

Regular Paper

Anti-Bullying Policies in Canadian Sport: An Absent Presence

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Abstract

In Canada, it is estimated that one-third of bullying occurs outside of educational settings, including sport and recreation spaces (Shannon, 2013). Beyond important academic literature on abuse in athlete-coach relationships, however, there is little research on peer-to-peer bullying in sport. This is a noticeable absence considering assertions that there is a high potential for bullying to occur (Kerr, Jewett, MacPherson, & Stirling, 2016; Shannon, 2013). Moreover, bullying has been connected to children and youth drop-out rates (Fraser, 2015).

Our interest in this project was to determine how Canadian national sport organizations (NSOs) address peer-to-peer bullying through policy. Although anti-bullying strategies that rely solely on policy are ineffective (Short, 2013), clearly communicated and implemented policies remain important (Mountjoy et al., 2016; Olweus & Limber, 2010; Walton, 2004). Thus, we focused our analysis on policy documents available to the public on NSO websites.

A total of 118 documents were retrieved, consisting of various codes of conduct and harassment policies. Of these 118 policy documents, only three had been produced that addressed peer-to-peer bullying specifically. In the remaining 115 documents, bullying was mentioned just 19 times and only defined in five documents. The absence of specific policy and policy statement addressing peer-to-peer bullying is important to highlight. Well-written and implemented policies are needed in order to help create safer spaces in sport for children and youth. More specifically, it is imperative for sport and recreation organizations to have clearly defined policies on peer-to-peer bullying, which are openly communicated to members of the organization. It is also important for organizations to make it clear how members should report incidents of bullying.

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Finally, policies that adequately define bullying and that address its root causes such as sexism, racism, ableism, and LGBTQphobia are considered best practice as they are determined to be more complete. Policies that highlight the root or ideological causes of bullying may have more long-term impact on reducing bullying behaviours and incidents, as children and youth are encouraged to embrace difference and demonstrate empathy, respect, and compassion (Short, 2013). These policies should co-exist with educational programs on bullying, such as those offered by Respect in Sport and the Canadian Red Cross.

Keywords

Bullying, sport, policy, content analysis

Bullying continues to be a serious problem in Canada, occurring across ages and in multiple settings. Indeed, approximately 75% of Canadians have reported being affected by bullying in some way (PREVNet, n.d.a). Research suggests that Canada has higher prevalence rates of bullying than two-thirds of western countries (PREVNet, n.d.b). One-third of adolescents have reported being victimized in school, sometimes as early as first grade and continuing through the first years of high school; 10% to 15% of high school-aged youth also report being bullied (Knowlton, n.d.; Poteat, Mereish, DiGiovanni, & Scheer, 2013). Importantly, it is also suggested that many experiences of bullying go unreported (Fraser, 2015; Molcho et al., 2009; Short, 2013).

Bullying is generally defined as “a form of aggression where there is a power imbalance [and] the person doing the bullying has power over the person being victimized” (Canadian Red Cross, n.d.). While this serves as a reasonable statement to describe bullying behaviour, the reality is that bullying in contemporary times is a complex issue. Research to date has provided, insights into the different forms of bullying (e.g., verbal, physical, sexual, cyber), and the various role(s) one might play (i.e., victim, perpetrator, bystander, or any combination of the three). Research has also elucidated the long-lasting, serious effects of bullying on health and wellness including (but not exclusive of) depression, anxiety, stress, damaged self-esteem, and withdrawal from social spaces (Bibou-Nakou, Tsiantis, Assimopoulos, & Chatzilambou, 2013; Mishna et al., 2009; Mountjoy et al., 2016; Olweus & Limber, 2010; Peguero & Williams, 2011; Ybarra, Boyd, Korchmaros, & Oppenheim, 2012). Greater risk of substance use/abuse, posttraumatic stress disorder, criminal activity, self-harm ideation and attempts, and elevated suicide ideation and attempts are also reported to varying degrees for victims, bystanders, and bullies (Fraser, 2015; Hirsch, 2011; Mountjoy et al., 2016; Poteat et al., 2013; Stirling & Kerr, 2014; Sullivan, 2000; Volk & Lagzdins, 2009). There have been many tragic stories, even in recent years, about young persons dying by suicide, the fact that they were bullied often a significant factor (Hirsch, 2011).

Clearly, bullying is a complex and serious issue especially when considering the suggested short- and long-term outcomes, as well as its continued prevalence in the Canadian context. The preponderance of bullying research to date has focused on the educational context, which is important because it is estimated that two-thirds of bullying occurs in schools (Shannon, 2013). That means, however, that one-third of

bullying experiences occur in other social settings, such as sport and recreation spaces. Other scholars have noted this and have turned their research agendas to bullying and abuse within the context of sport, and a small but important body of literature has emerged.

The purpose of the present project was to augment the existing literature by examining peer-to-peer bullying in the context of Canadian sport, with a specific focus on policy. The research questions guiding this project were: (1) What anti-bullying policies have Canadian sport organizations developed? (2) What are the key messages in these policies and are they more reactive or preventative in nature? Following a brief review of relevant literature, commentary on theoretical influences, and explanation of our methodological approach, we present the results of our critical content analysis of the policies reviewed. We then discuss these results in relation to existing literature within and outside the context of sport. We conclude the article with some “best practice” recommendations for administrators and those involved in policy development/implementation.

A Brief Review of Academic Research on Bullying

Scholars noting the relative absence of research on bullying in the context of sport contend that it may have been overlooked as a setting where bullying manifests for several reasons. These include the assumption of voluntary participation, the autonomous and unregulated nature of sport, and common views of sport as a moral utopia that upholds the highest behavioural standards (Kerr, Jewett, MacPherson, & Stirling, 2016). However, Kerr and colleagues (2016) have argued that sport has a high potential to foster bullying behaviour because of participants being in an elevated emotional state, power differentials arising from athletic ability, competition for limited playing positions, and the strength/existence of sport or team rituals. In light of these ideas, academic research has been done on hazing, abuse in coach-athlete relationships, and, to a lesser extent, bullying.

Hazing

Hazing can be defined as any dangerous, degrading, humiliating activity in which one is expected to participate to become an accepted member of a group. Kirby and Wintrup (2002) suggest that

hazing is a form of group bullying (Hoover, 2000) or group intimidation of rookies by established team members (and occasionally team trainers, coaches and parents) and may cause short- or long-term damage to the rookies involved. Such activities can include mental, physical, and/or sexual hazing. (p. 51)

These scholars also note that initiation/hazing practices are in some cases criminal. Importantly, there is no willingness of participation required—it is expected of new/potential members for inclusion in said group (Kirby & Wintrup, 2002). Along with the military and fraternities, sport has been argued to be a social space ripe for hazing practices, regardless of restrictions placed on such practices (e.g., Crow & Macintosh, 2009; Johnson, 2011). While many of the specific behaviours associated with hazing are similar to what are also considered bullying behaviours, there is one significant

difference between the two: hazing is about humiliation and degradation with the goal and outcome of inclusion; bullying is about humiliation and degradation with the goal and outcome of exclusion. Thus, while hazing should remain an important point of academic and practitioner conversation and action, specific engagement with hazing lies beyond the scope of our work here.

Abuse in Coach-Athlete Relationships

Researchers who have recognized the potential of abusive and bullying behaviours in sport have turned to coach-athlete relationships as their primary focus (e.g., Fraser, 2015; Stirling & Kerr, 2008, 2014). In doing so, they have brought to light hugely problematic issues of sexual and emotional abuse in sport. Research, for example, has shown that athletes are at risk for being sexually abused by coaches because of high demands, time investment, compliance, dependence on coach, and trust placed in the coach by athletes and often their parents/guardians (Kirby & Demers, 2013; Mountjoy et al., 2016; Stirling & Kerr, 2008, 2014). Furthermore, sport often occurs in private spaces with lack of parental control and/or where bystanders might be afraid to speak out for various reasons (Kirby & Demers, 2013).

Other research has suggested that some coaches intentionally use emotionally abusive tactics to try to push athletes to perform better or to punish athletes for inadequate performance (Fraser, 2015; Mountjoy et al., 2016; Stirling & Kerr, 2008). For example, a coach may tell male football players that “they are hitting like girls” and/or that they need to “man up” (Fraser, 2015). Some sport participants (including parents, administrators, other athletes, and other coaches) may allow, accept, excuse, and tolerate abusive behaviour by coaches because this “traditional” authoritarian coaching style has been normalized by the media as a successful technique to motivate players (Fraser, 2015; Stirling & Kerr, 2014). This exemplifies the “performance narrative,” where performance is valued above all other potential benefits from sport, and athletes must comply to perform successfully (Kerr et al., 2016; Kirby & Demers, 2013; Stirling & Kerr, 2008). Some sport participants may speak out against an abusive coach. However, fear of retaliation and reprisal, not being taken seriously, or losing a top spot on a team, has created a code of silence (Fraser, 2015; Short, 2013; Stirling & Kerr, 2014). This code of silence may also motivate bystanders or victims to drop-out of the sport or switch teams, instead of reporting the abuse (Fraser, 2015). All of these factors have worked to make abusive behaviours seem more “normal” or leave them unquestioned within some sporting spaces (Kirby & Demers, 2013; Stirling & Kerr, 2014).

Bullying

If abusive coaching behaviours go unquestioned, unchallenged, made to somehow seem “normal” or more acceptable in the context of sport, what impact might this have on peer-to-peer bullying in the context of sport? In her research focused on bullying in recreation programs in New Brunswick, Shannon (2013) argued that if athletes think abusive behaviours are natural and inevitable and a “part of sport,” this creates an environment that is permissive and reactive to bullying. Additionally, adults who witness bullying may justify it as natural, that “kids will be kids,” and that “they are just mean at this age” (Hirsch, 2011). Moreover, athletic ability has been identified in sport as a quality either protecting those from victimization, “permitting” individuals to bully others, or a risk factor for bullying depending on their age and seniority on

the team (Kerr et al., 2016; Stirling & Kerr, 2014). However, lack of commitment to the team and inferior athletic ability—even on occasion—are also always risk factors for bullying (Kerr et al., 2016). When one considers these different factors, it is perhaps not surprising that bullying that occurs at least once a week has a higher prevalence in sport than the Canadian average in other social settings (Volk & Lagzdins, 2009). In short, competitive environments may teach athletes negative social behaviours that encourage bullying (Shannon, 2013; Volk & Lagzdins, 2009). More specifically, physical contact that encourages physical aggression, notions of success based on comparison between other peers, and using aggression, intimidation and violence for conflict resolution may result in greater incidents of bullying (Shannon, 2013; Volk & Lagzdins, 2009).

To further complicate things, there is a correlation of athletes using bullying behaviours both in school and sport, indicating that bullying can traverse across boundaries (Shannon, 2013; Volk & Lagzdins, 2009). Bullying that stems from another setting can manifest in sport because of youth not getting consistent messages, bullying not being dealt with properly in other settings, and victims feeling they can switch their roles in new settings (Shannon, 2013). Shannon (2013) suggests a preventative approach where adults who influence youth agree on what bullying is and, therefore, know what behaviours to prevent. They would also know how to identify the behaviour, stage an intervention, and work toward behaviour modification. Prevention is also about knowing what sorts of behaviours to promote, such as respect, empathy, and compassion (Short, 2013). Prevention is critical as it has been argued that peer-to-peer bullying can be associated with higher levels of depression, anxiety, and other negative internalizing behaviours than when a child is abused by a parent (Fraser, 2015). Moreover, if youth drop out of sport because of bullying, that can have negative consequences on their short- and long-term physical and mental health.

The few studies discussed here that have addressed peer-to-peer bullying in Canadian sport have raised many important issues and concerns. We still know little, however, of what is being done at a national level to specifically address peer-to-peer bullying in sport, despite the seriousness of the issue in the larger context and what has been revealed to date in research (e.g., Kerr et al., 2016; Shannon, 2013). With a shared passion for sport, and as part of a larger project on bullying, we were interested in determining how Canadian national sport organizations might currently be addressing peer-to-peer bullying through policy. Although we recognized that policy-only anti-bullying strategies are ineffective (Short, 2013), clearly communicated and implemented policies remain important (Kirby & Demers, 2013; Mountjoy et al., 2016; Olweus & Limber, 2010; Shannon, 2013; Stirling & Kerr, 2008; Walton, 2004).

(Re-)Conceptualizing Bullying: Individualistic and Social Approaches

Dan Olweus, widely regarded as one of the first academics to make bullying a focus of research, contended in an early definition that “a student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students” (Olweus, 1994, p. 1173). In a more recent publication, Olweus and Limber (2010) expanded on that original definition, suggesting

that bullying should be considered as “intentional, repeated, negative (unpleasant or hurtful) behavior by one or more persons directed against a person who has difficulty defending himself or herself” (p. 125). Moreover, in its definition bullying must also be described as, “aggressive behavior or intentional harm doing that is carried out repeatedly and over time in an interpersonal relationship characterized by an actual or perceived imbalance of power or strength” (p. 125).

Olweus’ contributions to the contemporary understandings of bullying cannot be overstated; his definitions of bullying have informed vast amounts of academic research as well as policy interventions (Olweus & Limber, 2010; Short, 2013). That said, Olweus’ definitions of bullying (and those who have adopted his perspective) have been critiqued in recent years for their individualistic approach. An individualistic approach identifies factors that justify participation in bullying, and recommends ways to change the individual in order to curb the problem (Duncan & Rivers, 2013). Put another way, an individualistic perspective tends to view bullying as inevitable behaviour amongst young people that is best dealt with by behavioural change interventions (Duncan & Rivers, 2013; Short, 2013). In this way of thinking, an individual’s traits and personal characteristics are positioned as the cause of bullying (Duncan & Rivers, 2013; Short, 2013). Some of these individual factors include personality, background, relationships, biology, and psychology (Duncan & Rivers, 2013). Bullies have been defined as aggressive, having positive views toward violence, as impulsive, physically and emotionally strong with high self-esteem, lacking empathy, and as valuing power, domination, and being in control (Duncan & Rivers, 2013; Ferris, Zinko, Brouer, Buckley, & Harvey, 2007; Olweus, 1994; Shannon, 2013). Policies developed in Canada over the past 25 years have been based on an individualistic definition of bullying, largely focused on penalizing bullying behaviour after it happens (e.g., zero-tolerance policies in schools).

Scholars and anti-bullying activists critical of the individualistic approach have offered alternative conceptualizations of bullying, arguing that bullying does not stem from “innate” characteristics of an individual, but rather from the environment shaping that individual (Burr, 2015). For example, Short (2013) contended that “the notion of bullying requires additional adjectives—homophobic bullying, classist bullying, gender-based bullying, and so on” (p. 3). When there is failure to recognize systemic issues and resultant marginalization, the structural or ideological changes that could make the biggest impact on diminishing bullying do not manifest (Walton, 2004). Put another way, the generic term “bullying” and investigations of it as a psychological issue fail to account for its multiple cultural bases. When failing to take context into account, anti-bullying strategies continue to be adopted that are reactive rather than preventative. While not unimportant, they fail to address ideological causes and are often “too little, too late” in terms of impact on individuals involved (Short, 2013), with the targeting of (and potentially changing) a few individuals showing little long-lasting effect (Duncan & Rivers, 2013; Short, 2013). Thus, in this way of thinking, identifying and addressing ideological root causes of bullying through education on respect, empathy, compassion, and social justice are argued to be more effective in addressing the serious issue of bullying in Canada (Poteat et al., 2013; Short, 2013). It is this way of conceptualizing bullying—the social approach—that informs our work here.

Methods

In order to address our research questions, we conducted a content analysis (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The content analysis focused on policies related to bullying made available to the public on Canadian national sport organization (NSO) websites. For purposes of clarity, a Canadian NSO is the national body responsible for the governance of each type of sport in the country. NSOs may be responsible for the development of rules and regulations, policies, programming, funding allocation, etc. There were three primary objectives to our analysis. First, we wanted to see what policies existed. Second, we were interested in the specific content of any existing policies, searching particularly for language and definitions related to bullying, abuse, and harassment. Third, influenced by Short's (2013) conceptualization of bullying as a social issue, we wanted to determine if existing policies addressed the ideological causes of bullying in any way. If they did not address bullying, we looked for other common content across existing policies related to ethics/ethical behaviours. The objective here was to get a sense of what best practices may be in existence and where there could be some room for improvement in policy documents in relation to anti-bullying measures. Data collection and analysis were completed in the summer of 2016.

Data Collection

The decision was made from the outset of the project to focus on online policies available to the public. This decision was based on the notion that policy documents should be accessible to any member of an NSO as well as to the general public—especially people (e.g., parents/ guardians) with an interest in that sport for their children. As such, we focused on NSOs that received funding from Sport Canada, which at the time of study was 63 organizations. While all 63 organizations had official websites, six did not provide any policies online, leaving a total of 57 NSO websites to be analyzed.

Using site-provided search engines as well as manual scans, we explored official websites of these NSOs for references to bullying, harassment, abuse, and ethics/ethical behaviour. We then specifically searched for policies focused on bullying and harassment. We downloaded all relevant information that was available and copied non-downloadable information into a Microsoft Word document, ensuring to include identifying information. This included name of the organization and the policy, as well as the web address where the document was located. In total, 118 documents were retrieved: 84 codes of conduct/code of ethics, 31 harassment policies, and three stand-alone anti-bullying policies. There were more codes of conduct than number of organizations as some organizations had both a code of conduct and a code of ethics. Additionally, in many cases organizations had codes of conduct for specific groups, such as volunteers, referees, coaches, parents, and athletes.

Data Analysis

The first author completed the initial analysis of the various policy documents that were retrieved. Our general interest here was to investigate the inclusion of bullying in NSO policies. More specifically, the different ways that bullying was directly or indirectly referenced in policies was recorded. Direct references to bullying included using the word bullying and/or defining the term in some way. Indirect references included the incorporation and/or definition of related terms such as harassment and abuse. A total of 63 key terms pertaining to bullying, abuse, and harassment (e.g.,

mention of zero-tolerance, abuse of authority in the coach-athlete relationship, conflict of interest, and peer-to-peer bullying) were identified. A Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was created to list the terms. The spreadsheet was then used to determine how many of the 63 key terms were included in each of the documents retrieved.

We were, however, interested in more than just prevalence. Thus, following the initial identification of key terms, we conducted a content analysis of the documents retrieved. We made use of QSR International's NVivo 10.0, a software program that allows researchers to organize and code qualitative materials. Microsoft Word was also used for some of the coding, specifically for materials that we were unable to upload to NVivo. Our review of the existing literature and the research questions that were developed served as a starting point for the coding of the materials. Examples of the primary codes used were bullying and related terms such as abuse, harassment, hazing, and violence. A second round of coding was done to identify reference to or discussion of different forms of abuse and bullying, such as emotional, physical, verbal, sexual, relational, and racist forms. A final round of coding focused on common themes or ideas found in policies related to bullying and/or harassment. The themes that emerged consistently were equality, ethical leadership, abuse of authority, and holistic development of the athlete. We identified these themes as an important component of addressing bullying and abusive behaviours in organizations. In this final round of coding we also made note of references to the ideological roots of bullying within policies, what specifically was included, and in what context.

The Numbers: Prevalence of Bullying and Bullying-Related Terminology in NSO Policies

Given our particular interest in peer-to-peer bullying in this project, we want to emphasize that of the 118 documents reviewed, only three could be categorized as anti-bullying policies specifically, a point which we discuss later in the paper. Beyond these three anti-bullying policies, only 19 other NSO documents included the word bullying (see Table 1). Breaking that down even further to direct and indirect references, one code of conduct (11%) and four harassment policies (12%) included a specific definition of bullying. One organization, the International Wheelchair Rugby Federation, included the most complete definition of bullying, including specific reference to gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and physical appearance as the basis for bullying in their harassment policy. In terms of indirect reference—meaning that bullying was included as a term but with no accompanying definition—10 harassment policies (19.35%) and nine codes of conduct (9.5%) took such an approach. It is positive that bullying was listed as a behaviour that would not be tolerated, however, without specific definition the policies are incomplete and ineffective.

While not specifically including the term bullying, a definition of harassment on the basis of prohibited grounds, such as race, ethnicity, disability, religion, age, gender, sex, and sexual orientation, was included in several of the 118 NSO policy documents. This included all three of the anti-bullying policies, 30 harassment policies (96.77%), and nine codes of conduct (10.71%). In these instances, it may be the case that harassment is used as somewhat of a placeholder for “bullying” but scholars and

anti-bullying educators alike contend that it is important to name bullying specifically to begin meaningfully addressing it through both education and policy (e.g., Kirby & Demers, 2013; Short, 2013; Stirling & Kerr, 2014).

Table 1

Components of Bullying and Harassment Included in NSO Policy Documents

	Anti-Bullying Policies <i>n</i> = 3	Harassment Policies <i>n</i> = 31	Codes of Conduct <i>n</i> = 84
Listed the Word Bullying	3	10	9
Definition of Bullying	3	4	1
Definition of Harassment			
Addressing Prohibited Grounds	3	30	9
Types of Bullying or Harassment:			
Physical	3	31	54
Sexual	3	31	43
Verbal	3	31	57
Emotional	2	7	42
Relational	2	25	28
Cyber	1	4	11
Sexist	3	28	26
Racial	3	30	30
Preventative Approach	2	7	17
Reactive Approach	1	24	67
Statement on Respect of Others	0	0	23
Statement on Equal or Fair Treatment	0	0	13

In terms of specific references to types of bullying or harassment, verbal harassment/bullying was the type of violent behaviour mentioned the most. All of the anti-bullying and harassment policies and 57 of 84 codes of conduct (67.86%) referenced verbal harassment. Physical and sexual abuse were mentioned at the same rate in anti-bullying and harassment policies, 100% of the time. However, in the 84 codes of conduct, physical abuse was mentioned in 54 (64.29%) and sexual abuse in 43 (51.19%). Encouragingly, sexist bullying was specifically mentioned as an unacceptable behaviour in the three anti-bullying policies, 28 harassment policies (90.32%), and 26 codes of conduct (30.95%). Similar numbers were recorded for racist bullying: all three anti-bullying policies, 30 harassment policies (96.77%), and 30 codes of conduct (35.71%). Cyberbullying was the type of bullying behaviour mentioned the least. It was included in just one of the anti-bullying policies (33.33%), four harassment policies (12.9%), and 11 codes of conduct (13.1%). This is a problematic oversight because cyberbullying is a significant and growing concern in Canada. With increasing and easier access to technology, 33% of Canadians have reported being victimized online

and 25% of Canadians have confessed to participating in cyberbullying behaviours (Craig & Mishna, 2014).

While it is important to note what types of maltreatment are addressed in policies and with what frequency, it is also important to know what other messages are conveyed through policy documents. Messages related to ethics/ethical behaviour and anti-bullying/anti-harassment messaging may contribute to a more positive environment that helps to prevent, or at the very least decrease, incidents of bullying. Five predominant themes emerged in this portion of our analysis: equality; ethical leadership; abuse of authority in any position; abuse of authority in the coach-athlete relationship; and, holistic development. Four out of these five themes appeared in at least 66.67% of the anti-bullying policies (see Table 2).

Table 2

Predominant Themes Emerging from Analysis of NSO Policy Documents

	Anti-Bullying (Total = 3)	Harassment (Total = 31)	Codes of Conduct (Total = 84)
Equality	2	27	23
Ethical Leadership	0	9	17
Abuse of Authority in Any Position	3	20	33
Abuse of Authority in the Coach-Athlete Relationship	2	3	35
Holistic Development	2	1	17

The following section provides a description of each of the five themes identified, and includes specific examples from NSO policy documents. While there were several examples we could have incorporated, we have focused on those that were more preventative in their approach, which may especially help to deter bullying behaviours and incidents. As such, we identify these as a best practice in policy development.

Equality

Equality included any reference to equal opportunity for all people, as well as the idea of equal playing time. The following example comes from Water Ski and Wakeboard Canada's (WSWC) harassment policy:

WSWC, like the community at large, is becoming increasingly diverse. It includes people of different genders, races, cultures and backgrounds. We must all work together to eliminate the barrier to equality that is caused by harassment.... Harassment is a serious problem. It creates a hostile environment, undermines self-respect and contributes to low morale, poor performance and high turnover (p. 1).

Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership included reference to role models and statements about the importance of sport activity leaders, coaches, parents, and administrators behaving in ways reflecting their leadership roles and, therefore, setting good examples for young athletes. The following was produced by the Coaching Association of Canada:

Coaching Responsibility: Make wise use of the authority of the position and make decisions in the interest of athletes; Foster self-esteem among athletes; Avoid deriving personal advantage for a situation or decision; Know one's limitations in terms of knowledge and skills when making decisions, giving instructions or taking action; Honour commitments, word given, and agreed objectives (NCCP Code of Ethics, p. 2).

Abuse of Authority in Any Position and Abuse of Authority in the Coach-Athlete Relationship

This included specific descriptions of abuses of authority or imbalances of power and statements why it was imperative to behave in appropriate ways. Ringette Canada commented on abuse within coach-athlete relationships in the following way:

The coach-athlete relationship is a privileged one and plays a critical role in the personal, sport, and athletic development of the athlete. Coaches must understand and respect the inherent power imbalance that exists in this relationship and must be extremely careful not to abuse it, consciously or unconsciously (Code of Conduct and Ethics Policy, p. 4).

Holistic Development

Holistic development included any statement focused on the objective of enhancing an athlete's overall development or treating them as a whole person. This notion of holistic development is particularly important in sport, as we know that an exclusive and/or aggressive focus on winning can create environments more conducive to abuse and bullying (Fraser, 2015; Shannon, 2013). Both Hockey Canada and Rugby Canada included the following statement on holistic development in their respective anti-bullying policy documents:

A sports environment that actively discourages harassment and bullying and builds relationships based on trust and mutual respect, is an environment that discourages the abuse of children and youth, and encourages the overall development of the individual (Hockey Canada Bully Harassment and Abuse Policies, p. 3; Rugby Canada Policy on the Prevention of Harassment, Bullying, and Abuse, p. 4).

It is not only important to have policy in place to indicate how incidents of maltreatment in sport will be dealt with, it is important to create an environment that actively strives to prevent bullying and other abusive behaviours from occurring in the first place. Policies that mention and implicate strategies of equality, ethical leadership, abuse of authority, and holistic development help to do this. As noted, these five themes

were present in quite a few NSO policy documents, indicating we are on the way to creating meaningful change and preventing maltreatment in sport.

Beyond the Numbers: A Critical Discussion About Anti-Bullying Policies

Our analysis identified that the main focus of NSO policies is on harassment and abuse of athletes by coaches and activity leaders. This focus is crucial for the creation of a safe environment for sport participants. This also means, however, that peer-to-peer bullying is not being addressed to any great extent. As noted in the results above, a definition of bullying was only included in three anti-bullying policies, four harassment policies, and one code of conduct. Of the three NSOs that have an anti-bullying policy, just two—Hockey Canada and Rugby Canada—mention peer-to-peer bullying specifically. The third, Skate Canada, includes a definition of bullying that does not specify who is carrying out the bullying behaviour, so peer-to-peer bullying is implicitly but not explicitly included. The lack of specific definitions of bullying in NSO documents is discouraging as definitions are important to name issues and create clear boundaries to help address incidents of bullying properly (Kirby & Demers, 2013; Shannon, 2013).

In general, a reactive approach towards bullying was taken in one NSO anti-bullying policy (33.33%), 24 of the harassment policies (77.42%), and 67 of the codes of conduct (79.76%). When policies only permit authorities to take action after individuals exceed limitations of defined acceptable behaviour, the damage has already been done to the victim, as well as to bystanders and the person doing the bullying (Short, 2013). Many scholars recommend creating anti-bullying policies that, when implemented, can define and effectively deal with bullying behaviours when they arise (Kirby & Demers, 2013; Mishna et al., 2009; Mountjoy et al., 2016; Olweus & Limber, 2010; Poteat et al., 2013; Stirling & Kerr, 2008; Walton, 2004). It is also important to train individuals to enforce policies to successfully deal with this form of abuse (Mishna et al., 2009; Short, 2013). While the scholars referenced here did not focus on sport in their research, we would argue that the same logic applies.

We know from the limited research done in the Canadian context that only an estimated two-thirds of bullying takes place in school, meaning that bullying is experienced in other social spaces, such as sport clubs (Shannon, 2013). Peer-to-peer bullying within sport can be a barrier to participation for youth vulnerable to victimization because of cultural and societal norms (Peguero & Williams, 2011; Shannon, 2013). Certain sporting spaces may encourage bullying behaviours because of the competitive environment, unstructured playing time, and high participant to activity leader ratios resulting in decreased supervision (Shannon, 2013). Scholars have shown that peer relations in sport have inherent tension due to the imperative of team work for success, yet each individual tries to set themselves apart with competition for playing time (Kerr et al., 2016). Athletes may feel they do not need to justify their aggressive actions in the name of competing for playing time or acquiring superior performance (Kerr et al., 2016). The ways that activity leaders and administrators handle reports of bullying may further foster a climate that accepts aggression (Kirby & Demers, 2013; Peguero & Williams, 2011; Poteat et al., 2013; Shannon, 2013; Sullivan,

2000). Additionally, if an organization does not have clear procedures for victims and bystanders to report abuse, administrators may not recognize bullying as an issue and further policies and training will not be established (Shannon, 2013). As such, everyone within sport must be given clear behavioural expectations and be told what the consequences are for violations (Poteat et al., 2013; Shannon, 2013).

While the creation of anti-bullying policies is an important step in addressing incidents of bullying, individuals' experiences of bullying are not prevented through reactive policies alone. When policies only respond to certain limited incidents, the culture that creates and helps maintain bullying behaviours does not change (Short, 2013). As such, we were also particularly interested in exploring how or if policies sought to address ideological causes of bullying or if they adopted a more traditional, reactive approach. Only one of the NSOs included a definition of bullying that identified its cultural roots—the International Wheelchair Rugby Federation's harassment policy. Both scholars and activists working on anti-bullying initiatives have argued it is important to identify cultural roots and bias-based bullying in policies (Mishna et al., 2009; Short, 2013). Bullying does not occur in a vacuum, meaning that the behaviours we identify as bullying relate to the larger social context (Bibou-Nakou et al., 2013; Mishna et al., 2009; Peguero & Williams, 2011; Short, 2013; Sullivan, 2000; Walton, 2004). Scholars such as Short (2013) argue that it is imperative we begin to have more meaningful conversations about the ideological roots of bullying, conversations that can take place (at least in part) through educational programs. Teaching youth respect and empathy related to assumed differences based on gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and ability is one way to address the cultural roots of bullying (Short, 2013). Short suggests, in fact, that anti-bullying measures must be more preventative in nature, addressing the root cause(s) of the bullying behaviour, rather than targeting certain individuals who acted out in one or more incidents. For example, there must be meaningful education on, amongst other things, racial and sexual differences so that a culture of respect and empathy is created and maintained. Such an approach, it is suggested, will help to reduce instances of bullying, helping to preclude the "too little, too late" aspect of policy-only approaches to peer-to-peer bullying.

The three existing NSO anti-bullying policies noted the idea of a shift in the sport environment related to bullying but, unfortunately, even the best intentioned preventative policies can fail to be effective in prevention because of the disconnect between policy ideals and lived experiences (Short, 2013; Walton, 2004). This is why anti-bullying education is essential. But clearly defined and implementable policies are also of the utmost importance. Following this line of thinking, the anti-bullying policies of Hockey Canada and Rugby Canada (which were quite similar) should be considered "best practice" for other national sport organizations to follow. This is because they identify bullying as a social problem and take a preventative approach toward bullying by promoting educational resources and programs for all their participants. These "best practice" policies identify the cultural roots of bullying and harassment, and provide clear definitions and examples of bullying, harassment, and abuse. They also specifically mention peer-to-peer bullying without taking a zero-tolerance stance. Not adopting a zero-tolerance approach toward peer-to-peer bullying in policies is important because, as Walton (2004) has argued, zero-tolerance policies are too individualistic and reactive and, therefore, ineffective in shifting the culture in which the instances of bullying took place.

With all that said, based on our own research as well as existing academic literature, in the following section we provide some suggested “best practices” that we hope will be useful for practitioners in particular.

Implications for Practice

1. Organizations must have a specific anti-bullying policy, that focuses on peer-to-peer bullying in the context of sport and recreation. This policy would complement anti-harassment policies, which typically target abuse of athletes by coaches.
2. Any anti-bullying policy created must include a clear definition of bullying, including:
 - The types of bullying behaviours (i.e., physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, relational, cyber).
 - The ideological (or root) causes of bullying (i.e., gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, ability, social class, body shape/size), making it clear that bullying is a social phenomenon that can be prevented, not just something that is inherent and/or inevitable behavior amongst children and youth.
 - Explanation of the different roles that exist in peer-to-peer bullying (i.e., the bully, the victim, the bystander), with comment that one person rarely occupies only one role.
3. The policy should outline the types of spaces that tend to be more conducive to bullying behaviours, including those that are more competitive in nature, those with less structured time/programming, and those with fewer adult leaders/supervisors present.
4. The policy should outline how organization members can recognize bullying behaviours and incidents.
5. The policy should include a clear and transparent mechanism or plan for reporting bullying behaviours and incidents.
6. The policy should include reference to existing anti-bullying educational programs, such as Respect in Sport, as well as protocols for implementation of initial and continuing education programs.

Concluding Thoughts

We know that children and youth will drop out of sporting activities if they are not having positive experiences, which includes being bullied. Sport is ideally meant to be a positive and safe place, where children and youth can learn, amongst other things, skill development, physical literacy, respect for self and others, and teamwork. It is apparent from the number of NSO policy documents addressing abusive behaviour by coaches that it is of significant concern and attempt is being made to nullify maltreatment in the context of Canadian sport. We do believe that sport organizations are making great effort to create safer environments but are still missing a significant aspect of athlete welfare. Peer-to-peer bullying in sport is an absent presence. We propose, however, that the absence of anti-bullying strategies can be thought of as advantageous. Opportunity is provided to NSOs and other sport and recreation organizations to create policy and prevention strategies simultaneously. There are some policies, and statements within policies, that provide excellent example for other sport and recreation organizations to follow. We have done our best to highlight these in the paper.

An analysis of policy only tells part of the story, of course, and because some internal documents and organizational practices may not have been accessible through NSO websites, the present study is limited in that way. Moreover, we hope that scholars and practitioners might use our research here to explore the lived experiences of athletes and coaches. Interviews with athletes, coaches, and administrators in Canadian sport organizations would provide tremendous insight for addressing bullying in sport moving forward. Examining the experiences of athletes following an intervention strategy aimed at decreasing peer-to-peer bullying in sport (such as Respect in Sport) would be especially valuable. Furthermore, although hazing was not the focus of this research project, we did note that very few of the policy documents referenced it specifically. Rather, it is ostensibly captured in “catch-all” anti-harassment policies. This should be a concern for future research projects, policy development and implementation, and educational programs focused on inclusive sport. Our hope is that scholars, practitioners, and policy makers interested in addressing this social issue will work together to create meaningful change.

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