The complexities of coach-athlete dyads and interdependence in an adult female team sport

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Masters athletes (MA)

- **MAs** are adults generally 35+ that are registered in sport for the purposes of performance improvement and competition, often in the presence of a coach (Young, 2011)

- **Benefits** of having a **coach** (Callary et al., 2015; 2017, Ferrari et al., 2016)

- Masters sport involves **significant social interaction** (Callary et al., 2015a; 2017; MacLellan et al., 2017)
  - Social affiliation extends beyond sporting context
  - Quality coach-athlete relationships
C-A relationships and Interdependence

- **Interdependence** frames our understanding of interactions and describes what is happening in **dyadic** relationships (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978)

- Jowett’s **3+1 Cs**: Closeness (affective), commitment (cognitive), complementarity (behavioural), + co-orientation (mutuality)
  
  (Jowett & colleagues, 2004; 2007; 2016)

- Research has yet to discuss **C-A relationships in Masters sport**, nor how they pertain to and **all-female** setting
Research Question

• What are C-A relationships like within a women’s team sport setting as they relate to the Masters coach (MC), each MA, and the team as a whole?
Methods

• A team of 20 synchronized skaters and their female coach (MAs ages 18-55; MC age 32)
• Semi-structured interviews (25)
• Participant observation (50+ hours)
• Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)
  • Idiographic process (Smith, 2016)
Deductive Results

• 3+1 Cs
  • Closeness
  • Commitment
  • Complementarity
  • Co-orientation

MA coach-athlete relationships
Describe the relationship you have with your coach:

“I kind of want to have that, that bond where like I can talk to her about things I notice on the ice and so that’s more on the professional aspect of things. Um, so I want like, her to trust me with some of the [skating] stuff, and vice versa” –Meghan, 36
Describe the relationship you have with your coach:

“I consider her to be among my better friends for sure. We do things outside of skating, we train for the half together, we socialize together. So, she just bought a house like a 3-minute bike ride away from me, so we spend a lot of time together.” —Tina, 52
Recruitment

“After not skating for almost 5 years—she’s the one that encouraged me [to skate here], because I could’ve gone somewhere else. You know, there were other teams [nearby] which is only a half an hour from my house instead of an hour and a half, but to me it’s like I didn’t wanna do that, I wanted to go back to them.” —Sophie, 53
C-A DYAD: Complementarity

- **Reciprocal**: different behaviours that the coach and athlete exhibit (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016)
  - E.g. Individual feedback—commentaries

- **Corresponding**: same behaviours that the coach and athlete display (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016)
  - E.g. Coach as athlete
“So, for three and a half minutes or whatever the length of the program, I'm not ‘Ellen the federal public servant, mother of two’—I'm in position number 17 of 20 people and I'm part of this group that is delivering this show... for 3 and a half minutes. So I'm not me, I'm the program” —Ellen, 55
Inductive Results - Beyond the C-A dyad

Co-orientation
• COACH-TEAM: coaching strategies, social opportunities
• ATHLETE(s)-ATHLETE(s): peer mentorship, life experiences
MA coach-athlete relationships

- Closeness
- Commitment
- Complementarity
MA coach-athlete relationships

- Coach strategies
- Social opportunities
“I’m convinced that there’s a formula for fitting in on the synchro team. The criteria are being a good skater, being a really nice person, and being on the team for a long time. So those are the 3 criteria, and as long as you have 1 of those you’re going to be okay, if you have 2 you’re going to fit in, if you have 3 you’re going to be like everyone’s favorite“

“You can be sarcastic, you can be real, and there's like an actual opportunity to make those relationships. Like, if I think of the kids I coached for the same amount of time, I coached some kids for like 6-7 years and like, some of them I still don’t know that well”

–Coach, 32
Peer mentoring
Sisterhood
“They talk more about like, stuff that I never even thought of and it’s kind of just cool seeing the different perspectives of what [being] an actual adult is like... I find that if I ever need anything, I’ll kind of look to Jane” –Jenna, 18

“I’ve had a bit of a leadership role on the team. You know, if people had concerns and they didn’t want to go directly to the coach they would come to me” –Jane, 53
COACH-TEAM: direct and reciprocal relationship/interaction that the coach has with the team

COACH-ATHLETE: one-one-one relationship/interaction between the coach and each athlete

ATHLETE(s)-ATHLETE(s): relationships/interactions that occur amongst athletes
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MA coach-athlete relationships
“I went through a really, really rough period of my life. It would not have been okay but for the skating team. Yeah, so. Like they just picked me up, took care of me, and it's actually [the coach] that noticed. People hadn’t noticed, [the coach] did.” –Stephanie, 33
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Discussion and Implications

• Coached adult sport provides opportunities to develop **meaningful interpersonal connections** both in and out of sporting contexts

• In a team, athletes and their coach develop interdependence **beyond the dyad**. This novel interpretation of interdependence could support coaching models that consider a coach’s influence on a broader relational spectrum

• **Theoretical**: consideration of 3 + 1 Cs in broader coached contexts (Masters sport, women’s team)

• **Practical**: Masters coaches can utilize interpersonal strategies to maximize their C-A relationships and overall sport experience for themselves, as well as their athletes
Thank you

Questions?

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