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Male Coach-Female Athlete Relationships a Preliminary Description and Analysis of Abusive Male Coach

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'Male coach-female athlete relationships A preliminary description and analysis of abusive male coach.'

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In the last two decades women's participation in sport has slowly and steadily increased. Recently, sociologists and psychologists have written extensively about the experience of being or becoming a female athlete. This paper, however, ventures into an area which has virtually escaped the attention of social scientist – the interpersonal relationships between young female athletes and male coaches.

Such an investigation is warranted, given the reaction of men as a group to the advancements of women in the area of sport. In the last decade the number of men in coaching positions and other positions of power in women's sports has increased dramatically. An NCAA study indicated that, while in 1973 92% of women's teams were coached by women, in 1985 only 53% of these teams were coached by women. In addition the study showed that 90% of division one schools' athletic departments are headed by men (Farrell, 1985). Another study of the English sport system resulted in similar findings (white, 1984). In 1984 Summer Olympics, 2/3 of the U.S. coaching staff was men. Men coached three of the most popular sports among women: swimming, track and field, and volleyball. No woman coached an all male team (U.S. Olympic Committee). Thus, as women's participation in sport increases, men are increasingly involved in and in control of women's sports. In particular, men frequently coach women.

Male coach/female athlete relationships range from healthy coach/advisor relationships to abusive coach/master relationships. This paper's primary focus is the abusive coach/female athlete relationship. An abusive coach is one who creates a controlled athlete. He attempts to do away with the athlete's independence and her ability make personal decisions. Abusive coaches can be found on all levels of sport, from Olympic teams to neighborhood clubs.

The abusive male coach/female athlete relationship is a complex and dynamic one. To understand how and why it occurs and why it persists, one must analyze the relationship on various levels. An extensive analysis would take into account the psychological deficiencies of the abusive coach, gender relations, sexual politics of western society, sex role socialization, and adolescent

development and the history of gender relations and sexuality within the sporting community. This article focuses on the tactics employed by the abusive coach and the effect of these tactics on the athlete. This is the first and most important step in recognizing and coming to terms with this social problem.

METHOD AND APPROACH

So often social scientists stumble upon that which sits under our noses. Indeed, that is how this study was born. In gathering data on elite female athletes I repeatedly came across abusive relationships between coach and athlete. Such relationships seemed to occur most frequently with women who had begun their careers at the young age and participated in individual sports. I then began reflecting back on some of the coaching practices I had observed as a nationally ranked swimmer. Next, I contacted female athletes I knew had experienced some form of abuse by a coach. To date, I have recorded twenty-two interviews on tape, or, in cases of telephone interviews, on paper. This data was then coded and analyzed. Since first embarking on this project I have encountered other women whose experiences corroborate my findings. Since I gathered data in a directed manner, I am unable to provide figures on the frequency of the problem.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Tactics employed by abusive coaches are similar to those employed by wife beaters, incestuous fathers, pimps and other sadistic persons (Fromm, 1973). Feminist scholars have discovered that abusive men are dominating (Martin, 1976), objectifying (Barry, 1979) and authoritarian (Herman, 1981). Furthermore, these men have feelings of frustration and defeat about life in general (Dzeich, 1984). Herman's study of father daughter incest finds that incestuous fathers tend to be "ingratiating, deferential, even meek" in the presence of authoritarian figure, thereby empirically supporting Fromm's theory of the sadistic personality. All these studies agree that abusive men employ sadistic tactics against women for ego-gratification. They need to feel powerful and worthy and, by controlling other human beings, they gain this satisfaction.

Sadistic relationships have lasting mental and emotional effects on women (Herman, 1981; Martin, 1980). Victims of abuse often feel immense guilt for being involved in such a relationship. They

tend to blame themselves for their victimization (Del Martin, 1976). Further, Martin and others point out that the victims of sadistic relationships lose self-respect and their sense of identity. Studies also reveal that the victims, fearful of violence or a traumatic separation, feel as if they have no other option except to participate in an abusive relationship (Dzeich, 1984). Finally, studies by Herman, Harold Martin, Dzeich, and Del Martin reveal that in cases where there is cooperation on the part of the victim cooperation is initiated as a way of coping with a difficult situation.

Unfortunately, feminist analysis of sport makes up only 1% of sport journal articles (Birrell 1984). Further, most academic works on women in sport primarily are concerned with comparing male and female athletes within sporting institutions. That is, they dwell on the sociostructural, cultural and psychological factors which enforce female exclusion from sport. When the athlete is described, she is too often portrayed as a unique and isolated being (set in comparison to men or female non-athletes) or she is depicted as a person entirely created by culture. Rarely is any mention made of the dialectical and dynamic relationships between coach and athlete with regard to gender, sex, control, and the development of the female athlete.

There are, however, in few works that do support the arguments presented in this paper. John Salmela (1981) notes that female Olympic gymnasts spend significantly more time with their coaches prior to competition and receive more feedback from their coaches than do male gymnasts.. Ann Geracimos' essay "Memoirs of a Would-Be Swim Champ" (1979) is an account of a female athlete/male coach relationship, although it lacks any theoretical analysis. As is often the case, films and literature are the best source for accurate descriptions of social phenomenon. The film "Personal Best", for example, perceptively portrays the issues surrounding male coach/female athlete relations in a critical way. Nonetheless, a detailed account of abusive relationships between male coaches and female athletes is not a part of academic literature.

One of the main issues of concern in this study of coach athlete relationships is power or control over another. In The History of Sexuality, Foucault (1980) analyzes power. He notes that power is not held, seized or acquired, but is exercised in the interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile relations. These relations are not isolated, but part of a network of power relations which support one another to form a seemingly stable society. He argues, therefore, that while power is exercised in order to attain an objective, it is not necessarily a unique action. Rather, it is motivated by social inertia. The means to exercise power appear as givens – as recipes to power – which one is compelled to follow.

When seen through this power analysis, the abusive male coach/female athlete relationship becomes more than an isolated phenomenon or the result of a sick individual. It is a part of a much larger network of power relations. That this phenomenon lacks uniqueness does not excuse the behavior of these men. They may be compelled to control and dominate their athletes by the options presented to them by society, but they are not externally determined to do so (Ptacek, 1988).

DESCRIPTION

The abusive coach employs two types of tactics which support each other. The first group of tactics exploits the structures of sport to isolate the athlete and draw her into a dependent relationship with the coach. The second group of tactics exploits this relationship, inhibiting the athlete's ability to perform independent actions and make autonomous decisions. In essence, these tactics and structures free the athlete from responsibility, while at the same time increasing the coach's control over her. It must be understood that these tactics are not employed singly or with priority, but are intertwined. By themselves they would be ineffective and easily rejected. But, when presented as a group, these tactics force the athlete to develop coping mechanism to make sense of the abusive program. These mechanisms enable her to cope from day-to-day in the program.

INDUCED DEPENDENCY AND ISOLATION

There are two basic ways in which the coach subtly forces the athlete to depend on him. First the coach works to isolate the athlete. That is, he attempts to make his relationship with her the primary relationship of her life. This is accomplished by making all other relationships next to impossible. Secondly, he increases her dependence on him by gaining her "trust", or, as one former athlete called it, acquiring the athlete's "blind faith". These tactics increase the likelihood that the athlete will voluntarily do as the coach wishes.

SOCIAL STRUCTURES WHICH ISOLATE

It would be impossible to discuss forced dependency coaching tactics without also outlining the social factors of sport which contribute to the athlete's isolation. These social factors are often exploited by the abusive coach.

1. Separation from Friends and Peers in Sport

Many elite female athletes start training quite young, usually between seven and ten years of age. By age twelve, there is usually some indication of the athlete's talent. It is around this age that promising young athletes begin to get special attention from coaches. Often the gifted youngsters begin to practice with older, more advanced athletes, leaving friends and peers behind. Further, many athletes 'out grow' their local programs. That is, their skill level exceeds the coaching expertise in the area. Many young athletes, therefore, leave home to train in a more advanced program in another city. These athletes are housed by other families whose children are usually involved in the program. Such a move not only isolates the individual from her friends and family, but is also an investment which pressures the athlete to stick with the new program.

2. Isolation from the Family

Even those athletes who remain home often feel estranged from the family. They train as much as six to seven hours a day. During nine months of the year they also attend school about six hours a day and sleep close to ten hours a night. Thus some days the young athlete has as little as one hour a day to dress, do homework and chores, eat, travel and talk with family members. Even when the child has time to communicate with her parents, she is often too tired to express herself adequately.

3. Isolation from Peers

The athlete's schedule leaves little time to socialize with peers outside of sports. The early to bed and early to rise sleeping schedule makes regular socializing outside of the team virtually impossible. Rarely do athletes and non-athletes have similar interests. Non-athletes tend to label athletes as strange, weird or unfriendly. One athlete remembers:

Non-athletes thought I was weird. They couldn't relate to me at all. They thought I was nuts getting up at five o'clock in the morning. They kept their distance a lot and I kept mine. All my girlfriends could talk about what they did last Saturday night and what they were going to wear this Saturday night. It didn't interest me at all. And I could not talk to them about training. It didn't interest them all. They could not relate to it.

4. Isolation from Admirers

Moreover, it seems that those who admire the athletes the most understand them the least. Fan/Athlete relationships are rarely more than superficial. More often than not, fans seem to relate to

athletes as spectacles rather than as human beings. The following quote illustrates one athlete's sudden realization of her objectification by fans:

There was a time when I actually got beaten in one of my best events. I can remember getting out of the water and wanting to cry. I was upset, really upset that I had been beaten. I can remember the terrible pressure of everyone around me. That sort of pressure that all those people were just waiting and watching to see how and what I was going to do. They wanted to see how and what I was going to do. They wanted to see my reaction. I was just prepared not to allow them. I can remember walking through the stands smiling and thinking how shitty I felt, but how I wasn't going to let them know how I felt. When I got to the rest room I just burst into tears.

COACHING TACTICS WHICH ISOLATE

1. Exploitation of Social Structures

As shown above, the demands of sport limit the athlete's ability to develop interpersonal relationships. Further, abusive coaches often emphasize various characteristics of sport which further isolate the athlete. One such coach was fond of saying to his female athletes: "you hardly have enough hours in the day to train and go to school – you surely don't have enough time for men." Other coaches purposely work the athletes so hard that they are too tired to socialize at night. One coach of the U.S. Women's Olympic Ski Team is quoted as saying, "We don't have to devise any activities to keep the girls occupied after training – [we] just keep them tired enough." (Burkholz: 1983, p. 46)

On those rare occasions when athletes do socialize, meet friends, go on a family vacation, etc., the abusive coach often uses these activities as weapons against the athlete. For example, one athlete interviewed recounted that after one particularly bad workout the coach cautioned: "you really shouldn't have gone out drinking Saturday night." This reprimand might have seemed inappropriate if it wasn't Thursday and she had not just finished her seventh hard workout in four days. His tactic was an overt attempt to discourage her from socializing by correlating it to poor workout performance.

2. Isolation from Teammates

Abusive coaches also tend to separate teammates from each other. They employ tactics which literally divide the athletes from each other so they can be easily ruled. That is, these tactics limit the possibility of major confrontations between the coach and the team, or, if you will, "mutinies." One male athlete noted of a program in which the coach was indicted for multiple counts of sexual molestation of female athletes: "The system of intimidation was such that everyone was salivating to rat on everyone else. Everyone shat on everybody else."

Due to the individual nature of the sports, praise and punishment are usually delivered to individuals rather than to the entire team. Abusive coaches often praise individuals in such a way as to punish another. For example, in practice athletes are continually pitted against each other. One athlete wins at the others' expense. In one program, a particular swimmer felt compelled to lead her lane (pacing the workout by always going first and never allowing another to pass her) in order to get the attention of the coach. "Because," she reported, "if you were second or third in the lane you didn't get noticed."

Another athlete remembered being complimented in such a way that she felt she was in competition with her teammates. The coach had said, Now take [Sue], she is not the best on the team, but she works harder than most of you. You people should work as hard as she does." Since she was not a very gifted athlete, compliments were few and far between. Moreover, she was consistently concerned with getting along with the more gifted athletes. But such a compliment mentions nothing of her progress or accomplishments as she would have liked. In addition, the statement uses her example to reprimand her peers, therefore, endangering her relationship with teammates.

The divisions between teammates are enhanced by the athlete's emotional dependency on the coach as well. Since she is estranged from parents and peers, the coach is her main source for approval. Sometimes as many as sixty athletes compete with each other for the coach's time.

GAINING TRUST

The second major set of tactics abusive coaches use to increase the athlete's dependence is to gain their "trust." The word trust is used in a liberal sense here. By "trust" I mean that the coach employs tactics which manipulate the athlete and increase the likelihood that she will voluntarily do as the coach desires.

1. Reputation

It was mentioned above that the frequent phenomenon of moving from one city to another to train is a large emotional and financial investment and compels the athlete to obey the coach. Another factor which forces an athlete's obedience is the coach's reputation. Coaches who have already trained superior athletes gain legitimacy. The athlete wishes to replicate the accomplishments of former team members. She assumes that what the coach orders her to do is similar to what the former stars did. Thus, athlete responds to the coach's wishes because she thinks that "this is what it takes to be great."

2. Parental Support

Further, when an athlete changes programs or moves up within a team, the coach usually talks with the parents as well as the athlete. Abusive coaches tend to recruit the parents as much as or even more than the athlete. Not only is this behavior indicative of how little credit the coach gives the athlete as an autonomous decision maker, it is also a way of gaining "trust". Parental endorsement of a coach is quite influential on a young teenager, for most have yet to question their parent's authority. Further, such an endorsement makes it difficult for the athlete to complain about the coach at home and expect to get a sympathetic ear.

3. Promise of Grandeur

The initial appeal to parents and athlete is often accompanied by a grandiose promise. This promise of greatness is usually stated in such a way that the athlete feels obligated to obey the coach. For example a coach might say: "If you do 90% of what I tell you to do, you will be an Olympian in three years." Such tactics are similar to the ones employed by pimps to convince women to be prostitutes. Kathleen Barry (1979), for example, notes that:

[W]hen Officer Mary Christensen went undercover for the San Francisco Police department to arrest pimps for pandering, some of their opening lines were, "You are going to be my star lady", or "I'm going to make you my foxy lady" or "my sporting lady" or.... "You'll be my women. I'll turn you out on the street. Give you some schooling. If you are my partner you'll have your pockets filled with money and you'll fill my pockets too."

The tactics and situations described above isolate the athlete from family and peers and simultaneously obligate her to depend on the coach. By themselves, these tactics seem harmless to the

individual's development. But when presented as a package, the effects on the athlete can be debilitating. The coach/athlete relationship gains significant importance for the athlete. The coach becomes the main supplier of emotional support and motivation. In turn, she seeks his approval. The athlete is compelled to obey without question. She develops her identity by seeing herself through his eyes, as he is the primary authority figure.

EXPLOITATION OF DEPENDENCY

Abusive coaches exploit this non-egalitarian, dependent relationship with their athletes, by employing sadistic training tactics. These tactics not only coerce the athlete, but also perpetuate the already lopsided relationship. By exercising these tactics he can impose his will on the athletes almost as if they were his slaves. In essence, he atrophies the athlete's ability to act as independent agents.

1. Domination of Her Training

The first and most readily employed sadistic tactic is one which thwarts the athlete's ability to control her own training. In these cases, the coach demands that the athlete accomplish a certain exercise during or just after practice which the athlete would not ordinarily do. The following is an example of one such sadistic tactic:

He was often very cruel. At the beginning of the summer the pool was often very cool. And at five o'clock in the morning it took a couple of laps just to catch your breath. At the end of the session he would give us fifty meter sprints and he would put times on them. He would say, "You have got to do this time or you are not getting out." It was O.K. if you achieved your time on the first or second effort. But if you didn't get it then you just go too cold. Because you were waiting around for the other people you would just turn blue and start shaking. Then there was no way you were going to make it. And he just didn't care. I can remember doing ten to fifteen sprints just for his delight, I'm sure. I used to go away sort of crying and he would come up to me and say, "It wasn't all that bad after all. You did really well." And he would put his arm around me and say "You really need this work." And I would feel O.K. because he would say it was necessary. In retrospect it was a really poor excuse.

Here, the coach has, in essence, blamed the athlete for his cruelty. For a time, the athlete motivated by her desire for success, accepts responsibility for his sadistic acts. Similar logic can be found in case studies of wife abuse (Martin, 1976). The man often blames the woman for his violent eruptions. The woman often begins to accept these accusations and blames herself. This guilt often compels her to stay and “try to be better” (Martin, 1976).

In addition, the athlete is compelled to comply with the coach’s demands because she fears the coach and/or she wishes to appease the coach. IN some cases, failure to comply with the coach results in expulsion from the team. This is often the athlete’s greatest fear. Not only does expulsion deny the athlete access to her sport, but is also can be a traumatic break from teammates and coach. The more successful a coach is at isolating the athlete, the greater the fear of expulsion. Moreover, expulsion can become an embarrassment at home. The fear of punishment is often more threatening than the punishment itself. Therefore, athletes comply with abusive coaches.

In related studies, Harold martin (1980) discovered that the abused child is constantly aware of her parents needs and avoids conflict by attempting to be the perfect child. Also, Herman (1981) found that a few victims of incestuous and violent fathers encouraged the sexual encounters because they realized their fathers were less threatening in bed than they were otherwise. In all these cases, the appeasement of the abuser is the direct result of a desire to avoid his terror.

It is common for athletes to follow coaches’ instructions despite considerable physical and psychological pain. The following is Mrs. Chudy’s account of her daughters experience with the U.S. Women’s Volleyball Team. Not only is it an illustration of a coach forcing an athlete to train while physically sick, but it is also an example of isolation and the psychological effects of an abusive program. She said:

They went on tour all over the world, but Lucia got ill with some kind of lung inflammation while they were in Japan. She called me when they got back to the United States and told me she was unhappy. It was the first I hear from her in months. She called again from California and said, “I’m sick and he makes me go back in there.”

She had a doctor’s recommendation that she not practice for two weeks, but [the coach] said “You call yourself and athlete? Get back on the floor.”

Finally, she called one day and said “Mom, I’m confused. My mind is leaving me.”
(MacMullian, 1984)

Again, note how the coach blames the athlete for the pain he imposes on her. In the above and in other examples the coach justifies his actions by claiming they are exercises the sport demands and the athlete needs. Similarly, some incestuous fathers justify sexual abuse by claiming they are preparing their daughters for marriage (Herman, 1981).

2. Domination of the Body

Abusive coaches often try to control more than just athletic exercises, attempting to control the athlete’s body as well. Coaches have been known to dictate hair style, posture, the amount and type of food consumed, proper body fat content, weight and even when the athlete can relieve herself. In some cases control extends beyond these areas and becomes sexual. This can be as ‘innocent’ as demanding kisses from young athletes or as overt as sexual seduction.

The most common form of domination over the female athlete’s body is the weight chart. Often the athlete’s weight is recorded on a chart up to three times a day. The chart is often on public display. The abusive coach sets weight goals for the athlete independent of the athlete’s input. In at least one case, if the athlete failed “to make weight” she was expelled from the team. The chart is a constant reminder of the athletes’ short-comings and the coach’s control over her.

In the following illustration, the athlete had little or no problem with weight before joining a weight conscious program:

There was this chart up on the wall and all our weights were charted and next to the heaviest women they (male athletes) would draw all sorts of piggy symbols on the chart. Of course all I found was that all this weighing and all this pressure made me go and eat more. Some women would take fluid tablets to get rid of all their body fat before weigh in. But the men didn’t have charts like that.

Indeed, social scientists are now discovering that weight charts and diet control are ineffective and destructive (Chernin, 1981; Orbach, 1978). Because the coach consistently controls her eating habits, the athlete internalizes the subtle message that she lacks self-control. She is, therefore more likely to comply with a controlling, authoritarian coach. Similarly, battered women report a considerable loss of self-respect while in an abusive relationship. This low self-esteem hinders their ability to leave the battering situation.

Body control is often sexual in nature. One athlete reported that her coach would pull teenage athletes onto his lap. Another coach made it a habit of sticking a wet finger in the ears of female swimmers as a joke. Some coaches actually made passes at their older female athletes. Others have coerced athletes to engage in sexual relations. One of these coaches was indicted on 18 counts of rape. All of his victims were swimmers whom he coached and systematically abused over several years (Akron Beacon Journal, Nov. 22 through Nov. 28, 1984). The following quote is from "Ask Beth," a syndicated daily column for teenagers graphically depicts such an assault. A fourteen year old writes:

Last month after sports, I was alone in the locker room. It was late, so no one else was around. My coach came in and said he wanted to talk to me about Saturday's game. Then he began to kiss and touch me. When I tried to get away, he became violent, locked the door and raped me (Ask Beth/Sense about Sex, Feb 14, 1984).

Because of their isolation and dependence on the coach, some athletes consent to the advances of the coach. Many misinterpret their feeling of dependency as love. Carol Mann recalls this type of emotional confusion as she struggled to win the Ladies U.S. Open Golf Championship:

Before I won the U.S. Open Championship in 1965, I felt so low I wanted a comforting voice; I really wanted comforting hug. I was so afraid – it was a new experience for me – here was one of the great prizes in sports there for the taking, and I was leading. I was on the threshold of winning that event. Mostly what I felt was alone. I called my teacher and, mostly, I wanted to crawl in his hip pocket. At the end of the conversation, I shyly said, "I love you." I needed to visit with someone who understood the circumstances, the challenge, the anxiety and the alone feeling. This was what I had worked for, but I also so felt all these other things. (Mann, 1983)

In another case, an interviewed swimmer had a romantic relationship with an assistant swim coach 13 years her senior while she was between the ages of 13 and 15. The coach was eventually asked to leave his job due to this relationship. A decade later the athlete still wondered about the possibility of meeting the coach again and marrying him. It is also worth noting that coach/athlete marriages are numerous. One can only speculate whether some of these marriages are a continuation of lopsided power relations.

3. Control of Privacy and Personhood

One swimmer remembered that “you couldn’t do anything that he didn’t find out about – even the stuff we said in the locker room got back to him.” Another recalled that her coach “was like an eagle. If you missed a touch on the finish of warm-up by only an inch he would jump up and down, yelling.”

These remarks are typical of athletes who trained under an abusive coach. It is very difficult to keep secrets on a team whose members are pitted against each other and who are competing for the coach’s attention. To assert one’s individuality by secretly breaking the rules or to “bad mouth” the coach is difficult.

Even what the athlete does away from the sport often comes to the coach’s attention. Coaches have been known to interfere in budding romances, music lessons and training for other sports. One coach went so far as to call the parents of teenage team members to warn them of an upcoming “underground” party. The party was being hosted by a female team member. According to the coach she “was not the respectable sort and would most likely serve beer.” Another coach did not allow his team to drink except once a year, New Year’s Eve, at his home.

This same coach (later indicted on multiple counts of rape) often stopped practice to conduct lengthy lectures on “politics, dress, what to eat, how to sleep, and who to kiss.” The athlete reporting this commented later that “damn near everybody did [what he said].”

In essence, the abusive coach denies the athlete her private life, both social and personal. The most extreme form of this denial of privacy occurs when an athlete is coerced into revealing her most person thoughts. This type of domination is illustrated in this quote from an international athlete:

He would always ask, "How are you feeling." I had a terrible time making up my mind how I was feeling. I never knew how to answer that question. I would say, "Well, I don't know. I feel O.K. I guess." And he would yell, "For God's sake you've got to know how you feel. You're a swimmer aren't you – an extraordinary person. I've got to know how you feel otherwise we can't have any kind of relationship."

The abusive coach desperately desires to know the athlete's innermost mundane experiences. Such knowledge allows him to vicariously become the athlete and thus calculate a training program to bring about his desired results. She, on the other hand, has lost so much of herself to him that she has trouble answering the question, let alone making a suggestion concerning her training. In fact, if the coach was more aware of the results of his tactics, he might have simply told her how she should feel.

Jeffrey Reiman (1976) has argued that privacy helps to create, sustain, and promote personhood. Without privacy we have difficulty in recognizing our existence as belonging to us individually. Bruno Bettelheim's (1960, 131-4) experience in Nazi concentration camps supports Reiman's assertion. Bettelheim notes that in order to anticipate the nature of future events correctly, one must have in-depth knowledge of the other person's thoughts, motives, and desires (1960: 271). The abusive coach is preoccupied with the outcome of future competition over which he has little control. Thus, he often attempts to compel athletes to reveal their most personal thoughts so that he has ability to predict the future more successfully. For the athlete it is the most extreme violation of privacy.

CONCLUSION

The evidence presented above describes the social structure of sport that isolate the athlete from parents, peers and fans. The athlete, therefore, seeks approval and validation of self from the coach. The abusive coach exploits this situation employing various tactics which threaten the athlete, thwart her individuality, deny her privacy, and control her body and actions. The abusive coach employs these tactics to gratify his own material or psychological needs. The dynamics of an abusive relationship are such that the relationship tends to perpetuate itself. As long as the athlete cooperates with the coach's demands, the coach will feel some sort of satisfaction through his control. Until his sadistic tactics fail to gain control over the athlete, the coach will be content to continue with these methods.

The social structure of sport, the relative stage of personal development and other social factors such as a gender relations and sex role socialization, although influential, do not casually determine the tactics employed by the coach. Rather, these factors make the young female athlete a likely victim of an abusive coach. The abusive coach is a sadistic person and should be held accountable for his actions. He validates himself by controlling others. He objectifies his athletes, viewing them as a means toward his ends. He desires to be the principle actor: The athletes are just mere extensions of him. He uses young women and girls for his own ego-gratification. He dominates others in order to gain a sense of security. In turn, he becomes dependent on his victim's subservience in order to feel a sense of worth. Thus he is compelled to convince them to remain subservient.

Many sport critics have noted the empowering (Heide, 1978), liberating (Scott, 1979), enlightening (Lenk, 1984), or transcendent experience of sport. It is not infrequent for athletes, artists, poets, and musicians to be compared to each other. Similar to the artist and his work, the athlete can discover and transcend herself through sport. Both vocations can be creative and liberating. The abusive coach, however, destroys the transcendent element of sport and reduces the athletic experience to an exercise in domination.

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