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# Canadian Olympic Athletes, Gender Issues and Body Dissatisfaction: A Critical Analysis of the Impact of COVID-19 and Canadian Sport Resources

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts degree in Kinesiology

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## **Abstract**

This multidisciplinary study has three main aspects and is guided by a critical feminist lens. One aspect lays out the philosophical feminist foundations, the context for the study and provides a literature review and brief history. A second aspect is guided by research questions which explore how COVID-19 impacted Canadian female Olympic athletes. Qualitative interview data was collected during a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funded study and used for the empirical part of this paper. Participants included ten national level athletes (seven females and three males) and three coaches (two females and one male) from a variety of summer and winter sports. In addition, a web content analysis was done and took place in three stages, first examining the resources available on the Canadian Olympic Committees' Game Plan website, then looking at each Olympic sanctioned National Sport Organization (NSO) and multi-sport organization (MSO) to determine the availability of resources on their websites. Athletes who train and compete at the elite level, such as at the Olympics, are highly susceptible to engaging in disordered eating behaviours and developing a negative body image due to environmental and social factors. The COVID-19 pandemic added additional pressure on athletes impacting their ability to train and compete. Athletes are in need of resources that will assist them in uncertain times. The empirical aspect looked at the potential for body image dissatisfaction among these Team Canada Athletes; whether they currently have access to the resources they need to enhance their wellbeing; and what prevention programs are currently in place that athletes, coaches, and support personnel can access to mitigate their risks. The third aspect presents the findings and offers some analysis and conclusions where it is revealed that there is still work that needs to be done by the IOC and COC in order to meet athletes' needs. As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded, inconsistencies emerged between what athletes needed and what they could access. Additionally, the potential risk for disordered eating behaviours within the Olympic community was identified. Athletes in this study identified struggling with their relationship with food as well as their body image and that the pandemic negatively influenced this relationship. This study further showed the similarities between athlete transition periods such as retiring from sport and the athletes' experiences during the pandemic.

## **Key Words**

Canadian Olympic Athletes, Gender Issues, COVID-19, Body Image, Sport Resources, athlete wellbeing.

## **Summary for Lay Audience**

Using a critical feminist theory lens, this study is guided by research questions which explore how COVID-19 impacted Canadian Olympic female athletes. It looked at body image dissatisfaction issues in the context of women in sport and whether these Team Canada athletes currently have access to the resources they need to enhance their wellbeing; and what prevention programs are currently in place that athletes, coaches, and support personnel can access. Elite athletes, such as those competing in the Olympics, are highly susceptible to disordered eating behaviours and dissatisfaction with their bodies due to social and environmental influences. COVID-19 placed additional pressure on athletes due to various restrictions placed upon training and competing in sport across the world, thus impacting their ability to train and compete. Athletes are in need of resources that will assist them in uncertain times and in navigating disordered eating risk factors and body dissatisfaction within sport. This study interviewed ten national level athletes (seven females and three males) and three coaches (two females and one male) from a variety of summer and winter sports, to better understand the barriers athletes faced during the pandemic and what resources they would like to have to better overcome the barriers they faced. In addition, a web content analysis was done to examine the availability of body image, disordered eating, and safe sport resources for Canadian Olympic athletes. This study revealed that additional resources need to be developed by the IOC and COC in order to meet athletes' needs. Athletes identified that as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded, they were unable to access the resources they needed. Additionally, disordered eating behaviours within the Olympic community were seen as problematic. Athletes in this study conveyed struggling with their relationship with food as well as their body and that the pandemic negatively influenced this relationship. This study further showed the similarities between athlete transition periods such as retiring from sport and the athletes' experiences during the pandemic.

### **Co-Authorship Statement**

The information presented in this Master's thesis is my original work. However, I must acknowledge the co-authorship of my supervisor Dr. Angela Schneider who enriched this document with philosophical insights and perspectives.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

ACD - Advanced Coaching Diploma

AHS - Alberta Health Services

CAC - Coaching Association of Canada

CCES - Canada Center for Ethics in Sport

CCMHS - Canadian Centre for Mental Health and Sport

COC - Canadian Olympic Committee

FIVB - Fédération Internationale de Volleyball

IF - International Federation

IOC - International Olympic Committee

LEA - Low Energy Availability

MSOs - Multi-sport organizations

NCCP - National Coaching Certification Program

NEDIC - National Eating Disorder Information Centre

NEDA - National Eating Disorders Association

NOC - National Olympic Committees

NSOs - National Sport Organizations

PTSD - Post-traumatic stress disorder

RED-S - Relative Energy Deficiency in Sport

SIRC - Sports Information Resource Center

CAC - Coaching Association of Canada

UCCMS - Universal Code of Conduct to Prevent and Address Maltreatment in Sport

## Chapter 1 - Introduction

Olympic athletes train and compete, putting all other commitments on hold to pursue their Olympic dream and represent their country. In order to do this, an Olympic athlete spends most of their time training with limited time to pursue another career or education. These athletes are placed in a unique environment where they are constantly surrounded by other athletes, coaches and support personnel that can influence their everyday decisions. It is vital to ensure that coaches and athletes alike have education regarding the risks of disordered eating and recognize the warning signs in this context. According to a study conducted by Kerr, Willson, and Stirling, which surveyed Canadian National Team Members in 2019, 20% of current athletes thought about engaging in disordered eating behaviours, 16% have engaged in disordered eating behaviours, and 4% were diagnosed or treated for disordered eating or eating disorders.<sup>1</sup> However, it has become evident that this issue is continuing to grow. With various athletes speaking out in the media about their experiences with disordered eating, the Globe and Mail recently released a 6-part series in December 2021, reporting on their investigation into Canadian national team athletes struggling with eating disorders. This investigation has brought this ethical issue into the public light, with more than 40 cases of Canadian national team athletes speaking out about their struggles with eating disorders within national level sport and indicating the need for active intervention to address disordered eating among the country's elite athletes.<sup>2</sup>

Female athletes are highly susceptible to disordered eating behaviours and a negative body image, especially at the elite level.<sup>3,4,5</sup> Although there are cases of male elite athletes engaging in disordered eating risk behaviours and having body dissatisfaction, it has been shown that female athletes are more susceptible to these behaviours.<sup>6</sup> Although a low body weight can enhance performance in some sports, athletes that are constantly pushed to decrease their weight

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<sup>1</sup> Gretchen Kerr, Erin Willson, and A. Stirling, "Prevalence of maltreatment among current and former national team athletes," *University of Toronto in Partnership with AthletesCAN* (2019): 36.

<sup>2</sup> Grant Robertson and Rachel Brandy, "Awakening on Eating Disorders among Olympians Prompts Calls for Action," *The Globe and Mail*, December 27, 2021, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/winter-olympics-athletes-financial-struggles-endorsements/>.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Papathomas, Trent A. Petrie, and Carolyn R. Plateau, "Changes in body image perceptions upon leaving elite sport: The retired female athlete paradox." *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology* 7, no. 1 (2018): 31.

<sup>4</sup> Rachel J. Bar, Stephanie E. Cassin, and Michelle M. Dionne, "Eating disorder prevention initiatives for athletes: A review," *European Journal of Sport Science* 16, no. 3 (2016): 326

<sup>5</sup> Jorunn Sundgot-Borgen and Monica Klungland Torstveit, "Prevalence of eating disorders in elite athletes is higher than in the general population," *Clinical journal of sport medicine* 14, no. 1 (2004): 28.

<sup>6</sup> Justine J. Reel, "Current issues in North American sport psychology: Identification and prevention of weight pressures and body image concerns among athletes." *Revista iberoamericana de psicología del ejercicio y el deporte* 6, no. 2 (2011): 207.

for performance reasons often experience detrimental effects to their overall health and wellbeing and their performance outcomes.

There is increased pressure placed on elite female athletes to look according to the socially idealized female body and perform to the highest standard in Olympic sport. This is due to the societal norms placed on athletes competing at this level, such as sport-specific body pressure, sports culture, and personal expectations. A study conducted by Kantanista et al. exploring the differences in body image of elite Polish athletes found that an athlete's evaluation of their body image may change based on whether the athlete competed at the national or international level, their age and the social and the sport pressures an athlete endures.<sup>7</sup> Further, Petrie and Greenleaf's theoretical model proposes that an athlete's body satisfaction is subject to change due to internalized societal and sport pressures, which can be a moderator of disordered eating behaviours among athletes.<sup>8</sup>

Protocols must be developed to help protect these athletes in training environments. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has indicated that disordered eating and body dissatisfaction is a growing concern for Olympic athletes.<sup>9</sup> Despite the concerns raised by athletes and the IOC alike, it is evident that the IOC and National Olympic Committees (NOC), such as the Canadian Olympic Committee (COC), have not done enough to protect their athletes. To mitigate the adverse effects of societal, sport and individualized pressures, prevention programs must be put into place by Olympic committees and National Sport Organizations (NSOs).

It can be argued that the development of COVID-19 put immense pressure on athletes and should be treated as a transition period where athletes are more susceptible to developing these issues.<sup>10</sup> In a study conducted by Buckley et al., it was shown that the majority of participants (current and former athletes aged 18-63) reported a worsened body image and disordered eating in response to coping with the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>11</sup> COVID-19 has made a global impact as governments and public health organizations have adopted various health and

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<sup>7</sup> Adam Kantanista et al., "Body Image of Highly Trained Female Athletes Engaged in Different Types of Sport," *BioMed Research International* 2018 (2018): pp. 1-8.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Margo Mountjoy et al., "International Olympic Committee (IOC) consensus statement on relative energy deficiency in sport (RED-S): 2018 update," *International journal of sport nutrition and exercise metabolism* 28, no. 4 (2018): 688.

<sup>10</sup> Georgina Louise Buckley, Linden Elizabeth Hall, Annie-Claude M. Lassemillante, and Regina Belski, "Disordered eating & body image of current and former athletes in a pandemic; a convergent mixed methods study-What can we learn from COVID-19 to support athletes through transitions?," *Journal of eating disorders* 9, no. 1 (2021): 1-16.

<sup>11</sup> Georgina Louise Buckley, et al., "Disordered eating & body image," 13.

safety initiatives that have shifted how businesses can operate, how citizens' can go about their daily lives and how countries operate as a whole. COVID-19 has caused countless laws and regulations to be put in place to ensure the health and safety of citizens. This has included domestic and international travel restrictions, limiting social circles, physical distance guidelines, enforcing individuals to wear a mask in public, and limiting what businesses can operate and to what capacity.<sup>12, 13</sup> The ongoing public safety restrictions have caused Team Canada Olympic athletes to have to adapt to new training and competition regulations and guidelines, as well as find alternative methods for training. To mitigate the effects of COVID-19 and ensure the health and safety of Team Canada athletes, the COC needs to support athletes by providing information on preventing eating disorder risk factors, encouraging a positive views of the body, developing additional prevention programs, and providing resources to Team Canada athletes.

Therefore, this study aims to provide research that will better inform the sport community regarding female athlete's thoughts, feelings, emotions and behaviours towards their body and the development of eating disorder prevention and within Canadian Olympic Sport. This study also allows us to understand better the resources the COC has currently put towards this problem and where there is room for improvement. Further, this research will enable us to better establish the need for: I) preventing eating disorder behaviours; ii) programs that foster a positive body image for female athletes; iii) athlete accessibility for these programs; and iv) how COVID-19 has impacted female athletes.

### I. Statement of the Research Questions

To gain a better understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on Olympic athletes and their access to disordered eating and body image resources, the following questions are explored as part of this study:

1. What is the context for female Olympic athletes and body image?
2. How has COVID-19 impacted Olympic athletes; and in particular, the risk for body image dissatisfaction and development of eating disorders behaviours among these Team Canada Athletes?

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<sup>12</sup> Government of Canada, "Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)," 2021, <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>

<sup>13</sup> World Health Organization, "Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) advice for the public," 2021 <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

3. Do Team Canada athletes currently have access to the resources they need to enhance their wellbeing, in particular, during a pandemic like COVID-19?
4. What is the status and utilization of current prevention programs that athletes, coaches, and support personnel can access to mitigate the risk of developing eating disorders and encourage a positive body image for Team Canada Athletes?
5. What is the responsibility and role of the Olympic sport community?

## II Philosophical theoretical frameworks and context for female athletes

Sport provides an environment where gender issues are often amplified, and athletes are often framed as masculine or feminine based on how an athlete participates in the sport (weightlifting verse gymnastics). Typically, the sports that meet the societal ideal for a women's body are deemed more appropriate for them to participate in. Throughout history, we have seen female athleticism paired with sex appeal, which enables the system to deemphasize the strength and power it takes to compete in these sports as well as take away from their accomplishments.<sup>14</sup> Thus, it is important to consider the way that gender and women's bodies are socially constructed, as well as examine how the relationship between sport and gender can help us to understand better the impact of body image and disordered eating within Olympic sport.

Considering the philosophical components of body image and disordered eating concepts, the theoretical position utilized in this study will be a feminist perspective on women and sport, emphasizing the influence and effects of culture on an individual's worldview and presupposes that knowledge within this culture is relative to time and place.<sup>15</sup> This aspect is essential to consider as the study compares past events with current understandings.

As explained in an article written by Mary Duquin, words often signify value, using the example that in sport, adjectives like fast, hard, and male tend to hold a higher status than slow, soft, and female. Further understanding of this kind of theoretical approach can be gained from Chris Weedon's book, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, which aims to "address the questions of how social power is exercised and how social relations of gender, class, and race might be transformed."<sup>16</sup> Feminism aims to deconstruct social institutions and power relations by

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<sup>14</sup> Amanda Roth, and Susan A. Basow, "Femininity, sports, and feminism: Developing a theory of physical liberation," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 28, no. 3 (2004): 252.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Quinn Patton, "Two decades of developments in qualitative inquiry: A personal, experiential perspective" *Qualitative social work* 1, no. 3 (2002): 261-283.

<sup>16</sup> Chris Weedon, "Principles of Poststructuralism" 20



highlighting the way women and the greater society perceive women's lives and identities.<sup>1718</sup> The language used to describe women is challenged and we can further explore the diversity of womanhood through multiple truths, viewpoints and voices.<sup>1920</sup> This can assist us in examining how power relations within sport are exercised and look at the possibilities for change within a system that has been shown to foster adverse environments for women that increases their likelihood of developing disordered eating and body dissatisfaction.

Weedon distinguishes the various types of theories and identifies which types are most suitable for feminist theory. Language plays an integral role in evaluating social organizations, constructing social meaning, power relations, and individual consciousness. Language is important as it is the bases for defining social, institutional influences and sequences, as well as how self-identity is subjectively constructed. When exploring the development of disordered eating and body dissatisfaction, the language used when analyzing the power relations of social organizations, such as sport governing bodies, influence the way athletes construct their identity and self-worth within the sport culture they are emersed in. Weedon explains that "language is not the expression of unique individuality; it constructs the individual's subjectivity. One example is the meaning of femininity and masculinity varying between cultures and languages. Although the meaning of femininity and masculinity vary, for the purpose of this study, we consider the influence of the westernized definition of the ideal female and male and how that influences sport social settings, power relations within sport (coach and athlete), and sport culture for the context of the study. The definition of femininity changes for athletes based on the social context they are emersed in. Masculinity is linked to strength and power, whereas femininity is linked to weakness and fragility. Duquin explores how her theory can be applied to the sport context. In her article *She Flies Through the Air With the Greatest of Ease: The Contributions of Feminist Psychology*, she explains that feminist thinkers may understand better the recognition of the "socially constructed nature of knowledge." Duquin compares analysis text and practices within sport to demonstrate how male gender identity and athlete identity can intersect. In Duquin's work, she focuses on sport psychology, and how athlete identities are often

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<sup>17</sup> Nollaig Frost, and Frauke Elichaoiff, "Feminist postmodern, post structuralism, and critical theory" *Feminist postmodernism, poststructuralism, and critical theory*, Feminist research practice: A primer 2 (2014): 42

<sup>18</sup> Nicole Doria, and Matthew Numer, "Dancing in a culture of disordered eating: A feminist poststructural analysis of body and body image among young girls in the world of dance," *Plos one* 17, no. 1 (2022): 7

<sup>19</sup> Nollaig Frost, and Frauke Elichaoiff, "Feminist postmodern, post structuralism, and critical theory" 45

<sup>20</sup> Chris Weedon, "Principles of Poststructuralism" 19

viewed through a male-gendered body as in sport psychology texts, the athletes discussed are most often male. She explains that this could be due to authors solely focusing on male athletes. This can cause confusion for females reading the text in understanding what information they can identify with and relate to. The internal conflict between athleticism and femininity can further influence the self-esteem of female athletes. This comparison can also be seen throughout Olympic history and the way the ideal athlete, ideal male, and ideal female are defined, with the ideal Olympian and ideal male being described by similar characteristics.<sup>21</sup>

This view implies that meaning is not discovered but continuously created through individuals' interactions with the world. In Michael Crotty's book *The foundations of social research*, he focuses on social constructionism in the chapter *Constructionism: the making and meaning*.<sup>22</sup> According to Michael Crotty, "constructionism is the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of an interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context."<sup>23</sup> Constructionism embraces that for reality to be meaningful, it must also be socially constructed. Crotty explains that the 'social' in social constructionism comes from the way meaning is constructed through cultural experience.<sup>24</sup> The environment that influences our understanding of the world around us may be influenced by other cultures or sub-cultures. This means that the way these cultures come together affects our interpretation of the world. In turn, the meaning of interactions in the world are made up by individuals and this 'made up' meaning is then shared, influencing others' perceptions. Creating a shared reality around something helps give it a shared meaning within a given culture.

When examining social constructionism in terms of female athletes and their experience with body image, we can examine an article written by Sharon Guthrie and Shirley Castelnovo as they interpret the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, which implicitly focuses on males, through a feminist lens. Merleau-Ponty's theory on the body and body image as a dynamic and changing construct combines the physical and conscious dimensions of the body into a single unified

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<sup>21</sup> Angela J. Schneider, "On the definition of 'woman' in the sport context" In *Philosophical Perspectives on Gender in Sport and Physical Activity*, pp. 47-61, Routledge, 2009.

<sup>22</sup> William Lawrence Neuman, and Karen Robson, "Ethics in Social Research" in *Basics of Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. (Toronto: Pearson Canada, 2014). 42-65

<sup>23</sup> William Lawrence Neuman, and Karen Robson, "Ethics in Social Research" 42

<sup>24</sup> William Lawrence Neuman, and Karen Robson, "Ethics in Social Research" 55.

entity.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, he believes that the body is not merely a physical object, but rather a realm of consciousness that must be projected into a space to be fully experienced.<sup>26</sup> When exploring body image through Merleau-Ponty's theoretical lens, it becomes evident that social perceptions, individual choices and socioeconomic and historical circumstances influence the way in which they perceive their body. He further indicates that social change requires a necessity of shared experiences that influences an individual's subjective observations and feelings.<sup>27</sup> Feminism and social constructionism are complimentary when viewed as described above for application in understanding the context of this study. When employing a feminist lens with social constructionism, we can work towards liberating the way a woman's body is viewed by altering the societal beliefs of what a woman's body should look like. In summary, a social constructionist lens will allow us to better understand how the sport and societal culture influence athletes body satisfaction and engagement in eating disorder behaviours. Feminism will allow us to see how power relations and the language used to describe women in westernized society can impact athletes' self-worth and lead them to develop disordered eating behaviours and body dissatisfaction.

### III. Limitations

Some interviews in this study took place prior to the athlete competing at the Olympic games and some took place after. This may have slightly changed the detail the athlete was able to give about their experience training and competing during COVID-19. Another barrier of this study was in the web content analysis of NSOs. The information that was viewed to determine whether the organization had resources to address body image concerns and eating behaviours was only taken from their website. It is important to note that these organizations may have resources that are not available through their website. For the purpose of this study, we only examined information that athletes could find on the internet, due to time restraints and the scope of this research. In future research, taking a deeper look into the resources organization may have internally would be recommended. Lastly, this study is multidisciplinary, thus, the writing style begins with a philosophical perspective and shifts as we move to the empirical work.

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<sup>25</sup> Sharon R. Guthrie and Shirley Castrlnuovo. "The Significance of Body Image in Psychosocial Development and Embodying Feminist Perspective" in *Women and sport: Interdisciplinary perspectives* (Human Kinetics, 1994). 316

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Sharon R. Guthrie and Shirley Castrlnuovo, "The Significance of Body Image in Psychosocial Development" 317.



## Chapter 2 - Literature Review

### I. Development of Disorder Eating Behaviours and Body Dissatisfaction in Olympic Sport

Female athletes are highly susceptible to disordered eating behaviours and body dissatisfaction, especially at the elite level. Elite female athletes are put in a position where they must navigate between their ideal body in their prospective sport and the societal ideal of femininity and beauty. This can create a conflict for women and the way they view their bodies. Athletes are surrounded by social norms and feminine beauty ideals, where unrealistic body expectations are constantly being placed upon athletes both within their sport and by society's views of what an athlete "should" look like. This can cause athletes to feel "out of place" when comparing themselves to other females whose bodies fit the idealized body.<sup>28</sup>

In general, body image is "a multidimensional construct focused on both the body's appearance and function."<sup>29</sup> It further reflects an individual's thoughts, feelings, emotions, and behaviours towards their body.<sup>30</sup> The way individuals evaluate their bodies in terms of these dimensions leads them to feel satisfied or dissatisfied with their bodies. An athlete's body image may fluctuate based on the environment, causing them to be satisfied with their body in one setting but dissatisfied in another.<sup>31</sup> An elite athlete may view their body differently in a sport setting versus a social environment outside of sport. This could be based on the social ideals of a female body in each social context. A negative body image or body dissatisfaction occurs when an individual thinks negatively towards their body and does not have a positive outlook on how their body looks or performs.<sup>32</sup> Body dissatisfaction has been shown to increase low self-esteem, and aid the development of depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and muscle dysmorphia.<sup>33</sup> The development of any of these psychological concerns can affect an athlete's ability to keep a

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<sup>28</sup> Vikki Krane, et al., "Living the paradox: Female athletes negotiate femininity and muscularity." *Sex roles* 50, no. 5 (2004): 326.

<sup>29</sup> C. M Sabiston, E. Pila, M. Vani, and Cecilie Thøgersen-Ntoumani, "Body image, physical activity, and sport: A scoping review," *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 42 (2019): 48-57.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Cash, and Linda Smolak, eds. *Body image: A handbook of science, practice, and prevention*. Guilford Press, 2011.

<sup>31</sup> AP Karin De Bruin, Raoul RD Oudejans, and Frank C. Bakker, "Dieting and body image in aesthetic sports: A comparison of Dutch female gymnasts and non-aesthetic sport Participants," *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 8, no. 4 (2007): 519.

<sup>32</sup> Kimberly Wells, et al., "Disordered Eating In High Performance Sport Position Statement." *The Australian Institute of Sport and National Eating Disorders Collaboration*: 31

<sup>33</sup> Kathleen Ginis, Desmond McEwan, and Rebecca Bassett-Gunter, "Physical activity and body image," In *Routledge Handbook of Physical Activity and Mental Health*, pp. 236-246. Routledge, 2013.

consistent training schedule, increase the risk of injury, impact coordination, and concentration or an athlete's mental capacity to continue training.<sup>34-35</sup>

An athlete can develop body dissatisfaction when they do not perceive their body as fitting a specific idealized body shape or size, whether that being the body they want for their sport or the societal ideal of a feminine body. However, regardless of the pressures placed on an athlete to perform, negative body images in athletes is a risk factor for engaging in disordered eating and or developing eating disorders.<sup>36</sup> Disordered eating behaviours can occur in the form of body preoccupation, inhibitory food control, fear of body composition changes and binge eating.<sup>37</sup> Frequently engaging in disordered eating risk behaviours for the purpose of altering one's body shape or size can have a severe impact on the likelihood of developing an eating disorder.<sup>38-39</sup> In turn, this can impact an athlete's health, wellbeing and performance. Disordered eating behaviours differ from eating disorders as they are not a clinical diagnosis, rather they are a series of behaviours that are often dedicated to manipulating an individual's weight and can be detrimental to a person's wellbeing. Disordered eating risk behaviours can include but are not limited to dieting, over-exercising, induced vomiting, and reduced caloric intake. According to the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) mental health consensus statement, elite athletes more often meet the criteria for disordered eating than eating disorders. While elite athletes are at a higher risk for developing eating disorders than those who do not perform at the elite level or do not participate in sport, elite athletes show more signs of disordered eating than eating disorders.<sup>40,41</sup> Thus, this fact demonstrates that this is a critical issue that needs to be addressed.

A significant concern for athletes who engage in disordered eating risk behaviours is relative energy deficiency in sport (RED-S), underpinned by low energy availability (LEA).<sup>42</sup> LEA is caused by athletes' energy intake and energy expenditure not coinciding, meaning that athletes do not have the energy their body needs to perform the daily functions it needs to in

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Kimberly Wells, et al., "Disordered Eating In High Performance Sport Position Statement" 7

<sup>36</sup> Kimberly Wells, et al., "Disordered Eating In High Performance Sport Position Statement." 31

<sup>37</sup> Buckley et al. "Disordered eating & body image of current and former athletes in a pandemic" 2.

<sup>38</sup> Kimberly Wells, et al., "Disordered Eating In High Performance Sport Position Statement" 31

<sup>39</sup> Rachel J. Bar, et al., "Eating disorder prevention initiatives for athletes: A review." 325.

<sup>40</sup> Claudia L. Reardon, Brian Hainline, Cindy Miller Aron, David Baron, Antonia L. Baum, Abhinav Bindra, Richard Budgett et al. "Mental health in elite athletes: International Olympic Committee consensus statement (2019)." *British journal of sports medicine* 53, no. 11 (2019): 668.

<sup>41</sup> Jorunn Sundgot-Borgen and Monica Klungland Torstveit, "Prevalence of eating disorders in elite athletes is higher than in the general population," 28.

<sup>42</sup> See Margo Mountjoy et al., (2018) for more information on the physically and psychologically health consequences of RED-S.

order to maintain optimal health and performance.<sup>43</sup> RED-S can lead to various health consequences including, but not limited to, effects on the menstrual cycle, bone health, growth development, as well as hindering athletic performance through increased risk of injury, decreased energy or decreased muscle strength due to nutrient and caloric deficiencies.<sup>44</sup>

## II. Weight Pressures

Individuals are highly susceptible to being influenced by the people they associate with throughout their day-to-day life, including authority figures, friends, family, and what they see on social media. The atmosphere an individual is in can influence how they view themselves and the world around them. Elite athletes may experience weight pressures within their sports world or social life, which can, in turn, affect an athlete's body image and eating habits, especially when constantly surrounded by them. Various types of weight pressures can exist in elite sports, such as sport culture pressures, social or societal pressures, or internal weight pressures.

### *i. Sport Pressures*

Elite athletes are in a unique social environment as their social connections are primarily made up of other individuals in the sporting world. This means elite athletes are constantly immersed in an environment that emphasizes athletic ability, physical fitness, and a 'winners' mentality. Factors such as competing in and training in revealing uniforms (i.e. Swimsuits or leotards), enduring pressures from teammates or coaches to not over-indulge when eating, and the overrepresentation of a specific body shape/size can have immense effects on athletes eating behaviours and their thoughts, feelings, emotions, and behaviours towards their body.<sup>45</sup> The study conducted by Stoyel, et al., found that the pressure to perform came with an expectation that athletes must conform to the aesthetics that are commonly associated with success in their sport, thus giving little room for athletes to realize that other body types can achieve extreme success in sports.<sup>46</sup> Although athletes at any level and of any gender can develop disordered eating behaviours or have a negative body image, elite athletes who compete in weight-sensitive sports have been shown to be at greater risk, such as weight class sports and aesthetic

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<sup>43</sup> Claudia L. Reardon, et al., "Mental health in elite athletes" 675.

<sup>44</sup> Margo Mountjoy et al., "International Olympic Committee (IOC) consensus statement on relative energy deficiency in sport (RED-S): 2018 update," *International journal of sport nutrition and exercise metabolism* 28, no. 4 (2018): 688.

<sup>45</sup> Hannah Cooper, and Stacy Winter. "Exploring the conceptualization and persistence of disordered eating in retired swimmers." *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology* 11, no. 3 (2017): 222-239.

<sup>46</sup> Hannah Stoyel, Russell Delderfield, Vaithehy Shanmuganathan-Felton, Alex Stoyel, and Lucy Serpell. "A qualitative exploration of sport and social pressures on elite athletes in relation to disordered eating." *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2021). 5.

sports.<sup>47,48,49</sup> In a study conducted by Stoyel et al., it was found that athletes adopted the belief that if their body is lean and strong, it will improve their performance, thus causing athletes to seek this idealized body composition, even though various body types can achieve sporting excellence.<sup>50</sup> Studies have determined that the source of weight pressures can be internal psychological factors such as perfectionism, competitiveness, achievement-orientedness, or external factors related to sport environments, social settings, or media exposure.<sup>51</sup>

Sport-related pressures can vary within and between sports. For example, weight class sports may experience different cultural factors from aesthetic or lean sports. Weight class sports can be classified as a sport where an athlete must be within a specific weight range to compete. This may include Olympic weightlifting, wrestling, boxing, or light-weight rowing. These sports are broken into weight categories, causing athletes to monitor their bodies constantly. It is very important for athletes in these sports to meet their weight requirements. If they do not, this could cause the athlete to either have to change weight categories or be disqualified from the competition. In these sports, athletes often aim to have low fat to muscle ratio.<sup>52</sup> This will allow athletes to be in a lower weight class but have increased strength, power and endurance, giving them an advantage over their competitors. These athletes are more at risk of having negative thoughts, feelings, emotions, or behaviours towards their body. Athletes often have been associated with consistent weigh-ins to ensure they are within their competition weight range and ensure they will “make weight” leading up to and during competition.<sup>53</sup> These athletes often turn to dieting, weight cycling, and other extreme weight-loss tactics to meet their weight goals in these sports. A study conducted by Jorunn Sundgot-Borgen and Ina Garthe reported that up to 94% of athletes who compete in weight class sports have dieted or used extreme weight control methods to make weight before a competition.<sup>54</sup> However, many athletes and coaches in these types of sports believe that to be successful weight loss is necessary and athletes do not often

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<sup>47</sup> Margo Mountjoy et al. "International Olympic Committee (IOC) consensus statement on relative energy deficiency in sport (RED-S): 2018 update." *International journal of sport nutrition and exercise metabolism* 28, no. 4 (2018): 691.

<sup>48</sup> Jorunn Sundgot-Borgen and Ina Garthe, "Elite athletes in aesthetic and Olympic weight-class sports and the challenge of body weight and body compositions." *Journal of sports sciences* 29, no. sup1 (2011): 101.

<sup>49</sup> Jorunn Sundgot-Borgen and Ina Garthe, "Elite athletes in aesthetic and Olympic weight-class sports" 105.

<sup>50</sup> Hannah Stoyel et al., "A qualitative exploration of sport and social pressures on elite athletes in relation to disordered eating." 10.

<sup>51</sup> Justine J. Reel "Current issues in North American sport psychology" 207.

<sup>52</sup> Jorunn Sundgot-Borgen and Ina Garthe, "Elite athletes in aesthetic and Olympic weight-class sports" 102.

<sup>53</sup> Justine J. Reel "Current issues in North American sport psychology" 209.

<sup>54</sup> Jorunn Sundgot-Borgen and Ina Garthe, "Elite athletes in aesthetic and Olympic weight-class sports" 105.



question the weight loss methods used.<sup>55</sup> The requirement for athletes to stay within a specific weight range combined with the belief that weight loss is necessary can cause athletes to normalize disordered eating risk behaviours, leading to the development of eating disorders and body dissatisfaction. Jennifer Sygo, a sport nutritionist who has consulted on multiple Olympic programs spoke about the normalization of disordered eating in Olympic athletes in a *Globe and Mail* interview,

“I think in some cases, we almost just accepted that there was a certain amount of disordered eating behaviour that was normalized in sport, as part of what you do to be a champion, but if we want to be serious about being a country that doesn’t produce medals at all costs, but rather produces medals by supporting athletes who are psychologically and physically well [then] we need to invest time, resources and – when available – money in order to be able to ensure that our athletes are safe and healthy.”<sup>56</sup>

In addition, Stefan et. al, found in a study interviewing Swedish national combat sport athletes that, athletes saw both negative and positive effects of weight regulation. Athletes in this study indicated that weight regulation does not only help give them a physical advantage over their opponent but also a mental advantage, however it is also physically and mentally taxing. Stefan et al. indicated that weight regulation can be seen as a coping strategy for athletes as focusing on being self-disciplined to meet their weight goal can distract athletes from feeling anxious and having self-doubt moving into competitions. Thus, it is important for coaches to understand the benefits and risks of body weight regulation to properly support athletes and provide them with coping strategies that will not lead to preoccupation with weight.

In comparison, aesthetic sports may include gymnastics, synchronized swimming, figure skating or diving. In aesthetic sports, part of the scoring is based on presentation, overemphasizing the athlete’s body, and judging can be very subjective. For example, in gymnastics, athletes are judged based on the difficulty of the routine as well as the execution, which includes the artistry of presentation, technique, and composition.<sup>57</sup> Although body shape and physical appearance are not judged directly, athletes are expected to embody a specific

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<sup>55</sup> Jorunn Sundgot-Borgen and Ina Garthe, "Elite athletes in aesthetic and Olympic weight-class sports" 102.

<sup>56</sup> Grant Robertson and Rachel Brandy, "Awakening on Eating Disorders among Olympians Prompts Calls for Action,"

<sup>57</sup>USA Gymnastics. "FIG Elite/International Scoring" n.d. [https://usagym.org/pages/events/pages/fig\\_scoring](https://usagym.org/pages/events/pages/fig_scoring).

aesthetic appearance.<sup>58</sup> Athletes in these sports experience increased pressure to reduce their weight and have a lean physique.<sup>59</sup> The emphasis on an athlete's body in these sports can push athletes to aim for a thin physique while still maintaining the strength they need to compete in their sport. This could be due to the influence an athlete's body type has on judges and coaches, thus placing more pressure on athletes and influencing athletes to engage in dieting behaviours.<sup>60,61</sup> In addition, in a study conducted by Buchholz et al., surveying elite gymnasts, 51% indicated that having a lower body weight could help them succeed, and 32% said that having breasts or hips was a disadvantage for their performance.<sup>62</sup>

When examining sport-related pressures, a constant between all types of sports is body and weight-related pressures placed on an athlete by coaches. Coaches can significantly influence athletes as they are integral and powerful agents in athletes' life. Coaches have a major impact on an athlete's experience, setting the tone for the environment in which they will train, as well as greatly impacting how athletes perceive themselves, their body, and their weight goals.<sup>63</sup> These factors can affect athletes' willingness to continue and succeed in their sport. In many cases, coaches play the role of caregivers for athletes, especially at the elite level. A coach is entrusted with the care of athletes' safety, physical and emotional wellbeing, and future in the sport.<sup>64</sup> Given the influence of a coach, athletes may alter their behaviours to meet the coach's ideals. The comments or suggestions a coach makes can be a major weight pressure for an athlete. A study exploring coaches' communication of body image in the sport context identified that coaches' critical comments about athletes' bodies were often the reason that athletes engaged in unhealthy dieting and disordered eating and experienced intrapersonal and interpersonal body-related pressures.<sup>65</sup> This was especially true when criticisms focused on an athlete's body weight or shape rather than their health and performance.

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<sup>58</sup> Sherry Robertson, and Margo Mountjoy. "A review of prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of relative energy deficiency in sport in artistic (synchronized) swimming." *International Journal of Sport Nutrition and Exercise Metabolism* 28, no. 4 (2018): 375.

<sup>59</sup> Jorunn Sundgot-Borgen and Ina Garthe, "Elite athletes in aesthetic and Olympic weight-class sports" 101.

<sup>60</sup> Jorunn Sundgot-Borgen and Ina Garthe, "Elite athletes in aesthetic and Olympic weight-class sports" 102.

<sup>61</sup> AP Karin De Bruin, Raoul RD Oudejans, and Frank C. Bakker. "Dieting and body image in aesthetic sports: A comparison of Dutch female gymnasts and non-aesthetic sport Participants." *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 8, no. 4 (2007): 517.

<sup>62</sup> Annick Buchholz, Heidi Mack, Gail McVey, Stephen Feder, and Nicholas Barrowman. "BodySense: An evaluation of a positive body image intervention on sport climate for female athletes." *Eating Disorders* 16, no. 4 (2008): 316.

<sup>63</sup> Clara Teixidor-Batlle, Carles Ventura, and Ana Andrés. "Eating disorder symptoms in elite Spanish athletes: prevalence and Sport-Specific weight pressures." *Frontiers in Psychology* (2021): 2.

<sup>64</sup> Ashley E Stirling, and Gretchen A. Kerr. "The perceived effects of elite athletes' experiences of emotional abuse in the coach-athlete relationship." *International journal of sport and exercise psychology* 11, no. 1 (2013): 87.

<sup>65</sup> Angela M Coppola, Rose Marie Ward, and Valeria J. Freysinger. "Coaches' communication of sport body image: Experiences of female athletes." *Journal of applied sport psychology* 26, no. 1 (2014): 12.

Coaches can positively or negatively affect an athlete's body image and tendency to engage in disordered eating risk behaviours. A study conducted by Coppola, Ward, and Freysinger found that when coaches emphasized healthy nutrition and eating habits, it had a positive impact on athletes.<sup>66</sup> In addition, they found that when coaches encouraged regimes to enhance performance through weight training and development of technical skills and encouraged athletes to monitor their own physical development, some athletes felt more confident about their bodies in performance.<sup>67</sup> In order for coaches to foster a positive relationship with athletes and help athletes feel positive about their bodies, they should avoid telling athletes to lose weight, should not measure athlete's weight and body compositions unless for health/performance reasons, and should work with athletes to identify their preferences for monitoring their physical development and receiving coach feedback on making changes.<sup>68-69</sup>

However, it is important to note that not all coaches have effective communication styles. Some coaches lack knowledge and awareness on how to speak to athletes about their bodies which can have adverse psychological effects on an athlete, influencing them to engage in disordered eating risk behaviours. The development of disordered eating behaviours and body dissatisfaction due to coaches can be categorized as harassment and abuse.<sup>70</sup> This is due to the coaches' verbal behaviours, physical behaviours, and the denial of attention and support towards athletes, often conveyed by coaches through thoughts, words, ideas, and denial of attention and support.<sup>71-72</sup> These approaches can lead athletes to feel physically, mentally, or emotionally threatened.<sup>73</sup> According to the IOC consensus on mental health, more than 60% of elite female athletes have reported body-shaming pressure from coaches.<sup>74</sup> This was further explored in a study conducted by Willson and Kerr on the relationship between abusive coaching and athletes'

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<sup>66</sup> Angela M Coppola, Rose Marie Ward, and Valeria J. Freysinger. "Coaches' communication of sport body image" 6.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Jorunn Sundgot-Borgen and Ina Garthe, "Elite athletes in aesthetic and Olympic weight-class sports" 111.

<sup>69</sup> Angela M Coppola, Rose Marie Ward, and Valeria J. Freysinger. "Coaches' communication of sport body image" 13.

<sup>70</sup> For the purpose of this paper, we will use the definition of harassment and abuse defined by the IOC in *Safeguarding athletes from harassment and abuse in sport IOC Toolkit for IFs and NOCs* (Page 36). The IOC considers harassment and abuse to be on a continuum and should not be separated. The Tool kit states, "Harassment and abuse can be based on any grounds including race, religion, colour, creed, ethnic origin, physical attributes, gender, sexual orientation, age disability, socio-economic status and athletic ability. It can include a one-off incident or a series of incidents. It may be in person or online. Harassment may be deliberate, unsolicited and coercive." In addition, the IOC breaks down harassment and abuse into five forms including, psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual harassment, sexual abuse and neglect. Please see Figure 1 for the IOC's Conceptual model of harassment and abuse in sport.

<sup>71</sup> David Cruise Malloy, and Dwight H. Zakus. "Harassment issues in sport organizations: Utilitarian, justice, Kantian, and existential approaches to moral ontology." *Quest* 56, no. 3 (2004): 322.

<sup>72</sup> Ashley E Stirling, and Gretchen A. Kerr. "Emotional abuse in the coach-athlete relationship" 87.

<sup>73</sup> David Cruise Malloy, and Dwight H. Zakus. "Harassment issues in sport organizations" 324.

<sup>74</sup> Claudia L. Reardon, et al. "Mental health in elite athletes" 674.

body-related challenges. This study found that athletes became obsessed with their weight and engaged in extreme weight control measures, felt a lack of energy to train, or felt ashamed and self-conscious.<sup>75</sup> Some even developed eating disorders when their coaching experience was characterized by mistreatment and abuse.<sup>76</sup> Participants throughout this study explained how coaches emotionally abused or harassed them by making negative comments about their bodies in public and around teammates, and monitoring their food intake. Further describing being punished for not being the desired weight for their sport by imposing additional conditioning on the athlete or threatening to remove them from the team and focusing on their weight rather than their performance.<sup>77</sup>

Overall, athletes can internalize each type of external pressure they are exposed to and cause them to develop their own beliefs about what they should or should not do to succeed in their sport. The way an athlete views their body can influence their feelings, cognition, and behaviour within their environment.<sup>78</sup> In addition, athletes' personal goals and drive to win, especially at an Olympic level, can be a heavy load for an athlete, causing them to want to do anything possible to achieve their goal. Athletes at the Olympic level may experience increased weight pressure due to the increased rewards at stake, driving them to put pressure on themselves to do whatever they need to win, including pursuing extreme weight loss measures.<sup>79</sup> Other psychological factors may contribute to the weight pressures that athletes experience, including perfectionism, accomplishment-oriented behaviour, and a perceived competitive advantage by conforming to an ideal body in their sport.<sup>80</sup>

## *ii. Societal Pressures*

In addition to specific sport-related pressures, athletes also experience sociocultural and media pressures. It is vital to acknowledge the differences between social and societal pressures for athletes. Given an athlete's immediate social circle is often other athletes, coaches, and athletic support personnel, they are constantly surrounded by an environment where weight and the way an athlete's body looks is talked about and, in some cases, scrutinized. As an athlete's social circle and the sporting world are closely intertwined, it can be difficult to distinguish

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<sup>75</sup> Erin Willson, and Gretchen Kerr. "Body shaming as a form of emotional abuse in sport." *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology* (2021): 8-14.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Kimberly Wells, et al., "Disordered Eating In High Performance Sport Position Statement" 31.

<sup>79</sup> Anthony Papatomas, et al. "Changes in body image perceptions upon leaving elite sport" 31.

<sup>80</sup> Justine J. Reel "Current issues in North American sport psychology" 207.

whether the social messages an athlete receives fit within or between sporting pressures or social pressures.<sup>81</sup> As indicated by Stoyel et al., the term social pressures for an athlete can be different from societal pressures. These pressures are not transmitted from a world outside of the athletes but instead via social interactions anywhere within the athletes sporting experiences and connections.<sup>82</sup> This means that the social messages an athlete receives are most likely coming from teammates and coaches, suggesting that an athlete's social sphere, which builds an athlete's perception of societal norms, and beliefs are, developed within their sports atmosphere.<sup>83</sup> Thus, we can then define social pressures as influences on an athlete stemming from their direct contacts within the sport world. In comparison, societal pressures may include social media influences and larger society's views of what it means to be the ideal woman or have the idealist feminine body.

An athlete's body image can be influenced by society's pressures placed upon them. Generally, the body ideals set in Western societies push athletes to conform to the idea that a woman should be feminine, thin, and graceful. This often correlates to the media pushing unrealistic body ideals on athletes through objectification. These ideals emphasize thinness as a measurement of attractiveness, which can work against the athlete's body image.<sup>84</sup> These pressures can be internalized and cause athletes to have self-doubt, influencing the belief that they need to engage in disordered eating risk behaviours to achieve the idealized body.

Often the ideal athletic body and the idealized societal body can conflict with each other, especially for women athletes. This means that athletes may accept their strong muscular body when in a sport environment, but when looking externally at society's version of an ideal feminine body, they do not fit in. For many years, it has been argued that female athletes are often put in a position where they need to balance embracing their muscular, athletic bodies while also portraying the idealized societal standards of beauty.<sup>85, 86, 87, 88</sup> This has been referred

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<sup>81</sup> Hannah Stoyel et al., "A qualitative exploration of sport and social pressures on elite athletes in relation to disordered eating."

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Anthony Papatomas, et al. "Changes in body image perceptions upon leaving elite sport". 31

<sup>85</sup> Angela J. Schneider, "On the definition of 'woman' in the sport context" In *Philosophical Perspectives on Gender in Sport and Physical Activity*, pp. 47-61, Routledge, 2009.

<sup>86</sup> Angela J. Schneider, "The ideal Olympic athlete" 314-324.

<sup>87</sup> Angela J. Schneider, "On the definition of 'woman' in the sport context 47-61.

<sup>88</sup> Hannah Intezar, "Speaking Pictures, Silent Voices: Female Athletes and the Negotiation of Selfhood," *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science* 55, no. 1 (2021): 89-111.

to as a “double-bind”<sup>89</sup> or the athlete paradox, having significant impacts on how female athletes view themselves and their bodies.<sup>90</sup> This causes athletes to feel out of place, as though they have dueling identities due to the influence of hegemonic femininity.<sup>91</sup> This can cause athletes to feel vulnerable and cause them to be more susceptible to developing disordered eating risk behaviours and body dissatisfaction. For example, Georgia Simmerling, an Olympic multi-sport athlete competing in Alpine Skiing, Freestyle Skiing, and Track Cycling, had similar feelings. Simmerling suffered from bulimia and recounted that when she was competing with the best skiers in the world, she felt comfortable in her body and strong; however, when she was home and would go to yoga classes, she would feel “big and fat.”<sup>92</sup> This example demonstrates how athletes can have two opposing views of their body based on a particular social context.

### III. Depiction of Female Olympians

Although many Olympic female athletes have experienced weight pressures, poor body image, or disordered eating/eating disorders within their sport, many are now advocates encouraging other athletes of all ages to persevere and fight the gender norms they are placed under. The media plays a significant role in influencing societal views of what a female athlete ‘should’ look like. In Olympic sports media, female athletes are often framed by the showcasing of what is believed to be ‘socially acceptable’ female sports and female athletes emphasizing westernized socially constructed ideas of feminine beauty.<sup>93,94</sup> Today female athletes are more able to move away from being oversexualized and stereotyped in the media and create their own narrative using social media. When female athletes post content on social media that promotes self-love and self-empowerment, it may not only increase the athlete’s self-worth and positive body image but also that of other athletes and followers.<sup>95</sup> One athlete who often generates this type of content is Olympic Gymnast Aly Raisman. Raisman is an advocate for self-love and has been quoted as saying, “I think everyone goes through phases in life where they feel insecure. I have plenty of times. But as I’ve gotten older, I’ve learned to appreciate my body... Young girls

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<sup>89</sup> Angela J. Schneider (2000). « Ethical Issues” in *Psychosocial Issues, Women in Sport*, Drinkwater, B. L., (ed.) Blackwell Science, Oxford, London, Edinburgh, Malden, Victoria and Paris. 2000: 430-439.

<sup>90</sup> S. Cosh, P. J. Tully, and S. Crabb, "Discursive practices"

<sup>91</sup> Vikki Krane, et al. "Living the paradox: Female athletes negotiate femininity and muscularity." 326.

<sup>92</sup> Georgia Simmerling, “Georgia Simmerling: ‘I Am Ready to Tell My Story,’” Team Canada - Official Olympic Team Website, January 26, 2022, <https://olympic.ca/2022/01/26/georgia-simmerling-i-am-ready-to-tell-my-story/>.

<sup>93</sup> Christina Villalon, and Karen Weiller-Abels. "NBC’s televised media portrayal of female athletes in the 2016 Rio Summer Olympic Games: A critical feminist view." *Sport in Society* 21, no. 8 (2018): 1139.

<sup>94</sup> Christina Villalon, and Karen Weiller-Abels. "Female athletes in the 2016 Rio Games" 1137

<sup>95</sup> Kim Toffoletti, and Holly Thorpe. "Female athletes' self-representation on social media: A feminist analysis of neoliberal marketing strategies in “economies of visibility”." *Feminism & Psychology* 28, no. 1 (2018): 11-31.

should be taught that there's no ideal body type. We're all different and unique in our way—if we all looked the exact same, we'd be very boring”.<sup>96</sup> However, some athletes use social media to show off their bodies in a sexualized way as they feel that showing their bodies on social media empowers them and allows them to showcase the body that they worked so hard to achieve. This was seen with Olympic athletes who took part in Agent Provocateur's “*Play to Win*” lingerie campaign.<sup>97</sup> One Olympic athlete who participated in this campaign was Canadian pole-vaulter Alysha Newman, who posted about the campaign on Instagram, and was quoted stating that “Play to Win allowed me to show another side of the beauty of being a woman.”<sup>98</sup>

However, not all scholars or athletes agree that posing nude is empowering to female athletics. An article written by Charlene Weaving, examines a series of images of Olympians who have posed nude in magazines and calendars. Weaving argues that when women pose nude their talent is trivialized due to sexual objectification. She states that although some female athletes believe they gain power by posing nude, this is a false sense of empowerment as their photographs portray them as sexual objects.<sup>99</sup> In addition, some Olympic athletes met the “Play to Win” lingerie campaign mentioned above with disapproval. For example, Canadian Olympian Sage Watson stated, “My heart broke when I watched a recent lingerie campaign video as it zoomed in on women’s butts and breasts as they did sporting activities. As a female athlete, that’s not what makes our bodies amazing it’s our arms, legs, abs, backs and our mental strength ... Women’s sports need to move away from the direction of what we look like and more towards what we are doing in the sport”.<sup>100</sup> Both athletes in Play to Win campaign were working towards empowering female athletes and encouraging other athletes to love the body they have, however, they had very different views on how female athletes should be portrayed. Images of nude female athletes have been shown to represent a loss of individual agency and perpetuate the subordination of female sport, however, some women believe that they can still be

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<sup>96</sup> Lindsey Lanquist, “17 Athletes Who'll Inspire You to Love Your Damn Self,” SELF (SELF, October 18, 2017), <https://www.self.com/gallery/body-positive-athletes#:~:text=Aly%20Raisman%2C%20Olympic%20Gymnast,interview%20with%20Motto%20in%20April>.

<sup>97</sup> *Play To Win #WePlayToWin | Agent Provocateur Spring Summer 2020*, YouTube (YouTube, 2020), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9YrVRnqjXZk&ab\\_channel=AgentProvocateur](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9YrVRnqjXZk&ab_channel=AgentProvocateur).

<sup>98</sup> Madeleine Kelly, “Olympians Pose in Agent Provocateur Lingerie Campaign,” Canadian Running Magazine, March 12, 2020, <https://runningmagazine.ca/the-scene/olympians-pose-in-agent-provocateur-lingerie-campaign/>.

<sup>99</sup> Charlene Weaving, “Smoke and Mirrors: A Critique of Women Olympians' Nude Reflections,” *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 6, no. 2 (2012): 239.

<sup>100</sup> Madeleine Kelly, “Olympians Pose in Agent Provocateur Lingerie Campaign,”

taken seriously as athletes and receive greater funding by maintaining a sexual image.<sup>101</sup> The examples outlined highlight the way female athletes represent themselves and fight societal body norms can vary greatly.

#### IV. COVID-19's Impact on Olympic Athlete Disordered Eating and Body Image

COVID-19 is a respiratory disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus.<sup>102</sup> COVID-19 was recognized by the World Health Organization in December 2019 and was later declared a global pandemic in March 2020.<sup>103,104</sup> As a result of COVID-19 being classified as a global pandemic, countries and organizations across the world had to implement health and safety measures to protect their citizens from contracting the virus. The implementation of COVID-19 regulations has caused individuals across the globe to have to adjust the way they live and interact with the world. Restrictions have varied throughout the pandemic, with citizens being asked to adhere to social distancing measures, quarantine requirements, mass lockdowns, personal protective equipment mandates, remote working, and vaccinations to help 'flatten the curve.' Throughout the ongoing pandemic, the restrictions fluctuated. Each country handled the pandemic differently, imposing various restrictions that would assist their national context in fighting the virus. There was also variation across Canada, with each province having different COVID-19 protocols. In addition, this meant that while some athletes could not train in their countries, other countries were allowing their athletes to train and prepare for the Olympics.

The effects of COVID may vary among individuals, with older adults and those with chronic medical conditions or those who are immunocompromised, being at a higher risk of having more severe symptoms or outcomes when contracting the virus.<sup>105</sup> The majority of the population (approximately 80%) experience mild symptoms similar to the flu, but others have

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<sup>101</sup> Charlene Weaving, 2005, "An Examination of Women Athletes' Titillating Quest for Respect in Sport", Ann Arbor: ProQuest Dissertations & Theses. 201

<sup>102</sup> World Health Organization, "Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)," N.d. <https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus>

<sup>103</sup> World Health Organization, "COVID-19 – China," January 5 2020. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/disease-outbreak-news/item/2020-DON229>

<sup>104</sup> World Health Organization, "WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 - 11 March 2020," March 11 2020. <https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020#:~:text=WHO%20has%20been%20assessing%20this,to%20use%20lightly%20or%20carelessly>.

<sup>105</sup> Government of Canada, "People who are at risk of more severe disease or outcomes from COVID-19," last modified April 22, 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/people-high-risk-for-severe-illness-covid-19.html>



experienced more severe symptoms resulting in hospitalization, intubation, or even death.<sup>106</sup> To date, more than 430,000,000 people worldwide have contracted COVID-19, with over 6,000,000 confirmed deaths.<sup>107</sup> Canada has had more than 3,000,000 cases with over 36,000 confirmed deaths.<sup>108</sup>

On March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020, Canada announced that they would not be sending their athletes to Tokyo Olympic Summer Games due to the growing concern of the developing pandemic.<sup>109</sup> Shortly after, on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the IOC and Japanese prime minister Abe Shinzo announced the event's postponement. Prime Minister Abe Shinzo was quoted making the following statement:

*“Together with Tokyo 2020 President Mori Yoshiro and Tokyo Governor Koike Yuriko, we held a conference call with IOC President Thomas Bach... I proposed postponing the Games for around a year. President Bach said he agreed 100 percent... Given the situation of the pandemic we agreed it would be difficult to hold the Games inside (this) year which is why we decided to postpone for around a year.”<sup>110</sup>*

On the day of the IOC announcement, BBC spoke to athletes regarding the announcement to gauge their initial reaction.<sup>111</sup> Athletes reported mixed feelings, some reporting disappointment, uncertainty, anger, and others were relieved. In the article, athletes such as Heptathlete Katarina Johnson-Thompson described the feeling as heartbreaking and Olympic track cyclist Elinor Barker as devastated. In addition, Jade Jones, a double Olympic taekwondo gold medallist, was quoted saying, “I’m truly gutted - you give your heart and soul to something for four years, then for it not to go ahead is just horrible.” Other athletes explained the toll this would take on their bodies. Becky Downie, who planned to retire after the games, explained that managing the body she needed to compete would be challenging but was thankful for the downtime. Susannah Townsend, who was

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<sup>106</sup> Government of Canada, “COVID-19 and people with disabilities in Canada,” last modified July 6, 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/people-with-disabilities.html>

<sup>107</sup> World Health Organization, “Overview,” n.d. <https://covid19.who.int/>

<sup>108</sup> Government of Canada, “COVID-19 epidemiology update,” last modified July 15, 2022, <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/covid-19/epidemiological-summary-covid-19-cases.html>

<sup>109</sup> Canadian Olympic Committee, “Team Canada will not send athletes to Games in summer 2020 due to COVID-19 risks,” March 22, 2020, <https://olympic.ca/press/team-canada-will-not-send-athletes-to-games-in-summer-2020-due-to-covid-19-risks/>

<sup>110</sup> ZK Goh and Shintaro Kano, “Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games postponed to 2020,” International Olympic Committee, last modified April 22, 2021, <https://olympics.com/en/news/tokyo-olympic-games-postponed-ioc>

<sup>111</sup> BBC, “Tokyo 2020: How athletes reacted to Olympic Games postponement,” BBC, March 24, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/sport/olympics/52027542>

part of Team Great Britain's gold medal-winning Hockey team at Rio 2016, was also planning to retire and explained that her "body was hanging on by a bit of a thread" and was planning to talk to her coaches to figure out a new training plan.

During the pandemic and leading up to both the Tokyo 2020 and Beijing 2022 Olympic games, the restrictions athletes had to follow were constantly changing, causing them to have to adapt their training which caused a lot of uncertainty for athletes. This uncertainty has put a lot of undue pressure on Olympic athletes, especially due to the postponement of the 2020 Tokyo games and restriction to training facilities leading up to both the 2020 Tokyo games and the 2022 Beijing games. With the regulations necessitated by COVID-19, athletes did not have access to gyms, training facilities, coaches, or support personnel (i.e., strength and conditioning coaches, nutritionists etc.). In addition, athletes have had limited social interactions with family, friends, and teammates, thus impacting their support networks. These stressors led to some athletes reporting disturbed sleep, eating disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorders, family conflicts, and unhealthy coping mechanisms such as smoking and increased alcohol intake.<sup>112</sup>

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, there was longstanding knowledge that athletes were prone to developing disordered eating behaviours and body dissatisfaction.<sup>113,114,115,116</sup> The decrease in athletes' physical activities and changes in their regular training regime has had experts anticipating an increase in body dissatisfaction among athletes and an increase in disordered eating risk behaviours. However, there is currently minimal research exploring the connection between disordered eating behaviours and the pandemic. One study conducted by Buckley, Hall and Belski, which aimed to determine whether current and former athletes engaged in disordered eating behaviours or experienced worsened body image during COVID-19, found that 34.8% of athletes experienced a deteriorated body image, and 32.8% reported that their relationship with food was worse.<sup>117</sup> According to this study, body preoccupation, inhibition of food intake, fear of body composition changes, and binge eating were predominant forms of

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<sup>112</sup> Raven Haan, et al., "Health and well-being of athletes during the coronavirus pandemic: a scoping review," *Frontiers in Public Health* 9 (2021): 5.

<sup>113</sup> Jorunn Sundgot-Borgen and Ina Garthe, "Elite athletes in aesthetic and Olympic weight-class sports" 101-114.

<sup>114</sup> Magnus Hagmar, Angelica Lindén Hirschberg, Lukas Berglund, and Bo Berglund. "Special attention to the weight-control strategies employed by Olympic athletes striving for leanness is required," *Clinical Journal of Sport Medicine* 18, no. 1 (2008): 5-9.

<sup>115</sup> Margo Mountjoy et al. "IOC consensus statement on relative energy deficiency in sport (RED-S)" 316-331.

<sup>116</sup> Jorunn Sundgot-Borgen and Monica Klungland Torstveit. "Prevalence of eating disorders in elite athletes is higher than in the general population." 25-32.

<sup>117</sup> Buckley et al. "Disordered eating & body image of current and former athletes in a pandemic" 14.

disordered eating behaviour. Another study exploring the emotional and nutritional state of university-level athletes in the pandemic found that athletes experienced increasing negative emotional states during the pandemic, which led to an increase in emotional eating behaviours during periods of social isolation.<sup>118</sup> Although there is limited academic research in this area, professionals such as Poppy DesClouds, the Director of Care and Education at Canadian Centre for Mental Health and Sport (CCMHS) and Lisa Hoffart, a Registered Psychologist and Game Plan Adviser for Canadian Sport Centre, have spoken out about this issue. Both DesClouds and Hoffart have noted an increase in Olympic athletes looking to resources and assistance to mitigate the development of eating disorders during a Sportsnet interview. DesClouds indicated that they began to see a large influx of referrals in September 2020, having almost three times the typical referrals in November alone.<sup>119</sup> Hoffart explained a similar trend with an almost immediate rise in athletes accessing Game Plan for various reasons once the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics were postponed.<sup>120</sup> Hoffart also mentioned seeing a significant increase in athletes presenting with eating disorder concerns in September 2020, some with very severe cases that she hadn't seen in the past.<sup>121</sup>

The adaptations athletes have had to endure due to the pandemic can be compared to other transition phases for athletes, namely during retirement from sport or after an athlete endures an injury. Athletes' transition periods are seen as turning points where they begin to introspect about their identities, roles, and motivations and face social, occupational, and bodily changes.<sup>122</sup> These changes can result in emotional difficulties, disorientation and loss of self-confidence and life satisfaction, demonstrating lower perceived physical ability, sports competence, physical attractiveness, physical self-worth, and global self-esteem.<sup>123</sup> DeFreese et al. suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic is reshaping the way we think of athlete transition periods, as it has both exacerbated the understanding of mental, physical and social stressors

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<sup>118</sup> Gökmen Özen, Günay Eskici, Hüseyin Ö. Yurdakul, and Hürmüz Koç. "Assessment of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on emotional and nutritional status of university athletes," *Physical education of students* 25, no. 1 (2021): 47.

<sup>119</sup> Sports Net, "Eating Disorders in Canadian Athletes on the Rise amid Pandemic," Sportsnet.ca, December 22, 2020, <https://www.sportsnet.ca/olympics/article/eating-disorders-canadian-athletes-rise-amid-pandemic/>.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Yannick Stephan, Jean Bilard, Grégory Ninot, and Didier Delignières. "Bodily transition out of elite sport: A one-year study of physical self and global self-esteem among transitional athletes," *International journal of sport and exercise psychology* 1, no. 2 (2003): 193.

<sup>123</sup> Yannick Stephan, Jean Bilard, Grégory Ninot, and Didier Delignières. "Bodily transition out of elite sport" 203.

placed on athletes during these times and added new situational and environmental stressors.<sup>124</sup> DeFreese et al. believe that given the sport-related issues that have emerged during the pandemic, the concept of athlete transition should expand to include participation pauses, breaks, and changes to the structure of sport itself.<sup>125</sup> Transition periods have been seen as a time that athletes are at an increased risk for engaging in disordered eating behaviours and body dissatisfaction. Buckley, Hall and Belki had similar conclusions in their study, suggesting that transitions, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic, can be a significant factor in developing clinically diagnosable eating disorders.<sup>126</sup>

## V. Summary

This section explored the development of disordered eating behaviours and body dissatisfaction, the weight pressures athletes endure, how female Olympians are portrayed, and the impact COVID-19 had on Olympic athletes engagement with disordered eating risk behaviours and body image.

We first found that training at an elite level, such as the Olympics, can influence how susceptible an athlete is to disordered eating behaviours and body dissatisfaction. This can be due to having to navigate between social beauty ideals and the ideal sport body. Athletes may evaluate their body based on these ideals influencing the way they view their body within their social environment. Body dissatisfaction has been shown have negative effects on athletes such as increased low self-esteem, anxiety, eating disorders, muscle dysmorphia, and relative energy desineness (RED-S), affecting an athlete's ability to have the physical and mental strength needed to train and compete.<sup>127-128</sup>

In addition, elite athletes are very susceptible to weight pressures including from their sport or from society. Elite athletes are fully immersed in an environment that emphasises the importance of physical fitness, and a 'winners' mentality. In these environments athletes can often feel pressures from having to wear revealing uniforms, from teammates or coaches in regard to their training or nutritional intake or can feel pressured by an overrepresentation of a

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<sup>124</sup> J. D DeFreese, Samuel R. Walton, Avinash Chandran, and Zachary Y. Kerr. "A time for clinical transformation: Emerging implications from COVID-19 for athlete transition research and clinical practice," *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology* 1, no. aop (2021): 178.

<sup>125</sup> J. D DeFreese, et al. "A time for clinical transformation" 180.

<sup>126</sup> Buckley et al. "Disordered eating & body image of current and former athletes in a pandemic" 14.

<sup>127</sup> Kathleen Ginis, Desmond McEwan, and Rebecca Bassett-Gunter. "Physical activity and body image"

<sup>128</sup> Kimberly Wells, et al., " Disordered Eating In High Performance Sport Position Statement" 7

specific body shape/size.<sup>129</sup> The weight pressures athletes endure may vary based on whether they compete in a weight class versus aesthetic sport. In weight class sports athletes have to stay within a specific weight range and are very susceptible to weight cycling, and extreme weight-loss tactics often believed to be ‘just part of the sport’ and normalized.<sup>130</sup> In comparison to aesthetic sports, part of the scoring is based on presentation overemphasizing the athlete's body, causing athletes to feel pressure to push for a thin physique.<sup>131</sup> Athletes may also experience societal pressures such as the media's representation of the ideal female in a westernized society. The media can often portray unrealistic body ideals through the objectification of women.<sup>132</sup> The ideal athletic body and ideal female body can often conflict with each other causing an athlete to feel as though they do not ‘fit in’ in either environment.<sup>133,134</sup>

In addition, COVID-19 has shown to have impacted athletes astronomically. During the COVID-19 pandemic, athletes endured ample stressors such as the Olympic Games being postponed, having to train in lockdown, navigating the changing restrictions to training, and competing internationally. Many athletes spoke out about the mixed feelings that had about the postponement of the Olympic Games and the negative impact to their sleep and eating behaviours.<sup>135,136</sup> The pandemic was shown to decrease athletes physical activity, increase body dissatisfaction and increase disordered eating behaviours.<sup>137</sup> The adaptations athletes had to make to their training were often compared to other athlete transition phases, such as retirement from sport.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Hannah Cooper, and Stacy Winter, "Exploring the conceptualization and persistence of disordered eating in retired swimmers"

<sup>130</sup> Justine J. Reel "Current issues in North American sport psychology" 209.

<sup>131</sup> Jorunn Sundgot-Borgen and Ina Garthe, "Elite athletes in aesthetic and Olympic weight-class sports" 101.

<sup>132</sup> Anthony Papatomas, et al. "Changes in body image perceptions upon leaving elite sport" 31

<sup>133</sup> Angela J. Schneider (2000). "Ethical Issues"

<sup>134</sup> S. Cosh, P. J. Tully, and S. Crabb, "Discursive practices around the body of the female athlete: An analysis of sport psychology interactions in elite sport," *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 43 (2019): 90-104.

<sup>135</sup> BBC, "Tokyo 2020: How athletes reacted to Olympic Games postponement,"

<sup>136</sup> Raven Haan, et al. "Health and well-being of athletes during the coronavirus pandemic" 5.

<sup>137</sup> Buckley et al. "Disordered eating & body image of current and former athletes in a pandemic" 14.

<sup>138</sup> Yannick Stephan, Jean Bilard, Grégory Ninot, and Didier Delignières. "Bodily transition out of elite sport" 193.

### Chapter 3 - History and Progress of Body Image Issues in the Olympics

To fully understand the relationship between female athletes and their bodies in Olympic sport, we must first examine the history of women's participation in the Olympics. The history of restricting women from sports and placing controls on when and how they participate has contributed to the view of the female body in the context of sport. Throughout history, many elements of the Olympic games have marginalized female athletes, from controlling which sports are acceptable for them to participate in, to what they wear when competing. These environments tend to enhance the likelihood of developing disordered eating behaviours or body dissatisfaction. Comparisons of a female athletic body and society's idealized bodies have caused conflict for women and their bodies since the beginning of the Olympics Games.

#### I. Ancient Olympics

The depiction of female athletes and their bodies dates to the ancient Olympic Games. Dr. Heather Reid examines athletic beauty in the ancient Olympics in her article, *Athletic Beauty in Classical Greece: A Philosophical View*.<sup>139</sup> This article helps us compare how athletes' bodies and female athletes were perceived in the ancient Olympics compared to the early modern Olympics and the contemporary Olympics games.

The way Olympic athletes' physical appeal is captured and depicted today is very different from the ancient Olympic Games. A significant difference between how athletes were memorialized in ancient Greece versus today is the symbolism behind the artwork or image. In ancient Greece, images of athletes reflected their beauty by capturing them as an "expression of the desired state of their souls" rather than the beauty of athletes' bodies being the focus of the athletes' depiction.<sup>140</sup> In comparison, in today's society, Olympic athletes' portrayals are overly sexualized, especially when depicting female athletes.<sup>141</sup> Although Olympic athletes will appear in the media, they are rarely the subject of high art, encompassing the image of divine ideals as they would have in ancient Greece.<sup>142</sup> When examining the way athletic beauty was rendered in ancient Greece, one apparent similarity is the aesthetic appeal of muscular male bodies, with the

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<sup>139</sup> Heather Reid, "Athletic beauty in classical Greece: A philosophical view," 284

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Christina Villalon, and Karen Weiller-Abels. "Female athletes in the 2016 Rio Games" 1139.

<sup>142</sup> Heather Reid, "Athletic beauty in classical Greece: A philosophical view," 282.

physical structure of a male not varying significantly in 3000 years.<sup>143</sup> However, the ancient Greeks were aware that athletic bodies varied between sports, noting a difference between the bodies of athletes that would compete in ‘light-events’ (i.e. lean or aesthetic events, such as running, figure skating or gymnastics) versus ‘heavy-events’ (i.e. weight class events, such as Olympic weight lifting, or wrestling).<sup>144</sup> Ancient Greek athletes who competed in ‘heavy-events’ were rarely the subject of life-size sculptures; these were more often reserved for ‘light-weight’ athletes who possessed the characteristics of balance and harmony, such as pentathletes.<sup>145</sup> As quoted in Reid’s article, pentathletes were deemed more desirable,

“Beauty varies with each age. In a young man, it consists in possessing a body capable of enduring all efforts, either of the racecourse or of bodily strength, while he himself is pleasant to look upon and a sheer delight. This is why the athletes in the pentathlon are most beautiful, because they are naturally adapted for bodily exertion and for swiftness of foot.” (Rhetoric 1361b11).<sup>146</sup>

Today, we also see athletes who compete in sports that are viewed as more aesthetically pleasing and are more likely to be photographed for magazine covers, the subject of advertisements or spoken about in the media. For example, athlete Sultana Frizell, who is a two-time Olympian, two-time Commonwealth Games gold medallist and 2015 Pan Am silver medallist, explained in a CBC interview how she is an Olympian but does not have the ideal build of an athlete; thus, athletes who look like her and compete in her sport are rarely captured in the media. Frizell states, “I think we’re just ... bombarded with that type of body and you don’t get to see the other athletes...As a hammer thrower, I’m not really in the media too much, along with my colleagues”.<sup>147</sup>

Throughout Reid’s article, it becomes apparent that ancient female athletes were not only excluded from participating in the Olympics but were rarely discussed in literature or the subject of art.<sup>148</sup> When female athletes were depicted in the arts, they were most likely to be in the form of small bronze statues and were almost always clothed or partially clothed with one breast

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<sup>143</sup> Heather Reid, "Athletic beauty in classical Greece: A philosophical view," 283.

<sup>144</sup> Heather Reid, "Athletic beauty in classical Greece: A philosophical view," 283.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Jacqueline Doorey, "Don't Let the Gold Medal Fool You: Even Olympic Athletes Struggle with Body Image - CBC Sports," CBC News (CBC/Radio Canada), July 17, 2016, <https://www.cbc.ca/sportslongform/entry/olympic-athletes-struggle-with-body-image>.

<sup>148</sup> Heather Reid, "Athletic beauty in classical Greece: A philosophical view," 290.

exposed.<sup>149</sup> As Reid suggests, given that female athletes in ancient Greece were often clothed in art forms, we can thus assume that these athletes were excluded from the classical athletic aesthetic.<sup>150</sup> However, it is important to note that athletic females were more often associated with the goddess Artemis, whose followers were expected to remain virginal and shun the company of men and eroticism surrounding contemporary athletic females and/or surrounding marriage and reproduction.<sup>151</sup> Thus, this could be a reason why athletic females in ancient Greece were not sexualized in the same way they are today.

## II. Modern Olympics

Women were viewed very similarly during the revival of the modern Olympics as they were during the ancient games. The modern Olympics were founded in 1894 by Baron Pierre de Coubertin. The first modern Olympic games took place in 1896 in Athens, Greece.<sup>152</sup> Gender-based principles were applied in the development of the modern Olympic games as Coubertin did not think that the Olympics were the appropriate place for women and considered female participation counterintuitive to the goals and ideals of the games.<sup>153</sup> In Coubertin's opinion, female participation was impractical, uninteresting, unsightly, and improper.<sup>154</sup> Coubertin expressed his opinion by explicitly stating:

“We feel that the Olympic Games must be reserved for men ... we have tried and must continue to try to achieve the following definition: the solemn and periodic exaltation of male athleticism with internationalism as a base, loyalty as a means, art for its setting, and female applause as a reward”.<sup>155</sup>

Despite Coubertin's strong views towards female participation in the Olympics, female athletes were allowed to participate in some events during the 1900 Paris Games. Further, in 1908, female programming was added to the Games.<sup>156</sup>

When women were eventually permitted to participate in the Olympic games, they could only participate in sports that were considered appropriate for women and did not question the

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<sup>149</sup> Heather Reid, "Athletic beauty in classical Greece: A philosophical view," 291.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> International Olympic Committee, "Founder of The Modern Olympic Games," <https://www.olympic.org/pierre-de-coubertin>

<sup>153</sup> Angela J. Schneider, "The ideal Olympic athlete" 314.

<sup>154</sup> Jörg Krieger, Michele Krech, and Lindsay Parks Pieper, "'Our Sport': The Fight for Control of Women's International Athletics," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 5-6 (2020): 452.

<sup>155</sup> Quoted in John Loy (2009) 12.

<sup>156</sup> Christina Villalon, and Karen Weiller-Abels. "Female athletes in the 2016 Rio Games" 1139.



athletes' femininity.<sup>157</sup> Such, female participation at the time was limited to archery, diving, fencing, figure skating, golf, swimming, and tennis, excluding their involvement in sports that involved excess body contact and displays of strength, power, and stamina.<sup>158,159</sup> This was primarily due to the traditional understandings of the female ideal being tied to a specific view of a woman's body, labelling a woman as soft, graceful, weak, modest, and beautiful.<sup>160</sup> Although Coubertin allowed women to participate in 1900, some countries still had reservations about sending female athletes. In particular, during the 1900 Paris, 1904 St Louis, and 1908 and London games, women were required to wear high-necked, ankle-length dresses, and moving into the 1912 Stockholm games when women were then allowed to wear knee-length skirts.<sup>161</sup> During this time, the American Olympic committee was quoted in the New York Times stating that they were opposed to women taking part in any event where they could not wear long skirts.<sup>162</sup>

At the time of both the ancient Olympics and the onset of the Modern games, the ideal qualities of women were beauty, chastity, modesty, obedience, inconspicuous behaviour, and being a good wife and mother.<sup>163</sup> An article written by Linda Fuller examining women's uniforms throughout Olympic history explained that Victorian "modesty" placed upon female athletes could be seen as a patriarchal means of controlling women in sport.<sup>164</sup> A woman competing in contact sports, or sports that showcase their strength, would be going against the feminine ideals that female athletes were expected to abide by, thus falling into the traditional characteristics of the ideal man. Traditionally, men were categorized as powerful, strong, and rational, which closely coincides with the traditional view of a successful athlete.<sup>165</sup> Thus demonstrating that the idea of the ideal female athlete and the ideal athlete was squarely opposites. Schneider further demonstrated this in her article, *The Ideal Olympic Athlete: Some*

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<sup>157</sup> John Loy, Fiona McLachlan, and Douglas Booth "Connotations of female movement and meaning." *Olympika: The International Journal of Sports Studies* 18, (2009)

<sup>158</sup> John Loy, Fiona McLachlan, and Douglas Booth "Connotations of female movement" 6.

<sup>159</sup> John Loy, Fiona McLachlan, and Douglas Booth "Connotations of female movement" 5.

<sup>160</sup> Angela J. Schneider, "On the definition of 'woman' in the sport context," 41.

<sup>161</sup> Linda K Fuller, "Olympics Outfits for Women: From "Feminine Only" to Burqas and Bikinis," In *Sportswomen's Apparel Around the World*, pp. 41. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2021.

<sup>162</sup> "No Women Athletes for American Team; Olympic Committee Adopts Plan to Raise Funds for the Berlin Games.," *The New York Times* (The New York Times, March 31, 1914),

<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1914/03/31/100085417.html?pageNumber=9>.

<sup>163</sup> Angela J. Schneider, "On the definition of 'woman' in the sport context," 41.

<sup>164</sup> Linda K Fuller, "Olympics Outfits for Women" 38.

<sup>165</sup> Angela J. Schneider, "On the definition of 'woman' in the sport context," 41.

*Thoughts and Reflections on Gender Differences*.<sup>166</sup> In this article Schneider speaks about the unique challenges female Olympians face and reflects on potential tensions related to gender. In her article, she explains that many ‘facts’ related to female nature are founded on biased social constructs and gender bias. Often times gender bias will influence decision-makers in sport unconsciously treating all athletes as male athletes not considering the different needs of female athletes and the unique issues that female Olympians face.<sup>167</sup>

As the Olympics grew its sport offerings and female sport participation, female athletes began to discard traditional athletic attire for uniforms that would enhance their athletic performance.<sup>168</sup> For example, between 1956-1980, female athletes started to wear spandex in sports such as swimming, cycling, gymnastics, and field hockey.<sup>169</sup> By forcing athletes throughout history to dress a particular way and restricting what sports they could participate in, due to the belief that these sports were not socially acceptable, further placed societal feminine ideologies on athletes, which can impact their thoughts, feelings, emotions, and behaviours towards their body and enhance the likelihood of developing eating disorders.

Societal standards and the idea that women should not compete in high-level sport due to it being deemed inappropriate have shaped the discussion around women’s issues and equality in sport.<sup>170</sup> Female participation in the Olympics did not exceed 25% until 1988, with participation reaching near parity (49%) for the first time during the Tokyo 2020 games that took place in 2021.<sup>171,172</sup> Although the participation of female athletes in the Olympics has significantly grown since 1896, female athletes are still put in a contradictory position of having to conform to western idealized aesthetic standards while achieving the body they need to participate in sport. In some cases, the sexualized uniforms that female athletes are expected to wear hinder female participation. For example, sports such as beach volleyball require females to wear revealing uniforms. As a result, many women across the world will forgo participating in these sports due to cultural reasons.<sup>173</sup> Weaving spoke about this issue in an article titled, *No net gain: A critique*

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<sup>166</sup> Angela J. Schneider, "The ideal Olympic athlete".

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Linda K Fuller, "Olympics Outfits for Women" 38.

<sup>169</sup> Linda K Fuller, "Olympics Outfits for Women" 41.

<sup>170</sup> Angela J. Schneider, "On the definition of ‘woman’ in the sport context,"

<sup>171</sup> John Loy, Fiona McLachlan, and Douglas Booth "Connotations of female movement and meaning" 3.

<sup>172</sup> International Olympic Committee, "Tokyo 2020 first ever gender-balanced Olympic Games in history, record number of female competitors at Paralympic Games," March 8, 2021, <https://olympics.com/ioc/news/tokyo-2020-first-ever-gender-balanced-olympic-games-in-history-record-number-of-female-competitors-at-paralympic-games>

<sup>173</sup> Heather Reid, "Peace and World Community," in *Olympic Philosophy: The Ideas and Ideals behind the Ancient and Modern Olympic Games*. 326.

*of media representations of women's Olympic beach volleyball.*<sup>174</sup> In this article Weaving discusses the impact of the Fédération Internationale de Volleyball's (FIVB) decision to modify the uniform rules for the London 2012 Olympic Games to allow women to wear "shorts of a maximum length of 2 cm above the knee with sleeved or sleeves tops or a full body suit."<sup>175</sup>

Weaving explains that even with this rule change most Muslim women will still be excluded and the change does not meet the goal that promoted the modification to the uniform rules, as there isn't much difference between a bikini and shorts. Weaving suggests that this change was a way for FIVB to appear sensitive and preserve the status quo.<sup>176</sup>

These sexualized ideals, as well as both sport and societal pressures, have caused body image disturbance and the development of disordered eating risk behaviour in athletes. This issue has been constant throughout Olympic sport. For example, American Olympic Gymnast Cathy Rigby McCoy, who competed between 1968-1972 or Jessie Diggins, an American Olympic cross-country skier medalist who competed at the Olympics in 2014, 2018, and 2022, both had eating disorders. Cathy Rigby McCoy struggled with binge eating and bulimia and was hospitalized twice for her eating disorder.<sup>177</sup> McCoy was quoted saying, "I wanted to be a top gymnast. Nobody can tell you that you're thin enough".<sup>178</sup> She eventually had to leave the sport in order to recover from her eating disorder.

In comparison, Jessie Diggins also suffered from bulimia when training to be the best in her sport, believing she was doing what was best to be lean and succeed in her athletic career.<sup>179</sup> In an interview with EPSN, Diggins spoke about how her experience recovering from her eating disorder has changed her Olympic journey. After receiving treatment from the Emily Program, Diggins explained she now saw the Olympics as a motivating factor that gave her more confidence and helped her continue growing and educating others.<sup>180</sup> Diggins has now published a book, *Brave Enough*, to educate people on mental health, tell her story about her eating disorder and the barriers she faced, and to help give other athletes a starting point for having

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<sup>174</sup> Pam R Sailors, Sarah Teetzel, and Charlene Weaving, "No net gain: A critique of media representations of women's Olympic beach volleyball," *Feminist Media Studies* 12, no. 3 (2012): 468-472.

<sup>175</sup> Pam R Sailors, Sarah Teetzel, and Charlene Weaving, "No net gain" 469.

<sup>176</sup> Pam R Sailors, Sarah Teetzel, and Charlene Weaving, "No net gain" 470.

<sup>177</sup> "Sports People; Cost of Competing" *New York Times*. April 26, 1983. <https://www.nytimes.com/1983/04/26/sports/sports-people-cost-of-competing.html?searchResultPosition=25>

<sup>178</sup> Annie Pokorny, "Olympic gold medalist Jessie Diggins on confronting her eating disorder and recovery," *ESPNW*, March 1, 2019, [https://www.espn.com/espnw/voices/story/\\_/id/26112613/olympic-gold-medalist-jessie-diggins-confronting-eating-disorder-recovery](https://www.espn.com/espnw/voices/story/_/id/26112613/olympic-gold-medalist-jessie-diggins-confronting-eating-disorder-recovery)

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

difficult conversations about their mental health with their families, friends, and coaches.<sup>181</sup> Not all athletes are lucky as Diggins to have the support from coaches and family to persevere through eating disorders and return to sport, such as in Cathy McCoy's experience, explained above. This further demonstrates the necessity of support programs to assist athletes. It also demonstrates the difference athlete support and coach education can have in being able to provide athletes the resources they need to navigate disordered eating, eating disorders and body dissatisfaction in sport.

In sum, the control of how women could dress took away athletes' autonomy as they were not able to truly make their own decisions. If they wanted to be able to participate in sport they had to conform to the rules and regulations set out for them by officials in positions of power.<sup>182</sup>

### III. Responsibilities of the International Olympic Committee

#### *i. Evaluation of the Olympic Charter*

Given the harmful mental and physical effects disordered eating and body dissatisfaction can have on an athlete, the IOC has a moral responsibility to ensure the safety and welfare of all Olympic athletes based on their Olympic Charter. This includes protecting athletes from the development of eating disorder risk factors and body dissatisfaction.

Throughout various sections of the *Olympic Charter*, it is stated that the health and safety of athletes are a top priority. The *Olympic Charter* focuses on promoting the values of Olympism, defending against any form of discrimination and violence, and supporting measures related to the health and wellness of athletes.<sup>183</sup> The *Olympic Charter* is a set of actions and functions that establish the relations between the International Federations, National Olympic Committees, and the Olympic Movement.<sup>184</sup> Ultimately, the *Olympic Charter* solidifies the core principles and by-laws of Olympism and the rules and by-laws adopted by the International Olympic Committee.<sup>185</sup> The *Olympic Charter* states that "The mission of the IOC is to promote Olympism throughout the world and to lead the Olympic Movement."<sup>186</sup> The term "Olympism"

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<sup>181</sup> <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/olympics/beijing/2022/02/02/jessie-diggins-olympics-contender-cross-country-skiing/9233782002/>

<sup>182</sup> Angela J. Schneider, "On the definition of 'woman' in the sport context," 42

<sup>183</sup> International Olympic Committee, "Olympic Charter,"

<sup>184</sup> International Olympic Committee, "Olympic Charter," *Lausanne: IOC*, (2020).

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> International Olympic Committee, "Olympic Charter," 12

was coined by Coubertin, pairing the promotion of sporting events and setting a philosophical ideal of sportsmanship that was thought to have a ripple effect and improve the world.<sup>187</sup> The fundamental principles of Olympism provide a foundation that grounds the Olympic Charter.

The IOC defines Olympism as:

“A philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy found in effort, the educational value of a good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.”<sup>188</sup>

The *Olympic Charter* mentions numerous sections pertaining to the protection of athletes from harm and ensuring their health and safety. Although not explicitly stated, it can be extrapolated that the *Charter* protects athletes from harmful environments that increase their risk of disordered eating and body dissatisfaction. The *Olympic Charter* demonstrates the IOCs' responsibility to protect their athletes from harm and ensure that their health and safety are top priorities.

#### ii. *The Role of the International Olympic Committee (IOC)*

This section will look at the various sections of the *Olympic Charter* and demonstrate the IOC's responsibility in protecting athletes from eating disorders and their risk factors. The first chapter of the *Olympic Charter: The Olympic Movement*, Outlines the mission and role of the IOC. Here the following is stated:

- Section 2.6 “To act against any form of discrimination affecting the Olympic Movement.”;<sup>189</sup>

An athlete who encounters discrimination based on their weight or size could be subjected to body dissatisfaction or the development of disordered eating risk behaviours. “Body discrimination includes unfair treatment on the basis of various aspects of the body, such as weight, height, and body shape.”<sup>190</sup> In reference to sport culture, this may include when a coach body shames athletes or treats them differently based on their body shapes or sizes and not their skill.

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<sup>187</sup> Heather Reid, "Athletic beauty in classical Greece: A philosophical view," 208

<sup>188</sup> International Olympic Committee, "Olympic Charter" 8

<sup>189</sup> International Olympic Committee, "Olympic Charter" 13

<sup>190</sup> Sutin, Angelina R., Eric Robinson, Michael Daly, and Antonio Terracciano. "Perceived body discrimination and intentional self-harm and suicidal behavior in adolescence." *Childhood obesity* 14, no. 8 (2018): 528.

For example, Erin Willson, a former Canadian Olympic synchronized swimmer, spoke to *Globe and Mail* regarding her experience of body shaming while on the Canadian team. Willson stated that the coach “went around in a circle and told everyone what they needed to do to have a better body.”<sup>191</sup> The coach told Willson that she needed to lose fat and her breasts were too big for the sport.<sup>192</sup> Willson was then left behind with a few other swimmers when the team went to a competition and told to “work on [their] weaknesses,” suggesting that if they did not conform to the coach's wishes to change their bodies, they would be kicked off the team.<sup>193</sup> Athletes who are body shamed or told they need to alter their bodies to succeed in sports could suffer from negative views about their bodies, which could impact their self-confidence and performance.<sup>194</sup> In this scenario, the coach believed that if the athlete did not have the body that he or she thought was best for the sport, then the athlete would not be successful and thus did not deserve a spot on the team.

- Section 2.10 “To encourage and support measures relating to the medical care and health of athletes.”; <sup>195</sup>

This guideline is can also be found listed in Chapter 26, section 1.8 of the Mission and Roles of IFs Within the Olympic Movement and in Chapter 27, section 2.8 of the Mission and Role of the NOCs, showing the importance of ensuring athletes have access to appropriate medical treatment for any health needs from all Olympic governing bodies.<sup>196</sup> To ensure the health and safety of athletes, their mental health must be held at the same level of importance as their physical health.

This is extremely important given the novel stressors that COVID-19 has introduced to Olympic athletes. COVID-19 has been shown to elevate stress, anxiety, loneliness, depression, harmful alcohol and drug use, and self-harm or suicidal behaviour.<sup>197</sup> Jessica Bartley, a psychologist and the Director of Mental Health Services for the United States, explained in an interview during the Tokyo Games that her team received about ten requests per day

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<sup>191</sup> Grant Robertson and Rachel Brady, “The Suspect Science Used to Push Aspiring Olympians to Starve Themselves,” *The Globe and Mail* (The Globe and Mail, January 4, 2022), <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-the-suspect-science-used-to-push-aspiring-olympians-to-starve/>.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> S. Cosh, P. J. Tully, and S. Crabb, “Discursive practices” 101

<sup>195</sup> International Olympic Committee, “Olympic Charter” 13

<sup>196</sup> International Olympic Committee, “Olympic Charter”. 57-60

<sup>197</sup> World Health Organization, “Mental health and COVID-19,” n.d. <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/publications-and-technical-guidance/noncommunicable-diseases/mental-health-and-covid-19>

during the games, ranging in a variety of topics from athletes struggling with COVID-19 protocols to not performing as anticipated. Mental health was a major topic at the Tokyo games after American Gymnast Simone Biles, two-time Olympian and seven-time Olympic medalist, pulled out of the women's gymnastics team event to focus on her mental health and physical safety.<sup>198</sup> Biles was met with a lot of support from fellow athletes and the public, who expressed that what she did was brave. Athletes such as Michael Phelps spoke about the situation calling it “heartbreaking” and “an opportunity for us to jump on board, and to even blow this mental health thing even more wide open.”<sup>199</sup> However, others held the opinion she was being cowardly, with radio talk show host Charlie Kirk calling Biles “selfish,” “immature,” “a shame to the country,” and a “sociopath.”<sup>200</sup> He further stated, “Simone Biles just showed the rest of the nation that when things get tough, you shatter into a million pieces.”<sup>201</sup> Biles spoke on the issue stating, “People have no idea what is going on behind the scenes, and just judge us from our social media ... You guys have no idea what we are going through.”<sup>202</sup> Olympic athletes, such as Simone Biles, are met with immense pressure to succeed - not only for themselves but also for their country - which can take a toll on athletes. Athletes need to be able to speak out about their mental health struggles and have the same kind of support as if it were a physical health concern.

Disordered eating and body image concerns are included in the category of mental health concerns but can affect an athlete's physical health and ability to perform and succeed in their sport. For example, the development of RED-S can have metabolic, hematological, psychological, or cardiovascular effects on an athlete and impact their menstrual function bone health, increase the risk of injury, impair judgement, or decrease training response.<sup>203</sup> The IOC has suggested that awareness of problems such as RED-S among athletes and their support teams is crucial to preventing these conditions.<sup>204</sup> In order to fulfill its mission

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<sup>198</sup> Alice Park, “The Tokyo Olympics Changed the Conversation about Mental Health,” Time (Time, August 8, 2021), <https://time.com/6088078/mental-health-olympics-simone-biles/>.

<sup>199</sup> Joan Niesen, “In a Divided Us, It's No Surprise Some See Simone Biles as a Villain,” The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, July 28, 2021), <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/jul/28/simone-biles-withdrawal-olympics-gymnastics-tokyo-media-reaction>.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Alice Park, “The Tokyo Olympics Changed the Conversation about Mental Health,”

<sup>203</sup> See Margo Mountjoy (2018) p. 688 for more information on how RED-S physically and psychologically affects.

<sup>204</sup> Margo Mountjoy et al, “IOC consensus statement on RED-S” 691

and support measures related to athletes' medical care and health, the IOC should work with IFs and NOCs to develop prevention and treatment programs and educate athletes and support personnel regarding athletes' mental health.

- Section 2.18 “To promote safe sport and the protection of athletes from all forms of harassment and abuse.”<sup>205</sup>

Providing safe training and competition environments is crucial to promoting safe sport and protecting athletes from all forms of harassment and abuse. This includes ensuring that athletes are safe from psychological abuse from coaches, athletic support personnel, judges, and team members. According to IOC Safeguarding Toolkit, harassment can be defined as non-accidental violence that can impact an athlete's physical, cognitive, behavioural, or mental health.<sup>206</sup> The Toolkit lists disordered eating/eating disorders as a physical effect of harassment. It also lists low self-esteem and poor body image as a cognitive effect of harassment.<sup>207</sup> The development of disordered eating and body dissatisfaction is seen as an effect of indirect physical abuse. This type of abuse pressures athletes to engage in dangerous weight-management practices.<sup>208</sup> In a study conducted by Willson and Kerr examining the effects of body shaming as a form of emotional abuse towards athletes, it was found that athletes experience emotional abuse in the form of coach's verbal and physical behaviours, denial of attention and support, body-shaming, constant weigh-ins, having food confiscated, enduring extra conditioning administered for not meeting weight goals, and being prescribed restrictive diets.<sup>209</sup> This resulted in athletes feeling anxious, preoccupied with their bodies, developing eating disorders and negatively affecting their performance due to low energy and increased anxiety about coaches' comments.<sup>210</sup>

### *iii. The Role of International Federations (IFs)*

Chapter 3, section 26, outlines the mission and role of IFs within the Olympic Movement. In this section, the following is stated<sup>211</sup>:

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<sup>205</sup> International Olympic Committee, “Olympic Charter” 14

<sup>206</sup> International Olympic Committee. “Safeguarding athletes from harassment and abuse in sport: IOC Toolkit of IFs and NOCs” *Lausanne: IOC.* (2017): 37

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>208</sup> Margo Mountjoy, Kirsty Burrows, and Susan Greinig, "Protection of the athlete." *Routledge Handbook of Athlete Welfare* (2020): 354

<sup>209</sup> Erin Willson, and Gretchen Kerr, "Body shaming as a form of emotional abuse in sport," 12.

<sup>210</sup> Erin Willson, and Gretchen Kerr, "Body shaming as a form of emotional abuse in sport," 14.

<sup>211</sup> International Olympic Committee, “Olympic Charter” 56-57



- Section 1.3 “To contribute to the achievement of the goals set out in the Olympic Charter, in particular by way of the spread of Olympism and Olympic education”;
- Section 1.7 “To provide technical assistance in the practical implementation of the Olympic Solidarity programmes”;
- Section 1.8 “To encourage and support measures relating to the medical care and health of athletes.”

These items state the priority of IFs aligning themselves with the values and rules outlined in the *Olympic Charter* and the importance of assisting NOCs to implement Olympic Solidarity programmes to enhance Olympic education and support Olympic values. Olympic Solidarity programs are part of the World Programs that cover sport development goals deemed essential for NOCs to accomplish the goals and missions set out by the Olympic Charter, rule 5.<sup>212</sup>

According to the Charter, “The aim of Olympic Solidarity is to provide assistance to NOCs for athlete development programmes, in particular, those which have the greatest need of it.” These programs are used to level the playing field between countries that do not have the funds to put towards technology and coaching assistance and those that do. Some objectives outlined by the Olympic Solidarity By-Law Rule 6 includes:<sup>213</sup>

“Promoting the Fundamental Principles of Olympism;  
 Assisting the NOCs in the preparation of their athletes and teams for their participation in the Olympic Games;  
 Developing the technical sports knowledge of athletes and coaches;  
 Improving the technical level of athletes and coaches in cooperation with NOCs and IFs, including through scholarships;  
 Training sports administrators;  
 Collaborating with organizations and entities pursuing such objectives, particularly through Olympic education and the propagation of sport.”

This program empowers IFs to assist NOCs in keeping athletes' best interests in mind and at the center of the Olympic movement while portraying Olympic values and reinforcing the structure of NOCs.<sup>214</sup> This demonstrates how the IOC, IFs, and NOCs must work together to fulfil the Olympic Mission and provide sport opportunities that are safe for athletes.

The *Olympic Charter* and *Olympic Solidarity* show the importance of providing safe spaces for athletes to train and compete by providing knowledge to athletes and coaches, training sport administration, and supporting measures relating to athletes' medical care and health.

However, a study surveying medical representatives of 29 IFs from the 2016 Summer and 2018

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<sup>212</sup> International Olympic Committee, “World Programmes,” *Lausanne: IOC* <https://www.olympic.org/olympic-solidarity-world-programmes>

<sup>213</sup> International Olympic Committee, “Olympic Charter” 16.

<sup>214</sup> International Olympic Committee. “World Programmes”

Winter games explored IFs priorities and the barriers to implementing athlete and global health initiatives. This study indicated that less than 50% of IFs' medical representatives believed RED-S and eating disorders/disordered eating were important issues to address.<sup>215</sup> In addition, when examining the sufficiency of their health activities, those who ranked RED-S and eating disorders/disordered eating to be an important issue, less than 50% had partaken in actions to address these issues.<sup>216</sup> IFs also reported insufficient programs to address the protection of athletes against harassment and abuse, eating disorders/disordered eating and mental health.<sup>217</sup> This shows that although the health and safety of athletes are deemed essential to the values of Olympic sport there is not sufficient support from IFs to provide the assistance that Canadian Olympic athletes need.

*iv. The Role of National Olympic Committees (NOCs)*

According to the *Olympic Charter*, “The mission of NOCs is to develop, promote and protect the Olympic Movement in their respective countries, in accordance with the *Olympic Charter*.” NOCs work directly with national sport organizations (NSOs) and Olympic athletes to achieve their goals. Chapter 27 in the *Olympic Charter* outlines the following roles NOCs must follow to develop and promote the Olympic movement:<sup>218</sup>

- Section 2.1 “To promote the fundamental principles and values of Olympism in their countries, in particular, in the fields of sport and education, by promoting Olympic educational programmes...”;
- Section 2.4 “To help in the training of sports administrators by organizing courses and ensuring that such courses contribute to the propagation of the Fundamental Principles of Olympism”;
- Section 2.5 “To take action against any form of discrimination and violence in sport.;
- Section 2.7 “To encourage and support measures relating to the medical care and health of athletes.

This section outlines the importance of educating all members involved in the Olympic movement, including athletes and coaches, about the values of Olympism. As the IOC describes, Olympism is a philosophy of life that blends sport with culture and education. Through Olympism fundamental ethical principles should be respected such as the insurance that athletes can train and compete in a safe environment free from maltreatment. Thus, as the as reflected in

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<sup>215</sup> Margo Mountjoy, et al., "Health promotion by International Olympic Sport Federations: priorities and barriers," *British journal of sports medicine* 53, no. 17 (2019): 1121

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>218</sup> International Olympic Committee, “Olympic Charter” 59-60

the philosophy of Olympism, the health and safety of athletes have been a constant theme throughout the *Charter* and are addressed in Chapters 1, 26, and 27. Although this seems to be an important issue in the Charter, athletes from various countries have addressed their experience training and competing in unsafe environments and how that has impacted their engagement in disordered eating behaviours or development of body dissatisfaction. This shows that the Olympic Movement has not upheld the goal of providing safe training environments for athletes. It is imperative that NOCs, IFs and the IOC work together to support athletes to succeed in a healthy and safe environment.

In addition to the above roles, NOCs also have a right to:<sup>219</sup>

- Section 7.3 “Benefits from the assistance of Olympic Solidarity”;
- Section 8 “The IOC helps the NOCs fulfil their mission through its various departments and Olympic Solidarity.”

Although the IOC provides educational programming that NOCs can access, including educational courses for coaches, athlete career transition, development of national sport system, youth athlete development, and Olympic values programme, the IOC has failed to provide any programming on eating disorder prevention or improve body image for athletes. The IOC has indicated that these are areas of concern in consensus statements, but studies have been done showing that IFs struggle to support these concerns. The IOC should use this as motivation to move forward and develop the necessary programming to keep athletes safe. If this were developed at the IOC level, then IFs and NOCs would be able to adapt these programs to their specific sport needs.

In sum, throughout the Olympic Charter, we can see the importance of education for athletes, coaches, and support personnel and the need to provide the necessary support to athletes to ensure they can succeed in a healthy and safe environment.

#### *v. Athletes’ Rights*

The Athletes’ Rights and Responsibilities Declaration (Athletes’ Declaration) was formed and adopted by the IOC in October 2018.<sup>220</sup> The Athletes’ Declaration documents twelve rights and ten responsibilities. These rights and responsibilities were decided upon by gathering the opinions of more than 4,200 elite athletes from 190 countries. This declaration provides guidelines on topics such as doping, integrity, clean sport, career, communications, governance,

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<sup>219</sup> International Olympic Committee, “Olympic Charter” 61-62

<sup>220</sup> International Olympic Committee, “Athletes’ declaration officially endorsed by the IOC session,” *Lausanne: IOC*. October 9, 2018, <https://www.olympic.org/news/athletes-declaration-officially-endorsed-by-the-ioc-session>

discrimination, due process, harassment, and abuse. The Athletes' Declaration aims to empower athletes by making sure their voice is heard, tackling key issues that jeopardize the integrity of sport, and providing the opportunity to shape the future of sport by addressing important issues that athletes face in sport.<sup>221</sup>

Some of the rights for athletes that are outlined in the Athletes Declaration include:<sup>222</sup>

1. "Practise sport and compete without being subject to discrimination on the basis of race, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, disability, language, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other immutable status."
7. "The protection of mental and physical health, including a safe competition and training environment and protection from abuse and harassment."
9. "Report unethical behaviour without fear of retaliation."
10. "Freedom of expression."

The Athletes Rights Declaration aims to provide athletes with respect and the freedom to speak out to ensure safe environments to train and compete. The Olympic Charter, Olympic Mission, and Athletes Declaration have seemingly similar values and guidelines as all three indicate the importance of athletes' health and safety. In comparison to the Olympic Charter, the Athletes Declaration more explicitly states that both athletes' physical and mental health should be prioritized, and athletes must have the freedom to express their experiences of mistreatment, without repercussions.

The Athletes' Declaration provides the opportunity for athletes to speak out about unsafe sport environments they experience, that may impact the development of disordered eating behaviours and body dissatisfaction. Many athletes have shared their stories discussing how they have endured emotional trauma due to coaches' verbal and emotional abuse leading to their development of disordered eating behaviours and, in some cases, eating disorders. Two prominent examples of athletes who have spoken out and acted against their governing body due to unsafe training environments are the case against Gymnastics USA and separately the case against Canada Artistic Swimming.

The first example is the case against Gymnastics USA, where more than 500 women and girls endured a toxic culture within USA gymnastics that left young gymnasts susceptible to sexual, physical, and psychological abuse. This case resulted in a settlement totalling \$380,000,000 between the hundreds of victimized gymnasts and USA Gymnastics and the

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<sup>221</sup> International Olympic Committee, "Athletes' Declaration," *Lausanne: IOC*. <https://www.olympic.org/athlete365/who-we-are/athletes-declaration/>

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

United States Olympic & Paralympic Committees.<sup>223</sup> Athletes experienced sexual abuse by team doctor Larry Nassar, and were also subject to intense scrutiny, monitoring, mistreatment, and starvation by head coaches, Bèla and Márta Károlyi. Olympic Bronze Medalist Tasha Schwikert mentioned one example of this when she spoke about her experience on the *30 for 30 podcast Episode Season Seven: The Karolyi Way*. Schwikert recalled being at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games where the coaches would not allow the athletes to walk to a meal by themselves as the coaches wanted to monitor how much food they were eating and confiscate it if they believed the athlete had had too much.<sup>224</sup> Schwikert pled, “Have you ever had food like literally taken out of your hand when you were starving? On at least four occasions in Sydney, I cried myself to sleep because I was hungry. I had never cried myself to sleep about food in my entire life, but we’re at the Olympic Games, and I am like physically starving.”<sup>225</sup>

This example demonstrates how these athletes’ rights were taken away from them both in practice and in competition due to being in a sport culture that systemically fostered abuse and harassment at all levels. Furthermore, athletes described being unable to speak out about the abuse they experienced due to fear of punishment and retaliation by USA Gymnastics. This abuse should have never happened as the Athletes’ Declaration, National Olympic Committee, and International Olympic Committee are responsible for keeping their athletes safe.

We can also look at the Canadian context where former Team Canada Synchronized Swimmers filed a class-action lawsuit against their governing body, Canada Artistic Swimming. This class action was filed in March 2021, by fifty athletes who competed between 2010 and 2020 looking for \$250,000 for punitive damages and an additional \$12,000 per athlete for each year they spent on the team in order to compensate for moral damages.<sup>226</sup> Athletes involved in this class action have brought to light the widespread abuse, neglect and maltreatment they endured in the form of constant body shaming that lead athletes to develop severe eating disorders, anxiety, depression and PTSD.<sup>227</sup> In a *Globe and Mail* article, published in December

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<sup>223</sup> Juliet Macur, “Nassar Abuse Survivors Reach a \$380 Million Settlement,” *The New York Times* (The New York Times, December 13, 2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/13/sports/olympics/nassar-abuse-gymnasts-settlement.html>.

<sup>224</sup> “Heavy Medals Part 5: The Karolyi Way- Transcript,” *30 for 30 Podcasts*, July 14, 2020, <https://30for30podcasts.com/episodes/the-karolyi-way/#:~:text=On%20at%20least%20four%20occasions,I%20am%20like%20physically%20starving.&text=That%20meant%20Alyssa%20or%20Tasha,to%20compete%20at%20the%20Olympics>.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>226</sup> CBC News, “Former Artistic Swimmers Seek Damages for Alleged Abuse by National Team Coaches | CBC News,” CBC News (CBC/Radio Canada, March 10, 2021), <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/canada-artistic-swimming-class-action-lawsuit-1.5942463>.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*

2021, various athletes spoke out about their experiences.<sup>228</sup> Athletes recounted that their coaches would read out the names of the athletes whose weight was four-percent higher than their target weight, publicly shaming the athlete. The athletes also had weight goals set for them by the coaches. For many athletes, these often-arbitrary weight goals were built into their contracts. Each contract had a three-strike rule where if an athlete was over their goal weight, they were subject to being removed from the national team roster regardless of their performance. If the athlete was removed from the team due to not meeting their contract weight, they could be expected to pay back any costs associated with being on the team. These costs could include “facility rental, coach salaries, expert services fees and travel.”<sup>229</sup> Former athlete Erin Willson was one athlete who received warning letters from the team officials. Despite Willson engaging in dangerous eating behaviours and dropping weight to meet her contract, her weight was still too high according to the goal set out in her contract. She was given another warning indicating that if she did not meet her contracted weight, she could be forced to pay back almost \$50,000. In diary entries Willson shared with the *Globe*, she wrote about how athletes often did not agree with the competition weight that was set for them and had to lose a significant amount of weight through unhealthy and dangerous methods trying to obtain these unrealistic expectations. When speaking about her experience, Willson stated, “I don't think I'm ever going to be confident with my body or happy with how it looks. My body image will never be the same”.<sup>230</sup> The unhealthy environment Willson trained in caused her to develop an eating disorder, and she has now been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Another case that has recently been brought to light in the Canadian Context on March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022, when over 70 Canadian Gymnastics spoke out about being subject to a toxic culture consisting of abusive practices, neglect, and discrimination. As quoted from the *Global Athlete*, “We ask Sport Canada to take action to ensure the next generation of Canadian gymnasts is not subject to the physical and psychological trauma that we have had to endure”.<sup>231</sup> The *Global Athlete* statement indicated that athletes have not spoken out till now out of a fear of retribution and are now calling for an independent investigation to take place.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Grant Robertson and Rachel Brady, “The Suspect Science”

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>230</sup> CBC News, “Former Artistic Swimmers Seek Damages”

<sup>231</sup> *Global Athlete*, “Canadian Gymnastics Athletes Call for Independent, Third-Party Investigation,” *Global Athlete* (*Global Athlete*, April 27, 2022), <https://globalathlete.org/our-word/gymnastics-athletes-call-for-independent-third-party-investigation>.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*

Following the statement by Global Athlete, coaches, judges and athletes, have spoken out about their experience working within Gymnastics Canada. Brittany Rogers a former Canadian Olympian spoke to CBC News about her experience where she expressed the lasting impact of her childhood coaches calling her “fat, stupid, and not good enough”.<sup>233</sup> Rogers stated “I don't think I fully grasped the magnitude of how bad it was until I was removed from the sport...Something new surfaces almost every day. My self-confidence is almost non-existent. I doubt myself. I can't even look at myself in the mirror sometimes because I'm either so judgmental in my physical appearance or it's just instilled in me that I will never be good enough.”<sup>234</sup> Gabby (Pearson) Spadafora, also came forward in an open letter published by Global Athlete about the abuse that she endured as a young gymnast in Canada. Spadafora stated,

*“At the age of seven, I was weighed twice per day and measured sporadically for body fat. I still recall the pain of the fat calipers. It was the coaches’ goal to make us very aware of our weight. I was subject to my coach pinching my bum to fat shame me. I saw 12- and 13-year-old girls required to run while wearing garbage bags over their clothes in an attempt to sweat out retained fluids. In fact, I was so scared to gain weight I would hang my heels over the edge of the scale hoping for a lesser weight.” She further stated, “My goal was always to go to the Olympics, and we were taught that “this is what it takes to make it”. At the age of thirteen, I was named to the Canadian National Team. This is when I was forced to go on a no-carbohydrate diet. My parents tried to intervene knowing this was an unhealthy and dangerous diet for a child. Afraid of my coaches, I complied.”<sup>235</sup>*

These ongoing cases demonstrates that athletes' feel that they lack support and the ability to protect themselves from mistreatment. Athletes are forced to choose between their Olympic Dream or their health and safety. These athletes had their right to speak up without retaliation diminished and had no protection against harassment and abuse, which jeopardized their physical and mental health. This shows that even though the Athletes Declaration was put in place to help protect athletes and give them a voice, athletes still must fight for Olympic federations do their part to ensure athletes' health and safety. and the different preceptive that have come forward show that a shift needs to be made that puts athletes first. Through athletes speaking out against

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<sup>233</sup>Lori Ewing, “My Self-Confidence Is Almost Non-Existent’: Canadian Gymnasts’ Letter on Abuse Spurs Roundtable | CBC Sports,” CBC News (CBC/Radio Canada, April 1, 2022), <https://www.cbc.ca/sports/canadian-gymnasts-letter-on-abuse-spurs-roundtable-1.6406057>.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Abby (Pearson) Spadafora, “I Will No Longer Be Silenced - Canadian Gymnast Abby (Pearson) Spadafora,” Global Athlete (Global Athlete, April 27, 2022), <https://globalathlete.org/our-word/iwillnolongerbesilenced>

adverse cultures and demanding a shift in culture, it further demonstrates the shift that needs to take place to put athletes' rights at the forefront of sport. Athletes' health and wellbeing needs to be at the center of sport and ensure their safety comes before the status of winning medals.

#### IV. Steps in Preventing Eating Disorders and Body Dissatisfaction

##### *i. International Olympic Medical and Scientific Commission*

“The Medical and Scientific Commission’s mission is to provide a guiding reference for all other sports organizations on matters relating to the protection of the health of athletes.”<sup>236</sup> The Commission promotes health, physical activity, and the protection of athletes by advising the IOC Session, the IOC Executive Board and the IOC President.<sup>237</sup> Part of the work of the Commission is to fund research that helps further their mission and advance knowledge around athlete-centric concerns. The Commission has assisted in publishing 27 consensus statements on various topics since 2004. Consensus meeting and statements that have touched on relevant information regarding athlete development of disordered eating behaviours, eating disorders, and body dissatisfaction include:

- IOC Consensus Statement on the Female Athlete Triad – 2005
- IOC Consensus Statement on sexual harassment and abuse in sport - 2007
- IOC Consensus Statement on Body Composition Health and Performance in Sport - 2012
- IOC Consensus Meeting on Harassment and Abuse in Sport - 2015
- IOC Consensus Statement on Relative Energy Deficiency in Sport (RED-S), beyond the Female Athlete Triad – 2015
- IOC Consensus Meeting on Mental Health in Elite Athletes – 2018

It is intended that these statements are to be used clinically, in order to educate medical physicians and mental health providers who work with elite athletes, as well as to inform future researchers. To gain a complete understanding of how these consensus statements have contributed to the conversation around disordered eating and body dissatisfaction, we will briefly examine each of the consensus statements listed above.

##### **A. Female Athlete Triad and Relative Energy Deficiency in Sport (RED-S):**

First, we will examine the 2005 IOC Consensus Statement on the Female Athlete Triad – and the 2015 IOC Consensus Statement on Relative Energy Deficiency in Sport (RED-S) beyond the Female Athlete Triad.

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<sup>236</sup> International Olympic Committee, “Medical and Scientific Commission,” <https://olympics.com/ioc/medical-and-scientific-commission>

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.



In November 2005, the IOC Medical Commission held a working meeting where experts gathered to discuss the female athlete triad.<sup>238</sup> The female athlete triad is the combination of amenorrhea (persistent absence of menstrual cycle), osteoporosis (degenerative disease of the skeleton), and disordered eating. This consensus meeting was aimed to create awareness around the female athlete triad and examine the most reliable methods for prevention and treatment.<sup>239</sup> IOC Medical Commission Working Group Women in Sport Chair Patricia Sangenis, MD, published a position stand on the female athlete triad after the meeting.<sup>240</sup> Throughout the paper, Sangenis provided definitions for disordered eating, amenorrhea, and osteoporosis, explained the prevalence of each, as well as the risk factors, and made recommendations for moving forward. The author also explained that low energy availability (LEA) underpins the female athlete triad. LEA can be caused when your body does not have enough caloric energy intake to sustain the body's energy expenditure, resulting in an energy deficit.<sup>241</sup> In addition, the paper explained that athletes are often faced with the pressure to meet unrealistic weight expectations, which could potentially lead to athletes engaging in excessive dieting, and the development of the female athlete triad and LEA.<sup>242</sup> Further, the paper stressed the necessity of teaching athletes and coaches that weight loss does not ensure the improvement of athletic performance.<sup>243</sup>

In 2015, the IOC Consensus Statement on Relative Energy Deficiency in Sport (RED-S), beyond the Female Athlete Triad, was published. In this consensus statement, the female athlete triad was renamed and re-defined as relative energy deficiency in sport (RED-S). This was done to expand the definition to include male athletes, as low-energy availability can also affect them. The clinical understanding of the syndromes that influence an athlete's physiological function, health, and athletic performance was determined to be improved by substituting the term female athlete triad with RED-S.<sup>244</sup>

In 2018, the Commission provided an updated consensus statement on the same topic, demonstrating the scientific progress and advances that have brought more awareness to RED-

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<sup>238</sup> International Olympic Committee, "Consensus statement adopted on the Female Athlete Triad," November 5, 2005, <https://olympics.com/ioc/news/consensus-statement-adopted-on-the-female-athlete-triad>

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> P. Sangenis, B. L. Drinkwater, A. Loucks, R. T. Sherman, J. Sundgot-Borgen, and R. A. Thompson, "IOC medical commission position stand on the female athlete triad," *IOC, Lausanne* (2006): 5

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> P. Sangenis, et al., "Position stand on the female athlete triad," 1

<sup>243</sup> P. Sangenis, et al., "Position stand on the female athlete triad," 2

<sup>244</sup> Margo Mountjoy et al. "IOC consensus statement on relative energy deficiency in sport (RED-S)," 687

S.<sup>245</sup> The RED-S consensus statements provides valuable information on how to measure energy availability, the health effects of low energy availability, how to prevent disordered eating and eating disorders, and screening and treatment of RED-S—further stating that athletes support personnel must enhance their screening among athletes who may be considered to be in an at-risk group for developing RED-s.<sup>246</sup> This may include athletes who compete in weight-sensitive sports, injured athletes, and athletes who compete on teams with known cases of athletes engaging in disordered eating behaviours or developing eating disorders. The statement also stresses the need for developing the methodology to screen and identify athletes that are at risk, deeming that early detection of LEA is essential to prevent long-term health effects in athletes.

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## **B. Harassment and Abuse in Sport**

In 2007, the IOC made a press release announcing a consensus statement on sexual harassment & abuse. This consensus outlines how sexual harassment & abuse is a problem within sport environments, identifies risk factors, and provides guidelines for prevention and resolution.<sup>249</sup> Although this statement only includes the issue of sexual harassment, another consensus statement was later released in 2016, which expands to include multiple types of harassment and abuse such as psychological, physical abuse and neglect.<sup>250</sup> As the research in this area is relatively new, the information concluded in the 2016 article should be used as a starting point in exploring the effects of abuse and should be complemented by additional research to form congruent conclusions.

The 2016 consensus statement defines various forms of abuse and harassment in sport (psychological, sexual, and physical)<sup>251</sup>, explains various abuse mechanisms (contact, verbal, cyber, negligence, bullying, and hazing)<sup>252</sup>, and defines groups that are more susceptible to experiencing harassment and abuse (children and adolescent, members of the 2SLGBTQ+, and athletes with disabilities)<sup>253</sup>. The article then looks at the impacts this type of violence can have

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<sup>245</sup> Margo Mountjoy et al. "IOC consensus statement on relative energy deficiency in sport (RED-S)," 692

<sup>246</sup> Margo Mountjoy et al. "IOC consensus statement on relative energy deficiency in sport (RED-S)," 691

<sup>247</sup> Margo Mountjoy et al. "IOC consensus statement on RED-S". 693

<sup>248</sup> Margo Mountjoy et al. "IOC consensus statement on RED-S". 692

<sup>249</sup> <https://olympics.com/ioc/news/ioc-adopts-consensus-statement-on-sexual-harassment-and-abuse-in-sport#:~:text=Consensus%20Statement%3A%20Sexual%20harassment%20and%20abuse%20in%20sport> page 1

<sup>250</sup> Margo, Mountjoy, et al., "International Olympic Committee consensus statement: harassment and abuse (non-accidental violence) in sport," *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 50, no. 17 (2016): 1019-1029.

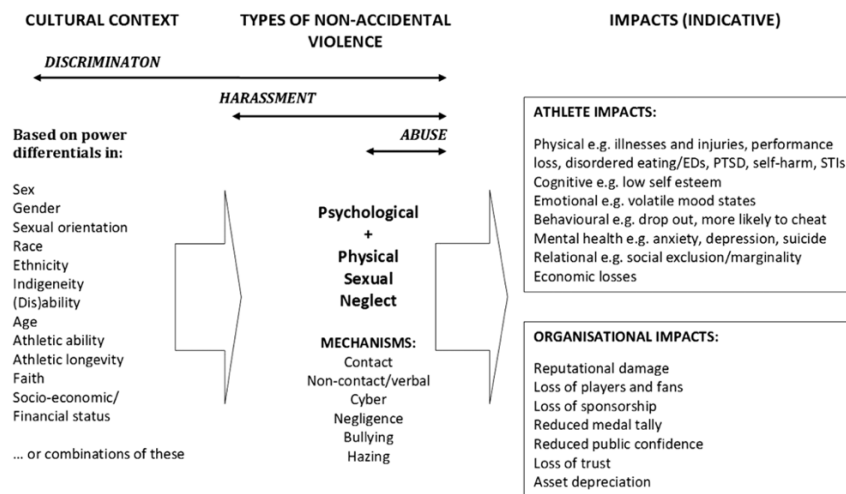
<sup>251</sup> Margo, Mountjoy, et al., "Harassment and abuse (non-accidental violence) in sport," 1020-1022.

<sup>252</sup> Margo, Mountjoy, et al., "Harassment and abuse (non-accidental violence) in sport," 1022.

<sup>253</sup> Margo, Mountjoy, et al., "Harassment and abuse (non-accidental violence) in sport," 1022-1023.

on athletes and the sport, as well as explores the various ways to prevent harassment and abuse in sport settings.<sup>254</sup> This consensus statement defines non-accidental abuse and harassment, stating that “it is important to stress that athletes of all ages have a right to engage in ‘safe sport’: an athletic environment that is respectful, equitable and free from all forms of non-accidental violence to athletes.”<sup>255</sup> The article demonstrates the cultural context in which discrimination, harassment and abuse occur, the types of non-accidental violence and the impacts of these actions (See Figure 1).<sup>256</sup> This shows that discrimination can be seen within various contexts, such as sex, gender, race, ethnicity, athlete ability, athletic longevity or a combination of the above.<sup>257</sup> Discrimination has been seen to easily develop into harassment or abuse, which can be psychological and/or physical in nature. The impacts of harassment can physically, cognitively, emotionally, and behaviourally affect an athlete. This document shows that both physical and cognitive harassment and abuse can cause the development of disordered eating or eating disorders, low self-esteem, and poor body image.<sup>258</sup>

*Figure 1 Conceptual Model of Harassment and Abuse in Sport*



In addition to the harassment and abuse consensus statement, the IOC has also developed the *IOC Toolkit: Safeguarding Athletes from Harassment and Abuse in Sport* in 2018, used to build and implement athlete-safeguarding policies and procedures. This toolkit closely aligns with the consensus statement using the same definitions for harassment and abuse. By building

<sup>254</sup> Margo, Mountjoy, et al., "Harassment and abuse (non-accidental violence) in sport," 1023-1024.

<sup>255</sup> Margo, Mountjoy, et al., "Harassment and abuse (non-accidental violence) in sport," 1024.

<sup>256</sup> Margo, Mountjoy, et al., "Harassment and abuse (non-accidental violence) in sport," 1020.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

on the toolkit, the IOC developed a step-by-step guide that IFs, NOCs and other sport organizations can use to develop policies and a solution-based approach to safeguard athletes.<sup>259</sup> This toolkit should be used to promote an environment that is respectful, equitable, and free from all forms of non-accidental violence to ensure athletes' safety and wellbeing.<sup>260</sup>

### **C. Body Composition Health and Performance in Sport**

The consensus statement titled, *Current status of body composition assessment in sport*, was published in 2012 and explains the difficulty of quantifying body composition.<sup>261</sup> Throughout this article, the authors explore different methods to measure body composition, breaking this down into reference methods, laboratory methods, and field methods. The authors state that there is no universally applicable methodology used for body composition assessment, with each assessment tool having flaws; however, body composition can play a significant role in monitoring athletes' performance and determining their training regimens. The authors state that although there have been concerns regarding the accuracy, repeatability, and utility of multi-component methods, when profiling change in interventions, single methods whose raw data are surrogates for body composition (with the notable exception of the body mass index) remain helpful. The authors analyze reference methods stating that they can be accurate techniques but have limitations due to feasibility, time and financial costs, lack of published normative data, and unnecessary radiation exposure.<sup>262</sup> Examples of reference methods include cadaver dissection, multi-component models and medical imaging (MRI and CT). Laboratory methods are often used to measure athlete body composition; however, there is a discrepancy between accuracy and precision.<sup>263</sup> Laboratory methods may include dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry (DXA), Densitometry, Hydrometry (Body Water), Ultrasound, and Three-Dimensional Photonic Scanning. Lastly, field methods can be used including anthropometry, bioelectrical impedance analysis, and body mass index and mass index.<sup>264</sup> These are the most commonly used methods for monitoring body composition in sport. Although body composition can be seen as an indicator of athletic performance, if an adequate measurement tool is not used and coaches are

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<sup>259</sup> International Olympic Committee. "IOC launches toolkit"

<sup>260</sup>Margo Mountjoy, Kirsty Burrows, and Susan Greinig, "Protection of the athlete," 351.

<sup>261</sup> Timothy R Ackland, et al., "Current status of body composition assessment in sport," *Sports medicine* 42, no. 3 (2012): 227-249.

<sup>262</sup> Timothy R Ackland, et al., "Current status of body composition assessment in sport," 230-232.

<sup>263</sup> Timothy R Ackland, et al., "Current status of body composition assessment in sport," 233-40.

<sup>264</sup> Timothy R Ackland, et al., "Current status of body composition assessment in sport," 240-46.

unaware of how to interpret and use these tools correctly, it can lead athletes to misinterpret the importance of body composition and engage in dangerous weight management practices.

The authors conclude that all the measurement tools listed are flawed, but, regardless of the method used, coaches, athletes and scientists still rely on body composition analysis and with proper understanding they can be an important measurement tool.<sup>265</sup> Body composition can be used to assess the effectiveness of athletes' training regimens or measure athletes' health; however, goals should be individually set by a trained professional and be treated as personal and confidential medical information.<sup>266</sup>

#### **D. Mental Health in Elite Athletes**

In 2019 the *Mental Health in Elite Athletes: International Olympic Committee* consensus statement was published. This consensus statement focused on various mental health symptoms and disorders, including a section on eating disorders. This article aimed to solidify the notion that mental health and physical health are closely connected, impacting one another, and cannot be separated.<sup>267</sup> This paper's eating disorder section discusses the prevalence of developing eating disorders and the risk factors. The authors note that limited research focuses on elite athletes in this area. Still, the studies that have been done have shown that elite athletes are at a significantly greater risk of developing eating disorders.<sup>268</sup> The article then explains the complexities of treatment for eating disorders among elite athletes, as there are confidentiality concerns, difficulties finding effective treatment, stigma and athletes' unwillingness to accept the problem, and the athletes return to play.<sup>269</sup> The conclusion of this section stresses the need for prevention programs, and the need to involve athletes, coaches and sports administrations and utilize interaction programs that encourage multiple modes of communication when developing prevention programs.<sup>270</sup>

#### **E. Diploma and Certificate Programs**

The IOC Medical and Scientific Commission also provides educational programming in the form of a diploma and certificate programs. These programs are developed in partnership with Sportsoracle, in part of fulfilling the Commission's mission of supporting the health,

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<sup>265</sup> Timothy R Ackland, et al., "Current status of body composition assessment in sport," 246.

<sup>266</sup> Timothy R Ackland, et al., "Current status of body composition assessment in sport," 227-249.

<sup>267</sup> Claudia Reardon, et al., "Mental health in elite athletes". 667

<sup>268</sup> Claudia Reardon, et al., "Mental health in elite athletes". 647

<sup>269</sup> Claudia Reardon, et al., "Mental health in elite athletes". 675

<sup>270</sup> Claudia Reardon, et al., "Mental health in elite athletes". 675

wellbeing, and performance of Olympic athletes.<sup>271</sup> These programs offer the opportunity for individuals who work with elite athletes to develop their knowledge and practical skills in order to support their athletes. Diploma and certificate programs include the IOC diploma in sports nutrition, IOC diploma in sports medicine, IOC certificate in drugs in sport, IOC diploma in sports physical therapies, IOC certificate: safeguarding officer in sport, IOC diploma in mental health in elite sport, and IOC certificate in mental health in elite sport.

*ii. International Olympic Committee Educational Tools*

In addition to consensus statements, the IOC also has a series of educational tools. These tools have been developed to educate athletes, coaches, and the public on Olympic sport, how to practice safe sport, and sport development.

One program that the IOC has developed is *Athlete 365*. *Athlete 365* is an online platform that provides athletes advice, tools and services that can assist them in navigating life as an elite athlete, both on and off the field.<sup>272</sup> Although the public can access the *Athlete 365* website, most of the information requires a login and can only be accessed by Olympic-level athletes. The content on the *Athlete 365* platform is broken down into six areas, including voice, integrity, well-being, performance, finance, and career. *Athlete 365* provides advice on topics such as rule 50, rule 40, athlete expression, anti-doping, safe sport and prevention of competition manipulation, career services, accessing mental health support, mental fitness support, and information on COVID-19. Athletes who use *Athlete 365* can access e-learning material, webinars, and media articles, as well as the Olympic games playbook.

Although *Athlete 365* provides a lot of valuable information, they offer limited information on preventing disordered eating, eating disorders, and body image. The platform has a section on safe sport, which includes information on preventing harassment and abuse in sport. As previously discussed, although this is not directly related, disordered eating and harassment and abuse can be closely connected.

Another program the IOC has, although difficult to find, is their page called *education and awareness-raising*.<sup>273</sup> There are links to IOC educational tools on this page, including athlete safeguarding course, Female Athlete Health Tool, sexual harassment and abuse in sport e-

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<sup>271</sup> Sportoracle, "Get ahead of the field," Sportoracle, <https://www.sportsoracle.com/>

<sup>272</sup> International Olympic Committee, "Athlete365: What we do," *Lausanne: IOC*, <https://www.olympic.org/athlete365/what-we-do/>

<sup>273</sup> International Olympic Committee, "Education and Awareness Raising," *Lausanne: IOC*, <https://olympics.com/ioc/safe-sport/education-and-awareness-raising>

learning videos. Upon further examination, the female athlete health tool provides information on eating disorders. After creating a log-in on this site, you can access e-learning modules on topics such as eating disorders, RED-S, psychology, exercise and pregnancy, contraception, and more. The eating disorder module provides information on the difference between disordered eating and eating disorders, the disordered eating continuum scale, psychological and physical symptoms, health and performance consequences, key risk factors, diagnosis, treatment, and prevention. The module also provides ‘check your understanding’ questions to help ensure learners grasp the concepts.

This is an excellent program for both athletes and coaches that allow users to gain a wide range of information on various topics. However, given that this resource is challenging to find, many athletes and coaches may not know it exists, thus impacting the program's usability and effectiveness.

Lastly, The IOC has also produced an educational video series to educate the public on body image dissatisfaction and eating disorders through an educational video series called *Hungry for Gold*. *Hungry for Gold* was developed in preparation for the 2014 Youth Summer Games in Nanjing and posted on the IOC website to promote positive body image among young athletes.<sup>274</sup> These four videos use scenarios based on actual events to teach viewers about healthy exercise and eating habits, the importance of a healthy body image, and preventing RED-S.<sup>275</sup> These videos were intended to help inform athletes, parents, coaches and support staff, and administrators on identifying risk factors but does not address how to address or prevent these health concerns.

The multitude of consensus statements, tool kits and education programs put forward by the IOC shows that throughout the last decade, the IOC has not only been aware of the various negative environments that athletes endure but also the impact disordered eating and eating disorders can have on athletes. The programs outlined are often difficult to access and most focus on bringing awareness to said issues instead of offering more tangible solutions like dedicated prevention or treatment programs or safe, confidential avenues to report abuse. Although it is very beneficial to research these topics and bring awareness, the IOC should also prioritize putting this research into action to ensure that there is a reduced number of athletes struggling

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<sup>274</sup> International Olympic Committee, “Safe sport: healthy body image promoted at the youth Olympic games,” *Lausanne: IOC*, <https://www.olympic.org/news/safe-sport-healthy-body-image-promoted-at-the-youth-olympic-games>

<sup>275</sup> International Olympic Committee, “Healthy body image,” *Lausanne: IOC*, <https://www.olympic.org/hbi>

from these concerns. As we have demonstrated when exploring athletes' rights, current elite sport culture has influenced and, in some cases, encouraged the development of eating disorders and athletes engaging in disordered eating behaviours. Thus, it is vital that a review of Olympic resources, such as the Game Plan, is done to evaluate whether athletes actually have the resources they need to avoid the development of disordered eating behaviours and the development of body dissatisfaction and further provide information on what improvements the Canadian Olympic Committee can make.

### *iii. Canadian Olympic Committee Resources*

#### **A. Game Plan**

To better assist athletes in meeting their needs, the COC has developed Game Plan, which is an athlete resource program. This program offers athletes tools that allow them to focus on their health, education, and career opportunities.<sup>276</sup> Game Plan uses a combination of advisors, who reach out to and work with athletes directly, and tools, and information through their online platform. The Game Plan program helps “to develop mentally stronger athletes who apply what they have learned as leaders in sport for the betterment of themselves and their communities.”<sup>277</sup> Game Plan offers resources in five areas, including career resources, community, education, skill development, and health.

Game Plan does not provide any direct information on disordered eating or body image dissatisfaction in athletes. Still, it does offer various mental health resources such as a chart of the Continuum of Mental Health Indicators and Resources, funding for athletes to talk to a mental health professional, a support hotline, and access to LifeWorks. Game Plan has, however, recognized the need for resources on disordered eating and body image. For example, in a SportsNet interview published in December 2020, Lisa Hoffart, a Game Plan adviser and a Registered Psychologist discussed an increase in Olympic athletes looking for resources for eating disorders and assistance to mitigate these concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>278</sup> In addition, Krista Van Slingerland, the mental health manager for Game Plan, indicated in a *Globe and Mail* article published in December 2021 that educating coaches on how to talk to athletes should be a priority. Van Slingerland also indicated that while Game Plan offers resources to

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<sup>276</sup> Game Plan, “Who We Are,” *COC Game Plan*, <https://www.mygameplan.ca/about/mission-history>

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>278</sup> Sports Net, “Eating Disorders in Canadian Athletes on the Rise amid Pandemic”



assist with eating disorders, they are very limiting due to funds and are only accessible to senior national team athletes.<sup>279</sup>

## **B. Canadian Olympic Committee – Safe Sport and Athlete Voice**

On the COC website, information is provided on safe sport. Here you can find the COC's code to address maltreatment in sport, which states that the code "sets out (the COCs) expectations for conduct and behaviour that is consistent with the highest standards of behaviour upon which the COC's reputation rests."<sup>280</sup> It then explains that this code applies to all activities that the COC is involved in. According to this code, the COC provides contact information for individuals to report any type of maltreatment they experience in relation to COC activities. They also provide information on reporting any maltreatment that involves national sport organizations (NSOs) and offers a fuller description of their policy on whistleblowing.

The COC also has a section on their website to share athletes' stories. In this section, athletes have shared stories of their Olympic successes and the challenges they had to overcome when pursuing their Olympic dreams. For example, in an article posted on the COC website where athletes spoke about their challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this article, Kia Nurse, an Olympic basketball player, discussed the challenges she faced during the COVID-19 pandemic,

*"The abrupt halt to my training was very hard on my mental health. As my offseason began I was eager to get back on the court and in the weight room to improve my game and heal my body. However, health and safety are of the utmost importance. To overcome this, I started to focus on one or two things I could do to get better from home: in-home workouts, outdoor runs, and eating right. I found focusing on small things you can control made a big difference."*<sup>281</sup>

In addition, in the same article, Olympic diver François Imbeau-Dulac stated,

*"I struggled with eating disorders from 2012 to 2015. When we went into lockdown, my relationship with food was still challenging. I was avoiding fatty and high calorie foods and couldn't eat with others. I was eating because I had to, not because I enjoyed it. During the lockdown, I took the time to deconstruct my food perception and eating behaviour. Being away from the pool helped me build a healthier relationship with food and learn to appreciate a meal with my family without any guilt."*<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> Grant Robertson and Rachel Brandy, "Awakening on Eating Disorders among Olympians Prompts Calls for Action,"

<sup>280</sup> Canadian Olympic Committee, "Safe Sport," <https://olympic.ca/canadian-olympic-committee/governance/safe-sport/>

<sup>281</sup> Paula Nichols, "Team Canada Athletes Share Their Mental Health Challenges," Team Canada - Official Olympic Team Website, January 28, 2021, <https://olympic.ca/2021/01/28/team-canada-athletes-share-their-mental-health-challenges/>.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

In other articles, athletes such as multi-sport Olympic athlete Georgia Simmerling, Olympic trampolinist Rosie MacLennan, Olympic Mountain biker Haley Smith, Olympic figure skater Kirsten Moore-Towers, and Olympic freestyle skier India Sherrt, have all spoken out about their struggles with eating disorders and body image concerns in sport. These articles are beneficial as they demonstrate to other athletes that they are not alone and contribute to destigmatizing mental health issues in sport.

However, while the COC provides further information and resources, they still fail to provide sufficient education on recognizing and preventing these disordered eating and body dissatisfaction and how to assist athletes when they present with warning signs. It is challenging to expect NSOs to foster an environment that promotes positive mental health and decreases the likelihood of athletes developing eating disorders if the COC does not have these programs or information in place to assist them with navigating these concerns.

#### V. Summary

This section explored disordered eating and athlete body image throughout Olympic History. Particularly looking at historical influences that impacted female athlete participation in sport comparing the image of women versus men in sport. In this section, we looked at both the ancient Olympics and Modern Olympics and then evaluated the IOCs responsibility and steps in preventing eating disorders and body dissatisfaction. In this section, it became evident that women in sport have been faced with barriers to sport participation since the beginning of the ancient Olympic games. The marginalization of female athletes throughout history created an environment that tends to enhance the development of disordered eating behaviours or body image dissatisfaction.

During the ancient Olympics athletes were memorialized through artwork encompassing an athlete's desired state of soul compared to representing athletes' body in a sexualized manner that we see in today's society. In the ancient Olympics images and artwork of athletes were typically muscular males as females were often excluded from participating in the Olympics and rarely the subject of art.<sup>283</sup> When the modern Olympics was founded by Baron Pierre de Coubertin in 1894, he kept similar ideals of the ancient Olympics in regard to female participation. Coubertin did not believe it was appropriate for females to participate in sport.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Heather Reid, "Athletic beauty in classical Greece: A philosophical view," 290.

<sup>284</sup> Quoted in John Loy (2009) 12.

Once females were permitted to participate in the Olympics they were met with restrictions to what sports were deemed appropriate and what they could wear when participating.<sup>285</sup> The early modern games and ancient games were also similar in that the ideal qualities of women were character traits such as beauty, modesty, obedience and being a good wife and mother, whereas men were strong and powerful.<sup>286,287</sup> Societal standards of women throughout history influenced female participation in the Olympics and were put in a contradictory position of having to conform to western idealized aesthetic standards. This further impacted the sexualization of female athletes throughout the Modern Olympics; thus, impacting female athletes' relationship with their body in sport and in society.

This section next looked at the responsibilities of the IOC demonstrating that throughout the *Olympic Charter* there is an emphasis on ensuring the health and safety of athletes. It was argued that ensuring the health and safety of athletes includes protecting athletes from the development of eating disorder risk factors and body dissatisfaction. The charter emphasizes working with IFs and NOCs to protect athletes against harassment and abuse in sport and supporting the medical needs of athletes. Both of these responsibilities include ensuring that athletes' environment does not foster disordered eating behaviours and that their mental health is taken seriously.

Lastly, this section discussed the steps the IOC has taken to uphold their responsibility to athletes' health and safety in regard to disordered eating and body dissatisfaction. Some steps the IOC has taken have been through the IOC Medical and Scientific Commission, IOC education tools, with addition resources from the COC. The Medical and Scientific commission have taken action by consensus statements on topics such as the female athlete triad, sexual harassment and abuse in sport, Body Composition Health and Performance in Sport, and Mental Health in Elite Athletes. The IOC education tools have included the *Athlete 365* platform. A page on the IOC website called *education and awareness-raising* with resources on safeguarding athletes, and female athlete health. The COC also provides information on Safe Sport.

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<sup>285</sup> John Loy, Fiona McLachlan, and Douglas Booth "Connotations of female movement and meaning."

<sup>286</sup> Angela J. Schneider, "On the definition of 'woman' in the sport context."

<sup>287</sup> Angela J. Schneider, "The ideal Olympic athlete"

## Chapter 4 –Methodology, Methods and Findings

As outlined in the introduction, this study utilized feminist analysis for the context, drawing upon principles of complexity, plurality, ambiguity, connection, recognition, and diversity. The feminist perspective considers gender differentiation to be a dominant discourse among competing discourses and regards gender differentiation as one of the most pervasive discourses across many cultures in terms of its systematic power to discriminate between human beings according to their gender and sexuality”<sup>288289</sup>

### I. Interviews

The empirical part of the study builds from an SSHRC-funded project in partnership with the COC, exploring how Team Canada athletes have coped with barriers due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Qualitative interview data collected during the SSHRC-funded project is used to answer our second research question: *How has COVID-19 impacted Olympic athletes, and in particular, the development of eating disorders behaviours and body image dissatisfaction among these Team Canada Athletes?*

#### *i. Participants*

Participants included ten athletes (seven females and three males) and three coaches (two females and one male). Participants were from winter and summer sports, including rowing, track and field, judo, bobsleigh, artistic swimming, weightlifting, beach volleyball, and kayaking. All athletes and coaches compete/coach at the national level. Participants ranged from 21 to 56 years old and trained/coached on a national team between 1 to 13 years.

These interviews took place at various times in the athlete's training cycle. For example, some took place before competing at the Olympics, and some were post-Olympics. Each interview focused on the perception of resource access, training challenges, gender equity, and impact on mental wellbeing and resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### *ii. Procedure*

The selection criteria for this study included any athlete or coach in Canada who train or coach at the national level and is carded as a Team Canada athlete/coach. To recruit participants

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Judith A Baxter, *Feminist Post-structuralist discourse analysis: a new theoretical and methodological approach?*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Baxter uses a quote to define FPDA from a previous article she wrote (Baxter 2005)

the following steps were taken. First NSOs were contacted via the COC providing them with the information on the study and ask their assistance with distributing the study details to team Canada athletes and coaches. Then, the NSOs that expressed interest were provided with an email script to send to potential participants that included the purpose, involvement, anonymity, confidentiality, and the researcher's contact information. Lastly, interested participants then contacted the researchers to arrange a date, and time to conduct the interview.

This study used a semi-structured interview guide to conduct one-on-one interviews via zoom.<sup>290</sup> This guide contained pre-determined questions (See Appendix 4 for the complete interview guide). The discussions began with introductory questions to establish trust with the participant and understand their current living and training situations and how these may have varied through the last two years in the COVID-19 pandemic. The interview then focused on how the athlete's conditions impacted their experience in training, competitions, and overall physical activity. Lastly, participants were asked questions pertaining to their physical, psychological, cognitive, and social needs, the challenges they experienced, and the barriers they faced. Athletes were asked to reflect on how their needs may have changed throughout COVID transition periods, before the COVID-19 pandemic, and during athletes return to sport following the pandemic restrictions lifting. Athletes were also asked specific questions pertaining to their thoughts, feelings, emotions, and behaviours towards their body and eating behaviours. Probes were used as necessary to facilitate a more detailed and rich response. In the transcriptions used in this paper, terms that could be used to identify the athlete and their sport have been redacted for anonymity.

The first step in analyzing this data was to compile the participant's stories. The data analysis guidelines outlined by Braun and Clarke were consulted (See Table 1).<sup>291</sup> The analyses focused on interpreting the participants' experiences and identifying common theme(s). The data collected has been read and re-read. The raw data was coded by a priori themes based on the interview questions (i.e., living arrangements, physical activity, challenges, future intentions). Subthemes were further identified within the higher-order themes, and potential patterns were noted. Themes were analyzed, re-defined and re-evaluated to ensure internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. As recommended by MacQueen et al., the transcripts were independently

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<sup>290</sup> Angela J. Schneider, "On the definition of 'woman' in the sport context,"

<sup>291</sup> Virginia Braun, and Victoria Clarke, "Using thematic analysis in psychology," *Qualitative research in psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77-101.

read, and a preliminary coding framework was established. A separate researcher read and independently coded 5 out of the 13 interviews.<sup>292</sup> The coding frameworks were compared and contracted to establish and resolve any discrepancies.

*Table 1 Phases of Thematic Analysis*

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

## II. Web Content

In addition to participant interviews a web content analysis was conducted. The content analysis took place in three stages, first examining the resources available on the COC Game Plan website. After exploring the content available on the Game Plan website, a further web content analysis was conducted, looking at each Olympic sanctioned NSOs and MSOs to determine the availability of body image, disordered eating, and safe sport content on their websites. This content analysis helps us answer the next two research questions, *Do Team Canada athletes currently have access to the resources they need to enhance their wellbeing, in particular, during a pandemic like COVID-19? And, What is the status and utilization of current prevention programs that athletes, coaches, and support personnel can access to mitigate the risk of developing eating disorders and encourage a positive body image for Team Canada Athletes?*

*i. Game Plan*

The Game Plan content analysis examines the type of resources, the language used, the ease of finding resources, the usefulness of resources, and whether Game Plan adequately meets the needs of athletes. Game Plan provided the research team with a log in so that we were able to

<sup>292</sup> Kelly Bartholow, Bobby Milstein, M. Kathleen, E. McLellan-Lemal, and K. M. MacQueen. "Team-based codebook development: Structure, process, and agreement." *Handbook for team-based qualitative research*. Lanham, MD: Rowman AltaMira (2008): 119-35.

view all information available to athletes. To analyze data, a keyword search was conducted first to find relevant information, followed by a thorough examination of the website for any information that may have been missed, and coded based on the content found on each webpage.<sup>293</sup> The keyword search looked for the following terms: disordered eating, eating disorders, body image, body dissatisfaction, RED-S, nutrition, and safe sport. The information gathered was then re-examined to determine how many times each key theme appears throughout the Game Plan site. The first review of the Game Plan website was completed in November 2021. Following the initial analysis, the researchers met with Cara Button, the senior manager at Game Plan for an interim review. During this meeting, Cara spoke about other resources Game Plan has outside of its website and provided the researchers with an example of Game Plans' monthly newsletter. The Game Plan website was then analyzed a second time in May 2022. Through this process, all data gathered was examined and then cross-analyzed to identify how closely the available resources align with the needs that athletes identified.

#### *ii. National Sport Organizations*

Following the analysis of Game Plan, the second step in gaining a holistic view of the resources currently offered to Canadian athletes focused on information offered by NSOs on body dissatisfaction and disordered eating risk behaviours. The sampling frame used to determine which NSOs to examine was based on the COCs website, indicating which NSOs are Olympic sanctioned.<sup>294</sup> This study limited its analysis only to NSOs that are Olympic sanctioned as the participant focus of this research is Olympic carded athletes. Fifty Olympic sanctioned NSOs were examined in this study.<sup>295</sup> The first step in completing the data collection and coding was a keyword search looking for the following teams: disordered eating, eating disorders, body image, body dissatisfaction, RED-S, nutrition, and safe sport. Following the keyword search, a thorough review of all aspects of the NSOs website was done, looking for any information relating to disordered eating, eating disorders and body image.

#### *iii. Multi-sport Organizations:*

After the analysis of NSOs, multi-sport and non-profit organizations that provide eating disorder and body image resources in Canada were examined to understand better what resources

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<sup>293</sup> Rebecca Hayes-Smith, and Justin Hayes-Smith, "A website content analysis of women's resources and sexual assault literature on college campuses," *Critical criminology* 17, no. 2 (2009): 109-123.

<sup>294</sup> Canadian Olympic Committee, "Sports," <https://olympic.ca/sports/>

<sup>295</sup> See Appendix 2 the full list of Canadian Olympic Sanctioned NSOs

are available to athletes outside their sport organizations. These organizations were found through a Google search. During this analysis, sixteen sport organizations' service offerings were reviewed. Similarly, to the analysis of NSOs, the first step of analyzing MSOs is completing the data collection and coding was a keyword search looking for the following terms: disordered eating, eating disorders, body image, body dissatisfaction, RED-S, nutrition, and safe sport. Following the keyword search, a thorough review of all aspects of the organization's website was done, looking for any information relating to disordered eating, eating disorders and body image in relation to athletes.

### III. Interview Findings

As this study was an outgrowth of a SSHRC-funded project that explored how COVID-19 restrictions have impacted Team Canada athlete's physical health, training and competition, and their physical, psychological, cognitive, and social needs, I will first provide some background information on the findings from the greater study that provides context for this research project. I will then go into further detail on the specific findings that directly relate to eating behaviours and athlete body image.

#### *i. Context*

Various themes from the wider context of the SSHRC-funded project were identified that may have indirectly impacted the athletes' relationship with food or their body image. In this sub-section themes identified from the wider context of the SSHRC-funded project will be discussed. Some of these themes includes, motivation, social impact, isolation / living away from home, financial burden, coping strategies and coping strategies.

In the wider context of the study various athlete spoke about their motivation during the pandemic to continue training and having a sense of hopelessness, whereas others felt a decrease of pressure which helped them to stay motivated. One coach also mentioned providing athletes with the freedom to fail, which helped to take the pressure off of the athletes. Some athletes also explained that they struggled with being socially isolated and not being able to see their families. This impacted some athletes' training as they found it difficult not being able to train with their team and having to isolate themselves from team members. Another barrier athletes faced was that of financial burden. Some athletes identified that they needed to purchase their own equipment to train at home and no longer had an opportunity for extra funding through competition. Other athletes felt that although they did not have the extra funding they were used



to but also were spending less so it did not put them at financial risk. These factors can all be seen as an additional stressor. At the national level with these athletes in an Olympic year, these additional stressors such as motivation to train and financial security can have a large impact on the ability to prepare physically for the game. This could potentially lead to athletes changing their eating behaviours in response to changes in their training routine.

## *ii. Physiological Impact Themes*

The physiological impact of how an athlete is able to train and compete both prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and during provides context to the environmental conditions that athletes endured that may have impacted the way they view their body or may have impacted their rationale for changing their eating behaviours. Athletes not being able to train in the way they are used to by not having access to the proper facilities or equipment can change the way they are training and cause fluctuations in their ability to perform in their sport. This can then have a psychological impact on the athletes and can influence the way an athlete views their body and eating behaviours. In addition, the added psychological pressure of not competing and not knowing where an athlete stands compared to their competition can cause doubts in their own ability. This could have an impact on an athletes body image or the way they engage with food.

### **A. Access to Equipment**

When the pandemic first began and Canada was in a nationwide lockdown, training facilities closed, and athletes struggled to get the equipment they needed to train for their sport. Athletes needed specialized equipment for their sport that they could not access. For example, many athletes in water-based sports did not have access to a body of water or pool to train in. However, some athletes were more successful than others in obtaining training equipment, such as weights. This was largely based on what sport the athlete was in and where the athlete was located during the lockdown. For example, participant 13 described being provided with equipment to use at home by the national team during the first four months of the COVID-19 pandemic. They further indicated that due to their high level of training and was able to have priority in choosing which equipment they would like to take home. Although it was very beneficial to be provided with this equipment, the athlete still felt that their training was limited

without the assistance of their trainers and coaches. In addition, Participant 2 mentioned that they was able to borrow some equipment from their sport governing body, stating:

*"[The Sport Governing Body] provided us with the equipment that they could umm, to best train from home, but that was definitely an adjustment, and I would say it got a little bit user as it went".*

Participant 5 also stated that they felt lucky to be able to borrow weights from their training center. The athlete felt there were more options to stay physically active due to where they was location geographically and felt they had all of the equipment needed to train. Participant 5 stated:

*"And because the island had such a low [COVID] rate, we felt like we could – one, train better here because of all the outdoor options. So, we were really like, I felt like, we were extremely lucky to be on Vancouver Island in those moments because we have so many places to trail run, to hike, to road bike. We need so many options and then because our weights, is like here we were able to [train]. They said OK, do people need weights? So, I could go, and they set up a time I could pick up a bar and all my weights and they gave us a program. They'd be like if these are the weights that you picked up, here are some things that you can do. So, I had to be like creative and make my own weird little bench press set up, but I had access to equipment like I could go pick up a \_\_\_\_\_. I could go pick up an indoor bike if I needed to. So, I felt like I was able to train with all the equipment I needed. Um, so I think I had access to equipment. So, I had access to spin bikes, \_\_\_ and I could pick up weight equipment."*

In addition, Participant 11 was able to borrow equipment to strength train at home from the fitness club they trained from.

However, some athletes were not as lucky and struggled to find the equipment they needed. Coaches and athletes reached out to schools, recreation facilities and training centers to try and borrow equipment. Participant 6, a coach, noticed a school that had hurdles locked up, and reached out to the track coach at that school and get a key to train on their track. Some athletes, such as Participants 7, 9, and 10, were able to acquire their own basic strength training equipment to train at home and develop a home gym. Participant 7 stated:

*"I did have to get equipment this past summer. Thankfully a company stepped in, and I was able to get my own fitness equipment. Umm, but still like again, if the pandemic didn't happen, I wouldn't have had to get my own gym equipment. I don't think that would have been a thought on my mind."*

In comparison, Participants 9 and 10 relied on their parents' basic strength equipment. However, Participant 10 competes in a water-based sport and indicated that both the athlete and other team members felt an increased chance of injury having to train on land with an increased impact on their joints. Participant 10 explained the difficulties of training out of the water. This athlete explained how they did not have access to an Olympic pool for four months and that it was nearly impossible to transfer their [skills] from the pool to on land. It also made it more difficult that the athlete did not have the typical physical cues they were used to and could not train with the team. As the athlete could no longer do in-pool cardio exercises, they opted for long distance running, sometimes running the equivalent of two marathons a week. Participant 1 had similar concerns stating:

*“It was pretty difficult too just because we normally are training many hours every day on the water, and the physiological benefit of that is kind of hard to match completely. So... I would say that all of us decreased slightly, or at least had a different level of physiological fitness, during the pandemic until we were back together, as a team training....”*

## **B. Access to Training Facilities**

How athletes trained during the pandemic, was largely influenced by the stage of the pandemic and the lockdown regulations. This meant that athletes and coaches had to overcome different barriers based on whether there was a provincial lockdown or if facilities were open. The restrictions that the training facilities were imposing impacted the athletes' ability to train.

At the beginning of the pandemic, training facilities across Canada were shut down, having a negative impact on athletes. Athletes had to find new ways to train away from their typical training environment. Many sports held online training through Zoom, with some athletes identifying that they found it helped them create a training schedule. Participant 2 said

*“We did actually, and I found that quite helpful. It sounds silly I got uhh just say, like, well, let's do a workout together on Zoom like it sounded really weird but, umm, some of the sessions that we had we would offer to the team like ‘Hey I’m gonna jump on Zoom at this time. Like feel free to join if you want to or not.’ And we always had at least a couple teammates that joined in, and it was nice even just to look at the screen and just know somebody else was doing like... Accountability piece was there, you know. Just knowing everyone else was kind of going through it as well and being able to laugh and joke before and after sessions. I found very helpful. I was. I always jumped on those opportunities when they arose. So yeah, we did do sort of virtual workouts, which was a first for me. For sure.”*

From the coach perspective, Participant 4 explained how Zoom sessions were important to developing the group dynamic:

*“We managed to get the group on zoom a number of times. We engaged our physiotherapist in core exercise work, workouts twice a week where we had the whole group on a zoom call. So that was, you know, at the early stages of bringing the group together and the weekly calls were actually quite effective. We engaged our sports psychologist, umm where we we did activities, um so that the group could get to know each other. You know, even if it was rather well, a little superficial or not, really getting to meet each other, it was still connecting, and I think that was super important in the early stages to building the team.”*

Some athletes and coaches had to find workaround training facilities during lockdowns and evade the restrictions imposed their province. Participant 6 explained that in order to coach their athletes properly, the coach had to find a facility to train from. Although the team was beginning to train as often as they did before the pandemic, their city kept going in and out of lockdowns making it challenging to find somewhere to consistently train. The coach was able to find an outdoor track at a high school during the warm months, but the coach stated that they felt guilty training:

*“I mean, honestly, you felt guilty, [...] There are so many people that walk their dogs like around, like there's so many like neighborhood people it's like you're there training and you think that the neighborhood is going to complain about it.”*

Other Participants made similar comments such as Participant 13 explaining that because they train in public, they were concerned about the public’s opinion.

When it became cold, Participant 6 had to find an indoor facility for the athletes to train:

*“We put together a facility to train indoors last year, that was not good, not ideal. But it made it... made it was workable enough ... we're training on \_\_\_\_\_ that we got from the [Sport Governing Body] that were laid on the concrete floor parks and arena. There was no heat in this, like in this arena. We'd come in... we'd be, you know, we have our mitts and hats on, we set up a small attempt and put heat... A heater inside that tent. So in between reps, the athletes could go in there, just maybe get warm a little bit. We had a treadmill that was in that tent for part of the warmup. But I do think it helped with resiliency.”*

Participant 6 explained the difficulties that the athletes had training in this temporary facility and the increased chance of injury for having to train under adverse conditions. In addition, some athletes and coaches found “underground” training facilities to train from when they could not gain access to their typical training facility. Participant 7 explained their experience:

*“We basically had to train at an underground gym, like we drove for half an hour to get to this gym that was being newly built and that's where we trained out of.”*

Participant 8 had explained a similar situation:

*“So initially, just prior to the lockdowns, we had an agreement with [A training facility], Which was great! Gave us access to a gym 'cause the athletes came to [city] to train and then as we started to transition into the lockdowns, it can very apparent we needed again access to weights with unfettered access, So how do we make that work? Well, start reaching out to friends that may or may not have a garage gym, and we found somebody short term on a farm situation which was good and then overtime that became problematic 'cause the time kept changing when we were allowed to come.”*

Participant 11 also explained the frustration of having to train out of their coach’s garage on uneven platforms. This was problematic due to the importance of even and stable platforms for safety concerns.

### **C. Negative Training Impacts**

Various athletes explained how they were negatively impacted while training during COVID-19. Surprisingly, many of the comments made were based around when athletes returned to training in person after the initial lockdowns. Participant 2 explained:

*“Once we were able to come back into the training environment but were still in the depths of this really big pandemic, that was, that was difficult. Also, because I've been [competing in my sport] for umm like over 10 years now at this level and I've never, like it was just a lifestyle that I just was completely not used to it all. Even something as little as being able to shower at the [training facility] after [training] before you go home was different. Umm, How you handle your post row nutrition 'cause now you can't eat anywhere, you have to come home and make yourself look just little details like that felt like a big learning curve for me, and umm first I didn't like it at all obviously I don't know... Change can sometimes be met with a bit of adversity, umm but now that it's almost a year gone by is kind of living this way. It feels a bit more routine, a bit more familiar.”*

Participant 7 also explained that once facilities opened up, they now had to adhere to time limits in the training centers:

*“You have to sanitize everything, and then it became like the gym was actually very frustrating because the way WinSport sets it up is they have like a.. I call it the “fancy side”. But it's like the carded athlete side and then like the regular gym, and if you wanted to get to the carded athlete side, it's like they're like, ‘yeah, you can, but it's only an hour time slot’ and I'm like, ‘OK, but my my workouts take a take three hours long, like what do you mean’, so I think I would just go to the regular gym and that ended up being fine.”*

In addition, Participant 4 described how they ended up having to coach double the hours during the pandemic due to restrictions in the training areas:

*“So, the numbers restrictions the group needed to be split in two. So, we were only allowed, umm I believe it was eight people in the gym at a time or maybe 9, depending on how many support staff were in there. So, uhh the group were split in two and my days were also lengthened because you know instead of just 70 minutes session in a gym it was 140.”*

#### **D. Positive Training Impacts**

Although there was a lot of adversity to overcome when training during the pandemic many athletes were able to stay optimistic and find positives in the situation. Various athletes described enjoying that they could make their own schedule and learning other ways to train and stay active. Participant 5 explained how they would bike with their teammates to stay physically active:

*“All of us benefited from enjoying movement in a different way. We all started road biking and enjoying that and spending time together doing that. You can also like talk with your road bike, so it was, like, fun and it was like you could explore. We had never road biked on [the] Island so we could go do this completely new thing and see new roads and that was really good.”*

In addition, Participant 2 felt that finding new ways to train helped to better understand how to stay active once after retiring from sport:

*“I think I'm going to retire after the games this summer and it got me thinking a lot about what my routines after sport will be like as far as fitness and stuff, I think I... I mean I enjoy working out. I always want to stay fit but outside this is the kind of stuff that I would want at home and that little home gym. I started to think more about like things that umm I will do after sport to keep fit so that was kind of fun too.”*

This demonstrated the parallels that can be made between the COVID-19 pandemic and other transition phases of an athlete's career.

#### **E. Canceled Competitions**

During the pandemic, many competitions were cancelled. Almost all participants interviewed touched on the impact of competitions being cancelled or modified. For some athletes, the number of competitions that were supposed to happen was reduced to half, whereas for others they also had the option to compete in virtual competitions. Many athletes also spoke about the impact that cancelled qualifying competitions had on them leading up to the Olympics.

Participant 2 spoke about how cancelled competitions leading up to the Olympics impacted her preparation for the Olympics:

*"We haven't raced in two years, so we have no idea where we stand in the field. In a normal Olympic year, you would have raced the year before and you would have also had a series of World Cups, another racing opportunity to at least gauge your speed when going into these games. Completely blind and umm that does change a little bit of my preparation for the race, in that instead of being able to say all we know, GB has a fast start and we know that this is the strongest part of our race. And that kind of thing, that's an unknown."*

This impacted the athlete's confidence leading up to the Olympics. Another participant shared their frustration about the qualifying system for their sport. Participant 12 stated that the sport federation changed its qualifying system during the pandemic. This caused Canada to lose their spot at the Olympics, which was very disheartening.

Another athlete spoke about the impact of Team Canada pulling out of a world cup leading up to the Olympics. Participant 7 stated:

*"So, Team Canada forgave, like we gave up competing the first half of World Cup. So, we didn't join World Cups until [month] and obviously that impacts like your world ranking [and] that impacts the future year. That can impact like I would say like, like, your chance at prize money - even though I don't think there was prize money last year because of the pandemic. That obviously impacts your ability to like to go up to sponsors. 'Cause, now instead of saying I'm top ten in the world or I'm top eight, it's like yeah, I'm top 18 because we only we missed like five competitions, four or five competitions, whatever it was. Umm, so that was tough."*

Participant 7 further mentioned that the team had to miss a World Cup competition in December when the team got COVID and how this was very stressful for the men's team:

*"COVID ran through almost the whole team in December when we were all in [Country]. So, we missed the [Country] World Cup, and that of course impacted... I know some of the males were impacted by that and that because they're placing and trying to qualify for the Olympics, all of a sudden, they were extremely stressed 'cause they needed the points. And all of a sudden, they didn't, they didn't have that competition. So now they were stressed 'cause they're like, we might not make the Olympics."*

This demonstrated the various ways that COVID-19 impacted athletes training and competing during an Olympic qualifying year and the barriers they had to overcome. In addition, by competitions being cancelled, we saw that this increased athletes' uncertainty about their skill. If an athlete is unsure of where they stand in the playing field, this could lead an athlete to try to

overcompensate by over exercising of changing their eating behaviours. This can be especially true for an elite athlete trying to qualify for the Olympics

## *ii. Psychological Impact Themes*

### **A. Uncertainty / Unease**

The theme of uncertainty and unease was also a relevant theme in the context of athletes' body image and eating behaviours. For example, Participant 7 spoke about being placed in the quarantine building at the Olympic games and found it very stressful not knowing how long they would be there, the protocols, and the uncertainty of what she would be fed:

*“The workers at the quarantine building were very kind, not super great English, but like they were very kind. They were very patient. Umm, and she was doing my intake on the clipboard outside, and she’s like, ‘Oh we’ll do the intake outside’. I was like, ‘OK’, she’s like ‘cause once we go inside, you’re not seeing... you’re not coming out’... And I was like, what? She’s like, yeah, like, so enjoy the sun while you can. And I was like, OK... And umm, so she’s doing the intake and I get to my room and umm, then the doctor like... then I’m calling people trying to figure out and I’m talking to the the COC doctor, and he’s like, I was like, how long am I gonna be in here? ‘cause I’m like, I gotta train. I’ve been training for this for three years. Like I put in so much work and sacrifice, like financial sacrifice, emotional like family. I’m like, how long am I going to be in here? ‘cause, this could, like, wreck my training. And also like I’m in a weight-based sport and suddenly I’m being handed food three times a day and I’m like, I don’t know what I’m going to be handed. Like, I need to be very careful with what I eat. I am usually very careful with what I eat. I can’t just get handed food. This is extremely stressful. And so, talking to the doctor and he’s like, ‘well, I had one person stay in there for about four nights. I’ve had another person for seven. And I had another person for 12.’”*

This put the athlete in an incredibly difficult situation considering all the work they put in to get to the Olympic Games. Being in a weight-based sport was an additional stressor for this athlete as they felt like they needed to have more control over their food in order to maintain their goal weight for competition. Many athletes also struggled with the uncertainty leading up to the games. Some athletes found comfort in knowing that athletes everywhere were going through similar struggles. Participant 10 explained this feeling and described that knowing that all athletes, from all sports, were in the same situation really helped her cope with the pandemic.



## B. Change in Eating Behaviours

As athletes' training schedules changed, so did their eating behaviours. Some athletes eating behaviours were negatively affected, whereas other athletes' behaviours changed but it did not have a negative psychological effect on the athlete.

Participant 1 went into detail about their eating behaviours during the pandemic. The athlete identified that they also had infectious mononucleosis (mono) at the beginning of the pandemic which caused them to lose weight. When the athlete was feeling better they were able to use their time during the pandemic as an opportunity to put on weight to assist their performance:

*“Uhh again, I, I, mine was a bit of a unique experience because of mono. So that meant I lost a lot of weight and then I wasn't training. So, I actually took that opportunity when I was better to increase my caloric intake so I could put on weight. When I returned to [my sport], I was a lot heavier, which was helpful because I previously as an athlete really struggled with my weight and keeping in on so that was beneficial to me in the long run.”*

Participant 5 spoke about feeling like they gained weight during the pandemic, but stopped stepping on the scale so was unsure they gained:

*“Yeah, for me, I think I gained a bit of weight, but then again, I think I'm lucky, like I'm in a weight class sport, but I'm naturally a lighter weight. So, for me I like usually, like, I never get any heavier than like 59 kilos. Like I'm a natural lightweight. So, I think I actually stopped stepping on the... like usually, like because I sit around, I didn't step on the scale, I didn't feel I need to because I know... Also, I never really gained that much weight.”*

Participant 5 further mentioned that they remained confident in their athletic ability as they knew they were following their training program.

Participant 3 also identified gaining weight during the pandemic and explained how this impacted their body image:

*“Yeah, I was definitely unhappy with like how my body looked and stuff, but the nutritionist kept being like It's not bad. You don't... like other people on the team are like cutting fat to like lose weight and stuff and she was like, oh no this is not bad like you're fine, you're fine. But normally I'm one of the lighter \_\_\_\_ 'cause I'm not as strong. So, I'm like well I'm always light, so that it's easy to move down the racecourse, like why am I 10 pounds heavier than normal, like I should be like normally during racing season 15 Kilos lighter kind of stuff. But now, she wasn't concerned about it, it was just kind of like something I dealt with. I was just like, uhh”*

Participant 2 had similar feeling about their body image during the pandemic and paying a bit more attention than normal :

*“Body image wise... Umm I think I definitely paid attention to that, I didn’t... I noticed that I was losing a lot of my muscle mass because we weren’t in the gym as much as we were before. Umm Now it’s just like trying to be body conscious. Umm I do suffer from just like self-esteem issues about my body looks like umm or I’m chubby here or there or whatever. So, I remember being quite aware of like, ‘Ok I don’t wanna like gain a ton of weight through this pandemic’ and that kind of stuff. So, I.... probably paid attention to it a little bit more than I normally do, only because I was just hyper aware that I wasn’t training as much as I normally do.”*

During preparations for the Games, Participant 7 was told they would have to train as an alternative for a different position given that there was a COVID outbreak within the team and they were one of the few athletes who did not get COVID. Participant 7 explained:

*“I was one of the few people that didn’t get COVID during December. Umm, and the stress levels just increased immensely and, all of a sudden, I was put in a position... Again, this is a bit of a side story, but... Umm, the [position1] that... the [position 1] and the [position 2] who also didn’t test positive, I was now their spare. And as a spear you have to prep as if you might be getting into the [position], and Unfortunately, I had to cut more weight than I should have... Like I should not have cut that much weight and I had to. But again, that’s a different story. But if COVID didn’t run through the team, I wouldn’t have been in that situation. I would have been racing with my [position 1] instead of cutting more weight to be a spare.”*

As previously mentioned, when speaking about athletes’ uncertainty and unease surrounding the games, Participant 7 ended up having to quarantine in the COVID building upon arrival at the Games. They emphasised how stressful it was to be handed food, not knowing what they would give the athlete due to being in a weight-based sport:

*“And also like I’m in a weight-based sport and suddenly I’m being handed food three times a day and I’m like, I don’t know what I’m going to be handed. Like, I need to be very careful with what I eat. I am usually very careful with what I eat. I can’t just get handed food. This is extremely stressful.”*

Participant 7 further showed us photos of the food they had in the quarantine building explaining that it was pretty good. It wasn’t until the athlete was moved to a different isolation building<sup>296</sup> that they really struggled with the food being providing. Participant 7 further stated:

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<sup>296</sup> The was a private room in the village where the athlete was allowed to leave the room for training only.

*“Yeah, the final straw for me, I guess was, The COC people did their best in trying to give me food, but it was like just I had never been in the cafeteria, so I didn’t know what to ask for. And again, being in a weight-based sport and being handed food is very stressful. ‘cause I’m being handed food, I’m being handed boiled chicken with no sauce, ‘cause I’m like hey, I need to eat really healthy and I’m like, I can’t even eat this. Like, this is horrible, I’m gagging on this. I can’t eat this, so it’s kind of the final straw. Yeah, that was extremely stressful. Thankfully, the COC did bring me, like protein shakes and some other, like healthier snacks kind of thing that I could like, protein bars and stuff like that. But I lost a lot of weight while I was in quarantine ‘cause, you’re drinking like protein shakes, eating the rice, and that’s about it. [...] Umm, but yeah, it was extremely stressful because like I said, like, umm, When you already have to be so careful, ‘cause you’re on, you’re on the “larger side” as a [sport] athlete. Again, different rant for a different day, and so you have to be careful with what you’re eating, and so you’re a weight cutting athlete. It’s extremely stressful to be handed food ‘cause you’re like, am I actually going to be able to eat this like boiled chicken? Like I’m not going to eat boiled chicken, but it’s like, I know I need to get my protein and get certain amount of carbs and stuff. So extremely stressful, I think I like a lot of crying happened the first couple days of quarantine.”*

Two coaches also described their experiences catering to their athletes change in eating behaviours. Participant 4 explained that as a coach, they wanted to ensure athletes nutrition was based on performance not aesthetic. The coach also indicated that some athletes struggled with their nutritional intake given that they were not in a structured environment:

*“I know a couple athletes struggled when they were not in a structured environment with, umm, with their nutritional intake. So, we did utilize our nutritionists on board and umm, and they were engaged quite a lot. So, you know, it’s a performance factor with weight, not an aesthetic factor, and that’s what I had always said to both nutritionists and athletes is like I... I don’t... for me it’s not important, It’s the performance side. So, you need to be the best you you can be in, however that is, umm you know, as long as it’s done with the help of a nutritionist and understanding, you know what the impact of being too light or too heavy does to your performance. Umm... Yeah, I think you know a couple probably did struggle. Umm well, they were not in the training environment just because of the structure. And you know sometimes you eat out of frustration or because it’s a social thing to do with your family as well.”*

Participant 8 went into more detail about two athletes that they coached that were living together, one who had to bulk and the other who had to cut weight:

*“[Athlete 1], unfortunately was always in a position where she was forced to be extremely lean, inappropriately. And we voiced our concerns, and they were just simply ignored. So that was just hard. \_\_Athlete 2 \_\_ had to eat a lot and just wouldn’t do it, ‘I’m full, I’m full’, sorry I don’t care man you gotta pull an extra 5 kilos that’s what the coaches wanted you to do, that’s not me, that’s, that’s your*

*job. And then [Athlete 1] had to not eat. So [Athlete 2] was eating like kraft dinner, smells great, and [Athlete 1] had to force herself to have her dry chicken, that sucks! That sucks almost, I think it's worse on the person that's trying to not eat, Then the person is trying to eat. I would rather be sick of eating food than constantly craving to eat something more and more delicious. And then so yeah, self image for sure becomes an issue like [Athlete 1] struggled. Oh my gosh, she struggled. She just constantly checking her weight, which was a necessity. But the same time, every piece of food, that went in her mouth was now a... 'Was that a mistake? Are we going to be overweight now? Are we going to be...', you know..."*

The coach further explained their frustration with trying to ensure the athletes were accountable and disappointed to meet their goals. Further stating that most athletes must have struggled with eating in their own regard:

*"Both of them, lacked discipline to maintain the diet. And that's the thing where how do I teach you that? [...] And all the time it was like you shouldn't be eating that right now, what should you eating? You have your list, Do that. And then the other one- Why didn't you finish your meal? Like a dad. I won't do this ever again like that. I can't. Yeah. The anger that it caused in me was sometimes it was like... Why did you pick me as your coach, if you're going to cut corners all the time, why? Why do that? So. So to your point, absolutely every athlete must have struggled with an eating thing. There's those that 'cause. We're cooped up, they eat 'cause, You're bored or feeling sad or whatever? That is a problem, no doubt."*

All participants, athletes and coaches, were asked if they have ever heard of any programs that could assist with navigating weight pressures or disordered eating behaviours: Specifically mentioning the Body Sense program available through Canada Center for Ethics in Sport (CCES). All participants indicated that they did not know of any resources focused on athlete body image or disordered eating behaviours/eating disorders. This indicating a need for resources on this topic for both athletes and coaches. However, Participant 8 indicated their frustration with unnecessarily asking athletes to cut weight and indicated that something needs to be done by the sport federation to monitor this:

*"There has to be more severe consequences to the governing bodies if they're not allowing the athletes to be at healthy body percentages, body fat percentage... If that that's something that, if that can be fixed, then it doesn't matter. You could have 1000 different body type programs, meaningless at that point it's like you're fighting against the mental health of the athlete versus the immovable object, which becomes whatever coaches decided that... Yep, I know that you are... Goodness look at [Athlete 1] at her prime, she was 80 kilos likely 12% body fat."*

*But because you are heavier, you must find more weight to lose, and she was probably their best [position] on the team.”*

The coach further stated:

*“If something comes up that needs to be changed for you because of some legitimate reason, then let it be changed. But in a weight driven sport like [sport], how are we having these discussions when one person is forced to be starved and the other person is clearly eating too much, but because they weigh... You know, per per foot less than the other person. Yes, the other person is punished and like they’re the ones that are going to help you win. That’s, that’s, something where you don’t have that as a fixed rule? Now, it’s known who has a better connection with the administration [...] It’s not mentally healthy, or physically healthy. We can only make it so good, but I think it has to be very clear restrictions when it comes to what the target body weight is, why it is, what is an intolerable composition, what is its acceptable range of a composition and I think that will then help you filter athletes to be in their own groups of ‘I’m trying to gain’ and ‘I’m trying to lose.’”*

By the head coach making these athletes have to gain weight or lose weight, this could be seen as a safe sport concern. It is important to ensure the safety of athletes when training and food intake is a vital part of training for a sport. Thus, it is important that athletes are not unnecessarily being told they must cut weight. It is also important to ensure that these athletes have the support they need when making adjustments like this to their diet whether that be a social network, sport psychologist, nutritionist, or coach.

### *iii. Coping Strategies / Athlete Resources Themes*

In this section we will look at both the coping strategies athletes used that they found themselves, and resources that were made available to athletes through their sport organization.

#### **A. Utilizing Sport Psychologist and Nutritionist**

Some athletes were able to access a sport psychologist or nutritionist through their organization, whereas other athletes looked outside of their sport organization for this assistance. Participant 9 explained how their team sport psychologist would have meetings with the team. During these meetings, they spent a lot of time talking about athletes’ social media use, as the use of social media seemed to be taking a lot of energy. Participant 2 explained how their team sport psychologist helped a lot by developing ‘challenges’ to keep the athletes engaged:

*“I reached out to our sport, psych, who was still available, um, virtually and she actually had us doing sort of little challenges once a week, umm to keep everybody just engaged and working together. I thought that was really, really helpful. Umm, yeah let’s say that was probably what helped me the most.”*

In addition, Participant 1 found working with the sport psych to be very helpful and felt privileged by the resources available, as not all teams have this resource:

*“I think realistically we're pretty privileged sport and that we do have a lot of resources available to us and we do have very great staff that are better on it. Umm... In providing those resources to us, such as we have a great sport psych. So, I found that that was incredibly helpful for me, and I personally spoke with our sport psych weekly and that really helped me get through the challenges that I was facing.”*

Various athletes also utilized their teams sport nutritionist when it came to any questions about their nutritional intake. Participants 2 and 3 mentioned that if they had any questions about their nutrition, they would speak to the team's sport nutritionist. Participants 4 and 6, also indicated that they would direct the athletes they coached toward the nutritionist if they had any questions.

However, some athletes felt that the resources available could have been better. For example, one athlete explained how it would have been beneficial to be able to access a general psychologist instead of a sport psychologist. Participant 5 described their frustrations stating:

*“A big area for improvement with the way the setup is with our mental health services, is we have like one sports psych, right? like we have one sport psych like with [our sport organization]. Like in the past like I worked at... so when I was struggling I was working with the sport psych and then I felt like she wasn't, like I honesty, to be quite frank, I don't know how she had a degree like I don't know how she could have not seen that I was clearly developing like severe anxiety like all the signs were there, but so I stopped seeing her and started working with someone else. But like I had to pay for that to work with that other person, because they weren't part of CSI and the way it worked was like if you weren't using someone who is listed as [sport organization] Sport Psych like that wasn't covered, so I would have like insurance with my Great West Life, but it was only like \$500, so I was paying before the pandemic.. I was like paying out of pocket to like to see someone else, like a general psychologist, not a sport psych. So, I felt like that was one area that like needs to be improved, like pandemic or not I felt like I was like... I'd just because this person isn't working for me doesn't mean that I should bend like... I feel like if you go through a ... like see if I'm using the [sport organization] provided one and that is just not a good fit because sometimes that happens, right? That's not a good thing. You want to see someone else. They should either be able to provide you another sports psych within The Canadian Sport Institute or they should cover you seeing someone else.”*

In addition, Participant 7 explained what they heard about a sport nutritionist that a teammate used through Game Plan and ultimately opted to pay out of pocket for a nutritionist:

*“Game Plan does have access to like, a Sport Nutritionist. But it's only four hours a year and I've never used it, but one of my teammates did and she's a bulking athlete in [sport] and they basically just told her to eat more. And she's like well, I know that like, but... Like she didn't find it helpful. And so, I've been paying for dietitian out of pocket. I've paid for body scans out of pocket. Luckily, that's only like 60 bucks out of [city]. But like, I've still had to pay for it myself.”*

One coach (Participant 8) also mentioned their frustrations with the mental health support provided through Sport Canada. The coaches comments come from the perspective of a former Olympic athlete and current coach:

*“You're you're entitled to six sessions therapy free and then after the six then, they can evaluate whether or not you still need you, and perhaps you may get six more, whatever. With reality is out of six sessions, probably three to four of them is getting to know each other, and then you have two were actually something can get done and then you're just kind of left. Realistically, like the mental health components, the mental performance part is expensive to support, and so you're left with relying on just what can I do to pay for my own physical health, which is vastly more, more important than ... in terms of actually like getting the job done.”*

Participant 8 further suggested that if an athlete can afford to, they should look outside of the sport institute for support:

*“I connected them with my old person right away, the difference being one was willing to pay for the service and the other not. So, the other one did not. I have heard mixed reviews with regards to using anything that's provided by the Sport Institute, so by extension by Game Plan as well as far as like the quality which are getting. Umm, I'm a firm believer of build your own IST. Don't rely on the team to provide you with anything. Because it's another thing they can control, and it's something that you can't, and you can't control the quality. You can't control the time. You can't control the attention, the investment in you as a person. Umm, So that's hard.”*

In terms of support for coaches, Participant 4 indicated that they took part in a coaching course that assisted her with being able to coach throughout the pandemic:

*“I was involved in a coaching program that helped me. Like I wouldn't have been able to survive this last year and a half or so... The coaching enhancement program. It was put on my OTP and, umm brought in over, I guess the top national team coaches from across Canada from various sports. And they brought in various experts to you know cover certain topics, whether it was emotional intelligence or mind shift or umm... the other one was courage through various topics [...] they were four-day sessions like, the whole program was four days sessions. It was covered a year and a half ago, then they did a reboot and a 1.5 version last year online, so on Zoom and not all the coaches came back to do that, but they tried to get all the top coaches back so that you know we were interacting with, let's say archery or judo and other coaches from the Olympic team...”*

This demonstrates the importance for not only supporting athletes but also providing support for coaches during these difficult times.

## **B. Connecting with Others**

Prior to the Olympics (Tokyo 2020, Beijing 2022) athletes did not have as many opportunities to meet other athletes outside of their team, this was especially true for new athletes. Participant 7 spoke about the importance of sharing experiences with other athletes from when she attended a training camp following the Olympics:

*“One of the Great Britain girls, we had shared experiences of like having to weight cut and like the stress of that and like it was so [...] just being able to have those shared experiences with someone else and making friends with other people, it's like, we weren't... We haven't been able to do that and yeah, so it's like I feel like, Even I was talking with one of my teammates and it's like there's a lot of, like, we had fun.”*

Participant 8 also spoke about how it would be very beneficial to connect athletes which were going through similar experiences, whether in the same sport or not. Participant 8 described how it is important to build community among athletes:

*“I think. I think what would actually be really cool is if, let's say everyone needed to train in whatever city each sport is based out of, and let's say those that necessity you couldn't, you couldn't do anything about that. Umm, I think it would be incredibly good for all athletes to be paired together. That were under similar dietary situations, A weight-gainer house, and ones that are trying to eat lean. Hang out here. 'cause you need to have a group around you that's doing the same thing, or at least reminding each other or even suffering together.”*

## **C. Game Plan**

All participants were asked about their experience using Game Plan. Questions focused on, whether athletes have used any Game Plan resources. If so, what resources did they use and were they helpful. If not, why not and was there anything that could make them more likely to use Game Plan resources.

### *a. Access / Awareness*

When athletes and coaches were asked about Game Plan, they all indicated that they were aware of the program however athletes use of Game Plans Resources varied. Some athletes indicated that they have used programs and acknowledged that there were resources available that they could have taken advantage of. For example, Participant 1 said, “I have used it on and



off. I haven't diligently... Followed through with it very often [...] I do think there were a lot of things available that I didn't necessarily take advantage of.

Athletes also indicated that they would have used more resources, but they either didn't know what was available or the information got lost in their email. For example, Participant 1 stated:

*"I think perhaps sometimes I don't realize what is available, and then I realized I realized later. So maybe a little bit more... uh broadcasting about what is specifically available for athletes and how they can benefit from it, because occasionally I would hear about it from a teammate later, and I would ohh that would've been really helpful if I had known, and if I'd known before, I needed it so umm Actually better layout of what's available."*

When speaking about what programs Participant 7 accessed they said:

*"I guess that's also the harder part. It's like. There is stuff that you can access it, but it's like if you don't know about it. If you don't see it, if you forget the email 'cause you're on tour. It's like. That's it."*

Participant 8, being a former athlete and now a coach, indicated that it can sometimes be difficult to proactively use Game Plan and know what resources you want to use:

*"There's all sorts of stuff that you can chip away at through Game Plan, but you have to be proactive and really get at it and understand what you may or may not want."*

Similarly, Participant 1 stated that the biggest indicator of whether they would use a resource or not was knowing how long it would take to find and utilize a resource, further noting that there is so much information available through Game Plan it can be overwhelming:

*"I would say probably my biggest thing is whether I look at something and think it's going to be time consuming. So, because my time is so valuable to me and rest and recovery, very important if something looks like I could utilize it and gain information from it quickly, then I'm interested and if it seems like it's gonna be a lot of work, then I may be a little bit more hesitant to do it. [...] There's so much information available that you can get overwhelmed and put aside and say I'll check it out later, but. Yeah, I. I know it's there; I just maybe take advantage of the fact that they're waiting and don't really use it."*

Another aspect that impacted athletes use of Game Plan was being in contact with a Game Plan advisor. Athletes indicated that following the Olympic Games, they were contacted by a Game Plan advisor, and they found this very informative and helpful. Participant 3 spoke about this and stated:

*“I think them reaching out to me directly is very useful, like calling me on the phone and talking to me. Emails like nowadays, we get so many junk emails, and they send a lot of emails. So, it's just like I don't want to open all these emails. I don't have time to read all these emails, so I think the most useful thing was then calling me saying Hey, this is what we offer.”*

For this athlete, there were a lot of different factors why an email was not the best form of communication including, too emails being sent, and she did not find she had the time to read the emails.

#### *b. Health*

Various athletes spoke about health and mental health resources available and what changes they would like to see made. Exploring the need for mental health resources, Participant 7 mentioned being told by a therapist that there was \$1000 funding available for athletes to go towards mental health support that the athlete was planning on accessing:

*“Actually, one of the therapists this past year explained that we have \$1000 towards mental health help. So, I am accessing that just to deal with some of the Post Olympics stuff.”*

As previously mentioned, Participant 5 had trouble gaining needed mental health support. The athlete wanted to speak to a general psychologist instead of a sport psychologist but ended up having to pay out of pocket for this. They further stated that athletes' mental health needs to be viewed as the same priority as an athletes' physical health:

*“If they truly want to treat mental health... like everyone say oh yea BellLetsTalk Day... All this kind of stuff, but until it's actually covered like a chiropractor would be, It's kind of like I'm like, OK, yeah, but if I don't get along with the... or like I don't totally connect with the sports psych. I also think it's totally weird with sports psych like I don't know why we don't have sports psych and a psychologist. I feel like a lot of people come on the team with different baggage, Different backgrounds like I feel like not everything is sports psych related. And I feel like they probably should have a general psychologist on board as well. That's like a bit of a missing piece.”*

### IV. Web Content Findings

#### *i. Game Plan*

The purpose of examining Game Plan was to see what resources were available to Team Canada athletes that relate to body image and eating behaviours. This is important as Game Plan aims to be the main resource hub for Canadian national level carded athletes. If this is the case, it

is important to gain an understanding of if Game Plan is currently meeting the need of Canadian national level athletes.

### **A. Game Plan Home Page**

During the initial analysis of the Home Page, the first banner, “Game Plan’s virtual Summit: More than medals” is out of date, and the second banner, “Access Support During the Tokyo Games” links to information about the Beijing games titled “Access Support During the Beijing Games”. It is important that the information on these banners are up to date and accurate as these draw in the users attention and directs the web page user to Game Plan’s most relevant information. During the second analysis in May, these banners were updated and included “Game Plan Day in Canada”, “a Fillable workbook for athletes”, "Success after sport", and "AbilitiCBT". More information on the information provided on these pages will be discussed below.

Game Plan then provides their mission statement “Game Plan takes a holistic approach to prepare you for the job of being a national team athlete during the formative stages, the prime of competitive life and what comes after the peak performance days are over.”

Following their mission statement, they list their 5 resource categories and one sentence about each:

Health – Discover health resources and confidential mental health services to support you.

Skill Development – Learn new skills that will help you manage life outside sport.

Education – Earn a degree or take specialized courses that fit within your hectic training and competition schedule.

Community – Develop your network, find mentors and like-minded individuals to support you;

Career – Explore your non-sport interests and career opportunities in advance of retirement.

A welcome video follows. This welcome video touches on how Game Plan can help athletes achieve total athlete wellness. The video states:

*“Success in sport and life... most people don’t see the challenges you face but we do, and we are here to support you ... We match you with advisors and match you with national programs and services (in 5 categories) ... register for us to help you on the path to success in sport and life.”<sup>297</sup>*

Towards the bottom of their home page there are links to news stories. Each news story has a category highlighted above the title such as (Health or skill development) to let the reader know what they can expect this story to help them with. However, at the time of the initial analysis

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<sup>297</sup> Game Plan, “Home Page,” *COC Game Plan*, <https://www.mygameplan.ca/>

these news stories were outdated with the feed showing articles from May 2021. Besides these articles Game Plan had a side panel showing their Twitter feed. This is beneficial as users are able to directly link to their social media page and see up to date information.

## **B. About Game Plan**

The Game Plans drop down menu in the tool bar provides the options to navigate between Our mission and history, Our team, eligibility and benefits for athletes, partners, and code of conduct. During the first analysis this section only included Game Plans mission and history. Between the first analysis and the last Game Plan added the additional sections.

### **a. Eligibility and Benefits for Athletes**

Game Plans section on eligibility states the criteria athletes must meet in order to be able to access their resources. This section states:

“To access individual Game Plan services, an athlete must meet the following eligibility criteria:

1. Sport Canada carded athletes — or national training group athletes deemed by their NSO to be at the senior national team level — in a Paralympic, Olympic, Pan Am or Para Pan Am discipline have full access to Game Plan services.
2. Category one athletes who have retired from sport within the past two years have full access to Game Plan services.
3. Category one athletes who have been retired for more than two-years are eligible for some Game Plan services and are encouraged to register to learn more and access alumni benefits.”<sup>298</sup>

Game Plan then breaks down which services are available based on athletes’ classification (See Figure 2), as well as the benefits to athletes.

*Figure 2 Game Plan Eligibility*

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<sup>298</sup> Game Plan, “Eligibility & Benefits,” *COC Game Plan*, <https://www.mygameplan.ca/about/eligibility-benefits>

## Eligibility criteria: what is available to you?

With the helpful guide below, you can determine which category you fall under!

Athlete Classification	Webinars Education Network	Program Prizing and Bursaries	Smith School of Business Scholarships	Mental Health Hotline	Institute / Center Events Special Events*
5 I am a developmental athlete on the pathway to become a Senior National team member	✓				Case by case*
4 I have been on the Senior National team during my career	✓				Case by case*
3 I am currently a member of the Senior National team	✓			✓	Case by case*
2 I have been carded during my career	✓		✓	✓	Case by case*
1 I am or have been carded in the last 2 years	✓	✓	✓	✓	Case by case*

**Special Events:** YouToi 2.0, Game Plan Summit, Game Plan Day in Canada, Mentorship, COPSIN special events, Networking events

Note: If you have any question about your eligibility, Contact [Info@mygameplan.ca](mailto:Info@mygameplan.ca) or the Game Plan advisor of your region (see p.8)



### b. Frequently Asked Questions

Game Plan further provides beneficial information in the form of frequently asked questions (FAQ). Here they provide information for on what Game Plan is and why it was developed, stating:

“Game Plan was initiated in response to the needs identified by athletes, coaches and sport system stakeholders in the 2010 Olympic Games Debrief Report and the 2011 Business Report. For more detailed information on how these findings led to the development or creation of Game Plan, please see our history section.”<sup>299</sup>

In addition, they also explain how Game Plan differs from past programs. In this section they state that the driving factors behind Game Plan are performance-enhancement, expertise, empowerment, partnerships, engagement and innovation:

“In addition to the proven benefits listed in our Benefits for Athletes section, the enhanced Game Plan program is powered by the following drivers:

1. Performance-enhancement: Supports transitioning athletes to achieve life-sport balance without compromising their sport-related goals.
2. Expertise: Provides expert-driven resources to help athletes make informed decisions.
3. Empowerment: Empowers athletes to proactively participate in and effectively manage their own career, education and personal development needs.
4. Partnerships: Maximizes community-based and corporate partnerships to enhance delivery and financial sustainability of the national program.
5. Engagement: Proactively engages athletes, coaches and sport organizations to make it easy to access Game Plan.
6. Innovation: Continually strives to develop new and innovative ways to support the evolving needs of Canadian athletes.”<sup>300</sup>

<sup>299</sup> Game Plan, “FAQ,” *COC Game Plan*, <https://www.mygameplan.ca/about/faq>

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

Game Plan also speaks about its importance for Canadian Athletes stating that:

“Research suggests that engaging in non-sport activities, while actively training and competing, can actually help athletes achieve better results both in sport and in life. For a more detailed breakdown on the benefits of this balanced approach, view our Benefits for Athletes page.”<sup>301</sup>

#### c. Code of Conduct

On this page Game Plan outlines their code of conduct that athletes must understand and agree to before participating in Game Plan, its programs, events or activities. This includes a definition of Game Plan, eligibility, the procedure for concerns and issues, the law and regulations, social media guidelines, consent to use of image, consent to personal information financial impact, and consequences (See Appendix 1).

### **C. Resources**

Each resources page begins with a short introduction video on the resource.

#### a. Career Resources

Game Plan works with partners organization to provide various career opportunities to athletes. At the beginning of Game Plan’s Career page, they have an introductory video followed by a career search bar. The Career search bar allows users to search by using filters such as, key words, location (each province), opportunity type (full time, part time, internship, volunteer, or industry (banking, education, engineering, health and wellness, finance, government, manufacturing, mining, oil and gas, professional services, retail, and technology). Users can also leave the search bar blank and click search opportunities to see all career results. Game Plan showcases opportunities such as job shadowing at Canadian Forced Morale and Welfare Services, a public service Commission with Government of Canada, or opportunities and opportunities with Air Canada. Two of Game Plans main athletes career opportunities is the RBC Olympians Program and the Game Plan Work Experience Program Powered by Deloitte. The Deloitte work experience program is a very competitive program. This program allows athletes to work with key Deloitte team members who will help you develop an understanding of the area they are operating in, including management services, or external client services.<sup>302</sup> The

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

RBC Olympians Program allows athletes to partner with RBC to do “speaking engagements, in person and virtual appearances at RBC sponsored events, and sharing stories online about meaningful experiences in sport.”<sup>303</sup>

Although these are great opportunities for athletes, there are not many part-time work opportunities listed. In addition, many of their career opportunities link to the organization’s webpage and then showing that these are not available positions. This may make it difficult for athletes to find the opportunity they are looking for.

Game Plan’s career page shows their employer network, listing the organizations that Game Plan Partners with. Following this, they show features, opportunities, and athletes’ testimonies. Towards the bottom of the page there is a breakdown of four career preparation categories, job shadowing, internships, flexible work, and project-based work. Game Plan then provides information for athletes to reach out to a Game Plan advisor if they any career related questions.

#### b. Community

During the first analysis of this page there was sessions athletes could attend networking events and the Game Plan Alumni Network. This page no longer has session information. Rather under networking events there is a hyper link that says, “To find networking events in your region, go to upcoming events”, however when you click on the link you receive a ‘page not found’ error message. Game Plan states in the networking events sections that “Game Plan offers hands-on networking sessions that will allow athletes to learn practical networking techniques and apply them in a low-risk setting at their respective Centres and Institutes across the country.” During the first review under sessions there were athlete-to-athlete sessions which stated “Game Plan does regular 90-minute athlete to athlete co-op calls. These calls allow athlete to connect with their peers to discuss specific topics. Octobers session was on “How are you managing training with new provincial restrictions?” There was also a link to Game Plan Employer Network that stated “The Game Plan Employer Network exists to connect employers with a non-traditional hiring pool: Canada’s high-performance athletes. This talent pool includes National Team, Olympic, and Paralympic active and recently retired athletes who are eager to connect with organizations.” However, this linked back to the career page and did not provide any

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additional information. In our interim report it was suggested that this could be removed from the page.

### c. Education

On Game Plans education resources page educational opportunities as well as scholarships are outlined. The functionality of this page has greatly increased from the first review to the second. Game Plan has added a drop-down accordion. This increases the visual appeal of the page and decreases information overload.

The main opportunity highlighted on this page is with Queen University Smith School of Business. Smith School of Business in the official National Business Education Partner of the Canadian Olympic Team, Smith plans to provide up to 1200 scholarships to Canadian athletes in the form of academic programs and non-credit executive education offerings over the next eight years.<sup>304</sup>

### d. Skill Development

In the introduction video for the skill development page, Game Plan states that they aim to help athletes develop skills outside of sport using, workshops, summits, webinars, or doing taxes and managing stress.

First, Game Plan outlines information on Rule 40 for the Tokyo 2020 & Beijing Games. Game Plan states:

“These guidelines outline how the Canadian Olympic Committee (“COC”) will implement Rule 40 in Canada during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games (being held in 2021) and the Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games (collectively the “Games”), including how athletes may continue to promote their personal sponsors (i.e., brands and companies who are not Olympic partners), and how these sponsors may continue to feature athletes in advertising during the Rule 40 period (the “Games Period”).”

They also provide a document with outlines the following information on rule 50, background information, athlete marketing guidelines, key principles, and information on generic advertising, sponsor social media, and athlete social media. This information was available during the first and second review of the Game Plan site. This information is valuable for athletes; thus, it may be beneficial to keep this information on the website but remove ‘for Tokyo 2020 & Beijing 2022’. The next section is called: Building Your Story: Understanding and Navigating social media as a Team Canada Athlete. Game Plan states, “This was built to empower all Team

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<sup>304</sup> Game Plan, “Education,” *COC Game Plan*, <https://www.mygameplan.ca/resources/education>



Canada athletes to make the best possible use of social media accounts and tell the story of their sports, their teams, their journeys, and themselves.”<sup>305</sup> This links to a document that provides athletes information on the building blocks of social media, best practices, blackout practices during major games, notification management, how Team Canada can help and watchouts. Next Game Plan lists information on Tips on Dealing with the Media stating, “Here you can learn about the positive opportunities involved with telling your story, how to best deal with the media, and how to better avoid distraction that may take away from your sport competition.”

Game Plan then has ‘skill programs.’ In this section they have a coaching education program. This is the same program that is listed under Education resources.

Also under skill development is financial management information where Game Plan provides information on navigating the financial landscape, alternative sources of funding for athlete’s, the amateur athletes trust, information on borrow, banking, buying a home, personal income tax training, and reading a paystub.

Information on navigating the financial landscape is offered in the format of power point slides by Deloitte. These slides provide information on time value of money, RRSP vs. TFSA, good vs. bad debt and credit history. The information on alternative sources of funding for athlete’s is also in a Deloitte PowerPoint. This provides information on bursaries and grants, stretching your dollars, business mentality, sponsorships, partnership negotiations, and crowdfunding.

The Amateur Athlete Trust is a program that allows athletes who earn income from endorsements, competitions, public speaking, etc., to grow their wealth tax-free. Game Plan provides information on, what the amateur athlete trust is, who is eligible to open an amateur athlete trust, the benefits of the trust, how it works, how athletes can get started and a complimentary athlete trust analysis.

Game Plan then provides information on borrowing, banking, and buying a home. Game Plan provides a lot of information on these topics by defining financial terms. Although giving the definitions of these may be beneficial, additional information on these topics may be beneficial. It could also be beneficial to have short video clips speaking about this information.

Game Plan also provides information on brand management by providing slides from a Deloitte presentation on “Opportunities (and Pitfalls) of Social Media for Athletes”. Topics that

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<sup>305</sup> Game Plan, “Skills,” *COC Game Plan*, <https://www.mygameplan.ca/resources/skills>

were covered in the presentation include how to build your personal brand increase your online influence, grow your fan base, secure sponsorship and funding, grow your network (career), and make a difference in the world. Although it is great to have these slides, it is challenging to get much information from them as there are no audio or slide notes. Most of the slides are just images.

Lastly, Game Plan provides athletes with resources to learn a new language. Athletes are able to use The Rosetta Stone Learning Software or Duolingo for free to learn a new language.

#### e. Health

The health page beginnings with a diagram of the continuum of mental health indicators and resources (See Table 3). This diagram shows mental health indicators, actions to take, who can help, and resources available, based on where you are on the continuum. The continuum ranges between healthy, reacting, injured, or III. Below the continuum diagram, Game Plan provides an email for athletes to contact if they would like to speak to a mental health practitioner who has sport knowledge. However, it does not indicate what the next steps are once you send an email. For example, when an athlete contacts the email will Game Plan, then set up a call with you, provide you with additional resources or set you up with a mental health professional? On this page there is also a link for additional resources which links to Game Plan's COVID resources hub.

*Figure 3 Continuum of Mental Health Indicators and Resources*

	Healthy	Reacting	Injured	Ill
MENTAL HEALTH INDICATORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Normal fluctuations in mood</li> <li>• Normal sleep patterns</li> <li>• Physically well, full of energy</li> <li>• Consistent performance</li> <li>• Normal social activity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occasional anxiety, irritability or sadness</li> <li>• Increased worrying, procrastination, forgetfulness</li> <li>• Trouble sleeping</li> <li>• Lowered energy</li> <li>• Decreased social / physical activity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anxiety, anger, pervasive sadness, hopelessness</li> <li>• Restless or disturbed sleep</li> <li>• Fatigue, aches, and pains</li> <li>• Decreased performance, presenteeism</li> <li>• Social avoidance or withdrawal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excessive anxiety, easily enraged, depressive mood</li> <li>• Unable to fall or stay asleep</li> <li>• Exhaustion, physical illness</li> <li>• Unable to perform duties, absenteeism</li> <li>• Isolation, avoiding social events</li> </ul>
ACTIONS TO TAKE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on task at hand</li> <li>• Break problems into manageable chunks</li> <li>• Identify and nurture support systems</li> <li>• Maintain healthy lifestyle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize limits</li> <li>• Get adequate rest, nutrition, and exercise</li> <li>• Engage in healthy coping strategies</li> <li>• Identify and minimize stressors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and understand own signs of distress</li> <li>• Talk with someone</li> <li>• Seek help</li> <li>• Seek social support instead of withdrawing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek consultation as needed</li> <li>• Follow health care provider recommendations</li> <li>• Regain physical and mental health</li> </ul>
WHO CAN HELP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your Game Plan Advisor</li> <li>• Mental Performance Consultant (MPC)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MPC</li> <li>• Counsellor / Psychotherapist</li> <li>• Your Game Plan Advisor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counsellor / Psychotherapist</li> <li>• Social Worker</li> <li>• Clinical / Registered Psychologist</li> <li>• Medical doctor (e.g., Team physician, family physician, psychiatrist)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counsellor / Psychotherapist</li> <li>• Social Worker</li> <li>• Clinical / Registered Psychologist</li> <li>• Psychiatrist</li> </ul>
RESOURCES AVAILABLE	<p><b>LifeWorks WorkLife Services</b> Go to <a href="http://teamcanada.lifeworks.com">teamcanada.lifeworks.com</a> and enter the credentials below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Username: TeamCanada</li> <li>• Password: lifeworks</li> </ul> <p>LifeWorks offers support with mental, financial, physical and emotional wellbeing. Whether you have questions about handling stress, parenting and child care, managing money, or health issues, you can turn to LifeWorks for a confidential service that you can trust.</p>	<p><b>LifeWorks Counsellor Network</b> LifeWorks Care Access Centre - Professional EAP Counselling Services Available 24/7, 365 days a year. • Call 1.844.240.2990</p> <p>Clinical Services are delivered through various modalities such as Face-to-Face, Telephone, Video, Chat/Instant Messaging, Online Group Counselling, or Self-Directed. <a href="#">Book services online</a></p> <p><a href="#">AbilitCBT App</a></p>	<p><b>Download the Lifeworks app or go to <a href="http://teamcanada.lifeworks.com">teamcanada.lifeworks.com</a> and enter the credentials below:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Username: TeamCanada</li> <li>• Password: lifeworks</li> </ul> <p><b>Connect with a mental health practitioner who knows sport:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confidential</li> <li>• Secure</li> <li>• \$1000 of coverage / year</li> </ul> <p><b>What to expect</b></p>	<p><b>If it's an emergency:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Crisis Services Canada</b> 24-hour line: Call: 1-833-456-4566 / Text: 45645</li> <li>• Lifeworks hotline: 1.844.240.2990</li> <li>• 9-1-1</li> </ul> <p><b>If it's not an emergency:</b></p> <p>Email the Mental Health Coordinator: <a href="mailto:mentalhealth@mygameplan.ca">mentalhealth@mygameplan.ca</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confidential</li> <li>• Secure</li> <li>• \$1000 of coverage / year</li> </ul>

Next, there are two hyperlinks for the mental health strategy for high performance sport in Canada and a mental health executive summary. The mental health strategy for high performance sport in Canada webpage allows you to download a 51 page mental health strategy document which includes: frameworks supporting the strategy, the strategy itself (Leadership, stake holder engagement, and communication; Promotion of mental health; Prevention of mental health challenges and mental illness; Assessment, diagnosis, treatment and recovery; Implementation, monitoring, and improvement); Mental health strategy timeline and group members; Sport Community Input; Key Consensus statements and systematic reviews, Example of scope of work for MHM; and Example of Scope of Work for COPSIN Mental Health Representatives. This document was developed to bridge the gap between Canadian health care and the high-performance sport system. The aim of this report is to improve mental health outcomes for all Canadian high performance athletes, coaches, and staff.

The web page then outlines the Mental health priorities and objectives which include:

- **“Leadership, Stakeholder Engagement, and Communication** - To build collective leadership to address mental health in HP sport”
- **“Promotion of Mental Health** - To improve and sustain mental health across the HP sport system”
- **“Prevention of Mental Health Challenges and Mental Illness** - To minimize factors that contribute to poor mental health and mental illness”
- **Assessment, Diagnosis, Treatment, and Recovery** - To manage and treat mental illness within the HP sport context”

- **Implementation, Monitoring, and Improvement** - To successfully deliver the Strategy”

The contact information for Krista Van Slingerland, Game Plan’s Mental Health Manager is provided. Lastly, the webpage outlines additional mental health resources and support including Canadian national team athlete mental health resource guide; continuum of mental health indicators and resources; infographic: mental health strategy process; fact sheet: mental health illness and sport performance; fact sheet: mental health and sport performance; fact sheet: mental health and sport performance; fact sheet: mental health and maltreatment in sport; fact sheet: mental health and risk management; and an executive summary – mental health strategy.

Next on Game Plans Health resources page they provide information on LifeWorks, Game Plans Official Mental Health partner. This section states:

“Game Plan has partnered with LifeWorks to provide our athletes with a range of support services in a confidential manner including health and well-being, career and workplace, relationships, family, finances, legal and counselling. For more information, please consider our mental health resource or use the links below to leave the Game Plan website and access LifeWorks resources.”

LifeWork provides athletes with health and well-being, career and workplace, relationships, family, finances, legal and counselling services. On their website, there is a link to sign up for assistance, chat with a counsellor, email a counsellor or contact LifeWork by phone. LifeWork also provides online group counselling, a build-your-self-care tool kit, as well as a section with monthly updates on new resources and events.

On the LifeWorks website, there is information on eating disorders, which is listed in their section on additional and other mental illnesses. LifeWork did a four-part series on eating disorders. The first article was titled “*What is an eating disorder?*”. This article touches on the signs of an eating disorder, and eating disorder categories. The second was titled “*Eating Disorders: Types of Eating Disorders*”. This article provided further information on anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder. For each type of eating disorder, it lists the warning signs and how it may affect the body. The next article was titled “*Prevention Tips For Parents*”. Which provided information on how to help someone with an eating disorder. The last article is titled “*Treatment Options*”. Further, under LifeWorks health habits sections they have information on diet and nutrition. Here you can find information on healthy nutrition, re-establishing healthy routines, maintaining health habits when life changes, setting SMART goals

and more. In this section, they have an article on body positivity. This article explains what body positivity is and how to practice body positivity.

These resources available through LifeWorks is the only place to find recourses and information on disordered eating, eating disorders and body image. Lifeworks provides a lot of additional resources that are not listed on the Game Plan website. Although it is very beneficial to have this information available, Game Plan should add a section on their webpage saying that these resources are available through LifeWorks. By not stating on their website that these resources are available there is less of a chance that athletes would access these resources. In addition, the information available on LifeWorks seems to be more general than specific to athletes. When doing a key word search for athlete no specific information appeared.

On the Game Plan Health Resources page there is also information on Canada's abuse-free sport hotline: This hotline supports Canadian athletes who are victims or witnesses of harassment, abuse, and discrimination. Game Plan then has health programs that they offer including YouToi 2.0 Virtual Edition. This was a 4-day virtual workshop that took place in November 2021 followed by 6 months of monthly check in calls. The website stated to stay tuned for 2022 dates. This webinar series is designed to assist athletes in their "transition to life after sport by assisting athletes in becoming more self-aware, developing a better understanding of your core values, motivators, and preferences, learning about transition, and equipping you with strategies to help you to move forward".<sup>306</sup>

Following Game Plans health programs they provide a link to the Sport Canada – Athlete Assistance Program (Section 8.4) with three examples of Sport Canada Athlete Support:

- **Retirement Assistance:** "High performance athletes who have been senior carded for at least three years may apply for Retirement Assistance to help them during their transition into retirement. Athletes can apply for a maximum of \$5,000 and are only eligible within one year of their retirement."
- **Child Care Assistance:** "Carded athletes who require the services of a childcare provider to attend NSO-approved training or competitions may apply for Child Care Assistance for up to a maximum of \$1,000 per carding cycle."
- **Relocation Assistance:** "Carded athletes may be required to relocate from home to a NSO designated national training centre to pursue their high performance athletic career."

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<sup>306</sup> Game Plan, "Health," *COC Game Plan*, <https://www.mygameplan.ca/resources/health>

Sport Canada offers relocation assistance support to assist in offsetting some of the relocation costs associated with relocating to and from a training centre.<sup>307308</sup>

Lastly Game Plan has information on gaining access to training facilities once retired from sport.

#### **D. Events**

Game Plan has another section on their website for event information. During the first review of the Game Plan site, they had information about the Game Plan Summit – More than Medals, that took place October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021. This was a half day virtual event that focused on “preparing elite Canadian athletes for life on and off the competitive playing field,” sessions included:

- Building Mentally Healthy High-Performance Cultures: Have we moved the needle?
  - Discussed what it means to have a mentally healthy high-performance sport culture and what athletes, coaches, and sport organizations can do to build one.
- Retraining: A mindful Approach to Fitness Post High Performance Sport
  - Discussed the benefits of staying active in a new way after retirement.
- Prospering in the Gig Economy
  - Discussed how to succeed as an independent contractor, consultant, or freelancer
- Athlete Panel: More than Medals
  - 3 past Olympians/Paralympians discussed how they succeeded in and out of sport and how the pursuit of excellence impacted their wellbeing
- Ready in Five
  - “Ready in Five founder and Team Canada Volleyball libero Jessie Niles explains how she responded to the pandemic by creating an athlete-led social enterprise that combines community and movement to enhance the energy, vitality, and culture of remote teams.”
- Smartphones, social media, and sport: Is it time to connect or disconnect
  - Discusses “media awareness to help athletes optimize their smartphone and social media usage to maximize well-being and performance experiences”
- Rewiring Relationships
- “Discusses strategies to help athletes balance their relationships with friends, family, and partners, with their commitment to sport”

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> Although the health section provides various resources many are links to other sites or links to large documents. When on the Game Plan website, it is difficult to know what is on these external links. It may be beneficial to add descriptions of what users would find if they continued to the external links. Game Plan could also use an accordion style format to organize the information available. Although Game Plan has the ‘Continuum of Mental Health Indicators and Resources’ I believe they should add additional information to their Health page. For example, about various mental health concerns, what the warning signs are or specific resources for these concerns. In addition, it may be beneficial for Game Plan to add in physical health resources. In a conversation with Cara Button, the senior manager at Game Plan it was mentioned that Game Plan now offers \$1000 in mental health funding. However, this information was not through their website.

During the second review in May, Game Plan had information about Game Plan Day 2022. During Game Plan Day attendees connected with peers from various sports and business backgrounds, explored potential career paths, expanded their professional network, and gained tools to build confidence as they begin the next phase of their career

### **E. Additional Resources:**

#### **a. COVID-19 Resource Hub**

During the first review, Game Plan had a link to their COVID-19 Resources Hub. This resource has since been removed from the website. On this page, Game Plan broke down the resources by category. In the health category, Game Plan provided links to the Canadian National team athlete mental health resource list, WorkLifehealth.com, and Managing Uncertainty During COVID-19 Workbook.

The Managing Uncertainty During COVID-19 Workbook focuses on 6 themes with activities athletes can do pertaining to each theme including a self-awareness worksheet for athletes to check in with how they are feeling and on COVID-19 facts from a reputable source; an exploration of control worksheet that helps athletes accept that things are the way they are; and perhaps not how you'd like them to be, the 5-4-3-2-1 Technique to assist athletes in navigating emotions; anchoring themselves during an emotional; adapt reflection questions to help athletes modify their approach to physical, emotional and mental maintenance and preparation; discussions on identifying your support system, communicate your plan; and a worksheet on values, and actions to assist athletes in adopting a values-driven approach to putting their new plan to action. Lastly, in the skill development section, Game Plan linked to a webinar on 'Finance Matters: Paying Your Bills During Economic Uncertainty'. This would have also been a useful resource to add to the Skill Development resource page. Game Plan then had career information on connecting with Game Plan Advisor on resume and cover letter support. In terms of education, they listed their resources for EdX, information on Duolingo, and a link to information on free educational subscriptions and resources. Lastly, for community they provided information on the athlete-only co-op program.

Overall, this information could have been very beneficial to athletes, but was not very accessible. The only way to get to it is to go through the banners on the Home Page and click the

learn more button. This information could have been added to the resources drop down on their menu bar.

#### b. Access Support During the Tokyo Games

During the first review, Game Plan provided information on support for the Tokyo Games. This resource has since been removed from the website. Resources on this page included a link to the Canadian National Team Athlete Mental Health Awareness Guide. This guide outlines the 10 Mental Health Warning Signs and What you can do. This would have also been a beneficial resource to add to the health resources page. This page also provided links to connect with a Game Plan advisor, Post-Games Planning Workbook, Game Plan Canada's Athlete Wellness Program. However, the links to the Post-Games Planning Workbook, Game Plan Canada's Athlete Wellness brought you to a Google Error page.

#### c. Fillable Workbook for Athletes

One of the resources that a banner on the home page linked to was a fillable workbook for athletes. The banner states, "What if we told you that you could spend an hour or two this week with a computer or pen and paper and probably improve, certainly not hurt, your chances at the Olympics or Paralympics". Although this sounds like a great resource when trying to access the document it links to an error page.

#### d. Success After Sport

Another resource linked in a banner on the home page is a success after sport resource. Game Plan states "This hybrid online program guides athletes through the challenges of athlete transition. It is meant to accelerate their process toward their future." This links to Melinda Harrison's webpage where athletes can sign up for a cohort starting in June or September of 2022. This course is broken into four parts. The first part looks at identity, decision making, and behaviours. Part two explores blind spots and roadblocks, wellbeing, and preparing for tomorrow. Part three explores the upward slope, athletes' possible future selves, and living your personal next. The last module is the finish line, providing notes and resources.

It may also be beneficial to have this program listed under events and in the skill development resource section of the Game Plan site.

### **F. News**

This page is broken down first by trending articles and then by each of the resource types. Each article preview on this page shows an image, the category, the article title, the date



published, and a short description. Examples of trending articles include '2022 Coaching Education Grant Recipients', 'Fundings for mental health support to renew each fiscal year, and Game Plan welcomes new mental health manager. Although Game Plan has this section on their webpage, they do not have many recent articles, with only one article being posted thus far in 2022 and six in 2021.

### **G. Game Plan Newsletter**

Game Plan provides very valuable information in their newsletter. Most information provided in the newsletter is not posted on the website. It is easy for athletes to miss emails in their inbox which may cause athletes to not be fully aware of Game Plan offerings. When communicating information to athletes it is important to use multiple channels such as posting on social media or having game plan advisors reach out directly to athletes.

#### *ii. Canadian Olympic Sanctioned National Sport Organizations*

The COC works closely with National Sport Organizations (NSOs) to promote positive sporting environments and the needed services and facilities for athletes to progress from developmental programs to national level athletes.<sup>309</sup>

After a thorough examination of Canada's fifty Olympic Sanctioned NSOs, only five-sport organizations, Alpine Canada, Canada Snowboard, Cycling Canada, Canoe Kayak Canada, and Climbing Canada had any information on eating disorders or body image on their website (See Appendix 2). First, Alpine Canada's *Race to Win* program, provided information on nutrition which outlines the effects and causes of RED-S.<sup>310</sup> In addition, Canada Snowboard offers webinars on professional development for coaches; one session was on nutrition where they spoke about RED-S.<sup>311</sup> Cycling Canada hosted a mental health workshop in 2013 which touched on eating disorders.<sup>312</sup> However, it is unclear whether this program has since been offered. Canoe Kayak Canada has a resource section on their website with links to presentations. One presentation was titled, *Nutrition for the Developing Athlete – Lucy Wainwright*, which

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<sup>309</sup> Canadian Olympic Committee, "About Us," <https://olympic.ca/canadian-olympic-committee/>

<sup>310</sup> Alpine Canada, "Race to Win". <https://itad.alpinecanada.org/stages/Race-to-win/health-and-wellness>

<sup>311</sup> Canada Snowboard, "Coaching Program," <https://www.canadasnowboard.ca/en/programs/technical/coaching/currentcoach/PD/>

<sup>312</sup> Cycling Canada, "Cycling Canada and Morneau Shepell partner to raise awareness about the critical need for mental health support within the athletic community," <https://www.cyclingcanada.ca/sport/general/news/ccms/>

included a slide on body image concerns.<sup>313</sup> Lastly, Climbing Canada had the most information on eating disorders among all national sport organizations. In their athlete wellness section on their website, they have information on nutrition wellness, which has various information on eating disorders. This webpage included information on a webinar that was run during eating disorders during National Eating Disorder Awareness Week (February 1-7, 2022), the 2022 Alberta Health Services (AHS) Eating Disorders Symposium, the LIGHT documentary on eating disorders, and had links to a national resource list for eating disorders and a document on RED-S, and the National Eating Disorder Information Centre (NEDIC).<sup>314</sup>

Although various NSOs provide educational material for coaches and athletes, fulfilling the Olympic Movement goal of education at all levels, most do not provide any information on eating disorders, disordered eating, body image or athletes' mental wellbeing in any form. This analysis indicated that only 10% of Canadian Olympic sanctioned NSOs have any information on eating disorders and body image available to their athletes. Those NSOs who do provide this information, offer very little in the way of breadth or depth, apart from Climbing Canada.

However, it must be considered that sport organizations could have internal resources that they do not post about on their website. Many sport teams have a team nutritionist and mental performance coach that may be able to provide more information on these subjects. Although these resources may be available for some teams, in some cases, athletes can feel reluctant to access help from within their team out of fear of their coach finding out. Thus, it is still beneficial to have these resources available for athletes to access independently, as well as offering them to the broader sports population who may benefit.

### *iii. Multi-Sport Organizations*

Multi-sport organizations (MSOs) and non-profit sports organizations also provide various programs and services to assist elite-level athletes. Of the sixteen sport organizations that had their service offerings reviewed, three had information that directly related to disorders and body image, and four organizations had programs focusing on safe sport (See Appendix 3).

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<sup>313</sup> Canoe Kayak Canada, "Resources," <https://canoeKayak.ca/resources-2/>

<sup>314</sup> Climbing Canada, "Nutrition Wellness," <https://www.climbingcanada.ca/nutrition-wellness/>

### **A. Canada Center for Ethics in Sport (CCES): ‘BodySense’**

The Canada Center for Ethics in Sport (CCES) had the most direct programming available through their BodySense program.<sup>315-316</sup> BodySense is a proactive program that can be used to assist with the prevention of disordered eating and muscle dysmorphia while promoting body acceptance. This program can be beneficial across the sporting community, with valuable information available for athletes, parents, teachers, coaches. This program provides tips on how to promote a positive body image and high self-esteem in athletes and information on how to navigate body image concerns, nutrition tips, myths and facts about dieting and sport performances. BodySense can also be used by coaches and sport organizations to support athletes. Resources are available for coaches to gain a better understanding of the signs and symptoms of disordered eating and muscle dysmorphia, and body dissatisfaction, how to promote healthy training in athletes, and tools to assist coaches when helping athletes struggling with body dissatisfaction or engaging in disordered eating risk behaviours.

### **B. National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA)**

Tools for individuals and families affected by eating disorders can also be found through the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA). NEDA provides information on screening tools, a helpline, treatment options, information on eating disorders and body image, prevention programs, and progression development.<sup>317</sup> This organization is not directly sport-related but does have a toolkit that may be useful for coaches and athletic trainers as it provides information on prevention, early intervention, and treatment.<sup>318</sup>

### **C. Sports Information Resource Center (SIRC)**

Another valuable resource to find evidence-based knowledge is the Sports Information Resource Center (SIRC).<sup>319</sup> SIRC provides various information on eating disorders and body image. Information on this site can be found in the form of blog posts, news articles, webinars, and scholarly articles and is readily available to be used by athletes, coaches, support staff, and administrators to create a better sports environment for athletes.

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<sup>315</sup> Canadian Center for Ethics in Sport, “BodySense,” <https://cces.ca/bodysense>

<sup>316</sup> BodySense, “Home,” <https://bodysense.ca/>

<sup>317</sup> National Eating Disorders Association, “About Us,” <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/>

<sup>318</sup> National Eating Disorders Association, “Toolkits,” <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/toolkits>

<sup>319</sup> Sport Information Resource Center, “Who is SIRC,” <https://sirc.ca/about-sirc/>

## D. Safe Sport Resources

Many organizations also offer various safe sport resources that help ensure athletes can train and compete in an environment free from harassment and abuse. These programs assist athletes in speaking out against harmful training environments and help mitigate adverse environments that exacerbate the development of disordered eating risk behaviours and the development of a negative body image.

The CCES and Coaching Association of Canada (CAC) have both developed safe sport programming at the request of Sport Canada. The CCES has developed the safe sport movement, including a universal code of conduct and sanctions.<sup>320</sup> The Canadian Sport Hotline was developed within this program, where athletes can report harassment, abuse, or discrimination in sport. In addition, the CCES has developed the Responsible Coaching Movement, which was established to protect athletes and coaches from unethical behaviours in sport. Due to the development of the Responsible Coaching Movement, the CAC developed a safe sport e-learning training. As of April 1, 2020, Sport Canada requires all NSOs to have safe sport training. When examining NSOs websites, forty-seven out of fifty organizations have included safe sport information on their website.

In December 2020, McLaren Global Sport Solutions released a blueprint for ensuring safer sport in Canada. This included recommendations for implementing the Universal Code of Conduct to Prevent and Address Maltreatment in Sport (UCCMS or Universal Code).<sup>321</sup> The UCCMS “addresses maltreatment broadly and comprehensively, covering all types of conduct that inflict physical or psychological harm by a person against another person, within the sport community.”<sup>322</sup> This document can be used across all levels of Canadian sport to develop implementation strategies to prevent and address maltreatment for all stakeholders in sport.<sup>323</sup>

## V. Summary

In summary, the data collected for this portion of the study took the form of participant interviews and a web content analysis. The interview data collected was in part from a SSHRC-funded project. The data was separated to first provide a context from that study and was then analyzed more in-depth looking for any content related to athletes body image and eating

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<sup>320</sup> Canadian Center for Ethics in Sport, “Safe Sport,” <https://cces.ca/safe-sport>

<sup>321</sup> McLaren Global Sport Solutions, “Blueprint for Ensuring Safer Sport in Canada Unveiled,” <https://www.mclarenglobalsportsolutions.com/pdf/blueprint-safer-sport-canada.pdf>

<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

<sup>323</sup> SIRC, “Policies & Procedures,” <https://sirc.ca/safesport/policies-practices/>

behaviours. Interview participants included ten athletes and three coaches aged 21-56 from a variety of sports. Interviews focused on how the athlete's conditions during COVID-19 impacted their experience in training, competitions, and overall physical activity. This allowed us to gain a better understanding of whether COVID-19 impacted athletes eating behaviours and body image. The interview data was analyzed by compiling participant stories, consulting the guidelines outlined by Braun and Clarke, focusing on interpreting participants' experiences and identifying themes.

The web content analysis took place in three stages, examining the COC Game Plan website, then examining Olympic sanctioned NSO, and multi-sport organizations, to determine the availability of body image, disordered eating, and safe sport content on their websites. This analysis allowed us to match the needs that athletes identified in the interviews with the resources available through Game Plan, NSOs, and multi-sport organizations. This will be further discussed in the next section.

## Chapter 5 – Discussion and Conclusions

The findings from the empirical part of this study allows us to compare and contrast athletes' experiences with COVID restrictions; reveal important aspects of their relationship with food and their evaluation of their bodies; and identify resources available to athletes. These findings gave us a better understanding of whether athletes' needs are currently being met by the Canada Olympic Committees athlete resources program, their own national sport organization programs or other third-party sport organizations within Canada.

### I. COVID-19 and Body Dissatisfaction and the development of Disordered Eating

In this study we have contributed to the identification of a potential problem with body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviours<sup>324</sup> and that it needs to be addressed within Olympic sport; and that within Canada, athletes' needs are not being met very well. Some athletes interviewed identified increased preoccupation and stress in relation to food and their body image due to situations brought on by COVID-19. Although body image concerns and the engagement of disordered eating behaviours are not a new issue within elite sport, COVID-19 can be seen as a contributing factor that has led some to athletes having a more negative body image and increasing disordered eating behaviours.

Some athletes in this study felt like their body image and eating behaviours were not negatively affected during the pandemic. One athlete identified that they were unhappy with the way their body looked, and knew they gained weight during the pandemic but later stated that they were not concerned with the way their body looked. Another athlete identified having self-esteem issues and being hyper aware of her training and food intake. These types of behaviours, or ways of thinking, are not uncommon in Olympic sport. An athlete's thoughts, feelings, emotions, and behaviours towards their body may fluctuate from being satisfied with their body in one setting but dissatisfied in another, based on their environment.<sup>325</sup> One athlete who stated that she had to restrict her eating as the coaches wanted her to lose weight, identified stress and discomfort around the situation. This athlete was experiencing sport related weight pressures, and this negatively impacted her relationship with food. This athlete stated that she did not

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<sup>324</sup> Many others have identified this problem too, but this is the first time Canadian Olympians were interviewed during COVID-19 restrictions.

<sup>325</sup> AP Karin De Bruin, et al., "Dieting and body image in aesthetic sports" 519.

believe she had eating disorder tendencies. However, it can be argued that she did engage in these types of behaviours. As mentioned, disordered eating behaviours can occur in the form of body preoccupation, inhibitory food control, fear of body composition changes and binge eating.<sup>326</sup> Given that this athlete is in a weight-based sport these types of behaviours are often normalized.

It is also important to note that although various athletes identified that they did not believe they engaged in disordered eating behaviours or had a negative body image, all coaches interviewed spoke to struggles that their athletes had with either their body image or eating behaviours. Often times at an elite level athletes can be conditioned into thinking that their behaviours are ‘just part of the sport’. This normalization of disordered eating behaviours has been recognized in literature since the 1900’s.

In an article written by Robert Hughes and Jay called *Positive Deviance Among Athletes: The Implications of Overconformity to the Sport Ethic*, Hughes and Oakley explain that athletes often become over committed to the goals and norms of sport due to authority figures, such as coaches, telling athletes what it means to be dedicated to their sport, how to set goals, to see adversity as a challenge to overcome and to sacrifices in order to become the best of the best.<sup>327</sup> By athletes conforming to these norms it creates a situation where athletes may not realize that they are engaging in disordered eating behaviours due to the widespread acceptance of these behaviours. Hughes and Jay refer to this type of behaviour as positive deviance, “caused by an unqualified acceptance of and an unquestioned commitment to a value system framed by what we refer to as the sport ethic”.<sup>328</sup> They further describe the sport ethic to be a criteria that many athletes and society use to define what it means to be a “real athlete”.<sup>329</sup> As practices of athlete body surveillance, such as weigh-ins and food observations, used to regulate athletes' behaviours become normalized, athletes begin to engage in self-surveillance and reproduce these monitoring norms.<sup>330</sup> For example, this could be seen in the athlete who spoke about having to drop weight while training for a new position on her team. She was very stressed about what food she could

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<sup>326</sup> Buckley et al. "Disordered eating & body image of current and former athletes in a pandemic" 2.

<sup>327</sup> R. Hughes, & J. Coakley, (1991), Positive deviance among athletes: The implications of overconformity to the sport ethic, *Sociology of sport journal*, 8(4), 308.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid, 209.

<sup>330</sup> Papathomas, (2018), Disordered Eating in Sport: Legitimized and Stigmatized. In *Sport, Mental Illness, and Sociology*, Emerald Publishing Limited, Vol. 11, 102

and could not eat and was self-regulating her caloric intake to ensure she met her coach's expectations.

## II. Team Canada Resources

This study has demonstrated that Team Canada athletes faced various barriers during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there are inconsistencies between the resources available to athletes and the resources they need. Many of the resources athletes would like to have are currently available to them, however, they either did not know that these resources exist, or did not know where to access the resources.

During the pandemic athletes in this study identified that it was very difficult for them to be apart from their teammates and/or their family. Thus, it was very helpful for athletes to stay in touch virtually as it helped to reduce stress levels. Athletes also identified how it was helpful to speak to athletes from other countries or sports that were going through similar situations. This was identified in terms of the pandemic restrictions and knowing other athletes were also navigating lockdowns, but also in the terms of cutting weight and being able to speak to athletes who also had to cut or gain weight while training. Providing a support network is very important for athletes, and the pandemic made it more difficult for athletes to build an athlete-to-athlete support network outside of their team. This was especially true for athletes who were newly carded athletes training for their first Olympic games. Although athletes identified the need to be able to connect with other athletes, none of the athletes indicated that they took part in Game Plan's athlete-to-athlete sessions that took place during the pandemic. Athletes identified that they want to know how long it will take them to complete a task on Game Plan so they can manage their time better. Athletes may also not use the information provided as they don't want to search for the information. Using awareness campaigns, visual headers, videos, and infographics and decreasing the amount of time it takes to find a resource, may increase the awareness and usage of resources. Athletes identified that newsletters from Game Plan sometimes get lost in their inboxes, thus it may be more beneficial to have a text subscription or to make constant posts on social media to update athletes on resources and upcoming events.

Game Plan's most accessed resources were their education and career resources. If an athlete was to reach out to a Game Plan advisor, it was most likely to gain assistance in accessing these types of resources. Aside from resources offered by Game Plan, no athlete or coach



identified any MSO's that they used to find resources. However, one coach did identify Athlete 365, an IOC sponsored website, as a resource available to athletes.

Currently, Game Plan has a lot of resources for athletes looking to retire. The transition to retirement from sport is when most athletes access Game Plan resources. The COVID-19 pandemic has been compared to various types of athlete transition periods. Our learnings from how athletes accessed resources and the barriers they faced can be further examined and compared to other athlete transition phases such as retirement from sport, return to play after an injury or pregnancy in female athletes.

Many athletes in this study drew similarities between methods of training during the pandemic and what methods they would like to use to stay active following the pandemic. Similarly in a study completed DeFreese et al. spoke about the way that COVID-19 is reshaping the way we think about athlete transition periods due to enhanced stressors.<sup>331</sup> In addition, Buckley, Hall and Belki suggest that transition periods such as COVID-19 can influence the development of disordered eating behaviours.<sup>332</sup> In this study, athletes were concerned that not following their typical training regime would hinder their athletic ability. An athlete's transition from an injury to return-to-play can be compared to the disruption in training athletes experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Athletes were not able to keep their typical training routine, did not train as often or had to modify their training. In a study by Stokes et al. they discussed militance of athlete skill, physical ability to perform, decision making ability and the impact on performance and injury risk.<sup>333</sup> They indicated that a reduction and pause in training can have a significant impact on an athletes body composition and physical ability to perform. Thus, it is important for athletes to focus on the progression of all training aspects and may need additional psychological support to navigate the challenges associates with isolation and a change in regular training routine.

### III. Disordered Eating and Body Dissatisfaction Prevention

In this study, we have identified that disordered eating behaviours and body dissatisfaction is a problem that needs to be addressed within Olympic sport and that within Canada, athletes' needs are not being met. Throughout Olympic history, we have seen a trend of

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<sup>331</sup> J. D DeFreese, et al. "A time for clinical transformation" 178.

<sup>332</sup> Buckley et al. "Disordered eating & body image of current and former athletes in a pandemic" 14.

<sup>333</sup> Keith A Stokes, et al. "Returning to play after prolonged training restrictions in professional collision sports." *International journal of sports medicine* 41, no. 13 (2020): 895-911.

female athletes not being held to the same standard as male athletes. Since the beginning of the Olympics what sports female athletes could compete in and what they could wear has been controlled based on societal ideals of women. Various athletes such as Sultana Frizell, Erin Willson, and Aly Raisman, have spoken out about not feeling like they fit the ideal aesthetic standards of what a female should look like or about their experience of their bodies being scrutinized by either society or their coaches. This kind of preoccupation with athlete's bodies and the idea that you must have a specific body type to be successful in sport has caused athletes to engage in disordered eating behaviours or have negatively affected their body image.

Some of the athletes interviewed also identified an increased preoccupation with their body and stress in relation to food and their body image. We have seen that situations like COVID-19 increased the development of these thoughts and behaviours. For example, when one of the athletes had to train for a different position due to multiple teammates having COVID causing her to have to lose weight. This type of situation could also happen outside of a COVID-19 situation, such as when an athlete is and an athlete has to fill in. Due to these parallel situations it is important that we implement the finding of this study into other transition periods athletes may face.

Lastly, this study identified that there are limited resources available to mitigate athletes developing disordered eating behaviours and body dissatisfaction. However, athletes and coaches alike were not aware of the few resources available. National Sport Organizations and Multi-Sport Organizations lacked information on their web pages on disordered eating behaviours, and body image concerns. In addition, Game Plan also lacked information on this area. However, Game Plan representatives have said in the media that they provide resources in this area. In a *Globe and Mail* article published in December 2021 Krista Van Slingerland mentioned that while Game Plan offers resources to assist with eating disorders, they are very limited due to a lack of funds and are only accessible to senior national team athletes.<sup>334</sup>

This study identified that there are multi-sport organizations in Canada that have resources available to athletes and coaches for support with disordered eating body image concerns. For example, Body Sense which is offered through the CCES. This program is outlined with a variety of resources on their website, none of the participants had ever heard of

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<sup>334</sup> Grant Robertson and Rachel Brandy, "Awakening on Eating Disorders among Olympians Prompts Calls for Action,"

this program. In addition, the IOC has developed the Female Athlete Health Tool which provides information to assist athletes struggling with disordered eating and body dissatisfaction.

This shows that although there are resources available, if athletes and coaches are not aware of these programs, then they cannot help. Coaches and athletes must be connected with these programs. If the IOC and COC want to ensure that athletes health and wellbeing are catered to, they must not only develop the required programs but also set up campaigns to get the information out to the proper stakeholders. The coaches interviewed in this study were very interested in knowing more about the resources available, with one mentioning it would be great to have a consolidated list of resources to pass down to their athletes. Due to the difficulty of finding and accessing resources that assist with disordered eating, eating disorders, and body image, it is recommended that information is consolidated onto one webpage for athletes, coaches, support personnel and family of athletes to be able to access with ease. Once this information is consolidated this information needs to be distributed using a multi-media approach such as posting on various social media platforms, press releases, email distribution and directly speaking to athletes and coaches to let them know these resources are available.

In addition, athletes in this study have identified that they engage in disordered eating behaviours although they did not view their behaviours to be detrimental. This type of behaviour shows that athletes in sports that foster a weight conscious culture normalize these types of behaviours. It is possible that athletes in this study have normalized these types of behaviours as we saw all three coaches identified that they had athletes that struggled with their body image or eating behaviours and less than half of athlete participants identified having these concerns for themselves.

#### IV. Implications and Impact

This study will expand knowledge about the increasing development of disordered eating behaviours and negative body images among Canadian elite athletes, especially during transition phases and crises such as during a global pandemic. To assist with mitigating the body image concerns and disordered eating behaviours among Canada's elite athletes' various stakeholders must come together and each sector should be held accountable.

From an institutional stand point we can look at the next steps for the IOC, COC, and multi-sport stakeholders. As identified in this study the IOC has a responsibility to protect athletes from harassment and abuse and in turn that means insuring that national Olympic

Committees such as the COC are able to implement the resources and programming needed to assist athletes in navigating body image concerns and disordered eating in sport. This also means ensuring coaches have the resources they need to support athletes. This study provides a better understanding of the resources the COC has currently made available and what resources athletes are currently looking for. This research can be used to inform the COC program development such as Game Plan in developing resources athletes identified as important to them and properly distributing these resources. This research will enable future research, policymakers, and the COC to better tailor prevention programs to athletes' needs, improve access to these programs, and understand how COVID-19 has impacted the development, implementation and deployment of these programs. The COC and NSO should look into partnering with other multi sport organizations that can help distribute and develop educational programs that focus on the prevention of disordered eating behaviours and body dissatisfaction in athletes such as the Canada Center for Ethics in Sport, Coaching Association of Canada, or Canadian Centre for Mental Health and Sport.

This research can also have various research implications, assisting in further research and development in the area of disordered eating and body image for team Canada athletes. Further research could focus on looking at what internal research NSOs have that focus on disordered eating and body dissatisfaction as well as when information they provide coaches to ensure that athletes are able to train in a safe environment removed from harassment and abuse. In addition, further research could look at a comparison of male and female athletes that train at the national level. Lastly, future research could look at what resources coaches feel like they need in order to properly assist their athletes.

On a societal level, this research can help inform the wider community to have a better understanding of how social pressures impact athlete body image and their likelihood to engage in disordered eating behaviours. Organizations that work towards putting educational information about women and sport in the media could benefit from this research. This could include organizations such as SIRC or social media platforms that focus on women in sport. The first step in creating a societal shift in the way we view woman, and their bodies is by starting a conversation and ensuring accurate information is being presented to the public.

## VI. Conclusion

This study aimed to inform sport stakeholders and the research community about female athlete body image concerns and the risk of the development of eating disorder prevention in Canadian Olympic Sport. To do this we explored the resources that are available to Canadian Olympic Athletes both from the COC, national sport organizations and multi-sport organizations. This was compared with athletes' options on what resources they have, need, and wanted to establish where there is room for growth. This research allows us to better understand the need for: I) preventing eating disorder behaviours; ii) programs that foster a positive body image for female athletes; iii) athlete accessibility for these programs; and iv) how COVID-19 has impacted female athletes.

In chapter one, a foundation was laid for this paper explaining that female athletes are highly susceptible to disordered eating and body dissatisfaction and that this is an ongoing issue in the Canadian Olympic sport context.<sup>335336</sup> Olympic level athletes tend to feel pressure, not only to succeed in their sport, but also a pressure to obtain the socially idealized body type. In addition, we discussed how COVID-19 has had a negative impact on athletes, altering the way they train and compete and how this impacted athletes body image and eating behaviours. The philosophical theoretical framework used was feminist theory utilized in the context of female athletes, body image and disordered eating. Here we saw that sport provides an environment where gender issues are often amplified. Through this lens, we could see that meaning is created through cultural experiences, and that the environment influences and affects the way we create meaning in the world and the way we interact with the world around us.<sup>337</sup> Using a feminist lens assists us in liberating the way women's body is viewed and the language when speaking about women's bodies in sport.

Chapter two explored the development of disordered eating behaviours and athlete body image, and the weight pressures athletes endure. We further identified how female Olympians are portrayed in the media, and how COVID-19 impacted Olympic athletes' vulnerability to the risks of disordered eating behaviours and developing a negative body image. Here we saw that training at the Olympic level can cause athletes to be more susceptible to disordered eating

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<sup>335</sup> Anthony Papatomas, Trent A. Petrie, and Carolyn R. Plateau, "Changes in body image perceptions upon leaving elite sport" 31.

<sup>336</sup> Grant Robertson and Rachel Brandy, "Awakening on Eating Disorders among Olympians Prompts Calls for Action,".

<sup>337</sup> William Lawrence Neuman, and Karen Robson, "Ethics in Social Research" 42-65

behaviour and body dissatisfaction. In addition, athletes feel increased pressure from their sport and societal norms creating a conflicting, ‘double-bind’ ideal body type.<sup>149150</sup> Lastly, we saw that during COVID-19 athletes did not have an ideal training or competing environment and endured extreme stressors. The pandemic restrictions caused a decrease in athletes’ physical activity, an increase in body dissatisfaction and an increase in the risk of disordered eating behaviours.<sup>153</sup>

In chapter three we examined how both the ancient Olympics and Modern Olympics influenced disordered eating and body image for Olympic athletes and then evaluated the IOCs responsibility in this regard and steps in preventing eating disorders and body dissatisfaction. Here we saw that societal standards for women influenced their participation in the Ancient and Modern Olympic games. They were put in a ‘double-bind’ position of having to conform to western idealized aesthetic standards, which further impacted the sexualization of female athletes throughout Olympic History; thus, negatively impacting female athletes' body image in sport and in society. In addition, we examined the Olympic Charter to better understand the role and responsibilities of the IOC. Here we saw an emphasis placed on ensuring the health and safety of athletes, which includes protecting athletes from the development of eating disorder risk factors and body dissatisfaction. Next, we saw some steps that the IOC has taken to address this issue such as providing research through the IOC Medical and Scientific Commission and IOC education tools such as *Athlete 365*.

Chapter four demonstrated the multidisciplinary approach that was taken in this research moving into the empirical work. The data collected for this study was done through participant interviews and a web content analysis. The interview data collected, from a SSHRC-funded project, was separated to first provide a context of the impact of Covid-19 restrictions and was then analyzed in more detail identifying any content related to body image and eating behaviours. Participants in the interviews included ten athletes and three coaches aged 21-56 from a variety of sports. Interviews focused on how the athlete's conditions impacted their experience in training, competitions, and overall physical activity. The web content analysis took place in three stages, examining the COC Game Plan website, then examining Olympic sanctioned NSO, and multi-sport organizations, to determine the availability of body image, disordered eating, and safe sport content on their websites. The empirical work done in this paper allowed us to further examine athletes’ experiences with COVID restrictions; reveal important

aspects of their relationship with food and their bodies, and identify resources available to athletes.

In Chapter five, the findings from our analysis were discussed. Through our interviews, we found that it was evident that the risk for disordered eating behaviours exists and are problematic within the Olympic community. Athletes in this study have identified the struggles that they have had with their relationship with food as well as their body. Athletes interviewed have also indicated the negative role that the pandemic has played in enhancing the likelihood of developing disordered eating behaviours or a negative relationship with their bodies. In addition to the athletes interviewed in this study, we have also shown that Olympic sport has placed pressure on athletes since the beginning of the Olympics, causing them to conform to beauty standards and engage in disordered eating behaviours. Various athletes have spoken out in the media about the harmful training environments they endured and the impact that had on their eating behaviours and body image. Although there has been progress in developing athlete resources, access to these resources needs to be greatly improved. Many of the resources identified existed through Game Plan's website, or other organizations that cater to national level athletes. The authors of Game Plan should consider new marketing techniques to show athletes what resources are available and increase the usage of these resources. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it became evident that there were inconsistencies between what resources athletes needed and what resources they could access. If a situation like this were to happen again, it would be essential that athletes had a way to train. It is also very important that athletes are able to have social interactions with athletes on their teams, athletes in other sports and with their families to provide support. This study further showed the similarities between athlete transition periods. Athletes' mental and physical performance can be hindered during a transition period. During these times, it is essential that athletes are provided with additional support and resources to navigate these difficult situations.

In closing, this study confirmed that there still exist major 'double-bind' conflicts for female athletes and their bodies. It also revealed that there is still much work that needs to be done by the IOC and COC in order to meet athletes' needs. Although progress has been made in developing athlete resources, access to these resources needs to be significantly improved. Many of the resources identified existed through the Game Plans website or other organizations that

cater to national level athletes, but awareness and access were barriers for the athletes in this study.



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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 Game Plan Code of Conduct & Education Opportunities

#### Code of Conduct

YOU MUST READ THE FOLLOWING CODE OF CONDUCT CAREFULLY AND MAKE SURE YOU UNDERSTAND IT BEFORE PARTICIPATING IN GAME PLAN, ITS PROGRAMS, EVENTS OR ACTIVITIES.

THIS CODE OF CONDUCT MUST ALSO BE READ, UNDERSTOOD AND CONSENTED TO BY YOUR PARENT/ LEGAL GUARDIAN IF YOU ARE A MINOR IN YOUR PROVINCE/TERRITORY OF RESIDENCE (I.E. 18 YEARS OLD OR YOUNGER).

Game Plan Code of Conduct ("Code of Conduct")

1. **Game Plan:** Game Plan is Canada's total athlete wellness program. It exists within the Canadian Olympic Committee ("COC"), and is co-funded by the COC, the Canadian Paralympic Committee ("CPC"), the Canadian Olympic and Paralympic Sport Institute Network ("COPSIN"), hereafter referred together as the "Game Plan Parties" and Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada as represented by the Minister of Sport ("Sport Canada"). Game Plan also works closely with a number of partners (listed here: <https://mygameplan.ca/about/#partners-block>) ("Game Plan Partners") and other providers or collaborators in industry, sport, and government.
2. **Code of Conduct:** This Code of Conduct sets forth the terms and conditions for participation in Game Plan and related programs, services, events and/or other activities, subject to additional terms and conditions for specific activities or programs offered through Game Plan.
3. **Eligibility:** to become a participant of Game Plan and related programs, services, events and/or other activities ("Game Plan Participant"): I must (i) comply with this Code of Conduct and, (ii) continue to meet the eligibility criteria for Game Plan, as determined and communicated by the Game Plan Parties and available here: <https://www.mygameplan.ca/about/eligibility-benefits>, understanding that such eligibility criteria may differ and will be communicated separately for certain specific programs, events or activities offered through Game Plan.
4. **Concerns and Issues:** If I have any concern or issue in relation with any aspect of my participation to Game Plan and/or any related programs, services, events and/or other activities, I shall bring them to the attention of a Game Plan representative in a timely manner so that these may be addressed and dealt with appropriately. I should refrain from publicly commenting (including via social media) in any way that reflects unfavourably on Game Plan, Game Plan Parties and/or any Game Plan service, program, workshop, event or activity.
5. **Laws and Regulations:** I will observe and comply with laws applicable to me, the terms and conditions of the Olympic Charter (available at: [https://stillmed.olympic.org/Documents/olympic\\_charter\\_en.pdf](https://stillmed.olympic.org/Documents/olympic_charter_en.pdf)) or the terms and conditions of the Paralympic Handbook (available at: <https://www.paralympic.org/the-ipc/handbook>), the Canadian Anti-Doping Program (available at: <https://cces.ca/canadian-anti-doping-program>), as applicable to me, the COC Policy Statement on Conduct available at: (<http://olympic.ca/canadian-olympic-committee/governance/policies/>), or the CPC Policy on Team Member Conduct (found in the latest team member agreement), and other reasonable procedures communicated for my participation to Game Plan, its programs, events and/or activities.
6. **Social Media Guidelines:** I will comply with the applicable social media, blogging or other guidelines communicated by Game Plan Parties, if I choose to post any social media or other public facing content relating to Game Plan and/or any of its specific programs, events or activities.
7. **Consent to use of Image:** I hereby consent for my name, personal image, likeness, photo, picture, video, voice, sport performance and/or speech (whether in traditional, digital, or any other form) captured in the context of my participation to Game Plan or any of its related programs, events and/or activities ("the Materials") to be used for Game Plan, any of its programs, events or activities or by any Game Plan Parties, Sport Canada, Game Plan Partners (listed here: <https://mygameplan.ca/about/#partners-block>) and/or my national sport federation (NSF), including without limitations, for editorial, educational, corporate and promotional, marketing, advertising and publicity purposes in any form. Materials may continue to be used for the above-mentioned purposes even after my participation to Game Plan ceases, until I expressly revoke my consent by informing the Game Plan Parties in writing.
8. **Consent to Personal Information:** I understand and agree that to allow for participation in Game Plan and/or its programs, events or activities, I may be required to provide certain information to designated parties such as my full name, date of birth, address and contact details, personal email address or other personal information about myself as an individual and my participation to Game Plan, its programs, events or activities. Any personal information may be used for the following purposes: (i) may be used or shared with Game Plan, Game Plan Parties, Sport Canada, Game Plan Partners/providers, solely within the scope of their involvement in Game Plan and/or specific program, event or activity, (ii) may be stored on servers of the Game Plan Parties and its partners, (iii) may be stored and archived for statistical, data analytics/trends and historical purposes, (iv) may be used to inform me about activities of Game Plan, its programs, events and/or activities, (v) may be used and shared with third parties to facilitate my participation, registration, accreditation, acceptance, withdrawal, and/or support, in Game Plan, its programs, events or activities, and any other use related, or incidental to the foregoing purposes.
9. **Financial Impact:** I am responsible to address any impact (e.g. use of image, scheduling, finance, commitment, etc) of my participation in Game Plan and/or related programs, events or activities on any employment, sponsorship, education, training, competition and/or other commitment (whether contractual or otherwise). Game Plan Parties shall not have any responsibility or liability in this regard. It is understood that my participation in Game Plan does not represent an endorsement of Game Plan Partners or Game Plan Parties, Sport Canada, and that it does not preclude me from seeking sponsorship or financing opportunities other than through Game Plan.
10. **Consequences:** I understand and agree that in the case that I am in material breach of this Code of Conduct, Game Plan Parties may in their reasonable discretion: (i) provide warning and/or request the alleged breach to be cured within reasonable time, (ii) suspend or remove any of the benefits associated with my participation in Game Plan, (iii) require me to leave a Game Plan program, service, event and/or activity, (iv) require me to reimburse applicable costs incurred for my selection and/or participation to a Game Plan program, service, event and/or activity (including if circumstances justify, reimbursing in whole or in part, scholarships or other financial benefits), and/or (v) take such other action, or require that I take such other action or that I refrain from taking such action as applicable Game Plan Parties determine is appropriate.

If you are considered a minor in your province of residence, you must review this Code of Conduct with your parent/legal guardian to ensure that you and your parent/legal guardian understand and agree to be bound by its terms.

## Appendix 2 Game Plan Code of Conduct & Education Opportunities

Athletes have the option to do the following programs with scholarship options for each program:

- **“Certificate in Business:** An option for athletes who have an undergraduate degree or are currently completing an undergrad. The program is made up of 6 online courses. Athletes have 5 years to complete the certificate.
- **Queen’s Graduate Diploma in Business:** This is a four month in person program. Credits can be applied to Queen’s Full-time MBA
- **Graduate Degree Programs:** Provides links to Various graduate programs in the Smith School of business including: MBA, Master of International Business, Master of Finance, Master of Management Innovation & Entrepreneurship, Master of Management Analytics, or Master of Management in Artificial Intelligence.”<sup>338</sup>

To be eligible for this program athletes be a former or current Sport Canada Carded Athlete, be registered on Game Plan and accept Game Plan’s code of conduct. Game Plan then provides a FAQ about Smith School of Business, with information such as: Who do I contact, Application information, virtual programs, course load, scholarship coverage, etc.

Following the information on Smith School of Business Game Plan offers education programs that cater to coaches. This program is in partnership with the Coaching Association of Canada (CAC). It provides support for athletes who are looking to coach in the Competition-Development (Comp-Dev) stream, or the Advanced Coaching Diploma (ACD) program as part of the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP). Game Plan will offer support for up to one year with up to \$1000 in grants. This program helps expose athletes to a career in coaching and to coaching education. Game Plan Coaching Education Program will reimburse athletes for their coaching education in their sport. The program also reimburses coaching education fees for 1-2 athletes to complete the NCCP Advanced Coaching Diploma.

Next Game Plan provides executive education (Exec. Ed) which refers to “academic programs at graduate-level business schools worldwide for executives, business leaders and functional managers.”<sup>339</sup> This program is also through the Sith School of business. However, when exploring the Executive Education resource on Game Plan, it was unclear what the program was. For example, Game Plan does not state that this is a program through Queen’s, a user would not know this until clicking on the program's link. The Game Plan website states that this program is “academic programs at graduate-level business schools worldwide” But it seems these are only courses offered through Queen’s University. Examples of programs offered include Accounting and Finance Fundamental, Foundations of Sales Leadership, The Neuroscience of Change, Innovation and Intrapreneurship, Strategic Planning and Leading Change, Managing Challenging Conversations from a Distance, and more. These courses seem very relevant and useful for athlete’s and could possible also be useful for some coaches.

Game Plan lists Institutions Participating in the Game Plan Network. These are Canadian Universities that provide support to athletes. It is unclear whether the support provided to Game Plan athletes differs from other student athletes that may play varsity sports in the school. It is unclear how these universities differ in the level of support offered to athletes from universities not on this list. Game Plan states information about each university, provides information for a

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

contact person at the school, and a link to the universities website but does not provide any information on applying.

### Appendix 3 Canadian National Sport Organizations Content Analysis Table

<b>Sport Organization</b>	<b>Sports</b>	<b>Focuses on ED/DE/BI</b>	<b>BI / ED Mention</b>	<b>Safe Sport</b>
<u>Canadian Olympic Committee</u>		<p>Safe sport information on: Filing a complaint regarding COC Participants, How to file a complaint regarding NSOs, a Policy statement on conduct, and policy statement on Whistleblowing.</p> <p>Link to the Canadian Olympic Education Program, which has resources that can be used in classrooms across Canada.</p> <p>Various articles talk about athletes’ experiences with eating disorders on the COC site. However, these are not easy to find unless you use their search bar. In 202, They made a BellLetsTalk talking about athletes who have struggled with mental health, including Olympic diver François Imbeau-Dulac’s who struggled with an eating disorder and Rosie MacLennan, who struggled with anxiety. The COC has also featured articles on athletes such as Aspiring Olympic mountain biker Haley Smith, Olympic figure skater Kirsten Moore-Towers, and Olympic freestyle skier India Sherret, speaking about their struggles with eating disorders and body image issues in sport.</p>	Y	Y
<u>Alpine Canada /</u>	Alpine Skiing	<p>Section on safe sport</p> <p>Has Canadian sport helpline on site</p>	Y	Y

		In their Race to Win <sup>340</sup> section under Nutrition that talk about RED-S and how mentions that parents and coaches should watch out for signs of eating disorders and low self-esteem		
<u>Freestyle Canada</u>	Freestyle Skiing (Ski Cross)	Section on safe sport Has Canadian sport helpline on site Provides a section on resources where they have coaching resources and athlete development resources but has no mental health or eating disorder information.		Y
<u>Nordic Combined Ski Canada</u>	Nordic Combined	No safe sport information		
<u>Ski Jumping Canada</u>	Ski Jumping	Has section on Safe sport Has Canadian Sport helpline		Y
<u>Canada Snowboard</u>	Snowboarding	Has section on Safe sport Has information on Canadian Sport Helpline Offers webinars on professional development for coaches, one session they had was on nutrition where they spoke about RED-S	Y	Y
<u>Archery Canada</u>	Archery	Have a section on safeguarding in sport. And guidelines on how to report harassment and abuse. Information on Canadian sport helpline		Y
<u>Canada Artistic Swimming</u>	Artistic Swimming	Section on Safe sport Their action plan for a safe and inclusive environment mentions that athletes' mental and physical health is prioritized.		Y
<u>Diving Plongeon Canada</u>	Diving	Has section on Safety in Sport. Information on Canadian sport helpline		Y

<sup>340</sup> <https://tad.alpinecanada.org/stages/Race-to-win/health-and-wellness>

<u>Swimming</u> <u>Canada</u>	Swimming	<p>Has a section on safe sport – education, prevention and response is outlined</p> <p>Information on Canadian sports helpline.</p> <p>Has a mental health strategy that supports and improves mental health care by early identification of mental health issues, interventions and return to play guidelines.</p> <p>It has appropriate athlete development resources for coaches; however, it does not have ED/DE resources.</p>		Y
<u>Water Polo</u> <u>Canada</u>	Water Polo	<p>Section on safe sport</p> <p>Info on Canadian sport helpline</p>		Y
<u>Athletics</u> <u>Canada</u>	Athletics	<p>Section on safe sport</p> <p>Info on Canadian Sport Helpline</p>		Y
<u>Badminton</u> <u>Canada</u>	Badminton	<p>Section on safe sport</p> <p>Info on Canadian Sport Helpline</p>		Y
<u>Baseball</u> <u>Canada</u>	Baseball	<p>Section on safe sport</p> <p>Info on Canadian Sport Helpline</p>		Y
<u>Canada</u> <u>Basketball</u>	Basketball	<p>Section on safe sport</p> <p>Info on Canadian Sport Helpline</p> <p>Has a targeted athlete strategy that assists selected athletes to grow and develop high-level skills. This performance plan is based on four pillars, technical skills, building up athletes' physicals, working on athletes' mental health and connectedness, and providing a positive training environment</p>		Y
<u>Volleyball</u> <u>Canada</u>	<p>Beach</p> <p>Volleyball</p> <p>Volleyball</p>	<p>Section on safe sport</p> <p>Info on Canadian Sport Helpline</p>		Y
<u>Biathlon</u> <u>Canada</u>	Biathlon	<p>Section on safe sport</p> <p>Info on Canadian Sport Helpline</p>		Y

<u>Bobsleigh</u> <u>Canada</u> <u>Skeleton</u>	Bobsleigh Skeleton	Information on Canadian Sport helpline		Y
<u>Boxing</u> <u>Canada</u>	Boxing	Has a document on Harassment Policy and Procedures		Y
<u>Canoe Kayak</u> <u>Canada</u>	Canoe and Kayak – Slalon Canoe and Kayak - Sprint	Section on Safe sport  In their resources section, they have links to presentations. One of the links to a presentation on nutrition where they talk about body image.	Y	Y
<u>Nordiq</u> <u>Canada</u>	Cross-Country Skiing	Has links to safe sports documents		Y
<u>Curling</u> <u>Canada</u>	Curling	Section on safe sport Info on Canadian Sport Helpline		Y
<u>Cycling</u> <u>Canada</u>	Cycling-BMX Cycling- Mountain Bike Cycling- Road Cycling- Track	Section on safe sport Info on Canadian Sport Helpline Implemented a one-day mental health in the workplace program in 2013. <sup>341</sup> In this program, leaders in Cycling Canada learnt about the signs of various mental health issues, including eating disorders. It is unclear if this program has since been offered.		Y
<u>Equestrian</u> <u>Canada</u>	Equestrian- Dressing Equestrian- Eventing Equestrian- Jumping	Section on safe sport Info on Canadian Sport Helpline		Y

<sup>341</sup> <https://www.cyclingcanada.ca/sport/general/news/ccms/>

<u>Canadian Fencing Federation</u>	Fencing	Section on safe sport Info on Canadian Sport Helpline		Y
<u>Field Hockey Canada</u>	Field Hockey	Section on safe sport Info on Canadian Sport Helpline		Y
<u>Skate Canada</u>	Figure Skating	Section on safe sport Info on Canadian Sport Helpline		Y
<u>Speed Skating Canada</u>	Speed Skating- Long Track	Section on safe sport		Y
	Speed Skating- Short Track			
<u>Canada Soccer</u>	Football (Soccer)	Section on safe sport Info on Canadian Sport Helpline		Y
<u>Golf Canada</u>	Golf	Section on safe sport Info on Canadian Sport Helpline		Y
<u>Gymnastics Canada</u>	Gymnastics – Artistic	Section on safe sport Info on Canadian Sport Helpline  Gymnastics Canada provides additional resources such as webinars and additional mental health resources.		Y
	Gymnastics - Rhythmic			
	Gymnastics- Trampoline			
<u>Handball Canada</u>	Handball	No safe sport information		
<u>Hockey Canada</u>	Ice Hockey	No safe sport information		
<u>Judo Canada</u>	Judo	Section on safe sport		Y



		Info on Canadian Sport Helpline Information on the Responsible coaching movement Has a page titled ' <i>What is RED-S</i> ' With no information on it		
<u>Karate Canada</u>	Karate	Section on safe sport Info on Canadian Sport Helpline		Y
<u>Luge Canada</u>	Luge	Section on safe sport Info on Canadian Sport Helpline		Y
<u>Pentathlon Canada</u>	Modern Pentathlon	Section on safe sport Info on Canadian Sport Helpline		Y
<u>Rowing Canada Aviron</u>	Rowing	Section on safe sport Info on Canadian Sport Helpline		Y
<u>Rugby Canada</u>	Rugby	Section on safe sport		Y
<u>Sail Canada</u>	Sailing	Has a section on mental health resources but no information on Disordered eating or body image		
<u>Shooting Federation of Canada</u>	Shooting	Section on safe sport Info on Canadian Sport Helpline		Y
<u>Canada Skateboard</u>	Skateboarding	Section on safe sport Info on Canadian Sport Helpline		Y
<u>Softball Canada</u>	Softball	Section on safe sport Info on Canadian Sport Helpline		Y

<u>Climbing Escalade Canada</u>	Sport climbing	Section on safe sport Info on Canadian Sport Helpline  In their athlete wellness section, they have information on nutrition wellness which links to a webinar that was ran on eating disorders during national eating disorder awareness week. And also has a link to National Eating Disorder Information Centre (NEDIC), the 2022 Alberta Health Services (AHS) Eating Disorders Symposium, and links to a national resource list for eating disorders and a document on RED-S	Y	Y
<u>Surf Canada</u>	Surfing	Section on safe sport Info on Canadian Sport Helpline		Y
<u>Table Tennis Canada</u>	Table Tennis	No safe sport information		Y
<u>Taekwondo Canada</u>	Taekwondo	Section on safe sport Info on Canadian Sport Helpline		Y
<u>Tennis Canada</u>	Tennis	Section on safe sport Info on Canadian Sport Helpline		Y
<u>Triathlon Canada</u>	Triathlon	Section on safe sport Info on Canadian Sport Helpline		Y
<u>Canadian Weightlifting Federation</u>	Weightlifting	Section on safe sport Info on Canadian Sport Helpline		Y
<u>Wrestling Canada Lutte</u>	Wrestling	Section on safe sport Info on Canadian Sport Helpline		Y

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**[Click Here to Return to Section on Canadian Olympic Sanctioned National Sport Organizations](#)**

*Appendix 4 Canadian Multi Sport Organizations Content Analysis Table*

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Program Name</b>	<b>About Program</b>	<b>Focuses on ED/DE/BI Or SafeSport</b>
International Olympic Committee	Athlete 365 <sup>342</sup>	Provides advise, tools and services. Focusing on various stages of the athletic journey	
Canadian Olympic Committee	Game Plan <sup>343</sup>	Athlete wellness program, giving athletes the tools to focus on their health, education, and career opportunities. Mental health support-counselling. Abuse-free sport hotline for athletes to make any reports.	Unclear if they have any resources to educate athletes on ED/BI issues. No know prevention programs available.
Canadian Centre for Mental Health and Sport <sup>344</sup> (CCMHS) Canada Center for Ethics in Sport (CCES)		Virtual and in-person mental health services. Psychologists, psychotherapists/ counsellors, mental performance consultants, or psychiatrists. List of other resources that athletes, coaches, parents and administrators may find useful. They also hold workshops and webinars Through their <i>Healthy Minds: Fostering Mental Health Through Coaching Practices- Strategies</i>	Does not specifically focus on eating disorders and body image in sport but through working with one of their councillors etc. these issues would be able to be addressed. CCMHS does not currently have any publicly available prevention programs.

<sup>342</sup> <https://www.olympic.org/athlete365/>

<sup>343</sup> <https://www.mygameplan.ca/>

<sup>344</sup> <https://www.ccmhs-ccsms.ca/>

		and resources to foster positive mental health.	
Canada Center for Ethics in Sport (CCES)	True Sport <sup>345</sup>	Series of programs and initiatives. Aim of these programs is for Participants to articulate and act upon their beliefs in the virtue of sport, enable Participants to identify with others who hold the same beliefs and create a fair, safe atmosphere for sport to grow.	
Canada Center for Ethics in Sport (CCES)	BodySense <sup>346347</sup>	A positive body initiative for athletes' that is used to proactively prevent disordered eating and muscle dysmorphia. Directed towards athletes, parents, teachers, coaches and leaders in the sporting community. Information, tools and tips to guide athletes to positive body image and high self-esteem.	Direct implementation that can be used by sport organizations
Canada Center for Ethics in Sport (CCES)	Safe Sport Movement <sup>348</sup>	This program was developed at the request of sport Canada. The CCES developed a universal code of conduct and sanctions. Through the safe sport program, the CCES has developed the Canadian Sport Hotline.	

<sup>345</sup> <https://cces.ca/true-sport-0>

<sup>346</sup> <https://cces.ca/bodysense>

<sup>347</sup> <https://bodysense.ca/>

<sup>348</sup> <https://cces.ca/safe-sport>

		<p>Developed the Responsible Coaching Movement developed to protect athletes and coaches from unethical behaviours.</p> <p>Sport organizations are asked to take the Responsible Coaching Movement pledge through Coach.ca.<sup>349</sup></p>	
Coaching Association of Canada (CAC), in partnership with Sport Canada	Safe Sport <sup>350</sup>	Sport Canada requires that all of its funded organizations have training in safe sport, as of April 1, 2020. This eLearning course is available through CAC	
Coaching Association of Canada (CAC) <sup>351</sup>	The Locker / NCCP	<p>The CAC educates and certifies coaches while promoting safety in sport, increasing diversity and inclusion, and enhancing sport experiences.</p> <p>The CAC provides the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP)</p> <p>Sport specific and multi-sport courses.</p>	<p>There are currently no e-learning courses that focus on ED or BI. It is unclear whether specific sport certification programs focus on ED and BI in their sport.</p> <p>However, CAC does provide safe sport training to protect athletes from abuse, neglect or other maltreatment.</p>
Sport Information Resource Center (SIRC)		SIRC shares evidence based credible knowledge to develop sport and physical education in Canada. <sup>352</sup>	Throughout the SIRC website you are able to find information on eating disorders and body image issues in sport.

<sup>349</sup> <https://coach.ca/sport-safety-sport-organizations>

<sup>350</sup> <https://coach.ca/sport-safety-sport-organizations>

<sup>351</sup> <https://coach.ca/>

<sup>352</sup> <https://sirc.ca/about-sirc/>

		Blog posts, news articles, webinars, and scholarly articles.	
National Eating Disorders Association		Assists individuals and families affected by eating disorders. Provide tool kits for parents, educators, coaches and athletic trainers as well as a workplace tool kit. <sup>353</sup>	
Canadian Sport Institute Ontario		No ED or BI courses publicly available.	
Canadian Women & Sport (CWS) <sup>354</sup>		CWS focus areas include retaining the participation of girls in sport, increasing female leadership in sport and influencing influencers in sport. CWS provides, workshops, presentations, webinars, as well as provides gender equity consulting, a playbook that supports sport leaders, and e-learning courses.	Although CWS has provided a webinar on mental health this course did not focus on ED or BI of athletes.
AthletesCAN <sup>355</sup>		AthleteCAN provides information for athletes on their rights, athlete agreements, safe sport, athlete social responsibilities. Provide programs such as respect in sport which provides “free education to recognize, understand and respond to issues	Although AthletesCAN does not have any programs that directly focus on ED and BI they do have a program that allows athletes to recognize BAHD which can lead to eating disorders, disordered eating and body image dissatisfaction.

<sup>353</sup> <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/toolkits>

<sup>354</sup> <https://womenandsport.ca/>

<sup>355</sup> <https://athletescan.com/>

		of bullying, abuse, harassment and discrimination (BAHD).	
Sport for life		Provides educational courses but none that focus on anything mental health, eating disorders, or distorted body image.	
Expand the reach <sup>356</sup>		Provides web-based resources for coaches, athletes, parents and community organizations focusing on mental wellness. Provides coaches with an online qualitative assignment and toolkit. Provides educational videos, podcasts, links to additional resources, and web pages on how to assist athletes and warning signs to look out for.	Although this site focuses on a variety of mental health concerns it neglects to focus on eating disorders and body image dissatisfaction.
<u>USports</u>		Has no programs that focus on ED and BI as this is said to be the responsibility of the university itself.	

**[Click Here to Return to section on Multi-Sport Organizations and Non-Profit Sport Organizations](#)**

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<sup>356</sup> <http://expandthereach.ca/>



## *Appendix 5 Semi-Structured Interview Guide*

**Information about these interview questions:** The interviews will be one-to-one (interviewer to athlete) and will be open-ended (not just “yes or no” answers). Because of this, the exact wording may change a little. Sometimes I will use other short questions to make sure I understand what you told me or if I need more information when we are talking (“*So, you are saying that ...?*”), to get more information (“*Please tell me more?*”), or to learn what you think or feel about something (“*Why do you think that is...?*”).

### **Introduction and Instructions**

Hello, my name is [One of Investigators]. I am one of the investigators for this study. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. Just to remind you; We are looking at coping strategies and adaptations that are being used by Team Canada athletes in preparation for participation in the 2021 Tokyo Olympic Games or the 2022 Beijing Olympic Games. We are interested in athletes’ experiences with physical distancing barriers, training adaptations (changes), social connectedness and overall well-being. We are also interested in knowing what resources you have found useful at this time.

### **Confidentiality**

Before we begin the interview, I want to spend a few moments **talking about confidentiality** and to go over some basic ground rules:

- Your views are welcomed and important.
- Your views will remain confidential.
- I may also step in if I feel the conversation is straying off topic or to clarify any of your responses
- You can expect this interview to last about 45 minutes.

### **Use of Audio/Video Recording**

- As you will recall, audio of this interview will be recorded to increase accuracy and to reduce the chance of misinterpreting what anyone says.
- All recordings and transcripts will be kept very secure, under lock and key, by the researcher.
- Names will be removed from transcripts.
- Only members of this research project will have access to the transcripts of this interview.

- I'll also ask that when using abbreviations or acronyms, you say the full name at least once to aid transcription.

**Interview** (boxes provided for potential follow up questions based on Participant response).

## **Getting to Know You**

### **Background Questions**

#### **Past**

I would like to ask you some questions about who you are and your experience as a Team Canada athlete before the Covid-19 pandemic.

Please state your age and your self-identified gender.

What is your sport that you compete in as a Team Canada athlete?

How long have you competed as a Team Canada athlete?

How often did you practice a week before the implementation of restrictions for Covid-19?

Where did you usually do your training before the pandemic?

Are there any barriers you have had to overcome as a competitive athlete in your career?

#### **Current**

I would now like to know more about your current situation during pandemic. Many people had to adjust their lives due to the strict COVID-19 pandemic protocols, such as quarantines, social/physical distancing measures, lockdowns.

What has changed now that the pandemic occurred?

In general, how has the pandemic impacted you as an athlete?

Many areas restricted non-essential business, such as gyms and training facilities.

Are you still engaging in the same level of training, if so how? If not, why not?

### **Coping Strategies being Employed During Pandemic**

How are you coping with the COVID-19 pandemic?

Discuss any coping strategies you find particularly helpful.

Discuss any coping strategies you tried that were not effective.

Disordered Eating Behaviours:

#### **Probes**

a. Why were they helpful?

- b. Why were they not helpful?
- c. Where did you learn about these strategies?

**Discussion**

I would now like to discuss more about what strategies and resources you have used and/or are using to support you during pandemic.

**Opening Question:**

- 1. Are you using any strategies or internet resources or social media to help cope with Covid-19 barriers and/or challenges? What are they? How useful they are?

**Mental health?**  
**Training accessibility?**  
**Financial support?**  
**Social connections?**  
**Others?**  
**Change in Eating behaviors / individual’s thoughts, feelings, emotions, and behaviours towards their body?**

- 2. Have you heard of **or used any athlete specific resources?** If you have heard of any, have you used them?

**Mental health?**  
**Career? Resume and cover letter.**  
**Education ? Online courses.**  
**Community ? Athlete to athlete connections.**  
**Monthly Webinars?**  
**Have you heard of ‘Game Plan’?**  
**Do you know of any resources that touch on eating disorder risk factors or body dissatisfaction?**  
**OR**

**Have you heard of 'Body Sense'?**

3. **If you have used it, was Game Plan** or any other athlete resource helpful for you to cope with the restrictions and challenges during the Covid-19 outbreak? Discuss which part and what aspects are useful in **Game Plan or other resource?**

**Mental health?**

**Career? Resume and cover letter.**

**Education ? Online courses.**

**Community ? Athlete to athlete connections.**

**Monthly Webinars?**

4. What is not useful in Game Plan or other resource? What could be added to provide better strategies?

5. **Mental health?**

6. **Career? Resume and cover letter.**

7. **Education ? Online courses.**

8. **Community ? Athlete to athlete connections.**

9. **Monthly Webinars?**

10.

Is there anything else that is relevant that we haven't talked about yet?

What else do you need?

### **Conclusion**

I want to thank you for sharing so much information about yourself and your experiences. I want to assure you again that this information will be treated in the strictest confidence. Thank you for your time.

**At this time Participant will be given a debriefing form and thanked for their participation.**

**[Click Here to Return to section on Interview procedures](#)**

# C U R R I C U L U M V I T A E

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## EDUCATION

### **Western University | Sept. 2020 – Present**

- M.A. Kinesiology Sociocultural Studies Candidate
- Research focuses on disordered eating and body dissatisfaction in Olympic athletes and the resources available to athletes, coaches and support personal.

### **University of Waterloo | Sept. 2016 – June 2020**

- Bachelor of Arts, Recreation and Sports Business
- Deans Honours List
- Completed 4 Co-operative education placements
- TCPS – 2 Ethics Certificate | Obtained January 2019

### **Queen's University | Sept. 2014 – April 2016**

- Bader International Study Centre located in East Sussex, England, 2014 – 2015

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## P U B L I C A T I O N S & P R E S E N T A I O N S

**McCulloch, Alyssa (2021). Body Image Dissatisfaction and Disordered Eating in Female Athletes: The Role of the International Olympic Committee. *International Center of Olympic Study Symposium Proceedings. (In-Press)***

### **International Center for Olympic Studies (IOCS) Symposium | October 2021**

- Provided a virtual presentation on Body Image Dissatisfaction and Disordered Eating in Female Athletes: The Role of the International Olympic Committee

### **Graduate Leisure Research Symposium | May 2019**

- Presented my undergraduate thesis work on Attitudes Toward Performance Enhancing Substances.

## RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

### **Research Assistant, Western University January 2021 – Present**

- In partnership with the Canadian Olympic Committee (COC), we are exploring how COVID-19 restrictions have impacted Team Canada athlete's physical health, training and competition, and their physical, psychological, cognitive and social needs
- This study will co-develop evidence-based strategies with the COC to develop a knowledge mobilization plan to enhance the existing capacity and utilization of COC athlete resources to Olympic teams across the country.

### **Undergraduate Thesis, Recreation and Sports Business January 2019 – December 2019**

- Completed a quantitative study exploring how an individual's attitudes change based on the context performance enhancing substances (PESs) are used (e.g., sports, music) and the consequence of using the PES (e.g., causes harm to self or others).

### **Research Assistant, McLaren Global Sport Solutions October 2017 – January 2018**

- Assisted with a Sports Review for U SPORTS to aid the organization's planning process through the next four-year cycle.
- Assisted in survey design, gathering data on current U SPORTS championships, NSO's and MSO's championship offerings, and created a comparison of university athletic championships in the USA versus Canada.

### **Research Assistant, Campus Athletic Research Network - University of Waterloo September. 2017 – December. 2017**

- Explored students' level of satisfaction in campus athletic participation to assist with new fitness facility development.
- Developed survey, attended council meetings, and aided in data collection.

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## E M P L O Y M E N T

### **Graduate Teaching Assistant at Western University September 2020 – June 2022**

- Courses include Professional Ethics in Kinesiology and Olympic Issues for Modern Time and Managing People in Sport and Recreation Organizations.
- Assist in facilitating breakout sessions in class, updating the course website, communicating with students, and grading assignments and exams.