WHEN IS "TOUGH LOVE" TOO MUCH? AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF TOUGH LOVE COACHING IN SPORT

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ABSTRACT

WHEN IS "TOUGH LOVE" TOO MUCH? AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF TOUGH LOVE
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Tough love is often discussed in sport, but there is not a clear understanding of what tough love is, which tough love behaviors are commonly used by coaches and how effective they are, or which factors may influence the effectiveness of tough love strategies. Additionally, tough love may cross over into abuse or maltreatment if approached incorrectly. The purpose of this study was to propose a definition of tough love coaching, identify effective tough love strategies, determine whether tough love coaching can be inappropriate or harmful to the athlete, and identify individual factors that influence the way in which tough love is received by athletes. Semi-structured interviews were used to investigate athletes' experiences with and feelings toward tough love in sport. 12 current and former athletes (three males, nine females) were interviewed. Thematic analysis was conducted on the transcribed interviews to identify relevant themes, subthemes and categories in the data. Four major results were found. First, a definition of tough love coaching was proposed. Second, examples of effective, ineffective, and harmful tough love strategies were provided. Third, factors perceived to influence tough love's effectiveness were identified, including the coach-athlete relationship, coach demographics, athlete characteristics, sport demographics, encouragement and support, clear feedback, frequency of use, motivational climate, and privacy. Fourth, the "line" between tough love and harmful or abusive coaching was identified. Results are discussed relative to the coaching feedback and approaches as well as maltreatment in sport research literature.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Sport has the potential to act as an avenue for young athletes to learn new skills, stay physically active, and develop social and emotional skills. However, sport can also present negative physical, psychological, and social consequences for the athlete when approached improperly by coaches and other adults (Merkel, 2013). Coaches play a critical role in influencing these sport outcomes as they spend a considerable amount of time with athletes, especially as athletes climb the competitive ladder toward the elite level of their sport. As part of this role, coaches are responsible for creating a motivational climate that gives athletes the opportunity to grow, develop, and reach their goals.

Consequently, coaches have the capacity to either help athletes reach their fullest potential or to severely undermine their personal development. Whether coaches help or harm an athlete's development depends greatly on the behaviors they engage in. While coaches often use encouragement and reinforcement to help their athletes, there are other times they need to challenge their athletes to stay motivated, work through fear, and deal with the frustration of not progressing as quickly as the athlete would like. A common coaching response to such challenges is to utilize "tough love."

Coaches frequently talk about using tough love strategies with their athletes. Generally, tough love involves having the best interest of the individual in mind and, in a harsh or stern manner, pushing them toward their full potential (Wikipedia). In the context of parenting, it requires the adult to be warm, understanding, and supportive of the child while helping the child grow, overcome some challenge, or deal with adversity (Lexmond & Reeves, 2009). Rules and boundaries are made clear and there are consequences for breaking them, but infractions are

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handled by the parent in an understanding and supportive manner (Lexmond & Reeves, 2009). While the coach-athlete relationship and parent-child relationship are different, they both occur within a critical relationship context in which a power differential exists, meaning the ways in which coaches demonstrate and athletes receive tough love may be like that of parent and child.

The main principle of tough love is helping the child overcome adversity by engaging in behaviors that may make the child frustrated or upset initially but will help the child in the long run. Tough love strategies in sport may include making an injured athlete sit out even though they want to keep participating, being honest with an athlete when they are not giving their best effort or removing an athlete from practice when they seem unfocused and could injure themselves. This is certainly not a comprehensive list, and one of the aims of the current study is to identify a range of situations in which coaches utilize tough love, and the specific tough love behaviors they commonly employ in these situations.

While coaches might intend to help an athlete when engaging in tough love, they may be unintentionally using strategies that are ineffective, harmful, or even abusive. Therefore, it is crucial to determine when tough love is effective and appropriate, and when it could potentially cross this line into maltreatment or abuse. Stirling (2009) identifies four types of relational maltreatment that occur in the sport context: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect. Physical and sexual abuse may be more readily identifiable than emotional abuse and maltreatment, as they are more clearly defined in the literature and are more likely to (but do not always) exist as physical behaviors that can be *seen*. Conversely, emotional abuse and neglect are not physical behaviors, making emotional abuse and neglect more challenging to recognize and define.

This "gray area" of emotional abuse and neglect makes it all the more difficult to clearly establish the line between effective tough love strategies and abuse and maltreatment. Although it may be challenging to distinguish this line, doing so is critical. If coaches can more clearly discriminate between tough love and abuse, they may be less likely to unintentionally abuse or maltreat their athletes while engaging in tough love strategies. As a result, the athlete avoids the negative consequences of abuse and maltreatment. Additionally, the athlete will be able to reap the benefits of successful tough love strategies and may be more successful in reaching their sport-related goals.

The coaching style adopted by a coach could potentially influence their perceptions of tough love and which tough love strategies they employ. Autonomy-supportive coaches who are attuned to the feelings of their athletes and avoid engagement in controlling behaviors likely approach tough love differently than controlling coaches who utilize authoritarian coaching tactics. Moreover, the perceived effectiveness of the coach may influence which tough love behaviors are implemented by the coach, how athletes respond to tough love coaching and ultimately the success of these behaviors. The personal characteristics of each athlete may also influence how tough love strategies are perceived by the athlete. Further exploring the factors that affect how tough love is utilized by coaches and received by athletes is essential to determine how coaches can successfully demonstrate tough love without causing harm to the athlete.

While tough love is frequently talked about in sport, there is not a universal understanding of what tough love really means and how to best approach it in the sport context. Without this understanding, it is not possible for coaches to know how to use tough love safely and successfully. Furthermore, the lack of a clear definition makes it challenging to distinguish

tough love from abuse and maltreatment. By clarifying tough love within the sport context, this study can facilitate future research on tough love in sport and assist coaches in employing more effective tough love strategies. Additionally, the results of this study may help coaches approach tough love more carefully and systematically to evade unintentional maltreatment or abuse which may lead to a host of negative outcomes for the athlete.

As previously stated, coaches may be unintentionally harming the athlete by using tough love strategies in an inappropriate manner. This accentuates the need to identify tough love strategies commonly used by coaches that are ineffective or potentially harmfully and that should be avoided to ensure there is no long-term harm to the athlete. On the flip side, determining which tough love behaviors are effective and appropriate will give coaches an inventory of tough love strategies they can confidently and successfully use to help athletes develop and achieve their goals. Finally, understanding factors that influence how tough love behaviors are perceived by athletes will help coaches individualize their approach to tough love, maximizing positive outcomes and reducing negative outcomes for the athlete.

The purpose of the current study is to better understand tough love within the sport context and determine when it may become ineffective, inappropriate or harmful to the athlete. This study will attempt to answer the following questions: *how do athletes describe tough love coaching?, which tough love strategies do coaches use?, which strategies are effective versus ineffective?, what factors influence the perceived effectiveness of tough love coaching?,* and *can tough love coaching become inappropriate or harmful to the athlete?* The specific aims of this study are to define tough love, identify tough love behaviors used by coaches and the effectiveness of these behaviors, identify factors that may influence the effectiveness of tough

love coaching, and determine when tough love crosses the line and becomes harmful,

inappropriate, or abusive.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are a number of areas of research that can inform this study. First, the existing literature regarding tough love in general will be reviewed and summarized. This literature is set within the context of parenting since tough love has been studied more in-depth in the parent-child relationship context than the coach-athlete relationship context. This section will also describe how tough love in the parental context may be related to tough love in the sport context.

The second section of this chapter describes relational maltreatment, or maltreatment that occurs within a critical relationship context such as the coach-athlete relationship. This section outlines the four types of relational maltreatment—physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect—and how these four types relate to tough love in sport. Psychological maltreatment will also be discussed in this section, which encompasses both emotional abuse and emotional neglect.

The third section of this chapter will discuss how the motivational climate created by coaches, the coaching style they adopt, and their perceived effectiveness may relate to how tough love strategies are utilized by coaches and received by athletes. Finally, the fourth section of this chapter will address personal characteristics of athletes that may influence the successfulness of tough love and how coaches approach it.

Tough Love

Tough love has been defined many ways in different contexts. According to Wikipedia, tough love occurs when someone treats another individual "…harshly or sternly with the intent to help them in the long run."

In the context of parenting, tough love occurs when a parent is warm but controlling with their child; there are rules and boundaries and consequences for breaking them, but parents take a more child-centered approach to discipline by supporting and reasoning with the child instead of punishing them (Lexmond & Reeves, 2009). Faw and colleagues (2019) have identified 5 distinguishing factors of tough love in parenting: it requires unconditional love, is difficult for the parent psychologically, requires understanding and compassion, can range from gentle to severe, and involves hindsight (the child may not initially see tough love as beneficial, but can look back after the fact and see why it was necessary).

Tough love has been shown to lead to more positive youth outcomes than other parenting styles. Children of those parents who use tough love are described as more cooperative, have better self-regulation skills, are more socially responsible, and score higher in child outcomes than children whose parents are not as engaged (Lexmond & Reeves, 2009). Additionally, tough love can lead to resolution of negative emotions, learning, and more positive relationships between parent and child (Faw et. al., 2019). Parents should avoid strict rules and harsh punishments and instead focus on being compassionate to maximize the benefits of tough love (Pieper & Pieper, 1992).

How, then, do these findings relate to sport? Both the parent-child and the coach-athlete relationship exist within a critical relationship context; a child depends on a parent for safety, security and trust, and an athlete depends on a coach for the same things (Crooke & Wolfe, 2007). Furthermore, both of these relationships involve a power imbalance; the child or athlete does not hold as much power as the parent or coach (Crooke & Wolfe, 2007). Because of these similarities, the findings and definitions listed above may apply to both the parenting and the sport coaching settings. The coach, like the parent, should use compassion when showing tough

love to an athlete and should care about the athlete unconditionally. The athlete may not initially appreciate tough love from their coach but should be able to look back and understand why it was necessary and how it helped them.

In his study investigating tough love in boxing, Trimbur (2011) found tough love to involve a balance between the care and commitment a coach feels toward their athlete and the coach's responsibility to help the athlete deal with the demands and harsh realities of sport. Trimbur describes the "tough" portion of tough love as the coach helping the athlete handle difficult situations, and the "love" portion as the coach protecting the athlete from disappointment or failure. This definition of "love" is problematic, however, because coaches can demonstrate love and care for athletes in more ways than just protecting them from disappointment. For example, a coach may demonstrate they care for an athlete by telling them directly, allowing them to rest, or providing encouragement. Regardless, Trimbur's (2011) definition of tough love falls in line with the definitions presented earlier: the coach cares about the athlete as a person and wants them to maximize their potential.

However, tough love is not always be approached in an appropriate or effective way. Coaches may sometimes think they are doing what is best for the athlete but are unintentionally harming the athlete by improperly utilizing tough love coaching strategies. For example, Trimbur (2011) highlights one potential issue with using tough love in sport. Often, tough love takes the form of a coach forcing an athlete to push through injury. According to Trimbur, this may lead to the normalization of injury and the unacceptability of expressing pain or agony. Herein lies the problem of using tough love in sport: when does tough love cross over into abuse or maltreatment?

Abuse and Maltreatment

Abuse is a form of maltreatment and is defined by the Legal Information Institute as "physically, sexually, or mentally injuring a person." Maltreatment encompasses abuse and neglect and refers to behaviors that cause or have the potential to cause physical and/or psychological harm (Crooks & Wolfe, 2007). Both abuse and maltreatment typically involve an imbalance of power in which the victim cannot easily defend themselves (Olweus, 1994).

Maltreatment exists in two forms: relational and non-relational (see Figure 1 below). Relational maltreatment occurs within a critical relationship context such as the coach-athlete relationship in which one individual depends on another for safety, security, and trust, while nonrelational maltreatment occurs in a non-critical relationship context in which this dependency does not exist (Crooks & Wolfe, 2007). Since this study is investigating tough love within the critical coach-athlete relationship context, this review will focus solely on relational maltreatment. There are four types of relational maltreatment which will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect (Crooks & Wolfe, 2007).

Figure 1: Forms of relational and non-relational maltreatment in sport (Stirling, 2009).
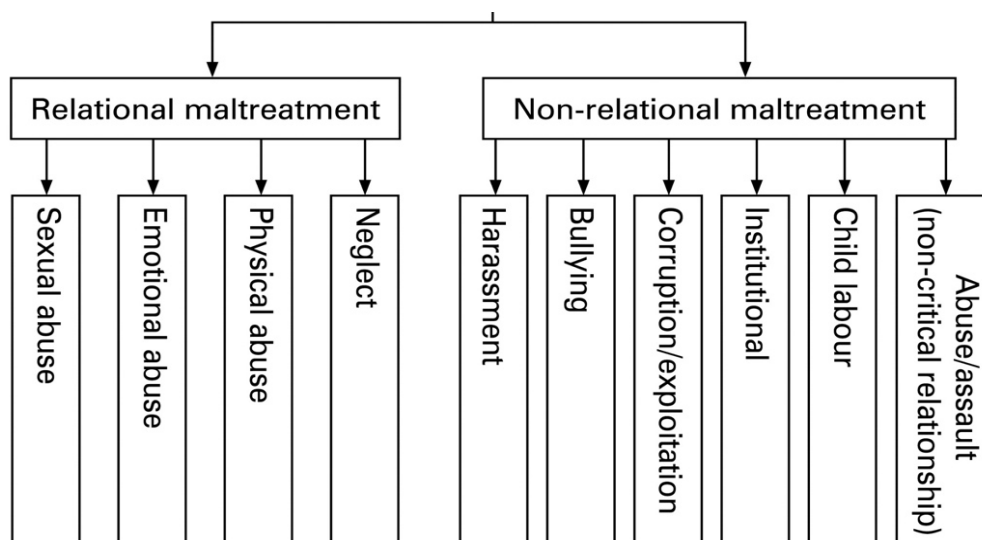
Physical abuse

Typically, physical abuse presents as physical behaviors and therefore is one of the more readily identifiable form of abuse. Physical abuse is defined by the American Psychological Association as "deliberately aggressive or violent behavior by one person toward another that results in bodily injury." It can be divided into two subtypes: contact physical abuse in which an individual is physically touched by a person or object our of anger, and non-contact physical abuse in which physical harm occurs without any form of physical contact occurring (Durrant et. al., 2004).

Physical abuse can cause a host of long-term negative outcomes for the physically abused, such as substance abuse issues, a greater likelihood of experiencing relationship violence, and difficulty regulating one's emotions (Malinosky-Rummell & Hansen, 1993). Those who are physically abused are also more likely to engage in maladaptive behaviors later in life such as violence, domestic abuse, criminal activity, and self-injury and suicide (Malinosky-Rummell & Hansen, 1993). Athletes who are physically abused in sport are at an increased risk of sport injury (Timpka et. al., 2019).

In sport, physical abuse can present itself in a number of ways. Coaches may use physical abuse to punish or control an athlete (Stafford et. al., 2013). Contact physical abuse in the sport setting includes behaviors such as "punching, beating, kicking, biting, shoving, striking, shaking, throwing, stabbing, choking, burning, spanking, slapping, whacking," or hitting an athlete with an object out of frustration (Stirling, 2009, p. 43). Non-contact physical abuse in sport encompasses all behaviors committed out of frustration that cause physical harm to the athlete, including (but not limited to) withholding water or food, not allowing the athlete to use the restroom, and using conditioning as punishment, ultimately resulting in physical harm to the

athlete (Stirling, 2009, p.43). According to Yabe and colleagues (2018), coaches may use physical abuse because they were physically abused themselves as an athlete. Additionally, the length of time a coach has been coaching is positively related to their likelihood of using physical abuse as a coaching tactic (Yabe et. al., 2018).

The important thing to remember is that coaches can commit acts of physical abuse without the intent to abuse the athlete. The coach may *think* they are helping the athlete in the long run by using these tactics, when in reality they are not helping the athlete and are in fact causing physical (and likely psychological) harm. This is where the relationship between physical abuse and tough love comes in.

Let us say, for example, that a gymnastics coach has a gymnast who performs poorly on the uneven bars at a meet. At their next practice, the coach makes the athlete practice the uneven bars for hours. Even though the athlete's hands become ripped and bloody from practicing the uneven bars too much, the coach forces the athlete to continue. The coach may think she is demonstrating tough love by making this gymnast practice her worst event repeatedly but in reality, the athlete is now physically (and likely psychologically) harmed as a result of the coach's frustration with her uneven bars performance and physical abuse has occurred.

Sexual abuse

According to the American Psychological Association, sexual abuse involves "unwanted sexual activity, with perpetrators using force, making threats or taking advantage of victims not able to give consent." Similar to physical abuse, sexual abuse is subdivided into touching offense or non-touching offenses. Touching offenses occur when a perpetrator makes physical contact with a victim, while non-touching offenses include forms of sexual abuse in which no physical contact occurs (Matthews, 2004).

For the victim, sexual abuse is traumatic and may lead to embarrassment, low self-esteem, negative emotions, feelings of powerlessness, and an external lack of control (Brackenridge, 1997; Dube et. al., 2005). It can also cause a host of psychopathological issues such as depression, PTSD, substance abuse, violent behavior, and suicidal ideations (Dube et. al., 2005; Hornor, 2010). Sexual abuse may also affect the victim's relationship with others, creating lifelong issues with creating and maintaining relationships (Brackenridge, 1997).

Touching offenses include penetration, genital contact, inappropriately touching an individual, making an individual inappropriately touch someone else, and rewarding sexual favors (Stirling, 2009). Examples of this form of sexual abuse in sport include a coach touching an athlete in an inappropriate place while taping or stretching them, or a coach offering to start an athlete in a big game if they perform some sexual favor.

Non-touching offenses include indecent exposure, forced observation of masturbation or pornographic material, sexually oriented jokes or comments, sex-related practical jokes, forced exposure to sexual intercourse, and inappropriate supervision of a minor's sexual activities (Stirling, 2009). This form of sexual abuse may appear in sport as a coach flirting with, discussing their sexual activities with, or taking inappropriate pictures of an athlete. Of the four types of relational maltreatment, sexual abuse is perhaps the least likely to be confused with tough love. It is unlikely that a coach intending to help an athlete would use any of the sexual abuse behaviors listed previously to do so.

Emotional abuse

Unlike physical and sexual abuse, emotional abuse does not involve physical contact and therefore is more difficult to recognize. Stirling and Kerr (2008) define emotional abuse as "a pattern of deliberate non-contact behaviors by a person within a critical relationship role that has

the potential to be harmful" (p. 178). Like physical and sexual abuse, emotional abuse does not need to be intentional in order to be classified as abuse (Stirling & Kerr, 2008).

According to Stirling (2009), emotional abuse can be either verbal or non-verbal. Verbal emotional abuse may appear as shouting, name-calling, and verbal humiliation; non-verbal behaviors may include throwing objects out of frustration (but not throwing the object *at* a person) or intentionally denying attention to an individual (Stirling, 2009). Both verbal and non-verbal abuse have the capacity to cause long-term psychological damage such as negative mood states, low self-efficacy and self-esteem, heightened anxiety, and a reduced sense of accomplishment (Stirling & Kerr, 2013).

Given the critical context of the coach-athlete relationship and the immense amount of pressure placed on young athletes to perform well, it is not uncommon for coaches to use emotionally abusive behaviors with their athletes. A number of athletes experience emotional abuse starting early in their careers; it becomes so normalized that athletes accept it as part of the sport culture (Stirling & Kerr, 2008). Stirling and Kerr (2008) found emotional abuse to occur in the coach-athlete relationship in three ways: physical behaviors, verbal behaviors, and denial of attention and support. Of these three forms of emotional abuse, the authors found denial of attention and support to have the greatest negative affect on athletes, followed by verbal behaviors and lastly physical behaviors.

In another study with 12 athletes, Gervis and Dunn (2004) identified eight types of emotionally abusive behaviors used by coaches: shouting, belittling, threatening, humiliating, scapegoating, ignoring, rejecting, and isolating. In any form, emotionally abusive coaching can have lasting impacts on the athlete. Of the 12 athletes in this study, all had experienced shouting and belittling at some point, and 9 had experienced frequent threats and humiliation at the hands

of their coach. Athletes said these behaviors made them feel "stupid, worthless, upset, less confident, humiliated, depressed, fearful, and angry," highlighting the long-lasting effects emotionally abusive coaching practices can have on athletes (p. 215).

In addition to psychological consequences, emotional abuse can also affect training and performance. However, the direction of these effects depends on how the athlete perceives their performance. According to Stirling & Kerr (2013), emotional abuse can cause lower enjoyment, impaired focus, and difficult acquiring skills during training. The authors found performance and motivation to be mediated by the athlete's perception of their performance: if the athlete believes they performed well, they received the coach's actions positively, even if those actions were emotionally abusive. Even if emotionally abusive behaviors have the potential to improve motivation and performance, the physical and psychological costs should be considered. These potential benefits do not outweigh the negative consequences for the athlete, and other methods can be used to improve motivation and performance that will not cause long-term harm.

So, then, why do coaches engage in emotionally abusive behaviors? Coaches may do so with the intent of helping the athlete, not realizing that these behaviors are really harming the athlete. Since emotional abuse does not present as physical behaviors, it is much more of a "gray area" than physical and sexual abuse. This "gray area" is especially concerning when coaches think they are using tough love, when in reality they are being emotionally abusive.

For example, if a coach does not think their athlete is working as hard as they could at practice, the coach may ignore the athlete (denying attention to the athlete; a non-verbal emotionally abusive behavior) with the intent of getting the athlete to try harder. What the coach may fail to realize is the athlete could be injured, may not be clear about the coach's directions, or could just be having a bad day—all things the athlete cannot tell the coach if they are being

ignored. By denying attention and support to the athlete, the coach may be exacerbating the issue that is causing the athlete to not practice at their full ability. Ultimately, the coach unintentionally causes further psychological and/or physical harm. This highlights one of the issues this study aims to address: where does this line lie between emotional abuse and tough love?

Neglect

The fourth form of relational maltreatment is neglect, which is defined by the American Psychological Association as a "failure to provide for the basic needs of a person in one's care." Neglect is similar to non-verbal emotional abuse in that an individual is being ignored or denied attention. However, in the context of emotional abuse, this denial of attention is deliberate and active; neglect is the denial of attention via a *failure* to act (Webb, 2016). Non-verbal emotional abuse involves *action;* neglect is *inaction.* A parent may be emotionally abusing their child if they are purposefully denying the child attention and support, or the parent may be neglecting their child if they are failing to meet the child's basic needs.

There are four types of neglect: physical, educational, emotional, and social (Stirling, 2009). Physical neglect occurs in sport when a coach fails to provide for the physical needs of the athlete, such as failing to adequately supervise or delaying health care to the athlete. Educational neglect includes behaviors that thwart the educational needs of the athlete, such as a coach encouraging an athlete to skip class or stop attending school in order to devote more time to sport. Emotional neglect occurs when a coach fails to meet an athlete's emotional needs; this could include delaying or refusing psychological care or failing to adequately nurture the athlete. Social neglect is characterized by the thwarting of an athlete's social needs and could appear as a coach prohibiting friendships outside of sport (Stirling, 2009).

Much like emotional abuse, neglect may be harder to identify than physical or sexual abuse because no physical contact occurs between the coach and the athlete. Additionally, its negative effects on the athlete may not appear immediately, making it difficult to distinguish which behaviors may be classified as neglect. Considering that neglect, like emotional abuse, is a gray area, it could be easily mistaken for tough love in the sport context.

For example, if an athlete appears to be struggling with a psychological disorder such as depression or anxiety, a coach may attempt to show tough love to this athlete by telling the athlete to "toughen up" and not suggesting psychological care. In doing so, the coach is failing to attend to the athlete's psychological needs and is therefore neglecting the athlete. While the coach thought they were using tough love by telling the athlete to "toughen up" and push through their psychological issue, they have made the situation worse by not helping the athlete get the necessary care. A common form of neglect in sport occurs when a coach has an athlete push through a known injury that could worsen. Refusing to give an athlete adequate rest and medical attention could be considered physical neglect, a situation that is not uncommon in sport.

Psychological maltreatment

Psychological maltreatment is composed of both emotional abuse and neglect (American Humane Association [AHA], 1980). It is defined as "a repeated pattern of caregiver behavior or extreme incident(s) that convey to children that they are 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. 702). Psychological maltreatment, like other forms of relational maltreatment, occurs within a critical relationship context. It appears in six different forms: spurning, terrorizing, isolating, exploiting/corrupting, denying emotional responsiveness, and psychological, medical, and educational neglect (APSAC, 1995).

Although not one of the four major types of relational maltreatment, psychological maltreatment is important in the context of tough love. Emotional abuse and neglect, as previously mentioned, are among the most difficult types of relational maltreatment to identify. A fine line exists between tough love and psychological maltreatment. A coach may attempt to use tough love by employing behaviors that seem helpful in the moment but end up psychologically harming in the long run.

An example of this could be a coach telling a crying athlete to "get over it" or "toughen up." The coach is attempting to demonstrate tough love by having the athlete push through adversity, however in doing so the coach is failing to attend to the emotional needs of the athlete. This example could be considered psychological maltreatment in the form of emotional neglect. Understanding what constitutes psychological maltreatment is crucial in determining this fine line between tough love and maltreatment.

Coaching in Sport

Motivational climates

Coaches largely influence the social environment of the team as they are responsible for planning practices and competitions and organizing all of the team's activities (Vallerand & Losier, 1999). This social environment, otherwise known as the motivational climate, defines how success and competency are measured. Ames (1992) distinguishes between two types of motivational climates: mastery and performance climates. Mastery motivational climates, otherwise known as "task-oriented motivational climates," encourage learning, focus on personal growth versus competing against others, and emphasize effort over winning. Performance motivational climates, also termed "ego-oriented motivational climates," are based on ability

over effort and focus on social comparison instead of self-comparison and self-improvement (Ames, 1992).

Mastery climates are related to positive outcomes such as greater intrinsic motivation, athlete engagement, basic psychological need satisfaction of athletes, team cohesion, and athlete satisfaction (Buch et. al., 2017; Curran et. al., 2015; Alvarez et. al., 2012; García-Calvo et. al., 2014). Performance climates are related to negative consequences such as lower levels of intrinsic motivation and the thwarting of athletes' basic psychological need satisfaction (Buch et. al., 2017; Alvarez et. al., 2012).

The behaviors that a coach engage in largely influence the motivational climate. Autonomy-supportive coaching behaviors such as allowing athletes to make decisions and considering athletes' feelings are positively related to intrinsic motivation and foster a mastery motivational climate (Vallerand & Losier, 1999).

The motivational climate created by the coach also influences the coach-athlete relationship. Mastery climates show a strong positive relationship with closeness, commitment, and complementarity in the coach-athlete relationship; performance climates show a negative relationship with closeness and commitment (Olympiou et. al., 2008). Furthermore, athletes demonstrate higher levels of intrinsic motivation when they perceive a more positive coach-athlete relationship (Losier & Vallerand, 1995). Fostering a positive coach-athlete relationship and using autonomy-supportive coaching behaviors will help coaches create an optimal motivational climate in which athletes can thrive.

Additionally, the coach-created motivational climate likely influences how coaches show and athletes receive tough love. Coaches who emphasize effort and self-growth (a.k.a., promote a mastery climate) may have more success when using tough love coaching strategies than those

who emphasize social comparison among athletes (i.e., promote a performance climate). This is because emphasizing athletes' effort and personal growth above all else will improve the quality and quantity of athletes' motivation and increase the likelihood that the coach-athlete relationship will be positive. Athletes that are intrinsically motivated to succeed and are close with their coach will likely respond more positively to tough love strategies than athletes that are not intrinsically motivated and do not have this strong coach-athlete relationship. In a performance climate where performance standards are based off of doing better than your teammates versus outperforming yourself, intrinsic motivation and the coach-athlete relationship are undermined, and tough love may not be as effective.

Autonomy-supportive coaching style

Autonomy-supportive coaches allow athletes to make personally important choices and do not attempt to control or excessively pressure their athletes (Katz & Assor, 2007; Black & Deci, 2000). Behaviors that characterize the autonomy-supportive coaching style include giving athletes choices that matter to them, acknowledging the feelings of their athletes, and allowing athletes to participate in the decision-making process (Katz & Assor, 2007; Deci et. al., 1994; Deci et. al., 1999). This consideration for and awareness of the athlete's feelings suggests autonomy-supportive coaches may be more effective than other coaches in using tough love strategies. If a coach genuinely cares about how their athletes feel, it can be assumed that the coach will be careful when using tough love to avoid hurting the athlete's feelings.

Autonomy-supportive coaching is related to a host of positive outcomes in sport including greater intrinsic motivation, commitment to sport, perceived competence, and basic psychological need satisfaction (Almagro et. al., 2010; Coatsworth & Conroy, 2009; O'Neil & Hodge, 2020). Additionally, athletes of autonomy-supportive coaches perceive greater

autonomy, are more likely to be physically active in the future and are less likely to burn out (Almagro et. al., 2010; Choi et. al., 2020). Autonomy-supportive coaching also leads to a more positive coach relationship and more effective coach-athlete communication (Choi et. al., 2020).

Since autonomy-supportive coaches are more likely to have a good relationship with and can communicate successfully with their athletes, they may use tough love more effectively than controlling coaches. Knowing how an athlete works and how to properly communicate with them will help a coach better understand how to show tough love to them. Moreover, the athlete will likely respond more positively to tough love if they are close with their coach and an effective communication system exists.

Controlling coaching style

Controlling coaching is opposite from autonomy-supportive coaching in that controlling coaches closely regulate athletes and give them little personal freedom. Controlling coaches use "…coercion, persuasion, and authoritarian behaviors to instill specific thought and behavior patterns in athletes" (Bartholomew et. al., 2010). Common behaviors associated with this coaching style include intimidation, judgment, devaluation, negative conditional regard, the controlling use of rewards, and excessive personal control (Bartholomew et. al., 2010). The controlling coaching style is related to negative consequences such as socially prescribed perfectionism, controlled motivation and amotivation, athlete burnout, moral disengagement, antisocial behavior, constrained commitment, and less effective coach-athlete communication (Barcza-Renner et. al., 2016; Hodge & Lonsdale, 2011; O'Neil & Hodge, 2020; Chen et. al., 2016; Choi et. al., 2020).

Whereas autonomy-supportive coaches are attuned to the feelings of athletes, controlling coaches may not consider how their authoritarian behavior makes their athletes feel. Coaches

that are not aware of or do not consider their athlete's feelings may be more likely to maltreat

their athletes, even if they do not intend to do so. For this reason, controlling coaches may use

tough love less effectively and less safely than autonomy-supportive coaches.

In addition to this, controlling coaches may not have as strong of a coach-athlete

relationship as autonomy-supportive coaches do with their athletes. Considering the behaviors

used by controlling coaches, they may be less successful in communicating with their athletes as

well (and they may not have a two-way communication system at all). Without a solid coach-

athlete relationship and the existence of an effective two-way communication system, controlling

coaches may be more likely to cross this line between tough love and maltreatment.

Effective coaching practices

Another factor that could play a role in the success of tough love strategies is the

perceived effectiveness of coaches. Effective coaches are "…empathetic, approachable, and

capable of identifying and then catering for the individual differences within the team" (Bennie

& O'Connor, 2011, p. 100). This ability to tailor their behavior according to individual

differences, along with their compassion and approachability, may allow effective coaches to be

more successful when engaging in tough love behaviors. Effective coaches also have strong

leadership, communication, people management, and planning skills an create a positive team

environment and team culture (Bennie & O'Connor, 2011). Being able to effectively

communicate and manage one's players would help coaches in their attempts to engage in tough

love.

Coaches are rated as more effective by athletes if they use technical instruction

(specifically mistake-contingent technical instruction) and reinforcement; these behaviors are

positively related to athletes' self-esteem and their liking of their teammates and the sport post-

season (Smith et. al., 1979). Smith and colleagues (1979) found coaches who received training on positive coaching behaviors used more reinforcement and encouragement and less punishment than coaches who did not receive the training. The athletes of the coaches who had undergone the training reported liking their teammates and coaches more and saw their coach as a better teacher post-training.

Change-oriented feedback, or feedback that is aimed at modifying a specific behavior, is often used by coaches (Carpentier & Mageau, 2013). Autonomy-supportive change-oriented feedback has been shown to be a powerful behavior modification tool for coaches and is "empathic, accompanied by choices of possible solutions to correct the problem, based on clear and attainable objectives known to athletes, free from person-related statements, is paired with tips, and given in a considerate tone of voice" (Carpentier & Mageau, 2013, p. 431). Tough love may involve change-oriented feedback; however, tough love requires initial sternness or harshness, so therefore may not always be provided in a considerate tone.

These findings suggest using more encouragement and technical instruction and avoiding punishment may help coaches use tough love more successfully by improving the coach-athlete relationship. Furthermore, an athlete with high self-esteem may respond to the initial frustration of tough love in a more positive manner. Being empathetic, providing the athlete with choices on how to fix the problem, giving clear objectives that are challenging yet attainable, avoiding personal attacks on the athlete, and providing tips for behavior change may also help coaches use tough love more effectively.

Gould and colleagues (2007) suggest the behaviors of effective coaches fall into three categories: working with players, dealing with others, and player development strategies. According to the authors, effective coaches are respectful, caring, and know how to effectively

communicate when working with their athletes. These coaches are flexible, yet have clear rules and expectations, and clear consequences for breaking these rules. Effective coaches also allow themselves times to cool off and regulate their emotions before handling any breach of the rules. Player development strategies of effective coaches include motivating, teaching goal setting, incorporating team building activities, and teaching positive life skills and transfer of these skills to out-of-sport contexts (Gould et. al., 2007).

Effective coaches' care and respect for their athletes, their ability to communicate with athlete, and the time they give themselves to cool down before confronting an athlete all play a role in increasing the effectiveness of tough love strategies. If a coach can clearly and calmly communicate with an athlete and this athlete knows the coach is coming from a place of compassion and respect, the athlete will likely respond to tough love more positively. Additionally, if these coaches have taught their players positive life skills, the athletes will be better equipped to handle and respond to tough love.

The way in which effective coaches develop character in and teach life skills to their athletes differs from the way in which less effective coaches do so. Effective coaches are not "cruel, punitive, or authoritarian;" they challenge but support their athletes (Flett et. al., 2013, p. 334). Less effective coaches, on the other hand, are harsh and negative (Flett et. al., 2013). They may think they are helping their athletes by attempting to develop character in this manner, but in reality, they may be hurting them. For this reason, less effective coaches may unintentionally maltreat or abuse their athletes when employing tough love strategies. The ability of effective coaches to challenge and support their athletes directly relates to their ability to use tough love, as "challenging yet supporting" falls in line with the definitions of tough love mentioned previously.

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In their Pyramid of Teaching Success in Sport, Gilbert and colleagues (2010) outline the necessary elements of a successful coach (see Figure 2 below). Each row of the pyramid is necessary in order for the next level to exist. At the bottom of the pyramid are the most fundamental aspects of coaching: love for teaching the sport, balance/moderation, friendship, loyalty, and cooperation. When these aspects are in place, the second level of the pyramid can exist which involves industriousness, curiosity, resourcefulness, and self-examination.. The third tier of the pyramid encompasses the core elements of effective coaching: pedagogical knowledge, subject knowledge, and conditioning. The fourth tier includes courage and commitment, and the fifth tier is teacher which exists when the athletes learn what you intended for them to learn.

Figure 2: The Pyramid of Teaching Success in Sport (Gilbert et. al., 2010).
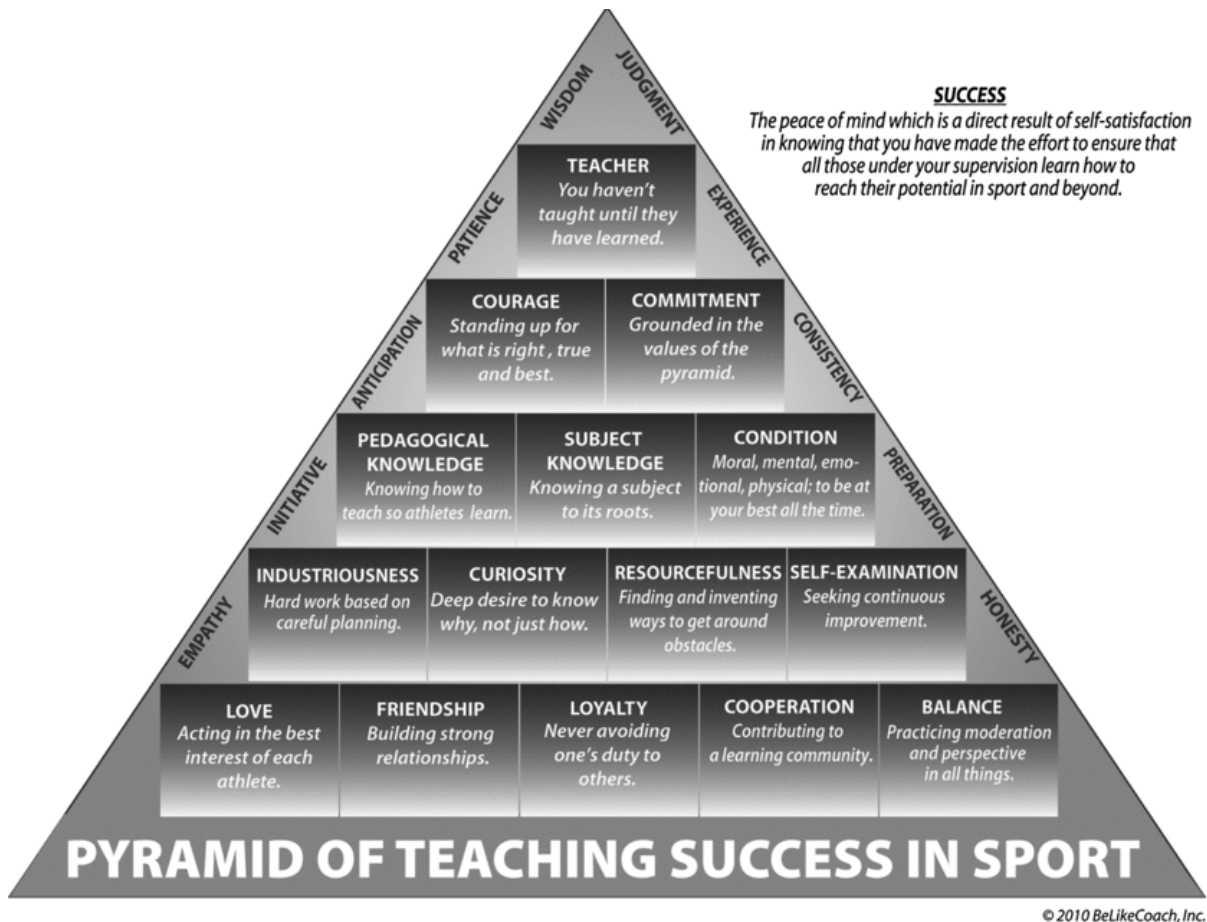
This pyramid outlines the complexity in successfully utilizing tough love in sport. In order for athletes to learn the lesson the coach intends for them to learn via tough love strategies, multiple factors must be in place. The coach must truly love coaching the sport, be able to cooperate and collaborate, be loyal, know their sport, be constantly working on themselves as a coach, be committed, and have courage (Gilbert et. al., 2010). If a coach meets all of these criteria, it is more likely that their efforts to use tough love will be successful.

To summarize, automotive-supportive coaches may be less likely to unintentionally maltreat or abuse their athletes than controlling coaches. This is because autonomy-supportive coaches give their athletes personal choices, involve them in the decision-making process, care

for their athletes' feelings, and effectively communicate with their athletes. In doing so, they create a more positive coach-athlete relationship and a more holistic understanding of how to approach tough love with each athlete. Controlling coaches, on the other hand, may not consider the feelings of their athletes as much or communicate as effectively, and therefore may not develop such a strong coach-athlete relationship. Additionally, coaches who are deemed effective will likely have more success when utilizing tough love coaching strategies because of the love and compassion they have for their athletes, their capacity for cooperation, ability to challenge their athletes successfully, and their capability to communicate effectively. Autonomy-supportive coaches, and coaches who are rated as more effective by their players, likely use tough love more effectively and more safely for these reasons.

Individual Athlete Differences

While the characteristics of the coach may play an important role in the effectiveness of tough love strategies, the individual differences between athletes are likely just as important in determining tough love's successfulness. Athletes have varying levels of motivation, commitment to sport, self-esteem, and multiple other characteristics, which could all affect how tough love is received by the athlete.

For example, an athlete who is highly intrinsically motivated may respond more positively to tough love strategies than an athlete who is amotivated. Amotivation is negatively related to and intrinsic motivation positively related to athlete persistence in sport (Vallerand & Losier, 1999). An amotivated athlete may respond more negatively to the initial frustrating stage of tough love, whereas an intrinsically motivated athlete may be more motivated to persevere and grow from this initial discomfort. An athlete that is more committed to their sport may be

more willing to "tough out" the initial frustration and discomfort that tough love strategies cause, whereas an athlete with less commitment to their sport may respond more negatively.

The athlete's self-esteem also likely plays a large part in influencing the effectiveness of tough love; an athlete who is low in self-esteem may not be able to cope with the initial harshness coaches use when engaging in tough love strategies. Additionally, children who are lower in self-esteem respond positively to encouragement and technical instruction and negatively to coaches who are not so supportive, whereas athletes with moderate or high self-esteem were not affected by these differences in coaching behaviors (Smith & Smoll, 1990). Having low self-esteem may make an athlete more vulnerable to changes in coach behaviors; this highlights the importance of a coach being able to identify individual differences within their team. If a coach knows their athletes, cares about them, and caters to these individual differences, they are likely to have much more success when engaging in tough love behaviors.

There are likely other personal factors not mentioned here that influence how coaches utilize tough love strategies. One of the purposes of the current study is to identify other factors that may play a role in how coaches approach tough love. In doing so, coaches will be better able to personalize their approach to tough love coaching to maximize the benefits and minimize the risks of tough love for their athletes.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of the current study was to better understand tough love within the sport context and distinguish between tough love strategies that are perceived as effective and appropriate versus those that are viewed as ineffective, inappropriate, or harmful to the athlete. This study attempted to define tough love, identify tough love strategies used by coaches, determine the effectiveness of these strategies in bringing about the desired consequences and identify factors that may influence the effectiveness of tough love coaching. Furthermore, this study attempted to identify the line that lies between effective, safe tough love coaching and inappropriate or harmful tough love coaching.

The research questions investigated in this study are as follows: *how do athletes describe tough love coaching?, what tough love strategies do coaches commonly use?, which strategies do athletes identify as effective and ineffective?, what factors do athletes identify as influencing the effectiveness of tough love coaching?,* and *do athletes believe tough love coaching can cross over into abuse or maltreatment? If so, under which conditions do athletes see tough love crossing this line?*

Researchers, and therefore research studies, operate through the lens of a certain paradigm. A paradigm is a set of beliefs or worldview that guides inquiry and explains how an individual relates to, thinks about, and perceives their world (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Killam, 2013). A paradigm includes the theoretical orientations and assumptions that drive a study (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). These assumptions and orientations through which the researcher and the research study operate maybe be conscious or the researcher may be unaware of them

(Sparkes & Smith, 2013). A paradigm, according to Denzin & Lincoln (2005), involves a researcher's, or research study's, ontology, epistemology, and methodology.

"Ontology" is defined by Rawnsley (1998) as "the nature and structure of being." (p. 2). It aims to describe things as they truly are and can vary widely between researchers and research studies (Rawnsley, 1998). Ontology attempts to answer the questions, "*what is the nature of reality?", "what exists?",* and "*what is true?"* (Killam, 2013, p. 7). This study operated out of a relativist ontology, meaning our social realities are multifaceted and can be reshaped based on our constructions of this reality (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). In qualitative research, the role of the researcher is to "interpret the interpretation of others" (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). As such, the ontological goal of the researcher is to better understand the participants' realities involving tough love in sport and the meanings they give to it.

The term "epistemology" refers to what an individual knows and how that individual came to know it (Cohen et. al., 2007). It is concerned with the "origin and structure of knowledge" (Rawnsley, 1998, p. 3), how knowledge is "created, acquired, and communicated," and "what it means to know" (Scotland, 2012, p. 9). Epistemology attempts to answer the questions, "*what is the nature of knowledge?", "how do we acquire knowledge?",* and "*how do we know what we know?"* (Killam, 2013, p. 8). It is different from ontology in that ontology is concerned with the nature of *reality* and what is true, whereas epistemology is concerned with the nature of *knowledge* and how we come to know it.

This study operated out of a constructivist epistemology (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). The main precept is an individual cannot be separated from what they know, and researchers cannot separate themselves completely from what they are studying (Smith, 1989). The beliefs and values of the researchers will always influence what is understood (Smith, 1989). Furthermore,

the constructivist epistemology suggests that our perceptions of reality are constructed based upon our subjective experiences (Schütz, 1962). Considering this constructivist positionality, the lead researcher in this study was aware that their subjective experience shapes how the experiences of participants are understood and organized.

Methodology includes the procedures used to obtain scientific knowledge (Rawnsley, 1998). It attempts to answer the question, *"how can the knower go about obtaining the knowledge and understanding he or she desires?"* (Killam, 2013, p. 9). The methodology one adopts is influenced by their ontological and epistemological beliefs (Killam, 2013). In qualitative research, the purpose is to investigate and distinguish how others perceive their world. Given this, a hermeneutical and dialectical approach to methodology was applied in the current study. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), this involves interpreting the social constructions of participants by "using conventional hermeneutical techniques" and comparing and contrasting these constructions "through dialectical interchange" (p. 111). In order to understand how participants perceive their world, semi-structured interviews were used in this study.

Considering the ontology, epistemology, and methodology shaping this study, a basic interpretive approach was adopted in this study. Interpretive research is focused on understanding the meaning a participant gives to a certain concept or phenomenon (Bhattacherjee, 2012). It is centered around this idea that knowledge is a subjective experience, and our knowledge of our world is shaped by our experiences. By better understanding how athletes perceive tough love coaching, it becomes possible to define tough love in the sport context, which tough love strategies are effective, and when tough love can cross over into relational maltreatment.

The researcher plays a primary role in basic interpretive research as they are an integral part of data collection (Bhattacherjee, 2012). In interpretive research studies, the researcher is often responsible for creating the questions asked to participants and analyzing the answers participants provide. Because of this, the researcher has the potential to greatly influence the study, perhaps unintentionally. Awareness of a researcher's potential biases is crucial. In the current study, the researcher was responsible for the construction of interview guides, data collection and interpretation of the data.

The researcher in this study has experience both as a gymnast and a gymnastics coach which has had a profound impact on her life. She has seen and experienced both positive and negative coaching in sport. Her interest in tough love stems from these experiences. The researcher recognizes coaches sometimes use tough love strategies to challenge their athletes to meet their goals, overcome fear, improve motivation, and develop self-discipline. She believes tough love may be difficult to use effectively and has the potential to cross over into abuse or maltreatment. Being aware of biases and engaging in constant self-reflection will help increase objectivity of the researcher. However, as mentioned previously, the researcher cannot be completely separated from what is being studied (Smith, 1989). It is inevitable that the researcher's subjective experience influenced the interpretation of data in some way.

The individual experiences of the research participants have influenced their perceptions of tough love in sport. Therefore, each athlete perceived tough love coaching differently. However, there also existed general themes and subthemes across participants' perceptions of tough love in sport. The process of determining and defining these general themes and subthemes across participant responses helped construct a more general understanding of tough

love in sport and when it may cross over into relational maltreatment. Each research participant's experiences and perceptions helped construct a more holistic picture of tough love coaching.

Participants

Purposive sampling procedures were used for participant recruitment to maximize transferability of findings. Purposive sampling involves choosing certain participants for a certain purpose rather than randomly sampling (Patton, 2002). In this case, purposive sampling was used to achieve maximal variation in the sample; the goal was to recruit athletes from multiple different sport types who could provide their opinions and experiences regarding tough love coaching to ensure a variety of perspectives were included.

Twelve current and former athletes were recruited to participate in this study. Appendix A contains an idiographic profile for each participant containing a brief description of each participant and their sport background, a summary of findings, and the researcher's interpretation of the quality of the interview. Participants 18 and older were recruited; this parameter was included as participants over 18 likely have more experience with tough love coaching than those younger than 18 and have had adequate time to reflect on whether their tough love experience was effective and/or appropriate. Additionally, all participants had been involved in sport for at least 5 years and had competed in the past 10 years. These last parameters were included to increase the likelihood that participants had spent enough time in sport to have had at least one tough love experience and had adequate time to reflect on that experience.

Table 1 below contains the demographic information of the participants. All sports that participants spent time in were included, regardless of how much time was spent in that sport or whether it was their main sport; all participants were multi-sport athletes. The highest competitive level reached was calculated using each participant's highest competitive level

reached in any sport. For example, if they did travel soccer and collegiate track and field, their

highest competitive level reached would be "collegiate".

Table 1: Participant demographic information.

VARIABLE	N	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL
AGE (AVERAGE)	20.8 years	N/A
GENDER		
MALE	3	25
FEMALE	9	75
HOMETOWN		
WITHIN MICHIGAN, USA	11	91.7
OUTSIDE OF MICHIGAN, USA	1	8.3
TOTAL TIME SPENT IN SPORT (AVERAGE)	14.8 years	N/A
SPORT TYPE		
SOCCER	6	50
GYMNASTICS	4	33.3
TRACK AND FIELD	4	33.3
SWIMMING	3	25
CHEERLEADING	3	25
SOFTBALL/BASEBALL	3	25
VOLLEYBALL	3	25
BASKETBALL	2	16.7
HOCKEY	1	8.3
WATER POLO	1	8.3
FIGURE SKATING	1	8.3
EQUESTRIAN	1	8.3
CROSS COUNTRY	1	8.3
TENNIS	1	8.3
FOOTBALL	1	8.3
LACROSSE	1	8.3
DIVING	1	8.3
SKI RACING	1	8.3
HIGHEST COMPETITIVE LEVEL REACHED		
PROFESSIONAL	1	8.3
COLLEGIATE	6	50
CLUB OR HIGH SCHOOL	5	41.7

Participant recruitment occurred during November of 2021. During this time, the lead researcher taught four 1-credit physical activity courses at Michigan State University. In each of these courses, the lead researcher informed all students of the research study, its purposes, population parameters, and what participants would be asked to do. Students were informed that participation in the study (or lack thereof) would not affect their course grade in any way. Participants were also offered a $25 Amazon gift card for participation. Nine participants were recruited using this method.

Three personal contacts of the lead researcher also took part in this study. These three individuals were chosen by the lead researcher because they have extensive sport experience at the collegiate and/or professional level in sport. Additionally, two of these three participants competed in sports that the other nine participants had not, so these participants were selected with the goal of transferability across sport types in mind. They were asked via text message or email to take part in the study and were given a brief summary of the study, along with what they would be asked to do.

There were no direct benefits to the participants for taking part in this study beyond the $25 Amazon gift card. However, the answers they gave contributed to our understanding of tough love coaching, which will help coaches use tough love safely and effectively. As a result, relational maltreatment can be avoided, and athletes can reap the positive benefits of tough love coaching. The $25 Amazon gift cards were provided by the Institute for the Study of Youth Sport at Michigan State University, the lab with which the lead researcher is associated.

There was no physical risk to participants for participating in this study. However, participants may have been triggered by the topics of abuse and maltreatment, so psychological harm was possible. This was counteracted by informing participants, both at the beginning of

each interview and in the informed consent form signed before each interview (see Appendix B), that they had the right to stop participating at any time and could skip questions they did not feel comfortable answering. Additionally, participants were sent a list of MSU and non-MSU resources after the interview to use if anything discussed brought about uncomfortable feelings or traumatic memories (see Appendix C).

Procedures

This study operated via a basic interpretive approach and therefore involved in-depth semi-structured interviews. Athletes were interviewed by the lead researcher to understand their perceptions of and experiences with tough love in sport. Since this study involved human subjects, the first step was to seek approval from Michigan State University's Institutional Review Board. Upon approval, participant selection procedures began as outlined above.

Before participants could take part in an interview, they were required to sign and return the informed consent form to the lead researcher (see Appendix B for a copy of the informed consent form). Participants returned the signed consent form via email or in-person. All interviews were conducted and transcribed by the lead researcher. Interviews were semi-structured in nature. Semi-structured interviewing involves using questions predetermined by the researcher that are asked to all participants in the same order, however other questions may be asked in response to a participant's answer that are not on the interview guide (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). Semi-structured interviewing allows some flexibility in participants' responses, gives more control to participants, and allows for in-depth explanations of the meanings a participant attaches to a certain construct (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). See Appendix D for the semi-structured interview guide.

Question one on the interview guide was included to obtain demographic information about the participant. Question 2 was included to obtain relevant sport background information; mainly, how much time the participant spent in sport, what sports they participated in, and what competitive level they reached (if applicable). Question 3 was included to investigate how each participant defines tough love in the sport context. Questions 4 and 5 were directed at past experiences of tough love in sport and their effects. Question 6 addressed whether the participant sees tough love in sport as useful and when they believe it is appropriate to use. Questions 7 and 8 addressed whether certain coach characteristics influence the effectiveness and frequency of tough love strategies. Question 9 addressed whether the participant believed tough love could ever be harmful to the athlete; specifically, if they had ever seen tough love coaching cross this line and where they believe this line lies. Question 10 asked about recommendations for tough love coaching in sport. Finally, Question 11 asked again about the definition of tough love in sport and whether the participant's definition had changed or stayed the same throughout the interview.

Interviews were conducted via Zoom. Each interview was recorded for transcription purposes. In-person interviews were not utilized due to the health risks and uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, Zoom interviews are cost-effective, allow for greater access to hard-to-reach participants than in-person interviewing, and are easier to reschedule or shift times as needed (Hanna, 2012). The interview recordings, informed consent forms, and transcripts were all stored in a private Dropbox folder only accessible to the lead researcher.

At the beginning of each interview, participants were reminded of their right to stop participating at any time, that the interview was being recorded for transcription purposes, and

that their name would be removed from the transcription to maintain anonymity. Interviews took between 30 and 60 minutes.

Upon completion of the interview, participants were thanked for their participation, sent the list of MSU and non-MSU resources (see Appendix C) via email, and told that their Amazon gift card would be sent to them via email. Gift cards were sent to participants within 48 hours after completion of the interview. Upon the recommendation of Sparkes and Smith (2013), field notes were taken by the researcher after each interview including details of the interview such as the relationship developed between researcher and participant, how the participant reacted to the questions, how the participant appeared (nervous, excited, etc.), and any other relevant details. Routine transcription conventions were used as suggested by Sparkes and Smith (2013).

Data Analysis

Transcriptions acted as the primary material of analysis in this study, meaning the main source of data was the words of the participants. As stated previously, all interview recordings and transcripts were stored in a private Dropbox only accessible by the lead researcher. Any participant identifiers were redacted or replaced with pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

The general purpose of this study was to better understand tough love in the context of sport, a concept that has not been studied extensively and for which a theoretical framework does not exist. For this reason, thematic analysis is the most fitting type of data analysis. Thematic analysis is "…a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). The strengths of thematic analysis are its straightforwardness and flexibility and the emphasis it places on interpretation (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). Additionally, thematic analysis permits both social and psychological data interpretations and can be completed without operating via a specific theory (Sparkes & Smith, 2013).

After transcribing all the interviews, the researcher utilized Braun and Clarke's six-step method for conducting thematic analysis (2006). The six steps in this method include (1) familiarizing yourself with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report (pp. 87-93).

Step 1: Familiarizing yourself with the data (immersion)

After each interview was transcribed, the transcriptions were re-read so the researcher could become familiar with their contents. Although transcription is time-consuming, it is a helpful way to get acquainted with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The investigator also wrote an idiographic profile or case history of each interview (Appendix A). This was done in an effort to capture each athlete's storty in a holistic fashion and was used to provide context in cases where codes were difficult to identify or interpret. Finally, in this preliminary phase the researcher looked for general patterns in the data and took some preliminary notes at the recommendation of Braun & Clarke (2006).

Step 2: Generating initial codes

Step two is when first cycle coding began. A code is "…a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña, 2016). Coding was data-driven as there is no specific theory this study is operating out of (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The coding process was systematic across all transcripts (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). Equal attention was given to all parts of the data and the transcripts were read carefully. At the recommendation of Braun and Clarke (2006), the researcher considered as many themes or patterns as possible, making sure not to lose the context when coding. Some pieces of data were coded into multiple different themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding was completed manually using Microsoft Word. As suggested by

Saldaña (2016), analytic memos were used to document the researcher's thoughts and experiences during the analysis process.

Both inductive and deductive coding strategies were used in this study. Provisional coding strategies were used for the first cycle coding process. Provisional coding involves creating a pre-determined list of codes or categories before data analysis begins (Saldaña, 2016). The researcher created five pre-determined codes, or "buckets", based on the research questions being investigated in this study: "Definition/description/components", "Strategies/effectiveness", "Influential factors", "Harm/abuse", and "Other". This last bucket was added to organize the codes that did not fit into a pre-existing bucket; this is where in vivo (using the verbatim text to create a code) and initial (open) coding strategies were used (Saldaña, 2016).

Step 3: Searching for themes

In this step, the first cycle codes were combined to form themes (Saldaña, 2016). Whereas the last step involved combining data units into code, this step involved combining codes into relevant themes. Some codes created larger overarching themes, some created subthemes, and some were not related at all to these themes and were grouped as miscellaneous (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this stage, code mapping was used. Code mapping involves putting codes into categories, and then grouping these categories into central themes (Brown, 1999). The first step in this process was listing all the codes. The second step involved turning these codes into categories. In the third step, these categories were grouped into broader categories or themes (Brown 1999). Subcategories were also created from these categories (Saldaña, 2016). A visual of this process can be found in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Saldaña's code-to-theory model (Saldaña, 2016).
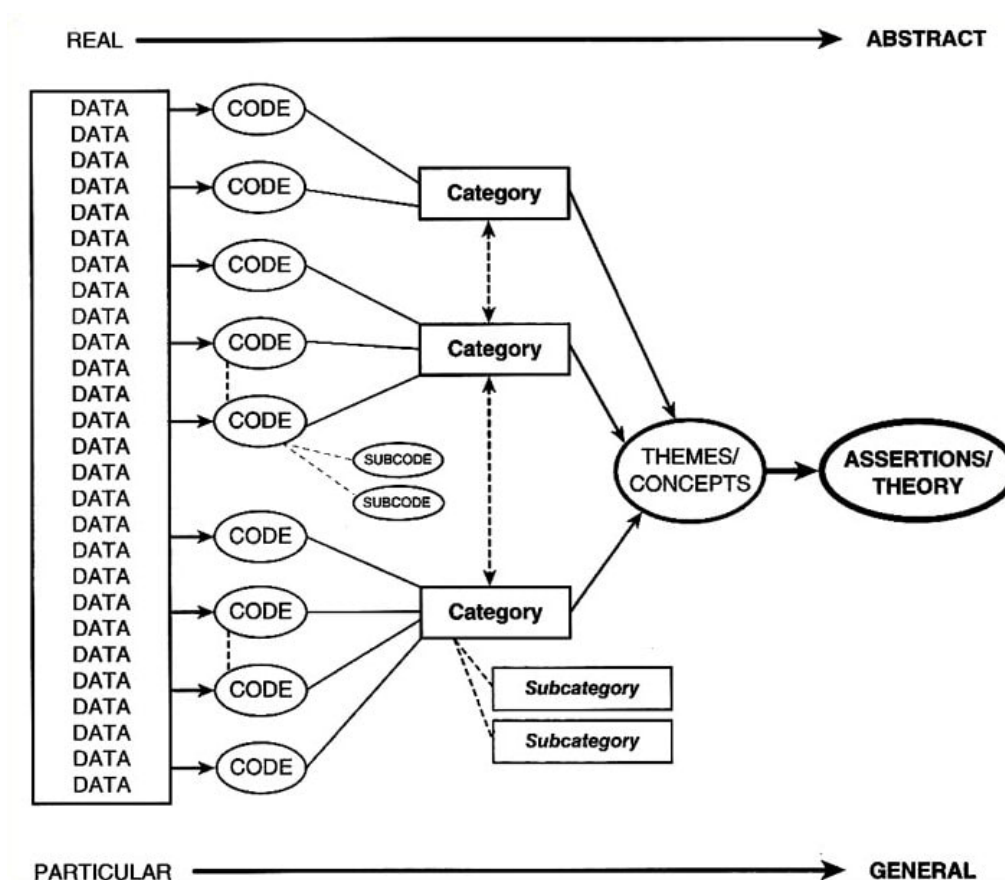
Step 4: Reviewing themes

Within each bucket, there was a large list of categories which needed to be further refined and grouped (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 91). Some themes remained as they were, and some were combined with other themes. At the recommendation of Braun and Clarke (2006), there were two levels of review and refinement in this stage. Level one involved reviewing the coded data extracts to see if the codes were coherently organized and truly represented the theme. The researcher also consulted with a "critical friend" during this process to discuss the refinement and categorization of themes, subthemes, and categories. The critical friend was a graduate student studying sport psychology who had experience conducting qualitative research. Lastly,

the research consulted with her advisor to review the codes. After multiple rounds of review, the researcher concluded that the categories and subthemes were coherently organized and that they were representative of each theme.

From here, level two began. This list of categories and candidate themes was combined to produce a thematic map (see Figure 3). Level two is similar to level one but instead of looking at the codes themselves, the researcher looked at the themes as they relate to the data set as a whole. The researcher considered whether the themes were truly reflective of the data set and continued to review and refine until she felt the thematic map was satisfactory (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Step 5: Defining and naming themes

Once a satisfactory thematic map was created, step five began. Here, the researcher "defined and refined" the themes to understand what each theme encompassed, and which parts of the data set related to this theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). Each theme required a detailed analysis; the researcher should know the core of each theme and how it relates to the story they are trying to tell with their data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As the researcher defined and reviewed each theme, smaller subthemes were identified (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). At the end of this stage, the researcher defined each theme, making sure each theme's name was clear and concise (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Definitions were kept to two sentences or shorter, and themes, subthemes and categories were defined so they could be clearly distinguished from one another (Sparkes & Smith, 2013).

Step 6: Producing the report

Once the researcher clearly identified all of the themes in the data, the final report was written. This report tells the story of the data beyond simply reporting the data. It provides

evidence from the data for each of the individual themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest

"extracts need to be embedded within an analytic narrative that compellingly illustrates the story

you are telling about your data, and your analytic narrative needs to go *beyond* description of the

data and make an *argument* in relation to your research question" (p. 93). The researcher kept

this suggestion in mind when writing and made sure the complete story of the data was not only

described but evidenced in her descriptions.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings of the current study. There were

four major themes identified, each related to one of the study's purposes. It is worth noting,

before presenting results, that this was a qualitative study operating out of a basic interpretive

approach to research (i.e., examining what associations and perceptions athletes have regarding

tough love coaching). While consistency was looked for across interview responses, the way in

which athletes perceive and interpret tough love behaviors varied to some degree across athletes,

and may be different than what the coach perceived that behavior to be.

Purpose 1: Athletes' Definitions of Tough Love Coaching

The first purpose of this study was to define tough love coaching. To achieve this

purpose, each athlete was asked how they define tough love coaching. Table 2 below contains

their responses and demonstrates that while each athlete had their own perspective of tough love

coaching, there were consistencies across definitions. Participants were also asked at the end of

the interview if their definition would change or stay the same. This was done because the

process of taking part in the interview may have allowed participants to think more about what

tough love coaching involves and how it may be defined, and therefore their definition or

description of tough love may have changed throughout the interview. Some participants

redefined the concept at the end of the interview, hence the reason some participants have two

definitions.

Table 2: Participants' definitions of tough love coaching.

PARTICIPANT	DEFINITION/DESCRIPTION
1	"Obviously you have to be aggressive at a certain point, so that people can get it through their mind and everything, but you also can't be very mentally aggressive towards people because then they just won't want to do it."
2	"…I think it starts with the basis of a relationship, and then being aggressive and coaching on the basis of deepened, like, love or caring for the person themselves. Like you want to push them to be better because at the end of the day you care for them." "It's tough and it's love. It's showing the care but also the necessary feedback to grow, rather than just kind of like, 'Oh, you have to have a relationship.'"
3	"… probably encouraging you to keep going, even when they [the coach] know it's hard and you might not want to do it that day, but you still have to do it no matter what." "Pushing someone to be better because you know they *can* be better."
4	"…they're not really taking into account your feelings. Like if you want to be done with something, or if something's not working, they're going to say, 'Too bad, keep going,'…. like, they'll make you keep going if—even if you want to be done or change something up." "Making an athlete do something that they don't want to do. And then also just being a little harsh and not really getting a choice, just saying, 'You have to do this.' And then... (5.0) I don't know. It's really kind of that. Like, you just don't really have a choice and you gotta do something."
5	"I think tough love is coaches who demand the best from you. It's... demand the best from you in a unique way. And I think it's--they deliver hard information, but clearly, and.... But tough love--because I mean, there's *tough*, and then there's *love*. I think it's clearly with--and they guide you on how to make it, actually, how to fix it, what the problem is. And it's kind of expressing their belief in you that it's possible." "…clear expectations, believes that you can make it happen. And expresses their belief that they can, but it's in a tough and direct fashion. And it's not an abuse, or, a form of–obviously it can be intimidating, but it's not meant to be a form of intimidation. It's just their clear-cut way of not beating around the bush and that's their expectations."

Table 2 (cont.)

PARTICIPANT	DEFINITION/DESCRIPTION
6	"I'd say I would define it as a coach being tough or hard on an athlete in order for the athlete to improve in a way. They don't mean to be mean or anything, it's just like, 'All right, maybe if I yell at them, it'll drill this specific thing into their head to get them to improve or remember it,' kind of thing." "…trying to drill something into an athlete's head in order to produce results."
7	"…making your athlete know that you're disciplining them, or giving them jobs, or making them do certain things in sport, because you want them to be good. That's what I feel like it insinuates is, you're making them train so that they can be the best that they can be."
8	"…I guess it's just more like aggressive motivation, is how I'd put it."
9	"I would say tough love is coaching that helps athletes become their best athlete and self. Uhm... and it can involve tough criticisms, but it's always constructive and, in the end, beneficial."
10	"So I think tough love coaching is, in my experience, I think it's the best way to be a coach, because you still have that respect in the relationship with the love part from your players, but then obviously the toughness is pushing you and knowing that you can do better from--like if your coach is on you and being tough on you, that's just showing that they care and that they want you to do better and succeed."
11	"I feel like defining it would have to be, they have a very... the relationship you guys have, it's not necessarily, it's more formal than informal. I feel like it's more, they're not there to--you're not there to cry on their shoulder. I don't know what I'm saying, but they're more tough."

Table 2 (cont.)

PARTICIPANT	DEFINITION/DESCRIPTION
11	"I would define it, I still would use the word stern. I think I would just say, tough love, it's nothing—it's not like the love you'd have with a friend. It's not like the love you'd have with a relationship, or with your family. It's more formal. It's more, you're trying to get the task done. It's not like we're lollygagging and we're trying to make relationships here. Obviously when you're, like, for example, I said when my coach was yelling at me. He was only trying to help me. So that's the love part of it coming in. He was trying to help. But it's tough. It's hard to hear, it's embarrassing, it's a sensitive part, it's a sensitive subject. It's just, it could be--it's tough on the person receiving that information. But in the end, it's for your own benefit, I would say."
12	"I would probably define tough love as having high expectations, not really bending on expectations, and being really upfront with where athletes stand on expectations, while also, I guess, supporting them in the drive to get there, if that makes sense."

Key themes emphasized in the various definitions, especially those that were mentioned by multiple participants, were used to formulate the following proposed definition of tough love coaching.

"Tough love is a coaching strategy in which a coach makes an athlete do something or

delivers feedback to an athlete in an aggressive, hard, stern or pushing manner for the

purpose of helping the athlete improve or succeed in the long run."

Several particular points characterize this definition. First, tough love is aimed at helping

the athlete improve or succeed, especially in the long run. Second, it involves the coach being

stern, harsh, or aggressive or pushing the athlete to do something they are not already doing,

although it is important to note when the athletes used the term aggressive, they did not imply an

attempt to harm on the part of the coach. Finally, tough love may involve the coach making the

athlete do something they may be reluctant to do or providing feedback relative to some action which is not being done correctly or needs to be performed at a higher level.

It is worth noting that although the proposed definition is reflective of the main ideas consistent across participant definitions, some participants mentioned concepts that were not included in the proposed definition. Concepts that were addressed by the majority of participants were included in the proposed definition, while other concepts, although important, were addressed by only one or two participants and therefore were not included in the proposed definition. For example, several participants alluded to the idea of having high expectations as a component of tough love coaching. Since this was not discussed widely across participants, it was not included in the final proposed definition. This does not mean having high expectations is not important in tough love, but that it was not discussed widely by participants and therefore was not included. As it was not possible to include all concepts, the proposed definition paints a holistic picture of the participants' perceptions and definitions of tough love coaching in sport.

Purpose 2: Athlete's Perceptions of Effective, Ineffective and Harmful Tough Love Coaching Strategies

The athletes were also asked a series of questions regarding tough love strategies and their effectiveness. The participants were asked to recall a time in which they saw or experienced a coach engaging in effective, ineffective, and harmful tough love. A large number of meaning units were identified relative to these questions and, via thematic analysis, collapsed into three higher-order themes. These included: (1) effective coaching strategies; (2) ineffective coaching strategies; and (3) harmful coaching strategies. Each of these will be defined and discussed below.

Effective strategies

Effective tough love coaching behaviors were those described as initially uncomfortable but ultimately perceived positively by the athlete and resulted in the desired outcome. Forty three meaning units were identified across the participant interviews relating to effective coaching strategies. Each participant mentioned at least one strategy. Three categories were identified based on these meaning units: "Yelling positive or neutral things", "Repetition", and "Challenging a maladaptive behavior". These categories are discussed in-depth below.

Yelling encouragement or instructional feedback. Ten of the 43 meaning units identified related to coaches' use of yelling. These meaning units were identified across five different participant interviews. While athletes had mixed views on yelling, they found it generally effective if the coach was yelling encouragement (positive) or instructional (neutral) feedback. For example, Participant 7 reflected on the times her coaches yelled at her. She had one coach who used yelling sporadically and was encouraging, and another coach who yelled constantly and yelled insults at her. As a result of her experience, she gave the following recommendations regarding yelling:

> "And if… for example, if your athlete is having a rough day, or is slacking off. It's totally fine to be like, 'Hey, remember your goals, remember what you want to do at this practice, set intentions, and get to it.' Stuff like that. But I don't think it's ever okay to yell at an athlete without any sort of intentionality. Like, just yelling to yell because you're frustrated with them. I don't think that's okay. Yelling to be like, 'Hey, get on top of your training right now,' or 'Get your mind right so that you can do blank blank blank,' is okay…. Stuff like that, it's okay as long as you're not beating the athlete down or making them feel like they're incapable."

For this athlete, yelling was an effective coaching strategy when it involved feedback, encouragement, or instruction. "Yelling to yell" out of frustration is ineffective or harmful, especially when it was negative.

Participant 6 also reflected on the times her coach yelled at her and she found it effective: "I guess she would have me do specific drills over and over again and she would be yelling at me during them to try to drill it into my head. I don't think she meant to be *mean*, but it was more like, 'All right, do it over and over again until it's perfect.' And it did definitely help me improve, for sure."

In this example, the athlete knew that the coach was not yelling at her to "be mean", but to help her "perfect" her sport-specific skills. To her, yelling was helpful in this context because the coach gave clear feedback: yelling at her during the drills gave the athlete feedback about her performance which helped her improve. Multiple other participants highlighted this idea that yelling was effective only if it involved encouragement, support, or feedback. Some athletes also mentioned that tough love could be demonstrated without yelling; however, if a coach does yell, it is important to make sure they are yelling neutral or positive statements.

In summary, yelling can be a useful tough love strategy, although yelling is not required for tough love to be effective. According to these respondents, when a coach yells at an athlete, it should be encouraging or should be instructional. The yelling should not be intense, constant, or personally attacking the athlete. Yelling positive or instructional feedback can be a useful way to get athletes to change an undesired behavior.

Repetition. Of the 43 meaning units, seven of them involved the use of repetition as a tough love strategy. Three of the athletes discussed times in which a coach made them redo a drill, skill, or routine when the athlete was afraid of a skill or not training to the best of their ability. For example, in the previous section, Participant 6 discussed how her coach would have her "do specific drills over and over again" to help her improve, which she found effective in the long run. Participant 7 also discusses times in which her coach effectively used repetition as a tough love strategy:

"Or if I had a... bad practice, or was having a bad program, it was like, 'Okay, we're gonna work harder. We're going to train harder, you're going to go back and do this section again.' Or, 'You're going to do another session,' or something like that that was just, 'It's not your best day. We're going to do extra.;'"

In this example, her coach told her to repeat a section or the entire session and to "work harder" without giving any negative or harmful feedback. The coach wanted her to repeat things because she wanted her to work and train harder to perfect the session and improve as an athlete. The athlete deemed this as effective because it helped her self-reflect, work harder, and become a "great athlete and good competitor".

Participant 8 talked about a time in which repetition helped him overcome fear in his sport, equestrian:

"Especially, it's really important in horseback riding when you fall off, that you have to get right back on the horse or you'll get a mental block, not being able to do it. Or the horse will actually develop a... it's like you're teaching the horse that if they're able to take a break after they throw you off, that they'll learn to do that more. So you always have to get right back on. So I've definitely had tough love experiences where I fell off

and, you know, I was kind of hurt. I wasn't--and they were like, 'No, you have to get

right back on. No, get on now. You have to.' And it's always been a good experience. I

mean, I have fallen off and immediately fallen off again {laughs}, but it's always been...

specifically, those situations, just helping get over the mental block in my head."

In this scenario, the trainer made the participant get right back on the horse, even though

the athlete was afraid, in order to avoid a mental block and to avoid teaching the horse negative

behaviors. Although scary, getting back on the horse and repeating whatever jump or skill he

may have been doing has helped him overcome his fears, get over the "mental block" in his

head, and become a better rider.

To summarize, repetition is a useful coaching strategy in general. Making athletes repeat

things when they are afraid or tired that they do not want to do is a useful way to demonstrate

tough love and achieved a desired outcome, as long as it is coupled with rationale and support.

Challenging a maladaptive behavior. Challenging a maladaptive behavior was noted as

a common and effective tough love strategy. It involves confronting or calling into question

something an athlete is doing that is affecting his or her ability to grow or succeed in sport. The

remaining 26 meaning units of the 43 identified were related to the coach challenging an athlete

behavior that was ineffective or maladaptive. Eight of the 12 participants recalled times a coach

challenged a behavior by calling them out for having a poor attitude, telling them to work harder,

being honest with them about where they are at in terms of ability, and so on. For example,

Participant 9, a track and field and cross-country athlete, discusses a time in which her coach

delivered tough feedback and was honest with her about her purposes and goals:

"Even my freshman year, I had a conversation with our head coach… And he was like, 'I

feel like you don't know what you're doing here.' We had to write these goal sheets for

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the year and then beyond the year, and he was like, 'I feel like you're, you don't know what you're doing here, and you need to figure it out if you want to be good.' And that was like, he didn't tell me that I *couldn't* be good, but he was like, 'You need to really evaluate what you think you can do and how you can make that happen.' And I think later on, it ended up being constructive."

In this example, the athlete thought she had set strong goals and was confident going into this meeting with her coach. She was surprised when he told her he was unsure of what her goals and purposes were being on the team and told her to "figure it out" if she wanted "to be good". The athlete clearly stated that the coach did not beat her down or tell her that she "couldn't be good", he just told her she needed to reflect, figure out her purpose, and figure out if she wanted "to be good". She learned from this experience, and it helped her become a better athlete.

Participant 5, a football player, also discussed a time a coach challenged him in response to an undesirable behavior:

"…I was a freshman, I made a good throw against varsity guys. And I was really excited about it, but then I walked back, and then he got really mad at me because I couldn't explain what coverage that the defense was in… I got really prideful in making a good throw against varsity guys, and I came back and he brought me right back down to the level I needed to be at. As a quarterback, he always wanted to make sure, like, that the quarterback has to be the most intelligent, smartest guy on the field and has to know what everyone else in the field is doing before you can do anything. Because anyone can make one good play. And that's the overarching thing, he's like, 'Anyone can make one good throw, but can you do it every play, and can you be consistent?'"

This participant was confident that he made a good play, but when the coach asked him to explain the defense's coverage, he was unable to do so. In this instance, the undesirable behavior was the athlete's lack of awareness and inability to explain the coverage of the defense. The coach challenged this behavior by asking the athlete to explain the coverage, and then getting upset with him afterward for not being able to do so. The athlete found this effective as it brought him "right back down" to the level he "needed to be at", and clearly understood the coach's reasoning for challenging this behavior. Overall, he feels this strategy made him a better player.

Many specific behaviors fall under the umbrella of challenging a maladaptive athlete behavior. This could involve calling out an athlete for having a bad attitude, telling an athlete to work harder, making athletes redo things that they are afraid of, or calling out a behavior that is impacting their ability to grow or succeed in sport. In the "Factors" section of this chapter, these and other factors will be discussed that influence the effectiveness of challenging a maladaptive athlete behavior.

Ineffective strategies

Ineffective tough love coaching behaviors were those that did not result in the desired outcome, regardless of how they were perceived by the athlete. Two categories of ineffective strategies were identified: (1) Yelling constantly and (2) Only providing negative feedback. Twenty four meaning units were identified across the participants' interviews relating to these categories, which are described in-depth below.

Yelling constantly. Fourteen of the 24 meaning units identified related to a coach's

constant use of yelling. These meaning units were identified across six participants' interviews.

While athletes identified that a coach raising his or her voice could be effective, athletes found it

ineffective if the yelling was consistent or used too often. In her interview, Participant 11

describe a coach whose constant yelling was not only ineffective, but made her and her

teammates angry:

"He was a very big screamer during the--but it was *constant*. Like, *every second*. And I'm

not saying it was right at me every time, but he would yell. It was like, come on, give us a

chance to play. You're just screaming in our ear and we're trying to play. So, I feel like

his tough love when he was trying to help was not helping because you could tell it was

basically pissing off a lot of the girls…. In the moment, really intenseness that was

insanely constant that we all would be mad about and not want to listen. We were like,

'Okay, this isn't working. The way you're screaming at us is not helping.'"

In this example, this participants's coach yelling so constantly was "not helping" and was

angering the athletes. The constant "screaming" at the athletes made them "not want to listen".

Whether or not it was directed at the participant, the coach's constant yelling was distracting and

frustrating for her.

As mentioned previously, yelling is not always an ineffective or negative strategy, but it

should not be used constantly and should involve instructional feedback or encouragement.

Yelling can be effective and perceived positively by the athlete if it is used in moderation and

incorporates either positive or instructional feedback; athletes should know how to fix the

behavior that the coach is yelling at them to fix. When using yelling as a tough love strategy,

coaches should use it sparingly and should incorporate encouragement and/or technical instruction.

Only providing negative feedback. This finding is the opposite of the effective strategy of "Yelling positive or instructional feedback." While tough love coaching may require negative feedback, according to these respondents it should also be paired with encouragement, support, and/or feedback for improvement. Without this positive or instructional feedback, athletes found tough love ineffective. Ten meaning units were identified across six participant interviews relating to the concept of only providing negative feedback. When asked to describe a time tough love was ineffective, Participant 2 gave the following answer:

"I feel like I've had an experience where, you know, I've made a mistake on the field, or I mess up something in practice, and... I get the tough *without* the love. And I think at the end of the day, the coach *thinks* that they're giving me a tough love, but when I'm just getting negative feedback, obviously that's not going to help me get better. That's just saying, 'Hey, here's all the things you're doing wrong.' So I know during practice, if I am making a mistake, and the coach is just kind of like, 'Hey, fix that, you're doing that bad, come on, let's do better,' and it's like, *well*... {scoffs, throws hands up} *but, now what?* So I think that that didn't help me, just kind of receiving negative feedback and no love."

This participant, a soccer player, becomes frustrated when a coach gave her "negative feedback" without specifically telling her what she should improve upon or fix. Not only is it unhelpful, but it is frustrating and confusing for her when a coach provides the "tough *without* the love". When providing negative feedback—which may be necessary when engaging in tough love—coaches should also provide encouragement and/or feedback on how to change the desired behavior.

Participant 11 also recommended that coaches avoid using purely negative feedback as a tough love strategy:

"If you're just screaming in someone's face saying, 'You need to do this', without maybe giving them the criticism in a, like, 'what do you mean I need to do this? Like, what do I have to do?' Maybe giving them a little bit more specific direction in the tough love versus screaming in their face. It would be a way more effective way to approach a player, I would say."

This quote highlights that according to the participants of this study, providing specific instructional feedback is an effective tough love coaching strategy, as detailed previously. It also emphasizes the use of purely negative feedback as an ineffective coaching strategy. "Screaming in someone's face" without providing "specific direction" is ineffective, because the player then becomes confused on how to fix the problem being addressed by the coach. Coaches cannot simply call out a behavior without telling the athlete how to change the behavior; providing specific feedback on how to improve or change is imperative.

The two ineffective tough love strategies highlighted in this section, "Yelling constantly" and "Providing only negative feedback", were identified by the participants as not effective and they were not perceived positively. In the following section, harmful tough love strategies will be discussed. There are two main differences between ineffective and harmful tough love strategies. First, ineffective strategies never produce the desired outcome, whereas harmful tough love strategies may or may not produce the desired outcome. Second, ineffective tough love strategies are not harmful to the athlete's well-being in the long run, whereas harmful tough love strategies have negative impacts on athlete's physical and/or psychological well-being long-term. Harmful tough love strategies will be discussed in detail in the following section.

Harmful strategies

Harmful tough love coaching behaviors were those that may or may not have resulted in the desired outcome but had long-term negative effects on the athlete. Two categories were identified within this subtheme: "Emotional abuse" and "Physical abuse and neglect". Sixty two meaning units were identified across 11 participant interviews relating to these categories.

Emotional abuse. Emotional abuse is defined by Stirling and Kerr (2008) as "a pattern of deliberate non-contact behaviors by a person within a critical relationship role that has the potential to be harmful" (p. 178). Fifty six of the 65 meaning units were related to emotional abuse, and 11 of the 12 participants discussed emotional abuse when asked when tough love can become inappropriate or harmful to the athlete, highlighting how prevalent the topic of emotional abuse was across interviews. Emotionally abusive behaviors identified by participants included swearing, screaming (especially in front of others), threatening, and degrading or insulting.

Swearing was identified by three participants as a harmful coaching strategy. Five meaning units fell within this subcategory. Participant 12 describes this when asked to provide recommendations to coaches regarding the use of tough love:

"I think cussing at athletes is *off* the table, in my book. Not that, I guess cussing in *general* is fine. Like, 'I'm F'ing hype' is very different than 'get on the F'ing line.' That's, I don't know. But I think cussing at athletes is nothing but demeaning. So, unless your goal is to demean them, then don't do it."

This participant clearly states that swearing at athletes is "off the table". To her, it may not be harmful or abusive if the coach is swearing in general, and not directly at the athlete. But, per her suggestion, swearing at athletes is "nothing but demeaning" and coaches should avoid swearing at their athletes.

Screaming, a more intense and negative form of yelling, was discussed by eight of the 12 participants when asked about harmful or inappropriate tough love coaching strategies. Twenty eight meaning units fell within this subcategory, so it was highly cited by athletes as a harmful tough love strategy. The participants found screaming especially harmful if it was done in front of others. Participant 11 detailed a time in which her coach screamed at a player, which she felt was a harmful tough love coaching strategy:

"I remember this one time. So we had a practice, and there was this one girl on the team that was a little more... she was good, but she, you know when you become, if you think you're good and you're a little cocky, and maybe a little bit more laid back because you know you're the best? We had a player like that. And my coach wasn't a huge fan of her attitude… There was this one time where he stopped practice right in the middle of it, and screamed, and I mean *screamed*, at this girl for literally five minutes straight. We all were in shock. I have never seen him that mad before… I think that was pretty, I think it was definitely inappropriate in the sense where he did not have to yell at her in front of *everyone*. But I'm honestly, in a sense, not surprised he did. But the *way* he did it was probably not the smartest because she was very upset and probably scared her a lot."

In this example, the participant accentuated the word "screamed", so it can be assumed that the coach was yelling loudly and intensely at her teammate. As the participant said, this girl may have needed tough love coaching, but the way the coach approached the situation was "definitely inappropriate" because it was too intense, as he screamed at her for "five minutes straight", and because it was done in front of the whole team. According the participants in this study, while yelling can be effective, it needs to be accompanied by instructional or positive

feedback, should not be overly intense (to the point where it becomes screaming) or constant, and should not be done in front of others.

Degrading or insulting athletes is another emotionally abusive behavior that coaches may mistake as tough love. Eighteen meaning units were identified across seven participant interviews relating to degrading, berating, or insulting athletes. When asked to explain when tough love becomes inappropriate or harmful, Participant 7 gave the following answer:

"…it's okay as long as you're not beating the athlete down or making them feel like they're incapable. If you're diminishing their competence, that's horrible. Or if you're knocking down their personality, or their body, or any part of them, tough love is super negative."

For this participant, tough love crosses the line when it makes the athlete feel "incapable" or it attacks them personally, for example, their "personality" or their appearance. "Diminishing" the athlete's "competence" in sport is inappropriate and harmful, as well as attacking them personally instead of attacking the behavior that the coach wants to change. Coaches should avoid attacking the athlete on a personal level and should instead attack the specific behavior they would like the athlete to change, as well as provide feedback on how to make this change, as mentioned previously.

Threatening was another emotionally abusive behavior mentioned by the participants. Five meaning units were identified across five participant interviews related to the use of threatening. For example, Participant 8 recalled a time a trainer threatened physical violence:

"I had this one trainer, actually. She was one of the worst horse trainers I've ever had, because she was just *way* too aggressive… Like, in horseback riding, it's really important to have your hands in the correct positioning so that you can protect your fingers and

your wrists and stuff. And when I would have it in the wrong positioning, she'd say, 'I'll break your hands if you don't get it right.' I would be like, 'Just chill, okay? {chuckles}I'm figuring it out.'"

This experience was not only frustrating and unhelpful for the participant but constitutes verbal emotional abuse. When he did not have his hands in the correct position on the reigns, his trainer threatened to break his hands. While it is important to have your hands in the "correct positioning", the coach's method of getting this athlete to use the correct hand positioning was "too aggressive" according to the participant. Threatening physical harm is a harmful coaching strategy that should never be used by coaches.

To summarize, four emotionally abusive behaviors were identified by participants: swearing, screaming, degrading or insulting athletes, and threatening. Of these four behaviors, screaming and degrading or insulting athletes were most prevalent across participant interviews. All these behaviors constitute verbal emotional abuse.

Physical abuse and neglect. Both physical abuse and physical neglect were discussed by participants as harmful or inappropriate behaviors. Physical abuse is defined as "deliberately aggressive or violent behavior by one person toward another that results in bodily injury" (American Psychological Association) and was discussed by three of the participants. Four meaning units were identified relating to physically abusive behaviors, which included both contact and non-contact behaviors. These behaviors include hitting athletes and overtraining.

For example, Participant 7 explained that her abusive coach forced her to do "40 to 60 minutes of extra cardio… 3 days per week" on top of the "three and a half to four hours a day" that she was already training, in order to lose weight; the coach repeatedly told her that she was

too big. Participant 12 explicitly stated that "physically hitting athletes is not a thing that would be acceptable".

While physical abuse was not discussed widely across interviews, this was to be expected. As mentioned in the literature review, physical abuse often presents as a physical behavior that can be seen and is easier to distinguish as an abusive behavior for this reason. Therefore, athletes may not have mentioned physical abuse as crossing the line because physical abuse is more clearly harmful than emotional abuse, and therefore they may not have thought as physical abuse as constituting tough love.

Neglect, or the "failure to provide for the basic needs of a person in one's care", was mentioned in two participant interviews. Two meaning units were identified across two participant interviews relating to physical neglect specifically. The two neglectful behaviors identified by participants were (1) forcing an athlete to play through injuries and (2) telling an athlete not to eat. Participant 5 discussed the behavior of forcing athletes to train through serious injuries:

> "It's like, when I said abuse, stuff like that. It's when a guy is obviously injured and they're calling you soft, or whatever… Playing through injuries and stuff when obviously it's not the right thing. Luckily I've never had that experience."

This participant clearly states that making fun of injured athletes for being "soft" or making an athlete train with a serious injury when "obviously it's not the right thing" are examples of abuse. Failing to provide the athlete with adequate health care is defined by Stirling (2009) as physical neglect, and this is not a strategy that should be used by coaches. If an athlete is injured, the coach needs to provide proper medical care to this athlete and should not use their own judgement to decide whether or not the athlete is "soft" or should keep going.

Participant 7 talked about an experience in which her coach asked her to not eat in order

to lose weight and perform better:

"I was always seen by him as not being thin enough. So, if I walked into practice,

sometimes he would grab the back of my arm, like the skin part. And just grab it and be

like, 'What is this?', insinuating that I was too big. Him and my other coach would tell

me not to eat after practice for at least a couple hours, so my body burnt more fat."

This participants' coaches were so focused on her losing weight that they told her "not to

eat" after her three and a half- to four-hour long practices for "at least a couple hours". In this

scenario, her coaches failed to provide adequate nutritional information by forcing her to lose

weight without regarding her "nutritional well-being and health", which is identified by Stirling

(2009) as a physically neglectful behavior (p. 1095). It is not appropriate for coaches to tell

athletes not to eat, and coaches should not use this behavior as a tough love coaching strategy, as

it can be harmful to the athlete's physical and psychological well-being, as it was in this

participant's case.

In summary, two categories of harmful behaviors were identified in this study:

"Emotional abuse" and "Physical abuse and neglect". Emotional abuse was the most prevalent;

behaviors in this category include swearing, screaming, degrading or insulting the athlete, and

threatening. Physical abuse was also identified as a harmful behavior, and examples included

both contact and non-contact physical abuse. Physical neglect was also identified as an

inappropriate or harmful behavior; such behaviors include forcing an athlete to train with serious

injuries and telling athletes not to eat. Coaches should avoid using the behaviors listed here as

they cause long-term harm to the athlete, whether or not they produce the desired outcome.

Coaches should instead use the effective tough love strategies given in this section to produce the desired outcome without causing long-term physical and/or psychological harm to the athlete.

Purpose 3: Factors That Influence the Effectiveness of Tough Love Coaching

The third purpose of this study was to identify factors that influence the way in which tough love is received by the athlete. Participants were asked whether they thought some coaches use tough love better, and what characteristics these coaches have if so. They were also asked whether they thought some coaches use tough love more often, and what characteristics these coaches have. Participants were also asked to provide recommendations regarding the use of tough love. A large number of meaning units were identified relative to these questions. Via thematic analysis, these meaning units were collapsed into nine higher-order themes. These included: (1) relationship; (2) coach demographics; (3) athlete demographics; (4) sport demographics; (5) encouragement and support; (6) clear feedback; (7) frequency; (8) motivational climate; and (9) privacy. Each of these factors is defined and discussed below.

Relationship

The strength of the coach-athlete relationship was cited as an influential factor by all participants. Fifty seven meaning units were identified relating to the coach-athlete relationship, or a coach's capacity to connect with, know about, and demonstrate care for their athletes. Participants stated that the stronger the coach-athlete relationship—i.e., the better the coach can connect with the athlete, the better the coach knows the athlete, and the more care the coach demonstrates to the athlete—the more effective they perceived tough love coaching to be. Participant 9 highlights this when asked about recommendations regarding the use of tough love coaching:

"I think tough love works the best when you have a better relationship with your coach. If you don't really have a relationship with someone and they're just yelling at you, it's usually not going to go well. But if you have a relationship and a better understanding of—the coach has a better understanding of you, and you have a better understanding of them and why they're saying these things, it'll make more sense and you'll be more apt to make these changes or just take the feedback in the way that they present it. But I think if you don't have a relationship with them, it doesn't really work."

This participant believes the coach-athlete relationship is essential when considering the effectiveness of tough love. If the athlete has a "better relationship" with their coach and a mutual understanding, the athlete will be more likely to "make these changes" or "take the feedback". On the other hand, if there is not an established relationship or the relationship is weak, it feels as though the coach is "just yelling at you" and it will not be well-received by the athlete. Coaches should foster a relationship with and have an understanding of their players before engaging in tough love to use tough love more effectively. Participant 7 also discussed this in their interview when asked about the effectiveness of tough love coaching:

"But for me, it depends on the coach-athlete relationship. With my coach… she knew when to use tough love with me, and she knew when to hold back and be more positive and encouraging and uplifting. Because I'm super type A perfectionist. So, if I was having a bad day, I was super quick to shut down. And she knew when I was shutting down that I didn't need tough love. In that situation, I needed encouragement. But like I said, it depends on the coach, and it depends on the athlete and the relationship."

In this scenario, the participant perceived that having a strong coach-athlete relationship not only influenced the *way* in which tough love was shown, but also *when* the coach decided to

engage in tough love. According to the athlete, their coach knew when they were "shutting down", that they "didn't need tough love" but instead they "needed encouragement". The coach knew her well enough to know when to engage in tough love, and when the participant simply needed encouragement and would not respond as well to tough love.

Having a strong coach-athlete relationship in which the coach knows about, cares for, and can connect with the athlete largely influences how effective athletes perceive tough love behaviors to be. Coaches who have a stronger relationship with their athletes may not only be able to use tough love more effectively, but also can better determine when to use tough love and when to use a different coaching strategy instead, when tough love may not be best for the athlete. Thus, the coach can positively influence the coach-athlete relationship by demonstrating care for and getting to know their athletes, although it must be noted that the athlete also plays a large role in the coach-athlete relationship and the coach themselves does not control this.

Coach background

Coach demographics, or the personal characteristics and sport background of the coach, were also perceived to influence the effectiveness of tough love. Fourty four meaning units were identified across participant interviews relating to the coach's personal characteristics and sport history as they influence the effectiveness of tough love. Coach demographics found to influence tough love's effectiveness include sport knowledge and personal characteristics of the coach, specifically empathy, understanding, and ability to balance "tough" and "love".

According to the participants, coaches who are more knowledgable about sport are more likely to use tough love effectively. When asked to explain whether some coaches use tough love more effectively, Participant 12 gave the following response:

"I feel like they're less educated [coaches who use tough love less effectively]. They're going on their previous experience of, 'well, *my* high school coach did this, so this is what's happening'… I think more educated people seek out resources that help them be better coaches, and less educated people tend to go off of their prior working knowledge a little bit more, so."

This participant believes that coaches who use tough love less effectively are less educated about their sport, or coaching in general, and therefore go off their "previous experience". Educated coaches, on the other hand, are more likely to "seek out resources that help them be better coaches" as opposed to "going off of their prior working knowledge". In this regard, educated coaches can use tough love more effectively.

Personal characteristics of the coach were also thought to influence tough love's effectiveness. The characteristics most widely mentioned were the coach's levels of empathy and understanding, and their ability to balance "tough" and "love". Participants believe that coaches who are empathetic can use tough love more successfully. Additionally, coaches who are able to read their athletes and understand their athletes' needs engage in tough love more effectively. Finally, coaches who can find the balance between "tough" and "love"—being aggressive, but not overly aggressive—can use tough love better than coaches who are either too aggressive or not tough enough.

Participant 10 talked about finding this balance. They said, "And so, finding that balance, I think good coaches *have* that balance and that's why they are successful, that they have figured out that balance between relationship and pushing the team and, yeah, the love part, too." They believe that coaches who successfully use tough love have the "balance" between "tough" and "love". They are able to balance the "relationship" with the need to push the team or the athlete.

And, as the participant mentioned, these coaches can push the team without losing the "love part". This ability to balance the "tough" with the "love" is what makes "good coaches" effective when engaging in tough love.

The coach's demographics influence the way in which tough love is demonstrated by the coach or received by athletes. Coaches with more sport and coaching knowledge were perecieved as being able to use tough love more effectively than less educated coaches. The personal characteristics of the coach also matter; for example, coaches who empathetic, good at reading their athletes, and can balance the "tough" and the "love" aspects of tough love can use it more effectively.

Athlete characteristics

An athlete's personal characteristics were also perceived to influence tough love coaching's effectiveness. Across seven participant interviews, 25 meaning units were identified regarding the personal characteristics of athletes. The most cited characteristics include mental toughness and motivation.

Generally, participants believe that athletes who are more mentally tough can handle the aggression or toughness that tough love coaching requires. When asked which athletes tough love may be more suitable for, Participant 6 gave the following answer:

"So I think an athlete that's already very tough mentally, more so than physically…
'Cause I know a lot of the time when I would see her [the coach] do that same thing [show tough love] to other athletes that were maybe more shy or timid or not as mentally tough, they would take it a little harder, maybe cry or stuff like that."

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This participant states that athletes who are mentally tough, even "more so than physically", can handle tough love, whereas athletes who are "not as mentally tough" would "take it a little harder".

The athlete's motivational style also influences how tough love coaching is received. Generally, athletes who are self-motivated and/or are driven by anger or intensity respond more positively to tough love than perhaps athletes who are not as self-motivated. When asked about the factors influencing how well tough love works, Participant 7 said, "And then I also think it just depends on the athlete, like I said earlier. If they're tough on theirself, they probably don't need as much tough love. But if they're a slacker, they probably need a lot of tough love." Athletes who are "tough" on themselves and work hard need less tough love than athletes who are not self-motivated to put in effort, or who are "slackers". Participant 12 also discussed in their interview how motivation influences the way in which tough love is received:

> "But I had teammates there where they really did better if our head coach got in their face and challenged them, pushed them. And I was like, *heck no. Do not do that to me*. But I mean, I know that they were like, 'no I need that. That motivates me.'"

This participant's teammates were motivated by a coach getting "in their face" and being tough with them. The participant herself, however, did not respond well to this type of coaching style. They did respond well to less aggressive tough love coaching, as mentioned previously in their interview. However, this tough love style of a coach getting in the athlete's face and being overly aggressive did not work well for her, whereas it was motivating and effective for her teammates.

Tough love may work better on athletes who are mentally tough. Athletes who are self-motivated may need less tough love than athletes who are less motivated or tend to slack off.

Athletes who are motivated by tough, intense coaching behaviors may take better to more aggressive tough love strategies, whereas athletes who do not respond well to such intense coaching may respond better to a less aggressive form of tough love coaching.

Sport characteristics

The demographics of the sport, specifically competitive level and position/role on the team, were shown to influence the effectiveness of tough love coaching. Twenty meaning units were identified across six participant interviews regarding sport demographics as they influence tough love's effectiveness. Participants believe that the higher the competitive level being coached, the more effective tough love is and the more responsive athletes will be to it (and, potentially, the more they need it). Paricipant 7, who is a coach now, reflected on this in their interview:

> "Some coaches are hesitant to use tough love just because they don't want to discourage the athlete in any way, especially with lower level athletes. As a coach now, I rarely use tough love with my athletes because they're all skating more for recreation, just fun. So, I don't feel the need, and also, I don't think it's going to do any good. So it depends on how high of a level the coach is coaching."

The participant believes that tough love might not be as appropriate for recreational or "lower level athletes", because it can be discouraging for them and is not as useful as it is for higher level athletes. According to the participant, tough love is more suitable and effective for athletes at a higher competitive level.

The position of the player, or their role on the team, also influence the way in which tough love is shown by coaches and received by athletes. Participant 5 stated that as a quarterback, the coach was "specifically hard" on them. This participant also found that when

they were a starting quarterback in high school, tough love was more effective than when they were playing in college as a back-up quarterback:

"Because, I mean, in college I had tough love, but it was most effective in high school because I actually was a significant player on the team. In college, I was a walk on. I didn't get a lot of snaps. So it was most effective for me, probably throughout high school."

As a quarterback, this participant played a vital role on the team. As the participant stated, "…the quarterback has to be the most intelligent, smartest (person) on the field and has to know what everyone else in the field is doing before you can do anything." For this reason, they believe they received more tough love than other players who maybe do not play as crucial of a role. When they went to college as a "walk on" and "didn't get a lot of snaps", tough love was less effective because he was not getting as much playing time.

The competitive level of the athlete and the position they play, or their role on the team, influence how tough love is demonstrated by coaches and received by the athlete. Athletes at a higher competitive level are more likely to receive tough love coaching positively, whereas it may not be effective or even necessary for lower-level athletes. It is also possible, however, that athletes who are less driven, less confident, or mentally weaker do not make it to the upper competitive levels of sport, and therefore the athletes at higher levels respond to tough love more positively because most of them are highly motivated, confident, and/or mentally tough. Athletes who play a significant role on the team also receive more tough love and it is more effective for them. Finally, athletes who receive more playing time may perceive tough love more effectively, partially because they may receive more of it than other players who do not play as often.

Encouragement and support

According to the participants, tough love coaching is most effective when accompanied with encouragement and support. The coach should express belief in the athlete and provide the athlete with resources to make the desired change. Sixteen meaning units were identified across seven interviews relating to the use of encouragement and support in effective tough love coaching.

For example, when talking about ineffective versus effective tough love coaching, Participant 6 said, "So it's almost like negativity versus, like, negativity, but like, encouragement and correction." Tough love that was just negative was ineffective and could potentially become harmful. On the other hand, negativity with "encouragement and correction" made tough love effective. To this participant, providing encouragement to and expressing belief in the athlete is what makes tough love work.

Providing support to the athlete also involves giving the athletes the necessary resources to make the desired change. This may includes asking athletes, "What can I help you with?", as suggested by Participant 9. Providing athletes with help when they ask for it, as mentioned in Participant 12's interview, is another way coaches can and should provide support to their athletes.

Providing encouragement and support is an important step when engaging in safe and effective tough love. Participants suggest that coaches express belief in their athletes, make their athletes feel capable, provide encouragement, and offer support by providing resources and asking athletes how they can support them. Doing so will increase the likelihood that tough love coaching strategies will produce the desired outcome.

Clear feedback

The participants in this study indicated that a necessary component of effective tough love coaching is clear feedback; this involves specifically explaining to the athlete what they are doing wrong and how to improve upon or fix it. Eleven meaning units were found across seven participant interviews relating to this concept. Participant 1 discussed this when asked if they believe tough love is useful:

"I do, in the circumstance that you're actually… giving them *actual* reasons for why they're doing stuff wrong... I feel like it works the best when you're communicating with the actual person instead of just being like, 'Oh, you're doing that wrong'. You have to actually tell them what they're doing wrong."

To this participant, it is important that the coach give the athlete "reasons for why they're doing stuff wrong" and simply don't just tell them what they're doing wrong, but to specifically "tell them what they're doing wrong". It is not enough to tell an athlete *to* fix something; the coach has to explain *why* they want the athlete to fix it and *what* behavior the athlete needs to change.

Not only should the coach provide specific feedback about what the athlete is doing "wrong", but they also need to provide specific feedback on how to make the desired change. Participant 9 gave the following response when asked what influences the effectiveness of tough love:

"I definitely think there are coaches that are better at it… If you're just screaming in someone's face saying, 'You need to do this', without maybe giving them the criticism in a, like, 'What do you mean I need to do this? Like, what do I have to do?' Maybe giving them a little bit more specific direction in the tough love versus screaming in their face. It

would be a way more effective way to approach a player, I would say. Just giving more

specific information… would be more effective in the tough love."

In this case, tough love is most effective when the coach tells the athlete what they have

to do instead of just saying "You need to do this". Giving "specific information" about how to

fix or change the behavior is an important aspect of tough love coaching; the athlete cannot make

the desired change if the coach does not explain how to do so.

Providing clear feedback to the athlete is crucial when engaging in tough love coaching.

The athlete should be told specifically what they are doing "wrong", why the coach thinks it is

"wrong", and how to fix it. Doing so will help athletes receive tough love more positively and

make the change that the coach desires.

Frequency of use

The frequency of use, or how often a coach engages in tough love, influences how

effective tough love is. Twelve meaning units were identified across five participant interviews

regarding the frequency of tough love strategies as they relate to tough love's effectiveness. It

was found that generally, the more often a coach engages in tough love, the less effective it will

be, especially if it is constant. Participant 3 highlighted this when asked if they believe tough

love is useful:

"I think it's useful in certain situations, but not as an overall coaching concept or strategy.

Like maybe in certain instances when you think they [the athlete] need it, but not like that

'every day' strategy, or your overall reason to coach is constantly giving tough love."

For this participant, tough love becomes ineffective when it is a coach's only coaching

"strategy" or if they are "constantly giving tough love". Tough love should be used when the

athlete needs it, but should not be used "every day" or it is no longer useful, and potentially even

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harmful. When tough love is used too frequently by coaches, it becomes ineffective and can even be harmful to the athlete.

Motivational climate

The motivational climate, or the norms and expectations created by the coach, influence the effectiveness of tough love. Eight meaning units were identified across four participant interviews relating to motivational climate as they pertain to the effectiveness of tough love. Participants stated that tough love was most effective when the coach was focused on the athlete improving and growing, versus focusing on competition and winning; i.e., tough love is more effective when the coach promotes a mastery climate that is focused on personal growth (Ames, 1992). Coaches who create performance climates use tough love less effectively and are more focused on performance outcomes and social comparison than on personal growth. Participant 6 discussed this in their interview:

> "So I guess the difference would be, I feel like the coaches that use it less effectively care more so about wanting to get the win, or advancing on, whereas the other coaches that do use it effectively care about the players too, not just the win. They're trying to be like, 'Okay, this will help you progress,' kind of thing."

This participant believes that coaches who care more about getting the win use tough love less effectively, whereas coaches who use it better "care about the players too", not just the performance outcome. Coaches who are focused on advancing the athlete along without considering the needs or abilities of the athlete also use tough love less effectively.

Athletes are more receptive to tough love when they perceive a mastery motivational climate in which self-improvement and effort are emphasized. Tough love is less effective when the coach is focused primarily on social comparison or performance outcomes.

Privacy

The last factor influencing the effectiveness of tough love is how privately it is done. Eight meaning units were identified across four participant interview relating to the privacy of tough love coaching. Participants stated that tough love should be done one-on-one in order to be both effective and safe. Participant 1 believes as a coach, "…you should just talk to (the athlete) individually without doing it in front of a whole team, because that just makes them feel worse." Taking the time to talk to the athlete individually, instead of demonstrating tough love in front of the whole team, will increase the likelihood that the athlete perceives the tough love positively and that the tough love is successful.

Participant 9 also talked about this in-depth in their interview. When asked to describe a time tough love was ineffective, the participant talked about a time their coach called a few athletes out in front of the whole team without directly addressing them:

"And just, I would say the thing that hurts most from that is one, being around your teammates and being called out feels worse than if they talk to you in their office because it feels like they don't want to spend the time to talk to you individually to help you grow, they just want to do it all in one 15 minute meeting, instead of talking to you about what you can do… It feels like they don't care enough to have a conversation with you. And then also being called out in front of your teammates, that sucks. Because then other people are gonna be like, 'Oh, they don't even care about our team,' or stuff like that."

In this scenario, the participant felt hurt because they and their teammates were "called out" in front of the whole team, and the coach did not want to "spend the time" to talk to them "individually" to help them grow. The participant felt their coach did not "care enough to have a

conversation" with them. The participant also believed this influenced the way their teammates perceived them and their work ethic in the sport.

When engaging in tough love, coaches should confront the athlete one-on-one. If the tough love is being given to the entire team instead of one individual, then using tough love at the team level is okay. However, tough love is less effective and potentially harmful if the coach calls out one individual in front of an entire group or team.

Purpose 4: Determining the Line Between Appropriate Tough Love and Harmful Tough Love Coaching

The fourth purpose of this study was to determine when tough love becomes inappropriate or harmful or constitutes maltreatment. In the interviews, participants were asked whether they believed tough love could become inappropriate or harmful to the athlete and to describe a time in which they had seen tough love cross this line. All 12 participants believe that tough love can become inappropriate or harmful to the athlete. Across participant interviews, a large number of meaning units were identified relating to finding this "line". From these meaning units, it was concluded that tough love becomes harmful or inappropriate when it (1) attacks the person instead of the behavior, (2) impacts the athlete's psychological well-being, and (3) focuses more on performance outcomes than athlete well-being. Each of these subthemes are addressed in-depth below.

Attacks the person instead of the behavior

Tough love can also become inappropriate or harmful if it is delivered in a way that attacks the person instead of the behavior. This occurs when a coach, instead of addressing the specific behavior they want to change, personally attacks the athlete. Relating to this subtheme, 18 meaning units were identified across six participant interviews. When asked to describe the

line between tough love and harmful or inappropriate coaching behaviors, Participant 10 gave the following response:

"I think belittling athletes and saying things not like, 'That was so bad', but '*You're* so bad', and that kind of stuff. Like, personally attacking. Rather than talking about what they just did, more like coming after them as a whole, as a person, of who they actually are, not what they're doing right in the moment, like, 'That pass was so bad.' That's the mental abuse side, I think, of it."

For Participant 10, tough love crossed the line when it belittled or personally attacked the athlete, instead of addressing the specific behavior the coach would like changed. "Coming after them as a whole" instead of "what they're doing right in the moment" is what makes tough love inappropriate or harmful and potentially constitutes "mental abuse".

Participant 7 also addressed this when asked when tough love coaching is appropriate to use:

"Yelling to be like, 'Hey, get on top of your training right now,' or 'Get your mind right so that you can do blank blank blank,' is okay. Or making athletes do an extra rep if they slack off. Stuff like that, it's okay as long as you're not beating the athlete down or making them feel like they're incapable. If you're diminishing their competence, that's horrible. Or if you're knocking down their personality, or their body, or any part of them, tough love is super negative."

To this participant, tough love becomes harmful when it beats the athlete down, makes them "feel like they're incapable", or knocks their "personality", "body", or "any part of them". "Yelling" in general is okay, but personally attacking the athlete or any part of them makes tough love "super negative".

When asked to describe a time they had seen tough love cross the line, Participant 11 discussed a time in which a player on their team was screamed at by their coach for "five minutes straight" and the yelling became "personal". When asked about the line between tough love and harmful coaching, Participant 11 came back to this example and said, "Cause obviously, that one girl was personally attacked for her behavior… that was super personal. It wasn't about her critique of soccer; it was about the attitude. And that wasn't necessarily okay." This participant believes this instance of tough love was harmful as the athlete was "personally attacked for her behavior". This personal attack on the athlete, instead of critiquing the behavior the coach wanted the athlete to change, made tough love harmful.

Tough love coaching should attack the behavior the coach wants changed, not the athlete themselves. Tough love becomes harmful when it personally attacks the athlete and does not address the specific behavior that the coach wants to modify. Even if this form of coaching brings about the desired outcome, it is harmful to the athlete and therefore coaches should avoid personally attacking their athletes and instead address specific sport behaviors.

Impacts the athlete's psychological well-being

Participants believe tough love coaching crosses the line when it impacts the athlete's mental health and psychological well-being. When a coaching behavior has long-term effects on athlete's mental health or well-being beyond the initial stage of discomfort that is present in tough love, it is considered harmful or potentially abusive. Across five participant interviews, nine meaning units were identified regarding this subtheme.

When asked if they believed tough love could become harmful to the athlete, Participant 3 responded, "Uhm, yeah. I think... maybe if... it actually is *getting* to the kid, then I think it can be harmful. So, on mental health, and will to continue in that sport." When the tough love starts

"getting" to the athlete and begins to impact "mental health" and "will to continue" in sport, that is when tough love crosses the line and becomes "harmful" to the athlete.

Participant 8 also discussed this in their interview. When asked to identify where the "line" is between tough love and harmful coaching, this participant gave the following response:

"The thing is, I feel like the line is different for everyone…. But I feel like it is just wherever the person feels motivated, but also still confident in themselves. Because you can push so hard that the person just starts thinking that they will never be able to do it and stuff. They start losing their sense of self-worth and stuff."

Participant 8 believes tough love becomes harmful when the athlete starts "losing their sense of self-worth" or no longer feels "confident in themselves". A coach can "push so ahrd" that the athlete starts to believe they "will never be able to do it" and their competence decreases.

While the line may vary across athletes, as mentioned by Participant 8, participants generally agree that tough love coaching becomes harmful or inappropriate if it impacts the athlete's mental health or psychological well-being long-term. While the initial "tough" stage of tough love can bring about negative emotions, these immediate negative effects should not be long-term and the athlete should not be psychologically or mentally harmed in the long run as a result of the tough love.

Focuses more on performance outcomes than athlete well-being

Lastly, according to the participants in this study tough love can cross the line into harm or abuse if the coach is focused more on performance outcomes than the well-being of the athlete. When a coach is more focused on obtaining a desired result than on the overall functioning of the athlete, tough love becomes harmful, even if it does cause the desired outcome as discussed previously. Nine meaning units were identified across five participant interviews

relating to this subtheme. Participant 7 discussed a coach she had who had a negative, controlling coaching style. This coach yelled frequently and used intimidation as a way to achieve behavior change. Participant 7 said:

> "I don't really know if he thought about how he was hurting me. I think it was more just, 'I'm going to try whatever way I can to get this (athlete) to do what I want.' And he saw that sometimes I was responsive to the yelling, because it scared me. So he would continue to do it."

This participant's coach yelled at them to get them to do what he wanted. This coach saw that the participant was "response to the yelling" because it "scared" them, so the coach would "continue to do it". The coach did not take the time to think about "how he was hurting" the athlete, but instead reverted to yelling because he knew it made the athlete do what he wanted. This lack of consideration for the athlete's well-being in pursuit of a performance outcome or standard of proficiency constitutes harmful, inappropriate, and potentially abusive coaching.

Participant 12 also discussed a time in which they saw tough love coaching cross the line. In this instance, the participant described an acquaintance who experienced controlling coaching; this person's coach used fear as a way to motivate behavior change, and was focused on competitive outcomes more than the well-being of their athletes. Participant 12 said the following:

> "Like, you competed against each other in practices, and if you were not the winner of the drill, you were the loser. And if you are the loser, then X, Y, Z came with that. And it was really... militant, almost, on what they got. And it was all, it was fear based. So maybe that's my line. It was very fear based of, 'I want you to be afraid of losing really badly. I want you to be afraid of not doing the right thing, *so* much so that you'll do

anything to get it right.' And… it worked. I mean it, fear is a really powerful behavior changer. And so… yeah, it can be effective in terms of getting the performance outcome you might want. But if we're thinking about long-term functioning... (this person) cannot play a board game now because (they're) too invested. And if it's not going well, it's a problem... So, I would say that. If it's really fear based, if you're just trying to drive someone by being afraid of the punishment or afraid of not doing what you want them to do, then it will work. But it's still over the line, I would say."

In this instance, the coach was so focused on "performance outcomes" that it impacted this athlete's "long-term functioning". While it may have produced the outcome the coach wanted, this athlete became so competitive as a result that it now has impacted their psychological functioning in the long run. Like in Participant 7's example, this coach used fear as a tactic to produce performance outcomes without considering the impact it would have on the athlete. The coach was hyper-focused on winning and the athlete's long-term functioning suffered as a result.

When a coach emphasizes the performance outcome above the needs and long-term functioning of the athlete, tough love coaching becomes harmful. While this hyper-focus on winning, and the questionable coaching practices that come with it, could produce the outcome the coach desires, it harms the athlete long-term and therefore should be avoided. In the pursuit of performance outcomes, coaches should foster a mastery motivational climate and promote the growth and well-being of the athlete above and beyond those performance outcomes.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purposes of this study were fourfold: (a) to propose a definition of tough love coaching; (b) to identify tough love strategies that are effective, ineffective, or harmful; (c) to identify factors that influence the effectiveness of tough love coaching; and (d) to determine when tough love coaching can become inappropriate, harmful, or abusive to the athlete. The findings as they relate to each of these four purposes and the existing related literature will be discussed below. As mentioned previously, this was a qualitative study aimed at investigating athlete's perceptions of and experiences with tough love coaching. Their perceptions of their coach's behaviors may be different than what the coach perceived those behaviors to be (i.e., the athlete's interpretation may be different than the coach's, and each athlete's interpretation of a certain behavior may vary).

Definition of Tough Love Coaching

The first purpose of this study was to propose a definition of tough love coaching in sport. Based on the definitions given by the participants, a proposed definition of tough love coaching was created. In this study tough love was defined as "a coaching strategy in which a coach makes an athlete do something or delivers feedback to an athlete in an aggressive, hard, stern or pushing manner for the purpose of helping the athlete improve or succeed in the long run." When engaging in effective and safe tough love, coaches have the best interest of the athlete in mind. They deliver difficult feedback or make an athlete do something they may not want to do in order to help the athlete grow and achieve their sport goals. Even though this initially involves delivering feedback or making an athlete do something in a stern, harsh manner, it should not be overly aggressive or cause long-term psychological harm to the athlete.

It is also important to note that when participants said the coach delivered feedback in an aggressive manner, they equated aggression with being stern and not as an intent to harm as defined in the sport psychology literature on aggression.

The definition proposed in this study is similar to existing definitions of tough love in non-sport contexts. For example, from a layperson perspective, Wikipedia defines tough love generally as treating someone "…harshly or sternly with the intent to help them in the long run." In both this definition and the one provided in this study, the purpose of tough love is to help the individual in the long run, and it involves acting in a harsh or stern manner. Lexmond and Reeves (2009) further emphasize that in the context of parenting, tough love is used to help a child grow, overcome adversity, or overcome some obstacle. Likewise, the definition provided here emphasizes that tough love coaching is used to help an athlete "improve or succeed in the long run".

Trimbur (2011) states that tough love has two components: the "tough" component in which the coach has to help the athlete deal with difficult situations and overcome adversity, and the "love" component that encompasses the care and commitment a coach feels toward the athlete. Tough love coaching, then, is a balance of a coach's care and commitment to the athlete, and the need to help them deal with and overcome difficult situations. This concept is present in the proposed definition as well: the "tough" aspect in the provided definition is the need for the coach to deliver feedback in a stern or unpleasant manner, in order to help the athlete grow or succeed in the long run (the "love" component). Finally, tough love coaching requires hindsight in that it is initially uncomfortable for the athlete, but in the long run the athlete can look back and see how that experience was beneficial or why tough love was necessary. Faw and colleagues (2019) identified hindsight as an important component of tough love in parenting; this

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finding holds true for tough love in sport as defined by the participants in this study as the athlete should be able to reflect on the experience and see how they grew as a result.

It is important to note that according to the definition provided, instances of tough love must benefit the athlete in the long run in order to be considered safe and effective tough love. This requires the coach to make a judgment about how their tough love strategy may impact the athlete in the long run, which is difficult to do. When determing whether a tough love strategy will be helpful in the long run, coaches should consider asking themselves the following:

1. Can what I'm about to do be considered abuse or maltreatment (as defined previously)?

2. Am I providing clear feedback on what the athlete is doing wrong and how to fix it?

3. How will this athlete respond to what I'm about to say or do, based on personal characteristics?

4. What is my end goal in providing tough love to this athlete?

5. Have I tried other forms of behavior modification first?

By asking themselves these questions, coaches can ensure that they are engaging in behaviors that, at the very least, are not abusive or neglectful. They can also be sure that the athlete is given clear feedback on what the issue is and how to fix it, they are keeping the athlete in mind, that they have a clear end goal in providing tough love, and they have exhausted all other behavior change modification options before engaging in tough love.

Tough Love Coaching Strategies

Three types of tough love coaching strategies were discussed in this study: (a) effective, (b) ineffective, and (c) harmful. Effective tough love strategies are coach behaviors that participants felt did not cause long-term harm and resulted in the coach's desired outcome;

ineffective tough love strategies are coach behaviors that participants felt did not cause long-term harm, but also did not result in the coach's desired outcome or help them in any way; harmful strategies are those coach behaviors that may or may not have result in the coach's desired outcome, but that participants perceived as harmful to the athlete's functioning long-term. Each of these strategies will be discussed in-depth.

Effective tough love strategies

The effective tough love strategies identified in this study were (a) yelling encouragement or instructional feedback, (b) repetition, and (c) challenging a maladaptive behavior.

Yelling was perceived as an effective tough love strategy if it included encouragement and/or instructional feedback. Yelling encouraging or supportive statements was perceived as motivating and helpful for the participants. Participants also felt that yelling was okay if it included instructional feedback that identified the behavior the athlete should change and/or provided information on how to make the desired change.

These findings are consistent with current research regarding encouragement and instructional feedback. For example, Smith and colleagues (1979) found that athletes rate coaches as more effective if the coach uses technical instruction, specifically mistake-contingent technical instruction, and reinforcement. Additionally, Smith and Smoll (1990) found that coaches who use encouragement and technical instruction are perceived more positively by athletes, especially those low in self-esteem, than coaches who are low on supportiveness or do not give much technical instruction. Change-oriented feedback has been shown to be most effective if it provides solutions on how to change the behavior or fix the issue, provides tips, and is based on "clear and attainable objectives known to athletes" (Carpentier & Mageau, 2013, p. 431). In a recent study, Horn (2019) identified four keys to effective feedback, one of which is

providing high rates of positive and instructional feedback. Providing more encouragement, support, and informational feedback is positively associated with athlete's self-esteem, adaptive forms of motivation, positive affect, persistence, and commitment to sport (Horn, 2019).

Consistent with previous research, in this study, yelling was only perceived by participants as an effective strategy when coupled with encouragement or technical feedback. Another of Horn's (2019) four keys to effective feedback is delivering feedback in an autonomy-supportive versus controlling manner; the information being communicated should be delivered in a way that enhances athlete autonomy, provides the athlete with instructional feedback, and provides athletes options on how to correct the issue (Carpentier & Mageau, 2013; Carpentier & Mageau, 2016; Horn, 2019). When yelling was always negative (i.e., low on support) or lacking technical instruction, it was perceived negatively by participants.

Making athletes repeat something was perceived as a positive tough love strategy by the participants. Repetition, defined by Lee and colleagues (1991) as "an attempt to solve a goal-related movement problem", can be used to help the athlete improve and further refine their sport skills; it becomes a tough love strategy when the coach makes the athlete repeat something that the athlete does not want to do, and/or when repetition is paired with feedback that is delivered in a harsh or stern manner. Participants perceived repetition positively as a tough love strategy if it was explained by the coach to be for their benefit, even if the athlete did not want to repeat the skill, drill or routine. According to the participants, when a coach makes an athlete repeat something, it is helpful if the coach explains why they are having the athlete repeat it and identify exactly what they want the athlete to change. Providing this reasoning and having clear objectives that are shared with the athlete is a crucial element of providing effective change-oriented feedback (Carpentier & Mageau, 2013).

Challenging a maladaptive behavior, or confronting something an athlete is doing that is affecting his or her ability to grow or succeed in sport, was perceived as an effective tough love strategy by the participants. Awareness is crucial when engaging in behavior change (Smith & Smoll, 2017); therefore, coaches often have to call attention to a behavior that the athlete should change. When challenging the behavior, the coach may provide change-oriented feedback; this becomes tough love when the coach delivers this feedback in a harsh or stern manner. Therefore, the "tough" aspect of this strategy is the challenging or confronting of the behavior, which is delivered in a harsh or stern manner; the "love" aspect is the coach engaging in this strategy to help the athlete improve or succeed in sport. Examples of this include calling into question an athlete's poor attitude, lack of work ethic, or inability to perform a certain sport skill.

Ineffective tough love strategies

Ineffective tough love strategies were those that participants felt did not cause long-term harm but were not beneficial or effective in producing the desired outcome. These behaviors include (a) yelling constantly and (b) only giving negative feedback.

Yelling frequently or too often was perceived as ineffective by the participants. While yelling could be perceived as an effective behavior if it included encouragement or instructional feedback, it was perceived as ineffective when it was "constant", in the words of Participant 11, regardless of the content. In their study investigating behaviors of effective coaches, Gould and colleagues (2007) found that effective coaches know how to communicate effectively with their athletes. Constantly yelling was not perceived positively by participants, suggesting that yelling frequently is likely not an effective way for a coach to communicate with an athlete. The athlete may be less receptive to the coach's attempts at tough love than if the coach yelled less frequently or communicated the tough love in a different manner.

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Participants also felt that tough love is ineffective when it includes only negative feedback. When coaches only told participants what they were doing wrong without providing instruction on how to fix it, the participants perceived tough love negatively. This finding aligns with the existing literature regarding effective coaching practices, which suggests that when providing change-oriented feedback, coaches should not simply address the behavior, but should help the athlete identify how to fix it and explain why they want the athlete to change that behavior (Carpentier & Mageau, 2013). As mentioned previously, Smith and colleagues (1979) demonstrated that athletes perceive their coaches as more effective if they provide encouragement and/or technical instruction; athletes of coaches that use punishment often or do not provide instruction or support rate their coaches as less effective and view the coach more negatively. More effective coaches are those that challenge and support their athletes, whereas coaches who are perceived as less effective by their athletes tend to be more negative (Flett et al., 2013).

Tough love may involve negative feedback, but it should also involve providing the rationale behind the negative feedback and instructions or guidance on how to modify the desired behavior. For example, one of the participants mentioned that it was frustrating when her coach told her something was bad without telling her to fix it. Multiple participants noted that tough love would be more effective if a coach did not simply say "That was bad, do it again", but instead provided rationale for *why* what the athlete did was bad. By providing this rationale when giving tough feedback or making an athlete do something, as tough love entails, the athlete will likely perceive the tough love more positively and the tough love strategy is more likely to produce the desired outcome.

Harmful tough love strategies

Harmful tough love strategies were those that may or may not have produced the desired outcome, but that participants perceived as having caused long-term harm to the athlete or severely disrupted their overall functioning. Two categories of harmful tough love strategies were identified: (a) emotional abuse and (b) physical abuse and neglect.

Emotional abuse, defined by Stirling and Kerr (2008) as "a pattern of deliberate non-contact behaviors by a person within a critical relationship role that has the potential to be harmful" (p. 178), was the most cited form of harmful tough love coaching by participants. This was to be expected, as emotional abuse does not typically present as a physical behavior and therefore is harder to identify than the more overt forms of abuse such as sexual and physical. There were four categories of emotionally abusive strategies discussed by participants in this study: swearing, screaming, threatening, and degrading or insulting the athlete.

Participants perceived swearing at athletes as a harmful coaching strategy. However, it is worth noting that some participants believe swearing in *general* is okay; in this case, swearing becomes harmful when it is directed at the athlete.

Screaming was another behavior perceived by participants as harmful; many of the participants discussed times in which they had seen a coach yell intensely and loudly at another athlete, scenarios that the participants identified as harmful and not okay. A few of the participants mentioned that threatening an athlete is harmful to athlete well-being and should be avoided as a tough love strategy. Finally, multiple participants mentioned they had seen a coach personally attack, belittle, or insult an athlete when engaging in what they perceived to be tough love; to the participants, this was not an acceptable tough love strategy as it is harmful to the athlete's mental well-being.

These findings are consistent with existing literature. For example, Gervis and Dunn (2004) found that there are eight types of emotionally abusive behaviors coaches engage in, including shouting, belittling, threatening, and humiliating. In this study, all of the participants had experienced shouting and belittling at some point, demonstrating how common these coaching behaviors are (Gervis & Dunn, 2004). Emotional responses to these incidents include feelings of stupidity, worthlessness, anger, lower self-confidence, depression, and humiliation on the part of the athlete (Gervis & Dunn, 2004). Screaming, an emotionally abusive behavior identified in this study, is functionally the same as shouting. Threatening was another emotionally abusive behavior discussed by participants that is consistent with the findings of Gervis and Dunn (2004). Belittling and humiliating relate to the behaviors of degrading or insulting an athlete that were identified in this study. All four of the emotionally abusive behaviors discussed in this study were also cited as emotionally abusive by Stirling (2008). The findings of the current study, combined with those in existing literature, suggest that these behaviors have lasting negative effects on the athlete psychologically and should be avoided.

Physically abusive and physically neglectful tough love coaching behaviors were also discussed by participants, although at a lesser frequency than emotionally abusive behaviors. These included making athletes train through serious injuries, hitting athletes, telling an athlete not to eat, and making athletes overtrain. Similar behaviors were identified as physically abusive or neglectful by Stirling (2008); for example, Stirling identified "striking", "forced physical exertion", "denying access to needed water, food, or sleep", "inadequate nutrition", and "reckless physical disregard for a person's well-being" as physically abusive and/or physically neglectful coaching behaviors. Given that physical abuse can result in serious long-term negative consequences for the athlete, both physically and psychologically (Malinosky-Rummell &

Hansen, 1993; Timpka et. al., 2019), these behaviors should be avoided and should not be confused with safe, effective tough love coaching.

It is worth noting that yelling was identified as an effective, ineffective, and harmful strategy. According to participants, what made the difference between effective, ineffective, and harmful instances of yelling by the coach is the content, frequency, and intensity. For example, an effective form of yelling as a tough love strategy may be "That was bad because you did not squeeze your legs. Do it again and squeeze your legs!" In this example, instructional feedback is provided so the athlete knows exactly what the coach wants them to change and how to change it. An ineffective version of yelling as a tough love strategy would be "That was bad, do it again!" Here, the coach attacks the behavior without telling the athlete specifically what they did wrong or how to fix it, or without providing encouragement. A harmful form of yelling as a tough love strategy would be "You're so bad!". This personally attacks the athlete instead of addressing the behavior the coach wants to change. Participants also perceived yelling as ineffective if it was constant, suggesting coaches may not want to use yelling as a consistent tough love strategy. Finally, participants perceived yelling as harmful if it was intense, or could be categorized as "screaming", so coaches should be aware of how intensely they are yelling at their athletes when using yelling as a component of a tough love strategy.

Influential Factors

Nine factors were perceived by participants to influence tough love's effectiveness: (a) the coach-athlete relationship, (b) coach demographics, (c) athlete characteristics, (d) sport demographics, (e) encouragement and support, (f) clear feedback, (g) frequency of use, (h) motivational climate, and (i) privacy.

Participants discussed that they perceived tough love more positively and as more effective if they had a strong relationship with their coach. Specifically, if the coach demonstrated care for and knew each of the athletes on the team, tough love was perceived as more effective because the coach could better tailor their tough love approach based on the individual needs and personality of the athlete. Demonstrating care for and building strong relationships with one's athletes is fundamental to coaching and teaching success (Gilbert et. al., 2010). Autonomy-supportive coaches, who are more attuned with the feelings and needs of their athletes, may therefore be more effective when using tough love strategies than more controlling coaches who do not consider the needs and feelings of their athletes (Deci et. al., 1994). This relates to past findings that coaches who demonstrate care and respect for their athletes, are empathetic, and can identify and cater to each athlete's individual differences within the team are perceived as more effective by their athletes (Gould et. al., 2007; Bennie & O'Connor, 2011). By establishing a strong coach-athlete relationship, coaches are earning athlete's trust and respect and learning how their athletes operate and how to approach or motivate them, consequently increasing the likelihood that their tough love strategy will be more successful. While the coach does not solely impact the coach athlete relationship, as the athlete is also involved in this relationship, coaches can attempt to strengthen this relationship by demonstrating care and respect for their athletes, being attuned to the athletes' needs and feelings, and being empathetic in their interactions with athletes.

The effectiveness of tough love may also be positively related to a coach's level of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence relates to one's ability to accurately recognize and label emotions in oneself and others, use emotions to influence cognitive process and thought, understand the effects of emotions and their underlying meanings, and regulate the emotions of

oneself and others (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). For example, Participant 7 discussed how her coach knew when to use tough love with her and when she needed encouragement because she was "shutting down"; in this scenario, her coach had enough emotional intelligence to identify when the participant truly needed tough love or whether a different coaching approach may produce better results. This ability of a coach to read and understand the athlete's mood and emotions is improved through the building of the coach-athlete relationship; the more a coach knows the athlete, the more they can tailor their use of tough love based on the athlete's mood and emotions.

The demographics of the coach, specifically sport knowledge and personal characteristics such as empathy, understanding, and the ability to balance "tough" and "love", were perceived by participants to be influential in the way tough love coaching was perceived by the athlete. Some participants mentioned they perceived tough love more positively and found it more effective when they knew their coach was knowledgeable about the sport. This concept is consistent with the current literature; for example, Gilbert and colleauges (2010) identified subject knowledge, or a coach's level of knowledge regarding the sport they are coaching, as an important component of successful teaching in sport.

Empathy, or a coach's "…ability and willingness to understand the [athlete's] thoughts, feelings, and struggles from the [athlete's] point of view" (Rogers, 1980, p. 85; c.f. Elliot et al., 2011)—was perceived as an important factor by participants influencing tough love's effectiveness. Coaches who were more empathetic, or those who were successful at understanding (and willing to understand) the athlete's view, were those who engaged in tough love more successfully according to the participants. Because empathetic coaches can and do understand their athletes thoughts, feelings, and experiences, they may be more effective at

knowing when to engage in tough love and how to use it successfully with each athlete. This relates closely to a coach's level of understanding for their athletes. Knowing each athlete and understanding how they operate may increase the likelihood that tough love is more successful due to the coach's ability to tailor their tough love approach based on the needs and personality of the athlete. A coach's level of empathy, ability to understand each athlete, and strength of relationship with each athlete likely play a role in how effectively they can balance the "tough" and "love" portions of tough love; this "balance" was also perceived to influence tough love's effectiveness by participants. Coaches who were purely "tough" with no "love", or vice versa, were perceived as less effective by the participants.

Participants perceived the personal characteristics of the athlete, namely mental toughness and motivational style, to influence how effective tough love is. Mental toughness is defined by Middleton and colleagues (2004) as "an unshakeable perseverance and conviction towards some goal despite pressure or adversity" (p. 6). One participant mentioned that mentally tough athletes may respond more positively to tough love than those who are "mentally weak". Athlete's mental toughness is positively related to problem-focused coping and perceived control, and negatively associated with stress intensity, emotion-focused coping, and avoidance coping strategies, suggesting that mentally tough athletes adopt more adaptive coping responses and deal with stress more positively than athletes who are less mentally tough (Kaiseler et al., 2009). Because of this, mentally tough athletes may cope with the initial toughness or aggression of tough love coaching more positively and therefore these tough love strategies may be more effective (or at least, less harmful) for them than less mentally tough athletes.

Some participants discussed the athlete's motivational style as potentially influencing tough love's effectiveness. One participant discussed how tough love worked well for her

because she was competitive and motivated by tough feedback. Another participant discussed how some of her teammates were highly motivated by tough love because they "did better" if the head coach "got in their face", whereas for her, instances of tough love such as this would have been ineffective because she does not respond well to tough love that is that aggressive. This suggests that athletes who are motivated by tough or moderately aggressive coaching may respond to tough love differently than athletes who are unmotivated by coaches getting "in their face". However, it has been shown that coaches provide more change-oriented feedback to athletes who the coach perceives as more motivated, suggesting that more motivated athletes may just receive more tough love in general (Carpentier & Mageau, 2014). Regardless, this highlights again the importance of knowing and understanding one's athletes in order to use tough love most effectively.

Sport demographics such as competitive level and position/role were also perceived to be influential in tough love coaching's effectiveness. Some participants believe that tough love is better suited for higher level athletes and is not as appropriate for lower level athletes, or should at least be watered down for athletes who are in sport recreationally or "just for fun". Athletes at higher competitive levels tend to be more perfectionistic and have higher levels of perfectionistic strivings than lower level athletes (Rasquinha et al., 2014). Because they set high standards and aim for perfection in achievement contexts (Rasquinha et al., 2014), higher level athletes may be more receptive to critical feedback because they can use this feedback to grow and continue to strive toward perfection. Some participants perceived that for players with important positions or roles on the team, or for those who got the most playing time, tough love was more effective. This could be due in part to the amount of tough love these vital players receive; these players may receive more tough love than those who do not get as much playing time because they play

a larger role in the outcome of performances, and therefore the coach may invest more time, energy, and tough love into helping them improve since their performance has larger implications for the performance outcomes. It is also possible that athletes who play key roles or important positions on the team may be more skilled and confident, factors that may allow them to better handle tough love.

Another factor perceived by participants to influence the effectiveness of tough love is the coach's use of encouragement and support. Participants viewed tough love more positively when coaches provided encouragement and support while the athlete was attempting to make the desired change or implement the coach's feedback. While tough love is initially harsh and may not involve encouragement or support during this initial stage, providing encouragement after the tough love is given, while the athlete is attempting to change the target behavior, may increase the likelihood that the tough love is successful. As discussed previously, coaches who use more encouragement and support are perceived as more effective by their athletes (Smith et. al., 1979). A study by Kilit and colleagues (2019) showed that coach encouragement is positively related to intensity during practice, sport performance, and sport enjoyment, demonstrating how encouragement and support can help athletes physically and psychologically. Positive coach feedback is also positively associated with athlete competence, self-confidence, and autonomous forms of motivation, further highlighting the positive impact that encouragement and support can have on athlete's psychological functioning. (Mouratidis et al., 2008; Gagnon-Dolbec et al., 2019). Again, while the initial stage of tough love is aggressive, stern and may not involve encouragement or support, coaches should provide this encouragement after the tough love is given while the athlete is attempting to implement the coach's feedback or make the desired change.

The use of clear feedback was perceived to play an essential role in tough love's effectiveness. As mentioned previously, the use of technical information is an important aspect of effective coaching (Smith et al., 1979) According to participants, tough love was ineffective when it included only negative feedback and did not provide any information on (a) what specifically the athlete should change and/or (b) how to fix the issue. This concept relates closely to change-oriented feedback (Carpentier & Mageau, 2013). More specifically, autonomy-supportive change-oriented feedback is provided in a manner that supports athlete autonomy, including "(a) providing rationales to explain why behaviours should be changed, (b) considering athletes' perspective, (c) providing choices of solutions, and (d) avoiding the use of a controlling communication style" (Carpentier & Mageau, 2013; c.f. Mouratidis et al., 2010). The difference between tough love and autonomy-supportive change-oriented feedback is that tough love requires the coach to be initially critical or stern with the athlete, while autonomy-supportive change-oriented feedback does not involve this initial display of harshness or sternness. Taken together, these findings suggest that coaches should be specific and clear when giving tough love about what behavior the athlete should change and how they should go about making that change, in addition to considering the athlete's perspective and providing options for how to solve the problem.

How frequently a coach uses tough love was also perceived as an influential factor in terms of tough love's effectiveness. The participants in this study believe the more often a coach engages in tough love, the less effective tough love is. Carpentier and Mageau (2016) found the frequency of change-oriented feedback is negatively related to athlete's competence; as change-oriented feedback is often present in tough love, it is likely that engaging in tough love too

frequently can also have negative consequences for athlete's competence and/or overall psychological well-being.

The motivational climate created by the coach may also play a role in how effective tough love is. Participants perceived tough love as less effective if they believed the coach cared more about winning or some other performance outcome than the athlete themselves (i.e., if the athlete perceived a performance motivational climate). Performance climates—those where social comparison is emphasized over personal growth and development—are negatively associated with intrinsic motivation, basic psychological need satisfaction, and closeness and commitment in the coach-athlete relationship (Ames, 1992; Buch et. al., 2017; Alvarez et. al., 2012; Olympiou et al., 2008). Because performance climates hinder athlete psychological well-being and negatively impact the coach-athlete relationship, the effectiveness of tough love may be impacted, especially given the importance of a strong relationship in tough love coaching as discussed earlier in this section.

Lastly, participants perceived tough love as more effective if it was done privately. Participants believed coaches should use tough love in one-on-one settings and not in front of the whole team, unless the tough love is aimed at the entire team and not just one individual athlete. Existing literature highlights the importance of providing change-oriented feedback in private, one-on one settings (Carpentier & Mageau, 2013; Cusella, 1987). Instances in which participants had seen tough love given in front of an entire team caused negative emotions such as embarrassment, anger, frustration, sadness, and confusion. When engaging in tough love, coaches should be consciencious not to do so in front of a group and should consider pulling the athlete aside or confronting them individually.

As previously mentioned, an athlete's perception of a coaching behavior may differ from the coach's perception of or intent behind that behavior. The findings of the present study relate to Smith and Smoll's (2011) Model of Adult Leadership Behaviors in Sport, which suggests that athlete perception and recall are central to coach leadership in sport. Individual coach and athlete variables, the coach's perception of the athlete's attitudes, situational factors, and the athlete's evaluative reactions of a coaching behavior, along with the athlete's perception and recall of such behavior, are all central in influencing coach leadership (Smith & Smoll, 2011). The individual factors identified in this study such as personal characteristics (e.g., mental toughness, empathy), as well as situational factors such as the athlete's competitive level and role or position, likely influence the way coaches engage in and athletes perceive tough love coaching behaviors. The athlete's perception and evaluation of a tough love behavior as either effective, ineffective, or harmful also influences the coach's leadership impact.

When Does Tough Love Cross the Line?

According to the participants, tough love becomes harmful when it (a) attacks the person instead of the behavior, (b) impacts the athlete's psychological well-being, or (c) focuses more on performance outcomes than athlete well-being.

Participants perceived tough love as inappropriate, harmful, or abusive when it personally attacks the athlete instead of addressing the behavior the coach wants to change. Research has shown that performance is enhanced when attention is aimed at the task and not the self (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Furthermore, Carpentier and Mageau (2013) suggest that change-oriented feedback should avoid person-related statements. The use of person-related feedback, or "feedback concerning the person's abilities, goodness, or worthiness" (Carpentier & Mageau, 2013, p. 425; c.f. Kamins & Dweck, 1999) is related to athlete vulnerability, a contingent sense

of self-worth, and ego-involvement and should therefore be avoided (Carpentier & Mageau, 2013; Mouratidis et al., 2010). Addressing the behavior directly instead of personally attacking the athlete will help protect athlete well-being and result in a more positive tough love coaching experience.

Tough love was also perceived by participants as harmful if it negatively impacts the athlete's psychological well-being long-term. While tough love requires initial sternness or harshness, it should ultimately be a positive experience and should not result in any long-term negative consequences for athletes' psychological well-being. Engaging in abusive or neglectful coaching behaviors with the intent of engaging in tough love can cause long-term harm to athlete well-being, and therefore such behaviors should be avoided as discussed previously. Coaching behaviors are harmful to athlete well-being if they thwart any of the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Again, while tough love may involve an aggressive or stern tone, coaches should avoid the use of controlling communication styles such as punishing, mimicking/mocking, or being overly aggressive (Mouratidis et al., 2010). Coaches should closely monitor and reflect on tough love before, during, and after engaging to ensure they are not thwarting the athlete's basic psychological needs or abusing or neglecting the athlete in any way.

As discussed previously, it is important to note that it is difficult for coaches to judge when using tough love if it will be for the benefit of the athlete in the long run (or if it will be harmful long-term). This decision requires judgment on the part of the coach, which can be a difficult judgment to make. Coaches should reflect to ensure they are not engaging in abusive or neglectful behaviors, are providing clear feedback, are keeping the athlete's perspective and individual needs in mind, have a clear end goal or purpose in mind, and have exhausted all other

behavior change techniques before engaging in tough love to increase the likelihood that it will benefit the athlete in the long run without causing long-term damage to the athlete's well-being.

Lastly, participants perceived tough love as potentially harmful or abusive if the coach is more focused on the performance outcome than the well-being of the athlete. Examples of this include making an athlete overtrain, forcing an athlete to train through serious injury, or making an athlete try a skill they are not ready for just to advance the athlete along more quickly. Performance motivational climates in which the coach emphasizes social comparison and performance outcomes above personal growth are related to a host of negative consequences for the athlete, including the thwarting of basic psychological needs and maladaptive forms of motivation (Ames, 1992; Buch et. al., 2017; Alvarez et. al., 2012). If the coach is hyperfocused on achieving a certain goal or outcome, they may not consider the needs and feelings of the athlete, which can cause negative psychological consequences for the athlete. When engaging in tough love, coaches should make sure that they do not lose sight of the athlete's needs, feelings, abilities, and viewpoints in pursuit of the desired outcome.

Practical Implications

Many practical implications can be derived from this study. One, considering the definition of tough love provided in this study, coaches should be sure that when engaging in tough love, it is for the benefit of the athlete in the long run and not a result of their own frustrations or inpatience in seeing athlete improvements in performance. This may involve the coach developing strong self-regulation skills to be able to better perceive and control his or her own emotions that have the potential to influence their way they coach. It also may involve reflecting before engaging in tough love to ensure this tough love strategy will actually benefit the athlete long-term. Reflection on one's coaching experience is a crucial aspect of the coach

development process (Gilbert & Trudel, 2001). According to Gilbert and Trudel (2001), reflection can occur in the midst of engaging in this behavior (reflection-in-action)—in this case, while engaging in tough love—or immediately after the tough love is given (reflection-on-action). In either form, reflecting on the use and outcomes of tough love, as well as reflecting and planning before engaging in tough love, will increase the effectiveness of the coach's tough love strategies and make the experience more beneficial and positive for the athlete.

Second, this study provided a list of effective, ineffective, and harmful tough love strategies. Making an athlete repeat something or challenging a behavior that is influencing the athlete's ability to succeed are strategies coaches can use to help athletes overcome adversity. If coaches use yelling as a tough love strategy, they should make sure they are not yelling too frequently or too intensely. They also should be sure that they provide specific feedback on what the athlete is doing wrong and how to fix it. Yelling encouraging statements or technical instruction is helpful; simply yelling negative feedback is ineffective and should be avoided. Strategies such as screaming, swearing, degrading or insulting an athlete, making an athlete train through serious injury, and neglecting the athlete's physical and psychological needs are harmful to athletes and constitute maltreatment, and therefore should be avoided.

Creating a strong coach-athlete relationship and knowing one's athletes is also important when engaging in tough love, as this allows the coach to tailor their tough love to each athlete's personality and needs, increasing the likelihood that tough love will be more effective. Before engaging in tough love, coaches should consider the athlete's needs and perspective to be sure tough love is really what the athlete needs in that moment. Providing clear feedback on *what* behavior the coach want the athlete to change, *why* they want the athlete to change that behavior, and *how* the athlete can go about doing so is also crucial when using tough love strategies.

Providing the athlete with options on how to go about changing that behavior, and providing encouragement and support while the athlete attempts to change that behavior, are also recommended. Engaging in tough love one-on-one instead of in front of a group is important, as well as refraining from using tough love too frequently.

To ensure that tough love does not become harmful to the athlete, coaches should attack the specific behavior they want to be changed and not attack the athlete personally; i.e., "*That* was bad" instead of "*You're* bad". When using tough love, coaches should avoid engaging in harmful behaviors that will negatively impact the athlete's psychological well-being long-term. Finally, coaches should be sure to promote a mastery climate in which athletes are more focused on personal growth than on social comparison, as this may influence the way in which tough love is perceived by the athlete and prevents the coach from being more focused on performance outcomes than athlete well-being.

Future Research Directions

As this study was an exploratory study of a concept that has not been studied extensively, there are many future directions. First, future studies should explore coach's perceptions of tough love, as this study was focused purely on athlete's perceptions and experiences of tough love. This could be done using similar methodology to the current study; by conducting semi-structured interviews with coaches and conducting thematic analysis to investigate their experiences with and perceptions of tough love in sport. These results could then be compared to the results of the current study to determine how coaches' and athletes' perceptions and experiences of tough love differ, and what similarities lie between them. This is crucial as an athlete's perception of a tough love behavior may differ from that of the coach's (or the coach's intent may not have been to give tough love, but just to give feedback) and therefore

investigating the perceptions of the coach is important in creating a comprehensive idea of tough love coaching.

Second, future research can further investigate each of the nine factors identified here that influence tough love's effectiveness. These factors include the strength of the coach-athlete relationship, coach demographics, athlete characteristics, sport demographics, encouragement and support, clear feedback, frequency of use, coach-created motivational climate, and privacy (using tough love in private, one-on-one settings versus in front of others). In doing this, researchers can establish which of these factors is most essential in influencing tough love coaching and its effectiveness. For example, if encouragement and support and clear feedback are more strongly related to tough love effectiveness than the other seven factors, interventions can be created to help coaches use tough love more effectively and more safely that focus on the use of encouragement and clear feedback.

Each of these factors could be investigated using a mixed-methods, multi-phase approach. Let us say, for example, a research study is designed to investigate the relationship between the strength of the coach-athlete relationship and the effectiveness of tough love coaching. First, the strength of the coach-athlete relationship could be quantitatively measured by distributing the Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004) to a large sample of coaches and athletes. In Phase 2, coaches and athletes that had a strong coach-athlete relationship (i.e., had high scores on the CART-Q) and those that had a weak coach-athlete relationship (i.e., had low scores on the CART-Q) would be selected to participate in a qualitative semi-structured interview to investigate their perceptions of tough love coaching and its effectiveness. Thematic analysis could then be conducted to determine how coaches and athletes perceive tough love's effectiveness, and how the results of the qualitative

analysis differ, or are consistent, between the participants with low CART-Q scores (i.e., a weak coach-athlete relationship) and high CART-Q scores (i.e., a strong coach-athlete relationship).

Third, future studies might focus on creating a questionnaire or other measure of tough love and its effectiveness so it can be objectively measured and assessed in relation to other variables. The results of the current study could be used to inform this study and aid in the creation of assessment items. For example, a major finding of this study was that tough love involves being initially tough or stern with an athlete in order for them to grow or succeed because the coach cares for them. Based off of this finding, an example of an item that could be included in the tough love measure is "When my coach is stern with me, it helps me in the long run." Or, "My coach can be tough on me, but I know they want the best for me." After this questionnaire or measure is created, it could then be assessed for validity and reliability.

Fourth, future research can investigate how tough love coaching may or may not fit into autonomy-supportive coaching. Can coaches still be autonomy-supportive while engaging in tough love? What components of autonomy-supportive coaching are consistent with safe and effective tough love, and where do these two strategies differ? These research questions could be investigated by conducting a literature review of autonomy-supportive coaching strategies and comparing the findings to those presented in this study.

Fifth, the role of emotional intelligence and self-regulation training in the use of tough love coaching can be examined, contributing to calls to better explore the role emotional intelligence plays in coaching (Chan & Mallett, 2011). How does emotional intelligence influence a coach's ability to effectively use tough love? Are coaches more effective when using tough love if they can better self-regulate? These questions could be examined using a mixed-methods study in which emotional intelligence and/or self-regulation are measured using pre-

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existing questionnaires, and then participants scoring high and low in emotional intelligence (and/or high and low in self-regulation) are chosen for qualitatitive semi-structured interviews to investigate their use of, perceptions of, experience with, and success in using tough love coaching strategies. Thematic analysis can be conducted to determine similarities and differences in the use and success of tough love coaching strategies for those who score high and low in emotional intelligence and/or self-regulation.

Sixth, and perhaps most importantly, future research should focus on creating interventions or programs for coaches to help them use tough love effectively and safely, as knowledge translation and education are crucial. Without knowledge translation and education, the important findings of research cannot be applied by practitioners—in this case, coaches. It is worth noting that, as this is an exploratory study of tough love coaching, further research should be conducted to confirm and/or expand on present findings before implementing interventions. Tough love is talked about and used often in sport settings; by applying the results of this study (and future studies which confirm and expand on the current findings) to an intervention or educational program, coaches can learn how to use tough love safely and effectively with their athletes. This could be done in a few ways. One, an online tough love course could be created for coaches to teach them how to use tough love safely and effectively within their sport context. This could be a required element of their continuing education; for example, governing bodies could require that coaches be trained in tough love before they begin coaching, and that they take a refresher course once per year. Two, a one-time workshop or webinar could be designed and distributed by sport psychology practitioners to teach coaches how to properly engage in tough love coaching. Three, a pamphlet or brochure could be created and given to programs, governing bodies, gyms, or other sport facilities that educates coaches, athletes, and parents about tough

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love. In any form, coach education and knowledge translation are important, as the results of research cannot be distributed and applied if not shared with sport practitioners such as coaches. Finally, it is is not only important to develop interventions but to design studies to evaluate their effectiveness using translational science assessment models such as REAIM or diffusion theory (Gould, 2017).

Strengths and Limitations

One strength of this study is its in-depth investigation of tough love from the perspective of athletes. A wide variety of perspectives were provided in this study, which contributed to a better understanding of tough love coaching in sport. Another strength of this study is the variety of sport types and competitive levels sampled. Participants had experience across 18 different sports; some were current athletes and some were retired. Some participants reached the club level, some competed at the collegiate level, and one even competed at the professional/elite level. This variety contributes to the transferability of findings across different sports and competitive levels.

This study is not without its limitations. First, all of the participants sampled were all students at Michigan State University, which limits transferability across other geographical regions and institutitons. Second, the researcher's perceptions, experiences, and biases inevitably influence the study in multiple ways, including study design, data collection and data analysis. This is inherent in the qualitative approach to research, and was diminished by the use of reflective memos by the researcher throughout the data collection and analysis process. Third, although the exploratory nature of this study allowed for an initial investigation of tough love coaching in sport, it is still an investigatory study and therefore the results need to be further confirmed and expanded on before being applied to intervention and coach education. Fourth,

the results were not directly related to existing theories of sport or coaching; however, this could be addressed in future studies. Finally, only athlete perceptions about their experiences with coaches were assessed in the present study. The views and actual behaviors of coaches were not examined.

Conclusion

Tough love coaching is "a coaching strategy in which a coach makes an athlete do something or delivers feedback to an athlete in an aggressive, hard, stern or pushing manner for the purpose of helping the athlete improve or succeed in the long run." Effective tough love strategies include yelling encouragement or instructional feedback, repetition, and challenging a maladaptive behavior. Ineffective strategies include yelling constantly and only providing negative feedback. Harmful strategies include emotionally abusive behaviors such as screaming, swearing, threatening, or degrading/insulting the athlete, and physically abusive or neglectful behaviors such as hitting, failing or refusing to provide proper medical care, denying access to needed food or water, and overtraining. The strength of the coach-athlete relationship, clarity of feedback, use of encouragement and support, privacy, and frequency of use of tough love all play an important role in tough love's effectiveness. Coach characteristics such as empathy, sport knowledge and emotional intelligence; athlete characteristics such as mental toughness and motivational style; and the motivational climate created by the coach were also perceived to influence tough love's effectiveness. Tough love crosses the line into harm or abuse if it personally attacks the athlete instead of the behavior, negatively impacts the athlete's psychological well-being long-term, or if the coach cares more about the performance outcome than the athlete's overall well-being.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Idiographic profiles

Participant 1

Participant 1 participated and competed in All Star cheer for nine years. She also participated in sideline cheer and track and field. She reached a highly competitive level in All Star cheer in which she competed against older, more advanced teams.

The participant began the interview with a negative outlook on tough love coaching. She began the interview with a story of her junior year high school cheer coach who constantly picked on her and called her out in front of the team. She then defined tough love coaching as being aggressive but also positive. She stressed the idea of not being overly harsh, as that would be mentally draining and unmotivating for the athlete. An important point for her was that tough love should be used in private, not in front of the whole team, unless it is an issue that the entire team is struggling with or something the entire team is doing wrong. Her junior year coach was so negative, in fact, that it made her not want to do the sport at all anymore. She highlighted the importance of communication in the coach-athlete relationship in order for tough love to be effective. She believes older coaches tend to use tough love more often, and that coaches that use tough love more effectively are committed to the team and can confront athletes well. To her, tough love coaching becomes harmful when it involves swearing, yelling, or talking behind the player's back. It also becomes harmful to the athlete when tough love is given unfairly across the team, or when the mental health of the athlete suffers. Toward the end of the interview, she views tough love coaching in more of a positive light. She recommended that coaches be open with their players, communicate effectively, and use tough love coaching privately versus in front of the whole team.

The participant was very honest and open about their experiences, even when the experiences were not positive. In fact, the participant talked more about her negative tough love coaching experiences than her positive ones. Her definition of tough love coaching was not very clear, but throughout the interview it became clear what tough love coaching was *not.* This was a quality interview that offered insight into what tough love strategies are effective versus ineffective.

Participant 2

Participant 2 started organized sport at the age of four and tried swimming, gymnastics, and soccer before she settled on soccer as her primary sport. She competed at one of the highest competitive levels in club soccer. She spent 16 years in organized sport, and roughly seven to eight of those years were spent in competitive sport (from middle school to end of high school).

The participant pulled from their experiences with three different coaches; one that she said used tough love effectively, one that was "too nice", and one that was all "tough" with no "love." She viewed tough love as positive and even referred to it as "special treatment", highlighting that she has a very positive view of tough love coaching in sport. Her definition of tough love was focused on this idea of having the best intentions of the athlete at heart and wanting to help them grow. She clearly distinguished between the "tough" and the "love" component and said there needs to be a balance of both. She also stressed the importance of having a strong coach-athlete relationship for tough love to be effective, as well as giving specific feedback on how to improve or fix the error. To her, tough love coaching becomes harmful when it is overly negative, used too often, or not demonstrated equally across a team. She believes coaches that are too nice and not competitive at all, in addition to those that are too negative and too competition-focused, use tough love coaching less effectively.

The researcher found this interview insightful and thought the participant's responses were well thought out and well-articulated. The participant was open about her experiences and reflected on them thoroughly. Her answers share some similarities with those of other participants. This interview helped in creating a clear definition of tough love coaching and in identifying factors that must be present for tough love coaching to be effective and safe.

Participant 3

Participant 3 started skiing at a very young age and began participating in organized sport at the age of four. She has experience in five sports: skiing, softball, swimming, soccer, and track. She was a member of their high school's ski team and competed at the varsity level for swimming, soccer, and track. She has spent 14 years in organized sport.

The participant defined tough love as a coach making an athlete keep going, or do things they may not want to do, even if the athlete doesn't think they can in order to help the athlete grow. Her positive and effective experiences with tough love coaching included her swim coach forcing her to do something that she did not think she could do, only to find out she could in fact do what the coach was asking her, which boosted her confidence in the pool. Her negative experiences with tough love were with her soccer coach who did not have a connection with the team, yelled, and forced them to do things without explaining why they would help the team improve. She stresses the importance of being positive; being negative all the time is detrimental to the athlete.

She believes tough love is useful but should not be used constantly. She believes male coaches use tough love more often, as well as coaches who have past success in the sport they are coaching or are in coaching for the money and the fame. She believes coaches who use tough love more effectively want what is best for the players (versus money, fame, etc.), give

reassurance after using tough love, and have a better relationship with the team. She believes that tough love coaching might not be appropriate for athletes who are very sensitive. The participant views tough love coaching as harmful if it harms the mental health of the player, or if it is used in every situation. She recommends that coaches get to know their athletes, assess the situation before engaging in tough love, and know their "why" for coaching (and that their "why" should be for the athletes, not for external rewards).

This interview was in-depth and insightful. This participant had both positive and negative experiences with tough love, which offered a lot of insight into when tough love is effective versus ineffective. The participant gave rich descriptions of her experiences with tough love and her thoughts, as well as a succinct definition at the end of her interview. This interview helped establish a definition of tough love coaching, as well as coaching strategies that are effective versus ineffective and safe versus harmful.

Participant 4

Participant 4 began organized sport at the age of five and started competing at the age of 7. He participated in gymnastics and diving, and reached a high competitive level in both sports. He spent 16 years in organized sport.

For this participant, "tough love" involves a coach making an athlete do something they don't want to do or don't think they are ready to do, regardless of the athlete's feelings. He stressed the importance of the coach knowing what they are doing and knowing where the athlete is at in terms of ability. He believes that experienced coaches know how to use tough love more effectively, and that less experienced coaches should observe more experienced coaches to learn how to use tough love properly. The participant also mentioned that tough love should not be used constantly and that it should be used as a last resort. He also mentioned that athletes vary in

the degree of tough love they can take but did not identify specific athlete characteristics or factors that influence the degree of tough love athletes can endure. He believes that tough love coaching becomes harmful when it is used excessively, involves swearing or threats, or makes the athlete wants to stop participating in the sport altogether.

This interview was informative, however, at times, it felt as though the participant was not being clear or was not sure of his definition of tough love. At the end of the interview he recounted a story that was deemed tough love, but had difficulties explaining why that coaching tactic constituted tough love. Nevertheless, the participant did give definitions of tough love both at the beginning and at the end of the interview and gave some great recommendations for coaches regarding the use of tough love. This participant's answers shared some consistencies with answers of other participants and helped to further understand the concept of tough love in sport.

Participant 5

Participant 5 was a multi-sport athlete and started organized sport at the age of four. Growing up, he played hockey, football, basketball, lacrosse, and baseball. His main sports were hockey and football. He played collegiate football at a D1 university. Total, he spent 14 years in organized sport.

This participant had multiple experiences with tough love coaching in sport since he was a multi-sport athlete and interacted with multiple coaches, however he drew mostly from his experiences in football. He believes that although he experienced tough love coaching in every sport he played, most of his tough love coaching experiences were in football. He defined tough love as a coach wanting the best for you and needing to deliver information in a harsh way to help you be your best. He separated the "tough" from the "love" and emphasized that both

entities, while separate, are important. For him, coaches that expressed an interest as you as a person and created a relationship with you outside of sport were those that used tough love more effectively. He believes that older coaches use tough love more often than younger coaches. He stressed that the personality of the athlete plays a role in how tough love is received; specifically, the competitive level of the athlete matters. For example, he said that as a backup quarterback, his tough love was focused more on overall development, whereas the tough love shown to the starting quarterback was focused more on specific instances. Lastly, he believes that tough love coaching should not be used publicly; if it is directed at the whole team, it can be used at the team level, but it should otherwise be private.

This participant gave thoughtful answers, and the interview was insightful. He gave detailed descriptions of when tough love can become abusive and the answers he gave will help establish where the "line" is between tough love coaching and abuse. He also gave a clear definition at the beginning of his interview, and the answers he gave in his definition and throughout the interview will help create a clear definition of tough love coaching. The researcher feels as though the participant was thoughtful in his answers and was not reserved in sharing his experiences.

Participant 6

Participant 6 started swimming competitively at the age of 8. She also did water polo in high school. She has spent 12 years in organized, competitive sport.

This participant defines tough love coaching as being tough on an athlete to help the athlete improve in some way. She had both positive and negative experiences with tough love coaching. She mostly drew on her experiences with her water polo coaches in high school. One of her coaches put a lot of pressure on her and used tough love effectively sometimes, but during

her last year coaching she started yelling at the athletes more and not being encouraging. The assistant coach during this time, who became the head coach during the participant's last year of water polo, was autonomy-supportive and did not yell at the athletes, which was an adjustment for the participant.

She believes that athletes who are mentally tough, confident, and competitive respond to tough love coaching more positively than other athletes. She also believes that tough love should be used privately and in practice versus during competitions or games. She mentioned that younger athletes may not respond to tough love coaching as well as older athletes, as they are not able to distinguish between "the coach is just being mean" and "the coach is being mean to help me". She believes coaches who use tough love more often are hard-headed, stubborn, focused on winning, and use anger to motivate athletes. She thinks coaches who use it less are calm and focused on athletes progressing. This participant believes coaches who are focused on athlete progress versus winning are those that can use tough love more effectively. She stresses that tough love should be sport-specific (not related to things outside of sport or in personal lives) and must involve encouragement and correction, not just negative. Finally, she thinks tough love crosses into abuse or maltreatment when the coach is just screaming at athletes without any encouragement or correction or is verbally abusing the athlete.

The participant was willing to share her experiences and gave lots of personal examples in her interview. Her definition of tough love was not very in-depth, but it was clear. This interview offered a lot of insight into what athlete factors influence the effectiveness of tough love, which other participants did not touch on as much. The answers she gave align with what other participants had said, but she also offered some unique perspectives that other participants

did not. Overall, this interview was helpful, especially in determining what athlete factors influence the effectiveness of tough love coaching strategies.

Participant 7

Participant 7 began organized sport at the age of four and participated in gymnastics, figure skating, and dance. She began competing at the professional level at the age of 16. Total, she spent 18 years in organized sport.

This participant defines tough love coaching as disciplining and athlete or making them do something to help them be the best they can be. She stressed the importance of not just identifying mistakes or disciplining and athlete but explaining how they can make the change the coach wants them to make. She also continuously came back to the importance of having a strong relationship and communicating the reason behind tough love. For example, a coach shouldn't just yell at an athlete for no reason; they should explain to the athlete that they are disciplining them to help them grow, and not just because they are angry. She does believe tough love is effective, but it can be harmful to the athlete when it attacks the athlete personally or is not followed up by instruction on how to fix the behavior.

She stated that coaches who are training high level athletes use tough love more often, and the effectiveness of tough love relies on the strength of the coach-athlete relationship and the way tough love is communicated (i.e., reasoning should be given, and it should not be delivered in an abusive manner). She also said that coaches who can use tough love more effectively know when to use tough love and when to use encouragement; this goes along with the importance of having a strong coach-athlete relationship. To her, athletes who are already hard on themselves and who are hard workers do not need tough love as frequently as those who slack off. The coach must care for the athlete and genuinely want what is best for them. Finally, she stressed

that the way the athlete internalizes the tough love plays a large role in the effectiveness and safety of that tough love strategy; the way the tough love coaching is internalized relies highly on the development of the coach-athlete relationship.

This interview was extremely effective, especially in highlighting which tough love behaviors are not only ineffective, but even harmful or abusive. The participant has experienced effective tough love coaching and tough love that was ineffective and even abusive, and she drew from these experiences throughout the interview. Her answers were in-depth and she shared her experiences in detail. She is one of the few participants to specifically address that tough love coaching can become abusive, not just harmful, to the athlete. Overall, this interview was very insightful and will help determine which tough love behaviors are effective and safe, as well as what factors influence the way it's given and received.

Participant 8

Participant 8 participated in sport for about 15 years and sampled many sports when he was younger. He spent a few years playing soccer, but his main sport is equestrian. He spent some time competing in equestrian but now rides for fun.

This participant defines tough love as "aggressive motivation." He stated at the beginning of the interview that he has a lot of negative experiences with tough love and drew specifically from one of the horse trainers he trained with at a specific barn who was negative and, in some ways, abusive. However, he does also state that tough love can be beneficial if approached correctly. This participant said that tough love can be used to help athletes overcome or prevent mental blocks, and to help coaches motivate athletes. He believes that tough love requires the coach to be aggressive, but the coach also must have the best interest of the athlete in mind, genuinely care about the athlete, and want to help them grow. This individual does not believe

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that being mean or negative all the time is a useful tough love strategy. He thinks tough love is most helpful in situations when the athlete is not reaching their full potential and needs that extra push to get them out of their comfort zone and help them succeed.

Acording to this participant, athletes respond differently to tough love but did not explicitly state which individual athlete factors influence how they receive and interpret tough love coaching. He stated that coaches who use tough love effectively are those who are personally invested in the athlete and/or the team, are good at reading athletes, are empathetic, and care about the athlete. This participant also stressed the importance of, as a coach, knowing your athletes and their limits to properly use tough love. He believes tough love becomes harmful or abusive when the athlete no longer feels confident or competent. This respondent also stressed the importance of not creating a performance-centered climate and not pitting athletes against one another. Finally, he suggested that coaches meet with athletes at the end of the practice or training session in which they used tough love and make sure the athlete is in a generally positive mindset and is not beating down on themselves.

Overall, the researcher found this interview helpful. The participant was comfortable sharing their experiences with tough love. He gave thoughtful answers to the questions asked, however, the researcher felt that he did not completely answer all the questions asked. Regardless, the participant gave explicit details regarding his tough love experiences and his answers will help create a more holistic picture of tough love coaching. His answers will be especially helpful in defining tough love and determining when tough love can become harmful or inappropriate.

Participant 9

Participant 9 started playing soccer when she was four and played up until her senior year of high school. She reached an intermediate competitive level in soccer. This individual also started in track and cross country in middle school, and still competes at the collegiate level. Total, she has spent 16 years of her life in organized sport.

This participant defines tough love as a coach pushing an athlete to the best of their ability but recognizes that tough love has a negative component. She stated at the beginning of the interview that it is easier for her to think of times tough love *did not* work than those times that it did work. She explained that her experiences with effective tough love, while initially uncomfortable, taught her important lessons in the long run and made her a better athlete. She stated that tough love was least effective in her experience when it was done in a group setting and was not specific to the person who needed to hear it. The respondent further believes coaches should take the time to use tough love individually in one-on-one settings with athletes. She emphasized that tough love is a middle ground between being too lax and being too harsh on an athlete; having all "tough" with no "love" is harmful and having "love" with no love" is not beneficial.

For this participant, tough love coaching is effective when the coach cares about the athlete, explains how to fix the behavior or mistake, is communicated properly and privately, and when there exists a positive coach-athlete relationship. The coach needs to know the athlete can do whatever it is they are trying to get the athlete to do, and they need to express this belief. She also believes older coaches use tough love more often, although not always more effectively, than younger coaches. Coaches also need to be able to understand and be open to different perspectives and not be set in their ways to use tough love coaching strategies effectively. This

former athlete believes tough love becomes harmful when it attacks the player personally. She thinks coaches should ask athletes for feedback regarding the effectiveness of their tough love strategies and their coaching in general. Finally, this respondent believes that tough love cannot be effective and harmful at the same time, because if it is harmful at all, then it is not effective and a different coaching strategy should have been used.

Overall, the researcher though this interview was insightful, and the participant gave clear answers to all the questions. She drew from tough love experiences with her track and cross-country coaches and described each scenario in detail. Her reflections on these experiences were thoughtful and she was honest when expressing her views on tough love coaching. This interview will help define tough love coaching, identify strategies that are ineffective versus ineffective, determine which coach characteristics influence the effectiveness of tough love, identify when it can cross the line into abuse or maltreatment, and identify other factors that influence the effectiveness of tough love coaching strategies.

Participant 10

Participant 10 started playing basketball and soccer at the age of five. She also played volleyball but stopped in middle school. This respondent played AAU basketball until high school and now competes at the collegiate level. Total, she has spent 16 years in organized sport.

This participant had a very positive view of tough love coaching. She defined tough love coaching as a coach pushing and being tough on athlete because the coach knows they can be better. She continuously emphasized the importance of having a strong coach-athlete relationship based on mutual respect. This participant believes coaches use tough love with athletes because they genuinely care about them and want to help the athlete grow. She separated the term into "tough" and "love", emphasizing that toughness is required, but so is a strong coach-athlete

relationship. Most of her experiences with tough love were positive, and while initially annoying or frustrating, she can look back and see how these experiences helped her in the long run. According to this respondent, tough love coaching is useful if there is a balance in the coach-athlete relationship. Personally, she views tough love from her coach as beneficial and necessary since she has a positive relationship with her coach. This respondent thinks it is useful as needed, but not as an everyday thing. She also believes it is acceptable in high-intensity contexts, such as high-stakes competitions or games. The respondent also indicated that tough love coaching can be ineffective if the coach does not properly assess the situation and evaluate what the athlete really needs.

This athlete thinks coaches that use tough love more often are more successful, so long as they have this strong relationship with their athletes, and they do not use it every day. She believes tough love becomes harmful to the athlete when the coach is constantly yelling and never takes the time to celebrate successes or encourage athletes. The respondent also thinks tough love coaching becomes abusive when it attacks the athlete personally versus attacking the specific behavior. To her, tough love coaching is a middle ground between "you can do whatever you want, this is all about having fun" and "I am going to yell at you constantly and you are never doing enough for me". She believes coaches who use tough love most effectively are those that have found that balance between having a relationship with their team/athletes and pushing them to be their best. She thinks coaches should create a culture of mutual respect within their team to successfully use tough love. It was also stressed that coaches need to constantly communicate the goals of the team and why the coach is using the tough love strategies they choose to use. Finally, she believes that tough love can be effective *and* harmful in the sense that

coaches might produces wins, but that this is detrimental to the athlete's well-being long-term and therefore harmful tough love strategies should be avoided.

The researcher found this interview effective, and the answers the participant gave were similar to those given by other participants. She was open when sharing her experiences and gave thoughtful answers to the questions asked. The respondent answered each question completely and gave well-thought-out answers. Overall, this interview was effective, especially in defining tough love, determining what factors influence its effectiveness, and drawing the line between effective tough love and abuse or maltreatment.

Participant 11

Participant 11 has spent most of her life in sport and enjoys being active. She began playing sports at the age of four. Her main sport was soccer, but she also did basketball, volleyball, softball, and cheerleading. She played soccer at a D1 high school and played travel soccer at a highly competitive level. She stopped playing soccer after her senior year of high school. She still plays soccer for fun but does not compete. Total, she has spent 15 years in sport.

This participant had multiple soccer coaches who she considered to be "tough, competitive" coaches. She liked that her coaches were tough because she feels as though it made her a more disciplined athlete. This athlete defined tough love coaching as a formal relationship in which the coach is tough and stern with the athlete to produce a certain result, typically performance related. She believes that when coaches engage in tough love, they care less about the relationship and more about producing positive outcomes. The respondent did, however, stress that tough love is likely more effective when a positive coach-athlete relationship exists, because the coach can better tailor their approach to tough love coaching. She believes that tough love can be effective in the long run and that she has learned a lot from her experiences with

tough love coaching. To her, tough love is most useful in practice settings, although it can be used sparingly in games or competitions.

The participant stated that tough love becomes ineffective when the coach is constantly yelling. Additionally, she thinks it is ineffective if the coach does not couple the yelling or aggression with feedback on how to correct the mistake or behavior. The respondent also believes tough love is less effective if the coach is giving too much feedback and is constantly shifting what they want the athlete to focus on. She does think yelling is an effective tough love strategy, but again, it should be coupled with instructional feedback or encouragement. She thinks coaches who use it more often are older, male, or had tough coaches themselves in the past and said coaches who use it more effectively give specific feedback or direction on how to fix the targeted behavior, use yelling sparingly, are educated on the sport, know their team well, are understanding, and have appreciation for their players. The participant stated that tough love coaching can become harmful to the athlete if a coach yells at a player in front of the entire team, yells at their players too much, or personally attacks a player versus attacking the targeted behavior. She thinks that the amount of tough love an athlete can handle is partially dependent on how much tough love coaching they have received in the past; those who have not had tough coaches previously may not take as well to tough love coaching strategies. Finally, this respondnet recommends coaches know their team, each member's boundaries, and the situation well before engaging in tough love coaching.

The researcher found this interview informative, but vague at times. The respondent's initial definition of tough love was not very clear, but when she redefined tough love more clearly at the end of the interview, her definition was a bit more developed. She was open and honest when sharing her experiences with tough love. The former athlete had a bit of a different

perspective than other participants, as she referred to sport as a "job" and something the athlete "has to get done", which influenced the way in which she answered the questions and gave a unique outlook on tough love compared to other interviews. Overall, this interview was insightful and will help determine effective versus ineffective tough love strategies, as well as when tough love can become harmful or inappropriate.

Participant 12

Participant 12 began sports when she was 5 years old and retired at the age of 22, totaling 17 years in organized sport. Much of her time in sport was spent as a gymnast. In gymnastics, she reached level nine, a highly competitive level. She also participated in travel volleyball, tennis, and track and field. She competed in cheer at the collegiate level for a D1 university.

This participant defines tough love coaching as having high expectations, holding athletes to them, and being stern with the athletes to help them meet these expectations while also being supportive and kind. She has experienced both effective and ineffective tough love and feels as though she grew and learned something in the long run from her effective tough love coaching experiences. To her, encouragement and support are critical when engaging in tough love coaching. She feels as though it is important that coaches reward and celebrate athletes' wins, no matter how large or small they may be. When explaining instances where tough love coaching was not effective for her, the participant mentioned that these coaches were overbearing, too intense, and were not successful in motivating their athletes because the coach was trying to be too tough.

Participant 12 believes tough love can be effective for some athletes, but not all. For tough love coaching to be useful, the coach must build a strong relationship with their athletes, be transparent and consistent, and care about the athletes as whole human beings. She stated that

some athletes can take more intense tough love coaching than others, which emphasizes the importance of the coach needing to know and have a relationship with each athlete on their team so they can tailor their approach to tough love. For this participant, tough love coaching is one tool coaches can use to change behavior, but some coaches adopt what they think is a "tough love coaching style" and use it too often, therefore making it ineffective or, even worse, harmful. She mentioned that tough love exists on a continuum from "no tough, all love" to "no love, all tough", and the sweet spot is somewhere in the middle; although, the sweet spot may be different for each athlete. This participant also thinks that coaches who use tough love more often coach the way they were coached, are less educated, are men, and are less empathetic. However, to her, using it more often does not always mean using it more effectively. She stated that coaches who use tough love more effectively are more empathetic, are attuned to the feelings and needs of their athletes, are more educated, and are transparent when explaining why they are using a specific tough love strategy.

The participant does believe that tough love can be harmful to the athlete. She thinks swearing at athletes and physically abusing athletes are never appropriate tough love strategies to use. She believes tough love coaching becomes harmful to the athlete when it attacks them personally or belittles the athlete. She also mentioned that what is considered "belittling" might vary from athlete to athlete, which again emphasizes the importance of the coach-athlete relationship. She said that using fear as a tactic when engaging in tough love is also inappropriate and harmful. She thinks tough love should be a last resort for coaches and they should explore all other behavior change strategies first. While she did say tough love can be effective and harmful in terms of achieving short-term performance outcomes, using tough love that is effective and safe will lead to better performance outcomes and mental health outcomes long-term. She

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recommends that coaches use tough love cautiously, and if they do decide to engage in tough love, to use it consistently and to "micro-dose" it.

The researcher feels as though this interview was in-depth and insightful. The participant not only spent time competing in multiple sports but is studying sport and exercise psychology and related the idea of tough love to other concepts in sport and exercise psychology such as basic psychological needs. She was thorough when explaining her experiences with and perceptions of tough love coaching. A lot of the things she said overlapped with what other participants had mentioned, but she offered some unique perspectives as well. This interview will be helpful in defining tough love coaching, determining which strategies are effective versus ineffective, identifying factors that influence its effectiveness, and determining when tough love becomes inappropriate or harmful to the athlete.

Informed Consent Form

Study Title: When is "Tough Love" Too Much? An Exploratory Study of Tough Love Coaching in Sport
Researcher and Title: Sarah Saxton, M.S. Candidate

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Sponsor: Dr. Dan Gould

BRIEF SUMMARY
You are being asked to participate in a research study. Researchers are required to provide a consent form to inform you about the research study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain risks and benefits of participation including why you might or might not want to participate, and to empower you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to discuss and ask the researchers any questions you may have.

You are being asked to participate in a research study exploring the concept of tough love in sport. Your participation in this study will take about 1 hour. You will be asked to discuss your perceptions of and experiences with tough love coaching. Participation is voluntary, and you may opt out of the study at any time. There are no risks of participation. You must be at least 18 years old to participate, have participated in sport for at least 5 years, and have competed in sport within the last 10 years.

You will not directly benefit from your participation in this study. However, your participation in this study may contribute to the understanding of tough love in sport and how to use it safely and effectively. You will receive a $25 gift card as a thank you for taking the time to complete the interview and take part in the study.

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH
- You are being asked to participate in a research study of tough love in sport.
- You have been selected as a possible participant in this study because you have spent considerable time in sport and can help further the understanding of tough love in sport.
- The purpose of this study is to understand how athletes describe tough love, what tough love strategies coaches use that are effective versus ineffective, which factors influence how coaches employ and athletes respond to tough love coaching, and whether tough love can ever be inappropriate or harmful to the athlete.
- If you are under 18, you cannot participate in this study. You must have participated in sport for at least 5 years and have competed in sport within the last 10 years to be in this study.

WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO
- Discuss your perceptions of and experiences with tough love in sport. You do not need to discuss anything you are not comfortable discussing.
- The interviews will be semi-structured, meaning there will be 10-12 questions to help guide the discussion.

- Interviews will occur via phone or video call and will be recorded. Transcripts of your interview will be provided to you once completed.
- Interviews should take roughly 1 hour.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS
- You will not directly benefit from your participation in this study. However, your participation in this study may contribute to the understanding of tough love in sport and how to use it safely and effectively.

POTENTIAL RISKS
- There is no risk to you for participating in this study. You can opt out at any time.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY
- Interviews will be conducted in a private place and no persons (other than those listed below) will have access to your interview data.
- The data for this project will be kept confidential.
    - Although we will make every effort to keep your data confidential there are certain times, such as a court order, where we may have to disclose your data.
- The researcher (Sarah Saxton), sponsor (Dr. Dan Gould), and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) are the only entities which will have access to this data.
- I, the researcher, am required to report any suspected child abuse/neglect, allegations of sexual abuse/assault, sexual harassment, or physical abuse, past or present.
- The results of this study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but the identities of all research participants will remain anonymous.

YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW
- Participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
- You may change your mind at any time and withdraw.
- You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR BEING IN THE STUDY
- As a thank you for taking the time to be interviewed in this study, you will receive a $25 gift card.

FUTURE RESEARCH
- Information that identifies you might be removed from the interview transcript. After such removal, the transcript could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from you.

CONTACT INFORMATION
If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the researcher (Sarah Saxton, email: saxtons2@msu.edu, phone: (616) 610-3154).

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT.

Your signature below means that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

CONSENT TO AUDIOTAPING/VIDEOTAPING

- o Interviews, whether they occur over the phone or via a video chat, will be recorded for transcription purposes. Once transcribed, the audio/videotape will be deleted, but the transcript will be stored (after removing identifiable information).
    - ▪ I agree to allow audiotaping/videotaping of the interview.
    - ☐ Yes   ☐ No   Initials: _____

APPENDIX C

List of MSU and Non-MSU Resources

- **MSU Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS)**

  o Accessible for MSU students

  o Offers virtual and in-person mental health services

  o Schedule an initial consultation: https://caps.msu.edu/schedule/index.html

  o Free, 24/7 Crisis number: (517) 355-8270

  o Link to a list of all their resources: https://caps.msu.edu/resources/index.html

- **MSU CAPS Virtual Care Kit**

  o Accessible for MSU students and non-students

  o A PDF document outlining steps you can take to support your mental health and well-being

  o Link: https://caps.msu.edu/_assets/pdfs/MSU_CAPS_virtual_care_kit.pdf

- **PsychHub (in partnership with MSU CAPS)**

  o Accessible for MSU students and non-students

  o Offers a host of videos addressing mental health topics

  o Link: https://psychhub.com/our-partners/michigan-state-university-counseling-and-psychiatric-services/

- **MSU Center for Survivors**

  o A resource for MSU students who have been survivors of relationship violence, stalking, and/or sexual misconduct

  o Offer a 24/7 Sexual Assault Crisis Hotline: (517) 372-6666

  o Also offer individual and group therapy, advocacy services, crisis chat, and more

- o Link: https://centerforsurvivors.msu.edu/index.html

- **MSU Prevention, Outreach, and Education Department**

  - o Offers a host of resources for MSU students and non-students including campus resources, community resources, statewide resources, national resources, reporting resources, and more

  - o Link: https://poe.msu.edu/resources/survivor-resources.html

APPENDIX D

Interview guide

1. Tell me about yourself and your life outside of sport. Where and how did you grow up?
   a. How did you end up at MSU?

2. Tell me about your sport background.

3. Have you heard of the concept of "tough love" in sport? How would you describe it?

4. Tell me about a time a coach tried to use tough love and it worked.

   a. How did you feel in the moment?

   b. Do you feel that it helped you in the long run?

5. Tell me about a time a coach tried to use tough love and it didn't work.

6. Do you think tough love is useful? If so, when is it appropriate to use?

7. Do you feel that some coaches use tough love more often than other coaches?

   a. If so, what characteristics do these coaches have that use tough love more often?

8. Do you feel that some coaches use tough love more effectively than other coaches?

   a. If so, what characteristics do these coaches have that use tough love more effectively?

9. Do you think tough love can ever become inappropriate or harmful to the athlete?

   a. Have you ever seen a coach engage in inappropriate or harmful attempts at tough love?

10. What recommendations do you have for coaches using tough love?

11. Considering everything we have discussed so far, has your description of tough love stayed the same or would you modify it?

APPENDIX E

Positionality Statement

The positionality, or individual worldview, of a researcher impacts the way in which data is analyzed and collected (Foote & Bartell, 2011; Smith, 1989). I, the primary researcher in this study, operate out of a combination of constructivist and post-positivistic worldviews. While I believe there are some phenomena and concepts that are consistent and measurable across populations, I also believe in many cases our social realities are constructed based on our past experiences and realities will vary greatly between populations and individuals (Fox, 2008; Sparkes & Smith, 2013). As such, my primary goal is to understand the way in which individuals and populations—in this case, athletes—make sense of a certain phenomenon or concept—in this case, tough love coaching in sport.

I have spent a considerable amount of time in sport. I did soccer and dance for a few years, but most of my time in sport was spent as a gymnast. I was, and still am, very passionate about gymnastics. During this time, I experienced both positive, autonomy-supportive coaching and controlling, harmful coaching. As a result of this negative coaching experience, I ended up burning out and eventually quitting sport altogether. My experiences as a gymnast and my passion for sport and psychology led me to pursue a master's degree in sport psychology. Specifically, my experiences with and perceptions of tough love motivated me to dissect the concept of tough love coaching in sport.

Inevitably, these past experiences shaped the way in which I conducted the study. I have experienced and engaged in tough love coaching. I have experienced effective and safe tough love, and I have felt the damaging effects of inappropriate and harmful tough love. I believe the definition of tough love coaching is slightly different for every athlete, but there are some

commonalities that can be identified and combined to produce a general definition of tough love coaching, as demonstrated in this study. I also believe there exists a wide range of tough love strategies utilized by coaches, and some of these strategies are commonly used by many coaches, as the athletes in this study highlighted. I believe tough love can be effective at times and ineffective at others, which was addressed by all participants in this study. Like the participants, I believe tough love can become harmful and even abusive to the athlete, whether the coach intends to cause harm or not.

My past experiences and thoughts about tough love shaped how I collect and analyze data. They played a role in the creation of this study's purposes, the interview guide, and the analysis process. However, I did several things to make sure I was aware of my biases and opinions and worked to ensure that they did not bias my data in ways that altered how the participants express their actual views. Specifically, I kept a reflective journal throughout the interview and data analysis process and had another graduate student trained in qualitative research methods serve as a critical friend to help keep my biases in check. Across all the semi-structured interviews, I held generally to the phrasing of the questions as stated in the interview guide.

As the study progressed, I continued to identify and reflect on other ways in which my past experiences with and perceptions of tough love coaching influenced data collection and analysis. My role as a researcher is to engage in constant self-reflection to minimize the effect of this bias or, at least, be aware of the influence it has on the way I conduct the study. I feel as though I accurately captured the perceptions and experiences of the participants in my analysis, and that I painted a holistic picture of tough love coaching.

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