Title: ‘Straight from the horse’s mouth’: Athletes’ lived experiences of care and caring in competitive youth volleyball

This paper will present preliminary findings from an investigation into the lived experiences of care and caring in youth sport. An institutional ethnography was conducted to examine the Ontario Volleyball Association (OVA) along with one 16U girls volleyball team. The lens of ‘care’ and ‘caring’ directs attention towards the quality of athlete experience in sport and shifts away from the assumed positive impact directly related to performance success. A combination of two ethical frameworks will be used; the Ethics of Care (EoC) and the Ethics of Justice (EoJ). These frameworks approach moral decision making from two distinct positions, and will be used to identify when care is experienced as a relation or when care aligns with goals of the institution, despite the experience of the athlete. While studies have explored athletes’ experiences of uncaring coach behaviour (e.g. Gearity, 2012), and the experiences of care and caring from the perspectives of coaches (Jones, 2009; Knust & Fisher, 2015), there has been no investigation into the interpretations and experiences of ‘care’ and ‘caring’ in the institution of youth competitive volleyball. The worry is that the language of care and caring, used by coaches, may be used to camouflage uncaring and possibly harmful behaviours and methods. Specifically, the narrative of one particular athlete’s experiences and interpretations of ‘care’ and ‘caring’ will be presented, along with data from her parent and coaches regarding her experience over the 2016-2017 season. These findings have implications for the complexity of the coach’s role in addressing individual athlete needs in youth competitive sport within the broad structure of youth competitive sport.

