Therefore, to better understand effective parasport coaching *behaviours*, chapter four explored the role of the national head coach in managing an elite parasport team. Conducting interviews and focus groups with three Paralympic teams from multiple perspectives (i.e., head coaches, assistant coaches, mental performance consultants, high-performance managers), participants spoke about coaching practices that were both facilitative in creating a team environment (e.g., deliberate about team fit, support, open communication), as well as coaching behaviours that damaged relationships and cohesiveness on the team (e.g., not living the values set by the team). Findings

provided insight on understanding best coaching practices for creating a strong team environment in the high-performance parasport setting. Together, this dissertation extends our understanding of coaching in the parasport context.

Conceptual and Methodological Implications

Although there was not one overarching conceptual model or theory to guide this dissertation, each chapter provided insight on varying elements of disability or coaching models under the lens of a parasport coaching population. For example, the definition of coaching effectiveness highlights the professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge that influences athlete outcomes in particular coaching contexts (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Côté and Gilbert (2009) stated that "coaching contexts are the unique settings in which coaches endeavor to improve athlete outcomes" and "an appreciation of these settings is critical to understanding effective coaching" (p. 314). Each of the chapters in this dissertation expanded our understanding of coaching effectiveness in the parasport context and situated parasport coaching as a unique sport context with regards to the attitudes, knowledge, and behaviours related to this setting. In chapter two, journalists portrayed challenges that many parasport coaches face relating to lack of awareness, exposure, and funding, and highlighted the role of the coach in promoting parasport and managing societal perceptions. In chapter three, parasport coaches acquired information related to disability-specific and coaching knowledge (professional knowledge), building relationships with their athletes (interpersonal knowledge), and gaining introspective skills through reflective assignments (intrapersonal knowledge) that aided in their perceived effectiveness as a parasport coach. Finally, in chapter four, national Paralympic coaches, athletes, and support staff explained how there were a number of situational and demographic considerations for coaches to be aware of that were unique to the parasport context, including

structuring practices for a group of athletes with varying disabilities and being aware of athletes' financial situations and dual career challenges. Collectively, the findings of each chapter extended our understanding of what it means to be an effective coach for athletes with disabilities (i.e., coaching effectiveness; Côté & Gilbert, 2009) in this underrepresented setting.

Additionally, this dissertation expanded our understanding of how parasport coaching was viewed, primarily through the various ways of thinking about disability (e.g., models of disability, Berghs et al., 2016). In chapter two, journalists portrayed the idea that there was "no difference" between coaching parasport and able-bodied athletes, supporting what DePauw (1997) entitled the "invisibility of disability" mentality where disability is disregarded by coaches and represented an unconscious bias towards ableism in pursuit of progression and inclusion (Friedman & Owen, 2017). Alternatively, in the opposing subject position, coaches who acknowledged the importance of understanding their athletes' disability and sought out specialized disability-specific information appeared to position themselves using a *social-relational view of disability* (Martin, 2013). In this way, coaches were aware of disability as a factor that influenced participation, however focused on the coaches' role in fostering athlete performance (e.g., acquiring parasport coaching knowledge). From chapter three, we saw that acquiring disability-specific information was highly valued from mentee parasport coaches, which has the potential to lean towards a categorical view of disability if adopting overgeneralizations or stereotypical views of disability (Townsend et al., 2018). Mentor coaches, therefore, can play an important role in helping their mentee coaches shift their attention from a categorical view (e.g., understanding how athletes with autism act under pressure at competition) to a social-relational view (e.g., understanding how coaches can facilitate a positive pre-competitive environment for athletes with autism). With the understanding that parasport

coaches (Cregan et al., 2007) and athletes (Alexander et al., 2020) have emphasized the need for coaches to have a strong understanding of their athletes' disabilities, it is critical that models of disabilities and contributors of ableism are reflected on when acquiring this knowledge. Together, this research has extended our current understanding of how disability is viewed within a parasport coaching context.

Finally, the studies in this dissertation used a variety of methods of data collection and analysis. For example, in chapter two, a critical discourse analysis was used, which has previously been utilized by only a small amount of sport and exercise psychology researchers (cf. McGannon et al., 2020; McGannon et al., 2016; McGannon & Spence, 2012), and none in parasport coaching research. Critical discourse analysis allowed for an in-depth exploration of coaching portrayals around the world, led to discussions surrounding models of disabilities, and allowed for a better understanding of the attitudes, knowledge, and behaviours of coaching parasport (e.g., a coach who does not view their Paralympic athlete any different than their Olympic athlete may not wish to engage in tailored parasport coach education and vice versa). Chapters three and four utilized two common qualitative data collection methods: semi-structured interviews and focus groups (Kreuger, 2014; Smith & Sparkes, 2016). In a community that has been historically marginalized, it was important to provide parasport coaches, athletes, and support staff with a voice in the research process as a way of understanding the lived experiences, perceptions, and preferences of coaching athletes with disabilities. With the understanding that parasport coaching research has been labelled coach-centric (Allan et al., 2020), the voices of the athletes and support staff were purposefully recruited to provide a more holistic understanding of how parasport teams were run and the role of the coach in facilitating effective team environments.

Recommendations for Future Research

This doctoral dissertation expanded what is known about parasport coaching, including ways of viewing parasport coaching, parasport coach education, and understanding effective and ineffective behaviours in this context. Due to the relative novelty of the field in empirical settings, there remains much to be explored to enhance the quality of parasport coaching and the sporting experiences of coaches and athletes around the world. In chapter two, opposing opinions regarding coaching athletes with disabilities were presented. This helped the reader understand that the way a coach views or conceptualizes disability may play a large role in their philosophy, vision, or values as a parasport coach. Future research is needed to better understand *how* parasport coaches develop their view of disability (e.g., reflecting on societal influences, personal experiences, assumptions, biases, etc.) and in what ways it influences the quality or direction of their coaching practices. Chapter three explored the effectiveness of a formal mentorship program for parasport coaches through a partnership with a provincial coaching association. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the program was conducted in an online format, which led to the mentee coaches waiting for an opportunity to put what was learned in the classroom into the field of play. Thus, it is important for (1) coaching organizations to continue providing a formal parasport coach mentorship program following the return to in-person activities for coaches to practice what was delivered in the program, and (2) researchers to adopt a longitudinal approach to studying coach mentorship in parasport by following coaches who participated in the program to identify benefits of mentorship in their sport environments. This would allow for a more in-depth understanding of how coach mentorship may have benefited or enhanced their coaching competencies (e.g., confidence, competence) to coach athletes with disabilities.

As noted by Bentzen et al. (2021) and Lui et al. (2022), there is a need for parasport coaching and adapted physical activity researchers to work beyond their geographic silos. In chapter two, articles from 66 newspaper sources from 13 countries around the world were gathered to better understand how parasport coaching is portrayed and discussed. Furthermore, chapter four extended our understanding of parasport team environments and the role of the coach by gathering data from both North America and Europe. Due to the interpretivist nature of the study design and the differences in sport structures, it was not feasible to make comparisons between teams or countries but rather identify best practice approaches across all countries. Although chapter three focused on a mentorship program accessible to one province in Canada, previous parasport coaching research by Fairhurst et al. (2017) highlighted that coaches intentionally seek out international mentors to expand their knowledge-base and expose themselves to specialized information beyond their own country. This provides a rationale to continue expanding parasport coaching research through international collaborations to provide formal and tailored learning opportunities for parasport coaches as well as high-quality empirical research in this domain. Future researchers should consider adopting quantitative designs that would allow for multiple teams from both Western and Non-Western countries (as recommended by Bentzen et al. 2021), to participate in an anonymous manner with the intention of expanding our cross-cultural understanding in parasport coaching. This would allow for a more diverse and holistic understanding of parasport coaching that is largely underrepresented in the literature to date.

Findings from this dissertation can influence parasport coach education in Canada, particularly through the *Coaching Athletes with a Disability* module put forward by the National Coaching Certification Program. Based on our findings, the module is encouraged to include

knowledge on various ways of thinking about disability (e.g., models of disability; Berghs et al., 2016) including how coaches develop their philosophy and mentality towards coaching and disability. Taken from the findings of chapters two and three, coach education in parasport should actively strive to develop a community of practice to enhance the coaching network in parasport and strive to engage in meaningful discussions surrounding our philosophical assumptions of disability, including our previous experiences, beliefs, and values, to encourage communication among coaches in this population. With the idea that there is not one "right" way to coach athletes with disabilities, having these conversations would allow for personal reflection and growth to ultimately strengthen one's coaching philosophy and in turn, work to benefit their athlete's satisfaction and performance. Coach education leaders can play a role in facilitating these discussions and reflections. Additionally, there has been increasing research conducted on effective and ineffective coaching behaviours in the parasport context that should be incorporated into parasport coach education, and particularly, the *Coaching Athletes with a Disability* module, in addition to the inclusive strategies and practices that is currently covered. As such, these recommendations are intended to expand and build upon the 45-minute module as opposed to replace content, and perhaps provide a full day, in-person learning opportunity for coaches to engage in, learn from, and network within. Taken together, researchers and coaching developers need to work together to bridge the theory to practice gap in efforts to provide coaches with empirical and relevant research to enhance their coaching practices.

Conclusion

The overarching purpose of this dissertation was to expand what is known about parasport coaching by exploring attitudes, knowledge, and behaviours in the parasport coaching context. This purpose was achieved through three separate but related studies that explored the

dominant discourses being used to portray parasport coaches in the newspaper media, the perceptions and experiences of coaches taking part in a formal parasport coach mentorship program, and the strategies and behaviours of national Paralympic head coaches in managing team environments from the perspectives of coaches, athletes, and support staff. One of the main strengths of this dissertation was the concerted effort to acquire width in each of the studies: chapter two collecting articles from 66 sources and 13 countries over a 20 year time span, chapter three exploring a year-long mentorship program and gathering data at two time points with different methods of data collection, and chapter four studying three separate parasport teams from three countries around the world and acquiring perspectives of 32 people, with each study yielding over 200 pages of single-spaced transcriptions. Together, this doctoral program of research contributes to an in-depth comprehension of parasport coaching, including how coaching is understood (Study 1: Attitudes), desired parasport-specific coach learning (Study 2: Knowledge), and how national coaches manage a team environment (Study 3: Behaviours). These theoretical and practical findings will contribute to improving the knowledge and skillset of parasport coaches, and ultimately, enhance the personal and professional sport experiences of parasport athletes and coaches around the world.

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Appendix A

Study 2: Informed Consent Form – Interviews

You are invited to participate in the research study entitled: "Exploring the effectiveness of a pilot parasport coach mentorship program". If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to partake in one 60-minute video and audio recorded interview, without compensation. The interview will take place virtually over Zoom. A Zoom link will be shared with you following the signed receival of this form. If more information is required, an additional follow-up interview may be requested either over the telephone or virtually over Zoom. During the interview, you will be asked questions regarding your experiences participating in the coach mentorship program that you started in November 2020. This project is funded by the MITACS PT# 90672.

At the end of the interview, you will have the opportunity to ask any questions or make additional comments that were not discussed throughout. Your identity will remain confidential at all times and the primary researcher, Dr. Gordon Bloom, and Ph.D. Candidate, Danielle Alexander, will be the only individuals with access to a copy of the responses. All of the data, including the video and audio recorded copy of the interview and the consent form will be stored in an encrypted folder on a password-protected computer for seven years. Any paper copies of notes will be converted into digital files and destroyed at the end of the study. The information gathered from the study will be used solely for conference presentations, final reports for the Coaches Association of Ontario, and journal article publications, and your confidentiality will be maintained and respected throughout the entirety of the dissemination process. **Your participation in this study is voluntary and not mandatory, therefore you have the ability to refuse to answer any questions without penalty and if you choose to withdraw from the study, all information attained up until that point will be destroyed.**

After reading the above statements you can now provide consent to voluntarily agree to participate in this research study based on the terms outlined in this consent form. You will be provided with a signed copy of this consent form. This study has been reviewed by the McGill University Ethics Board (REB #507-0519). If you have any addition questions regarding ethical considerations including your rights and welfare as a participant in a research study, please feel free to contact deanna.collin@mcgill.ca. Please sign below if you agree to participate:

_____	_____
Signature	Date
_____	_____
Researcher's Signature	Date

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Appendix B

Study 2: Informed Consent Form – Focus Groups

You are invited to participate in the research study entitled: "Exploring the effectiveness of a pilot parasport coach mentorship program". If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to partake in one 120-minute video and audio recorded focus group interview, without compensation. Focus groups are a form of evaluation in which groups of people are assembled to discuss potential changes or shared impressions. Focus groups are an appropriate procedure to use when the goal is to explain how people regard an experience, idea, or event. The focus group will take place virtually over Zoom. A Zoom link will be shared with you following the signed receival of this form. If more information is required, an additional follow-up interview may be requested either over the telephone or virtually over Zoom. During the focus group interview, you will be asked questions regarding your experiences participating in the coach mentorship program that you started in November 2020. This project is funded by the MITACS PT# 90672.

At the end of the focus group interview, you will have the opportunity to ask any questions or make additional comments that were not discussed throughout. Your identity will be seen by the other participants in the focus group (~6-10 coaches), the primary researcher, Dr. Gordon Bloom, and Ph.D. Candidate, Danielle Alexander. Danielle Alexander and Dr. Bloom will be the only individuals with access to a copy of the responses and from that point forward, all data will remain confidential. All of the data, including the video and audio recorded copy of the focus group interview and the consent form will be stored in an encrypted folder on a password-protected computer for seven years. Any paper copies of notes will be converted into digital files and destroyed at the end of the study. The information gathered from the study will be used solely for conference presentations and journal article publications and your confidentiality will be maintained and respected throughout the entirety of the dissemination process. **Your participation in this study is voluntary and not mandatory, therefore you have the ability to refuse to answer any questions without penalty and if you choose to withdraw from the study, all information attained up until that point will be destroyed.**

After reading the above statements you can now provide consent to voluntarily agree to participate in this research study based on the terms outlined in this consent form. You will be provided with a signed copy of this consent form. This study has been reviewed by the McGill University Ethics Board (REB #507-0519). If you have any addition questions regarding ethical considerations including your rights and welfare as a participant in a research study, please feel free to contact deanna.collin@mcgill.ca. Please sign below if you agree to participate:

_____	_____
Signature	Date
_____	_____
Researcher's Signature	Date

I agree **(CHECK YES □ OR NO □)** to the video and audio recording of the focus group interview with the understanding that these recordings will be used solely for the purpose of transcribing these sessions.

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Appendix C

Study 2: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

CAO Mentees

1. Tell me what sport(s) you coach (or have coached) – both able-bodied and para.
    a. When and why did you decide to start coaching your current parasport?

2. How did you hear about this program and why did you decide to participate in this coach mentorship program?
    a. Socially – to meet other people?
    b. Technical or tactical knowledge?

3. What impact (if any) did COVID-19 have on your participation in the program?

4. Describe a typical meeting with your mentor.
    a. How often (dates/frequency) and in what format (e.g., phone call, Zoom) did you meet?
    b. How did you feel about the frequency and format of your meetings?

5. Describe the topics you typically discussed with your mentors.
    a. What type of information/knowledge were you looking to acquire? Do you feel satisfied with the content you received?
    b. Reflecting back to your goals and objectives for participating in this program, do you feel that you got the information you were looking for?

6. In what ways (if any) did you feel connected with your mentor?
    a. How have you applied this information in your coaching (if you have coached)?

7. What did you enjoy the most about the CAO mentorship program?

8. What did you find was most challenging about the CAO mentorship program?
    a. How did you work to overcome these challenges?
    b. What advice would you give to someone encountering a similar challenge?

9. In what ways (if any) was disability discussed in your conversations with your mentor?
    a. Did you (or would you) change any of your coaching practices (with respect to disability) based on your discussions with your mentor? If so, how?
    b. Have your thoughts about the NCCP coach education structure in Canada changed in any ways with regards to disability specific content?

10. What recommendations would you provide to the organizers of the CAO in revising this mentorship program for the next iteration?

11. What would you say to someone who was considering participating as a mentee in the next iteration of this program?

12. Is there anything you would like to add that we have not discussed today?

Semi Structured Interview Guide

CAO Mentors

1. Tell me what sport(s) you coach (or have coached) – both able-bodied and para.
    a. When and why did you decide to start coaching your current parasport?

2. How did you hear about this program and why did you decide to participate in this coach mentorship program?

3. What impact (if any) did COVID-19 have on your participation in the program?

4. Describe a typical meeting with your mentee.
    a. How often (dates/frequency) and in what format (e.g., phone call, Zoom) did you meet?
    b. How did you feel about the frequency and format of your meetings?

5. Describe the topics you typically discussed with your mentees.
    a. What type of information/knowledge were you wanting to offer? Do you feel satisfied with the content you provided?

6. In what ways (if any) did you feel connected with your mentee?
    a. What did you learn about yourself as a mentor that will stay with you in the future?

7. In what ways (if any) do you feel that the CAO adequately trained you to be an effective mentor?
    a. What (if anything) was missing?

8. What did you enjoy the most about the CAO mentorship program?

9. What did you find was most challenging about the CAO mentorship program?
    a. How did you work to overcome these challenges?
    b. What advice would you give to someone encountering a similar challenge?

10. In what ways (if any) was disability discussed in your conversations with your mentee?
    a. Have your thoughts about the NCCP coach education structure in Canada changed in any ways with regards to disability specific content?

11. Moving forward, what recommendations would you provide to the organizers of the CAO in revising this mentorship program?

12. What would you say to someone who was considering participating as a mentor in the next iteration of this program?

13. Is there anything you would like to add that we have not discussed today?

Appendix D

Study 2: Focus Group Interview Guide

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore the effectiveness of a pilot parasport coach mentorship program offered through the Coaches Association of Ontario (CAO).

Design: Two separate focus groups will be conducted; one only for the mentees and one only for the mentors, with 6-10 participants in each group.

Time Length: Time limit is approximately 2 hours for the focus group, with 90 minutes representing the actual focus group.

Medium: Virtual/Zoom Focus Group features to discuss:

- Raise hand option versus speaking regularly – Raise hand option allows for control for the facilitator but can halt the flow of the discussion. Speaking regularly allows for more "regular" flow of conversation but can quickly become chaotic/confusing if people are talking over one another.
- Use of the chat box – don't think it's needed.
- Instructions for signing back on if participant's internet goes out/they need to re-sign in due to internet connection.
- Although in the consent form, restate that the focus groups will be audio and video recorded prior to starting. Restate the aim of pilot programs and their role in providing feedback towards the betterment of the program for future coaches.

Interview Guide for Mentors

Opening Questions (not intended for the study; generally not analyzed; more to learn about people, build rapport for main questions; ~30 min)

1. Tell us your name and please share some personal information, such as where you live and what you do for a living.

2. How long have you been coaching in parasport? What para and able-bodied sports have you coached?

Introductory Questions (introduce general topic of discussion ~10 min)

3. Tell us one thing you love about coaching your sport.

4. Who has had the most influence on your parasport coaching career and why?

5. How would you define mentoring? Have you ever been mentored in your personal or professional lives? In what context?

Transition Questions (move conversation towards key questions driving the study ~15 min)

6. How would you define your role as a mentor?
   Probe: What qualities/characteristics do you consider to be the most important in an effective mentor?

Key Questions (~50 min)

7. Describe your experiences working with your apprentice, including your most memorable experience.

8. Reflecting on your mentoring experiences, have you had any encounters that have impacted your own professional development as a coach?

9. In what ways (if any) have you experienced challenges or barriers within your apprentice relationship so far?
   Probe: What strategies did you implement to overcome any challenges/barriers?
   Probe: Any challenges/barriers with mixed-gender pairs?
   Probe: Any challenges/barriers with technology or COVID-19 restrictions when interacting with your apprentice?
   Probe: Any lessons learned from this?

Ending Questions (3 types ~15 min**)**

10. After reflecting on the first half of the program, can you comment on any changes you will make (i.e., your approach, conversations, intentions) with your apprentices going into the final half?

11. What recommendations would you suggest that mentors consider when dealing with the COVID-19 restrictions throughout this program?

12. a. What information did you learn from the CAO that helped prepare you for your role as a mentor?
    b. What information wasn't provided that you think might have been helpful?

13. *The "all things considered" question*: Suppose you were encouraging a colleague to participate in this mentoring program as a mentor. What would you say?

14. *Summary question*: (moderator gives a 3-minute summary of what people have said, in general, and related to the mentoring program, then the question is asked): Is this an adequate summary?

15. *Final questions*: Now is the time to let me know if there is anything that we should have talked about but didn't. Are there any final comments as we head into the second half of the mentorship program?

Interview Guide for Apprentices

Opening Questions (not intended for the study; generally not analyzed; more to learn about people, build rapport for main questions; ~30 min)

1. Tell us your name and please share some personal information, such as where you live and what you do for a living.

2. How long have you been coaching in parasport? What para and able-bodied sports have you coached?

Introductory Questions (introduce general topic of discussion ~10 min)

3. Tell us one thing you love about coaching your sport.

4. Apart from your current mentor, who has had the most influence on your parasport coaching career and why?

5. How would you define mentoring? Aside from this experience, have you ever been mentored in your personal or professional lives? In what context?

Transition Questions (move conversation towards key questions driving the study ~15 min)

6. How would you define an effective mentor?
   Probe: What qualities/characteristics do you consider to be the most important in an effective mentor?

Key Questions (~50 min)

7. Describe your experiences working with your mentor, including your most memorable experience.

8. What are some of the key things that you learned from your mentor that you plan on implementing into your coaching practice?

9. In what ways (if any) have you experienced challenges or barriers so far within your mentor relationship?
   Probe: What strategies did you implement to overcome any challenges/barriers?
   Probe: Any challenges/barriers with mixed-gender pairs?
   Probe: Any lessons learned from this?

10. Any challenges/barriers with technology or COVID-19 restrictions when interacting with your mentor?
    Probe: Any lessons learned from this?

Ending Questions (3 types ~15 min**)**

11. Thinking back to the start of the program, can you tell us what things you expected to gain from this program and if it has happened or not?

12. After reflecting on the first half of the program, can you comment on any changes you would like to see your mentors adopt going into the final half?

13. What recommendations would you suggest that apprentices consider when dealing with the COVID-19 restrictions throughout this program?

14. *The "all things considered" question*: Suppose you were encouraging a friend to participate in this mentoring program as an apprentice. What would you say?

15. *Summary question*: (moderator gives a 3-minute summary of what people have said, in general, and related to the mentoring program, then the question is asked: Is this an adequate summary)?

16. *Final questions*: Now is the time to let me know if there is anything that we should have talked about but didn't. Are there any final comments as we head into the second half of the mentorship program?

Appendix E

Study 3: Recruitment Script – Head Coach

Dear _____,

My name is Danielle Alexander and I am currently working towards a doctoral degree in sport psychology at McGill University in Canada under the supervision of Dr. Gordon Bloom. Alongside Dr. Marte Benzten from Norway and Dr. Göran Kenttä from Sweden, we would like to invite you and your team to participate in our study examining effective coaching practices in Paralympic sport. We are contacting you based on your connections to a highly successful parasport team with hopes that you and your team would be interested in participating in this study. In particular, we are interested in conducting observations and interviews with yourself as the head coach and three to five members of your support team that you consider valuable in helping you create and maintain a culture of excellence (e.g., athletes, assistant coaches, mental performance consultants, nutritionists, physical therapists). Acting as the lead researcher, I would also ask permission to observe quietly in the practice facility for my own learning and to build rapport with the team.

If you and your team choose to participate in this study, we would request for a combination of focus group and individual interviews that would last approximately one to two hours each at a private location within the team practice facility. If more information is required, a follow up interview may occur. The questions would revolve around your teams' experiences with you as head coach. All of the information provided will be confidential and the responses will only be analyzed by myself, my supervisor Dr. Bloom, our collaborators Dr. Bentzen and Dr. Kenttä, and the research team.

The study has been reviewed by the McGill University Ethics Board (REB # 21-11-032). If you have any questions or concerns regarding ethics, please feel free to contact the Associate Director, Research Ethics at 514-398-6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca citing the REB file number. If you have any questions regarding the nature of the study itself, feel free to contact myself or my supervisor using the information at the bottom of the page. Finally, if you are interested in learning more about the research conducted in our Sport Psychology Lab at McGill University, please visit our website for more information: http://sportpsych.mcgill.ca/gpsp.html.

Thank you for considering to take part in our study. I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Sincerely,

Danielle Alexander

Danielle Alexander, M.A.
Ph.D. Candidate, Sport Psychology
Dept. of Kinesiology & PE

Gordon A. Bloom, Ph.D.
Full Professor
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Appendix F

Study 3: Informed Consent Form – Head Coach

You are invited to participate in the research study entitled: "Exploring the role of the head coach in creating a culture of excellence in parasport". If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to consent to observations by the lead researcher, Danielle Alexander, who will situate herself within the practice facility during training as well as partake in one 60-minute audio (and video if needed – see below) recorded interview, without compensation. Interviews are often used for data collection when the goal is to explain how people regard an experience, idea, or event – in this case, to better understand your role as head coach in fostering a successful parasport team. The Principal Investigator would like to be present as an observer. Observations are strictly for the PI to become familiar with the training environment rather than an observational data collection measure/chart. On the first day, the PI will describe that she will situate herself within the training environment in the bleachers or the stands to become acquainted with the environment and take non-identifiable notes for the first three days.

Do you agree to be observed during practice sessions? Please circle one option:

Yes No

If in-person interviews are not possible, interviews will take place via Microsoft Teams. It will not be mandatory to participate by video and you can leave your camera function off if you wish. Although all reasonable precautions are taken, there is always the possibility of third-party interception when using communications through the internet.

If virtual interviews are needed due to COVID restrictions, do you agree for the interviews to be video recorded? Please circle one option:

Yes No

A signed copy of this form will be required prior to starting the interview. If more information is required, an additional follow-up interview may be requested either in person, over the telephone, or virtually over Microsoft Teams. During the interview, you will be asked questions regarding your experiences with your team. At the end of the interview, you will have the opportunity to ask any questions or make any additional comments that were not discussed throughout the interview. Your identity will remain confidential at all times and the primary researcher, Danielle Alexander, the faculty supervisor, Dr. Bloom (Canada), our collaborators Dr. Bentzen (Norway) and Dr. Kenttä (Sweden), and the research team will be the only individuals with access to a copy of the responses. Data will be stored on a McGill's OneDrive service and identifiable data will be shared with the aforementioned stakeholders through a securely shared McGill password-protected folder with restricted access. All of the data, including the audio (and video if needed and consented) recorded copy of the interview and the consent form will be stored in an encrypted folder on a password-protected computer for seven years. Any paper copies of notes will be converted into digital files and destroyed at the end of the study. The information gathered from the study will be used solely for conference presentations and journal article publications and your confidentiality will be maintained and respected throughout the entirety of the process. **Your participation in this study is voluntary and not mandatory, therefore you have the ability to refuse to answer any**

questions without penalty. If you choose to withdraw during or right after the study, all information obtained up until that point will be destroyed unless you specify otherwise at the time of withdrawal. Once data have been combined for publication, it may not be possible to withdraw your data in its entirety. We can only remove your dataset from further analysis and from use in future publications. Identifiable data will be kept for seven years.
The PI is familiar with the General Data Protection Rules and will adhere to the current guidelines outlined in this link: https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-topic/data-protection/eu-data-protection-rules_en.

Questions*:*
If you have any questions/clarifications about the study, feel free to contact the Principal Investigator Danielle Alexander (danielle.alexander2@mail.mcgill.ca) or the study Supervisor Dr. Gordon Bloom gordon.bloom@mcgill.ca

If you have any ethical concerns or complaints about your participation in this study, and want to speak with someone not on the research team, please contact the Associate Director, Research Ethics at 514-398-6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca citing **REB file number #21-11-032**

Please sign below if you have read the above information and consent to participate in this study. Agreeing to participate in this study does not waive any of your rights or release the researchers from their responsibilities. To ensure the study is being conducted properly, authorized individuals, such as a member of the Research Ethics Board, may have access to your information. **A copy of this consent form will be given to you and the researcher will keep a copy.**

Participant's Name: (please print) _____ Date: _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Danielle Alexander, MA
Ph.D. Candidate
Dept. of Kinesiology & PE
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Appendix G

Study 3: Informed Consent Form – Members of the Team

You are invited to participate in the research study entitled: "Exploring the role of the head coach in creating a culture of excellence in parasport". If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to partake in one 60-minute audio (and video if needed – see below) recorded interview, without compensation. Interviews are often used for data collection when the goal is to explain how people regard an experience, idea, or event – in this case, to better understand your role as a member of the team or athlete in fostering a successful parasport team.

The Principal Investigator would like to be present as an observer. Observations are strictly for the PI to become familiar with the training environment rather than an observational data collection measure/chart. On the first day, the PI will describe that she will situate herself within the training environment in the bleachers or the stands to become acquainted with the environment and take non-identifiable notes for the first three days.

Do you agree to be observed during practice sessions? Please circle one option:

Yes No

The interview will take place in person at a private location within the team's practice facility. If in-person interviews are not possible, interviews will take place via Microsoft Teams. It will not be mandatory to participate by video and you can leave your camera function off if you wish. Although all reasonable precautions are taken, there is always the possibility of third-party interception when using communications through the internet.

If virtual interviews are needed due to COVID restrictions, do you agree for the interviews to be video recorded? Please circle one option:

Yes No

A signed copy of this form will be required prior to starting the interview. If more information is required, an additional follow-up interview may be requested either in person, over the telephone, or virtually over Microsoft Teams. During the interview, you will be asked questions regarding your experiences on your team and with your head coach. At the end of the interview, you will have the opportunity to ask any questions or make any additional comments that were not discussed throughout the interview. Your identity will remain confidential at all times with the exception of the primary researcher, Danielle Alexander, the faculty supervisor, Dr. Gordon Bloom (Canada), our collaborators Dr. Bentzen (Norway) and Dr. Kenttä (Sweden), and the research team will be the only individuals with access to a copy of the responses. Data will be stored on a McGill's OneDrive service and identifiable data will be shared with the aforementioned stakeholders through a securely shared McGill password-protected folder with restricted access.

All of the data, including the audio (and video if needed and consented) recorded copy of the interview and the consent form will be stored in an encrypted folder on a password-protected computer for seven years. Any paper copies of notes will be converted into digital files and destroyed at the end of the study. The information gathered from the study will be used solely for conference presentations and journal article publications and your confidentiality will be maintained and respected throughout the entirety of the process. **Your participation in this study is voluntary and not mandatory, therefore you have the ability to refuse to answer any questions without penalty.** If you choose to withdraw during or right after the study, all information obtained up until that point will be destroyed unless you specify otherwise at the time of withdrawal. Once data have been combined for publication, it may not be possible to withdraw your data in its entirety. We can only remove your dataset from further analysis and from use in future publications. Identifiable data will be kept for seven years. The PI is familiar with the General Data Protection Rules and will adhere to the current guidelines outlined in this link: https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-topic/data-protection/eu-data-protection-rules_en.

Questions:
If you have any questions/clarifications about the study, feel free to contact the Principal Investigator Danielle Alexander (danielle.alexander2@mail.mcgill.ca) or the study Supervisor Dr. Gordon Bloom gordon.bloom@mcgill.ca

If you have any ethical concerns or complaints about your participation in this study, and want to speak with someone not on the research team, please contact the Associate Director, Research Ethics at 514-398-6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca citing **REB file number #21-11-032**

Please sign below if you have read the above information and consent to participate in this study. Agreeing to participate in this study does not waive any of your rights or release the researchers from their responsibilities. To ensure the study is being conducted properly, authorized individuals, such as a member of the Research Ethics Board, may have access to your information. **A copy of this consent form will be given to you and the researcher will keep a copy.**

Participant's Name: (please print) _____ Date: _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

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Appendix H

Study 3: Informed Consent – Athletes

You are invited to participate in the research study entitled: "Exploring the role of the head coach in creating a culture of excellence in parasport". If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to partake in one 120-minute audio (and video if needed – see below) recorded focus group, without compensation. Focus groups are a form of evaluation in which groups of people are assembled to discuss potential changes or shared impressions. Focus groups are an appropriate procedure to use when the goal is to explain how people regard an experience, idea, or event - in this case, to better understand your head coaches' role in fostering a successful parasport team. The focus group will take place in person at a private location within the team's practice facility. A signed copy of this form will be required prior to starting the focus group. If more information is required, an additional follow-up focus group may be requested either in person or virtually over Microsoft Teams. If an in-person focus group interview is not possible, it will take place via Microsoft Teams. For in person focus group discussions, COVID-related guidelines will be respected and you will be given the Participant Letter that describes these measures in detail. However, it will not be mandatory to participate by video and you can leave your camera function off if you wish. Although all reasonable precautions are taken, there is always the possibility of third-party interception when using communications through the internet. Please note that confidentiality cannot be fully guaranteed due to the nature of a focus group where everyone hears and may see one another. In order to respect the privacy of others in the group, please refrain from sharing details with anyone outside the group.

If virtual focus groups are needed due to COVID restrictions, do you agree for the focus group to be video recorded? Please circle one option:

Yes No

At the end of the focus group, you will have the opportunity to ask any questions or make additional comments that were not discussed throughout. Your identity will be seen by the other participants in the focus group (~5-6 athletes), but the only individuals with access to a copy of the responses will be the primary researcher, Danielle Alexander, the faculty supervisor, Dr. Gordon Bloom (Canada), our collaborators Dr. Bentzen (Norway) and Dr. Kenttä (Sweden). Data will be stored on a McGill's OneDrive service and identifiable data will be shared with the aforementioned stakeholders through a securely shared McGill password-protected folder with restricted access.

All of the data, including the audio (and video if needed and consented) recorded copy of the focus group and the consent form will be stored in an encrypted folder on a password-protected computer for seven years. Any paper copies of notes will be converted into digital files and destroyed at the end of the study. The information gathered from the study will be used solely for conference presentations and journal article publications and your confidentiality will be maintained and respected throughout the entirety of the process. **Your participation in this study is voluntary and not mandatory, therefore you have the ability to refuse to answer any questions without penalty.** If you choose to withdraw during or right after the study, all information obtained up until that point will be destroyed unless you specify otherwise at the

time of withdrawal. Once data have been combined for publication, it may not be possible to withdraw your data in its entirety. We can only remove your dataset from further analysis and from use in future publications. Identifiable data will be kept for seven years. The PI is familiar with the General Data Protection Rules and will adhere to the current guidelines outlined in this link: https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-topic/data-protection/eu-data-protection-rules_en.

Questions:
If you have any questions/clarifications about the study, feel free to contact the Principal Investigator Danielle Alexander (danielle.alexander2@mail.mcgill.ca) or the study Supervisor Dr. Gordon Bloom gordon.bloom@mcgill.ca

If you have any ethical concerns or complaints about your participation in this study, and want to speak with someone not on the research team, please contact the Associate Director, Research Ethics at 514-398-6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca citing **REB file number #21-11-032**

Please sign below if you have read the above information and consent to participate in this study. Agreeing to participate in this study does not waive any of your rights or release the researchers from their responsibilities. To ensure the study is being conducted properly, authorized individuals, such as a member of the Research Ethics Board, may have access to your information. **A copy of this consent form will be given to you and the researcher will keep a copy.**

Participant's Name: (please print) _____ Date: _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

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Appendix I

Study 3: Focus Group Interview Guide - Athletes

Opening Questions:

1. Please tell us your name, your position (if applicable), and your journey into parasport.

2. What do you love about your current sport?

3. Who has had the most influence on your parasport career and why?

4. Please describe your history with your current head coach, including the length of time together, as well as an example of a memorable moment(s) you have had with him/her.
    - In what ways did your interactions with your head coach change during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Main Questions:

5. How would you define a "culture of excellence"?

6. In what ways (if any) do you consider this team to exhibit a culture of excellence?

7. In what ways (if any) does your head coach work to create and/or maintain a culture of excellence on this team?

8. What strategies or behaviours does your coach employ that you consider to be valuable or effective towards fostering success?
    - Please provide an example(s) of when your coach implemented these strategies or behaviours.
    - In practice? In off-season? In competition? During COVID-19?

9. Are there any strategies or behaviours that your coach uses that you do **not** find valuable or effective? If so, please explain.

10. Are there any strategies or behaviours that your coach does not use that you **wish** he/she did? If so, please explain.

11. Apart from the head coach, what other members of the support team do you consider valuable towards creating and/or maintaining a culture of excellence?
    - In what ways (if any) do these members interact with the head coach?

Closing Questions:

12. *Summary question*: (moderator gives a 3-minute summary of what people have said then the question is asked): Is this an adequate summary?

13. *Final questions*: Now is the time to let me know if there is anything that we should have talked about but didn't. Are there any final comments?

Appendix J

Study 3: Individual Interview Guide – Members of the Team

Opening Questions:

1. Please tell us your name, your position, and a brief summary of your professional journey, which has led you to this position.

2. Please provide a summary of your role on this team.

Introductory Questions:

3. Please describe your history with the current head coach, including the length of time together, as well as an example of a memorable moment(s) you have had with him.

4. What strategies or behaviours does the coach employ that you consider to be valuable or effective towards fostering success?
    - Please provide an example(s) of when the coach implemented these strategies or behaviours.
    - In practice? In off-season? In competition?

5. Are there any strategies or behaviours that the coach uses that you do **not** find valuable or effective? If so, please explain.

6. Are there any strategies or behaviours that the coach does not use that you **wish** he did? If so, please explain.

Main Questions:

7. How would you define a "culture of excellence"?

8. In what ways (if any) do you consider this team to exhibit a culture of excellence?

9. In what ways (if any) does the head coach work to create and/or maintain a culture of excellence on this team?

10. In what ways (if any) do you work with the head coach in pursuit of creating and/or maintaining a culture of excellence?

11. What other members of the support team do you consider valuable towards creating and/or maintaining a culture of excellence?
    - In what ways (if any) do these members interact with yourself and/or the head coach?

12. Are there any unique facilitators or barriers that come to mind when trying to create a culture of excellence in the parasport context compared to an able-bodied setting?
    - Do you feel supported by your organization in pursuing a culture of excellence (if that is the goal)?
    - Resources? Funding? Structure? Equipment?

Closing Questions:

13. Is there anything we haven't discussed today that you think should be mentioned?

14. Do you have any questions?

Appendix K

Study 3: Individual Interview Guide – Head Coach

Opening Questions:

1. Please tell us your name and provide a brief summary of your professional journey, which has led you to this current position.

2. Tell me what you love about coaching your sport.

Introductory Questions:

3. Please describe your history with this team, including the length of time together, as well as an example of a memorable moment(s) you have had with your team.
    - In what ways did you interactions with your team change during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Main Questions:

4. How would you define a "culture of excellence"?

5. In what ways (if any) do you consider this team to exhibit a culture of excellence?
    - In what ways (if any) do you work to create and/or maintain a culture of excellence on this team?
    - In what ways (if any) do you work with your athletes and support team in pursuit of creating and/or maintaining a culture of excellence?

6. What strategies or behaviours do you use in training or competition that you consider to be valuable or effective in fostering success on the field of play?
    - Please provide an example(s) when you implemented these strategies or behaviours in practice? In off-season? In competition? During COVID-19?

7. Are there any strategies or behaviours that you haven't implemented yet but that you **hope** to use in the future? If so, please explain.

8. What members of the support team do you consider particularly valuable towards creating and/or maintaining a culture of excellence?
    - In what ways (if any) do you interact with these members of the team?

9. What are your team values and how do you incorporate them into your team environment?
    - How were they built?
    - What is your vision for this team? How is this vision communicated to your athletes?

10. What are you most proud of with regards to the culture you have built here?

11. If you could go back to day 1 with this team, is there anything you would do differently, and if so, why?

12. Are there any unique facilitators or barriers that come to mind when trying to create a culture of excellence in the parasport context compared to an able-bodied setting?
    - Do you feel supported by your organization in pursuing a culture of excellence (if that is the goal)?
    - Resources? Funding? Structure? Equipment?

13. What is one piece of advice you would give to an incoming parasport coach trying to develop a strong culture with their team?

Closing Questions:

14. Is there anything we haven't discussed today that you think should be mentioned?

15. Do you have any questions?