Coaches' Perspectives on Bullying

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INTRODUCTION

Bullying is seen as a method of degrading, abusing, or humiliating someone to demonstrate superiority, and it can be witnessed in the athletics environment through harmful acts such as physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, as well as team rituals or "traditions" (i.e., hazing). Because of the values associated with major sports in Western culture (i.e., winning at all costs, using power and dominance to control others, and employing a hierarchical structure of authority), bullying and hazing practices are often utilized within the athletics environment (Steinfeldt, Vaughan, LaFollette, & Steinfeldt, 2012; Stirling & Kerr, 2009). To that end, a central figure in the development of athletes, and whether or not they engage in bullying activities to achieve sport-related goals, is the coach. A coach may not recognize the danger of bullying or hazing in athletics, foregoing an analysis of the negative consequences of these behaviors because of the prioritization on winning. The importance of winning may be so great that a coach will push for victories while sacrificing the dignity and integrity of the athletic program.

A coach's primary focus may be winning, but there are also important responsibilities to the athletes associated with the sport. Coaches are

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tasked with aiding in the development of athletes' mental, physical, technical, and tactical abilities, as well as healthy socialization skills (Becker, 2009). Coaches who have favorable win-loss records or athletes under their tutelage that elicit positive psychological responses are considered effective in their role (Horn, 2008). For many coaches, the development of a positive culture among their athletes serves as the vehicle towards a successful psychological experience by the athlete along with a favorable win-loss record. Unfortunately, there are coaches who choose the path towards success that invites bullying and hazing among their athletes. While short-term success may occur, the long-term effects to the athletes and the athletic program are detrimental and debilitating.

This chapter will highlight a number of items related to coaches and bullying in the athletic arena. First, a description of bullying will be outlined from an athletics standpoint, inclusive of reasons why bullying may occur in the sport environment. Additionally, key individuals who can impact the prevalence or deterrence of bullying in athletics will be highlighted. Following this definition will be a discussion of the role a coach plays in addressing bullying that may occur within their team or among their athletes, inclusive of the power dynamic associated with the coach-athlete relationship. Lastly, strategies for bullying prevention, intervention, and elimination will be illustrated.

WHAT IS BULLYING IN THE ATHLETIC SETTING?

Bullying in the athletic setting involves physical, verbal, or psychological behaviors between teammates and, in some cases, between a coach and an athlete, which has the potential to abuse and demoralize an individual (Stirling, 2009). Studies have shown bullying in the athletic setting to include acts that are physical (i.e., hitting, damaging an individual's personal property), verbal (i.e., name-calling, inappropriate jokes or gestures, threatening), social (i.e., spreading rumors, exclusion), electronic/digital (i.e., using email, Facebook, or text messages as a vehicle for embarrassment/humiliation), and social actions such as hazing rituals (Shannon, 2013; Steinfeldt et al., 2012; Stirling & Kerr, 2009; Swigonski, Enneking, & Hendrix, 2014). The stress associated with being a victim of bullying can be daunting, and the emotional pain that one endures during and after a bullying incident may be a long-term hurdle an athlete will have to overcome in life (Fuller, Gulbrandson, & Herman-Ukasick, 2013).

As McMullen (2014) points out, the definitions of bullying, hazing, and harassment in athletics often overlap due to the similarities associated with the tendencies and consequences of each action. There are slight differences associated with bullying and hazing, with hazing taking on a more ritualized activity that is associated with induction of new members by older or current members into an existing social group. Hazing occurs due to the motivation to preserve traditions and enhance the team cohesion. Bullying tends to isolate or separate an individual from a group.

Nearly all definitions of bullying in the athletic setting include a discussion of the imbalance in power between teammates or between a coach and an athlete. The imbalance in the power dynamic creates a situation of vulnerability for athletes who become victims of bullying. When it comes to reporting bullying incidences, this power dynamic also influences whether a victim speaks up or silently accepts the abuse (Stirling & Kerr, 2009).

Why is bullying in athletics continuing? The belief that participation in sports helps build one's character is a common thought. While the positive elements of sports participation may help young people develop, the dark side of this statement is the perpetuation of bullying and hazing rituals that provide "proof" of character development (Rees, 2010). The longevity of bullying and hazing in athletics, and the support given to the acts by athletes, coaches, and communities, can make it challenging to step forward and move towards social change within the athletics program.

Kevorkian and D'Antona (2010) highlight ten key facts about bullying in athletics; they are:

- Bullying occurs when there is minimal adult supervision,
- Hazing and bullying in athletics occurs in all forms,
- Bullying behaviors are detrimental to the benefits of athletics participation,
- Many coaches are not provided with bullying prevention training or education,
- Males and females are involved in all forms of bullying,
- Bullying occurs among athletes of all ages, abilities, and levels,
- Many athletes do not report bullying for fear of retaliation,
- Parents and caregivers may be the perpetrators of bullying behaviors towards athletes,
- Good sportsmanship must be modeled, taught, and reinforced among athletes, and

- It is important to implement and enforce bullying policies in and out of the athletic setting, as well as in the cyber setting.

These factors illustrate the far-reaching roots, as well as repercussions, that bullying has in the athletic setting. Consideration of the source of bullying behaviors and the extension of bullying behaviors into a person's life are important points to ponder when deliberating how to prevent bullying from occurring. Bullying may not be compartmentalized to just the athletic team; it may be the result of years of "traditional practices" by athletes, coaches, and community members.

One perspective regarding the continuance of bullying in athletics is rooted in Bronfenbrenner's *ecological systems theory* (1979). Supporters of ecological systems theory highlight that individual characteristics of youth are weighed in consideration of social contexts that involve other "key players" in a child's life. Those contexts include home life, school, and community. To understand bullying in athletics, ecological systems theorists point out that consideration should be given to the context or setting where youth development occurs (Barboza et al., 2009; Espelage & Swearer, 2010; Garbarino & deLara, 2002; Shannon, 2013).

Studies exploring bullying in the sport and recreation settings found core themes influencing the nature and extent of bullying incidents (Barboza et al., 2009; Espelage & Swearer, 2010; Garbarino & deLara, 2002; Shannon, 2013). These themes include organizational culture, program elements, spillover from other settings, and peer group dynamics. Organizational culture includes the values, beliefs, and attitudes staff members and administrators hold in conjunction with the prevalence of bullying. Values associated with a positive organizational culture include creating a safe and enjoyable environment for youth, as well as open communication with parents and caregivers about codes of conduct within the organization. Communication procedures also include developing steps to document bullying incidents, inclusive of any harm or injury that occurred. Organization administrators also provided staff trainings on addressing bullying if it occurred, and encouraged staff to attend conferences outside of the organization.

A handful of program elements were perceived to increase the opportunities for bullying, including competitive programs and activities, lack of leader supervision, and unstructured time (Barboza et al., 2009; Espelage & Swearer, 2010; Garbarino & deLara, 2002; Shannon, 2013). There are sports that involve physical contact, and as administrators pointed out,

when coaching a sport with physical contact, coaches may also encourage athletes to engage in aggressive behaviors. It is the athletes who take the aggressive nature of the sport too far who facilitate bullying, via threats and altercations. Making sure that the ratio of athletes to coaches is adequate is important for supervisory purposes. The coaches also need to embody the values of the organization and be mature in their decision-making. Administrators may value coaches and staff members who come with backgrounds in psychology and youth development as these individuals have an understanding of strategies to address bullying behavior. When there is unstructured time, bullying opportunities increase. Some coaches wanted to eliminate unstructured events, such as team sleepovers, due to the potential for problems. Other coaches stated it would be more beneficial to discuss with youth how to interact with each other during unstructured time (Shannon, 2013).

Bullying behavior that may have originated in other settings was identified as a major factor for bullying in the recreation and sport setting (Shannon, 2013). Eliminating this type of behavior would need to include the same message regarding bullying in all settings and from all leaders. If this consistency emerged, the potential for bullying behavior may decrease.

Lastly, the individual personalities of youth and how youth communicate with each other in a group setting may influence whether bullying occurs (Garbarino & deLara, 2002; Shannon, 2013). When group dynamics fluctuate based on the youth in the group, the challenge is for coaches to maintain a solid stance on policies and goals of the organization. Developing strategies for creating positive group dynamics as the group members change is an important stabilizing factor in combating bullying. Some coaches engage in these types of activities when the group initially comes together, and they continue these types of activities with the group throughout the time together. Noticing negative peer group dynamics is also an important step for coaches to take; the development of cliques or socially excluding certain individuals is a detrimental step in group development and can be a precursor to bullying.

As Kreager (2007) pointed out, high school athletics can serve as a vehicle for the development of peer social networks and hierarchies among students based on social status. Coaches—and to some extent, athletes—create expectations for participation in athletics. In an effort to navigate the path of participation in athletics and developing friends, athletes may conform to expectations—in some cases, that are counterproductive to personal development. Coakley (2009) refers to this pressured affiliation

within the athletics setting as *deviant overconformity*. Engaging in deviant overconformity takes many forms, including participation in bullying practices and hazing rituals (Waldron & Krane, 2005). Deviant overconformity occurs when athletes and coaches uncritically and unquestionably accept the norms associated with the sport ethic. The four tenets of the sport ethic include (a) athletes making sacrifices for the game, (b) athletes striving for distinction, (c) athletes accepting the risks associated with the sport and playing through pain, and (d) athletes accepting no limits in pursuit of success (Coakley, 2009). Deviant overconformity occurs among athletes; this unbridled acceptance of norms will drive athletes to do whatever it takes to gain the power and status associated with being an athlete. A critical factor of deviant overconformity is an athlete's vulnerability to the team's demands coupled with the need to gain or reaffirm group membership (Coakley, 2009).

Coaches who create environments that encourage deviant overconformity in athletes are developing dangerous settings for athletic performance. Athletes who feel the need to constantly affirm their status with their coach will more regularly engage in behaviors aligned with deviant overconformity. Young athletes are willing to subject themselves to humiliating acts, taunting, and in some cases physical harm from teammates and coaches in order to retain membership on the team and gain approval from their coach. Coaches who feel fortunate to have athletes on their team who are willing to "give it all" to the point of deviant overconformity are actually harming their team and program. These types of behaviors may start as isolated incidents; if they are condoned or not dealt with by a coach or athletic administration, they can warp a culture and become extremely difficult to undo.

The Coach-Athlete Relationship

The relationship between the coach and athlete is integral to the development of players within sports. Coaches serve as role models, mentors, and in some cases, surrogate parents. Coaches are expected to provide guidance both on and off the field, to teach sportsmanship, to foster a competitive fire in each athlete, and to help individuals develop life skills that they can use once their involvement in athletics is complete (Becker, 2009).

As outlined before, there is a power dynamic that exists within the relationship between the coach and the athlete; that is, a coach holds authority

over the athletes due to the nature of his or her position (Stirling & Kerr, 2009; Swigonski et al., 2014). Coaches' power over athletes is due to one or more factors, including age, knowledge and expertise in the sport, and previous success (Stirling & Kerr, 2009). Coaches' influence in athlete's lives also extends beyond the playing field or court and into elements of moral, social, and psychological development. Coaches play vital roles in athletes' lives, and they often serve as one of the most influential individuals in their development. This power dynamic is often positive and healthy, with productive growth and development occurring in athletes on and off the field. The dark side of this relationship is manifested when coaches manipulate and abuse athletes via bullying and hazing acts (Bringer, Brackenridge, & Johnston, 2001).

Multiple studies have been conducted analyzing the impact that coaches can have on athletes' understanding and interpretation of bullying in the athletic setting. Steinfeldt et al. (2012) conducted a study involving adolescent football players and found the following results: (a) players who perceived the most influential male adult in their lives did engage or would condone bullying were more likely to judge bullying as an appropriate act, and (b) the more players perceived the most influential adult in their lives supported bullying, the more likely players reported having recently engaged in bullying. These results illustrated two important facts: (a) coaches are often listed as the most influential figure in a young person's life, and (b) that if a coach endorses or condones bullying, the athletes are more likely to accept and endorse bullying as part of the cultural development of the team. Echoing previous research and findings on bullying, coaches can influence personal development and impact the prevalence of bullying in athletics.

Researchers have also been able to learn from athletes what is considered appropriate behavior by coaches in association with bullying in the athletic setting. Kowalski and Waldron (2010) interviewed high school and collegiate athletes to gain insight on how coaches responded to hazing, as well as the role coaches should assume if hazing occurs. Athletes stated that coaches either took a proactive stance against hazing or the coaches accepted hazing. Taking a proactive stance against hazing included a zero tolerance policy for hazing as well as punishment for hazing. Coaches who accepted hazing behavior ignored the actions, allowed hazing if it was under control, and actively encouraged hazing. Athletes' expectations of coaches' roles regarding hazing rituals were wide-ranging, but common themes emerged. Some athletes responded that coaches should prohibit

hazing of any kind, while other athletes felt coaches should "look the other way" when hazing occurs. Finally, a few athletes voiced that coaches should have no role in hazing, should or could not know about hazing, and lastly, if they did know, not do anything because they would not be able to curtail it anyway.

The results of the aforementioned studies depict the importance for coaches to establish healthy relationships with their athletes (Bringer et al., 2001; Kowalski & Waldron, 2010; Steinfeldt et al., 2012; Stirling & Kerr, 2009; Swigonski et al., 2014). Coaches wield significant power in their leadership roles and, whether verbally or nonverbally, communicate expectations to athletes regarding the structure and makeup of their athletic teams and program. It is important that positive cultural values are passed on from athletes to coaches; this can occur via strong, healthy relationships between the athletes and the coach.

Coaches who bully in the athletic setting. Coaches who exhibit bullying behavior may be guiding athletes based upon myths associated with the coach's role. One of these myths is that negative, belittling, and demeaning language directed at athletes helps prepare them for life, in and out of the athletics context (Kevorkian & D'Antona, 2010). Athletes' confidence and identity is detrimentally impacted if a central figure in their life is consistently putting them down or pointing out their inadequacies. "Coaches can be demanding without being demeaning" (Kevorkian & D'Antona, 2010, p. 40)—this statement highlights that coaches can have high expectations for athletes and hold athletes accountable without being dehumanizing or hurtful.

Examples of coaches' bullying behavior have included throwing objects or equipment at an athlete, belittling and name-calling directed at an athlete in front of teammates, threatening players and forcing them to play through injury, and usage of derogatory language such as homophobic or sexist statements aimed at athletes (Kevorkian & D'Antona, 2010). In some cases, the bullying and abuse inflicted by a coach is sexual in nature. Again, a main reason this type of bullying and abuse occurs is due to the manipulation of the power dynamic that exists between a coach and athlete (Bringer et al., 2001). Coaches may also engage in vicarious bullying through the athletes they coach. Kowalski and Waldron (2010, p. 95) found that coaches would tell athletes on their team to "go get that kid," identifying the athlete on the team to bully. The speculation for this behavior is due to a strict adherence to the sport ethic (as discussed earlier in the chapter) and the social hierarchy associated with the team.

There are numerous challenges that exist when attempting to correct coaching behavior that may be considered bullying. One challenge is the subjective judgment of what behavior is considered "crossing the line" or bullying (Swigonski et al., 2014). Behavior that may be considered bullying in some contexts may not be considered bullying in others; it is based on whether the victim feels intimidated or bullied. There are some actions that regardless of the context or setting are inexcusable, such as name-calling, demeaning or homophobic language, and insults by the coach.

A second challenge associated with correcting bullying behavior is the rationalization or minimization of the coaches' actions. Four different defensive techniques have been noted by Swigonski et al. (2014) in association with rationalizing and minimizing bullying behavior. First, a coach who engages in bullying behavior may try to portray the behavior as socially acceptable. Statements such as "sometimes, a coach may lose it" or "this is how we've done things in the past, and we've continued to win games" invoke the concept that because it is a common action—something that is normally done by coaches once in a while—that action is good. These rationalizations are damaging to the development of athletes, and if perpetuated, then the end result is that bullying becomes a normative behavior between coach and athletes.

A second defensive technique is termed the "backhanded apology" (Swigonski et al., 2014). A backhanded apology is one which is not sincere, and the person deflects responsibility for his or her actions (Bandura, 1978). Coaches who engage in backhanded apologies minimize the harm done by their bullying tactics, as well as put the blame on the athlete for the coaches' behavior. A coach who states that he or she would not have acted in a bullying manner if the individual athlete or team had done what they practiced is placing the burden or responsibility for the actions on the athletes. Again, this is deferring responsibility, and the backhanded apology becomes part of the bullying cycle.

A third defensive technique is associated with advantageous comparisons (Swigonski et al., 2014). When bullying is compared to more heinous or egregious acts, the standard for behavior may shift, allowing a coach's behavior to not seem too severe. Coaches who may verbally bully downplay their actions by stating that "I never push the players around or lay a hand on them" (Swigonski et al., 2014, p. 274). Physical bullying and verbal bullying may be seen as equally wrong, but a coach who makes this statement is saying that physical bullying is much more severe than verbal bullying, therefore shifting the standard for behavior.

A fourth defensive technique is escalation. During escalation, a coach may tell an athlete that if he or she "doesn't like the way things are done on the team, then leave" (Swigonski et al., 2014, p. 274). The bully is escalating the situation and presenting repercussions to the athlete if he or she reports the coach's behavior. A coach is "raising the stakes" and essentially challenging the athlete, potentially forcing a situation to occur that is favorable for the coach.

A coach's past success, as well as the cultural demands that are created by coaches in the athletic environment, may also normalize behaviors such as bullying, which in other environments would not be tolerated (Richardson, Andersen, & Morris, 2008). Athletes may recognize the coach's behavior is abusive, but they also recognize that the coach has achieved a certain level of success, so the abusive behavior by the coach must be what is needed in order to continue to be successful (Stirling & Kerr, 2009). Athletes learn cultural demands for their particular sport via socialization experiences. Over time, these demands become the normative expectations if an athlete participates in the sport (Wiese-Bjornstal, 2010). These norms can lay the foundation for a positive culture within the athletic setting, or they can be the keys to bullying and hazing in the athletic setting.

The Bystander Effect

Athletes who witness bullying may not be comfortable reporting the behavior due to the concern for retaliation or loss of status within the athletics program (Brendtro, Ness, & Mitchell, 2001). Bystander athletes may also not intervene because they are unaware of what the expectations are associated with intervention on the victim's behalf (Hawkins, Pepler, & Craig, 2001). Often, bystanders who intervene are aggressive in their defensive response for the victim; this may be due to mimicking the behavior of the bully. The aggressive response towards the bully may stop the action and provide short-term relief, but it will not likely eliminate bullying in the long term.

Kevorkian and D'Antona (2010) created three profiles that describe the role of a bystander during a bullying incident. The *disinterested bystander* does not think bullying is a problem and does not want to get involved in rectifying the bullying incident. The *active bystander* wants to help the victim of a bullying incident but does not know the proper steps to do so. The active bystander also fears retaliation from the bullying if he or she

intervenes on behalf of the victim. Lastly, the *proactive bystander* knows that bullying is wrong, understands how to effectively intervene, and does take action to stop the bullying and defend the victim.

The goal for coaches and athletic administrators is to create a culture that supports athletes as proactive bystanders, if bullying occurs. Athletes should be educated on how to effectively intervene to reduce and eliminate bullying in athletics, as well as how to support victims of bullying. Praising the efforts of bystanders to proactively intervene if bullying occurs is a positive step towards eliminating bullying from the athletics setting.

BULLYING PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION IN THE ATHLETIC SETTING

There are a number of steps that coaches, as well as athletic administrators and communities, can take to curtail and dissuade bullying behavior. Yet, to dissuade and reduce bullying in athletics, coaches, athletic administrators, and communities need to be aware of the signs and symptoms of bullying behavior—and this has been a challenge. The interpretation of what is considered bullying in athletics is under debate. For example, coaches have differing impressions of bullying behavior, as opposed to aggressive behavior associated with the sport they coach. While monitoring athletes' behaviors both on and off the field has been shown to reduce relational aggression in the school setting (Leadbeater, Banister, Ellis, & Yeung, 2008; Totura et al., 2009), it is important for the coaching body as a whole to learn the signals associated with bullying behavior. At the forefront of this education is the need for coaches, considered as influential adults in athletes' lives, to take a central position regarding prevention and intervention efforts that target bullying (Steinfeldt et al., 2012).

There are a few methods that coaches employ to address bullying in athletics. Some coaches may take a rule-sanction approach (Baar & Wubbels, 2013). The emphasis is on setting rules in place to manage athletes' behavior and including penalties or punishments if the rules are broken. Other coaches may take a problem-solving approach. A problem-solving approach is a collaborative effort to identify solutions to end bullying, inclusive of making bullies aware of victims' feelings (Ellis & Shute, 2007).

A coach's attributions and outcome expectations may also impact the steps taken to prevent bullying from occurring (Baar & Wubbels, 2013).

Coaches may attribute bullying to child-related factors (i.e., obesity) and situational factors (i.e., group dynamics). In studies associated with teachers, attributing bullying to child-related factors tends to reduce the level of sensitivity and need to rectify the bullying among students (Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O'Brennan, 2007; Mavropoulou & Padeliadu, 2002; Novick & Isaacs, 2010).

The beliefs coaches have towards victims of bullying are important in understanding how coaches address bullying (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). Coaches who put an emphasis on victims learning to stand up and defend themselves are engaging in assertive beliefs. Comparatively speaking, if coaches view bullying as a way to learn social norms, they will be less active in helping or aiding victims. These actions are associated with normative beliefs. Lastly, coaches who engage in avoidant beliefs are prone to supporting victims of bullying by preventing the formation of cliques through effective leadership efforts. Coaches with such beliefs help victims of bullying incidents avoid perpetrators and interact or socialize with other individuals.

Are there impediments to bullying prevention in athletics? There are a few factors that may impede the identification of bullying behavior, as well as bullying prevention and intervention conducted by coaches. Many coaches may not be aware that bullying is occurring among their athletes (Baar & Wubbels, 2013). Bullying between athletes usually occurs when adults (i.e., coaches, athletic administrators) are not aware of it, or they are not physically present. A coach who is not aware of bullying is not the same as a coach who is not present when bullying occurs. As Johnson and Donnelly (2004) found, some coaches removed themselves from the bullying and hazing process associated with their team. The coaches knew that bullying and hazing rituals were occurring. By removing themselves, the coaches could ignore the actions and also prevent change from occurring—therefore, these abusive acts would still persist. Other coaches may feel that bullying does not exist among the athletes on the team, therefore taking a proactive stance against that type of behavior is not a priority (Caperchione & Holman, 2004).

In researchers' studies examining peer aggression, bullying, and victimization, the results indicated the challenge coaches face in identifying what is considered bullying behavior (Baar & Wubbels, 2013; Coakley, 2009; Endresen & Olweus, 2005; Nucci & Young-Shim, 2005). First, bullying definitions, as stated earlier, highlight intentionality to hurt or harm, repeated actions over time, and an imbalance in a power relationship.

Although a strong body of knowledge exists outlining what is considered bullying in the athletic setting, not all coaches have an exhaustive knowledge of what bullying includes, such as perpetrators' tendencies towards bullying behavior. Second, coaches may mislabel peer aggression or bullying as socially acceptable or assertive behavior due to the competitive nature associated with coaching children in sports. Third, many coaches are volunteers and may not have ample training or education on youth development, bullying, and peer aggression in the sports setting. Their pedagogical training, as well as content knowledge associated with youth work, is limited.

Creating a respectful athletic culture. A primary goal within the athletics environment that helps curtail bullying behavior is the development of a healthy culture within a team or program. Coaches emphasized the importance of creating a positive climate within the sports program, which embodied such characteristics as social cohesion, inclusion, and open communication (Baar & Wubbels, 2013). This type of climate included highlighting that bullying would not be tolerated, as well as the harmfulness of bullying. Directive organization, effective pedagogical coaching techniques, clear codes of athlete conduct, and remaining vigilant and alert to possible bullying behavior were also identified as helpful in dissuading bullying.

The construction of a healthy, positive culture begins with the coach and extends to peers. Adult modeling has a significant impact on whether bullying occurs. If adults model positive behaviors, researchers have found that bullying is less likely to occur (Espelage, Bosworth, & Simon, 2000; Fuller et al., 2013). Students who felt support from their peers were less likely to be involved in bullying in any form (Demaray & Malecki, 2001; Espelage & Green, 2007).

Coaches and athletic administrators should also be considering bullying as a larger sociocultural issue (Dominguez, 2013). These leaders should be communicating with athletes and challenging them to consider what type of team the athletes want. Do they want a strong, competitive team of athletes who positively support each other during success and setbacks, or do they want a team of athletes who abuse and harm each other? These questions also have to be considered by the coaches before they communicate a stance to the athletes in the program.

Johnson (2011) noted that bullying and hazing rituals may be replaced by orientation retreats or events. These opportunities facilitate a welcoming, inclusive environment for healthy bonding between athletes. New

athletes to the team are able to mingle and interact with current or veteran athletes, potentially developing healthy bonds that feel genuine and are not facilitated out of fear. Coercion, or forceful adherence to principles associated with the team, is replaced with elements of togetherness, cohesion, and positive group growth. As noted, orientations as alternatives to bullying and hazing practices "can replace and in fact surpass the potential of an initiation" (Johnson, 2011, p. 218).

What Does a Coach Do if an Athlete Reports Bullying?

As Stirling, Bridges, Cruz, and Mountjoy (2011) highlight, there are a number of steps a coach can take if bullying is reported to him or her by an athlete. During the conversation, it is important to actively listen in a careful and calm manner. It might behoove the coach to take notes so that he or she can remember the details of the athlete's report. As the athlete shares his or her thoughts, it is important to not speak poorly about the perpetrator. The athlete who is reporting the bullying may think favorably of the perpetrator, even caring for them, and ill comments directed at the perpetrator may reduce the athlete's comfort in sharing again if subsequent bullying occurs. While the conversation is occurring regarding the bullying experience, a coach should encourage the athlete to share as much as he or she feels comfortable sharing. The primary goal in the conversation should be to make sure the victim gets the best care and support possible, and this can only be achieved if a coach prioritizes the victim. Targeting information by inquiring about specifics regarding the experience may create an awkward and uncomfortable situation, which can slow down the process of addressing the bullying. Unfortunately in bullying scenarios, a culture of silence persists. A coach should praise the athlete for coming forward, being courageous, and sharing his or her experience, and that the experience was not the victim's fault.

Following the report and conversation with the athlete, it is important for a coach to inform all pertinent individuals to keep them abreast of the situation. A similar expectation exists among youth care workers and professionals via certification as a Mandatory Child Abuse Reporter. This certification entails a youth care worker reporting to a child protective services agency, as well as an organization's administration, any suspicion of child abuse. Not all coaches may hold the Mandatory Child Abuse

Reporter certification, but following a similar protocol associated with reporting is paramount for effective guidance of the athlete and anyone else involved in the bullying experience. Lastly, coaches should be aware of their abilities and limitations in their role. An effective coach in this situation should recognize the importance of shepherding the victim to a professional who can counsel the athlete. This type of professional care can help an athlete work through the potential long-term consequences that can arise from victimization associated with bullying.

Discipline and Bullying in Athletics

As McMullen (2014) discusses, it is important to focus on what the objectives are in conjunction with the punishment or discipline before consideration is given to whether the policy addressing bullying in athletics is appropriate. One goal for punishment may be deterrence—to stop the bullying immediately and prevent future bullying acts. A second goal may be retribution—punishment is levied out so that the perpetrators feel pain, just as the victims did. A third goal may be rehabilitation—the perpetrators should learn from their mistakes and develop alternative ways to interact with teammates.

Disciplinary measures taken once bullying is identified may include immediate intervention coupled with punishment on a case-by-case basis, as well as openly discussing bullying with the whole team or group. There are coaches who tend to engage in avoidant beliefs when dealing with bullying; they believe these beliefs are effective in the athletic setting (Baar & Wubbels, 2013). As mentioned earlier, avoidant beliefs include helping athletes avoid perpetrators of bullying behavior and separating athletes from each other if bullying occurs. The caveat though is that the coach is the "driver" of addressing and discussing bullying and cultural makeup; thought should be given on how much athletes should and can be involved in the process.

If rehabilitation is a goal for perpetrators of bullying, then character education and individual guidance are integral steps in the corrective measures associated with bullying in athletics. The learning opportunity that can result from effective guidance associated with a bullying incident can have a long-lasting impression on a bully. Instead of swift execution of a punishment, a coach can use the bullying actions as an opportunity, with proper administrative support, as a teachable moment for the bully (McMullen, 2014).

Do zero tolerance policies regarding bullying work? Currently within the United States, all 50 States as well as the territories of Puerto Rico, Guam, the Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana have either anti-bullying laws or policies in place to help govern identifying bullying and how to respond if bullying occurs ("Policies & Laws," 2015). In several cases, each state's Department of Education is the governing body regulating policies and procedures associated with bullying. At the federal level, there is not a statute addressing bullying or hazing in athletics.

If bullying occurs, there are a number of governing bodies within each state that may be affiliated with handling the action, including school districts, athletic leagues, and conferences. One method that may be used to handle bullying is the creation of a zero tolerance policy. A zero tolerance policy refers to assigning disciplinary action or punishment for undesirable athlete behavior that violates rules regardless of the situation or context (Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011). The discipline for the perpetrator may include severe consequences, such as suspension or expulsion from school, if the athletics team is school-based. In theory, zero tolerance policies will work and curtail bullying because the discipline and punishment for the offender is so harsh and severe.

Research from a variety of fields on zero tolerance regarding bullying in the academic setting has shown that the severe and harsh punishment for offenders actually has detrimental effects on development. Educational research conducted by Osher, Bear, Sprague, and Doyle (2010) found that suspension from school significantly increases the likelihood of future suspension and expulsion from school, as well as lower academic performance and higher dropout rates. Whitlock (2006) found that students who trust their teachers and view them as respectful, fair individuals are more likely to build bonds with the teachers and perform well in school. Zero tolerance for athletes that includes suspension or expulsion is counterproductive to Whitlock's research. Removing an athlete from school can negate opportunities to building a trusting relationship with staff and faculty, which may detrimentally impact academic performance due to absence from school. Psychological research has also shown that zero tolerance punishments (i.e., suspension, expulsion) further reinforce detrimental behavior by denying students the opportunities to develop healthy social interaction skills and build trusting relationships with adults, some of whom could become mentors and role models in a young person's life (American Psychological Association, 2008). As Christensen (2008)

pointed out, "zero tolerance approaches do not prevent bullying—they only place a band-aid on the problem" (p. 14). Zero tolerance policies and approaches to bullying highlight the specific incident and fail to work towards a cultural shift in deterring bullying within the athletics program.

What are alternatives to zero tolerance policies associated with bullying? There are a few alternatives to zero tolerance policies associated with bullying in athletics. Character education and social-emotional learning programs are examples of methods that athletics administrators and coaches can take to positively impact the environment and dissuade bullying (Christensen, 2008). Character education programs teach core values and are reinforced through training, practice, and athletes' interaction during their time together. By encouraging core values that are predicated upon healthy character development, the hope is that bullying behavior will be reduced or eliminated. Social-emotional learning programs encourage management of one's emotions, goal-setting, caring and concern for others, the development of positive peer relationships, and the creation of effective decision-making skills (Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). Examples of character education and socio-emotional learning programs connected to reducing and eliminating bullying are outlined below.

The social inclusion approach and restorative justice. Payne's social inclusion approach (as cited in Christensen, 2008) has also been outlined as a method for addressing bullying. Altering the athletic climate is necessary and can be done by having the team, when together, outline what constitutes bullying. By sharing with each other what are characteristics of bullying behavior, and the detrimental results of bullying, the prevalence is higher for someone to speak out against bullying if the action occurs. The social inclusion approach incorporates restorative justice—if someone bullies, he or she is held accountable, but without the swift punishment or blame that is traditionally associated with zero tolerance. Restorative justice involves bringing all individuals together who may have been involved in the action to discuss the action, the consequences to individuals, and how to move forward in a rehabilitative manner so it does not occur again (Marshall, as cited in Grimes, 2006). If bullying occurred, the perpetrator and the victim would come together with adult leadership to discuss how to move forward and avoid future bullying behaviors. The social inclusion approach involves the bully understanding the deeper impact of his or her actions, and how to make things right replaces shame and punitive discipline. This approach involves a wholesale change with the culture—in this

case, the team, the athletic program, and possibly the school if the team is a part of school athletics.

The teaching personal and social responsibility model (TPSR). Reactive punishment for engaging in hazing or bullying, such as suspension from matches and practice for the perpetrators, may send an immediate message about the actions. The more effective measure is to create and build a proactive model for team building from the first day of practice (Rees, 2010). An example of a template that helps foster this type of cohesion and positive group dynamics is Hellison's (2003) teaching personal and social responsibility model (TPSR). Using TPSR, athletes learn respect, positive participation in activities with others, self-direction, caring, and ethical behavior. TPSR encourages athletes to develop life skills that will benefit each young person individually, as well as when they work and interact socially with others. Examples of activities that are a part of TPSR include taking on leadership roles within the athletic setting and collaborating with teammates as well as a coach on positive team-building opportunities.

Conclusion

Bullying behavior does not occur in a bubble; it is perpetuated due to larger, societal issues. As Dominguez (2013) points out, organizations may have spent too much time reacting and focusing on the symptoms of bullying; the target of work should be on the larger problem of how the seed for bullying is planted in youth. Much of the discussion should revolve around how various components of culture support bullying.

Creating a social climate that does not support bullying in athletics in any capacity is crucial for the erosion and potential elimination of this type of behavior in athletics. Change will occur associated with the perception of bullying once changes in the environment happen. Until these environmental changes occur, incidents will continue and more rules will be added on top of the existing procedural methods for addressing bullying.

This chapter has highlighted multiple research studies that point out individual, situational, and organizational factors play a role in whether bullying behaviors occur in the recreation and sport setting. Adherence to the sport ethic and engagement in deviant overconformity may create norms within athletic teams that support bullying and hazing behaviors. Taking bullying seriously and creating a safe environment for youth

were initial steps towards developing norms that do not support bullying. These norms also included educating staff on identifying bullying behavior and how to address bullying if it occurs, as well as encouraging youth to build healthy relationships with each other. Coaches who do not acknowledge bullying as an issue are setting themselves up for potentially harmful scenarios. How coaches view bullying, whether it is harmful or part of growing up, and the results of bullying behavior can influence how they intervene if bullying occurs under their watch (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; Mishna, Pepler, & Wiener, 2006).

In closing, coaches have an incredible amount of responsibility as they work to craft an athletic climate that encourages positive growth within and among athletes on their team. The impact coaches have in curtailing or perpetuating bullying behaviors in the athletic setting is far-reaching. Although winning is paramount in athletics, great coaches are considered "…extraordinary people who left lasting impressions on the lives of those who were fortunate enough to call them coach" (Becker, 2009, p. 112). The goal of creating a positive athletic culture is firmly within a coach's grasp, and their leadership will dictate how that culture is developed and maintained during their tenure with the athletic program.

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