



The Dark Side of Sport: Athlete Narratives of Maltreatment in High Performance Environments

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Abstract

This study provides a unique insight into the impact and experience of maltreatment in elite adult sport, which to date has had limited consideration within the sporting literature. The evidence suggests that elite adult athletes can experience maltreatment in high performance environments and such treatment has the potential to have long-term negative effects on athlete wellbeing and continued participation in sport. However, to date, much of the guidance on protecting and supporting athletes has been directed toward child athletes or those under the age of 18. There remains much to be understood about the experience of maltreatment into adulthood if adult safeguarding and protection in sport are to be enhanced. The aim of this study is to explore elite adult athletes' experiences of maltreatment in high performance sport.

In order to meet the aim of this research, athlete narratives of maltreatment gained through in-depth interviews were completed in order to capture the experiences of both male and female elite athletes. The participants of this study were 12 elite athletes between the ages of 19 and 35 years (mean = 27 years), who had competed in the United Kingdom and had represented England, Wales and/or Great Britain within their chosen sport. A variety of sports and sports types were included within the sample with participants from eleven different sports (hockey, volleyball, archery, rugby, cricket, football, eventing, handball, beach volleyball, taekwondo and tennis), and both team and individual sports were represented.

Five main themes were identified: becoming an athlete, being an athlete, being maltreated, the perceived impact of maltreatment and coping with maltreatment. The findings suggest that maltreatment in sport is complex and multifaceted, and has the potential to pose a significant threat to athlete wellbeing. Prior to this study, existing research had failed to explore maltreatment as an overarching phenomenon and instead sought to examine individual types of maltreatment. While this has increased understanding, the complexity of experience is lost when individual maltreatment types are explored in isolation.

This study underlines the co-occurring nature of maltreatment as well as the diverse nature of the experience of maltreatment. In addition, taking a broader approach has enabled an understanding of maltreatment types that have not previously been systematically explored. This study therefore extends knowledge about and understanding of the experience of maltreatment in high performance environments.

A conceptual framework is presented to demonstrate how athletes experience maltreatment in sport. This study supports the need to further explore the impact on and consequences of maltreatment for athletic experience. Implications for practice and future research directions are outlined in order to identify the scope of work yet to be explored in this area. This study makes an important contribution to knowledge as the first piece of research that seeks to illuminate the experience of maltreatment in high performance sport.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Rationale and Background

The aim of this research is to explore the experience of maltreatment within a sample of elite adult sports performers. This is a subject that to date has had limited consideration within the sporting literature. Sport is generally viewed in positive terms, with participation leading to a variety of desirable outcomes such as improved health, a sense of achievement, teamwork, social inclusion, social capital and 'fair play'. The importance of such outcomes is reflected in the focus on the positive impacts and legacies of events such as the Olympic games. What is generally overlooked, however, are the negative aspects of participation. Sport provides an environment within which the exploitation of power and authority may lead to the maltreatment of performers. The subject is however, a relatively recent addition to the sports research agenda and has yet to be systematically explored within the United Kingdom (UK) sporting context. In recent years, there has been a shift in the focus of empirical research, acknowledging the need to examine current practices within the high performance environment in order to promote best practice and prevent malpractice, and thus ensure that athletes are provided with the best opportunity to realise their own potential in the safest possible environment.

The rapidly changing landscape of high performance (HP) sport and the escalating imperative to be able demonstrate success have increased the industry's visibility and accountability (Brady and Kavanagh 2014). In the UK, previously unprecedented resource allocation has contributed to the rapid development of new professions (for example, performance analysts, sport scientists, strength and conditioning coaches and sports psychologists) and performance management cultures and systems. In the rush to demonstrate the success of the systems in place to achieve performance outcomes, an often forgotten stakeholder is the performer. As arguably the most important stakeholder, athletes' voices about their experiences are often lost in the serious business of performance sport (Beamish and Ritchie 2006). Throughout their career in sport, high performance athletes experience pressures, challenges and rewards. While considerable

attention has been paid to identifying the characteristics of successful athletes and performances, little attention has been paid to understanding the experience of being a high-performance athlete (Andersen 2006), especially those experiences which are deemed to be negative or lead us to question current practice or methods. In order to understand the environment, it is essential to take a critical stance when analysing current practices; an understanding of performer experiences offers the sporting industry valuable insights with which to review and advance practice. In the same way that academic literature highlights the positive implications of participating in sport, it is essential that the practices that would be classed as negative are examined in order to fully reflect on the entire experience that is performance sport. Vanden Auweele (2010) believes that when considering sport, a balanced approach is needed that is neither hypercritical or cynical nor too romantic about the positive outcomes associated with it.

Increasing evidence from the sporting literature highlights that the pursuit of excellence is associated with particular discourses and cultural practices, some of which have been explicitly challenged for their inappropriateness and dehumanising nature (Anderson 2010; Brackenridge 2006; David 2005; Brackenridge 2001; Coakley 1995; Hoberman 1992). Understanding of these instances is limited through what Wisberg (1996) observes as the hypnotic power of HP sport, which discourages penetrating inquiry into its negative effects on participants. As Hoberman (1992) implies, HP sport is widely viewed consciously or unconsciously as an experimental arena and its subjects' sufferings are a natural part of the drama of sport. In this sense HP sport practices remain beyond scrutiny; inquiry about the lives of its participants may be unwanted within a performance driven agenda, and deemed to be low priority (Brady and Kavanagh 2014). The area of maltreatment is relatively new to the sports research agenda and there is still much work to be completed in order to understand its impact on athletes.

Maltreatment is complex and its meaning and individual constructs are widely debated in academic publications and organisational settings. Definitional criteria (i.e., severity or frequency of the act, consequences of the act and the intent of the perpetrator) vary, making maltreatment difficult to define. As a result, terms such

as abuse, maltreatment and neglect are labels used to describe what could be an indeterminate range of behaviours (Hart and Glaser 2011). For the purpose of this study maltreatment can be defined as “volitional acts that result in or have the potential to result in physical injuries and/or psychological harm” (Crooks and Wolfe 2010, p. 640) and that can result from acts of omission or commission (Claussen and Crittenden 1991). Definitional criteria and types of maltreatment will be discussed in more detail in the literature review, however it is generally accepted that maltreatment can be seen as an all-encompassing term that typically subsumes an array of abusive acts or behaviours against the individual, and includes acts of physical and/or psychological violence against the person within the context of a power differential. There has been a growing body of research examining abusive relationships in sport over the past decade, resulting in a considerable increase in our understanding of sexual abuse and sexual harassment of athletes, especially child athletes by their coaches (Parent and Bannon 2012; Parent 2011; Sand et al. 2011; Hartill 2009; Brackenridge et al. 2008; Fasting et al. 2008; Bringer et al. 2006; Brackenridge et al. 2005; Fasting and Brackenridge 2005; Fasting et al. 2004; Leahy et al. 2004; Leahy et al. 2002; Cense and Brackenridge 2001; Kirby et al. 2000; Brackenridge and Kirby 1997). Other forms of abuse, such as emotional and physical abuse, are less well understood especially within adult sports participation in the UK.

Evidence of maltreatment is not only being reported within the academic literature but also more recently there has been widespread publicity of the abuse of athletes in the media. For example, in 2007 the Daily Mail reported that elite tennis coach Claire Lyte was found guilty of sexually abusing a schoolgirl who was one of the athletes in her care at a tennis academy. Lyte was jailed for nearly three years (she only served half of this sentence) and ordered to sign the sex offenders register (Sapstead 2007). Alan Roberts, a British judo coach was banned from coaching for life after a disciplinary panel found him guilty of sexually abusing children in his care. The British Judo Association (BJA) stated that over a period of four decades, “he manipulated his position, influence and experience for the purpose of his own sexual gratification”. Yet surprisingly it has been reported that the disclosure and barring service (DBS) will still allow him to work with children (Delgado 2013). In America, there have been several high

profile cases reported in the media, including the Penn State sexual abuse case, where coach Jerry Sandusky was charged with 52 cases of sexual abuse of boys over a 15 year period and sentenced to 60 years in prison (CBS News 2013), whilst Rutgers basketball coach, Mike Rice, was fired after video emerged of him physically and verbally abusing players. This points to an overwhelming emphasis on identifying cases of sexual abuse; other types of maltreatment have been less widely reported or identified. Nonetheless, such accounts demonstrate that athletes are not immune from the experience of maltreatment in performance sport. However, understanding of the over-arching experience of maltreatment in sport has yet to be accomplished. This study aims to address this gap in knowledge and to explore individual athletes' personal experiences of maltreatment within the HP sport environment.

From an academic viewpoint, this research seeks to contribute to a number of areas. It aims to enhance knowledge and understanding through providing an in-depth insight into the different types of maltreatment athletes can experience within the sporting environment, as to date the emphasis has been on the experience and prevalence of sexual abuse and harassment and more recently emotional abuse in sport. There remains a paucity of literature on maltreatment more broadly as a phenomenon or more specifically of other maltreatment types such as physical abuse and forced physical exertion (FPE), bullying, neglect and discriminatory maltreatment. In addition, little is understood about the potential impact of maltreatment, or the profile of perpetrators in the sports environment. Research has focused on the elite child athlete and experiences of children in sport (through retrospective accounts from adult participants), and as a result much of the guidance on protecting and supporting athletes is directed toward child athletes or those under the age of 18. There remains much to be understood about the experience of maltreatment in general and more specifically the experience of maltreatment into adulthood. Further, the findings will be utilised to enhance theoretical understanding of how and why maltreatment occurs and to develop a conceptual framework that demonstrates the mechanisms through which individuals experience maltreatment within the sporting environment.

Despite the limited amount of literature on maltreatment in sporting environments, there remains consistent avocation of the need for policy intervention methods. However, the implementation of effective policy will not happen until there is understanding of the social and psychological processes that occur during, and as a result of, the experience of maltreatment in sport. Therefore, before policies and interventions can be implemented, an exploration of the experience of maltreatment is warranted especially within elite adult populations as to date this has had limited consideration within the sporting literature. This study thus aims to provide a theoretical contribution that has the potential to impact upon future policy and practice.

From Playing to Concern: My Position Within the Research

I have been involved in the world of competitive sport over the past twenty years and during this time I have occupied a number of roles within it, including athlete, coach and more recently sport scientist (performance psychologist). My journey has therefore taken me from being a performer to working with athletes within a performance environment and supporting them in their athletic endeavour. The way I practice has been shaped by my own experiences as well as my education in sport and exercise science and sport psychology. On a personal level, sport has always been a significant part of my life. My involvement in sport has enabled me to experience some of my proudest achievements and conversely suffer some of my greatest upsets and disappointments.

My early sporting memories are of attending a variety of sports clubs; I was always active and thrived in a competitive environment. However, it was the sport of hockey that seized my attention and soon everything else in my life started to come second to training and competition. My career was successful; I represented England in national and international competitions and played at the top club level. I can recall the pride and sense of accomplishment I experienced as a young athlete representing England, when I felt there was no greater feeling than lining up on the field of play, singing the national anthem and preparing for competition. Conversely, I can easily recall the upset and sense of loss I experienced when I was dropped from a team; I was not good enough; I was rejected. I learned first-

hand that sport has the potential to create highs and lows, and I also learned the importance of training, commitment and dedication. I loved my sport; however, it was here that I observed the power and control that coaches hold over their athletes and the upset that can occur when such power is abused. I experienced what it is like to have a coach use abusive and intimidating language, to throw sports equipment at players and to make us afraid to make mistakes or take risks in performance. I have felt the fear and distress that can arise as a result of abusive coaching behaviour and I have witnessed the damaging effect of negative peer-to-peer interaction in a team environment. As an athlete I was submissive and compliant and failed to challenge the behaviour or the authority of the coach.

As my career has progressed I left the role of athlete to occupy that of coach and subsequently the performance psychologist. I have worked with athletes who compete at a variety of levels but primarily my focus has been on elite sports. At this level competition for places is high and athletes invest significant amounts of time and effort in pursuit of performance. Individuals have to work hard physically and mentally in order to cope with the pressure of performance at this level. Such pressure comes from both the internal desire to achieve and from external pressures and figures in the sporting landscape (coaches, teammates, managers, sports fans and the media). I have observed that in an environment centred on performance outcome, athletes can be exploited and subjected to maltreatment. This includes: coaches shouting at athletes until they are reduced to tears; screaming at and belittling athletes in order to provoke a response; physically abusing performers within the training environment through the use of forced physical exertion; putting pressure on athletes to conform to weight ideals. I have seen individuals pushed to extremes physically and mentally, which can lead to athletes prematurely abandoning their sporting career or developing maladaptive behaviours such as eating disorders. My own experience has led me to reflect on the sporting environment and consider why such behaviours are unquestioned, seen as a normal part of athletic endeavour, at times as motivational or necessary measures in the quest for performance. It is my own personal experience and observation of maltreatment that have inspired me to collect and share the personal stories of athletes. I want to stop ignoring the incidence of maltreatment. Instead, I want to learn more about the nature of maltreatment in

competitive sport, as this could be the catalyst for safeguarding athletes of the future who may be afforded the opportunity to practice and compete in a safe and positive environment at any age or standard.

Research Aim and Objectives

This research aims to explore elite adult athlete experience of maltreatment within the performance environment. To achieve this the emic view is given priority in order to understand the individual experience of maltreatment.

Four objectives have been set for this study:

1. To explore elite adult athletes' experiences of maltreatment in sport in the United Kingdom in order to examine how and why maltreatment occurs;
2. To investigate the impact of maltreatment upon elite adult players;
3. To identify the potential sources of maltreatment (for example coaches, managers, team-mates).
4. To develop a conceptual framework for the understanding of maltreatment in elite sport.

The Structure of the Thesis

The review of literature (chapter 2) demonstrates how maltreatment has yet to be clearly defined within the sporting context and is certainly an area that requires further exploration. In order to understand the study background the review of literature will introduce maltreatment utilising theory from a variety of settings including theory from sport, interfamilial and domestic violence settings, in order to provide a context for this thesis. Chapter 3 presents the methodology, specifically designed to capture athlete experience of maltreatment in order to prioritise the athlete voice through collecting individual narratives of maltreatment in HP sport. The analysis and interpretation of the narratives are presented within the discussion chapters (see chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, 8). Finally the conclusion is presented in chapter 9 and this will include guidelines on the implications of the findings for practice and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: Understanding Maltreatment: The Literature

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the theory relevant to this thesis by introducing the HP sport environment and the current literature in the area of maltreatment. It serves to set a context for the study and to provide an “*overall orientating lens*” through which the research can be viewed and understood (Creswell 2009, p.62). It must be noted, however, that in line with the inductive nature of qualitative research, the findings from the collection of primary data will shape the nature of the literature reviewed following analysis. Indeed much of the literature will be tied to the themes that emerge from thematic analysis. Nevertheless, this chapter aims to provide an introduction to the literature and will broadly define maltreatment and introduce current legislation surrounding safeguarding and protection. Research from the sporting literature will be introduced in order to demonstrate what has already been achieved in this area and to highlight the research gap.

From Abuse to Concern, the Evolution of Maltreatment Legislation

This section begins by examining the development of legislation surrounding safeguarding and protection as an introduction to the wider concept of maltreatment within society. It starts with a focus on the development of child protection mechanisms and then compares this with the wider concept of safeguarding adults. This process is essential as visibility, awareness, development of laws to protect individuals from harm and changes to legislation have all had a significant impact upon the detection and recognition of maltreatment within society and in dealing with cases of both adult and child maltreatment. This section therefore provides a general commentary to outline some of the key societal changes with regards to the detection and prevention of maltreatment.

Child abuse, now more commonly called child maltreatment, was identified as a social problem in Western industrialised countries in the 1870s, despite children

being hurt, killed, injured and exploited by others well before this date (Radford et al. 2006). Central to the identification of child abuse was the “discovery” of childhood, which Miller-Perrin and Perrin (2013) consider only to have emerged within the past few hundred years. The authors believe that the conceptualisation of childhood is therefore a human creation and a social construction. For example, in nineteenth century England, children were brought up under the strict regime of discipline and hard work (Brackenridge 2001). Prior to the emergence of the right to a childhood, behaviour that today would be labelled as maltreatment was not necessarily seen as abusive (beating children for control, subjecting children to hard manual labour, neglecting the basic needs of the child such as access to medical support or education). Children were politically powerless; a group without independent status or rights and this provided a platform where adults were able to provide rules and laws regarding their treatment or care. Brackenridge (2001) states that the terms ‘child’ and ‘childhood’ are therefore culturally constructed concepts and believes that some would argue that these are peculiar to the modern Western world. Today some societies have re-constructed their understanding of childhood as a special phase of life and children are more valued, nurtured and protected than they ever have been before. Under current guidelines, the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child states that a child refers to a “human being below the age of eighteen years, unless the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (cited National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, NSPCC 2013). Childhood therefore refers to the period during which one can be classified as being a child and will vary across nations.

Social changes throughout the 20th Century directly contributed to the development of child protection mechanisms and the increase in moral concern surrounding the maltreatment of children (Brackenridge 2001). In 1962, Kempe and colleagues published an article entitled ‘The Battered Child Syndrome’ and introduced the term ‘battered child’ to the medical vocabulary (Kempe et al. 1962). Kempe identified child abuse as a clinical condition with diagnosable medical and physical symptoms that can result from deliberate physical assault. The battered child syndrome referred specifically to chronic, intentional, physical abuse of children (Kerr and Stirling 2008) and was therefore later replaced in

1975 by the term child abuse and neglect to encompass other forms of non-physical forms of maltreatment (Stirling and Kerr 2009). This period was pertinent as it identified that the abuse of children was a serious problem, thus allowing the medical profession to collaborate with other advocacy groups already fighting for child protection, and permitting the movement to rapidly gain momentum (Miller-Perrin and Perrin 2013).

In the 1980s, legislation in Britain began to view the child as a subject rather than an object, who should have some say in their own life. The term ‘safeguarding’ children appeared with the advent of several key acts and policy documents, which outlined priority statements for the protection of children from harm (Broadhurst et al. 2009). To date there is no single piece of legislation that covers child protection in the UK, but rather a myriad of laws and guidance that are continually being amended, updated and revoked (NSPCC 2012). The current child protection system is based on the Children Act 1989 introduced in an effort to reform and clarify the existing plethora of laws relating to children. The Children Act introduced comprehensive changes to legislation in England and Wales affecting the welfare of children which reinforced the autonomy of families, yet allowed legislation for the protection of children who may be or are likely to be suffering significant harm. The Children Act was intended to outline and identify children’s capacity as autonomous decision makers, however Brackenridge (2001) states that it was not without its critics. According to Parton and Lyon (1995), whilst it appeared to advance children’s rights and develop opportunities for autonomy, it further presented children as legal rather than welfare objects for the purpose of governing families at a distance. In response to such problems, it was through the introduction of *Working together to Safeguard Children: A Guide to Inter-Agency Working to Safeguard and Promote the Welfare of Children* (Department of Health, DoH et al. 1999) and the *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* (DoH et al. 2000) that a broader notion of safeguarding became central to policy discourses.

Since the implementation of the Children Act 1989, many laws have been passed to strengthen the ways in which children are protected by law in the United Kingdom. Most notably following the death of eight year old Victoria Climbié in

2000, the government issued the Laming Review (Laming 2003), and the response was the *Keeping Children Safe* report (Department for Education and Skills, DfES 2003a) and the *Every Child Matters Green Paper* (DfES 2003b), which in turn led to the *Children Act 2004*. The Children Act 2004 does not replace or even amend much of the Children Act 1989; instead it sets out the process for integrating services to children. The act places a duty on local authorities and their partners to co-operate in promoting the wellbeing of children and young people. It is evident that safeguarding and protecting children have been of key concern to the government, and measures are constantly being reviewed in order to better protect vulnerable individuals, yet critics state that there is still much to be done to improve the child protection process within the United Kingdom (Broadhurst et al. 2009; Brackenridge 2001).

It is important to consider the development of child protection mechanisms as this process is now embedded within society and safeguarding children is deemed of high priority for any organisation that deals with those under the age of 18. The identification and developments in dealing with cases of abuse in adults is slightly more challenging, as prevention of abuse has not always been high on the adult safeguarding agenda (Faulkner and Sweeney 2011), and in addition where this focus occurs, it is typically related to safeguarding and protecting ‘vulnerable adults’. The DoH and HO (2000 p. 8-9) define the term ‘vulnerable adult’ as:

“A person aged 18 or over who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental health or other disability, age or illness, and who is or may be unable to take care of him or herself or unable to protect him or herself from harm or exploitation.”

Perhaps a criticism of the focus purely on those classed as vulnerable adults is that this creates a narrow frame of reference, losing sight of the fact that every individual can be subjected to maltreatment.

Safety from harm and exploitation is one of our most basic needs, and safeguarding can be classed as a range of activities aimed at upholding adults’ fundamental rights to be safe (Williams 2010). In 2000, the government produced the *No Secrets: Guidance on developing and implementing multi-agency policies and procedures to protect vulnerable adults from abuse* (DoH 2000), which

highlighted that there should be no hiding places when it comes to exposing the abuse of vulnerable adults. The paper aimed to build on the government's respect for human rights and resulted from its intention to close a gap in the delivery of those rights alongside the implementation of the *Human Rights Act* in 1998 (DoH 2008). The *No Secrets* guidance created for the first time a framework for multi-agency action in response to the risk of abuse or harm. Local authority social services were therefore tasked with playing a lead role in developing local policies for the protection of vulnerable adults (DoH 2008).

The *No Secrets* guidance is acknowledged as a significant step in the recognition and description of public responsibility for an issue that in the past has been invisible or deemed of low priority. The initial focus of the *No Secrets* guidance was on 'adult protection' however, since this time there has been a move towards the broader term 'safeguarding adults' and 'keeping people safe', which are used interchangeably within the documentation. In 2008, there was a consultation on the review of the *No Secrets* guidance, which served to develop existing provision for safeguarding adults in line with wider changes within the structure of government. The review sought to learn from some of the problems with the initial guidance notes and to capitalise on the aspects that were seen to be successful in order to strengthen understanding of managing, preventing and dealing with cases of abuse in adults (DoH 2008). The consultation document set to explore how society enables adults to be safe from abuse or harm and in particular examined how to change and develop the existing guidance to encompass wider government policy goals that have changed since its initial implementation (Faulkner and Sweeney 2011).

A significant progression identified through the review process is the acknowledgement of the lack of legislative provisions around safeguarding adults when compared with the wealth of information and legislative provision around safeguarding children. Within the consultation document there was a further acknowledgement that often in keeping people safe the focus is on those who would be classed as vulnerable, or those that are at risk, as they are perceived as easy targets. However, it is now highlighted that keeping people safe should be a universal government objective and therefore applies to all adults, demonstrating

the shift in focus since the initial implementation of the policy. In future, policy regarding adult safeguarding should incorporate a dual focus on all citizens and further on those groups who would be classified as vulnerable members of society. Hooper and McClusky (2000) state that individuals may experience abuse of whatever kind, in the contexts of their own stage in life and past history. Abuse is therefore a widespread phenomenon with a multitude of manifestations occurring in a variety of contexts and this should be reflected within safeguarding policy of the future.

Significant steps are being taken to modernise guidance on adult safeguarding and ensure that future legislation encompasses a vision of an inclusive society with opportunity for justice for all. Adult safeguarding has:

“a vision of a future of safeguarding of those at risk of harm which is empowering and person centred, preventative and wide-ranging” (DoH 2009, p. 8).

However, there remains to be issued definitive guidance notes for the future on safeguarding, and as such adult safeguarding has not yet been implemented throughout multi-agency partnerships, including sports provision. This therefore remains a constantly evolving area of legislation.

Through mapping the process of governmental identification and management of both child and adult maltreatment, it is evident that this is an area that is constantly under review and will only improve through complete partnership between local organisations, communities and individuals. The *No Secrets* policy was purported to remain as statutory guidance until 2013 (to date there remains no change to this guidance) in line with the recent changes that strive to increase the personalisation of services (Faulkner and Sweeney 2011). What is clear and important for this study is the emphasis placed on the need to protect adults from maltreatment and the notion that legislation to this effect is as important as that in place to outline child protection measures. It is clear that there is still much to be done to align the protection mechanisms available for adults with those currently in place for children.

Although there are many comparisons that can be drawn between the processes in place for managing cases of maltreatment in adults and children, for example the use of language within professional processes (alerts, referrals, case conferences, strategy meetings and safeguarding plans), there are also some significant differences in this provision that were identified through the review of *No Secrets* in 2008 that makes safeguarding adults unique. It is evident from the results of this consultation document that adults do not want to be treated like children in matters of safeguarding and want more autonomy over the decisions made in individual cases. In addition, adult protection is unique in that it needs to cover two very different client groups: people who have the capacity to make decisions and therefore need to provide their own consent for intervention, and those who do not have the capacity and may need to be approached in the context of the Mental Capacity Act 2005 which potentially makes safeguarding adults more complex. It is clear that adults with the capacity to do so should have the right to choose their own actions and their own safeguarding plans, therefore the process may be focussed more on assisting and empowering individuals to make informed decisions rather than intervening as with child protection. Therefore, for adults the focus of policy should be on self-directed support, access to help and counselling, increased choices and clear access to organisations to help manage individual cases. In addition legislation is very different for adults and children. The Children Act 1989, supplemented by the Children Act 2004, set down a holistic approach to safeguarding in the wider context of the well-being of children. There is currently no comparable legislation for adults in England (DoH 2009). What is evident from the information available on safeguarding and protecting adults is that the nature of abuse of adults can be different and potentially wider. It is important to recognise that safeguarding adults should not and in many ways cannot simply follow the children's approach and requires further consideration.

Defining Maltreatment and Introducing Maltreatment Types

Maltreatment is complex and its meaning and individual constructs are widely debated. Maltreatment can be defined as “volitional acts that result in or have the potential to result in physical injuries and/or psychological harm” (Crooks and

Wolfe 2007, p. 640) and can result from acts of omission (neglect) or commission (abuse) (Claussen and Crittenden 1991). Perhaps offering a wider conceptualisation of the term, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has defined *child maltreatment* as being:

“All forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power” (in Butchart et al. 2006, p. 59).

Both of the definitions above clearly demonstrate that maltreatment can be seen as an all-encompassing term that typically subsumes an array of abusive acts or behaviours against the individual, and includes acts of physical and/or psychological violence against the person within the context of a power differential. Maltreatment may consist of a single act or repeated acts. It may include physical, verbal or psychological actions and may be an act of neglect or an omission to act. Finally maltreatment can occur in any relationship and may result in significant harm to, or exploitation of, the person subjected to it (Faulkner and Sweeney 2011; Butchart et al. 2006; DoH and HO 2000; Claussen and Crittenden 1991).

In 2000 the Government produced *No Secrets: Guidance on developing and implementing multi-agency policies and procedures to protect vulnerable adults from abuse* (DoH 2000), which identified a number of types of abuse including physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, neglect and acts of omission and discriminatory abuse. The NSPCC (2009) identify five types of maltreatment when referring to safeguarding individuals from harm: neglect, physical, emotional and sexual abuse and bullying. It is believed that these pose a physical and psychological threat and can occur in a variety of settings. Physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, sexual abuse and sexual harassment, discriminatory abuse and bullying will be introduced within the following sub-sections as these serve as a starting point for the identification of behaviours under the wider term maltreatment that may be present within the sporting environment. The maltreatment types will be defined and each of the sub-sections will end with a

summary table, which will include examples of behaviours that relate to this maltreatment type.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse, also known as physical violence has, historically, been the most visible form of maltreatment as this is one of the more identifiable types of abuse. However, as with other types of abuse there are differing views over its definition and measurement. Some researchers include only acts that were intended to cause physical harm or injury (Reis and Roth 1993); others argue that intentionality may be difficult to ascertain, and therefore physical abuse should also include acts that are perceived as having the intention of producing physical injury or harm (Crowell and Burgess 1996). Kerr (2010) believes that physical abuse refers to a pattern of deliberate behaviours by a person within a critical relationship role that has the potential to be harmful to an individual's physical wellbeing. Further it is abuse that includes the infliction of physical injury caused by other than accidental means that results in substantial risk of physical harm (Miller-Perrin and Perrin 2013). Stirling (2009) claims that physical abuse can be classified as contact and non-contact physical abuses. Contact abuse can relate to non-accidental trauma or physical injury inflicted by a person or caregiver. Non-contact physical abuse can stem from punishments or actions that can cause physical discomfort but do not necessarily have to involve physical contact from the perpetrator. Physical abuse therefore refers to behaviours that threaten, attempt or actually inflict physical harm (Crowell and Burgess 1996). Examples of contact and non-contact physical abuse can be seen in table 2.1 (p.17).

Table 2.1 Physical Abuse: Classifications and Examples

Maltreatment Type	Classifications	Examples
Physical Abuse	Contact Physical Abuse	Punching, beating, kicking, slapping, pushing, grabbing, shoving, slapping, biting, hit with a fist, struck or an attempted strike with an object for example a stick, strap or other object, choking, stabbing, burning
	Non-contact Physical Abuse	Threatened with a weapon, requiring an individual to remain motionless or in a seated position without a chair, forced physical exertion, forcing a person to kneel on a harmful surface, isolating in a confined space.

(Source: adapted from Stirling 2009; Miller-Perrin and Perrin 2013; Crowell and Burgess 1996).

Emotional/Psychological Abuse

Like other forms of maltreatment, emotional abuse has been difficult to define and assess and has been operationalised in a number of ways within the literature (Claussen and Crittenden 1991). The term emotional abuse has also been used interchangeably with the terms verbal abuse, emotional neglect, emotional violence, psychological abuse, murder of the soul or mental cruelty (Doyle 1997). Emotional abuse is understood to be an under-recognised but extremely common form of relational maltreatment (Glaser 2002). In child psychology, the category of emotional maltreatment typically subsumes an array of behaviours usually presented by parents or caregivers that range from neglectful, unresponsive, and uninvolved to hostile, critical, and controlling (Hart et al. 1998). Together these behaviours convey a message that the child is “worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted, endangered, or of value only in meeting another’s needs” (American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children, APSAC 1995, p.2). Often emotional maltreatment co-occurs with other forms of maltreatment including physical and sexual abuse, though it may also occur independently (Shaffer et al. 2009).

What is generally accepted is that the broader term psychological maltreatment incorporates emotional abuse and emotional neglect (and other forms relating to this behaviour) (Marshall 2012; Stirling 2009; Stirling and Kerr 2008). The American Humane Association (AHA, 1980) define emotional maltreatment as:

“active, intentional, berating, disparaging or other abusive behaviour toward the child (person), which impacts upon the emotional wellbeing of the child (person).” (in Stirling 2009, p.1092).

Emotional abuse includes omission and commission and requires no physical contact (Glaser 2002).

The APSAC have published guidelines for identifying child psychological maltreatment which recognises six forms of psychological maltreatment: spurning, terrorising, isolating, exploiting/corrupting, denying emotional responsiveness and unwarranted denial of mental health care, medical care or education (Marshall 2012). In emotional abuse, the victim is made to feel un-valued and their thoughts, feelings and behavioural choices are not validated, or they are actively condemned. Emotional abuse creates a climate of fear and uncertainty, limiting confident exploration and personal assertion. The victim may not feel free to show protest behaviour or express a range of emotions (Werkerle et al. 2009). Examples of emotionally abusive behaviours can be seen in table 2.2.

Table 2.2 Emotional Abuse: Classifications and Examples

Maltreatment Type	Classifications	Examples
Emotional Abuse	Verbal	Shouting, belittling, name-calling; degrading or intimidating comments; verbal acts of humiliation; ridiculing; verbal threats of abuse; harm or torture; repeated threats of abandonment; ostracising.
	Non-verbal	Rejecting; isolating; denying emotional responsiveness; exclusion or expulsion from an activity, intentional denial of attention and support; failure to recognise or acknowledge a persons individuality and psychological boundary; damage or destruction of property; psychological punishment
Type	Definition based on the APSAC framework (Glaser 2002)	
Spurning	Verbal and non-verbal hostile rejecting/degrading.	
Terrorising	Behaviour that threatens or is likely to harm physically the person or place loved ones in dangerous situations.	
Isolating	Denying opportunities for interacting/communicating with peers or adults.	
Exploiting/Corrupting	Encouraging inappropriate behaviours.	
Denying emotional responsiveness	Ignoring the persons needs to interact, failing to express positive affect, showing no emotion in interactions.	

(Source: Adapted from Marshall 2012; Stirling 2009; Glaser 2002; Hart et al. 1998).

Sexual Abuse

Brackenridge (2001) states that there is no universally accepted set of definitions for practices associated with sexual discrimination, sexual harassment or sexual abuse. She further highlights that there is a need to agree on working definitions as “confusion over certain terms and how language is used to describe and evaluate sexual exploitation can compound or ameliorate the problem” (p.26). Although this sub-section is directly related to sexual abuse, it is important here to understand that this is one manifestation of a wider concept of ‘sexual exploitation’. Sexual harassment and abuse are part of a continuum of sexual exploitation whereby sexual abuse is a sub-set of harassment and sexual harassment is a sub-set of sexual discrimination (Brackenridge 1997) as demonstrated in figure 2.1 (p.21). The continuum encompasses sexual discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual abuse; sexual harassment and abuse are represented as the middle and extreme points along this continuum. To enable clarity of meaning, these will therefore be discussed within this element of the review rather than under harassment as a discriminatory form of maltreatment. Brackenridge (2001) states that the construction of the relationships between each of these terms is susceptible to criticism in that it serves to simplify what is in fact, a highly complex, dynamic combination of power and sexuality. Nevertheless, the model is a useful framework for understanding this complex area.

The overarching term of sexual exploitation is classed as the most severe manifestation of sexual abuse and is a behaviour, which Brackenridge (2001, p.13) states, “abuses power, abuses trust, causes harm and sometimes even breaks the law”. Sexual exploitation includes this reference to power being exercised by authority figures and contains a range of behaviours that are harmful to the individual. Sexual discrimination is linked to organisational practices and the term discrimination derives itself from the division of women and men on the basis of personal attributes such as age, sex, race and sexuality. Whilst sex discrimination has individual consequences, it is based on collective policies and practices directly endorsed by organisations. It is therefore mainly an institutional problem and institutional sexism is not, therefore, traceable to one individual but instead reflects prejudice related to cultural and historical attitudes, beliefs and

working practices that serve to exclude and marginalise women and other minorities (Brackenridge 2001). Sexual discrimination has the power to change the environment and create feelings of discomfort and is therefore labelled the ‘chilly climate’ within the conceptual framework in figure 2.1 (p.21).

Fasting and Brackenridge (2005) state that it is difficult to distinguish between the terms sexual harassment and abuse as there is a grey area between the two. Sexual harassment is classed as unwanted attention on the basis of sex (for example lewd comments, pinching, touching or caressing, sexual jokes) that a person in a position of power visits on someone in a subordinate position, and sexual abuse is classed as groomed or coerced collaboration in sexual and/or genital acts where the victim has been entrapped by the perpetrator (Fasting and Brackenridge 2005; Brackenridge 2001, 1997). According to Leahy et al. (2002), sexual abuse can further be defined as any sexual activity where consent is not or cannot be given. It incorporates non-contact, contact and penetrative sexual acts. It may include exchange of privileges for sexual favours, forced sexual activity or physical violence. Further, Ryan and Lane (1997, p.3) define sexual abuse as:

“Any sexual interaction with person(s) of any age that is perpetrated (1) against the victims will, (2) without consent, or (3) in an aggressive, exploitative, manipulative or threatening manner.”

This makes sexual harassment and sexual abuse two different yet related phenomena. There are parallels between sexual harassment and abuse; both are discriminatory and display an abuse of unequal power between the harasser and the harassed on a personal level, as well as within the social structure or a hierarchy of power (Volkwein-Caplan and Sankaran 2002). Sexual harassment is potentially more widespread than sexual abuse but can be the precursor to more severe sexual misconduct.

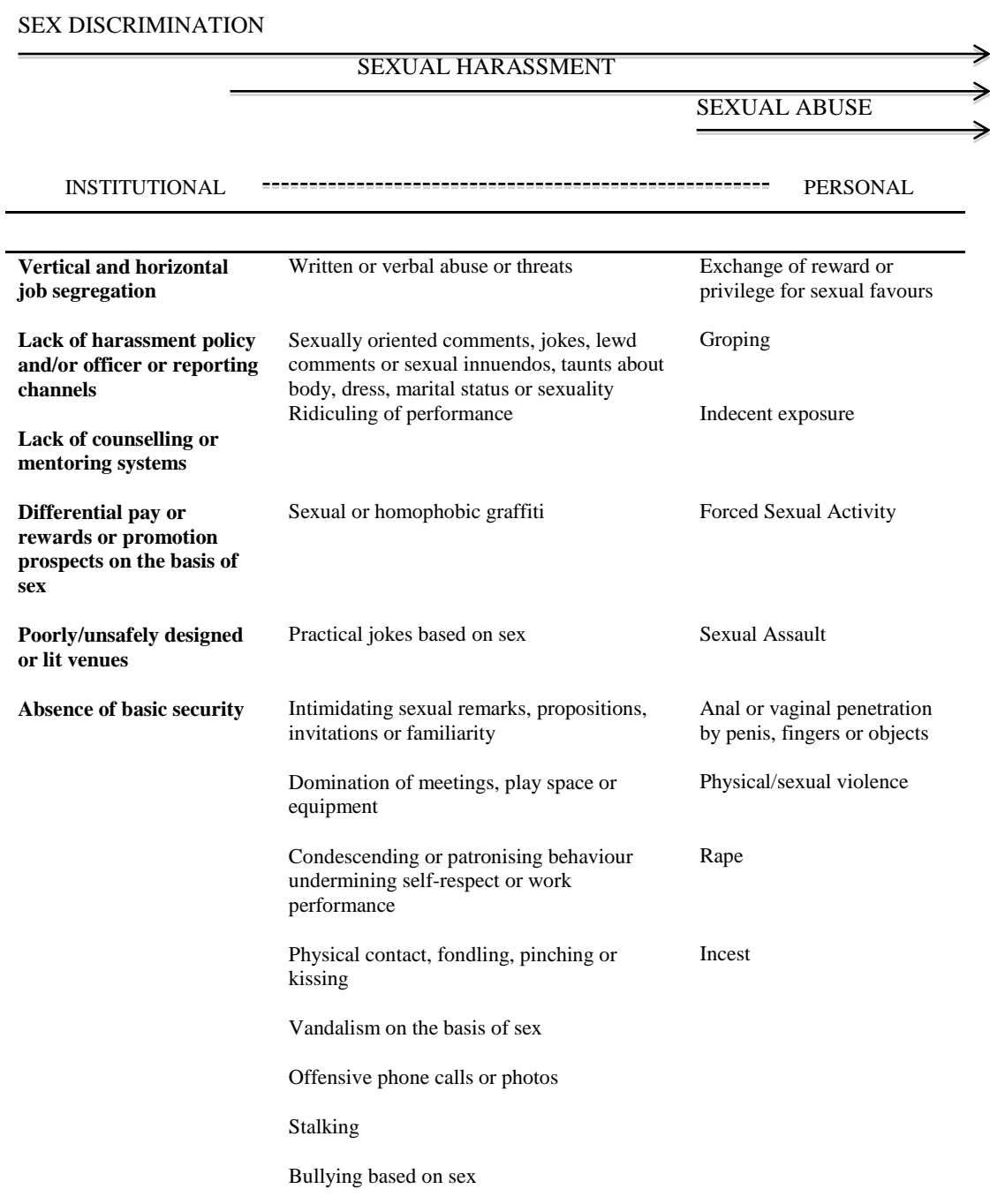


Figure 2.1: The Sexual Exploitation Continuum (Brackenridge 2001, p. 29)

The person who is the target in sexual abuse is described as a victim or survivor (Kelly et al. 1995). The process of grooming is central to the formation of abusive relationships and as a label is taken from social work and clinical sex offending literatures (Fasting and Brackenridge 2005). Perpetrators of abuse generally select victims who are vulnerable in some way (Miller-Perrin and Perrin 2013) and then slowly gain their trust before systematically breaking down interpersonal

barriers prior to committing any form of sexual abuse (Fasting and Brackenridge 2005). This process can take time yet is important because it brings about the appearance of co-operation from the victim, making the act of abuse seem to be consensual. Harassment is undeniably unwanted treatment, whereas sexual abuse is so intertwined in terms of the relational status that it may appear to be wanted (or consented to) due to the victim having been subjected to the grooming process (Stirling 2009; Brackenridge 2001). It is possible to further classify sexual abuse into touching sexual offenses (for example sexual relations, inappropriate touching) and/or non-touching sexual offences (for example indecent exposure, sexually oriented comments, sexual propositions) (Matthews 2004 cited Stirling 2009), further demonstrating the complex nature of behaviours related to this form of maltreatment, as identified in table 2.3.

Table 2.3 Sexual Abuse: Classifications and Examples.

Maltreatment Type	Classifications	Examples
Sexual Abuse	Touching Sexual Offences	<i>Intrusion</i> oral, anal or genital penile penetration; anal or genital digital penetration. Molestation with genital contact with no intrusion; Unwanted/coerced touching of another's personal sexual organs; making an individual touch another person's sexual organs; exchange of reward or privilege for sexual favours; inappropriate sexual contact: groping, kissing, touching.
	Non-touching Sexual Offences	Sexually oriented comments; jokes or sexual innuendoes; Unwanted/coerced exposure to pornographic material; deliberate exposure of an individual to the act of sexual intercourse; production of sexual images; watching sexual activities; encouragement to behave in sexually inappropriate ways; prostitution and sexual exploitation for commercial gain

(Source: Adapted from Stirling 2009; Brackenridge and Fasting 2004; Brackenridge 2001).

Neglect

Crooks and Wolfe (2007) state that neglect involves a failure to provide care in accordance with expected societal standards for food, shelter, protection and affection. Neglect depends on acts of presumed omission rather than commission, requires no physical contact and involves violation of or failure to respect elements of psychosocial being (Barnett et al. 1993). As a form of maltreatment,

neglect refers to a lack of reasonable care (Glaser 2002), deficits in the provision of basic needs (Munkel 1994) and deprivation of attention (Iwaniec and Sneddon 2003). Definitional problems exist in terms of whether to include both physical and emotional dimensions of neglect. English guidance includes both and defines childhood neglect as: “the persistent failure to meet a child’s basic physical and / or psychological needs” (Department for Children, Schools and Families, DCSF, 2010, p.39). Daniel and Taylor (2004) highlight that whilst emotional neglect can occur even when physical needs are met, physical neglect will always have an emotional impact on the individual.

The severity of neglect can be conceptualised along a continuum, ranging from optimal care to that which is grossly inadequate, and severity is typically examined in relation to the magnitude of the outcome or the degree of demonstrable harm to the individual (Miller-Perrin and Perrin 2013). Of further importance are the frequency and duration of the treatment or neglecting behaviours. Single incidents could simply be excused by basic human error rather than a pattern of serious neglectful behaviour. Repeated patterns of neglectful behaviour are conversely more likely to be considered harmful to the individual. However it is also argued that to truly understand the experience and impact of neglectful acts we need to evaluate the frequency and chronicity of the behaviour in the context of the severity of harm (Marshall 2012). This is due to the fact that an isolated incident or brief omission in care could have the potential to result in serious consequences. Based on this, neglect includes any act or omission in care that endangers an individual whether it happens once or repeatedly (Dubowitz et al. 1993). It is known to co-exist with other forms of maltreatment, yet can also stand in isolation as its own form of abusive behaviour (Daniel and Taylor 2004).

Stirling (2009) identifies four types of neglect, which demonstrate incidents of inattention to an individual’s needs, nurturing or wellbeing: physical, educational, emotional and social neglect (see table 2.4, p.24). However, it is acknowledged that there is some overlap between types of neglect and that there are other classifications available in the literature, for example the inclusion of medical neglect. For the purpose of this study medical and social neglect have been combined into one category.

Table 2.4 Neglect: Classifications and Examples.

Maltreatment Type	Classifications	Examples
Neglect	Physical Neglect	Failure to provide basic necessities; Refusal of healthcare; abandonment; inadequate supervision; failure to provide for safety, physical and emotional needs; rejection; inadequate nutrition, clothing or hygiene; other forms of reckless physical disregard for a person's wellbeing.
	Educational Neglect	Failure to provide access to adequate schooling or educational access; permitted or encouraged chronic truancy; inattention to special education needs
	Psychological/Emotional Neglect	Ignoring; rejecting; inadequate nurturing or affection; refusal of psychological care; constant belittling and withholding affection; verbally assaulting; other forms of reckless emotional disregard for a person's wellbeing.
	Social and Medical Neglect	Delay in psychological care; inattention to social needs; chronic rejection; permitted maladaptive behaviour without the intervention from a caregiver; failure to provide medical treatment or healthcare (where the caregiver has reason to be aware of the existence and seriousness of the problem and does not intervene).

(Source: Adapted from Marshall 2012; Stirling 2009; Glaser 2002).

Discriminatory Abuse/Harassment

Discriminatory abuse or harassment refers to unwanted or coerced behaviours that are in violation of an individual's human rights (Stirling 2009). Although harassment comes in many forms, it directly relates to persistent exposure to negative and/or aggressive behaviours of a primarily psychological nature that lead to stigmatisation and victimisation of the target (Poilpot-Rocaboy and Winter 2007). Ljungqvist et al. (2008) state that harassment is a violation of human rights regardless of cultural setting and has the potential to damage both individual and organisational health.

Discriminatory abuse can be based on various identity group characteristics (for example race, gender, disability, religion, sexual orientation) but can also come in

the form of ‘vexatious behaviour’ that is not overtly linked to membership of a particular identity group (for example bullying, incivility, aggression) (Raver and Nishii 2010). Types include sexual harassment, physical harassment, psychological or emotional harassment, gender harassment, racial harassment, homophobia or harassment related to sexual orientation. Bullying is sometimes linked to or defined within the realms of harassment in the literature (Poilpot-Rocaboy and Winter 2007; Leyman 1996), with psychological or emotional harassment being the extreme point on this continuum. Evidence has increasingly demonstrated that targets of harassment often experience multiple forms of mistreatment. For example, one type of harassment co-occurs with others but further research needs to be conducted in this area to further our understanding of such instances (Raver and Nishii 2010).

Table 2.5 Harassment/Discriminatory Abuse: Classifications and Examples.

Maltreatment Type	Classifications	Examples
Harassment/ Discriminatory Abuse	Physical Harassment	Physical threats; acts of aggression toward a person; threat of physical violence; shoving or intentionally bumping a person; intimidating behaviour or actions.
	Sexual Harassment	Written or verbal abuse/threats; Sexually oriented comments, jokes, lewd comments or sexual innuendoes, taunts about body, dress, marital situation or sexuality; Ridiculing of performance; Sexual or homophobic graffiti; Intimidating sexual remarks, propositions, invitations or familiarity; Physical contact, fondling, pinching or kissing; Stalking; Bullying based on sex; quid pro quo.
	Emotional/Psychological Harassment	Behaviours of a derogatory or exclusionary nature; Put-down jokes about an individual; Exposure to excessive teasing or sarcasm; Insulting or humiliating remarks; Ridicule and the spreading of gossip or rumours; Unwelcome, offensive or hostile facial expressions or body gestures; Telling embarrassing or upsetting stories about a person.

Gender Harassment including Transphobia	Referring to a person's gender in a negative, vulgar or derogatory manner; Exclusion of an individual based on gender. Crude verbal and physical behaviours that convey hostile, offensive and sexist attitudes.
Racial Harassment	Racial abuse; Reference to someone's race in a negative way; Vulgar or derogatory terms related to race; Exclusion of an individual based on race. Threatening verbal or exclusionary behaviour that has an ethnic component and is directed at a target individual because of their ethnicity.
Homophobia	Referring to someone's sexual preference in negative, vulgar or derogatory terms; Exclusion of an individual based on sexual orientation; Use of homophobic language or humour.

(Source: Adapted from Stirling 2009; Poilpot-Rocaboy and Winter 2007; DoH 2000)

Bullying

The term bullying can be defined as:

“Offensive, abusive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, or abuse of power conducted by an individual or group against others, which makes the recipient feel upset, threatened, humiliated or vulnerable, which undermines their self-confidence and which may cause them to suffer stress. Bullying is behaviour which is generally persistent, systematic and ongoing” (Task Force on the Prevention of Workplace Bullying 2001, p.10).

Bullying is a form of aggression that occurs when people perceive actions directed at them from one or several individuals as negative over time (Simons and Mawn 2010). It includes “physical, verbal or psychological attacks or intimidations that are intended to cause fear, distress or harm to the victim” (Stirling 2009, p.1097). Bullying occurs without provocation from the victim, and an incident cannot be categorised as bullying unless there is a power gradient, perceived or actual, between individuals involved and the behaviour is repeated over a prolonged period of time involving the same individuals (Simons and Mawn 2010; Zapf and Gross 2000). To distinguish bullying from abusive behaviour, it is thought that this form of maltreatment is more likely to occur in peer-to-peer relationships.

Although there is still often a power imbalance present, the bully is not in an official or prescribed position of power over the victim (Stirling 2009). Rigby (2002) states that bullying is best viewed on a continuum due to the differences in experience for individuals and, like all forms of maltreatment, the subjective nature of the experience. For example, one victim may have the negotiation or coping skills to successfully deal with bullying with limited emotional or psychological damage where as in exactly the same situation another individual could be left feeling anxious and helpless as a result of their treatment.

A type of maltreatment important to note as a sub-set of bullying is classed as horizontal violence, also referred to as lateral violence or horizontal hostility. These are terms used to describe physical, verbal or emotional abuse of an individual within an organisational setting. Horizontal violence is a form of bullying which has been described as overt and covert non-physical hostility (such as criticism, sabotage, undermining, infighting, scapegoating and bickering) (Jackson et al. 2002). Bullying differs from horizontal violence in that the latter can occur as a single isolated incident, without power gradients between the individuals involved. Horizontal violence is a hostile behaviour that has the potential to lead to bullying if the behaviour were to continue over a period of time (Simons and Mawn 2010; Duffy 1995). As stated above, this type of maltreatment includes both overt and covert behaviours. The former includes name-calling, bickering, faultfinding, backstabbing, criticism, intimidation, gossiping, blaming, using put downs and utilising negative facial expressions. The latter includes sarcasm, the use of unfair tasks or assignments in order to cause someone added distress, eye-rolling, ignoring, refusing to work with someone, isolation, exclusion and fabrication (Bartholomew 2006). Frequently referred to in nursing and health care settings, this form of maltreatment can be damaging to social relations (Duffy 1995). It is suggested here that sport may not be immune from this form of work-place bullying and that horizontal violence could be present across the sporting landscape (for example between players in teams or individuals in management positions) and is therefore worthy of inclusion within the maltreatment spectrum.

Table 2.6 Bullying and Horizontal Violence: Classifications and Examples.

Maltreatment Type	Classifications	Examples
Bullying	Physical Bullying	Theft; Hitting; Punching; Kicking; Biting; Shoving; Slapping; Pushing; Physically intimidating and any negative physical contact with another.
	Emotional Bullying	Teasing; Name calling; Spreading rumours; Use of threatening comments or language; Ridiculing; Humiliation; Gossiping; Blaming;
	Social Bullying	Isolation from activities or non-acceptance in a peer group; Hazing or initiation rituals; Pressure to over conform.
Horizontal Violence	Overt Behaviours	Name-calling; Teasing; Bickering; Fault finding; Creation of Rumours; Backstabbing; Criticism; Intimidation; Gossiping; Blaming; Using put downs; Utilising negative facial expressions; Exclusion.
	Covert Behaviours	Sarcasm; The use of unfair tasks or assignments in order to cause someone added distress; Eye-rolling; Ignoring; Refusing to work with someone; Isolation; Exclusion.

(Source: Adapted from Simons and Mawn 2010; Stirling 2009; Jackson et al. 2002).

Maltreatment in Sport

Sport has the potential to offer a positive experience and it is often associated with both short-term and long-term benefits for participants (Brady 2010). However, Fraser-Thomas and Cote (2007) recognise that such benefits are not automatic and that the wellbeing of a person cannot be guaranteed within the sporting domain simply through their active participation. Sport has to be well planned, executed and developmentally appropriate in order to promote enjoyable, engaging and holistic sporting experiences. Bissell (2010) believes that all athletes have the right to participate in a safe and effective sporting environment. As such, the human rights of athletes must be respected and protected throughout their sporting careers. However, with athletes being pushed to extremes in pursuit of sporting excellence (Tofler et al. 1996), the line between positive training and maltreatment can become blurred (Stirling and Kerr 2008).

As in other contexts, current research in the area of maltreatment in the sporting environment has been limited by a lack of conceptual understanding of what

constitutes maltreatment and also by a lack of consistency in the definitions of maltreatment. Definitional ambiguity across domains has led to difficulty in conducting research and gaining an understanding of the extent of the problem. As of yet, there is limited empirical research within the domain of sport that will help us better understand the impact of maltreatment on athletes within the competitive environment. In addition, much of the work in the area has come directly from literature examining child maltreatment or retrospective accounts of maltreatment during childhood rather than instances of maltreatment in adults or those classified as adults. Therefore an outcome of this study will be the development of clearer guidelines for defining and classifying maltreatment of adults within the sporting context.

Over recent years, there has been a wealth of literature that has questioned the long-term impact of certain behaviours on the wellbeing of the athlete (Lang 2010a; Beamish and Richie 2008; Theberge 2008; Miller and Kerr 2008; Kelly and Waddington 2006; Gervis and Dunn 2004). Abuses of many kinds have been known about for many years, but for a variety of reasons they have not been labelled as abuse or dealt with as misdemeanors. Brackenridge et al. (2005) believe that this is because the physical demands of training, emotional toughness, and a culture of resilience in sports have acted as a mask to the sufferings that some athletes experience as part of their sports participation. Kerr (2010) highlights that it is only recently that concern has been shown over athletes' experiences of maltreatment and that this has led to an emergence of research on the maltreatment in sport.

Stirling (2009) is the first researcher to attempt to classify maltreatment within the sporting context, introducing it as an overarching term that can be further sub-categorised into a range of maltreatment types. Stirling notes that the terms maltreatment and abuse have been used interchangeably within the literature to describe a range of behaviours, however, she believes that abuse should be distinguished as a specific type of maltreatment. Kerr and Stirling (2008) demonstrate the difference between abuse and maltreatment through their conceptualisation of relational (including abuse) and non-relational (excluding abuse) forms of maltreatment. This classification depends upon the nature of the

relationship in which the behaviour occurs. Much maltreatment, both relational and non-relational, exists within relationships that include a power differential, thus it is the critical nature of the relationship in which the maltreatment occurs that allows us to differentiate the various forms (Stirling 2009). Kerr (2010) believes that abuse is distinguished from other non-relational maltreatments such as assault, harassment or bullying, in that it is a relational disorder and refers to a pattern of harmful behaviours that only exist within a critical relationship role. A critical relationship is one where the perpetrator is placed in a position of authority over the victim and therefore has responsibility for the welfare of the victim in some capacity. In this sense, it creates a relationship in which one individual is dependent, fully or in part, on another individual for his or her sense of safety, trust and fulfilment of needs (Crooks and Wolfe 2010).

Based on Stirling’s (2009) categorisation of maltreatment in sport, relational maltreatments include physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect. Non-relational maltreatments include abuse or assault, child labour, institutional maltreatment, corruption, bullying and harassment, which occur within a non-critical relationship. Stirling called for greater consistency in the use of terms throughout research therefore her framework outlined in figure 2.2 provides a useful starting point through which to analyse the current literature in the area.

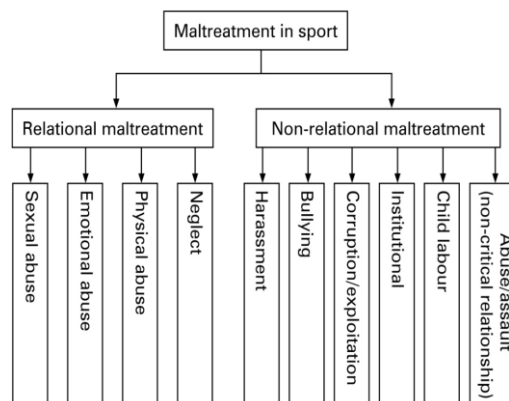


Figure 2.2: Categorisation of Maltreatment in Sport (Source: Stirling 2009, p 1092)

It is acknowledged that limited consensus in the sporting literature surrounding the concept of maltreatment makes it difficult to know if the classification

proposed by Stirling (2009) is a true representation of the types of maltreatment experienced or if there may be overlap between relational and non-relational maltreatments (for example a coach in a critical position bullying an athlete). The rationale for viewing maltreatment and abuse as separate constructs is clearly stated, but clouded by the fact that Stirling (2009) also includes the term abuse within abuse/assault (non-critical relationship) within her conceptual framework. An examination of the critical relationship between the athlete and the type of maltreatment they experience will therefore be essential to further understanding in this area. However, in line with the classification of maltreatment from the previous section, Stirling's framework is an excellent starting point from which to examine the concept of maltreatment within the sporting context and serves as a supporting framework for this study.

A number of other related typologies of maltreatment exist within the sporting literature. These include sport-specific typologies of face-to-face maltreatment and virtual maltreatment. David (2005), for example, proposed a typology that identified four main types of direct abuse of athletes in competitive youth sport: physical, psychological, sexual abuse and neglect. The direct nature of the abuse means that the athlete experiences it first hand from the perpetrator (a coach hitting an athlete could be classified as direct physical abuse). Raakman et al. (2010) extended this through the introduction of indirect abuse, whereby an individual can be indirectly exposed to abusive behaviours (an athlete observing a coach physically abusing a teammate). Direct abuse can be defined as:

“any behavior of a coach aimed directly at or involving player(s) that violates the child in the following categories: physical, sexual psychological, neglectful or inappropriate modeling” (Cook and Dorsch 2014, p.510).

Indirect abuse relates to any behavior that takes place in the presence of players (Raakman et al. 2010). The latter category is deemed important as it acknowledges that athletes do not have to experience behaviours directly in order for them to have an impact upon them. This assumption is based on the work of Omli and LaVoi (2009) who proposed the negative effects of background anger in youth sport. “Background anger refers to the presence of verbal, nonverbal or physical conflict that does not directly involve the observer” (Omli and LaVoi

2009, p.245), yet has the potential to threaten them. This led to the conceptualisation of the coaching transgressions model (TOCT), which states that an athlete could experience neglect, physical, psychological, sexual abuse and/or inappropriate modeling, either directly or indirectly in the sports environment. It should be noted, however, that this model relates to coaching transgressions and not to those of others stakeholders (for example, peers, sports scientists, medical staff). In addition, it relates directly to unacceptable behaviours in recreational youth sport, therefore it is unknown if it is transferrable to adults in elite sport environments.

Kavanagh and Jones (2014) proposed a framework to explain virtual maltreatment in sport in response to data collected from a sample of Paralympic athletes who identified that maltreatment also occurs in virtual environments and not just during face-to-face interaction. They suggest that individuals can experience four types of maltreatment directly or non-directly through virtual platforms such as twitter: physical, sexual, emotional or psychological and discriminatory, of which the final type can further be categorised into discrimination based upon gender, race, sexual orientation, religion and disability. Even with the introduction of a number of frameworks to identify the types of maltreatment an individual could be exposed to within the sporting environment, an understanding of the overarching experience of maltreatment in sport has yet to be provided and its creation therefore forms one of the goals of this study.

Cense and Brackenridge (2001) argue that within a sports culture that thrives on authoritarian leadership, the climate is ripe for the individual exploitation of athletes and evidence of maltreatment in sport is undeniable. However, the nature of maltreatment is a relatively recent addition to the sports research agenda (Rhind et al. 2014; Fasting et al. 2013; Stirling and Kerr 2008; Brackenridge et al. 2005; Gervis and Dunn 2004), and to date has received sporadic attention within the academic literature. Recent research in sport indicates that athletes are not immune to experiences of physical (Stafford et al. 2013; Kerr 2010; Lang 2010a; Pike 2010; Kelly and Waddington 2006), sexual (Fasting et al. 2011; Parent 2011; Parent and Demers 2011; Hartill 2009; Brackenridge et al. 2008; Fasting et al. 2004; Brackenridge 2001; Cense and Brackenridge 2001) and emotional (Stirling

2013; Stirling and Kerr 2013; Stirling and Kerr 2009; Stirling and Kerr 2008; Stirling and Kerr 2007; Gervis and Dunn 2004) abuse along with other forms of maltreatment. Athletes, coaches, parents, administrators and sports fans all have the potential to become both victims and perpetrators of maltreatment (Kavanagh and Jones 2014; Stirling 2009). At this stage it is pertinent to explore the research that has been conducted to date and examine the development of the understanding of maltreatment within the sporting context. Existing research exploring sexual abuse and sexual harassment, emotional abuse, physical abuse and forced physical exertion and maltreatment in virtual environments will now be introduced. In addition, the types of maltreatment that have been identified in existing typologies that have failed to have been examined to date within sports research will be highlighted.

Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment in Sport

Sexual abuse and sexual harassment have received the most research attention in sport when compared to all other relational and non-relational maltreatments. Brackenridge (2001) states that in Britain, one of the catalysts with regards to our awareness and willingness to accept that sexual abuse could occur within the sporting environment occurred in 1993 when Paul Hickson, a former Olympic swimming coach, was charged with sexual assaults against retired teenage swimmers with whom he had worked. The 'Hickson case' is recognised as a defining moment in the history of sexual exploitation in sport; sexual abuse was not included in the national sports research or policy agenda until after this time. Research studies on interpersonal harassment and sexual abuse in sport began in the 1980s and have grown in number steadily since this time (Hartill 2012; Parent and Bannon 2012; Parent and Demers 2011; Sand et al. 2011; Rodriguez and Gill 2011; Hartill 2009; Fasting and Brackenridge 2009; Fasting et al. 2007; Bringer et al. 2006; Fasting et al. 2004; Fasting et al. 2003; Fasting et al. 2002; Leahy et al. 2002; Cense and Brackenridge 2001; Brackenridge 1997; Lenskyj 1992; Lackey 1990).

Fasting (2005) notes that given the relatively recent history of research in the area, it is not surprising that there is a marked variety in both the theoretical and methodological approaches adopted for research. Qualitative research has enabled

a better understanding of descriptions of abuse experiences and their consequences in order to identify risk factors associated within sport (Bringer et al. 2006; Fasting and Brackenridge 2005; Fasting et al. 2002). In addition, theoretical models have been developed which are grounded in the direct experiences of athletes (Fasting 2005). For example, through her research Brackenridge (2001) identified risk factors associated with sexual abuse in sport, which are divided into normative risks (to do with the organisational culture) and constitutive risks (to do with the organisational structure, including technical or task demands). The risk factors directly relate to the coach, the athlete or the sport, as demonstrated in table 2.7.

Table 2.7 Revised risk factors for sexual abuse in sport

The Coach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has unsatisfactory relationship(s) with peers or partner or has no partner. Has history of (sexual) relationship difficulty with wife/partner and/or children Possibly models self on own parents lack of empathy or exploitation Suffers from thwarted personal ambitions Derives self-esteem from control over others and public affirmation Has access to the means to isolate intended victims (often using own car or team bus, hotel and/or own home) Pushes back interpersonal boundaries through ambiguous sexual behaviours (touching, massage, non-verbal flirting) Sets very demanding technical and training goals Makes public comparisons between ability of intended victim and that of their peers.
The Athlete	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suffers from psychological vulnerability that may be compounded by sensory or motor impairment Is relatively youthful or inexperienced in the sport compared with the authority figure Is sexually naïve or immature/around puberty Is at or near the stage of immanent achievement May show signs of disordered eating Has distant relationship with parents or carers Afford the coach complete control of their life Is totally dedicated to the coach or authority figure who assumes the status of a father figure.
The Sport	<p>Normative organisational culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has an autocratic authority system and involves close personal contact with athletes Sets up clear power imbalance between the athlete and the coach Gives scope for separation of athlete from peers in time and space Gives scope for the development and maintenance of secrecy Involves mixed sexes and ages sharing rooms on away trips Condones sexual relationships between all ages and statuses Sexualises athletes' idiocultural traditions (songs, jokes, nick-names, hazing, rituals, pranks) Supports collective silence on matters of sexuality. <p>Constitutive organisational structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involves hierarchical status system Gives rewards based on performance Links rewards to compliance with authority system Has rules and procedures which omit/exclude consultation Has no formal procedures for screening, hiring and monitoring staff Intense training regimes to acquire necessary technical skill Technical/task demands legitimate touch

(Source: Brackenridge 2001 p 136).

Quantitative studies on sexual abuse and harassment have been conducted in Canada (Kirby and Greaves 1996), the USA (Volkwein et al. 1997), Australia (Leahy et al. 2002), Norway (Vanden Auweele et al. 2008; Fasting et al. 2004;

Sundgot-Borgen et al. 2003) and Denmark (Toftegaard Nielsen 2001). Some of these studies used a qualitative phase in the investigation. Qualitative studies have also been conducted in England and the Netherlands (Fasting and Brackenridge 2005; Cense and Brackenridge 1997), predominantly focused on former athletes' retrospective accounts of abuse. Additional risk factors highlighted within the literature include the athletic maturation of the athlete, parents' trust of the coach in relation to child sexual abuse and the subculture of the sport itself (Stirling 2009).

Only a small number of large-scale quantitative studies have been conducted on the incidence of sexual abuse in sport. In such research, comparison is difficult due to, for example, differences in definitions, sampling, response rate, validity and reliability of measures (Fasting 2005). Studies conducted suggest prevalence between 2% and 22% (Brackenridge et al. 2008). The first national survey of sexual harassment and abuse in sport was conducted by Kirby and Greaves (1996) and was administered to the total population of Canada's HP recently retired Olympic athletes (n = 1200). Although the response rate of 22% (n = 266) is acknowledged as low, the findings demonstrated that 22% of the athletes reported that they had engaged in sexual intercourse with persons in a position of authority in sport, nine percent reporting that they had been raped. Fasting et al. (2004) conducted a study of the prevalence of sexual harassment among Norwegian female elite athletes in relation to sport type to examine if the experience of sexual harassment differs by sport. The female athletes (n = 553, an 87 % response rate from an original sample of 660) participated in 56 different sports disciplines. Although there were no significant differences in levels of reported sexual harassment between team and individual sports, the most important finding from this piece of research was that sexual harassment occurs in almost every sport group and is not specific to any particular type of sport. Toftegaard Nielsen (2001) conducted an investigation of 253 student athletes and 275 coaches to examine their perceptions of interpersonal coach-athlete relations. In this piece of research, two percent of the sample had an experience of sexual abuse in sport, and three percent of coaches admitted to having an intimate involvement within an athlete under the age of 18.

In an interview on Radio 4 in 2012, Daniel Rhind, a leading researcher in athlete welfare, stated that in 2011 there were 652 recorded cases of safeguarding or abuse in sport, and of those, 120 were linked to sexual abuse, which ranged from inappropriate touching to allegations of rape. He believes that what gets reported to National Governing Bodies (NGBs) is only the tip of the iceberg and that at every stage of abuse there is a barrier to it being reported (Rhind 2012). Studies of sexual abuse in sport have typically focused on male coaches as abusers, yet there is also evidence of peer abuse, especially through the practices of hazing, a process of humiliating, degrading or abusive activities expected of junior ranking athletes by a more senior teammate (Groves et al. 2012; Waldron and Kowalski 2009). Although greater work is needed within this area, it is clear that sexual abuse *is* occurring in the sporting environment. Fasting (2005) states that currently there are many rumours and few facts based on research and that more prevalence studies are needed in order to directly inform policy. Currently, much of the research presented involves female abuse victims, and there is limited exploration of the experience or prevalence of male athlete victims (Hartill 2012; Parent and Bannon 2012; Hartill 2009), female coaches, trainers, referees or sports leaders, leaving much unknown about sexual abuse and sexual harassment in sport.

Emotional Abuse in Sport

Examination of emotional abuse in sport has been limited, or not clearly conceptualised. Anderson (2010) highlights that there remains an ‘if you don’t like it then leave it mentality’ within sport that creates an environment where athletes do not question practice: this has the potential to permit all types of abuse. Emotionally abusive behaviours in sport are characterised by sustained and repeated patterns of contact free harmful interactions between the athlete and caregiver (Stirling 2013; Stirling and Kerr 2008), and result in emotional upset of the athlete. Stirling (2009) suggests that for a particular behaviour to be classified as emotionally abusive it must be deliberate and occur within a critical relationship, thus making it different from bullying, emotional neglect or harassment. Based on the findings of their study, Stirling and Kerr (2008, p.178)

created the following definition of emotional abuse for use within the sporting context:

“A pattern of deliberate non-contact behaviours by a person within a critical relationship role that has the potential to be harmful. Acts of emotional abuse include physical behaviours, verbal behaviours, and acts of denying attention and support. These acts have the potential to be spurning, terrorizing, isolating, exploiting/corrupting, or deny emotional responsiveness, and may be harmful to an individual’s affective, behavioral, cognitive or physical wellbeing.”

Gervis and Dunn (2004) conducted one of the first studies to investigate the prevalence of emotional abuse of elite child athletes by their coaches in the United Kingdom. Results highlighted that abusive behaviours were categorised under eight headings: belittling, humiliating, shouting, scapegoating, rejecting, isolating, threatening and ignoring. All of the participants reported that the behaviour of their coaches changed and became more negative when they were identified as elite performers. The behaviour left athletes feeling stupid, worthless, depressed, under-confident and rejected, highlighting the problems associated with such behaviour from coaches. Stirling and Kerr (2008) completed a study with 14 retired swimmers and they found that emotionally abusive behaviours of the coach occurred in three ways: through physical behaviours, verbal behaviours and the denial of attention and support. Physically emotionally abusive behaviours included acts of aggression such as hitting and throwing objects either at an athlete or in the presence of an athlete. Verbal behaviours included yelling and shouting at an athlete or group of athletes, belittling, name-calling and utilising degrading comments. Denial and attention of support included athletes sharing experiences of being ignored by the coach and “being treated as if they didn’t exist” (Stirling and Kerr 2008, p.176) and being excluded from training practices. This form of emotional abuse was found to have the most negative effect on athletes, followed by verbally emotionally abusive behaviours. Finally, physically emotionally abusive behaviours were found to have the least negative effect on performers within this study.

Stirling and Kerr (2007) further identified that athlete experiences of emotional abuse change as athletes’ career progress, and that their experiences were related to their perceptions of their athletic performance and their socialisation into the

culture of elite sport. Emotional abuse was experienced differently depending upon the athlete's stage of athletic development (early, mid and late career). Stirling found that athletes experience emotional abuse as soon as they began to train at a competitive level within their sport, but that at this stage they are willing to accept this behaviour as symbolic of the training process and the competitive environment, especially if as a junior performer they witness older athletes accepting similar treatment. Similarly, in the middle and often more important stage of the athlete's career (this is likely to be a stage of peak performance), they are willing to accept emotionally abusive behaviour from coaches and rationalise this in line with performance gains and competitive success. Differences at this stage align with how successful the athletes were; if the athlete is performing then it is easier to accept emotionally abusive coaching than if they are underperforming. When performances start to plateau or decline however, the emotional abuse they receive from coaches is deemed to have a more detrimental impact. Combined with the pressure to perform, this can create challenging and uncomfortable situations for athletes that can lead to anxiety, depression and feelings of hopelessness. At the end of a career, athletes can become intolerant of abusive behaviours, question the coach and even rebel against their actions. Whether this is because they can no longer cope with the behaviour or the consequence of not putting up with it have reduced as their careers are already coming to a close is not known. Yet despite this rebellion the negative effects of emotional abuse remain and participants demonstrate evidence of long-term distress as a result of the treatment from their coaches. Although using a small sample (14 elite retired female swimmers), Stirling's study points to the impact of emotional abuse on athletes and further demonstrates that this form of abuse can occur throughout athletic careers, having a considerable impact on athletes' lives.

Physical Abuse and Forced Physical Exertion in Sport

Research that has examined physical abuse in sport is limited; yet several researchers highlight that physical abuse in sport does occur (Kerr 2010; Theberge 2008; Kelly and Waddington 2006; Kirilanis et al. 2002). Physical abuse has been difficult to identify due to the variety of terms that have been adopted to describe physically abusive behaviours in the sporting context, for example:

playing through pain and the normalisation of injury (Fenton and Pitter 2010; Vetter and Symonds 2010; Theberge 2008; Malcom 2006; Charlsworth and Young 2004; Pike and Maguire 2003); experience of physical aggression and violence in sport (David 2005; Stafford et al. 2013) and the presence of forced physical exertion, intensive training as an abuse and punishment in sport (Hagiwara and Wolfson 2013; Kerr 2010; Lang 2010a). Kerr (2010) believes that the win at all costs environment and the drive to endure whatever it takes to win leads athletes to accept violence and aggression as part of the process. In her work on forced physical exertion (FPE), Kerr suggests that overuse injuries, especially in child athletes should constitute physical abuse. Furthermore, David (2005, p.63) referred to chronic overuse injuries as physical exploitation and stated that:

“Competitive sport can expose athletes to at least 4 types of physical abuse and violence: excessive intensive training; peer violence; physical violence by adults, including corporal punishment; and violence due to participation in competitions.”

FPE is an emerging area of literature within the sporting domain. It is suggested that when commonly used training methods for physical conditioning are used as a punishment this may constitute abusive behaviour, or, when athletes are forced to endure an excess amount of physical training beyond that which would be deemed reasonable for training benefits, to a point where this could be harmful to them, then they may be experiencing FPE (Kerr 2010). Lang (2010a) highlights that many popular sports such as gymnastics, tennis, skating, diving and swimming have extremely intensive training programmes, and as early specialisation sports, they require high levels of training from a very young age. Such sports require long and frequent practice hours and specialist training linked to one sport in the early years. Such specialisation has long been associated with sports where a small, prepubescent frame is considered essential, such as women’s gymnastics; however, it is also increasingly common in other sports such as swimming, figure skating, tennis and football (Lang 2010a).

Lang questions whether the levels of training that can be enforced by coaches are justified in pushing athletes towards success, or if this could be classed as a new form of abuse. Athletes who are exposed to FPE and intensive training

programmes at a young age are at greater risk of physical and mental burnout, overuse injuries, shorter sporting careers and an increased likelihood of dropout (Theberge 2008; Reynolds 2000; Hollander et al. 1995). Examples of FPE include exercise as a form of punishment (laps of a pitch or sprints, perhaps for losing a competition), having athletes train to the point of vomiting, forcing an athlete to do an exercise alone in front of a group because they have performed poorly and using unreasonable training programmes that fail to incorporate adequate rest and recovery required for physiological and psychological adaptation. Kelly and Waddington (2006) describe how football managers utilise physical training as a punishment for players who make defensive errors in matches by being made to do additional running:

“When we trained, if someone got a clear shot at goal then he would stop training and make us run for 20 minutes... we were all terrified to make mistakes. It was entirely based on fear. We were scared. After matches that we lost, he would have us in at six in the morning running” (extract from an athlete interview, p.153).

Kerr (2010) states that it is important to emphasise the problems with examining FPE in sport. Firstly, FPE is inherent in sport and the development of fitness and athleticism depend upon it. In addition, training principles are built on the premise that athletes need to push themselves out of their comfort zone in order to benefit from training. This means that it becomes ever more challenging to distinguish legitimate physical exertion for conditioning athletes from exertion that would be classed as abusive. It is evident that further work is needed to create a clear definition of FPE and to understand its impact on athletes.

One of the problems highlighted in the sporting literature is the normalisation of violence in competitive sport, which can lead athletes to risk injury in pursuit of a performance objective (Kerr 2010; Lang 2010a, 2010b; Kelly and Waddington 2006; David 2005; Pike 2005; Pike and Maguire 2003; Donnelly 1997). In addition, athletes are taught not to question authority (Anderson 2010); they follow guidance from authority figures almost without consideration for their own wellbeing. Theberge (2008) conducted a study with 20 male and female athletes from 3 sports (field hockey, rowing and wrestling) in order to explore their access to and experiences of working with sports medicine practitioners, their

experiences of injury and rehabilitation and their understanding of the relationship between sport participation and health. The findings suggest that most of the respondents acknowledged that their sport participation posed threats to their health, yet these health outcomes were classed as probable rather than inevitable features of being a performance athlete. Theberge notes that her study provides further confirmation of the toll that HP sport takes on athletes' bodies. Athletes cited both immediate and long-term outcomes associated with training, with the long-term effects being less certain. Most frequently mentioned was chronic arthritis, however, other long-term implications were noted including a female athlete who considered the potentially negative impact that years of training may have on her reproductive capacities. It is clear that the athletes interviewed for this study had a very clear focus on the present and on their immediate competitive career rather than their long-term health and well-being, as Theberge (2008, p.206) states:

“Respondents’ accounts of efforts to manage the threats to their health that are posed by their sporting activity frequently convey a disembodied notion of the athletic body as an object to be managed.”

Pike (2005) reported similar findings in her study on recreational rowers: she found that even in amateur sport, athletes demonstrate a disregard for their personal wellbeing in pursuit of performance. The normalisation of pain and injury in a variety of contexts reveals that athletes are willing to sacrifice their health in order to meet performance objectives. Waddington (2002, 2000) highlighted that sport is often championed on the basis of its beneficial impact on a variety of health measures. However, he further states that such benefits are more likely related to physical activity, not sport, and the findings are instead simply extrapolated to sport. Waddington believes that the competitive context of sport constrains participants to ‘play hurt’ and subordinate their health to performance. As Donnelly (1997, p.394) states:

“In no other occupation or profession would the high rate of burnout, and high rate of overuse injuries, the serious potential for traumatic injury, [and] the serious possibility of long-term disability (i.e. arthritis or growth-plate damage), ... be allowed to pass without question.”

Kelly and Waddington (2006) conducted a study to examine how football managers maintain control over players in professional football clubs, and how

disciplinary codes are established by managers imposed on players for breaches of club discipline. This research highlights the central role of intimidation and abuse, both verbal and physical, in order to control players. In many clubs, the traditional role of the football manager continues to be based on traditional forms of authoritarian leadership, creating a climate where abuse can occur without question. Participants highlighted a feeling of fear of the manager and the use of physical abuse to intimidate young players. Parker (1996) stated that football revolves primarily around a strict diet of authoritarianism, ruthlessness and hyper-masculine work-place practice; the threat or the use of physical violence are all aspects of this work culture (Kelly and Waddington 2006). More recently, Stafford et al. (2014) explored physical harm in sport within a sample of 6124 young people (18-22) who completed an online survey about their experience of participation in sport as children; 89 follow up interviews were conducted with a sub-set of the participants. Their findings suggest that participants experienced a range of physically abusive or aggressive behaviours whilst involved in the sporting environment. They comment that in sport, where training and competing to the limits of physicality are linked with sporting achievement, physical harm is common.

Physical abuse is thus present within the sporting environment but it is important to note that athletes experience abuse not only at the hands of coaches and teammates, but they also push themselves to extremes even if this has long-term health implications, pointing to a degree of self-harm. Reynolds (2000) believes that this happens because many sports people may perceive abusive behaviours such as playing through pain and injury and accepting physical punishment as a normal part of athletic endeavour and an essential part of progress.

Virtual Maltreatment in Sport

Kavanagh and Jones (2014) noted that much of the existing research in the area of maltreatment in sport has explored issues relating to face-to-face maltreatment such as abusive acts or behaviours against the individual, including acts of physical and/or psychological violence. Recent years have seen a considerable shift in the ways in which athletes and fans communicate (Pegoraro 2010), with

social media allowing direct and immediate communication between fans and athletes, permitting gatekeepers such as officials and journalists to be bypassed (Hutchins 2011). As a consequence, fans now have unprecedented access to athletes (Kassing and Sanderson 2010), bringing them closer to their heroes (Pegoraro 2010). One such platform used extensively by both fans and athletes is Twitter, which allows followers to communicate directly with or about high profile athletes. Communication can be instantaneous, uncontrolled, and often anonymous, perceived to be bridging “the ever-increasing gap between our players and supporters – they can correspond directly with their heroes, effectively” (Price et al. 2013, p.452). Research into the nature and prevalence of virtual maltreatment, commonly referred to as ‘cyberbullying’, is relatively recent (Kowalski and Limber 2013), and focuses largely upon abuse by and against children. There is, however, a growing body of literature that explores the nature of online abuse against adults. Kavanagh and Jones are the first to explore how athletes can become victims of such on-line interactions experiencing a variety of types of maltreatment in virtual environments.

Kavanagh and Jones (2014, p.37) define virtual maltreatment as:

“Direct or non-direct online communication that is stated in an aggressive, exploitative, manipulative, threatening or lewd manner and is designed to elicit fear, emotional or psychological upset, distress, alarm or feelings of inferiority.”

They propose four types of maltreatment that can be experienced either directly or indirectly within virtual relationships (see figure 2.3, p.44). These are physical, sexual, emotional and discriminatory, of which the final type can be further categorised into discrimination based upon gender, race, sexual orientation, religion and disability.

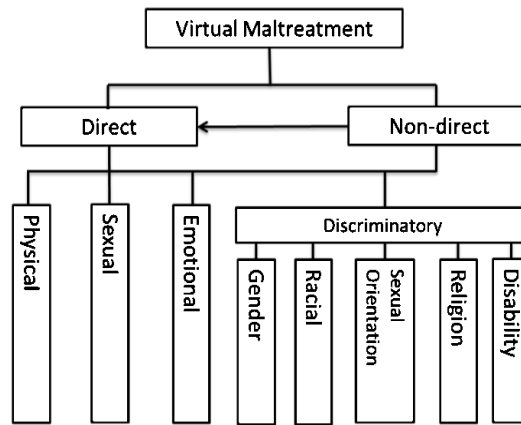


Figure 2.3: A Typology of Virtual Maltreatment in Sport (Source: Kavanagh and Jones 2014, p. 37)

Virtual relationships are those established within on-line environments and could include the follower-to-athlete (coach or official) or athlete-to-athlete relationship, and maltreatment can be experienced directly or indirectly within such relationships. Direct maltreatment refers to those incidents where a message is directly sent to a recipient. Non-direct maltreatment refers to cases whereby a message is not sent to the actual subject of the message, but the content would make reference to them. Non-direct maltreatment can become direct maltreatment through the process of retweeting or through media uptake or coverage of the abuse. In this instance, the subject of the abuse could become a direct recipient of it. Kavanagh and Jones suggest that athletes and other key stakeholders (coaches, managers, officials) can experience a variety of abusive or negative behaviours within virtual environments and that this type of maltreatment poses a significant threat to individual wellbeing. Kavanagh and Jones acknowledge further exploration of the phenomenon is needed.

Neglect, Bullying and Organisational Maltreatment in Sport

To date, no study has examined the experience of bullying in sport; similarly neglect has failed to gain attention within the academic literature in sport. Stirling (2009), however, highlights that when considering the long-term health implications resulting from intensive training, if the person within a critical relationship role over the athlete is aware of the occurrence of harm, then this reckless disregard of the athlete's wellbeing could be classed as neglectful behaviour. Failure to provide medical attention or care for injured athletes or

failure to provide access to an appropriate education due to the demands of sporting commitment could also constitute neglectful behaviour.

Institutional maltreatment refers to abusive or neglectful behaviours experienced by an individual where the serving institution maintains responsibility for the behaviour (Stirling 2009; Kerr and Stirling 2008). This type of maltreatment is a new categorical structure of maltreatment yet is critical when we examine the structure of organised sport, which is ruled by NGBs and the broader objectives of National Institutes of Sport (English Institute of Sport, EIS or UK Sport). Examples of institutional maltreatment include the failure of an institution to meet appropriate standards of care, or when the fundamental or core practices of an organisation could be classed as abusive (Stirling 2009). A large proportion of the instances of abuse highlighted throughout the literature review could be classified as institutional maltreatment as many of the problems are inherent in the current climate surrounding competitive sport. It is essential to acknowledge that with its performance-driven agenda, where 'win at all costs' is emphasised as all-important, there is the potential to forget the person at the centre of the experience. Much work remains to be done if we are to understand the impact of institutional maltreatment on individuals.

Sporting Ethos: The Normalisation of Maltreatment

Brackenridge and Fasting (2002) note that throughout its historical development, there has been a political and ideological preoccupation with the social, physical and moral benefits of sport. What is generally overlooked however, are the negative aspects of participation. Brackenridge (1994) criticised sport for what she describes as 'moral isolation' whereby organisations have existed or functioned outside of regulatory or moral frameworks, which govern other spheres of institutional life. She stated that such a problem stemmed from the traditional separation of sport from moral and legal scrutiny, which rested on the assumed purity of the activity. As a result, abuses of many kinds have been known about for a number of years in performance sport, but for a variety of reasons they have not been labeled as abuse or dealt with as misdemeanours. Brackenridge et al. (2005) believe that this is because the

physical demands of training, the demands for athletes to display emotional toughness and a culture of resilience in sports have acted as a mask to the sufferings that some individuals experience as part of their sports participation, leaving maltreatment not only unchallenged, but also undetected. The misuse of power has resulted in the normalisation of practices that could pose a significant threat to athlete wellbeing.

Seemingly critical to all types of maltreatment are the concept of power and sport as the site for the production of heterosexual masculinity (Brackenridge 2001). Anderson (2008) suggests that gendered institutions are always dynamic areas of tension and struggle, but states that there is perhaps no other institution in which gender is more naturalised than sport:

“As a highly segregated, homophobic, sexist and misogynistic gender regime, sport not only contributes to the gender order, but it also reproduces a conservative and stabilizing form of masculinity that renders considerable costs for both sexes.” (p.260)

In sociology, masculinity has typically been defined as the socially constructed gender ascribed to male bodies (Kimmel and Messner 1998). Connell (1987, cited Theberge 2000, p.323) writes that images of ideal masculinity are constructed and promoted most systematically through competitive sport, where the combination of skill and force in athletic competition becomes a defining feature of masculine identity. Hegemony, a concept created by Gramsci (1971), refers to a particular form of dominance in which the ruling class legitimises its position and secures the acceptance (if not complete support) of the rest of society. Hegemonic masculinity therefore refers to the most influential and most honoured or desired ideas about manhood (Connell 2000), through which heterosexual men assert their dominance over women and other masculinities (Dempster 2009). Connell (1995) believes that sport is the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity. Physical prowess, the ability to withstand pain and embarrassment and aggressive heterosexuality are all celebrated and demonstrate complicity with hegemonic masculinity. Athletes are revered for the physical attributes of strength, speed and stamina and psychological strength or mental toughness to cope with the demands of the competitive environment. It is accepted that athletes should ignore pain,

hurt others, play through injury, dominate others and 'do whatever it takes' in pursuit of performance outcome.

Beamish and Ritchie (2006) highlight that HP sport today inescapably involves the systematic, scientific and technological enhancement of individuals based upon the abstract ideal of 'the spirit of sport'. The real work of HP sport athletes takes place over a course of a lengthy, physically and emotionally demanding period of time to become a top class performer. Certainly such commitment can create an environment where sport becomes a near-total institution that has control over all aspects of a person's life. Anderson (2009) suggests that sport uses the myths of glory, patriotism, and masculine idolatry, along with corporeal discipline and structures of rank, division, rules and punishment, to subordinate individual agency and gain control.

Ewald and Jiobu (1985) showed that some athletes so overly adhere to the norms of sporting culture that they disrupt family relationships, work responsibilities and even reject the need to maintain their own physical health. Hughes and Coakley (1991) describe this type of adherence to sporting ethic as a form of social deviance. They further state that deviant behaviour among athletes is a complex diversified phenomenon (p.308) and that a significant portion of deviance among athletes does not involve disregarding commonly accepted cultural goals. Instead deviance is grounded in athletes' uncritical acceptance and commitments to what they feel are the goals and ideals of sport. The sport ethic consists of four general norms that are used to guide and evaluate ideas, traits and actions within the social world of sport: total dedication and sacrifice for the game; striving for distinction; accepting risks and playing through pain; and accepting no obstacles in the pursuit of possibilities. Many problem behaviours are created when athletes care too much for, accept too completely and over-conform to the above value systems of sport (Hughes and Coakley 1991). The sport ethic helps to construct athletic identity and shape interactions with others and over conformity is a form of social deviance that can be rewarded. Anderson (2010) states that the challenge to be the best, remain sponsored and compete at the highest level is increased if athletes over conform. This becomes a form of positive deviance whereby the individual is not rejecting norms, or conformity to a set of norms, they are over-conforming

to what could be classed as the value system of sport itself, especially evident in HP athletes. Therefore many athletes would not class their behaviour or overconformity as deviant; instead it simply reaffirms their identity as athletes and members of selective sports groups.

Within sport, coaches and athletes often expect to win, no matter what the cost to the self or others (Waldron and Kowalski 2009). Stirling (2009) highlights that over-conformity in competitive sport has the potential to make athletes vulnerable to abuse especially when the goal of winning overshadows the reasons for taking part as this can result in an uncritical acceptance of a range of negative behaviours. Furthermore, it has been suggested that as pressures to win in sport increase, not only are athletes depersonalised in their sporting environment, but also the competitive nature of sport encourages individuals to do whatever it takes in order to achieve success (Kerr 2010). In a review of the expectations of sports coaches and the physical and emotional health of athletes, Reynolds (2000) identified examples of coaching and athlete behaviour, which would currently be classed as normal and acceptable practice but challenge the boundaries of abuse and maltreatment. This is illustrated by the following example:

“I said to him “I can’t”, I’d done three (400 meter sprints) and I told him “I would be sick if I do it”. He said, “oh come on, come on, do it, do it,” so I did and I hit the hurdle and I landed on my head and I wound up in hospital with concussion and a neck brace” (Johnson 1995 cited Reynolds 2000, p.52).

Such an account highlights the problems associated with pushing athletes to extremes. What could be classed as motivational coaching behaviour simultaneously tells a story of athlete distress and mismanagement. Adherence to the basic tenets of the sport-ethic could explain why athletes are willing to accept maltreatment, especially if they believe it will increase their likelihood of achieving success. Such adherence can result in the silence of athletes; even if they do not agree with the behaviours they witness or experience, many will not report or question them. This means that competitive athletes’ vulnerability to abuse is magnified through the normalisation or justification of processes they believe will help them attain performance related goals (Bringer et al. 2001). Gervis (2009) highlighted that the major concern with abusive behavior is when it

becomes so endemic to a culture or a community that it is not acknowledged as such. She suggests that if the prevailing culture within elite sport is a fundamentally an (emotionally) abusive one, coaches and athletes alike will fail to recognise its destructive nature.

In a recent study, Alexander et al. (2011) examined the experiences of children participating in organised sport in the United Kingdom in order to enhance understanding of negative experiences and harm in sport. Students aged 18-22 in higher and further education were asked to complete an online survey (yielding 6000 valid responses), which sought to gather information about the impact of sport on body image and their experience of categories of harm including: emotional harm (including teasing, bullying and humiliating treatment); self-harm; sexual harm (including sexual harassment and abuse); physical harm (including training while injured or exhausted and aggressive and violent behaviour). The researchers conducted 89 in-depth follow up telephone interviews with young people who had admitted to being exposed to harm. The study highlighted that alongside the benefits outlined for participating in sport, there are also a range of more negative behaviours that have the potential to cause harm to children participating in sport. 75% of respondents reported emotional harm, 29% sexual harassment, 24% physical harm, 10% self-harm and finally 3% sexual harm. Although a further finding from this study was that overall, participation in sport is seen as a positive experience for most children and young people, it is interesting that for many there is a widespread acceptance that all forms of harm are a normal part of what happens in sport. Alexander et al. (2011) highlight that behaviour that would be intolerable in other settings such as adult workplaces or school is often accepted as a normal part of sporting culture. They further state that:

“This raises essential questions about sport, cultures of excellence and a sporting ethic which accepts as normal a culture of bullying, humiliating treatment, sexualized behaviour and of training and competing through exhaustion and injury.” (p.17).

With the increasing number of criminal and abusive incidents in sport, Vanden Auweele (2010) proposes that in order to address a growing moral deficit, modern

sports need to restructure for good governance to facilitate an increase in ethically informed practice and to demonstrate corporate social responsibility. Overt illegal practices such as athlete abuse, doping, match-fixing and deliberately or negligently causing harm have been witnessed, alongside many less overt and sometimes subtle and/or normalised but highly inappropriate practices that can be associated with a win at all costs ethos (Vanden Auweele, 2010). In addition to the areas highlighted above, examples of topics that have received attention include: pressurising of support staff and performers; poor treatment and conditions of service for some personnel (Theberge 2008); systematic overtraining (Pike 2010; Reynolds 2000; Hollander et al. 1995); hazing (Groves et al. 2012; Waldron and Kowalski 2009; Campo et al. 2005; Caperchione and Holman 2004); over-conformity to required behaviours (Boardley et al. 2014; Steinfeldt and Steinfeldt 2012; Dempster 2009); promotion of over-investment in sport by young performers at the expense of other areas of life (Miller and Kerr 2002; Stambulova 1994); homophobia and transphobia in sport (Anderson 2010; Rivers 2010; Brackenridge et al. 2008); and the normalisation of disordered eating and weight manipulation practices (Byrne and McLeen 2002; Stambulova 1994; Sundgot-Borgen 1994; Hoberman 1992). There remains a need to challenge the dominant ideologies that inform praxis in HP sport if we are to reduce the incidence of maltreatment in this area. While research to date has contributed significantly to our understanding of maltreatment further advancement is required (Stirling 2009).

Safeguarding Athletes

Athletes' and children's rights in sport derive much of their moral and legal force from the stance that sport should be viewed as educational; they are therefore reinforced by human rights legislation (Kerr and Stirling 2008). Donnelly (1989 cited Kidd and Donnelly 2000) notes that "human rights are literally the rights one has because one is a human being" (p.132), and states that they are essential not just for life but also for a life of dignity. There has been a long struggle in trying to achieve equal rights for all in sport, and in trying to safeguard and protect individuals who take part. Grayson (2000) notes that for most of its history, the majority of sports organisation and authorities believed that they were free from

legal obligations – or even above the law. In 1948, the United Nations (UN) proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which set out the UN's goal for international cooperation to achieve a common standard of basic freedoms and human rights. Advances in human rights have led to considerable change since the implementation of the declaration, working to reduce racism, discrimination against women and to develop the rights of the child. Kidd and Donnelly (2000, p.135) further state that:

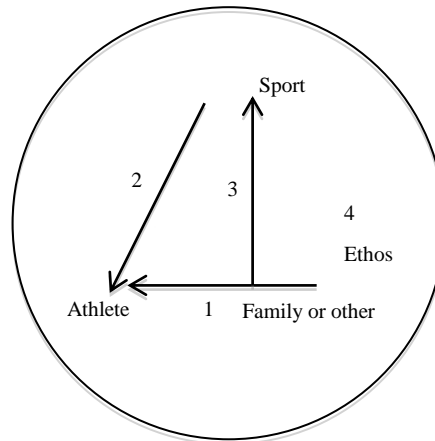
“It is evident that those committed to advancing opportunities for humane sport rely on the development of charters, declarations and covenants that enshrine codes of entitlement and conduct and seek to protect those individuals who engage in sport.”

While a thorough review of the development of legislation regarding human rights in sport is perhaps outside of the scope of this review, it is important to highlight some of the significant changes in legislation to demonstrate how athlete protection has changed in recent times. As with the universal declaration, there were several precursors in the first half of the twentieth century to the development of modern day international charters relating to sport and physical activity. Various nations such as the United Kingdom and the United States of America began to develop their national policies of physical education in the late 1930s and it wasn't until the 1970s that the notion of sport and physical education as a right for all became adopted. In 1980 an American organisation, Sports for People, elaborated on the rights of the athlete in sport highlighting the right for sport for everyone of any age, nationality, every race and both sexes, and the right to competent concerned coaching free from the pressure of winning at all costs. This marked a dramatic shift in the development of policies to protect those engaging in sport. The Court of Arbitration for Sport was established in 1983 by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the National Olympic Committees and International Sports Federations, which further led to the encouragement and development of the very notion of human rights for athletes (Kerr and Stirling 2008). This increasing respect for athletes' rights demonstrates the recognition that athletes should be afforded the same protection enjoyed by all citizens including the right to freedom from discrimination, to education, to informed consent about the physiological effects of training, to have capable and

responsible leadership and to be free from sexual harassment (Kidd and Donnelly 2000).

The Council of Europe recognised that HP and professional sport issues such as doping, violence, ideas on competitiveness and personal achievement needed to be addressed in a more comprehensive manner and this led to the development of the European Sports Charter (1992 revised in 2001). The code of ethics for sport functions alongside this charter as a separate document: they aim to support and inform one another. The European Sport Charter provides guidance for the Council of Europe's member states to perfect existing legislations or other policies and to develop a comprehensive framework for sport (Council of Europe Sport 2012). The charter provides the framework for sports policy to which all European countries have to put their name and provides a common set of principles for all Europe. More recently since the inception of the World Anti-Doping Association, WADA, in 1999, the focus of the IOC Medical Commission has shifted from anti-doping to athlete health. Mountjoy (2010) identifies that protection of the health of the athlete is the primary goal of the IOC medical commission alongside respect for medical and sports ethics and equality for all competing athletes (health includes the notion of protection from abuse in sport).

Despite the advances made in politically affirming the rights of the athlete in sport, policy developments specifically on protection from maltreatment in sport are lacking. Abuse prevention, mainly in the form of child protection (CP) policies and procedures, has become an imperative for all grant aided NGBs of sport in the United Kingdom since January 2001, when the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) was opened. This operates as a specialist, advocacy, training and support agency for sport bodies and further as a mechanism through which the government can deliver a safeguarding agenda in sport. The CPSU work on abuse prevention addresses the four major abuse types identified by the NSPCC: sexual, emotional, physical abuse and neglect – as well as many cases of bullying and poor practice (Brackenridge et al. 2005). Brackenridge (2004) highlighted a framework for understanding the dynamics of child protection in sport, offered in figure 2.4.



Where:

- Sport leader = the athlete's coach, teacher, physio or other authority figure
- Athlete = athlete in dependent relationship to sport leader/professional
- Family or other = primary carers, siblings, peer coaches and peer athletes

Figure 2.4 Four Dimensions of Protection in Sport (Source: Brackenridge 2004, p.329)

This figure suggests four dimensions of protection that should be considered in relation to protection from child abuse in sport:

1. Protecting the athlete from others: involves the recognition and referral of anyone who has been subjected to abuse or sexual misconduct by someone else whether inside or outside of sport.
2. Protecting the athlete from oneself: relies on observing and encouraging good practice to avoid becoming the perpetrator of abuse.
3. Protecting oneself from the athlete or others: involves taking precautions to avoid false allegations against oneself by athletes, their peers or families.
4. Protecting one's profession: safeguarding the good name and integrity of sport, coaching, sport science and management.

The guidelines of protection are suggested to assist the detection and referral of cases of abuse in sport and enhance the protection afforded to athletes and other key stakeholders. Despite growing public awareness of child abuse and expanding research on the subject, public attention has focussed more on sexual abuse than other forms of maltreatment (Bringer et al. 2006; Brackenridge 2001). In the UK, a range of legal measures has been put in place to ensure the safety of children and to minimise access to them by perpetrators of abuse. These include: The Children Act 1989; Sexual Offences Amendment Act 2000; the Protection of

Children Act 1999; and the Criminal Records Bureau (Bringer et al. 2006). As the CPSU is the NGB responsible for child protection in sport, it is responsible for focussing its resources on the protection of those participants under the age of 18 years. This raises essential questions about the mechanisms of protection in place for those athletes over the age of 18 years, especially individuals who would be classed as vulnerable adults. Some organisations have adopted welfare policies in an attempt to embed best practice for all ages engaging in their disciplines (Brackenridge et al. 2005). Others have adopted policies that are specifically designed to protect children and vulnerable adults, with the intention to extend protection to cover all over time.

All NGBs are now directly faced with the task of responding to any allegations of abuse and poor practice in order to better support and protect athletes. In 2007, the Executive Board of the IOC adopted a Consensus Statement on Sexual Harassment and Abuse in Sport to improve the health and protection of athletes through the promotion of effective preventative policy as well as to increase the awareness of these problems in sport (Mountjoy 2010). This unique document defines the problems, identifies the risk factors and provides guidelines for prevention and resolution. Despite the fact that there is a growing awareness of the incidence of sexual and physical abuse in sport and that there has been some movement in the mechanisms in place to safeguard and protect athletes, sports coaching in the UK remains largely unregulated at all levels. Although the health and wellbeing of athletes and key stakeholders in sport is of primary concern to many key organisations, Kerr (2010) argues that even with the introduction of athlete protection in sport, we are still seeing incidents of maltreatment.

Rhind et al. (2014) conducted the first investigation into incidents of safeguarding concern in sport in the UK. They collected data from 41 lead welfare officers of NGBs in order to investigate incidents of safeguarding concern in 2011 (a total of 652 cases were recorded, highlighting a range of abuses). The most frequently reported abuse types were physical and sexual and the majority of alleged victims and perpetrators were male. Rhind et al. suggest that sport needs to recognise the broad scope required for safeguarding as it involves both male and female victims, across sports and levels. Their findings further highlighted that abuse can target

those who are over 18. As suggested previously, this has clear implications for sport as the vast majority of safeguarding strategies are targeted at children due to the CPSU's association with the NSPCC. The fact that an individual reaches the age of 18 does not mean that they are no longer vulnerable. This provides further rationale for the importance of the current study, which furthers understanding of maltreatment against adult athletes.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to examine the experience of maltreatment in elite sport, a previously untold story. There remains much to explore in the area of high performance sport in order to understand the mechanisms through which abuses occur. The area of maltreatment is complex, and we have yet to understand the impact of maltreatment on athletes in performance environments. It is clear that research has gone some way to help examine maltreatment within the sporting domain, however, attention has been placed more on our understanding of individual types of maltreatment, for example, sexual abuse and sexual harassment, rather than on the overall experience. It could be argued that separating maltreatment types over-simplifies the topic, as it is argued that different forms of maltreatment may co-occur. This perhaps makes the overarching term maltreatment even more complex and provides a rationale for exploring the experience of maltreatment more broadly rather than reducing it to an analysis of specific types. In addition, current research provides limited understanding of the potential perpetrators of maltreatment or insight into the impact of maltreatment on the individual.

It is evident through the examination of research that competitive sport needs to be more amenable to inspection if we are to be able to facilitate a process of change. At the point at which we understand what is 'good' and conversely what is 'bad' about current practices in sport, then perhaps we can make balanced judgements about competitive sport and its impact. It is envisaged that the findings from this study will add to knowledge through providing an in-depth insight into the experience of maltreatment through identifying the potential perpetrators and victims of abuse and the mechanisms through which some

athletes are able to negotiate or deal with maltreatment. Further, the findings will be utilised to enhance theoretical understanding of how and why maltreatment occurs and to develop a conceptual framework that demonstrates the mechanisms through which individuals experience maltreatment within the sporting environment.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter presents a qualitative methodology designed to facilitate an open and responsive approach to understanding the experience of maltreatment in high performance sport. The purpose of the chapter is to offer a rationale for the methodological choices made during this research and to detail how the data were collected and analysed. The theoretical underpinnings of the study are discussed, as are ethical considerations, issues of validity and limitations of the study.

Research Philosophy and Approach

For a new researcher, the nature of paradigms and their meaning seems to be a minefield of information regarding what the term paradigm actually means, and its use within the social sciences. There appears to be great breadth in the use of term paradigm and a lack of clarity in its meaning (Holloway and Wheeler 2010; Morgan 2007; Ponterotto 2005). Holloway and Wheeler (2010) identify that Kuhn was responsible for the conception of the term and the popularity of paradigms as a way to summarise researcher's beliefs about their efforts to create knowledge, yet his ideas have been extensively criticised due to a lack of consensus of meaning. Masterman (1970) identified up to 21 ways in which Kuhn used the term paradigm in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962/1996). Morgan (2007) states that the term paradigm has multiple uses and meanings throughout research disciplines and as a result it is all too easy for social scientists to talk about paradigms and mean entirely different things.

A research paradigm is essential to set the context for a study. Further it is common for qualitative researchers to make their worldviews, assumptions and biases explicit in order to assist the reader in the understanding of the researcher's stance on the research (Morrow 2005). Of the numerous classification schemes introduced in the literature, I find a combination of the schemas proposed by Guba and Lincoln (2005) and Ponterotto (2002) to be the most manageable and

applicable to this study and will therefore refer to this to outline the assumptions of my research (see table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Intersection of Research Paradigms

Item	Positivism	Postpositivism	Critical -ideological	Constructivism/ Interpretivism
Ontology	Naïve realism – “real” reality but apprehensible One true reality; apprehensible	Critical realism – “real” reality but only imperfectly and probabilistically apprehensible. One true reality; approximal	Historical realism – virtual reality. Shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values; crystallized over time	Relativism – local and specific constructed and co-constructed realities. Multiple, equally valid, and socially constructed realities.
Epistemology	Dualist/objectivist; findings true; Detached researcher role.	Modified dualist/objectivist; critical tradition/community; findings probably true	Transactional/ subjectivist; value mediated findings. Interactive and proactive researcher role seeking transformation and emancipation.	Transactional/ subjectivist; created findings. Interactive researcher – participant role; potency of interaction uncovers deeper meaning and insight.
Axiology	Researcher values have no place in the research; must be carefully controlled.	Researcher values must be kept in check so as not to bias study.	Researcher values are central to the inquiry as participant empowerment in the research goal	Researcher biases are inevitable and should be discussed at length and bracketed (“epoch”).
Rhetorical Structure	Third person, objective, and “scientific”; detached.	Third person, generally objective, and “scientific” detached and unemotional prose.	First person; relying extensively on participant voices; emotive prose.	
Methodology	Experimental/ Manipulative; careful manipulation of variables and control of confounds; only quantitative methods	Modified experimental/ manipulative; experimental and quasi-experimental; field research, chiefly quantitative methods; some qualitative methods.	Dialogic/ dialectical Naturalistic, highly interactive; creating transformation (dialectic) through transactional discourse (dialogical); chiefly qualitative methods.	Hermeneutical/ dialectical Naturalistic, highly interactive; uncovering embedded meaning through words and text (hermeneutical); only qualitative methods.
Inquiry aim	Explanation: Prediction and control		Critique and transformation; restitution and emancipation	Understanding; reconstruction
Nature of knowledge	Verified hypotheses established as facts	Non-falsified hypotheses that are probable facts or law	Structural/historical insights	Individual or collective reconstructions coalescing around consensus
Knowledge accumulation	Accretion – “building blocks” adding to “edifice of knowledge”; generalizations and cause-effect linkages		Historical revisionism; generalization by similarity	More informed and sophisticated reconstructions; vicarious experience
Voice	“Disinterested scientist” as informer of decision makers, policy makers, and change agents		“Transformative intellectual” as advocate and activist	“Passionate participant” as facilitator of multi-voice reconstruction

(Source: Adapted from Guba and Lincoln 2005, p. 193 and Ponterotto and Grieger 2007, .410.)

The net that contains the researcher’s ontological, epistemological, axiological and methodological premises may be termed a paradigm, or an interpretive

framework (Morrow 2007; Denzin and Lincoln 2005). Ontology includes one's view of the nature of reality, whilst epistemology addresses how reality is known, as well as the relationship between the knower and the known. Axiology meanwhile concerns the role of researcher values in the scientific process (Morrow 2007). The personal biography of the researcher makes them a gendered, multiculturally situated individual who approaches the world with a particular set of ideas (theory, ontology) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology) that he or she then examines in a specific way (methodology). Methodology therefore emerges from the ontology, epistemology and axiology of the researcher and addresses the question of how we gain knowledge (Guba and Lincoln 1994). The research paradigms considered within this framework include positivism, post-positivism, constructivism-interpretivism and critical-ideological (Ponterotto 2005) and their positions on selected practical issues have been highlighted in table 3.1.

This study is grounded in the meanings that people make of their experience of maltreatment in competitive sport. Thus my research approach relies upon understanding the ways in which people bring meaning to this experience and will therefore be directly interested in the construction of meaning (constructivism). Constructivists contend that meaning is not discovered but constructed; different people will construct meaning in different ways even when exploring the same phenomenon (Crotty 1998). In my study, meaning will be co-constructed through the collection of individual athlete stories of maltreatment and through my interpretation of these stories as the researcher. Further, given the subject area and perhaps the way in which it challenges the dominant structure of the sporting world, I would also take a critical-ideological perspective in order to position the research. In this sense, I recognise that there is a transformative and emancipative angle to this study whereby as a researcher I am questioning negative practices that have perhaps until recently received little attention in the sporting literature. For many people, sport is still associated with positive images of fair play, ethical values and high moral standards however, for some individuals the sporting environment can lead to the abuse of power and individual exploitation.

The constructivist-interpretivist paradigm can perhaps be best understood when compared with its antithesis, the positivist or post-positivist paradigms. Both positivism and post-positivism share the goal of explanation, leading to a prediction and control of phenomena, thus emphasising cause-effect linkages that can be studied, identified and generalised relying upon an objective, detached researcher role (Haverkamp and Young 2007; Ponterotto 2005). The positivist/post-positivist paradigms therefore underlie the familiar approach to psychological science and are based on the ontological assumption that reality exists separate from the perceiver and that knowledge can be identified, yet the critical-realism of post-positivism acknowledges that reality can only be apprehended imperfectly (Morrow 2007). In this sense, human intellectual mechanisms are flawed and therefore, one can never fully capture a true reality. Both of these approaches operate from both a nomothetic (application to people generally) and etic (universal laws and behaviours that apply to all humans) perspective, so therefore primarily align themselves with quantitative research methodologies.

Bryman (2008) recognises that this clash between positivism and interpretivism lies in the division between an emphasis on explanation of human behaviour (positivist/post-positivist) and the understanding of human behaviour (constructivist-interpretivist). Therefore, in marked contrast with positivism's naïve realism (a single external reality) and post-positivism's critical realism (objective reality that is only imperfectly apprehensible), constructivism allows a relativist position that instead assumes multiple, apprehensible and equally valid realities (Ponterotto 2005). A constructivist-interpretivist paradigm therefore has a relativist ontology in which there can be as many realities as there are participants (plus one: the investigator) – and in which meanings then become co-constructed by participants and researchers, implying a transactional and subjectivist epistemology (Morrow 2007). The assumptions then of this approach are idiographic (applying to the individual) and emic (unique to the individual). The critical-ideological paradigms, like the constructivist-interpretivist perspective, assume that multiple realities exist; however, they focus on realities that are mediated by power relations that are socially and historically constituted (Morrow 2007; Ponterotto 2005). Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) state that this is

due to the critical-ideological paradigm's critical realist ontology and transactional epistemology. This approach values subjectivity and is committed to social justice and ending oppression, making the research process highly value laden.

In the constructivist-interpretivist and critical-ideological paradigms, researcher values are assumed to exist and subjectivity is an integral part of the research process. In both approaches, knowledge or meaning emerges through interaction and is therefore co-constructed. Constructivists-interpretivists maintain that the researcher's values and lived experience cannot be removed from the research process (the researcher's axiology should be acknowledged). Criticalists would take a step further in the hope that their value biases would influence the research process, leading to change (Ponterotto 2005). Haverkamp and Young (2007) believe that this is due to the defining features of the critical-ideological paradigm, which challenges dominant social structures or meaning systems in order to facilitate empowerment for research participants. Morrow (2005) suggests that the importance of understanding the paradigms underpinning one's research cannot be overstated, as they define the methods adopted and further the standards by which the research will be evaluated. However, it is acknowledged that it would be too simplistic to assume that each research project would fall neatly under a single paradigm, as is the case for this study. Instead Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe the qualitative researcher as a *bricoleur* who crosses paradigms in order to respond to the nature of the research and questions it poses. As a qualitative researcher, it is my responsibility to piece together a set of representations to create a *bricolage* or an emergent construction of the underlying themes associated with the research. Acknowledged through this process is that there will be multiple meanings of maltreatment within the minds of the people who experience it, as well as the multiple interpretations of the data from the researcher perspective. It is not then my role to unearth a single truth from the reality of the participants of this study but instead provide a bricolage of meaning in order to enhance understanding of the phenomena in the high performance sports environment.

Adopting a Qualitative Approach

In line with the assumptions of constructivism and the critical ideological perspective, this study was undertaken using a qualitative approach to data collection. According to Patton (2002), qualitative research is a process of inquiry that seeks to understand phenomena in real-world settings where the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest. The task of qualitative research is to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context, and the interactions that happen within that context (Tinning and Fitzpatrick 2012). Qualitative research methods allow us to describe, interpret and make sense of experience (Holloway and Wheeler 2010) and have the ability to “delve into complexities and processes” (Marshall and Rossman 1999, p.57). Such methods allow an insight into behaviour, perspectives and personal experiences, all of which lie at the core of this research programme. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe qualitative research as a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive material practices that make the world more visible. These practices turn the world into a series of representations that allow us to increase understanding of experience. Jones et al. (2012) state that qualitative research should be emerging and evolving rather than wholly predetermined. Qualitative researchers usually enter the research process uncovering their assumptions and setting them aside. Qualitative research is therefore inductive, allowing the researcher to move from specific instances to discover patterns or regularities, giving the data primacy. At this level qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. Therefore, qualitative researchers study phenomena in their natural settings, attempting to interpret experience in terms of the meanings people bring to it. A qualitative approach to data collection is suitable for my study as it reflects the epistemological and ontological approach of the research by validating and privileging the voice of the participant (Davidson 2003).

In qualitative research, and more specifically within this study, there is an emphasis on understanding how people interpret and recollect their experiences, allowing us to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). Qualitative research is therefore

emic and idiographic, characterised by categories that emerge from the ‘insider’ perspective of the participants and producing knowledge claims about one or a very few individuals, groups or institutions (Morrow and Smith 2000). As opposed to the deductive or hypothesis-testing approach of quantitative research, qualitative inquiry commences with research questions instead of hypothesis.

This study adopted an open approach in order to be responsive to the multiplicity of meanings that the participants brought to their experience of maltreatment. Therefore, the aim of this study was to describe, understand and interpret athlete experiences of maltreatment rather than to predict or generalise such experiences. Holloway and Todres (2003) believe that this ‘goodness of fit’ between the research topic, methodology, collection of data and the presentation and analysis of data is essential for the success of a research project. Thus, it is the synergy between the research design and topic that underpinned the adoption of a qualitative methodology. Such an approach is suitable as there is still much to learn about maltreatment within competitive sport and the literature review demonstrates that there is currently little understanding of the overarching experience of maltreatment within athletic populations.

Narrative Research

The choice of methods was guided by the research topic and the overall aim of the research. There is a range of qualitative methods that could be appropriate for the completion of this research (Creswell et al. 2007), however I identified narrative interviewing as a suitable method as it allowed the representation and understanding of experience over time (Smith and Sparkes 2009a, 2009b; Willig 2008). Narrative methods prioritise a specific individual’s experience through eliciting stories of concrete events and happenings that have occurred in their life. By recounting moments of experience within a storied form, the individual’s emotional and subjective responses are made accessible, bringing meaning to personal experience (Carless and Douglas 2013). Narrative research was undertaken through the collection of individual narrative accounts of the

experience of maltreatment and the analysis of the lived experiences of the human actors (or the athletes), based on their interaction with the sporting world.

The purpose of this section is not to define narrative inquiry, as Smith and Sparkes (2006) suggest such a move would imply that narrative inquiry is uncontested. Instead it details how I have interpreted and utilised the narrative approach for data collection in my study. Narrative psychology is interested in the ways in which people are organised and bring order to experience (Willig 2008). As such, through constructing narratives about their lives, people can make connections between events and interpret them. Defining narrative is difficult: the key writers also find it challenging to draw a precise boundary around its meaning (Smith and Sparkes 2009a): “narrative contains a multiplicity of meanings” (Holloway and Freshwater 2007, p.5) and narrative research is conducted in a variety of ways. As Smith and Sparkes (2006) note, narrative fails to offer a singular perspective and instead should be viewed as an on-going and plural enterprise. Murray (2003, p.113) defines narrative as:

“An organised interpretation of a sequence of events [which] involves attributing agency to the characters in the narrative and inferring causal links between the events.”

In their simplest form, Holloway and Freshwater (2007) describe narratives as continuous stories with connected elements that include plot, a particular problem, and a cast of characters or actors who have an impact on a personal story. The narrative provides us with an account of events or experiences, which are expressed in such a way that can be understood and communicated to others. Wengraf (2001, p.11) believes that a narrative design “focuses on the elicitation and provocation of story telling or narration.” However, Smith and Sparkes (2009a) point out that narrative and story tend to be utilised interchangeably within the literature, and that this is not universally accepted. As Frank (2000) notes, although researchers often use narrative and story interchangeably people do not tell narratives, instead they tell stories. The story relates to the tale that an individual or group tells or performs (Frank 1995). Narratives are the general structures created by the researcher that may encompass a number of stories, and allow us to discuss the general dimensions or properties of stories such as the plot, tellability and cast of characters. Thus narrative research has been characterised as

providing a method for “telling stories” (Munro Hendry 2007, p.489), which allows researchers to give voice to those traditionally marginalised through providing a less exploitative method than other forms of research.

Arguments for the use of narrative emerge from the supposition that a person at their most basic level is a story-telling animal (Smith and Sparkes 2009a), naturally constructing stories out of cultural life (Polkinghorne 2005). In the formation of a story, unique aspects of an experience are highlighted and meaning and understanding are formed against a backdrop of previous life experiences (Carlick and Biley 2004). Smith and Sparkes (2009b) believe that sport and exercise behaviour needs to include an exploration of meaning systems that form human experience. Woike (2008) comments that narrative analysis may be a good choice for researchers interested in complex subjective experiences and can help us to find meaning within them.

To date, narrative inquiry has received little attention within the sport and exercise domain; however, Smith and Sparkes (2009b, p.3) see this as a medium through which we can share lived experience of “what is out there in society”. They believe that the strength of narrative research lies in its ability and power to:

“Lift the veil of conventionality from people’s eyes as stories subtly raise different and sometimes troubling questions about the necessity and desirability of conformable and familiar practice within sport and exercise settings.”

This leads to greater understanding of idiosyncrasies or common differences in practice within the sport setting, especially as the dominant discourse revolves around success and achievement. Brackenridge and Fasting (1997) refer more directly to the importance of narrative as a method for investigating the experience of abuse in sport due to its power to capture or engage with historical and personal nuances of experience. Narrative research comes in a variety of forms (Creswell et al. 2007). In this study a personal experience narrative was adopted, which allowed me to gain understanding of the athletes’ experience of maltreatment, recounted in single or multiple episodes. The narrative approach invited the participants to share their personal stories of maltreatment in high performance sport through providing accounts of their personal life story, tales of

significant moments within their sporting lifespan and or the recollection of times when they recalled being maltreated. Experience of maltreatment in sport was captured within this study through generating an understanding of individual athletes' stories, and thus responds to the call for greater adoption of the narrative method within the sport and exercise domain.

Narrative interviewing aligns with unstructured in-depth interviews that enable each participant to tell their own story and not be directed by the researcher. This approach allows participants greater voice and further minimises the influence of the interviewer (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). I did not think it was suitable to adopt a structured or rigid approach to interviewing as this can limit or constrain dialogue. Instead, the narrative afforded a more conversational approach, which sought to explore the participant experience from their personal viewpoint. Brewer (2000) suggests that in-depth interviews enable us to capture experiences, and allows participants to express themselves in their own words and at their own pace. Mason (2002) further believes that the unstructured interview permits flexibility and spontaneity, which allows the researcher to gather the unique aspects of individual stories without directing their content or structure. Rather than providing a static 'snap-shot' of multiple lives at a fixed moment in time, the narrative interview enables consideration of how a particular life developed over time (Carless and Douglas 2013). This afforded me an insight into the context, social and personal experience and the connectedness of people in a way that may not have been afforded otherwise.

Sampling and Participant Profile

The participants of this study included 12 elite athletes between the ages of 19 and 35 years (mean = 27 years), who had competed in the United Kingdom and had represented England, Wales and/or Great Britain within their chosen sport. Maximum variation sampling was adopted in the selection of sports in order to ensure that a variety of sports and sports types were included within the sample: athletes competed across eleven different sports (hockey, volleyball, archery, rugby, cricket, football, eventing, handball, beach volleyball, taekwondo and

tennis), and both team and individual sports were represented. Each athlete had competed at national or international standard(s) during their athletic career and had represented a national or international team at a variety of events including European championships, World cup competitions, Olympic and Commonwealth Games, to name but a few. Five of the participants are still competing in their particular sport or discipline; six had retired completely; one had retired only from national or international competition. Further information on the participants can be found in table 3.2; reference to the individual's age and their sport has not been included in order to maximise the preservation of athlete anonymity. This is reflected in the results chapters, which do not include reference to a particular sport; rather they explore experience across sports.

Table 3.2 Athlete Participant Demographics.

No.	Age	Gender	Sport	Sport Level	Age Started	Age Retired
1	27	Female	Team	International	13	/
2	32	Female	Individual	International	11	20
3	25	Male	Team	International	18	25
4	23	Male	Team	International	14	/
5	35	Female	Team	International	18	34
6	28	Male	Team	National	8	20
7	19	Female	Team	International	13	/
8	32	Female	Team	International	13	27
9	25	Male	Team	National	8	/
10	25	Female	Individual	International	14	/
11	28	Male	Individual	International	12	25
12	25	Female	Individual	National	4	25

Elite adult athletes were chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, many of the studies exploring maltreatment have focussed on the experience of the child athlete, especially those who have examined sexual abuse in sport. Only limited research has explored the experiences of elite, adult athletes. Secondly, within the literature on emotional and sexual abuse, maltreatment is thought to increase as athletes move up the sporting ranks due to the individual's significant investment in the sport and time spent alone with the coach (Stirling and Kerr 2013; Stirling and Kerr 2009; Gervis and Dunn 2004; Brackenridge and Kirby 1997; Tofler et al. 1996). Accordingly, elite athletes are suggested to have experienced a variety

of maltreatment types within the sporting context making them suitable for this exploratory study that aims to gather a broader understanding of maltreatment in HP sport.

Non-probability purposive sampling was adopted for the selection of participants. Purposive sampling involves a strategy in which persons, events or particular settings are deliberately selected in order to provide information that cannot be obtained from other sources (Gratton and Jones 2010; Holloway and Wheeler 2010; Maxwell 1996). According to Creswell (2009), purposive sampling involves the researcher choosing those participants and settings that will allow the research question to be addressed. The selection of participants was criterion based; Jones et al. (2012) identify this as a process whereby sampling criteria are formulated and the participants are chosen accordingly.

The criteria were identified following the review of the initial body of research and were as follows:

1. Athletes should be over the age of 18;
2. Athletes should be either participating or should have participated at an elite level (national or international representation) within their chosen discipline;
3. Athletes should have experienced some incidence of maltreatment within the elite sporting context;
4. The sample should include both female and male participants.

Sample size in narrative research is usually small due to the large volume of data that are generated through this type of research (Wengraf 2001). Sears (1992) states that the power of qualitative data lies not in the number of participants selected for a study, but in the ability to generate in-depth understanding of a few people within their own cultural contexts. Morse (2000) suggests that when determining sample size in qualitative research, it is important to avoid generating too much data that could result in superficial analysis. Morse (1995) and Romney et al. (1986) found that samples as low as six can be sufficient in providing accurate information, as long as the participants are knowledgeable about the phenomenon under inquiry. Guest et al. (2006) recommended that for a non-

probabilistic, purposive sample where the main aim of the research is to understand the perceptions and experiences among a group of relatively homogenous individuals, twelve interviews should suffice. Twelve participants were interviewed within this study. This number aligns with similar studies in the area, including Stirling and Kerr (2013) who interviewed fourteen athletes across eleven sports on their experience of emotional abuse; Stirling and Kerr (2007) who interviewed fourteen retired swimmers in their study of emotional abuse in sport; Fasting and Brackenridge (2005) who shared the narratives of two athletes in their study exploring the grooming process in cases of sexual abuse and harassment in sport; Gervis and Dunn (2004) who conducted semi-structured interviews with twelve elite child athletes in their study on emotional abuse.

Participants were initially recruited through snowballing using personal contacts that were identified as potential gatekeepers. Jones et al. (2012) note that using snowballing as a sampling method means that participants nominate others with knowledge of the research topic. This process was integral to the identification of and access to the sample for this study. The recruitment process was disheartening at times: in the initial stages I contacted via e-mail gatekeepers within NGBs and found that this failed to result in the recruitment of participants; I also found that athletes from certain sports were told that they were unable to take part in this study, which was frustrating, and yet made me even more determined to gain access to a sample that would enable me to explore maltreatment in HP sport. When I contacted athletes directly, I found that they were more than willing to take part in the study and recognised the importance of the research. Purposive chain sampling (Patton 1990) was initiated when athletes recommended or suggested other athletes who met the criteria of this study, and who they thought would be willing to take part. The data analysis was an iterative process and this meant that the participant sampling and the interview process were conducted until the point at which data saturation had been met. Data saturation for the purposes of this research was judged when I was confident that new information was not being gleaned from the narrative interviews and no new themes emerged from the data collected and analysed.

Gaining Entry and Building Rapport

The success of research involves the complex and dynamic process of negotiating a research relationship: this depends upon gaining entry, gaining access and building rapport (Suzuki et al. 2007). Harrington (2003) states that entry is the act of gaining permission to start a study. Gaining entry refers to negotiating access to the research setting and gaining access to participants who will enable researchers to gather the deepest possible understanding (Hastie and Hay 2012). Gaining entry for this study was in part generated due to my privileged perspective as an insider within the research context. Working as a lecturer in sport psychology and coaching science and as a sport scientist allows access to the performance sports environment that may not be afforded an outsider. However, as stated previously, recruiting participants further relied upon gatekeepers who provided access to individuals suitable for the study. Gatekeepers for this study included athletes, coaches, performance directors and other academic colleagues who had links to athletes willing to share their experiences. This link through a mutual contact further helped to build rapport between the participant and myself.

Once the researcher has gained entry and recruited participants, the process of building rapport begins: this is crucial to the success of the research process. Holloway and Wheeler (2010) state that the relationship between the researcher and the participant should be based upon mutual respect, however they further state that it is a fallacy that the interviewer and participant work together in a relationship of complete equality. Suzuki et al. (2007) suggest this is because data collection happens through relationships within which power imbalances can occur. Hall and Callery (2001) believe that researchers have an obligation to emphasise equity in power relationships with participants and that this can be achieved through empowering the individual and ensuring that their perspective is given primacy and voice is given to their concerns throughout the research process.

Asking participants to share private and emotive accounts of their personal experiences demands that the interview setting is suitable and that the athletes feel in control of the process. I was humbled by the level of trust that participants were

willing to afford me, given the sensitive nature of the research and the type of stories that they were sharing. Perhaps my training as a sports scientist helped me to gain rapport; I am used to meeting athletes and having to gather personal information from them during the performance psychology consultancy process. Making telephone contact prior to the interview helped to start building a relationship with the participant and this meant that I wasn't communicating with them for the first time on the day of the interview. In addition, the use of the narrative interview allowed a very open and descriptive approach to data collection, permitting the participant to explore their experience of maltreatment in their own time and position it within their individual story. The first question explored the athlete's background within their sport: this was a comfortable and familiar opening question, situating sport within their personal biography. I believe this also created a sense of understanding between the participant and myself; I got to know them through their own story. Therefore trust was built between us as the interview progressed.

Conducting the Interviews

Following approval from the Bournemouth University ethics panel, participants were contacted via e-mail and asked if they would be willing to take part in the study; attached to this e-mail was a participant information sheet detailing the aim of the study (see Appendix A). Prospective participants were then contacted by telephone. This initial contact served to break down barriers and allowed the participant to confirm their participation and ask any questions about the study. If participants met the criteria for the study and were interested in taking part, an interview time was arranged. Interviews were conducted at a time and place convenient to the participant and in an environment in which they felt comfortable. Before the interview commenced, participants were given the opportunity to read through the information letter again, they signed a letter of consent (see Appendix B) and gave permission for the interview to be digitally recorded. Participants were advised that they were free to end the interview at any time.

Jones et al. (2012) believe that it is important in a narrative interview to preserve the holistic nature of the story; therefore questions are only used as stimuli to provide a trigger for participants' tales. As Riessman (2008) states, researchers let the storyteller talk fluently, without interruption: questions are initially used to provide a trigger, and prompt questions are used to invite participants to elaborate on issues they raise. It was my aim to allow the athletes control of the interview, with limited interruption from myself. This meant that meaning and understanding of the phenomena were described in the participants' own terms and were not directed by my questioning. This approach fosters an emic or insider perspective of maltreatment whereby the participant decides the direction of their account. Interviews started with two main questions: "*Can you tell me about your history within the sport of...*"; "*Can you tell me about a time where you have experienced maltreatment whilst involved in competitive sport*". Participants were told that there were no right or wrong answers to these questions and that I was interested in their personal experiences. A range of probes were utilised throughout the interviews: these allowed me to clarify meaning, ask for greater depth and to further explore experience. In addition, I utilised visual prompts to encourage participants, such as nodding, smiling, using encouraging phrases like: *please continue, that's interesting, can you perhaps explore that for me further*. Some participants became visibly upset and there was a need to pause the digital voice recorder so that they could regain composure and resume the interview. Such participants were asked if they were willing to continue and reminded that they could terminate the interview if they wished, but they insisted on continuing. Not rushing the interviewee was integral to the interview process, especially when participants were recommencing the interview after reflection on an upsetting incident. This ensured that participants maintained control over the interview and told their story in their own time and words.

The interviews were terminated when the participants' were happy that they had been afforded the opportunity to tell their story. They were asked if they would like to add further comment. When they were happy that no further information could be provided participants were thanked for their participation and I answered any questions they had about future involvement or engagement. All of the participants seemed grateful for the chance to discuss their previous experiences

in sport, and many noted the cathartic nature of the interview. Frank (2000) suggests that the narrative interview can provide participants relief through their ability to share stories, thus their stories have a recuperative role. For some this was the first time they had spoken about their experience of maltreatment and the interview provided a platform to reflect on their career, something they hadn't previously done.

Data Analysis

The participant interviews lasted between 1 and 5 hours in duration (62mins – 305 mins in duration). Interviews were digitally recorded and fully transcribed by the researcher. Data were analysed using the technique of thematic analysis, which focuses on the content of the story, rather than how it is told (Riessman 2008). Brewer (2002) states that analysis involves the process of bringing order to the data, organising what is there into patterns, categories and descriptive units, and looking for relationships between them. The process is complex and non-linear and reliant upon the researcher working in a systematic, orderly and structured fashion (Holloway and Wheeler 2010). Hammersley (1992) states that the ability to analyse data involves thinking that is both self-conscious and systematic, therefore qualitative data analysis consists of exploring, managing and interpreting data collected over time (Jones et al. 2012). Holloway and Wheeler (2010) describe this as an iterative process as the researcher moves back and forth from collection to analysis and back again refining the questions that they ask of the data. This makes the analysis of qualitative data a time-consuming activity that demands patience from the researcher.

In order to explore and analyse the qualitative data, audio recordings needed to be transcribed to create full verbatim transcripts of the interviews. The transcription was completed using an Olympus AS-2400 transcription pedal. The data for this study came from 21 hours of audio which resulted in twelve full transcripts of the narrative interviews; 250 pages of verbatim transcripts over 146,000 words. Comments were added during transcription, including notes on participants' mood or tone; intonation and emphasis were also noted where appropriate. Transcription was carried out as soon as possible after each interview so that the

event was fresh in my mind and so that I could recall key moments with ease. The transcription process is acknowledged as the first stage of analysis. Familiarisation is the second stage, as audio files were listened to and transcripts were read in their entirety on a number of occasions in order to immerse myself in the data and get a sense of the interviews as a whole before the analysis sought to break them into parts. Frank (2000) asserts that it is essential to take time over the analysis process otherwise analysts risk misunderstanding if they move too quickly to transform the story into text. He suggests that analysis should move beyond engaging with the data systematically and instead engage in it personally. Importantly he believes that:

“story-tellers do not call for their narratives to be analysed; they call for other stories in which experiences are shared, commonalities discovered and relationships are built” (p.355).

This resonated with me during the analysis process and guided how I worked with the data. Narrative inquiry rejects the assumption that there is a real story or singular truth in the realm of experience therefore my role was to illuminate the key findings across interviews in order to tell the participants’ story of being maltreated in HP sport.

Data analysis followed guidelines identified by Braun and Clarke (2006) who define the process as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p.79). In thematic analysis, the researcher analyses the narrative as a whole in order to reflect the “core of the experience that truly represents the narrators’ accounts” (Holloway and Wheeler 2010, p.204). Riessman (2008) believes that the focus of thematic analysis is more on ‘what’ is said, rather than ‘how’, ‘to whom’ or ‘for what purposes’. Lieblich et al. (1998) believe that in thematic (or content) analysis, rather than examining the structure of stories as a whole, the narrative materials or life stories may be analytically processed through breaking the text into relatively small units of content and submitting them to descriptive treatment. This process involves dissecting the original story; sections or single words belonging to a defined category are collected from the entire story or from several texts belonging to a number of narrators. Thus, thematic analysis is valuable for examining the thematic similarities and differences between narratives provided by a number of people

(Smith and Sparkes 2005), developing general knowledge about the core themes that make up the content of the stories generated (Sparkes 1999). The choice was taken not to use computer software for the analysis of the data to prevent the analysis becoming too mechanistic and to prevent myself from being distanced from the data. A traditional or manual process of analysis was adopted instead.

Braun and Clarke (2006) identify six phases in the process of conducting a thematic analysis, as outlined in table 3.3 (p.76), which can be followed in order to approach the analysis in a logical and systematic way. As mentioned previously, stage one took place during and directly after the transcription process allowing me to gain a holistic impression of the data, permitting initial analysis to take place before data were broken up through the process of coding (Daymon and Holloway, 2011). The codes and themes in this study were data driven and inductive in nature (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006). As such there was no attempt to pre-determine or anticipate the findings. Stage two, coding, was completed through scrutinising the transcripts and highlighting recurring words or statements with highlighter pens to assign codes. I worked systematically through each transcript and reviewed them on a number of occasions to ensure that I hadn't missed anything in the earlier stages. The codes therefore emerged from the data and from the emic perspective.

Once all the data were coded, the process of sorting codes took place (stage three): similar codes were grouped together, leading to the emergence of a theme, which is a conceptual label for a group of linked codes. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain how a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents a patterned response within the data set. Patterns were identified in a bottom up way drawing information from the interviews in an inductive manner. I kept a research diary throughout the research process and this was essential during the analysis as it enabled me to organise my thinking and reflect on the decisions made at this time. I also made analytic memos and recorded my thoughts on the grouping of codes into sub-themes and/or themes. Throughout this time I noted ideas and potential coding schemes, organised and reorganised my data. The analysis involved a constant process of moving backwards and forwards across the data set.

Table 3.3 Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description of the Process
1. Familiarising yourself with the data	Transcribing data, reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (level 1) and the entire data set (level 2), generating a thematic map of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names of each theme.
6. Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

(Source: Adapted from Braun and Clarke 2006, p.87).

Phases four and five, ‘reviewing themes’ and ‘defining and naming themes’, took place continuously and required reflexivity, critical thinking and understanding of the data. The participants placed their trust in me as a researcher and I felt a great responsibility for the stories they had shared. It was imperative that I interpreted the information they had shared in a way that remained faithful to the original story. In line with the methodology, it was also important to remain truthful to the narrative form, which helped to organise the themes for this thesis. As a result the final chapters take the reader on a journey of being an athlete in HP sport and experiencing maltreatment.

Thematic analysis identified five key themes from the data collected from the twelve narrative interviews: becoming an athlete; being an athlete; being maltreated; the perceived impact of maltreatment; coping with maltreatment. Themes were further broken down into sub-themes, for example, in chapter 7, the overall theme is ‘the perceived impact of maltreatment’, which is broken down into two major sub-themes: the immediate impact of maltreatment and the legacy of maltreatment. Once the themes and sub-themes had been identified, I went through a process of qualitative description, writing the data offering description and an initial level of interpretation, using the data to illustrate the analytic points

made. The final stage was theoretical interpretation, bringing meaning and providing explanations for the findings and re-storying the experience of maltreatment for this group of HP athletes. An amalgamation of the descriptions, analyses and interpretations allows the full picture to be established and the complete story to be told from the viewpoint of participants (Shipway 2010) and myself as the researcher.

Ethical Considerations of the Research

MacNamee et al. (2006) highlight a number of ethical considerations in relation to qualitative research in the exercise, health and sport context. These include the role of the researcher; the necessity of gaining written informed consent from participants; deception; the researcher's responsibility to informants; the risks of completing the study versus the benefits; issues of relationship and leaving the field; the presentation of participants; anonymity; and how to deal with unforeseen ethical issues that emerge during and after the research study. Gratton and Jones (2010) highlight that whatever the research design, ethical issues associated with the research should be of paramount concern and that research should be socially and morally acceptable. The importance of ethics when dealing with a sensitive topic such as maltreatment cannot be underestimated.

Ethical approval was obtained through clearance from the Bournemouth University ethics panel, and ethical considerations featured highly during the data collection process. Given the sensitivity of the research area, a strict protocol was adhered to in order to minimise the psychological risk to participants. Participants were informed of the study aims and the potential emotional risks associated with the interview prior to organising a date for the interview. Only if participants were comfortable with what the process would entail was an interview time and place organised. On the day of the interview, participants were again reminded of the interview structure and the overall aims of the project: at this stage they read and completed a letter of informed consent. Participants were informed of the right to withdraw from the programme at any time and it was explained that confidentiality would be paramount in the reporting of the personal narratives. As such, participants were assured that, in presentation of data, they would not be

identifiable and would be given a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. In addition, any reference to the participant's sport is withheld to preserve anonymity. Where major tournaments have been referred to within the write up, they have been commented on more broadly, for example an Olympic games, rather than The London Olympics.

Each participant was assured that if s/he felt uncomfortable at any time during the interview they could take a break, end participation, re-schedule or withdraw from the study. None of the participants asked to terminate the interview, or withdrew; however several became noticeably upset during the course of the narrative account. Emotional upset was evidenced through tears, lowered tones, heavy breathing or sighing, taking long pauses to regain composure and noticeable anger in one participant who clenched his fists and became visibly agitated while recounting a particular experience. On two occasions, the interview was paused so that the individual could regain composure. In both of these instances, participants were given time and asked if they were willing to continue. Interviews only recommenced when the participant was ready. The interview was approached in a sensitive manner and I tried to vary the tone and type of questioning where possible. For example, when an individual became angry I didn't force the line of inquiry and asked if they were happy to continue allowing them a sense of control. An interviewer gathering accounts that contain personal and upsetting information has a responsibility to ensure the safety of participants and needs to find a balance between being empathetic and supportive and desiring to gather rich data for the study. Gaining the trust of the participant and conducting myself with integrity was essential for the success of the study.

It is important to acknowledge that when researching topics that can make the interviewee vulnerable or working with vulnerable individuals, the morality of the research process should be a priority at all times. Hallowell et al. (2005, p.149) state that:

“As researchers (and human beings) we act as ‘morally responsible selves’... we need to be flexible and reactive, but above all, accountable for our actions.”

It was acknowledged that given the sensitive nature of the research, I needed to offer comfort to the interviewee at times of distress and to understand that recounting negative experiences may raise uncalled-for self-knowledge that carries repercussions beyond the research encounter (Jones et al. 2012). It was essential to have in place an exit strategy upon completion of the interview process. For this reason, and with regard to the disclosure that this study calls for, a follow up strategy with participants post interview was in place. Upon completion of the interviews, I thanked individuals for their participation, and I made a follow up phone call to participants within a week of data collection. This allowed me to thank them for their participation and to check on their wellbeing. As a safeguard, I also had in place contacts to local counselling services for referral. For example, for interviews that were conducted in the Dorset region I had arranged a contact with a local counselling service called The Gateway, and I also had a personal contact with a clinical psychologist who was happy for direct referrals should this have been required. Though athletes became upset during interviews, none of them requested referral.

It was also important to address issues of responsibility if a participant were to disclose a criminal offence. University ethical guidelines were consulted and it was clear that as a researcher I had both an ethical and moral obligation to participants. The ethical guidelines state that it is not the responsibility of the researcher to inform anyone (police, social services or a sporting NGB) if it is believed a criminal offence has been committed, as the participants are classified as adults. However, participants were advised that they could report instances of abuse to welfare officers within their sport or to the police should they want to retrospectively take action. None of the participants were involved in an existing investigation or court case surrounding matters of maltreatment in sport; in addition, none of the participants requested or were offered referral information.

Demonstrating Trustworthiness

The notion of trustworthiness in qualitative research has been debated in the research methods literature, especially concerning the criteria appropriate for assessing the quality of research. It is important that trustworthiness is evident in the analytical process and the wider research design and epistemology. However, there remains much dispute and no consensus over the terms and criteria that best assure trustworthiness (Jones et al. 2012). There were a number of strategies that I adopted in order to achieve trustworthiness within the collection and analysis of data, including, member checking, creating an audit trail, maintaining a research diary contextualisation, thick description, and being reflexive.

The process of member checking means that participants are provided the opportunity to check that the research faithfully and adequately reflects the participants' social world (Holloway and Brown 2012). To increase trustworthiness, participants went through a process of member checking their transcriptions after they had been completed to ensure that they believed them to be an accurate reflection of the interview and that they were happy with their responses to the questions. In addition the themes that arose from the analysis of the data were also presented to participants to demonstrate how their narratives had been interpreted. Member checking ensured that participants were satisfied that their accounts of the experience of maltreatment were accurately represented in the interview transcripts. Cohen and Crabtree (2008) suggest that the member check can be problematic, as the interpretations made by the researcher could be theoretical and abstract and therefore may be difficult for the participant to understand. This wasn't seen as a problem in this study and participants' were happy to be an active part of the research process.

An audit trail was kept throughout the research process in order to track decisions made and the path followed throughout the study. Holloway and Brown (2012) believe that record keeping and storing ideas are important actions throughout the research process. This process made me more accountable for the decisions that I made at each stage of the research journey and enabled me to record both internal discussions and those that I engaged in with others. The maintenance of an audit

trail was particularly important during the analysis of data as this provided a way for me to structure my thinking and record my process. I used analytical memos throughout the research process to take note of decisions, to organise thinking and document my internal dialogue where possible. During the thematic analysis, memos were an important way of organising the data and making sure that the data had primacy. The methodology is an example of this audit trail and each aspect of it was carefully considered in order to ensure that I appropriately conducted the research and considered any decisions made.

Keeping a research diary was an integral part of the audit trail and was central to my understanding and reflexivity. I maintained a research diary from the start of this process and used this to reflect on my place within the research and its impact upon me. For example, keeping such a record aided reflection on the interview process, and dealing with the personal impact of the study on myself as researcher. I found the interview process physically and emotionally demanding and it was important to take the time to reflect on this. Although the data collection was rewarding, I was also surprised at the sense of responsibility I felt for the stories shared. However, I think this has aided the writing up of the thesis as it has made me more aware of the need to preserve the participant voice and be authentic in the reporting of data.

Contextualisation is a criterion of trustworthiness and is essential in qualitative research. As Willig (2008) notes, researchers need to demonstrate situated understanding and grasp a particular context within their writing to ensure authenticity. Holloway and Brown (2012) suggest that to achieve contextualisation, researchers need both context sensitivity and context intelligence: that is, awareness of the wider context but further, the specific circumstances or conditions that influence or determine the research. The structure of the chapters affords contextualisation and provides a clear storyline, which remains true to the participant narratives. The chapters initially describe the process of becoming and subsequently being an elite athlete, affording the reader an insight into the performance world. In addition the process of being maltreated and an exploration of its impact and the coping mechanisms adopted

are presented. This provides a holistic picture of the maltreatment, providing rich description of the participants' experience.

Thick description is closely linked to contextualisation and was one of the inherent benefits of the narrative method. The narrative approach relies on understanding the experience of the participant through sharing rich insights into lived experience. Thick description involves detailed and rich descriptions of the actions, behaviours and words of people and provides further insight into the cultural context of the participants. Preservation of the participants' voice was a key consideration when writing up and this afforded thick description that remained faithful to the context. The use of the literature to illuminate and interpret the data not only affords thick description but further allows confirmability, as the reader can view the data extracts and evaluate whether the interpretation resonates with them or not. This also allows the reader to grasp how interpretation was made.

Finally, reflexivity is an important aspect of qualitative research. Finlay (2002) believes that personal reflexivity is paramount in qualitative research and relies upon a conscious attempt by the researcher to acknowledge their involvement in the study. Although Morrow (2005) suggests that the very nature of qualitative research is subjective, she also notes that it can be subject to researcher bias and that reflexivity allows the researcher an open reflection of their role in the research. Reflexivity is a conscious attempt by the researcher to acknowledge their own involvement in the study in order to complete a form of self-monitoring of their interaction with the research process. This enables understanding of the wider context but also the specific circumstances and conditions that may influence or determine the research. Rossman and Ralis (2012) recognise that each researcher has their unique lens that will be shaped by their own personal biography and that this will directly influence the way in which they view the social world. This lens will be present within the analysis and interpretation and writing up of the research.

My personal experience as an athlete and practitioner have shaped the choice of topic and the aims of this study. I have been fortunate to gain an insider

perspective on the elite sporting world in my capacity as both an athlete and more recently a sport scientist, and through this experience I believe I have witnessed both positive and negative examples of practice from grass roots sport through to performance level participation. My experience shows that the sporting world can provide athletes with the opportunity for self-discovery, achievement and personal development, and it can provide a fulfilling and satisfying environment to work in. However, I have also witnessed how the environment challenges individuals and pushes them to and beyond their personal limits in pursuit of performance objectives. As a sports scientist working with athletes to enhance their mental approach to performance and competitive settings, I have found that sometimes athletes are pushed to extremes physically and mentally in order to reach peak performance and for some the demands that the environment places upon them can be too great and result in career termination or transition, and physical and/or psychological harm.

What is evident from my personal and professional experience is that the positive benefits associated with sports performance are not guaranteed simply through active participation. It is reliant upon skilled professionals delivering well-planned and developmentally appropriate sport experiences and that this is not always the reality of current praxis. Holloway (2011) believes that the self is always present in qualitative research but that being a qualitative researcher means being accountable for the choice of data it prioritises and its subsequent interpretation. In this sense, researchers cannot exclude themselves from data collection, analysis and reporting but they must take a critical stance to their work when they have completed it. It was important through the analysis to ensure that priority was given to the participant voice, and thus my assumptions needed to be placed aside when working with the data. Reflexivity also enabled me to witness my own biases in data collection and interpretation. For example, findings highlighted a positive impact of maltreatment from the participant perspective and feelings of growth through adversity; this was not something that I would have expected to arise. The reporting of such a finding challenged my own assumptions and provided an additional insight into the area. Although I recognise that my subjectivity and experience have shaped the structure of the thesis and the analysis of the results, I have also ensured that the participant voice and

perspective has been given primacy throughout analysis and the reporting of the results. As qualitative research is an interpretive process the findings of this study are offered as my personal interpretation of the experience of maltreatment in competitive sport.

Limitations of the Research

There are a number of acknowledged limitations within narrative inquiry or qualitative research more broadly and within this study that should be noted. One of the common limitations highlighted in qualitative research is the need for recall and the reflective nature of participant interviews. Fasting et al. (2007) note that when dealing with sensitive data testimonies may suffer from distortion or memory attrition. In the case of the participants of this study, their experiences were not dated and the distance from events varied considerably. Some were recollecting events that could have taken place as many as eight years previously; others referred to instances of maltreatment that had occurred within a matter of months or one year from the interview date. Although I do not want to invalidate the participants' experiences, it is possible that time can have an impact upon their recollections of events. Jones et al. (2012) highlight problems with finding truth in qualitative research as tales are rooted in the participants' memory and perceptions of events. The important thing to note is that this study is not searching for absolute truth, but instead to illuminate experience. The truth refers to that which the participants in the study perceive and construct.

The small sample is an acknowledged limitation of this study, yet this aligns with the qualitative and inductive nature of the research process. Although the sampling strategy for this thesis was clearly thought out, it is noted that it may be that only the participants who had been most affected by maltreatment would be willing to be interviewed, therefore having an impact on the findings. This could create participant bias, which is common in qualitative research. Great care was taken to ensure participant confidentiality, yet this could have prevented some people from taking part through fear of being identified. Fear of identification could also have had an impact on what participants were willing to say within the

interviews. Certainly the nature of the subject at times made it difficult to access participants who were willing to openly talk about their experience.

One of the reasons the following chapters focus on across-case data (rather than individual narratives) was to help protect the identity of individuals, however, this could also be a limitation of the research as this has the potential to reduce the richness of the picture concerning each individual narrative. I have been conscious of this within the write up and all of the participants are given voice within the following chapters.

The co-occurring nature of the maltreatments make it hard to unravel experience and this could limit the reporting of experience. In addition, because maltreatment types can be co-occurring the fact that this study separates them into distinct types could oversimplify a complex experience. Where possible, the overlap between maltreatment types has been highlighted and the preservation of the participant voice through vignettes serves to demonstrate the complexity of experience. Despite the potential limitations care has been taken in the planning and execution of the research process in order to maintain the integrity of the research and capture an honest and detailed account of maltreatment in HP sport.

Summary

This chapter presents an interpretive, qualitative research design, which adopted an inductive approach to data collection through the use of narrative interviews. Twelve interviews were conducted with elite athletes in order to generate understanding of their experience of maltreatment in the performance setting. The data were analysed using thematic analysis, resulting in five key themes: becoming an athlete; being an athlete; being maltreated; the perceived impact of maltreatment; coping with maltreatment. A thematic framework has been produced in order to illustrate the main themes and sub-themes developed through analysis and interpretation. Before moving onto the findings chapters it is perhaps timely to signpost the reader to the structure of the results and subsequent chapters of the thesis.

The results derived from the analysis of the data represent the participants' collated responses in order to share with the reader the story of maltreatment in high performance sport. The themes and sub-themes were constructed through the analysis of the data (see table 3.4, p.87). There are a total of five themes presented and discussed in the following chapters, whose structure remains true to the narrative form and takes the reader on a journey from becoming to being a high performance athlete from the early stages of positive introductions to the sport through to selection and peak performance. Central to the narrative accounts of being a high performance athlete is the story of maltreatment and the perceived impact of this treatment on their continued participation within the sport. In addition, participants provided an insight into the coping process demonstrating how individuals seek to deal with maltreatment in the moment and over time. It is important to recognise that the number of sub-themes related to a theme does not suggest or influence the relevance of that theme. Instead each theme was determined by the interpretation of the data at the time of analysis.

Table 3.4 The Thematic and Sub-Thematic Framework

Theme	Sub-Theme	Chapter
Becoming an Athlete	Critical Introductions to Sport	4
	The Performance Pathway	
Being an Athlete	Organisational Structure and Management	5
	Funding HP Sport: Paying to Play Versus Playing to Pay	
	Training and Competing	
	Managing Injury in Sport: Everyone Plays with Pain	
	Being Picked up and Dropped Down: The Selection Process	
	Commitment and Sacrifice: What it Takes to be an Athlete	
Being Maltreated	He, She, They, Me: Identifying the Perpetrators of Maltreatment	6
	I Experienced It and I Saw It: Direct and Indirect Maltreatment	
	Types of Maltreatment Experienced: (Emotional Abuse, Physical Abuse and FPE, Neglect, Bullying, Discriminatory Maltreatment, Organisational Maltreatment)	
The Perceived Impact of Maltreatment	Immediate Impact of Maltreatment	7
	Legacy: Looking Back	
Coping with Maltreatment	Taking Control and Managing Feelings	8
	Needing a Support Network	
	Making Sense of Maltreatment	

The structure of each chapter will include a discussion of each theme and its related sub-themes and these will be examined in line with relevant literature where appropriate in order to illuminate and interpret the findings. The focus will be to allow the data to have primacy and therefore make use of extensive quotations from the narrative accounts. Where possible, examples will be used from the range of participants who took part in the study to demonstrate the construction of themes across the narrative accounts. A pseudonym will be included to add richness and life to the data. Any reference to sport will be removed to protect the anonymity of the participant and to further tell the story of maltreatment across sports and disciplines rather than the story of individual maltreatment within a specific sport.

The following chapters describe, analyse and interpret the participant narratives and share the experience of maltreatment from the perspective of this group of participants.

CHAPTER 4: Becoming a High Performance Athlete: The Journey into High Performance Sport

Introduction

This chapter explores the process of *becoming* a high performance athlete. The narrative approach enabled the participants to discuss their individual sporting biographies that, in each case, started with an introduction to their sport and provided reflection on the pathway to elite performance. As a context chapter, this will set the scene and allow the reader to understand how the careers of athletes are shaped by early introductions to sport and how these drive future engagement and commitment to sport at the elite level. The reader is reminded in table 4.2 of the athletes at the centre of this piece of research. As Jones et al. (2012) state, contextualisation in qualitative research is important in order to locate and understand the data presented.

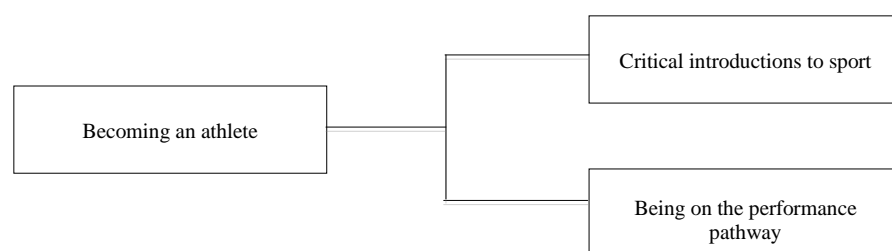
Table 4.1 Athlete Participant Background

Name	Background
Megan	Megan is 27 years old and has competed in her sport since the age of 13. She was “sporty” and “a bit of a tomboy” from a young age and always believed that she would be a successful athlete. As a talented junior she excelled within her sport and soon became part of the junior national and international set up. At University she started to train full time and committed to being a performance athlete playing on contracts both in the United Kingdom and abroad. During her most critical year of training in the run up to an Olympic Games her older brother was diagnosed with cancer leading to some challenging decisions about training and performing. She was unsuccessful in her Olympic campaign but continues to train and compete.
Immy	Immy is 32 years old and hasn’t spoken to anyone about her sport in a long time; in fact she has avoided any reference to her first career as an athlete. She started playing her sport at the age of 11 and soon found that she was identified as a gifted and talented performer. At the age of 15 she moved away from home to become a full-time athlete balancing her education around her sport. She competed on the international tour at junior and senior level before one day walking away from the sport completely. She looks back on her career with regret about what could have been had she been able to negotiate the difficulties she faced.
Adam	Adam is 25 years old and was “hooked on sport” from a young age competing in “traditional” sports from “as early as he can remember”. His father was a significant role model and used to take him along to the local sports club to spend quality time together. After sustaining several serious injuries the chance to gain a professional contract within his sport seemed to be slipping away, so the opportunity for an Olympic talent transfer programme came along at a critical time in his athletic career. Successfully making it through the selection process he dropped out of University and trained for 4 years to make it to an Olympic Games. Currently he is unable to play his sport as a result of a serious injury sustained whilst competing. He is unemployed and exploring the opportunity of going back to University to complete his degree.

James	James is 23 years old and was introduced to his sport at the age of 14 during a school physical education lesson. Within a year he had his first “call up to England” and from that point played at the top level in both junior and senior competitions. When he was 18 years old he got selected to represent Great Britain and at that stage, started full time training. He suspended his University studies in order to concentrate on training as a full time athlete and take a contract abroad in the run up to an Olympic Games. He is proud of his achievements as an athlete and believes that many of his experiences have shaped him as a person.
Ella	Ella is 35 years old and came into her sport later in life through an introduction to it at University. Within a year of starting the sport she was competing for English Universities and gained selection at the top club level. On completion of University Ella was balancing the commitment of her sport with a new and demanding career and at this time she gained her first call up to the England senior squad. She achieved her first cap after a successful European development tournament and decided to commit more to the sport in the lead up to a major international competition. Ella’s international career was marred by negative experiences that led to her retirement from international sport. She looks back on her time as an elite athlete and views herself as a failure at that level. She still competes at the top club level and is focusing on this for the remainder of her career.
Sebastian	Sebastian is 28 years old and started playing his sport with his dad “down at the local sports club”. His sport became a part of his life and weekends were spent with the entire family at the club both performing and spectating. As a talented performer across two sports he had to make a decision early in his career to specialise and at this time he gained national and international selection. He struggled with the transition from junior to senior competition and found this normative transition to be a stressful time within his career. A range of negative experiences led to him dropping out of the sport to go travelling and create as much distance as he could with his athletic self.
Charlotte	Charlotte is 19 years old and was introduced to her sport at secondary school through a talent identification programme. A naturally gifted athlete, she was signposted to a club team and soon started taking it seriously. She competes at the top club level and has also worked her way through England juniors to senior competition. Although she has had a successful career to date and continues to compete at the top level recent problems in the sport have made her question her engagement and have had a wide reaching impact on her life outside of sport. She is unsure of her future direction and doesn't know if she even likes her sport anymore.
Alexandra	Alexandra is 32 years old and started playing her sport at an after school club at the age of 13. She remembers not really liking the sport but felt forced into it by physical education teachers who favoured the sport over other timetabled options. Over time, she developed a love for the game and this led to her success at junior level, gaining regional and national selection. A negative period during the transition between Under 21 and senior competition led her to stand down from international representation and focus on club performance in a comfortable and positive environment. Through positive performances at club level she again gained selection at senior level where she competed in a range of senior international competitions. Alexandra’s experience of international competition continued to be marred by the problems she faced as a junior performer yet she believes her age better enabled her to negotiate problems at the senior level. She walked away from international competition due to changing her focus to her career and life outside of her sporting endeavour.
Austin	Austin is 25 years old and has been involved in his sport “for as long as he can remember”. He “worked his way through the levels as a junior” and was playing at the top level for his age group throughout his teenage years. From the age of 18 he competed at international level and this led to him gaining a scholarship in America to perform full-time alongside his academic studies. Sport became a way for him to have the opportunity to travel and meet new people and experience different cultures. Although he still competes his focus has changed and is centred more on his personal development and enjoyment rather than performance.

Lisa	Lisa is 25 years old and started her sport at the age of 14 “after years of wearing her parents down to allow her to do it”. She knew from an early age that she wanted to compete and eventually coach others to give back to the sport. She started to be involved in competitions as a junior performer and didn't gain recognition but continued to be involved due to her love of the sport. Her greatest successes have come as an adult performer where she competes on the world stage in her chosen discipline. She is currently having her most successful season.
Billy	Billy is 28 years old and has recently been exploring the opportunity to get back into his sport after a long break through a performance related injury. He was introduced to the sport by chance after driving past a local club and asked his parents if they could let him “have a go” at it. From that point forward he was involved in the sport at a club level progressing to international competition where he competed in a range of major events. In the build up to an Olympics during a training session he gained a career ending injury that resulted in major surgery and forced him out of the performance environment. After a number of years dealing with the injury and its aftermath he is finally ready to compete again for his own personal enjoyment and development.
Lauren	Lauren is 25 years old and started her sport at the age of 4 and it became an important part of her life from that point forward. She is passionate about her sport and loves the challenge of competition. Her family are all involved in the sport and they share her passion for competition, travelling with her as a support network. Throughout her career she has competed across levels with her peak performance being her chance to compete for Great Britain. She believes that even when she is no longer competing her sport will be an opportunity to get away from the pressures of normal life and allow her the chance to escape normality.

The data from the interviews suggests 2 main sub-themes within the participants’ narratives that refer to becoming an athlete: critical introductions to sport and being on the performance pathway.



Critical Introductions to Sport

The athlete development pathway takes participants on very different journeys dependent upon the sport, its structure and the athlete’s age of introduction to it. What is interesting is that each participant had a different story to tell about his or her individual journey, and that these stories reflected the unique circumstances that pave the way to high performance. Some started their competitive careers at 4, 7 or 12 years of age while others waited until their late teens or early twenties

before committing to performance sport. All participants started their accounts of a life in sport through sharing stories of their initial steps or introductions to it. For each participant, the onset of an athletic career had identifiable beginnings that either started in their early years through critical introductions to sport or occurred later in life through personal choice or talent transfer programmes. Central to the introductions were gatekeepers such as parents, teachers and coaches who shaped the athletes' introductions to a sport. While considerable attention in the literature, most notably in sport psychology, has been paid to transitions out of sport and athlete retirement (e.g., Butt and Molnar 2009; Lavalley 2005; Yannick 2003; Kerr and Dacyshyn 2000; Parker 1994), little is known about the processes that lead to the production of elite athletes. The findings of this study directly add to an understanding of this process.

Participants recounted how the early years were centred on nostalgic memories of positive introductions to sport and time spent with family members in a protected and secure environment. Sebastian noted that his sport seemed to be "*something he always did*"; time was spent at the local sports club with his father where they could bond and share a similar interest:

"It was always quality time with my dad down at the local club like any kid would do... I guess from then it became something I always did and it was something that we did every weekend together or as a family."

Megan remembers how her family were directly involved in the local club, and this led to her introduction and subsequent involvement in a sport. Megan's parents taught her the sport and were actively involved in her training and development at club level:

"I roughly started playing when I was about 13 or 14, I kind of, I was just really sporty from a young age and a bit of a tomboy. I did all sorts of different sports, anything I could try really. But I got into this sport because, like my mum and dad played in a local league, just like a not very good level, but for a team around this area. So me and my sister, well we started at school as well because one of our teachers also played for my mums team and that's it really. I started from a young ish age, and then focused on it as a sport and along with my sister and friends we started at that club and it's pretty much where I have been ever since apart from playing abroad. It will always be my club you know."

Similarly Immy recalled how:

“Starting from the beginning, my parents belonged to a club and my sister and I used to obviously, when they were playing, go up to the club and they had a big brick wall there and we used to just spend hours hitting up and down the wall, and I think I got quite good because it was sort of positioned at the top of the drive and the drive sloped down, so every time you missed the ball, you know went all the way to the bottom of the drive, so we kind of got into it like that really. My parents obviously saw us doing that and thought, you know, got some talent there and we started playing at the club... I think my first tournament was when I was under six.”

The above quotations demonstrate the emphasis interviewees placed on the support of family members during the early years and highlights how family members could shape the critical introduction to sport. Numerous researchers have acknowledged the importance of parental influence on children’s introduction to, and subsequent engagement in sport (Bloom 1985; Coakley and White 1999; Côté 1999; Dixon et al. 2008; Wolfenden and Holt 2005). Significant others can be classified as agents of socialisation who exert an influence on athletes and guide their choice of activity (Stevenson 2002). Many of the participants stated that their families were directly involved in sports clubs therefore it was natural for them to engage in physical activity from a young age. Others reflected on the support role their parents adopted as the transport to or funders of physical activity; in the early years the child was reliant on their family to access opportunities beyond the school curriculum. Prus (1984) describes this as a process of sponsored recruitment, where others are willing to support an athlete’s involvement in sport or provide opportunities that encourage their engagement.

Whilst the previous extracts provide a positive reflection on parental support, Lisa conversely reflected on how initially she failed to have the backing or support of her parents as they believed her sport to be *“too dangerous for a girl to be part of”*: she recalled having to convince them to allow her to start training. Steinfeldt et al. (2012) refer to the gender-role socialisation process, and explain how attitudes, beliefs and behaviour can be shaped by societal messages about what it means to be female and male. The fact that Lisa’s choice of sport was brought into question by her parents reinforced the recognition of traditionally masculine

and feminine sports (Engel 1994) and demonstrates how the construction of masculinity and femininity can be shaped by the dominant ideologies of gender and society and are therefore played out within the sports setting (Johnson and Russell 2012). Lisa stated that her desire to take part increased and although she had to work hard to gain their support, in the end her parents allowed her to pursue her activity of choice:

“I started when I was 14, so about 10 years ago, and basically for whatever reason I decided at a very young age that I wanted to do it. After years of wearing my parents down they finally agreed to let me have a go and from day one I said to my dad, I’m going to be the best and one day I will be an instructor as well. He was supportive and kind of said, as parents do when you’re 14, give it a go first, and I was like no, it’s more than that. I think I knew it from day one.”

Lisa believed in a pre-destined or inevitable pathway into performance sport and used this to gain the support from her family so that she could commence training. She was willing to demonstrate deviance from the norm and engage in an activity that her parents felt to be risky. This supports the work of Prus (1984) and Stevenson (1990a; 2002) who suggest that the pattern of an athlete’s involvement in sport and their choice in pursuing an athletic career is the consequence of various processes of involvement. This approach is grounded in an interactionist view of social behaviour and assumes that an individual is an active, self-reflexive actor and thus capable of making his or her own decisions. It is not only significant others who shape an individual’s engagement in an activity but also the athlete’s own personal choice and preference for the activity. This self-driven approach demonstrates a level of maturity and desire for freedom of choice in the pursuit of an activity; Lisa doesn't recall who introduced her to the sport but she believes that she always had a burning desire to be a part of it and achieve the highest standard.

Individuals external to the family were also important in the initial introductions to sport. Alexandra first played her sport within physical education lessons at school where she felt she was initially given little choice about participation. The findings suggest that at school, the interests of the teaching staff guide the type of activity that individuals engage in and this can therefore limit the type of activity that children are exposed to:

“I initially started playing X (the sport) when I was about 12 and the only reason was because my PE teachers wanted me to play, not through my choice at all. They had recently done their PGCEs and they came to my school and they were players they were like right lets get everyone to try and play. And I hated it, and thought it was a stupid game and I didn’t really get involved and then they roped me in for a game about a year after I first got to that secondary school... Then we played a game and I scored a goal and I thought actually this is really fun but I had made such a fuss that I didn’t really want to let anybody know that I liked it, and then bit by bit I think it became obvious that I really enjoyed it and then I suppose I got better at it.”

Alexandra’s account illustrates that those responsible for delivering physical activity in the younger years directly influence introductions to sport. She acknowledges that there was a shift in her feeling about the sport from lack of choice to enjoyment. Alexandra further highlights the intrinsic enjoyment and personal satisfaction that athletes gain from taking part in an activity and achieving a high level of performance. In the early stages of an athletic career, personal enjoyment and satisfaction can lead to the decision to invest more time in a sport and commit to the demands of training. The impact of significant others on participation is clear throughout the accounts; they influence the activities individuals are introduced to and further provide support and encouragement for on-going participation. Parents played an essential role in this process for many of the athletes, siblings, PE teachers and coaches were all influential in the early stages of the athletic career. Dixon et al. (2008) support this finding and they believe that it is well accepted that significant others play an integral role in influencing the attitudes and behaviours of individuals towards sport participation, especially during the younger years.

As the findings demonstrate, the influence of significant others can range from encouragement and/or facilitating participation to a more active process of engagement that involves teaching the values and norms associated with participation and competition; this is known as socialisation. Socialisation, which can be situated in social learning theory (Bandura 1977), is a process of learning and social development which occurs through interaction with others and learning about the social world in which we live (Coakley and Pike 2009). During socialisation, individuals are exposed to salient information that can shape their

perceptions of the norms of the environment. These norms are transmitted, taught and may be adopted by the individuals being socialised who in turn participate in and influence this process through embracing, rejecting or conforming to such norms (Dixon et al. 2008). Interestingly, it is suggested that parents are the most prominent agents of socialisation during the child's younger years, but that influence reduces during adolescence when there is a greater focus on teacher, coach and peer influence (Côté 1999; Côté et al. 2003; Babkes and Weiss 1999; Fredricks and Eccles 2004). This is an observation that is supported by the athlete narratives. Wolfenden and Holt (2005) refer to these changes as developmental epochs that are characterised by changing relational dynamics between the athlete and significant others, which are critical to the athlete's development in sport.

Not all athletes are introduced to their sports in the early years and for some, participation can begin later in their athletic career through exposure to new opportunities or access to talent transfer programmes. Vaeyens et al. (2009) refer to this as mature-age introduction or a fast-track non-traditional route into performance sport. Ella had always enjoyed being physically active and throughout her school years engaged in a number of sports but "*not to any real standard*": she described herself as "*a good all round sportswomen*". At university she was involved in a number of activities but was starting to lose interest in her main sport due to what she referred to as '*the politics outside of competition*', which had an impact on her enjoyment. She was invited to a training session in a new sport to "*make up numbers*", and this marked the start of what was to become an international career:

"So I started playing when I was University, I was involved in (names sport) for the first three years of University and competed to the top level, I then kind of got to the point where I... There was a lot of politics. I was a bit frustrated with where I was going with the sport so I thought – that's it I'll go and try something else. A friend of mine was a X (names sport) player at the uni club and said to me – come and have a go we need numbers, and I basically went down, was obviously strong and fit but didn't have a clue what I was doing, I was pretty unskilful... But I started playing all the same and so I started playing at uni, played in the varsity match that year and then a year later I got selected for England students which was unexpected... I didn't expect that to be the start of what became I guess an international career."

Adam recalled how his initial introduction to sport happened because his father was “*hooked on it*”, but he described how his career was marred with injury. He played to international standard in his first sport and this guided his choice of university so that he could pursue a full-time professional contract upon completion of his degree. However, at the age of 19 another injury made him reconsider: “*this is not going to happen for me, I’m not going to be an elite athlete any more*”. His life changed one day when he looked at a varsity sports notice board:

“I went to Loughborough University, and the reason I went to Loughborough University was simply because I wanted to go and play sport there, and I knew that when I was 15 when I saw them playing at the Middlesex Sevens Tournament. Basically, like a lot of guys, last chance saloon sort of thing, get through it and then hopefully a premiership or championship contract, well up there, managed to get myself into the development squad, things were looking OK and then I popped my intercostal muscles in between my ribs in a tackle and got injured again. I was just like – right this is not happening for me any more. I was getting a bit pissed off and out of nowhere on the Loughborough notice board it said – do you think you have what it takes to an Olympian and I thought yeh, yeh I do. So literally signed down my name for this UK sport talent identification process, put my name down, two weeks later got an email back – congratulations you’ve been selected to trial... That was the start of my journey for the last 6 years”.

Adam refers to a talent transfer programme, a novel approach to increasing retention and participation of elite athletes recently applied by UK Sport. Talent transfer occurs when an athlete reduces their involvement in a primary sport and redirects their effort towards a sport that may be new to them. This can happen informally through the athlete investigating opportunities in other sports or formally through talent transfer programmes initiated by sporting bodies or institutes of sport. Although research in this area is limited, anecdotal accounts suggest that it is possible to focus on or switch to a new target sport at a relatively late age and rapidly achieve sporting excellence (Vaeyens et al. 2009). Gulbin (2008) notes that there are currently a number of successful Olympic (Summer and Winter) ‘talent crossover’ athletes who have demonstrated that it is possible to make the transition from one sport into the elite level of another. Adam had reached a performance plateau in his primary sport and the risk of injury prevented further progression; the opportunity to take part in the transfer process afforded him the opportunity to prolong his athletic career. Vaeyens et al. (2009)

refer to this process as the structured recycling of talented athletes. Interestingly both Adam's and Ella's stories highlight that athletes can find themselves engaging in a new sport later in their career rather than following traditional talent pathways or introductions in sport that start in their younger years. This offers an alternative to traditional career development, which is linear and can occur within one sport or discipline. Talent recycling and mature-age talent identification strategies are two techniques that elite sport agencies are adopting that focus on the systematic search for additional or re-assigned talents at a late stage in an athletic career, providing alternative routes into high performance sport.

This study shows that the pathway into sport differs among individuals, depending upon personal attraction to a sport and the opportunity to train and compete. During the early years, the pathway to performance commences with initial introductions to a sport or a range of sports and leads to specialisation whereby individuals select and maintain focus on one particular activity or discipline, which may change in the later years. During this time individuals acquire knowledge about the sport and start to learn more about the norms of that environment (Donnelly and Young 1999), forming the building blocks or introduction to and subsequent involvement in sport (Stevenson 1999). Stevenson (2002) noted that the early years mark the start of the athletic career and stated how a process of ever-increasing commitment to the sport follows the initial introduction to it. An introduction to a sport is not sufficient in itself to produce a long-term commitment to the sport on the part of the athlete: this becomes a more intricate process during the later years of participation. The process of deepening commitment is captured in the following sub-theme *being on the performance pathway* and in the next chapter *being an athlete*.

Being on the Performance Pathway

To be an athlete involves being on a journey that progresses from the initial introductions to an activity to achieving elite status. All of the participants described this process as a pathway to performance or a ladder that they were climbing that took them through the various levels of competition. Billy described

it as a process of “*getting good at it*” and acknowledged that this required significant commitment and a number of years refining physical, technical and tactical awareness of the sport, playing position or individual discipline. Adam saw it as a process of moving from being “*consciously incompetent*” to “*autonomous and skilled*” and believed this was integral to the process of becoming an elite performer. The time and dedication required to reach elite levels of competition requires athletes to be motivated to train and this motivation is central to success (Ryan and Deci 2000). During the early stages of engagement, participants explored the process of taking part in their sports for the intrinsic benefits, such as enjoyment, personal development and personal achievement. Sebastian reflected that:

“I just got a real sense of personal satisfaction from being involved in and developing in my sport. Dad was a coach and I used to go to his club and help out, you know I was a role model for his players as a junior international so I got a real sense of enjoyment out of it.”

Similarly Lauren stated that:

“I think generally I just really enjoy it and I am always learning and developing and that's critical, even through any bad times I love it and that keeps you going.”

Megan said that playing for her country made her proud but she also loved how sport made her explore her own personal boundaries:

“I just love the challenge of pushing myself, I always wanted to be better and loved the experience of working hard to achieve that. You know it was something for myself, something I had and I was good at and my family could be proud of, you know, my brother was always talking about how proud he was of me and that keeps you going.”

For Billy it was the combination of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards that motivated him to perform and his enjoyment of the sport was reinforced through recognition and achievement:

“I remember I went out to the Czech Republic, I won a silver individual medal there, which was amazing, it just worked and I got the benefit... I loved it, I had to play around with my equipment but just felt really comfortable in my execution, it was a lovely feeling, it all worked and I felt happy and satisfied, with the result and my performance... You know I often get asked – “why do you do it” and it's just because I enjoy the sport, I love the sport, I love most of the people. And then, it's just a love

of the sport, the idea of going to the Olympics, that medal, and just because I'm good at it, so it reinforces the good bits of me."

Immy recalls the first time she won a trophy in a competition, which served to affirm that she was progressing as a junior athlete:

"Got a little, I can still see it now, I think my mum's still got it, like a little silver plaque because I lost in the final to someone else there. But it was great to gain some recognition for getting that far."

She felt that this was also the point from which her career gained momentum and winning competitions put her on "the radar" of talent development scouts; she associated winning with progression:

"Then it just gradually gained momentum from there, I went from having group lessons to having an individual lesson a week, and then, when I was eight we moved up to sort of this area (Bath) and that's where I met my then coach who coached me until I was about 14 and I started off having lessons once a week, got involved with County performance, I think you know, I played some local tournaments and I was on the radar of selectors so then I got selected to go to County and that's kind of like the next step up the ladder. So I started playing for the County and then through winning the County Closed, you then immediately got invited to regional training, so again that was the sort of next progression, going to regional training, and with that I then started to enter significantly more tournaments that were further afield than just County. And then with that, I think my first big break came at the national governing body, they organised various sort of winter and summer series so, if you won certain regional ones you got invited to compete in a bigger one, and I think at the time I sort of had a game where if I was on form I kind of could beat anyone really. I happened to be on form at one of these tournaments and I won it, so I then got a bit more noticed and someone from the NGB used to come and give me a coaching lesson along with my coach... It was always about taking that next step up the ladder."

The personal characteristics of elite athletes have been explored within the sports literature and many studies acknowledge the need for individuals to be high in motivation and self-confidence in order to achieve success (Burton et al. 2006; Mallet and Hanrahan 2004; Weiss and Williams 2004; Gould et al. 1992; Orlick and Partington 1988). However, the development of individual athletic performance relies not only on the personal motivation of the performer but also on that person gaining access to optimal coaching within a club environment. It is evident from the participant stories that training and commitment alone do not guarantee success in sport; many youngsters show signs of expert sporting

potential, however, only a minority of them will attain international sporting excellence (Vaeyens et al. 2009).

In the early stages of athletic competition, talent identification or athlete screening allows coaches or performance specialists to identify individuals who show a certain aptitude for a sport, however, as their career progresses, athletes must negotiate selection across different levels of competition. Throughout their time playing, performers are likely to be part of a club, progress to regional performance levels and then gain selection to national camps or elite performance centres. This process will differ across sports and is based on player performance pathways that take the athlete from grass roots to elite level competition. Charlotte noted that this is a stepping stone process:

“I played local league then, national league, I play for England and now I am currently playing for X club (names club) and England. Initially to get into England we had trials for West Midlands and I got picked for West Midlands and you get to play at an invitational tournament. At this there are scouts and so they pick the people that they want to trial for England. And then I trialled, got picked and I have been playing with them for 7 years now.”

This journey through the levels of sport is further outlined by James:

“I started when I was 14 through school and then quite quickly got hooked on it. Then when I was 15 I had my first call up to England, so sort of thrown in the deep end quite early on with relatively little experience, but from then on in I just worked hard sort of saw the results from it. I did two or three years solid with the England team then moved up sort of, every time I went back to the England camp I would have improved by working hard at it in my club training. When I was 18/19 I was in the England squad, went through a two-year cycle with them, and also when I was 18 I got called up to the Great Britain senior team... I started (playing for Great Britain) in 2008 and I got my first cap early summer 2009, so I did a year's full-time development programme, so it was not the first squad, it was sort of the fringe players of the first team and the next cycle of youngsters coming through, all potential athletes. So from September through to April we did solid training, two sessions a day, then April came and it was the whole squad back together fighting it out basically for the international season which was through the summer. 2009, the end of April 2009 we'd finished the development bit, June, or May/June we started internationals and that's when I got my first cap, I was officially a GB player then, which was nice. That was pretty cool. I mean we played Australia and it was a tough period because I was going through my exams as well. The following year then I went two years professionally during the winter and the summer also played all the games, pretty intense from sort of that first cap.”

There are a plethora of athlete development frameworks within the literature that highlight the various stages an athlete may progress through on the pathway to performance (Sotiriadou and Shilbury 2013). These include the works of Bloom (1985), Côté (1999), Balyi (2002) and Wylleman and Lavallee (2004). Although conceptually different, all of the frameworks agree that an athlete moves through distinct stages of development during their time participating in sport. For example, Bloom outlined three critical stages of learning that have been translated to the sporting environment: the initiation stage (early years), the development stage (middle years), and the perfection stage (late years). Côté (1999) extended this framework and identified three stages of development specific to sport: the sampling years (ages 6-12), consisting of play and enjoyment and the opportunity to sample a number of sports, the specialising years (ages 13-15), where the athlete begins to focus on one or two sports and take part in structured or directed practice (deliberate practice) and finally the investment years (post 16), which are characterised by the quest for elite success and commitment to performance in a single activity. Côté further identified a perfection or performance stage that would appear after the investment years which Durand-Bush and Salmela (2002) also identified as the maintenance years. Importantly, research in the sporting literature and across other domains (for example, learning and teaching) reveals distinct phases during the maturation of high achievers (Wolfenden and Holt 2005).

The findings of this study support such development from playful initiation to increasing commitment or investment during adolescence and the quest for the perfection of skills in the later years as the talented athlete reaches maturation and adulthood. The narrative accounts also highlight how athletes can enter these stages of development later in their career through normative life transition (for example moving to University), as in the case of Ella. In addition, talent transfer programmes can redirect athletes during the investment years toward another sport, due to their demonstration of athletic ability, which may well have occurred as a result of moving through the earlier stages of athletic development. This study highlights how this process is unique to the individual and their own circumstances.

Highlighting the difficulty or challenge associated with performance development, participants recalled the process of being a junior playing in the adult game and how this forced them to “*step up*” (Austin) or “*grow up quickly*” (Alexandra). Alexandra reflects on how she “*was desperate to be known as a grown up and not a child*”, in order to show that she was mature enough to deal with the demands of senior competition as a junior performer. Billy recalled how he coped well with the transition to senior competition but saw many other athletes and teammates drop out due to an inability to achieve or cope with this next step in his sport:

“I made it up to senior squad, actually within my first year, so straight out of junior squad straight into senior squad, what was interesting was actually a lot of the guys I’d worked up with at that time stopped at this stage. As soon as they left junior for some reason they couldn’t make that transition and I actually went from top of the junior rankings into the top four of the senior rankings, at least top 10 anyway and then worked up to the top four. It was obviously a lot tougher because your opposition, they were bigger and stronger and that makes it a tough transition to make I guess.”

Immy found the need to grow up quickly challenging and a contrast with the protection she was offered as a junior performer:

“You know when they put so much into juniors and then when you’re a senior you’re just kind of like... You’re expected at a very early age just to go off and travel and do things very much on your own, and I’m not saying you shouldn’t, but you can’t... It’s like giving a child a load of attention and then just withdrawing it, you can’t go – well your XX amount of years old, you don’t get any attention now. You kind of have to sort of... You have to sort of taper it down gradually and encourage independence, you know, I would have said I was quite independent, but at 16, I don’t know, I think it’s a difficult age to just be expected to cope.”

Throughout their careers, athletes move through career transitions, which can have a significant impact on them. The shift into the investment years can mark the start of personal and extra-curricular sacrifices in order to concentrate on deliberate practice and competition; these can lead to a need to grow up quickly and adapt to the demands of the environment. As demonstrated within the quotations above, the development of a junior athlete is traditionally characterised by a series of career transitions when the athlete moves through levels of competition. Younger athletes move through their age group classifications and make the shift from junior to senior or adult competition. They may also

transition from regional to national or international performance as a junior performer and move to senior international level; participants in this sample represented England, Wales and Great Britain in their respective sports. Career transitions cannot then be viewed as isolated events but instead as processes that occur as the athlete negotiates the performance pathway. Although much is known about the difficulties athletes face transitioning out of sport (Van Raalte and Anderson 2007; Alferman and Stambulova 2007; Lavalée 2005; Wylleman et al. 2004), less is understood about the transitions that athletes face throughout their careers (Wylleman and Lavalée 2004). Wylleman and Lavalée proposed a lifespan approach to understanding athlete development within a sport and suggested that athletes need to be able to cope with transitions throughout a career. This was supported by Alferman and Stambulova (2007), and has resulted in a more holistic understanding of the athletic lifespan approach where athletes need to negotiate transitions throughout their time competing. This study supports this understanding and suggests that while athletes move through normative transitions that can be anticipated they may also experience non-normative transitions (for example, deselection and injury) that are more difficult to prepare for and adjust to. This makes the athletic career complex, and demands that the individual negotiates numerous transitions throughout an athletic lifespan.

For some of the participants, their progression and development process took place over a number of years, allowing them to follow the natural talent pathway of their sport. Conversely, those who came into their sport later in life through talent development or late introductions had less time to learn about the intricacies of the sport and were competing against others who had more years playing and training experience. Although such athletes had developed the physical and perhaps the mental characteristics required to be successful at an elite level they were on a steep learning curve to ensure they developed the technical and tactical knowledge required to compete. Adam highlighted how the organisation of the talent transfer programme he was part of required him to perform and *be* an elite athlete even when he was in the process of learning:

“So all the time like remembering that all the time I’m developing as an athlete in a new sport and cramming a career into a relatively small time, but playing people that have been competing for years. It’s kind of a sink or swim mentality, and I guess that’s what I always wanted. I always

thought when I started off in 2008 it's sink or swim. I wanted to be thrown in there with the best guys in the world and you'll either pick it up because you have to or you'll drop off the wayside."

The above excerpt further demonstrates the perception that athletes need to be able to cope with the demands of the performance environment in order to compete and challenge for selection. This was echoed by Ella who recalled her first call up to the England squad as an unknown athlete selected to play in a European tournament:

"At the end of that season I got called up to go to the Europeans which was a kind of development side, so it was some senior internationals and some kind of non-capped up and coming players and it was a non-capped tournament I think, yes, it was a non-capped tournament, so we just went over for two weeks to Toulouse and I loved it. Had a great time, met loads of players that I'd idolised before and then came back from that and thought that was it. Then I got a phone call to say that one of the players for England was injured and they needed somebody to go to Canada with the full squad to a tournament. So I went out that summer with the squad as somebody that nobody even knew because I was playing for X (name of club) a small club in the premiership so we weren't even, you know we didn't really have internationals, and people didn't even know my name, so I turned up and people were like – who are you. It was good and I got capped, I got three caps on that tour."

This study acknowledges selection as a critical aspect of becoming and being an athlete at any level; progression in sport relies on meeting performance related criteria. Although selection is important to highlight at this stage, due to its direct impact on an individuals' progression through sport, it will be discussed more deeply in the next chapter, *being a high performance athlete*. Interestingly, although participants found it easy to recall the process of being introduced to their sport, the moment of "*being*" an elite athlete was much harder to identify. It was the culmination of training, trialling, selection and dedication to their sport over a period of time. Immy reflects on how she looked back and suddenly realised she was a performance athlete:

"I think it was one of those experiences with my sport that I never actively sort of said – right, I'm going to do this, you know one thing just sort of led to another which led to another, you know you win one thing then you go on to the next stage and before you know it you're training X amount of times a day and you haven't made that conscious decision that this is what I'm going to do if you know what I mean."

Lisa, however, believed that becoming an athlete was a result of persistence and self-belief:

“I entered competitions, I started to compete... You know I remember my coach actually said to me that I reminded him of one of the – at the time – the current world champion. He also said that to my mum and dad. I’ve always had a confidence issues but belief in my ability to succeed. So at first I was like – this person’s just like – up here, I’m down here, how am I ever going to be up here? Whereas now I’m drawing against her so obviously– my coach was talking some truth, but at the time, it’s only really until I started to go – OK yes, I could actually beat her... I believe I can do it. So like I entered hundreds of competitions and when you’re like, when you first enter it and when you start, 50% get knocked out in the first round, and then like another 50% get knocked out at the second round and all the way through for a couple of years, I kept getting knocked out first round every time. I kept going back because I was enjoying it but I did keep saying – why am I doing it? My coach was always saying to me – look you’re capable of doing it; it’s a confidence thing. So then when I got in the toughest division, now like I’ve got 42 medals and they’ve all come, well with the exception of one, all come in the toughest competitions.”

The quotations above demonstrate the very personal nature of moving from *becoming* to *being* an elite athlete and suggest that this is a complex process that involves a significant commitment from the individual and those around them. The pathway to success requires the investment of time and dedication and this investment starts during the early years of performance, which in many ways shape the athlete’s future trajectory within sport.

Conclusion

This chapter adds to the understanding of athlete *beginnings* in performance sport as little research focus has been placed on the uniqueness of this experience. Carless and Douglass (2013) believe that the narrative perspective is essential as participants’ stories provide much insight into the key steps of identity development. The beginnings of an athletic career rely upon critical introductions to sport and the process of negotiation in the early years to enable the individual to maintain a trajectory toward an elite talent pathway. The journey of athletic development, however, takes individuals along many different routes depending on the sport and the opportunities afforded to the individual, and each participant

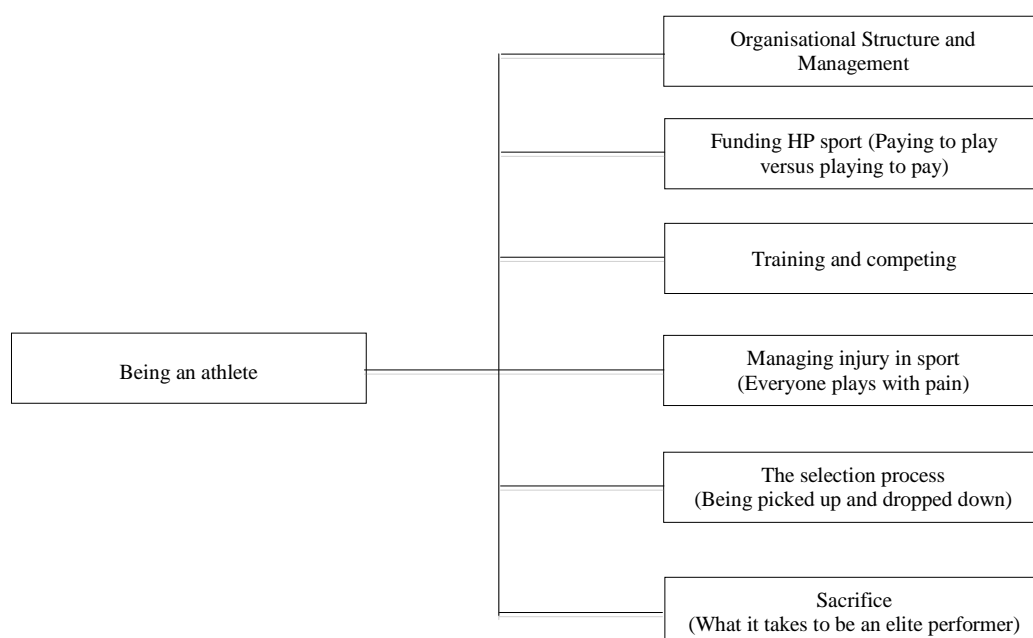
had a unique story to share when reflecting on their personal pathway through sport.

During the early years, an important stage of athletic development, participants made choices about their involvement in sport that went on to have an impact upon their career trajectory. In addition these choices are guided or affected by key stakeholders (parents and coaches) and the environment. The chapter contextualises the participants' experiences; in the early stages they experience a sense of enthusiasm for their sport and learn about the norms of the environment. This demonstrates that early memories of sporting experience can shape an individual's future engagement and direction, and thus mark the start of athletic identity formation.

CHAPTER 5: Being an Athlete

Introduction

Within their individual narratives all participants reflected on the distance travelled since their initial introductions to a sport and identified that the process of becoming and subsequently being a performance athlete demands time, dedication and sacrifice in pursuit of excellence. The analysis highlighted 6 main sub-themes that aligned with *being a performance athlete* including: Organisational structure and management; funding in high performance sport (paying to play versus playing to pay); training and competing; managing injury in sport (everyone plays with pain); the selection process (being picked up and dropped down); sacrifice (what it takes to be an elite performer). Along with the previous chapter, this chapter provides a context for the thesis and provides an insight into the life of a performance athlete. Importantly this provides an insight into the participants' perceptions of what it takes to be an elite performer and how this can provide an environment in which they experience maltreatment.



The thematic diagram should not be interpreted as hierarchical in nature; equal emphasis is placed on each sub-theme. It is acknowledged that there is a cross over between the process of *becoming* and *being* a performance athlete: many of the sub-themes would be relevant when exploring progression into high performance sport. As the participants found it difficult to pinpoint exactly when they became an elite athlete the two themes, *becoming* and *being*, are inextricably linked. It is also important to note that many of the sub-themes within this chapter directly align with the next chapter, *being maltreated*. As participants from this study were maltreated within the sporting domain, many of the sub-themes of *being* a performance athlete also align with the process of being maltreated.

Organisational Structure and Management

The delivery of high performance sport relies upon synergy between a range of services that combine to provide athletes with the opportunity to train, compete and progress through the levels of performance. From the start of their career, athletes set out on a journey through performance sport that is co-ordinated by a range of individuals and organisations. They may work directly with coaches, managers, sports scientists, medical and other support staff who serve as their direct point of interaction during their daily and weekly training. However, it is clear that these services fit into a bigger organisational framework and that the delivery of sport relies on a system to direct and control performance. Over the past fifteen years, sporting infrastructure and the delivery of high performance sport programmes in the United Kingdom has developed as a direct result of governmental support, substantial amounts of funding from the National Lottery and the creation and/or modernisation of sporting bodies such as UK Sport and UK sports institutes (for example, the English Institute of Sport (EIS) (Green 2009; Green and Houlihan 2005). Oakley and Green (2001a) refer to the strategic investment in elite sport systems in pursuit of international sporting success as the global sporting arms race. Although it is outside of the scope of this section to review the structure of performance sport in the UK, it is important to acknowledge that the structural characteristics of a sport are complex and that

each system will differ dependent upon the sport the athlete is engaged in and the level at which they are competing.

Throughout their accounts, participants referred to many structural or organisational elements of their sport including clubs or leagues, tournaments, national associations and sporting federations. For example, Charlotte mentioned that she played within the premier league demonstrating understanding of organisation and hierarchy in sport that relates directly to the level performed at. James provides a further example of this through noting that he “*progressed really quickly from local league to national league and international competition*”. Similarly Ella stated that she played for her University, English Universities, a club team, and for England. Each level has fixtures, tournaments and training, meaning that players need to effectively manage their time in order to achieve balance of the different types and levels of competition. Interestingly the structure of sport was something that participants spoke about almost as an implicit factor of being a performance athlete, not something that they consciously had to think about. The structural or organisational aspects of performance were a part of the delivery of sport. For example, Alexandra described how she progressed through her sport and acknowledged that this process was organised by the NGB:

“I did I think my first international development session at a camp being an under 14 and then South of England U16s and really through them you get involved in the whole process and you’re involved in centres of excellence and then I got up to I can’t remember what it was called like regional centres or performance centres through the NGB, so it was kind of at the highest level I could be at that age. I suppose that’s really, U16s I was always going to be in the team and going to be starting but never going to be one of the better players. So South of England I would have been a regular starter but never one of those who you thought would get pulled up and then I got better. England U18s, possibly I would have got in at pure U18 level but then I got injured which was rubbish and then from there obviously I got involved in the England U21s straight after the obvious age bracket. This was the process for you through the NGB, that was performance centres and the pathway I was on. I then progressed to senior international level, so I guess it was a stepwise process for me, with a few bumps in the road.”

This development process was simply a pathway that individuals followed, working their way up the ladder to elite participation. Through the account we

can infer that the organisation of high performance sport across levels is complex; however, for the athlete it is just part of the process and not something they reflect on during their journey. When discussing their sporting journey individuals focussed very much on their own story and personal progression; the management and organisation of the sport was an interwoven part of the narrative account and provided a context within which to frame *being* a high performance athlete.

Athletic development has originally been viewed using the pyramid analogy whereby participation in sport and competitive standards are linked by the endeavour to create a talent pool of athletes from which elite performers can develop (Green 2006; Oakley and Green 2001a, 2001b). Athletes are therefore nurtured through different stages of a development pathway toward elite success: athlete entrance/recruitment, athlete retention and athlete advancement (Green 2006). Sotiriadou et al. (2008) referred to these stages as attraction, retention/transition and nurturing when describing the Australian sports system. This phased progression is evidenced within this study; the findings demonstrate that the development of athletes within a system is reliant upon a number of pathways that facilitate progression. De Bosscher et al. (2010) propose a nine-pillar model that outlines the essential factors that determine international elite sports success and explored the elite pathway from a more strategic perspective. The SPLISS model (see figure 5.1, p.112, De Bosscher et al. 2008, 2006) aims to demonstrate the variety of factors that need to be considered in order to understand the optimum strategy for delivering international success (De Bosscher et al. 2013). They concluded that key success drivers, which can be influenced by sports policies, can be distilled down into nine key areas or pillars: 1) financial support, 2) an integrated approach to policy development, 3) participation in sport, 4) talent identification and development system, 5) athletic and post career support, 6) training facilities, 7) coaching provision and coach development, 8) (inter)national competition, 9) scientific research and innovation. These pillars are situated at two levels: inputs are reflected in pillar one, the financial support for sport and elite sport, and throughputs are reflected in pillars two to nine, which are processes in elite sport policies that may lead to increasing international success. Participants referred to many of these pillars when

describing their journey through sport. For example, the next section explores elite sport funding and the direct impact it has on performance.

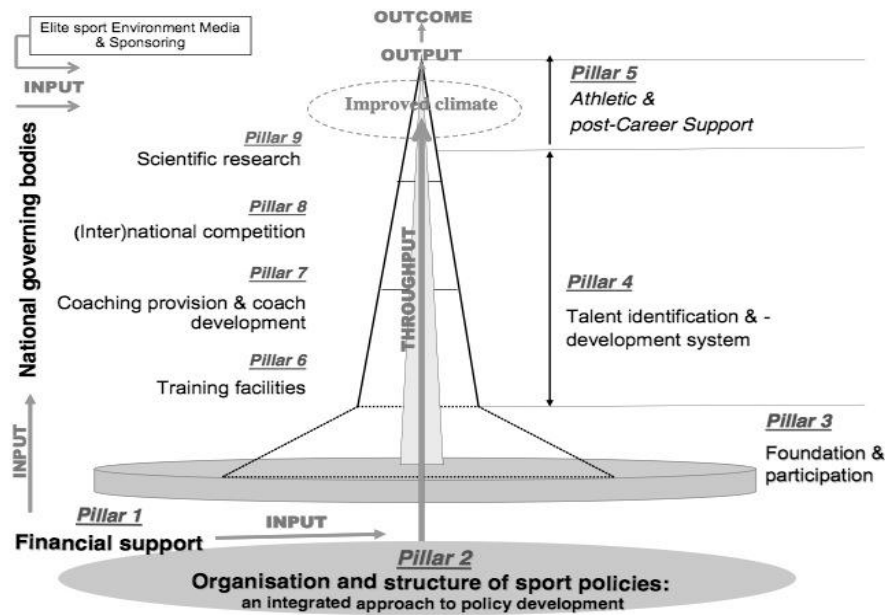


Figure 5.1: The SPLISS Model: A Conceptual Model of 9 Pillars of Sports Policy Factors Leading to International Sporting Success (Source: De Bosscher et al. 2006, 2008)

The participants described a stepwise process of moving up the levels of performance, a pathway that they worked their way along as they developed within the sport of their choice. The previous chapter, *becoming an athlete*, focussed on the initial steps the performer takes within their sport at the athlete recruitment or attraction stage and demonstrates how the individual progresses to retention through a deepening commitment to the sport (Stevenson 2002). This chapter focuses on the nurturing or advancement phase of the athletic pyramid; when the athlete refines their skills and physical conditioning and moves to more advanced levels of training and competition.

It is critical to acknowledge that the structure of sport is an essential factor in elite athlete development. Pathways shape opportunity, provide direction and determine the support structures and delivery of sport at the elite level; experiences will vary across sports. The organisation is also responsible for selecting coaches and other key support staff who the athlete will interact with throughout their careers. The organisation and management of athletes is a

central aspect of the experience of being an elite performer. Important to note at this stage is the fact that participants seemed to focus more on the individual management and delivery of sport, such as how they train, interaction with coaching and support staff and the organisation of competition rather than on the macro or organisational structures responsible for the delivery of sport when they were discussing their individual progression. However, interestingly, when they came to talk about experiences of maltreatment in sport or instances of being maltreated, they focussed on the broader organisational structure of sport such as the role of NGBs, strategic management and delivery of sport, roles of performance director and delivery of or access to support systems. This will be explored in greater detail throughout the following findings chapters. Further, the organisation of sport was directly referred to when exploring the funding of performance sport, which will be the focus of the next section.

Funding High Performance Sport (Paying to Play Versus Playing to Pay)

The financial implications of being an athlete and gaining funding to support performance were highlighted in this study. As noted in the previous section competition in international sport is increasing and more nations are adopting strategic approaches to develop world-class athletes (De Bosscher et al. 2010). Funding or financing sports participation is central to this strategic development. Pillar one of the SPLISS model (figure 5.1) is concerned with measuring the financial contribution of nations and is the input pillar in the entire high performance strategy. Financial resources provide the foundation for which the remaining eight pillars can be implemented (De Bosscher et al. 2009, 2006). Green (2006) states that a clear storyline emerged in the UK regarding elite sport development; a ruthless approach to the realisation of Olympic glory through a 'No Compromise' investment strategy for elite sports performance, which targets resources at athletes and sports capable of medal winning performances (UK Sport 2006). This approach has an impact on the delivery of sport in the UK as well as on the experience of athletes within the elite sports system.

Participants in this study were either training as full-time athletes and relying solely on funding from NGBs or principal national sporting agencies such as UK Sport, or they were balancing the demands of their sport with part-time work or full-time education and had to rely on other sources of income in order to finance their lives as a performance athlete. Adam came into his sport through a UK Sport initiative that provided the opportunity for athletes to trial under a talent transfer programme. Selection enabled him to train full time in a sport funded by the NGB and UK Sport. He recalls the first year on the programme and how it felt to be a full-time athlete working towards a major competition:

“The first year it was incredible, it was nuts just thinking – what am I doing, I’m pretty much living the dream. We were funded by UK Sport at that point so we had some... we had a bit of financial pocket money, our accommodation was paid for, our food was paid for, we were living a professional lifestyle... you know, had a bit of money in our pockets so you could go out and buy some trainers if you needed to or buy some clothes, this sort of thing. You had your APA, your Annual Performance Award, which was about £333 per month, but obviously we were living, accommodation and all that stuff was paid for, it was ample. Training twice a day and yeah, it was kind of smooth sailing at that point.”

The excitement associated with being on the elite programme is evident within this account as is the satisfaction with the financial support received. As a professional athlete, his focus was on performance and training in pursuit of a spot on an Olympic team. Similarly, James recalled how funding in his sport helped him to dedicate his time to training whilst at University. He recalled that there was a change in his funding from a small weekly allowance to being provided an athlete personal award (APA), which enabled him to concentrate on training without having to worry about how to “*make ends meet*”. The APA comes from one of a two-part funding process offered by UK Sport to those supported by the World Class Performance Programme (WCPP).

The UK Sport funding stream is suggested to reflect the athletic journey and offers three levels of support: talent, development and podium. The level at which the athlete or the sport sits directly impacts the funding available to the athlete and the sport. Funding primarily goes directly to the NGB and will be used to fund programme delivery and support services for a particular sport. In addition, athletes can apply for an APA that will be paid directly to them. The

APA is traditionally used to pay toward the individual's ordinary living costs, and this award will be distributed based on the athlete banding on the WCPP (A Podium, B Development or C Talent). UK Sport (2014a) states that the average APA payment to athletes on the podium programme (those demonstrating realistic medal winning capabilities) is £18500, yet for a development athlete (newly competitive sport or potential medal winning capability in the future), the level is closer to £7500. This demonstrates that many athletes will need to supplement their income with sponsorship or part-time employment in order to cover their living costs. James reflected that although it was a small amount of money, it allowed him to concentrate solely on the task of being an athlete; it meant that he didn't have to worry about working on top of a full time training schedule:

“Back then in 2008 we had funding, so we got a, let me think... an APA we got which was like a monthly allowance, actually no, for the first bit we got a weekly allowance for food of £35 a week, so we could get that. That was all we were funded, and then when September came we then had an APA, which is a bit of a better monthly allowance and a place to live. It was in halls of residence, sort of connected with the universities that were in Sheffield at the time, but it was just like a standard halls. Five of us to a nice tight little place.”

Not all sports are covered by UK Sport funding; many rely on programmes in place and funding from NGBs. For example, Ella was competing at an international standard within her sport whilst working full time in a demanding job. She found it hard to maintain a balance, as she had to make time for intensive training in and around long shifts and a gruelling work schedule. During the run up to a major tournament, Ella had to make a decision about her future: she decided that she needed: *“to give myself a chance for selection”*. The decision to commit to World Cup selection meant that she had to make a sacrifice in terms of her career and reduce her working hours in order to concentrate on this goal. She believed that this decision was a necessity, given that other players *“within the system”* were already full time athletes and supported by higher funding awards:

“I went part-time at work for the last six months prior to the World Cup which was kind of semi funded so we got some increased funding... I can't remember what it was, but I know it wasn't enough to kind of compensate for losing half your salary. It was a decision I understood and I made for the right reasons, so I went part time at work, to give myself the best chance.”

This extract points to the tension that can arise for athletes who have a career outside of sport. It also shows the financial sacrifices involved in pursuing an athletic career. James noted that the small amount of funding he received would be sufficient for younger athletes who were “*on an adventure at University and not used to having any real income*”. However, he felt that for older athletes who needed to support a family, the funding was insufficient, and this became a cause for concern for some of the members of his squad:

“Obviously some players needed the funding more than others so, you know, I was by myself, a lot of us were young students, we didn’t need a lot of money, but some of them were parents, some of them had families, a couple of the older guys in the team had daughters to look after and they’d travel with them, it became – right well how can you survive on £500 a month with a wife and kids?”

It was evident from the interviews that funding allocation is dependent upon a number of factors and greatly differs between sports. Interestingly, Ella observed that funding could also differ between members of the same team, that some athletes were paid to train as full time performers, whilst others were only part funded. Megan echoed this:

“So at that point I had to work like in between the days just to be able to afford to give me rent, obviously with my rent like it took me, I’d just moved up to Sheffield... after being in America and didn’t have a house, I didn’t have a job, I didn’t have funding whereas all the other girls were funded and had that support, I didn’t, so I had to do that all outside of my sport... I literally didn’t have a roof to sleep under, I didn’t have food, I didn’t have anything. Like I had people there trying to help but, the money I got from my sport was £50 a month, whereas a lot of the other girls were on APAs and had funding and they also got expenses and it was slightly different for them.”

As a new member of the training squad, Megan reflected on having to get through a period where she needed to “*prove herself as a performer*” before being able to gain the funding she required, adding an element of pressure to her performance during training and competition. Further, she believed that the coaching staff failed to understand the problems caused by variability in funding, as outlined in the following account:

“Obviously she (the coach) knew that I was struggling with money and things like that, so, she was like, “when your coming to training – you’re too distracted about other things”, she wasn’t understanding what I was having to do outside of training... she would just say well other players

they manage to come into training and they're not as distracted as you are... but they didn't have the financial concerns I did so it felt like it was very different."

Evident from this extract are the differences in financial stability between players within a training squad highlighting the additional pressures that some may face as a result of reduced funding.

Participants shared concerns about the instability of funding and noted that the amount of money awarded to a sport or individual could change during a performance cycle. When medals, and in particular Olympic medals, are the key outcome of funding policies, the strategy of allocated lottery monies will only be given to the governing bodies most able to produce medal-winning outcomes at major competitions (Green 2004). Targeted funding therefore provides support or investment to a select number of organisations based on their capability of meeting performance related targets (Sam 2012). In the run up to major events, sports face funding reviews, and this can lead to significant changes in funding allocated. Recent announcements for the UK Sport funding plan for the Rio Games has highlighted a number of significant funding cuts and large discrepancies in the amount of funding allocated across sports. On the 'road to Rio', twenty Olympic sports have been awarded funding: at the top, rowing has been allocated £32,622,862, and at the bottom, weightlifting has been allocated £1,350,448 (UK Sport 2014b); many sports fail to be included. Funding reviews were stressful events for participants as they created uncertainty and brought about significant change. This was compounded by a lack of understanding about how decisions on funding were made and by poor communication concerning the perceived and actual impact of funding cuts on the programme that was being delivered. Adam recalled a meeting he attended with his team where the performance director delivered the news of a funding review:

"December sort of time, the funding review happens, and it was just devastating. I remember the meeting exactly... We had a meeting with our performance director at the time, and they basically came in, called the whole squad in and they said OK guys the funding for UK sport's coming up, it looks like we're going to get a cut, and everyone's looking around like – what. Don't forget most of us had just come through the UK sport talent identification process, there's 15-20 athletes in here who'd been selected by UK sport to be in this programme. So we are in there and they

go – yeh, yeh, it looks like we’re going to get a cut and it could be quite substantial. Everyone’s asking loads of rubbish little questions like – what does this mean, what happens now, what’s the cut, what’s substantial, how bad do you think this is going to be? I managed to drag it out and we were told it would be a 50% cut, and the whole room just went silent. Then the meeting was pretty much over there and then.”

Adam’s anger and confusion over the decision to cut funding to a programme that had been implemented by UK Sport as a pathway to an Olympic games are clear. Such sentiments were echoed by other participants who believed that at times communication was poor, and failed to account for the impact that funding would have on the delivery of the sport and on the ability of athletes to support themselves in pursuit of performance. Similarly, James’ sport faced reduced funding which he believed to be “*a real blow to the preparation for an Olympic competition*”. Adam further outlined the level of impact that his team faced as a result of the funding review:

“Basically that (the funding cut) meant for us that all financial and sort of any help was completely removed. The only financial backing the NGB could give us would be to run GB national team camps and pay for international competition. That basically meant that your training environment would have to be self sufficient, so you were not running a self sustaining programme, which basically meant that if you wanted to play you had to get a contract. I was like, just like – what the fuck. Like – how is this possible? I just couldn’t get my head round how all these guys at UK sport had run this programme, brought us into it and then just cut the funding. Why would you fucking bother in the first place, what’s the point? It was, you know... those were some dark times, those were really dark times. After that when I’ve gone back home, there is nothing. I didn’t know what was going to happen. I applied for university again whilst I was there and just trained and just sat round the house looking at stuff. You do a lot of staring at walls because your mind’s just racing through stuff, trying to race through stuff and trying to sort it out and this sort of thing. This is still 2009. I’ve got nothing. Now this is self sustaining, I’ve got to pay for it myself or I’ve got to get a club team to pay for me.”

The devastating impact of funding cuts in James’ sport directly resulted in questioning his continued participation:

“We started to think that it was a joke, because if you’ve not got any money to afford to get to training why would you bother training. A lot of us resorted to families; we were all very lucky with the amount of support we did get... It did have an impact because a lot of us were, we became more focussed on how to fund ourselves than focused on training because you were worried about how you were going to pay for the meals next week, and you should have been focussed – right, well let me get a good

session in, I'll go have my recovery shake and I'll get home and have a good piece of meat, sort of relax, recover and I'd be good for the morning. So your focus was definitely put elsewhere."

Adam highlighted the marked impact that funding cuts had on him as an athlete as he went from "playing to pay to paying to play". For James, the impact was on motivation to perform:

"If you look at the last session in 2012 you had your physio and you had a coach that was it. So the extreme, so it had gone from full support complete funding... You know it all started the big buzz of the home Olympics and thinking of carrying it through seven years later, it would completely change, it was a real sort of, and you could see it year on year that sort of the buzz of playing for GB had just fizzled out. As you built up to the Olympics it became more of a drain. You think the building up would, you'd have more sort of enjoyment, and don't get me wrong, the Olympics was amazing as was getting there. As soon as we arrived there, the week before, you know, you forget about it all because suddenly you're funded like every other athlete because everybody is being treated the same."

Conversely, Megan believed that the loss of funding had a positive impact on her team as they had to fund their own Olympic programme:

"We had to do fund-raising, we actually became a closer team because of it, so even things that we had one our players mums, she basically helped out full-time for the last four years, she put her life and soul into trying to fund-raise things for us and did like, adopt Olympians who would go into schools, we would go into schools and give back a legacy for them and they would do like fund-raising things for us, so it was kind of bitter-sweet in a sense like the way our team came together and the things that we did, we did like 310 mile bike ride from Sheffield to London to try and raise money and even that as an experience in itself was just cool. To know that as a team we kind of got ourselves to where we were."

Nevertheless, she recognised that funding is an essential component that should not be taken for granted:

"You know funding is so important, you need funding, like it's real key in our development, but also because we are a minority sport, I don't ever expect it or like really take it for granted, because obviously for me, being an athlete, even these last years I've not really had much money or things, but you have to have some kind of funding or some kind of backing to be able to make it, so that you can train every day and stuff, it is so important and it's not until you don't have it anymore that you realise how important it was."

It is evident that funding has a direct impact on athletes. Participants highlighted the financial commitment required to train, compete and travel in order to achieve

peak performance. In order to commit and train full time athletes require support; for many the funding received to train and compete was enough money to cover their basic requirements but not further to encompass the wider demands of their life such as paying a mortgage or keeping a family. Many of the participants stated that they functioned on extremely limited resources, relying on financial support from family or some sponsorship. Critically, at times, participants had to consider if they could afford to be a high performance athlete. The findings demonstrate how important funding can be to the athlete and their sports experience making it an essential part of the jigsaw of being a performance athlete.

Training and Competing

Training and competition are central to the experience of being an elite athlete and provide the focus of an athlete's day-to-day routine. Individual training sessions, or units of training, take place on and off of the field of play, and provide individuals with the opportunity to refine their skills and prepare for competition. Success in sport is reliant upon well-planned training that prepares the athlete to meet the demands of the competitive environment (Côté and Fraser-Thomas 2008; Baker and Cobley 2008; Côté et al. 2007; Durrand-Bush and Samela 2002). It was evident across the interviews that it takes significant investment and commitment to be an elite athlete. For full-time athletes, training can take place during multiple daily and weekly sessions. James stressed that such a routine requires dedication and commitment:

“When I started full time training, when I was 18, it was twice a day from then on in. Full time meant twice a day training, S & C (strength and conditioning) the lot and we did that five times a week with games on the weekend. You know it was full on and demanding.”

This statement points to the fact that elite athletes have to be able to withstand the toll that training takes on the body; athletes will need to be able to recover and adapt between individual sessions and perform when it matters. It further highlights the need to balance different types of training, for example, technical and tactical sessions that may take place on the court, pitch or track alongside strength and conditioning that focuses on training individual musculoskeletal

functioning. Clear planning and organisation of training are needed to ensure that athletes avoid injury and suitably prepare for the demands of their individual discipline.

Although the training routine or structure of training will vary between sports, as it will align very much with the unique demands of the activity, participants agreed that this was one of the core elements to their daily routine and that “*life fitted around training*” (Immy). The commitment required to train as an elite athlete and the need to refine and develop skill to perform at the top level is clearly articulated in the following extract from Adam:

“As an athlete I think, from what I’ve seen and experienced of elite sport, there are certain things people do. You do things consistently and regularly, like consistency is such a big thing, it’s about taking a skill and practicing it over and over again and making it almost robotic in effect. So there’s consistency, there’s perfection, and everyone talks about you can’t perfect something but you can at least reach excellence. Whatever they do they’re always trying, there’s a reason for why they’re doing it, they’re not just training for the sake of training, they’re training for an outcome, for a result, to improve something. That’s what I’ve seen, the guys who are the best... I think it was Steve Backley that said actually the guys who are the best at stuff actually aren’t the best, they’ve just got less weaknesses because they practice so much and have so many skills that actually you can’t break them down because there are no weaknesses.”

Interestingly, Adam refers to the mechanistic way in which athletes need to reproduce movements that are honed, skilled and highly developed in pursuit of perfection or ‘*something beyond perfection*’. Megan echoed this:

“I think especially for me, like, every single step of the way through sport you learn... I suppose as well, like being a top athlete, or even aspiring to be a top athlete, you strive for the best so like you’re always going to be disappointed because you kind of want perfection but you don’t always get it.”

Gervis and Dunn (2004) explain that elite sport is both physically and psychologically demanding, requiring athletes to push themselves to extreme limits even at a very young age. Athletes train for many hours at the elite level and must engage in deliberate practice (Ericsson et al. 1993) in order to reach expertise. Engagement in deliberate practice requires effort, persistence and attention and will not always be pursued for enjoyment (Côté and Fraser-Thomas 2008); training will often be long, boring and repetitive without obvious

performance increments. As a result, participants must demonstrate significant motivation and determination to perform at the elite level (Burton et al. 2006; Gould et al. 2002; Durrand-Bush and Samela 2002; Gould et al. 1992).

The findings support these statements and demonstrate that athletes feel the need to physically and mentally push themselves in order to “*be the best they can be*” (Lisa). Participants adopted machine-based metaphors, referring to the need to be robotic or superhuman, willing to challenge and push themselves in pursuit of peak performance. Lisa mentioned that training with the national team was an essential step for her in raising the standard of her performance. This came from the challenge of training with the best in the world but also the ability to learn from their mindset and the way in which they approach training and competition:

“I’m also training with the national team, so it’s like being surrounded each week by the current team, the current world champions, so it kind of... it gives you a different mindset because that’s where you want to be so you’re surrounding yourself with the right people, it pushes you to develop, there are no hiding places at international training.”

Participants acknowledged that achieving this level relied upon significant effort, persistence and at times a failure to find satisfaction with performance. Megan felt that the “*quest for perfection*” was what drove her to push herself in training and competition. Similarly Sebastian noted that training was about finding weaknesses and working to eliminate them; this would be a never-ending process for an elite athlete. Training therefore provides an opportunity to learn, develop and achieve personal targets in preparation for specific events and becomes the forum for personal development.

It was highlighted that training can be physically and emotionally demanding and that athletes are willing to push themselves in order to achieve performance gains. Alongside the benefits of improved performance and increased skill, participants also highlighted that their willingness to push themselves to extremes in pursuit of performance carried associated risks. Megan referred to the process of “*getting ugly*” and “*being willing to get out of that comfort zone and push yourself to your limits*”, which is integral for improvement. However, she also stated that when training load or intensity becomes too great and active recovery isn’t sought, this could lead to injury and problems with performance. Over-training and under

performance will be discussed within the following section, *managing injury in sport*, but perhaps fitting here is Adam's account of how training leads to adaptation and how even in some of the most extreme situations, the body learns to adapt and reach new levels:

"Yes certainly. You have to, it's like anything you know, you train a certain way for an amount of time, eventually your body adapts so you change it again. When we were doing this it was just, it was a case of mentally and physically adapting to that situation and trying to find the joy in it, you had to find some way of getting through it, and you know it was kind of like... everyone's in the same boat in this ridiculous situation, you've got to find some way of getting through it, although some of us didn't, for some people in the squad it just broke them... Like properly broke them and you don't get selected in that situation."

In this account, he notes that if an athlete fails to cope with the intensity of training, it can break them, and "*broken bodies don't gain selection*". This demonstrates a worrying disregard for personal safety and provides an insight into the willingness of athletes to accept training methods that push them to extremes. Lang (2010b) adopts Foucauldian analysis to explain how athletes are willing to push themselves to physical extremes in the sport of swimming. She believes that certain practices act to discipline athletes, creating docile and submissive bodies. A key objective of sport is to produce efficient, machine-like bodies that are obedient. Certainly, the findings suggest that the way in which participants train failed to consider the potential impact this can have on their body; this was true of the way in which athletes are being trained and their personal acceptance of such training methods. This could be a reason why some types of maltreatment go unquestioned in elite sport.

One of the acknowledged purposes of training was for athletes to reach new heights in competition, to work on weaknesses and increase proficiency. Billy acknowledged that training is central to performance enhancement, and that this in turn can impact upon personal confidence and performance in competition:

"I worked hard, put the training in, I think there was a lot of, I would say my technique definitely improved over those training sessions over the winter probably more than anything was the impact this period had on my confidence, because I rocked out the next summer and obliterated my personal best by about another 20%, just absolutely nailed it."

For elite athletes, competing in major events is often the pinnacle of their career (Sharp et al. 2014), and can be the culmination of many years of training. Participants were all performing at the very best standard within their respective sports and had represented their country in events such as European championships, World cup competitions, Olympic and Commonwealth Games. Although the structure of competition greatly differs, the participants were all involved in sports whereby performance would be evaluated based on final rankings or win/loss ratios. It is evident from the narrative accounts that in the competitive arena, athletes can achieve great heights but this can also be the site of some of their lowest experiences within highly pressurised environments. Megan explored how her team were playing daily during a pre-Olympic tour and how although this took a physical toll the experience of playing in front of crowds was one that she will never forget:

“Like we obviously did a South American tour... we went for like a month and played as many games as we could during this period... so we actually played nearly a game a day per week to try and get like an Olympic experience kind of like the year before and it was just like such an experience, like we had crowds of 7,000 and we’re used to crowds of like 20 in England. And over there players are like stars, so it was kind of like a really amazing summer, like you train hard and you do all that and then you forget sometimes why you do it, and especially that year it was amazing. We felt the pressure of having to perform especially because it was so close to selection but it was unreal to have that experience.”

Billy also highlighted the impact of playing in front of a crowd at a major competition; he believed that the crowd enabled him to reach another level in his performance:

“Nothing can prepare you for that, and then the crowd cheering as well. I remember there and then thinking – there’s only us and this other team that we we’re against on the field of play at the minute, and everyone’s cheering, now, I know that we’ve got a contingent of people up there, but 90% of them aren’t so, I just got into the mindset of – well, I don’t know who they’re cheering for so I’ll just... plain ignorance and I’ll just think they’re cheering for me and I just used that as power for me. I remember a couple of times everyone was cheering and I was waving to everyone... So in that one in the Czech Republic I managed to get a silver individual medal, we got a silver team medal and that was really good, got a couple of National records in there at the same time, actually broke the senior National record and the junior National record, it was an amazing trip, and I was absolutely in the zone on the individual one, I was absolutely in the zone.”

Competition is acknowledged as a stressful and challenging environment for performers (Hanton et al. 2007; Neil et al. 2007; Dugdale et al. 2002). Gaining selection to teams, performing under pressure, coping with winning and losing and competing in front of crowds were some of the factors highlighted that make the competitive climate both unique and challenging. Akehurst and Oliver (2014) refer to the passion that athletes display as the driver to train, perform and persist, even in the most adverse conditions. Participants referred to the resilience required to cope with the highs and lows of performance and noted that each competition brings with it new challenges, for example:

“2010 to now basically has been my best time. This year is currently my best, like I’ve had four golds already this year, so at the moment it’s currently like my best season so far and it’s such a contrast emotionally to previous years where I’ve struggled you know. I sometimes doubted if I had what it took to make it.” (Lisa)

Similarly, Adam conveyed how competing for him took a great deal of sacrifice, but performing at optimal level in competition justified his dedication and commitment:

“You give a lot up for your sport don’t you and if you then find yourself kind of – like, I’m not getting the results, so I’m not where I want to be, like there’s, you can feel like you’ve given up a lot, but when it’s going great well that’s the most incredible feeling and it all sort of feels worth it. I guess like other careers there’s lows and dips and highs when it all comes together and that’s one of the reasons I love sport, one of the reasons why I hate it as an athlete as well.”

The stories shared by the participants demonstrated how competition is seen as the pinnacle of sporting endeavour, where the athletes’ commitment and dedication to training come together in pursuit of optimal performance. The athletic career demands that individuals perform within the competitive arena and this is reliant on training as the foundation of their daily work or routine. Achieving success or producing performances, is not guaranteed however, and success in sport is something that the individual works tirelessly to achieve. The experience of training and competing is therefore unique to the individual and these elements are central to the process of *being* an elite athlete.

Managing Injury in Sport (Everyone Plays with Pain)

There was much discussion of injury and its impact on performance in this study. Participants all took part in sports that had risks associated with them and highlighted that it can be dangerous performing at the elite level. The narrative accounts identified a variety of reasons why injury could occur, including those sustained in the line of competition and those that were the result of poor management or failure to consider athlete welfare. Important to note here is the fact that injury can be sustained as a direct result of maltreatment, for example, through FPE or failure to appropriately manage training load and recovery. It can also simply be a consequence of consistent strain on the body over a significant period of time as a result of training or competition. Injury as a result of maltreatment will be explored within the following chapter, *being maltreated*. The focus here will be on participants' shared experience of sustaining and coping with injury within their sports to explore how being injured is one of the challenges associated with being a high performance athlete.

Multiple training sessions and demanding competitive schedules make injury at some stage inevitable. Experiencing pain and managing injury were described as synonymous with being a performance athlete, as Charlotte noted, sustaining injuries is simply *"part and parcel of being an athlete"*. James stated that when *"being an athlete is your full-time occupation, injuries always have a part to play"*. This is evident in the following extract from Adam who recalled how in his early career he was *"plagued by injury"* and how this prevented him from maintaining a position within a junior international team:

"So every time I'd make it into a national team I'd get injured and drop out, had some quite serious injuries, double leg fractures, broken thumbs, dislocated shoulder, all this sort of stuff kept on coming through, I was always recovering from something."

This extract highlights the elevated risk associated with certain sports (for example, contact sports) that are *"hard on the body"* and *"take their toll"* (Adam). This demonstrates that athletes may have to recover from multiple injuries throughout a season or career. Adam felt that this was unquestioned as a performer and was part of the process of demonstrating that he was resilient enough to cope with the sport and its demands. Research has found that injury is

an acknowledged part of sports performance; accepting pain is a normal part of the sports identity, and athletes tend to normalise pain, illness and injury in the sporting context (Theberge 2008; Malcom 2006; Pike 2005; Pike and Maguire 2003; Howe 2001; Curry 1993), a finding supported by this study. It has been suggested that athletic participation occurs in a cultural context that normalises pain, inducing athletes into a culture of risk (Malcom 2006; Nixon 1994). Nixon (1992, p.128) asserted that:

“In general, this culture of risk includes beliefs about the structural constraints, structural inducement, and processes of institutional rationalization and socialization that implicitly or explicitly influence athletes to believe that accepting the risks of pain and injury is their only legitimate choice if they want to play.”

As Goffman (1972) suggests “a body is a piece of consequential equipment, and its owner is always putting it on the line” (p.166). Injuries, as several participants noted, are just an inevitable part of being a high performance athlete.

Individuals are at risk of sustaining injuries that can be classified as acute (present for 7-10 days), sub-acute (10 days – 7 weeks) or chronic (lasting longer than 7 weeks and possibly career ending: Magee 2002), and these can occur at any stage within the athletic life cycle. The participants acknowledged that being injured is something that elite athletes fear because of the consequences it can have for their ability to train, their selection and, in the most serious circumstances, their ability to continue participation. In training, injury can be a result of athletes pushing their body to extremes in pursuit of physical gains or simply a consequence of over use or strain on the body. In competition, where individuals are striving to attain a certain standard, time or score line, injuries can occur as a direct consequence of the competitive setting. James noted that experiencing an injury brought home how fragile the body can be; this realisation changed his approach to training in that he tried to ensure that his body was in the best shape to withstand the strain of being a performer:

“When I was a junior I dislocated fingers like you wouldn’t believe. It always had an impact but I was quite reluctant to stop with a dislocated finger, I could always strap it up and I’d always have these metal splints over them so I could still play. I did injure my knee in France in my first couple of months with GB and that was pretty tough, you know two weeks on the sideline watching, it was you know, still, just having moved away

with the buzz of being a GB player, taking full time training made you realise – oh crap this is if you get injured and you know, what am I there for, what am I doing? It was... it made me sort of refresh and look at how I approached everything and how I did my strength and conditioning so I don't do it again. So it was a negative at the time but it made me think about how I prevent it from happening in the future and probably made me a better athlete. It was just difficult to sit there and watch everybody train and still be up beat about it, in the long term it did have a good impact.”

James reflects on how he classed a dislocated finger as a minor injury that required little consideration whilst the injury to his knee forced him to stop training and was therefore classed as a more serious injury. Allen-Collinson and Hockey (2007) refer to the disruption of identity that can be caused by an injury. Sparkes (2000) suggests that when an athlete becomes injured, the integrity of the self is threatened and assaulted as their taken-for-granted assumptions about possessing a smoothly functioning body are disturbed and the sense of wholeness of body and self is disrupted. Evidently, injury challenges identity through the threat of loss if the injury is significant and can lead to long-term damage; in addition, it can be used to affirm certain dimensions of identity (such as athletic identity) through the person's ability to cope with it. Bouncing back or playing through pain become a demonstration of resilience, and as Malcom (2006) notes, this serves to reinforce athletic identity: “shaking off injuries and playing with pain is simply what athletes do” (p.496). Participants noted that having to miss training or competition as a result of injury creates anxiety and concern. The findings suggest that participants viewed injury as something that needs to be avoided in the performance environment.

It was evident in this study that elite athletes have to make decisions about the seriousness of their injuries and that at times they are willing to mask their severity through concern that it will affect their selection or have an impact on the way the coach views them. Austin noted that at times he played on with injuries through fear of being deselected for failing to train. This concern was also articulated in Ella's story where she explained how she competed in an international test series with an ankle injury due to a coach stating that she had to play to be considered for selection:

“I played in a club match and injured my ankle... I phoned up the coach and was... because I was supposed to be playing Scotland the following

week in (named a tournament), I phoned up the coach and said – you know, I've injured my ankle, do I need to play and was told – yes, you need to play you have to play to be selected. So I played in that match and I played in the French match the following week off the bench. I started Scotland and played off the bench against France and then I basically was out then for a couple of months because my ankle was completely destroyed. I should have known better myself but... I was thinking can I get away with this, can I play because I knew in my head that if I didn't play then how could they select me because that was kind of, they'd said they need to see me play. So I went and played and probably didn't play very well, I played the whole game against Scotland with my ankle strapped and couldn't really walk before the match but I could run around and play the game. I then managed it the following week and was able to play against France, again struggled but could play. Then obviously I'd done the damage and I ended up with the sort of chronic inflammation in the ankle joint, I needed a steroid injection in the end and had an MRI and bits and bobs and it took quite a while to settle down so I didn't play any more that season but there were only a couple of games left, but I thought you know – that's going to help me get selected.”

The implications of training through injury are clearly articulated within this extract. Chronic inflammation developed as a result of playing through injury; this is a clear indication of the short-term focus that athletes maintain as opposed to a consideration of their long-term health or performance. Adam also recalled how he required a 10-week recovery period for a groin problem incurred through over-training and a failure to appropriately manage acute injuries:

“I went through that ten week period and I missed all of it and obviously you're shitting yourself at that period because actually you've got to remember you're on a performance programme now where you can actually get cut, so the cuts happened every six months... So obviously all the time I'm thinking – crap, if I'm injured for ten weeks that means I'm going to be out because you know you've got to be accelerating and getting better to show that you have what it takes to get to the Olympics, for that you have to show you can actually play.”

This study shows that athletes feel pressure to train and compete, and injury poses a direct obstacle. The stress that injury can cause is evident; athletes worry about the impact of injury on their selection, funding and continued participation. This can lead athletes to make poor decisions in pursuit of performance. The findings support those of other researchers who have examined athletes' responses to injury and the normalisation of injury in sport. For example, Pike (2005) found that female amateur rowers demonstrated a similar disregard for their own personal safety and wellbeing. She believes that athletes weigh up the cost of

disclosure against the possible benefits, and this can often lead them to continue performing despite the risk of further damage, as was certainly evidenced through Ella's account. Similarly Theberge (2008) found that athletes were willing to ignore the threats that sport posed to their health and wellbeing in pursuit of performance. She noted that athletes respond to potential health threats through a process of disembodiment, in which their physical body is seen as separate from their self. This process of depersonalisation creates distance from the potential for injury. Howe (2001) refers to this as the absent body, which has been central to the study of pain and injury. When sportspeople take part in training the healthy injury free body is invisible, a tool with which an athlete has to work. It is only when an athlete becomes injured and there is an onset of pain that the body becomes visible: this has implications for the individual as it can limit their ability to participate.

Interestingly, Ella demonstrated the conflict she felt as a performer between her appraisal of an injury as a "*rational person who understood the implications of playing on through it*" and her desire to be fit and her desire to be selected. She believed that even if they are provided with knowledge on the negative implications of training or competing through an injury, athletes are unable to make objective decisions that take into account their personal wellbeing in the performance environment:

"Obviously now I am a sports doctor and if I put that hat on, players shouldn't be playing who are injured, obviously there are World Cup finals and that isn't necessarily World Cup final for each player it might be that's their premiership match that's going to be their pinnacle, but playing against Scotland in a game I hoped wasn't going to be my pinnacle, so the decision should have been made for me not to play. I wasn't capable as a player of making that decision."

And why did you not feel you were capable of making that decision?

"Because you're not thinking about it right. You're thinking about the selection and so it takes an element of responsibility for your own welfare and puts it to one side. Decisions like that should be made completely objectively... You know, they're never, but from the sports medics point of view they should be the one saying – they're not fit, and then the coaches should be listening but coaches don't always listen. Yes, it shouldn't be the player, it shouldn't be because I honestly don't think they can't make those decisions for themselves, or at least I know I couldn't, players who

are injured shouldn't play if it's going to make them worse or impact on their recovery but that's just not the way things happen."

The significant level of personal investment that athletes make is evident within all of the accounts. Athletes are willing to disembodiment their own health within competition or training to ensure that they are given every opportunity to be selected. This provides a clear insight into the commitment and dedication that athletes make in order to maintain their elite status and at the same time it also provides a disturbing picture of the athlete who is so heavily invested in their sport that they are willing to risk serious injury to secure or maintain selection to a national squad. Duquin (1994) noted that in sport, risk is framed as a personal choice and injury as a personal problem. Athletes believe that they have a choice to play through pain or continue competing when injured; she suggests this belief is misplaced. Further, the common assumption that sport is a positive outlet for obtaining a variety of health measures could be challenged based on the significant threat posed to athletes long-term wellbeing as a result of their disregard for the impact of injury (Fenton and Pitter 2010; Waddington 2004; Roderick et al. 2000). Theberge (2008) notes that the context of competitive sport can constrain participants to play hurt and in other ways to subordinate their health to performance. The culture of normalisation of feeling pain and playing through injury is perhaps most clearly articulated within the following quote from Adam:

"You know everyone plays with pain and it wasn't until I'd got to the end of the Olympics that I understood what that actually meant. What it meant to me is that – we're playing a contact sport, we're playing a tough contact sport on a hard surface twice a day every day, you were going to get hurt. The question then is are you hurt or are you injured".

Is there a difference?

That's different, yes. If you were injured, then you would get support, if you were hurting you wouldn't... You had to decide if you are hurt or injured."

The notion of being hurt or injured provides a powerful image of the decisions athletes have to make with regards to their own physical safety. Although the long-term implications of athletes training through injury and pushing themselves to extremes are unknown, James noted that he feels the long-term implications of over-training with a body that feels *"older than it should do"*:

“We were all quite young yet my body doesn’t feel like it should feel, you know, the amount of times you’re thinking my back hurts and this hurts and that hurts. I should be feeling fresh and I should have another ten years before my body really starts to say – I’m a bit stiff, my knees are sore now, I need a session off. But because of the style of training and the things we had to do and playing on when maybe we shouldn’t it’s like – no wonder we’re all struggling.”

In an environment where “everyone plays with pain”, the question as to whether athletes are truly capable of objectively making decisions that will not put themselves at risk of further injury is debatable. For the participants in this study, the reality of having to deal with injury and maintain the balance of training was a real concern. For an elite athlete there is a need to physically challenge or push the body; clearly this process has to be carefully managed to prevent broken bodies along the path to performance.

The Selection Process (Being Picked Up and Dropped Down)

Selection and deselection were highlighted as important elements of athletic experience. Competitive sport demands that individuals work hard to maintain their position and selection may happen across multiple performance levels. Gaining selection can be one of the significant achievements of athletic endeavour, whilst deselection can be one of the times of greatest disappointment. Selection creates an environment where athletes need to be open to analysis and able to deal with both the highs and the lows of this process. Participants highlighted this as an inevitable period in performance; it is certain that selection will happen, what is not certain is a person’s individual fate at the time of selection:

“Obviously when selection comes around people are going to be disappointed if you’re not good enough you’re not good enough and unfortunately that’s sport, I have also learned that there is no point second guessing it, maybe that has been a way to protect myself from the disappointment when it hasn’t gone my way.” (Ella).

Mechanisms of selection differ across sports, however; in general, this is a staged process through which individuals work to become a named performer for a particular squad, tournament or competition within a playing season or training cycle. Selection involves choice making and a prediction that one person will

perform better than another (Van Iddekinge and Ployhart 2008; Evers et al. 2005). In both team and individual sports, an athlete will be fighting against others from a training squad for a final position, creating a competitive environment that pushes the individual to meet performance standards or objectives. Megan outlined how in order to cope with selection, the athlete needs to be selfish, and self-focussed; the shift to caring about herself prior to selection was difficult to manage as a player. In her sport, selection meant that she had to compete against those who she classed as teammates:

“I think it was because like when you’re there you’re competing against everyone in your team, like even though you’re a team, it’s like I still want to be on court, I still want to be playing.”

This is a feeling echoed by James, who recalled a shift in the team atmosphere during the final stages of selection for an Olympic games:

“2012 summer started, it was you versus everybody, you were playing against everybody. You were pushing... you know, if you can get him out of the team there’s a spot for you. If he’s out of the team that’s your spot, battle versus battle, it was hot.”

Evident in the extracts above are the independence and single mindedness required during selection, especially within sports that function based on team play and cohesion; teammates become competition and individuals are fighting against one another for positions. Participants described a need to be resilient in order to deal with selection, and noted that friendships have to be put to one side when trying to secure a place within a squad.

At the elite level, the investment in sport toward selection for a major competition is significant. James recalled working towards an Olympic games for a minimum of six years; similarly Adam stated that his life had stopped in the five years prior to an Olympic games. Alexandra noted how *“getting picked dominated everything”*; striving to attain selection becomes an all-consuming endeavour for an elite athlete. Squad sizes reduce in the run up to major competitions, causing athletes to constantly appraise where they believe they sit in the *“pecking order”* (Ella). Selection is therefore the ultimate target for an athlete and athletes will at some stage experience the *“elation”* (Lisa) or *“relief”* (James) of selection or *“devastation”* (Adam), *“upset”* (Charlotte), *“confusion”* (Ella) or *“acceptance”* (Megan) associated with deselection in sport. Given the importance of selection

to the athlete and the significant impact that it can have on their life and career at the elite level, it is surprising to note the paucity of literature that examines this complex process in sport. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that selection can be stressful for athletes and can be a source of organisational stress within the sporting context (Hanton et al. 2012; Fletcher et al. 2012; Kristiansen and Roberts 2010; Hanton et al. 2005a, 2005b). Research on the impact of selection on athletes has predominantly examined it as a career transition, specifically a non-normative or involuntary transition. A non-normative transition is generally unpredictable, unanticipated and involuntary, and does not occur within a set plan (Wylleman et al. 2004). At the elite level, failure to be selected from a squad can lead to forced career termination and therefore could have a significant impact on the life of the athlete.

Megan recalled the process of having to work her way into a team from “*being on the periphery*” to “*becoming part of the squad*” and subsequently a “*first choice player*”. Sebastian also stated that there was a phased approach to selection where he had to work through the stages to prove he was worthy of a position. Alexandra recollected how within months, she had experienced both the elation of being picked to represent her country and the devastation of “*being dropped*”:

“At U21 I was selected which was incredible, then I got ignored and then dropped, my feedback was get fitter be better, and it was such a contrast to all the great coaching that I had had before. I had only been back from Australia for about a month so I had come back from Australia to play this summer because we were supposed to be going out to America to represent England. I had honestly been dropped before I had really even been given a chance or an opportunity. It had implications on my sponsorship I found out my sponsorship had changed the day I got dropped so they knew probably before me. It was horrible.”

This demonstrates the dynamic nature of selection; athletes are required to work hard throughout a season to prove that they are worthy. In addition, participants noted that it is not enough to be selected; this simply marks the start of the journey. The focus then shifts to maintenance of a position, understanding that another performer could come along at any time and threaten selection. Butt and Molnar (2009) refer to this as the pyramidal structure of organised sport, a system of allocation that involves identification, selection and elimination or weeding out. The sometimes quick and unexpected experience of deselection is evident in

Charlotte's story where she was told of the loss of a place on a national team via an e-mail from her coach. She recollects the pain associated with "*not being needed anymore*" and being seemingly easy to replace without thought or question:

"I was selected to play in a tournament in Sweden (representing England). I got all the information about the tournament, I was told I was going so was obviously excited and family and friends knew that I was travelling to represent my country... Then a week before I was going I got an e-mail from the coach that basically just said sorry you're not going anymore, we've found someone else. And then I later found out it was his daughter that he was taking instead of me. I was really upset, like so upset. Obviously I was looking forward to it, I had been training for it and this girl hadn't been to any of the training so it was literally she had just taken my space out of the blue. I think the fact that someone had taken my space at such short notice and without warning was bad enough but add to that the fact she was the coach's daughter, I was really upset. I think I also thought what's the point? Why should I even bother training if that's what can happen. It really knocked my confidence. The e-mail that told me I wasn't going simply said we have found someone else. There wasn't any explanation, literally one line, not even development points or an explanation. One line saying you are no longer needed and that was it. I cried, I know I cried and I spoke to my club coach but they were just like, that's sport for you."

Frustration was evident with the sometimes "*impersonal approach*" (Charlotte) to selection that fails to account for the feelings of the person receiving the decision. Participants recollected the various ways in which selection decisions had been delivered throughout their career including face-to-face conversations or telephone calls with coaches, receipt of a letter or e-mail, and the use of on-line player management systems. Clearly the delivery of such decisions is extremely difficult to manage and needs to be considered based on the significant impact that they can have on athletes.

All of the participants accepted selection as an intrinsic part of being an athlete but interestingly commented on the importance of appropriately managing the process in order to enable individuals to cope better. One-to-one meetings with coaches, although difficult, were deemed to be more personal, allowing the player to discuss the reasons for selection or deselection. However, some athletes stated that they preferred player listings to be placed on line, allowing for a follow up meeting once the information had been processed and the initial emotional

reaction reduced. Clearly, this is a process that players need to have some control over, and it may be that coaches need to work with their squad to decide what the best mechanism for selection delivery is. Regardless, the findings from this study suggest that athletes need to understand the reasons for being dropped in order to cope with and negotiate the impact of deselection:

“You know as athletes that it is inevitable that there are selections, there are cuts that need to be made, but the way that that process is managed is integral to how you then cope with it. You know in sport that there will be times when you are deselected but it could be managed so much better. If I had been given feedback that said why then I would have known, at least I would have known what I needed to do to get better or get my place back instead of being left in the dark. I carried on playing don’t get me wrong, but sometimes as a player you want or need things to be more transparent. I kept playing and I played for England again. I think you have to take these things as a performer and use them to make you stronger, but they could always be handled with greater care, maybe not everyone would be able to take the approach that I did to training after a set back like that.”
(Ella)

Potential difficulty in coping with selection seemed to be evident in situations where athletes felt that the decisions made were not communicated early enough, or with enough care from the coaching and support staff. The subjective nature of selection was also noted, as athletes were left with little understanding as to how decisions had been reached. Stevenson (1989) referred to justice and fairness in his analysis of selection of national teams. He used two types of justice that he deemed relevant to the selection process: distributive and procedural justice. Distributive justice is concerned with the just allocation of resources or rewards on the basis of relative contribution, and this lies at the heart of the selection process. If selection to a team is fair, then those who deserve to be selected on the basis of their ability and performance will be. Procedural justice focuses on the fairness of the rules and procedures by which they are applied. This is relevant because satisfaction with the outcome of a selection is thought to be greater when selections are made following procedures that are thought to be fair. He believed that athletes are willing to accept the decisions of selection committees, if they are deemed to be fair or just, and those whom they affect can understand the decisions. The need for clear selection criteria, transparency and fairness in decision making was noted in this study. In addition, participants commented that they needed to feel valued even when deselected from a squad; this could come

from being provided with a clear action plan so that they understand what they need to do in order to re-challenge for a place.

Alexandra described the selection process in sport as a conveyor belt of talent upon which players enjoy a journey but understand that it could end at any time:

“The way it felt was that with England, is that they have so much access to so many players that it’s a bit like a production line and you jump on the conveyor belt and if you are not good enough then they just knock you off.”

Ella further explained how selection in sport has the potential to make people feel disposable and unwanted:

“You know it’s almost like a person is a disposable entity, just picked up and put down. Or that’s what it feels like... There are players that they value, and there are key individuals that they invest a lot of energy in and then the others who they don’t value at the same level are disposable and it’s like – well we’ll bring someone in – oh actually, I think they’ll be better, we’ll drop them.”

Important to note was the vivid way in which participants provided accounts of the selection process in sport. Stories of selection and deselection were recounted in a detailed way that explored the emotions individuals felt at the time. Even when recalling the selection process as junior athletes, participants referred to the significant impact that decisions had on their life both inside and outside of sport. It was evident from the narratives that this is one of the most difficult times as a performer, both when adjusting to selection and proving themselves within that environment, or dealing with the impact of non-selection.

The lack of security that athletes face was an important issue highlighted by the participants in this study. Selection is based on performance criteria that are specifically outlined by coaching staff or talent identification mechanisms, and athletes are appraised in relation to these standards. Athletes can experience deselection at any time, and this can mark the end of an international career in sport. The narratives provided a unique insight into the pain experienced as a result of being deselected from a sport, but further the resiliency that athletes display after being dropped in order to continue participation. At the point of deselection athletes have choices to make about continued participation and the possibility of being reselected at another time. For some, the experience of being

“picked up and dropped down again” (Alexandra) can be too great and becomes a reason to retire from international competition. Others successfully negotiate being dropped and this can provide the catalyst for attaining new levels of performance, making this a personal and unique experience.

Commitment and Sacrifice: What it takes to be an Elite Performer

Participants strongly identified with *being a performance athlete*. Over time, athletes become committed and dedicated to their sport, and this is what helps drive them forward towards international success. The significant attachment to sport was evident across the narrative accounts, and athletic identity was central to the individual stories. Athletic identity has been defined as “the degree to which an individual identifies with the athletic role” (Brewer et al. 1993, p.237), and is a unique and important dimension of the self-concept (Horton and Mack 2000). Stryker and Serpe (1982) proposed identity salience as a way of understanding the construction of identity; identities can be organised into a salience hierarchy. Identity salience refers to the importance of an identity for defining oneself relative to other identities the individual holds (Stryker 1980). Identity salience can therefore be conceptualised as the probability that a given identity will be activated in a given situation (Stryker 1978). In this study participants described themselves as elite athletes, for example as an international hockey player, footballer, rugby player or volleyballer, and this was central to how they defined themselves. Megan stated that *“sport is what I do and where I want to be”*, and accepted that this took priority in life. When talking about her development in sport Lisa, stated that she had been on a personal journey and that it had taken time for her to believe *“she has what it takes”* to be an elite performer:

“I now feel like an international athlete, I believe in it. I also believe that I have what it takes to become a European and World Champion.”

For Lisa, her identity extended beyond being an international athlete to achieving the status of world champion within her sport, demonstrating the different levels of identity formation an athlete may move through during their career. Fear of loss of identity was also evident in some of the accounts. Participants explored what they would be left with, and who they would become, if they no longer performed

or if they failed to gain selection. Adam experienced an injury prior to the Olympic games and he described the fear associated with the potential of not achieving the goal he had been working toward for five years:

“When I did my ACL, I had that horrible fear of – who are you if you don’t go to the Olympics, if you’re not Adam Cole, Olympian?”

Austin also noted that:

“I don’t know what I would have done without my sport or where I would be, it’s hard to imagine it not being a part of me.”

Evidently athletes achieve or develop valued identities through success in their sport and this becomes a significant part of who they are. Horton and Mack (2000) suggest that the extent to which being an athlete is an important part of the person’s self-concept will determine how likely it is that thoughts and behaviours associated with the athlete role will be expressed or used to interpret a given situation. Terms such as role engulfment (Wiechman and Williams 1997) and premature identity foreclosure (Good et al. 1993) are used to describe singular or salient identities in which perceptions of the self are dependent upon athletic performance. These may create crisis conditions for athletes who encounter difficulties in their career that challenge their ability to continue participating. Identity is enduring and dynamic and the thought of losing this important dimension of the self caused individuals concern, especially when they reflected upon how little else they had outside of their athletic performance.

Participants claimed that sport can take them away from normal every-day routine, that life is different for an elite performer. They highlighted the *“things they had missed”* (Immy) as a result of a demanding training and competition schedule and observed that sport at times prevented them from doing *“normal things, that normal people do”* (Charlotte). Family weddings, friends’ birthdays, significant life landmarks such as turning 18 or enjoying the University experience were all acknowledged as being difficult to balance with the life of a performance athlete. Alexandra recalled an intense discussion with her coach concerning missing an international practice match to attend her sister’s wedding:

“It was a real battle to be given leave to attend even my sister’s wedding, and I paid for it... You know I was made to feel guilty and I had to face that it may have affected my selection chances.”

For Alexandra, this was obviously a difficult decision to make and she risked selection in order to meet a family commitment. She stated that perhaps she wouldn't have been willing to take that risk, had the wedding not been for an immediate family member, demonstrating the level of investment that can be expected from performance athletes. Ewald and Jibou (1985) found that serious athletes often fanatically pursued and over-conformed to the norms within their sport to the extent that their sports participation was disruptive to family and work relationships, their physical health and their personal comfort. According to Hughes and Coakley (1991), athletes over-conform in this way because of a need to continually endorse their identity and garner the respect of their teammates and coaches. Participants acknowledged that being committed to sport at times prevented them from leading the 'normal' life that their friends or other people were afforded. Stevenson (2002) believes that throughout the athletic career the individual moves through processes of conversion, entanglements, commitments and obligations. Early in the involvement, the athlete becomes 'converted' to the worldview of the sporting subculture and becomes 'entangled' relatively quickly in a subtle but ever-increasing series of 'commitments and obligations'. The further the athlete moves along the career path, the more commitments and obligations s/he has to make and meet, and the more entangled s/he also becomes in relationships with others in the sport. Finally, to the extent that reputations and identities are built and are seen as desirable, the athlete becomes increasingly committed and tied to his/her athletic career and continues along the performance pathway. A significant level of commitment and entanglement with the sport and its demands was evident throughout the participant accounts.

Participants explored how as an elite athlete sport can "*take you away*" (Billy). Training takes time and dedication, and elite competition requires athletes to travel in order to compete. Athletes can feel pressure to gain professional contracts in order to train full time and be able to afford to compete, and this can necessitate spending a great deal of time away from their home or familiar surroundings. Immy noted that her sport caused her to move away from home at an early age and that travelling abroad for long periods of time was the norm. She moved away at a young age to train at a national academy centre and had to learn

how to look after herself whilst away from family and friends. She noted that although the opportunity was valued, there were times when she felt desperate for a more stable life:

“And this is how desperate I felt at one point, I really was very unhappy, I felt it was very full on and I felt very lonely because I wasn’t with my family and like I said, you had a bedroom, a kitchen and you really had to look after yourself, plus I was away on tournaments for so much of the year... and I remember, this is going to sound really drastic, but I remember saying to my sister that I just wish I’d had someone run over my foot or something, or I could get injured enough that I didn’t have to play, or didn’t have to do it because I didn’t feel I could tell my parents because they’d invested so much money in me and sport, and essentially it wasn’t that I didn’t love the sport, I just... it was just so full on and I thought the only way I can really get out of it without disappointing my family, is to just have a bad injury and leave that way. Now, looking back it just sounds ridiculous, but I think at the time I did feel quite desperate.”

This provides an insight into the loneliness that an athlete can experience, and in the case of Immy, the detachment she felt from her friends and family led her to drop out of her sport. Conversely, Megan felt that the opportunity to travel was one of the benefits of her sporting experience and stated that this enriched her experience:

“It’s the best thing ever getting paid to play your sport and things I’ve done and places I’ve gone, I could go like on a map and go round the world and tick off like 30, 40 countries, and it’s like how many other people would get to travel and do that, so for me travel and experiencing different cultures has been one of the best things in my sport. At the time it’s hard, like you feel like you are constantly re-adjusting, but looking back now it’s also incredible.”

Megan referred to the need to readjust and how this could take time dependant upon how long she would be staying in each country or location. International athletes who train and compete overseas may well have to cope with obstacles to this transition including culture shock, cultural differences, adjustment difficulties and homesickness which all have the potential to impact upon them personally. The move to a new environment can be a traumatic event in a person’s life and some degree of culture shock is inevitable (Brown and Holloway 2008). Sebastian’s story describes the desperation to gain a professional contract abroad, leading him to make a decision to move to a country that he knew little about. In

the following extract he talks about the life he ended up living through signing a contract without appropriate guidance or support:

“There was no heating, there was no fridge, there was no freezer, there was no way of storing food, there was no way of washing any clothes. I didn’t have a pillow or anything like that, so I was sleeping... It was minus 23, we had no heating, so I was sleeping in a jacket, two pairs of tracksuit bottoms, a hoody and a woolly hat, sleeping on my travel bag that I took out there and I was there for, I was on the floor there for four months, and I’m thinking – shit, this can’t get any worse, I’m thinking fucking hell, this country is expensive, I can’t afford to live here, I can’t buy any food, I can’t keep on asking my parents to give me some money. Fortunately my parents managed to dish out some money every now and again to keep me going and without them I would never have been able to do that.”

This marks a worrying account of the willingness of a young athlete to live in sub-standard conditions in order to compete at the top level within their sport but this experience was not confined to one participant. Consistent across the narrative accounts was the notion that sacrifice (whether physical, emotional, financial or other) is a necessary part of being an elite performer.

The participants acknowledged that to be successful in elite sport takes commitment and sacrifice. Megan noted that sacrifice was necessary to prove how much she wanted to perform at the top in her sport:

“Obviously I’d given up and sacrificed everything to be there, like even just like the job that I was doing and where I was living and everything. Like I sacrificed so much that it was kind of like... Yes, this is me showing how much I want to be here.”

In her case, sacrifice meant time away from home, living abroad and struggling to make ends meet. James highlighted the level of dedication and commitment he felt was necessary as a full-time athlete:

“Sport was my job, my job’s target was the Olympics, you know, it’s a career then, and while I was playing professionally you know they expect you to perform, they’re not paying you to enjoy your sport, they’re paying you to play well.”

This extract provides an insight into the performance-focussed approach to training and competition in the run up to a major event. Sport is a full-time occupation and as a result enjoyment is not always the focus of athletic endeavour and to fulfil performance targets, sacrifices have to be made. Billy recognised

that players who were no longer willing to make sacrifices ended up leaving the sport or dropping out through failure to cope with the demands it placed upon them:

“Each year you’d have the older guys drop out piece by piece because they couldn’t handle it or they weren’t willing to sacrifice anymore, or they just never made the level.”

This served to reinforce the need to make sacrifices in order to cope with the demands of the environment and to have “*what it takes*” (James) to be an elite athlete. Adam noted how over time, performers make so many sacrifices that it isn’t until they look back on a career that they realise the risks they had taken:

“What you find that all throughout this, every little sacrifice you make like going abroad, getting injured and putting up with it, funding yourself, you sacrifice a little and you know, all those little sacrifices build up and up and up. Eventually you’ve sacrificed a lot. Another little thing doesn’t seem very much, but then you look at it all. So now you’re like – you’re sleeping on the floor, - I was paying to play last year, I’m sleeping on the floor this year, I need to get a job now as well, working as a removal man while I’m sleeping on the floor, what’s the straw that breaks the camel’s back and eventually, you keep on going and going and sacrificing a little bit, a little bit and eventually you look back and you think – fuck what am I doing. But you keep on going because you’re like I’ve sacrificed this much already... And I’m getting closer to the Olympics, you know that’s my goal and now it’s so close... If I don’t get selected for the Olympics that’s the last five years of my life all that sacrifice is for nothing.”

Central to the narratives was the discussion of what it takes to be an athlete and the way in which the individual needs to behave in order to fulfil the athletic role. This would suggest that the salience of athletic identity was high for this group of participants and that the way in which the athlete responds to certain situations is shaped over time; individuals learn how to think and act like an elite athlete, both from experience and through learning from others about the expectations of the athletic role. The experience of being an elite athlete is reliant upon meeting objectives and pushing the limits of performance to compete on both a national and international level. James stated that “*it takes something to be an athlete*”, and that people in “*normal occupations*” may struggle to cope with the demands that are placed upon individuals in performance environments.

This somehow elevates the experience of *being an athlete*, perhaps inferring that it is in some way different from other careers. Ella noted that only her sports

friends or teammates truly understand what it takes to be an athlete and that her family and significant others are proud of her achievements but “*don’t really get it*”. When exploring the process of *being* an elite athlete, there is a clear focus on understanding this life from the inside, that only those who have lived the experience would ever truly understand what it takes to be a performer. It was evident that being an athlete became part of the person, something that had taken significant development and was a primary component of the individual self-concept; the participants of this study demonstrated a strong athletic identity and this directly impacted upon the way that they act and perceive situations in the sporting context. Brewer et al. (1993) suggest that there can be both positive and negative consequences of a strong athletic identity, which they referred to as either “Hercules’ muscles” or an “Achilles heel”. Some of the potential problems in developing a strong, exclusive identity are apparent in this and subsequent chapters. The development of singular identities can be one of the reasons why athletes are willing to accept maltreatment as this is evaluated as part of the athletic experience, and personal commitment to the sport. In this sense, having a strong athletic identity could have a direct impact on what performers are willing to accept on the pathway to performance.

Conclusion

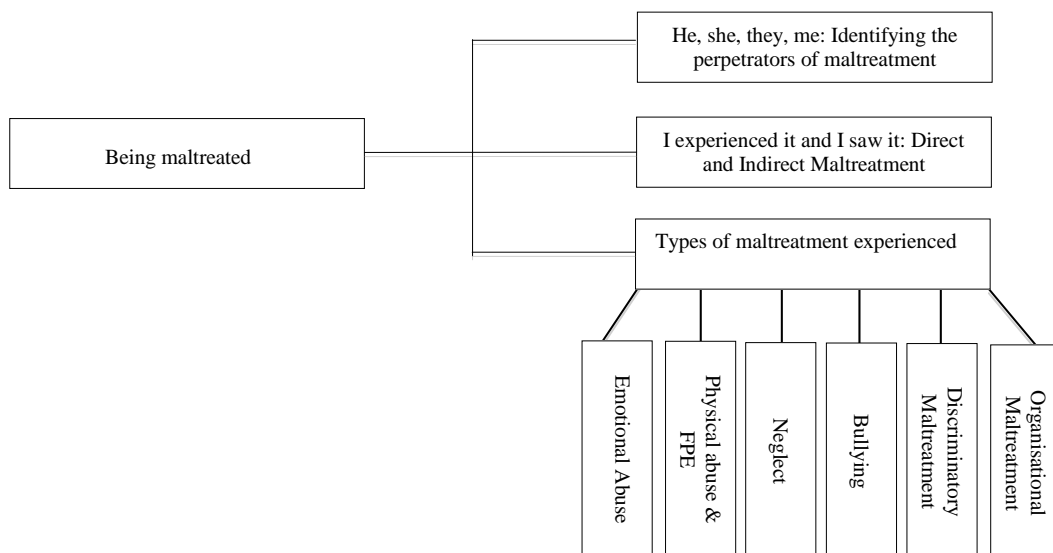
This chapter provides a unique insight into the life of a performance athlete. Organisational structure and the funding of high performance sport shape the individual pathway through sport and have a direct impact on athlete experience. Athletes’ lives involve a significant commitment to training and competition, and this requires considerable personal investment in order to reach the elite level. It is acknowledged that this can occur at the expense of the development of other dimensions of the self (education, maintaining relationships, building a connection with friends and family). Individuals must demonstrate resilience in order to negotiate the different levels of performance and the selection process associated with them: as a direct result they are constantly being appraised, challenged and pushed to achieve higher levels in pursuit of optimal performance. Therefore, only the strongest survive or cope with the performance environment. This study allows us to understand what it is to be an elite performer, from the

insider perspective; it also sets the scene for how or why maltreatment can occur within the sporting context. Athletes demonstrate a willingness to push themselves physically, emotionally and mentally; this is viewed as a normal part of athletic endeavour. However, this can create opportunity for others to abuse power and treat individuals as they wish. This will be the focus of the following chapters where the process of being maltreated will be explored; alongside the impact it can have on the individual and the coping mechanisms adopted by them.

CHAPTER 6: Being Maltreated

Introduction

This chapter presents the third theme and three related sub-themes of the thematic framework and explores the process of “*being maltreated*”. Firstly, the *perpetrators of maltreatment* are identified. Secondly, the nature of the maltreatment, whether it be *direct or indirect* is discussed. Thirdly, the *types of maltreatment* experienced are explored in relation to existing typologies for understanding maltreatment in sport.



He, She, They, Me: Identifying the Perpetrators of Maltreatment

This section will identify the perpetrators of maltreatment referred to by participants. Interestingly, although a variety of sources refer to perpetrators or potential abusers in sport (for example Rhind et al. 2014; Alexander 2011; Brackenridge et al. 2008; Brackenridge et al. 2005), a definition of a perpetrator has not yet been provided for the sporting context. For the purpose of this study, I have defined perpetrators as those alleged to have committed or to be responsible for an act of maltreatment against another individual.

The narratives referred to two primary relationships in which maltreatment occurred, the coach-athlete relationship and peer-to-peer relationships. The findings align with research that acknowledges the coach-athlete relationship to be one of the most common sites in which maltreatment can occur (Kerr and Stirling 2012; Sand et al. 2011; Raakman et al. 2010; Lang 2010a; Stirling and Kerr 2009; Stirling and Kerr 2007; Gervis and Dunn 2004; Kelly and Waddington 2006; Burke 2001; Brackenridge 1997). It was also noted that athletes can experience negative treatment from fans (including people known to the athlete such as parents and others unknown) as the spectators or observers of a sport. Yet, this type of treatment was seen to differ from the maltreatment experienced within the coach-athlete relationship or between peers. Although participants referred to fan behaviour as abusive, they acknowledged that it was more likely to be a one off incident, rather than a sustained or repeated pattern of behaviour, and this lessened the perceived impact.

Participants noted that maltreatment had the potential to have a greater impact when perpetrated by someone they knew, as the perpetrator would be able to use intimate knowledge. This provides evidence to support Stirling's (2009) classification system, which serves to categorise maltreatment as relational or non-relational. Stirling utilises literature from child maltreatment to operationalise her definitions and therefore refers to relational maltreatments as those that occur within critical relationships. A critical relationship is one where the perpetrator is placed in a position of authority over the victim and therefore has responsibility for the welfare of the victim in some capacity. The victim is thought to be dependant upon the perpetrator, fully or in part, for his or her sense of safety, trust and fulfilment of needs (Crooks and Wolfe 2010). The findings here suggest that this distinction may be too complex to explain the maltreatment experienced by adult athletes. Though it is acknowledged that much maltreatment occurs within relationships where there are power differentials, and this was certainly found in this study, the individual may or may not be reliant on that person for a sense of safety or trust. This study acknowledges that maltreatment can be relational or non-relational, but it is more fitting for this to align to the level of interaction between the victim and the perpetrator. Relational maltreatments would therefore occur when the perpetrator is known to the individual or identifiable, and non-

relational maltreatments would occur when the perpetrator is unknown (for example a sports fan) or cannot be ascertained (as may be the case with the broader classification of organisational maltreatment).

In considering those who present a risk to athletes in performance sport, both male and female perpetrators were identified by this sample. Much of the research that identifies the potential perpetrators of maltreatment focuses on cases that refer to sexual abuse of individuals. In such cases, the evidence is overwhelming for the prevalence of male perpetrators both in sport and other settings (Thomas et al. 2013; Parent and Demers 2011; Fasting et al. 2011; Brackenridge 2001; Burke 2001). Understanding of female perpetrators is less well developed (Kirby et al. 2000). Rhind et al. (2014) collected data from 41 lead welfare officers of national governing bodies (NGBs) in order to investigate incidents of safeguarding concern in sport within the UK in 2011 (a total of 652 cases were recorded, highlighting a range of abuses in this context). Rhind et al. reported that 91% of the alleged perpetrators of maltreatment in their study were male, comparable with 92% reported by Brackenridge et al. (2005), demonstrating an overwhelming bias toward male perpetrators. Conversely, findings from studies exploring emotional abuse in sport have suggested that perpetrators of maltreatment can be male or female (see Stirling and Kerr 2008 and Gervis and Dunn 2004 in their studies of emotional abuse). Clearly, little is known about the gender profile across other maltreatment types, which have yet to be explored within the sports literature. Indeed, this could be an interesting line of inquiry in the future in order to increase understanding of the gender of perpetrators related to maltreatment type.

Perhaps most interesting was the finding that elite adult athletes demonstrated a willingness to maltreat themselves. Pushing bodies to extremes, following intensive training programmes, training to point of exhaustion, playing through pain or injury and the critical acceptance of whatever the sport required, underlay all of the narrative accounts, suggesting an uncritical acceptance of the norms of the environment. Athletes conform and believe they are demonstrating mental toughness or resilience by doing so (Lee Sinden 2010). This will be explored

further in the organisational maltreatment section through a discussion of power and the concept of willing compliance.

Participants experienced maltreatment in male-to-male, female-to-female and male-to-female (male perpetrator- to-female athlete) relationships. This suggests a variety of relationships in which maltreatment occurs and challenges the male perpetrator – female victim paradigm that has been common outside sport research (Hartill 2009, 2005; Kirby et al. 2000). Interestingly, maltreatment was not reported in female-to-male relationships, perhaps due to the lower number of females in coaching positions or positions of authority in male sports (Marks et al. 2012). Considering those who present a risk to athletes, this study supports the work of other researchers and proposes that both male and female coaches, athletes, parents, fans and other key stakeholders have the potential to become both victims or perpetrators of abuse (Rhind et al. 2014; Kavanagh and Jones 2014; Alexander et al. 2011; Stirling 2009; Brackenridge 2001). The findings enhance our understanding of the complexity of the relationships in which maltreatment can occur. Future research in this area could seek to explore the motives of perpetrators across maltreatment types. For example, a number of typologies exist that seek to explain the motivational and behavioural factors associated with sexual abuse as well as the potential risk factors. To date, little is known about the risk factors across maltreatment types or if there are similarities that can be drawn from the literature on sexual abuse in sport.

I Experienced it and I Saw it: Direct and Indirect Maltreatment in Sport

Participants noted that they experienced maltreatment directly, and that they witnessed others being maltreated in the training and competition environment. Alexandra recalled that her coach would “*work his way round players*” making demeaning comments and shouting at them until they cried or could no longer cope:

“I remember him (the coach) being so nasty to a girl, she passed a ball to him in the wrong place and he humiliated her in front of everyone... He said oh sorry, I think I must have signalled over there, wake up you silly

bitch and all this kind of stuff, honestly really really nasty you were on edge the whole time.”

Alexandra noted that everyone was on edge as a result of his outbursts; watching others being shouted at created a sense of fear and control amongst players. Megan explained how when the coach was “*on someone else’s back*”, it would offer some respite. Adam echoed this sense of relief at watching others being maltreated. He believed that viewing the coach abusing his teammates served to reinforce how he should behave to avoid being on the receiving end of the coach’s bad temper:

“We were back in for the team chat, and we were in there for an hour and a half just getting a bollocking, it was more, he bollocked us, kicked stuff, shouted and screamed and worked his way around the room tearing people apart and everyone’s scared of him so no one says a thing. I remember sitting there and feeling thankful if he was going at someone else, it meant he wasn’t tearing me apart. But we all learnt from it and you took the message on board, I worked harder to keep him off my fucking back and I’m sure other people reacted in the same way. I learnt as much watching him go at other people as I did when I was on the receiving end of it.”

In this example, Adam shows that the coach was verbally aggressive and noted that he threw objects around the room, shouting at the group as a whole or singling out individuals. When a person wasn’t being directly addressed, they could do little more than sit back and observe the coach abusing others. Like Alexandra, Adam believed that this increased the control the coach had over individuals and he stated that this led to players becoming more afraid or uncertain of the coach’s behaviour. This made him manage his behaviour in order to reduce the likelihood of being on the receiving end of the treatment.

It is evident that not being directly maltreated didn’t lessen or eliminate the emotional impact; watching others being maltreated could have a significant negative effect. Alexandra remembered a particular instance whereby her coach berated an athlete for an error on the field, which she believed shaped how the whole team behaved subsequently:

“There was a girl, she still plays, but she certainly never played for England after this incident. There was a game and she was a forward she dribbled in a place that he didn’t think you should dribble with the ball. He thought what she did was a vulnerable run, which it probably is, and

she lost the ball. But she lost the ball right up in the attacking 25 and then eventually that ball worked its way back and a goal was conceded and the minute that goal went in he ripped her off of the pitch and he laid into her, saying things like that goal was your fault, you'll never play for England again, you are a disgrace, we could hear it on the pitch and it was awful, I remember watching and I should have been playing, everyone was shocked at the way he was speaking to her it was disgusting... Honestly the poor girl had lost the ball as a forward the other end of the pitch where there really was no pressure on her it made me afraid and very accountable for what I was doing in case my behaviour would lead to something like she was experiencing. Let's face it, if a player loses a ball in the attacking 25 there is a whole 8 or 9 other people that the ball has to get through before a goal is scored and he made it not about that but about an individual and I can honestly say that was scary and for her, I remember her being so upset by it because she was broken."

Alexandra noted that the behaviour of the coach scared her and other players on the team. This served to condition her behaviour through fear of being on the receiving end of a similar outburst. It is evident that maltreatment has the potential to have a negative impact on the individual both when they are the direct target of the treatment or when they observe another athlete being maltreated. This supports similar work in the field, for example, based on the work of David (2005), Raakman et al. (2010) identified how maltreatment can be experienced either *directly* (a coach shouting in the face of an athlete could be classified as direct emotional abuse) or *indirectly* (an athlete observing a coach shouting at or belittling a team-mate could be classified as indirect emotional abuse) within a youth sport environment. Similarly, Kavanagh and Jones (2014) identified that maltreatment can be experienced directly and indirectly within their typology of virtual maltreatment of athletes.

Omlil and LaVoi (2009) provided support for the notion of indirect abuse through the introduction of background anger as a concept in sport. Their work and the work of others in this area has specifically explored how background anger has an impact on children in youth sport settings (Omlil and LaVoi 2012; LaVoi and Babkes Stellino 2008; Omlil et al. 2008). Background anger refers to the presence of verbal, nonverbal or physical conflict that does not directly involve the observer (Omlil and LaVoi 2009, p.245), yet has the potential to threaten them. The notion of background anger comes from interfamilial settings and was originally described as anger between adults where verbal and non-verbal anger is

expressed in front of children; that may or may not include physical hostility (Cummings and Cummings, 1988). Omlil and LaVoi (2009) state that anger can be expressed verbally, nonverbally, physically or in combination; each of these expressions of anger can be viewed as threatening to the person witnessing the behaviour. Cummings (1987) explored background anger in dysfunctional family settings and found that children demonstrated a number of negative responses. These include heightened symptoms of stress and negative emotional responses. Similarly, Ballard et al. (1993) found emotional and cardiovascular responses such as higher systolic blood pressure and increased stress in response to background anger.

Raakman et al. (2010) were the first to explore coach player interactions as a source of background anger in sport and found indirect physical abuse, psychological abuse and neglect to be examples of this in the youth sport setting. They proposed that the environment or climate that the athlete functions within could be abusive for young people without them having to be the direct victim of the abuse. Omlil and LaVoi (2009) found examples of background anger in the youth-sport context, including verbal anger (yelling), non-verbal anger (avoidant communication, eye-rolling, stomping up and down sidelines), and physical anger (pushing, punching, grabbing), all of which are potentially very distressing to children. Wings (2012) found background anger to be detrimental to the health and wellbeing of young performers through its direct impact on player emotions and performance. It is thought that background anger increases in the sport context as the age of the performer and their subsequent skill levels increase, yet there fails to be an exploration of this as a concept in adult sport.

This study shows, however, that direct and indirect maltreatment are not only present in youth sport and virtual environments but also in the adult sporting context. The notion of background anger could provide an explanation as to why indirect abuse can have an impact on the individual, even though to date this has been reserved as a term that relates to anger in the presence of children. The findings suggest that background anger does not disappear from the performance environment as the athlete gets older, instead it could be ever-present. This could

be an interesting line of inquiry for future research along with the perceived difference in direct and indirect maltreatment in elite adult athletes.

Types of Maltreatment Experienced

This section provides an insight into the experience of maltreatment in high performance sport and explores how both male and female athletes can experience maltreatment across a range of sports. Evident throughout the narrative accounts is the notion that maltreatment can be experienced in many different ways within the athletic environment. Types of maltreatment have been classified according to existing definitions in the area and these have served as a starting point for organising the narrative data. It is noted that there can be overlap in the types of maltreatment experienced; therefore maltreatments can be co-occurring and athletes can experience more than one type of maltreatment at any given time. For example, if a coach shouts at or belittles an athlete this could be classified as verbal emotional abuse; if at the same time they were to throw a piece of sporting equipment at or toward the athlete this could be classified as non-verbal emotional abuse and/or physical abuse, depending upon the final destination of the object (if the object made contact with the athlete this could be physical abuse, no contact could be interpreted as non-verbal emotional abuse or intimidation). This example demonstrates the difficulty that can be faced when trying to classify or operationalise definitions of maltreatment. Existing typologies are therefore useful for making sense of experience, however, they can sometimes be too simplistic; this is reflected in this study, which showed that individual types of maltreatment rarely occur in isolation. Studies that have focussed on one type of maltreatment in isolation have potentially missed the co-occurring nature of experience. The narrative accounts reveal that rarely did a participant experience only one-type of maltreatment in isolation, thus this study provides a more holistic account and understanding of maltreatment than previous studies may have achieved.

Within this study, six types of maltreatment were identified: emotional abuse, physical abuse and forced physical exertion (FPE), neglect, bullying (horizontal violence), discriminatory maltreatment (including racism and homophobia) and

organisational maltreatment. Emotional and physical abuse were the most commonly referred to behaviours across sports and between genders and were classed as commonplace in the sporting environment; athletes experienced these behaviours frequently within both training and competition. Many of the instances could be classified as neglect and this was a further common form of maltreatment identified by this sample. The types of maltreatment will be discussed in turn drawing on excerpts from the narrative accounts.

Emotional Abuse

Emotionally abusive behaviours were among the most commonly referred to maltreatment types. As outlined in chapter two, Stirling and Kerr (2008) defined emotionally abusive behaviour in sport as “a pattern of deliberate non-contact behaviours by a person within a critical relationship role that have the potential to be harmful to an individual’s emotional wellbeing” (p.178), characterised by sustained and repeated non-contact behaviours. Identified within the narrative accounts were examples of verbal behaviours such as screaming or shouting at performers, the use of insulting, belittling, or demeaning language. In addition, physical behaviours such as acts of aggression or angry outbursts by coaching staff directed toward participants or acted out in the presence of athletes were identified. These behaviours are seen to overlap with non-contact physical abuse but can be classed as emotional abuse in this instance based on their ability to intimidate or control an athlete rather than to inflict physical pain or to threaten injury as in the case of physical abuse. Emotional abuse was felt to be commonplace in the performance environment and viewed simply as a part of the coaching process. Megan recalled the frustration displayed by her coach when she failed to change an aspect of her performance they had been working on in training:

“I remember my first international match, it was only just a friendly... I’d come in a bit too close and she shouted at me about it once, like... For fucks sake stop coming in so close and then I can remember again later on in the match, I obviously had served and come on in a bit too close and she got so angry she chucked her clipboard down and it smashed everywhere, there was F-ing and blinding and then like afterwards I can remember her standing there with half a clipboard and I was like... I made her do that, oh my god, what have I done, and it was just purely through not... Like her just being frustrated at what I’d done.”

This extract highlights the overlap between types of emotional abuse, as the coach displayed both verbal (abusive language) and physical (throwing an object) behaviours within a singular outburst. Glaser (2002) identifies this overlap as one of the potential problems with research exploring abuse, particularly emotional abuse, as it frequently coexists with other maltreatments and therefore can be difficult to identify. Interestingly Megan explained that she blamed herself for the coach's behaviour when she stated, "*I made her do that*". Research suggests that self-blaming is a common consequence of maltreatment and can be potentially negative as the individual is more likely to internalise the treatment rather than seek to prevent it as they feel in some way responsible for its occurrence (Kanagaratnam et al. 2012; Hetzel-Riggin and Meads 2011; Grossman et al. 2006).

Physical acts of aggression with the aim of intimidation were identified by many of the participants who recalled how they had witnessed their coach displaying anger both in training and in competitive environments. Participants recalled coaches throwing clipboards, water bottles, white board pens and sporting equipment such as balls and racquets either directly at players or in a fit of rage in the presence of athletes. Physical outbursts generally occurred at the same time as verbal behaviours, and this was seen as the way in which the coach released their frustration. As mentioned previously, these behaviours could also be seen as non-contact physical abuse due to the violent nature of the act and the threat it poses. The outbursts from coaches were frequently justified by participants who explained that they often resulted from inadequate performance, failure of a player to grasp a new skill or technique or through the coach's frustration with a situation or result.

James believed his coach had different ways of "*getting at a player*" and stated that this could include physical or verbal behaviours:

"He (the coach) liked to single players out a lot of the time, he was very... He could... He had different ways of getting to you. One would be physically pushing you, some of the drills were physically tough, designed to drain you like a bleep test like control and beast you, and you know if he wasn't happy you'd know because he'd make you do it again until you

were exhausted or he would do something stupid and embarrass you in front of the rest of the team, or try to embarrass you.”

James recalled that the coach would try to embarrass a performer in front of others or belittle them to gain a reaction; this was apparent across other narratives. Individuals felt that they were singled out and this added to their upset as it made them feel in some way “*different to others*” (Sebastian). In addition Adam stated that his coach would be violent towards players and would “*go at them*” physically and verbally:

“You know he (the coach) crushed me, there were some days, I didn’t know what the fuck was going on, but I always knew that if I just worked as hard as I possibly could and just try to do exactly what he said, eventually he would get off my back. He’d always shout and scream... So that’s exactly what I did, whatever it was, I would just do it to get him off my back... He would get in your face like just get in your face and scream and shout and insult you call you things like you fucking pussy, you fucking pussy, you may as well take your trousers off and let me fuck you. Sometimes he would lose his mind and punch stuff and throw stuff... Fucking hell he would go nuts. All this stuff would like build up, build up, and then he would go fucking crazy.”

Adam highlights the level of control that the coach can hold over their athletes and how in this instance as a performer, he would “*do anything*” to get the coach off his back. The use of language could also be classified as sexual harassment due to the explicit nature of the comments from the coach, and the violence displayed shows evidence of non-contact physical abuse; further demonstrating the likelihood for co-occurring abuse. The narrative accounts suggest that negative exchanges between coach and athlete are not uncommon; participants all stated that they had experienced threatening behaviour and intimidating language within the coaching environment. Austin recalled that his coach was “*quite old school and controlling*” and how “*he wanted it all his way, and he would get his way by shouting and swearing and being intimidating*”. Lauren observed that her coach would “*shout and scream*” at performers all of the time; similarly Alexandra recalled how her coach “*was snide*”, and how “*he would humiliate people*” and “*was just a nasty, cold man*”.

Demeaning comments about the way people looked and about the athletes’ weight were also mentioned. Immy recalled that her coach could be very personal and

make comments about the way she looked and the way she moved as a player: she could be “*very mean*” and “*quite personal*” in her communication with performers. Alexandra recalled that her coach called other members of the team fat and told them they would need to lose weight if they wanted to continue competing:

“I know players that had to give up sport because they developed serious eating disorders as a result of what he (the coach) said to them, I know I had a weird relationship with food when I was competing, you never wanted to be the one singled out or told you were fat or overweight.”

Similarly Immy stated that her coach used to make “*throwaway*” remarks about players looking overweight during pre-season and noted that this had a very negative effect on them as performers. One of the problems with degrading comments or the use of negative language was highlighted by Ella who stated that she believes athletes take on board everything coaches say, and that this can have a negative impact on performers later in their careers:

“I don’t think coaches are aware of how every word they say is stored by the players and I’m sure all my team-mates could remember everything that was ever said to them by the coaches and sometimes I think coaches throw away remarks like they’ll say something without thinking what they’re saying, and it’s really dangerous.”

This highlights the significant impact that a coach can have on a performer and the importance of optimal and considered communication within this important role.

Participants stated that they were ignored, isolated and faced coach rejection within the performance environment. Gervis and Dunn (2004) identified these as specific types of emotional abuse in their study of elite child athletes. Stirling and Kerr (2009) identified this as a non-verbal form of emotional abuse, which could include behaviours such as rejecting and isolating individuals and exclusion from an activity; they referred to this as the denial of attention and support. This study acknowledges that this form of maltreatment closely aligns with neglect, specifically psychological neglect and that there could be overlap between these behaviours. Participants recalled many experiences of being ignored or isolated within the coaching environment and noted that the coach could “*blow hot and cold*” (Charlotte) depending on their mood on that day. Immy stated that she felt

at times that her coach, who controlled her players through reward and punishment, treated her like a pet rather than an athlete:

“In a way it’s like a punishment really, you’re rewarded if you kind of... You know, it’s almost like being a pet, if you do a good thing you’re rewarded and if you’re not you’re in for it. I mean I understand if you do something wrong or you misbehave or you don’t try or whatever, you shouldn’t get loads of praise and encouragement, it should be structured, but you shouldn’t be totally ignored at the same time either, but there has to be a bit more of a balance, she would totally ignore us and want nothing to do with us if we lost, if you lost she would simply ignore you as and when she wanted.”

This was supported by Lisa who noted that her coach:

“He (the coach) was constantly driving for medals which I was as a performer as well but, so if you got gold – fantastic, he loved you, but if you didn’t he wasn’t interested. I remember in one competition, an International, I won a bronze and his response was oh well, you better win next time and then I got nothing from him, I was completely ignored, he just didn’t talk to me or communicate with me at all, I’m not talking for a day, it was a long time and I felt totally lost. I had won a bronze, not totally bombed out, and then you are constantly second-guessing and trying to get them to notice and value you. It’s horrible now I’m thinking about it, you’re totally controlled by it.”

Lisa’s account suggests athletes can positively reinforce the behaviour of coaches by using the negative treatment to drive them to work harder in order to be noticed. Interestingly, the participants believed that being ignored and rejected as a form of emotional abuse was potentially more harmful than some of the verbally or physically abusive behaviours. The deliberate nature of the behaviour made it seem somewhat more calculated or cold than the more aggressive or open outbursts that would equally be classified as emotionally abusive, as Sebastian commented:

“You know I’m not saying that you should wrap players up in cotton wool, being an athlete is hard, really hard and you have to be prepared for that, but you also want to feel like you’re worthwhile from the coach’s point of view and to have no communication is almost more damaging than having negative communication.”

Megan supported this by stating that she preferred to be yelled at by her coach, as this was at least a form of attention. She stated that others in the squad “weren’t as lucky”; they were simply ignored or rejected by the coach:

“It was always that way, like the whole time I was under her as a coach, but I do think as much as she was a psycho and as much as she was like this with me and others, she did actually ignore other people, so for me, like there was... She likes you, she hates you and she’ll make your life hell, or she’ll ignore you and doesn’t care about you at all, so at least I was kind of the middle option... She would always shout at me and go at me rather than just ignoring me and pretending I wasn’t there. Because there were girls that she just pretended that they weren’t there, and like I’d always get selected over them, so it obviously meant that even though she hated me and she didn’t really like what I was doing, she would always still give me shit about it rather than just forgetting I was there and not even acknowledging that I’m a person.”

This supports the work of Stirling and Kerr (2008) who found that athletes perceived the removal of attention and support to be more damaging than verbal or physical outbursts from the coach. In this study, rejection resulted in the athlete searching for recognition or acknowledgement from the coach. In the case of Megan, negative communication was preferable to isolation. Craving recognition from the coach was echoed across the interviews; a finding that could be explained by Rhatigan et al. (2006) who refer to the bonding that occurs in abusive relationships, making them difficult to walk away from: it can lead to the victim seeking acceptance from their abuser rather than choosing to challenge their behaviour. Cense and Brackenridge (2001) believe that aspirations to achieve at the elite level can effectively mask the distress an individual can experience as a result of emotional abuse and other maltreatments. This can lead to a critical acceptance of abuse and justification of problematic behaviours on the part of the athlete.

It is worth noting that both male and female athletes reported that they had experienced critical and demeaning language from a coach, as well as witnessing physical or aggressive outbursts that they felt sought to intimidate or control people. The athletes therefore experienced both direct and indirect emotional abuse. The findings support the existing literature, which identifies emotional abuse as a pervasive problem in sport (Gervis and Dunn 2004; Stirling and Kerr 2013, 2008, 2007). This maltreatment type occurred primarily within the coach-athlete relationship, acknowledged as one of the most critical or important relationships that an athlete will encounter within their career (Jowett, 2003; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Mageau and Vallerand, 2003). This study suggests

then that emotional abuse could be classed as a relational or non-relational maltreatment that occurs in the context of a power differential.

Physical Abuse and Forced Physical Exertion (FPE)

Research that examines physical abuse in sport is limited, which is difficult to identify due to the variety of terms that have been adopted to describe physically abusive behaviours in the sporting context. For example, a variety of terms have been used in literature to describe physically abusive behaviours including, playing through pain and the normalisation of injury (Fenton and Pitter 2010; Vetter and Symonds 2010; Theberge 2008; Malcom 2006; Charlsworth and Young 2004; Pike and Maguire 2003); experience of physical aggression and violence in sport (Stafford et al. 2013; David 2005) and the presence of forced physical exertion, intensive training as an abuse and punishment in sport (Hagiwara and Wolfson 2013; Kerr 2010; Lang 2010a). Lack of clarity in the definition of physical abuse has limited understanding of its impact and prevalence in the sporting environment.

In other settings (interfamilial, domestic violence or inter-partner abuse), physical abuse has historically been recognised as one of the most identifiable forms of maltreatment as it can result in visible signs on the abused party. More recently, understanding of this type of maltreatment has been extended to include behaviours that have the potential to result in physical and/or psychological harm and can include contact and non-contact behaviours, making it perhaps more difficult to classify (Stirling 2009; Feerick et al. 2006). Physical abuse therefore includes behaviours that result in physical harm but also those that threaten or attempt to physically harm an individual (Crowell and Burgess 1996).

Participants in this study highlighted several examples of contact physical abuse. In line with physical emotional abuse, these behaviours did not always result in physical harm to the individual, yet the potential threat of harm is thought to be equally damaging. James recalled that his coach would physically remove players from training sessions and then strike them with equipment to gain a reaction:

“He would go at you if he wasn’t happy, if you were lucky he would just throw you out of training, like physically throw you out. He would throw

balls at you if you'd not gone for a ball. Literally he would stand behind you and throw a ball at you, try to hit you just to get a reaction or to try and hurt you, half of the challenge was not letting it get to you and not letting him see you react."

James described how frustration displayed by the coach led to physical outbursts with the intention seeming to be to either hurt the player or provoke a reaction. He recalled a time when his coach resorted to physical violence during a break in play and "*punched a guy right in the face*", due to anger over his performance. Participants also described being "*manhandled*" (Charlotte) or physically hurt by coaches during training sessions. Billy recalled that his coach was always "*hands on*" and "*pushed performers beyond their capabilities*". During this time, he received a career-ending injury as a result of being physically pushed by a coach. The following account reflects on the moment leading up to injury, his subsequent recovery and anger over his treatment within his sport:

"We were doing hamstring stretches for basic flexibility, so sitting on the floor, touching your toes and then the coach just came up and jumped on my back because I wasn't going far enough, full body weight, full clean air, jumped clean on my back, couldn't see him because obviously my head's down towards my knees, yeh, little bit of pain (sarcastic intonation), rolling on the floor, two weeks later I was in for an operation... Nothing was said at the time you know he got off my back, stood up and started to walk away and just went "you're not going far enough", that was it. He just walked off. No interaction, no apology, nothing, and I was rolling around on the floor in pain... I needed surgery because I had a prolapsed disc that nearly severed my spinal cord. I was then in constant pain, so I had bilateral sciatica down both legs to both toes, front and back of my quads and my hamstrings, in my bum, through my hips into my groin which then hurt my testicles as well. It just felt as though I was on fire all the time... I saw a BOA (British Olympic Association) doctor, had an MRI and from that I was in having surgery on my back 2 weeks later... What frustrated or hurt me more than anything was that they (the NGB and coaching staff) were not really interested; there was no letters, nothing. There was no formal process, there was no check-up to see how I was doing, and it was all swept under the carpet and totally ignored."

Frustration and distress are evident in this account over the lack of follow up or care from the NGB and the inability to formally deal with an incident that had such extreme consequences for the athlete. The participant believed that he felt that he had no proof against the coach and would not have known the formal

channels through which to report this incident, leading to his removal from the sport at an elite level. This indicates a common theme throughout the accounts: participants were unsure who to report instances of abuse to, or how to formalise concerns. In addition, for some of the participants, it wasn't until they had achieved some distance from the sport that they were able to realise that their treatment had the potential to be damaging. This will be explored further later on in the thesis (see coping with maltreatment chapter 8).

Instances of extreme training methods, extended periods of training without sufficient rest or recovery and failure to allow athletes time to deal with injury were all highlighted within the athlete accounts and can be classified as non-contact physical abuse or more specifically FPE. The narratives suggest that although they questioned their treatment when outside of the training arena, within it, they were duty bound to accept these behaviours as a part of their athletic endeavour, and to question them could have dire consequences on their selection to a squad. James recalled how his coach would use extreme training drills or methods to push the athletes:

“Ok, so like in a defence drill if you didn't get a ball then you got another ball, and another... I remember one time I got about 60 balls in the space of about 5 or 10 minutes and he threw them around the court, like really threw them. If I missed one then he would start again. We did it and then everyone ended up having to do it. It took about an hour and a half because as soon as you missed one you'd start again. So as soon as you'd done 20 balls and you missed the 21st then you had to start again. You know he would throw it anywhere, into the walls, it was ridiculous. It wasn't clever, now I think about it I think what an idiot, some of us could have gotten injured. But at the time you know male ego sort of thing, you go for it, you push yourselves because out of pride and determination you don't want to sort of see him beat you.”

James explains that pride and male ego prevent athletes from questioning training methods, even when they pose a physical threat, further highlighting the level of control that can be exercised over athletes. The critical acceptance of this physically abusive behaviour demonstrates that athletes view maltreatment as something to be negotiated rather than challenged; to challenge would simply demonstrate weakness on their part. Thus athletes view maltreatment not as abusive but as a required behaviour to achieve success, an accepted part of the coaching process. Hartill (2009) suggests that sports are a primary arena through

which hegemonic masculine identities are forged and reinforced, which can prevent individuals speaking out or questioning their treatment. Sport is a masculinity symbol for boys where hyper-masculinity is revered (Parent and Bannon 2012). This wasn't only the case for male athletes in this sample as women also demonstrated the same approach to coping with physical abuse. Women also adopt the values and practices of male sports and can help to reinforce male hegemony. Physically abusive practices can be linked to training, and therefore questioning the coach can be seen as displaying weakness or failing to fulfil the criteria necessary for elite status. James further noted that, as players, they feared injury but carried on playing, as this was critical for squad selection. He felt at times that the coach wanted to “*break players*” to avoid having to make selection decisions:

“You know of course we were worried about injury. If you’re jumping 100, 200 times a session your legs are bad, so your knees, your ankles, your hips, your back, it’s almost like through that summer the sessions got tough and it was like he didn’t want to make a decision so he wanted to break you and that would make his decision easier. And two were broken, two got injured, luckily they all were fit during selection and were back to normal, but he got two people injured because of his training... Some of the guys had to pull out because of the threat that they wouldn’t walk any more. It was stupid, it was serious. One of the guys, a Scottish lad got an injury in his leg because he did too much jumping, so he took time off – said alright you’ve got three weeks off, sort yourselves out, a week and a half later, the coach needed him back on the court, He said – I can’t you know, I’ve got to have three weeks rest – that was met with resistance and you know oh, come on, you’ll be alright, the coach killed him in the session, killed everybody in that session, but killed him. He said I can’t play tomorrow, I just can’t do it and he went to the hospital and they said look if you keep playing you’re at risk of not walking again. He had some sort of compartment syndrome in his legs, and that was how serious it was. So he got pulled out in 2011 for an injury that he should have recovered from, put his feet up for however long was needed, have surgery if that was necessary, but do it properly, but he made that choice when it got so serious he may never play again, the coach would have kept playing him until he couldn’t play anymore.”

This extract substantiates Ella’s observation (see chapter 5, Managing injury in sport: Everyone plays with pain) that international athletes are unable to make appropriate decisions about their own health and wellbeing in performance environments, as they are afraid of the negative consequences of failing to train and compete. Even under the most extreme circumstances, athletes can

demonstrate a willingness to disembodiment their own health in pursuit of performance and can make decisions that have the potential to inflict physical and or psychological harm.

This study adds to a growing body of research on pain and injury in sports that suggests that athletes normalise playing through pain to prevent looking weak or losing their place on a team (Malcom 2006; Albert 2004; Roderick 2004), demonstrating overconformity to the sport ethic, a set of ideals that comprise the norms of the traditional athletic environment (Hughes and Coakley 1991). Experiencing pain or sustaining injury, as described here, is seen as a normal part of sports performance, and playing through this is a normal sacrifice that an athlete would make to strive for distinction. In addition, this study demonstrates that some coaches are willing to push their athletes to extremes even when they are aware that they have existing injuries. This could be constituted as physical neglect, further demonstrating the overlapping nature of maltreatment. The example above could also be classified as FPE: coercing the performer to play even when physically unable. Kerr (2010) believes that it is the drive to reach elite status that can lead athletes to accept violent or aggressive behaviour and/or inappropriate or extreme training methods as part of the process, rather than to question or report it. This may also explain why coaches are willing to push athletes to extremes without demonstrating concern for their long-term health and wellbeing.

Consistent overtraining and failure to allow athletes appropriate time to recover between bouts or periods of training were also highlighted by Adam who explained how his performance camps were so condensed and poorly managed that they took a physical and emotional toll on performers:

“I have never experienced anything like the death camps in my life. I thought 8 weeks training in Sheffield was hard but this was just bullshit, it was nuts. There were no rest days, you talk about tapering progressive and planned programming, this was literally you go as hard as you can every session for 25 days. We would travel and train without rest, we would play and train without eating, we would do fitness tests after games, like this was absolutely insane. Like we had guys diagnosed with chronic fatigue, it was the first time in my life that I had ever had knee pain before like literally I would wake up and my knees were so sore. Yeah it was

completely mental but he (the coach) was absolutely hell bent on doing it this way.”

Adam explains that the coach failed to allow athletes time to recover whilst on a training camp and how even though this approach made no sense to players they followed it through fear of repercussions. In addition, the vignette below reveals that players were denied time to eat appropriately between training sessions and how they were training and competing in a state of fatigue:

“One of the team got diagnosed with chronic fatigue, had like a rash on his eye and stuff, I’m telling you diagnosed with chronic fatigue due to a training schedule. I was nearly gone as well, we literally arrived in X (location of training), dropped our bags down and were off to go and play a training match. I went – coach, I can’t play, I feel terrible, I’ve got to go and sleep. I was given like 16 hours to recover, had a sleep while everyone else trained and I was back in it...I guess I was at the point of burnout, I was gone. If I’d trained that night I would have been severely ill. Like I said other guys were getting chronic knee pains and chronic injuries, just chronic over training injuries. Now I’ve got the fitness section of the camp... Guys are just dying on the testing, we were doing a beep test or a yo yo test or something and everyone is dying and I looked at...I’m jogging away I’m just about surviving, I looked over my teammate is still in the beep test with his chronic fatigue and he’s, I looked over and he’s fallen down and trying to crawl to the line to make thirteen. Someone else is on the side being sick, God it was just like – wow what are we doing?”

The extract above suggests a lack of regard for the health of the athlete when in the final stages of tournament preparation. The use of excessive training programmes, failure to provide sufficient rest and recovery for individuals and forcing players to train or compete with compromised health poses a significant threat to wellbeing. The findings suggest that athletes still demonstrate compliance even when they are aware of the risk or threat this approach to training can pose to their health. Stafford et al. (2014) suggest that those who do not adhere to the sport ethic of tolerating pain and playing through injury fear repercussions, such as being ridiculed or stigmatised (by coaches and team-mates) and being dropped from the team. If an athlete plays through pain or negotiates adversity, they can gain respect from team-mates and performance staff, and this only serves to strengthen their athletic identity and to reinforce negative behaviours. Roderick (1998) stated that the culture of risk, which normalises pain, injuries and playing hurt is extremely dangerous for elite athletes; there is an abundance of evidence to suggest that elite level athletes are expected to take

serious risks with their health (Murphy and Waddington 2007; Young et al. 1994). Young (1993) referred to the normalisation of risk and the excessive pressure exerted upon the individual from those within the environment as ‘athletic exploitation’ or ‘workplace exploitation’ in sport. More recently, he has questioned whether injury can be understood as the outcome of victimisation and abuse in sport (Young 2004). The findings demonstrate that failure to appropriately manage training can have significant negative consequences for the performer, and such mismanagement could lead to a career-ending injury. Injury can be a direct consequence of maltreatment or it can be caused indirectly through inadequate planning and preparation, both of which are shown to be examples of non-contact physical abuse.

In addition to poorly structured training and forcing athletes to train and compete while injured or without allowing sufficient recovery, athletes were exposed to FPE as a mechanism of control. Participants reported being forced to take part in intensive physical training that was beyond the realms of standard sessions. In addition, coaches used repetitive training measures to control or punish athletes. Lisa recalled that her coach “*forced us to hold planks*” or “*singled people out to do burpees repetitively like until it hurt*”, while other participants watched on. Lisa believed this was predominantly about coach control over players rather than for a training effect: the tasks were designed to target individuals and push them physically or “*to break them*”. David (2005) notes that athletes could be vulnerable to corporal punishment in sport and this can be used as a mechanism of control. Echoing David’s views, participants indicated that physical punishment was used as a punishment for poor performances or to reinforce the dominance of the coach. James stated that some of the training sessions he was involved in left players unable to walk: “*some days players just fell over and collapsed, they didn’t have anything left in them and it was dangerous*”. He suggested that the coach took training beyond what would elicit a training effect to a stage where it was “*touch and go*” if performers would be able to compete or train as a result. Interestingly, James was keen to emphasise that this approach was inappropriate and not a suitable way to train athletes; he didn’t want to appear that his concern arose as a result of him being unable to cope with the intensity level of training. This might help to show why FPE has been difficult to examine in sport, as it is

seen so often to be an inherent part of training: athletes need to be able to push themselves in order to generate physiological training benefits or adaptations. However, as Kerr (2010) states, there is a fine line between legitimate and abusive training mechanisms.

Other forms of non-contact physical abuse were also evident in this study, including threats of physical violence and denying athletes access to food or water. For example, Immy noted that her coach would withhold water at training and make players train to exhaustion, due to her worry that water would lead them to gain weight (through water retention). Megan recalled the fear she felt when her coach threatened her in order to get her to change her behaviour in training:

“Me and another girl (were warming up) and she (the coach) said “if you drop your arms on that ball one more time, I’ll break your fucking fingers, and I was just like, shit. I didn’t think until afterwards... Actually that’s not a thing a coach would normally get away with saying, but she just kind of had that it was just brushed off and you did what she fucking told you.”

This extract offers further evidence of the overlap between types or instances of maltreatment. This form of communication from a coach or a caregiver could constitute verbal emotional abuse; however, given the threat of physical harm, it perhaps aligns more clearly with non-contact physical abuse, owing to the intention of the coach to intimidate the athlete into changing an aspect of their performance. When asked if she believed that the coach would follow through with such a threat, she responded: *“well, let’s just say I didn’t drop my arms to find out”*.

The examination of physical abuse and forced physical exertion in sport remains an emerging field of research. Existing research has mainly concentrated on harm to young athletes with a focus on coaches as the primary perpetrators of abuse. Recently Stafford et al. (2013) conducted a study exploring physical harm in young people participating in sport in the UK. They used survey data from 6124 respondents, and interview data from 80 participants (age 18-24) who had engaged in organised sport. The findings of their study suggest that the participants experienced a range of physically abusive or aggressive behaviours whilst involved in sport. Twenty-four per cent of the respondents had experienced at least one form of physical harm. Peers and coaches were primarily

identified as the perpetrators of the treatment and it was found that the risk of physical harm increased as the individual's careers progressed competitively, which may explain why physical abuse was present within the narratives of elite performers in this study's sample. Being forced to train or compete when injured or exhausted was the most common form of physical harm identified. Physically violent or aggressive behaviours in some cases were only experienced once while for others they were a regular occurrence. The findings of Stafford et al. support this study's claim that athletes competing through exhaustion and injury come to be an accepted part of sports participation, sometimes with serious consequences for health and wellbeing.

The findings from this study extend understanding of physical abuse in high performance sport. It is suggested that there are four types of abuse which elite athletes may experience or be exposed to: 1) intensive or excessive training regimes; 2) forced physical exertion as means of control or punishment; 3) physical violence or threats of physical violence from those in authority; 4) pressure to play whilst injured or in pain. It is also clear that the threat of physical abuse is increased when athletes demonstrate a willingness to engage in activities regardless of the potential impact they may have on their health or wellbeing. Athletes' own health-compromising behaviours can pose a significant threat and may constitute self-maltreatment. It is suggested that over-conformity to the norms of the environment lead the athlete to behave in this manner. As Malcom (2006) notes, athletes do not start out with this attitude: only after competing and learning about the expectations of the training environment do they develop a brazen approach to their body and wellbeing. This can lead to the individual demonstrating a willingness to accept physical abuse as part of the process of athletic endeavour. The normalisation of extreme training methods and the need to play through pain or injury, combined with the pressure athletes experience from coaches and significant others, can be seen to create a melting pot in which physical abuse can occur without question in performance sport.

Neglect

Neglect is one of the more difficult dimensions of maltreatment to define due to the multiplicity of meanings of the term. A definition from the literature review is as follows: neglect can refer to a lack of reasonable care, deprivation of attention and deficits in the provision of basic needs. According to Crooks and Wolfe (2007), neglect involves the failure of a person to provide care in accordance with expected societal standards. It occurs due to acts of omission rather than commission. Four types of neglect were identified in this study: physical, emotional, educational and social neglect, aligning with Stirling's (2009) classification system. Presented below are instances that demonstrate failure to provide adequate care or standards that either resulted in harm to the individual or posed threat of harm: this represents a previously unexplored area in sport.

Instances of physical neglect were most commonly referred to. Participants stated that it was commonplace for coaches to expect performers to continue to compete regardless of existing injuries; this could be compounded by pressure to perform due to fear of deselection. Ella recalled that this occurred when she injured her ankle:

“Definitely the worst injury I played through was my ankle... I'd been selected for the Scotland game and I knew I'd really hurt my ankle when I did it, I knew something bad had happened. But in my head I thought – if I can finish the game then I can play against Scotland next week, so I was like – right, no my ankle's fine. By the time I got off the pitch I couldn't really walk and had an ankle that was out here and knew I had... I think we were playing on a Saturday, so it was Sunday to Saturday turn around and so I basically just wrapped and iced and wrapped and iced and went... I did go and see physios and told people, but was kind of like – can I get away with this, can I play because I knew in my head that if I didn't play then how could they select me because that was kind of... Anyway, I was honest with the coach about the state of my ankle and they just said, we need to see you play and I had a conversation, which was – well you know, you haven't played since X (names tournament) and we have to see you play. So I went and played and probably didn't play very well, I played the whole game against Scotland with my ankle strapped and couldn't really walk before the match but I could run around and play the game... but I thought you know – that's going to help me get selected, ironically they then selected a girl who hadn't played, and you kind of think – if you'd said to me – like this isn't going to impact on whether you get selected or not, whether you play, we don't want you to play if it's going to cause you more problems, then I definitely shouldn't have played

but I was convinced that I needed to go out and prove to them that I'd not lost what I'd had the previous season because I didn't have that care or assurance from them that they were looking after me, or would select me without playing on it."

She observed that her coaches disregarded her wellbeing; it was an expectation that she play on regardless of her injury. This led to Ella coining the phrase, the "disposable athlete", who is there to be used until they are no longer required, demonstrating a disregard for them as people:

"You know I don't think I ever felt valued. There is almost a total lack of awareness of you as a person... It's a shame because coaches need to look after players because they are... Yes they may think they are disposable but you may also be needed again, and if you've treated them badly then it's going to, well as well as be bad for the individual it's also bad for that coach, and I definitely didn't play well for the coaches, not in the second part of my career."

Ella believed that her international coaches neglected her personal safety and failed to understand the physical and psychological toll this could take on her as a performer. Adam pointed to the fact that a lack of communication between medical staff and coaches compounded problems with injury and rehabilitation. This led to a failure to provide appropriate support or advice for players on managing injuries and a breakdown in communication with regards to when players were fit to perform. Failure to manage the rehabilitation of athletes in this instance had the potential to result in further injury through physical neglect:

"They were just ridiculous you know we were training 25 days solid and I mean solid, by training like that there was a higher risk of injury, there's illness, probably more from being just run-down. There's not... There wasn't great co-operation between the medical staff and the coaching staff and instead of the coaching staff and medical staff combining to be the staff, we had two very separate identities and no-one was taking control or responsibility for the athletes and that was very fucking dangerous."

This extract highlights how in addition to concerns raised about the expectation to play through injury, participants also questioned the coaching practices they were exposed to and explained how at times poor training methods and lack of planning elevated the risk of injury. This was also evident in the accounts presented in the physical abuse and FPE sub-section, whereby participants stated that the training methods they were exposed to directly caused injury and in some instances led to them dropping out. Physical neglect in this instance was evident through poor

planning and failure to appropriately manage or deliver training programmes. The following extract from the interview with Adam reflects on the concern he felt over a lack of management or regulation of training in the run up to an Olympic game:

“You know we had no support. So I knew I had a shoulder problem that was coming on, I knew I had a foot problem that was coming on but I’m six months away, eight months away from the games at that point, do I dare stop – absolutely not, I need to be the best player I can possibly be otherwise I’m going to get there and get killed, or I might not get there at all. No-one’s saying – let’s have a look at your shoulder, no it’s not serious, you’re OK, you can carry on playing, no actually no, you need to take it easy now, there’s no-one regulating that and as an athlete you’re always pushed further, always pushed further because if you don’t you’re not really an athlete and the coaches they just keep on pushing... There’s no-one controlling the way you’re developing or implementing, you’re just literally going one hundred per cent all the time so that can lead to injury.”

Adam believed that failure to appropriately manage his training schedule led to a number of chronic overuse injuries, which at times threatened his selection due to an inability to train and compete. The failure of the coach to appropriately manage the training load of performers was deemed to be damaging and to pose long-term threats to physical safety. His reference to the planned “*death camps*”, where athletes were exposed to 25 days of training, competition and fitness testing without sufficient rest or recovery reflected his concern over the management of physical preparation and the potential for injuring performers rather than preparing them appropriately for competition. Stirling (2009) states that physical neglect could show a reckless disregard for an athlete’s wellbeing through forcing them to perform activities that could compound an existing injury, or lead to a chronic overuse problem. In addition, this study shows that neglectful behaviour may lead to an athlete being discouraged from seeking health care or taking the appropriate time to rest and recover after injury, training or competition. Physical neglect thus posed a considerable threat to safety. Clearly there is some overlap between physical neglect and physical abuse; which can be co-occurring maltreatments. If a coach forces an athlete to undertake physical training that places the athlete at risk from injury, this could be deemed to be physically abusive. Meanwhile, failure to appropriately manage the training load to account

for the safety or wellbeing of the athlete is an act of omission and could be classed as physical neglect.

Educational neglect relates to behaviours that directly impact on the educational development of the athlete. In the sporting context, this can include encouraging an athlete to miss classes for competition or training, or to cease or neglect their education (Stirling 2009). It is apparent that participants found that being an elite athlete sometimes meant that they needed to sacrifice other dimensions of their life and that this resulted at times in a heavy emphasis on their sport. All of the participants at some stage within their career had ceased their education and reflected on the fact that their educational needs were seen as less important than their sporting performance. The balance of education and sporting endeavour was deemed to be particularly challenging during the athletes' younger years when completing GCSEs or A-Levels, however, the friction between education and performance continued during undergraduate study, if they had continued to higher education. Pressure in the early years predominantly came from coaches who wanted performers to place greater emphasis on training if they were to reach the top level. Immy recalled that she felt "forced" to make the choice between pursuing her dream as an athlete and being able to complete her A-levels:

"It really came to a crunch when I came back (from an international tournament) you know I'd been away, although I'd come back for a couple of days, I'd probably been away for about nine weeks, and I said – you know I want to have a couple of weeks off, I wanted to catch up with friends, I wanted to just have a bit of down time... Then it got me thinking – well, you know, I'm not doing any A levels, all my old school friends were doing A levels and they were going to university and I thought – what happens if the X (names the sport) doesn't work out, and obviously I wasn't playing well at that period, so I sort of thought – what if I don't make it, what if this, what if that, and I sort of started to think about doing A levels and my mum was fine with it because she... academically... academics had always been quite important to her that we did well and, not that we did well, but that we, you know, did GCSEs and all these sorts of things, and I spoke to my coach about wanting to do A levels and he basically said – well you can do A levels but you will be. I could stay on the programme, but I would basically be the bottom of the bottom in the sense that I wouldn't be having any coaching input whatsoever, so it was kind of like, you can stay but you won't be coached, you won't be this, you know... essentially there's no point really. That's how I felt it was very much one or the other... whereas if you don't do A-levels you will be given everything. It was almost like a punishment for wanting to do A levels and I wasn't even to do three at the time you know, I would have had plenty of

a timetable free to be able to come out and do coaching and do things like that. Education just didn't seem to be an option available to me.”

She felt a tension between these important aspects of her life and observed that the pressure from her coach at this time was the “*breaking point*” that made her drop out of her sport. This pressure continued into adult competition for many of the participants who felt that full time programmes left limited time to study and complete a university degree or equivalent. James stated that he found it impossible to commit to two things and that he “*had to take a leave of absence from uni*”.

For many athletes, a lack of qualifications limits post career options, and this can cause adjustment difficulties after major games or at the end of the athletic career (Aquilina 2013; Henry 2013). Adam recalled “*having nothing left*” after an Olympic Games, as he had been “*forced to give up everything*” in pursuit of “*the Olympic dream*”. In recent years, there has been increasing attention paid to the need for athletes to find balance in their life so that the pursuit of excellence is not at the expense of the development of personal dimensions of the individual such as career development and forming relationships with others outside of sport (Price et al. 2010; Lavallee 2005; Miller and Kerr 2002). Aquilina (2013) states that the requirements placed on elite athletes in contemporary sport are such that individuals need to dedicate themselves more and more to achieving excellence. This suggests that athletes will allocate most of their time to performance related objectives rather than to other aspects of their life such as education. Miller and Kerr (2002) corroborated this in their observation that athletes experience tension between the academic, sporting and social dimensions of the person. The potential problem arises when the demands of elite sport outweigh other aspects of an individual’s life, which can predispose them to failure both in sporting and academic terms (Aquilina 2010).

Emotional neglect refers to behaviours that fail to account for the emotional needs of the performer, and can include a chronic lack of attention or performance feedback that would be expected by an athlete, refusal of psychological support or counselling and/or delay in the psychological care of an athlete (Stirling 2009).

This sub-type of neglect aligns with the denial of attention and support as a form of emotional abuse; being rejected by a coach or being isolated were common experiences in this study. The following extracts highlight how this can be an extremely damaging form of maltreatment due to the athletes' interpretation as a calculated form of abuse. By failing to account for the emotional needs of the athlete, the perpetrator fails to provide support: this is therefore an act of omission.

Alexandra highlighted the negative feelings provoked when rejected or ignored by coaching staff whilst away at an international competition:

“A couple of nights later I remember walking down the corridor in the hotel and the coaches walked past me and they just totally ignored me in the corridor and it was like just oh my god I am right here again. I felt like the weakest person and it was just really horrible. The coaches would blank me in the corridor whilst being so matey with other people. Some people were having the most amazing time and it was the most terrible time for me, probably made worse because I thought there must be something wrong for me to not be enjoying it like they were.”

Sebastian provided an additional example of the profound impact of emotional neglect on him as a younger athlete:

“Now that I look back at it, you know, when you're in a stage of development where you're not cemented, you're 18, you still need to understand the reasons why, you still need to understand their expectations of you, it's just as I said before, I think my feelings as an athlete were neglected. It was tough to take, at least when they're (the coaches) making an effort to go – actually, that's not good enough, you didn't do this, you didn't do that, we told you that this is your responsibility, you've not done it. At least then you go OK. It may be negative, but the onus is on you to then prove them wrong... I think you know if you're given no feedback and you're not made to feel worthwhile, or you're not given any responsibility or role within the team it does become very damaging, or at least for me it was extremely damaging. But at least then you are getting something, whereas to have nothing, or very little is... well it's damaging as I said.”

Sebastian reveals here how being emotionally neglected or ignored can be as damaging as outwardly aggressive behaviour from a perpetrator. This type of treatment can isolate the individual and create feelings of self-doubt and uncertainty.

Social neglect can include inattention to social needs and discouraging the athlete from forming friendships or a life outside of sport (Stirling 2009). This can lead to chronic or unrealistic expectations relating to performance and to athletes overinvesting in performance related training, thus neglecting other dimensions of the self in pursuit of success. All of the participants indicated that being a performance athlete required a great sacrifice; it was common to miss out on the experiences friends enjoyed who didn't have a commitment to sport and training. This was seen as one of the primary pressures from coaches who equally had to make sacrifices in order to work at this level. Megan believed her coach failed to allow players the time to have a “*life outside of sport*”. She described that the coach wanted to monitor athletes’ social lives so closely that they became “*totally controlled by the environment and expectations of the coach*”:

“I think, especially for our coach, she thought that if you socialised or if you drank or you went out, even like, we trained in x (training location) for two years with the men’s team there. Even talking to boys and things like that, she kind of just saw that as a distraction and that we were not putting everything into sport. And she didn’t allow us to do that, and if we did it, then we would get kind of reprimanded or we’d get spoken to like about our attitude or that we’re not giving everything.”

This extract reveals how much control coaches exert over their athletes, controlling more than simply their performance on a court or field. Brackenridge (1997) noted that it is not uncommon to see coaches, or those in power, controlling athletes and going through a process of rigid timetabling of their personal life. Coaches view athletes as possessions and may enact a number of restrictions, as they have unquestioned power over the athlete (Burke 2001). They often have control over an athlete’s medical treatment, diet, social activities, and sexual behaviour (Tomlinson and Yorganci 1997). Brackenridge (1997) suggested that in sport, loyalty or obedience to the coach is considered the norm; athletes willingly embrace the imposition of these restrictions. This was a finding reiterated within the participant narratives. Control is often normalised, meaning that maltreatment may be more easily tolerated in sports settings than elsewhere. For Megan a need to over-invest and neglect her social needs became overwhelming during a critical life incident that occurred in the build-up to an Olympic games:

“Well, the biggest thing for me that I went through in my life and that isn’t to do with sport, is, I lost my brother like a year and a half ago and that was during... or coming up to the Olympics. Obviously he was always supportive of my X (names sport) and like for the last seven years he’s been fighting with cancer so it was a tough. It was always tough for me because sport is what I do and where I want to be and he always supported and loved that, so it was always easy for me to go away, but to be away when you want to be at home, when those things are going on it’s hard. The toughest thing for me was when, last summer, in the run up to the Olympics we had a test run and we were playing against Japan and Holland and it really was the highlight of my career playing wise, but not emotionally off court. My brother was supportive of me being there and stuff, but he had then been told that he had only 3 months to live and for me, I just wanted to go home, so I said to my coach about the situation and they’d always kind of said they would be supportive and stuff... but she said No, if you want to be here... like this next week we were supposed to be training and that it was really important for her decisions for next year, and she said it in a way that if I wanted to be selected and I wanted to be considered, that I needed to be there. So the day that I went... I went to the camp for a day, then my mum called me just after she’d been in with the doctors with my brother and I just came home, I just cut and run, because for me, family has always been... and it always will be the most important thing, and nothing else really matters to me, but like, obviously for a coach not to have been supportive and to put me in that position where I was like having to choose, I was really... I didn’t even tell her I’d left, you know I just thought that she’s not really a person or a human by making me make that decision.”

Megan’s account shows that it is essential to acknowledge the differing roles that athletes occupy, including daughter, sister or mother. In this example, unrealistic expectations placed upon her at a critical time had an extremely negative impact and led to her feeling that her only option was to “run away”. This study thus reveals that when coaches, athletes themselves, or the sports system require athletes to neglect the social dimensions of their self, this can have damaging consequences.

Adam also highlighted problems that can occur through over-investment in sport. He stated how in his sport the focus was purely on performance and there was little time or space to consider other dimensions of life. Adam sustained an injury prior to the Olympic Games, yet he continued to play through injury due to a fear of not being part of the competition he had been working towards for nearly 6 years. This has resulted in long-term problems that have prevented him from continued participation in his sport. He indicated that failing to find the balance

between “real life” and sport led to significant adjustment problems after his Olympic campaign:

“I went back home to mum and dad with my leg up on the sofa, which is where I have been for the last 3 months after Christmas. There is nothing left of what was before the Olympics. You know there was nothing for me, not just to recover from my injury but to recover for the rest of my life. I never wanted to step out of the sport I would still love to carry on playing but there’s no way that I can. There’s no support to help me structure that, plan it, you know there is just nothing and it is such a surreal feeling. I just competed at the Olympics, we’ve done so much to get a team there and through so much adversity and then it’s like thank you very much for being at the Olympics, well done everyone, bye... Yeah it’s a strange feeling, it’s like it never even happened and I know a lot of Olympians probably feel the same way no one expects to go to the Olympics and for it to change their life but I didn’t expect it to just stop. I never imagined it would just be right, bam, fuck off... I always hoped it would be the beginning, I really did, you know be the beginning of something. It’s honestly like it never happened. I’ve just got a load of Olympic kit around the house like I’ve got a load of photos... Psychologically that’s a strange thing to deal with. That’s it, the end; go back to what you did beforehand. I have nothing here, I’ve lived abroad training for 5 years, I know more people in X (training location) than I do here. I have nothing here. What the fuck do I do now? You know there’s no one there to help guide you through it or help support you. And of course as an athlete I didn’t think of anything post Olympics because just getting there was just such a big challenge. To think about life after when you don’t even know if you are going to get there, let alone when I then did my ACL. You know I lived with that horrible fear of who are you if you don’t go to the Olympics? But I never imagined it turning out like this... I have such an amazing support network in my parents and family, who knows where I would be without them. I am living back at home at the age of 25 and doing some coaching, you know trying desperately to move my life forward, but where do I go from here? To have that support network has just been so crucial, and without them I would be in serious trouble, serious, serious trouble... You know I think about it, about how it would have been if I hadn’t gone to the Olympics? – wow, like if that injury had taken me out of the Olympics and I didn’t have the courage to go in my own direction with it, or I didn’t have the support of my parents and the people that I eventually got around me, I don’t know how I’d have come back from a hammer blow like that. That would have been very fucking tough, because it’s completely out of balance, there’s no balance there and you know everything in your life is yin and yang and all this shit, it should be balanced, you have a social life, your family life, your work life, your professional life whatever, it’s all got to fit in and make you a balanced individual, but the last five years hasn’t been balanced at all, it’s been so heavily put into that Olympic goal and dream, there’s nothing outside of it almost, so when that’s taken away what actually are you left with in terms of your life, not a lot, fortunately my family to start and try and build again.”

The failure of the NGB to appropriately manage this critical transition had an extremely damaging effect on Adam's wellbeing. The adjustment difficulties that athletes face after being a part of a major competition point to the danger of failing to appropriately advise individuals on how to cope after taking part. This demonstrates the danger that can arise when athletes neglect the differing dimensions of their self in pursuit of performance. The pressure to focus solely on competition can come from coaches, the sports system (Performance Directors, NGB, National sports institutes) and ultimately the athlete him/herself. In Adam's case, he believed that the NGB failed to appropriately manage or advise players, offering no post-Olympic support or injury recovery plan and leaving him to cope alone: this indicates an example of social neglect. Adam became so invested in performance that he neglected other dimensions of his life; therefore he was unable to think about life after the Olympic games.

Although the literature on child abuse acknowledges that neglect has been harder to detect than others forms of maltreatment, it is still recognised as one of the most frequently reported maltreatment types in interfamilial contexts (Dubowitz 2006), furthermore, the consequences of neglect are thought to be as damaging as more active types of maltreatment (Stoltenborgh et al. 2013). Even though it is one of the most reported types of maltreatment, Dubowitz (1994) suggests that neglect can be taken less seriously by child protection services because its effects are usually insidious and not obvious. This study shows that this is also the case in performance sport. In studies that have examined cases of abuse which have been managed or reported in sport, neglect has proven to be one of the lowest reported abuse types, especially when compared with other maltreatment types, for example physical abuse or bullying. Rhind et al. (2014) analysed 652 cases across sports in 2011 and Brackenridge et al. (2005) analysed 132 cases of alleged abuse in football, which occurred between 1967 and 2002. Allegations of neglect accounted for 1.2% (N = 8) of the cases in Rhind et al's study and 3.8% (N = 5) in the study conducted by Brackenridge et al. This may be lower due to a lack of awareness as to what would constitute neglect in sport. Failure to recognise behaviours as neglectful would limit or prevent reporting and individuals may be unaware of the potential damage they can cause.

Many of the examples provided by the participants refer to normalised practices that are acknowledged to be part of being a performance athlete. Brackenridge et al. (2005) believe that normalisation occurs because the physical demands of training; the demand for emotional toughness and a culture of resilience in sports have acted as a mask to the sufferings that some individuals experience. This leaves a variety of maltreatment types not only unchallenged, but also undetected. Kerr and Stirling (2012) believe that the emphasis on performance also contributes to the silence surrounding abuse in sport. When an athlete has a performance related goal, they will pursue that at any cost, physical or psychological. Only when individuals start to question ‘what is normal’ and ‘what is appropriate’, will these subtle yet dangerous behaviours be eliminated from normative practices. This study is the first to attempt to outline the types of neglect elite athletes may experience. Further work is needed to fully understand the different types of neglect, how they occur and their potential impact on the performer.

Bullying and Horizontal Violence

Bullying is defined as a form of aggression that occurs when people perceive actions directed at them as negative over time (Simons and Mawns 2010). It can include physical, verbal or psychological attacks or intimidations that are intended to cause fear, distress or harm (Stirling 2009). An additional form of maltreatment that could be a precursor to bullying is known as horizontal violence, a term which refers to incidents that occur in isolation without power gradients and that can be overt or covert in nature (Jackson et al. 2002). Horizontal violence has the potential to lead to bullying if the behaviour continues over a period of time (Duffy 1995; Simons and Mawn 2010). Stirling (2009) suggests that bullying occurs in non-critical, peer-peer relationships, and this study suggests that this is also the case with horizontal violence. Both types of maltreatment were evident in this study, occurring during player-to-player interaction and interaction between players and support staff, such as physiotherapists and medical officers.

Participants referred to instances of tension between players: name-calling, fault-finding, overly critical or demeaning comments, put-downs, a lack of trust between players, and a gossip culture, all of which could be classified as horizontal violence. Megan stated that in her team everyone wanted to be in “favour”, which led to a lack of privacy and damage to trust between players:

“It was kind of like they were your friend as well, but on another level you knew you couldn’t trust anyone to say anything because it would always get back and it would always... It would always be a case of everyone talking about everyone.”

Though the behaviour may not be malicious, it nevertheless carried a significant impact on interaction between team members, demonstrating the danger a lack of trust and gossip culture can pose to social relations in groups. Horizontal violence was also reported between athletes and members of support teams, leading to a breakdown in trust. Megan recalled speaking to an assistant coach about a problem with another player who broke her confidence, thus compounding the tension. James also noted that in his team, members began to “lose trust” in one another, as rumour-mongering was endemic:

“You’ve lost trust you know. You could say things to the physio, but the physio that’s for sure, that’s public, she was a chatty person... It was there was no privacy and you know some people in the team were too close to the head coach anyway. There was one or two players that would instead of joining the team would go with the coach, which was an interesting one so if you did say something the likelihood is that he would find out.”

James felt that this behaviour was exacerbated by a negative coaching environment, which led to some performers rebelling against the coach and others trying to become allied with the coach in order to limit the amount of negative treatment they received. As Carron and Hausenblas (1998) observe, lack of trust can fragment a team and have an impact on their potential productivity or cohesion. LaVoi (2007) claimed that, “conflict is an inevitable part of life and relationships” (p.34), but it has to be dealt with early in order to limit the damage it can create in team environments. Without intervention, it can escalate and result in a toxic environment for players. In his work on hazing, Holman (2004) concluded that power is gained through diminishing others: this form of intimidation reinforces power and hierarchy within group environments, such as sports teams or training squads. In a performance setting, horizontal violence

may be a way for individuals to assert their dominance over others and exert control over individuals to affirm in-group status, a notion that was corroborated within the current study.

Participants suggested that instances of horizontal violence increased in the lead up to major competitions and team selection dates. It was acknowledged that friends or team-mates could at this stage become enemies as athletes are all vying for positions in a final squad. James recalled that in his team there were people who worked well together and those who didn't; this was directly related to the competitive environment:

“You know there were players who really didn't get on, we worked through it but sometimes it's hard. People want to put you down because in the end they are threatened by you and that's part of a team sport. We all want that spot and sometimes it gets nasty. I'm pleased as a player I don't enter into any of that shit because it doesn't help the individual and it doesn't help the team.”

It was acknowledged that when players are living, training and working in close proximity, they can become bored, and gossip is part of being in a training network. Alexandra noted that squads and teams “essentially have lots of little cliques” that players are alternately members of and excluded from and to, which has an emotional impact. Clearly in a team environment, it can be difficult to blend characters and personalities, and conflict may be inevitable. Immy observed that even though she was playing an individual sport, people never travel in isolation, therefore problems of inter-player conflict still arose. She recalled travelling away for long periods of time, and reported that “bitchy girls” were a part of that experience:

“I used to travel with one particular girl, that when you were playing your match would then, and it always went in threes which is just an awful number for girls, when you were playing your match, she would then get the other person and start saying that you'd said such and such about her... You know those kind of like really school stuff really, and it became a big issue because obviously you're away, it happened to me once or twice and then I kind of got the measure of it and had it out with her and stopped it, but she would try and do it every trip we went on... And then obviously again you've got that whole thing of being away from home, the two friends that you're supposed to be travelling with then turn against you, no-one's talking to you, it's fine in front of the coach, but then when you're not... You can't be with the coach all the time, you feel very alone and it's really quite a shit feeling really, it might sound childish to other

people, but actually for girls, girls friendships... You know, boys would just punch each other then it's over and that's the end of it, if at all they fall out, but girls are horrid when they want to be and then when you're playing a match and you know two people are talking about you... It's mind games really and I think... I don't know what the answer to that is."

Immy's account points to the impact of negative interactions with team-mates. Although Holt et al. (2012) believe that inter-player conflict is an accepted part of team interactions and can be essential for the optimal functioning of groups, if it goes unmanaged, it can be damaging to group interaction and individual functioning. Holt et al. refer to two types of conflict. The first is termed performance conflict and refers to issues relating to the execution of a particular task. The second is relational conflict, which refers to emotional or interpersonal issues between players or groups of players. This study suggests that horizontal violence is a form of negative conflict between players that has the potential to affect working relationships. Horizontal violence is thought to have a number of consequences for the recipient: it can leave them feeling upset, humiliated, vulnerable, or threatened, creating stress and undermining their self-confidence (Johnson and Rea 2009; Thomas and Burk 2009). In health care, it is acknowledged that horizontal violence can create a toxic climate and can have a direct impact on quality of life by diminishing the safety of the personal and professional environment (Leinung and Egues 2012). This study shows that inter-player conflict can cause unhappiness in the sporting environment.

Although there were no obvious differences in the experience of horizontal violence between genders, interestingly, it was only female participants who provided examples of inter-player bullying. This behaviour seemed to escalate from episodes of horizontal violence to sustained or repeated interactions that had a negative impact and could be classified as bullying. This is the first section where there is a noticeable difference in the experience between genders, and perhaps this poses an area of future research. The experience of Charlotte best demonstrates how horizontal violence has the potential to escalate and become a pattern of bullying. She commented that her training partner's put downs became persistent and had a significant impact:

"I was told every training session that I wasn't good enough, being told I don't want you to be here, you're rubbish, you're letting us down... It

completely destroyed me... She (another player) was just down on me all the time. Like downing comments all the time even if there was something good it felt like she would find a mistake in it somehow when I knew I wasn't as good as them anyway because they had been playing for years. Trying to play at their level and enjoy it became impossible when I was being told that you know you're rubbish, you're rubbish, you're not good enough to be here, we are aiming for this and you're nowhere near that, you're not anywhere near our level, you're ruining this for all of us by being here... Basically just leave and don't come back. There was one training session where the coach said to the pair to tell me when and where it was and they didn't tell me. I think I found out about ten minutes before and it was then impossible for me to get there. The fact was they didn't want me to be there and I knew it and that's a disgusting feeling. They just didn't tell me."

This account shows that Charlotte was exposed overtly to demeaning comments, and that she felt covertly the other players were working against her to keep her away from practices. Charlotte cites “*not being as good as the others*” as an excuse for the behaviour she faces, and yet she was at the time one of the country's top athletes in her sport, another example of self-blaming for the maltreatment experienced. Charlotte stated that as time went on, the behaviour started to have a profound impact on her emotionally and directly affected her ability to play the game:

“When I would get to training I felt like a lot of the time I would just stand there and they wouldn't even acknowledge me, they wouldn't include me in their conversations so right from the start it felt like them two and then just me. I would try to go over and they just wouldn't include me in their conversation... I think it was one girl in particular that was the worst and it felt like she was bullying me and I was being picked on and that's not a nice feeling. She never shouted at me you know... It was always so quiet or almost in the background. There would be a comment after everything that was negative... In the end it felt like it was after every single touch of the ball I had something negative was said, I don't know if it was every touch but that's what it felt like. I wasn't good enough, I wasn't in the right place, I didn't hit the ball hard enough, and then I didn't want to play... I wanted to be a million miles away from it.”

Bullying takes place in the absence of provocation from the victim and occurs due to power imbalances between individuals, whereby the individual who is more powerful attacks or harasses the individual who is less powerful (Pepler and Craig 1999). Bullying is acknowledged to be an intentional behaviour to harm another repeatedly, where it is difficult for the victim to defend himself or herself (Olweus 1999). Although little is known about bullying in sport, it is acknowledged as an

all too common phenomenon in other settings, including educational and occupational environments. Much of the research that examines anti-social behaviour in sport refers to moral functioning (Kavussanu et al. 2013; Kavussanu and Boardley 2009; Sage et al. 2006; Shields et al. 2005; Kavussanu et al. 2002). Steinfeldt et al. (2012) suggest that bullying in sport can be predicated by social norms and the norms of the moral atmosphere. This relates to all of the behaviours and norms for functioning deemed acceptable by the group that can exert an influence on its members (Kohlberg and Higgins 1987; Power et al. 1989). Nicholls (1989) argued that the focus on demonstrating superiority over others may cause a lack of concern for the wellbeing of others; as a result, moral atmosphere could have a significant impact on the way in which athletes treat one another (Faccenda et al. 2009). Thus the moral atmosphere in elite sport could be a predictor of transgressive behaviours such as bullying or horizontal violence. If the performance climate creates an environment whereby coaches are maltreating athletes in pursuit of performance gains, this could set the standards for athletes to maltreat one another without questioning its physical or psychological impact.

Discriminatory Maltreatment

Discriminatory maltreatment, although not included in Stirling's (2009) classification system for understanding maltreatment in sport, is a form of maltreatment that has been recognised in other settings. The DOH and HO (2000) state that this form of maltreatment can include racist, sexist and homophobic behaviours or abuse on the basis of disability. Kavanagh and Jones (2014) identified a conceptual framework for understanding virtual maltreatment in sport, defining it as:

“Comments that negatively refer to an individual's membership of a particular social group based on gender, race, religion, nationality, disability and/or sexual orientation. Comments can be stated in an aggressive, exploitative, manipulative, threatening or lewd manner and can be designed to elicit fear, emotional or psychological upset, distress and alarm (p.39).”

Though applied to the virtual environment, it is argued that this definition could extend to non-virtual settings, and indeed it provided a starting point for identifying discriminatory maltreatment within the narrative accounts. Two types of maltreatment were present in this study, racism and homophobia.

Austin recalled how his early memories of sport included instances of racism and how this marked the start of a type of discrimination that he would witness throughout his career as a black athlete. His first experience of racism came not from on field communication between players, but instead, from parents who were spectators on the sidelines of his games. He believed that this was because young players didn't themselves necessarily notice differences that related to skin colour:

“Yes, I mean I think certainly being like a black player, sort of like, especially growing up in the area that I did, Portsmouth, was always a bit of a rough and ready area from what I remember. I think certainly from quite a young age, about 7, that was probably the first time I experienced racism, and it didn't even come from the players, it actually came from parents on the side-line. And I think, and that sort of, it was quite a weird one because I think I was still at a young age, wasn't quite sure I knew about it really, and I think the comment was – kick that black kid on the field – coming from one of the parents.”

As Austin grew older, he noticed that racist comments were made not only by spectators but also by his opponents, and he also witnessed his team-mates behaving in a racist manner towards other players:

“I think then as you kind of like got older it came from sort of like people on the pitch, it was kind of just, if there was an argument, that was kind of like the first thing that came out of people's mouths, because it was quite an easy thing to pick up on... I'm not saying this happened every week, but it was there, it sort of like happened probably a couple of times a season whether you'd get you black cunt, or you fucking nigger, like it was quite like an easy thing for people to say, and it came out of their mouths when you were playing against them... But I would also see it in my team-mates there was a lad who I was playing with, but he wasn't racist to me when he was playing on the pitch, it was towards a person on their team. So... and for some reason it kind of seemed to be accepted because it was towards the other team member and not towards me. The words he was using towards the other guy was – you fucking coon, as he was kicking him and stuff like that.”

Sue et al. (2007) refer to instances of racial abuse as racial micro-aggressions or micro-assaults, defined as:

“explicit racial derogations characterized primarily by verbal or nonverbal attacks meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling or purposeful discriminatory actions” (p.274).

Burdsey (2011) refers to racism as a discourse in modern sport and to racial micro-aggressions within player locker room discussions and matches as

commonplace in sports such as football. The excerpt above is interesting in that Austin reflected on how racist micro-assaults seemed to be accepted when they were directed against a member of the opposition but condemned if they were directed to a member of the same team. He noted that when the opposition made derogatory comments toward him, his team-mates were protective and reacted negatively toward the perpetrator. However, if a member of his team made racist remarks toward a player on the opposition, he had to accept these as a part of the game and interaction between his team and their opponent. This demonstrates differing values toward racism and a lack of understanding of the wider impact of racist language, which can be damaging even if a person is not the direct target. This highlights the need to understand the nature of direct and indirect maltreatment in sport. The language used by his team-mates toward members of the opposition discomfited Austin and led directly to his move to another team.

Kilvington and Price (2013) and Burdsey (2004) found that overt racism is commonly encountered in sports such as football and cricket. However, like Austin, players in their research felt that it is the athlete's responsibility to know 'how to take' racist remarks and that players have to be mentally tough in order to advance in sport. As such, players have a tendency to downplay some forms of racial prejudice (Burdsey 2011). Long (2000) suggested that in sport, racism can be excused on the basis that it occurs as a result of the highly charged nature of competition or it is stated that comments are said in jest. This serves to normalise racist behaviour and to trivialise its potential impact. Long suggests that tolerating such abuse is invidious as it robs a person of the opportunity to challenge the behaviour, which would prove that they "cannot take the joke" (p.128) or they are mentally weak. He argues that denials of abuse represent a major social failing.

Although Austin described the on-field racism as "*part of the game*", he stated that his opinion of racism changed when he experienced it directly from a coach. His coach referred to him as a "*monkey*" and used an analogy of him chasing a "*banana*" within drills openly in practice. Austin said that it was commonplace for the coach to say to other players, "*feed the monkey a banana*", and commented that no one reacted negatively to the use of this language. He

recognised that his coach was “*old school*” and spoke to players in a way that wouldn't be accepted in other settings, but he felt that such racist language was unacceptable and this contributed to his decision to leave the club. While campaigns such as ‘kick racism out of football’ have raised concern over racial discrimination, these have a primary focus on a single sport instead of being a global approach to condemning racism across all sports. Burdsey (2007) suggests that even though campaigns have sought to stamp out racism, sport can still provide a hostile environment for ethnic minority groups, a view supported by Austin’s account of his experiences. It would therefore be a mistake to see racism in sport as a thing of the past, as sporadic and emanating from individual prejudices (Burdsey 2011; Lusted 2009). Findings from this study would suggest that athletes from minority groups could experience racism from peers, coaches or spectators and that this is a form of discriminatory maltreatment that athletes could be exposed to. It is acknowledged that only one participant in this sample identified as an ethnic minority and that with a more racially diverse sample the instances of racial abuse may or may not have been higher. Further research on the subject using a different sampling strategy would be illuminating.

The second form of discriminatory maltreatment identified was that based on sexual orientation, also known as homophobia or homonegativity. Alexandra described how through her early career she had fears of people discovering she was gay, of “*being found out*”: this was a source of much anxiety. In her teenage years, she experienced confusion over her sexual orientation, which wasn't helped by the negativity she experienced in the sporting environment. It is acknowledged that sport can provide a hostile climate for sexual minorities such as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered (LGBT) people, or those who do not conform to a normative gender ideology (Kauer and Krane 2012). Shang et al. (2012) describe sport as one of the most homophobic social arrangements and refer to many anecdotal reports that show how sexual minority athletes can be stigmatised or discriminated against through negative stereotypes, social isolation, and harassment. Homophobia in sport is frequently normalised and athletes can be persistently and publically ‘measured’ for their conformity to heterosexist norms and ideals (Messner and Sabo 1994). Kauer and Krane (2012) suggest that although there are more openly lesbian, bisexual and transgender female elite

athletes than ever before, longstanding discrimination against LBT athletes continues. Alexandra recalled that homosexuality was negatively portrayed when she was a younger athlete and that team-mates gossiped and talked negatively about gay athletes:

“When I was younger I remember talking about it, like so and so is a lesbian, it was talked about. But it was so negative, there was one team and they were known for being all gay or mostly gay and I remember that being talked about. Stuff like that team are a bunch of dykes, or it’s just like playing blokes so it’s not fair. At school because I played sport and because I played X (names sport) it was always people saying oh you must be a lesbian, or make sure they don’t turn you into a lesbian. So yes it was negative, I associated being gay with negativity at first.”

The language used by Alexandra’s team-mates and school friends is a clear demonstration of homonegativity, which serves to create a hostile environment for someone growing up questioning their sexuality. She remembered that although she thought she might be gay, in the early years she tried to ignore this and to conform to heterosexual ideals: *“I didn’t want to be another lesbian”* who would be talked about in a negative manner. Symmons et al. (2010) conducted a comprehensive study of LGBT sport in Australia and found that whole teams of players were regarded as lesbians and were subjected to abuse, regardless of the sexual orientation of individual athletes. This whole team approach can be seen in the extract above, which demonstrates that a team or sport can be negatively labelled according to assumed sexual orientation of its members. Brackenridge et al. (2008) believe that homophobia and homonegativism can limit participation in sport and create a climate of fear, mistrust and, in some instances, violence. They further suggest that gay people are subjected to homophobic bullying, including gossip, ridicule and name-calling; physical, sexual and emotional abuse and forcing people to engage in heterosocial activities against their will in the sports environment.

Alexandra recalled how, as her sports career progressed, she continued to encounter episodes of homophobia, even though she wasn't *“out”* as an athlete. Although her close friends knew she was gay she kept quiet through fear of the impact this would have on sponsorship and on people’s perceptions of her.

Alexandra observed that homophobia was not confined to team-mates but also extended to coaches:

“We had an international coach and everyone knew his stance on having lesbians in a team, I think he worried about it having an impact on the dynamics of the team. He especially didn't want to have people on a squad who were in a relationship and that was common knowledge. I think that also made it hard because I certainly didn't want to make this a reason not to pick me.”

Players were aware that one of their coaches didn't think that having lesbians in a team helped the dynamics and was open about his lack of interest in having gay players in his squad. This marks an example of the type of pressure a gay athlete may face to hide this dimension of their identity, out of fear of the impact this could have on their selection or progression within their sport. This is reminiscent of a high profile case in the USA, where in 2005 women's university basketball coach, Rene Portland, had a lawsuit filed against her for discrimination based on sexual orientation. An ex-athlete, Jen Harris, accused Portland of “humiliating, berating and ostracising” her based on the way she looked and because she perceived her to be a lesbian. Harris filed a lawsuit claiming damages for being removed from the programme due to the coach's homophobia (Osborne 2007). At the same time other accounts were provided that suggested that Portland ran a programme with clear training rules: ‘no drinking, no drugs, no lesbians’. In 1986, Portland told the Chicago Sun-Times that she reassured recruits and their parents of her anti-gay convictions, stating: *“I will not have it in my program.”* This continued even after Penn State added sexual orientation to its non-discrimination policy in the early 1990s (Cyphers 2011). The resolution of the lawsuit was settled out of court in 2007: shortly after, Portland resigned. Kauer and Krane (2012) suggest that while there has been a great deal of progress towards increased acceptance of gender and sexual diversity in sport, heterosexual and homonegative climates still persist, a finding supported in this study. As such the contemporary sporting landscape for athletes is diverse and can range from inclusive to hostile.

Clearly more research is needed in order to better understand the impact of discriminatory maltreatment on the basis of sexuality, but Alexandra's accounts point to the presence of homophobia in sport and highlight the damaging impact it

can have on a person's development and enjoyment of sport. Two of the sample openly referred to themselves as being gay, and one of these recalled instances of homophobia. To better explore instances of homophobia in sport, a broader sample of gay athletes would need to be obtained, and this represents an interesting line of inquiry for future studies.

Organisational Maltreatment

Organisational maltreatment refers to abusive or neglectful behaviours experienced by an individual where the serving institution holds responsibility for the behaviour (Kerr and Stirling 2008; Stirling 2009). This type of maltreatment is a new categorical structure of non-relational maltreatment, yet it is critical when examining the structure of organised sport that is ruled by NGBs and the broader objectives of National Institutes of Sport (English Institute of Sport, EIS or UK Sport). Decisions made by these governing bodies can have a direct impact on the individual athlete. Examples of organisational maltreatment include the failure of an institution to meet appropriate standards of care, or when the fundamental or core practices of an organisation could be classed as abusive (Stirling 2009).

As outlined in chapter 5, the structure of sport in the United Kingdom has a direct impact on the delivery of the elite sports programmes and therefore the support structures available to elite athletes. What is evident from this study is that the participants function on a day-to-day basis in the 'bubble' of their own sport; interacting with coaches and other athletes during individual sessions or units of training. The narratives focussed predominantly on this micro-level interaction during daily training and on the process of being an elite athlete, as outlined in the previous chapter. However, when individuals came to question why instances of maltreatment had been allowed to occur, they started to question the broader organisation of their sport. At this stage, participants asked, "*why would they (the NGB) let things happen without questioning it?*" (James) and observed that much of the time as an athlete, individuals are left to cope alone. Megan noted how in elite sport:

"You've got to be able to stick it, and that means putting up with anything that gets thrown at you, even if that means literally thrown at you."

Megan believed that part of the responsibility of the athlete is to be able to withstand or negotiate negative patterns of behaviour in order to demonstrate resilience and that if the coach is the person mistreating the athlete, it would be pointless to complain, as such a complaint would simply be ignored.

Adam was perhaps one of the more vocal participants when it came to questioning the treatment that he had received throughout his Olympic campaign. He expressed anger toward the NGB and UK Sport for the lack of care they took in the planning and organisation of his sport's Olympic preparation. His frustration was magnified due to his entry into the sport through a talent identification programme launched by UK Sport that "*promised the world, hooked us in and trashed us*". His anger is evident in the following extract:

"And what annoys me now is that on the UK Sport Talent Identification website they'll see – eleven Olympians selected from the UK Sport Talent Identification process (names Olympians), you know... Where the fuck were UK Sport when this was happening. They're more than happy like what is it ... fighting chance... Pitch to podium, all this sort of stuff you can go and be one of these guys, it's like, tell them what really happened because you guys brought us into this and this is what I was doing. And from that sleeping on the floor, I couldn't fucking eat, I couldn't afford to live, what am I going to do. This is one of the great travesties of the journey that all these guys have been on no-one knows, no one knows what the hell we did or how hard it was or anything like this. No-one I'm pretty sure even UK Sport hadn't got a clue what we actually did, what we put up with, I mean no one was checking – who the fuck is checking up on the athletes, checking that the programmes are viable or at least safe? When I show people those photos of me sleeping on the floor and all that sort of stuff tell them about how we were trained and treated everyone assumes that you are supported like Chris Hoy is or Jessica Ennis – yeah – I'm Team GB, I'm trying to get to the Olympics – oh wow. You know you're training hard, you've got this ridiculous programme all in place and it's the only people that really know are my close family, my mum and my dad, a few cousins that sort of thing who really know what went on, what really went on."

Adam complained that the popular image of sport represented in the media of the "*top athletes*" fails to reflect the experience of *all* athletes; those who he said struggle every day to financially make ends meet and can be exposed to negative practices within the coaching environment. Adam stated that his team came to breaking point just before an Olympic games and decided to take the story of their

Olympic campaign to the press, however, this was “shut down” by the NGB and players were told they wouldn’t gain selection if they went to the media:

“We weren’t allowed to speak about this because of bringing the sport into disrepute. It got to the point where the guys went – let’s go to the press, it’s a month before the Olympic games, we’ve got all this information now about how shit the process has been and we’re going to go to the press and say – look this is what’s happened, this is ridiculous, kick mud in UK Sport’s face a bit I guess. And X (the captain) kind of lost his nerve on it, he was the captain at the time, he had been sort of whittled down and beaten down by X (names the coach) and all his shit by X (names the performance director) and the problem with all the players and it was just too much, and it kind of broke him a little bit, like he wasn’t the leader that he used to be and he just kind of wanted get to the games and get it done. So we sent a letter off to the board and all this sort of stuff saying how we had a vote of no confidence in the organisation, and then it was like – well let’s go to the media. It’s such a shame because you know X (the performance director) then sent out an email saying – if you go to the press we can deselect you from the Olympic squad on the grounds of bringing the sport in disrepute. So everyone immediately went – OK and stepped down from it and it went no further.”

This is a clear example of the power enjoyed by the sporting organisation and the lack of autonomy afforded to the athlete. The threat of deselection outweighed the benefit of ‘whistleblowing’ and the team “backed down”. There is a sense of hopelessness in the vignette that reflects how little control an athlete enjoys.

Ella also stated that her team felt they lost faith in the system; even when they escalated issues or took concerns to coaches or the NGB, little ever came of it:

“You know even when we did take things further they all just went to ground, disappeared and that was every senior player really in the squad who had stood up and said – we think we’re going the wrong way, and it just got brushed under the carpet. So even when you do raise or escalate issues you feel like they’re easy to shut down, so you know, I think that was the biggest sign of – well I don’t know what we can do, we can only say and then if you’re not going to listen to what you’re players are saying, there’s not a lot more... I don’t know what more we can say. And so then you daren’t say anything (a) because, you don’t want to be the person that’s easy to get rid of because you’re difficult, also then if you’re asked to feed in and then it doesn’t go anywhere it has an impact on your ability to continue to do that. And it makes you very bitter as a player, which is sad. I’m definitely sad on how I feel about international competition.”

The inability to voice concerns over poor practice marred Ella's international career. NGBs offer guidance notes on maintaining and preserving the wellbeing of athletes through the adoption of welfare policies, and statements have been issued by national and international organising committees on abuse in sport (for example, the IOC Consensus statement on sexual harassment and abuse in sport 2007); however Hartill and Prescott (2007) suggest that organisations are barely off the mark in attempting to make the environment a safe one for athletes. The findings from this study perhaps paint an even more worrying picture of organisations that are not willing to address issues of poor practice or maltreatment which serves to nullify any mechanisms in place that could offer an athlete guidance or support. Guidelines are redundant if athletes feel they cannot escalate issues or find that when they do they are shut down or ignored. This could leave an individual feeling trapped in their sport with no choice other than to put up with the treatment or leave.

James observed that his team regained a sense of control once an announcement on the Olympic squad was made. At this stage, the players felt a sense of security they hadn't been afforded in the run up to the games and this enabled them to question the behaviour of the coach and fight back against the NGB on the delivery of the final stages of the programme:

"I remember when...when that announcement was made that was when they lost the power, that was when players said – right I'm in the team, what the hell are you doing and they started talking back and disagreeing, becoming a lot more public with what they had been through."

James explained that once the athletes no longer feared "not making it", they were able to challenge behaviour that they had come to accept throughout their training. The notion of power here is interesting as the participant refers to it as shifting; the pursuit of selection controlled their ability to speak out about the maltreatment they had experienced. Yet once individuals were selected they felt more confident to question practices and stand up to the coach.

Lee Sinden (2012a) states that disciplinary power can have a strong impact on athletes in high performance sport; she suggests that control occurs through the structures in place that work to condition athletes to obey certain commands and

act in relative conformity. She also believes that power in sport functions through the notion of consent and that this consent is developed over time through adapting to the cultural norms of the environment – thus shaping the athletes' perceptions of what is normal or acceptable practice. Consent is interesting in this study as the athletes within this sample are over 18: it could be argued that they are providing consent to their treatment, thus removing responsibility from the organisation and placing it on the athletes themselves. Adams and Kavanagh (2014), however, suggest that consent fails to account for athletes' uncritical acceptance of the norms of an environment, and instead an understanding of a notion of power that shapes individual preference and leads to the willing compliance of individuals may be more fitting for understanding athlete behaviour. The term willing compliance appears to have its origins in management science and was arguably first coined by Elton Mayo and taken further by Chester Barnard as an objective of good management (Clegg 1989). Others since (Lukes 2005; Hay 2002), have taken the idea of willing compliance and located it in the context of power relations, such that it refers to an acceptance of the status quo in a particular instance. Willing compliance therefore relates to individual submission to an impersonal set of principles, and this compliance is achieved through the manipulation of power.

For Lukes (2005), the most credible account of power lies in its ideological nature and involves exercising power by shaping perceptions, cognitions, and preferences in such a way as to ensure the acceptance of a certain role in the existing order. It recognises that power is decision-making, agenda setting and preference shaping (Hay 2002). This aspect of power is exercised when A gets B to do something she otherwise would not do - but is also exercised when A influences or shapes B's preferences; so that B believes the options offered by A are 'a good deal' (Hay 2002, p.178). According to Lukes (2005, p.28), power is "...shaping their perceptions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural or unchangeable". Retrospectively, Lukes has argued that his analysis only really dealt with power as domination, therefore Foucauldian interpretations of power and domination may better explain how power functions in society. Foucault contended that power

cannot be possessed, but is something that is exercised; when exercised it facilitates the communication of identity. Power therefore rises from the bottom up and individuals become the vehicles of power. Shogan (1999) contends that power can exist as relations of power in relationships such as coach-athlete or peer-to-peer relationships. Foucault (1977, pp. 26-27) suggested that:

“Power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those ‘who do not have’ it; it invests them; it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them.”

Thus power is situated in a privileged way. It is not ascribable but circulates through a network of individuals; it is omnipresent; it is in everyone; it is immanent (Rail and Harvey 1995, p.166). Foucault (1977) demonstrated how this form of disciplinary power viewed the body as an object and target of power. The body can be manipulated, shaped, trained to obey; placing it in the grip of strict powers which impose on it constraints, prohibitions and obligations. Lee Sinden (2012a) explains how high performance sport practices utilise these mechanisms of control through imposing morals and values, encouraging a rigorous work ethic and producing docile individuals. Disciplinary power is a type of power that can be used in this context to control individuals and socialise them to accept the norms of the environment.

Foucault’s (1977) description of normalisation comes from his understanding of how the military and penitentiary system gain control of individuals, and this can be used to explain how athletes behave in high performance sport. Lee Sinden (2010) explains how the process of normalisation works by utilising methods to coerce or persuade athletes to accept, without question, the norms of the sport. This has been demonstrated throughout this chapter, whereby the participants referred to abusive practices as a normal part of athletic endeavour. Participants experienced depreciating comments and physically abusive training mechanisms and chose to accept or negotiate such attacks through the understanding that such behaviour is ‘normal’ in this context. Lee Sinden suggests that this process of normalisation works through society and localised systems, such as the HP sport system, through acting upon individuals to conform to the norms of the sport. These norms are then strengthened as the athlete becomes bound up in the entanglements, commitments and obligations of the environment. Stevenson

(2002) uses the image of a fly caught in a spider's web to explain this process of entanglement. Initially the spider may get caught in a single strand of the web, but over time it becomes progressively more entangled and more deeply immersed in the web. This can lead individuals to become thoroughly 'converted' into a subculture. Normalisation is a process by which the environment acts on the individual to shape or regulate them to conform to normal rather than abnormal behaviours.

Adams and Kavanagh (2014) suggest that it is not too far removed to consider HP athletes as employees who enter a programme and become subject to a particular belief system and therefore have to succumb to the principles, practices and processes of that programme as exercised by the agents of control within it (for example coaches or NGB staff). Willing compliance is therefore a normative and rational response to this particular set of culturally determined circumstances and processes, where an individual may rationalise his or her identity, and the acceptance of that identity, in the face of specific norms and values. In this regard willing compliance is further reinforced through non-coercive means with peer pressure being the most dominant, and part of that acceptance is to acknowledge and submit to authority. If this is achieved, then can such subordination ever truly be voluntary as willing compliance implies? It is suggested here that it cannot, rather that the athlete is merely aligning themselves with the structures or systems in place that condition them to conform. As Shogan (1999) argues, when an athlete is simply consenting to the norms of an environment this can create illegitimate power, meaning that the notion of consent becomes misplaced.

This makes the issue of maltreatment in adult athletes extremely complex, especially when trying to ascertain responsibility. This study demonstrates that parents, teachers, administrators, the media and athletes themselves condone abuses of athletes. Many athletes view maltreatment not as abusive or negative but as a required behaviour to achieve success: an accepted part of the coaching process. There perpetuates a culture of silence surrounding maltreatment in sport; the willingness to participate in the sport regardless of the treatment the individual may experience reveals the power relations at play within the environment within which they operate.

Although a thorough exploration of the cultural or political context in which HP sport is delivered is outside of the scope of this chapter, this study provides evidence of the instances of maltreatment an athlete may encounter throughout their career. It is observed that these experiences have the potential to threaten the physical and psychological wellbeing of the athlete. As employers of athletes does the organisation have a responsibility to protect all of their employees from abuse? Could all of the instances of maltreatment that have been reported in this study be classified as organisational maltreatment? It is evident by the lack of research in this area that there is much work to be done in order to fully understand the impact of organisational maltreatment on individuals. Clearly the cultural practices and norms of sport go some way in creating an environment in which athletes can be exposed to various types of maltreatment. The problem perhaps lies in the romantic image of sport that builds character and individual strength through the negotiation of adversity; thus condoning a range of behaviours that could be classed as maltreatment in any other setting and that threaten the rights of the individual (Rhind et al. 2014; Henry 2013; Burke 2001).

Conclusion

The results of this study support the work of other researchers and demonstrate how elite athletes can be particularly vulnerable to maltreatment. Athletes experience a wide variety of maltreatment types in sport, and the findings from this study extend the existing typologies proposed by Stirling (2008) and Raakman et al. (2010). Six types of maltreatment were identified: emotional abuse, physical abuse/FPE, neglect (of which there were four sub-sets), bullying and horizontal violence, discriminatory maltreatment (of which there were two sub-sets identified) and organisational maltreatment. This is the first study to explore the broader experience of maltreatment and as such it has highlighted types of maltreatment that have previously not been examined or identified in the performance setting.

The findings demonstrate that maltreatment can include acts of omission and/or commission, supporting previous definitions outlined in the literature review. It

can incorporate physical, non-physical, verbal and non-verbal behaviours and can lead to physical and or psychological harm. Interestingly participants observed that maltreatment could vary on a continuum from “mismanagement” or failure to manage, to abusive behaviour (see figure 6.1).



Figure 6.1 Mismanagement to maltreatment: A Spectrum of Behaviours

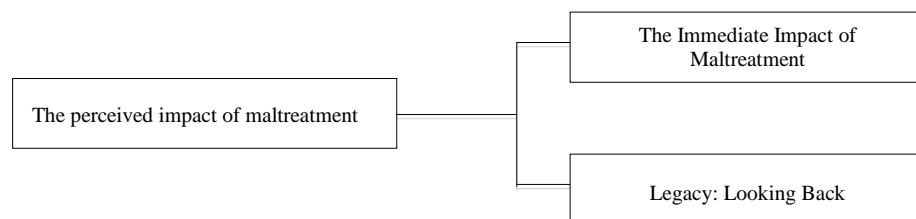
Failure to manage or deal with situations over a period of time, leading to acts of omission, was deemed to have a significant impact on the performer. Thus the distance between mismanagement and maltreatment presents a spectrum of behaviours, which can have a potentially harmful impact on the athlete emotionally, physically and or psychologically. This aligns with the findings of Rhind et al. (2014) who found that poor practice was a form of abuse reported to the CPSU in youth sports settings.

The coach-athlete relationship was recognised as one of the primary sites in which maltreatment occurs; in addition, participants experienced maltreatment in peer-to-peer relationships and from fans or spectators of sport. The findings extend the work of Stirling (2009) and support her contention that maltreatment can be relational or non-relational, but it is argued that her definition of such relationships does not fully represent adult athlete experience. The findings suggest that relational maltreatment occurred when the victim knows the perpetrator in some capacity whilst non-relational maltreatment related to behaviours from perpetrators not known to the individual. Perpetrators of maltreatment can be male or female, and participants experienced abusive behaviours in male-to-male, female-to-female and male-to-female relationships. Participants experienced maltreatment both directly and indirectly, lending support for the work of Raakman et al. (2010) and Kavanagh and Jones (2014). The findings of this chapter advance understanding of maltreatment through identifying and classifying maltreatment types and describing the context in which they occur. Thus this study makes an important contribution and allows a greater insight into this phenomena of maltreatment in HP sport.

CHAPTER 7: The Perceived Impact of Maltreatment

Introduction

This chapter presents the fourth theme and related sub-themes of the thematic framework and explores the *perceived impact of maltreatment*. The narratives demonstrated how participants experienced an *immediate impact* of maltreatment in the moment that it occurred and/or during the weeks or months after. A temporal shift in their perception of maltreatment was also noted: this is termed the *legacy of maltreatment* and refers to participant accounts of the lasting impact of maltreatment. As identified in the previous chapter, the participants experienced a range of maltreatment types. It is also acknowledged that the experience of maltreatment differed across participants. Some experienced maltreatment multiple times throughout their career, while others simply reflected upon one period or instance of maltreatment. Interestingly, whether it happened once or repeatedly, the participants noted similar impacts. Therefore, this chapter will not explore the difference in perceived impact between types of maltreatment and will not serve to grade the severity of treatment. This would not do justice to the methodological approach used and would be impossible to infer given the co-occurring nature of maltreatments experienced. Instead, extracts will be taken from the narratives to explore the perceived impact of maltreatment more broadly, based on the individual appraisal of the treatment; as such this chapter will describe how the individual can experience maltreatment both in the moment and over time.



The Immediate Impact of Maltreatment

Little is known about the impact of maltreatment on the individual in the sporting context. What is known has predominantly focussed on the impact of particular

abuse types, for example, sexual abuse and harassment (Marks et al. 2012; Rodriguez and Gill 2011; Fasting et al. 2007; Fasting et al. 2002; Cense and Brackenridge 2001; Brackenridge 2001) and emotional abuse (Stirling and Kerr 2013; Stirling and Kerr 2008; Gervis and Dunn 2004). Research from other domains such as organisational and interfamilial settings has been used as a guide to infer some of the potential impacts or consequences of maltreatment. However, as Fasting et al. (2007) suggest, the impact could in fact be very specific depending upon the domain examined and the point in the process where the assessment was made. The impact of maltreatment types appears to be extremely broad and can include a range of psychological, behavioural and performance effects within the general population (Bruce et al. 2012; Marshall 2012; Burns et al. 2010; Binggeli et al. 2001). Similarly, physical, psychological and performance consequences have been found in sport (Stirling and Kerr 2013; Marks et al. 2012) where it is recognised that maltreatment can have a significant impact on all aspects of the victim's life. These could range from negative impacts on the athlete's self-esteem and/or confidence, to sleep disturbances and reduced performance on the field of play. The findings from this study will add to the limited literature that has attempted to explore the consequences of maltreatment for an athlete.

Emotional Impact of Maltreatment

Participants stated that the immediate impact of maltreatment was characterised by feelings of anger, frustration, fear and sadness. Charlotte recalled how as a result of the emotional abuse she experienced during her training, she “*tried to hold it together*” during training but how after she “*cried and cried*” and felt emotionally overwhelmed. Similarly, Adam recalled how on his programme, “*like guys were in tears all the time*” as a result of being pushed to extremes in training and of the coaches' negative and abusive behaviour. He experienced emotional shifts from tearfulness to extreme anger over his treatment and the treatment of others in the squad. During the interview, he became visibly agitated when recounting a particular experience and described how the anger and frustration he felt were difficult to contain. Adam commented that “*on the worst*

days”, all he could do was “*hang on in there*” and hope that the treatment would stop or that he would be selected, which would make it all worthwhile.

Numerous researchers have highlighted emotions as an inherent part of the athletic experience (McCarthy 2013; Tamminen and Crocker 2013; Babkes et al. 2012; Campo et al. 2012). While emotions have been difficult to define, it is generally accepted that they may arise when an individual appraises an event as positive or negative in relation to his or her goals (Lazarus 1999). Emotions are directly related to specific stimuli; they are dynamic processes that “unfold, linger and then dissipate over time” (Larsen and Fredrickson 1999, p.42). Frijda (1986) believes that the function of emotions is to signal the meaningfulness of events and situations, and it is recognised that they have physiological, motivational and cognitive consequences for athletes’ participation and performance in sport (Tamminen and Crocker 2013). The experience of an emotion originates from a complex interaction between the person and the environment and it is the cognitive appraisal of this transaction that creates the emotions recognised such as anger, anxiety and fear (Lazarus 2000, 1999).

It is evident in this study that an emotional impact of maltreatment was stimulated in the immediate instance that it occurred. Fasting et al. (2007) explored the impact of sexual harassment in sport and found that athletes reported emotions such as disgust, fear, irritation and anger. Similarly, Stirling and Kerr (2008) reported feelings of emotional disturbance in response to experiences of emotional abuse in sport, which could become more pronounced across the athletic career. Stirling and Kerr (2013) further explored the perceived impact of emotional abuse in a sample of 14 athletes across 9 sports and distinguished emotional shifts in performers (anxiety and anger) as well as broader psychological impacts (impacts on self-efficacy or mood). This study also suggests that emotional and psychological impacts could be separated in order to provide a distinction between the moment-to-moment effects of maltreatment, which manifested themselves as emotions on a court or field and the perception of the on-going impact of maltreatment over time, where athletes experience a broader psychological impact (such as confidence loss or decreased motivation). This broader impact will be explored later in this chapter.

Megan noted that at times she tried to “*play through*” her emotions: at times she found herself on the court with tears streaming down her face trying to keep her focus on the task and “*not let the coach know she had gotten to me*”. At other times, however, the emotion was too strong, and she would leave the court in tears, “*just to get away*”. She recalled how the coach had little concern for her emotional state, which was perceived to stand in the way of performance:

“I can remember sitting there crying, and she (the coach) just walked off and like, she just didn’t care that I was upset or that she was the cause of it.”

The ability to control emotions is an important part of being an athlete and is essential to cope with the demands of training and competition (Lane et al. 2012). However, many participants echoed the words of Megan and stated that in the high performance environment, there is an expectation of resilience; showing emotion demonstrates weakness. Alexandra commented:

“I guess I learned from a young age that crying gets you nowhere in sport, in fact it will probably get you ignored or dropped. So I learned, and where I could I wouldn’t let them see my emotion. I guess it made me grow up quickly and I was quite young to have to work that out.”

Acquiring the capacity to suppress emotional reactions can be viewed as a psychological strength in competition so that athletes keep focused: this is reflected in Alexandra’s account. The participants stated that they utilised a variety of techniques in order to deal with maltreatment in the immediate moment they experienced it, which will be explored more deeply in the following chapter, *coping with maltreatment*. Emotional regulation strategies can be positive in performance settings and can enable athletes to negotiate potential performance stressors (Wagstaff et al. 2012; Lane et al. 2011; Robazza et al. 2004). However, this study demonstrates that the ability to regulate emotions can also be dangerous if the same mechanisms are used to mask negative emotions experienced in an abusive environment. In the short-term, maltreatment has the potential to cause emotional difficulties for performers who are forced to cope with the demands of the environment. The emotional impact of maltreatment was deemed to be significant by the participants, especially as the emotions they experienced were unwanted or thought to demonstrate weakness. Previous research suggests that

individuals in the sporting community glorify athletes who are able to demonstrate resilience or mental toughness (Madrigal et al. 2013; Weinberg et al. 2011; Jones et al. 2002). Further the ability to regulate or manage emotions could force people to put negative emotions aside while they focus on their performance, which could have detrimental effects. Indeed participants acknowledged that over time the emotional toll of maltreatment started to have an impact on how they felt about themselves and their sport and this had a subsequent impact on their performance. Even for those who could control or suppress their emotional reactions in the moment, there was a cost when they were away from the sport.

Psychological Impact of Maltreatment

Over time, participants noted that maltreatment had a direct impact on their mood and left some feeling low or exhausted. Others experienced fluctuations in their self-confidence, lowered self-esteem and increased anxiety; these are described as the psychological impact of maltreatment, a term which will be adopted here to refer to the broader impact of maltreatment over time. Charlotte stated that as a player the treatment she faced became impossible to cope with and that she found it became harder to adopt the attitude of “*just picking yourself up*” and keep playing:

“I felt like the weakest person and it was just really horrible. I remember sinking lower and lower, down and down and down it’s hard if not impossible to keep upbeat and train well with that going on. There is only so much you can block it out... She made me feel weak and like I was rubbish... she just knew everyone’s weaknesses and she would just play on them and she would just pick at them.”

This helpless feeling was echoed by Immy who acknowledged that her treatment made her feel desperate and isolated, unable to manage a situation that was escalating and making her feel ever more unhappy in her sport:

“At the time I did feel quite desperate and I think also for me it was... Everything happened very quickly so you sort of think, God, I should have said something earlier, but before you realise it you’re in a situation and you can’t get out.”

Coping, and the importance of support networks, will be discussed in the following chapter, however, this extract highlights how a negative situation can

lead an athlete to feel trapped and unsure as to who to turn to for support. Alexandra recalled how being maltreated made her want to run away from the environment and how she would be physically sick before training because of her fear of her coach:

“It made me feel like I couldn’t get far enough away from it. Like I never wanted anything to do with that environment. It made me feel so sick and that’s such a shame because playing for your country at any level should be the best experience of your life you should be very very proud of that... But it wasn’t at all it was one of my most unpleasant moments and memories to be honest.”

In addition, she noted that she had difficulty sleeping and switching off whilst away at training camps as they made her feel uncomfortable and frustrated. She recalled feeling desperate at times, yet found it impossible to walk away as she couldn’t find the words to explain to others why she wasn't enjoying playing for her country. Marks et al. (2012) stated that the psychological consequences of maltreatment are often harder to gauge because they are less observable than physical symptoms. However, they highlighted sleep disturbances, fatigue, loss of energy and mood disturbances as potential consequences of sexual abuse and harassment in athletes.

The damaging effect of maltreatment on participants’ self-esteem and self-confidence was also highlighted in the analysis of data. Whilst sport in general has the potential to offer individuals a positive experience leading to enhanced emotional wellbeing, if managed incorrectly, it can lead to feelings of worthlessness and meaninglessness (Baker and Byon 2014; Kavanagh and Brady 2014; Miller and Kerr 2002). Sebastian noted that being maltreated made him feel exhausted and unable to continue with his training and competition schedule. This had an impact on the way he viewed himself and his confidence in his performance:

“It definitely damages your self-esteem. I think you know if you’re given no feedback and you’re not made to feel worthwhile and you’re treated that badly it does become very damaging... It was like, it just burnt me out.”

Similarly Charlotte recounted the negative impact of another athlete's abusive verbal communication during training on her self-esteem. This behaviour left her questioning every aspect of her life, not just her sport:

"I wish I had spoken to someone earlier about it because it has affected me so much and so badly. Not just (names sport) but it feels like it has had an impact on my whole life and everything and how I feel about myself. It has knocked my confidence with everything you know, not just my sport I feel like I am always upset with everything. It makes me blame myself for everything not, I don't know... Like this was every day for three to four months, I'm not just talking once or someone saying something bad that upset me in one training session. It felt relentless... I hated it. You know I love my sport; I wanted to be there even though she was being so horrible I still wanted to be there because I like the sport... But to be honest now I feel like I hate it. I don't even want to play it anymore... Because of the way I've been made to feel. You know I think if someone tells you enough that you are no good at something then you start to believe it."

The above extract demonstrates how far this emotional bullying impacted upon her life outside sport and how this led her to question her continued participation. Wider impacts of maltreatment have been found in sport, workplace and interfamilial settings. For example, Marshall (2012) reported that children can demonstrate sudden changes in behaviour or decreased performance in school work as a result of maltreatment, while Marks et al. (2012) stated that maltreatment can lead to decreased concentration or immersion in a task and negative impacts on scholastic and employment achievements. Charlotte commented that her confidence changed as a direct result of maltreatment, leaving her doubting her ability to perform:

"I was quite confident before but now I feel as if I have had all my confidence ripped out of me. I blame myself for everything even if it's not my fault. I don't really enjoy being at training because of the way I now make myself feel... It's not even coming from someone else now it's like I tell myself those things instead. I am so down on myself, I'm the one putting myself down now and saying the comments she said to me because it was drilled into me that that was what I was doing... So that's what I say to myself now... You know I don't think it's just affected me it's also affected my family because they're upset (athlete starts crying) it's affected my friends cause they can see how much it's affected me. All my friends have told me to quit cause they just know how upset I am and they don't like seeing me like this. I know it sounds crazy but it's how I feel."

Charlotte believed that the negative comments that came from a team-mate soon became so ingrained in her way of thinking that she started to communicate

negatively with herself, and served to reinforce the treatment she suffered. This was echoed by many of the participants who suggested that once their confidence had been knocked they started to doubt their ability to perform, which had wider implications for their performance in training and competition. For some, this had a direct impact on their global self-confidence and a damaging impact on their ability to perform at the level they had been used to obtaining.

Alexandra noted that sport left her feeling like a passive agent whereby as an athlete she felt unable to question the experience she faced; she was left to suffer the consequences emotionally and psychologically:

“In the first game I threaded a pass to the far post and the girl there missed it. I couldn’t help but constantly think that if she had scored everything would have been different – I would have set up the goal and wouldn’t have been the big failure that I was... everything felt so out of my control. I remember being on the bench and the coach looking directly at me and saying, I was going to put you back on, but I actually wanted to win the game. I was honestly broken at that point, like gutted, it’s a feeling I don’t think I could ever even explain but I felt powerless. I felt beaten into submission and this was like the last straw of nastiness. It was beyond coaching, you know, we were picked at and shouted at and torn apart leaving nothing left. On the plane on the way home the assistant coach gave individual debriefs on the seat next to her. When it came to me she put her book down and said “I don’t even need my notes for this one”. She basically told me I wasn’t good enough; I wasn’t what they had expected. I felt so ashamed. She just annihilated me, she said I wasn’t fit enough, my skill level wasn’t high enough just how wrong they had got me and they thought I was a much better player than I was and I had let them down. I cried so much one of the airhostesses took me to the bit by the toilets and gave me a paper bag to breathe into. I was ruined. And then we landed and all of the parents were waiting for us to get off of the plane because it was like yeah the England team are back and I remember seeing my mum looking really really proud and I remember thinking, oh no I felt so awful. I thought, bless her she has no idea, she’s really proud of me yet I’m the daughter who has actually let her down massively and I remember me saying to her can we go, please lets go, lets just go and she just didn’t understand cause she wanted to enjoy it. I just couldn’t get away from there fast enough and that was that.”

Feelings of passivity are also frequently reported in studies that have explored athletes’ experience of sexual abuse or sexual harassment in sport (Fasting et al. 2007; Fasting and Brackenridge 2005); they often occur because the victim feels powerless to confront or speak out, leaving them feeling weak and lacking in autonomy. Alexandra highlighted how as an athlete the impact was so damaging

to her feelings of self-worth that it was easier to conclude that she wasn't good enough for the sport, rather than criticise the behaviour that had led to her feel this way. She found it almost impossible to find the confidence or self-belief to play again; she recalled that it was commonplace for athletes in her squad to be made to feel like they "*weren't good enough*":

"With the England stuff it's very easy to say I couldn't have been good enough because maybe that is the way that I have to rationalise it in my brain because I am the player, but when I think about it I must have been good enough because I was always there, I was selected, so maybe they just didn't know how to deal with me? Or, but I wasn't a high maintenance player not at all, maybe they only knew how to deal with players that were playing well and felt settled and they didn't know how to deal with players that perhaps needed a little more confidence? I should never have walked away feeling like I wasn't good enough because I was. I just, in my brain it's probably just the way I have compartmentalised it, not good enough for England and that's probably just the way I have comforted myself with it, probably."

Representing ones country as a sports performer should be something that is marked by feelings of pride, satisfaction and achievement, however, Alexandra's account demonstrates that an emphasis on performance objectives and negative or abusive treatment can mar this experience. Coach outbursts, hostility and hyper-criticism all have the potential to damage the athlete and leave them doubting their ability to perform. In the case of Charlotte, this had a wider impact to her feelings of self-worth outside of sport, demonstrating that it is difficult if not impossible to separate the athlete from the person.

The participants highlighted that maltreatment led to disturbances in their mood over time. McCarthy (2011) states that mood disruptions differ from emotional changes. Moods typically last longer (hours, days, weeks) and can be objectless in contrast with emotions, which have an object, for example, when a person is angry they are usually angry at something. Therefore, mood disturbances can lead to enduring problems. Adam noticed episodes of depression both in himself and his team-mates as a result of their treatment. He recounted that he "*sort of got lost in it all, depressed with it, like what are we doing here, why are we giving up so much to be treated like this?*" This had a particular impact on his mood and at times he struggled to "*pick himself up out of it.*" Further he stated that it became

even harder to justify being away from friends and family when the environment was so challenging and “*getting people down.*”

The term depression can be used to reflect both negative affect (i.e. depressed mood) and psychiatric disturbance (i.e. major depression). However, Newcomer-Appaneal et al. (2009) suggests that there are important distinctions between depressed mood and major depression. They state that a depressed mood is a transient state of feeling sad or down, whereas major depression is a medical condition consisting of an array of symptoms beyond merely depressed mood. It is acknowledged that participants referred to lowered mood as a result of maltreatment rather than the diagnosis of clinical depression; yet this could be a precursor to conditions classified as serious mental health concerns, recognised as a potential consequence of maltreatment in other settings. Participants stated that they were constantly justifying to themselves why they should continue competing and recollected that they had to manage low mood and negative feelings associated with poor treatment. The following comments from Adam reflect how athletes are pushed to the edge both physically and mentally:

“After training we’d go back to our rooms which were literally boxes with a bed, and there’d be two of us in there and we were just like looking at walls, watching paint dry, then we’d wait, wait, wait, go and eat then go back and train. So you’re trying to push yourself as far as you could go, and there were days when you’re just like – you haven’t had a good training session or you haven’t improved or maybe training got cancelled or you had to put up with a massive amount of shit from the coach. You’re not moving forward, you’re not moving your life forward, you’re not studying because you can’t afford to or you haven’t got the resources to, you’re not playing because of whatever reason and you’re in (names country) thinking – why. It does get to you massively. Just the sheer monotony of what you’re doing. I remember one of my team-mates was getting pretty down, I used to look at him and I’d be on Facebook or doing something to entertain myself. He would just be staring, staring at the wall and he was like he was going crazy, he was literally just staring, like our two beds were lined up on the wall, we had a divider between us, I’d be on one end, he’d be on the other and I’d get up and he’d be sat there like that staring up at the wall. So it was just pushing us to extremes in terms of our wellbeing really when you look at it, like it had a major impact on our mental and physical wellbeing.”

The account demonstrates that athletes experience dips in their mood, which can lead to feelings of depression or isolation. Similarly, Immy suggested that this

helpless feeling led to hypersensitivity and to an inability to control or regulate her emotions:

“I went through a period when I felt very down, I felt very emotional about things and I was due to go away to Slovakia for three weeks and the thought of that was getting me quite depressed to be honest. Yes, I had this period where I just felt really down, I didn’t really want to do that and I did lose a bit of weight during that period.”

The participant narratives demonstrate that negative feelings such as low mood or heightened anxiety can be exaggerated if the individual is experiencing maltreatment, as they may be even less likely to seek support to help them cope. Some of the participants recalled that they had to try and work through the lows in order to keep going through some of their darkest experiences. For others, maltreatment became the reason why they walked away from sport or could no longer cope with the psychological toll it was taking. Participants referred to the need to step away from their sport completely in order to create some distance. This may involve leaving a team or walking away from international competition, or in the worst instance giving up their sport completely. The following extract from Ella shows how she reached a point where she simply didn't know how to carry on:

“I, at that stage was just like – I’m stopping, I didn’t know if I could continue after this any way, so I wasn’t even sure that I had a goal, if was going to carry on next season let alone through the rest of the summer so I probably to be honest didn’t really handle it very well and probably didn’t train very well that summer, I couldn’t emotionally deal with it any more so I stopped playing for a season.”

Ella recalled how quitting international competition was one of the hardest decisions she had ever had to make, yet she felt she had no resources left to help her cope with the treatment she faced. Similarly Alexandra stated that she would *“play for England, be treated poorly, perform badly and then get dropped”*. She would then regain her confidence and perform well at club level and be reinstated as an international athlete. Over time this became exhausting and she felt that emotionally it was easier to step away from international sport than continue to cope with the emotional and psychological fall out from this cycle of events.

The psychological impact of maltreatment can also extend to the way in which the athlete is made to feel within a training group and can involve feelings of

alienation, separation and isolation (Parent 2011; Kirby et al. 2000). Participants referred to feelings of both togetherness and isolation: Maltreatment had the potential to make people work together and create a sense of solidarity; alternatively it could leave them feeling like an outsider, deprived of community. Solidarity was deemed to be a *coping* mechanism whereby sticking with others even in the most negative circumstances created a sense of community. This acted as a buffer to the impact of maltreatment as individuals could share their upset with others and avoid feelings of marginalisation (this will be explored in the following chapter, *coping with maltreatment*). Conversely, the psychological impact of maltreatment was seen to intensify if the individual believed that they were being singled out or were in some way treated differently from others. The experience of exclusion was highlighted by participants who stated that being maltreated can lead to feelings of loneliness and alienation. Whether actual or perceived, the isolation seemed to intensify the emotion attached to the situation and fuelled psychological impacts such as lowered self-confidence or self-esteem. As Alexandra recalled:

“It made me feel alone, like I was the only person who was sat on the outside. You know like the kid left out in the playground that sort of feeling. It made me feel powerless and weak... Vulnerable almost. The one who would be easy to get rid of, and I remember not knowing what I could do to make it better.”

Similarly Charlotte referred to the loneliness she felt upon being singled out by her team-mates and being made to feel like an outsider or in some way different from the others in her training group. She explained how this had a profound effect on her enjoyment of her sport and her confidence outside of it. Alexandra noted that:

“My team-mates felt sorry for me I knew that they felt sorry for me. They could obviously see that I was being marginalised and it was really horrible.”

Nevertheless, the sense of exclusion she experienced was felt to be unbearable, and her team-mates' pity only served to compound the feeling.

Austin stated that he couldn't understand how players on his team tolerated racist language toward an opponent even though they had black athletes on their team. In addition he found it even more distressing that players were willing to ignore

racist remarks from a coach toward black players on their team. This left him feeling alone and unsupported within a team environment. Separation, described as the feeling that the athlete was the only one going through a negative experience, tended to intensify their negative responses, whereas a shared negative experience was more bearable:

“I would still rather have collectively hated my coach than have had pockets of people who were loving their coach and others being treated like outsiders. The fear of my coach but knowing that everyone else was frightened of him was much more comforting than the other side, which was that some people loved their coach but that coach was also ignoring other people. X (names coach) ignored everybody. He didn’t like anybody, but we all knew where we were, and yeah he should never have been allowed to be as nasty as he was to us. But at least even with his vileness we knew where we stood.”

This perhaps highlights the complexity of the experience of maltreatment and its impact: feeling isolated can intensify the emotional, psychological and performance impacts of maltreatment in sport. This study thus adds to existing research that has attempted to identify the psychological impacts of maltreatment (Stirling and Kerr 2013; Fasting et al. 2007; Fasting and Brackenridge 2005; Cense and Brackenridge 2001).

The Impact of Maltreatment on Performance

Maltreatment can be seen to have a significant impact on athletic performance in both training and competition. Participants referred to heightened anxiety, lowered confidence in performance and a decreased motivation to train and compete. Having to second guess the mood of the coach or feeling afraid of what the training session would bring – be it physically or emotionally abusive behaviours - provoked an anxiety response and further compounded problems of lowered self-confidence. James recalled how he was worried about the repercussions of making mistakes and how this changed his mindset in performance from playing with ease to over-analysing everything he did:

“I was ready to walk out of the sport. I was quite happy to move home and just start again, I was not interested in playing for him. It didn’t make me want to play for him, if I was on the court I was worried about... I wanted to play well and when I played well it was all fine, but if I made a mistake, even just one mistake in a game, I was worried what the repercussions of that would be in training next week, and I would think about that during games which is not... Now when I think of a game, I’m

thinking – right, how am I going to win a point, how am I going to beat them, that was how I felt, but that year as I said, he broke me down properly so I was on my heels rather than on my toes to go after the games. So it was quite tough.”

Sebastian also noted that the maltreatment he faced made him self-conscious about his performance:

“You become self conscious about your own performance all the time, so I felt like I was always over analysing and always chasing myself to do better, which I guess you could say in sport is the reality. That’s just the nature of the beast, unfortunately that is sport, but I think this compounded that... It’s hard to then justify your existence in a team sport, you know, you always, the pressure’s always there, I would say it adds more pressure because you’re always trying then to stick your neck out to do something extraordinary to get noticed.”

He recounted that his coach would ignore him or be emotionally abusive and this meant he had to work harder to be noticed; he was permanently seeking approval. This resulted in heightened anxiety surrounding competitive matches and negative decision making under pressure. Adam stated that this increase in anxiety response left players on his team feeling mentally exhausted:

“We all felt exhausted. Mentally exhausted, like it makes you feel very nervous as well, because you’ve gone from a place of confidence where you know you can rock up to anywhere and repeat that same thing, then suddenly you’re thinking very consciously about everything, so it’s gone from very sub-conscious to very conscious when it used to be very automatic.”

There is evidence that a deterioration of performance under pressure can occur as a consequence of attentional disturbances, caused by heightened anxiety (Beilock and Gray 2007). Masters (1992) referred to over analysis of performance as the consciousness-processing hypothesis and explained how performance can deteriorate as a direct consequence of athletes reinvesting and trying to gain conscious control over a skill that would normally be performed automatically. In addition, distraction theories maintain that under stressful conditions athletes’ attentional capacity can be overloaded by task-irrelevant stimuli such as worry or self-doubt (Hill et al. 2009), which can lead to performance decrements. James pointed to the impact that additional pressure placed on performers; in his team people either crumbled or learnt to deal with the behaviour of the coach. The call of the Olympics meant that he needed to learn how to adapt and perform even in the most negative of circumstances:

“There were players that under performed because they couldn’t deal with his pressure. Some players bottled, some players left, I mean some players just said – right, I’m not going to try and make the Olympic squad because I can’t deal with that coach.”

James highlights the importance of coping skills in order to deal with maltreatment, however, unfortunately these did not alleviate the pressure for all athletes. Megan suggested that the behaviour of the coach had the potential to create a self-fulfilling prophecy, as players were repeatedly told they didn’t “*want it enough*”, or had a poor attitude to training or were told they were worthless and didn’t deserve a place on an international squad. In this instance, people started to assume the labels they were given by the coach and felt helpless to challenge them:

“It was kind of she would tell them enough that they had a bad attitude in training and they were not giving enough and they’re not doing this, and it did actually become that they did start feeling shit and then they would start coming into training sessions and not feel great, so it didn’t help their performance, then they would just get more anxious and more upset, it was a permanent mental battle – her v us.”

Megan believed that an environment where individuals are consistently made to feel inferior could eventually take a psychological and performance toll. She explained how only the strongest coped in her team; others who couldn’t handle the coach simply left the squad and gave up the sport.

The pressure that some of the participants experienced had a negative impact on performance in matches as well as on motivation to train and turn up to practice on a daily basis. Conversely and perhaps somewhat surprisingly, some participants described maltreatment as a driving force that drove them to be more successful and work harder “*in spite of the coach*” (James). Participants recalled feeling driven to train and refine their skill in order to avoid negative repercussions. Additionally, participants referred to not being beaten by the negative treatment, to a desire to prove to the coach that they deserved their place on a squad or team. Adam recalled that:

“I think that’s still something that frustrates me today. I carried on training because I didn’t want him to think that he had beaten me, you know you should never give up. I wasn’t going to let him beat me.”

James referred to “*playing for pride*”, which was echoed by Ella who stated that her treatment drove her to prove her coach wrong, to show that she wasn't worthless:

“Even if it's in a negative way and being like – I'm going to prove you wrong, it's still there and that was what most of mine was, it was about proving them wrong, that they'd got it wrong, and even when I came back from that final half season that I did, it was about proving them wrong.”

She reflected that this was a negative extrinsic motivator, a reflection of the hold that the treatment had over her:

“When you're playing to prove something to someone else then you lose the reasons that you started doing it for in the first place which is to be yourself, and the enjoyment of a game, which is when you play your best. I played some of my best (names sport) after I'd given up on the international game.”

Interestingly she recalled enjoying her sport again once she retired from international competition. Participants seemed to agree that they played at their best when relaxed and in the moment and not dwelling on mistakes or worrying about the repercussions of a poor performance.

Readdy et al. (2014) state that understanding motivation is a complex yet fundamental task and they believe that self-determination theory (SDT, Deci and Ryan 2000, 1985; Ryan and Deci 2007, 2002) is one of the most comprehensive frameworks for conceptualising motivation. Previous research has distinguished forms of motivation and considers three important constructs that are deemed to be of central importance to SDT: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation. Intrinsic motivation concerns the desire to perform an activity purely for the satisfaction and pleasure it produces (Readdy et al. 2014). In contrast amotivation refers to a relative absence of motivation and therefore no desire to engage in the behaviour (Gillet et al. 2010). Between these two forms of motivation lies extrinsic motivation, whereby behaviour is regulated through expectant outcomes (Lonsdale et al. 2009).

Deci and Ryan (2000, 1985) posited four types of extrinsic motivation: external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation and integrated regulation. External regulation is the least self-determined form of motivation and occurs

when an athlete participates to satisfy an external demand such as to obtain rewards or avoid punishment. Introjected regulation refers to taking part to avoid feelings of guilt or shame or to enhance feelings of self-worth. Identified regulation occurs when the athlete participates to realise benefits he/she deems personally important. Integrated regulation is the most self-determined and is present when the athlete engages in the behaviour because it is deemed to be coherent with their identity and deeply held values (Adie et al. 2012; Lonsdale et al. 2009; Deci and Ryan 2002; Deci and Ryan 2000; Deci and Ryan 1985). External regulation and introjected regulation have been described as non-self-determined or controlled regulatory styles, whereas identified regulation and integrated regulation are considered self-determined or autonomous (Deci and Ryan 1987). It is suggested that the more people are intrinsically or extrinsically motivated in a self-determined manner, the more positive their cognitive, behavioural and affective outcomes (Readdy et al. 2014).

Deci and Ryan (2002) suggests that socio-contextual factors can influence human motivation by affecting three basic and innate psychological needs of autonomy, competency and relatedness. In turn, intrinsic and self-determined motivation is more likely to occur when individuals' three basic needs are satisfied; when needs are thwarted the athlete is likely to have been controlled. Environments that foster and satisfy these needs have been labelled autonomy supportive and offer choice, support individual volition, minimise pressure and control and acknowledge negative feelings (Ntoumanis and Standage 2009). Therefore, motivation can be autonomous or controlled, self-determined or non-self-determined depending on the individual's degree of internalisation versus compliance (Deci and Ryan 2000). It is proposed that autonomous forms of regulation result in more adaptive outcomes such as effort, persistence and performance (Vallerand 2007; Mageau and Vallerand 2003) when compared with those that are controlled. Autonomy support is part of the motivational climate in which the activities take place; the behaviour of coaches and other key individuals significantly contribute to this climate. Variations in the psychological environment created by significant others (such as the coach) and their impact upon athletes' motivational processes are key determinants of the quality of sport engagement and can influence whether participation leads to positive and/or maladaptive outcomes (Balaguer et al. 2012).

Unfortunately, as the vignettes demonstrate, competitive sport appears to lend itself to a controlling climate. This study suggests that the athletes are controlled and compliant rather than self-determined. As Stirling and Kerr (2013) suggest, it is possible that maltreatment may initially increase an athlete's motivation to produce their best efforts in training out of fear of reprisal or rejection. However, over time the emotional and/or psychological effects of such abuse may build, reducing the athlete's enjoyment and interest; as a result motivation to train to the best of their ability declines. Conroy and Coatsworth (2007) believe that the functional significance of autonomy-supportive climates is that individuals feel that their behaviour originates from and expresses their true selves as opposed to being a response to external pressures or demands. As can be seen from the quotes above, participants felt that their motivation was controlled by the demands of the coach and the fear of reprisal for poor performances or mistakes in training. This could mean that the participants were functioning in a non-self-determined environment, and this can have consequences for their motivation. Although this drove some to work harder, it led to negative feelings about the training environment and the sport itself. This suggests that maltreatment could have potentially negative consequences for an athlete's motivation, self-determination and basic psychological need fulfilment.

Overall the results demonstrate that athletes may experience a range of performance effects as a result of maltreatment. Participants experienced performance decrements due to heightened anxiety and feelings of fear associated with coach control. In addition, this study explored the impact of maltreatment on motivation to train and compete and identified how the environment can control an individual and reduce their autonomy. Worryingly, it was also demonstrated that problems with performance, reduced mood and unhappiness can eventually lead an individual to drop out of sport.

Legacy: Looking Back

The term legacy is used here to refer to the long-term or lasting impact of maltreatment. How it affected participants during their career and how it continued to affect them in their life. This reflection relied upon distance from the

sport in the form of time (an actual break from sport) or through space away from it (time off for recovery and recuperation). For some, the interview process provided an opportunity to reflect upon their career and to examine the shifts and changes that come over time. Immy articulated the impact of distance from her sport within the following extract:

“I guess, when you are younger you can kind of go along with the situation, you kind of don’t realise where you’re at until you have time to reflect. I think that’s the thing with sport, you’re so involved in it at the time you don’t get that opportunity to stand out of the situation to reflect on it. So, it’s only now that I’m a bit older you know, for ages I just didn’t want to have anything to do with X (names sport), and it’s only now that I kind of think – I wonder what, if I’d done this or if I’d gone to the States and taken that opportunity, or how far I would have got with it if I hadn’t walked away. Because for a long period after I didn’t want to talk about it or anything to do with it, I didn’t ever want to think about what I could have done.”

She recollected that when competing, athletes can become so engulfed that they have little time or space for reflection. It wasn't until she stepped away that she considered the immediate and wider impact of her treatment and explored why she failed to do anything to challenge it as a performer. She coped with this through failing to imagine what she could have achieved if she had continued to compete. This points to the significant lasting impact that maltreatment can have on an athlete, who competed at the highest of standards and felt unable to talk about her experience to anyone.

Some of the emotional and psychological impacts already referred to were reiterated when considering the legacy of maltreatment, demonstrating the pronounced consequences that negative treatment can have both in the short and long term. The lasting impact of maltreatment echoed across the narratives as participants referred to damaging and lasting consequences for feelings of self-worth and self-confidence. Participants mentioned feeling *affected* (Charlotte) and *damaged* (Ella) in some way by their experience. Stark (2007) used a theory of coercive control in relation to intimate partner violence, which may account for this long-term impact on confidence. They assert that the on-going experience of physical and/or psychological violence can erode an individual’s confidence or sense of self and his or her sense of agency. Ella further described how her

treatment left her feeling empty and sad about her time competing internationally and how this marred what other athletes might consider a successful career:

“It makes you very bitter as a player which is sad. I’m definitely sad on how I feel about international X (names sport), I haven’t been to reunions since because I don’t think I could which is bizarre, and it’s such a long period of your life you do it for, I mean I was involved for seven years or something like that, so yes, it’s... I guess it’s a real shame, I definitely wish I felt more positive about my international career.”

Like Immy, Ella chose to cope by avoiding speaking up. She wanted to avoid “*digging up*” the hurt and pain that she associated with international performance. The narrative interview marked the first time that she had spoken to anyone about how being maltreated made her feel both at the time and since her retirement.

Adam stated that he remained angry about his treatment in the run up to an Olympic games and the lack of support provided to cope with what he referred to as “*the fall out*” afterward. This anger was long lasting; he felt it “*bubble up*” when he thought too much about his time training and competing. Adam believed that the training regime his team had been exposed to had resulted in the career-ending injury he sustained, but thinking about “*placing blame*” only left him more angry and unable to concentrate on the elements of the experience that were life-changing for positive reasons: he didn't want to be bitter about his experience. However, he explained that positive reflection was only possible because he made it to the Olympic games, making it all worthwhile. Part of coping for these participants seemed to be the process of rationalising the treatment they had experienced (this will be discussed further in the following chapter *coping with maltreatment*). It is important to note that this process of rationalisation has an effect on the perceived long-term impact of maltreatment. Those who viewed their career as successful or who felt they had managed to negotiate instances of maltreatment seemed more equipped to deal with the chronic or lasting effects of the experience. Like Adam, they could always counter a negative emotion with a positive memory. Conversely, those who dropped out of sport or failed to deal with the treatment recalled a more negative or longer term impact and stated that the treatment had affected them not just in their sport but beyond too.

As mentioned previously, there is little work available which outlines the reactions to maltreatment over time in sport. Fasting et al. (2007) believe that more knowledge is needed on the personal, emotional and behavioural responses to abuse as the symptoms may persist long after the abuse ends and could be linked to clinical distress. It is agreed in general child abuse literature that the long-term sequelae of maltreatment are both significant and harmful. Child maltreatment is thought to have pronounced negative consequences for the emotional, cognitive, physical and behavioural development of children and can be harmful to a child's wellbeing and long-term development (Bruce et al. 2012; Burns et al. 2010; Stark 2007; Arias 2004; Leahy et al. 2004). However, the focus here is usually on children who have been abused during significant developmental years. Perhaps more appropriate to this study would be those findings related to the long-term implications of intimate partner violence, which occurs in adulthood. Similarly, the long-term impacts are varied and depend upon the individual experience. It is suggested that intimate partner violence/abuse can lead to a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of the individual, high rates of mental and physical health problems, issues with cognitive functioning such as concentration and memory problems which can affect performance in work or education (La Flair et al. 2012; Banyard et al. 2011; Banyard et al. 2009; Campbell et al. 2002). Thus the impacts are diverse and serious.

In sport, research has focused on the impact of sexual abuse and/or harassment and emotional abuse. Parent and Bannon (2012) suggest that maltreatment can result in various impacts depending on the context in which the behaviour took place, the events surrounding the abuse and the athlete's experience in disclosure of their treatment. Research that has explored sexual abuse and harassment in male and female athletes has suggested that long-term damage can be more pronounced or serious than short-term impact (Cense and Brackenridge 2001). More specifically, Stirling and Kerr (2013) highlighted that athletes can experience significant psychological effects as a result of emotional abuse in sport. Parent (2011) stated that sexual abuse experienced by athletes can result in serious consequences in physical and emotional health and can have a significant impact on sports performance (either through forcing the individual to retire, or make unnecessary changes or disruptions to their training or lead to performance

decrements). The impact of sexual assault or attempted sexual assault was articulated by Kirby et al. (2000, p.96) who stated that this form of maltreatment had a profound impact on athletes in both the short and long term:

“For many, it changed how they behaved in sport and in their day-to-day lives. Athletes found ways to take care of themselves by not associating with the perpetrators, by changing the training routine, by changing personal behaviour to become more professional, or by changing the situation or location so that they would be less at risk. Several athletes continue to have long-term personal problems. They sought psychotherapy/counselling, refused media interviews, lost interest in sport and/or remained unable to deal with the experience and are now violent and temperamental.”

Although the studies that have examined the negative impact of maltreatment in sport differ, they all agree that it can have significant negative impacts. Some of the potential consequences noted include reduced self-confidence; emotional instability; poor performance consistency and a break down in performance; development of mood disorders such as major depression or anxiety problems; post traumatic stress disorder; problems with alcoholism or other addictive tendencies; diminished ambition; returning anger, guilt, shame, fear and sadness surrounding treatment (Stirling and Kerr 2013; Hartill 2012; Marks et al. 2012; Parent and Bannon 2012; Parent 2011; Rodriguez and Gill 2011; Fasting et al. 2007; Stirling and Kerr 2007; Leahy et al. 2004; Cense and Brackenridge 2001; Kirby et al. 2000; Cleary et al. 1994). With the findings being limited to emotional abuse and sexual abuse, it is clear that this may only provide a starting point for understanding the impact of maltreatment on athletes. The immediate physical impact of FPE and physical abuse was outlined in chapter 6 (being maltreated), yet the long-term consequences of consistent over-training and the impact this could have on an athlete's body can only be inferred and many of the participants may not know this impact until they are older. In addition, the impact of neglect, bullying or other types of maltreatment could differ from those mentioned above. It is clear that more work on specific maltreatment types and their potential impact needs to be conducted in order to fully understand the individual legacy that maltreatment can leave. However, this study suggests that the cost could be significant.

The adoption of a narrative approach captured change in the impact of maltreatment over time. The data indicate that the participants experienced maltreatment differently depending upon the stage of athletic development, and that the experience of maltreatment changed as their careers progressed. The athlete biographies allowed for a temporal frame of reference where individuals could recount their experience and compare it with their earlier or later career. It was evident from the interview data that during their early career or at the peak of their performance, athletes may be more willing to accept maltreatment as a natural part of the performance environment and as part of the training process. Participants referred to frustration over their inability to speak up or deal with the situation when they were in, which possibly compounded the situation or at least allowed it to go on for longer. This realisation seemed to spark a range of emotional reactions including visible anger (“*I don't know why the fuck I kept my mouth shut*”: Adam), to emotional upset or discomfort. Charlotte stated that at the time she didn't know how to speak to anyone about what she was experiencing:

“I think at this point I was just so upset I couldn't talk to anyone. If I spoke to someone then in some way it would have made it more real and impossible to deal with on a weekly basis if that makes sense? I don't know. Maybe it's the kind of person that I am? I prefer to keep things to myself rather than talk to people I wish I had spoken to someone earlier about it because it has affected me so much and so badly.”

On reflection, Charlotte believed that keeping quiet and trying to cope alone were among the reasons for a lasting impact both on her sport and her private life. This highlights the importance of support networks for athletes and the need to create an open environment where they feel they can discuss and manage their experiences in and through sport.

James recalled that in his team, one of the reasons people stayed quiet was out of fear of being de-selected, an opinion echoed by many participants:

“No, we were in a situation where a lot of us felt the same, but we knew he had a CV and that's something... So for that we didn't know really how to deal with him or whether it was just that's how it was, so for those two years whilst we were in the development squad we just kept our heads down because we were chasing a dream. You know it's tough to say – right we're going to shout at the coach and disagree with him and try and get him fired, because if you're the only one and nobody stands up behind

you then you're the one out because you won't be wanted in that team any more and that's your dream gone. So you're in a tough situation because you don't want to single yourself out as – you hate the coach or, you know a lot of us would feel it, but if I said it and my competition for my place was also there. Well would you say it, probably not. So you're in a tough place. It was quite funny looking back on it now because the situation in the Olympics was, it was ridiculous and it should never have got to that point, he should have gone before, the players should have spoken up, but because like I said, you can't speak up in those situations not unless the whole team are solid and they do not break. And when you're fighting for that Olympic spot where you probably won't ever get that for your sport in your lifetime as a player, nobody's going to speak up... You don't want to muck up that chance, so you do everything possible to do your job, and any knocks and bruises you get on the way is part of the job, and that was the attitude we all had. We grinded and grafted all the way through and it was a race for those twelve to get to the finish line, and if you wanted to stick your neck on the line and say something be my guest, but I wasn't going to put my place at risk, I could handle the coach by the end of it and I knew how to deal with him."

Adam supported this, stating that this fear controlled players and prevented them from speaking their mind:

"Can I tell you I think you're being a fucking prick? If I actually tell you what I'm really thinking you're going to chop me, I'm out, so no-one has the balls to do it, and it happens in all teams."

In his team, players took their anger out on the court, or they suppressed it. They provided examples of times where players on their team were "chopped" (Megan) as a result of questioning behaviour, and this served to reinforce the importance of keeping quiet. Alexandra recalled how standing up to her coach resulted in her deselection from the team:

"No-one speaks up cause no one wants to get dropped. No one wants to be the one. I rocked the boat and I got dropped. My friend then who was a teacher said I've just learnt something from you, don't ever challenge the coach. Oh my god, so no one wanted to be like me, and not be going to Poland or wherever we were going to. Cause I asked a question and I'm not in the team anymore. What I am now is a whiney person who isn't on a team anymore and it then it becomes just too easy to say well X got dropped don't listen to her, sour grapes. People don't question because they don't not want to be in the team anymore."

Similarly Megan believed that speaking up led to her deselection from an Olympic squad; her confidence to question treatment, even once or twice, was seen as threatening to coach control:

“I did kind of challenge it a couple of times, because obviously, being the person I am, like I let it happen and she’d get to me, I’d take it on the chin and she’s do it again and again, but obviously there were times when I just cracked.”

The extracts demonstrate the powerful message conveyed to athletes by those having the strength to speak up; athletes who want to be selected to the line and accept anything the sport throws at them. Frustration over keeping quiet was lasting. The system denied them a voice and forced them to be passive agents simply working towards selection or major competitions. When looking back, participants wished they had been able to do or say more to protect themselves and those around them. Kavanagh and Brady (2014) assert that in sport there can be an over-riding emphasis on practices that render the athlete passive agents in relation to their own treatment and circumstance and this can result in feelings of disempowerment and a lack of control over individual destiny. Lenskyj (1992) claims that even the most assertive people rarely question the coach’s authority or challenge manipulative or abusive behaviour.

Silence over maltreatment was found across all of the interviews. This study therefore highlights athletes’ fear of confronting negative circumstances. It wasn’t until participants achieved some distance from their sport that they realised how unhealthy their silence had been. There was a sense of regret over keeping quiet about abuse, and a need to justify why this seemed like the only option under the circumstances. Cense and Brackenridge (2001) stated that many athletes simply do not know how to disclose instances of abuse. Therefore abuse usually only stops when the athlete leaves their sport, receives support or is empowered to come forward. Parent (2011) suggests that there remains a ‘culture of inaction and silence’ (p.328) surrounding the disclosure of abuse, therefore athletes face a number of barriers in the reporting of specific events or instances. These include key stakeholders (including athletes) minimising or trivialising the problems experienced by victims, victims being blamed for the acts perpetrated against them and lack of awareness on the part of all key stakeholders as to how to deal with issues of abuse. Fasting et al. (2007) suggest that the reason why people are reluctant to make formal complaints is because they feel it won’t accomplish anything. They also note a common fear of deselection from a team or training

squad, as echoed in this study. Rhind et al. (2014) note that significant changes have taken place in relation to safeguarding in sport in the UK since the introduction of the CPSU. However, in their study exploring safeguarding cases across 50 NGBs, of the cases reported (652) only 11 % related to cases whereby the victim was over 18 years. The work undertaken by the NSPCC's CPSU is focused on those under the age of 18, and this raises concerns for the safeguarding of adult athletes. The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that athletes are either unwilling to report instances of abuse or do not know how to do so. It is therefore imperative that NGBs recognise the broader scope of safeguarding that needs to account for both male and female athletes, under and over the age of 18 years.

Feelings of regret didn't haunt all of the participants; instead some mentioned how as their career progressed, they became more confident about fighting back. For example, both Megan and Alexandra highlighted a temporal shift in their ability to question or rebel against the status quo. Alexandra recalled how:

"I had had enough of the way she was treating me and actually probably I was too strong for her to cope with. At an under twenty one level I would never have answered her back but when I was what twenty seven, twenty eight years old I wasn't having any of that. She then got rid of me because that probably made me too much to handle and I didn't care... I was all of a sudden probably a threat to her, and she probably saw me and thought I was challenging her, and I dared to ask questions which meant I was standing up to her. That experience was small fry to me when I was twenty-eight years old, it upset me because it frustrated me, but not because it hurt me or she had hurt me. But when I was twenty years old I had never dealt with somebody like my England under twenty one coach and when I was sixteen years old I had never had somebody yelling at me like that before you know you don't have that at school and you don't have that at home if you are lucky. So you're not used to people yelling at you and you're not used to them playing these mind games with you so when I encountered X (the coach) at whatever age I was, you know it didn't bother me because I had seen that behaviour in the past and I knew it was nothing personal it was just her problem in fact she was just someone who was a bit of a nutter. But when you're younger you don't know that and you haven't seen it and you can't cope with it. You don't know how too. You know when I was younger I had less, it was my main focus, as I've got older its a nice to have. It's not, it doesn't define me, whereas when I was younger it was a really really big part of who I was. You get to the stage where you realise it's just a game and that's maybe an age thing, maybe that's a life experience thing maybe that's just I'm old, not old but maybe I know realistically the level that I can reach so I'm not chasing anything.

But if someone had treated me like she had treated me when I was younger, I probably wouldn't have played anymore. If I had been a sixteen or eighteen year old dealing with a coach like that... who knows what would have happened."

This shift may be due to personal development or maturation or could be linked to performance plateau, as shown: when athletes have achieved all that they could hope to, it becomes easier to stand up to the behaviour that they once normalised in pursuit of a performance objective. Fasting et al. (2007) suggest that athletes go through an emotional cost-benefit equation. The preparedness to accept negative aspects of maltreatment is thus balanced against the potential for performance success. In the latter stages of the career, the emotional impact of the behaviour could be thought to outweigh the performance benefit and this can result in the athlete moving from passivity to confrontation. Alexandra expressed that she had "less to lose" when she was a little older and her sport became just one aspect of her identity not its primary component. She mentioned that life experiences also helped to shape her opinion of what was appropriate coaching:

"I think when you are young you blame yourself and when you are older you realise that it's them not you. So I didn't do anything wrong with X (names coach) I just wasn't as good as she thought I would be and I shouldn't have been there, she got it wrong and blamed me. I wouldn't let her make me feel bad, but if that had happened when I was younger then it would have ruined me probably."

In the long-term, she had other experiences to help her rationalise or deal with the treatment, and this had an effect on its lasting impact. Knowing that she had been able to stand up to the coach was empowering. Similarly Megan believed that losing her brother before an Olympic competition was one of the worst things that could have happened to her and this changed her sense of perspective and altered what she was "willing to put up with". This suggests that athletes are better able to cope with maltreatment in their latter years when they have been able to extend their identity beyond a singular athletic identity (Stirling and Kerr 2007), creating a sense of perspective that isn't present in the early years. This highlights the importance of life balance for athletes, to prevent them from over-investing so highly in one dimension of their life that they lose focus on what is appropriate behaviour.

The temporal shift did not just alter the participants' strength to stand up against maltreatment, but for some it also had influenced its impact. Alexandra noted that:

"You know emotionally when I was younger it made me feel stupid and probably powerless and then as an older athlete it just made me feel angry and probably it's a real sense of things not being fair and that's quite a difficult emotion I think to have to deal with."

She explained that when she was younger she wasn't aware that the treatment she experienced was necessarily "*wrong or damaging*": she shouldered the blame for a lot of the negative treatment she experienced because she in some way "*wasn't good enough*". As she grew older she realised this wasn't the case and started to question the behaviour:

"I don't think you're prepared for it at all. I think you go into it and you're quite young anyway, and you're when you first start I think players are just excited to be there and surprised and kind of you know... Everything you do is great and it doesn't really matter how you're treated because you're just pleased to be involved. Then I guess your expectations get raised over time and you expect when you go in that it will be a step wise thing, that you have a career which, we know, you start at the bottom and you go to the next step and the next step, the next step and then you know you carry on until you finish and then you stop. The kind of the up down kind of getting selected, not getting selected, getting selected, not getting selected, injuries as well thrown into it, coaches treating you badly, competition, it's just really really tough."

The raising of expectations along with the fact that for some athletes sport becomes their career can mean that even in the most extreme circumstances, people are not always willing to walk away. Choosing to do so takes as much strength so as it does to stay. This study provides an interesting insight into the career of an elite athlete and demonstrates that their perception of their treatment can change over time. Cense and Brackenridge (2001) referred to a number of transitional phases that an athlete will go through, which can increase or decrease their likelihood of experiencing abuse, specifically sexual abuse. Brackenridge and Kirby (1997) identified a stage of imminent achievement (SIA): the couple of years prior to the athletes reaching their peak as a time of heightened risk. This is the case for early specialisation sports where children could spend a great deal of time away from parents in the sporting arena at a young age and this could provide an optimal time for abuse to occur. They state that when athletes reach 18

years of age, they move into a period of greater autonomy and this can act to protect them against sexual abuse. This may be slightly different for other types of maltreatment and as the data here demonstrate, athletes can face a number of problems throughout their career and not just at SIA. Even with the autonomy afforded to them as adults, this may not ensure that they stand up to negative treatment, especially if it has been normalised in their younger years.

Stirling and Kerr (2007) found that athletes' experiences of emotional abuse in the coach-athlete relationship change as their careers progressed. They believe that the athletes' experience of emotional abuse is related to the athletes' acquiescence with the culture of sport, which can shift from normalisation to rebellion. They found that during the early years, athletes failed to question the behaviours of the coach and didn't challenge what they had learnt to be the cultural norms of the environment. Once immersed in the elite sport culture, individuals were more willing to accept problematic behaviours as normal and required for success, especially if this resulted in performance gains. It wasn't until the latter years that athletes reached a stage of rebellion whereby they became willing to question the behaviour of the coach and stand up to negative treatment. This shift aligns with a change in the individual's perception of their performance (perceived positively to negatively). It is suggested that there is a concomitant shift in the athletes' affective responses to emotional abuse, with negative affect increasing as perceptions of performance become more negative. This study's findings support those of Stirling and Kerr, although it is suggested that the stage of rebellion could happen at any time, and will align with the threshold for maltreatment. This could come toward the latter stages of a career, or an athlete may reach this point earlier on, and this may be a reason for them to cease participation or make changes that adjust their training routine or environment.

This section highlights the lasting impact that maltreatment can have on the individual. The participants' ability to recall their experience in detail and with emotional content reflects the potentially enduring impact of maltreatment. Some were reflecting on experiences that had occurred some time earlier in their career, yet they noted that their feelings were still raw and it was easy to transport themselves back to that situation. Memories were easily stirred and evoked

emotions such as distress, anger, confusion and resentment. Time and distance from the sport enable the athlete to engage in critical reflection on the impact of maltreatment and this can play a significant part of the coping process, which will be explored in the next chapter. Maltreatment led for some to lasting emotional and psychological impacts including reduced self-confidence, lowered self-esteem, sadness, anger and regret linked to their failure to stand up to treatment. For others, there was pride in their ability to negotiate adversity or to stand up to treatment where others failed to cope. This study makes it clear that maltreatment can stay with the athlete and thus has a legacy beyond the time or moment in which the athlete experiences it.

Conclusion

This chapter shows that there is no single impact of maltreatment and that the experience is unique to the individual, their appraisal of it and the environment in which it occurs. The findings demonstrate that maltreatment can have a negative impact both during the experience and in the aftermath. More broadly it is suggested that maltreatment can have an emotional, psychological and performance related impact during the time in which it occurs. It is acknowledged that there is overlap between these distinctions whereby participants are constantly experiencing an emotional reaction to a situation; the appraisal of that reaction can lead to a psychological impact; in turn this could have a positive or negative performance impact, so it may not be possible to separate these immediate impacts completely. In addition, it is suggested that the long-term impact or legacy is shaped by the immediate impact, and over time, the immediate impact will be affected by the legacy of maltreatment as athletes take experiences with them throughout a career. This chapter shows that athletes may be willing to accept maltreatment more readily when they are experiencing performance gains and this can also have an impact on the perceived impact of maltreatment. This chapter also raises important concerns surrounding the safeguarding of over 18s and problems with disclosure, which need to be addressed if issues of maltreatment in adult athletes are to be reduced. This study adds to knowledge in this area through providing an insight into maltreatment and its perceived impact.

However more research is needed in this area to explore potential differences in impact across maltreatment types.

CHAPTER 8: Coping with Maltreatment

Introduction

The final stage of the narrative journey is described by a process of coping: this chapter discusses the various mechanisms participants adopted to help them deal with or negotiate instances of maltreatment. Before exploring coping with maltreatment, it is important to outline the coping process to provide a context for this chapter. The coping process has been defined in many ways, yet the dominant model accepted in the psychology literature is the transactional coping process (Kristiansen and Roberts 2010). This is classed as a process of transaction between the individual and the environment: coping represents efforts to manage the demands that an individual appraises as taxing or exceeding his or her resources (Holt et al. 2007). Coping is therefore a dynamic process that relies upon the interaction between an individual's internal, (i.e., their beliefs about the self and individual goals) and external (situational) environments (Lazarus 1999). It can be defined as:

“A process of constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands or conflicts appraised as taxing or exceeding one's resources” (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, p.141).

Critical within this definition is the individual's appraisal of the situation (Nicholls and Polman 2007). The coping process involves cognitive appraisals that shape coping responses, which in turn influence on-going appraisals (Lazarus 2000, 1999). Appraisal is recognised as a two-stage process and includes primary and secondary appraisal (Lazarus 1999; Lazarus and Folkman 1984 see figure 8.1, p.231). Primary appraisal is the evaluation of the potential significance of an event for the person's wellbeing (Holt et al. 2005). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) proposed three types of primary appraisal: irrelevant appraisals are those situations that are evaluated as neither threatening or harmful, nor of potential benefit to the individual; benign-positive appraisals are related to potential enhancement of wellbeing; and stressful appraisals which occur when the individuals evaluation concludes that there is a substantial threat. Nicholls and Polman (2007) identify that if an evaluation is made that what is happening has the potential to endanger the wellbeing of the individual then there are four

alternative appraisals at this stage. Harm or loss considers damage that has already occurred, threat suggests potential damage in the future, challenge is when people feel joyous about the ensuing struggle, and benefit refers to an individual gaining benefit from a stressful situation (Lazarus 2000). Secondary appraisal refers to the individual's reflection on the coping options available to them and is therefore the point at which an individual decides if they are going to cope (Lazarus 1999). At this stage the person evaluates what can be done and the resources available to manage the demands (Lazarus 2000). When events are appraised as challenging, threatening or harmful, coping responses are required (Holt et al. 2005).

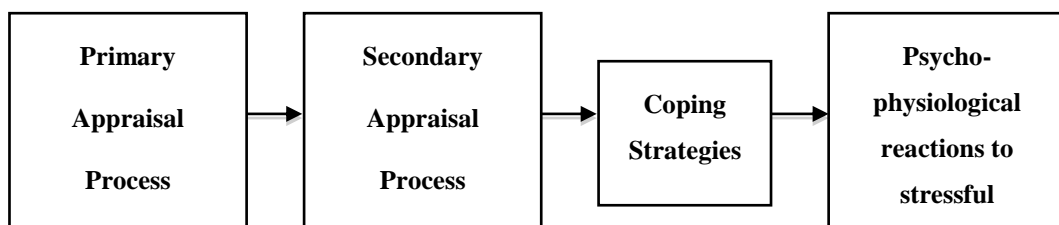
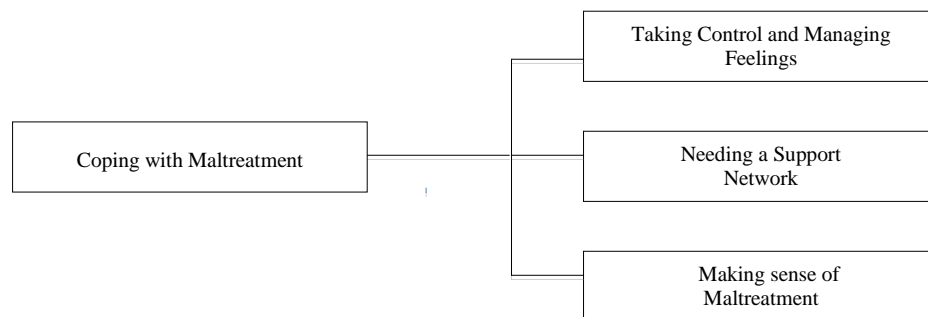


Figure 8.1: Primary and Secondary Appraisals (Source: Lazarus and Folkman 1984).

Little is known about coping with maltreatment in sport. More generally athletes adopt a variety of strategies for coping with stressors in the sports environment; the ability to manage this process of transaction is seen as critical to performance (Hoar et al. 2010). Coping is recognised to serve different functions such as problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidance coping (McDonough et al. 2013; Lane et al. 2012; Kowalski and Crocker 2001). Some of the strategies noted for coping include, but are not limited to, problem solving, relaxation, mental and physical disengagement, distraction, ignoring, increasing effort, wishful thinking, confrontation, humor, self-talk, positive reappraisal, and seeking social support (Nicholas et al. 2011; Hoar and Evans, 2010). Although it is outside of the scope of this chapter to provide a thorough review of coping models (see Nicholas et al. 2011 or Nicholls and Polman 2007 for a review), those relevant will be illuminated where appropriate in order to demonstrate how athletes from this sample coped with maltreatment.

Lazarus (2000) emphasised the need to examine personal narratives in order to understand individual perspectives and contextual influences of the stress and coping process. As such, this chapter offers narratives that reveal the experience of coping with maltreatment in this sample. Participants went through a process of *taking control and managing feelings* in the instance that maltreatment happened and in the aftermath through utilising individual coping strategies. They also noted how individuals *need a support network* within or outside of the sport to assist with coping. The final section explores the meaning that people find in experience and the explanations they provide for the occurrence of maltreatment: *making sense of maltreatment* is highlighted here as a significant aspect of coping and was captured as a result of the reflection that the narrative method affords.



Taking Control and Managing Feelings

Participants described how they adopted coping strategies in the immediate instance that maltreatment occurred. They commented that it was essential over time to learn how to master their feelings. When dealing with maltreatment in the moment it was noted that participants predominantly adopted emotion focussed coping (coping that directly addresses the emotional distress experienced) and avoidance coping techniques (physical removal from a situation or cognitive distancing) (Nicholls and Polman 2011; Nicholls 2007; Nicholls et al. 2006; Holt et al. 2005; Lazarus 2000). In the literature examining coping in intimate partner violence, these are deemed to be passive coping strategies as they serve to allow

the person to remain in the situation and cope with the emotions associated with negative behaviour, rather than actively seeking support (Kanagaratnam 2012).

Distraction techniques were highlighted by a number of participants as a way of taking their attention away from a negative behaviour and reducing or limiting the emotional response to it. Megan recalled how she would “*focus on the lines on the court*” or try to distract herself while her coach was shouting and screaming. This enabled her to concentrate on her performance rather than react emotionally. Charlotte remembered when once she “*bit her lip so hard that it bled*”: she did this to prevent her showing any emotion, she didn't want this to be seen as a weakness or to be used against her. James recalled how he would take it out on the ball or channel his frustration or upset into his performance rather than let it consume him. This enabled him to block out the coach:

“You listened to what he said but you ignored it. I just used to let it go over my head... Because the head coach just continually shouted and went at you, you'd listen to him, but you wouldn't acknowledge it, you wouldn't use what he said any more because it became – he was just shouting at you for shouting's sake because he always has done and he always will.”

In the short-term, emotion-focused coping meant that the participants could continue to play or compete without letting the negative treatment detract from their performance, otherwise they feared the repercussions from poor performance, such as more abuse, or being dropped from the team for being “*mentally weak*” (Megan). Sebastian said that even in the worst situations, he could always control his work rate and channel everything into his performance, and as Adam noted:

“I always knew that if I just worked as hard as I possibly could and just try to do exactly what he said, eventually he would get off my back.”

Working hard as a coping mechanism was echoed across the narrative interviews and was seen as something the individual could control in a situation where so much felt out of their control. Adam stated that distraction or encouragement from team-mates prevented him from reacting to the behaviour in an angry or violent manner. Even at times when he wanted to hit or physically punch his coach, his team-mates would catch his eye and tell him to calm down, or he might focus on his breathing to prevent a reaction. The ability to suppress anger enabled

him to “*suck it up*” and “*get a performance out of it*”. The data suggest that the participants believed they needed to successfully negotiate negative experiences to demonstrate strength and resilience. Thus, maltreatment became something to deal with: this could lead to it being accepted rather than challenged or questioned.

This study shows that the physical and psychological demands placed upon the athlete within the competitive environment demand that those who are successful have the ability to master and control their feelings; this can be achieved through emotional regulation strategies (see Friesen et al. 2013). Emotional regulation refers to processes by which individuals influence their emotions through controlling the type of emotions they experience, when they have them, and how they express them (Gross 1998). Tamminen and Crocker (2013) explained that athletes use a number of strategies to regulate their emotions, including distraction, redirection of attention, cognitive reappraisal, self-talk and suppression. They further state that the ability to regulate emotions is associated with successful performance, a view echoed by many other researchers (Friesen et al. 2013; Lane et al. 2012; Lane et al. 2011; Koole 2009; Niven et al. 2009; Jones 2003). This finding is supported here. In this study, participants re-directed their attention away from how maltreatment made them feel, thus attempting to mask the emotional impact in the moment.

James referred to preserving his ego and restraining his emotion out of pride and a refusal to let the perpetrator win. James claimed that only the strongest coped, and the weakest crumbled; and the battle was to keep picking himself up in training and competition. He believed that his coping ability adapted over time and he became better equipped to deal with maltreatment the more often it happened. Thus he learnt from experience and used knowledge from other training environments to help him through times that were challenging. Coping was therefore acknowledged as a developmental process whereby as time progresses the individual becomes better equipped to manage their emotions and performance. Although limited, research does suggest that coping changes over time and that older athletes are more able to control their negative emotions following stressful events than adolescents (Goyen and Anshel 1998). Holt et al.

(2005) state that as individuals mature they acquire social-cognitive abilities such as increased awareness, self-understanding and self-evaluation skills. These advancing abilities are suggested to enhance appraisal of stressful events and increase coping ability. James believed that time and experience enabled him to deal with his coach and mentally gave him strength to perform:

“I had him for four years solid. Four years, and I played every game from 2009 to the Olympics, so I knew what he was like and I knew what he wanted. 2010 was a tough one because I had the first sort of summer was amazing, I played everything, and I was just excited to be there. 2010 he started grilling me, if I wasn’t passing my best passing game every game he wasn’t happy. He was grilling me every time and he almost broke me that year, a lot of tough things with uni, with sort of my life outside of sport and it really sort of bugged me, but because of that, when I went abroad that year and played professionally, the club built me up again, they sort of took me back to basics, built myself up and I learnt from that and I learnt that that’s not necessarily the way to coach how he does it, so I started dealing with it instead and using it to drive me forwards.”

Similarly, Charlotte, suggested that each negative experience had the ability to make her stronger and better *“able to deal with what it (sport) throws at you”*:

“Every experience you have helps you to deal with the next one, it’s like a learning curve. The things I have experienced have only made me stronger and more able to deal with whatever the sport throws at me. Sometimes it’s too much and you can’t cope but you have to learn from experience. It’s kinda, I’ve got through this before so I’ll get through it again mentality. I hope that carries on if I keep playing it gets easier to deal with stuff. But you learn from those who are older than you as well, if they cope then you try to as well because otherwise you’re the one making a fuss about nothing.”

Athletes therefore learn from experience how to cope, but also through watching others. If younger athletes see older performers accepting or negotiating maltreatment, this perhaps reinforces that it is something to cope with rather than directly address or report. This study therefore notes that the process of socialisation is central to the development of coping resources. Fasting et al. (2007) suggest that this happens as a result of enculturation, whereby the athlete becomes inducted to the world of sport over a number of years, leading to the gradual acceptance of behaviour. Therefore, as this study shows, the process of learning could serve to reinforce or normalise negative behaviour.

Emotion-focussed coping was viewed by many of the participants as a survival mechanism; athletes either coped and adapted, or dropped out. Lee Sinden (2012a) uses Foucault's conception of normalisation with respect to emotions in sport and refers to the need for the athlete to control or regulate their emotions as the normalisation of emotion. She suggests that athletes' emotions are 'shaped, regulated and judged against a standard of emotionality' (p.5), and further, disciplinary power in HP sport works to homogenise athletes' emotions. Lee Sinden (2012b, 2010) found that athletes willingly suppressed their emotions because they did not want to portray the image that they were incapable. As a result, they failed to talk to anyone when they had training or competition concerns and this led them to continue training despite health concerns such as eating disorders or injury related to overtraining. Lee Sinden believes that the need to regulate or normalise emotion can have potentially negative effects on an athlete's long-term health and wellbeing because this can lead them to ignore their emotions in order to appear mentally tough and thus ignore the first sign that something could be going wrong. The findings of this study suggest that this occurs when an athlete is being maltreated and demonstrates how individuals adopt emotion-focussed coping strategies in order to negotiate negative experiences. This can create an environment where individuals become compliant and willing to accept maltreatment, through fear of showing psychological or physical weakness.

Some of the participants noted that they reached a stage where they could no longer emotionally cope with maltreatment; leaving the sport became their primary mechanism for coping: it was an avoidance strategy. In their darkest moments, walking away seemed like a logical way to avoid hurt and upset. Alexandra stated that leaving international competition became the only way she could protect herself from pain: it was a way to "*avoid a situation that would inevitably make me feel awful*". Austin also noted that choosing to leave the team enabled him to maintain control; he chose not to challenge the maltreatment he suffered as he thought this would have little effect. Avoidance coping is shown to be similar to certain types of emotion-focused coping as it involves avoiding rather than confronting sources of stress. However, as Fasting et al. (2007) suggest, avoidance coping strategies are ineffective as when an athlete drops out

or ends their career, the perpetrator will continue their behaviour, and other athletes may suffer as a result.

Research from the sporting literature that specifically refers to coping with maltreatment is scarce. Where coping is mentioned, it is in conjunction with the impact of maltreatment. This study therefore helps to fill a gap in knowledge through identifying how athletes attempt to cope with maltreatment in the moment and over time. Based on the work of Fitzgerald et al. (1990), Fasting et al. (2007) referred to athletes' use of internally and externally focussed coping strategies in order to cope with abuse. Internal strategies were highlighted, including the process of detachment (minimising the situation or treating it as a joke), denial (denying or attempting to forget the situation), illusionary control (attempting to take control of the harassment) and endurance (putting up with the treatment thinking they will not be believed). Externally-focussed strategies included avoidance (staying away from the harasser), assertion or confrontation (verbal confrontation of the harasser) and social support (seeking the support of others); seeking social support was also referred to as a coping mechanism by Fasting and Brackenridge (2005). Fasting et al. noted that none of the athletes in their study reported cases of harassment to sporting organisations or institutions outside of the organisations (for example, welfare officers within an NGB or the police), however, they suggest that this may have been because the interviews were conducted at a time when Norwegian sports organisations had no policy for handling cases of sexual harassment, which has since changed. They therefore presented seeking institutional or organisational relief as a potential coping strategy. More recently, Papaefstathiou et al. (2013) suggested that athletes rationalise, normalise, minimise or deny maltreatment on the pathway to success; these could be classified as coping mechanisms yet were not directly referred to as such within their study. Although these studies provide some insight into the broader process of coping with maltreatment in sport, they fail to increase understanding of the mechanisms through which athletes attempt to cope. In addition, Fasting et al. refer to the passivity of athletes in the coping process, yet this study argues that it could take considerable effort on the part of the individual to activate coping strategies that enable them to continue to perform in an abusive environment. As Davis (2002) notes, survivors of intimate partner violence are

capable of exhibiting great inner strength and developing strategies to keep themselves safe. She found that women were able to survive for many years using emotion-focused coping while they gathered the resources to leave, which she termed, the ‘strength to survive’.

The findings demonstrate that athletes can use emotion-focussed coping mechanisms in order to deal with maltreatment in the instant that it occurs, and over time. Some of the strategies identified include the use of distraction, re-direction of attention, reframing, relaxation, ignoring behaviour, increasing effort and positive re-appraisal of a situation. Participants further demonstrated avoidance-focussed-coping through choosing to leave the sport or drop out of international competition. Participants observed that the ability to cope develops across the athlete’s career; indeed this chapter shows that coping skills are dynamic and transferrable across contexts.

Needing a Support Network

Support structures were deemed to be essential for elite athletes in performance environments. Competition and training can be demanding, and participants highlighted the importance of having people both inside and outside of the sporting world to talk to about individual performance and stressors surrounding the environment. Social support can be defined as:

“An exchange of resources between two individuals perceived by the provider or the recipient to be intended to enhance the wellbeing of the recipient” (Shumaker and Brownell 1984, p.73).

Social support has been proposed to have a positive impact on athletes and performance and is deemed important in the process of coping with competitive, organisational and performance stressors (Kristiansen and Roberts 2010; Rees 2007; Rees and Hardy 2004, 2000). It is recognised as a multi-dimensional construct, and Rees and Hardy (2000) identify four dimensions in sport: 1) emotional, 2) esteem, 3) informational and 4) tangible support. Emotional support relates to support which offers comfort and security and leads to the person feeling loved and cared for. Esteem support relates to bolstering a person’s sense of competence or self-esteem. Informational support relates to advice or

guidance provided (feedback to the athlete) and tangible support relates to providing concrete, instrumental assistance (loans, gifts, driving someone to a venue). Rees and Hardy (2004) point out the potential stress-buffering effect that social support can have through moderating the effect of stress: this might lead to the benign appraisal of events or may provide better coping behaviours as a direct result of the athlete receiving supportive behaviours or simply through the belief that support is available (Freeman and Rees 2010). The participants of this study identified social support as an essential part of the coping process; for many it was the primary reason for remaining within their sport. As Adam stated:

“If you don’t have a network of support for you as an athlete or any structure, you’ve got nothing to ground yourself with, you’ve got nothing to come out of, you’re just literally concentrating on surviving.”

He claimed that support networks help to keep the athlete grounded and enable them to create distance from the performance world. Support was imperative; it was what *‘kept me going during the hard times’* (Adam).

Participants referred to both formal and informal coping structures or mechanisms of support. Formal support structures included designated professionals from within the NGB and/or qualified individuals who supported the athlete outside of their performance pathway. Sport psychologists, performance lifestyle advisors, strength and conditioning specialists, physiotherapists and performance analysts were all identified as people in place to provide support for the athlete. Megan felt that her team’s sport psychologist allowed some release from the treatment she experienced at the hands of her coach:

“Actually my sports psychologist, especially this year, like this past year was amazing, she was the only one who had my best interests at heart, she was the only one that I knew that I could say X (the coach) is a bitch and it would be OK... She would make me feel better and say things like I can see it, I know what she’s like, it’s not only you that’s saying this, it’s not only like well there’s about four other people in the team that have come to me and said this, so it’s like... It makes you feel less kind of on your own. And she also, she didn’t... She never gave me advice to kind of go against it or challenge it or anything, but she kind of made me feel like what I was thinking was actually I wasn’t going crazy, and that actually the coach really was like that and I wasn’t making it up.”

It was important that she did not feel she was imagining the behaviour of her coach; she commented that talking to someone allowed her to realise that she wasn't alone in her concern over the coach's treatment of herself and of other athletes in her squad. Fitzgerald et al. (1995) suggest that social support systems can help victims to corroborate their perceptions of abuse; for Megan speaking out and finding out that others felt similarly was comforting and validating. The sport psychologist provided an outlet and offered coping strategies, but notably they didn't provide advice on how negative treatment could be reported: a finding that echoed across interviews. Support structures were in place to facilitate coping but failed to offer appropriate guidance for reporting or dealing with maltreatment at a higher level. As Stirling and Kerr (2010) note, when the distinction between appropriate training and abusive practice is difficult to ascertain it makes the process of identification and support more complex. The narratives demonstrate how athletes can progress from private attempts to cope with a situation to seeking or requesting formal support. Although coping skills are essential in performance settings in order to negotiate organisational and competition stress, they may reduce the likelihood of disclosing abuse; instead individuals will try to deal with maltreatment independently. Fasting et al. (2007) argue that resilience and coping are outcomes of the elite athletes' pathway to success but they develop within a sports culture that may maltreat them. Practitioners who occupy formal roles may work within the constraints of the environment, and as a result may act as bystanders to abuse and therefore contribute to the normalisation of abusive behaviours in sport (Leahy 2012; Leahy et al. 2002). This serves to explain why many instances of maltreatment may be normalised rather than challenged in the performance environment; the athlete is taught to adapt and cope rather than to question.

Stirling and Kerr (2010) argue that sports psychology consultants are in a unique position to learn about athletes' experiences of abuse as they often work on a one-to-one basis with athletes and build trusting relationships with them. As a result, sports psychologists may be the first point of contact for athletes in distress. Leahy (2008) further suggested that sports psychologists occupy a key position to ensure that athletes are participating in a physically, psychologically and sexually safe environment. Fasting et al. (2007) believe that sports psychology

consultants, sport scientists and other practitioners in support roles have an important part to play in detecting and ameliorating the effects of abuse in sport. They further suggest that practitioners should be able to equip individuals with a repertoire of coping skills in order to avert or confront harassers. Practitioners who occupy formal roles are therefore primary agents of athlete protection and need to be appropriately trained in order to offer guidance or support. Such advice relies on the formal training and education. For example, the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES) has recently introduced mandatory training on athlete protection for all sport science consultants, which aims to provide practitioners with appropriate guidance on athlete protection in sport. Its primary focus is on supporting, protecting and reporting in the management of maltreatment in sport; a much needed step forward in the education of practitioners.

Many participants reported that whilst speaking to someone ‘*within the programme*’ (Alexandra) offered an outlet, doing so was viewed as a potentially risky endeavour as they couldn't guarantee that the information shared would remain private, that it wouldn't be passed on and used against the individual. James explained how his lack of trust in the system of support was a primary reason why he opted to speak to someone external to his sport; he viewed this as the only way to ensure that his thoughts and feelings remained confidential:

“We did have a performance lifestyle guy that came in part time. You could see him on a Monday if you were free, so if you didn't have university, work or had an hour or half an hour from training you could see him. He was good but he was in the office half the time. He'd quite happily go in the office and hear things from the coaches, the staff from the office so... It's not that you don't you know, if you say it's confidential, it's confidential, but again do you take that risk? I'd rather have spoken to somebody at the university who doesn't even know what's going on and do it completely confidentially than risk it being used against me or shared with the wrong people.”

Similarly Alexandra noted:

“At the U21s there was a sport psychologist that they could have sent me to but even so I don't think I would have trusted that she wouldn't have told the coaches.”

This highlights a lack of trust that may prevent athletes from being honest about their situation. Fear over the confidentiality of consultations controlled whom participants were willing to speak to and further dictated the information they were willing to share. Charlotte stated that she would happily talk to a sport psychologist about her performance but refused to speak to them about maltreatment. Ella equally commented that communication was purely linked to performance; she didn't trust those in management or support positions with her feelings about maltreatment. Immy noted that the support structures an athlete can access are in place to facilitate performance not to support the person, which she felt was entirely different:

“I think when people talk about support network as well, it’s often... We did have a physio and a nutritionist and a doctor, we had a support network for the sport, but not a support network for the person, they’re very different things. I would never have discussed with the... I mean the physio didn’t care, she just treated me as an athlete, not about my feelings, not about anything, so I would never had discussed things with her anything that I was thinking... Yes, I think its very much a support network for the sport not for the person, I think that’s where the two terms, I think they should have different terms because it’s not actually support, it’s facilitating the sport, but it’s not supporting the athlete I don’t think. That’s my opinion on it really.”

Here, Immy distinguishes between being a person and being an athlete, and claimed that performance is simply one dimension of individual identity. This aligns with Megan’s comment that her sport psychologist acknowledged the coach’s maltreatment yet dealt with this by working on coping mechanisms in order to continue to perform. It became the athlete’s responsibility to adapt and respond in order to successfully negotiate the treatment. The notion of support for the person and support for the athlete is an interesting area of discussion. If support structures exist just to enhance performance, perhaps the mechanisms that should offer the athlete protection and safety are failing through being inappropriately directed.

Participants identified the importance of social support networks such as family, friends and significant others in order to cope effectively with being a performance athlete. These informal support structures resided outside of the formal sporting system and were deemed to be critical in order to cope with maltreatment. Parents, siblings, friends and partners were all described as an

essential outlet for coping in the moment with negative experiences. James referred to his dad as a “logical kind of guy, who sees the sense of things” and he commented that this afforded him the opportunity to “sound things out” with someone who had “his interests at heart”. This helped James to verbalise his frustrations, without fearing that staff within the management team would share his disclosures. Megan explored this source of support further:

“My mum remembers quite clearly a time when I phoned her up and I was crying my eyes out and I can’t remember how the conversation ended, but she said, still to this day I have the message that you sent me after that... And it was just me going she (the coach) was an f-ing this and I can’t believe I’m here I just want to leave I hate her so much and this, that and the other, it was just the way she made me feel at that time, but because of the support network and everything that I had, especially from my parents like I would always tell them absolutely everything so she would always kind of make me feel better so then I didn’t need it from X (the coach), I kind of got it from my parents.”

Thus Megan’s parents offered reassurance and emotional support that she failed to gain within the system, which meant she could remain within it, rather than walk away. Similarly Charlotte recalled that she was so upset by her treatment that she could only communicate with her mother about the impact it was having on her:

“I didn’t talk to anyone about the way that I was being treated apart from my mum, because I just wanted to keep it inside me. I think at this point I was just so upset I couldn’t talk to anyone. If I spoke to someone then in some way it would have made it more real and impossible to deal with on a weekly basis if that makes sense? I don’t know. Maybe it’s the kind of person that I am.”

Rodriguez and Gill (2011) similarly found that athletes who experienced sexual harassment relied on their family network as a source of unconditional social support. This enabled their participants not only to cope with maltreatment but also to confront it. Findings from this study indicate that although participants’ parents were aware of the significant negative impact the sport was having on their adult children, their role was confined to offering an outlet rather than confronting maltreatment. Lally and Kerr (2008) conducted semi-structured interviews with six parents after their children retired from elite gymnastics. They found that parents expressed a number of concerns about the potentially negative impact sport had on their children. More specifically, they noted concern over the potential psychological impact of investment in a single activity, over damaging behaviour on the part of coaches and over injuries sustained as a result of the

physical demands of sports participation; yet they failed to intervene and acknowledged that at no point did they curtail the degree of their child's involvement in sport, nor did they question the behaviour of coaches. Kerr and Stirling (2012) believe that parents may witness or be exposed to harmful coaching behaviours in the sport environment but act as silent bystanders to their children's experiences of abuse in sport. The findings here support this view. As the literature shows, not only is the athlete socialised into a sport culture but parents and other well-meaning figures can also be subtly enculturated into the world of elite sport (Kerr and Stirling 2012; Parent 2011; Lally and Kerr 2008; Drewe 2002; Brackenridge 2001; Burke 2001). Lally and Kerr (2008) believe that the environment and coaches hold power not only over athletes but also over parents. This study provides further evidence to explain why maltreatment continues to be accepted as part of the performance environment, even by the parents of those being maltreated.

The final source of social support was team-mates and/or squad members, who offered friendship and provided a source of strength during difficult times. Peer-to-peer support created a sense of solidarity. Participants recalled how maltreatment could trigger either feelings of togetherness or isolation, a sense of community with or disconnection from the group. As identified previously, feeling alone or being isolated was one of the impacts of maltreatment, which had potentially damaging consequences. Conversely a feeling of togetherness was viewed as the primary reason why participants persisted even in abusive circumstances; it seemed to improve the ability to cope. Participants explained that there was common ground between players who were all "*in the same boat*" (Adam), that this made them work to protect each other or act as a buffer against maltreatment.

Sharing a negative experience was deemed critical to coping with maltreatment as individuals did not feel singled out, or made to feel different from others; instead their shared experience created a bond. One participant (Alexandra) spoke of '*being united*' in their hatred for a coach who "*made players' lives hell*" and "*forced us to perform almost in spite of him rather than for him*":

“When I was with other people of the same age group and in a way we were all going through it together so it never felt as bad. He would call people a “fucking silly bitch” he would be absolutely vile to people but it was almost like at school when that teacher is really mean and you all go through it together. It was a collective loathing of him, it really was... And that made people feel less alone I think.”

James stated that his team players formed an in-group to act as a protective mechanism. Megan cited the benefit of sticking together: her coach was erratic and would exhibit mood swings that the athletes would suffer the consequences of in training and competitive events. The coach would abuse individuals and try to isolate them, but would also shout abuse at the whole squad which Megan described as tests of their commitment. She commented that this meant the team always had to second-guess the mood of the coach and if they stuck together no one could be “picked off” or be “accused of going against the team”:

“You know it was like we were being tested all the time, and it was always best if you just stuck with the team. If none of us knew what we were going to get we could at least stick together. It was just fucking confusing at times because nothing would make her happy, like nothing would satisfy her so you're in this impossible situation really. It was kind of, as a team we just always stuck together because you couldn't win or you couldn't lose as long you were as a team, whereas if you were on your own you were fucked.”

This extract exemplifies the comfort and safety found in numbers. In addition, participants noted that going through a shared experience created a network of people who understood what each was dealing with and could therefore provide empathy and support, as James commented:

“You know people manage, and we kind of did it ourselves in the team, we managed our team because the funding, the coach was crap, you learned how to manage every player, you've seen how people were doing, we'd be like helping each other out – like if one guy couldn't move much then we'd all shift a bit to the left and help him out because he was struggling in that session, not because we wanted to single him out. Obviously not everybody did that because people had their own agenda, but for the younger ones, we were there from the beginning, being grilled, we'd just help each other out, you had to because otherwise we'd all look out of place and we'd be struggling and you know the next day when you can't do anything he'll be there helping you, so you just kind of help each other through, and you get through it you know.”

Sticking together in order to negotiate difficult times is a clear representation of the feeling of community existent between players within team environments.

Adam stated that his team-mates became his “*friends for life*”, or like brothers as a result of their experiences: they were brought closer together through shared experience of abusive coaching practices. Similarly Udry et al. (1997) found that the bond between team-mates can become so strong that they feel like family. With long preparatory periods and competitions abroad, the athlete will spend a significant amount of time away with a training squad, and team-mates can become a primary source of support.

Social support between athletes is proposed to have an impact on emotional regulation in both training and competition (Tamminen and Crocker 2013). Freeman and Rees (2010) believe that team-mates can be a valuable source of esteem and emotional support demonstrating the importance of peer-to-peer social support as a coping strategy in sport. Social support from team-mates can have a direct stress-buffering impact on the individual and this in turn can increase self-confidence and performance. Holt et al. (2007) referred to the importance of communication between team-mates and championed the sense of togetherness that can result from increased communication as an emotional coping mechanism. They believe that athletes can look to one another for reassurance and security and this can help increase emotional control in individual and team settings. Seeking support and sharing experience has also been acknowledged as an important coping strategy for individuals who have experienced child sexual abuse (Hetzl-Riggin and Meads 2011; Phanichrat 2010). Internet forums and support groups provide an opportunity to share experiences with others who can provide understanding, empathy and support concerning treatment. Social support is therefore deemed to be beneficial in terms of helping individuals navigate their adversity (Tamminen et al. 2013) and provides an opportunity for disclosure.

The feeling of togetherness was not only apparent in the narratives from the athletes engaging in team sports, but also those in individual sports. Rarely in sport do athletes train independently, and the shared experience of maltreatment offered an outlet for individual athletes to create a bond or link between squad members in a training and competitive environment. Immy recollected that she found ‘*comfort*’ in the knowledge that other players in her training group despised the coach and his management of performers. Similarly Lisa stated that her

training group acted together to stand up to their coach in a way that she felt they wouldn't as individuals. Maltreatment in this instance led to the training group forming its own support structures to protect individuals and allow them to work together to support one another. Kavanagh and Brady (2014) believe that togetherness is an important dimension of humanness and that being human involves the desire for a sense of community. Being with others or treated in a similar way when this related to negative experiences was clearly linked to the process of coping within this study. The ability to articulate and compare experience also enabled participants to rationalise or make sense of maltreatment, and this too was deemed to be central to the coping process.

Making Sense of Maltreatment

Sense-making of experience was commonplace among participants. When recounting their individual biographies, they not only described what had happened to them, but also offered potential reasons as to why such treatment had occurred. They further explained why they were willing to deal with maltreatment, or seek to negotiate it, providing an additional insight into their coping. While the first two sub-themes of this chapter explored coping mechanisms that focussed on coping in the moment, this section focuses on coping with the long-term impact or legacy of maltreatment. It appeared that post hoc rationalisation enabled participants to put forward possible explanations for their treatment and to examine how it shaped their career. Rationalising, making sense of and justifying maltreatment are thought to facilitate healing in victims of child sexual abuse (Phanichrat and Townsend 2010; Merrill et al. 2001) and have been used to cope with intimate partner violence (Zanville and Bennett-Cattaneo 2012; Hetzel-Riggin and Meads 2011). Similarly, re-framing and reappraisal of maltreatment have been accepted as a part of the coping and recovery process and can lead to positive adaptive functioning rather than long-term psychological damage in those who have experienced abuse in inter-familial settings (Banyard and Williams 2007; Grossman et al. 2006; Morrow and Smith 1995). A number of researchers and clinicians have emphasised the importance of trauma survivors developing a verbal account or narrative: Harvey et al. (1990) refer to this process

as account making, and Pipher (2002) writes of healing stories. It is therefore argued that the narrative interview approach enabled participants to explore their personal story and to attach meaning to it. Participant narratives demonstrated meaning-making in two ways; through exploring the personal impact of maltreatment and through identifying the cultural setting as a reason why maltreatment occurred.

An interesting and perhaps surprising finding is linked to the ability to negotiate negative experiences; growth through adversity was identified. According to Joseph and Linley (2006) there is personal gain to be found in suffering. Growth through adversity has been reported following chronic illness, cancer, HIV and AIDS, plane crashes, bereavement, injury and abuse (see Joseph and Linley 2006; Joseph et al. 2005; Linley and Joseph 2004). This has been referred to in a variety of ways, including, post-traumatic growth (PTG), stress-related growth, thriving, perceived benefits, positive adjustment, and positive adaptation. Joseph et al. (2005) have found that despite differences in terminology, growth may be considered a unitary phenomenon; they refer to it as adversarial growth. Such growth occurs when adversity or trauma propels an individual to a higher level of functioning than that which existed prior to the event or time (Linley and Joseph 2004).

In sport, little research has explored the ways in which adversity may (or may not) contribute to growth within athletic populations. Tamminen et al. (2013) believe that a better understanding of these positive concepts may produce a more balanced view of athletes' experiences. This study shows that maltreatment is an example of adversity that an athlete may face during their athletic career, which the ability to negotiate leads to personal growth. James stated that his experience of maltreatment drove him to achieve a higher level of performance, calling on personal strength:

“Maybe it (maltreatment) helped me in the long picture because in 2012 I was quite strong headed, felt confident, knew my ability and knew how I needed to feel going into a game, and if I could have planned that, I couldn't have planned it any better. Everything happened for me at the right time, it was just unfortunate for some of the guys that it wasn't and they couldn't cope or deal with it.”

He commented that his need to deal with maltreatment forced him to work on his confidence and pushed him to refine certain aspects of his game so that he could enter competition with confidence. Megan noted that she worked hard to focus on the positives even in the most negative situation; this helped her to cope throughout her career and made her stronger as an athlete:

“Well some people would go, OK, look at the negatives, but I just kind of forget them, push them back and not even think about it because... Yes, maybe just because of things that have gone on in my life, like, I could think about so many other things that are more important, so I just don't give them the time of day to remember how bad it was, it was more about how I got from and how I got there, in that sense I grew from the experience and it made me a more confident and self-assured person. I know some people you know out of the lowest lows, create their highest highs and this sort of thing, like out of nothing comes something, and that's what we were trying to do I guess.”

This approach to a negative situation was shared by other participants who told stories of using adverse or challenging situations to harness an inner strength in order to be able to continue performing. Tamminen et al. (2013) believe that the struggle with adversity is one way in which an individual may realise new strengths and enhance meaning in their life. Critics of growth through adversity would argue that this is no more than self-deception; however, the evidence to support a process of growth as a result of negative circumstances is supportive (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004a, 2004b). Though participants referred more to the negative outcomes associated with maltreatment such as emotional and psychological distress, nevertheless they also reflected on the positive gain. This points to an interesting area of exploration in the sport maltreatment literature, allowing a more balanced view of the impact of maltreatment.

Interviewees acknowledged that they went through a process during their career of weighing up the positives and negatives for participation. This guided their decision as to what they were willing to accept and what lay outside the boundaries of tolerable treatment or behaviour. For example, James noted that although the maltreatment he experienced pushed him to extremes and challenged him emotionally, the lure of an Olympic competition informed his appraisal; he was willing to tolerate any treatment in order to have the chance of performing at an Olympic games:

“Maybe the goal at the end of it was big enough to deal with it all, like because obviously having an Olympics there, it was like a once in a lifetime opportunity and that meant that even when I was really down, I’d never give up.”

James suggested that although his sport posed a threat to his emotional and psychological safety, if the outcome was positive, such as selection for a major event or achieving a certain standard in performance, this predominated. This was a common response. Making sense of and accepting maltreatment was influenced by the outcome, as demonstrated by Adam within the following extract:

“As soon as I was selected everything became worth it. You know, you’d all be doing it for a reason, you’d all be doing it for a point of you know, every day like, you know, keep going, you’ve got to keep going, keep going, keep going, next year you’ll hopefully make it, one more year come on, keep going. That was what it was all about, so as soon as you made it, it was like yes, I’ve done it, there you go, I’ve pushed my way through it and I’ve got where I wanted. Some people found it really tough, to pick themselves up after it, I don’t know how that would have felt like, I’m so pleased and lucky, but it could have been such a completely different situation had it not ended that way and if I didn’t have that at the end of it.”

Conversely, those who walked away from their sport or ceased international competition viewed maltreatment more negatively. Immy stated that she hated the “*what if*” that hung over her by prematurely ending a career; as Adam reflected, selection for Olympic competition influenced how he felt about his involvement and treatment within his sport. There was consensus across the interviews that anything goes in sport, especially if it results in individual success (team or squad selection, medals, personal bests), as this is what athletes aspire to achieve throughout their career. As James stated, “*as long as I was playing well that’s what really mattered, anything else I had to handle any way I could*”. This provides further evidence to support Fasting et al’s. (2007) cost-benefit equation. This study suggests that the positive findings of growth through adversity and participants’ perception of improved performance as a result of maltreatment should be taken with some caution. Although for some, maltreatment resulted in success, others were unable to deal with its consequences. Stirling and Kerr (2013) assert that maltreatment can come at a severe cost to the psychological wellbeing of the athlete, and as such, even when the outcome is positive, it should not be condoned.

The second type of meaning-making occurred through participants' exploration of the culture of elite sport, using this to provide an explanation as to why maltreatment could occur. As previously stated, athletes learn throughout their career that there is a need to accept negative behaviours as a normal part of the sports experience, and this shapes their approach in accepting and dealing with maltreatment. Alexandra noted that she learnt from early on in her career to cope with *'whatever the game threw at her'* and that this was essential for her own progression and self-preservation. Interviewees felt that being able to negotiate instances of maltreatment could make them stronger, and that this had the potential to pay off within performance. However, it was acknowledged that finding this strength came as a result of developing coping mechanisms and removing as much emotion from performance as possible, as Charlotte noted:

"In my sport it's like man up and get on with it... You know just deal with it and get on with it rather than talk about it because I'm not sure you should include that emotional level. That's sport. You have to get on with things, you need to just be able to deal with it and not let anything affect you. That's part of being an athlete, which isn't easy."

Acceptance that athletes need to control their emotions was learned over time and participants saw this as a critical lesson in individual development within sport. In the above extract Charlotte suggests that this was simply part of her journey. As an athlete, her role was to conquer or negotiate and not dwell on the negatives: maltreatment was just another negative to be dealt with. This was echoed across; what it takes to be an athlete was much discussed. When rationalising this fact however, this seemed to bring meaning and provide a rationale for the treatment. If being an athlete is hard and requires the ability to negotiate a range of negative circumstances, then by accepting maltreatment individuals are embracing the athletic role. They are doing what is required to achieve or maintain elite status.

The notions of power and control were central to participants' meaning-making: maltreatment occurred because of power differentials that enable those who occupy power to gain control over others. The primary focus within the narratives directly focused on power within the coach-athlete relationship, possibly because this is the primary site in which participants witnessed or experienced maltreatment. Alexandra stated that coaches occupy total power over an athlete, leaving individuals passive, unable to control their destiny:

“Coaches have so much power I think it’s people deciding your fate for you and people don’t want to challenge or question that because when you’re a player and you’re being selected for a team you have no control at all. You are just a subject, and if you don’t do well, or they don’t like you or you seem to be causing trouble then they just get rid of you. And ultimately it is the people that say the least that get the furthest. And I would say that is still true. Anyone who has spoken out or questioned has just fallen by the wayside even now.”

According to Alexandra athletes are treated as subjects who have little ability to challenge the methods utilised by those in power to gain a performance effect. The following quote from Megan perhaps best encapsulates the level of control that she felt coaches hold over the athlete, a power so complete that it shapes behaviour without athletes realising it:

“That was just the way, but because you’re in it and you’re breathing it and you’re sleeping it, you just did exactly what you were told. It’s strange because you go... OK, it’s really weird what they’re doing like other countries where they get told how to think and what to do and whatever and you don’t get to see the news because they can’t see what’s going on in the rest of the world, it was kind of like that, but without you knowing, you did everything and said everything, even just stuff like you would eat, like OK, the nutritionist would say to one of the players, right, we need to make sure we’re all having bananas and like... the protein shakes after training... virtually within a week, everyone in the team was doing it and it’s like everyone is the same, everyone is the same person, the same athlete and we have to do the same, because if you’re not doing it, then that means you don’t care.”

The level of control referred to by Megan demonstrates how athletes become obedient and compliant with dominance in performance environments. Foucault argued that such disciplinary processes produce a disciplined and docile body ‘that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved’ (Foucault 1977, p.136). Burke (2001) believes that the subtle training of obedience occurs early on in the athletic career and teaches the athlete to relinquish responsibility. Athletes are trained from a young age to submit to the coach and not question their authority. This can create a climate of control or obedience whereby the adoption of roles and the relinquishment of autonomy can lead to athletes adopting a passive or submissive state of mind, permitting maltreatment to be committed by coaches or team-mates (Anderson 2010).

Brackenridge (1997) has reported on the power of coaches in her research on the sexual abuse of athletes by coaches. Through interviews with 11 elite female athletes, she reported a “widespread fear of challenging a powerful coach” (p.120). In her sample, athletes demonstrated complicit behaviour, where the dominant culture within the sport was one where the power was firmly in the hands of the coach. Brackenridge stated that:

“The significance of the power of the coach cannot be underestimated and can be likened to that of a priest who is also vested with authority (God) and whose absolute knowledge is not questioned or challenged” (p.120).

Burke (2001) believes that there are some ingredients that sports share with cults. The cult can be controlled by a charismatic figure that imposes controls over the lives and beliefs of the followers. He further notes how the adherents to a cult are generally in search of some form of utopia and are easily manipulated by the dream of achieving such a utopia. This can be seen in the above extracts with reference to passivity that both Alexandra and Megan experienced as athletes. Billy described witnessing a power dynamic from early in his career, as a coach held power over everyone including other coaches and members of the performance staff:

“No other coaches would question him because he had the power to say – well you’re not helping to coach any more – and then to any athletes that questioned him, he’d just go – no, you’re gone, bye, bye. So it was a very weird power blob because it was just him in control of everyone and everything.”

Megan observed a similar organisation in her sport where the coach was dominant and occupied control over all others working for her:

“It was kind of always like X (the coach) kind of needed power, so it was always like she had to have that against other people... It was kind of like, she wasn’t really... I would say she wasn’t a coach, she was everything, like she was a coach, a manager like she was a player herself as well, so like, even in sessions she’d be like ... Why can’t you do this, look, it’s just like this. She’s obviously very good at what she does so, like, we all had respect for her or at least were terrified of her, she was just kind of everything that she thought and said was...it was that way or it was no other way, so it was kind of like tough to ever have another opinion, or ever challenge things because there was not point, it was just that was the way.”

Notable here is the comment about fearing the coach and how this fear can lead to control. Sand et al. (2011) believe that a fine line appears between the distinctions of power 'to' and power 'over': with power to representing a more positive connotation of power than power over. 'Power to' refers to a person's abilities and their opportunity to utilise these abilities (typical sources include knowledge, resources, intellect). Conversely, 'power over' relates to the ability to dominate and impose one's will on other individuals or groups and is therefore often associated with fears or threats. The dominant person who maintains 'power over' has the ability to accomplish what he or she wants others to do, and therefore has the power to use force to make subordinate persons comply with his or her will (Sand et al. 2011). Brackenridge (2001) argues that authority figures like coaches come to assume dominance and control over athletes.

Jowett (2005) believes that there is a set of unwritten rules that should define and therefore regulate the coach-athlete relationship. These rules are formed through individual experience and expectations of what would constitute appropriate behaviours. Sand et al. (2011) believe that it is this process that has the potential to form the positive basis of the coach-athlete relationship, such as the creation of stability and predictability, interaction and sense of control for the athlete and contribution towards the attainment of mutual goals. On the other hand, such unwritten rules are also easily violated or abused by the coach and can be extremely damaging for the athlete. Stirling and Kerr (2008) state that as the realm of influence a coach has over an athlete becomes more significant, the potential for abuse in this relationship increases. An abusive relationship can result from a lack of autonomy or independence on the part of the athlete, and a high level of control and dominance from the coach. Anderson (2010) believes this occurs because the coach has too much power and because athletes learn not to contest it. The following quote highlights the importance of coach education programmes and the regulation of practice to ensure that coaches consider and respect the athlete at the centre of the experience:

"You know X (the coach) yelled at a whole raft of athletes and a lot have given up the sport because of the way he spoke to them and that's sad he was allowed to get away with that because they didn't really question what he was doing and nobody spoke up to him to say that he was wrong. I know I didn't. But he got results so England were coming top at this

tournament, that tournament. Why are you gonna change something that isn't broken? That's the problem, and when it goes wrong it's normally because you have been dropped and then no one listens. So you look like the player that is whining because you're not in the team anymore or you're in it and you don't want to rock the boat in case it has an impact on your selection. So later in my career when I was ready to speak up, I got dropped (from international representation). All people learnt from that was to not rock the boat and certainly not to question her (the coach) authority but how dare she treat somebody like that? But no one is gonna speak out because everyone else is having this experience and playing for your country is so important. You don't walk away from that. So no one wants to be the person that goes. You won't disagree because you don't want to be the person that gets dropped as a result. It happens because people are given that opportunity and I don't think that they are watched. Who is keeping an eye on coaches? You go away on these tournaments and you are away with people that are coaching you but there is no one watching how they are with you. You're in a situation and you have to trust them and sometimes they get it hugely wrong.” (Alexandra)

When decisions are not questioned and coaches do not have to be accountable for their actions, an abuse of power can occur. The question of ‘who is watching the coaches’ points to problems in policing the coaching environment. It suggests that not all coaches update their knowledge and skills and perhaps more should be done to ensure that coaches prioritise the importance of understanding the needs and feelings of their athletes and learn how to communicate effectively.

Navarre (1987) stated that abusive behaviour is sometimes so endemic to a culture or community that it is not acknowledged as such. Gervis (2010) argued that if the prevailing culture within elite sport is fundamentally an (emotionally) abusive one, then coaches and athletes alike will fail to recognise its destructive nature. Even more worryingly such behaviour may be justified or even championed when the means is justified by the end. This highlights the importance of coach education programmes and regulation of practice to ensure that coaches develop practice in line with the best interests of the athlete. There is a broad literature on athlete-centred (Miller and Kerr 2002; Clarke et al. 1994) and holistic approaches (Stirling and Kerr 2008) to coaching that recognises the need for the humanisation of practice (Kavanagh and Brady 2014), thus there is a wealth of information available to coaches in order to develop and direct practice. However, problems remain in encouraging coaches to update their knowledge and skills.

Finding meaning was important to participants, and it was facilitated by the narrative approach adopted in this research. A possible explanation of the need to make sense of maltreatment is provided by Kavanagh and Brady (2014) who suggest that the desire to make sense of experience is an essential part of being a human, and is important for adaptation and response to the environment. Being able to make links, find significance and interpret such events and experiences in ways that generate personal stories and heuristics are important for adaptation and response to the environment. They enable the person to understand experience and find meaning in it. Todres et al. (2009) argue meanwhile that the search for significant personal meaning of events is more salient than the search for objective truth. This perhaps explains why participants prioritised sense-making.

Conclusion

The results indicate that athletes can adopt a number of coping strategies in order to deal with maltreatment. In the short-term participants demonstrated a reliance on emotion-focussed coping that enabled them to continue competing and to limit (or buffer) the impact of maltreatment. Coping strategies included distraction techniques, redirection of attention, relaxation, re-framing, blocking, increasing effort in training or competition and suppression. Such behaviours were deemed to have a positive impact on participants' ability to continue competing, however, it is suggested that they can have a negative effect on the athletes' likelihood to report maltreatment or seek advocacy. Participants also demonstrated negative coping behaviours such as avoidance coping through quitting the sport. The importance of social support as a coping mechanism referred primarily to two sources of social support: formal and informal coping structures. This presented the only support seeking behaviour in this sample. Finally, the process of finding meaning or providing a rationale for maltreatment was revealed as a long-term coping mechanism. The findings provide a unique and interesting insight into the coping process that athletes adopt in order to deal with maltreatment in the moment and over time. This is suggested as an important line of inquiry for future research.

CHAPTER 9: Conclusion

Introduction

This aim of this research was to explore elite adult athletes' experiences of maltreatment within the performance environment, a previously untold story in the academic sporting literature. The narrative approach afforded a unique insight into the lives of a group of performance athletes and allowed a deep understanding of their experience of maltreatment from their own perspective. It provided a rich and meaningful view of life as a performance athlete and the sometimes difficult reality that athletes face.

Prior to this study, existing research had failed to explore maltreatment as an overarching phenomenon and instead sought to examine individual types of maltreatment. While this has increased understanding, it is argued that the complexity of experience is lost through exploring individual maltreatment types in isolation. This study demonstrates the co-occurring nature of maltreatment as well as the diverse nature of experience. In addition, taking a broader approach has enabled an understanding of maltreatment types that have previously failed to undergo systematic exploration, extending knowledge and understanding. This chapter will provide an overview of the key findings of this study by reviewing the themes that arose from data analysis. Deriving from these findings, a conceptual framework for understanding the experience of maltreatment in HP sport has been developed (see figure 9.1, p.268). Finally, implications for practice and future research directions are highlighted.

An Overview of the Contributory Themes

This study affords a rare insight into the lives of performance athletes, by providing understanding of critical introductions to sport, and through sharing stories of the significant impact that maltreatment can have on individuals. The study provides an insight into the culture of HP sport, framed by this group of participants. Analysis of data led to five key themes emerging from the elite

athlete narratives: becoming an athlete; being an athlete; being maltreated; the perceived impact of maltreatment; coping with maltreatment.

The first theme explored the process of becoming a HP athlete, and thus revealed how individuals start their journey in sport. The development pathway is unique to the athlete, and each person has their own story to tell about their critical introductions to sport. However, the findings suggest that some elements of the experience are transferable across the stories of the participants. The beginnings of an athletic career rely upon critical introductions to the sport, shaped by gatekeepers such as parents, teachers and coaches who guide early athletic choices and opportunity. Participants gave a nostalgic account of entry into sport; it was a time when sport was about enjoyment, personal development and socialisation. Few studies provide such an account of athletic careers, focussing more on transitions out of sport, therefore this marks an important contribution to knowledge. The early years are a critical time for athletes to learn about the norms of the sporting environment; during this time they start to shape their perceptions of what it takes to be successful in sport, thus the study provides an insight into identity development at the start of a career. The findings support the assumptions of Stevenson (2002) who noted that the early years mark the start of a process of ever-increasing commitment to sport. Many of the foundations of performance are laid down at this stage; this could therefore be a critical time for educating individuals about athlete protection in order to safeguard them in the future. It is shown that the pathway to elite performance is complex and requires significant commitment in the early years from the athlete and those around them; a deepening commitment continues as the athlete moves along the performance pathway.

The second theme, *being an athlete*, provides an insight into the life of a performance athlete, outlining the organisational structure of sport, the impact of funding on athletic performance and the intricacies of day-to-day player routine such as training, selection, managing injury and engaging in athletic competition. It is demonstrated that participants strongly identified with being an elite athlete: it is part of who they are and shapes the way they behave. A significant level of commitment and entanglement with their sport was evident among participants.

This study demonstrates that individuals can over-conform to the sport ethic and be willing to do whatever it takes, regardless of the consequences, to progress in their sport. Waldron and Kowalski (2009) suggest that deviant overconformity occurs when athletes engage in uncritical and unquestioning acceptance of the norms of sport (i.e., the sport ethic). Such overconformity was shown in this study in many ways, such as being willing to play through pain and injury, and to accept over-training or dangerous training methods and the need to sacrifice other dimensions of life in pursuit of performance objectives. It is suggested that such adherence to the sport ethic can lead to the silencing of elite athletes, thus increasing their vulnerability to maltreatment. This study therefore lends support to other researchers who believe that the sporting environment can increase the likelihood of athletes being maltreated and failing to question such treatment (Lang 2010a; Gervis 2009; Stirling 2009; Brackenridge et al. 2005; Bringer et al. 2001).

The first two themes create a backdrop to explain how or why maltreatment can happen in performance environments. Early in their career athletes learn what is acceptable and what it takes to be an elite performer and this shapes their future trajectory through sport. If athletes are willing to push themselves physically, emotionally and mentally and if this is seen as a 'normal' part of athletic endeavour this can create the perfect platform for maltreatment to occur without question.

The third theme directly relates to *being maltreated* in the performance environment. The findings demonstrate that participants experienced six types of maltreatment: emotional abuse, physical abuse and FPE, neglect, bullying (horizontal violence), discriminatory maltreatment (including racism and homophobia) and organisational maltreatment. The findings support and extend existing typologies proposed by Stirling (2009), Raakman et al. (2010) and Kavanagh and Jones (2014). Maltreatment is complex and multifaceted. Participants can experience a variety of types of maltreatment throughout their career, and many maltreatment types are co-occurring and difficult to differentiate or separate. Maltreatment can include acts of omission and/or commission and can incorporate physical, non-physical, verbal and non-verbal behaviours. A

continuum of maltreatment is proposed in this study that describes how maltreatment can vary from “mismanagement” or failure to manage through to abusive or harmful behaviour. The various maltreatment types discovered in this study are as follows:

- Experiences of emotionally abusive behaviours were present across all of the narrative accounts. This study provides support for the work of Stirling (2013, 2009, 2007); Stirling and Kerr (2009) and Gervis and Dunn (2004) and demonstrates that athletes can experience a variety of emotionally abusive behaviours in the performance environment. Participants experienced verbal behaviours, physical behaviours and the denial of attention and support. This was one of the most common forms of maltreatment experienced by this sample and was seen as commonplace in HP sport. Interestingly, there was an overlap between physically emotionally abusive behaviours and physical abuse and between the denial of attention and support and psychological/emotional neglect. Perhaps with an increased focus on additional maltreatment types, this may lead to changes in existing definitions currently adopted in the sporting literature.
- Research that has examined physical abuse and FPE in sport is limited; therefore this study extends understanding in this area. It was found that there are four types of physical abuse that athletes experience or could be exposed to: 1) intensive or excessive training regimes; 2) FPE as a means of punishment or control; 3) physical violence or threats of physical violence from those in authority; 4) pressure to play whilst injured or in pain. Overconformity to the norms of the environment is shown to increase the risk of physical maltreatment. This maltreatment type poses a significant threat to the safety and wellbeing of elite athletes.
- Neglect has yet to be examined within the academic sporting literature; therefore this was the first study to demonstrate the incidence of neglect in elite adult sport. This study provided support for Stirling’s (2009) classification system and highlighted four types of neglect: physical, emotional, educational and social. It is suggested that neglect could be

one of the more pervasive types of maltreatment in sport, yet could be one of the most difficult to identify. Many normalised, negative practices could constitute neglect and this can mean that it not only goes unchallenged but also undetected. The findings highlight that this form of maltreatment could pose a significant threat to an individual's physical and psychological safety.

- Bullying and horizontal violence occurred primarily during peer-to-peer interaction. Neither of these maltreatment types has undergone exploration previously. It is noted that conflict is a common and accepted part of athletic performance especially within training squads and teams; however if it is left unmanaged it can be damaging to group interaction. Horizontal violence is suggested to be a precursor to bullying. Bullying is seen as a more enduring problem and can be difficult for the victim to negotiate.
- This study shows that athletes can experience discriminatory maltreatment within the performance environment. The findings support the work of Kavanagh and Jones (2014) who identified discriminatory maltreatment as a form of virtual maltreatment in sport. Racism and homophobia were detected in this study.
- The final type of maltreatment identified in the study was organisational maltreatment. This is perhaps one of the more complex maltreatment types as this refers more broadly to the organisational structure and delivery of HP sport. As a result, the perpetrator is nameless and faceless. Participants referred to an environment which failed to recognise certain behaviours as abusive (for example, emotional abuse, FPE, neglect), and which shut down reports of abuse. The age of consent to treatment is relevant here. Given that the participants study were aged 18 years and over, it could be considered that they provided consent to the behaviours they were exposed to simply through continued participation and a failure to challenge maltreatment. However, it is argued that there are many

normalised behaviours within the sporting context that exist culturally and that could result in the normalisation of maltreatment as ‘part of the process’ of being an elite athlete. As such, this may have a direct impact on athletes’ ability to distinguish maltreatment from other forms of training. It could be that many athletes who have suffered maltreatment might not see themselves as victims since they consider such behaviour to be normal.

This study records the impact of maltreatment which can be immediate, occurring in the moment that the athlete experiences negative treatment, or long-term. The immediate impact of maltreatment occurs in three ways affecting the participant emotionally, psychologically or in terms of performance. This study supports the work of Stirling and Kerr (2013) and Fasting et al. (2007) who reported an emotional response to emotional and sexual abuse in sport. The reference to psychological and performance impacts of maltreatment extends understanding in this area. A surprising finding was the reported positive performance impact. For some, maltreatment became a driving force in training and competition; however, this finding is taken with some caution, as participants suggested that maltreatment as a form of motivation could be damaging to long-term feelings of self-worth and could reduce autonomy. The temporal impact of maltreatment was identified in this chapter, providing support for the work of Stirling and Kerr (2008); athletes may be more willing to accept maltreatment in the early years and when they are experiencing performance gains. Later in their career they may be more likely to rebel against maltreatment especially if performance plateaus or if they are nearing retirement.

Maltreatment is further suggested to have a long-term impact on participants; this is referred to as the legacy of maltreatment. This points to a more enduring impact of maltreatment that can affect participants over time. Critical to the perceived impact of maltreatment is the process of appraisal and this also triggers the coping mechanisms adopted by individuals. When athletes experience maltreatment they go through a process of appraisal and this directly affects their

response to maltreatment and its perceived impact. It is argued that the ability of an athlete to positively appraise maltreatment, or their ability to activate coping mechanisms, can act as a buffer to its impact.

Analysis led to the identification of coping as the fifth and final theme. This is the first study within the sporting literature to identify the coping process of athletes experiencing maltreatment. Participants adopted a number of coping strategies in order to cope with maltreatment in the immediate instance they experienced it, and over time. Coping is acknowledged as a dynamic process that relies on cognitive appraisal of the situation (Lazarus 2000, 1999; Lazarus and Folkman 1984). In the short-term, participants adopted coping strategies such as distraction techniques, redirection of attention, relaxation, re-framing, blocking, increasing effort and suppression. Negative behaviours were also apparent such as dropping out of the sport. Accessing social support was identified as an essential coping mechanism. However, participants noted a number of barriers to the reporting of maltreatment. Barriers included: a lack of trust in practitioners; a lack of knowledge of how to report maltreatment or who to speak to about instances of maltreatment; concern surrounding continued participation if they were to report an incident; lack of response when instances had been reported or concerns raised. As a direct result, participants referred to placing greater trust in social support external to the sport and accessing support from family members or significant others. This raises important questions surrounding the support mechanisms in place for adult athletes in performance environments. Finally this study demonstrated that participants engage in meaning-making as a coping mechanism. Post-hoc rationalisation highlighted two primary explanations for the presence of maltreatment in HP sport: power in the coach-athlete relationship and normalisation of negative practices inherent in the sporting culture.

Central to the findings, and more importantly, critical to the process of maltreatment, is the notion of power and how power is manifested within the sporting environment. What this study shows is that maltreatment seemingly occurs when there is a power differential present in a relationship, such as

between athlete and coach. Power occurs at two levels: at an intra-individual level, between the perpetrator and the victim, where *power over* is witnessed; and at an organisational level, where the norms of the environment are created and sustained, and these shape the athlete's tolerance for maltreatment in the pursuit of performance excellence. This study suggests that power is an ever-present and ever-shifting property, as Foucault (2000, 1991, 1980, 1977) and those who have used his work to understand power in sport and physical activity have argued (see Lang 2010b; Lee Sinden 2010; Markula and Pringle 2006; Johns and Johns 2000; Rail and Harvey 1995). Power permeates performance environments and the relationships that operate within them. As these relationships change, so too does the power differential between them. This study indicates that wherever power lies, there is always the opportunity for maltreatment to occur, unless the cultural norms of the elite sport environment are challenged.

Towards an Overarching Understanding of Maltreatment

In line with the study objectives, a theoretical contribution is an important outcome of this research. Thus a conceptual framework of the experience of maltreatment has been developed based on the findings of this study. Stirling (2009) was the first researcher to attempt to conceptualise maltreatment within the sporting literature. She provided the first conceptual framework for research practitioners, which sought to categorise the different types of maltreatment athletes might experience in the sporting environment; this was adopted as a supporting framework to help guide the early stages of this study. Much of the literature adopted for the development of Stirling's framework came from other settings (such as interfamilial abuse) and focused on the experiences of children. As a result, the original conceptual framework failed to fully encapsulate how athletes experience maltreatment in sport, more specifically it failed to capture the experience of adult athletes in elite sports environments. The findings of this study therefore provide a more holistic understanding of the process of being maltreated and have resulted in the development of a conceptual framework that demonstrates the process of being maltreated and the subsequent appraisal and

coping process that an athlete might go through when responding to such treatment.

This study shows that maltreatment in sport is complex, multifaceted, and has the potential to be damaging to athlete wellbeing. It can be experienced directly or indirectly; it can be relational or non-relational in nature. Central to the experience of being maltreated is the individual appraisal of the treatment and subsequent use of coping resources. The framework demonstrates the process that an athlete can go through when being maltreated within the performance environment. This encapsulates the perpetrators, the nature of the maltreatment and the appraisal and coping process.

Athletes may encounter a number of perpetrators of maltreatment who are defined as those alleged to have committed or to be responsible for an act of maltreatment. This study supports the work of other researchers and proposes that both male and female coaches, athletes, parents, fans and other key stakeholders have the potential to become both victims and/or perpetrators of abuse (see Rhind et al. 2014; Kavanagh and Jones 2014; Alexander et al. 2011; Stirling 2009; Brackenridge 2001). Additionally, in an environment that normalises many maladaptive practices, the athlete can pose a threat to him or herself through being willing to self-maltreat.

This study shows that maltreatment can be relational or non-relational in nature, supporting Stirling's (2009) classification system. However, the distinction between relational and non-relational maltreatment is slightly different for adult athletes. Relational and non-relational maltreatment directly refers to the level of interaction between the victim and the perpetrator. Relational maltreatments occur when the perpetrator is known to the victim or identifiable, and non-relational maltreatments occur when the perpetrator is unknown or cannot be ascertained. This better reflects the relationships that adult athletes have in the sporting environment.

Athletes experience a wide variety of maltreatment types in sport, and the findings from this study extend the existing typologies proposed by Stirling (2009),

Raakman et al. (2010) and Kavanagh and Jones (2014). The conceptual framework identifies a number of maltreatment types that athletes can experience in this setting. Some were reported in the study, for example, physical maltreatment (including acts of violence, assault and FPE), and emotional maltreatment. Others have been included even though they were not directly referred to in this study, for example, sexual maltreatment has been included within the framework as this has received considerable attention within the sport literature and therefore could not be overlooked (see Hartill 2012; Parent and Bannon 2012; Parent and Demers 2011; Sand et al. 2011; Rodriguez and Gill 2011; Parent and Demers 2010; Hartill 2009; Fasting and Brackenridge 2009; Fasting et al. 2007; Bringer et al. 2006; Fasting et al. 2004; Fasting et al. 2003; Fasting et al. 2002; Leahy et al. 2002; Cense and Brackenridge 2001; Brackenridge 1997; Lenskyj 1992; Lackey 1990). Sexual maltreatment encompasses sexual abuse, harassment and sexual violence. Similarly, although only two types of discriminatory maltreatment were represented in this study, the framework includes those that have been evidenced in other studies to represent the variety of discrimination an athlete may face in the sports environment (Kavanagh and Jones 2014; DoH 2000). Maltreatment rarely occurs in isolation and can be co-occurring, as a result this study demonstrates how an individual may experience any number of types of maltreatment throughout their career or in a given instance. Although presented in discrete types the overlap between maltreatments is acknowledged and emphasised.

Individuals may experience maltreatment directly or indirectly within the performance environment, providing evidence to support Raakman et al. (2010) and Cook and Dorsch (2004). However, the definitions of direct and indirect maltreatment have been adapted in order to align with the experience of adult athletes. Direct maltreatment is therefore defined as maltreatment aimed directly at an individual and indirect maltreatment is defined as maltreatment that takes place in the presence of an individual. Both direct and indirect maltreatment have the potential to result in physical and/or psychological harm and can lead to fear, emotional or psychological upset, distress, alarm or feelings of inferiority.

The perceived impact of maltreatment directly relates to a dynamic process of appraisal and coping and this makes the experience of maltreatment unique to the individual. The process of appraisal affects the perceived impact of maltreatment both in the moment and over time. The coping process involves cognitive appraisals that shape coping responses, which in turn influence on-going appraisals (Lazarus 2000, 1999). The acknowledgement of appraisal also demonstrates understanding of the fact that maltreatment should be classified based on its effect on the recipient and not on the intention of the perpetrator. Thus, if the individual perceives that they have been maltreated this would be the starting point for investigation. The process of coping may result in the individual seeking intervention and this could come from formal or informal support structures within or outside of the sporting organisation. However, it is noted that an individual may encounter a number of barriers to support-seeking and this can limit their engagement with external parties.

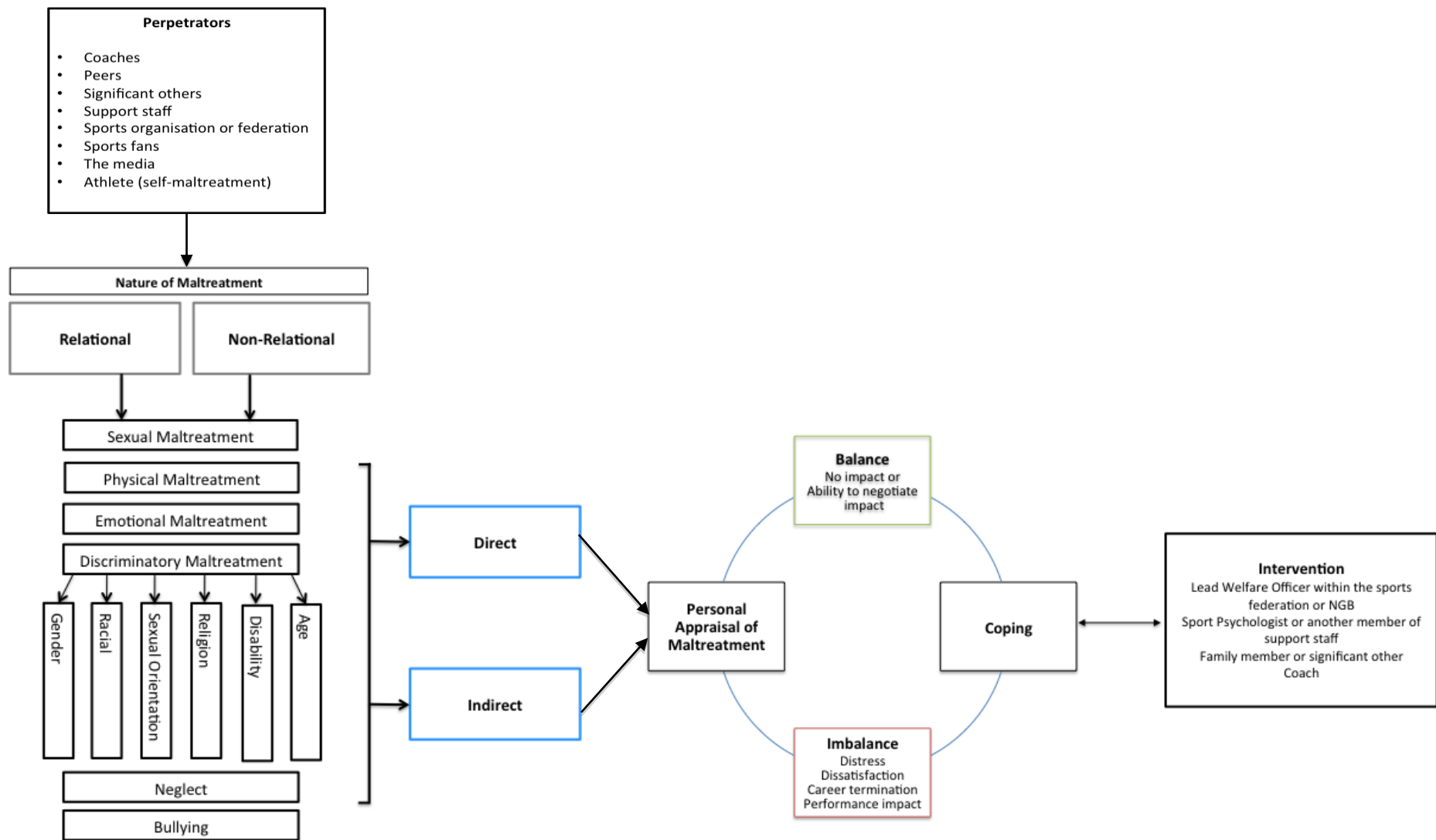


Figure 9.1: A Conceptual Framework of the Experience of Maltreatment in Sport

In order to demonstrate the applicability of the conceptual framework, one participant's experience of maltreatment will be mapped below.

Adam who features in this study is 25 years old and competed internationally within his sport. During his time competing, Adam experienced a variety of types of maltreatment directly and indirectly from relational and non-relational sources. For example, Adam experienced verbal emotional abuse and physical abuse from his coach (direct, relational maltreatment) during training and competition. This included threatening language, the use of insults, equipment being thrown at him and threats of physical violence. These could be classified under physical maltreatment and/or emotional maltreatment. In addition, he witnessed his coach shouting at other players on his squad (emotional maltreatment) and he saw a team-mate being punched (physical maltreatment) by the coach during practice (indirect, relational maltreatment).

Adam noted that witnessing others being maltreated had a similar impact to being maltreated himself, he modified his behaviour in order to prevent him being the person the coach singled out. Adam referred to a variety of coping mechanisms that helped him to deal with the effect of maltreatment in the moment and over time. In the moment, he discussed increasing his work rate, and investing significant effort into a task in order to impress the coach. In addition, he utilised breathing and relaxation techniques in order to reduce the anger he felt in response to the coach's behaviour. His appraisal shifted from imbalance to balance; at times he wanted to leave the sport and felt that he was unable to cope with the treatment he was subject to. At other times, he used it to harness inner strength and to motivate him to work harder in training. Adam also reached out to external sources in order to cope with maltreatment, such as parental support and a performance lifestyle advisor from within the NGB.

Adam reported that seeking support from the NGB led to the experience of another form of maltreatment. His team raised concerns over the behaviour of the coach and the inappropriate training and treatment they experienced in the performance environment with the NGB and performance director. When this failed they considered going to the media, which was met with resistance from

the NGB and with a threat from the captain of the team of deselection from an Olympic squad. This resulted in feelings of hopelessness and despair and the recognition that maltreatment is something to accept and negotiate in the performance environment. It is suggested that this is an example of organisational maltreatment, which is non-relational and indirect. This demonstrates that the experience of maltreatment is complex, as an individual can experience a number of co-occurring treatments. Therefore the conceptual framework provides a useful model to examine the experience of maltreatment as well as its impact on the individual.

This study makes an important contribution to knowledge as the first piece of research that has sought to illuminate the experience of maltreatment in HP sport. The findings allow a greater insight into this phenomenon in HP sport. Elite adult athletes can experience a variety of types of maltreatment throughout their career, and this study shows that all athletes are vulnerable. It is acknowledged that the findings are context-bound and are not intended to be representative of all elite athletes nor generalisable to this population. It is suggested that the findings could be transferable however to other athletic contexts, yet that inference is appropriately left to the reader. The findings provide an initial view of maltreatment within the elite sporting culture and suggest a number of important directions for future research, as well as implications for professional practice and wider policy development.

Implications for Practice

This section identifies a number of implications for practice as a result of the findings of this study. Firstly, the results indicate a significant need for the development of athlete protection initiatives in sport that focus on safeguarding the adult athlete. It is suggested that the CPSU has a relatively narrow focus on children or those under the age of 18, and the findings draw attention to the need to safeguard those over that age boundary. Although Brackenridge (2004) believes that the focus on child protection mechanisms could be the lever for broader change, safeguarding adults in sport has remained second-place to the child protection agenda. Clearly the findings from this study demonstrate the need

for a broader athlete welfare agenda in sport that considers the importance of safeguarding and protection for all, not just those under the age of 18 or classed as vulnerable. It is therefore imperative that NGBs recognise the broader scope of safeguarding that needs to account for both male and female athletes, under and over the age of 18 years. As the findings show, no one should be discounted from the safeguarding agenda. Rhind et al. (2014) suggest that there are implications for the relationship between sporting bodies and the criminal justice system when dealing with adult safeguarding. Some allegations may require legal intervention; others, which are unlikely to lead to criminal conviction, may need to be dealt with through disciplinary channels managed by the NGBs. Consistency in the approach to dealing with cases of maltreatment across sports is a necessity and a transparent approach to safeguarding would be essential across sports at all age levels.

The findings suggest that many athletes are either unwilling, or do not know how to disclose instances of maltreatment. In addition, participants highlighted a number of barriers to the reporting of maltreatment in the sports environment. The implications of this are threefold. Firstly, this suggests that guidelines for reporting maltreatment need to be clearer for elite adult athletes and those charged with a responsibility for handling cases of maltreatment need to be clearly highlighted within NGBs. Secondly, lead welfare officers or those in designated positions of safeguarding and protection need to be appropriately trained in how to deal with issues of adult athlete protection. Finally, athletes need to be educated on their rights and how to protect them within the sporting domain in order to preserve personal safety. This study provides evidence of the need for an athlete-rights based perspective in sport that empowers individuals to speak out against maltreatment and ensures that the appropriate channels are in place to do so.

Education surrounding athlete protection and maltreatment prevention should extend beyond informing athletes of their individual rights, and should include the appropriate training of coaches, sports scientists and other key stakeholders in sport. It is evident that consensus across sports organisations is required demonstrating a zero tolerance approach to all types of maltreatment in sport. Practitioners who occupy formal roles within sports organisations are recognised

here, as primary agents of athlete protection and therefore need to be appropriately trained in order to offer guidance or support on matters of safeguarding. Such advice relies on their formal training and education, which may be delivered by NGBs or sporting federations. Whilst significant steps have been made with regards to educating individuals on the safeguarding of children and vulnerable people, a broader focus that relates to adult safeguarding is also required. Such education would not only concern advice on how to support those who need safeguarding, but also regarding the types of maltreatment people may experience in this setting. The findings from this study demonstrate the complexity of experience, which extends beyond sexual abuse and harassment. However, protection against these types of maltreatment has dominated training and understanding to date. An example of good practice has been the recent development of safeguarding and protection in the sport and exercise sciences. The findings from this study have been directly utilised to help inform mandatory training on athlete protection for all sport science consultants working as accredited sport scientists through BASES. Practitioners will be required to attend a workshop, which aims to provide appropriate guidance on athlete protection in sport. Its primary focus is on supporting, protecting and reporting in the management of maltreatment in sport; a much needed step forward in the education of practitioners. It is envisaged that the findings here could be used to impact on practitioner training more broadly across sports.

Recommendations for Further Research

In addition to the implications for practice, this study also demonstrates that the subject of maltreatment in sport is a phenomenon that calls for greater scholarly attention. Given that research is still emerging, it is clear that many important questions remain, therefore a number of implications for future research have been identified. Firstly, as there remains a paucity of research into certain types of maltreatment, further investigation is required on the prevalence, antecedents and consequences of many of the maltreatment types identified in the conceptual framework. For example, there is still much to understand about how athletes experience neglect, physical abuse/FPE, discriminatory maltreatment and emotional abuse across sports and levels. It would also be interesting to know if

athletes experience types of maltreatment in different ways, or if there is a difference in the perceived impact of different maltreatment types.

The focus in research has primarily been on the maltreatment of athletes in the sports environment; however, it is acknowledged that safeguarding concern should extend beyond athlete protection. Gaining an understanding of other key stakeholders experiences of maltreatment would be a fruitful line of enquiry. For example, it would be interesting to understand if coaches experience maltreatment within the performance environment either from athletes or the sporting organisation within which they work.

The conceptual framework developed in this study points to some areas for future exploration. Firstly, it would be interesting to understand more clearly how individuals experience direct and indirect maltreatment and if there are any differences in the impact of these maltreatment types. A greater understanding of the context and risk factors across maltreatment needs to be ascertained in order to guide safeguarding and prevention. Although potentially difficult, profiling of perpetrators and an understanding of the motivation behind their maltreatment would also be a worthwhile addition to the literature.

A clear focus of research should be that of the impact of maltreatment upon the recipient. A psycho-physiological approach to this could afford understanding of the impact of certain maltreatment types and explore subsequent coping mechanisms adopted. This could further provide an insight into how people negotiate instances of maltreatment. Generating a clearer understanding of how athletes cope with different types of maltreatment would extend the findings of this study and could prove to be an exciting development within the literature.

Finally, generating a clearer understanding of the barriers to reporting maltreatment and learning more about how adult athletes would like sports organisations to support them in areas of safeguarding could lead to greater understanding on how to protect individuals from maltreatment. It is evident that adult athletes should not be treated in the same way as children on issues of safeguarding; understanding of what athletes need in order to manage issues of

maltreatment could guide intervention and protection mechanisms that will safeguard athletes of the future.

It is acknowledged that organisational maltreatment could occur within a number of institutions and/or working environments. Therefore, the findings of this study could be recognisable, with sensitivity to different cultural contexts, in other high performance and high-pressure settings where power differentials may be present. Such institutions could include the military, the professional kitchen, ballet and/or city trading (this list is not exhaustive). The findings of this study could therefore be used to build upon research that has examined workplace bullying (for example, Hall and Lewis 2014; Galanki and Papalexandris 2013; Agervold 2007; Beswick et al. 2007), hazing and bullying in the military (for example, DiRosa and Goodwin 2014; Mangerøy et al. 2009; Pershing 2006; Østvik and Rudmin 2001) and bullying within the hospitality or tourism industry (for example, Alexander et al. 2012; Bentley et al. 2012; Bloisi and Hoel 2008; Johns and Menzel 1999). It is suggested that the results of this study could help to inform or extend research on maltreatment across a variety of settings, specifically, for example, through developing an understanding of the experiences of the impact of, and process of coping with maltreatment. In addition, the findings could be used to enhance standards of practice across a number of disciplines.

Reflections on the Research Journey

Having introduced the reader in chapter one to my personal reasons for choosing the research topic, it now seems pertinent to discuss how conducting that research has been for me personally. Completing this piece of research has been challenging, yet rewarding and has increased my passion for enhancing athlete wellbeing across ages and levels of participation. I recognise a number of personal developments through completing this process, including increased confidence as a qualitative researcher, enhanced understanding of the narrative research approach and experiencing a shift from being an applied practitioner to researcher.

The process of data collection had a significant impact on me, and this wasn't something that I expected at the start of the research journey. Participants

recounted their individual pathways through sport and their experiences of maltreatment with clarity and poignancy, demonstrating the significant lasting impact that maltreatment can have. I feel fortunate to have been entrusted with the athlete narratives and I experienced an overwhelming sense of responsibility for the data collected; this wasn't something I was prepared for. When dealing with sensitive data, participants are entrusting the researcher with their stories, and I believe that the qualitative researcher has a responsibility to accurately represent the participant voice within the analysis and write up.

Completing this process has made me consider the balance required when collecting qualitative data between being the researcher in search of a story and being a human being with a sense of empathy for the participant. I believe this will make me a better qualitative researcher in future, however, this was also a challenge when conducting the interviews. I wanted to gather information but felt guilty doing so when I knew that the stories were sometimes difficult to recount. I believe that good qualitative research maintains respect for the participants' humanity and commits to treating them with dignity.

When I started on this journey, it appeared a mammoth task in front of me. I am now excited about the prospect of completing future research projects and believe that there is still much to be done in the area of maltreatment. I am currently completing a number of projects related to this study including research examining virtual maltreatment in sport (types of maltreatment and impact), and an exploration of the experience of maltreatment in athletes with disabilities. It is envisaged that the findings of these projects, along with my thesis, will inform practice through their publication and presentation at conferences. In addition, I have been delivering a number of coach education workshops emphasising the importance of safeguarding athletes of all ages. Recently, I have been part of a BASES working group responsible for the development of athlete protection workshops for trainee and existing sports scientists. It is exciting to think that my research will have practical application, as this is the place where I feel the most impact can be achieved.

Finally and ironically, I see many parallels between the journey of the doctoral student and that of the elite athlete: long hours, sacrifice, a need to accept

criticism and maintain motivation and energy even in times of self-doubt. I believe that the endurance and dedication that I learned as an elite athlete competing in the sports of hockey have helped me to persist with the research task, to maintain focus at times when I have lacked self-belief and kept me going during the difficult periods.

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Appendices

Appendix A Participant Information Sheet

Title of Project: A narrative inquiry into the experience of maltreatment in sport.

Level of Study: PhD

Investigator: Emma Kavanagh

Contact details: ekavanagh@bournemouth.ac.uk; 07725748626

Project background

The purpose of this project is to provide a greater understanding of the experience of maltreatment in competitive sport. Maltreatment is a wider term that encompasses a range of behaviours including emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, bullying and harassment to name a few, experienced through behaviour initiated by another person or in some cases the athletes themselves (for example a coach could emotionally maltreat an athlete through degrading comments and abusive language, yet an athlete willing to play through injury and disregard their own health in pursuit of a performance objective would be maltreating themselves). The aim of the research is to gain a greater understanding of maltreatment so that we can safeguard and protect those engaging in sport at all levels.

Why you have been asked?

This research project involves interviewing athletes (existing or retired) about negative experiences in performance in order to find out more about why maltreatment occurs and its impact on individuals future involvement in sport. With this in mind, if you have experience of maltreatment in competitive sport I would like the opportunity to interview you in order to gain a greater understanding of your individual experience of maltreatment.

If you agree, what will happen?

By participating in the current investigation you will, with your consent, be asked to complete an in depth interview with the possibility of a follow up interview with the primary researcher. The interview will take place at a time and location convenient and comfortable for you.

Your rights

You are entitled to withdraw at any point during the investigation. During data analysis you will be provided with a copy of your transcript and any subsequent information to read and verify the information and to ensure the interpretations are correct.

The investigation

It is an aim that the findings from this study will be disseminated through research journals and academic conferences and that this improved knowledge could be used to educate other individuals involved with elite sport, such as Sport Psychologists, Performance Directors and National Governing Bodies, to enhance their understanding of

the impact of maltreatment on athletes in performance environments. It is evident from existing research that negative behaviours do occur and that the experience of sports participation is not always a positive one. With this in mind there is still work to be done to ensure that the sports environment is more carefully regulated to safeguard and protect individuals and ensure that all athletes have the right to participate in an environment that provides the best opportunities for them to reach performance potential.

What will happen to the data collected?

The transcripts from the interviews will be securely stored within Bournemouth University. The data will be coded to remove names, making the information anonymous. Primarily the data will be presented within the PhD, which will be read and marked by examiners. Within this, your actual names will not be used, again providing anonymity. The information from the dissertation will further inform research publications however again the protection and anonymity of participants will be paramount within this process.

Issues of privacy

Confidentiality will be ensured by all individuals who contribute to the project and is of primary importance to the researcher. As mentioned previously, pseudonyms will be adopted to ensure individuals are not directly identifiable. The transcripts will be stored by Bournemouth University for five years, after which they will be destroyed.

What happens next?

After reading this information sheet and agreeing to participate within the project, you will be asked to complete an informed consent form. From this I will contact you to arrange a suitable time and location for the interview. You will be kept fully informed about the project via me as the primary investigator.

Further information

If you have any further questions regarding the project or the research process, feel free to contact me through the contact details at the beginning of the sheet.

Thank you for your time and consideration

Emma

Emma Kavanagh

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Appendix B Informed Consent Form



Informed Consent Form

Maltreatment in sport

Researcher: Emma Kavanagh

	Please initial
1. I confirm that I have read and understood the <i>Maltreatment in Sport</i> Information sheet. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
2. I give permission for this interview to be recorded on a digital voice recorder.	
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.	
4. I agree to take part in the study.	

Name of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____